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Boris Pasternak

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Boris Pasternak (10 February 1890 – 30 May 1960)

Boris Leonidovich Pasternak was a Russian language poet, novelist, and literary translator. In his native Russia, Pasternak's anthology My Sister Life, is one of the most influential collections ever published in the Russian language. Furthermore, Pasternak's theatrical translations of Goethe, Schiller, Pedro Calderón de la Barca, and William Shakespeare remain deeply popular with Russian audiences.

Outside Russia, Pasternak is best known for authoring Doctor Zhivago, a novel which spans the last years of Czarist Russia and the earliest days of the Soviet Union. Banned in the USSR, Doctor Zhivago was smuggled to Milan and published in 1957. Pasternak was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature the following year, an event which both humiliated and enraged the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. In the midst of a massive campaign against him by both the KGB and the Union of Soviet Writers, Pasternak reluctantly agreed to decline the Prize. In his resignation letter to the Nobel Committee, Pasternak stated the reaction of the Soviet State was the only reason for his decision.

By the time of his death from lung cancer in 1960, the campaign against Pasternak had severely damaged the international credibility of the U.S.S.R. He remains a major figure in Russian literature to this day. Furthermore, tactics pioneered by Pasternak were later continued, expanded, and refined by Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn and other Soviet dissidents.

Early Life

Pasternak was born in Moscow on 10 February, (Gregorian), 1890 (Julian 29 January) into a wealthy Russian Jewish family which had been received into the Russian Orthodox Church. His father was the Post-Impressionist painter, Leonid Pasternak, professor at the Moscow School of Painting, Sculpture, and Architecture. His mother was Rosa Kaufman, a concert pianist and the daughter of industrialist Isadore Kofman. Shortly before his birth, Pasternak's parents had left the Orthodox Church for Tolstoyan Christianity. Leo Tolstoy was not only a close family friend. Pasternak later recalled, "my father illustrated his books, went to see him, revered him, and ...the whole house was imbued with his spirit."

In a 1956 essay, Pasternak recalled his father feverishly compiling illustrations for Tolstoy's novel Resurrection. The novel was then serialized in the journal Niva by the publisher Fyodor Marx, based in St Petersburg. The sketches were drawn from observations in such places as courtrooms, prisons and on trains, in spirit of realism. To ensure that the sketches met the journal deadline train conductors were enlisted to personally collect the

illustrations. Pasternak wrote, "My childish imagination was struck by the sight of a train conductor in his formal railway uniform, standing waiting at the door of the kitchen as if he were standing on a railway platform at the door of a compartment that was just about to leave the station. Joiner's glue was boiling on the stove. The illustrations were hurriedly wiped dry, fixed, glued on pieces of cardboard, rolled up, tied up. The parcels, once ready, were sealed up with sealing wax and handed to the conductor."

According to Max Hayward, "In November 1910, when Tolstoy fled from his home and died in the stationmaster's house at Astapovo, Leonid Pasternak was informed by telegram and he went there immediately, taking his son Boris with him, and made a drawing of Tolstoy on his deathbed."

Regular visitors to the Pasternak's home also included Sergei Rachmaninoff, Alexander Scriabin, Lev Shestov, Rainer Maria Rilke. Pasternak aspired first to be a musician. Inspired by Scriabin, Pasternak briefly was a student at the Moscow Conservatory. In 1910 he abruptly left for the German University of Marburg, where he studied under Neo-Kantian philosophers Hermann Cohen and Nicolai Hartmann.

Early Career

Pasternak fell in love with Ida Vysotskaya, a girl from a notable Moscow family of tea merchants. Pasternak had encountered her at the final class of high school. He helped her prepare for finals. She came to Marbugh unannounced during the summer of 1912, and he told of her of his love, as recounted in the poem "Marburg" (1917).

Although Professor Cohen encouraged him to remain in Germany and to pursue a Philosophy doctorate, Pasternak decided against it. Ultimately, he returned to Moscow upon the outbreak of World War I. His first poetry anthology was published later that year. In the aftermath, Pasternak proposed marriage to Ida. However, the Vysotsky family was disturbed by Pasternak's poor prospects and persuaded Ida to refuse him. It was said Ida died in poverty.

Pasternak responded by channelling his grief and frustration into his next anthology, Safe Conduct. His early verse cleverly dissimulates his preoccupation with Immanuel Kant's philosophy. Its fabric includes striking alliterations, wild rhythmic combinations, day-to-day vocabulary, and hidden allusions to his favourite poets such as Rilke, Lermontov, Pushkin and German language Romantic poets.

During World War I, Pasternak taught and worked at a chemical factory in Vsevolodovo-Vilve near Perm, which undoubtedly provided him with material for Dr. Zhivago many years later.

Unlike the rest of his family and many of his closest friends, Pasternak did not leave Russia after the October Revolution. According to Max Hayward:

Pasternak remained in Moscow throughout the Civil War (1918-1920), making no attempt to escape abroad or to the White-occupied south, as a number of other Russian writers did at the time. No doubt, like Yuri Zhivago, he was momentarily impressed by the "splendid surgery" of the Bolshevik seizure of power in October 1917, but – again to judge by the evidence of the novel, and despite a personal admiration for Lenin, whom he saw at the 9th Congress of Soviets in 1921 – he soon began to harbor profound doubts about the claims and credentials of the regime, not to mention its style of rule. The terrible shortages of food and fuel, and the depredations of the Red Terror, made life very precarious in those years, particularly for the "bourgeois" intelligentsia. In a letter written to Pasternak from abroad in the twenties, Marina Tsvetayeva reminded him of how she had run into him in the street in 1919 as he was on the way to sell some valuable books from his library in order to buy bread. He continued to write original work and to translate, but after about the middle of 1918 it became almost impossible to publish. The only way to make one's work known was to declaim it in the several "literary" cafes which then sprang up, or – anticipating samizdat – to

circulate it in manuscript. It was in this way that My Sister Life first became available to a wider audience.

Pasternak (second from left) with friends including Lilya Brik, Eisenstein (third from left) and Mayakovsky (centre).

When it finally was published in 1921, Pasternak's My Sister Life revolutionised Russian poetry. It made Pasternak the model for younger poets, and decisively changed the poetry of Osip Mandelshtam, Marina Tsvetayeva and others.

Following My Sister Life, Pasternak produced some hermetic pieces of uneven quality, including his masterpiece, the lyric cycle Rupture (1921). Authors such as Vladimir Mayakovsky, Andrey Bely, Anna Akhmatova and Vladimir Nabokov applauded Pasternak's poems as works of pure, unbridled inspiration. In the late 1920s, he also participated in the much celebrated tripartite correspondence with Rilke and Tsvetayeva.

After the ascension of Joseph Stalin, Pasternak increasingly felt that his colourful style was at odds with the dictator's demand for Socialist Realism. He attempted to make his poetry more comprehensible to the censors by reworking his earlier pieces and starting two lengthy poems on the Russian Revolution of 1905. He also turned to prose and wrote several autobiographical stories, notably The Childhood of Luvers and Safe Conduct. By 1932, Pasternak had strikingly reshaped his style to make it acceptable to the Soviet public and printed the new collection of poems aptly titled The Second Birth. Although its Caucasian pieces were as brilliant as the earlier efforts, the book alienated the core of Pasternak's refined audience abroad, which was largely composed of anti-communist White emigres. He simplified his style and language even further for his next collection of verse, Early Trains (1943), which prompted his former patron, Vladimir Nabokov, to mock Pasternak as a "weeping Bolshevik" and "Emily Dickinson in trousers."

Translation

Reluctant to conform to Socialist Realism, Pasternak turned to translation. He soon produced acclaimed translations of Sandor Petofi, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, Rainer Maria Rilke, Paul Verlaine, Taras Shevchenko, and Nikoloz Baratashvili. Osip Mandelstam, however, privately warned him, "Your collected works will consist of twelve volumes of translations, and only one of your own work."

In a 1942 letter, Pasternak declared, "I am completely opposed to contemporary ideas about translation. The work of Lozinski, Radlova, Marshak, and Chukovski is alien to me, and seems artificial, soulless, and lacking in depth. I share the nineteenth century view of translation as a literary excericise demanding insight of a higher kind than that provided by a merely philiogical approach."

Pasternak's translations of William Shakespeare (Romeo and Juliet, Antony and Cleopatra, Othello, King Henry IV (Parts I and II), Hamlet, Macbeth, King Lear) remain deeply popular with Russian audiences because of their colloquial, modernised dialogues. Paternak's critics, however, accused him of "pasternakizing" Shakespeare. In a 1956 essay, Pasternak wrote, "Translating Shakespeare is a task which takes time and effort. Once it is undertaken, it is best to divide it into sections long enough for the work to not get stale and to complete one section each day. In thus daily progressing through the text, the translator finds himself reliving the circumstances of the author. Day by day, he reproduces his actions and he is drawn into some of his secrets, not in theory, but practically, by experience."

According to Olga Ivinskaya, however, translation was not a genuine vocation for Pasternak. She later recalled:

One day someone brought him a copy of a British newspaper in which there was a double page feature under the title, "Pasternak Keeps a Courageous Silence." It said that if Shakespeare had written in Russian he would have

written in the same way he was translated by Pasternak... What a pity, the article continued, that Pasternak published nothing but translations, writing his own work for himself and a small circle of intimate friends. "What do they mean by saying that my silence is courageous?" [Boris Leonidovich] commented sadly after reading all this. "I am silent because I am not printed."

The Stalin Epigram

During the later 1930s, Pasternak became increasingly disillusioned with Communism. He remained a close friend of Anna Akhmatova, as well as Osip Mandelstam. Mandelstam recited his searing indictment of Stalin, the Stalin Epigram, to Pasternak soon after its composition in late April 1934. After listening, Pasternak told Mandelstam, "I didn't hear this, you didn't recite it to me, because, you know, very strange and terrible things are happening now: they've begun to pick people up. I'm afraid the walls have ears and perhaps even these benches on the boulevard here may be able to listen and tell tales. So let's make out that I heard nothing."

On the night of May 14, 1934, Mandelstam was arrested at his home based on a warrant signed by NKVD boss Genrikh Yagoda. Devastated, Pasternak went immediately to the offices of Izvestia and begged Nikolai Bukharin to intercede on Mandelstam's behalf.

According to Olga Ivinskaya, Pasternak was deeply upset by Mandelstam's arrest. He was concerned for his friend but he also worried that he might be blamed for fingering Mandelstam to the secret police. Ivinskaya writes that Pasternak "raced frantically all over town, telling everybody that he was not to blame and denying responsibility for Mandelstam's disappearance, which for some reason he thought might be laid at his door.

Soon after his meeting with Bukharin, the telephone rang in Pasternak's Moscow apartment. A voice from The Kremlin said, "Comrade Stalin wishes to speak with you." According to Ivinskaya, Pasternak was struck dumb. "He was totally unprepared for such a conversation. But then he heard his voice, the voice of Stalin, coming over the line. The Leader addressed him in a rather bluff uncouth fashion, using the familiar thou form: 'Tell me, what are they saying in your literary circles about the arrest of Mandelstam?' ". Flustered, Pasternak denied that there was any discussion. Stalin went on to ask him for his own opinion of Mandelstam. In an "eager fumbling manner" Pasternak distanced himself from his friend, claiming there had been no contact been the schools of the two poets. Ivinskaya writes that he "went on for quite a time in this vein. Stalin gave him no encouragement whatsoever, not interjecting, or uttering a sound of any kind. At last B[oris] L[eonidovich] came to a halt. Stalin then said, in a mocking tone of voice: "I see, you just aren't able to stick up for a comrade," and put down the receiver.

Years later, Pasternak recalled that he was horrified at how the conversation had ended. He repeatedly telephoned the Kremlin's number, begging to be reconnected to Stalin. Instead, Pasternak was told, "Comrade Stalin is busy." He became frantic, pacing around his apartment repeating over and over that he must write to Stalin to explain what he had meant and tell him that injustices were being committed in the name of the Leader. Pasternak later did write and send just such a letter.

Great Purge

According to Pasternak, during the 1937 show trial of General Iona Yakir and Marshal Mikhail Tukhachevsky, the Union of Soviet Writers requested all members to add their names to a statement supporting the death penalty for the defendants. They demanded Pasternak's signature as well, but he refused to give it. Vladimir Stavski, the chairman of the Union, was terrified that he himself would be punished for Pasternak's dissent. The leadership of the Union travelled to Peredelkino and severely threatened Pasternak, who still refused to sign the statement. After returning home to their dacha, a pregnant Zinaida Pasternak threw herself on the floor, weeping and accusing her husband of risking the destruction of their family. Pasternak, however,

still would not be moved. They expected to be arrested that evening. They later learned that an NKVD agent was hiding in the bushes outside their window and heard everything.

Soon after, Pasternak appealed directly to Stalin. He wrote about his family's strong Tolstoyan convictions, which he still held dear. He declared that his own life was at Stalin's disposal but said that he could not stand as a self-appointed judge of life and death. Pasternak was certain that he would be instantly arrested, but he was not. Stalin is said to have crossed Pasternak's name off an execution list during the Great Purge. According to Pasternak himself, Stalin declared, "Do not touch this cloud dweller."

According to Stalin's biographer, Simon Sebag Montefiore, the Boss was well aware that Mandelstam, Pasternak, and Bulgakov were geniuses, but ordered their writings suppressed. As Bulgakov and Pasternak never attacked him openly, they were never arrested. According to Ivinskaya, however, "I believe that between Stalin and Pasternak there was an incredible, silent duel."

World War II

After the outbreak of war between Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union, Pasternak was elated. When the Luftwaffe began bombing Moscow, Pasternak immediately began to serve as a fire warden on the roof of the writer's building on Lavrushinski Street. According to Olga Ivinskaya, he repeatedly helped to dispose of German bombs which fell on it.

In 1943, Pasternak was finally granted permission to visit the soldiers at the front. He bore up well, considering the hardships of the marching and he wanted to go to the most dangerous places. He read his poetry and talked extensively with the active and injured troops.

With the end of the war in 1945, there was a great expectation that the Soviet people would not only see the end of the devastation of Nazism, but also the end of Stalin's Purges. However, sealed trains began carrying large numbers of prisoners to the Soviet gulags. Some were Nazi collaborators who had fought under Vlasov, but most were ordinary Soviet officers and men. Pasternak watched as troops were directly transferred from Nazi to Soviet concentration camps. Russian emigres who had returned due to pledges of amnesty were also sent directly to the gulag, as were Jews from the Anti-Fascist Committee and other organizations. Many thousands of innocents were incarcerated as part of the Leningrad Affair and the Doctor's Plot, while whole ethnic groups were deported to Siberia.

Pasternak later said, "If, in a bad dream, we had seen all of the horrors in store for us after the war, we should have been sorry not to see Stalin go down together with Hitler: an end to the war in favour of our allies, civilized countries with democratic traditions, would have meant a hundred times less suffering for our people than that which Stalin again inflicted on it after his victory."

Olga Ivinskaya

In October 1946, the married Pasternak met Olga Ivinskaya, a single mother employed by Novy Mir. Deeply moved by her resemblance to his first love Ida Vysotskaya, Pasternak gave Ivinskaya several volumes of his poetry and literary translations. Although Pasternak never left his wife, this initiated an extramarital relationship which would last for the remainder of Pasternak's life. Ivinskaya later recalled:

He phoned almost everyday and, instinctively fearing to meet or talk with him, yet dying of happiness, I would stammer out that I was "busy today." But almost every afternoon, toward the end of working hours, he came in person to the office and often walked with me in person through the streets, boulevards, and squares all the way home to Potapov Street. "Shall I make you a present of this square?" he would ask.

She gave him the phone number of her neighbour Olga Nikolaevna Volkova who resided below. In the evenings, Pasternak would phone and Volkova would signal by banging on the water pipe which connected the apartments.

When they first met, Pasternak was translating the verse of the Hungarian national poet, Sándor Petofi. Pasternak gave his lover a book of Petofi with the inscription, "Petofi served as a code in May and June 1947, and my close translations of his lyrics are an expression, adapted to the requirements of the text, of my feelings and thoughts for you and about you. In memory of it all, B.P., May 13, 1948."

Pasternak later noted on a photograph of himself "Petofi is magnificent with his descriptive lyrics and picture of nature, but you are better still. I worked on him a good deal in 1947 and 1948, when I first came to know you. Thank you for your help. I was translating both of you." Therefore, Ivinskaya would later describe the Petofi translations as, "a first declaration of love."

In 1948, Pasternak advised Ivinskaya to resign her job at Novy Mir, which was becoming extremely difficult due to their relationship. In the aftermath, Pasternak began to instruct her in translating poetry. In time, they began to refer to her apartment on Potapov Street as, "Our Shop."

According to Ivinskaya:

Whenever [Boris Leonidovich] was provided with literal versions of things which echoed his own thoughts or feelings, it made all the difference and he worked feverishly, turning them into masterpieces. I remember his translating Paul Verlaine in a burst of enthusiasm like this – L'Art poétique was after all an expression of his own beliefs about poetry.

In time, Ivinskaya began to tackle more and more translation work, which permitted Pasternak to focus on writing Doctor Zhivago. However, Pasternak closely followed her work and often scribbled suggestions for improvement. He encouraged her not to be too literal in her translations which he felt could confuse the meaning of the text. He advocated observing the work from afar to be able to plumb its true depths. While they were both collaborating on translating Rabindranath Tagore from Bengali into Russian, Pasternak advised Ivinskaya, "1) Bring out the theme of the poem, its subject matter, as clearly as possible; 2) tighten up the fluid, non-European form by rhyming internally, not at the end of the lines; 3) use loose, irregular meters, mostly ternary ones. You may allow yourself to use assonances."

