

## Remembering Evgeny Borisovich Pasternak

I have never forgotten the moment of my first meeting with Evgeny and his wife, some 45 years ago. I had spent a couple of years reading Boris Pasternak (not *Doctor Zhivago* yet, but much of the early prose, and the poems of *Sestra moia zhizn'*), and felt that P's way of writing, especially in *Okhrannaia gramota*, was exactly what I felt at home in and found most exciting. So it was with considerable nervousness that I knocked at the door of his son's flat, that day in Moscow. When the door opened to let me in, I became all the more nervous as for a moment I thought I was confronting Boris Leonidovich himself. The nervousness was soon cured by a warm reception from Evgeny and Alena, by the domesticity [//suggested by the presence of two little boys//], and by the way in which, after introductions and cups of tea, I was guided, as if it was the most natural thing in the world, to a spacious desk in a quiet room where amazingly valuable typescripts related to my work were laid in front of me and I was invited to read and write for as long as I wished.

Similar occasions, with courteous welcomes and with offerings of – to me, heavenly – materials from the domestic archive, were repeated many times in the subsequent years. I copied and pondered texts, asked many questions about them and received careful, unhurried answers. It was a secret joy to me whenever Evgeny Borisovich, (with his resemblance to his father in face and voice) approved of ideas or writings of mine;[// for example when he praised my small 1989 book on Dr Zhivago//]. And of course it was a great privilege to be so close to the immense work of collecting, preserving, editing, annotating and publishing of Pasternak's works, which he and Alena were engaged in, work that in Soviet times was often frustratingly hampered and even endangered.

I don't think I ever saw him separately from Elena Vladimirovna. The good will of both of them became very precious to me, as it has been to many other Pasternak-enthusiasts who have visited them; and I learnt a great deal, in our conversations, not only about various strangenesses of Soviet life and the peculiar difficulties and dangers for Soviet scholars concerned with Pasternak's work, but also about the new world-wide community of Pasternak scholarship,[// in which, through them, I made good friends//].

Certain small but lasting memories of Evgeny stand out in my mind. I remember discussing the working of the outdoors rukomoinik [[peculiar kind of washstand]] with him once at their dacha, before joining a family hunt for mushrooms; I recall the dismay I felt when he could not accept a gift of dollars I was trying to hand over from an American well-wisher and his handing me a piece of paper on which he had written the explanation: that it was then a crime to receive capitalist money; I recall his and Alena's sudden kind appearance in the Moscow home of a friend of mine where I had been confined by a badly sprained ankle; [//I recall details of their successive apartments – and how they moved from each one to a smaller one to enable the growing families of their children to move into larger ones. //]

Also fixed in my mind is the unpretentious seriousness with which, in the summer of 2006, Evgeny took a spade and set in place the foundation stone of a Pasternak Museum to be built in Vsevolod-Vil'va in the Urals, to which the two of them and a large company of Pasternakovedy [P-scholars] had travelled for a conference.

Attending several public talks Evgeny gave, in post-Soviet times, about his father's work and thought, I recall how, at such events, he was never noticeably proud of being the child of a famous poet but was always just slightly self-deprecating, humbly and gladly 'giving his all'; how he seemed to live not only in a ring of extraordinary light but, deep within that, in a shadow of past sadnesses not to be forgotten.

Other memories are of his and Alena's visits to England. When I called on them in Park Town, Oxford, in that house all hung with Leonid Osipovich's paintings, they would be still hard at work editing and promoting Pasternak's works. I heard Evgeny lecture in London, and in winter 2006 accompanied him and Elena on a walk round Cambridge, where he gave a lecture and a reading of his father's poems.

One year they came to Colchester, where I live, and I went with them to the Orthodox Monastery at Tolleshunt Knights, ten or so miles away. There they had a leisurely yet intense conversation with the wise and scholarly 'hieromonk' Father Symeon (now, alas, deceased). Though by origin Swiss, he spoke Russian well and found great pleasure in meeting them, both because of themselves and because Evgeny brought with him for the Monastery a copy of a drawing made, very many years past, by the Monastery's founder, Father Sophrony who, it turned out, had been a fellow-student at Art College of Evgeny's artist mother (Pasternak's first wife), Evgenia Lur'e. Our visit was on a fine sunny day and, together with Father Symeon and two nuns (this

Monastery is for monks and nuns), we sat peacefully on benches out in the garden under a spreading oak-tree - a scene remembered and mentioned many times later on. Another memory from the visit to Colchester is of how keenly Evgeny enjoyed our quiet boat ride through Constable country along the river Stour from Dedham.

In 2001 they actually came all the way to my family's favourite holiday place, the village of Polruan, in South Cornwall, where, together with their son Boria, Boria's wife Olia and all five children, Evgeny and Alena spent a whole fortnight and had a good holiday despite the rain. My partner Alan and I rented a lodging not far off and joined them for some walks and meals. One scene from that holiday is remains unforgettable: we were all on a walk at a very steep place in the Cornish countryside, and the young people had gone off ahead, strongly walking up-hill, when we, pausing along the way, caught sight of Evgeny (no longer able to climb craggy slopes, indeed not in good health at all but obliged to swallow certain tablets) - striding along on his own, slowly but courageously, absolutely not giving up! As he reached the top of the slope, he smiled his usual gentle smile. This vision of him is inscribed in our minds.

His and Alena's dedication to editing and promoting Pasternak's works has led, as is well known, to the innumerable publications of Pasternak's poetry, prose and correspondence. Towering amongst these are Evgeny Borisovich's 'Materialy dlia biografii', 1989, the Biografiia, 1997 (both done in close collaboration with Elena Vladimirovna) and - an even greater blessing for Pasternak-scholars and Pasternak-enthusiasts - their sostavlenie, with lengthy kommentarii, of the eleven-volume publication of Pasternak's Complete Works, 2003-2005.

I never knew how to say, but will say at last, of both Evgeny and Alena, though now especially in memory of Evgeny, how grateful I am to him, to them, for these splendid and, morally as well as intellectually, important works of scholarship. Recently it has been an additional pleasure to read Evgenii's own book of memories (Poniatoe i obretennoe) , and to be presented, even more unexpectedly, after his death, with a book of his own poems. His friendship now seems an - almost lifelong - good dream, a kind of glowing enhancement of my life.