

## **Blind leaps of passion and other strategies to outwit inevitability**

*On Pasternak and the legacy from the turn of the 19th to the 20th century*

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### **I.**

THE TURN of the last century a hundred years ago is probably the single most creative period in the history of the Russian intelligentsia. Born in 1890 Boris Pasternak matured as a writer only after the turn of the century but, as a child and adolescent of the time, he was steeped in its atmosphere and influenced by its thought. The focus of this study is on a section from *Ochrannaja gramota* (Part Three, 1) which, with its elaborate cluster of imagery, warrants discussion as to how far Pasternak continued and how far he diverted from the spiritual legacy of the so-called religious renaissance. The religious philosophers from the turn of the century developed a tradition of Russian thought which is evident in the slavophile thought of Aleksej Chomjakov, as well as in Fedor Dostoevski's reaction to modernity and Vladimir Solov'ev's mysticism.

Dostoevski's spiritual quest with its commitment to the Russian concept of community and brotherhood in a modern alienating world was bequeathed to and developed by the religious philosophers of the turn of the century. At the other end of the period, Pasternak received the legacy of this quest. In the first part of *Doktor Živago* Jurij's maternal uncle, Vedenjapin, argues according to a personalistic Christianity recognisable from Dostoevskij and the ensuing religious philosophers. Vedenjapin plays a positive role in the novel and his teachings bear the mark of respect and approval of the implied author; even though his own spirituality will develop in

another direction, as a child Jurij Živago is close to his uncle and susceptible to his thought. The legacy of the religious renaissance in Russia finds a significant place in Pasternak's writings.

A key concept for this religious thinking was the notion of *ličnost'* or personality. The rudiments of this concept had been expressed by Dostoevski) as early as 1863 in his publication *Zimnie zapiski o letnich vpečatlenijach* (Dostoevskij 1973, 79).<sup>1</sup> The notion of personality or *ličnost'* allowed the religious thinkers to accredit the individual with personal freedom and responsibility before God and his/her fellow human beings, while avoiding the spiritual pitfalls of the Western and liberal concept of the individual as a self-contained and legally defined entity whose integrity must not be infringed. For Dostoevskij and Nikolaj Berdjaev the idea of personality was connected to their respective insistence on human freedom, while for other religious philosophers such as Pavel Flo-renskij, Sergej Bulgakov and Lev Karsavin, the notion of the person as integral and at the same time as part of a greater community was integrated with trinitarian epistemology and theology.<sup>2</sup>

The questions addressed in this paper have to do with the nature of Pasternak's spirituality. On the one hand I consider again whether this spirituality is transcendental or whether it is a secularised spirituality where art with the help of Christian rhetoric takes the place of Christ.<sup>3</sup> A question which follows from this concerns the notion of personality; in the passage from *Ochrannaja gramota* analysed here, the spiritual concept of personality (личность) is supplanted by the concept of a generation (поколение).

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<sup>1</sup> Having criticised the individual person as conceived in the West, Dostoevskij continues: Что ж, скажете вы мне, надо быть безличностью, чтоб быть счастливым? Разве в безличности спасение? Напротив, напротив, говорю я, не только не надо быть безличностью, но именно надо стать личностью, даже гораздо в высочайшей степени чем та, которая теперь определилась на Западе. Поймите меня: самовольное, совершенно сознательное и никем не принужденное самопожертвование всего себя в пользу всех есть, по-моему, признак высочайшего развития личности, высочайшего ее могущества, высочайшего самообладания, высочайшей свободы собственной воли. See Björling 1997.

<sup>2</sup> For a description of Berdjaev's 'personalism' see Zenkovsky 777-9; for an analysis of Sergei Bulgakov's philosophy see Meerson; Lev Karsavin's 'personalism' is examined at length by Namli (2000).

<sup>3</sup> See Björling 1998 which considers this matter at greater length.

2.

*Ochrannaja, gramota* is an autobiographical piece of writing which has to do with the author's account of how he came of age.<sup>4</sup> In Part One Pasternak tells the story of his decision not to become a composer and in Part Two he tells of the comparable decision not to devote himself to philosophy; in Part Three he considers the path he has finally chosen: to become a poet. All three parts are concerned with coming of age; not unlike Tolstoj in his trilogy *Detstvo > Otrocestvo* and *Junosf*, Pasternak takes stock from the close perspective of new adulthood, not from the perspective of venerable old age.

