Angela Livingstone, University of Essex May 2000

Unexpected Affinities between *Doktor Zhivago* and *Chevengur* (1)

> 'While in Pasternak the tragic, as it enters life, brings with it meaning and truth, in Platonov the source of the tragic is in the estrangement of meaning and truth from the world, from humanity and from life itself... In Platonov's case it is more accurate to speak of the tragic condition of the world itself than of tragic heroes such as one finds in Pasternak's work....' (2)
>
> Andrei Kretinin

The epigraph is chosen not merely to suggest further paths of research in the comparison of Pasternak with Platonov but, above all, to honour the valuable work in this direction begun by Andrei Anatolyevich Kretinin, whose sudden death in 1998 at the age of thirty-four was such a sad loss to scholarship. This paper is dedicated to his memory.

I

I wish to draw attention to some unexpected resemblances between two very different twentieth-century Russian novels by writers of genius, both of which were unpublishable in their own time and place. Before pointing to detailed resemblances (in sections 6 and 7 below), I shall juxtapose the two works more generally, indicating general likenesses as well as the major differences. Each is set in the decade or so before and after the Revolution and, in each,

events are seen largely through the eyes of a thoughtful young male hero at once involved and not involved in them, while the narrative also ranges beyond his vision. One is by a poet who had turned to prose, Boris Pasternak; the other by a prose-writer, Andrei Platonov, who had published a volume of poetry; the prose of both has been called 'poetic' - a word meaning something different, however, in each case.

The novels occupy dissimilar positions in their authors' careers. *Doktor Zhivago* (3) is Pasternak's last major work, his conclusive and comprehensive statement about art, history, love, religion, the meaning of life. *Chevengur* (4) comes in the middle of Platonov's writing career and early in his period of highest achievement; though it is his only work of novel length, it has features in common with many of his other fictions and it does not stand out in the way *Zhivago* does amongst Pasternak's works; nor is it a final statement. It was finished towards the end of 1928, nearly thirty years earlier than *Doktor Zhivago*, yet close in time to the fictional Zhivago's death. Obliquely, then, the two books share this temporal turning-point.

Both authors frequently write of trains and railways, and their fictional characters' relations to trains reflect something of their own biographies. Pasternak's heroes and poem-personae are either passengers in trains or observers of them. Platonov's are usually engine-drivers or railway technicians - the ones who are responsible if the train crashes. (The slogan about the Revolution being the 'Locomotive of History' haunted and inspired the young Platonov - who himself worked as a railwayman and train-driver - as it may haunt the reader of the *Chevengur* chapter in which two trains, one of them driven by the novel's main hero, collide head-on.) While Pasternak studied music, then philosophy, Platonov studied electrical science in a Railway Polytechnic, then went into agricultural engineering; Pasternak in his twenties worked as a private tutor in artistic families, while Platonov, in his, built hydro-electric power stations and dug many hundreds of wells and ponds. Platonov remained a committed communist even

after becoming deeply disappointed with Stalin's regime and being rejected by it; whereas Pasternak, also rejected and disappointed, felt he belonged in both eras, the pre- and the post-revolutionary, and was able to praise one of his characters for having an '*aristocratic'* (my italics - A.L.) sense of equality with everyone alive'.(5)

II

I take it that the views expressed by Yurii Zhivago, Lara and Vedenyapin are close enough to those implicit in the statements and imagery offered by the novel's narrator for us to call them the views of Pasternak-as-narrator, or even of Pasternak *tout court*. Although Platonov's novel is far more elusive in this respect, there being almost no narratorial voice, nonetheless, as the views of his main characters - Aleksandr Dvanov, Chepurnyi, Kopenkin (partly) and Zakhar Pavlovich (largely) - not only coincide or considerably overlap but are presented with a perceptible authorial sympathy, I shall refer to them as views Platonov held, at least for a time, and was testing out in this novel.

Both writers are concerned with the large question of our relation to history and to nature. Definite statements about this are made in *Doktor Zhivago*, as in Vedenyapin's assertion that 'man lives not in nature but in history', (6) and that history, while always continuing, is also a totality experienced as a 'home', a place to live and die in: 'Man dies not under a fence on the road but at home in history'. (7) Furthermore, as we see Zhivago the poet responding to nature (flowers, forest, a rowan tree in fruit) and engaging with it in such a way as to create poems from it - which go, we realise, into that great lasting and moving web of history - what we see happening, throughout the book, is Nature becoming History. In this optimistic world-view, nothing is lost; everything is transformed, preserved, made habitable.

Platonov's novel differs here in two fundamental ways. First (though this must be the subject of a separate study), no clear or definite view is given; all attitudes are implicit, not explicit, every apparent statement stands alongside something which tends to contradict it, to diffuse it or to render it ambiguous. In notes he made after reading Spengler's 'Decline of the West' (8) three or four years previously, Platonov wrote that history, not nature, is our fate, and history, not nature, should be 'the passion of our thought' (which sounds rather like Vedenyapin); also that space (or nature) is the finished and rejected product (the 'excrement') of time, and that man lives, if not 'in history' yet at the very mid point at which time (unborn, enthralling) is turned into space (dead, frozen). Nonetheless, in the work of fiction, *Chevengur*, any such general assertions are offered far more indefinitely, even mysteriously, as when Dvanov ponders (in what seems a sorrowful variant of that earlier Spenglerian vision) how, to the Chevengurians, 'communism is the end of history, the end of time, but time proceeds /idyot/ only in nature, while in the human being stands yearning'.(9) All the same, one can draw out a dominant set of - depicted rather than affirmed - views.

