Megan Swift

Writing the Manuscript: Pasternak's 'Povest'' (1929)

The task of prose is to connect man and his historical era, writes Boris Pasternak in a precocious theory of art titled 'Several Propositions' (1918).[1] At the time of composition he was a fledgling prose writer with one published story.[2] But over the following four decades of a literary career culminating in the famously-refused Nobel Prize for Literature in 1958, the representation of man and the age indeed became a hallmark theme of Pasternak's writing, developing into the even more complex question of the writer and the Revolution. Pasternak's novel *Doctor Zhivago* (1957) is a sustained reflection on this topic, but a much earlier attempt can be found in 'The Tale' (1929).[3] With its various incarnations spanning the 1920s, 'The Tale' represents a fascinating laboratory of open-ended queries and formulations that anticipate the responses of Pasternak's mature prose.[4]

For Pasternak the ethical question of the artist's place in the revolutionary era became entangled with the aesthetic question of how to describe that era in verse, prose, or any language at all. This difficult problem – how to create an unprecedented art appropriate to an unprecedented era – preoccupied many of the bellicose literary factions at the time, and belies the Party's calm certainty,

[1] 'Several Propositions' was written in 1918 and published in the first issue of *The Contemporary*, 1922: 'Poetry and prose are two polarities, indivisible one from another. Through its inborn hearing, poetry seeks out the melody of nature amid the noise of the lexicon, and picking it up like some motif, it proceeds to improvise on that theme. *By its feeling, through its spirituality, prose seeks and finds man in the category of speech. And when man is found lacking in an age, then it re-creates him from memory and sets him there and pretends for the good of mankind to have found him in the present*'. My italics. Boris Pasternak, *Collected Short Prose*, ed. Christopher Barnes (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1977), 262.

[2] Pasternak's first published story, "The Apelles Mark" was written in 1915 and printed in *Znamia truda*, Moscow, 1918.

[3] *Doctor Zhivago* was first published in 1957 by Giangiacomo Feltrinelli (Milan). The first English-language publication was in 1958, by Wm. Collins Sons and Co., Ltd., (London) and Pantheon Books (London). It was published in the Soviet Union for the first time in 1988, in *Novy mir*.

[4] Beginning in 1922, Pasternak attempted, in prose and in poetry, to write about a young hero named Sergei (Seriozha) Spektorsky. The trilogy of works dealing with this hero, 'Three Chapters from a Story' (1922), *Spektorsky* (1924–31) and 'The Tale' (1929), are dealt with at greater length in the body of this article.

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expressed in the Party Resolution on Literature (1925), that a literary style 'appropriate to our epoch'[5] was imminent and inevitable. Pasternak published an immediate response to the 1925 Resolution, citing his own intention to breathe the 'air of history'.[6] Despite an extended attempt to deal with revolutionary themes in four epic poems spanning 1924–31,[7] Pasternak was still struggling with the air of history when he proposed to describe the Russian Revolution in 'The Tale' ('Povest'), originally conceived under the title 'Revolution'.[8] Opening in the winter of 1916, 'The Tale' stubbornly refused to move forward into the revolutionary era Pasternak intended to depict. Instead, the story moved ineluctably backwards to the summer of 1914. Worse, promising revolutionary characters, among them a brave marine and an iron-willed Bolshevik, refused to develop, while 'The Tale' devoted its pages to a dreamy, artistic hero and his transformative attempt to write a story. Some thirty years later, in *Doctor Zhivago*, Pasternak finally began to untangle the skein of ethical and aesthetic questions that had overwhelmed his work in the 1920s. He found a language to describe the post-1917 years in Russia, he explored the question of the artist's place in the Revolution and he successfully developed the revolutionary hero Pasha Antipov. He also found a way to overcome the dilemma of *dopisyvanie*, or the problem of how to write his story to the end. Indeed the period between 'The Tale' and *Doctor Zhivago*, that is, between 1929 and 1957, can be described as a journey from draft manuscript to fair copy.

