

## ETHNICITY AND HISTORY IN BORIS PASTERNAK'S *DOCTOR ZHIVAGO*<sup>1</sup>

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The events of Russian history and society in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century were often viewed by both contemporaries and historiographers from the perspective of Russia's position between West and East, or in relation to Russia's internal problems arising from ethnic and religious differences. After the revolution, Soviet authorities declared the equality of all nationalities populating the Russian Empire and the abolishment of any discrimination on the basis of ethnicity. These declarations were repeated throughout the Soviet Union's 74-year history, despite the deportation of entire peoples in the 1940s and the deployment of the state's anti-Semitic campaign at the end of the 1940s, which dragged on in various forms until the end of the 1980s. Correspondingly, in *Doctor Zhivago*, problems related to the "ethnic question" both define the novel's historical context (1945–1955) and become a subject of discussion and reflection for the characters.

The revolutionary movement in Russia at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century is shown in Pasternak's novel not only through the prism of the political parties, worker's unions (the railroad strike), and youth ("young men shoot"), but also in "ethnic colors". Thus, the wife of a terrorist serving hard labor and mother of one of Zhivago's friends, Innokenty Dudorov, is "a Georgian princess of the Eristov family, a spoiled and beautiful woman, still young and always infatuated with <...> rebellions, rebels, extremist theories" [DZ: 18]. According to her son, in summer 1903 she "was having a lovely time in Petersburg with the students shooting at the police". Another example of revolutionary spirit with a distinctively "Polish" hue is found in Komarovsky's acquaintance, Ruffina

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Onissimovna Voit-Voitkovskys, lawyer and wife of a “political emigrant”, in whose apartment he settles Lara after she shoots at the Sventintsky family’s Christmas party:

Ruffina Onissimovna was a woman of advanced views, entirely unprejudiced, and well disposed toward everything that she called “positive and vital”.

On top of her chest of drawers she kept a copy of the Erfurt Program with a dedication by the author. One of the photographs on the wall showed her husband, “her good Voit”, in a popular park in Switzerland, together with Plekhanov, both in alpaca jackets and panama hats [DZ: 92–93].

However, it is of note that in Pasternak’s novel, the characters’ Polish roots are not necessarily connected to an obvious revolutionary spirit. Neither the musician Fadei Kazimirovich Tyshkevich, who became the reason for Yura and Lara’s first meeting, nor the Sventitskys themselves, though the wife bears a most likely Polish name, Feliciata, are in any way connected with the revolutionary movement.

In addition to Georgian and Polish participation in the revolutionary movement, the novel also mentions participation by Jews, though, naturally, the Jewish theme cannot be boiled down to a primitive attribution to Jews of a dominant role in or responsibility for the revolution.

Through the arguments of both central and peripheral characters, Pasternak conveys an attitude towards the Jewish question, the historical fate of the Jewish people, and the particular circumstances of the Jewish population of the Russian Empire that is typical of Russian society at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The present position of Jews in Russia and the attitudes of Russian society toward them is the subject of a large body of literature; see the works of modern historians [Слѣзкин; Миллер; Будницкий; Гольдин; Гительман].

In Pasternak’s novel, the Krestovozdvizhensk (a town controlled by Kolchak, in the chapter entitled “The Highway”) shopkeeper Galuzina directly considers Jewish participation in the revolution. She falls to musing as she walks past an old, settling “on four sides, like an old coach” two-story house, where the tailor Shmulevich and the pharmacist Zalkind live and the photographer’s assistant, Magidson, works — here Pasternak chooses recognizably Jewish surnames, and underscores the dilapidation, crowdedness, and poverty of the house<sup>2</sup>:

<sup>2</sup> See Yu. Slezkine’s book about Jewish stereotypes in the Russian empire based “on actual differences in economic roles and cultural values”: “From the opposite perspective <...> intellect, moderation, rationalism, and devotion to family <...> can seem like slyness, cowardice, chicanery, unmanliness, tribalism, and greed <...>” [Слѣзкин: 146].