Central is the conviction that a new human condition is needed, and, accompanying this, a conviction that up to now everything in the world has been arranged wrongly. The novel is filled with accounts of longings for another kind of world - from major passages such as Zakhar Pavlovich's contemplation of rivers - and nature altogether - flowing futilely onward and always entailing human misery, (10) to innumerable fleeting sketches like the single sentence about a four-year-old boy dreaming of a life 'not resembling his own'. (11) What the characters long for is increasingly, as the novel proceeds, called 'communism' or 'socialism', and the attempt to establish a 'communist/socialist' order by a few Bolsheviks in the remote provincial town of Chevengur is the main subject of the last third of the novel. Almost never discussed in economic or political terms, ' communism' is understood as a 'society of good people', (12) as comradeliness, friendship and kindness (between men, for women are tacitly

excluded - another subject for a separate study). This 'communism', most of the characters agree, must come about through acts of clearing away what has existed hitherto, cutting that all down, reducing life to some sort of minimal condition, starting afresh from a 'chistoe pole'.(13) At the same time, it is conceived as the end of everything. For under 'communism' people will no longer die,(14) and there will be no more autumn or winter, only an endless summer solstice. (15) There are other shared views and values among the main characters, such as that sexual love is to be avoided, and that articulate speech is, in the main, useless. Both these attitudes are the direct opposite of the values contained in *Zhivago*,(16) while the general opposition between the two novels' philosophies of time and history, and of the good life and how it is achieved, is basic to any comparison of the two books.

If Platonov, or Platonov in his characters, wants history to come to an end, this is just the contrary of what Pasternak, with the characters he speaks through, wants. According to Zakhar Pavlovich and others, nature has been a failure. Almost as if knowing his great contemporary would suggest this, the youthful Pasternak forestalled him with his own praise for nature, the 'real, living world' as an example to the artist: 'Look at it continuing, moment after moment a success.'(17) In *Zhivago*, nearly forty years after he wrote those words, his acclamation has lost none of its force.

III

At the heart of Pasternak's enraptured response to the world-the-way-it-already-is lies his welcoming of a certain constitutive configuration within reality; he did not give this a name, but in 1986 Boris Gasparov summed it up as the 'contrapuntal' principle. This principle underlies the whole structure of *Doktor Zhivago*, writes Gasparov. Referring to polyphony in music, where

> Interrelations between different voices, that had started at different points of the composition and progressed at different speeds, create infinite possibilities for variation, with different melodic lines sometimes diverging far from one another , and sometimes merging into one...

the critic speaks of Pasternak's 'overcoming of the linear flow of time'. This sounds like the very thing Platonov's characters desire; but Pasternak, with his trust in metaphor, conceives such overcoming as itself constituting history, in the *midst* of which we gratefully live, whereas Platonov, with his pity and literality, seems to mean the factual overcoming of death, time and history, at the end of which we strive to be.

The over-insistence in *Doktor Zhivago* on 'contrapuntality', on the diverging, merging, crossing and interweaving of narrative and figurative lines, accounts for much of the artificiality of its prose. Rather than dwell on that, however, I wish to recall the fascinating and persuasive, essentially artist's, view of life which is thus insisted upon.

Examples of the principle at work can be taken from any page. An early, small-scale, one is the passage where Vedenyapin and Voskoboinikov walk down a garden path at Duplyanka:

> Po mere togo, kak oni shli, pered nimi ravnymi staikami na ravnykh promezhutkakh vyletali vorob'i, kotorymi kishela kalina. Eto napolnyala ee rovnym shumom, tochno pered /nimi/ vdol' izgorodi tekla voda po trube. (19)

Two kinds of movement - a slow forward-walking and a quick outward-flying - intersect, producing an effect which resembles music in more than its counterpoint: one unified sound results from the counterpointed movements, a sound which is not a product of the birds alone nor an impression in the men alone, but constitutes some third element. In miniature, this is an

image of Vedenyapin's idea of history as a third reality arising out of the innumerable interweavings of things.

Another example: the passage about Yurii's reading in the Yuryatin library (20) is dominated by 'intersection', the crossing of paths. The emphasised windows bring inner and outer scenes into parallel relation; angles of tables toward windows are mentioned for their sheer juxtaposing of differing lines; locals entering the reading-room make Yurii feel he is 'standing on one of /the town's/ populous crossing-points'; in the readers two social classes cross and merge; their being at home in the town crosses with Yurii's homelessness; and all this leads climactically to the counterpointing of Yurii's fate with Lara's, when he realises that she, too, at her own pace and in her own parallel life, has entered the library.