The purpose of this article is to return to the critical point of 1929, to examine in some depth the strategies at work in 'The Tale' and to trace the trajectory that allowed Pasternak to travel forward from crisis to resolution. With its extraordinarily fecund system of writing imagery, 'The Tale' is proposed not only as Pasternak's most intensely metafictional prose of the 1920s, but also as a text whose proliferating and open-ended writing about writing supplies an evasive

[5] See Pasternak's 'Apropos of the Central Committee's Resolution on Literature' in Pasternak 1977, 263.

[6] Pasternak 1977, 263–5.

[7] The four *poemy* written in this period are: *High Malady* (1924), *The Year 1905* (1927), *Lieutenant Schmidt* (1927) and *Spektorsky* (1931).

[8] 'Revolution' was proposed as the title for the work in a letter to Pavel Medvedev of 28 February 1929. Boris Pasternak, *Sobranie sochinenii v piati tomakh*, ed. A. A. Voznesenskii, D. S. Likhachev, D. F. Mamleev and E. B. Pasternak (Moskva: Khudozhestvennaia proza, 1989–92), Vol. 5, 261.

strategy for engaging the contemporary historical era, and indeed, for completion. 'The Tale' is not treated in David Shepherd's 1992 *Beyond Metafiction: Self-Consciousness in Soviet Literature*. In this important study, Shepherd argues that within the well-mapped territory of metafiction theory and practice, Russian texts remain significantly under-explored.[9] In addition to addressing this gap in the study of self-conscious fiction, Shepherd is keen to refute critics who read metafictional devices as an expression of the autonomy of art, advocating, instead, a reorientation from hermetic text to ideological and political context. Shepherd reads works by Leonov, Shaginyan, Vaginov and Kaverin in terms of the shift, identified by the critic Boris Eikhenbaum in the 1920s, from 'how to write' to 'how to be a writer'.[10] For Shepherd, the proliferation of author-figures in Soviet literature of the late 1920s and early 1930s signals a redirection towards context and necessitates a theoretical framework that is readily supplied by Bakhtin's work on socially and historically grounded discourse in the novel.[11] The only work by Pasternak that is included in Shepherd's study is the other prose written in 1929, the autobiographical *A Safe Conduct*, which, like 'The Tale', deals with the relationship between the writer and the epoch and contains Pasternak's famous formulation that the best works of literature, 'even as they speak of the most diverse things, are in fact telling of their own birth'.[12] While Shepherd seeks

[9] A very broad definition of metafictional writing is a text that refers to itself 'in an endless mirroring process'. Linda Hutcheon, *Narcissistic Narrative: The Metafictional Paradox* (Waterloo: Sir Wilfred Laurier Press, 1984), xii. A metafictional work also draws attention to the aesthetic construction of the text by 'self-consciously reflect[ing] upon its own structure'. Patricia Waugh, *Metafiction: The Theory and Practice of Self-Conscious Fiction* (London: Methuen, 1984), 14. See also Lucien Dällenbach, *The Mirror in the Text*, trans. Jeremy Whitely with Emma Hughes (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1989).

[10] Fleishman, in his studies of Pasternak's *Spektorsky*, 'The Tale's' sister-text, has also focused on Pasternak's portrayal of 'the writer' and 'professional man of letters' of the late 1920s. Fleishman juxtaposes the Seriozha of 'The Tale' as an amateur writer with the Seriozha of Spektorsky as a professional writer and member of the Writers' Union, in order to expose Pasternak's oblique commentary on the literary crisis of 1929. See Lazar Fleishman, *The Poet and His Politics* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990), 156–7 and 268.

[11] Shepherd makes special reference to M. M. Bakhtin, 'Discourse in the novel', 'From the prehistory of novelistic discourse' and 'Epic and novel'. See M. M. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, ed. Michael Holquist and trans. Michael Holquist and Caryl Emerson (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981).