The first passage to be discussed is the following (iv. 2101. OG)<sup>5</sup>:

(1) По бульварам, нагибаясь, как для боданья, пробегали бедно одетые молодые люди. С некоторыми я был знаком, большинства не знал, все же вместе были моими ровесниками, т.е. неисчислимыми лицами моего детства.

(2) Их только что стали звать по отчеству, наделили правами и ввели в секрет слов: овладеть, извлечь пользу, присвоить. Они обнаружили поспешность, достойную более внимательного разбора.

(3) На свете есть смерть и предвиденье. Нам мила неизвестность, наперед известное страшно, и всякая страсть есть слепой отскок в сторону от накатывающей неотвратимости. Живым видам негде было бы существовать и повторяться, если бы страсти некуда было прыгать с той общей дороги, по которой катится общее время, каковое есть время постепенного разрушенья вселенной.

(4) Но жизни есть где жить и страсти есть куда прыгать, потому что наряду с общим временем существует непрекращающаяся бесконечность придорожных порядков, бессмертных в воспроизведеньи, и одним из них является всякое новое поколение.

(5) Нагибаясь на бегу, спешили сквозь вьюгу молодые люди, и хотя у каждого были свои причины торопиться, однако больше всех личных побуждений подхлестывало их нечто общее, и это была их историческая цельность, то есть отдача той страсти, с какой только что вбежало в них, спасаясь с общей дороги, в несчетный раз избежавшее конца человечество.

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<sup>4</sup> See Björling 2000 for a parallel analysis of *Ochrannaja gramota*, Part Three.

<sup>5</sup> References to Pasternak are denoted by volume and page only, OG denotes that the passage is from *Ochrannaja gramota*. The quoted paragraphs are numbered for convenient further reference.

A key notion throughout *Ochrannaja gramota* is that of a 'generation' (поколение), and if in Part Three the ostensible focus is on Majakovskij, then the background theme is the young generation which came of age and spilled onto the streets in the 1910s. Pasternak associates himself with the young people, poorly dressed, who 'ran along the streets, bending down as though to charge'. The scene is the public space of 'boulevards', an urban setting concomitant with modernity. The young people have energy and an impulse to move forwards, to rush headlong into life. Their energy is connected to their newly awoken sense of having just been admitted into the adult world with its adult concepts and they have just discovered haste (поспешность, perhaps 'urgency'), a haste which deserves more attentive investigation.

Paragraph (3) may be expected to pick up the final remark of (2) and elaborate as to what is meant by the need to investigate haste. But (3) begins by presenting two threatening facts of life: death and foreknowledge. The human condition entails not only a life which leads to death, but a life lived in the face of death. More generally the author claims that we find pleasure in not knowing what lies ahead, to know the future beforehand is frightening.<sup>6</sup> The initial chronotope has quickly gained existential overtones : what at first was presented as a humdrum detail, young people charging along the streets (to meetings, to lectures, to whatever) has promptly been transposed into a metaphysical image of the path through life which leads inevitably to death: boulevards apatii through life.

Now follows a typically Pasternakian metaphor: the chronotope (boulevards >^path through life) remains constant as does the energetic movement characteristic of young people, but there is a sudden change of direction; instead of rushing headlong towards the inevitable, the young people leap aside urged by passion. We leap aside to avoid the inevitability which rolls towards us. Note here the grammatical shift of the agent of movement from the young people (пробегали бедно одетые молодые люди) to inevitability itself (накатывающей неотвратимости).<sup>7</sup> In the metaphor of blind leaps of passion we see a gesture of protest and perhaps even a sub-

<sup>6</sup> The text refers to a first person plural (*нам мила неизвестность*, etc.) and includes all of us in the sense of 'we human beings'.

<sup>7</sup> Compare with an earlier passage in *Ochrannaja gramota* : Не говоря о том, что внутреннее членение истории навязано моему пониманию в образе неминуемой смерти, я и в жизни оживал целиком лишь в тех случаях, когда заканчивалась утомительная варка частей и, пообедав целиком, вырывалось на свободу всей ширью оснащенное чувство, (iv. 151, OG)

stantiation of what Bachtin will later call 'unfinalizability' : to live we have to do more than walk the straight path to a foreordained end.<sup>8</sup>

The completion of this same sentence expresses the existence of a common path and common time (*общая дорога, общее время*) which has to be escaped; in the final subordinate clause of (3) the idea of death is drastically rendered as the gradual destruction of the universe. The notion of the common as something to be avoided acts as a sensitive hinge in Pasternak's thinking. On the one hand Pasternak reveres the unique and the original and is scornful of the untalented, while on the other he confirms the value of the ordinary at least when named for the first time, when experienced in its pristinity.<sup>9</sup> In the present context the qualification common has negative connotations; it is the way and the time which has no scope for unique experience. But to make the issue more complicated the notion of common is repeated in (5) and this time in a more positive tone:

нечто общее, и это была их историческая цельность, то есть отдача той страсти, с какой только что вбежало в них, спасаясь с общей дороги, в несчетный раз избежавшее конца человечество.

