# *"FAUSTA CHTO-LI, GAMLETA LI": THE MEANING OF FAUST IN PASTERNAK'S POETRY*

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## I

"Of Faust, maybe, or Hamlet" — the quotation is from the poem "Elene" ("To Helen"), 1917, and I use it as a title because it epitomises that nonchalant yet exhilarated imprecision which seems an essential part of Pasternak's conception of Faust, as of Hamlet, too, and of many another figure.[1] If "imprecision" sounds negative, a better term might be that "interchangeability of images" (vzaimozamenimost' obrazov) as which Pasternak defined art itself. For the creating poet, each of the world's details "could be replaced by another," he writes, and he goes on to speak of "the interchangeability of images, that is art..." (1985, 2: 174). An "interchanging" tendency characterises all of Pasternak's thinking about art and one finds it, for example, in a letter he wrote in 1920 : "... more than anyone I love Goethe. This is really freedom! Like Chopin's preludes," though he goes on: "That is to say, not like them at all" (Vil'mont, 173), well aware of his habit of finding close kinship in everything that inspires creative happiness, or rather — of regarding the shared inspiring quality as incomparably more important than any particular differences. For to link Hamlet and Faust as he does is to ignore most of their characteristics. Both are, indeed, scholars, but beyond that? The fate of one follows from a selfless promise made to a benign spirit, the fate of the other from a selfish pact concluded with the Devil. Yet to Pasternak both are

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1 All of the translations are mine.

positive figures. It is not impossible to agree with him on Hamlet's virtues, to share his view, in the "Notes on Translating Shakespeare" (1985, 2: 309), that Hamlet is someone on a self-sacrificing mission, called to be "judge of his own time and servant of a more distant one." Yet a great deal has to be forgotten about Faust if we are to see him as Pasternak does. (With similar open-armed indiscriminacy he will later link Faust with Zhivago, at one stage subtitling his novel "An attempt at a Russian Faust," and calling Faust an artist as well as a scientist [1961, 293f] — *in order*, it seems, to assimilate him to Zhivago.) The purpose of this paper is to look at seven early poems by Pasternak, all of which have some connection with Faust or his story, and to ask through these what Faust meant to him.[2]

## II

Pasternak spoke fluent German from his childhood on, made two long visits to Germany, read a great deal of German literature, translated works by Hans Sachs, Kleist, Schiller, Rilke and others. In his youth he translated Goethe's epic poem "Die Geheimnisse" ("The Mysteries"), without success: it was severely criticised by no less a publisher's reader than Aleksandr Blok; much later, he translated a number of Goethe's lyric poems (successfully); his translation of Goethe's *Faust* was published in 1950 (Part I) and 1953 (both parts). This translation was made in the very years in which he was writing *Doctor Zhivago*, and it is surprising that there are not more echoes of *Faust* in the novel, not (*pace* some commentators) a deeper Faustian current of thought to be found there. But neither is there much reference to that work in the earlier works, even though Pasternak often re-read *Faust*. There are, however, seven poems,

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2 For a separate study of Faustian motifs in *Doctor Zhivago* see my article "Pasternak and Faust" in *Forum for Modern Language Studies*, 1990, Vol. 24, No.4, 353-369, ed. Christopher Barnes, published at the University of St. Andrews.

written between 1917 and 1921, which mention Faust or treat Faustian themes; I propose to look at these in turn.

III

Of two relevant poems in *My Sister Life*, the first, "Elene" ("To Helen") (1985, 1: 106), seems to have Goethe in mind, since Helen, "Queen of Sparta," appears in the poem too; while the second, "Lyubit,' idti, — ne smolknul grom" ("To love, to walk, the thunder still sounding") (1985, 1: 113), refers to Gounod's opera.

"To Helen" is a love poem, about the ending of a relationship. Its fourth stanza describes someone's, probably the lover's, habit of wandering, full of emotion, through fields, perhaps gesturing oddly:

> Луг дружил с замашкой
> Фауста что ли, Гамлета ли,
> Обегал ромашкой,
> Стебли по ногам летали.

> [The meadow made friends with the ways
> Of Faust, maybe, or Hamlet,
> Ran round him as camomile,
> Stems flew at his legs.]