[12] Pasternak 1977, 53. Part 1 of *A Safe Conduct* was published in *Zvezda* No. 8, 1929; Parts II and III published in *Krasnaia nov'*, No. 4, 5–6, 1931. The work was published as a book in Leningrad, 1931.

to resolve the friction of the text-context dichotomy, claiming that 'By and large [in the metafictional prose of the late 1920s early 1930s], the portrayal of the artist is not accompanied by sustained thematisation of the texts' own epistemological or historiographical status',[13] 'The Tale' resists easy categorisation within this schema. As a tale that set out to describe the contemporary age but instead fashions itself as an unfinished draft manuscript, this text is precisely the kind of 'overtly metafictional',[14] self-conscious and unfinalisable writing about writing that returns us to the horns of the text-context dilemma.

'The Tale' has only infrequently been treated as an object of critical interest in its own right,[15] and the work has elicited contradictory readings from scholars.[16] The story of the 'The Tale' begins and ends with an impasse. In 1924 Pasternak had begun work on an epic poem, entitled *Spektorsky* (1924–31), which treated the theme of a young artistic hero defining his position in a world of war and revolution. In response to the difficulty of proceeding beyond the year 1917, Pasternak began to transpose the *poema* into prose. The resulting tale, under the original title 'Revolution', took up the story of Seriozha Spektorsky, as well as several of the same secondary characters contained in the *poema*, and was intended to successfully describe the post-revolutionary years. Pasternak worked on the prose piece from January to May of 1929, and published extracts from the work, now entitled 'The Tale' ('Povest'), in Number 30 of *Krasnaia niva*, as well as in the July 13 and 15 editions of *Literaturnaia gazeta*. A full version of the story appeared in *Novy mir* in July.[17] However, the specter of non-

[13] David Shepherd, *Beyond Metafiction: Self-Consciousness in Soviet Literature* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), 24.

[14] Shepherd 24.

[15] One exception is Michel Aucouturier, 'The Metonymous Hero or the Beginnings of Pasternak the Novelist' in *Pasternak – A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Victor Erlich (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, 1978), in which he develops his thesis that Seriozha Spektorsky is Pasternak's first 'metonymous hero', who dissolves into the life that surrounds him. See also Megan Swift, 'A Self-Conscious Tale: Pasternak's *Povest'*', *Canadian Slavonic Papers* Vol. 42 No. 4 (2000), 481–89 and '*The Tale* and The Novel: Pasternak and the Politics of Genre' in *Canadian Slavonic Papers* Vol. 49, No. 1–2 (2007), 43–53.

[16] Angela Livingstone calls 'The Tale' 'a still pre-literary grappling with incidents in [Pasternak's] own life'. Angela Livingstone, 'Pasternak's Early Prose' in *A.U.M.L.A.*, 22 (1964), 249. Michel Aucouturier, however, considers the work to be 'the most cleverly structured of [Pasternak's] stories. See Aucouturier 43–4.

[17] Pasternak 1989–92, Vol. 4, 810.

completion continued to haunt Pasternak and he agonised over the 'non-endings' which plagued the works, writing to Lengiz editor Pavel Medvedev in 1929 about the impossibility, in contemporary circumstances, of dealing with 'the individual story, that is, a plot about individual characters'.[18] After publishing 'The Tale', Pasternak returned to work upon *Spektorsky*, bogged down by editorial demands for a more ideologically distinct hero.[19] 'The Tale' was in actuality his third attempt at the story of Sergei Spektorsky. Its earliest incarnation was in 1922, with the prose fragment 'Three Chapters from a Story', originally conceived as a novel entitled *Three Names*.[20] 'The Tale' is therefore the final, though unfinished, version of a story that continued to write itself throughout the 1920s.