Pasternak's conception of reality as an incessant interrelating of variously starting and ending themes entails an acceptance not only of perfect moments but of imperfect, faulty, erroneous ones as well. In an earlier article (21) I discussed 'mistakes' as a motif in this novel and I will mention these again to connect them with the idea of counterpoint. Many of the small and large errors made by the characters, narrated so starkly and ungroundedly that they cry out for allegorical interpretation, can be understood as a curious way of indicating this idea. For an incorrect statement side by side with the correct one is a temporary crossing of two versions: two voices sound, one in the error, one in the verity. Mistakes of this sort mark the very opening of the novel, where passers-by suppose it is Mr, not Mrs, Zhivago who is being buried - a variant that would have made for a quite different novel; and when the tired mourners wrongly think the boy will make a speech on his mother's grave we briefly visualise him doing so: his doing so and his not doing so strangely interlink. Later, 'Oleg's steed' and 'Askold's grave' fleetingly cross paths in Anna Gromeko's muddled allusion; a railwayman's strike started by Tiverzin is imagined alongside the one he did not start; a story in which the

Kologrivovs find Lara a burden is evoked next to the fact that in the present story they do not; our thought of the never-identified stranger in mistake for whom Strelnikov arrests Zhivago when the latter wanders, at a different existential speed, near his train-headquarters in the night, shadowily intersects with the actual (strangerless) incident. In more than one place Pasternak stresses the positive value of chance mistakes, as when the hoof-sounds giving rise to 'God knows what rural remoteness and loveliness' (22) in Lara's drowsy mind are those of a horse which has wandered into the yard 'by mistake'. These instances are closely related to Pasternak's concern with coincidences.

Furthermore, 'counterpoint' - synchronous movements going on at various speeds or starting at different moments - is evident in Zhivago's response to the October Revolution. What he admires about it is that 'this revelation has been flung /akhnuto/ into the very thick of the continuing everyday'. (23) The recurrence of the laudatory word 'continuing' is highly typical. The two opposite lines that intersect (like the sparrows' flight crossing the path of the walkers) are the continuing flow of ordinary life and the instriking of something extraordinary, making you gasp in amazement. Here Pasternak starkly celebrates the way a 'miracle of history' does *not* first clear the ground for itself, does not begin from the beginning, but directly enters life's already sounding polyphony, comes 'into the very peak-activity of the trams coursing around the town',(24) becoming a part of it all and changing it. Later in the novel Zhivago will complain about people who, instead of living, only 'prepare' for living, while uttering such inane slogans as 'the dawn of the future', 'the building of a new world'; (25) in this we again hear Pasternak's radical non-acceptance of the monological. 'Not living' means not welcoming life's polyphony.

IV

Chevengur describes a utopian experiment based on a principle which is just the opposite of Pasternak's contrapuntal philosophy, and Platonov presents a group of Bolsheviks who do indeed talk of 'the dawn of the future', of 'building a new world', and of clearing the ground in advance. Yet these are not the politically conscious, leather-jacketed Marxists Pasternak had in mind; instead, they are sad, poor, simple, semi-articulate, rural eccentrics, unsure of themselves, knowing little of Marxism, immersed in a 'rural remoteness and loveliness' that Lara could not have dreamt of, men with 'holy-fool' qualities, whose thought that the new order must be inscribed on a blank page is simply unquestioned. These people are depicted, in all their occasional - helplessly benighted - cruelty and fanaticism, with an authorial compassion that makes them irresistibly, and as if inadvertently, attractive. 'Nechayannost'', inadvertency, a word used often by Platonov, is not a quality of *Doktor Zhivago* at all. One of Platonov's remarkable achievements, it seems to me, is that he enables readers and admirers of Pasternak's novel to read with no less sympathy a book about a wholly opposite kind of people, wholly opposite ideas and ideals, against the background of the same Revolution and Civil War.

Thus Pasternak celebrates life's onward process, and sees the process as a fertile crisscrossing of phenomena, a counterpointing of voices and thoughts, an interweaving of lives, fates, directions. But Platonov cannot endure the imperfection, injustice and sorrow inherent in life's onward process, however polyphonic it may be, and longs for an end to it and a new beginning, so as at last to create the perfect human home. The two books' opening sentences point to the contrast.

> Est' vetkhie opushki u starykh provintsial'nykh gorodov. Tuda lyudi prikhodyat zhit' pryamo iz prirody. Poyavlyayetsya chelovek - s zorkim i do grusti izmozhdennym

> litsom, kotoryi vsyo mozhet pochinit' i oborudovat', no sam prozhil zhizn' neoborudovanno.(26)

These first sentences of Platonov's novel evoke an unspecified very-beginning of things in such phrases as: 'people come straight from nature'; 'The - or A - human being appears...'; while simultaneously the end of things is suggested in such adjectives as 'vetkhie', 'starykh', 'izmozhdennykh'. In Pasternak's opening sentence -

> Shli i shli i peli 'Vechnuyu pamyat'', i kogda ostanavlivalis', kazalos', chto ee po zalazhennomu prodolzhayut pet' nogi, loshadi, dunoveniya vetra... (27)

no beginning or ending but a being in the very midst of things is evoked, in the references to ritual, custom and traditional song; here disparate phenomena (feet, horses, gusts of wind) join in one chorus; and the intersecting of passers-by with people in a procession announces that contrapuntal mode which Boris Gasparov described. It is not that where Pasternak has polyphony Platonov has homophony or unison, but rather that Pasternak writes of midsts while Platonov writes of beginnings and endings; though it could also be said that Platonov conveys singleminded views with the utmost ambiguity and ambivalence, where Pasternak with lucid univalence speaks of multiplicity. (28)

V

Chief among the constituents of nature regretted by Platonov is the fact of death. Again and again he addresses the question of what death is and whether it can be overcome. Pasternak, too, especially in *Zhivago*, makes 'overcoming death' a central issue. Both writers may have been, Platonov certainly was, influenced by Nikolai Fedorov (1829-1903) in whose philosophy the defeat of death was the sole human problem and task.(29) It is hard to live as a thinking person and not be affected by this question, but the 'overcoming of death' as an explicit and urgent obligation (actually more explicit in Pasternak than in Platonov) does seem to derive from the widespread Fedorovian influence.