Life must keep cheating death by time and again luring individuals into passion to ensure another lease of life; in this case *нечто общее* is part of humankind's strategy to preserve life, that is it is something good.

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<sup>8</sup> See Morson, 82-113 and *passim*.

<sup>9</sup> This paradox is crucial for an understanding of Pasternak's conception of poetry and merits a study of its own. Originality and uniqueness are qualities which Pasternak values above all; genius, the extraordinary that which has a distinct face are valued as against the untalented, the ordinary, facelessness. In *Ochrannaja gramota* this is expressed in Part One, 6. (See Angela Livingstone's commentary, Livingstone 1985, jyf). At the same time Pasternak's emphasis on the prosaic may be seen as a variant of Bachtinian 'prosaicness' as I have argued in *Björling (Tampere)*. In the following passage we see the significance of the everyday for art, even if the relative values of the everyday, poetry and music is somewhat obscure: Мы втаскиваем повседневность в прозу ради поэзии. Мы вовлекаем прозу в поэзию ради музыки. Так, в широчайшем значении слова, называл я искусство, поставленное по часам живого, будущего поколениями, рода. (iv. *ibi*, OG).

Reference to death as the gradual destruction of the universe is drastic, but for Pasternak significant. In an earlier article I have argued that for Pasternak spirituality, even when it borrows Christian rhetoric, is a secularised spirituality in which history and art constitute the beyond which gives meaning to individual life. The present passage supports this thesis. The thoughts expressed here are, as I interpret them, incompatible with belief in life after death, that is a transcendent reality, Christianity included.<sup>10</sup>

Leaps of passion comprise an energetic form of procrastination, a manifestation of life in the face of death. They are blind since they deliberately look away from what is known about the inevitability of death; but they are blind in a second meaning too in that the leapers do not understand the nature of the passion which drives them. The fact that it is young people who make these blind leaps of passion is significant. In her excellent translation and commentary on Pasternak's writings on art and creativity, Angela Livingstone pinpoints Pasternak's concern with the connection between passion as sexuality and passion as art.<sup>11</sup> In our passage (3) we have a direct reference to sexuality as in reproduction: Живым видам негде было бы существовать и *повторяться* [emphasis added -F.B.].

A second reference to reproduction and to the concept of a new generation follows in (4): существует непрекращающаяся *бесконечность* придорожных порядков, *бессмертных в воспроиз-веденьи* [emphasis added-£5.], in which clause the contextually oxymoronic references to the noun 'eternity' (tautologically described as 'unceasing') and the adjective 'immortal', serve to make the image even more puzzling. Those who perform leaps of passion are not accountable as individuals, their historical significance lies in their constituting a new generation. Furthermore leaps of passion are not simply a personal escape from a common path and common time, neither the avoidance of suicide, nor the result of

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<sup>10</sup> See Björling 1998. The following quotation from *Doktor Živago* refers to Jurij Zivago's reflections after the death of Anna Gromeko: Сейчас как никогда ему было ясно, что искусство всегда, не переставая, занято двумя вещами. Оно неотступно размышляет о смерти и неотступно творит этим жизнь. Большое, истинное искусство, то, которое называется Откровением Иоана, и то, которое его дополняется. (Pasternak III. 91-2)

<sup>11</sup> See Livingstone 1985, J7, 62. The theme is present and important throughout *Ochran-naja gramota*, See for example Part Two, 3 (178-80).

unique personal whims and desires as we might have inferred from the previous sentence, but are part of a strategy devised by mankind (человечество) in order to avoid the inevitable end for the umpteenth time. Adolescents emerging into adult life and attaining sexual maturity are filled with what each one believes to be a private, unique experience. But sexual passion is not unique, it is part of nature and it is manifested anew in each generation. Herein lies the historical integrity of the generation. The new generation fulfils its role as a link in the furthering of the species, not merely in accomplishing physical reproduction but also in renewing the desire for life, in responding to a sexual desire which is not only physical but also spiritual.