Ultimately, 'The Tale' suffered from the same dead end that had curtailed the composition of *Spektorsky*. Although *Spektorsky* breaks off in the year 1919, 'The Tale' ends abruptly just before the fateful year 1917, focusing instead on the so-called 'last summer' of 1914, when Seriozha is working as a tutor in the wealthy Fresteln family, falling in love with a young Danish widow named Anna Arild and developing his gift as a writer.[21] The theme of revolution is approached obliquely, through Seriozha's ruminations on the injustice of society (embodied for him by the feminine lot), by his fictional attempt to correct those injustices in the tale that he writes, and by a prescience of historical change. The 'last summer' of 1914 is imbedded within a much shorter narrative frame treating the winter of 1916. In this outer frame, the theme of revolution is suggested by the arrival of a man possessing the necessary 'new qualities', a deliberate, definite and iron-willed man who personifies the terrible 'masculine spirit of fact'[22] and who poses a challenge to the lyrical hero Seriozha. Many of these themes, including the justification of the Revolution in terms of righting a wrong done to women,

[18] Pasternak 1989–92, Vol. 5, 283.

[19] Spektorsky was published in fragments in various journals 1924–31. Five chapters of the work, entitled 'Spektorsky, Glavy iz romana', were published in *Krasnaia nov'* 1928, No. 1. See Pasternak 1989–92 Vol. 1, 736. The complete text was published in 1931. See also Boris Pasternak *Stikhotvoreniia i poemy* (Moskva: Sovetskii pisatel', 1965), 671.

[20] 'Three Chapters from a Story' ('Tri glavy iz povesti') was originally published in *Moskovskii ponedel'nik. Novosti*, 12 June 1922, No. 1. See Pasternak 1989–92 Vol. 4, 866.

[21] *The Last Summer* is the English title given to 'The Tale' in the George Reavey translation of the work (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1960).

[22] Pasternak 1977, 241. Subsequent references to this English translation of *Povest'* (titled 'The Story') by Nicholas J. Anning, will be to this edition.

and the opposition of a 'lyrical' and 'revolutionary' character, are successfully developed in *Doctor Zhivago*. In 'The Tale', however, the revolutionary era continued to elude Pasternak. An analysis of the figure of the draft manuscript that sits at the core of 'The Tale' suggests a key to this conundrum.

'The Tale' is a network of texts about texts and texts within texts, presenting itself as the draft copy of an original that never has been, nor ever will be, written. It is a text captured endlessly in progress, a *version* among other possible versions, which continually writes itself (*pishetsia*) and writes *about* itself, but can never be completed nor written to the end (*dopisan*). Critics continue to disagree on the title of the work, some reading it as a clever and misleading self-reference (since Pasternak originally conceived the work as a novel), others simply as a working title.[23] Michel Aucouturier reads the title in reference to the imbedded tale that the hero writes before our eyes, in essence his coming of age as a writer. This scene is the true centre of 'The Tale', located in the innermost of the three narrative frames, as well as the metafictional centre of a tale about a writer who in turn writes a tale. The present analysis seeks to extend Aucouturier's work by suggesting that, as a draft manuscript, the unfinished tale within 'The Tale' becomes an emblem for processes at work in the larger text. Both the main and imbedded stories of 'The Tale' are presented as drafts rather than finished, integral works. Mimicking the tale at its centre, 'The Tale' is a *proposition* for a tale, the *zamysel* (plan, intention) for a work not yet completed. Hence the strange opening paragraph of the work, which begins the story while laying bare the device of the tale's composition:

> At the beginning of 1916 Seriozha came to stay with his sister Natasha in Solikamsk. I have had the separate parts of this story in my mind for the past ten years now, and shortly after the Revolution some of them found their way into print.
>
> But the reader would do better to forget these versions; otherwise he will flounder about, deciding what fate eventually befell each of the characters. I have given different names to a number of them; as to the fates themselves, they remain to this very day as I found them during those years in the snow beneath the trees; and there will be no discrepancy between my novel in verse

[23] For a description of the projected novel, in which a number of characters and motifs were to have received lengthier treatment, see Nikolai Vil′mont, *O Borise Pasternake: Vospominaniia i mysli* (Moskva: Sovetskii pisatel′, 1989), 191–2.

