

Dr. Zhivago: Humanism and the Spirit of Revolution

Gideon Morton

At the end of WWII, the lofty idealization and utopian vision of world communism had been dashed by the repressed violence of the period 1917-1922 and was haunted by the spectre of Stalinism. Upon this backdrop, Boris Pasternak published *Dr. Zhivago*. The Soviet canonical memory regarding the October Revolution was an assertion of a singular ethos, one of grandiosity and self-assured righteousness, and the necessity of the revolution itself. The Soviet canon is starkly contrasted to Pasternak's vision of the Russian Revolution. This contrast displays the absurdity captured in the stories of Pasternak's characters. Their chance meetings and miraculous survival, or precipitant deaths, sets *Dr. Zhivago* apart from the assuredness of the Soviet canon. A comparison between the official narrative of the revolution, and the narrative presented in *Dr. Zhivago*, reveals the incongruity which caused a generation of Soviet citizens to reject Pasternak's notion.

Pasternak describes a feeling within Russia in 1917, a feeling of boundless possibility; the tensions which had for nearly a century plagued the whole of Russia finally erupted in February of that year. The deposition of Tsar Nicholas II left a country full of disparate intentions, keenly aware of both a pure sense of freedom and an impossible future. During the summer of 1917, Pasternak's alter ego, Dr. Yurii Zhivago, worked at a hospital in a small town in the black soil country of European Russia.¹ In the summer after the February Revolution, Zhivago saw those endless possibilities and notes the sense that "the whole of Russia has had its roof torn off" as a symbol of a (hopefully) freer future.² Few would have predicted, in those halcyon days, that five years of bitter civil war lay ahead. It is prudent to note in any discussion of great events that the realities of these events were not then, and should not be now, described in generalities. This feeling of freedom had its caveats: it was sectarian, ethnic, and geographical, and depended upon much more than simply being a member of those peoples who inhabited the now-collapsing Russian Empire. These particularities go beyond the scope of this essay but demonstrate a conflict between the Bolshevik vision of the revolution and Pasternak's contention, which this essay will

¹ Boris Pasternak, *Doctor Zhivago*, trans. Max Hayward and Manya Harari (New York: Pantheon Books, 1958), 111.

² *Ibid.*, 123

demonstrate. It is clear in retrospect that this newfound sense of freedom in Russia left opportunity for ideology to take hold like a wildfire. In fact, Ronald Suny's observation, in his book *The Soviet Experiment*, that the Chinese characters for *crisis* "can be translated as 'dangerous opportunity,'" incredibly relevant in the context of Russia's uncertain summer before the Civil War of 1917-1922.³ The various strains of revolutionary sentiment which were bubbling in Russia represented a great variety of opinions, with regard to the old Imperial infrastructure, culture, symbolism, language, and custom. Historian Richard Stites describes these developments:

The making of a revolutionary culture and way of life required clearing away old forms (iconoclasm) and fashioning new myths, rituals, and moral norms through revolutionary festival and atheist "godbuilding;" a surge to establish social justice through equality; and the compulsion to transform Russian work habits and revise Russian notions of time, space, motion, and order with the goal of introducing the Revolution to the culture.⁴

As Stites makes clear, the construction of a particular memory of the period of revolution and Russia's past was part of the many different viewpoints associated with the Revolution in Russia. The violence inherent to revolution notwithstanding, it is imperative for a revolutionary group to establish itself within a framework of memory. The Bolshevik notion was fundamentally oriented towards establishing themselves as both rightful successors to power, and as emblematic of progress - progress that most Russians were vying for. The popular revolution of February 1917 and the deposition of the Tsar bore witness to this fact. The old was no longer preferable. This, therefore, meant finding a position between the iconoclasts and those whose progressive ideals were founded in the existing cultural and physical infrastructure of late imperial Russia. Lenin and the Bolsheviks fell among those whose aspirations were closer to iconoclasm but upheld the cultural significance of Imperial objects and symbols within a broad definition.⁵ The Revolution, as harbinger of a reconstitution of history, foreshadows the cultural conflict which is exemplified by *Dr Zhivago's* reception. This perception of historical actors, their purpose, and on what basis they took such and such an action, are questions which Pasternak answered unsatisfactorily for many Soviet people.

