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DONALD DAVIE AND BORIS PASTERNAK

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I

As an epigraph for this study I wish to take the last quatrain of 'Or, Solitude':

> The metaphysicality
> Of poetry, how I need it!
> And yet it was for years
> What I refused to credit.

It has been said that, largely under Pasternak's influence, Donald Davie moved from a poetry of 'extreme self-consciousness' to a poetry 'aiming at a way of knowing the world we are in'.[1] What then can 'metaphysicality' mean? Pasternak is not a poet of transcendental themes like Blok, nor of ontological inquiry like Rilke, but his work can be called metaphysical in its being a response to the world 'we are in', conceived as something obviously more than it obviously is. 'I was attracted by the unusualness of the usual', he wrote to Stephen Spender in 1959,[2] and 'was struck by the observation that existence was more original, extraordinary, and inexplicable than any of its separate astonishing incidents and facts'. Twice, elsewhere, he has offered versions of a very striking image for the whole world of our experience. He compared it to a painting, itself depicting turbulent movement, upon a canvas which was being buffeted and blown turbulently onward by something unrelated to what the painting depicted and about which nothing more could be directly said. With this in mind I am taking 'metaphysical' to mean alert to a ubiquitous amazingness, to a coherence and a dynamic directedness of all things, only just ungraspable by us and so always to be sought in art. It is not that Pasternak writes poems *saying* such things as 'the world is like a painting on

1. Martin Dodsworth, 'Donald Davie', *Agenda* (Summer 1976).
2. Three letters from Pasternak to Spender, in Pasternak's own English, were published in *Encounter* (August 1960).

a canvas which . . .'; he does not try to depict the force itself, but to reproduce parts of the painting in such a way as to evoke that force's vehemence.

If Donald Davie changed in the way described, then Pasternak changed rather in the opposite way: from extreme world-we-are-in consciousness to poetry aiming at knowing the relation of his self to it all. His earlier poems (up to the 1930s) were impassioned, impetuous responses to whatever was around him, and especially to its changes, its 'weathers'; they were a full intoxicated speech, abundant with metaphor knotted at every point to an abundantly perceived actuality; he was accused of 'remoteness' by politically-minded contemporaries, but the political events of his time were really in his poems, not as outlines but as admixtures, yeasty constituents, no less than were the events of love and of landscape. It was a poetry both of infinitely fine attention to detail and of seizure—of trust in that thing which he did not call 'inspiration' but always sought other names for.

This 'metaphysics' has little to do with a fixed truth, and everything to do with energy. In 1962, in an impatient and fascinated 'Note on Translating Pasternak',[3] Donald Davie discerned in him 'the single perception—that natural energy is wonderful and good, whether it throws two lovers together or makes the grass grow or makes poems come to poets—', 'a single devotion to energy however manifested'. He clearly appreciated in Pasternak the ability to sense and yield to that energy, a readiness for excitement or rapture, an emotional *élan* not easily available to the modern English mind. The English climate would scarcely accommodate what Isaak Babel called in the 1920s 'the wind of big thoughts and big passions' and Pasternak—similarly making it tangible—'the taste of big principles'. Russia was (and perhaps is) felt to be going *on*; towards something, while we have to feel ourselves on a downward curve, the away slope of the cycle of an accomplished culture. When Donald Davie notes—without the indulgence of regret—that for us there is no longer a shared symbolic system, and when he therefore advocates the selfconsciously 'minor' poem with its own hard honesty, its meaning each time centred separately in itself, he is indicating the absence of 'big thoughts and big passions', the absence of a sense of being blown by one wind. But through all Pasternak's poetry, even his more modest later work (even when 'listen to the voice of life' has turned into 'only stay alive, to the end'), the 'big' things, continuing from the unexhausted Russian Symbolist movement and from

3. In *Listen* (Autumn 1962) pp. 19-23.

the inspiration of the Revolution, go on being heard; there is a sense of history in them and a vast conception of 'process'. And he took just the opposite view from Davie's of 'minor' poems: *his* small poems were a marking time and a preparation for something far bigger, a great epic or a novel (finally achieved) which, he intended, *would* correspond to the bigness of reality.[4]

Davie certainly liked the combination of all this—the *élan*, the lack of irony, the grateful witness of grandeur—with Pasternak's complete unpretentiousness, insistence on formal perfection, his strict and vigorous syntax and his civilized, highly intelligent speaking voice.

Both put themselves through a change of poetic manner. And in each it was a question of working against the grain, a decisive self-disciplining. Pasternak changed twice, in fact. First, when at the beginning of his poetic career, he took up a careful stance against the exaltation of the poet's self that he saw in Blok and in Mayakovsky and felt himself drawn to, and went in for anonymity, for such a practised merging of ego with external things that on a night walk home (as one poem tells) he found the wind and the branches quarrelling about—*him*: to such an extent had he become unsubjective and humorously deliberate about it. Different as Pasternak is from Pushkin, one could read Davie's words in 'Pushkin: A Didactic Poem' as if they applied to him:

> . . . The poet exhibits here
> How to be conscious in every direction
> But that of the self, where deception starts.
> This is nobility; not lost
> Wholly perhaps, if lost to art . . .

His second change was more dramatic and under more public pressures: attentive to current injunctions, which he interpreted in his own idiosyncratically conscientious way, he worked his style away from the natural layered and concentrated fullness of language which had made him such a difficult poet, and towards a willed simplicity, accessibility to people in general, a more ordinary sincerity. He even made a public announcement about the planned change, 'this migration from one position to another', and told his audience how hard it would be for him: 'for a while I shall write like a cobbler, forgive me'. Both changes were from apparent excess to patent discipline. And we do really sense throughout his work something of this sharp-edged forming and holding in check; even when a poem's very subject is release of restraints (as it often is) he will stop short before too much is said, refuse to let things slacken off.

4. It is interesting to compare Pasternak's lament: 'You say I am "first and last a poet, a lyric poet". Is it really so? And should I feel proud of being just that? And do you realize the meaning of my being no more than that, whereas it hurts me to feel that I have not had the ability to express in greater fullness the whole of poetry and life in their complete unity?' (Letter to E. Kayden, August 1958; in his own English. See introduction to B. Pasternak, *Poems*, trs. E. M. Kayden, University of Michigan Press 1959)—with Donald Davie's confession: 'It is true that I am not a poet by nature, only by inclination: for my mind moves most easily and happily among abstractions, it relates ideas far more readily than it relates experiences.' (Printed in *Collected Poems*, p. 301).