< ... > downstairs were Zalkind's pharmacy on the right and a notary's office on the left. Above the pharmacist lived old Shmulevich, a ladies' tailor, with his big family. The flat across the landing from Shmulevich, and above the notary, was crammed with lodgers whose trades and professions were stated on cards and signs covering the whole of the door. Here watches were mended and shoes cobbled; here Kamin-sky, the engraver, had his workroom and two photographers, Zhuk and Shtrodakh, worked in partnership. As the first-floor premises were overcrowded, the photographers' young assistants, Blazhein, a student, and Magidson, who retouched the photographs, had fixed up a darkroom at one end of the large woodshed in the yard [DZ: 311–312].

Galuzina is not prepared to see Jews as a cause of revolution and civil war, as does her husband, the “anti-Semite” Vlas Pakhomovich, supposing that they are too insignificant to have a defining influence on the fate of the country. The reason for the “collapse”, in her opinion, is in the cities, education, and everything traditionally associated with the influence of Western Europe:

“There they all are in a pack, the whole Kehillah”, thought Galuzina as she passed the grey house. “It’s a den of filthy beggars”. And yet, she reflected at once, her husband carried his Jew-hating too far. After all, these people were not important enough to affect Russia’s destinies. Though, if you asked old Shmulevich why he thought the country was in such turmoil and disorder, he would twist and turn and contort his ugly face into a grin and say: “That’s Leibochka up to his tricks”<sup>3</sup>.

Oh, but what nonsense was she wasting her time thinking about? Did they matter? Were they Russia’s misfortune? Her misfortune was the towns. Not that the country stood or fell by the towns. But the towns were educated, and the country people had their heads turned, they envied the education of the towns and tried to copy their ways and could not catch up with them, so now they were neither one thing nor the other.

Or perhaps it was the other way around, perhaps ignorance was the trouble? An educated man can see through walls, he knows everything in advance, while the rest of us are like people in a dark wood. We only miss our hats when our heads have been chopped off. Not that the educated people were having an easy time now. Look at the way the famine was driving them out of the towns! How confusing all this was! Even the devil couldn’t make head or tail of it! [DZ: 312].

Notably, the circumstances of the plot here seem to partly contradict Galuzina’s thoughts – in the darkroom of the photographer’s assistants “illegal meetings” are taking place, with lectures by the Bolshevik propagandist “comrade Lidochka” [DZ: 316].

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<sup>3</sup> This is the only mention in the novel of L. D. Trotsky, connecting an ironic context with the widespread impression of Trotsky as the symbolic embodiment of the “Jewish” beginning of the Russian Revolution.

Lara also talks about Jewish involvement in the revolution when she assesses the historical mission of the Jewish nation and their role in modern history, all while noting the painful paradox of their inability to free themselves from themselves:

It's so strange that these people who once liberated mankind from the yoke of idolatry, and so many of whom now devote themselves to its liberation from injustice, should be incapable of liberating themselves from their loyalty to an obsolete, antediluvian identity that has lost all meaning, that they should not rise above themselves and dissolve among all the rest whose religion they have founded and who would be so close to them, if they knew them better.

Of course it's true that persecution forces them into this futile and disastrous attitude, this shamefaced, self-denying isolation that brings them nothing but misfortune. But I think some of it also comes from a kind of inner senility, a historical centuries-long weariness. I don't like their ironical whistling in the dark, their prosaic, limited outlook, the timidity of their imagination. It's as irritating as old men talking of old age or sick people about sickness. Don't you think so? [DZ: 300].