Lenin was, in the years preceding the summer of 1917, planning and waiting for a moment to assert Bolshevism on a national scale. He was well aware of the fact that, to create an enduring

³ Ronald Suny, *The Soviet Experiment*, 2nd ed. (Oxford University Press, Incorporated, 2011).

⁴ Richard Stites, *Revolutionary Dreams: Utopian Vision and Experimental Life in the Russian Revolution* (Oxford University Press, 1988), 61.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 76-8.

legacy with his revolution, he would need to place it within a particular historical frame. Within the Bolshevik leadership, there was some disagreement as to the exact constituents of this historical constitution *in utero*. The iconoclasts were not, however, to find allies with the Bolsheviks. Stites noted this fact stating, “the Bolshevik leaders also felt ambivalent about the destruction of monuments, but their ambivalence led to a policy and action.”⁶ The Bolsheviks began a program of protecting art and symbols within their own definition of historical and aesthetic value.⁷ This action indicates the Bolshevik assertion of control and its relationship to Russia’s past; in Sites’s words, “the negational [iconoclastic] broom was plucked away by the state for its own exclusive use.”⁸ The example of imperial monuments is also particularly important, as the monuments stand for much more in the eyes of the iconoclasts, and their destruction is symbolic of the destruction of intangible aspects of a society. The state grasp of memory, as a means to cultivate political legitimacy, was imperative for the Bolsheviks.⁹ As Frederick Corney - a noted contemporary scholar of the early revolutionary years - points out, “It was widely agreed from the very beginning by Bolshevik leaders that personal and group reminiscences about October would inevitably play a major role in preserving it.”¹⁰ By grasping the imperial monument as a tool of memorialization, the Bolsheviks were able to achieve their goals. Lenin and his cohort carried this plan to fruition with programs of memorializing and framing numerous vestiges of imperial power within the Bolshevik canon, with museums and exhibitions created to this end.¹¹ Corney asserts that the revolution itself was, “above all, a *remembered* event, an event constituted as cultural and historical memory intended to legitimize the young Soviet regime.”¹² Lenin’s program of preempting the reception of the Revolution had an extremely enduring impact. So enduring, was this program, that even during the *glasnost* years, historians did not readily criticize the memory of the Revolution as a legitimate assertion of state power. This may have been prudent for much of Soviet history as such a critique would have been treated predictably: all differing viewpoints would have been consumed and out as the work of rogue *intelligentsia*. Instead, their critique

⁶ Stites, *Revolutionary Dreams*, 65.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 76.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 78.

⁹ Frederick C. Corney, “Rethinking a Great Event: The October Revolution as Memory Project,” *Social Science History* 22, no. 4 (1998): 399-400.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 397.

¹¹ Stites, *Revolutionary Dreams*, 77.

¹² Corney, *Rethinking a Great Event*, 397.

functioned only as the “retrieval of suppressed historical memory.”¹³ Memory may eventually have been acknowledged as a tool of the state, but the legitimacy of Lenin’s program as an extension and affirmation of state power was not questioned.

Lenin did effectively assert the legitimacy of the Bolshevik seizure of power in the minds of many Russians, now Soviet people, who soon believed that Lenin’s vision had been justified. It follows that a system which draws its power – that inherits its very legitimacy - from a memory project would be quite sensitive to anyone who would call that legitimacy (memory project) into question. Certainly, during the Stalin years it would have been tantamount to suicide for one to question the legitimacy of Soviet power; the Revolution was the action which had freed Soviet people from Tsarist autocracy, delivered them from their slavery at the hands of the bourgeoisie and nobles, and asserted the worker as the head of a dictatorship of the proletariat. It was a history not that was not easily questioned. Moreover, it was a notion of history that, within the framework of Bolshevik ideology, represented the “‘natural’ ways of telling their story and of persuading others of its relevance to their daily lives.”¹⁴ The nature of the Revolution made it worth killing and dying for. For those who had fought in the civil war, and who knew the cost, it was an incredibly important justification; For the heads of Soviet power, it was unquestionable because it provided legitimacy to their power; For the members of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) it was necessary to orientate themselves within the post revolution landscape. It should not be assumed that the people accepted this version whole cloth, however the necessity for image building in the absence of a formerly accepted state power should not be underestimated. The importance of this national memorialization is enough to explain why *Dr. Zhivago*, in placing the human toll of revolution in the spotlight, was roundly rejected, once by the state and again by the people of the USSR. Bolshevik power asserted itself amid a struggle for total destruction of all vestiges of imperial power; as such, this assertion was tenuous and relied on Bolshevik power, and “power in Bolshevik hands of course [often] meant the power of the bullet.”¹⁵ Imperial power had been rejected wholly by the population, as the past was unacceptable.