Although the richness of language in the earlier Donald Davie is not, as it is in the earlier Pasternak, an attempt to copy the richness of 'nature'—'I have little appetite, only profound admiration, for sensuous fullness and immediacy'—but rather a self-assertion of the variously dressed cogitating mind of the poet, an abundance not of celebration but of cerebration, the winding and unwinding of skeins of conversation, the invention of mentalities; and although it constitutes an elaboration of an existing high tradition, rather than the Russian instinctive-programmatic 'starting afresh' as if from unprecedented exposure to 'God's world'; yet the change he made from about 1957, partly through Pasternak's influence, is both similarly deliberated—'I have taken a decision to write no more poems of this kind'—and similarly directed: towards the more pruned and accessible, towards more reflection of, as well as on, the immediate world, to more physicality, and to personality rather than the wearing of personae. For Pasternak too became more personal as he became simpler, as though he had previously worn his impersonality as Davie wore his masks of wit, didact, orator, poet-academic. When the later Pasternak opens a poem with the words 'I used to go around with the poor' we know he means that it was he himself who did that; and when the later Donald Davie starts 'Whenever I talk of my art' there is the same straight confessional effect. From the simpler Pasternak he learnt to be simpler. But he had not rejected in *his* past the same thing that Pasternak had, and could thus also learn—or enact through Pasternak—a more feeling responsiveness, and start out upon an 'adventure in blessing the world'.

Common to the two poets, and not a matter of influence, is the strong presence in most of their poems of a vigorous speaking—rather than singing—voice. Pasternak's fellow-poet Aseev wrote about him in 1923[5] that what mattered in his verse was not 'melody' but 'intonation'; he called it 'a poetic speech designed for powerful vocal muscles' and he spoke, approvingly and aptly, of 'the peculiar tautness of his syntactical devices'. This seems not very distant from Davie's preference for syntax over musicality, or

5. N. Aseev, 'Melody or Intonation', trs. A. Livingstone, in *Pasternak: modern judgements*, Donald Davie and A. Livingstone (eds.) pp. 73-84.

rather for 'that understanding of the musicality of poetry which immediately issues, not in manipulation of vowels and consonants, but in manipulation of syntax'. Not music as tunefulness, but music as onward flow, afforded the analogy with poetry, with the poem as a 'sequence of verbal events' and 'inhabiting a duration'.[6] Saying this, Davie quotes Yury Zhivago's rather mystical piece about the poet writing. But he could have quoted Pasternak on an actual musician. For his own praise of Spenser, in whom 'the orchestration is subdued to the melodic unwinding of the syntax', presents a curious parallel—with reverse relation of the two arts—to Pasternak's praise of Chopin, in whom melody, he says, is 'a consecutively developing thought, like the movement of a gripping narrative or the content of a historically important message'.[7]

Each of them stresses that poetry proceeds in the space of time. But the difference in their explanation of it both epitomises their differentness altogether and shows, I think, what Donald Davie wanted Pasternak for. When Davie says 'poetry, like music, erects its structures in the lapse of time', he is making a point only about the nature of poetry, advising us of a rewarding way of considering it. But Pasternak is concerned with the nature of nature. For him poetry and music take time in just the way the world-we-are-in does. 'Look at it continuing, moment after moment a success', he wrote in 1922 ['it' means 'the live, real world'] '. . . For the poet it is an example, even more than a model or a pattern'.[8] The world as an example of what can be done . . . and poetry not to model itself on nature as on something other, but to be spurred on by *that* example of what is being achieved, as if by someone else in the same material. Something in Pasternak's work invariably recalls this common origin of itself and of everything else, this likeness of poetry to the way the world *is*.

While sharing Pasternak's enthusiasm for the poem in time, its onwardness, and its music as narrative, Donald Davie rigorously translates this romantic large certainty about the nature of nature (which in some way he must have admired and desired to have) into a more cautious, up-to-date critical language adapted to the close look at the individual poem, the strict and sensible attempt to say what *it*, not what the world, is. A telling example of this is his quoting Pasternak's words: 'The clearest, most memorable and

6. 'The relation between syntax and music in some modern poems in English' in *The Poet in the Imaginary Museum*, pp. 94-5.
7. Pasternak, 'Chopin' in *Sochineniya*, G. Struve and B. Filippov (eds.) (University of Michigan Press 1961) pp. 171-5 (not translated).
8. Pasternak, 'Some statements', trs. A. Livingstone, in *Modern Russian Poets on Poetry*, Carl Proffer (ed.) (Ann Arbor: Ardis 1974) p. 85.

important fact about art is its conception, and the world's best creations, while telling[9] of the most diverse things, in reality describe their own birth', and then continuing (with reference to his argument hitherto): 'How can it be otherwise, if the events which the poem narrates are the events of its own words occurring in it one by one?'[10] But Pasternak was not being as clever as that, nor as formalistic. He *meant* the 'birth' of the poem, the moment in the poet's life which gave it birth, that is, the moment (he says) of finding the world so changed and new that it suddenly has no name: 'We try to name it. The result is art.' There is a modern note in his insistence that the 'ray of feeling' which thus changes the world is as objective as the forces studied by physics, but a tirelessly romantic note in the implicit eulogy of the heightened moment—whether it be of 'inspiration' and changed sensation or, as he has it, of enthralled *perception* of an objectively changed world. 'Feeling' changed the world, and 'feeling' now makes the poem by copying down that change (with the help of 'devices'). Donald Davie wants us to know what the *poem* is, Pasternak what its origination is and its relation to what is happening outside in the real.

'The result' is of course *a* poem. But where Davie assumes the discrete definiteness of the given poem, Pasternak's look at its 'biographical' coming-into-being includes the thought of it as having been able to be wholly different, because the 'interchangeability of details *is* art'.[11] Indeed, perhaps the very multitude of metaphors in his earlier poems is to make us realise we need not take any one of them with a final seriousness; what matters is always something *else*—not transcendental, but still 'metaphysical'.

