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Hamlet, Dvanov, Zhivago

1.

This paper is conceived as a sequel to an essay I published a few years ago in a volume devoted to Pasternak's novel *Doctor Zhivago*.[1] That essay compared *Doctor Zhivago* with Platonov's *Chevengur*. Using ideas from a 1984 article by Boris Gasparov,[2] I analysed *Doctor Zhivago* as an ecstatically contrapuntal work, and, moreover, as itself *insisting* upon its contrapuntality. By this I meant a simultaneity of many fictional voices merging and diverging, a crossing and interweaving of many narrative and figurative lines (Gasparov speaks of the 'beskonechnoe raznoobrazie ikh perepletenii'[3]), along with explicit acceptance of the whole world and nature as they are. By contrast with Pasternak's characters' affirmation of things as they are, Platonov's characters refuse to endure the imperfections, injustices and sufferings inherent in nature's endlessly onward process and long for everything to come to an end so that something morally better, something simple, single-minded, sincere and straightforward, can begin.

Accordingly, Pasternak makes his heroes, especially Yurii Zhivago, delight in the fact that anything 'great', any 'chudo istorii' (199)[4], such as the revolutionary year of 1917, takes place – like a poetic inspiration coming in the midst of mundane life - right in the midst of the whole interweaving, intersecting and already incessantly mutating complexity of things, without asking for a space to be cleared or needing a suitable *starting* moment. Could he have been tacitly but deliberately countering Platonov, whose heroes, existing in an exactly opposite mode, seek, in their wish for a better life, a *chistoe pole*, a tabula rasa, a new beginning, a place from which the old kind of people are thrown out in advance and the old kind of time is terminated? It seems to me that these two books contradict, yet also somehow complement, each other. Two opposite views are expressed in them – of human existence itself, and of the historical period with which both of them are concerned. We see the same country in the same years, the same events, similar heroes and many similar motifs, yet all of it is described in opposite ways and with opposite philosophies (both of which, but very differently, border on the religious).

Meanwhile, paradoxically, it is with a convinced, clear and single voice that Pasternak insists on the marvel of multiplicity and polyphony, while Platonov's apparently straightforward theme of starting afresh is conveyed with the utmost ambiguity, ambivalence and mystery. Pasternak's 1958 novel is a lucid call of expansively lyrical confession and declaration, full of allusions that can all be worked out and of poems either distinctly in the process of arising through the prose or else - even more distinctly

- set aside in a separate chapter. Platonov's 1928 work, also called a 'novel', is a quietly unemphatic, quasi-inarticulate work, cryptically lyrical, full of unwritten poems, elusive myth and undeclared enigma.

The difference shows in the two works' very titles. They have a certain phonic similarity, the consonants of 'Zhivago' echoing those of 'Chevengur' (Zh-V-G / Ch-V-G). At the same time, the word 'Chevengur', which for Alexander Dvanov, the novel's hero, 'resembled the attractive rumble of an unknown country' (pokhodilo na vlekushchii gul neizvestnoi strany [192]),[5] is a mysterious and strangely pleasing word, in itself an enigma, and is only a sound - a murmur or 'a rumble (гул)' without meaning; whereas the name 'Zhivago' has a clear meaning: 'the living one' (it even suggests, since it is in an oblique case, a whole syntactic structure) and it is not enigmatic at all but practically a statement: 'This is about life, about someone living', or possibly, given its archaic ending and its use in the Bible, '… about the living Christ'. The complete title might be translated 'doctor of the living'.

My paper will address this main difference – on the one hand Platonov's mysterious, strange, ambivalent, non-obvious effects; on the other, Pasternak's declarations and statements, openly confessing, extolling and denouncing.

2.

To give this a focus, I propose to take up the idea (given to me by Evgenii Iablokov) that both heroes could be interpreted through Shakespeare's 'Hamlet'. How do these two Russian protagonists resemble the English Hamlet? There are indeed resemblances. Each is a young man of studious, thoughtful and – somehow – noble or admirable mind, who lives in times which are 'out of joint' (*Hamlet*, Act 1, Scene 5 [1:5]), requiring his active engagement, and who either feels or is told that he has an all-important task connected – more, or less, closely – with his dead father. He lives in relation to that task, and yet he has to be pushed into action. As Hamlet procrastinates until *pushed* into action by a series of circumstances, so Dvanov is *sent* on his journey of search by Shumilin, is *summoned* back to it by Kopenkin, then later still *sent* onward again by his father in a dream; and Zhivago is repeatedly *pressed* by his family and by professional obligations, merely to move from the spot.