This passage with its metaphors suggests aspects of Pasternak's thinking which differ from the personalistic notions developed by the religious philosophers mentioned above. In the first place, the actor here is not an individual personality (личность) but a generation (поколение). In the second place these people, whose historical integrity lies in their making up a generation, do not know the true meaning behind the feelings of passion which lead them to jump blindly aside. They experience that they are following a personal impulse whereas in fact they are doing their part for nature, or history or whatever. This plays havoc with the idea of ethical responsibility and Christian virtue as being the business of the personality. I remind you of the passage from *Detstvo Ljuvers*, a passage which caused me to feel indignant on the part of the adolescent Ženja when I wrote about the story almost twenty years ago.<sup>112</sup> Zenja's passage from child to woman is undertaken without knowledge. She has no understanding and is frightened by her first menstruation, her mother's pregnancy etc. With physical maturity

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<sup>12</sup> Жизнь посвящает очень немногих в то, что она делает с ними. Она слишком любит это дело и за работой разговаривает разве с теми только, кто желает ей успеха и любит ее верстак. Помочь ей не властен никто, помешать — может всякий. Как можно ей помешать? А вот как. Если доверить дереву заботу о его собственном росте, дерево все сплошь пойдет проростью, или уйдет целиком в корень, или расточится на один лист, потому что оно забудет о вселенной, с которой надо брать пример, и, произведя что-нибудь одно из тысячи, станет в тысячах производить одно и то же. (iv. 38) See Björling 1982. When I wrote this article many years ago I was insensed by the author's approval of guilt caused by the adolescent Ženja's enforced ignorance. Today I understand better the complexity of Pasternak's thought. See Livingstone 1985, 53, 62.

comes her ability to empathise with the Other. This is her womanly equivalent to creativity. But the process takes place without self-understanding. Pasternak attributes to nature or life a design which must remain mysterious if it is to work.

The notion of the 'generation' as acting force is interesting when seen as an intermediate subject greater than the single individual, while yet moved by talent and the instinct for originality. *Ochrannaja gramota* contains further allusions to the generation as indeed to the power of adolescence.<sup>13</sup> At times the emphasis is on the historical responsibility of the generation while here we have to do more with the generation as an inadvertent actor on behalf of Nature's (Humanity's) common cause (общее дело).

### 3.

Although expressed in a very different tone, many of the premises for a meaningful life, as expressed in Dostoevskij's *Zapiski iz podpol'ja*, foreshadow those of Pasternak. The underground man's monologue draws on a stock of metaphors which cohere in their rejection of utopia, natural laws and practical men who sit smugly on final solutions. Not least are the striking similarities, both semantically and as visual images, of the underground man's metaphors of the wall and the way or road when compared with the boulevards/path of life of Pasternak's autobiographical text.

In Part One, 3 of the work the narrator discusses people who are moved to single-minded action, and by way of example he describes a gentleman driven by revenge (Dostoevskij 1973 103 f):

Такой господин так и прет прямо к цели, как взбесившийся бык, наклонив вниз рога, и только разве стена его останавливает. (Кстати: перед стеной такие господа, то есть непосредственные люди и деятели, искренно пасуют. Для них стена — не отвод, как, например, для нас, людей думающих, а следственно ничего не делающих; не предлог

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<sup>13</sup> See for example the following passage from Part One, 3 (iv. 152-3, OG): А как необозримо отрочество, каждому известно. Сколько бы нам потом ни набегало десятков, они бессильны наполнить этот ангар, в который они залетают за воспоминаньями, порознь и кучею, днем и ночью, как учебные аэропланы за бензином. Другими словами, эти годы в нашей жизни составляют часть, превосходящую целое, и Фауст, переживший их дважды, прожил сущую невообразимость, измеримую только математическим парадоксом.



воротиться с дороги, предлог, в который наш брат обыкновенно и сам не верит, но которому всегда очень рад. Нет они пасуют со всею искренностью. Стена имеет для них что-то успокоительное, нравственно-разрешающее и окончательное, пожалуй, даже что-то мистическое. .. Но об стене после.)

How does the single-minded gentleman behave? The revenge seeker charges like an enraged bull at the object of his fury, but once up against a wall which blocks his way he shirks the whole project. The gentleman bent on revenge has physical strength and moves with energy as long as he is rushing straight ahead, but he has neither the imagination nor the moral stamina to try to get round the wall once it stands in his way. Our chap (наш брат), on the other hand, with whom the underground man bitterly identifies himself, welcomes diversion. For him a wall provides a convenient impediment on the road straight ahead, and although he knows that choosing another way round will not lead anywhere he is still happy to have an excuse to try something else. The metaphor is clear, easily visualised and it is delivered with that bitter humour which is the mark of the underground man: everyone is stupid, both the man intent on revenge, the charging bull and *наш брат*.