> *Spektorsky*, which I started subsequently, and this present piece of prose. They are one and the same life.[24]

As a draft version, 'The Tale' is able to revel in liberties and anomalies: the references to characters who never appear, or who appear, but only in other tales, or whose tales are begun but never developed. As an unfinished narrative, an outline for a more detailed work to come, 'The Tale' becomes a 'tale about a tale', a reflection rather than the object itself. The character Fardybasov is introduced, for instance, and we follow the story of his arrival in the Urals on the same train as the hero, and the 'uproar' (*furor*)[25] this creates until the thread of his storyline is suddenly and mysteriously cut off. Fardybasov, who is that brave marine slated to enter active duty in the Revolution, remains a character-sketch prepared for future development.[26] Likewise, our introduction to the mountain town of Usol′e comes through the eyes of an unknown and unnamed doctor, whose perspective seems to have been chosen simply because his newly-painted walls reflect the glowing whiteness that is the salt-mining and gun-powder producing town of Usol′e.

Patterning itself on the messy draft manuscript, 'The Tale' is overflowing with references to other, unwritten and non-existent tales. Far from advancing the plot, these are generally imaginative and whimsical digressions leading outside the borders of the story proper. 'Three new tales of women'[27] take their place in Seriozha's life as he goes out on nightly expeditions, and yet only one of these tales is told. Seriozha proposes a tale for the editor Kovalenko that has neither been conceived nor written. The larger story, from which three chapters have presumably been extracted in the predecessor to 'The Tale', 'Three Chapters from a Story', turns out to be another missing original. Most importantly, the imbedded inner tale, recounted word for word, is revealed as merely a replica. 'This is not, of course, an original of Seriozha's draft'[28], we are told. Nor, it seems, is 'The Tale' itself. The text we are reading continually corrects and adjusts itself, referring

[24] Pasternak 1977, 198.

[25] Pasternak 1989–92, Vol. 4, 103. Subsequent references to the Russian text will be to this edition.

[26] In the planned novel, both Fardybasov and the younger Lemokh brother, who appears only once in 'The Tale', were to have received a more extended treatment in scenes following active fighting in the Revolution. Seriozha's romance with Anna Arild was to have continued for several years. See Vil′mont 191–2.

[27] Pasternak 1977, 52.

[28] Pasternak 1977, 233.

outside itself to another version of the events recounted. The first sentence of 'The Tale' tells us that Seriozha arrived in Solikamsk in the winter of 1916 to visit his sister. One paragraph later this information is retracted: Seriozha arrived in Usol′e. Likewise, the Fardybasov story is told and then retold in a 'truer' version. First we are informed that the marine narrowly escaped death during wartime bombing in the Gulf of Finland; then we discover that he could not have escaped the bombing since his ship, the *Novik*, was never bombed.

Writing imagery permeates virtually every episode of 'The Tale' and forms an immediate entry point into the narrative as, in the outer frame, Seriozha 'holds the summer of 1914 right in front of his nose *like a book*'.[29] An extended exploration in the writing theme is Sashka's tale, which critics have thus far read in terms of the theme of women and social injustice. Sashka is a prostitute and denizen of one of the poorest neighborhoods of Moscow. Both Lazar Fleishman and Evgeny Pasternak have emphasised the importance of the Sashka episode for the 'woman theme' – the interlacing of the social and erotic – which was to form the basis of Pasternak's commentary on the Revolution. This oblique response can be understood in the sense that the Revolution's greatest impulse was the quest to create a just life for the downtrodden members of society. The feminine fate (in particular that of the prostitute) exemplified for Pasternak the injustice of the pre-revolutionary era. It is in the interests of improving this feminine lot that Seriozha is inspired to write his first story.[30] Indeed, Ida Vysotskaia-Feltzer has attested to the fact that '[s]aving prostitutes was the ideal of all young men from good families on the eve of the war'.[31] In this sense Sashka's tale aims to expose the sexual and political hypocrisies of the pre-revolutionary era, providing a moral justification for the events of 1917. In literary biographies of Pasternak's works, the Sashka episode has generally been read as a Mary Magdalene tale that, coupled with his love for Anna Arild, fills Seriozha with a sense of overwhelming

[29] Pasternak 1977, 204; my italics.