The voice of the dead father is a motif uniting Dvanov with Hamlet. In a dream Dvanov's father sends Dvanov to the town of Chevengur, to save him and others who are dead: 'Why should we lie dead? (Зачем же мы будем мертвыми лежать?' [248]) Later – in 1938 – Platonov wrote the short play entitled 'Voice of the Father', in which the opening stage direction, stating 'that the father's voice exists only in the son's head' because 'this scene must be completely realistic' ('Golos ottsa po sushchestvu golos togo zhe Iakova [the son]' because ' eta stsena dolzhna byt' sovershenno

realisticheskoi')[6], *may* suggest a conscious variation on Shakespeare's (otherworldly, however) ghost. The motif scarcely contributes, though, to a comparison between *Zhivago* and *Chevengur* as Yurii Zhivago does not receive any command from his father, nor does his father's voice sound to him in a dream (unless we take Evgraf as a sort of manifestation of the father, and his coming into Zhivago's life as a kind of dream revelation from the past). *Both* heroes, though, are like Hamlet in having at least one substitute father or one quasi-father (Dvanov has Prokhor Abramovich and Zakhar Pavlovich; Zhivago has Gromeko and, it could be argued, Vedeniapin).

Each one's task is eventually completed. Hamlet kills Claudius; Dvanov discovers and works for communism; Zhivago writes his poems of witness – which was his task according to the view of Hamlet which Pasternak expounded elsewhere[7] – that is, of Hamlet not as weak-willed or procrastinating but as an eloquent, introspective witness to the rottenness of his times and as one who sacrifices himself, renouncing his love for Ophelia, feeling a Gethsemane-like anguish before the deathly task he has taken on and giving up the advantages of his royal position. Strangely enough, it was precisely in terms of self-sacrifice that Turgenev, in his well-known speech of 1860,[8] contrasted Hamlet and Don Quixote: Quixote, he said there, is always capable of it, the egotistic and calculating Hamlet - never! Yet the very possibility of such contradictory readings is something Shakespeare shares with Platonov. Iablokov has pointed to critics' opposite readings of Dvanov – either as a morally developed person, deeply compassionate and with an ability to sense the sources of being, or else as someone lacking both individuality and self-awareness.[9] He does not share it, however, with Pasternak, in whose Zhivago nothing is ambiguous or multi-interpretable.

And in each of the three works there is in the fulfilment of the task something unsatisfactory, an admixture of failure in the very act of achievement: Hamlet has had to kill Polonius and Laertes, and also causes his mother's death; Dvanov's achievement is unseen, uninfluential and almost immediately annihilated by the brutal attack upon the town; Zhivago has lost and harmed his lover and his child, has gone into a decline, and has not written his great book of prose (unless, illogically, *Dr Zhivago* somehow is that book). Moreover - like Hamlet - Dvanov and Zhivago die young, indeed they die in the same year as each other, 1929.

Platonov does not mention Hamlet. It may be Turgenev's powerful juxtaposition of Hamlet with Don Quixote that gives rise at all to our wish to see Alexander Dvanov as a Hamlet-figure alongside the undeniably quixotic Kopenkin, his companion. But Pasternak does mention Hamlet - most clearly of all in using this name for the title of the first of the poems supposed to be written by Yurii Zhivago. I shall place this poem, which shows the poet making a delayed and risky entry upon the public stage, next to the passage in *Chevengur* where Dvanov makes his delayed, unconsciously risky, all-important entry into the town of Chevengur. For each it is a fateful moment.

3.

If the poem's title informs us that its persona, the actor who speaks the words of the poem, should be thought of as playing the dramatic role of Hamlet, then five levels of acting are indicated here, - five levels of offering oneself as something to be seen: the first-person *person* is observed. Much of what I want to say about the difference between Platonov and Pasternak has to do with whether or not they ask us to **observe their writing** as an act, that is as a self-conscious action, an enacting of something; it also has to do with the amount of inter-personal **looking** in their novels.

Pasternak's preoccupation with the act of looking starts in his earliest prose fragments. His preoccupation with the moment when the writer goes, as it were, out on stage, *to be looked at,* is also a lifelong one (first vividly expressed in the early story Il Tratto di Apelle). This preoccupation reaches a high point in the poem 'Hamlet'.

'Hamlet'

The noise has stopped. I've gone out onto the stage.
Leaning against the jamb of a door,
I'm trying to catch in the distant echo
What is to happen in my lifetime.

The half-dark of night is focused on me
Along the axis of a thousand binoculars.
If only it's possible, Abba, father,
Let this cup pass from me.

I love your stubborn plan
And I agree to play this role.
But just now another drama is going on,
And for this once let me off.

But the order of acts is thought through,
And the end of the path can't be avoided.
I am alone, everything drowns in pharisaism.
To live a life is not to cross a field.

In this poem, then, there are the following levels of enactment. The biographical Pasternak enacts the fictional Zhivago. The fictional Zhivago acts as the speaker of the poem, an actor. That actor enacts Hamlet. Within, or behind, this, there is the theme of Hamlet himself pretending to be, or becoming, an actor, his putting on of an 'antic disposition' (1:5). Finally, without any explanation of the transition, we see this compound enacter - Pasternak/Zhivago/actor/Hamlet-as-actor - uttering the well-known words of Jesus in Gethsemane (about wishing not to have to fulfil the terrible task), with the implication that, as well as everything else, the role of Jesus Christ is being re-enacted. For Christ (one might mildly say) was indeed sent by his Father to perform a great task in a difficult world and he, too, died young; of him too it could be said that he was only ambiguously successful.