There is a link between this poem and Pasternak's translation of *Faust*, Part I, thirty years later, in that the same unexpected colloquialism, "*zamashki*," recurs in his version of the "Erdgeist" scene: shedding Goethe's solemnity, Pasternak makes the Earth-Spirit mock Faust's timidity by asking him: "gde tvoi zamashki?" ("where are your 'ways'"?) (Goethe 1960, 60). In "To Helen," the exchangeability of Faust for Hamlet would suggest that it makes no difference *which* solitary, male, dramatic (perhaps self-dramatising) person, of strong feeling and linked to a woman, is invoked; reinforcing this exchangeability, both Ophelia and Faust's second

beloved, Helen, enter the poem. Helen, a woman of mysterious strength — "The Trojan age should be hers, I thought,/ Kissing the curve of the bitter lips" — is perhaps related to the "Amazon" with whom Gretchen is identified in the poem "Margarita," which is discussed below; moreover, she is asleep — "Sleep, queen of Sparta,/ It's early still, it's damp still" — and thus again is like the Gretchen-Amazon, who falls down and lies still. The central figures, then, are the man of emotion and the woman of strength; the man wanders about wildly and blissfully in the countryside, the woman forbears to use her strength.

Stanzas six and seven speak of the happiness of youth:

> Юность в счастье плавала, как
> В тихом детском храпе
> Наспанная наволока.

> [Youth floated in happiness, like
> A slept-on pillow-case
> In a child's quiet snore.]

This is interesting both for its introducing the motif of sleep, and for its being the first linking of Faust with youth. Youth, or childhood, is invoked in most of the poems which mention Faust, and in the last two lines of "To Helen" fate is to decide about the lovers, "either as mother or as stepmother," that is to say, it will relate to them, in whichever case, as to children.

Youth swims in happiness, the pillowcase swims in the child's snore, and there is surely something watery, wave-like, about those stems flying at or around the lover's legs, so that he too seems plunged in a flowing element. For all their individuality, Faust and Hamlet are envisaged as immersed in a larger, tangible, elemental, surrounding world.

## IV

The more difficult poem "To love, to walk..." opens with two stanzas which could well be a development of the fourth stanza of "To Helen." They are about a self-abandoning emotional walk through a countryside. Passion combines with vegetation, sharp perception with loss of self; then, once again amongst passion, nature and forgetfulness, comes the reference to *Faust* ("that Margarita"). By sunset the lovers know "that the sun is older" both than "those stars and those carts carrying oats" — things which they see — and than "that Margarita and the innkeeper's wife" — which they remember. What they remember are operas: Gounod's *Faust* and Mussorgsky's *Boris Godunov*. The idea of the inn may double as a reference to *Faust*, in which — that is to say, in the opera — there is also an important inn scene. The message appears to be that the countryside is a more traditional (older) and better (more absorbing) scene for lovers than is opera, or, by extension, than is art altogether. Oldness is mentioned again in the last three stanzas, where the lover, as he lies in the grass, recalls in song how "Gray-haired, I walked and fell without strength," and reflects that the town too is probably an "old man" about "to croak" — an obscure hint at the age that Faust casts off, and a stress on the present youthfulness of the poem's protagonist and of the rejuvenated Faust.

## V

"Lyubov' Fausta" ("Faust's Love"), 1919 (1985, 2: 391), not published in Pasternak's lifetime, appeared for the first time in *Stikhotvoreniya i poemy*, 1965; it may have formed part of a planned Faust-cycle along with "Zhizn'" ("Life") (also not published by Pasternak) and with two poems which he included in the collection *Temy i variatsii* (*Themes and Variations*): "Margarita" and "Mefistofel'" ("Mephistopheles").

The twenty-four lines of "Faust's Love" offer a series — one would like to say a "serries" — of nouns, altogether forty-nine, with a few adjectives (six), almost unattached to verbs; only one verb is the vehicle of a main clause; of the other three, two are participial and one is in a firmly subordinate clause. These nouns are strung along a thread consisting of repeated variants of "all": *ves'*, *vse*, *vsyo*, *vsekh*. All lamps, shops, etc. (evidently in a town) have drawn one single window tight with spiderweb (stanza 1); all eating-places and barracks (evidently conceived of as locations of thought and dream) are reduced to, or have gone towards, or in some sense approach, one single perfume (stanza 2); all "magics" and other heavy things happening at night — to a single "unhappy blouse" (stanza 3); "ash of all Julys," along with all things to do with medicine, are listed in stanza 4, and in stanza 5 "all oil of all portraits," everything, it seems, that has to do with painting. Another linking element is the repeated "recently" or "since a short while ago." The poem says something, then, about an obsession or all-embracing preoccupation that has very recently come upon someone; love is not mentioned but is represented by its tendency to make all things become focussed on *one* thing. "All" is repeated here with the same rhythmic frequency that Pasternak was to use, many years later, in the *Zhivago* poem "Rozhdestvenskaya zvezda" ("Christmas Star"), where we read of, for instance, "all apples, all golden baubles...," although the two poems show opposite movements: in the early one, everything, under erotic desire, reduces to one focus; in the later one, everything, under the desires that make history, expands from the nativity scene to a wide spread of customs and emblems.