Lara's words express an evaluation of the role of Russian Jews in the revolution that is free of Galuzina's rude primitiveness, yet at the same time views Jews as outsiders, in the manner of the "intelligentsia", a perspective S. Goldin calls the "racial" view in public discourse [ГОЛЬДИН: 378]. Jewish manners of behavior, speech, and self-presentation are clearly unpleasant to the novel's heroine. At the same time, Lara's words about the Jewish nation's role in "the victory over idolatry" (similar to Vedenyapin's discussion of "history" beginning at the advent of Christ) essentially reproduce the views espoused in well-known texts of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century (which were undoubtedly known to Pasternak)<sup>4</sup>. At the very least, recall what Vl. S. Solovyov wrote in 1890, quoting B. Chicherin's letter:

"In my opinion", Boris Nikolaevich Chicherin writes to me, "there is no other people in the world to whom humanity owes more thanksgiving than the Jews. Suffice it to say that Christianity arose from among them, revolutionizing World History. No matter what one's opinion of religion, there is no doubt that the book which serves as the ultimate spiritual food for many millions of people belonging to a higher order of Humanity, the Bible, is of Jewish origin. The Greeks gave us secular education, but the Greeks disappeared, while the Jews, despite untold persecutions and scatterings across the Earth, have preserved inviolable their nationality and their faith <...>" [СОЛОВЬЕВ: 299].

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<sup>4</sup> See further [ГОЛЬДИН: 382–383].

Lara's words about Jewish participation in the revolution also recall the opinions of many of Pasternak's contemporaries. For example, consider N. A. Berdyaev's article "Christianity and Antisemitism", published in 1938:

<...> Jews, of course, played no small part in the revolution and its preparation. The oppressed will always play a big role in revolutions, oppressed nationalities and oppressed classes. The proletariat has always actively participated in revolutions. It is to the Jews' credit that they participated in the fight for a more just social order [Бердяев: 327].

In answer to Lara's words, Zhivago remembers his friend: "I haven't thought about it much. I have a friend, Misha Gordon, who thinks as you do" [DZ: 300].

Of all the novel's characters, it is Gordon who considers most deeply the position of Jews in the modern world as a whole and in Russia in particular. In the first chapter, "The Five-O'Clock Express", this character, still a youth, reflects on the incomprehensible and unnatural isolation of Jews, for whom "a higher sense of an ultimate freedom from care" and "the feeling that all human lives were interrelated" are inaccessible, unable to bring a sense of happiness based on the belief that "all events took place not only on earth, in which the dead are buried, but also in some other region which some call the Kingdom of God, others history, and still others by some other name" [DZ: 13]<sup>5</sup>.

Misha felt himself to be an "unhappy, bitter exception" to this world. At that (compare to Lara's reflections), he sees in himself ethnic features inherited from his elders: "A feeling of care remained his ultimate mainspring <...> He knew this hereditary trait in himself and watched with an alert diffidence for symptoms of it in himself" [DZ: 13]. He sees this very trait in his own father, upon whom, it seems to him, other passengers look with disapproval after the suicide of Andrey Zhivago:

Now, for instance, no one had the courage to say that his father should not have run after that madman when he had rushed out onto the platform, and should not have stopped the train when, pushing Grigory Osipovich aside, and flinging open the

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<sup>5</sup> Note how closely the words Pasternak puts in Gordon's mouth on Christianity as a path to unity, harmony, and freedom mirror O. Mandelstam's 1915 work, "Skryabin and Christianity", in which Mandelstam juxtaposes Judeo-Christian and ancient cultures: "Christianity did not fear music. With a smile, the Christian world said to Dionysus, 'Well then, try, lead your maenad to break me: I am all integrity, all identity, all welded unity!' The new music had such strength in this confidence in the final triumph of the individual, whole and intact. This confidence in personal salvation, I would say, is a part of Christian music <...>" [Мандельштам: 38]. The provisions of this article are similar to the ideas about the connections between Christianity, freedom, and art in Pasternak's novel. M. L. Gasparov associates the reasoning in this article with Mandelstam's contrasting of Christianity and Judaism [Гаспаров: 195].

door, he had thrown himself head first out of the express like a diver from a spring-board into a swimming pool.

But since it was his father who had pulled the emergency release, it looked as if the train had stopped for such an inexplicably long time because of them [DZ: 13–14].