Three pages from the opening of *Chevengur* comes the story of a fisherman who dies by plunging into a lake to find out about death, thinking the fish must know; later there are extraordinary close-up accounts of dying - external , factual ones (as after the train crash) and internal, imaginational ones (as in the dying foreman's image of being pushed back into the birth-tube); in the town Chevengur, 'communism' is tested by whether it can stop a child dying, and - when he dies - by whether it can resurrect him; people yearn for buried bones (Zakhar Pavlovich for his mother's, Kopenkin for Rosa Luxemburg's, Sasha for his father's); there are vividly described deaths in a battle; on the last page the hero drowns himself. The novel's treatment of death is always ambiguous and inconclusive; no answers are given, only hints, which we are not compelled to take - as when Kopenkin's mysterious dying words to his friend are: 'They are waiting for us, you know /Nas ved' ozhidayut/, Comrade Dvanov', (30) or when Dvanov, entering the lake, is said by the narrator to be 'continuing his life'.(31)

Pasternak's novel, too, abounds in deathly scenes. It opens with a funeral, offers in its first pages a speech about history as work towards 'overcoming death', then a suicide; it dwells on a sick woman's fears about death and the after-life, describes atrocious killings in the Civil War, and conveys the feverish hero's thoughts of death and resurrection. But Pasternak is confident of the answer. No, there is no afterlife as such, Yurii tells Anna Gromeko, nor do we want it (what an intolerable crowd there would be!)(32) - and actually, he says, referring to the Book of Revelation, there *is* no death. It is clear that he means subjective death - one's own: you will not know your own death any more than you knew your own non-existence before birth.(33) Most important of all, death (one's own or that of others) is not to be worried about because it is the necessary condition, the source and the subject matter, of art, and because art, like science, is a sufficient equivalent of resurrection; in art's survival is our own survival. All this is ecstatic, visionary; it depends on feeling and it requires our enchantment with

symbolism. Carried away by the certainty experienced in poetry, one is saved from the dread ambiguities known to Platonov, one will not face extinction as the literal-minded face it.

So in their preoccupation with the enigma of death Platonov and Pasternak are akin, but in their ways of dealing with it they are worlds apart. The polarity of the two attitudes is seen also in their approach to language. Both write extremely interestingly about a sensitive adolescent hesitating to adopt the conventional language applied to the surrounding world. The young Sasha Dvanov 'did not give another's name to..the nameless life being revealed before him. But he did not want the world to remain unnamed, he was only waiting to hear its own name instead of the deliberately invented names.'(34) The theme is developed in one or two later passages. But the world's 'own' name, the real name, never comes. One does see Dvanov drawn to the very name 'Chevengur', which resembled 'the attractive resonance /vlekushchii gul/ of an unknown land',(35) perhaps a hint that the world's 'own' name does exist. If 'Chevengur', however, were the ultimate name, this would be a joke uncharacteristic of Platonov, since this made-up word appears to mean something like 'the buzzing of a shred of bast-sandal.'(36) But search for the true name and hesitation to use conventional language have an indirect counterpart in Platonov's own style, at least as we see it in this novel and in a few other works. For this is a style which consistently avoids ready-made idioms, unless subtly to undermine them, and composes itself instead, at once boldly and meekly, of even grotesquely unfamiliar sounds and nuances, as if hoping to stumble across some unprecedentedly truthful idiom, and perhaps doing so.

Pasternak has similarly related the story of a young person hesitating to use grown-ups' fixed language. Here I shall refer to a work other than *Zhivago*. The young girl in 'Detstvo Luvers' (1917) (37) gazes at various ordinary sights - say, the heads of people reading on a bench - as well as at extraordinary ones - say, the Ural mountains - and is unable to name them; going by

train from European to Asian Russia, she cannot accept the abstract name ‘Asia’. Only slowly and with difficulty does she come to use the readymade names and definitions, to fill ‘Asia’ with meaning derived from her own travel experience, to say ‘it’s the Urals!’ or ‘it’s three readers on a bench’.

The telling difference from Platonov’s Sasha is that she does eventually adopt the regular language - if with more of a poet’s sensitivity and associative profundity. And this acceptance points forward to the prose of *Doktor Zhivago*, which is, declaratively, written in ordinary comprehensible Russian (or as nearly as the complex poet Pasternak could approach it). ‘A novel in prose’, he insisted. Platonov might have called his ‘ a novel in unversed poetry’.

Let us look at passages from the two novels which are similar in their implied question - about whether some kind of language may be heard, or meaning gained, from the natural world; but are divergent in their answers. (The words ‘air’, ‘surroundings’ and ‘life’ occur in both.) Lara walks a meadow path towards a forest, stops and, screwing up her eyes -

> ...vtyagivala v sebya putano-pakhuchii vozdukh okrestnoi shiri. On byl rodnee ottsa i materi, luchshe vozlyublennogo i umnee knigi. Na odno mgnovenie smysl sushchestvovaniya opyat’ otkryvalsya Lare. Ona tut, chtoby razobrat’sya v sumasshedshei prelesti zemli i vsyo nazvat’ po imeni, a esli eto budet ei ne po silam, to iz lyubvi k zhizni rodit’ sebe preemnikov, kotorye eto sdelayut vmesto nee.(38)

Sasha walks along a path in the melancholy evening:

> No Dvanovu slyshalis’ v vozdukhe nevnyatnye strofy dnevnoi pesni, i on khotel v nikh vozvratit’ slova. On znal volnenie povtorennoi, umnozhennoi na okruzhayushchee sochuvstvie zhizni. No strofy pesni rasseivalis’ i rvalis’ slabym vetrom v prostranstve, smeshivalis’ s sumrachnymi silami prirody i stanovilis’ bezzvuchnymi, kak glina. On slyshal dvizhenie, nepokhozhee na ego chuvstvo soznaniya.