[30] Lazar Fleishman, *Boris Pasternak v dvadsatye gody* (München: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 1979), 145 and 163; and Lazar Fleishman, *Boris Pasternak: The Poet and his Politics* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990), 157. Evgeny Pasternak has confirmed that the 'woman theme' in 'The Tale' corresponds to Pasternak's thoughts on the moral justification of the Revolution. Evgeny Pasternak, *Boris Pasternak – Biografiia* (Moskva: Izdatel′stvo 'Tsitadel'', 1997), 421.

[31] Jacqueline de Proyard, 'Une amitié d'enfance' in *Boris Pasternak 1890–1960* (Paris: Colloque Cerisy-la-Salle, 1979), 518.

compassion and inspires him to write his allegorical tale about a hero who sells himself so that the less fortunate need not.[32] It is hoped that an alternate reading of Sashka's tale can provide a new perspective on 'The Tale'.

Seriozha is intent on framing his experience with this 'hardened, thickly powdered and promiscuous'[33] prostitute in terms of narrative, seeking an appropriate text in which to feature this unlikely heroine. He briefly considers a novel that would treat Sashka's life, entitled *The Childhood of a Woman*, which, with its heroine's non-Russian surname and setting far from Moscow becomes a metatextual reference to Pasternak's own 1922 novella 'Childhood of Luvers'.[34] With no narrative prose format readily available, the pages of a 'policeman's clothbound, braided notebook'[35] are determined as the text that will tell Sashka's tale. Sashka's tale also suggests a rewriting (*perepisanie*) of a fragment from Dostoevsky's *Brothers Karamazov*. An important detail from Sashka's past recalls that other 'woman of easy virtue' (*zhenshchina legkogo povedeniia*), Grushenka, who lost her reputation at the hands of a Polish officer. Sashka too has a Polish officer in her biography, and it is his photograph that Seriozha notices in Sashka's small room: '…the glossy effigy […] revealed [Sashka's] earliest and most precious memory, in all probability the prime cause of all that came after. It was probably to him that her plump arm, outstretched from shoulder to wrist and now lost in the far distance, seemed to lead. Then again, perhaps it did not lead to him at all'.[36]

This modernist rescripting of Grushenka's tale suggests the concept of *dopisyvanie* (to finish writing) in its secondary sense of 'to add onto' or 'to continue to write'. In *Creating Creation* (2000) Susanna Witt has done some intriguing work with *Doctor Zhivago* as a novel which 'continues to write' *Brothers Karamazov*, *Hamlet* and the biblical Book of Revelation, as well as 'continuing to write' from the verbal into the visual arts. The present article seeks to extend Witt's analysis

[32] J. W. Dyck, *Boris Pasternak* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1972), 74–6; Guy de Mallac, *Boris Pasternak, His Life and Art* (Norman, Oklahoma: University of Okhlahoma Press, 1981), 10–11 and 139; and Christopher Barnes, *Boris Pasternak: A Literary Biography*, Vol. 2 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 10.

[33] Pasternak 1977, 216.

[34] 'The Childhood of Luvers' ('Detstvo Luvers') was originally published in the almanac *Nashi dni*, Book 1, Moscow 1922. Pasternak 1989–92 Vol. 4, 807.

[35] Pasternak 1977, 219.

[36] Pasternak 1977, 218.

by expanding the understanding of *dopysivanie* to include not only a writing that extends other works of literature, but also an intensely metafictional 'continual writing' of other versions of *itself*. In this sense 'The Tale', which opens by referring to different incarnations of its story and then proceeds to produce an extensive array of frames, tales and narratives, is very much an exercise in text production. 'Text production' is a term used by Witt to denote the self-conscious writing theme that emerges in *Doctor Zhivago*, the large number of Pasternak's titles that 'signal an orientation toward (his own) text and (his own) writing',[37] and the prominent number of characters who are writers or readers. 'The Tale' is certainly this kind of fecund and abundant writing that continually brings forth more texts.