Later, while she was collaborating with him on a translation of Vítezslav Nezval, Pasternak told Ivinskaya:

"Use the literal translation only for the meaning, but do not borrow words as they stand from it: they are absurd and not always comprehensible. Don't translate everything, only what you can manage, and by this means try to make the translation more precise than the original – an absolute necessity in the case of such a confused, slipshod piece of work."

Translating Faust

Pasternak's translation of the first part of Faust led him to be attacked in the August 1950 edition of Novy Mir. The critic accused Pasternak of distorting Goethe's concepts and meanings to support "the reactionary theory of 'pure art'", as well as introducing aesthetic and individualist values. In response, Pasternak wrote to the exiled daughter of Marina Tsvetayeva:

"There has been much concern over an article in Novy Mir denouncing my Faust on the grounds that the gods, angels, witches, spirits, the madness of poor Gretchen, and everything 'irrational' has been rendered much too well, while Goethe's 'progressive' ideas (what are they?) have been glossed over. But I have a contract to do the second part as well! I don't know how it will all end. Fortunately, it seems that the article won't have any practical effect."

Khrushchev Thaw

When Stalin died of a stroke on March 5, 1953, Olga Ivinskaya was imprisoned in the gulag, and Pasternak was in Moscow. Across the nation, there were waves of panic, sadness, confusion. Pasternak wrote, "Men who are not free... always idealize their bondage."

After her release, Pasternak's relationship with Ivinskaya picked up where it had left off. In a 1958 letter to a friend in West Germany, he wrote, "She was put in jail on my account, as the person considered by the secret police to be closest to me, and they hoped that by means of a grueling interrogation and threats they could extract enough evidence from her to put me on trial. I owe my life and the fact that they did not touch me in those years to her heroism and endurance."

Soon after, he confided in her, "For so long we were ruled over by a madman and a murderer, and now by a fool and a pig. The madman had his occasional flights of fancy, he had an intuitive feeling for certain things, despite his wild obscurantism. Now we are ruled over by mediocrities." During this period Pasternak was reading a clandestine copy of George Orwell's Animal Farm in English. He relished the characture of Nikita Khrushchev as the swine dictator Napoleon.

Doctor Zhivago

Although it contains passages written in the 1910s and 1920s, Doctor Zhivago was not completed until 1956. Pasternak submitted the novel to Novy Mir, which rejected it for its implicit rejection of socialist realism. The author, like his protagonist Yuri Zhivago, showed more concern for the welfare of individual characters than for the "progress" of society. Soviet censors also regarded some passages as anti-communist, especially the novel's criticisms of Stalinism and references to the gulag.

Soon after, Pasternak and Ivinskaya arranged for Doctor Zhivago to be smuggled abroad by Sir Isaiah Berlin. In 1957, multi-billionaire Italian publisher, Giangiacomo Feltrinelli announced that the novel would be released by his company. Despite repeated demands from visiting Soviet emissaries, Feltrinelli refused to cancel or delay publication. As retaliation, Feltrinelli was expelled in disgrace from the Italian Communist Party.

Helped considerably by Soviet campaign against the novel, Doctor Zhivago became an instant sensation throughout the non-Communist world.

The character of Zhivago's mistress, Lara Antipova, has long been rumored to have been modeled on Ivinskaya. However the elder of Pasternak's sisters stated that on a visit to her in Berlin in the late 1930s, Pasternak told her of the nascent character of Lara, years before he met Ivinskaya in 1946.

The first English translation of Doctor Zhivago was hastily produced by Max Hayward and Manya Harari in order to coincide with overwhelming public demand. It was released in August 1958, and remained the only edition available for more than fifty years.

Between 1958 and 1959, the English language edition spent 26 weeks at the top of The New York Times' bestseller list. Although no Soviet critics had read the banned novel, the Union of Soviet Writers held a trial behind closed doors. Afterwards, they announced that Pasternak had been expelled from the Union. They further signed a petition to the Politburo, demanding that Pasternak be stripped of his Soviet citizenship and exiled to the West. This led to a humorous Russian saying, "I did not read Pasternak, but I condemn him".

Nobel Prize

Meanwhile, as the novel topped international bestseller lists, the British MI6 and the American CIA commenced an operation to ensure that Doctor Zhivago was correctly submitted to the Nobel Committee. This was done because it was known that a Nobel Prize for Boris Pasternak would seriously

harm the international credibility of the Soviet Union. As a result, British and American operatives intercepted and photographed a manuscript of the novel and secretly printed a small number of books in the Russian language. These were submitted to the Nobel Committee's surprised judges just ahead of the deadline. Meanwhile, Pasternak wrote to Renate Schweitzer, that though some believed Pasternak would win but the writer was convinced that he would be passed over in favour of Alberto Moravia. Pasternak wrote that he was racked with torments and anxieties at the thought of failure.

On 23 October 1958, Boris Pasternak was announced as the winner of the 1958 Nobel Prize for Literature. The citation credited Pasternak's contribution to Russian lyric poetry and for his role in, "continuing the great Russian epic tradition." On 25 October, Pasternak sent a telegram to the Swedish Academy: "Infinitely grateful, touched, proud, surprised, overwhelmed." That same day, the Literary Institute in Moscow demanded that all its students sign a petition denouncing Pasternak and his novel. They were further ordered to join a "spontaneous" demonstration demanding Pasternak's exile from the Soviet Union. On 26 October, the Literary Gazette ran an article by David Zaslavski entitled, Reactionary Propaganda Uproar over a Literary Weed. Acting on direct orders from the Politburo, the KGB surrounded Pasternak's dacha in Peredelkino. Pasternak was not only threatened with arrest, but the KGB also vowed to send his beloved Olia back to the gulag. It was further hinted that, if Pasternak traveled to Stockholm to collect his Nobel Medal, he would be refused re-entry to the Soviet Union. As a result, Pasternak sent a second telegram to the Nobel Committee: "In view of the meaning given the award by the society in which I live, I must renounce this undeserved distinction which has been conferred on me. Please do not take my voluntary renunciation amiss." The Swedish Academy announced: "This refusal, of course, in no way alters the validity of the award. There remains only for the Academy, however, to announce with regret that the presentation of the Prize cannot take place."

Despite his decision to decline the award, the Soviet Union of Writers continued to denounce Pasternak in the Soviet press. Furthermore, he was threatened at the very least with formal exile to the West. In response, Pasternak wrote directly to Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev, "Leaving the motherland will equal death for me. I am tied to Russia by birth, by life and work." As a result of this and the intercession of Indian Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru, Pasternak was not expelled from his homeland.

Meanwhile, Bill Mauldin produced a political cartoon lampooning the Soviet State's campaign against Boris Pasternak. Pasternak and another prisoner in the gulag, splitting trees in the snow. In the caption, Pasternak says, "I won the Nobel Prize for literature. What was your crime?" The cartoon won the Pulitzer Prize for Editorial Cartooning in 1959.

Last Years

Pasternak's post-Zhivago poetry probes the universal questions of love, immortality, and reconciliation with God. Boris Pasternak wrote his last complete book, When the Weather Clears, in 1959.

According to Ivinskaya, Pasternak continued to stick to his daily writing schedule even during the controversy over Doctor Zhivago. He also continued translating the writings of Juliusz Slowacki and Pedro Calderón de la Barca.

Ivinskaya recalls:

In working on Calderón he received help from Nikolai Mikhailovich Liubumov, a shrewd and enlightened person who understood very well that all the mudslinging and commotion over the novel would be forgotten, but that there would always be a Pasternak. I took finished bits of the translation with me to Moscow, read them to Liubimov at Potapov Street, and then went back to Peredelkino, where I would tactfully ask [Boris Leonidovich] to change passages which, in Liubimov's view departed too far from the original. Very soon after the "scandal" was over, [Boris Leonidovich] received a first

payment for the work on Calderón.

Ivinskaya further recalls:

He knew that his poetry would remain after the age in which he had lived had gone by, and that, escaping from time's captivity, it would pass into the future – as Pushkin's poetry has into our day. All the same, however, he was anxious that something of his life as a "captive of time" should be recorded for posterity. In his last years he often said to me: "You must go on living. You must give the lie to all the falsehoods which have been woven about me."

During the summer of 1959, Pasternak began writing The Blind Beauty, a stage play about an enslaved artist during the period of serfdom in Russia. However, he fell ill with lung cancer before he could complete it.

Death

Pasternak died of lung cancer in his dacha in Peredelkino on the evening of 30 May 1960. He first summoned his sons, and in their presence said, "Who will suffer most because of my death? Who will suffer most? Only Oliusha will, and I haven't had time to do anything for her. The worst thing is that she will suffer." Pasternak's last words were, "I can't hear very well. And there's a mist in front of my eyes. But it will go away, won't it? Don't forget to open the window tomorrow."

Shortly before his death, a priest of the Russian Orthodox Church had given Pasternak the last rites. Later, in the strictest secrecy, an Orthodox funeral liturgy, or Panikhida, was offered in the family's dacha.

Despite only a small notice appearing in the Literary Gazette, handwritten notices carrying the date and time of the funeral were posted throughout the Moscow subway system. As a result, thousands of admirers traveled from Moscow to Pasternak's civil funeral in Peredelkino. According to Jon Stallworthy, "Volunteers carried his open coffin to his burial place and those who were present (including the poet Andrey Voznesensky) recited from memory the banned poem 'Hamlet'."

One of the dissident speakers at the graveside service said, "God marks the path of the elect with thorns, and Pasternak was picked out and marked by God. He believed in eternity and he will belong to it... We excommunicated Tolstoy, we disowned Dostoevsky, and now we disown Pasternak. Everything that brings us glory we try to banish to the West... But we cannot allow this. We love Pasternak and we revere him as a poet... Glory to Pasternak!"

Legacy

After Pasternak's death, Olga Ivinskaya was arrested for the second time, with her daughter, Irina. Both were accused of being Pasternak's link with Western publishers and of dealing in hard currency for Doctor Zhivago. The KGB quietly released them, Irina after one year, in 1962, and Olga in 1964. By this time, Ivinskaya had served four years of an eight-year sentence, apparently to punish her for her role in Doctor Zhivagos publication. In 1978, her memoirs, were smuggled abroad and published in Paris, France. An English translation by Max Hayward was published the same year under the title A Captive of Time: My Years with Pasternak.

Ivinskaya was rehabilitated only in 1988. All of Pasternak's letters to her and other manuscripts and documents had been seized by the KGB during her last arrest. She spent several years in litigation trying to regain them. However, those were blocked by Pasternak's daughter-in-law, Natalya. The Russian Supreme Court ultimately ruled against her, stating that, "there was no proof of ownership," and that the, "papers should remain in the state archive". She died of cancer on September 8, 1995. A reporter on NTV compared Ivinskaya's role to that of other famous muses for Russian poets: "As Pushkin would not be complete without Anna Kern, and Yesenin would be nothing without Isadora, so Pasternak would not be Pasternak without Olga

Ivinskaya, who was his inspiration for Doctor Zhivago."

Meanwhile, Boris Pasternak continued to be pilloried by the Soviet State until Mikhail Gorbachev proclaimed Perestroika during the 1980s.

In 1988, after decades of circulating in Samizdat, Doctor Zhivago was serialized in the literary journal Novy Mir.

In December, 1989, Yevgeny Borisovich Pasternak was permitted to travel to Stockholm in order to collect his father's Nobel Medal. At the ceremony, acclaimed cellist and Soviet dissident Mstislav Rostropovich performed a Bach serenade in honor of his deceased countryman.

In 2007, The Times at last revealed that the involvement of British and American intelligence officers in ensuring Pasternak's Nobel victory. When Yevgeny Borisovich Pasternak was questioned about this, however, he responded that his father was completely unaware of the actions of Western intelligence services. Yevgeny further declared that the Nobel Prize caused his father nothing but severe grief and harassment at the hands of the Soviet State.

The Pasternak family papers are stored at the Hoover Institution Archives, Stanford University. They contain correspondence, drafts of Doctor Zhivago and other writings, photographs, and other material, of Boris Pasternak and other family members.

Cultural Influence

A minor planet 3508 Pasternak, discovered by Soviet astronomer Lyudmila Georgievna Karachkina in 1980 is named after him.

Russian-American singer and songwriter Regina Spektor recites a verse from "Black Spring", a 1912 poem by Pasternak in her song "Apres Moi" from her album Begin to Hope.

In October 2010, Random House released Richard Pevear and Larissa Volokhonsky's translation of Doctor Zhivago.

Adaptations

The first screen adaptation of Doctor Zhivago, adapted by Robert Bolt and directed by David Lean, appeared in 1965. The film, which toured in the roadshow tradition, starred Omar Sharif, Geraldine Chaplin, and Julie Christie. Concentrating on the love triangle aspects of the novel, the film became a worldwide blockbuster, but was unavailable in Russia until Perestroika.

In 2002, the novel was adapted as a television miniseries. Directed by Giacomo Campiotti, the serial starred Hans Matheson, Alexandra Maria Lara, Keira Knightley, and Sam Neill.

The Russian TV version of 2006, directed by Alexander Proshkin and starring Oleg Menshikov as Zhivago, is considered more faithful to Pasternak's novel than David Lean's 1965 film.

Eserleri:

Poetry Collections

In The Interlude: Poems 1945-1960 (1962)

My Sister, Life (1922)

On Early Trains (1944)

Over the Barriers (1916)

Poems (1954)

Selected Poems (1946)

Themes and Variations (1917)

Twin in the Clouds (1914)

When the Weather Clears (1959)

Books of Prose

Childhood (1941)

Collected Works (1945)

Doctor Zhivago (1957)

Essay in Autobiography (1956)

Goethe's Faust (1952)

Safe Conduct (1931)

Second Birth (1932)

Selected Writings (1949)

‘February. Take ink and weep,’

February. Take ink and weep,
write February as you’re sobbing,
while black Spring burns deep
through the slush and throbbing.

Take a cab. For a clutch of copecks,
through bell-towers’ and wheel noise,
go where the rain-storm’s din breaks,
greater than crying or ink employs.

Where rooks in thousands falling,
like charred pears from the skies,
drop down into puddles, bringing
cold grief to the depths of eyes.

Below, the black shows through,
and the wind’s furrowed with cries:
the more freely, the more truly
then, sobbing verse is realised.

Boris Pasternak

‘Like a brazier’s bronze cinders,’

Like a brazier’s bronze cinders,
the sleepy garden’s beetles flowing.
Level with me, and my candle,
a flowering world is hanging.

As if into unprecedented faith,
I cross into this night,
where the poplar’s beaten grey
veils the moon’s rim from sight.

Where the pond’s an open secret,
where apple-trees whisper of waves,
where the garden hanging on piles,
holds the sky before its face.

Boris Pasternak

‘My sister – Life’s overflowing today’

My sister – Life’s overflowing today,
spring rain shattering itself like glass,
but people with monocles still complain,
and sting, politely, like snakes in the grass.

The elders have their logic of course,
certainly yours is foolish, no doubt:
that eyes and lawns glow lilac in storms,
and sweet perfume blows from the south.

That in May, when traveling you see
the timetable on the Kamyshin line,
the Bible’s penned no less magnificently,
while in reading it you’re mesmerised.

That sunset has only to show a village,
girls crowding the track as we flee,
and I find that it’s not my stop today,
the sun offering its sympathy.

With three splashes the bell swims by,
‘Sorry, not here’: its apology’s far.
Burning night seeps under the blind,
the steppe plunges, from step to star.

Winking, blinking, sweetly somewhere,
my love, a fata-morgana, sleeps yet,
while, like my heart, splashed on platforms there,
the carriage throws window-light over the steppe.

Boris Pasternak

1918

Stars were racing; waves were washing headlands.
Salt went blind, and tears were slowly drying.
Darkened were the bedrooms; thoughts were racing,
And the Sphinx was listening to the desert.

Candles swam. It seemed that the Colossus'
Blood grew cold; upon his lips was spreading
The blue shadow smile of the Sahara.
With the turning tide the night was waning.

Sea-breeze from Morocco touched the water.
Simooms blew. In snowdrifts snored Archangel.
Candles swam; the rough draft of 'The Prophet'
Slowly dried, and dawn broke on the Ganges

Мчались
звезды. В
море
мылись
мысы.
Слепла
соль. И
слезы
высыхали.
Были темны
спальни.
Мчались
мысли,
И
прислушив&#107
2;лся сфинкс
к Сахаре.

Плыли
свечи. И
казалось,
стынет
Кровь
колосса.
Заплывали
губы
Голубой
улыбкою
пустыни.
В час
отлива
ночь пошла
на убыль.

Море

тронул
ветерок с
Марокко.
Шел самум.
Храпел в
снегах
Архангельск.
Плыли
свечи.
Черновик
'Пророка'
Просыхал, и
брезжил
день на
Ганге.

Boris Pasternak

A Dream

I dreamt of autumn in the window's twilight,
And you, a tipsy jesters' throng amidst. '
And like a falcon, having stooped to slaughter,
My heart returned to settle on your wrist.

But time went on, grew old and deaf. Like thawing
Soft ice old silk decayed on easy chairs.
A bloated sunset from the garden painted
The glass with bloody red September tears.

But time grew old and deaf. And you, the loud one,
Quite suddenly were still. This broke a spell.
The dreaming ceased at once, as though in answer
To an abruptly silenced bell.