Lara senses an absolute kinship between herself and nature; Sasha experiences precisely the absence of such a kinship. Lara receives the 'meaning of existence' from the 'confused-fragrant air' - and here 'putano/confused' is of the essence, suggesting the virtue of 'crossings'; while Sasha senses how all traces of meaning disperse and disintegrate - here 'smeshivalis'/mixed' indicates not abundance but loss. Both sense that the name is already there, in nature, but Lara is confident that either she or others will be able to find it and to 'call everything by its name', while for Sasha the finding of the world's own name is doomed to failure from the very beginning. As Andrei Kretinin wrote, for Platonov the tragic is in the estrangement of meaning and truth from life itself; it is not we that estrange them and, by the same token, not we who can introduce them. From beginning to end, Sasha seems to be on a search. From beginning to end, Zhivago and those close to him seem sure they have found the truth.

VI

Each author has his hero born in roughly the same year as himself, but makes him (unlike his biographical self) an orphan, brought up in someone else's family. Each hero has two substitute fathers: Yurii is brought up by Gromeko and has Vedenyapin as a fatherly mentor; Sasha is first brought up by Dvanov, whose surname he takes, then by a second foster-father, Zakhar Pavlovich, who is more of a mentor. Each hero enters the narrative at the age of ten, on the occasion of the burial of one of his parents, the other having vanished, and is led away from the grave by the mentor father-substitute. Each, a very little later, being alone in nature, speaks aloud with emotion to his recently dead parent. Each one's real father commits suicide near the beginning of the book, and in each case there is something mysterious about the suicide: Sasha's father, the fisherman who believes fish possess the secret of death and drowns himself to find it,(40) may or may not find it, may or may not be crazed; Yurii's father, just before he leaps to his death, is seen 'turning pale from horror'(41) - but why? and why, indeed,

does he kill himself? Boyhood scenes show each protagonist as an original, metaphysically conscious child. After the Revolution, each one lives a nomadic life during which he sees a great deal of Russian land and villages, meets a number of wandering weirdos and comes in contact with provincial attempts at setting up a social utopia. Each, near the end of the book, meets a man who loved the same woman as he himself loved and talks to him about her. Each becomes acquainted with his younger half-brother, who has the same surname as himself and whom he has either never met before or not met for some twenty years, a half-brother whose relationship with the - vaguely defined - political authorities is a powerful one, the opposite of his own; moreover, this half-brother survives him and is seen at the very end of the narrative being active in matters urgently concerning him. (True, this activity takes only one sentence in *Chevengur*.)(42) And in the course of the book, each is saved from death at least six times, finally to meet a death which resembles that of his father: like his father, Zhivago leaves a crowded public vehicle and dies at the side of its track; like his father, Dvanov drowns himself in Lake Mutevo. Going into the water, Dvanov strangely 'continues his life', and even this has a counterpart in Pasternak's novel, as Yurii is strangely survived and as if continued by the 'contrapuntal' pattern of Mademoiselle Fleuri's walk along the same road as his tram, and, it is implied, by the interweaving of all other human lives with his.

As well as these parallels in their fates, Sasha and Yurii have remarkable affinities as personalities. It must be admitted that their differences are far greater than their resemblances. Zhivago is a home-maker, Dvanov finds homeless wandering natural. Zhivago deplores the joining of political parties, Dvanov joins the Bolshevik Party. Above all, Zhivago is a poet, a lover, a man of raptures, adorations, visions and inspirations; Dvanov is no poet and no lover; he says nothing about art, rejects sexual love, has dreams but no uplifting visions. All the same, there are striking parallels.

Both manifest a certain weakness by contrast with men of action: Sasha is the gentle friend of bold quixotic Kopenkin,Yurii the inactive, meditative member of the symbolic pair he makes with Strelnikov, the man of action and principle. Both indeed lack 'principle', do not theorise or believe in theories; nor have they that other motive force for action - ambition. Both are passive, characteristically moved by events, rather than movers of them. Thus, Zhivago is *sent* to the front, *follows* his family to Varykino against his own - feebly expressed - will, is twice arrested without having done anything to provoke it, and even fires a gun in the midst of battle in a pacific, passive way; Dvanov likewise is *pushed* into the Bolshevik party, is *sent* on a mission 'to seek communism amongst the spontaneous activity of the population' (43), is *summoned* to Chevengur, indeed also *sent* there - by his father in a dream. In both cases, the passivity is felt by their friends to be a virtue. Both are presented as caring and unaggressive. As a doctor, Zhivago continually cares for suffering people. Dvanov is called 'affectionate /laskovyi/'; and when he ought to shoot a bandit he grieves for the man instead and lets him go. He feels an extraordinary compassion for everyone around him including strangers and passers-by, and for every*thing* - for animals too and even for grass and fences. Union with all being and beings - which Yurii Zhivago experiences in his intense moments of poetic vision or of enjoying the identity of light inside and outside a house - is Sasha Dvanov's continuous and lifelong sensation, although, as ever, it is much less insisted on by his author. Both heroes are innocents in a guilty world, quiet minds amid the noise. Both of them, further, are described as unremarkable in appearance and yet with some sort of exceptionally attractive 'lightness' about them. When she first meets him, Lara thinks of Yurii as 'snub-nosed, and you couldn't say he was very good-looking', (44) but at his death she speaks of 'the breath of freedom and carefreeness that always emanated from him'. (45) Looking at a photograph of Sasha, whose sunken eyes are 'like tired watchmen', Sonia says ' He looks uninteresting, and yet one feels so light to be with him! He feels his faith, and he makes others calm.' (46)