The Bolshevik legitimacy within history, as an heir to the national legitimacy of Russia, was fundamentally tied to the Revolution. By grasping for themselves the memory making

¹³ Corney, *Rethinking a Great Event*, 397.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 398.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

apparatus, the Bolsheviks placed their revolution as a definitive break from the imperial past. It is particularly this definition of eras that Pasternak would call into question with *Dr. Zhivago*. Within Russia, the impression given by the Bolsheviks with regards to the significance of the Revolution was to separate it from Russia's past; their position, however, in a tradition of revolution was also important. The Bolsheviks drew some power from the French Revolution, as a legitimization of their place within history.¹⁶ As an enduring symbol of people's power (and therefore a legacy from which the Bolsheviks could build), the French revolution was an obvious choice. The marchers in 1905 and in strikes in 1917 had all sung the Marseilles. Revolution as a force for change within Russia was accepted, however the revolution was definitive within her borders, as evidenced by the fact that any fundamental criticism of the Bolshevik version of history was swiftly adjudicated. The aforementioned discontinuity between the conception of history in *Dr. Zhivago*, and that which was championed in the Bolshevik canon, is critical to understanding why not just the established political actors rejected the book's message. Despite a general appeal to historical continuity, the Bolsheviks presented an aesthetic break from the past, a fact affirmed by the desperate grasp at shaping the memory of the new Soviet people. It is a trite observation, but the innocent have nothing to hide. Nearly half a century later, when *Dr. Zhivago* was published, it threatened to reveal a continuity in Russian history, at the time an open secret which must not be spoken of.

From his early adulthood, Pasternak's impression of the ruling elite in Russia was dim. He was also critical of the present political mode, in which expression could be limited on the ruler's whims, and tens of thousands struggled to find food. Pasternak was exposed at a young age to the "wretchedness of rural Russia;" an experience which influenced his impression of the stark inequalities present within the empire.¹⁷ Aged fourteen, when the Russo-Japanese war began in 1904, the young Boris Pasternak began to develop an awareness of the rapidly unraveling hegemonic Russian empire, and he began to associate himself with an indistinct but certainly progressive strain of political opinion. Despite some limited engagement with protests and political action, however, Pasternak was self-ascribed apolitical.¹⁸ Pasternak's family too, being members of the *intelligentsia* and of a liberal progressive persuasion, were socially acquainted with left-

¹⁶ Corney, *Rethinking a Great Event*, 398.

¹⁷ Christopher J. Barnes, *Boris Pasternak: A Literary Biography*, vol. 1 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 55.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 1:56-61.

wing activists, but did not engage in direct action themselves.¹⁹ His experiences of the period 1905-6—particularly the events of 9 January 1905, ‘Bloody Sunday’—began to create a man who was highly sensitive to the political world and the ramifications of its actions, especially to the human component.²⁰ He is both critical of the excesses of a dying way of life, and sympathetic to the plight of disenfranchised Russian citizens. In Pasternak’s first autobiography, *Safe Conduct* (written in 1931 but not published until 1958), he belies his impressions of the disintegrating upper class in Russia, “winks were exchanged by the lacquered smirks of a way of life that was cracking apart.”²¹ Pasternak’s invocation of images of decay, facades, and inside jokes suggests his personal disenchantment with the hegemony of Russia’s aristocracy.