And I awakened. Dismal as the autumn
The dawn was dark. A stronger wind arose
To chase the racing birchtrees on the skyline,
As from a running cart the streams of straws.

Boris Pasternak

A Sultrier Dawn

All morning high up on the eaves
Above your window
A dove kept cooing.
Like shirtsleeves The boughs seemed frayed.
It drizzled. Clouds came low to raid
The dusty marketplace.
My anguish on a peddlar's tray
They rocked;
I was afraid.
I begged the clouds that they should stop.
It seemed that they could hear me.
Dawn was as grey as in the shrub
Grey prisoners' angry murmur.

I pleaded with them to bring near
The hour when I would hear
Tidbits of shattered songs
And your wash-basin's roar and splash
Like mountain torrents' headlong rush,
The heat of cheek and brow
On glass as hot as ice and on
The pier-glass table flow.
My plea could not be heard on high
Because the clouds
Talked much too loud
Behind their flag in powdered quiet
Wet like a heavy army coat,
Like threshed sheaves' dusty rub-a-dub
Or like a quarrel in the shrub.

I pleaded with them-
Don't torment me!
I can't sleep.
But-it was drizzling; dragging feet,
The clouds marched down the dusty street
Like recruits from the village in the morning.
They dragged themselves along
An hour or an age,
Like prisoners of war,
Or like the dying wheeze:
'Nurse please,
Some water.'

Boris Pasternak

A tall, strapping shot, you, considerate hunter...

A tall, strapping shot, you, considerate hunter,
Phantom with gun at the flood of my soul,
Do not destroy me now as a traitor,
As fodder for feeling, crumbled up small!

Grant me destruction rising and soaring,
Dress me at night in the willow and ice.
Start me, I pray, from the reeds in the morning,
Finish me off with one shot in my flight,

And for this lofty and resonant parting
Thank you. Forgive me, I kiss you, oh hands
Of my neglected, my disregarded
Homeland, my diffidence, family, friends.

Boris Pasternak

A Walts With a Tear in It

Ah, how I love it in these first few days,
Fresh from the forest and out of the snow,
Awkwardness obvious still in every bough,
When every silver thread lazily sways
And every cone begins slowly to glow
In candlelight—and the white sheet below
Hides its sore stump from our eyes.

It will not bat an eye if you heap gold
And jewels on it-this shyest of fays
In blue enamel and tinfoil enfolded
Creeps in your heart of hearts—and there it stays.
Ah, how I love it all in these first days,
All golden finery and silver shades!

All in the making-stars, flags, lanterns, flares,
There are no chocolates yet in bonbonnieres.
Even the candles are no candles—they
Look more like dull sticks of makeup by day.
This is an actress still lighting stage fright
In the tumult of her benefit night.
Ah, how I love her on this opening day,
Flushed in the coulisses before the play!

Apples to appletrees, and kicks to firtrees.
Only not this one—no kicks for the beauty.
She has a different purpose and duty.
She's the select one, receiver of favours.
Her evening party will go on forever.
Others may fear proverb s-this one does not.

Her fate is only a few firtrees' lot.
Golden and fiery, she will soar high,
Like an old prophet ascending the sky.

Ah, how I love it all in these first days,
When all the world chats and fusses and plays!

Boris Pasternak

About These Poems

On winter pavements I will pound
Them down with glistening glass and sun,
Will let the ceiling hear their sound,
Damp corners-read them, one by one.

The attic will repeat my themes
And bow to winter with my lines,
And send leapfrogging to the beams
Bad luck and oddities and signs.

Snow will not monthly sweep and fall
And cover up beginnings, ends.
One day I'll suddenly recall:
The sun exists! Will see new trends,

Will see-the world is not the same;
Then, Christmas jackdaw-like will blink
And with a frosty day explain
What we, my love and I, should think.

The window-halves I'll throw apart,
In muffler from the cold to hide,
And call to children in the yard,
'What century is it outside?'

Who trod a trail towards the door,
The hole blocked up with sleet and snow,
The while I smoked with Byron or
Was having drinks with Edgar Poe?

While known in Darial or hell
Or armoury, as friend, I dipped
Like Lermontov's deep thrill, as well
My life in vermouth as my lips.

Boris Pasternak

After the Interval

About three months ago, when first
Upon our open, unprotected
And freezing garden snowstorms burst
In sudden fury, I reflected

That I would shut myself away
And in seclusion write a section
Of winter poems, day by day,
To supplement my spring collection.

But nonsense piled up mountain-high,
Like snow-drifts hindering and stifling
And half the winter had gone by,
Against all hopes, in petty trifling.

I understood, alas, too late
Why winter-while the snow was falling,
Piercing the darkness with its flakes-
From outside at my house was calling;

And while with numb white-frozen lips
It whispered, urging me to hurry,
I sharpened pencils, played with clips,
Made feeble jokes and did not worry.

While at my desk I dawdled on
By lamp-light on an early morning,
The winter had appeared and gone-
A wasted and unheeded warning.

Boris Pasternak

After The Storm

The air is full of after-thunder freshness,
And everything rejoices and revives.
With the whole outburst of its purple clusters
The lilac drinks the air of paradise.

The gutters overflow; the change of weather
Makes all you see appear alive and new.
Meanwhile the shades of sky are growing lighter,
Beyond the blackest cloud the height is blue.

An artist's hand, with mastery still greater
Wipes dirt and dust off objects in his path.
Reality and life, the past and present,
Emerge transformed out of his colour-bath.

The memory of over half a lifetime
Like swiftly passing thunder dies away.
The century is no more under wardship:
High time to let the future have its say.

It is not revolutions and upheavals
That clear the road to new and better days,
But revelations, lavishness and torments
Of someone's soul, inspired and ablaze.

Boris Pasternak

August

This was its promise, held to faithfully:
The early morning sun came in this way
Until the angle of its saffron beam
Between the curtains and the sofa lay,

And with its ochre heat it spread across
The village houses, and the nearby wood,
Upon my bed and on my dampened pillow
And to the corner where the bookcase stood.

Then I recalled the reason why my pillow
Had been so dampened by those tears that fell-
I'd dreamt I saw you coming one by one
Across the wood to wish me your farewell.

You came in ones and twos, a straggling crowd;
Then suddenly someone mentioned a word:
It was the sixth of August, by Old Style,
And the Transfiguration of Our Lord.

For from Mount Tabor usually this day
There comes a light without a flame to shine,
And autumn draws all eyes upon itself
As clear and unmistaken as a sign.

But you came forward through the tiny, stripped,
The pauperly and trembling alder grove,
Into the graveyard's coppice, russet-red,
Which, like stamped gingerbread, lay there and glowed.

And with the silence of those high treetops
Was neighbour only the imposing sky
And in the echoed crowing of the cocks
The distances and distances rang by:

There in the churchyard underneath the trees,
Like some surveyor from the government
Death gazed on my pale face to estimate
How large a grave would suit my measurement.

All those who stood there could distinctly hear
A quiet voice emerge from where I lay:
The voice was mine, my past; prophetic words
That sounded now, unsullied by decay:

'Farewell, wonder of azure and of gold
Surrounding the Transfiguration's power:
Assuage now with a woman's last caress
The bitterness of my predestined hour!

'Farewell timeless expanse of passing years!
Farewell, woman who flung your challenge steeled

Against the abyss of humiliations:
For it is I who am your battlefield!

'Farewell, you span of open wings outspread,
The voluntary obstinacy of flight,
O figure of the world revealed in speech,
Creative genius, wonder-working might!'

Boris Pasternak

Autumn

I have allowed my family to scatter,
All those who were my dearest to depart,
And once again an age-long loneliness
Comes in to fill all nature and my heart.

Alone this cottage shelters me and you:
The wood is an unpeopled wilderness
And ways and footpaths wear, as in the song.
Weeds almost overgrowing each recess;

And where we sit together by ourselves
The log walls gaze upon us mournfully.
We gave no promise to leap obstacles,
We shall yet face our end with honesty.

At one we'll sit, at three again we'll rise,
My book with me, your sewing in your hand,
Nor with the dawning shall we realize
When all our kissing shall have had an end.

You leaves, more richly and more recklessly
Rustle your dresses, spill yourselves away,
And fill a past day's cup of bitterness
Still higher with the anguish of today!

All this delight, devotion and desire!
We'll fling ourselves into September's riot!
Immure yourself within the autumn's rustle
Entirely: go crazy, or be quiet!

How when you fall into my gentle arms
Enrobed in that silk-tasselled dressing gown
You shake the dress you wear away from you
As only coppices shake their leaves down!-

You are the blessing on my baneful way,
When life has depths worse than disease can reach,
And courage is the only root of beauty,
And it is this that draws us each to each.

Boris Pasternak

Autumn Frost

The morning sun shows like a pillar
Of fire through smoke on frosty days.
As on a faulty snap, it cannot
Make out my features in the haze.

The distant trees will hardly see me
Until the sun at last can break
Out of the fog, and flash triumphant
Upon the meadows by the lake.

A passer-by in mist receding
Is recognized when he has passed.
You walk on hoarfrost-covered pathways
As though on mats of plaited bast.

The frost is covered up in gooseflesh,
The air is false like painted cheeks,
The earth is shivering, and sick of
Breathing potato-stalks for weeks.

Boris Pasternak

Bad Days

When Passion week started and Jesus
Came down to the city, that day
Hosannahs burst out at his entry
And palm leaves were strewn in his way.

But days grow more stern and more stormy.
No love can men's hardness unbend;
Their brows are contemptuously frowning,
And now comes the postscript, the end.

Grey, leaden and heavy, the heavens
Were pressing on treetops and roofs.
The Pharisees, fawning like foxes,
Were secretly searching for proofs.

The lords of the Temple let scoundrels
Pass judgement, and those who at first
Had fervently followed and hailed him,
Now all just as zealously cursed.

The crowd on the neighbouring sector
Was looking inside through the gate.
They jostled, intent on the outcome,
Bewildered and willing to wait.

And whispers and rumours were creeping,
Repeating the dominant theme.
The flight into Egypt, his childhood
Already seemed faint as a dream.

And Jesus remembered the desert,
The days in the wilderness spent,
The tempting with power by Satan,
That lofty, majestic descent.

He thought of the wedding at Cana,
The feast and the miracles; and
How once he had walked on the waters
Through mist to a boat, as on land;

The beggarly crowd in a hovel,
The cellar to which he was led;
How, started, the candle-flame guttered,
When Lazarus rose from the dead…

Boris Pasternak

Beloved, with the spent and sickly fumes...

Beloved, with the spent and sickly fumes
Of rumour's cinders all the air is filled,
But you are the engrossing lexicon
Of fame mysterious and unrevealed,

And fame it is the soil's strong pull.
Would that I more erect were sprung!
But even so I shall be called
The native son of my own native tongue.

The poets' age no longer sets their rhyme,
Now, in the sweep of country plots and roads,
Lermontov is rhymed with summertime,
And Pushkin rhymes with geese and snow.

And my wish is that when we die,
Our circle closed, and hence depart,
We shall be set in closer rhyme
Than binds the auricle and the heart.

And may our harmony unified
Some listener's muffled ear caress
With all that we do now imbibe,
And shall draw in through mouths of grass.

Boris Pasternak

Black spring! Pick up your pen, and weeping...

Black spring! Pick up your pen, and weeping,
Of February, in sobs and ink,
Write poems, while the slush in thunder
Is burning in the black of spring.

Through clanking wheels, through church bells ringing
A hired cab will take you where
The town has ended, where the showers
Are louder still than ink and tears.

Where rooks, like charred pears, from the branches
In thousands break away, and sweep
Into the melting snow, instilling
Dry sadness into eyes that weep.

Beneath - the earth is black in puddles,
The wind with croaking screeches throbs,
And-the more randomly, the surer
Poems are forming out of sobs.

Original Version ??
Февраль.
Достать
чернил и
плакать!
Писать о
феврале
навзрыд,
Пока
грохочущая слякоть
Весною
черною
горит.
Достать
пролетку.
За шесть
гривен,
Чрез
благовест,
чрез клик
колес,
Перенестись туда, где
ливень Еще
шумней
чернил и
слез. Где,
как
обугленные груши, С
деревьев

тысячи
грачей
Сорвутся в
лужи и
обрушат
Сухую
грусть на
дно очей.
Под ней
проталины
чернеют, И
ветер
криками
изрыт, И чем
случайней,
тем вернее
Слагаются
стихи
навзрыд.

Boris Pasternak

Change

I used to glorify the poor,
Not simply lofty views expressing:
Their lives alone, I felt, were true,
Devoid of pomp and window-dressing.

No stranger to the manor house,
Its finery and lordly tenor,
I was a friend of down-and-outs,
And shunned the idly sponging manner.

For choosing friendship in the ranks
Of working people, though no rebel,
I had the honour to be stamped
As also one among the rabble.

The state of basements, unadorned,
Of attics with no frills or curtains
Was tangible without pretence
And full of substance, weighty, certain.

And I went bad when rot defaced
Our time, and life became infested,
When grief was censured as disgrace
And all played optimists and yes-men.

My faith in those who seemed my friends
Was broken and our ties were sundered.
I, too, lost Man, the Human, since
He had been lost by all and sundry.

Boris Pasternak

Confession

Life returned with a cause-the way
Some strange chance once interrupted it.
Just as on that distant summer day,
I am standing in the same old street.

People are the same, and people's worries,
And the sunset's still a fireball,
Just the way death's night once in a hurry
Nailed it to the ancient mansion's wall.

Women, in the same cheap clothes attired,
Are still wearing down their shoes at night.
Afterwards, against the roofing iron
They are by the garrets crucified.

Here is one of them. She looks so weary
As she steps across the threshold, and
Rising from the basement, drab and dreary,
Walks across the courtyard on a slant.

And again I'm ready with excuses,
And again it's all the same to me.
And the neighbour in the backyard pauses,
Then goes out of sight, and leaves us be.

_____

Don't cry, do not purse your lips up,
They're puffy as it is, dear.
Mind you don't break the drying scab
Of smouldering spring fever.

Your hand is on my breast. Let go!
We are like two live wires.
If we aren't careful, we'll be thrown
Together unawares.

The years will pass, you'll marry yet
And you'll forget this squalor.
To be a woman is a feat,
To drive men mad, that's valour.

And as for me, I've been in thrall
For ages-begged like alms,
And worshipped the great miracle
Of woman's neck, back, arms.

Though bound tight, at the end of day,
By the anguished darkness' loop,
I'm ever lured to get away-
I long to break things up.

Boris Pasternak

Craft

When, having finished, I shall move my armchair,
The page will gasp, awakened from the strain.
Delirious, she is half asleep at present,
Obedient to suspense and to the rain.

The heaviness of burnt-out ships has numbed her,
Prostrated, weighted down her senseless form;
You cannot dupe this one by false pretences-
It is the poet who will keep her warm.

I told her at an hour (its secret shudder
Vouchsafed by fancy) when the winter will
Light up green screeching ice, fed up with waiting
Behind an office worker's window sill,

And clocks in banks and other public places,
While drinking in the snow and outside's dark,
Will suddenly jump up and strike-their faces
Crossed by the clockhands at the 'seven' mark-

At such a deep, at such a fateful hour,
I made the page wake up and take her chance,
To put on hood and scarf, and venture out to
Descendants, strangers, shaking off her trance.

Boris Pasternak

Crossed Oars

My boat throbbed in the drowsy depths,
willows bowed, kissing collarbones,
elbows and rowlocks – oh wait, yes,
all of this might happen to anyone!

Isn’t it all just trivial…a singing.
Isn’t its meaning – the lilac petals on
water, camomile’s sensuous sinking
lip on lip, into starry extinction!

Isn’t its meaning – clasping the sky,
arms embracing mighty Hercules,
isn’t its meaning – for endless lives,
squandering on nightingales your glory!

Boris Pasternak

Definition of Creative Art

With shirt wide open at the collar,
Maned as Beethoven's bust, it stands;
Our conscience, dreams, the night and love,
Are as chessmen covered by its hands.

And one black king upon the board:
In sadness and in rage, forthright
It brings the day of doom.-Against
The pawn it brings the mounted knight.

In gardens where from icy spheres
The stars lean tender, linger near,
Tristan still sings, like a nightingale
On Isolde's vine, with trembling fear.

The gardens, ponds, and fences, made pure
By burning tears, and the whole great span,
Creation-are only burst of passion
Hoarded in the hearts of men.

Boris Pasternak

Definition of Poetry

It's a whistle blown ripe in a trice,
It's the cracking of ice in a gale,
It's a night that turns green leaves to ice,
It's a duel of two nightingales.

It is sweet-peas run gloriously wild,
It's the world's twinking tears in the pod,
It is Figaro like hot hail hurled
From the flutes on the wet flower bed.

It is all that the night hopes to find
On the bottom of deep bathing pools,
It's the star carried to the fish-pond
In your hands, wet and trembling and cool.

This close air is as flat as the boards
In the pond. The sky's flat on its face.
It would be fun if these stars guffawed-
But the universe is a dull place.

Boris Pasternak

Do not fret, do not cry, do not tax...

Do not fret, do not cry, do not tax
Your last strength, and your heart do not torture.
You're alive, you're inside me, intact,
As a buttress, a friend, an adventure.

I've no fear of standing exposed
As a fraud in my faith in the future.
It's not life, not a union of souls
We are breaking off, but a hoax mutual.