A useful comparative framework for 'The Tale' is suggested by Osip Mandelstam's novella 'The Egyptian Stamp' ('Egipetskaia marka') (1928), a near-contemporary to 'The Tale'.[38] In these works both Pasternak and Mandelstam attempt to come to terms with the jeopardised status of the individual in the new post-revolutionary historical reality, and to portray a 'last summer' for the individual.[39] Mandelstam places that chronological marker some three years after Pasternak's dreamy summer of 1914, in the 'Kerensky lemonade summer' of 1917. 'The Egyptian Stamp' is a treatment of one disorienting day in that summer of 1917, in Petersburg, as we follow the meek hero Parnok on his round of errands, and watch the quotidian quickly devolve into the terrifying. Most relevant to the present discussion is the fact that Mandelstam stylises his text as a manuscript, writing his story while simultaneously 'showing' the reader the manuscript in the act of being created. This includes a detailed inventory of the sketches and doodles in the margin, and an oath of fealty to the act of *scribbling*, as opposed to writing: 'Scribbling is better than writing'.[40] In this sense the writing found in

[37] Susanna Witt, *Creating Creation: Readings of Pasternak's 'Doktor Zivago'* (Stockholm: Almqvist ochWiksell International, 2000), 9.

[38] Osip Mandelstam, 'The Egyptian Stamp' originally published in *Zvezda*, No. 5, 1928 and as the book *Egipetskaia marka* (Leningrad: Priboi, 1928).

[39] Mandelstam's remarked in 'The End of the Novel' (1928) that 'Very early on, the new novelist sensed that individual fate did not exist'. Jane Gary Harris, *Mandelstam: The Complete Critical Prose and Letters* (Ann Arbor: Ardis, 1997), 125.

[40] Osip Mandelstam, *The Noise of Time*, ed. and trans. Clarence Brown (New York: Penguin, 1993), 149.

the text proper is continually juxtaposed to the incoherent doodling in its margins. Indeed the direction of the narrative is centrifugal, moving from the centre to the edge of the page.

The properties of the draft manuscript allow Pasternak and Mandelstam to pursue unusual narrative strategies. For Pasternak this means writing that is caught 'in process' and with no set limits, with every tale containing the kernel of another tale. This code of text production obviously problematises the idea of an ending. For Mandelstam, however, the manuscript suggests a vulnerable object, in danger of disappearing altogether. 'The Egyptian Stamp' seems to follow an alternate code of text destruction, foregrounding a stylistic method of severing, deleting and distancing.[41] Mandelstam conflates writing and violence by associating the text with images of sickness, death and fire. The narrator refers to the pages of library books as 'inhabited by measles, scarlatina and chicken pox'.[42] References to the fragility of the physical manuscript are frequent in 'The Egyptian Stamp'. In the second 'scribbling episode' (the narrative digressions showing the reader the doodles in the margin) Mandelstam writes: 'A manuscript is always a storm, worn to rags, torn by beaks'.[43] Later we see the pages of library books becoming transparent, the paper worn terribly thin, the writing rubbed out. This culminates in a scene in which books perish by fire, the text a frail victim of predatory outside forces. In sum, a kind of *mise-en-abyme* takes place in these texts, in which the figure of the draft manuscript finds reflection in the text proper. In Mandelstam's work the ink-blackened pages of the draft provide the impetus for the text to unravel and devolve into its own scissor-slashed, incoherent margins.[44] In 'The Tale', the story itself takes on the properties of a draft copy, with the opportunity to perpetually elaborate, extend and continue writing.