While it is inaccurate to claim that at a young age, Pasternak ever courted revolutionary status, or indeed came anywhere close (as Barnes notes, he and his family were deeply impacted and disturbed by all acts of violence), and although Pasternak is sympathetic to the problems within Russia, he did not advocate for total revolution.²² As Barnes notes, and Pasternak’s own work testifies, Pasternak was keenly aware and quite sensitive to violence. Pasternak’s own Yurii Andreyevich Zhivago, the titular character of *Dr. Zhivago* and Boris’ alter-ego, though an idealized one, shares this trait with Pasternak.²³ A poignant moment in chapter three of Pasternak’s *Dr. Zhivago* captures the particularities of this sensitivity for Pasternak; while Yurii Zhivago is working in a morgue, he describes the “naked bodies of unidentified young suicides and drowned women.”²⁴ The stark contrast of tragedy and groundlessness, a theme which is central to Pasternak’s criticism of the Soviet revolutionary canon, is explicit in this prose. The senselessness and surreality reflected in this short quotation reflect a continuity between Pasternak’s opinion of the Tsarist regime, and the Bolshevik government which succeeded it. Pasternak uses this contrast of groundless tragedy to describe the individual’s plight in the face of a state which fails to consider them, a theme which is present throughout Pasternak’s *Dr Zhivago*. An example within *Dr Zhivago* which explicitly displays the political criticism present within this thematic contrast occurs at the very end of the book. Larisa ‘Lara’ Guishar Antipova, Zhivago’s lover and confidant, disappears

¹⁹ Barnes, *Boris Pasternak*, 1:54.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 1:56.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 1: 55.

²² *Ibid.*, 1:57.

²³ Evgenii Pasternak, “‘For Pasternak, Communication Was, Like Creativity, a Way to Give of Himself’: Interview Conducted by E. Kalashnikov,” *Russian Studies in Literature* 48, no. 2 (2012): 82-95.

²⁴ Pasternak, *Doctor Zhivago*, 58.

and is presumed to have died in a Gulag, but her fate is ultimately left unclear.²⁵ This particular example displays Pasternak's own anguish at the senselessness of the violence which characterized the Stalinist period; Lara Guishar is a character who embodies (among other things) human goodness and altruism in the face of adversity. For Pasternak, the Bolshevik's were insensitive to the individual.

The loss of humanity is a theme fundamentally important to Pasternak's criticism of the Revolution. It is a theme not exclusively linked to the Bolsheviks, but to each actor who Pasternak interpreted as hindering expression, agency, and life. Pasternak confronts these actors in *Dr. Zhivago* unequivocally and without prejudice. From the first chapter of the book, Pasternak displays the tension between the lower classes in Russia and the Imperial hegemony most starkly in terms of humanity. The image of dragoons routing protesters in the snow and their whips and sabres falling indiscriminately among the assembly displays Pasternak's anguish.²⁶ It is events such as these, chronicled through the eyes of many different characters in *Dr. Zhivago*, for which Pasternak constitutes a legitimate political grievance. Those who assembled in protest are the disenfranchised and abused members of a system which has failed them. Their protestations are justified. This is hardly surprising considering Pasternak's aforementioned upbringing, as a member of the liberal *intelligentsia*, he felt a certain duty to be aware of current events, but equally was not particularly taken with offering commentary. This is a character trait which Pasternak and Yurii Zhivago share, and it seems their reaction to the fall of the Tsarist autocracy was much the same. Zhivago's Russia with no roof is Pasternak's Russia too. Barnes notes that Pasternak's summer of 1917 was marked by euphoric happiness and even contentment - an emotion seemingly out of place in a time of such shifting realities.²⁷ Yurii Zhivago and Boris Pasternak felt the righteousness of the fall of the Tsar, and believed it to herald, "an ocean of blood and filth [beginning] to give out light."²⁸ It was, however, a double-edged sword. In a whirlwind of excitement, the apparent enthusiastic beckoning of the future quickly turned to confused horror, and in this chaos the Bolshevik assuredness that this was part of the plan became appealing. Just how this chaos settled upon people is masterfully reflected in Pasternak's prose on the occasion of Yurii Zhivago's return to Moscow. Yurii Zhivago, having been sent to the front as part of the

²⁵ Pasternak, *Doctor Zhivago*, 416.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 35-6.