In another matter the two of them speak similarly: in the uncompromising expectation of perfection. Again their different philosophies—and nationalities—show up. Characteristically starting from existence, from the human condition (though he doesn't use this phrase), Pasternak says it is the discrepancy between life's brevity and art's length that brings the necessity for the fullest and fastest possible statement at each moment—'Because of this discrepancy [man] is obliged to look at things with eagle-eyed-sharpness and to explain himself in momentary illuminations that will be immediately comprehensible. This is what poetry is. Metaphorism is the stenography of a great personality, the shorthand of its

9. I have corrected a slight error in the translation here.
10. 'The relation between syntax and music', p. 98.
11. Pasternak, *A Safe Conduct*, trs. A. Livingstone, in Pasternak, *Collected Short Prose*, ed. C. Barnes, (New York: Praeger 1977) pp. 21-97, p. 55.

soul'.[12] Characteristically *not* existential, Davie declares 'The art imposes its own laws: it demands to be pushed to the extreme, to be wrought up to the highest pitch it is capable of', and he judges poets accordingly, offended by those in whose hands 'the medium . . . is *not wrought up to the highest pitch*. They do not say a thing once and for all, then move on fast to another thing. Their expressions could be, not more true, but more forcibly, more brilliantly and compactly true'.[13]

Pasternak is metaphysical about the way art demands our best. Davie is aesthetic about it—and also moral. The moral fervour with which he seeks out the slightly slovenly, to castigate it, goes along with a sense of responsibility for the prevailing standards of taste; it is up to him to refine and maintain these. Pasternak's eternalism, his lack of fight, is of course partly due to his enjoying the paradoxical freedom of being, as a true artist, necessarily outside the 'establishment' in his country, unable to be responsible for what standards officially prevail. So, except on rare occasions (as once or twice in *Doctor Zhivago*), he avoids taking issue with the prevalent mediocrity and sticks to praising what is good, always praising *in* it the same thing: 'the presence of life'. Davie values the highly wrought—and so does Pasternak, but *he* calls it that to which life has come rushing in like a wind from the street. In his appreciations of others (Blok, Pushkin, Verlaine . . .) and also in accounts of his own creation, he conceives of a fidelity to the 'voice of life' which produces the perfect, not through an inner strenuousness, but through obedience to an outer force. One of the many poems about this is a poem of 1923 which begins (in Donald Davie's translation):

> The slantwise images, flying in on a rainstorm
> From the road outside, extinguishing my candle,
> From hook and wall propelling themselves into rhyme
> And falling into measure, I cannot stop them.[14]

As often as 'zhizn': life', Pasternak uses the word 'sila : force, strength, power', as when he says of how he wrote his book *My Sister Life*: 'I became utterly indifferent as to the name of the power which had given me the book, because it was immensely bigger than me', or when he writes: 'When we imagine that in Tristan, Romeo and Juliet and other great works a powerful passion is represented, we underestimate their content. Their theme is wider than this powerful theme. Their theme is the theme

12. Pasternak, 'Notes of a translator', trs. A. Livingstone, in *Modern Russian Poets on Poetry*, pp. 99-100.
13. From 'See, and Believe', *The Poet in the Imaginary Museum*, p. 71.
14. Quoted in *Pasternak: modern judgements*, p. 128.

of power'.[15] 'Sila' has the same centrality in his theory as 'energy' has in Donald Davie's. But where Pasternak uses it of something vaster than poet and poem, Davie keeps it for a description of something *in* the poem, product of the poet's own brilliance and care.

II

Davie gained more, more directly, from Pasternak's late poems: simpler, plainer, shorn of all excess and of some exuberance, using fewer and less connotative metaphors, offering the sympathy, moderation and self-knowledge of the travailed, assaulted and surviving older man—the poems of *Kogda razgulyayetsa* (When the Weather Clears) and of *Doctor Zhivago*. He was thus influenced by the work of someone who had been, in Schiller's sense, 'naive' in his metaphysicality but had become 'sentimental'—reflective, self-conscious—about it. Yet through his affinity to the later Pasternak he harks back, *with* him, to the earlier. He came to know the early Pasternak well in any case, or a good deal of him, and much comes straight through, in pieces of translation or occasional images or, less often, in the furnishing of bases for his own poems.

But there are a number of poems which represent conscious encounters with particular poems of the *later* Pasternak, in *Events and Wisdoms* words like 'snagged', 'foison', 'lissom', 'polders', tions nor 'imitations' nor anything that could give consistent meaning to the phrase 'After Pasternak', which Donald Davie uses quite variously and which could be applied to more poems than it is applied to. They might be looked at as new growths, in one man's work, of something that started growing in another's: offshoots, a kind of offspring. In *Events and Wisdoms* I find Pasternak often admiringly invoked and at the same time disputed with—a mixture of homage and impatience, of emulating and wrestling. In *Essex Poems* he seems to have been more accepted and absorbed. Then later, in the volume *In the Stopping Train*, there comes what might be construed as a single complex farewell to him.

I discern a beginning dialogue with Pasternak in the *Events and Wisdoms* poem 'Humanly Speaking'. The Russian poet, deciding to change his style, in the 1930s, felt he was obeying the 'spirit of the epoch': both its loud demand that art be for

15. *A Safe Conduct*, pp. 87 and 54.

everyone and its quiet demand for an unrhetorical sincerity. Accordingly, his poems about fresh beginnings, or about the outcomes of experiments in living, usually have reference to some more general thing than himself, whether it is 'Nature' or the town full of people or a change in the general consciousness.[16] In Donald Davie such themes are without the 'objective' reference. In 'Humanly Speaking' there is a hint of Pasternak's 'A Change', and there is a lot of his confessional plainness, but the focus is on a quite private mood and plan, the sorting out of one's own attitudes.

> After two months, already
> My auspiciously begun
> Adventure of blessing the world
> Was turning woe-begone.

'Blessing' seems to mean speaking well of, perhaps instead of the 'revulsion' Davie has elsewhere called habitual to himself, but also suggests an aspiration to a new metaphysics, for who can bless but God or priest? The poem traces a mental argument about this aspiration, going through three turning-points. First, he thinks the failure may be due to a particular way of living rather than to 'life itself'; that is, he tries to capture a Pasternakian sureness of 'life's' continuing presence ('immensely bigger than me'). Then, he abandons this notion:

> But a truce to pieties!
> I pull myself together
> And get exasperated:
> Damn this stupid weather!