Each of these levels involves being looked at. First, when the biographical Pasternak becomes Zhivago and (secondly) when Zhivago becomes the poem's persona, it is in order that a wide readership or audience may see him and thus encounter his view of what has happened in Russia. Thirdly, actors are people who are by definition to be looked at (the 'theatre' is the place of looking ['theorein': to look]) – and 'thousands of binoculars' are mentioned. In Shakespeare's play, fourthly, Ophelia calls Hamlet 'the observed of all observers' (3:1). And, fifthly, Jesus is gazed at not by thousands but by many millions. The poem consistently uses the language of drama – thus the 'play's acts have all been written' and must be performed, even though 'seichas idiot drugaia drama'. (Could it be that the idea of two plays going on at once - that is of two whole, life-size, thoughts, to be thought simultaneously - rehearses the 'two thoughts' (две мысли сразу [368]) which, in *Chevengur*, Semion Serbinov considers characteristic of Dvanov? (Interestingly, in both cases it is less than obvious what the two thoughts *are*.) Furthermore, being looked at, looking at others, spying on people from behind an arras, watching them from afar – such motifs, frequent in Shakespeare's plays, are particularly prominent in *Hamlet*. In this respect *Doctor Zhivago* does resemble *Hamlet*, though *Chevengur* most certainly does not.

4.

In the passage from *Chevengur*, Alexander Dvanov is entering the town of communism which he has heard about long before, yet which – despite having been sent on a mission to search for communism - he has put off approaching, preferring to complete his studies (as it were, in Wittenberg).

> In the evening it began to rain, because the moon had begun to wash itself; it went dark early from the thunderclouds. Chepurnyi went into the house and lay down in the dark to rest and concentrate. Later one of the 'prochie' (the 'others') turned up and told Chepurnyi the

> general wish – to ring songs on the church bells: the man who had had the only harmonium in the whole town had gone away with it no one knew where, those who remained were used to music now and could not wait. Chepurmyi replied that this was a matter for musicians, not for him. Soon the church chimes sang out over Chevengur; the sound of the bells was softened by the pouring rain and resembled a human voice singing without breathing. To the sound of the chiming and the rain another person came up to Chepurnyi, already indistinguishable in the silence of the darkness that had begun.
> 'Invented what?' – sleepy Chepurnyi asked the man who had come in.
> 'Who has invented communism here?' – asked the old voice of the man who had come.
> 'Show it to us in an object.'
> 'Go and call Prokofii Dvanov or one of the prochie – they'll all show you communism!'
> The man went out, and Chepurnyi fell asleep – he slept well in Chevengur now.
> 'He says go and find your Proshka, he knows everything', the man said to his comrade who was waiting for him outside, not hiding his head from the rain.
> 'Let's go and look for him, I haven't seen him for twenty years, he is grown up now.'
> The elderly man took ten or so steps and changed his mind: 'Better look for him tomorrow, Sasha, let's first find some food and somewhere to sleep.'
> 'Let's, comrade Gopner', said Sasha.

Not merely is there no element of 'enactment' here but measures are taken to conceal the protagonist here and to distance any observers. Although there might be an indirect invoking of the figure of Christ (Easter chimes are sounding) this Christ is not a part of Dvanov's consciousness, as he *is* of Zhivago's. Instead of drama, we have here a lyrical text, full of devices and explanations which *deflect* attention from the hero and from the significance of the moment. The reason for the bell-ringing, for instance, is stated to be a request from the 'prochie' for some sort - any sort - of music, their one harmonica player having gone away – that is, it has nothing to do with Dvanov; and the reason why precisely Easter matins are rung is that the bell-ringer is unable to play the Internationale – again, mere chance. Further, the sound of pouring rain reduces the bells to the likeness of a single voice, and amongst this ambivalent, half-concealed bell-ringing, Dvanov's friend Gopner is said to arrive, 'uzhe nerazlichimyi v tishine nastupivsheisia t'my' (320). That he is actually accompanied by the main hero Dvanov is simply not stated; Dvanov's presence is mentioned as if it were a secondary fact - he is merely someone's companion, not part of what's happening but waiting outside and, moreover, 'ne skryvaia golovy ot dozhdia' (320) – a phrase most moving in its laconic tenderness. Dvanov is faceless, obscure and humbly exposed to the elements. Yet Dvanov is the one, as we know or half-know, who has 'the new world' inside himself (в [его]ясном чувстве [77]) and who has been specially sent to find socialism, that is, to find or to bring about the new world in all reality.