²⁷ Barnes, *Boris Pasternak*, 1:224.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

Imperial effort in WWI, had spent the summer of 1917 working at a hospital far southwest of Moscow in the aforementioned black soil country.²⁹ It was here that Zhivago experienced that summer, and here that he made his observation of Russia with her roof torn off, that then seemed to promise something new and good. The train ride home to Moscow introduces the conflict with which Yurii Zhivago grapples - between those whose ends would destroy him and anyone else, destroy humanity, and his yearning for change:

The doctor [Zhivago] was concerned about this life, he wanted it safe and whole and in his night express was impatient to get back to it after two years of separation. In the same group were his loyalty to the revolution and his admiration for it. This was the revolution in the sense in which it was accepted by the middle classes [left-liberal intelligentsia] and in which it had been understood by the students, followers of Blok, in 1905.³⁰

It was this understanding of the Revolution which Pasternak himself deeply believed; an understanding he shares with Yurii Zhivago. It is this understanding too that threatened the Bolsheviks. This sense of the revolution was, quite simply, not enough to be accepted in the all-encompassing frame that the Bolsheviks had placed it in. There could be no guarantee of safety; the revolution must come first and above all else. Despite this, during his train ride home, Yurii Zhivago still maintained belief in his Revolution, the revolution that promised real change from the oppressive ways of the Empire. It was not to be. Even during Zhivago's train ride, amid his continual hope for a truly better future, a conversation with a stranger fills him with misgivings.³¹ Upon Yurii Zhivago's arrival in Moscow, foreshadowing warns of the tough winter ahead, and a sense of absolutism continues to pierce any conversation of the revolution.³² The pervasion of this absolutism is heralded by detachedness, calculation, and embodied in Pasternak's narrative by Yurii Zhivago's uncle, a man whom Zhivago holds in the deepest regard as an artist and scholar.³³ A parallel can be drawn here between the trajectory of the revolution in Pasternak's (and Yurii Zhivago's) eyes. Pasternak and Zhivago share a common understanding of the Revolution, and this understanding is clearly different from Zhivago's uncle. The euphoria of the February Revolution, and the summer of 1917, were replaced with consternation and horror as the civil war began, reflected in Zhivago's happiness when he sees his uncle only to discover his uncle is now

²⁹ Pasternak, *Doctor Zhivago*, 111.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 134.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 136-8

³² *Ibid.*, 143-44.

³³ *Ibid.*, 149-51.

unbearable in political conversation.³⁴ As 1917 wears on, Yurii Zhivago becomes increasingly anxious about the future, misgivings which are not misplaced. Yurii Zhivago's initial reason for returning to Moscow becomes his reason for leaving, and concerns about the wellbeing of his loved ones comes to a head. Material conditions and the threat of violence eventually convince Zhivago to take his family to Yuriatin, in the foothills of the Ural Mountains. It is here that the direct confrontation between Bolshevism and Pasternak's own notions of progress occurs, chronologically situated during the proceeding four years of vicious civil war.

The train ride from Moscow to Yuriatin was long and harrowing. The violence of the civil war had already caused chaos in the countryside, causing delays to the journey and affirming the worst. During Yurii Zhivago's train ride to Yuriatin, the demarcation between actors (Whites, Bolsheviks, etc.) begins to break down with regards to the impact of their actions. They are not described as Whites, as Bolsheviks, but as violent. The violence is characterized as it is, the human toll and loss of normalcy, the very ability for those who once inhabited the burned-out villages to eke out an existence has been taken from them; it is this that Pasternak bemoans, via Yurii Zhivago. This journey also brings Zhivago into contact with characters whom Pasternak's opinion of Bolshevism is directly confronted through. Upon arrival in Yuriatin, the husband of one of Zhivago's previous acquaintances and favorite interlocutors, Larisa Guishar Antipova, makes his appearance. He was responsible for some of the destruction that Yurii Zhivago witnessed during his travels, and he had transformed himself from a teacher to one of the Red Armies most dependable commanders in a remarkably short time.³⁵ Pasha 'Strelnikov' Antipov is at once the mouthpiece of Bolshevik sentiment and an absolutely 'unaffected' man.³⁶ On the occasion of their first meeting, Zhivago is struck by Strelnikov's confidence. Strelnikov is, in effect, the embodiment of the revolution in the Bolshevik sense; he represents the necessity of purism. His character is uncompromising and confident because it must be, there is no room for error and no room for second guessing, as to do so would be antithetical to the commitment to fundamentally break with the imperial past in aesthetic sense. As previously discussed, this commitment cannot be questioned or it becomes self-referential, and indeed Strelnikov's ultimate fate reflects this. Strelnikov had been committed fully to the Revolution, but the Revolution itself, in the Bolshevik