From straw mattresses' sick wretchedness
To the fresh air of wide open spaces!
It's my brother and hand. It's addressed
Like a letter, to you, crisp and bracing.

Like an envelope, tear it across,
With Horizon begin correspondence,
Give your speech the sheer Alpian force,
Overcome the sick sense of forlornness.

O'er the bowl of Bavarian lakes
With the marrow of osseous mountains
You will know I was not a glib fake
And of sugared assurances spouter.

Fare ye well and God bless you! Our bond
And our honour aren't tamely domestic.
Like a sprout in the sunlight, unbend,
And then things will assume a new aspect.

Boris Pasternak

Eve

By water's edge, quiet willows stand,
And from the steep bank, high noon flings
White fleecy clouds into the pond
As if they were a fisher's seines.

The firmament sinks like a net,
A crowd of sunburnt bathers dive
With yells into the pond, and head
For this elusive netlike sky.

Some women from the water rise
Under the scanty willows' lee,
And stepping on the sand, wring dry
Their bathing costumes hurriedly.

The coils of fabric twist and slide
Like water-snakes, and nimbly roll,
As if the dripping garments hide
Beguiling serpents in their folds.

0 woman, neither looks nor shape
Will nonplus me or make me gloat.
You, all of you, are like a lump
In my excitement-stricken throat.

You look as if hewn in the rough-
A stray verse line dashed off ad lib.
You make me think it is the truth-
That you were made out of my rib.

And instantly you broke away
From my embrace, and moved apart,
All fear, confusion, disarray-
And missing beats of a man's heart.

Boris Pasternak

Fairy Tale

Once, in times forgotten,
In a fairy place,
Through the steppe, a rider
Made his way apace.

While he sped to battle,
Nearing from the dim
Distance, a dark forest
Rose ahead of him.

Something kept repeating,
Seemed his heart to graze:
Tighten up the saddle,
Fear the watering-place.

But he did not listen.
Heeding but his will,
At full speed he bounded
Up the wooded hill;

Rode into a valley,
Turning from the mound,
Galloped through a meadow,
Skirted higher ground;

Reached a gloomy hollow,
Found a trail to trace
Down the woodland pathway
To the watering-place.

Deaf to voice of warning,
And without remorse,
Down the slope, the rider
Led his thirsty horse.

_____

Where the stream grew shallow,
Winding through the glen,
Eerie flames lit up the
Entrance to a den.

Through thick clouds of crimson
Smoke above the spring,
An uncanny calling
Made the forest ring.

And the rider started,
And with peering eye
Urged his horse in answer
To the haunting cry.

Then he saw the dragon,
And he gripped his lance;
And his horse stood breathless
Fearing to advance.

Thrice around a maiden
Was the serpent wound;
Fire-breathing nostrils
Cast a glare around.

And the dragon's body
Moved his scaly neck,
At her shoulder snaking
Whiplike forth and back.

By that country's custom
Was a young and fair
Captive brought as ransom
To the dragon's lair.

This then was the tribute
That the people owed
To the worm-protection
For a poor abode.

Now the dragon hugged his
Victim in alarm,
And the coils grew tighter
Round her throat and arm.

Skyward looked the horseman
With imploring glance,
And for the impending
Fight he couched his lance.

_____

Tightly closing eyelids.
Heights and cloudy spheres.
Rivers. Waters. Boulders.
Centuries and years.

Helmetless, the wounded
Lies, his life at stake.
With his hooves the charger
Tramples down the snake.

On the sand, together-
Dragon, steed, and lance;
In a swoon the rider,

The maiden-in a trance.

Blue the sky; soft breezes
Tender noon caress.
Who is she? A lady?
Peasant girl? Princess?

Now in joyous wonder
Cannot cease to weep;
Now again abandoned
To unending sleep.

Now, his strength returning,
Opens up his eyes;
Now anew the wounded
Limp and listless lies.

But their hearts are beating.
Waves surge up, die down;
Carry them, and waken,
And in slumber drown.

Tightly closing eyelids.
Heights and cloudy spheres.
Rivers. Waters. Boulders.
Centuries and years.

Boris Pasternak

False Alarm

From early morning-nonsense
With tubs and troughs and strain,
With dampness in the evening
And sunsets in the rain.

Deep sighing of the darkness
And choking swallowed tears,
A railway engine's calling
Down from the sixteenth verst.

Outside and in the garden
A short fast-darkening day;
Small breakages and losses
In true September way.

In daytime autumn's vastness
Beyond the stream is rent
By wailing in the graveyard,
By anguish and lament.

But when the widow's sobbing
Is carried from the bank,
With all my blood I'm with her
And see my death point-blank.

As every year I see it
Out of the hall downstairs,
The long-delayed approaching
Of this my final year.

Through leaves in yellow terror,
Its way swept clear, I see
That winter from the hillside
Is staring down at me.

Boris Pasternak

Feasts

I drink the gall of skies in autumn, tuberoses'
Sweet bitterness in your betrayals burning stream;
I drink the gall of nights, of crowded parties' noises,
Of sobbing virgin verse, and of a throbbing dream.

We fiends of studious fight a battle everlasting
Against our daily bread - can't stand the sober mood.
The troubled wind of nights is merely a toastmaster
Whose toasts, as like as not, will do no one much good.

Heredity and death are our guests at table.
A quiet dawn will paint bright-red the tops of trees.
An anapaest, like mice, will on the bread-plate scrabble,
And Cinderella will rush in to change her dress.

The floors have all been swept, and everything is dainty,
And like a child's sweet kiss, breathes quietly my verse,
And Cinderella flees-by cab on days of plenty,
And on shanks' pony when the last small coin is lost.

Boris Pasternak

Fiat

Dawn will set candles guttering.
It will light up and loose the swifts.
With this reminder I'll burst in:
Let life be just as fresh as this!

Dawn's like a gunshot in the dark.
A bang-and flying burning bits
Of wadding go out, spark by spark.
Let life be just as fresh as this.

Another guest outside's the wind.
At night, it huddled close to us.
It's shivering-at dawn, it rained.
Let life be just as fresh as this.

It's so ridiculous and vain!
Why did it want to guard this place?
It saw the 'No admittance' sign.
Let life be just as fresh as this.

I'll do your bidding at a sign-
A wave of kerchief-now,
While in the darkness you still reign
And while the fire's not out.

Boris Pasternak

First Snow

Outside the snowstorm spins, and hides
The world beneath a pall.
Snowed under are the paper-girl,
The papers and the stall.

Quite often our experience
Has led us to believe
That snow falls out of reticence,
In order to deceive.

Concealing unrepentantly
And trimming you in white,
How often he has brought you home
Into the town at night!

While snowflakes blind and blanket out
The distance more and more,
A tipsy shadow gropes his way
And staggers to the door.

And then he enters hastily…
Again, for all I know,
Someone has something sinful to
Conceal in all this snow!

Boris Pasternak

From A Poem

I also loved, and the restless breaths
Of sleeplessness, fluttering through darkness,
Out of the park would downward drift
To the ravine, on to the archipelago
Of meadows, sinking from sight among
Wormwood, mint and quails beneath the wispy mist.
And the broad sweep of adoration's wing grew
Heavy and drunken, as though stung by shot,
Floundered into the air and, shuddering, fell short,
Scattering across the fields as dew.

And then the dawn was breaking. Till two
Rich jewels blinked in the incalculable sky,
But then the cocks began to feel afraid
Of darkness and strove to hide their fright,
But in their throats blank mines exploded,
As they strained, fear's putrid voice erupted.
As though by order, as the constellations faded,
A shepherd, goggle-eyed as though from snuffing candles,
Made his appearance where the forest ended.

I also loved and she, it well may be,
Is living yet. The time will pass on by
Till something large as autumn, one fine day,
(If not tomorrow, then perhaps some other time)
Will blaze out over life like sunset's glow, in pity
For the thicket. For the foolish puddle's tormenting,
Toadish thirst. For the clearings trembling timidly
As hares, their ears tight-muffled in the wrapping
Of last year's fallen leaves. For the noise, as though
False waves are pounding on the shores of long ago.
I also loved, and know: as damp mown fields
Are laid by the ages at each year's feet,
So the fevering newness of the worlds is laid
By love at the bed-head of every heart.

I also loved, and she is living still.
Cascading into that first earliness, as ever
Time stands still, vanishing away as it spills
Over the moment's edge. Subtle as ever this boundary.
Still as before, how recent seems the long ago.
Time past streams from the faces of those who saw,
Playing still its crazy tricks, as if it did not know
It has no tenancy in our house any more.
Can it be so? Does love really not last,
This momentary tribute of bright wonderment,
But ever, all our life, recede into the past?

Boris Pasternak

From early dawn the thirtieth of April...

From early dawn the thirtieth of April
Is given up to children of the town,
And caught in trying on the festive necklace,
By dusk it only just is settling down.

Like heaps of squashy berries under muslin
The town emerges out of crimson gauze.
Along the streets the boulevards are dragging
Their twilight with them, like a rank of dwarves.

The evening world is always eve and blossom,
But this one with a sprouting of its own
From May-day anniversaries will flower
One day into a commune fully blown.

For long it will remain a day of shifting,
Pre-festive cleaning, fanciful decor,
As once it used to be with Whitsun birches
Or pan-Athenian fires long before.

Just so they will go on, conveying actors
To their assembly points; beat sand; just so
Pull up towards illuminated ledges
The plywood boards, the crimson calico.

Just so in threes the sailors briskly walking
Will skirt the grass in gardens and in parks,
The moon at nightfall sink into the pavements
Like a dead city or a burnt-out hearth.

But with each year more splendid and more spreading
The taut beginning of the rose will bloom,
More clearly grow in health and sense of honour,
Sincerity more visibly will loom.

The living folksongs, customs and traditions
Will ever spreading, many-petalled lay
Their scent on fields and industries and meadows
From early buddings on the first of May,

Until the full fermented risen spirit
Of ripened years will shoot up, like the smell
Of humid centifolia. It will have to
Reveal itself, it cannot help but tell.

Boris Pasternak

God's World

Thin as hair are the shadows of sunset
When they follow drawn-out every tree.
On the road through the forest the post-girl
Hands a parcel and letters to me.

By the trail of the cats and the foxes,
By the foxes' and by the cats' trail,
I return with a bundle of letters
To the house where my joy will prevail.

Countries, continents, isthmuses, frontiers,
Lakes and mountains, discussions and news,
Children, grown-ups, old folk, adolescents,
Appreciations, reports and reviews.

0 respected and masculine letters!
All of you, none excepted, have brought
A display of intelligent logic
Underneath a dry statement of thought.

Precious, treasured epistles of women!
Why, I also fell down from a cloud.
And eternally now and for ever
To be yours I have solemnly vowed.

Well and you, stamp-collectors, if even
Only one fleeting moment you had
Among us, what a marvellous present
You would find in my sorrowful stead!

Boris Pasternak

Hamlet

The murmurs ebb; onto the stage I enter.
I am trying, standing in the door,
To discover in the distant echoes
What the coming years may hold in store.

The nocturnal darkness with a thousand
Binoculars is focused onto me.
Take away this cup, O Abba Father,
Everything is possible to Thee.

I am fond of this Thy stubborn project,
And to play my part I am content.
But another drama is in progress,
And, this once, O let me be exempt.

But the plan of action is determined,
And the end irrevocably sealed.
I am alone; all round me drowns in falsehood:
Life is not a walk across a field.

Boris Pasternak

Here a riddle has drawn a strange nailmark

Here a riddle has drawn a strange nailmark. To sleep now!
I'll reread, understand with the light of the sun,
But until I am wakened, to touch the beloved
As I do has been given to none.

How I touched you! So touched were you even by the copper
Of my lips, as an audience is touched by a play,
And the kiss was like summer; it lingered and lingered,
Only later the thunderstorm came.

And I drank in long draughts, like the birds, half-unconscious.
The stars trickle slowly through the throat to the crop,
While the nightingales roll up their eyes in a shudder
From the firmament draining the night drop by drop.

Boris Pasternak

Here will be echoes in the mountains...

Here will be echoes in the mountains,
The distant landslides' rumbling boom,
The rocks, the dwellings in the village,
The sorry little inn, the gloom

Of something black beyond the Terek,
Clouds moving heavily. Up there
The day was breaking very slowly;
It dawned, but light was nowhere near.

One sensed the heaviness of darkness
For miles ahead around Kazbek
Wound on the heights: though some were trying
To throw the halter from their neck.

As if cemented in an oven,
In the strange substance of a dream,
A pot of poisoned food, the region
Of Daghestan there slowly steamed.

Its towering peaks towards us rolling,
All black from top to foot, it strained
To meet our car, if not with clashing
Of daggers, then with pouring rain.

The mountains were preparing trouble.
The handsome giants, fierce and black,
Each one more evil than the other
Were closing down upon our track.

Boris Pasternak

Here—now—our age of socialism!...

Here—now—our age of socialism!
Here in the thick of life below.
Today in the name of things to be
Into the future forth we go.

Like Georgia shining in her beauty,
Like a land of light by open seas,
It beckons-veiled within a mist
Of wild surmise and theories.

There mothers of Putivl no more
Lament like cuckoos their dismay;
There joy no longer looks askance
In fear, but walks abroad by day.

There life and happiness converse
Together, free from hate and strife,
All joined to give their saving strength
And stay to every child and wife.

There men no longer by exchange
Compute the things they have or owe,
But gladly spend themselves in giving-
The all they have, the all they know.

Then let my message overtake
This wondrous age in history:
O may my children in their gladness
Out of the future answer me!

Boris Pasternak

Hops

Beneath the willow wound round with ivy
we take cover from the worst
of the storm, with a greatcoat round
our shoulders and my hands around your waist.

I've got it wrong. That isn't ivy
entwined in the bushes round
the wood, but hops. You intoxicate me!
Let's spread the greatcoat on the ground.

Boris Pasternak

How few are we. Probably three...

How few are we. Probably three
In all-coallike, burning, infernal
Beneath the grey bark of the tree
Of wisdom, and clouds, and eternal
Debate on verse, transport, the part
The army will play-and on art.

We used to be human. We're eras,
We're trains, in a caravan ripping
Through woods, to the sighing and fears
Of engines, and groans of the sleepers.
We'll rush in, and circle in the throes
Of being, like a whirlwind of crows.

A miss! Much too late you will see it.
Thus galloping wind in the morning
In passing a straw pile will buffet-
The blow will live on as a warning
To riotous tree-tops, and mingle
With their wrangles over the shingles.

Boris Pasternak

Humble home. But rum, and charcoal...

Humble home. But rum, and charcoal
Grog of sketches on the wall,
And the cell becomes a mansion,
And the garret is a hall.

No more waves of housecoats: questions,
Even footsteps disappear;
Glassy mica fills the latticed
Work-encompassed vault of air.

Voice, commanding as a levy,
Does not leave a thing immune,
Smelting, fusing… In his gullet
Flows the tin of molten spoons.

What is fame for him, and glory,
Name, position in the world,
When the sudden breath of fusion
Blends his words into the Word?

He will burn for it his chattels,
Friendship, reason, daily round.
On his desk-a glass, unfinished,
World forgotten, clock unwound.

Clustered stanzas change like seething
Wax at fortune-telling times.
He will bless the sleeping children
With the steam of molten rhymes.

Boris Pasternak

I grew. Foul weather, dreams, forebodings...

I grew. Foul weather, dreams, forebodings
Were bearing me - a Ganymede -
Away from earth; distress was growing
Like wings - to spread, to hold, to lead.

I grew. The veil of woven sunsets
At dusk would cling to me and swell.
With wine in glasses we would gather
To celebrate a sad farewell,

And yet the eagle's clasp already
Refreshes forearms' heated strain.
The days have gone, when, love, you floated
Above me, harbinger of pain.

Do we not share the sky, the flying?
Now, like a swan, his death-song done,
Rejoice! In triumph, with the eagle
Shoulder to shoulder, we are one.

Boris Pasternak

I hang limp on the Creator's pen

I hang limp on the Creator's pen
Like a large drop of lilac gloss-paint.

Underneath are dykes' secrets; the air
From the railways is sodden and sticky,
Of the fumes of coal and night fires reeking.
But the moment night kills sunset's glare,
It turns pink itself, tinged with far flares,
And the fence stands stiff, paradox-stricken.

It keeps muttering: stop it till dawn.
Let the dry whiting finally settle.
Hard as nails is the worm-eaten ground,
And the echo's as keen as a skittle.

Warm spring wind, spots of cheviot and mud,
Early naileries' hoots faraway,
On the grater of cobble-stones road,
As on radishes lavishly sprayed,
Tears stand out clearly at break of day.

Like an acrid drop of thick lead paint,
I hang on to the Creator's pen.

Boris Pasternak

I would go home again—to rooms...

I would go home again—to rooms
With sadness large at eventide,
Go in, take off my overcoat,
And in the light of streets outside

Take cheer. I'll pass the thin partitions
Right through; yes, like a beam I'll pass,
As image blends into an image,
As one mass splits another mass.

Let all abiding mooted problems
Deep rooted in our fortunes seem
To some a sedentary habit;
But still at home I brood and dream.

Again the trees and houses breathe
Their old refrain and fragrant air.
Again to right and left old winter
Sets up her household everywhere.

Again by dinner time the dark
Comes suddenly—to blind, to scare,
To teach the narrow lanes and alleys
She'll fool them if they don't take care.

Again, though weak my heart, O Moscow,
I listen, and in words compose
The way you smoke, the way you rise,
The way your great construction goes.