Pasternak's Zhivago, when he reaches his goal and becomes a tragic hero by speaking out to the world, is thinking of himself as both Hamlet and Jesus. Platonov's Dvanov is not thinking of himself at all when – possibly Hamlet-like, probably Christ-like – he reaches his goal (in a tragic world)[10] obyfinding a remote, lone instance of communism springing up in the midst of the steppes, a manifestation of that 'novyi svet' which 'can only be done, not spoken' (mozhno lish' sdelat', a ne rasskazat'[77]).

5.

Everyone sees Zhivago; no one sees Dvanov – neither the other characters, nor, because of the novelist's concealing devices, the reader. This being seen and not being seen is a significant differentiating feature of the two novels' styles.

On the first page of *Chevengur*, although one of the only two qualities attributed to Zakhar Pavlovich (alongside 'worn out by sadness') is 'sharp-sightedness', none of the many objects mentioned is described really visually, they are described only in terms of where they came from, what they are made of, what they are used for. Platonov is not a visual describer, he rarely mentions colour, nor does he render things – as distinct from the forces at work in them - *visible*. He is primarily interested in forces, the origins of force and of movement.

Similarly, he rarely indicates that his characters look at one another, nor tells us what they see if they do; and mostly manages to avoid suggesting that he as author is looking at them. Even the main characters lack individualised facial features. Not merely are such features not mentioned but often their absence is explicitly referred to. Kopenkin is said to have a 'mezhdunarodnoe litso' in which 'cherty ego lichnosti uzhe sterlis' o revoliutsii' (112), then the one feature of Chepurnyi's face – he was a man 'so slabym nosom na litse'(190) – draws attention to the absence of any other features there. A different kind of featurelessness is found in an account of Dvanov's own appearance, which is described at a double remove – from a photograph and through the reactions to that photograph by two people. 'Tam byl izobrazhen chelovek dvadtsati piati, s zapavshimi, slovno mertvymi glazami, pokhozhimi na ustalykh storozhei; ostal'noe zhe litso ego, otvernuvshis', uzhe nel'zia bylo zapomnit'(368-9)'. Then Sonia, one of the two with the photograph, supporting the other's (Serbinov's) indifference towards the picture, remarks: 'On neinteresnyi …' (369)

To digress slightly: there exists a remarkable similarity between this account and Bakhtin's account of what it is like to look at one's own face in a mirror or in a photograph. There, says Bakhtin, we see 'lish' svoe otrazhenie bez avtora …nas porazhaet v nashem vneshnem obraze kakaia-to svoeobraznaia *pustota, prizrachnost'* i neskol'ko zhutkaia odinokost' ego'.[11] Reading the

Sonia/Serbinov episode through Bakhtin, we may wonder if this is not so much a moment of others looking at Dvanov, as Dvanov secretly looking at himself and finding, in the photo, in the mirroring, only that Bakhtinian pustotu, prizrachnost', odinokost', sluchainost', zhutkost'. As Bakhtin says, you cannot look at yourself with the fulfilling 'zavershaiushchii' look with which others can look at you, and Sonia's and Serbinov's inability to look fulfillingly (and this imperfect looking contrasts with Sonia's warm *memory* of what Dvanov really is)[12] is very like Bakhtin's account of every individual subject's inability to look fulfillingly at himself. Dvanov's facelessness is of another order than that of Kopenkin and Chepurnyi; he is the projected invisible subject, while they are presented as objective persons who have been defeatured by the greater force of the Revolution, by history and by time. Meanwhile, it is highly interesting that Yurii Zhivago, too, the 'subject' of that novel and a vehicle for the all-encompassing subjectivity of the narrator, is, on practically the sole occasion when he is seen from outside, also described as almost faceless and as uninteresting to look at. Lara 'udivlenno posmotrela na etogo kurnosogo, nichem ne zamechatel'nogo neznakomtsa' (129).

In this question of characters not being seen by either other characters or by the author, I will look now at a passage early on in *Chevengur***.**

> When they stood the coffin by the pit of the grave nobody wanted to take leave of the dead man. Zakhar Pavlovich knelt down and touched the bristly fresh cheek of the fisherman, which had been washed on the bottom of the lake. Then Zakhar Pavlovich said to the boy: 'Say farewell to your father – he is dead for ever and ever. Look at him – you'll remember him.'
>
> The boy lay close to the body of his father, to his old shirt, from which came a smell of native living sweat, because they had put a shirt on him for the coffin – his father had drowned in another. The boy felt the hands, a fishy dampness came from them, on one finger there was a tin wedding ring in honour of his forgotten mother. The child turned his head towards the people, took fright seeing strangers and burst out crying piteously, seizing his father's shirt in folds as his defence; his grief was wordless, lacking any consciousness of the rest of life and therefore inconsolable; he was so sad about his dead father that the dead man could have been happy. And all the people at the grave also began to weep from pity for the boy and from that premature sympathy for themselves that each of them would have to die and be wept for in this way.
>
> Zakhar Pavlovich, despite all his sorrow, remembered something more distant.