Very English ('Damn . . .'), he equates self-discipline with recognition of the mundane causes of personal ups and downs, such as the weather. This sounds like a well-known English preoccupation, but weather, as Davie knows, is Pasternak's great speciality,[17] and the way he talks of it eight lines later ('The weather invades me . . .') is so much like Pasternak's own relation to it (except for the unwillingness) that I take it he is also exasperated with Pasternak himself and saying that *his* over-happy faith in nature and in his 'Sister, Life' is less real than is a true bit of moody self-criticism. Damning the weather, he is damning any notion of it as more than it seems, and 'life itself' now *is* 'the one soured life I am leading'.

16. E.g., the poem 'Peremena/A Change/' in *Kogda razgulyayetsa*, which ends: 'I have lost the human being / Since the time he was lost by everyone.'
17. In *A Safe Conduct* he equates it with 'nature', with which it also rhymes in Russian: pogóda, priróda.

Pasternak has been diversely present in the poem so far: the surprising 'towel of wind' recalls his towel image in two bad-mood poems of 1922, and the 'barren fig-tree' is the one cursed by Christ in the Zhivago poem 'Miracle'. Not Christ-like, Donald Davie cannot work the miracle, but his job as human being is at least to revile barrenness—to express, after all, his basic revulsion. An impressive achievement of this poem is that it makes this big point in chancy, *un*impressive language. But making big points in little language is one of the things learnt (at least in part) from the later Pasternak, so that the relation to him is paradoxical: the poem goes against him, yet it is in his spirit. Indeed, the very vocabulary—words like 'rasped', 'out of gear', 'selfsame pothers'—is, like much in *Events and Wisdoms*, remarkably Pasternakian.

The third turning-point is at the very end:

> But I, who had hoped no more
> To have to point the finger,
> Who had ventured on new feelings . . .
> For me misgivings linger.

The impossible 'adventure' has become the possible 'ventured', the grand task of blessing is rewritten as a try for new feelings. These changes, along with the row of dots, suggest that 'hoped no more' must not be paused at for long and that the attempt at a change is to continue; and this is *very* oddly confirmed by the way 'point the finger' is taken up into the opening words 'Look there!' of the next poem, 'The Hill Field', a poem which turns out to be just the opposite of 'soured', affirmative in at first a thoroughly Pasternakian manner: Look how splendid the world is! . . .

But 'The Hill Field' too develops into an implicit dialogue with Pasternak. Its first words practically invite us to look for an antecedent, and we find it—a little remotely—in Pasternak's poem 'Bread'. This poem records a somewhat Rilkean realisation that the animal and vegetational kingdoms are in need of human myth and meaning, and that the first human revelation to them was bread: our corn-sowing ancestor was 'inscribing a page about us', the cornfield was his 'word'. Continuity—from age to age and from matter to spirit (field-bread-symbol)—is here Pasternak's gentle, transcendent and down-to-earth, thought. Donald Davie, more early-Pasternakian than Pasternak himself here is, elaborates a more visual and image-rich idea.

The Pasternak poem starts lightly, colloquially, the Davie one—even jocularly, with 'halfway to bread' turning into 'half a loaf', the *shape* of the half-reaped field; there comes a Gogolian ramification of the simile, with the shape evoking farmer's wife serving slices of bread to farmer's men, and a multiplication of it,

the field being also *cheese*-shaped; then (again as in Gogol) human life springs out from it when the cheesemites turn back into reapers, so that loaf and cheese can turn back into field. All this is a concrete and merry enriching of Pasternak's more wise and abstract cornfield-plus-meaning. But then the last two stanzas make a point that seems to intend a sort of discussion with him. Not only is Davie *not* (we read, if we've got Pasternak's poem alongside) concerned with that modest but grand continuity between plant and spirit, but he much prefers the self-critical scrutiny of his own means of perception.

> It is Brueghel or Samuel Palmer,
> Some painter, coming between
> My eye and the truth of a farmer,
> So massively sculpts the scene.
>
> The sickles of poets dazzle
> These eyes that were filmed from birth;
> And the miller comes with an easel
> To grind the fruits of earth.

Although 'filmed from birth' might mean that *all* human or poetic seeing must be done through theory, convention and custom, yet 'these eyes' and 'dazzle' suggest that it's a matter of particular regret—*he* cannot look directly at things, cannot get the film of culture off his eyes—and that a more naive poet has something he misses.

Yet it is not only Brueghel and Samuel Palmer who film his eyes, it is Pasternak too (one of the 'sickles of poets') with his fields full of meanings and his prompting the enacted spontaneity of 'Look there!' And when a further suggestion of Pasternak comes, in the image of grinding—for poetry as the grinding of old or dead life into new is a prominent motif in Pasternak—it seems the conclusion is that, although his culture disables him from seeing with immediacy, as artist he is nonetheless a kind of miller: even if his experience is thickly mediated, he too usefully grinds; his spiritually grinding the 'fruits of earth' is the last stage of the pattern of transformation from corn to bread and to symbol. He has displayed his difference from Pasternak and then adopted his vision.

Then there are two poems which are much closer than these two to particular Pasternak source-poems: 'Housekeeping' and 'New York in August'. 'Housekeeping' is largely a new mix of elements from 'Babye leto' [Indian Summer]. There may be a cryptic hint at its provenance in the quaint phonic-semantic connection between the Russian poem's title ('babye': literally

'peasant-woman's' but suggesting, at least to the non-Russian, 'babushka: grandmother') and the grandmother in the first line of the English poem. The similar components are early Autumn, the picking or preserving of fruit, a slope or 'bank' with 'poor trees', and—at beginning and end—the carrying and echoing of sounds of laughter.