Other similarities could be mentioned. Both have a time of unconsciousness: Sasha, feverish after an injury, travels about for two days in a trance, forgetting why he is alive and whither he has been sent; Yurii, ill with typhus for two weeks, has trance-like intuitions. Both, articulate and well-read themselves, love the impassioned or timid inarticulacy of others: thus Sasha responds with love to Kopenkin's confounding of 'terminy' with 'ternii'(47) and replies with laconic sympathy to Chepurnyi's helpless question about what to do with the elemental pressure of 'communism' inside himself; (48)while Yurii is fond of those who, gripped by feeling, do not speak clearly - the 'humming and hawing /myamlyushchie pauzy/', for example, of Alexander Gromeko, ' ego ekanye and mekanye'; (49) and Pasternak's novel contains a whole series of characters who for a variety of reasons cannot get their words out straight. Of course the philosophies underlying the welcoming of inarticulacy are characteristically opposite. Dvanov welcomes it as an instance of the ignorance and inchoacy which betoken a blank page where the new and better human story can be written, while what Pasternak/Zhivago likes about word-muddling, slips of the tongue and so on, is their polyphonic aspect. For such confusion represents a crossing-point either of speech with something else (with an urgent situation, as in the case of Kolya the telephonist,(50) or with an unfamiliar excitement, as in the case of Ustinya)(51), or else of two kinds of speech - of French with English in Mlle Fleuri,(52) and of contrasting etymologies in Terenty Galuzin's mixing of, for instance, 'sovatazhnik' with 'sabotazhnik'(53).

And both Yurii and Sasha oppose rhetorical talk of 'people' and of 'people in general', believing instead in individuals. Also, however, though far from being an orator, each does have one moment of making a prophetic-sounding speech. Dvanov speaks, just once, at a village commune meeting about the, not merely international but interplanetary, aspirations of Russian communism:

> Ibo nesomnenno - posle zavoevaniya zemnogo shara - nastupit chas sud'by vsei vselennoi, nastanet moment strashnogo suda cheloveka nad nei. (54)

And Zhivago, in his tipsy speech at the social gathering in Moscow, also speaks just once in this vein, and also invokes the 'universe':

> Nadvigaetsya neslykhannoe, nebyvaloe... Vsyo zhe istinno velikoe beznachal'no, kak vselennaya. (55)

Behind Zhivago's words, as we know, lies his belief in the Book of Revelation, and if the connotations of 'revelation' are closer to him than those of the same word in Greek - apocalypse - his antithesis and double, Strelnikov, does speak of apocalyptic times and 'last judgment'. The apocalyptic notion of a 'holy city' is also present in both novels. In *Chevengur,* the eponymous town, though never called 'holy', is felt to be that, as it is the place where the old evil complexity has been swept away and a pure beginning of the good is to take place. In *Zhivago,* Moscow is actually called 'holy', meaning it is the place of the infinitely symbolical crisscrossings of life and of lives.

VII

Expectations, beliefs and images associated with the Book of Revelation/Apocalypse play no small part in *Chevengur*. The town's previously established inhabitants accept their slaughter as the 'Second Coming', and the Bolsheviks who carry it out act tacitly as avenging angels at the end of time. Allusions to the life of Christ as told in the Gospels are also numerous. Sasha, like Yurii, is partly projected on the background of an image of Christ.

This is not the angry Christ ('prophet of anger and hope') Platonov described in his journalistic essay 'Khristos i my' of 1920,(56) but the gentle Christ of a more selective tradition. Sasha is chaste, humble, compassionate. His faith and his humaneness have a certain absoluteness about them. This does not derive from any insistence or expatiation on the author's part, but rather

from a few succinct statements. 'He feels his faith', Sonia says. 'Is *everyone* necessarily to have life - or not?'(57) asks Zakhar Pavlovich, and Sasha answers, with assurance, 'Everyone'. It is not said where his moral certainty originates, nor how he makes his choice to live non-sexually. Two episodes show him as sexually potent and desirous, but the 'dark agitation of love'(58) takes an unusual form in the adolescent Sasha and is channelled into compassion. Without saying so, Sasha accepts that his life is a mission; as I have indicated, he is forever being 'sent'. While his main mission is to look for beginnings of communism in the countryside, he is sent out into the world, even before that, with touchingly awkward words from Zakhar Pavlovich which could suggest an unusually great vocation: 'Remember - your father drowned, your mother is unknown, millions of people live without soul - there's a great deed /to be done/ here...'(59) On the same page stands a direct statement from the narrator about Sasha's relation to 'Utopia', or to 'Heaven' (but neither of these words is used, here or elsewhere):

> /On/ veril, chto revolyutsiya - eto konets sveta. V budushchem zhe mire mgnovenno unichtozhitsya trevoga Zakhara Pavlovicha, a otets-rybak naidyot to, radi chego on svoevol'no utonul. V svoyom yasnom chuvstve Aleksandr uzhe imel tot novyi svet, no ego mozhno lish' sdelat', a ne rasskazat'.(60)