Without claiming any intentional intertextuality we can see the similarity of the imagery used by Dostoevskij and Pasternak. Both are concerned with the existential dilemma of a path through life which leads straight forward and allows for no freedom of will. Both authors associate to the idea of charging along a path straight ahead; but while the target of the underground man's irritation is a gentleman behaving like an enraged bull, the autobiographical Pasternak refers tenderly to the enthusiasm of those who have just reached adulthood and stand ready to tackle the business of life: *нагибаясь как для боанья*. Pasternak has affection for his generation and he describes it seriously and poetically. In *Zapiski iz pod-polja* the narrator makes jokes but only while grinding his teeth: Я, может быть, скрывая зубами шучу (Dostoevskij 1973,117)

In a footnote signed Fedor Dostoevskij, the author of *Zapiski iz podpol'ja* presents the narrator as a typical man of the time 'who apparently wishes to elucidate the reasons as to why he has appeared and indeed was bound to appear in our midst'. During his one and half century-long existence in world literature the underground

man has become a specific literary individual rather than a representative of his time. The author's footnote asks the reader to see the underground man not merely as a curious case but as a member of a generation and this allows another comparison with Pasternak's text. With the help of the underground man the author [Dostoevski], from the position of the 1860s, describes the generation of the 1840s, a disillusioned and querulous generation; Pasternak's generation of poorly dressed young people is newly awakened, bears no grudges, is utterly serious and manifests the creative energy and passion of a dawning generation.

In Part One, 9 of *Zapiski iz podpol'ja* the monologue reels off a number of metaphors which express Dostoevski's contempt for final solutions, for the Crystal Palaces of rational social utopias. Here is another metaphor connected with ways and ends this time couched in engineering terms (118):

... человек есть животное, по преимуществу созидающее, присужденное стремиться к цели сознательно и заниматься инженерным искусством, то есть вечно и непрерывно дорогу себе прокладывать хотя куда бы то ни было. Но вот именно потому-то, может быть, ему и хочется иногда бильнуть в сторону, что он присужден пробивать эту дорогу... Человек любит созидать и дороги прокладывать, это бесспорно. Но отчего же он до страсти любит тоже разрушение и хаос? Вот это скажите-ка! Но об этом мне самому хочется заявить два слова особо. Не потому ли [...], что сам инстинктивно боится достигнуть цели и довершить созидаемое здание? Почему вы знаете, может быть он здание-то любит только издали, а отнюдь не вблизи; может быть он только любит созидать его, а не жить в нем...

Familiar is the narrator's overt irritation with the non-reflective man of action. The text is doubly polemical; on the one hand it revolves around an internal polemic within itself (the underground man argues with himself and his imagined readers); on the other hand the author is polemical and intends the work as an intellectual attack on the radical intelligentsia with their plans for social engineering. The text reveals both an emotional or neurotic underground man who harbours a grudge to each and everyone, and a consistent dispute, not only emotional but also intellectual, which is the author's verdict on two generations of the Russian intelligentsia, both the fathers and the sons, but particularly the latter with their proffered solutions of human happiness.

The narrator's riling tone notwithstanding there is a serious and painful existential undertone to this passage; a human being is not an ant and does not have to build anthills, but is not the resort to destroying what has been built just to have the space to start building anew equally disturbing from an existential point of view ? Being busy on the construction of a building while not actually completing it is not unlike Pasternak's blind leaps of passion. Dostoevski's text too accepts existential procrastination as a way out of a dilemma. It could be concluded that Dostoevskij is no more Christian in this text than is Pasternak in *Ochrannaja gramota*. While Dostoevski's Christian spirituality is expressed in other texts, in *Zapiski iz podpol'ja* it is close to Pasternak's 'spirituality' seen as the desire to live, a desire which is connected to freedom of will.

#### 4.

*Ochrannaja gramota* is as much a tract on art as it is an autobiographical work. When we now return to the text and pursue the reading of Part Three, 1 we find that Pasternak addresses directly the issue of running towards death (двойственность бега сквозь неизбежность); the young people turn out to have a guardian angel and the guardian angel is art:

А чтобы заслонить от них двойственность бега сквозь неизбежность, чтобы они не сошли с ума, не бросили начатого и не перевешались всем земным шаром, за деревьями по всем бульварам караулила сила, страшно бывалая и искушенная, и провожала их своими умными глазами. За деревьями стояло искусство, столь прекрасно разбирающееся в нас, что всегда недодумашь, из каких исторических миров принесло оно свою способность видеть историю в силуэте. Оно стояло за деревьями, страшно похожее на жизнь, и терпелось в ней за это сходство, как терпятся портреты жен и матерей в лабораториях ученых, посвященных естественной науке, то есть постепенной разгадке смерти, (iv. HI, OG)