As regards sensations and feelings in this passage, there is touch, smell, indirect reference to sound (bezmolvnyi); there are fear, pity and grief; above all, there is (at the end of the paragraph) a felt immersion in the human condition. But there is a fable-like absence of the visual, and there are no

sharp details arising in any all-encompassing authorial vision. Although Zakhar Pavlovich tells the boy Sasha to 'look at' his dead father, neither he nor the boy is said to do so.

As a contrast, let us look at the second paragraph of the novel *Doctor Zhivago,* taking it as typical.

> They walked and walked and sang 'Eternal Memory' and whenever they stopped it seemed as if the song went on being sung by feet, horses, gusts of wind.
> ……..
> The last moments flashed by, counted, unreturnable. …..
> The coffin was closed, hammered down, it began to be lowered. A rain of clods drummed onto it … On the grave there grew a mound. Onto it climbed a ten-year-old boy.
>
> Only in that state of numbness and feelinglessness that usually comes at the end of big funerals could it seem that the boy wanted to make a speech on his mother's grave.
>
> He raised his head and with absent gaze looked around from his height at the autumn wastelands and the roofs of the monastery. His snub-nosed face became distorted. His neck stretched out. If a wolf-cub had raised its head with such a movement it would have been clear that it was about to howl. Hiding his face with his hands, the boy burst into sobs. A cloud flying up began whipping him on hands and face with the wet lashes of a cold downpour. Up to the grave came a man in black, with gathers on his narrow fitting sleeves. He was the brother of the dead man and uncle of the weeping boy, a priest defrocked at this own request, Nikolai Nikolaievich Vedeniapin. He went up to the boy and led him away from the graveyard.

As in the *Chevengur* passage, the hero is introduced as a boy about ten years old, at his parent's funeral, with other mourners present, he himself at first silent, then weeping. Just as Platonov writes: Ребенок повернул голову к людям, испугался чужих и жалобно заплакал…, so Pasternak writes … окинул взором….The word 'взор' emphasises the idea of seeing, even here where no seeing is being done, whereas Platonov's boy had turned his unseeing *head*. Throughout the Pasternak passage typical formulations are: казалось …могло показаться…было бы ясно…, which, even more than suggesting that someone is looking on, actually *insist* on the presence of an observer. Of course we can take this observer to be the author, who does indeed consistently observe. But then, at the end, the words это был брат покойной tells us that, in addition, someone <u>within</u> the narrative has been watching all the others, a kind of extra, text-immanent narrator, a supreme watcher, knowing who each one is. There is nothing in this text that is not seen by someone 'for', as T.S.Eliot wrote, 'the roses / Had the look of flowers that are looked at'.[13]

Pasternak was always preoccupied with looking, and most typically with looking through a window; and it is telling that he so often describes the looked-through windows themselves: frames, mullions, glass-panes, curtains, the sill…(He does so, for example and very notably, in the poem 'Son' ['Dream'] and in the early prose fragment 'Zakaz dramy' [Ordering a Drama]). This repeated motif is his confession, or declaration, that for him the art of literature is, like that of painting, an art of observing. The described frames and panes speak of his love for the very materials of his craft. Platonov, though, speaks from *among* things, not from their viewpoint edges; his characteristic preposition is 'sredi'. As noted above, he more often evokes the dynamic strengths in things than their appearances.

A further antithetical parallel is that, whereas Pasternak's Zhivago, who sees everything and everyone, is himself watched and seen by his quasi-angelic half-brother Evgraf (the name means 'good writing', but alternatively, it should be noted, it can mean 'good painting' - and a painter has to *look*), Platonov, some thirty years earlier, invented the quasi-angelic being whom he named, among other things, 'evnukh dushi' (an interesting coincidence here of the prefix 'ev' or 'eu'!) – who is, significantly, *not* an intelligent watcher from a Siberian distance with superfine eyesight, ready to come and be helpfully involved, but a small mysterious being hidden inside the main character - watching, yes, but not with external eyes, not understanding, and not involved in the man's life.

6. (Looking at oneself)

Hamlet is a self-analyser and watcher, a judge upon himself, a ponderer of who he is. 'O what a rogue and peasant slave am I!' (2:2) …. Such a trait appears overtly only once in the characterisation of Alexander Dvanov, though many times in that of Yurii Zhivago. A comparison of the sole Dvanov instance with a similar Zhivago one is revealing.