But the definition is mysterious, not clarifying whether the task is a spiritual or a practical one, nor explaining what it means to have 'in oneself' the 'new world'; it seems to mean far more than merely to be convinced of its imminence. Moreover, Sasha is apart from the other Bolsheviks, being able to understand them in ways in which they do not understand him. Unlike them, he is not impatient for the new life, holding it already within himself: he 'was not in a hurry to sow' (61) the bared fertile soil of the cultureless folk around him. (Meanwhile the incidental information that he has the power to 'sow' seems a reference to the biblical Parable of the Sower (62)). Instead he loves them for their desire: 'he loved many people for the fact that they would die from life's impatience (translatable also as 'from their impatience for' - or

‘with’! - ‘life /ot neterpeniya zhizni/)’ (63); and it is he who proposes the symbol of two linked eternities (of space and of time) as the logo for a collective farm: he thinks on the level of the eternal.

Supporting these personal features, there are several echoes of specific motifs in the Gospels. Christ’s injunction to look at the birds and flowers, which prosper without working, is echoed more than once. Proshka, recalling Sasha’s childhood, says ‘You asked for food but they gave you none’ (‘For I was an hungered; ye gave me no meat’.) (64) The number of Bolsheviks in Chevengur (Sasha is never counted among them) is eleven, and becomes twelve when they are joined by Serbinov, whose action will destroy them. Mikhail Geller was the first to note that this recalls the number of the Apostles, and to suggest a Judas-Serbinov. Geller was also first to note that the secluded meeting of the two newly met brothers to talk about saving mankind has very much in common with Dostoevsky’s depiction of the first grown-up meeting between Alyosha and Ivan Karamazov, thus between Christ and the Grand Inquisitor. More could be said about this, for at the end of their conversation Proshka realises, looking curiously at Sasha, that he is ‘a useless creature, he’s no Bolshevik, he’s a beggar with an empty bag’(65), echoing a passage much earlier in the book where Zakhar Pavlovich reflects that in any kingdom of Proshka’s ‘Sasha would be a beggar’; (66) this again associates Sasha not only with Platonov’s many other ‘dushevnye bednyaki’ but also with the barefoot figure of Jesus, praiser of the poor in spirit. Conceivably, Christ-the-fish (‘Khristos-ikhthus’) may be alluded to in the fish for whose wisdom Sasha’s father dies; ‘Vot - predmudrost’!’(67) he says about it, using a word that occurs repeatedly in the Orthodox liturgy. More certainly relevant, despite Platonov’s characteristic under-emphasising of it, is the fact that Sasha Dvanov first enters Chevengur just as its church bells are ringing for the one and only time, and - because the bellringer does not know how to play the ‘Internationale’ - are ringing Easter matins.(68)

In *Doktor Zhivago,*allusions to the Gospel and to Christianity are made more prominently. Yurii dreams of Christ's three days in Hell as if he himself were having that experience. He wishes to say to his philistine friends: 'The only bright and living thing about you is the fact that you have lived at the same time as me and have known me...', (69) which recalls: 'For ye have the poor with you always.. but me ye have not always..' (70) Lara says:

> Yurochka, ty moya krepost' i ubezhishche i utverzhdenie, da prostit Gospod' moyo koshchunstvo... (71)

- and her words about the 'breath /veyanie/ of freedom and carefreeness' always emanating from him seem, with their imputation of 'lightness', to echo Vedenyapin's 'And now into this heap of ...tastelessness came that man, light-footed and dressed in radiance'.(72) Then, in his first poem, Zhivago puts the words spoken in Gethsemane into the mouth of Hamlet and of the actor playing Hamlet, representatives of himself.

Again the parallels emphasise the difference between the two writers. There is nothing otherworldly in Platonov's novel, except what is given in hints, questions and ambiguities. As Evgenii Yablokov has said, Platonov 'went right up to the edge of the mystical but never over it.'(73) But Pasternak has in mind the Christ who died for another level of things. The other level is, at its most explicit, that of poetry or art. According to an important line in his last poem, he goes down into the grave 'in the name of the parable'(74) - in the name of the symbolical. Moreover, Vedenyapin's version of Christ's coming into the world has the same symbolic structure as characterises the whole novel. For just as the Revolution strikes straight into the 'thick of the continuing everyday...', and just as the actor arrives on the stage facing straight into 'a thousand binoculars', ready to affect a world of people who have already gathered, so too it is *into* the ongoing world of Roman vice, the whole never-stopping polyphony of things, that Christ, 'light-footed and dressed in radiance', is described as arriving;

a new idea strikes in amongst the old ones, to work with and through them, to change and continue the process.

VIII

It could be interesting to speculate whether Pasternak knew *Chevengur* and perhaps, in some measure, had a 'correction' of it in mind when writing *Doktor Zhivago*. If so, he corrected it , above all, by making the hero a poet, thus giving him salvation through art - a solution to the problem of death and the removal of the need for earthly perfection. Pasternak knew Platonov personally; at times they moved in the same literary circles. If he had heard a reading of Platonov's novel, or of parts of it, and remembered it in a fragmentary and hazy way over the many years that had elapsed, this would fit well with the way certain motifs - presumably the ones he either liked most or most wanted to counter - seem to have reappeared in his own work. But all this is unwarranted guesswork. The only thing certain is that here are two important novels, set in the same period, immensely unalike and yet in a number of ways strongly and surprisingly alike.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

1 Research (relating to Platonov) on which this article is based was done with the help of an Emeritus Fellowship awarded in 1998 by the Leverhulme Trust.