The connection between passion as sexuality and passion as art is reaffirmed. A new generation has to be 'deceived' into living and the young people must not discover the real state of affairs lest they commit suicide. The value of a new, life-confirming generation is greater than the value of each of its members. Easing the situation

a force called art, personified as a being which stands looking on from behind the trees with wise eyes, experienced and tried; this personified force is ubiquitous (по всем бульварам караула сила). Art is outside history (the hurried movement on the streets) but can see the historical silhouette which we ourselves cannot discern. Art as a personified guardian angel is now elucidated with the help of a simile whereby it is likened to portraits of wives and mothers hanging in the laboratories of scientists trying to solve the riddle of death. The point of likeness turns on the verb denoting patience or suffering (терпелось), the primary meaning of which in the context denotes toleration: art/portraits of wives and mothers are tolerated by life/scientists because of the (only apparent) similarity between them: Оно [= искусство — *F. 5.*] стояло за деревьями, страшно похожее на жизнь, и терпелось в ней за это сходство. So too portraits bear the likeness of wives and mothers and are tolerated by scientists in laboratories. At the same time there is an association to toleration or patience in the reverse relationship: art and portraits of wives and mothers lovingly and patiently observe how men rush frenetically around absorbed by their involvement in the present.

The point of the metaphor and its explanatory simile is that those who are caught up in life—young people and scientists—feel that they are in touch with reality, they put up with art/portraits of wives and mothers hanging around to watch them in action but obviously think that it is they who are in touch with the real thing: we who read the text, however, have been told that if they were not observed and guarded from a point outside history, by art or portraits of wives and mothers, the frantically active men would be heading for suicide or madness. And since Majakovskij's suicide will emerge as the focal point of *Ochrannaja gramota* Part Three, it seems reasonable to interpret the role of art/portraits of wives and mothers with respect to young men/scientists as absolutely necessary. These guardians seem passive, they do not interfere, but it is they who give permanence to the activity which men pursue, men who in being so at one with common time (общее время) would be heading fast towards the destruction of the universe, were it not for the force which gives meaning and permanence, which sees the fleeting as part of human history.

The text continues by answering its own question: what kind of art? Skrjabin, Blok, Komissarževskaja and Belyj are named as examples of an art which was progressive (передовое), inspiring and original. Then comes the next question: What kind of generation?

The author expounds on the political background with which the generation was imbued, a generation which was passing into puberty in 1905 and had come of age at the outbreak of the First World War. Pasternak reflects at length on the nature of hereditary power and the increasing irresponsibility of the last Tsar. The generation born into and reared through this period was influenced by the prevailing atmosphere of disintegration; the institution of tsarism tried with increasing futility to keep up appearances the closer to the end it came. As a result the new generation was without political insight:

Поколение было аполитичным, мог бы сказать я, если бы не сознавал, что ничтожной его части, с которой я соприкасался, недостаточно даже для суждения обо всей интеллигенции. Такой стороной было око повернуто ко мне, скажу я, но тою же стороной обращалось оно и ко времени, выступая со своими первыми заявлениями о своей науке, своей философии и своем искусстве, (iv. 214, OG)

Writing from some 16 years later and from a position 13 years into the Soviet era, Pasternak characterises the new generation as being apolitical, but in its defence he points out that it was at the mercy of an intermediate social situation; apparently politically unaware, still it created something new and gave to both the older and the coming generation the fabric of that time stitched through and through with its nerves.<sup>14</sup>

Pasternak, at one with his generation, pronounces himself guilty of a frivolous lack of political awareness, whereas we in hindsight are able to see that all that he wrote as an expression of the times.<sup>15</sup> As a public figure and member of the intelligentsia he was concerned with his responsibility to history; art according to Pasternak

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<sup>14</sup> Их детская возмужалость и их призывное совершеннолетие сразу пошли. ЧИЙ скрепы переходной эпохи. Наше время по всей толще прошито их нервами и любезно предоставлено ими в пользование старикам и детям, (iv. 212, OG)

<sup>15</sup> I am grateful to Evgenij Pasternak for pointing out to me that the designation 'apolitical' was, in the context of the late 20s and early 30s, a covert defense for the so-called creative intelligentsia (творческая интеллигенция), at the time subjects to political -attack.

has a duty to history and that duty consists in discerning what is unique and specific to an age, seen as a stage in the development of mankind. For Pasternak the distinction between the times or the epoch on the one hand and politics proper on the other was and remained a sensitive matter. Essentially Pasternak was not political, his understanding of the duty of art to the age made that impossible; apolitical though he may have been, he was never unconcerned with history and the age in which he lived (Björling 1999). The culmination of Pasternak's concern with his age and the political significance which the people of his generation bore is expressed in the novel *Doktor Zivago*, but even here there is a case for claiming that the novel is historical in the broader cultural rather than the narrowly political sense.