And so I take you as my harness
For the sake of raging days to be,
That you may know our past by heart
And like a poem remember me.

Boris Pasternak

Imitators

A boat came in; the cliff was baked;
The noisy boat-chain fell and clanked on
The sand-an iron rattle-snake,
A rattling rust among the plankton.

And two got out; and from the cliff
I felt like calling down, 'Forgive me,
But would you kindly throw yourselves
Apart or else into the river?

Your miming is without a fault-
Of course the seeker finds the fancied-
But stop this playing with the boat!
Your model on the cliff resents it.'

Boris Pasternak

Improvisation

I fed out of my hand a flock of keys
To clapping of wings and shrill cries in flight.
Sleeves up, arms out, on tiptoe I rose;
At my elbow I felt the nudging of night.
The dark. And the pond, and the wash of waves.
And screeching black beaks in their savage attack,
All quick for the kill - not to hunger and die,
While birds of the species I-love-you fall back.

The pond. And the dark. The pulsating flare
From pipkins of pitch in the gloom of midnight,
The boat keel nibbled by lapping of waves.
And birds at my elbow in their wrath and fight.
Night gurgled, washed in the gullets of weirs.
And it seemed if the young were unfed, by rote,
The hen-birds would kill - before the roulades
Would die in the shrilling, the crooked throat.

Boris Pasternak

In everything I seek to grasp...

In everything I seek to grasp
The fundamental:
The daily choice, the daily task,
The sentimental.

To plumb the essence of the past,
The first foundations,
The crux, the roots, the inmost hearts,
The explanations.

And, puzzling out the weave of fate,
Events observer,
To live, feel, love and meditate
And to discover.

Oh, if my skill did but suffice
After a fashion,
In eight lines I'd anatomize
The parts of passion.

I'd write of sins, forbidden fruit,
Of chance-seized shadows;
Of hasty flight and hot pursuit,
Of palms, of elbows.

Define its laws and origin
In terms judicial,
Repeat the names it glories in,
And the initials.

I'd sinews strain my verse to shape
Like a trim garden:
The limes should blossom down the nape,
A double cordon.

My verse should breathe the fresh-clipped hedge,
Roses and meadows
And mint and new-mown hay and sedge,
The thunder's bellows.

As Chopin once in his etudes
Miraculously conjured
Parks, groves, graves and solitudes-
A living wonder.

The moment of achievement caught
Twixt sport and torment…
A singing bowstring shuddering taut,
A stubborn bow bent.

Boris Pasternak

In Hospital

They stood, almost blocking the pavement,
As though at a window display;
The stretcher was pushed in position,
The ambulance started away.

Past porches and pavements and people
It plunged with its powerful light
Through streets in nocturnal confusion
Deep into the blackness of night.

The headlights picked out single faces,
Militiamen, stretches of street.
The nurse with a smelling-salts phial
Was rocked to and fro on her seat.

A drain gurgled drearily. Cold rain
Was falling. The hospital-clerk
Took out a fresh form of admission
And filled it in, mark upon mark.

They gave him a bed by the entrance;
No room in the ward could be found.
Strong iodine vapour pervaded
The draught from the windows around.

His window framed part of the garden,
And with it a bit of the sky.
The newcomer studied the floorboards,
The ward and the objects nearby,

When, watching the nurse's expression
Of doubt, in her questioning drive,
He suddenly knew this adventure
Would hardly release him alive.

Then, grateful, he turned to the window
Behind which the wall, further down,
Was breathing like smouldering tinder,
Lit up by the glare of the town.

There, far off the city was glowing
All crimson-aflame; in its swell
A maple-branch, ragged, was bowing
To bid him a silent farewell.

'0 Lord,' he was thinking, 'how perfect
Thy works are, how perfect and right;
The walls and the beds and the people,
This death-night, the city at night!

'I drink up a sedative potion,
And weeping, my handkerchief trace.

0 Father, the tears of emotion
Prevent me from seeing Thy face.

'Dim light scarcely touches my bedstead.
It gives me such comfort to drift
And feel that my life and my lot are
Thy priceless and wonderful gift.

'While dying in fading surroundings
I feel how Thy hands are ablaze,
The hands that have made me and hold me
And hide like a ring in a case.'

Boris Pasternak

In Memory of Marina Tsvetaeva

Dismal day, with the weather inclement.
Inconsolably rivulets run
Down the porch in front of the doorway;
Through my wide-open windows they come.

But behind the old fence on the roadside,
See, the public gardens are flooded.
Like wild beasts in a den, the rainclouds
Sprawl about in shaggy disorder.

In such weather, I dream of a volume
On the beauties of Earth in our age,
And I draw an imp of the forest
Just for you on the title-page.

Oh, Marina, I'd find it no burden,
And the time has been long overdue:
Your sad clay should be brought from Yelabuga
By a requiem written for you.

All the triumph of your homecoming
I considered last year in a place
Near a snow-covered bend in the river
Where boats winter, locked in the ice.

What can I do to be of service?
Convey somehow your own request,
For in the silence of your going
There's a reproach left unexpressed.

A loss is always enigmatic.
I hunt for clues to no avail,
And rack my brains in fruitless torment:
Death has no lineaments at all.

Words left half-spoken, self-deception,
Promises, shadows-all are vain,
And only faith in resurrection
Can give the semblance of a sign.

Step out into the open country:
Winter's a sumptuous funeral wake.
Add currants to the dusk, then wine,
And there you have your funeral cake.

The apple-tree stands in a snowdrift
Outside. All this year long, to me,
The snow-clad city's been a massive
Monument to your memory.

With your face turned to meet your Maker.
You yearn for Him from here on Earth,

As in the days when those upon it
Were yet to appreciate your worth

Boris Pasternak

In the Wood

Blurred by a lilac heat, the meadows:
in the wood, cathedral shadows swirled.
What on earth was left for them to kiss? So
like wax, soft in the fingers, theirs, the world.

There's a dream – you do not sleep, you only
dream you long for sleep: someone's dozing,
two black suns are beating under eyelids,
burning eyelashes, while he's slumbering.

Sunbeams play. Iridescent beetles flow by,
dragon-flies' glass skims over his cheek.
With tiny scintillations, the wood's alive,
like those the clockmakers' tweezers seek.

It seems he slept to the tick of figures,
while in acid, amber ether, over his head,
the hands of a carefully tested clock quiver,
regulated precisely by tremors of heat.

They calibrate, they shake the pines,
scatter the shadow, exhaust and pierce
the darkness of timber raised up high,
in the day's fatigue, on the blue clock-face.

It seems a primal happiness was setting,
it seems the wood was sunk in sunlit dream.
Happy folk don't spend time clock-watching,
but this pair were only sleeping, it seems.

Boris Pasternak

Intoxication

Under osiers with ivy ingrown
We are trying to hide from bad weather.
I am clasping your arms in my own,
In one cloak we are huddled together.

I was wrong. Not with ivy-leaves bound,
But with hops overgrown is the willow.
Well then, let us spread out on the ground
This our cloak as a sheet and a pillow.

Boris Pasternak

It is not seemly to be famous...

It is not seemly to be famous:
Celebrity does not exalt;
There is no need to hoard your writings
And to preserve them in a vault.

To give your all-this is creation,
And not-to deafen and eclipse.
How shameful, when you have no meaning,
To be on everybody's lips!

Try not to live as a pretender,
But so to manage your affairs
That you are loved by wide expanses,
And hear the call of future years.

Leave blanks in life, not in your papers,
And do not ever hesitate
To pencil out whole chunks, whole chapters
Of your existence, of your fate.

Into obscurity retiring
Try your development to hide,
As autumn mist on early mornings
Conceals the dreaming countryside.

Another, step by step, will follow
The living imprint of your feet;
But you yourself must not distinguish
Your victory from your defeat.

And never for a single moment
Betray your credo or pretend,
But be alive-this only matters-
Alive and burning to the end.

Boris Pasternak

It's spring, I leave a street where poplars...

It's spring, I leave a street where poplars are astonished,
Where distance is alarmed and the house fears it may fall.
Where air is blue just like the linen bundle
A discharged patient takes from hospital,

Where dusk is empty, like a broken tale,
Abandoned by a star, without conclusion,
So that expressionless, unfathomable,
A thousand clamouring eyes are in confusion.

Boris Pasternak

July

A ghost is roaming through the building,
And shadows in the attic browse;
Persistently intent on mischief
A goblin roams about the house.

He gets into your way, he fusses,
You hear his footsteps overhead,
He tears the napkin off the table
And creeps in slippers to the bed.

With feet unwiped he rushes headlong
On gusts of draught into the hall
And whirls the curtain, like a dancer,
Towards the ceiling, up the wall.

Who is this silly mischief-maker,
This phantom and this double-face?
He is our guest, our summer lodger,
Who spends with us his holidays.

Our house is taken in possession
By him, while he enjoys a rest.
July, with summer air and thunder-
He is our temporary guest.

July, who scatters from his pockets
The fluff of blow-balls in a cloud,
Who enters through the open window,
Who chatters to himself aloud,

Unkempt, untidy, absent-minded,
Soaked through with smell of dill and rye,
With linden-blossom, grass and beet-leaves,
The meadow-scented month July.

Boris Pasternak

Lessons of English

When Desdemona sang a ditty-
In her last hours among the living-
It wasn't love that she lamented,
And not her star-she mourned a willow.
When Desdemona started singing,
With tears near choking off her voice,
Her evil demon for her evil day
Stored up of weeping rills a choice.

And when Ophelia sang a ballad-
In her last hours among the living-
All dryness of her soul was carried
Aloft by gusts of wind, like cinders.

The day Ophelia started singing,
By bitterness of daydreams jaded,
What trophies did she clutch, when sinking?
A bunch of buttercups and daisies.

Their shoulders stripped of passion's tatters,
They took, their hearts a-quake with fear,
The Universe's chilly baptism-
To stun their loving forms with spheres.

Boris Pasternak

Marburg

I quivered. I flared up, and then was extinguished.
I shook. I had made a proposal - but late,
Too late. I was scared, and she had refused me.
I pity her tears, am more blessed than a saint.

I stepped into the square. I could be counted
Among the twice-born. Every leaf on the lime,
Every brick was alive, caring nothing for me,
And reared up to take leave for the last time.

The paving-stones glowed and the street's brow was swarthy,
From under their lids the cobbles looked grim,
Scowled up at the sky, and the wind like a boatman
Was rowing through limes. And each was an emblem.

Be that as it may, I avoided their glances,
Averted my gaze from their greeting or scowling.
I wanted no news of their getting and spending.
I had to get out, so as not to start howling.

The tiles were afloat, and an unblinking noon
Regarded the rooftops. And someone, somewhere
In Marburg, was whistling, at work on a crossbow,
And someone else dressing for the Trinity fair.

Devouring the clouds, the sand showed yellow,
A storm wind was rocking the bushes to and fro,
And the sky had congealed where it touched a sprig
Of woundwort that staunched its flow.

Like any rep Romeo hugging his tragedy,
I reeled through the city rehearsing you.
I carried you all that day, knew you by heart
From the comb in your hair to the foot in your shoe.

And when in your room I fell to my knees,
Embracing this mist, this perfection of frost
(How lovely you are!), this smothering turbulence,
What were you thinking? 'Be sensible!' Lost!

Here lived Martin Luther. The Brothers Grimm, there.
And all things remember and reach out to them:
The sharp-taloned roofs. The gravestones. The trees.
And each is alive. And each is an emblem.

I shall not go tomorrow. Refusal -
More final than parting. We're quits. áll is clear.
And if I abandon the streetlamps, the banks -
Old pavingstones, what will become of me here?

The mist on all sides will unpack its bags,
In both windows will hang up a moon.

And melancholy will slide over the books
And settle with one on the ottoman.

Then why am I scared? Insomnia I know
Like grammar, by heart. I have grown used to that.
In line with the four square panes of my window
Dawn will lay out her diaphanous mat.

The nights now sit down to play chess with me
Where ivory moonlight chequers the floor.
It smells of acacia, the windows are open,
And passion, a grey witness, stands by the door.

The poplar is king. I play with insomnia.
The queen is a nightingale I can hear calling.
I reach for the nightingale. And the night wins.
The pieces make way for the white face of morning.

Boris Pasternak

March

The sun is hotter than the top ledge in a steam bath;
The ravine, crazed, is rampaging below.
Spring -- that corn-fed, husky milkmaid --
Is busy at her chores with never a letup.

The snow is wasting (pernicious anemia --
See those branching veinlets of impotent blue?)
Yet in the cowbarn life is burbling, steaming,
And the tines of pitchforks simply glow with health.

These days -- these days, and these nights also!
With eavesdrop thrumming its tattoos at noon,
With icicles (cachectic!) hanging on to gables,
And with the chattering of rills that never sleep!

All doors are flung open -- in stable and in cowbarn;
Pigeons peck at oats fallen in the snow;
And the culprit of all this and its life-begetter--
The pile of manure -- is pungent with ozone.

Boris Pasternak

Margarita

Sundering the bushes like a snare,
More violet than Margarita's tight-pressed lips,
More passionate than Margarita's white-eyed stare,
The nightingale glowed, royally throbbed and trilled.

Like the scent of grass ascending,
Like the crazed rainfall's mercury, the foliage among,
He stupefied the bark, approached the mouth, panting,
And, halting there, upon a braid he hung.

When Margarita to the light was drawn,
Stroking her eyes with an astonished hand,
It seemed, beneath the helm of branch and rain,
A weary Amazon was fallen to the ground.

Her head in her hand in his hand lay,
Her other arm was bent back up to where,
Dangling, there hung her helmet of shade,
Sundering the branches like a snare.

Boris Pasternak

Mary Magdalene I

As soon as night descends, we meet.
Remorse my memories releases.
The demons of the past compete,
And draw and tear my heart to pieces,
Sin, vice and madness and deceit,
When I was slave of men's caprices
And when my dwelling was the street.

The deathly silence is not far;
A few more moments only matter,
Which the Inevitable bar.
But at the edge, before they scatter,
In front of Thee my life I shatter,
As though an alabaster jar.

O what might not have been my fate
By now, my Teacher and my Saviour,
Did not eternity await
Me at the table, as a late
New victim of my past behaviour!

But what can sin now mean to me,
And death, and hell, and sulphur burning,
When, like a graft onto a tree,
I have-for everyone to see-
Grown into being part of Thee
In my immeasurable yearning?

When pressed against my knees I place
Thy precious feet, and weep, despairing,
Perhaps I'm learning to embrace
The cross's rough four-sided face;
And, fainting, all my being sways
Towards Thee, Thy burial preparing.

Boris Pasternak

Mary Magdalene II

People clean their homes before the feast.
Stepping from the bustle of the street
I go down before Thee on my knees
And anoint with myrrh Thy holy feet.

Groping round, I cannot find the shoes
For the tears that well up with my sighs.
My impatient tresses, breaking loose,
Like a pall hang thick before my eyes.

I take up Thy feet onto my lap,
Wash them clean with hot tears from my eyes,
In my hair Thy precious feet I wrap,
And my string of pearls around them tie.

I now see the future in detail,
As if it were stopped in flight by Thee.
Like a raving sibyl, I could tell
What will happen, how it will all be.

In the temple, veils will fall tomorrow,
We shall form a frightened group apart,
And the earth will shake-perhaps from sorrow
And from pity for my tortured heart.

Troops will then reform and march away
To the thud of hoofs and heavy tread,
And the cross will reach towards the sky
Like a water-spout above our heads.

By the cross, I'll fall down on the ground,
I shall bite my lips till I draw blood.
On the cross, your arms will be spread out-
Wide enough to hug the whole wide world.

Who's this for, this glory and this strife?
Who's this for, this torment and this might?
Are there enough souls on earth, and lives?
Are there enough cities, dales and heights?

But three days-such days and nights will pass-
They will fill me with such crushing dread
That I'll see the joyous truth, at last:
I shall know Christ will rise from the dead.

Boris Pasternak

Meeting

The snow will dust the roadway,
And load the roofs still more.
I'll stretch my legs a little:
You're there outside the door.

Autumn, not winter coat,
Hat-none, galoshes-none.
You struggle with excitement
Out there all on your own.

Far, far into the darkness
Fences and trees withdraw.
You stand there on the corner,
Under the falling snow.

The water trickles down from
The kerchief that you wear
Into your sleeves, while dewdrops
Shine sparkling in your hair.

And now illumined by
A single strand of light
Are features, kerchief, figure
And coat of autumn cut.

There's wet snow on your lashes
And in your eyes, distress,
And your external image
Is all, all of apiece.

As if an iron point
With truly consummate art,
Dipped into antimony,
Had scribed you on my heart.

Those modest, humble features
Are in it now to stay,
And if the world's cruel-hearted,
That's merely by the way.

And therefore it is doubled,
All this night in snow;
To draw frontiers between us
Is more than I can do.

But who are we and whence,
If, of those years gone by,
Scandal alone remains
And we have ceased to be.

Boris Pasternak

Music

The block of flats loomed towerlike.
Two sweating athletes, human telpher,
Were carrying up narrow stairs,
As though a bell onto a belfry,

As to a stony tableland
The tables of the law, with caution,
A huge and heavy concert-grand,
Above the city's restless ocean.

At last it stands on solid ground,
While deep below the din and clatter
Are damped, as though the town were drowned-
Sunk to the bottom of a legend.

The tenant of the topmost flat
Looks down on earth over the railings,
As if he held it in his hand,
Its lawful ruler, never failing.