2 A.A.Kretinin, 'Tragicheskoe v khudozhestvennom mire Andreya Platonova i Borisa Pasternaka', in *Tvorchestvo Andreya Platonova. Issledovaniya i materialy*. 'Nauka', St Petersburg, 1995, pp. 63-69.

3 All references are to Boris Pasternak, *Doktor Zhivago,* Milano, 1957. Abbreviation: ZH

4 All references are to Andrei Platonov, *Chevengur*, Moscow, 'Khudozhestvennaya literatura', 1988. Abbreviation: CH

5 ZH, p.7 6 ZH ,10 7 ZH, 10

8 Oswald Spengler's *Untergang des Abendlandes* was published in Russia as 'Zakat Evropy' in 1923. Platonov was very 'shaken' by it and wrote an essay about it entitled 'Simfoniya soznaniya', which he tried in vain to publish. A reconstruction of its text is given by Natalya Kornienko on pp. 46-53 of N.V.Kornienko, *Istoriya teksta i biografiya Andreya Platonova (1926-1946),* which constitutes the whole of *Zdes' i teper',* I, Moscow, 1993. My observations in this sentence depend on pp. 44-53 of this publication.

9 CH, 340 10 CH, 56 11 CH, 88 12 CH,132 13 CH,148 14 CH, 309-11

15 On page 304 of CH we read that 'Chepurny, with the proletariate, had stopped in the middle of summer', while on page 242 the character Lui, who equates communism with ceaseless running, notices above him the 'light of the solstice (solntsestoyanie)'.

16 Zhivago does, however, consider some people's speech useless, as at the meeting with Commissar Gintz.

17 Boris Pasternak, 'Some Propositions' (Neskol'ko polozhenii), 1918, see Angela Livingstone, *Pasternak on Art and Creativity,* C.U.P. 1984, p. 31.

18 Boris Gasparov, 'Temporal Counterpoint as a Principle of Formation' in Edith Clowes (ed), *Doctor Zhivago. A Critical Companion*, Evanston, Illinois, 1995, pp. 89-114, this quotation p...++ Originally published as 'Vremennoi kontrapunkt kak formoobrazuyushchii printsip romana Pasternaka "Doktor Zhivago" in *Boris Pasternak and his Times*, ed. Lazar Fleishman, Berkeley, 1989, pp 315-358.

19 ZH,9 20 ZH, 297-8

21 Angela Livingstone, 'Integral Errors: Remarks on the Writing of *Doctor Zhivago'* in *Essays in Poetics*, 13, 2, 1988, pp. 83-94

22 ZH,100 23 ZH, 199 24 ZH,199 25 ZH,294 26 CH,23 27 ZH, +

28 One of the many fertile ideas of the Platonov-commentator Evgenii Yablokov is of the prevalence in the style of *Chevengur* of a principle he calls 'I tak i obratno'; see E.A.Yablokov, 'Printsip khudozhestvennogo myshleniya A.Platonova 'I tak i obratno' v romane "Chevengur", in *Filologicheskie zapiski*, vypusk 13, Voronezh, 1999, pp. 14-27.

29 See Ayleen Teskey, *Platonov and Fyodorov. The Influence of Christian Philosophy on a Soviet Writer*, Avebury, 1982.

30 CH, 410 31 CH,411 32 ZH, 68
33 As Bakhtin wrote, in 'Author and Hero in Aesthetic Activity' ('Avtor i geroi v esteticheskoi deyatel'nosti' (1920-24): 'In the life I live and experience from within myself, my own birth and death are events which I am in principle incapable of experiencing; birth and death as *mine* are incapable of becoming events of my own life.' Quoted from: *Art and Answerability. Early Philosophical Essays by M.M.Bakhtin*, ed. Michael Holquist and Vadim Liapunov, translated by V.Liapunov, ++ p. 104.

34 CH,71 35 CH,192

36 See Mikhail Geller, *Andrei Platonov v poiskakh schast'ya*, Paris, 1982, p.211.

37 Boris Pasternak, *Sobranie sochinenii v pyati tomakh*, vol. 4, Moscow, 1991, pp.35-86.

38 ZH, 76 39 CH, 103 40 CH,27 41 ZH, 16 42 CH,412 43 CH,96
44 ZH, 129 45 ZH,512 46 ZH,368-9 47 CH,148 48 CH,190 49 ZH,183
50 ZH,157 51 ZH,144-5 52 ZH,136-7 53 ZH, 333 54 CH,146 55 ZH,184-5

56 Andrei Platonov, *Vozvrashchenie*, Moscow, 'Molodaya Gvardiya', 1989, p.12.

57 CH,65 58 CH,66 59 CH,77 60 CH,77 61 CH,148 62 Matthew,13:18-23
63 CH,324 64 CH,332-3; Matthew, 25:42 65 CH,336 66 CH,62 67 CH,27
68 CH, 320-1 69 ZH,493 70 Mark, 14:7 71 ZH,438 72 ZH,44

73 In conversation.

74 'Ty vidish', khod vekov podoben pritche/ I mozhet zagoret'sya na khodu./ Vo imya strashnogo ee velich'ya / Ya v dobrovol'nykh mukakh v grob soidu.' (Penultimate stanza of 'Gefsimanskii sad'.) ZH, 565-6