## 5.

In conclusion I return to my initial question, namely: to what extent does Pasternak modify the tradition of spirituality which he received from the philosophers of the religious renaissance from the turn of the 19th to 20th century? My discussion of *Zapiski iz podpol'ja* focused on Dostoevski's existential fear of a deterministic world view. In *Zapiski iz podpol'ja* the reaction to modernity is not simple conservatism, a rejection of change as such, but a protest against a modernity which replaces belief in higher truths with materialism, egoism and Utopian solutions, thereby denying human beings the freedom to choose and by implication spirituality as such. It protests against the lack of spirituality in the modern world. For a more positive expression of Dostoevski's spirituality, his desire for belief in a transcendental truth, that is Christ, we must turn to other works such as *Brat'ja Karamazovy*. Because of his fundamental desire to believe, Dostoevskij was irked by modern society and he was openly political in his writings and opinions. The responsibility of the generation stood in a vertical relationship towards God and Christ.

On the other side of the turn of the century, Pasternak is inspired by a similar desire for spirituality, for a life meaningful beyond the moment of its being lived. In *Ochrannaja gramota*, completed in 1931, the Christian focus is not expressed and I argue that, with the

reference to the inevitability of death and the gradual destruction of the universe noted above, the idea of Christian salvation is excluded. Pasternak does not believe in a transcendent reality or transcendental truths, but argues for a spirituality here on earth; spirituality is human rather than divine, it is the dimension in life which is opened by the notion of history and the succession of epochs. The responsibility of each generation stands in a horizontal relationship within history as it stretches back into the past and forward into the future. As Pasternak struggles to find the eternal in the transitional, to find a meaning in life which transcends death, he finds himself glancing backwards at that which is slipping into the past, unable to keep up with the movement of time. He expresses this explicitly in Part One, 6 when he considers how his own poetry was conceived:

В этой оглядке и заключалось то, что зовется вдохновеньем. К особенной яркости, ввиду дали своего отката, звали наиболее отечные, нетворческие части существования. Еще сильнее действовали неодушевленные предметы. Это были натюрштики натюрморта, отрасли, наиболее излюбленной художниками. Копясь в последнем отдалении живой вселенной и находясь в неподвижности, они давали наиполнейшее понятие о ее движущемся целом, как всякий кажущийся нам контрастным предел. Их расположение обозначало границу, за которой удивленью и состраданью нечего делать. Там работала наука, отыскивая атомные основания реальности, (iv. *ibí*, OG).

That spirituality is to be sought here on earth, in history, and not in a divine timelessness, is explicitly stated:

Но так как не было второй вселенной, откуда можно было бы поднять действительность из первой, взяв ее за вершки, как за волоса, то для манипуляций, к которым она сама взывала, требовалось брать ее изображение, как это делает алгебра, стесненная такой же одноплоскостностью в отношении величины, (iv. *ibí*, OG).

History is one component in the spiritual dimension which Pasternak puts forward, but as we have by now understood, history cannot perceive itself, lift itself by its own hair, and since there is no second, transcendental universe from which to observe what is going on in history, this has to be done in the first universe. The second component for a secularised spirituality is art. The quoted passage continues (*ibid.*):

Однако это изображение всегда казалось мне выходом из затруднения, а не самоцелью. Цель же я видел всегда в пересадке изображенного с холодных осей на горячие, в пуске отжитого вселд и в нагонку жизни. Без особых отличий от того, что думаю и сейчас, я рассуждал тогда так. Людей мы изображаем, чтобы накинуть на них погоду. Погоду, или, что одно и то же, природу, — чтобы на нее накинуть нашу страсть. Мы втаскиваем вседневность в прозу ради поэзии. Мы вовлекаем прозу в поэзию ради музыки. Так, в широчайшем значении слова, называл я искусство, поставленное по часам живого, бьющего поколениями, рода.

The agents of history cannot see their position in the indiscrete flow of time; for that an outside force is needed. The duty and responsibility of art is to be that force, to bear witness to the unique, the discrete and accordingly the meaningful in the common flow. Art forges the integrity of human unity along the horizontal axis of history.