³⁴ Pasternak, *Doctor Zhivago*, 151.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 208-9.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 206-7.

sense, was nothing but totality. Total belief was the commitment to itself for commitment's sake. For Strelnikov, the Revolution became his final commitment, and stripped him of all he held dear. After Yurii Zhivago and Strelnikov met in the last days of the civil war, two men had lost nearly everything representing their humanity to that war. Zhivago is saved by the last shred of his humanity to survive the war - his art. Strelnikov can do nothing but run from his former masters. Strelnikov had given up his life voluntarily, during the malaise of World War I, and when the Revolution had called, he answered. For freedom, he thought he would fight, and "When I'd won it [freedom], I thought, my hands would be untied, and I could belong to my family. And now, all my calculations have come to nothing."³⁷ Stripped of his utility to the Soviet regime by the end of the war, and disabused of his commitment to the Revolution, Strelnikov shot himself. In his final act, Strelnikov maintained more agency than most of those unfortunate victims of the Bolshevik Revolution. The end result, however, is fundamentally the same.

Pasternak's critique of Bolshevism grows more defined as the civil war rages on, and from Zhivago and Strelnikov's first meeting to their last, Zhivago spent some time with a band of Bolshevik insurgents. Zhivago was kidnapped for his practical knowledge of medicine and made to spend two years with the guerillas. During this time, and to his chagrin, Zhivago made the acquaintance of the group's commander, Liberious Mikulitsyn - the son of Zhivago's families' landlord in Yuriatin. Coincidences aside, Liberious was, unlike Strelnikov, a character who becomes repulsive to Yurii Zhivago. A cocaine addicted revolutionary fanatic, he bores Zhivago with his incessant dialogue.³⁸ To Zhivago, his character is totally disconnected from any sort of reality, and despite his acknowledgment that some practical measures proposed by Liberious are sound, he is anything but enthusiastic about his fanatical aspirations. For Pasternak, human life and history are not as easily shaped as Liberious claims them to be.³⁹ It is here that ideology clashes; for Pasternak, the absolutism and naivete of Liberious represent the totality of belief present in the Revolution personified.⁴⁰ It is particularly the necessity of absolutism in the Bolshevik sense of revolution, which as previously discussed is due to their control of the memory apparatus, which makes Liberious a repulsive character. For Pasternak one cannot change human life in such a fundamental sense through action. Yurii Zhivago sees Liberious as attempting to do just that: "The

³⁷ Pasternak, *Doctor Zhivago*, 383.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 279-82.

³⁹ Barnes, *Boris Pasternak*, 1:132.

⁴⁰ Pasternak, *Doctor Zhivago*, 281.

people you worship go in for proverbs, but they've forgotten one proverb—'You can lead a horse to water but you can't make it drink'—and they've got into the habit of liberating and of showering benefits on just those people who haven't asked for them."⁴¹ The Revolution is uncalled for, and those who have made it their motive maintain that it was always imminent, a necessity, when in reality it is their own construction of what the revolution should be that they call imminent. The construction of memory as belief is a phenomenon which also induces in its believers the confidence in the necessity of that construction. It is this that the Bolshevik's actions are explained by violence in service of a construction.