On that one occasion the student Dvanov, at seventeen years old, casts aside his books to reflect on the void inside himself and on the nameless world which he experiences as something moving through that void (pustota) (71). He wants it to be described and named but does not want to apply to it any of the descriptions or names that are current or traditional (all accounts of the world hitherto, it is implied, have been inadequate, let alone invent a new 'name' for it; instead he waits to hear the world's 'own name'. At the same time he senses the future as 'gory zhivogo vozdukha' which must be transformed by him into breath and heartbeat. His reflection culminates in a short and unexpected (to himself as well as to the reader) utterance: 'Vot – eto ia!' (71), probably to be interpreted as his suddenly grasping with conclusive vividness the truth we have already been told about him: namely, that he feels - and *is* – 'one with' the surrounding universe, with people, animals, things, plants and machines. Thus his only moment of conceiving his relation to the general totality of all things is a

moment of identifying himself *with* it. On the next page this is confirmed in the sentence: 'On do teplokrovnosti mog oshchutit' chuzhuiu otdalennuiu zhizn', a samogo sebia voobrazhal s trudom (72)'. Whether his experiencing things this way is a strength or a weakness in him we do not know.

How differently the student Yurii Zhivago, of similar age, ponders his place in the universal picture. He too reflects on the whole world, including the 'higher forces of earth and sky (/vysshie sily/ zemli i neba […])', but *his* discovery is an opposite one: whereas previously he has felt small and timid vis-à-vis all that (life, world, cosmos), he has now grown up into equality with it, and has become a *separate*, distinguishable mind, well able to think for himself. He stands there opposite it, *seeing* it and knowing himself to be (in two senses) a seer. This time it is perfectly clear that the described relation to the world is valued not as a weakness but as a strength.

So the two heroes are comparable to Hamlet in their having one or more moments of serious self-pondering, an introspective look at the universe, but the discoveries they then make about themselves are psychologically / philosophically antithetical. In fact, Zhivago's is *so* antithetical to Dvanov's that, given the numerous other points of affinity, one may again wonder whether Pasternak was not consciously countering Platonov.

7. (Emphases)

The affirmative tone in the passage quoted above from Pasternak's novel is unmistakable. *Doctor Zhivago* is filled with unmistakable emphases. So it is paradoxical that Yurii Zhivago makes the repeated and utterly conspicuous statement (as if *asking* us to note and to quote it) that what he longs for is to be capable of an 'unnoticeable style'. [Всю жизнь он заботился о незаметном стиле,не привлекающем ничьего внимания, и приходил в ужас от того, как он еще далек от этого идеала. (452)] All effects and images in *Zhivago* are highly and, it seems, deliberately, noticeable. Could it be (I ask once more) that Pasternak's/ Zhivago's longing for the 'unnoticeable' derives from an admiration for Platonov's *Chevengur* where 'the unnoticeable' has been uniquely and fully achieved? In *Chevengur*, Platonov says nothing at all about his methods and style, nor about his ambitions as a literary craftsman; he only says, through Dvanov, that the important thing to be done or made (that is, the 'new world') can only be 'done, not said' (его можно лишь сделать, а не рассказать… 77); which implies that *no* verbal 'style' would be adequate.

Once, when writing out a discursive summary of the main events in *Chevengur*, as a sort of guide for readers who might find the book hard to follow (and indeed to clarify its sequences to myself), I found myself repeatedly wanting to insert such phrases as: 'some time after this', 'before this', 'despite all that', 'in pursuance of his goal'; or such words as 'suddenly', 'unexpectedly', 'nonetheless'; I had to force myself either to omit them or else to put them in italics or square brackets with the explanation

that, although the prose of the summary called for them, they would fundamentally misrepresent Platonov's narrative manner. Those helpful adverbial phrases constitute a guidance Platonov chose not to give. He is not present in the text as guide to events and seems not interested in our expectations. (He does not see us, any more than we see him.)

As a single example of this I will cite the passage where Dvanov falls seriously ill for a long time and in delirious moments of his illness 'ему казалось, что он может полететь, как летят сухие, легкие трупики пауков' (90). It is *directly* after these words giving the absorbing detail of his fantasy, that the next paragraph - without any such bridging formula as 'therefore', or 'seeing his condition,' or 'fearing the worst …', - starts with the words: 'Перед Пасхой Захар Павлович сделал приемному сыну гроб – прочный, прекрасный, с фланцами и болтами …', after which, again almost immediately, and again with no bridge such as 'but the worst did not happen' or 'however, he got better' (nor with any explanation of the strange, quasi-biblical time-notation, 'novym letom'), there come two unexpected statements: 'Дванов вышел из дома новым летом; воздух он ощутил как воду…'(90)

It would be easy, but nonetheless interesting, to compare this writer with one of his contemporary contraries in stylistic conspicuousness - with Andrei Belyi, for example. Pasternak, though, provides another kind of contrary to Platonov, a non-modernist one. Without Belyi's elaborate dances of wit and rhetoric, he too makes all his narrative transitions as prominent and as commented-upon as possible; he insists - even to the point of clumsiness - on time and location, on what precedes and what follows, on who is present, who can see whom and how everyone and everything appears to the author-narrator. Nothing is left to chance by the writer of *Doctor Zhivago*, in whose philosophy, contradictorily enough, the unplanned, random nature of everything that happens is a declared and celebrated delight.