Davie here investigates and elaborates a simple memory; Pasternak solves, as it were, the problematic sadness to be felt in view of Autumn's fiery raggedness and of the fact that everything comes to an end,[18] briskly simplifying all this by insisting that the bright kitchen sounds (or women pickling fruit) are reflected outdoors: what is within is also without, it's one and the same thing, so all is well. Davie diverges from Pasternak in making the fruit-picking a 'historic habit', echoing across time. 'Contentment cries from the distance. How it carries!' may seem sheer Pasternak, but here it carries across generations rather than across the side of a house, and his bank is a vehicle not for the house's noise but for his long-ago youthful grandmother to slide down squealing. This variation upon Pasternak is done so prominently—as is also the way the 'poor trees', though included, are put firmly into a subordinate clause—that he seems to be saying: whatever Pasternak may have meant about those trees, which, yes, I *will* (for homage) roughly repeat, *I* am saying that my grandmother slid down the bank and that the relatedness of my existence to hers is of more moment than the metaphysical-metaphorical relatedness *he* is after, of indoors with outdoors, or inner and outer altogether. Nevertheless there is more than a household history here, there is a joyfulness in the affirmation of a real time continuance, which quite probably Donald Davie came to through immersion in that same kind of joy, that repeated acclamation of the continuing world, in Pasternak. For Pasternak's stress on those audible echoes supports the view—which he has often expressed, and often far better than in this poem—that the world, with whatever grief or loss you may look at it, whatever crevices and gaps you may notice, holds together in a miraculous entirety and is ever and again to be seen *doing* so; and that everywhere unexpected affinities remind us of this.

'New York in August' is described as 'After Pasternak' but has about the same closeness to Pasternak's 'Summer in the City' as 'Housekeeping' has to 'Indian Summer'. It leaps off from Davie's own translation of that poem: 'crossgrained' he had called the insomniac trees there, here he expands this to 'crosspatch,

18. Unfortunately this is not clear in Donald Davie's translation of the poem.

drained-out'. Though the narrative detail of the two poems is not much alike, there is the same brevity of stanza, speed of statement, metonymic method, and above all the pointing inward of bits and pieces of everyday experience towards a sexual act which is mainly indicated through description of an accompanying change in the weather or promise of it: 'And the fan whirled in the dark, / For thunder, a break in the weather'. (These two lines sound very much like a good literal translation of some two Pasternak lines, although they are not.) The changing of weather, which—especially the change from stuffiness to freshness, and the reborn feeling after a storm—is Pasternak's recurrent inspiration, becomes, in all its powerful physicality, Donald Davie's theme and experience. 'New York . . .' draws Pasternak into Davie's own life, rather as another poem, 'Autumn Imagined',[19] does with the Zhivago poem 'Autumn': in each case a similar metaphor for love, and a similar connectedness of love with weather and season, are brought into a quite different biography.

But I believe he takes issue with Pasternak again in the last poem of *Events and Wisdoms*, 'Hardness of Light', and precisely with that habit of solving and coming to terms with things, noted in 'Indian Summer'. The poem contains two Pasternakian images. 'The equivocal breath of change, / In a clatter of sudden slats . . .' while possibly suggested by lines in his own translation of 'The God of Details', also looks back to a much older—that is, much younger—poem of Pasternak's, called 'Dawn', where not only do shutters clatter in the night but, when the weather changes, an inexplicable rancid smell suddenly enters the house. This is paralleled by 'old stench released' in Davie's poem. Typically metonymic, 'Dawn' gives sharp external bits of an unmentioned and invisible event, which we guess to be a love encounter, and love to be again inscrutably one with weather. Though 'Hardness of Light' is not about love, the human fact in it (one man's 'growing older') is pointed to in a similar way. Mainly outward things are described: heat, rain, wind, 'motels', and the poem's ostensible event is the change of weather. The most striking resemblance between the poems is the smell: rankness prefiguring freshness.

Where then is the dialogue? First, Davie doesn't get through to the freshness, he stops at the 'hard light of burning skies'—the hardness of intellectuality? the hardness of living? In Pasternak's 'Dawn' the light is hard, too, ('the garden dazzles like a stretch of lake'), but it is part of a poem about affirmation and joy, whose movement—though it is not an easy *poem*—is upward, sheer and

19. 'Poems 1962-3' in *Collected Poems*.

simple. So that (secondly) Davie's saying, at the end of his poem, 'It neither solves / Nor even simplifies', can be read as a disagreement with the Pasternak for whom all is so easily clarified by rapture. Isn't he even angry with him, as with a brother or friend who will not *see*?

A good deal more could be said about *Events and Wisdoms*. One could discuss, for example, the many poems which, though they don't have identifiable Pasternak poems behind them, carry an echo of his (later) voice, that is of a similar kind of vigilant self-querying conversational summing-up of what life has been, what art has meant. In them there is often a certain quasi-elliptical effect when a seeming conclusion is belied by its unfinished *tone*, as in:

> How many such, even now,
> I dismiss out of hand
> As not to my purpose, not
> Unknown, just unexamined

which is peculiarly like many of Pasternak's short-line poem or stanza endings and is a complete contrast to the *witty* effect of, say, the neat couplets in the 'Accident' cycle in this same volume, for example, 'You had to nearly die / For me to know I lived' which may recall Emily Dickinson, but not Pasternak, who is rarely epigrammatic: his shortness is of another kind—an instinctive inconclusiveness, a bearing in mind of what remains unsaid, outside the poem. Many of the poems with this Pasternakian tone of voice also incorporate an image or idea apparently borrowed from him. The 'getting across' life's terrain in 'Life Encompassed' is very like the end of Pasternak's 'Hamlet'; in 'Cypress Avenue' the flower-naming recalls Lara's definitions of her life-task, while the avenue full of scent there makes us think of the one in Pasternak's 'Lime-Tree Avenue'; in the diverging clock times at the opening of 'Treviso . . .' there may be a recollection of Pasternak's 'Wind'; the landscape in 'Love and the Times' is reminiscent of the wide fertile landscapes in the *Kogda razgulyayetsa* poems; and in 'Resolutions' the 'growth not groped towards' may connect with the main idea of Pasternak's middle-period poem, 'Had I but known . . .' Some of this may be mistaken guessing on my part, but there is certainly a general modal kinship and in some at least of these similar metaphors or ideas a deliberated use of Pasternak. And further, the theme of the combining of opposites, in some poems ('Hyphens', 'Meeting of Cultures', 'Poreč' . . .), while doubtless Donald Davie's own, may have been fostered by the intensity of interest in this phenomenon in much of Pasternak's work.