It is as if Gordon admits the right of those around him to dislike Jews and, at the same time, can't understand why they do so:

For as long as he could remember, he had never ceased to wonder why, having arms and legs like everyone else, and a language and way of life common to all, one could be different from the others, liked only by a few and, moreover, loved by no one. He could not understand a situation in which if you were worse than other people you could not make an effort to improve yourself. What did it mean to be a Jew? What was the purpose of it? What was the reward or the justification of this impotent challenge, which brought nothing but grief?

When Misha took the problem to his father he was told that his premises were absurd, and that such reasonings were wrong, but he was offered no solution deep enough to attract him or to make him bow silently to the inevitable [DZ: 13].

The boy firmly decides that in the future, these questions will be “straightened out”.

It is significant in *Doctor Zhivago* that Gordon wants to overcome his isolation from the Christian world, which is happy in its “freedom from care”, since for those that belong to that world death is merely a transition to the Kingdom of God (eternal life) or, put another way, to history. In almost the same words, again in “The Five-O’Clock Express”, Nikolay Nikolaevich Vedenyapin, Yura’s uncle, explains the meaning of life for the modern man, which consists in overcoming death. This requires, in his words, “spiritual equipment”, represented by the Gospel, which carries in itself the “still extraordinarily new” ideas of love of one’s neighbor as the highest form of “life energy,” and of “free personality” and “life as sacrifice”:

It was not until after the coming of Christ that time and man could breathe freely.

It was not until after Him that men began to live toward the future. Man does not die in a ditch like a dog — but at home in history, while the work toward the conquest of death is in full swing; he dies sharing in this work [DZ: 10].

It is unsurprising that Misha Gordon becomes an ardent follower of Nikolay Nikolaevich in Moscow, passionate about the ideas in his new books, produced in Lausanne “in Russian and in translations”, in which he developed “his old view of history as another universe, made by man with the help of time and memory in answer to the challenge of death. These works were inspired by a new interpretation of Christianity, and led directly to a new conception of art” [DZ: 66]. Under the influence of these ideas, Gordon chooses “to regis-

ter at the Faculty of Philosophy. He attended lectures on theology, and even considered transferring later to the theological academy” [DZ: 66]<sup>6</sup>.

However, in Zhivago’s opinion, these hobbies and activities reveal Gordon’s ethnic identity, which, as before, does not allow him to be free of what seem to Yura to be “extravagant ideas” (he is deprived of what Misha himself in childhood called “freedom from care”):

Yura advanced and became freer under the influence of his uncle’s theories, but Misha was fettered by them. Yura realized that his friend’s enthusiasms were partly *accounted for by his origin*. Being tactful and discreet, he made no attempt to talk him out of his extravagant ideas. But he often wished that Misha were a realist, more down-to-earth [Ibid., italics added].

Zhivago and Gordon finally have a reason to talk about this after they witness a terrible scene of abuse of an elderly Jew by a Cossack near the front:

In one village they saw a young Cossack surrounded by a crowd laughing boisterously, as the Cossack tossed a copper coin into the air, forcing an old Jew with a gray beard and a long caftan to catch it. The old man missed every time. The coin flew past his pitifully spread-out hands and dropped into the mud. When the old man bent to pick it up, the Cossack slapped his bottom, and the onlookers held their sides, groaning with laughter: this was the point of the entertainment. For the moment it was harmless enough, but no one could say for certain that it would not take a more serious turn. Every now and then, the old man’s wife ran out of the house across the road, screaming and stretching her arms out to him, and ran back again in terror. Two little girls were watching their grandfather out of the window and crying.

The driver, who found all this extremely comical, slowed down so that the passengers could enjoy the spectacle. But Zhivago called the Cossack, bawled him out, and ordered him to stop baiting the old man.

“Yes, sir”, he said readily. “We meant no harm, we were only doing it for fun” [DZ: 118–119].