Back in the drawing room he starts
To play-not someone else's music,
But his own thought, a new chorale,
The stir of leaves, Hosannas booming.

Improvisations sweep and peal,
Bring night, flames, fire barrels rolling,
Trees under downpour, rumbling wheels,
Life of the streets, fate of the lonely…

Thus Chopin would, at night, instead
Of the outgrown, naive and artless,
Write down on the black fretwork stand
His soaring dream, his new departures.

Or, overtaking in their flight
The world by many generations,
Valkyries shake the city roofs
By thunderous reverberations.

Or through the lovers' tragic fate,
Amidst infernal crash and thunder,
Tchaikovsky harrowed us to tears,
And rent the concert hall asunder.

Boris Pasternak

My desk is not so wide that I might lean

My desk is not so wide that I might lean
Against the edge and reach out past the shell
Of board and glass, beyond the isthmus in
The endless miles of my scraped out farewell.

(It's night there now.) Beyond your sultry neck.
(They went to bed.) Behind your shoulders' realm.
(Switched off the light.) At dawn, I'd give them back.
The porch would touch them with a sleepy stem.

No, not with snowflakes! With your arms! Reach far!
Oh you, ten fingers of my pain, the light
Of crystal winter stars-and every star
A sign of northbound snowbound trains being late.

Boris Pasternak

Night

The night proceeds and dwindling
Prepares the day's rebirth.
An airman is ascending
Above the sleeping earth.

And almost disappearing
In cloud, a tiny spark,
He now is like a cross-stitch,
A midget laundry-mark.

Beneath him are strange cities,
And heavy traffic-lanes,
And night-clubs, barracks, stokers,
And railways, stations, trains.

The shadow of his wing-span
Falls heavy on the cloud.
Celestial bodies wander
Around him in a crowd.

And there, with frightful listing
Through emptiness, away
Through unknown solar systems
Revolves the Milky Way.

In limitless expanses
Are headlands burning bright.
In basements and in cellars
The stokers work all night.

And underneath a rooftop
In Paris, maybe Mars
Or Venus sees a notice
About a recent farce.

And maybe in an attic
And under ancient slates
A man sits wakeful, working,
He thinks and broods and waits;

He looks upon the planet,
As if the heavenly spheres
Were part of his entrusted
Nocturnal private cares.

Fight off your sleep: be wakeful,
Work on, keep up your pace,
Keep vigil like the pilot,
Like all the stars in space.

Work on, work on, creator-
To sleep would be a crime-

Eternity's own hostage,
And prisoner of Time.

Boris Pasternak

Nostalgia

To give this book a dedication
The desert sickened,
And lions roared, and dawns of tigers
Took hold of Kipling.

A dried-up well of dreadful longing
Was gaping, yawning.
They swayed and shivered, rubbing shoulders,
Sleek-skinned and tawny.

Since then continuing forever
Their sway in scansion,
They stroll in mist through dewy meadows
Dreamt up by Ganges.

Creeping at dawn in pits and hollows
Cold sunrays fumble.
Funereal, incense-laden dampness
Pervades the jungle.

Boris Pasternak

O had I known that thus it happens...

O had I known that thus it happens,
When first I started, that at will
Your lines with blood in them destroy you,
Roll up into your throat and kill,

My answer to this kind of joking
Had been a most decisive 'no'.
So distant was the start, so timid
The first approach-what could one know?

But older age is Rome, demanding
From actors not a gaudy blend
Of props and reading, but in earnest
A tragedy, with tragic end.

A slave is sent to the arena
When feeling has produced a line.
Tnen breathing soil and fate take over
And art has done and must resign.

Boris Pasternak

Oh terrible, beloved! A poet's loving

Oh terrible, beloved! A poet's loving
Is a restless god's passionate rage,
And chaos out into the world comes creeping,
As in the ancient fossil age.

His eyes weep him mist by the ton,
Enveloped in tears he is mammoth-like,
Out of fashion. He knows it must not be done.
Ages have passed-he does not know why.

He sees wedding parties all around,
Drunken unions celebrated unaware,
Common frogspawn found in every pond
Ritually adorned as precious caviare.

Like some Watteau pearl, how cleverly
A snuffbox embraces all life's matter,
And vengeance is wreaked on him, probably
Because, where they distort and flatter,

Where simpering comfort lies and fawns,
Where they rub idle shoulders, crawl like drones,
He will raise your sister from the ground,
Use her like a bacchante from the Grecian urns,

And pour into his kiss the Andes' melting,
And morning in the steppe, under the sway
Of dusted stars, as night's pallid bleating
Bustles about the village on its way.

And the botanical vestry's dense blackness,
And all the ravine's age-old breath,
Waft over the ennui of the stuffed mattress,
And the forest's ancient chaos spurts forth

Boris Pasternak

On a fateful day, an unlucky time

On a fateful day, an unlucky time,
Unannounced, it may happen thus:
Stifling, blacker still than a monastery
Utter madness descends on us.

Bitter frost. The night, as a decency,
Is observing the icy cold.
In an armchair, the ghost mumbles on and on,
Still the same, in his winter coat.

And the branch outside, and the parquet floor,
And his cheek, and the poker's shade-
All are shot with repentance and sleepiness
Of the blizzard that raved night and day.

Now the night is calm. Bright and frosty night.
Like a puppy suckling, still blind,
With the whole of their darkness-the palisade
Drinks the sparkle of stars through the pines.

Seems-it drips from them. Seems they're glimmering.
Seems-the night is brimming with wax
And the pad of one fir warms another pad
And one hollow traces the next.

Seems-this stillness, this height's an elegiac wave,
A concern of a soul for a mind,
The expectancy after an anxious 'respond'!
Or an echo of different kind.

Seems it's dumb, this enquiring of needles and trees.
And the height is too deaf or too blue,
And the shine on the frozen swerve of the road's
A reply to that pleading 'Helloooo…'

Bitter frost. The night, as a decency,
Is observing the icy cold.
In his armchair the ghost mumbles endlessly,
Still the same, in his winter coat-

Oh-his lips-he is squeezing them horribly!
Face in hands-shaking-ready to choke!
Whirls of clues for the gifted biographer
In this pattern, as dead as chalk.

Boris Pasternak

On Early Trains

This winter I was outside Moscow,
But when the time for work came round,
Through the blizzard, biting frost and snow,
I made the journey into town.

At the hour I stepped outside the door
Not a soul could be seen on the street,
And through the forest darkness drifted forth
The crunching echo of my tramping feet.

At the crossing I was greeted
By the willows of the vacant plot.
The constellations towered above the world
In the dark chill of January's pit.

And usually, there behind the yards,
The number forty or the early mail
Would overhaul me, pulling hard,
But the six forty-five was my own train.

Suddenly some invisible tentacles
Would draw into a circle lines of light,
As a massive searchlight hurtled past
On to the viaduct out of the night.

Once in the carriage's tuffy heat
I would allow myself to sink
Into the state of innate weakness
I imbibed with my mother's milk.

Through all the struggles of the past,
Through all the years of war and want,
I gazed on Russia'a unique face
In silent awe and wonderment.

Passing beyond this adoration,
I worshipped as I looked around
At countrywomen, students, workers
Living on the edge of town.

I could not see a single trace
Of servitude imposed by poverty.
Each new discomfort and each change
Was borne with lordly dignity.

Bunched close together in a group,
Boys and girls sat reading there,
Struck varied poses as they read,
Drinking in the words like vital air.

Moscow greeted us in darkness
Already lined with silver light,

As we emerged from underground,
Out of the ambiguity of night.

Our future pressed against the rails,
Flooding my senses as they went,
With floral soap's lingering trace
And honey-cakes' enticing scent.

Boris Pasternak

On The Steamer

The stir of leaves, the chilly morning air
Were like delirium; half awake
Jaws clamped; the dawn beyond the Kama glared
Blue, as the plumage of a drake.

There was a clattering of crockery,
A yawning steward taking stock,
And in the depth, as high as candlesticks,
Within the river, glow-worms flocked.

They hung from streets along the waterfront,
A scintillating string; it chimed
Three times; the steward with a napkin tried
To scratch away some candle grime.

Like a grey rumour, crawling from the past,
A mighty epic of the reeds,
With ripples in the beads of street lamps, fast
Towards Perm the Kama ran upon a breeze.

Choking on waves, and almost drowning, but
Still swimming on beyond the boat
A star kept diving and resurfacing
An icon's shining light afloat.

A smell of paint mixed with the galley smells,
And on the Kama all along,
The twilight drifted, secrets gathering,
With not a splash it drifted on…

A glass in hand, your pupils narrowing
You watched the slips of tongue perform
A whirling play on words, at suppertime,
But were not drawn into their swarm.

You called your partner to old happenings,
To waves of days before your day,
To plunge in them, a final residue
Of the last drop, and fade away.

The stir of leaves in chilly morning air
Was like delirium; half awake
One yawned; the east beyond the Kama glared
Blue, as the plumage of a drake.

And, like a bloodbath now the morning came,
A flaming flood of oil - to drown
The steamer's gaslights in the stateroom and
The waning street lamps of the town.

Boris Pasternak

Out of Superstition

A box of glazed sour fruit compact,
My narrow room.
And oh the grime of lodging rooms
This side the tomb!

This cubbyhole, out of superstition,
I chose once more.
The walls seem dappled oaks; the door,
A singing door.

You strove to leave; my hand was steady
Upon the latch.
My forelock touched a wondrous forehead;
My lips felt violets.

O Sweet! Your dress as on a day
Not long ago
To April, like a snowdrop, chirps
A gay 'Hello!'

No vestal-you, I know: You came
With a chair today,
Took down my life as from a shelf,
And blew the dust away.

Boris Pasternak

Parting

A man is standing in the hall
His house not recognizing.
Her sudden leaving was a flight,
Herself, maybe, surprising.

The chaos reigning in the room
He does not try to master.
His tears and headache hide in gloom
The extent of his disaster.

His ears are ringing all day long
As though he has been drinking.
And why is it that all the time
Of waves he keeps on thinking?

When frosty window-panes blank out
The world of light and motion,
Despair and grief are doubly like
The desert of the ocean.

She was as dear to him, as close
In all her ways and features,
As is the seashore to the wave,
The ocean to the beaches.

As over rushes, after storm
The swell of water surges,
Into the deepness of his soul
Her memory submerges.

In years of strife, in times which were
Unthinkable to live in,
Upon a wave of destiny
To him she had been driven,

Through countless obstacles, and past
All dangers never-ended,
The wave had carried, carried her,
Till close to him she'd landed.

And now, so suddenly, she'd left.
What power overrode them?
The parting will destroy them both,
The grief bone-deep corrode them.

He looks around him. On the floor
In frantic haste she'd scattered
The contents of the cupboard, scraps
Of stuff, her sewing patterns.

He wanders through deserted rooms
And tidies up for hours;

Till darkness falls he folds away
Her things into the drawers;

And pricks his finger on a pin
In her unfinished sewing,
And sees the whole of her again,
And silent tears come flowing.

Boris Pasternak

Ploughing Time

What is the matter with the landscape?
Familiar landmarks are not there.
Ploughed fields, like squares upon a chessboard,
Today are scattered everywhere.

The newly-harrowed vast expanses
So evenly are spread about,
As though the valley had been spring-cleaned
Or else the mountains flattened out.

And that same day, in one endeavour,
Outside the furrows every tree
Bursts into leaf, light-green and downy,
And stretches skyward, tall and free.

No speck of dust on the new maples,
And colours nowhere are as clean
As is the light-grey of the ploughland
And as the silver-birch's green.

Boris Pasternak

Poetry

Yes, I shall swear by you, my verse,
I shall wheeze out, before I swoon:
You're not a tenor's shape and voice,
You're summer travelling third class,
You are a suburb, not a tune.

You're a street as close as May,
You're a battlefield at night,
Where clouds groan loudly in dismay
And scatter, when dismissed, in fright.

And, splitting in the railway's lace-
That's outskirts, not refrain and home-
They crawl back to their native place
Without a song, as if struck dumb.

The shower's offshoots stick in clusters
Till break of day, and all the time
They scribble on the roofs acrostics
And bubble up rhyme after rhyme.

All poetry is what you make it.
And even when the truism's not worth
The rhyme, the flow of verse is scared.
The notebook's open-so flow forth!

Boris Pasternak

Railway Station

My dear railway station, my treasure
Of meetings and partings, my friend
In times of hard trials and pleasure,
Your favours have been without end.

My scarf would wrap up my whole being -
The train would pull up, with deep sighs,
The muzzles of brash harpies, leering,
Would puff wet white steam in our eyes.

I'd sit at your side for a moment -
A hug and a kiss, brief and rough.
Farewell then, my joy and my torment.
I'm going, conductor, I'm off!

And, shunting bad weather and sleepers,
The west would break open-I'd feel
It grab me with snowflakes to keep me
From falling down under the wheels.

A whistle dies down, echoed weakly,
Another flies from distant tracks.
A train comes past bare platforms sweeping -
A blizzard of many hunched backs.

And twilight is rearing to go,
And, lured by the smoke and the steam,
The wind and the field rush and now
I wish I could be one of them!

Boris Pasternak

Snow Is Falling

Snow is falling: snow is falling.
Geranium flowers reach
for the blizzard's small white stars
past the window's edge.

Snow is falling, all is lost,
the whole world's streaming past:
the flight of steps on the back stairs,
the corner where roads cross.

Snow is falling: snow is falling,
not snowflakes stealing down,
Sky parachutes to earth instead,
in his worn dressing gown.

As if he's playing hide-and-seek,
across the upper landings,
a mad thing, slowly sneaks,
Sky creeps down from the attic.

It's all because life won't wait,
before you know, it's Christmas here.
And look, in a minute,
suddenly it's New Year.

Snow is falling, deeper – deeper.
Maybe, with that same stride
in that same tempo,
with that same languor,

Time's going by?

Year after year, perhaps,
passing, as snow's falling,
like words in a poem?
Snow's falling: snow's falling.
Snow is falling, all is lost –
the whitened passers-by,
leaves' startled showing,
the corners where roads cross.

Boris Pasternak

So they begin. With two years gone...

So they begin. With two years gone
From nurse to countless tunes they scuttle.
They chirp and whistle. Then comes on
The third year, and they start to prattle.

So they begin to see and know.
In din of started turbines roaring
Mother seems not their mother now,
And you not you, and home is foreign.

What meaning has the menacing
Beauty beneath the lilac seated,
If to steal children's not the thing?
So first they fear that they are cheated.

So ripen fears. Can he endure
A star to beat him in successes,
When he's a Faust, a sorcerer?
So first his gipsy life progresses.

So from the fence where home should lie
In flight above are found to hover
Seas unexpected as a sigh.
So first iambics they discover.

So summer nights fall down and pray
'Thy will be done' where oats are sprouting,
And menace with your eyes the day.
So with the sun they start disputing.

So verses start them on their way.

Boris Pasternak

Sometime at a concert hall, in recollection...

Sometime at a concert hall, in recollection,
A Brahms intermezzo will wound me-I'll start,
Remember that summer, the flowerbed garden,
The walks and the bathing, the tryst of six hearts,

The awkward, shy artist, with steep, dreamlike forehead,
Her smile, into which one would dive for a while,
A smile, as good-natured and bright as a river,
Her artist's appearance, her forehead, her smile.

They'll play me some Brahms-I will shudder, surrender,
And in retrospection the sounds will evoke
That faraway summer, the hoard of provisions,
My son and my brother, the garden, the oak.

The artist would stuff in her overall pockets
Her pencils, and objects with fanciful names,
Or would, inadvertently dropping her palette,
Turn much of the grass into colourful stains.

They'll play me some Brahms-I'll surrender, remember
The stubborn dry brushwood, the entrance, the roof,
Her smile and appearance, the mouth and the eyebrows,
The darkened verandah, the steps and the rooms.

And suddenly, as in a fairytale sequence,
The family, neighbours and friends will appear,
And-memories crowding-I'll drown in my weeping
Before I have time to have shed all my tears.

And, circling around in a swift intermezzo-
Embracing the song like a treetrunk at noon,
Four families' shadows will turn on the meadow
To Brahms's compelling and childhood-clear tune

Boris Pasternak

Soul

My mournful soul, you, sorrowing
For all my friends around,
You have become the burial vault
Of all those hounded down.

Devoting to their memory
A verse, embalming them,
In torment, broken, lovingly
Lamenting over them,

In this our mean and selfish time,
For conscience and for quest
You stand-a columbarium
To lay their souls to rest.

The sum of all their agonies
Has bowed you to the ground.
You smell of dust, of death's decay,
Of morgue and burial mound.

My beggarly, dejected soul,
You heard and saw your fill;
Remembered all and mixed it well,
And ground it like a mill.

Continue pounding and compound
All that I witnessed here
To graveyard compost, as you did
For almost forty years.

Boris Pasternak

Sparrow Hills

Breasts beneath kisses, as though under a tap!
Summer’s stream won’t run for ever.
We can’t pump out the accordion’s roar
night after night, in a dusty fever.

I’ve heard of age. Terrible prophecies!
No wave will lift its hands to the stars.
They say – who believes? No face in the leaves,
no gods in the air, in the ponds: no hearts.

Rouse your soul! Make the day, foaming.
It’s noon in the world. Where are your eyes?
See there, thoughts in the whiteness seething,
fir-cones, woodpeckers, cloud, heat, pines.

Here, the city’s trolley-lines end.
Beyond there’s no rails, it’s the trees.
Beyond – it’s Sunday, breaking branches,
the glade running off, sliding on leaves.