Pasternak is performing it all, is acting the role (unfamiliar to him) of the novelist, the self-conscious presenter of a great symbol; while Platonov is speaking - murmuring - as if without artifice, helplessly conveying a naked truth.

Another paradox here is that Platonov, a man of the people, whose earlier writings, especially his many journalistic ones, are all strong thrust, clear statement, is, by 1928, writing with a mistrust of language which must alienate that very 'people', so much eccentricity and curious difficulty does his language-mistrust result in. But Pasternak, 'poet for poets' and man of high culture, 'steps (differently from Mayakovsky) on the throat of his own song'(становится на горло собственной песне) in order to become clear and loud and noticed – a suffering Hamlet on the world stage, introspector

forced into extrospection; and his *Zhivago* is in fact widely read, understood, liked, translated, included in the world-wide twentieth-century literary canon, reduced to abysses of popularity in films.

8.

The two novels lend themselves to comparison not only because they deal with the same historical period but also because Pasternak must have read, perhaps heard, or at least heard in detail *of*, the unpublished *Chevengur* and because in *Zhivago* he may conceivably be echoing parts of it. There are numerous similarities in their heroes' biographies and fates. Some of them have been mentioned above. Many others are noted in the article «Unexpected Affinities…»;[14] they include a comparable meeting of the hero, once grown up, with his vaguely powerful half-brother, and a death similar to that of his father, as well as several similarities of personality and a number of strikingly coincidental motifs: thus Serbinov and Dvanov establish in the one conversation they ever have together, that both of them have loved the same woman, while Strelnikov and Zhivago, in *their* sole conversation, make an identical discovery.

As regards general themes – both authors are preoccupied with the Fedorovian theme of overcoming death. But their approaches differ incompatibly. Although Pasternak was just as concerned as Platonov with this problem, and just as passionate that it should be solved, his whole way of thinking was doubly different: it was metaphorical, not literal, and it had its starting-point in rapture, not in sorrow. Thus Pasternak was able to be convinced that we do continually overcome death – through art, science, philosophy, love and self-sacrifice. The fact that these do not literally stop us from dying scarcely concerns him, for we die (he says) 'at home in history' (у себя в истории [10]), and history is a 'second universe' made by us, so that death is – not death. But Platonov's position reminds me of some words of the film-actor Woody Allen: 'I don't want to achieve immortality through my work, I want to achieve immortality through not dying'. [15] Platonov wanted, moreover - to put it bluntly - *everyone* not to die, not only those who could think Pasternak's difficult thought about being 'at home in history'; he wanted not only poets' and ecstatics' eyes not 'to burn out, lose colour and turn into turbid mineral' (/выгорать и выцветать/, превращаясь в мутный минерал [87]) but *no one*'s eyes ever to do this… Pasternak was enraptured by memory and continuity and by how *these* 'overcome' death; while Platonov mourned – and longed to change – the actual forgottenness of nearly everyone who has ever lived and died.

In respect of Fedorov, what the two have in common is only the centrality of the theme of conquest of death; their approaches to it, as to everything else, could not be more different.

NOTES

1. Angela Livingstone, 'Unexpected Affinities between *Doktor Zhivago* and *Chevengur'*, in *V krugu Zhivago, Pasternakovskii sbornik*, ed. L. Fleishman, Stanford University Press, 2000, pp. 184-205.
2. Boris Gasparov, 'Vremennoi kontrapunkt kak formoobrazuiushchii printsip romana Pasternaka "Doktor Zhivago" ' in *Boris Pasternak and his Times*, ed. L. Fleishman, Berkeley Slavic Specialties, 1989, pp. 315-358.
3. Gasparov, p. 319.
4. Page numbers refer to Boris Pasternak, *Doktor Zhivago*, Milano, 1957.
5. Page numbers refer to Andrei Platonov, *Chevengur*, Khudozhestvennaia literatura, Moscow, 1988.
6. Andrei Platonov, 'Golos ottsa', *Zvezda vostoka*, 1967, No. 3, p. 80.
7. 'Zamechaniia k perevodam iz Shekspira' in Boris Pasternak, *Sobranie sochinenii v piati tomakh*, tom 4, Moscow, 1991, pp. 415-417.
8. Turgenev, 'Gamlet i Don Kikhot', 1860.
9. E.A. Iablokov, *Na beregu neba. Roman Andreia Platonova "Chevengur",* Petropolis, St Petersburg, 2001, pp. 41-2 (Commentary 16).
10. 'a tragic hero … a tragic world …' : I derive these concepts from the study by the late A.A. Kretinin, 'Tragicheskoe v khudozhestvennom mire Andreia Platonova i Borisa Pasternaka', in *Tvorchestvo Andreia Platonova. Issledovaniia i materialy,* 'Nauka', St Petersburg, 1995, pp. 63-69.
11. M.M. Bakhtin, 'Avtor i geroi v esteticheskoi deiatel'nosti' in *Estetika slovesnogo tvorchestva*, ed. S.G. Bocharov, 'Iskusstvo', Moscow, 1979, p. 29.
12. " … зато с ним так легко водится! Он чувствует свою веру, и другие от него успокаиваются … К нему нужно лишь прислониться, и так же будет хорошо.»
13. T.S. Eliot, *Four Quartets*, Faber, London, 1944 etc, p. 8.
14. Livingstone, 'Unexpected Affinities…', especially section 6 (pp. 196-200).
15. Heard on BBC Radio 4, some time in 2002.