Davie has himself indicated a Pasternakian presence in 'Barnsley Cricket Club' (the 'layabout July', the 'blur of heat', the desire for both naturalness and perfectness . . . ?) He has not done so for 'In Chopin's Garden', yet the preparation for performance of music, all its external circumstance, is one of Pasternak's enduring fascinations, recorded all the way from notes made in his student years,[20] through his Chopin poems of 1931 and 1956, accounts of orchestra rehearsals and people on their *way* to them in *A Safe Conduct*—and much else—to the tuning of the piano and arranging of the recital in *Doctor Zhivago*: Donald Davie has excellently captured and conveyed this unusual fascination, and he practically announces his poem's origin by making the storming of the music from the keys, when at last it *is* played, very like that in Pasternak's 'Definition of Poetry'.

III

In *Essex Poems* I find less discussion with Pasternak, more absorption and transmutation of him. The four poems which have their direct sources in him, and others here which are akin to him, are more peaceful and more radiant; Davie's quarrel with him or with himself has gone. Again there seem to be tangential acknowledgments. Strangely enough, the word 'peaceful' is emphasised by an observation that the Pacific Ocean is 'pacific' in Russian too. Why bring in Russian? Well, the Russian language has meant a lot to Davie, and so has Pushkin's poetry. But in the beautiful 'Winter Landscape near Ely', there is a suggestion that Russia—again drawn in gratuitously—means Pasternak. For it is not geographically true that 'Over verst on verst of Russia / Are lime-tree avenues', but there *is* an important poem by Pasternak called 'Lime-Tree Avenue'. To think of Russia, then, is to think of him?

By 'radiant' I have this poem in mind, above all, and, with it, the one entitled 'Sunburst'. In them both, Pasternak's fast joyful response to fierce changes of weather (like Davie's 'dashing of ice-hail' and his 'wheeling and flashing of light') and his untiring interest in how the weather, or nature, or any dazzling, striking or crashing impulse from outside, becomes an immediate stimulus to thought and creation, are here made into, or paralleled by, Davie's own so well that one recalls Pasternak's requirements for translation: the translation should reflect the *'power'* of the

20. See Angela Livingstone, *PN Review*, 8 (1978) which includes a translation of these student-year notes.

original, must be connected to it like a sapling to the tree it has grown from, must be its 'fruit . . . and its historical consequence'. Only, these are not translations, nor do particular Pasternak poems suggest themselves as engendering sources. But here there is at last that desired fine element of amazingness—of the power of the 'interchangeable detail' to call up the medium in which it is 'plunged',[21] of something more than ordinary, yet not otherworldly but met with in the perception of the perfectly ordinary world (in the light's 'furious virtue', in how 'spaces stop time from hurting'), as there also is in 'Or, Solitude', which is able to admit so fully to the need for metaphysicality just because the thing needed has been obtained.

There *are* two straight translations in *Essex Poems*. One is a modified version of 'Grass and Stones', published earlier in full—a warm, pleasing version, though not one of Pasternak's best poems. The other, 'The God of Details' (oddly enough also called 'After Pasternak', although it is, bar two lines, a translation) is one of the best renderings—closest and most vivid—of a Pasternak poem[22] that I have ever come across.

I note that Donald Davie is again very much at home here with Pasternak's earlier range and kind of vocabulary. In *Events and Wisdoms* words like 'snagged', 'foison', 'lissom', polders', 'stippling', 'crosspatch', 'truss' and 'lodes' are, in their degree of oddness and oldness and physical preciseness, the equivalents of endlessly listable words Pasternak is fond of. In 'The God of Details' Davie finds in Pasternak a kindred vocabulary: 'madder', 'leafage', 'sluicing', 'lattices', 'italic', 'bauble'. In diction, tone, connotation, in general import, the translation is extremely accurate yet it is at the same time powerful with the power of its original. Donald Davie seems by now to be so at home here that when he introduces excellences of his own, like 'Who goes about to staple / Light leaves to the maple . . .' or 'That asters taste, and peonies / Agonies, come September', then the effects—in the first example the image-from-rhyme, and the lightfooted indirection of 'goes about', and in the second the felicitous rhyme-syntax discovery of 'peonies / agonies', and the stenographic-colloquial 'come'—while they aren't exact equivalents of Russian effects at these places (though practically all the *words* are exact equivalents), are inspired translatings of the early Pasternak's very way and habit with language generally. And it is perhaps at these points

21. In the second letter to Stephen Spender (*Encounter*, loc. cit.) Pasternak wrote of his wish to 'render the *atmosphere of being* . . . where the particular and depicted thing is having been plunged and floating.' (His English).
22. It is from *My Sister Life* where it has no title: Davie's title is a phrase from the poem.

that we see Donald Davie moving off from Pasternak and deeper into himself in a Pasternakian way. (It is interesting to note that from 'The God of Details' certain words reappear in adjacent poems of Davie's own: 'italic' comes again in 'Thanks to Industrial Essex', and the repeated 'sparsely' connects vitally with the statement 'Excellence is sparse' in 'Ezra Pound in Pisa', suggesting at least an equal importance of Pasternak with Pound.)

In the matter of Davie's translating of Pasternak, there are many felicitous translations of his early poems (especially fine is 'Death of the Poet' and 'Rending the raiment brush'[23]). Among Davie's translations of the Zhivago poems,[23a] done at about the same time as the writing of *Essex Poems*, some share this felicitousness[24], but many are less successful. Still valuable, since track of thought and plotting of imagery are faithfully and animatedly rendered, they are less close in spirit—that is, in diction: there seems a reluctance to follow Pasternak into his new, more tender and, after all, more *melodious* mode, and a preference to remain at the odder, spikier and cleverer diction of his much earlier work. Here, as a single example, are two lines from 'Autumn', first in my literal translation: 'Still more richly and recklessly / Sound, scatter yourselves, leaves . . .' now in Davie's version: 'Ever more grandly, ever less guardedly, come / Into your clamours, uncover your seed-pods, leafage. . . .' I suggest that the manner of this is closer to these lines, for instance, addressed to 'Rain' in *My Sister Life*:

> She's with me. Strum your tune,
> Pour, laugh, rend the dusk,
> Drench, flow like an epigraph
> To a love that is such as you . . .[25]

with the complex 'naigryvai: play, strum', the unconventional materiality of 'rend' (cp. 'seed-pods' in the 'Autumn' translation?) and the conceit of 'flow like an epigraph' (cp. 'come into your clamours'?).