Scattering noons: Whitsuntide: walking,
‘The world’s always like this’, says the wood.
So the copse planned it, the clearing was told,
So it pours, from the clouds, towards us.

Boris Pasternak

Spasskoe

In Spasskoe, unforgettable September sheds its leaves.
Isn't it time to close up the summer-house?
Echo traps the thudding of axe-blows in the trees,
and, past the fence, barters a herd-boy's shout.

Last night the marsh by the park shivered, too.
The moment the sun rises it vanishes.
The bluebell can't drink the rheumatic dew,
and a dirty lilac stain soils the birches.

The wood's downcast. It wants to sleep, as well,
under the snow, in the deep quiet of the bear's den.
The park, gaping, framed by tree-trunks stands still,
in neat obituary-columns, its edges blackened.

Has the birch copse stopped fading, staining,
its shade more watery still, and growing thin?
And again, you're, fifteen – it's still complaining –
again – 'oh child, oh, what shall we do with them?'

They're already so many it's time to stop playing.
They're – birds in the bushes, mushrooms in the trees.
Already we've veiled our horizon with them, shrouding
each other's landscape with fog-bound mysteries.

The comic, on the night of his death, typhus-stricken,
hears a peal: it's Homeric laughter from the box.
Today in Spasskoe, the same grief, in hallucination,
stares, from the road, at a house of weathered logs.

Boris Pasternak

Spring

How many sticky buds, candle ends
sprout from the branches! Steaming
April. Puberty sweats from the park,
and the forest's blatantly gleaming.

A noose of feathered throats grips
the wood's larynx, a lassoed steer,
netted, like a gladiatorial organ,
it groans steel-piped sonatas here.

Poetry! Be a Greek sponge with suckers,
among green stickiness drenched,
I'll consent, by the sopping wood
of a green-stained garden bench.

Grow sumptuous pleats and flounces,
suck up the gullies and clouds,
Poetry, tonight, I'll squeeze you out
to make the parched sheets flower.

Boris Pasternak

Spring (Fragment 3)

Is it only dirt you notice?
Does the thaw not catch your glance?
As a dapple-grey fine stallion
Does it not through ditches dance?

Is it only birds that chatter
In the blueness of the skies,
Sipping through the straws of sunrays
Lemon liturgies on ice?

Only look, and you will see it:
From the rooftops to the ground
Moscow, all day long, like Kitezh
Lies, in light-blue water drowned.

Why are all the roofs transparent
And the colours crystal-bright?
Bricks like rushes gently swaying,
Mornings rush into the night.

Like a bog the town is swampy
And the scabs of snow are rare.
February, like saturated
Cottonwool in spirits, flares.

This white flame wears out the garrets,
And the air, in the oblique
Interplace of twigs and birds, is
Naked, weightless and unique.

In such days the crowds of people
Knock you down; you are unknown,
Nameless; and your girl is with them,
But you, too, are not alone.

Boris Pasternak

Spring Shower

Winked to the birdcherry, gulped amid tears,
Splashed over carriages' varnish, trees' tremble.
Full moon. The musicians are picking their way
To the theatre. More and more people assemble.

Puddles on stone. Like a throat overfilled
With tears are the roses, deep with wet scalding
Diamonds. Showers of gladness thrill,
Eyelashes, stormclouds, and roses enfolding.

The moon for the first time is casting in plaster
An epic poem uncast till today:
The cordons, the flutter of dresses, the speaker
And people enraptured and carried away.

Whose is the heart whose whole blood shot to glory
Drained from the cheeks? We are held in his grip.
The hands of Kerensky are squeezing together
Into a bunch our aortas and lips.

This is not night, not rain, not a chorus
Of tearing acclaim for him, swelled to a roar-
This is the blinding leap to the Forum
From catacombs wanting an exit before.

It is not roses, not Ups, not the roaring
Crowd-it's the surf on Theatre Square,
Marking the end of the long sleep of Europe,
Proud of her own reawakening here.

Boris Pasternak

Stars were racing

Stars were racing; waves were washing headlands.
Salt went blind, and tears were slowly drying.
Darkened were the bedrooms; thoughts were racing,
And the Sphinx was listening to the desert.

Candles swam. It seemed that the Colossus'
Blood grew cold; upon his lips was spreading
The blue shadow smile of the Sahara.
With the turning tide the night was waning.

Sea-breeze from Morocco touched the water.
Simooms blew. In snowdrifts snored Archangel.
Candles swam; the rough draft of 'The Prophet'
Slowly dried, and dawn broke on the Ganges.

Boris Pasternak

Storm, Momentary, Forever

Then summer said goodbye
to the station. Lifting its cap,
the thunder took souvenirs,
hundreds of shots on the fly.

The lilac went black. And that
instant, gathering whole armfuls
of lightning, the far clearing lit
the white station-master's shack.

And when the whole roof ran
with a fierce torrent of malice,
and, like charcoal onto a sketch,
the rain crashed down on the fence,
consciousness started to flash,
here, it seems, flooding in play
even the corners of mind
where it's always bright as day.

Boris Pasternak

Storm-Wind

I am finished, but you live on.
And the wind, crying and moaning,
rocks the house and the clearing,
not each pine alone,
but all the trees together,
with the vast distance, whole,
like the hulls of vessels,
moored in a bay, storm-blown.
And it shakes them not from mischief,
and not with an aimless tone,
but to find, for you, from its grief,
the words of a cradle-song.

Boris Pasternak

Sultry Night

It drizzled, but not even grasses
Would bend within the bag of storm;
Dust only gulped its rain in pellets,
The iron roof-in powder form.

The village did not hope for healing.
Deep as a swoon the poppies yearned
Among the rye in inflammation,
And God in fever tossed and turned.

In all the sleepless, universal,
The damp and orphaned latitude,
The sighs and moans, their posts deserting,
Fled with the whirlwind in pursuit.

Behind them ran blind slanting raindrops
Hard on their heels, and by the fence
The wind and dripping branches argued-
My heart stood still-at my expense.

I felt this dreadful garden chatter
Would last forever, since the street
Would also notice me, and mutter
With bushes, rain and window shutter.

No way to challenge my defeat-
They'd argue, talk me off my feet.

Boris Pasternak

Swifts (2)

At twilight the swifts have no power,
to hold back that pale blue coolness.
It bursts from throats, a clamour
an outpour that can’t grow less.

The swifts have no way, high
up there, overhead, of restraining
their clarion cries: ‘O, triumph,
see, see, how the earth’s receding!’

Like steam from a boiling kettle,
the furious flow rushes by –
‘See, see – no space for the earth
between the ravine and the sky.’

Boris Pasternak

The Earth

Spring bursts violently
into Moscow houses.
Moths flutter about
crawl on summer hats,
and furs hide secretly.

Pots of wallflowers and stock
stand, in the window, just,
of wooden second storeys,
the rooms breathe liberty,
the smell of attics is dust.

The street is friends
with the bleary glass,
and white night and sunset
at one, by the river, pass.

In the passage you'll know
what's going on below
and April's casual flow
of words with drops of thaw.

It's a thousand stories veiled
in a human sadness,
and twilight along the fence
grows chill with the tale.

Outside, or snug at home
the same fire and hesitation:
everywhere air's unsure.
The same cut willow twigs,

the same white swell of buds,
at crossroads, windows above,
in streets, and workshop-doors.

Then why does the far horizon weep
in mist, and the soil smell bitter?
After all, it's my calling, surely,
to see no distance is lonely,
and past the town boundary,
to see that earth doesn't suffer.

That's why in early spring
we meet, my friends and I,
and our evenings are – farewell documents,
our gatherings are – testaments,
so the secret stream of suffering
may warm the cold of life.

Boris Pasternak

The garden scatters burnt-up beetles...

The garden scatters burnt-up beetles
Like brazen ash, from braziers burst.
I witness, by my lighted candle,
A newly blossomed universe.

And like a not yet known religion
I enter this unheard of night,
In which the shabbily-grey poplar
Has curtained off the lunar light.

The pond is a presented secret.
Oh, whispers of the appletree!
The garden hangs-a pile construction,
And holds the sky in front of me.

Boris Pasternak

The Girl

By a cliff a golden cloud once lingered;
On his breast it slept…

From the swing, from the garden, helter-skelter,
A twig runs up to the glass.
Enormous, close, with a drop of emerald
At the tip of the cluster cast.

The garden is clouded, lost in confusion,
In staggering, teeming fuss.
The dear one, as big as the garden, a sister
By nature-a second glass!

But then this twig is brought in a tumbler
And put by the looking-glass;
Which wonders:-Who is it that blurs my vision,
From the dull, from the prison-class?

Boris Pasternak

The Linden Avenue

A house of unimagined beauty
Is set in parkland, cool and dark;
Gates with an arch; then meadows, hillocks,
And oats and woods beyond the park.

Here, with their crowns each other hiding,
Enormous linden trees engage
In dusky, quiet celebration
Of their two hundred years of age.

And underneath their vaulted branches,
Across the regularly drawn
Symmetric avenues, grow flowers
In flower-beds upon a lawn.

Beneath the trees, on sandy pathways,
Not one bright spot relieves the dark,
Save-like an opening in a tunnel-
The distant entrance of the park.

But now the blossom-time is starting,
The walled-in linden trees reveal
And spread about within their shadow
Their irresistible appeal.

The visitors, in summer clothing,
While walking on the crunchy sand,
Breathe in unfathomable fragrance
Which only bees can understand.

This gripping scent is theme and subject,
Whereas-however well they look-
The flower-beds, the lawn, the garden,
Are but the cover of a book.

The clustered, wax-bespattered flowers
On massive trees, sedate and old,
Lit up by raindrops, burn and sparkle
Above the mansion they enfold.

Boris Pasternak

The patient watches

The patient watches. Six days long
In frenzy blizzards rave relentlessly,
Roll over rooftops, roar along,
Brace, rage, and fall, collapsing senselessly.

In snowstorms Christmas is consumed.
He dreams: they came and lifted someone.
He starts: 'Whom? Me?' There was a call,
A tolling bell… Not New Year's summons?

Far, in the Kremlin, booms Ivan,
Dives, drowns, resounds in swaying motion.
He sleeps. When great, a blizzard can
Be called Pacific, as the Ocean.

Boris Pasternak

The Patient's Sweater

A life of its own and a long one is led
By this penguin, with nothing to do with the breast-
The wingless pullover, the patient's old vest;
Now pass it some warmth, move the lamp to the bed.

It dreams of the skiing; in darkness it poured
From shaftbows, from harness, from bodies; it seemed
That Christmas itself also sweated and snored;
The walking, the riding-all squeaked and all steamed.

A homestead, and horror and bareness beside,
Cut-glass in the sideboards, and carpets and chests;
The house was inflamed; this attracted the fence;
The lights swam in pleurisy, seen from outside.

Consumed by the sky, bloated shrubs on the way
Were white as a scare and had ice in their looks.
The blaze from the kitchen laid down by the sleigh
On the snow the enormous hands of the cooks.

Boris Pasternak

The Road

Down into the ravine, then forward
Up the embankment to the top,
The ribbon of the road runs snaking
Through wood and field without a stop.

By all the precepts of perspective
Well-surfaced highway windings rush
Among the fields, among the meadows,
Not raising dust, nor stuck in slush.

The peaceful pond nearby ignoring
(On which a duck with ducklings swam)
The road once more is forward soaring
On having crossed and left the dam.

Now-down a slope again it hastens,
Now-on and upwards, in a climb,
As only life, maybe, is meant to
Strain up and onward all the time.

Through thousands of unheard-of fancies,
Through times and countries, climb and fall,
Through helps and hindrances it races
Relentless, too, towards a goal;

And this is to have lived your fullest,
Experienced all-at home, abroad-
Just as the landscape now is livened
By twists and turnings of the road.

Boris Pasternak

The shiv'ring piano, foaming at the mouth

The shiv'ring piano, foaming at the mouth,
Will wrench you by its ravings, discompose you.
'My darling,' you will murmur. 'No!' I'll shout.
'To music?!' Yet can two be ever closer

Than in the dusk, while tossing vibrant chords
Into the fireplace, like journals, tome by tome?
Oh, understanding wonderful, just nod,
And you will know I do not claim to own

Your soul and body. You may go where'er
You want. To others. Werther has been written
Already. Death these days is in the air.
One opens up one's veins much like a window.

Boris Pasternak

The spring-it had simply been you

The spring-it had simply been you,
And so, to a certain extent,
The summer; but autumn-this scandalous blue
Of wallpaper? Rubbish and felt?

They lead an old horse to the knacker's yard.
His wistful, short-breathing nostrils
Are listening: wet camomile and moss,
Or maybe a whiff of horsemeat.

Imbibe with your lips and the blaze of your eyes
The transparent days' tear-stained vagueness,
Like the drift of an empty bottle of scent,
Its nostalgic lingering fragrance.

To sleep, not to argue. Despairingly
To sleep. Not to open the window
Where last summer, in frenzy, July
Was burning and glowing like jasper,
And melting the glass, and was pairing

The same crimson dragonflies,
Which now, on their nuptial beds,
Are deader and more transparent
Than crumbled dry cigarettes.

How sleepy and chilly are windows
In the twilight hours of frost.
Dry vitriol oil. At the bottom,
A gnat, and expired wasps.

How draughty the north is. How ruffled
And sulky… O whirlwind, drive,
Feel, search all the crannies and hollows,
Find me my song alive!

Boris Pasternak

The Steppe

How lovely those journeys into quiet!
Boundless the steppe, like a seascape,
ants rustle, and the feather-grass sighs,
mosquitoes go whining through space.

The hayricks line up with the clouds,
volcano after volcano, they fade.
Grown silent, damp, the boundless steppe,
you drift, you're buffeted, you sway.

The mist overtakes us, washes, a sea,
and burrs are clinging to stockings, today
it's lovely to tramp the steppe's shore,
you drift, you're buffeted, you sway.

Is that a rick in the mist? Who knows?
Is that one ours? Yes, it's found.
There! Yes, that's it all right, though.
The rick, and the mist, and the steppe all round.

And the Milky Way slants towards Kerch,
like a path that cattle have stamped on.
Go past the houses, you'll lose your breath,
on every side, broad, broad horizons.

Shadowy midnight stands by the way,
strewn with stars, that touch every verst,
and you can't cross it, beyond the fence,
without trampling the universe.

When did the stars sweep down so low,
midnight sink so deep in tall grass,
and drenched muslin, afraid, aglow,
long for a dénouement at last?

Let the steppe judge, and night decide.
When, if not in the Beginning,
did Mosquitoes whine, Ants ride,
and Burrs go clinging to stockings?

Close them, my darling! Or go blind!
The whole steppe's as before the Fall:
All, drowned in peace, like a parachute,
like a heaving vision, All.

Boris Pasternak

The Swifts (1)

The swifts have no strength any more to retain,
To check the light-blue evening coolness.
It burst from their breasts, from their throats, under strain
And flows out of hand in its fullness.

There is not a thing that could stop them, up there,
From shrilly, exultedly crying,
Exclaiming: The earth has made off to nowhere,
O look! It has vanished - O triumph!

As cauldrons of water are ended in steam
When quarrelsome bubbles are rising -
Look - there is no room for the earth - from the seam
Of the gorge to the drawn-out horizon!

Boris Pasternak

The Weeping Garden

It’s terrible! – all drip and listening.
Whether, as ever, it’s loneliness,
splashing a branch, like lace, on the window,
or whether perhaps there’s a witness.

Choked there beneath its swollen
burden – earth’s nostrils, and audibly,
like August, far off in the distance,
midnight, ripening slow with the fields.

No sound. No one’s in hiding.
Confirming its pure desolation,
it returns to its game – slipping
from roof, to gutter, slides on.

I’ll moisten my lips, listening:
whether, as ever, I’m loneliness,
and ready maybe for weeping,
or whether perhaps there’s a witness.

But, silence. No leaves trembling.
Nothing to see: sobs, and cries
being swallowed, slippers splashing,
between them, tears and sighs.

Boris Pasternak

The Wind(Four fragments concerning Blok)

1

Who'll be honoured and praised,
who'll be dead, and abused,
that's only known these days
to power's sycophantic crew.

To honour Pushkin or not:
perhaps no one would know,
were it not for their dissertations
that shed light on our darkness so.

But Blok, happily, isn't like that,
his case is a different one.
He didn't come down from Sinai
or adopt us as his sons.

Eternal, owned by no programme,
beyond systems and schools,
he's not been manufactured
or thrust down our throats by fools.

2

As the wind: like the wind. Like the wind
that shrieked on the estate in those days,
when Fil'ka, the postilion still galloped
at the head of a team of six bays.

And grandfather was still alive
crystal-pure Jacobin, radical soul,
his gusty grandson close behind
by a fingerbreadth, and as bold.

That wind, that penetrated
under his ribs, into his spirit,
entered his verse, and was praised,
in good times and in evil.

That wind's everywhere. The house,
trees, country, and rain,
in his third book of poetry,
in The Twelve, in death – the same.

3

Wide, wide, wide,
river and field stretch away.
It's haymaking time
it's communal work today.

And the mowers at the bend

have no time to stand and gaze.
The mowing made Blok wild,
the young squire grasped a scythe,

missed a hedgehog at a swipe,
then two adders were sliced.

But his lessons weren't complete.
'You idler, you slacker', they cried.
Ah, childhood! Ah, school, so dry!
Oh, the songs of the makers of hay!