There are numerous possible references to *Faust* in this poem, yet none would be conclusive on its own and they are mostly indirect, slanting, metonymic allusions to something adjacent, or in some way akin, to certain images in *Faust*. Thus "eating places" *could*

recall Auerbach's Cellar; "plastercasts of thought" — Faust's accumulation of old dead learning in scene 1; "barracks" might bring Gretchen's soldier brother to mind; "sabbath" somewhat more directly the Witches' Kitchen or Walpurgisnacht; "unerring dream" could conceivably refer to Faust's vision of a beautiful woman at the "sabbath"; "magics" points to Faust's alchemy and the devil's supernatural tricks; "doctors and mastiffs," despite being plural and despite Mephistopheles' entering the play as a poodle, could make us think of Faust and Mephistopheles in each other's company; "horns" might again suggest devils and devilry; and in stanza four, "all that the devil squawks and the genius whispers" offers a certain indistinct parallel to "Mephistopheles and Faust." Meanwhile, "one window," "Violette de Parme" and "unhappy blouse" seem metonyms for Gretchen, who disappears by stanza 4 just as she does in the play from Faust's later concerns. The last stanza, with its piecemeal and highly metonymic suggestions of the environment of an artist (drying-oil, berets, burnt-cork, lime) brings poets into the picture too by making them the objects of portraits.

The indirectness of Pasternak's depiction of Faust's surroundings, as well as the very fact that it *is* the surroundings rather than his fate or his feeling that is being made the centre of the picture, show up clearly when compared with a fragmentary poem of 1945 by Akhmatova which describes Faust's surroundings as seen in a dream: it is like Pasternak's poem in its emphasis on plurality and in its appearance of including "everything" relevant, but is unlike it in selecting elements that are easily associated with what we know of Faust. Here are seven lines from this fourteen-line poem:

И очертанья Фауста вдали —
Как города, где много черных башен,
И колоколен с гулкими часами,
И полночей, наполненных грозою,
И старичков с негетевской судьбою,

Шарманщиков, менял и букинистов,
Кто вызвал черта, кто с ним вел торговлю...
(Akhmatova 1983: 68)

[And outlines of Faust far off —
Like towns where there are many black towers,
And belfries with resonant chimes,
And midnights filled with storm,
And little old men with ungoethean fates,
Barrelorgan-players, money-changers, antiquarians,
Some summoned the devil, others traded with him...]

VI

In "Faust's Love," stuffs and solid things are dominant (calico, spiderweb, oilcloth, plastercasts, tar, ash, poultice) and this quiddity reappears in the contemporaneous poem "Zhizn'" ("Life," 1985, 2: 392), this time as material for a statement. Again many of the stuffs belong to painting: paint, alcohol for colours, paper, glue, drying-oil.

If "ty" in line one addresses "life," the poem is saying that life, "sprinkled with pineneedles and dripped on by wax," keeps forever the Christmas-tree pleasures of childhood (a wealthy childhood, with parquet flooring and governesses). The fairy-tales read by lamplight or stuck together in home-made books last throughout the person's life, and above all, the memory of their materials does, for the child is fascinated not only by the tale but by the page it is written or printed on, not so much by the painting as by the smell of the paint. *Faust* is mentioned in the last stanza, which asserts that what those scents and materials are to the child, the clothing of Faust and Margarita are to, one understands, the same person in adult life.

И Фаустов кафтан, и атласность корсажа
Шелков Маргаритина лифа...

[And Faust's kaftan, and the corsage satin
Margarita's bodice's silks...]

This must again be about the opera, since Gretchen does not wear silk and satin in Goethe's play. The idea of all things becoming one, or of one thing becoming all, already seen in "Faust's Love," and later found in "Christmas Star," is present here too. Pleasure from a work of art (from operatic garments) takes the observer back to its origin in childhood; childhood sensations lead to, open out to, artistic sensations generally.

## VII

"Margarita" (1985, 1: 118) is the most perfected of the four *Themes and Variations* poems. The serried imagery in it achieves a harmony and autonomy that are lacking in "Faust's Love," and although it is difficult, one has a sense of understanding more from it than from the clearer message of "Life." It is more close-knit and firmly organized than is "Mephistopheles," with its last line both repeating and developing its first, and with its strangely successful combination of two figures that represent the woman in love: Gretchen and the Amazon.