Quotations

A
‘Hamlet’

The noise has stopped. I’ve gone out onto the stage.
Leaning against the jamb of a door,
I’m trying to catch in the distant echo
What is to happen in my lifetime.

The half-dark of night is focused on me
Along the axis of a thousand binoculars.
If only it’s possible, Abba, father,
Let this cup pass from me.

I love your stubborn plan
And I agree to play this role.
But just now another drama is going on,
And for this once let me off.

But the order of acts is thought through,
And the end of the path can’t be avoided.
I am alone, everything drowns in pharisaism.
To live a life is not to cross a field.

In the evening it began to rain, because the moon had begun to wash itself; it went dark early from the thunderclouds. Chepurnyi went into the house and lay down in the dark to rest and concentrate. later one of the 'prochie' turned up and told Chepurnyi the general wish – to ring songs on the church bells: the man who had had the only harmonium in the whole town had gone away with it no one knew where, those who remained were used to music now and could not wait. Chepurmyi replied that this was a matter for musicians, not for him. Soon over Chevengur there sang out the church chimes; the sound of the bells was softened by the pouring rain and resembled a human voice singing without breathing. To the sound of the chiming and the rain another person came up to Chepurnyi, already indistinguishable in the silence of the darkness that had begun.

'Invented what?' – sleepy Chepurnyi asked the man who had come in.

'Who has invented communism here?' – asked the old voice of the man who had come. 'Show it to us in an object.'

'Go and call Prokofii Dvanov or one of the prochie – they'll all show you communism!'

The man went out, and Chepurnyi fell asleep – he slept well in Chevengur now.

'He says go and find your Proshka, he knows everything', the man said to his comrade who was waiting for him outside, not hiding his head from the rain.

'Let's go and look for him, I haven't seen him for twenty years, he is grown up now.'

The elderly man took ten or so steps and changed his mind: 'Better look for him tomorrow, Sasha, let's first find some food and somewhere to sleep.'

'Let's, comrade Gopner', said Sasha.

When they stood the coffin by the pit of the grave nobody wanted to take leave of the dead man. Zakhar Pavlovich knelt down and touched the bristly fresh cheek of the fisherman, which had been washed on the bottom of the lake. Then Z P said to the boy:

'Say farewell to your father – he is dead for ever and ever. Look at him – you'll remember him.'

The boy lay close to the body of his father, to his old shirt, from which came a smell of native living sweat, because they had put a shirt on him for the coffin – his father had drowned in another. The boy felt the hands, a fishy dampness came from them, on one finger there was a tin wedding ring in honour of his forgotten mother. The child turned his head towards the people, took fright seeing strangers and burst out crying piteously, seizing his father's shirt in folds as his defence; his grief was wordless, lacking any consciousness of the rest of life and therefore inconsolable; he was so sad about his dead father that the dead man could have been happy. And all the people at the grave also began to weep from pity for the boy and from that premature sympathy for themselves that each of them would have to die and be wept for in this way.

Zakhar Pavlovich, despite all his sorrow, remembered something more distant.

They walked and walked and sang ‘Eternal Memory’ and whenever they stopped it seemed as if the song went on being sung by feet, horses, gusts of wind.

……..

The last moments flashed by, counted, unreturnable. …..

The coffin was closed, hammered down, it began to be lowered. A rain of clods drummed onto it …

On the grave there grew a mound. Onto it climbed a ten-year-old boy.

Only in that state of numbness and feelinglessness that usually comes at the end of big funerals could it seem that the boy wanted to make a speech on his mother’s grave.

He raised his head and looked around from his height with absent gaze at the autumn wastelands and the roofs of the monastery. His snub-nosed face distorted. His neck stretched out. If a wolf-cub had raised its head with such a movement it would have been clear that it was about to howl. Hiding his face with his hands, the boy burst into sobs. A cloud flying up began whipping him on hands and face with the wet lashes of the cold downpour. Up to the grave came a man in black, with gathers on his narrow fitting sleeves. He was the brother of the dead man and uncle of the weeping boy, a priest defrocked at this own request, Nikolai Nikolaievich Vedeniapin. He went up to the boy and led him away from the graveyard.