One of the Zhivago poems ('White Night') turns up as the origin for 'Stratford on Avon' in *Essex Poems*. Davie strikingly uses Pasternak's pattern, recreates his atmosphere, while mildly avoiding his main meaning. 'White Night' is another of the poems about a sensed unity of human and natural things:

> In echoes of the heard conversation,
> Along gardens, fenced with planks,
> Apple-tree and cherry-tree branches
> Dress in whitish blossom.[26]

23. *Pasternak: modern judgements*, pp. 27-8 and 116.
23a. D. Davie, *The Poems of Doctor Zhivago*, translated with a commentary. Manchester University Press, 1965.
24. E.g., 'March' and 'Winter Night', pp. 9f and 12ff.
25. My literal translation.
26. My literal translation.

Pasternak *means* 'in': the traces of talk from the high window, the 'whisperings' that run along the imagined landscape, are as really there, below, as colours or shadows would be, so that with nature's transformations everything is transformed. This reading is assisted by the lines, four stanzas earlier, which (like the end of 'Indian Summer') rather bluntly mention the oneness of things:

> We are seized by the very same
> Timid fidelity to a secret
> As (is) the spread-out, in a panorama,
> Petersburg beyond the boundless Neva.[27]

'Stratford on Avon' is firmly based on this poem—with similar first stanza, boy and girl again in a half-light, the lanes and the creeping and the juxtaposition of speech with countryside—but the verse which corresponds to the one I have quoted has a different emphasis:

> And yet within the echo
> Of our lame exchanges
> No grasses ceased to grow,
> No apple pair turned strangers . . .

for 'within' is not the same as 'in', and a certain *dis*unity is suggested: our lameness, nature's success. The fact that in his *Doctor Zhivago* commentary Davie omits to link this poem thematically with 'Indian Summer' shows, I suppose, that Pasternak's idea did not preoccupy him. Nevertheless the poem has a considerable Pasternakian quality in its combining of prosaic and magical tones and in its attempt to create a mood of the more-than-ordinary.

Now 'Tunstall Forest', which is related more loosely to its source-poem, seems to me fully successful at this. What it calls up is Pasternak's 'Tishina: Silence'. I am giving the Russian name because I think Davie again indicates the source by half-echoing Pasternak's title. Tishina-Tunstall. This seems confirmed by his first word: 'Stillness'. As in 'Tishina', a 'tense stillness' is evoked by the image of a deer feeding in the forest. True, this poem is about people *desiring* the deer and the stillness; while in Pasternak the deer is centrally present, influencing everything around it, and instead of human beings there is only a sort of edgeless essence of them: people have 'asserted' something, flowers behave like people, at the end there's the sound of the stream trying to 'narrate something / Almost in human words': it is a typical acknowledgment of the primacy of nature. While the Davie poem is primarily about a human wish for something that is not obtained.

27. Again my translation. The first two lines have been strangely translated by Davie as: 'We are caught in the same confidences / Safeguarded with apprehension . . .' (Davie, *Poems of Doctor Zhivago*, p. 13).

But Davie does not call up Pasternak's poem simply to tell us that he cannot do what was done there, for the absent deer is as present in his poem as it would have been, had it been present in reality, and the 'stillness', which in reality 'did not come', *does* come in the poem. And this would of course be the case without the Pasternakian origin. So I think one can only state that somewhere helping this poem must have been Donald Davie's recollection of 'Tishina', making him mind that *he* did not have that unhuman elusive sensation of stillness, that naive relation with nature, yet also enabling him to imagine it and thus to create it.

IV

Lastly, 'Portland'. After a long interval, this is based fully and complexly upon an early Pasternak poem. It is the only poem in *In the Stopping Train* with such a clear source. The title-poem of the volume *is* somewhat reminiscent of a poem by Pasternak. 'Townend' provocatively but inchoately evokes the layout of Pasternak's 'Spektorsky', there is Pasternakian imagery in 'The Harrow', and there certainly still sounds in several poems that sober and life-knowing finality that the later Donald Davie has in common with the later Pasternak ('What sort of a life this is / I thought I knew, or I learned'). Then also, apart from these spots, there are some explicit mentions of Pasternak, and what look like quotations from his aesthetic theory—with this oddity, that they are actually *not*; instead they are a blend of respect with rejection:

> For it is the past
> Is brilliant, Pasternak says;
> The debt we owe it, only
> More modest coin repays.

As far as I know, Pasternak does not say this; or if he does, it is still much more characteristic of him to see the past inspiring the present by being, like 'Nature', an unrepeatable model stirring us to attempt its 'enraptured reproduction'—no debt or duty, but emulation, made possible by the knowledge that the force which made *it* works in *us*. And another poem mentioning Pasternak opens with what for two lines is (more or less) a quotation from him, but for its second two is *not*:

> Most poems, or the best,
> Describe their own birth, and this
> Is what they are—a space
> Cleared to walk around in.

Excellent and sparse and freeing though this conception of poetry may be, it is not Pasternak's. What *he* means is the opposite of this separation of poetry from the world around: poetry *is* everything else, or continuous with it. So Davie seems to be defining a departure from Pasternak. All the more interesting is the one poem in the book which reproduces the thought and imagery of a Pasternak poem.

'Portland'—again perhaps a cryptic title link: the Russian poem has no title and is thought of by its first word 'Popytka'—it may not be fanciful to hear an echo in the repeated sounds p, t, and o. At any rate, the beginning and ending of the English poem clearly repeat those of the Russian one, while a whole variety of Pasternakian elaborations come in the middle. Here is Pasternak's 'Popytka dushu razluchit' ',[28] in Donald Davie's translation:[29]

> It sounds still, like the plaint
> Of a fiddlebow, the attempts made
> To estrange my soul from you
> In Rzhaks, Moochkap—those place-names.
>
> I love these names, as it might be they were
> You—yes, you yourself,
> With all the strength of unavailing
> I love them to the blacking out of reason.
>
> Like a night that is tired of shining,
> Like what to asthma muslin is,
> Like what, at the sight of your shoulder, sets
> The very hallway shaking.
>
> Whose whisper sailed upon the daybreak?
> Mine, was it? No, in soul 'twas yours,
> More aery than a drop of spirits, it
> Evaporated from the lip.
>
> How in bliss thought clarified itself!
> Irreproachably! As if a moan!
> As foam at midnight suddenly lights up,
> Upon three sides, a promontory.