Fyodor Stepun describes almost the same picture of abuse of Jews on the front to the joyous approval of onlookers. Unlike Pasternak, Stepun was a direct participant in military operations. Stepun’s book *From the Letters of an Artillery Ensign*, quoted below, was known to Pasternak<sup>7</sup>:

Galicia in spring, perfect weather. A lousy sled rushed at a gallop along the rocky mountain road. In the sled sat a young Cossack, a brash curl blown out from under his hat. Upon the skinny nag harnessed to the sled, whose ribs stuck out like broken

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<sup>6</sup> These words lead the reader to understand that Gordon has converted to Christianity.

<sup>7</sup> He mentions it in a letter to Stepun dated May 30, 1958 [Пастернак: 328].

mattress springs, trembled a ragged old Yid with gray side curls and a face petrified with terror. With a long whip, the Cossack lashed the Yid upon the back, and the Yid passed the blow to the horse.

To the uproarious laughter of a group of soldiers and most of the officers, this pogrom ghost disappeared beyond a bend in the road.

I saw this myself, this is an eyewitness account. On the highway, crisscrossed by abandoned Austrian trenches, a Cossack and a soldier met. Stopping, the soldier complained to the Cossack that he had no boots and none were to be found. The Cossack's first suggestion was to look in the trenches to see whether there were any on the corpses (the trenches were reliable warehouses, and the corpses the only honest commissaries). Just then a Yid with shoes appeared on the highway. The Cossack instantly thought to magnanimously give the soldier the "Yiddish" boots. Said and done. The Yid attempted to protest. The Cossack was outraged, and his "ethnic sense of humor" suggested the following joke to him: "pull down your pants", he said to the soldier. Understanding his comrade's idea, the soldier quickly followed the order. "Kiss his ass and thank us for leaving you alive", the Cossack shouted at the Yid, brandishing his fist at him. Utterly dumbfounded, the Yid unquestioningly did as he was told, after which all three went their separate ways.

It is terrible that all this could happen. It is more terrible that an officer could be a witness to it. But most terrible of all is that the tale was a huge success with the narrator's audience as he placidly related it over brandy [Сренун: 76–77].

It is of note that the parallel episode in Pasternak's novel uses the main character's words to give an accurate historical account explaining why, in 1914–1917, the residents of the Pale, across which the front line continually moved, where subjected to even greater hardship than before<sup>8</sup>:

You can't imagine what the wretched Jewish population is going through in this war. The fighting happens to be in their Pale. And as if punitive taxation, the destruction of their property, and all their other sufferings were not enough, they are subjected to pogroms, insults, and accusations that they lack patriotism<sup>9</sup>. And why

<sup>8</sup> "World war brought multiple disasters to the Jewish population of the Pale. In addition to the hardships of war that were common to all residents of the western suburbs, Jews suffered from the extremely hostile attitude of the military authorities. On a mass scale they were forcibly evicted from the war zone" [Миллер: 143]. "Around 250,000 people were deported; another 350,000 fled to the hinterland" [Будницкий: 334].

<sup>9</sup> Regarding this, see "<...> in the first months of the war <...> Jews were accused of disloyalty and it was announced that they would be evicted from the cities in the war zone and the surrounding area. Jewish hostages were taken and held responsible for the actions of all Jews. Jews <...> were called to fight for Russia, and at the same time were accused of disloyalty to her" [Гительман: 81]. Cf. Yu. Slezkine: "Over the course of the war more than a million residents of the Russian Empire were — by reason of their citizenship, ethnicity, or religion — expelled from their homes and subjected to, among other things, deportation, internment, police surveillance, and confiscation of property. The vast majority of these were Germans and Jews, who were seen as potential



should they be patriotic? Under enemy rule, they enjoy equal rights, and we do nothing but persecute them. This hatred of them, the basis of it, is irrational. It is stimulated by the very things that should arouse sympathy — their poverty, their overcrowding, their weakness, and this inability to fight back. I can't understand it. It's like an inescapable fate [DZ: 119].