Without wishing to insist on the necessity of this reading, I interpret this poem as an account of how Faust's love appears to Gretchen (Margarethe, Margarita). This makes it a complement to "Faust's Love," where Gretchen is sheer object (a blouse, and so forth) and where the foreground obsession is Faust's.

Hearing the nightingale's passionate singing, Margarita is filled with a responsive passion; seeking at first to resist it, she becomes hot-eyed and presses her lips together till they go purple; here I take the singing to be an aural image for the man's love. In hearing it "tearing the bushes apart on itself like a snare," she projects on to it her own condition of doing just that, trying to get out of a snare. But is the snare the feeling of passion or the convention that restrains her from yielding to it? "He issued like the scent from herbs": the

approach of the lover is as natural, easy and alluring as that. "He, like mercury" is one of three hints at madness ("mercury" — an old cure for syphilis, a dementing illness; "of crazed rains"; and "the stupefied bark") which renew the identification of passion with vegetation already familiar from the two poems from *My Sister Life*. "Choking": she is overcome by the effect of that approaching passion. "Remained to hang": whatever she now does, it has become part of her, lodged even in her simple-maiden plait. "And when Margarita was drawn to the silver" presumably recalls her delight in the casket of jewellery Faust brings her. Goethe mentions gold and pearls, not silver, but it is typical of Pasternak to indicate a thing by something that only resembles or approximates to it; further, mercury is silver in colour, so the silver casket or trinketry is also the mad-silver of love itself. "Then it seemed": it seemed *to her* (in my interpretation) that an Amazon had rolled down in the woods under a helmet of branches and rain. Her chastity (or conventional virtue) was her real strength. To Faust her fall seems a slight event (he does not wake up to the tragedy it is for her until he learns that she is in prison), but to Gretchen herself it is a great fall from a monumental height, which takes place "in the woods" because nature and passion are, as so often in Pasternak, commingled; from now on there is no defensive helmet for Gretchen, her only protection is branches and rain. "And her nape": she sees herself wholly abandoned *to him*: we cannot be sure who is the "him" in "u nego": the most recent masculine noun is "bor" (woods); the most important has been "solovei" (nightingale); Faust the lover is in our thoughts; "u nego" may bring all these together into one concept. "Where stuck": the notion of a tall woman in a helmet falling so that the helmet catches on something and hangs there behind her (the word "leg" [lay] suggesting on, or near, the ground) contains an implicit image of a tree falling or felled, with its crown catching in the undergrowth so

that it lies at a slant from the ground, one branch sticking out of its normal position. Finally, the last line, in repeating the first, which now refers directly to her, implies Margarita's total identification and union with the nightingale, that is with the lover's love. Altogether the repeated snare, the fall, the forfeited helmet, tell of calamity; while the intoxication and madness, along with the imagery of trees, bushes and rain, suggest naturalness and liberation.

## VIII

If "Margarita" described Gretchen's perception of her seduction, "Mephistopheles" (1985, 1: 119) describes the common crowd's perception of their Sunday excursion into the country, where they catch sight of the devil. In the scene "Vor dem Tor," in *Faust*, Part One, Faust, the scholar, goes for a walk, observing and meeting some of the Easter Sunday crowd out enjoying themselves, and talking to his inferior colleague Wagner about the spring, the folk and his divided soul, until he comes across the dog which he takes home and which turns into Mephistopheles. This episode may well be the subtext of "Mephistopheles."

There are seven stanzas, of which the first three concern the "Volk," the last three concern Mephistopheles with his "friend" (the already metamorphosed poodle taking the place of Wagner), and the middle one, the meeting of the two (folk and devil). Here "every evening" the people's "lineiki" (simple carriages with lengthwise wooden benches) are met by a "shadow" which frightens the horses. The features of the first group of three stanzas are distinct from those of the last: in the first, people senselessly pour out to "ponds, nature and spaces," while nature (rain and wind) pours into their houses and rages round the rooms; in the last, instead of colorless wild

forces of nature and meaningless movements of crowds, suddenly there is a lot of bright red and a single figure — or at least his legs:

В чулках как кровь, при паре бантов,
По залитой зарей дороге,
Упав как лямки с барабана,
Пылили дьяволовы ноги.

[In stockings like blood, with a pair of bows,
Along the sunset-drenched road,
Falling like straps from a drum,
The devil's legs raised dust.]