Pasternak's own vision of history, from a letter to his family upon concluding his studies at Marburg, Germany, describes history as anything but ordained. Distinct from the Bolshevik notion, Pasternak views history as a series of serendipitous events (albeit with dark moments) which each follow precipitously,

I realized that the history of a culture is a chain of equations in the shape of images which form pairs linking the already known with the next unknown. And this known element which remains constant for the whole series, is the legend underlying the tradition, whereas the unknown which is new each time is that actual moment in the stream of a culture.⁴²

Pasternak contends that history is fundamentally unpredictable, with the best possible tool to understanding the future being the past. It is a version of history which is highlighted in the many chance encounters of Pasternak's characters in *Dr. Zhivago*, relationships which give one a headache to try and understand. Most truthfully, it is this which defines history for Pasternak, and for many Soviet people, for whom the only official version was that of the October Revolution was unpalatable. The occasion of *Dr. Zhivago*'s publication, an event with a storied history all its own, caused great turmoil within (and outside of) the Soviet Union. Pasternak first attempted to publish the book within the Soviet Union, but when this failed, he took the project to Western Europe. Besieged by the Soviet officials and press, Pasternak was forced to deliver a conference rejecting the decision to publish abroad.⁴³ Pasternak also received many letters, both at his home, and addressed to literature journals within the Soviet Union condemning his work.⁴⁴ As Denis Kozlov notes in his book *The Readers of Novy Mir*, "Most letter writers indeed viewed Pasternak's

⁴¹ Pasternak, *Doctor Zhivago*, 281.

⁴² Barnes, *Boris Pasternak*, 1:132.

⁴³ Christopher J. Barnes, *Boris Pasternak: a Literary Biography*, vol. 2 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 348-50.

⁴⁴ Barnes, *Boris Pasternak*, 2:349.; "'Doctor Zhivago': Letter to Boris Pasternak from the Editors of 'Novyi Mir.'" *Daedalus* 89, no. 3 (1960).

behavior as treasonable, seeing Doctor Zhivago as an act of calumny against the Soviet order, the Revolution, and “our achievements.”⁴⁵ Kozlov also notes that it is not possible to accurately deduce the totality of the Soviet reader’s reaction to Pasternak, the volume of letters both received to Pasternak’s home and those received by journals and newspapers does give an idea of the reception.⁴⁶ Pasternak’s vision was incompatible with the memory of the Revolution as Lenin and his party had established it, as was it necessary for its long term legitimacy, and it was a threat.

Pasternak himself died soon after *Dr. Zhivago* was published. The legacy of the book today is no longer threatened so severely by the Revolution as the Bolshevik’s defined it, but the conflict it created is a testament both to the great subtlety of Pasternak’s work, and the enduring legacy of the Bolshevik vision. Pasternak’s emphasis on the human element of the Revolution, the toll in terms of human lives and human suffering and the very degradation of life as it was known, called into question the legacy of a moment in history which defined the Soviet Union. It is not simply that people were brainwashed; for many the Revolution truly became what Lenin defined it to be. For many, the ends did in fact justify the means, and the belief in the necessity of the Revolution rang true for many people. Pasternak’s own notion of history was perhaps too based in circumstance to uphold the legitimacy of Soviet power, and thus it faced a great deal of backlash. The very self-assuredness which Pasternak critiqued was in 1958 still very present in Russia.

⁴⁵ Denis Kozlov, *The Readers of Novyi Mir Coming to Terms with the Stalinist Past* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013), 116.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 116.

Bibliography

Barnes, Christopher J. *Boris Pasternak: a Literary Biography*. 2 Volumes. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989.

Corney, Frederick C. "Rethinking a Great Event: The October Revolution as Memory Project." *Social Science History* 22, no. 4 (1998): 389-414.

"'Doctor Zhivago': Letter to Boris Pasternak from the Editors of 'Novyi Mir.'" *Daedalus* 89, no. 3 (1960): 648-68.

Kozlov, Denis. *The Readers of Novyi Mir Coming to Terms with the Stalinist Past*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013.

Pasternak, Boris. *Doctor Zhivago*. Translated by Max Hayward and Manya Harari. New York: Pantheon Books, 1958.

Pasternak, Evgenii. "'For Pasternak, Communication Was, Like Creativity, a Way to Give of Himself': Interview Conducted by E. Kalashnikov." *Russian Studies in Literature* 48, no. 2 (2012): 82-95.

Stites, Richard. *Revolutionary Dreamsw: Utopian Vision and Experimental Life in the Russian Revolution*, Oxford University Press, 1988.