Like Lara, Zhivago thus speaks of the reasons for anti-Semitism, seeing them, paradoxically, in the features of the Jews themselves.

Accordingly, on the one hand, the world and civil war in *Doctor Zhivago* occasion the even more painful rise of old inter-ethnic and inter-religious conflicts. On the other hand, due to the partial destruction of the habitual framework of the social hierarchy, fundamental changes in social roles became possible at this time.

In its depiction of the events of 1905, the novel describes railway workshop foreman Piotr Khudoleiev's abuse of a young apprentice, the son of Gimazetdin, a janitor in Moscow. Khudoleiev's abuse has a distinctly "ethnic" undertone:

"Is that the way to hold a file, you *Asiatic*?" bellowed Khudoleiev, dragging Yusupka by the hair and pummeling the back of his neck. "Is that the way to strip down a casting, you *slit-eyed Tartar*?" [DZ: 30, italics added].

In 1914 the "locksmith's student"

on getting his commission, he had found himself, against his will and for no reason that he knew of, in a soft job in a small-town garrison behind the lines. There he commanded a troop of semi-invalids whom instructors as decrepit as themselves took every morning through the drill they had forgotten [DZ: 113]<sup>10</sup>.

However, the lieutenant's "carefree life" ends when

<...> among the replacements consisting of older reservists sent from Moscow and put under his orders, there turned up the all too familiar figure of Piotr Khudoleiev <...>

It was impossible that this should be the end of it. The very first time the lieutenant caught the private in a fault at drill he bawled him out, and when it seemed to him that his subordinate was not looking him straight in the eye but somehow sideways, he hit him in the jaw and put him on bread and water in the guardhouse for two days.

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traitors due to their family ties to subjects of the enemy states" [Слѣзкин: 220]. William Fuller writes about the spread among the public of the belief in the "rampant" espionage of the Jewish population during World War I [Фуллер].

<sup>10</sup> This description recalls A. S. Pushkin's depiction of the training of the "invalid" soldiers at the Belogorskaya fortress in *The Captain's Daughter* (see [Смирнов: 324]).

From now on every move of Galiullin's smacked of revenge. But this game, in their respective positions and with rules enforced by the stick, struck Galiullin as unsporting and mean. What was to be done? Both of them could not be in the same place <...> Giving the boredom and uselessness of garrison duty as his reasons, he asked to be sent to the front. This earned him a good mark, and when, at the first engagement, he showed his other qualities it turned out that he had the makings of an excellent officer and he was quickly promoted to first lieutenant [DZ: 113–114].

In 1918 he becomes commander of the troops of the Constituent Assembly. Strelnikov speaks first about the vicissitudes of Galiullin's and his own destinies, created by the circumstances of the civil war:

It all seems more like playing at war than serious business, because they are as Russian as we are, only stuffed with nonsense — they won't give up, so we have to beat it out of them. Their commander was my friend. His origin is even more proletarian than mine. We grew up in the same house. He has done a great deal for me in my life and I am deeply indebted to him. And here I am rejoicing that we have thrown them back beyond the river and perhaps even farther [DZ: 249].

In describing to Yurii Andreevich how many people she helped with the help of an "old friend" (Galiullin), Lara also speaks about the way in which destinies can unexpectedly intertwine ("It's only in mediocre books that people are divided into two camps and have nothing to do with each other. In real life everything gets mixed up!" [DZ: 298]):

You can't think how many people I managed to save, thanks to him, how many I hid. In all fairness, he behaved perfectly, chivalrously, not like all those small fry — little Cossack captains, policemen, and what not. Unfortunately, it was the small fry who set the tone, not the decent people. Galiullin helped me a lot, bless him. We are old friends, you know. When I was a little girl I often went to the house where he grew up. Most of the tenants were railway workers. I saw a lot of poverty as a child. That's why my attitude to the revolution is different from yours. It's closer to me. There's a lot of it I understand from the inside. But that Galiullin, that the son of a janitor should become a White Colonel — perhaps even a General! There aren't any soldiers in my family, I don't know much about army ranks [DZ: 297].