The inference is at hand that the crowd's mind, disturbed by folly and by the plunge out into nature's wildness, has conjured this unreal, frightening jester, a shade with red legs, out of the sunset and evening shadows. One may infer, that is, that he is not really there, or else (conversely) that, although he is there, all they can see is shadows and reflections of the sunset. The sixth stanza says that the "haughty disk" could have endured much more and yet has only a small demon to endure, whom the people pass by on their way home, scarcely noticing that he is abandoned to his laughter and pawing at some friend or other:

Он шёл, откидываясь в смехе,
Шагал, приятеля облапя.

[Walked, throwing himself back in laughter,
Paced, hugging his friend with his paws.]

Faust's presence in the scene is so subordinated that it is almost omitted: he is no more than a "friend" of Mephistopheles, object of his behaviour, grammatically dependent and nearly dropping off the end of the poem.

"Oblapya" calls to mind a "bear-hug," but as this is Mephistopheles the paws may conceivably suggest a dog. Much of the scene presented in this poem — the walk, the sounds, the dog-quality, the marginality of the figures — is later taken up and developed in *Doctor Zhivago*. At the very end of a quite unemphasised section (chapter 2, section 11), Komarovsky, whose seduction of Lara is in several respects comparable to Faust's of Gretchen, goes for a walk with his friend Satanidi, and the voices of the two of them echo from side to side of the street like a dog's growling ("rychanie"). We recall that Komarovsky also has a vicious dog that is described by Lara and her schoolmate as *satana* and "an unclean force."

A further subtext of the poem is apparently Blok's "Neznakomka" ("The Unknown Woman"). The folk pour out "za zastavy," "beyond the town-gates" (in Blok things happen "za shlagbaumami," "beyond the barriers"); something happens "ezhevecherne," "every evening" (cf. "kazhdy vecher"); there is, as in Blok's poem, a "tletvorny dukh" ("pernicious spirit"); Mephistopheles' behaviour recalls that of Blok's "ispytannye ostryaki" "well-tried wits"; the feathers unexpectedly associated with him in stanza six may derive from the ostrich feathers of Blok's unknown lady; and both poems mention the "disk" in the sky, both apparently meaning the moon:

> Казалось, захлестав из низкой
> Листвы струей высокомерья,
> Снесла б весь мир надменность диска
> И терпит только эти перья.

> [It seemed, that, lashing up from low
> Foliage in a stream of arrogance,
> The haughtiness of the disc would have borne the whole
> world
> And endures only these feathers.]

Here Blok's "ko vsemu priuchenny" ("accustomed to everything") has become Pasternak's "nadmennost'" ("haughtiness").

"The Unknown Woman" is about an illusion, for even if the lady is real the enchanted shores her presence suggests are not. Thus, this subtext reinforces the idea that "Mephistopheles" too is about an illusion: there are no devils, only phantoms in the sunset. There also exist natural forces, for there is nothing unreal about the winds that fly "like a bicycle" around the cupboards in the houses temporarily left empty in the second stanza. Moreover, four lines after that, nature is found trying to "shake senseless people awake," so that they will not see any more superstitious visions? Everything works to diminish Mephistopheles and practically to annihilate Faust (whose story after all it ultimately has to be). In contrast with "Neznakomka" where the indifferent disc was just a part of the blasé introductory landscape, here the "haughty" disc is given four powerful lines, to which the final four about the two friends seem a mere coda: the bigness of nature's phenomena is stressed in order to achieve a massive diminution of the two figures and their surprising subjection to the landscape.

"Haughty" was the less surprising attribute of Faust himself in a poem written by Valerii Bryusov (also a translator of both parts of Goethe's *Faust*) in 1911. The title of the poem is "Faust" (Bryusov 1973, 2: 76), and Faust is central in it. In fact it consists of first-person expression of his feelings and attitudes; he addresses Gretchen as her destroyer. Bryusov takes the romantic stance of Faust, the fugitive, homeless monster as expressed in the "Wald und Höhle" speech to Mephistopheles — "Bin ich der Flüchtling nicht, der Unbehauste,/ Der Unmensch ohne Zweck und Ruh'..." ("Am I not the fugitive, the unhoused/ The monster without aim or peace...") (Goethe, 1954, 107) — and exaggerates the implicit wickedness in it, thereby losing the tragic dimension, since the tension between good

desire and bad compulsion is forfeited and Faust revels in being solely shameful, poisonous, proud and destructive:

> Я простираю руки с лаской, –
> Но в ласке затаен позор;
> Свое лицо скрываю маской, –
> Горит под ней надменный взор.

> [I stretch out my hands with a caress
> But shame is concealed in the caress,
> I hide my face with a mask —
> Under it burns a haughty gaze.]