[The translation is accurate. It should be observed only that the listed objects in stanza three are in apposition not to 'I' but to 'them' (i.e., 'I love them as I love night' etc), and that in the last stanza 'nega' is more langorous than 'bliss'—it can suggest the voluptuous but not the mystical.]

28. *My Sister Life* (1922).
29. See *Pasternak: modern judgements*, p. 87.

Here is Donald Davie's 'Portland':

> Portland, the Isle of Portland–how I love
> Not the place, its name! It is as if
> These names were your name, and the cliff, the breaking
> Of waves along a reach of tumbled stone
> Were a configuration of your own
> Firm slopes and curves–your clavicles, your shoulder.
> A glimpse of that can set the hallway shaking.
>
> And I am a night sky that is tired of shining,
> Tired of its own hard brilliance, and I sink.
>
> Tomorrow morning, grateful, I shall seem
> Keen, but be less clear-headed than I think;
> A brightness more than clarity will sail
> Off lips that vapour formulations, make
> Clear sound, full rhyme, and rational order take
> Account of a dream, a sighing cry, a moan,
>
> Like foam on all three sides at midnight lighting
> Up, far off, a seaward jut of stone.

Three other Pasternak poems are, I believe, used here besides 'Popytka . . .' Comparison of woman to sea-shore suggests the Zhivago poem 'Razluka' with its lines: 'She was as dear to him / With her every feature / As the sea is near to a coastline / In each wave breaking ashore'.[30] The odd word 'clavicles' recalls a 1917 love poem 'With folded oars', where clavicles inner-rhymes with rowlocks and the subject is thoughts produced by the langorous bliss of love. 'A brightness more than clarity' is like the ending of yet another early poem, where, in 'an avalanche of consciousness' following a downpour, it seems there 'would light up / Even those corners of the mind / Where it is now as bright as in daytime'.[31] Such mixing of pieces of poems is uncomfortable, despite their being properly assimilated,[32] and this very method may indicate a leavetaking from Pasternak.

A different but comparable instance of a change in Davie's treatment of Pasternak may be found in his 'The Break (After Pasternak)',[33] where what happens is no longer reverence or debate or transmutation but a straightforward appropriation. Of the poem-cycle's seventy lines some four are Davie's own, the rest are translations,[34] but with two poems and two half-poems lopped

30. Davie's translation. (*Poems of Doctor Zhivago*, p. 31).
31. 'Thunder momentary forever'; my literal translation.
32. Unlike, say, Robert Lowell's Pasternakian collage, 'Hamlet in Russia'.
33. In 'Recent Poems', *Collected Poems 1950-1970*.
34. Of Pasternak's 'Razryv' in *Themes and Variations*.

off altogether and the rest so altered in rhythm and shape that one seems to see Davie striding off firmly into himself again, using Pasternak not as a model to copy or a companion to contend with, but as a tool in his hands–a walking-stick, say; he holds him masterfully, and in walking *with* him he walks *past* him.

'Popytka . . .' is discreetly about a love encounter. The whisper that could belong to either person, the evaporating of speech from lips, are recollections–one assumes–of an experience of love, and the clarifying of the mind is its result. We see the creation of the poem's final image, that is of the poem itself, out of the clarity produced by that feeling. Poetry is displayed as a direct outgrowth of life's passions.

'Portland', as well as being about love-making, is also more directly about poetry-making. The first lines work very closely to Pasternak's poem: love of the name of the place, recollection of the physical woman, the same detail of reference–hallway and shoulder. I take Davie to be saying: first I'll faithfully show something of Pasternak, before I depart from him. The departure comes in the first of the couplets. Here, it is the *poet* who becomes the 'night sky tired of shining', and this image now brings with it, I think, a great Daviean self-conscious sadness about being an intellectual. For although earlier he has really, if ambiguously, wanted hardness, wanted the world to be 'hard all over',[35] he has also lamented his own hardness, as when he identifies himself with that 'hard light of burning skies'[36] which can neither 'solve nor simplify'. So now he adapts Pasternak's shining night sky, in order momentarily to give up his intellectuality and 'sink' into a softness of feeling where dream, cry and moan belong.

For Pasternak, however, there is nothing soft about feelings. They directly produce the mental clarity and the sharp hard brilliant image. Whereas Davie, the morning after, though he has gained from them, is out to control them in a way that seems to him inevitably opposition to them. He will be merely 'bright', not 'clear' in Pasternak's sense, and I suppose 'bright' means clever and academic once again: dream, cry, moan will be *controlled* by 'clear sound, full rhyme and rational order'–like the bright foam lighting up a promontory–which of course would not be visible at all without it. So the foam is the lucid poem, subordinating and making uniquely visible the illucid stuff of life.

This was my second reading of the poem. At a first reading I had taken the 'sinking' to be not momentary but continuing till morning, so that the poet was to wake still capable of the irrational

35. 'Across the Bay', *Events and Wisdoms*.
36. 'The Hardness of Light', *Events and Wisdoms*.

and passional and, with the help of a brightness *greater* than clarity (as opposed to *mere* brightness *rather* than a–greater–clarity), would compel his customary devices–sound, rhyme, order–to do more than they customarily did, that is, to go so far as to take proper account of a dream. Maybe the ambiguity[37] in 'more than' is intended to leave the possibility of both readings. But I then saw that the connection of 'brightness' with 'brilliance', the thing he is tired of, supported my later reading, and I came to the conclusion that we have here something like a statement that he is giving up the aspiration to be like Pasternak, a recognition that he is himself 'sentimental', not 'naive', and finally committed to a 'rational order' more rational and more ordered than the ecstatic rationality and metaphysical order of Pasternak.

And yet–comment on this poem must include the extremely fine last two lines. These are a word-for-word translation of Pasternak's last two lines (surely homage again?), although they are also totally Davie: hard and brilliant no less in manner than in reference to their content. They are what he *says* his poem will be: clear in sound, and even full in rhyme (sides-night-light; up-jut; moan-foam-stone). One could go so far as to call them, with their more prominent 'enacting of themselves' (for the lines themselves 'jut' out), and with their actually more interesting rhythm, a transfiguration of Pasternak's lines: at once a reverent repetition of them and a quite new birth from them.

37. I have since heard from Donald Davie that he intends an ambiguity.

I am grateful to Professor Arthur Terry (University of Essex) for sharing with me his insight into many of Donald Davie's poems. [A.L.]