A secularisation of spirituality whereby history is consecrated in art comes close to a traditional humanist view and indeed Pasternak celebrates humanism in an important passage on Italy and the renaissance in *Ochrannaja gramota* Part Two, i8.<sup>16</sup> The focus on history and art might also be considered as a return to romaniti-cism. But if *Ochrannaja gramota* embraces fundamental principles of romanticism, its author is at pains to deromanticise his own role as poet (Björling 2000). We have to do with a depersonalised romanticism, where the hero of the time is not the individual poet, scientist or philosopher; the hero is the generation.<sup>17</sup> A generation represents a collective hero and I believe that this shift from the individual to

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<sup>16</sup> Как много, например, говорилось о язычестве гуманистов и как по-разному, — как о течении законном и незаконном. И правда, столкновение веры в воскресенье с веком Возрождения — явление необычайное и для всей европейской образованности центральное. Кто также не замечал анахронизма, часто безнравственного, в трактовках канонических тем всех этих «Введений», «Вознесений», «Бракосочетаний в Кане» и «Тайных вечере» с их разнузданно великосоветской роскошью ?

И вот именно в этом несоответствии сказала мне тысячелетняя особенность нашей культуры.

Италия кристаллизовала для меня то, чем мы бессознательно дышим с колыбели. Ее живопись сама доделала для меня то, что я должен был по ее поводу додумать и, пока я днями переходил из собрания в собрание, она выбросила к моим ногам готовое, до конца выварившееся в краске наблюдение, (iv. 208, OG)

<sup>17</sup> On the other hand personalities are of the utmost importance. Thus Pasternak writes of Venice: И так, коснулось это счастье. И мне посчастливилось узнать, что можно день за днем ходить на свиданья с куском застроенного пространства, как с живою личностью, (iv. 204, OG)



some kind of collective hero is brought about by what I would call an ethos of collectivity which pertains to late modernity, when a socialism far more widespread than in its Soviet variant, is pitched against liberalism.<sup>18</sup>

What has emerged in this analysis is not only the collectivity of the generation as historical actor or hero, but, more disturbingly, an ambivalent attitude towards the notion of personal responsibility: on the one hand Pasternak seems in *Ochrannaja gramota* to adhere to a humanist conception of history where actors, individuals or generations, take responsibility for their actions, while on the other he implies a kind of nature-ruled principle of life where those same actors are seen to be the unwitting tools of a manipulating force, which when couched in terms of coming of age and sexual passion and reproduction, seems to point to an ahistorical life force. In *Doktor Živago* Pasternak is to go one step further and show that art itself is deceived, since the individual work of art turns out not to be entirely unique but part of a greater principle:

Когда мы воображаем, будто в Тристан, Ромео и Юлии и других памятниках изображается сильная страсть, мы недооцениваем содержания. Их тема шире, чем эта сильная тема. Тема их — тема силы.

Из этой темы и рождается искусство. Оно более односторонне, чем думают. Его нельзя направить по произволу — куда захочется, как телескоп. Наставленное на действительность, смещаемую чувством, искусство есть запись этого смещения. Оно его списывает с природы. Как же смещается натура? Подробности выигрывают в яркости, проигрывая в самостоятельности значенья. Каждую можно заменить другою. Любая драгоценна. Любая на выбор годится в свидетельства состоянья, которым охвачена вся переместившаяся действительность, (гл. 1871)

My conclusions are firstly that Pasternak secularises spirituality placing it within history rather than in a transcendental world; secondly that he replaces or compromises the individual's position in history by replacing or complementing personal responsibility by consistently focusing on the generation as an actor in history; and thirdly that he renders that generation's responsibility ambiguous by introducing the notion of a life principle operating within history

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<sup>18</sup> *Doktor Živago* can be called a novel about a generation, for although Jurij Živago is contrasted with Paša Antipov and with his friends Gordon, Dudorov, still the novel as a whole takes responsibility for all these men as members of the generation which came to maturity on the eve of the First World War and the Russian Revolution.

as a procrastinating force, which moves to make the generation behave in a certain way. Although this principle is called human (общее человечество), it seems to function as an ahistorical force. Finally art is a theme or force which exceeds the unique, incorporates the unique, at the same time as art is the mechanism by which the succession of fleeing moments may be recognised as history, as a dimension. Pasternak was not passive in his reception of the heritage of Russian spirituality; he modified those ideas in an active search for a spirituality which would be adequate to the new and difficult age in which he found himself.

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