What Bryusov stresses is what Pasternak greatly underplays, both in his many remarks on Faust and, in various ways, in his translation of the play: that Faust has made a promise to the Devil (capital D), has repudiated "this world of chance," and has cursed his God: the "Fluch dem Glauben" (curse upon faith) pronounced by Faust in the presence of Mephistopheles (Goethe 1954, 54), which is the main point about him for Bryusov, is simply omitted by Pasternak from his translation. This is consistent with his general silence about Faust's rejection of theology and readiness to embrace evil.

## IX

Two years after this group of poems Pasternak again alluded to Faust in a poem entitled "Tak nachinayut" ("Thus they begin") (1985, 1: 138).

The poem describes the growth of a child: from a yearning after melodies, through acquisition of words, through doubts and alienations and fears about beauty, through great aspiration and desire (stanza 4), to a kind of vision (of seas "where there ought to be houses") and the beginning of writing (iambics). Then comes a shift to the outside. The subjective becomes objective: not *you* lie at night in

fields and pray, but the summer nights themselves fall down and lie there praying, "threatening the dawn with the pupil of your eye." Finally, there are Mayakovsky-like quarrels with the sun, and "Thus they begin to live through verse," meaning, surely, that the shift of "me" into the world of nature, the discovery that nature is the perceiver of *me* or the happener to me, rather than the other way round, constitutes — or is the necessary preliminary to — "living through verse."[3]

The Faust allusion occurs in the fourth stanza. The beginning of this quatrain, "Thus fears grow ripe," belongs, in its meaning, to the preceding one, and its ending (after the two and a half lines containing the reference to "Faust"), with the words "Thus gipsies begin," belong there too, in that the fears in line one are, or include, the fear that the "beauty" of a lilac bush will turn out to be a stealer of children, while we often think it is gipsies that kidnap children. They do so, moreover, in one of Pasternak's stories: "Vozdushnye puti" ("Aerial Ways"). It seems the child projects his desire to steal nature's beauty on to nature's beauty itself, seeing *his* desire for *it* as *its* desire to steal *him*; that is to say, when overwhelmed by the beautiful (being that sort of child, a poet in bud), he already, as if instinctively, makes that subject-object switch that at the end of the poem will turn out to be the essence of "living through poetry."

How different, incidentally, is Pasternak's "terrible beauty" from other well-known instances of the same concept: Yeats' "A terrible beauty is born" ("Easter 1916") and Rilke's "Denn das Schöne ist nichts/als des Schrecklichen Anfang" ("For the Beautiful is nothing

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3 Lazar Fleishman (1990) has shown the presence of Pushkin in this poem and it seems to me that this line "Thus gipsies begin" may also be read as "Thus [Pushkin's poem] 'The Gipsies'" begins and understood in two ways: 1. the freedom and spaciousness evoked at the beginning of "The Gipsies" come into the child's life with his thought about beauty; 2. a life in poetic creation begins for him now as it began for Pushkin with, for example, his poem "The Gipsies."

but beginning of the Terrible"; first "Duino Elegy"). Yeats' line describes the transformation of something common and vulgar into something incomprehensibly noble, Rilke's is about the transformation of desirable beauty into something repellently alien, frightening; but Pasternak's lines — "What is the terrible beauty to do/ Of lilac perching upon a bench,/ When you simply cannot steal children?" — have no such existential transition in them, but enact rather a poet's transition into the world ("I cross over into this night," he wrote in another poem), the exchange of his "I" with the world's, or the world's beauty's. Terrible beauty which is painfully beyond poetry's reach is not Pasternak's concern, not part of his world-view, and it is telling that in his translation of the passage in *Faust*, Part I, where Faust, in the Witches' Kitchen, glimpses the image of beauty in a mirror (beauty that is wholly terrible through its contradictorily ghastly surroundings), he omits the word "beautiful" altogether, even though the word *schön* occurs twice in the original. Moreover, while, in Goethe, Faust thinks he is beholding "the quintessence of all heavens" and longs desperately for what he is almost certain he can never have, Pasternak merely makes him wonder admiringly: can there really be such non-pareil head and hands as these in the world?

Let us look again at the Faust-allusion in stanza four of "Thus they begin":

> Как он даст
> Звезде превысить досяганье,
> Когда он — Фауст, когда — фантаст?
>
> [How shall he let
> A star surpass his reach,
> When he is Faust, when he's a fantasist?]

For Pasternak "fantasy" is usually a negative term. That here it is not is perhaps due to its belonging, properly, to a stage of childhood; however, if fantasy is condoned for being in its proper place, Faust's ethereal aspirations are denigrated by being made part of a child's fantasy-life. Also, the very placing of the line about gipsies may imply that Faust, too, is gipsy-like, a stealer of the beautiful as well as desirer of the sublime. "Everyone is born a Faust," Pasternak will write in *Doctor Zhivago*; here, not everyone, but the future poet at least, is born a Faust, or is one by the age of three. In this poem Faust is firmly related to childhood.