Lara's efforts are inspired, in part, by the "harassment and beatings of the Jews" [DZ: 300] by the Whites, which is also the reason for her reflections, quoted above. Jewish people, in her judgment, make up a significant part of the cities' intelligentsia ("if you do intellectual work of any kind and live in a town,

as we do, half of your friends are bound to be Jews”<sup>11</sup>. Like Zhivago and Gordon, Lara believes that even with all the repulsiveness of the pogroms<sup>12</sup>, sympathy for their victims can’t help but mix with a feeling of alienation<sup>13</sup>, the cause of which young Misha sought in his contemplations at the beginning of the novel and which he aspired to overcome at any cost.

As noted above, Zhivago sees an “inescapable fate” in this, while Gordon, in discussing with his friend the Cossack’s abuse of the old Jew, formulates in detail the cause of the alienation. He asserts that the only path to the unity of humanity is not in the equality of peoples (as the Soviet authorities will declare):

When the Gospel says that in the Kingdom of God there are neither Jews nor Gentiles, does it merely mean that all are equal in the sight of God? No — the Gospel wasn’t needed for that — the Greek philosophers, the Roman moralists, and the Hebrew prophets had known this long before [DZ: 122].

The hoped-for unity of humanity presupposes a rejection of the very idea of belonging to a nation as something already passed:

And now I’ll tell you what I think about that incident we saw today. That Cossack tormenting the poor patriarch — and there are thousands of incidents like it — of course it’s an ignominy — but there’s no point in philosophizing, you just hit out. But the Jewish question as a whole — there philosophy does come in — and then we discover something unexpected. Not that I’m going to tell you anything new — we both got our ideas from your uncle.

You were saying, what is a nation?.. And who does more for a nation — the one who makes a fuss about it or the one who, without thinking of it, raises it to universality by the beauty and greatness of his actions, and gives it fame and immortality? <...> And what are the nations now, in the Christian era? They aren’t just nations, but converted, transformed nations, and what matters is this transformation, not loyalty to ancient principles. And what does the Gospel say on this subject? To begin with, it does not make assertions: “It’s like this and that”. It is a proposal, naive and timid: “Do you want to live in a completely new way? Do you want spiritual happiness?” And everybody accepted, they were carried away by it for thousands of years [DZ: 121–122].

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<sup>11</sup> Cf.: “The Jews who had fled their homes not only became students, artists, and professionals; they — including the majority of students, artists, and professionals — became “intelligentsia” [Слѣзкин: 186], cf.: [Ibid.: 284].

<sup>12</sup> Cf.: “For the Whites, among whom Russian nationalists and sovereign revenge-seekers dominated, Jews personified everything that had previously been called ‘German’ <...> and, of course, Bolshevism” [Слѣзкин: 228].

<sup>13</sup> “Yet in times when there are pogroms, when all these terrible, despicable things are done, we don’t only feel sorry and indignant and ashamed, we feel wretchedly divided, as if our sympathy came more from the head than from the heart and had an aftertaste of insincerity” [DZ: 300].

Gordon emphasizes that his reasoning builds directly on the ideas of Nikolay Nikolaevich Vedenyapin<sup>14</sup> (“Not that I’m going to tell you anything new — we both got our ideas from your uncle”); he is convinced that the Gospel opens a new world to humanity:

“But it said: In that new way of living and new form of society, which is born of the heart, and which is called the Kingdom of Heaven, there are no nations, there are only individuals” [DZ: 122].