At twilight, clouds from the east,
north and south are overcast.
Wind, unseasonable and fierce,
suddenly blows in, and hacks
at mower's scythes, at the reeds,
hacks at the prickly copse,
where the river bends, runs deep.

Ah, childhood! Ah, school, so dry!
Oh, the songs of the makers of hay!
Wide, wide, wide,
river and field stretch away.

4

The horizon's sinister, sudden,
and dawn is streaked with blood,
like unhealed lacerations
on a reaper's legs, dark blood.

No counting the gaps in the sky,
tempests and storms, the omen,
and the air of the marsh is high
with water that's rust and iron.

Over woods, gullies, and roads
over villages and farms,
the lightning in the clouds
prophesies earth's harm.

When the rim of the city sky
is purple like that, and rusty
the State's shaken, by and by,
a hurricane strikes our country.

Blok read the writing above.
To him the heavens were set,
on foul weather, presages of
whirlwind, cyclone, tempest.

Blok foresaw that storm and stress.
It etched, with its fiery features,
fear and longing for that excess,
on his life, and his verses.

Boris Pasternak

There'll be no one in the house...

There'll be no one in the house
Save for twilight. All alone,
Winter's day seen in the space that's
Made by curtains left undrawn.

Only flash-past of the wet white
Snowflake clusters, glimpsed and gone.
Only roofs and snow, and save for
Roofs and snow-no one at home.

Once more, frost will trace its patterns,
I'll be haunted once again
By my last year's melancholy,
By that other wintertime.

Once more, I'll be troubled by an
Old unexpiated shame,
And the icy firewood famine
Will press on the window-pane.

But the quiver of intrusion
Through those curtains folds will run.
Measuring silence with your footsteps,
Like the future, in you'll come.

You'll appear there in the doorway
Wearing something white and plain,
Something in the very stuff from
Which the snowflakes too are sewn.

Boris Pasternak

Things of great worth shall come to pass...

Things of great worth shall come to pass
By true foreknowledge and in fact,—
Names worthier than mine in fame
And words which earned me men's esteem.

Here breakers roar across the bay;
Wave follows wave unchangeably,
Their tracks, like letters traced in sand,
Erased by ebbing lines of foam.

So yet you're here at this resort.
I should have found you in this hall
At five, instead of vain small talk
I shared and wagging of my tongue.

I would have warned you, one so fair,
Mature, a woman brave and calm,
About the death in life-and bounds
No higher than the ant's low life.

Great poets, through experience,
Find words so simple and restrained
That in the end they can't do more
Than wait in silence and in awe.

In faith and kinship with real life
And with the future knit as one,
We're bound to find immortal words
Of unbelievable simplicity.

Yet keep them holy in your hearts
Or we shall not be spared at all.
Men quickly grasp the complex schemes
When simplicity's their greater need.

Boris Pasternak

Three Variants

1

When in front of you hangs the day with its
Smallest detail-fine or crude-
The intensely hot cracking squirrel-sounds
Do not cease in the resinous wood.

The high line of pine-trees stands asleep,
Drinking in and storing strength,
And the wood is peeling and drip by drip
Is shedding freckled sweat.

2

From miles of calm the garden sickens,
The stupor of the angered glen
Is more alarming than an evil
Wild storm, a frightful hurricane.

The garden's mouth is dry, and smells of
Decay, of nettles, roofing, fear…
The cattle's bellowing is closing
Its ranks. A thunderstorm is near.

3

On the bushes grow the tatters
Of disrupted clouds; the garden
Has its mouth full of damp nettles:
Such - the smell of storms and treasures.

Tired shrubs are sick of sighing.
Patches in the sky increase. The
Barefoot blueness has the gait of
Cautious herons in the marshes.

And they gleam, like lips that glisten,
When the hand forgets to wipe them:
Supple willow-switches, oak-leaves,
And the hoofprints by the horsepond.

Boris Pasternak

Thunderstorm, Instantaneous Forever

After this the halt and summer
Parted company; and taking
Off his cap at night the thunder
Took a hundred blinding stills.

Lilac clusters faded; plucking
Off an armful of new lightnings,
From the field he tried to throw them
At the mansion in the hills.

And when waves of evil laughter
Rolled along the iron roofing
And, like charcoal on a drawing,
Showers thundered on the fence,

Then the crumbling mind began to
Blink; it seemed it would be floodlit
Even in those distant comers
Where the light is now intense.

Boris Pasternak

To Anna Akhmatova

I think I can call on words
that will last: you are there.
But if I can’t, no matter –
I’ll persist, I won’t care.

I hear the muttering of wet roofs,
pale eclogues from stones and kerb.
From the opening lines, that city,
is alive in each sound, each word.

You can’t leave town though it’s spring,
and your customers won’t wait.
Dawn glows, by lamplight sewing
with unbowed back, eyes wet.

Breathing the calm of far-off Ladoga,
stumbling towards the water.
There’s no relief from such trips.
The shallows smell mustier, darker.

The wind dances, it’s a walnut shell,
a glitter, the warm wind blows
branches and stars, lights, and views,
as the seamstress watches the flow.

Eyesight can be sharp, differently,
form be precise in varying ways,
but a solvent of acid power’s
out there under the white night’s blaze.

That’s how I see your face and look.
Not that pillar of salt, in mind,
in which five years ago you fixed
our fears of looking behind.

From your first verses where grains
of clear speech hardened, to the last,
your eye, the spark that shakes the wire,
makes all things quiver with the past.
Boris Pasternak

To Boris Pilnyak

Ah, don't I know that, groping in the gloom,
Night would not find its way out of the dark?
Am I monster who the millions' doom
Would shrug away for a few hundreds' luck?

Am I not measured by the Five-Year Plan?
Its falls and rises, aren't they also mine?
What shall I do, though, with my heartbeat, and
With things whose sluggishness boggles the mind?

In highest councils, in those spheres where reign
The highest passions and the strongest will,
The poet's post has been set up in vain:
It's dangerous-unless it's left unfilled.

Boris Pasternak

To the Memory of Demon

Used to come in the blue
Of the glacier, at night, from Tamara.
With his wingtips he drew
Where the nightmares should boom, where to bar them.

Did not sob, nor entwine
The denuded, the wounded, the ailing…
A stone slab has survived
By the Georgian church, at the railings.

Hunchback shadows, distressed,
Did not dance by the fence of the temple.
Soft, about the princess
The zurna did not question the lamplight,

But the sparks in his hair
Were aglitter and bursting phosphorous,
And the giant did not hear
The dark Caucasus greying for sorrow.

Boris Pasternak

Try and don't let me grieve

Try and don't let me grieve. Come and try to extinguish
This wild onslaught of sadness that rumbles like mercury in Torricellian void.
Madness, try and forbid me to feel, come and try!
Do not let me rant on about you! We're alone-don't be shy.
Now, extinguish it, do! Only-hotter!

Boris Pasternak

Unique Days

How I remember solstice days
Through many winters long completed!
Each unrepeatable, unique,
And each one countless times repeated.

Of all these days, these only days,
When one rejoiced in the impression
That time had stopped, there grew in years
An unforgettable succession.

Each one of them I can evoke.
The year is to midwinter moving,
The roofs are dripping, roads are soaked,
And on the ice the sun is brooding.

Then lovers hastily are drawn
To one another, vague and dreaming,
And in the heat, upon a tree
The sweating nesting-box is steaming.

And sleepy clock-hands laze away
The clockface wearily ascending.
Eternal, endless is the day,
And the embrace is never-ending.

Boris Pasternak

Venice

The clatter of a cloudy pane
Awoke me in the small hours.
It hung in a gondola rank
And vacancy weighed on the oars.

The trident of hushed guitars
Was hanging like Scorpio’s stars
Above a marine horizon
Untouched by the smoking sun.

In the domain of the zodiac
The chord was a lonely sound.
Untroubled below by the trident,
The port moved its mists around.

At some time the earth had split off,
Capsized palaces gone to wrack.
A fortress loomed up like a planet;
Like a planet, houses spun back.

And the secret of life without root
I understood as the day surfaced:
My dreams and my eyes had more room
To grope on their own through the mist.

And like the foam of mad blossom
And like the foam of rabid lips
Among glimmering shadows broke loose
The chord that knew no fingertips.

Boris Pasternak

Wet Paint

'Look out! Wet paint.' My soul was blind,
I have to pay the price,
All marked with stains of calves and cheeks
And hands and lips and eyes.

I loved you more than luck or grief
Because with you in sight
The old and yellowed world became
As white as painters' white.

I swear my friend, my gloom-it will
One day still whiter gleam,
Than lampshades, than a bandaged brow,
Than a delirious dream.

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Не трогать

'Не трогать,
свежевыкрашен', -
Душа не
береглась,
И память - в
пятнах икр
и щек,
И рук, и губ, и
глаз.

Я больше
всех удач и
бед
За то тебя
любил,
Что
пожелтелый белый свет
С тобой -
белей
белил.

И мгла моя,
мой друг,
божусь,
Он станет
как-нибудь
Белей, чем
бред, чем
абажур,
Чем белый
~~~~~~~~~~~

бинт на лбу!

Boris Pasternak

When It Clears Up

The lake is like a giant saucer;
Beyond-a gathering of clouds;
Like stern and dazzling mountain-ranges
Their massif the horizon crowds.

And with the light that swiftly changes,
The landscape never stays the same.
One moment clad in sooty shadows,
The next-the woods are all aflame.

When, after days of rainy weather,
The heavy curtain is withdrawn,
How festive is the sky, burst open!
How full of triumph is the lawn!

The wind dies down, the distance lightens,
And sunshine spreads upon the grass;
The steaming foliage is translucent
Like figures in stained-window glass.

Thus from the church's narrow windows
In glimmering crowns, on spreading wings
Gaze into time in sleepless vigil
Saints, hermits, prophets, angels, kings.

The whole wide world is a cathedral;
I stand inside, the air is calm,
And from afar at times there reaches
My ear the echo of a psalm.

World, Nature, Universe's Essence,
With secret trembling, to the end,
I will thy long and moving service
In tears of happiness attend.

Boris Pasternak

White Night

I keep thinking of times that are long past,
Of a house in the Petersburg Quarter.
You had come from the steppeland Kursk Province,
Of a none-too-rich mother the daughter.

You were nice, you had many admirers.
On that distant white night we were sitting
On your window-sill, looking from high on
On the phantom-like scene of the city.

The street-lamps, like gauze butterflies fluttering,
Had been touched by the chill of the morning.
My soft words, as I opened my heart to you,
Matched the slumbering vistas before us.

We were plighted with timid fidelity
To the very same nebulous mystery
As the cityscape spreading unendingly
Far beyond the Neva, through the distances.

In that far-off impregnable wilderness,
Wrapped in springtime twilight ethereal,
Woodland glades and dense thickets were quivering
With mad nightingales' thunderous paeans.

Crazy resonant warbling ran riot,
And the voice of this plain-looking songster
Sowed derangement, ecstatic delight
In the depth of the mesmerised copsewood.

To those parts Night, a barefoot vagabond,
Stole its way along ditches and fences.
From our window-sill, after it tagging,
Was the trail of our cooed confidences.

To the words of this colloquy echoing
In the orchards beyond the tall palings
Spreading branches of apple and cherry trees
Swathed themselves in their pearly-white raiment.

And the trees, like so many pale phantoms,
Waved their farewell, along the road thronging,
To White Night, that all-seeing enchanter,
Who was now to North Regions withdrawing.

Boris Pasternak

Wind

I am no more but you live on,
And the wind, whining and complaining,
Is shaking house and forest, straining
Not single fir trees one by one
But the whole wood, all trees together,
With all the distance far and wide,
Like sail-less yachts in stormy weather
When moored within a bay they lie.
And this not out of wanton pride
Or fury bent on aimless wronging,
But to provide a lullaby
For you with words of grief and longing,

Boris Pasternak

Winter Nears

Winter nears. Once more
the bear's secret retreat
will vanish under mud's floor,
to a child's fretful grief.

Huts will wake in the water,
reflecting paths of smoke,
circled by autumn's tremor
lovers meet by the fire to talk.

Denizens of the harsh North
whose roof is the clear air,
'In this sign conquer', set forth,
marks each unreachable lair.

I love you, provincial haunts,
off the map, the road, past the farms,
the more tired and faded the book,
the greater for me its charms.

Slow files of carts lumbering by
you spell out an alphabet flowing
from meadow to meadow. And I
found you always my favourite reading.

And it's suddenly written again,
here in first snow is the spider's
cursive script, runners of sleighs,
where ice on the page embroiders.

A silvered hazel October.
Pewter glow since frost began.
Autumn twilight, of Chekhov,
Tchaikovsky, and Levitan.

Boris Pasternak

Winter Night

It snowed and snowed ,the whole world over,
Snow swept the world from end to end.
A candle burned on the table;
A candle burned.

As during summer midges swarm
To beat their wings against a flame
Out in the yard the snowflakes swarmed
To beat against the window pane

The blizzard sculptured on the glass
Designs of arrows and of whorls.
A candle burned on the table;
A candle burned.

Distorted shadows fell
Upon the lighted ceiling:
Shadows of crossed arms,of crossed legs-
Of crossed destiny.

Two tiny shoes fell to the floor
And thudded.
A candle on a nightstand shed wax tears
Upon a dress.

All things vanished within
The snowy murk-white,hoary.
A candle burned on the table;
A candle burned.

A corner draft fluttered the flame
And the white fever of temptation
Upswept its angel wings that cast
A cruciform shadow

It snowed hard throughout the month
Of February, and almost constantly
A candle burned on the table;
A candle burned.

Boris Pasternak

Winter Sky

Ice-chips plucked whole from the smoke,
the past week's stars all frozen in flight,
Head over heels the skater's club goes,
clinking its rink with the peal of night.

Step slow, slower, slow-er, skater,
pride carving its trace as you race by.
each turn's a constellation cut there,
scratched by a skate in Norway's sky.

The air is fettered in frozen iron.
Oh, skaters! There – it's all the same,
that, like snake's eyes set in ivory,
night's on earth, a domino game:

that moon, a numb hound's tongue
is there, frozen tight: that mouths like
the forgers of coins' – are stung,
filled with lava of breathtaking ice.
Boris Pasternak

With Oars at Rest

A boat is beating in the breast of the lake.
Willows hang over, tickling and kissing
Neckline and knuckles and rowlocks-O wait,
This could have happened to anyone, listen!

This could be used in a song, to beguile.
This then would mean-the ashes of lilac,
Richness of dew-drenched and crushed camomile,
Bartering lips for a start after twilight.

This is-embracing the firmament; strong
Hercules holding it, clasping still fonder.
This then would mean-whole centuries long
Fortunes for nightingales' singing to squander.

Boris Pasternak

Without A Title

So aloof, so meek in your ways,
Now you're fire, you're pure combustion.
Only let me lock up your beauty
Deep, deep down in a poem's dungeon.

See how wholly transformed they are
By the fire in the glowing lampshade;
Edge of wall, edge of window-pane,
Our own figures and our own shadows.

There you sit on cushions, apart,
Legs tucked under you, Turkish fashion.
In the light or in the shadow,
Childlike, always, the way you reason.

Dreaming, now you thread on a string
Beads that lie on your lap in profusion.
Far too sad is your mien, too artless
Is the drift of your conversation.

Yes, love's truly a vulgar word.
I'll invent something else to supplant it,
Just for you, the whole world, all words
I will gladly rename, if you want it.

Can your sorrowful mien convey
All your hidden orebearing richness,
All that radiant seam of your heart?
Why d'you fill your eyes with such sadness?

Boris Pasternak

You are disappointed? You thought...

You are disappointed? You thought that in peace we
Would part to the sound of a requiem, a swan-song?
You counted on grief, with your pupils dilated,
Their invincibility trying in tears on?

At the mass from the vaults then the murals had crumbled,
By the play on the lips of Sebastian shaken…
But tonight to my hatred all seems drawn-out dawdling,
What a pity there is not a whip for my hatred!

In darkness, collecting its wits instantaneously,
It knew without thinking: it would plough it over-
That it's time; that a suicide would be superfluous;
That this too would have been of a tortoise-like slowness.

Boris Pasternak

Your Picture

It's with your laughing picture that I'm living now,
You whose wrists are so slender and crackle at the joints,
You who wring your hands yet are unwilling to go,
You whose guests stay for hours sharing sadness and joys.

You who'll run from the cards and Rakoczy bravura,
From the glass of the drawing-room and from the guests
To the keyboard on fire, unable to endure
Bones and roses and dice and rosettes and the rest.

You will fluff up your hair, and a reckless tea-rose,
Smelling of cigarettes, pin to your bright-red sash,
And then waltz to your glory, your sadness and woes
Tossing off like a scarf, beaming, breathless and flushed.

You will crumple the skin of an orange and swallow
Cooling morsels again and again in your haste
To return to the hall, to the whirling and mellow
Lights, and air with the sweet sweat of fresh waltzes laced.

Defying steam and scorching breath
The way a whirlwind dies,
The way a murid faces death
With wide unflinching eyes.

Know all: not mountains' noise and hush,
And not a purebred steed-
The reckless roses in your sash
Are riding at full speed.

No, not the clatter of the hoofs
And not the mountains' hush,
But only she who stands aloof
With flowers in her sash.

And only that is really It
What makes our ears ring,
And what the whirlwind-chasing feet,
Soul, tulle and silk sash bring.

Until sides split the jokes are cracked,
We're rolling in the aisles,
The envy of the romping sacks-
Until somebody cries.

Boris Pasternak