But Faust is only a passing analogy here, not the main thing. Overall, the poem is about something other than and bigger than Faust the fantasist. It develops powerfully from its prosaic beginning referring to ages and stages, through a regular pattern of outgrowths or outbursts of sudden poetic vision and union (these come in the second and third lines of stanzas one and two, and the first, second and third of all the others). The moments of vision and union are held in, controlled, by the prosaic refrains: "Tak nachinayut"; "Tak voznikayut"; "Tak zreyut" ("Thus they begin," "Thus arise," "Thus ripen"); thus not only is the tension between bursts of imaginational growth and the retrospecting adult's rational description of them played out, but the way it may really be for such a child is too: excursions into the extraordinary, returns to the ordinary.

X

Six of these seven poems are about intense, even obsessive, emotion. The absence of emotion from the poem "Mephistopheles" seems related to the near-absence of Faust from it and the total absence of Margarita. In different degrees, and ranging from erotic passion through nostalgia to celestial aspiration, the emotion described is some kind of yearning desire. In four of them (not in

"Life" or "Faust's Love") this emotion of desire is expressed through a plunge into the world of nature, into fields, meadows, woods and vegetation: such a plunge is depicted in "Mephistopheles" too, though there the ambience is not emotion but something else: both a "senselessness" and a diabolic dangerousness. It is worth noting here (though this has less to do with Pasternak's notion of Faust than with the presentation of emotion, especially artistic emotion, in his early writing generally) that the idea of a fall, of falling, or merely of lying down (being already in a fallen position) is rather frequent. Helen is asleep; the lover in "To love, to walk..." rolls to the ground and gazes upward; the child in "Thus they begin..." is identified in the last stanza with nights fallen in the fields; the word "upav" (having fallen) is prominent even in the poem "Mephistopheles," albeit oddly applied to the devil's legs only, rather than to an entire figure; and of course a fall, both literal and metaphorical, is the central action in "Margarita." In some of his very first prose experiments, Pasternak depicts the poet as one who falls or who faints (Ljunggren 1984, IV, V), which may suggest that the fallings in the poems under consideration have to do, in some measure, with the origination of art in life. As for art itself, this appears in "To love, to walk..." and in "Life" through references to operas, in "Life" again and in "Faust's Love" through the imagery of painting, and in "Thus they begin" through both the references to "verse" and "iambs" and the fact that the poem's main subject is the growth of a poet. As well as with emotion, nature and art, Faust is associated in four of the poems ("To love, to walk...," "To Helen," "Life" and "Thus they begin") with youth; in the last three of these — with childhood.

We have also seen that three of the poems contain a characteristically Pasternakian exploration of the subjective-objective boundary, an attempted reversal of the customary poles of perception; and that in two of them Pasternak makes central use of motifs and

figures from the play *Faust* in order to conduct this exploration. Thus while in Goethe's seduction scenes, Gretchen is the object of Faust's desire, in Pasternak's "Margarita" Faust's desire becomes the object of *her* perception and of her catastrophic yielding. While in the drama's scenes of conversation between Faust and Mephistopheles, these two are like a conjoined subject, a shared "I," with the world around them becoming the sheer object of their plans and plots, in Pasternak's "Mephistopheles" the world with its generalised folk is the perceiver, Faust and Mephistopheles becoming objects of that perception. There are many similar moments in Pasternak's early poetry, a well-known example being the poem "Dushnaya noch'" ("Stifling Night," 1985, 1: 97) where the poet overhears a quarrel between twigs and wind — which is about *him*: "*pro menya*"! Such shifts are also employed in Pasternak's prose, from the many instances in "Detstvo Lyuvers" ("The Childhood of Lyuvers") to the rather different, but related, passages in *Doctor Zhivago* where a thing is seen by two observers, such as the candle in the window seen simultaneously by two separate pairs of lovers (in Chapter 3, sections 9 and 10). These passages point to a continuing preoccupation with the nature of subjectivity, and to that intuition Pasternak wrote of in *A Safe Conduct* when he mentioned, with astonishing yet typical understatement (a mere adumbration), "what it is like for visible things when they begin to be seen." They all derive, further, from the paper he wrote in his youth entitled "Symbolism and Immortality," with its idea of subjectivity as not an attribute of separate individuals but suprapersonal.