In this precise moment, the thoughts of the young Misha are repeated again — “all events took place <...> in some other region which some called the Kingdom of God, others history <...>” [DZ: 13]. Gordon sees the Jews’ problem precisely in their attachment to feeling like a people:

Their national idea has forced them, century after century, to be a nation and nothing but a nation — and they have been chained to this deadening task all through the centuries when all the rest of the world was being delivered from it by a new force which had come out of their own midst! Isn’t that extraordinary? How can you account for it? Just think! This glorious holiday, this liberation from the curse of mediocrity, this soaring flight above the dullness of a humdrum existence, was first achieved in their land, proclaimed in their language, and belonged to their race! And they actually saw and heard it and let it go! How could they allow a spirit of such overwhelming power and beauty to leave them, how could they think that after it triumphed and established its reign, they would remain as the empty husk of that miracle they had repudiated? What use is it to anyone, this voluntary martyrdom? Whom does it profit? For what purpose are these innocent old men and women and children, all these subtle, kind, humane people, mocked and beaten up throughout the centuries? And why is it that all these literary friends of ‘the people’ of all nations are always so untalented? Why didn’t the intellectual leaders of the Jewish people ever go beyond facile *Weltschmerz* and ironical wisdom? Why have they not — even at the risk of bursting like boilers with the pressure of their duty — disbanded this army which keeps on fighting and being massacred nobody knows for what? Why don’t they say to them: “Come to your senses, stop. Don’t hold on to your identity. Don’t stick together, disperse. Be with all the rest. You are the first and best Christians in the world. You are the very thing against which you have been turned by the worst and weakest among you” [DZ: 122–123].

Symbolically, Pasternak formulated all these arguments for his characters at a time when the state ideology of “internationalism” was still preserved in words, but in reality was being supplanted by ideas of a specifically interpreted “nationality” (this process began as early as the second half of the 1930s),

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<sup>14</sup> L. Katsis connects the origin of Gordon’s and Vedenyapin’s ideas with the statements of G. Kogen and his Muscovite students [Кацис].

which, in part, transformed into a new anti-Semitism, renamed the “fight against rootless cosmopolitanism”. Pasternak wrote a novel in which the “best” characters speak both of the shamefulness of anti-Semitism, and of the fact that genuine, rather than official, “internationalism” is achieved not through social revolution, not through ideological propaganda, nor even through the abolition of the Pale and other such administrative and legal restrictions in the Russian Empire, but only through liberation from the idea of nation (ethnicity), achieved through “faith in Christ” and faith in the idea of “free personality”.

In the epilogue, it is Gordon who, having clearly felt from the very beginning of the novel a lack of freedom arising from national isolation, in reading a notebook of Zhivago’s poems, feels that they contain the “portents of freedom” that alone “defined [the] historical significance” of the postwar period [DZ: 519]. This is a reference to that long-lasting historical period in which it seemed to so many Russian intellectuals (and not without reason) that the new nationalism of the Soviet state took on an unassailable form.

Zhivago’s poems bring a sense of freedom to two characters that appeared in the first part of the book, Gordon and Dudorov:

To the two old friends, as they sat by the window, it seemed that this freedom of the soul was already there, as if that very evening the future had tangibly moved into the streets below them, that they themselves had entered it and were now part of it. Thinking of this holy city and of the entire earth, of the still-living protagonists of this story, and their children, they were filled with tenderness and peace, and they were enveloped by the unheard music of happiness that flowed all about them and into the distance. And the book they held seemed to confirm and encourage their feeling [DZ: 519].

It turns out that just as Gordon’s thoughts about the fate of Jews are generated by Nikolay Nikolaevich Vedenyapin’s ideas about the free personality, a new Christianity, and a new conception of art (in many ways connected to the views of Vl. S. Solovyov, N. A. Berdyaev<sup>15</sup>, and, in part, of O. Mandelstam), it is Gordon who receives the feeling of freedom from his friend’s poetry. The poems of Yurii Zhivago thus complete the “work” about which Misha dreamed in his childhood.

*Translated by Allison Rockwell*

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<sup>15</sup> A. V. Lavrov wrote about the possible contiguity of “sources” for the philosophies of N. N. Vedenyapin and Vl. S. Solovyov and N. Berdyaev [Лавров: 329–332].

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