Goethe could offer perception-reversing metaphors as poetic conceits, as in the poem "Willkommen und Abschied" ("Welcome and Farewell"): "Where darkness looked out of the bushes with a hundred black eyes...." But Pasternak's — under-emphasised yet central — examination of perception and his attempt to rearrange its

norms in such a way as to produce a concept of immortality are not Goethean preoccupations. Goethe's Faust goes at a stride out into the world, emphatically as the individual man, the source of both perception and perspective, undeniably the subject in search of objects, whose immortal soul has nothing to do with wrestling meaning out of seeing, but is to go to heaven or hell at the end of his ambitious life. But Zhivago merges, wherever he can, into foliage or work or other people, thinking about mimicry, eyesight and the mystery of being remembered. Perhaps this is why Pasternak modified Faust so much in his translation of Goethe's play — reducing his grandeur, moderating his emotions, smoothing out the ruggedness of his huge dichotomous confrontations with Nature.

Indeed the frequent and compelling word *Natur* in Goethe's *Faust* is often translated by Pasternak through other concepts, such as "zhizn'" or "vselennaya," so that it ceases to be the great vital presence it is in Goethe. "Priroda" does not have that vastness, especially in Pasternak's work where, instead of being hypostatised as a spirit or unitary background, it is variously combined with human meanings and realities. In the poem "Mephistopheles," for example, it occurs in a list of things that either shrink it to an example of itself or expand it to something abstract: "Ponds, nature and spaces...." In *A Safe Conduct*, Pasternak writes that "pogoda" is another word for "priroda": but if weather is nature changing and unpredictable, it is also nature rendered familiar. The weather, useful to gardeners and farmers, is in fact what makes nature into history (in Pasternak's conception of history), the human-made "second universe." In general, Pasternak is interested in the interaction of the natural with the human. He loves suburbs, windowsills, fences, gates, mirrors reflecting branches, everything where the interchange of the two takes place; in the same spirit he is more fascinated by gardens than by open fields, by a bathing-pool

than by the river it is a part of; he will describe a train going through the steppe, an opera's sounds flying out on to flowerbeds, and he speaks in one poem of the "bassein vselennoi," the basin or swimming-pool of the universe (1985 1: 87). His "nature" is made by us: "gardens, ponds and fences," he says, mentioning things that are already the product of human action upon wild nature, represent "only the discharges of our passion." But nature for Goethe is something else: autonomous, infinite, either sinister or greatly benevolent, possessing spirits of its own, containing the seeds of the universe, utterly elusive and other to Faust who, as human being, the would-be knower and controller, is rejected once for all by the Erdgeist, so alien are the latter's ways to humanity's.

In these early poems, then, Pasternak admires and welcomes the image of Faust, making it his own in a generous, imprecise, boundless way — just as he recommends writing poems in "Davai ronyat' slova" ("Let us drop words," Pasternak, 1985, 1: 110):

> Рассеянно и щедро,
> Едва, едва, едва.

> [Absent-mindedly and abundantly,
> Scarcely, scarcely, scarcely.]

He changes the usual emphases on aspects of Faust, giving unexpectedly central, or marginal, place to Faust's several qualities, to bring him closer to his own concerns. So Faust as lover expands into all the surrounding world and is able to feel united with nature ("To Helen," "To love, to walk...," "Faust's Love," "Margarita"). And Faust is associated with childish or lifelong pleasure ("Life"), less powerful, however, than the pleasure of nature ("To love, to walk...").

Meanwhile, aspects of Faust that Pasternak did not like are much diminished. Faust as aspirer to the impossible is represented only by

a child and only by one stage in his development ("Thus they begin.."). Zhivago's note, "Everyone is born a Faust" (Pasternak 1961, 293), continues thus: "to [i.e. destined to — A.L.] embrace everything, experience everything...." Although in "Thus they begin" Faustian "striving" for the impossible is hinted at, the universal destiny mentioned by Zhivago is more a matter of acceptance and fortune, and the totality, the "allness," declared or, respectively, implied, in the poems "Faust's Love" and "Life," is of this kind too: neither is about striving for that totality, both are about experiencing it. Above all, Faust is associated with youth and seems to mean to Pasternak life's beginning. This may mean fresh beginnings altogether, as Lazar Fleishman suggests when he writes that "generally speaking, the poetic myth of Faust is linked in Pasternak's writings with the motif of second birth which is so relevant in Pasternak's poetry" (Fleishman 1990, 74). Or it may mean the rich and strange place in one's life taken by the origination of poetry and culture. And Faust as companion to the devil is reduced almost to nothing, is almost erased, becomes the shade of a shade.

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