[41] See Emma Gerstein's article on Mandelstam, which includes an insight into his artistic process. Gerstein cites him as saying 'I think dropping links'. Emma Gerstein, 'Nadezhda Iakovlevna', *Znamia*, 2 (1998), 172.

[42] Mandelstam 157.

[43] Mandelstam 149.

[44] *Mise-en-abyme*, a term taken from heraldry, meaning 'the image of a shield containing in its centre a miniature replica of itself', is developed by Lucian Dällenbach in *The Mirror in the Text*. He posits that self-conscious art displays 'the subject of the work itself' (7) in a 'kind of reflexion' (8), an enclosed work within a work. In this sense it becomes a 'mirror in the text' (43). Dallenbach's study of *mise-en-abyme* focuses on the *nouveau roman* of the 1960s.

This kind of *mise-en-abyme* recurs in Pasternak's prose, as he returns again and again to scenes of the physical creation of a manuscript. Such scenes appear not only in 'The Tale' (1929), but also the autobiographical *A Safe Conduct* (1929) and *Doctor Zhivago* (1957). The manuscript in *A Safe Conduct* is created by a young man (the young Pasternak) who is just beginning to explore the idea of becoming a writer.[45] His manuscript is, consequently, an immature and even immaterial creation, confined to a conceptual structure, or kind of 'aerial plan', that hovers in the air above the writer's desk. This draft grows by means of a connected network of quotations, citations and references, a trail marked by books left open at the necessary page. This imagined manuscript is compared to a 'tree-fern whose leafy volutions rested on the table, couch and window ledge',[46] and is subsequently destroyed by Pasternak, at the time a young student of philosophy, by tidying up the books. This act is described as 'tantamount to burning a manuscript before any fair copy had been made'.[47]

Imagined manuscripts also appear to the mature, published writer Yury Zhivago, but as a preliminary stage in which plans and ideas float 'in the air like apparitions'[48] before taking physical form in a feverish outpouring of writing that includes old copied poems, new drafts of poems, snatches of articles, as well as doodles and sketches. Three sustained writing scenes take place in the novel *Doctor Zhivago*. The first appears in the chapter 'Varykino', where Yury Zhivago, surrounded by his wife and family, begins to write a diary. The pages of this diary, including some ruminations on the nature of art, are quoted at length until the narrator remarks that 'At this point [his] diary breaks off. He never went on with it'.[49] The second sustained writing scene takes place in the chapter 'Return to Varykino', with Zhivago now accompanied by Lara and her daughter Katya. Here the narrator describes Zhivago's method of copying out old work in a clear, beautiful penmanship, then moving on to new texts that are characterised by 'an illegible scrawl full of gaps and abbreviations'.[50] The third and final

[45] The scene referred to is in *A Safe Conduct* Part II, Chapter 5.

[46] Pasternak 1977, 184.

[47] Pasternak 1977, 184.

[48] Boris Pasternak, *Doctor Zhivago*, trans. Max Hayward and Manya Harari (New York: Pantheon, 1958), 487.

[49] Pasternak 1958, 287.

[50] Pasternak 1958, 440.

writing scene of the novel is the one to which we will make special reference. It takes place in the 'Conclusion' of the work, in Moscow, in a 'secret apartment' that turns out to be the same room that Zhivago had looked up at to see a candle burning, with Lara standing behind it. It is here that imagined manuscripts appear, to be replaced by the familiar process of rewriting and revising. This 'devouring activity'[51] is sustained until the writer's untimely death, when, having literally written himself to the end, his body takes the place of the manuscripts on the table. These manuscripts are later collected, put in order, and published.

The writing of the manuscript, then, functions as a kind of gauge for the artist-protagonist. In *A Safe Conduct* the manuscript is stillborn and the writer is yet to emerge. In *Doctor Zhivago* many manuscripts are produced and the writer is at the height of his powers. Placed within this comparative framework, 'The Tale' suggests an intermediate stage in which an emerging writer begins a draft that is never completed. The act of writing, of scribbling and re-scribbling, (*marat' i peremaryvat'*) is emphasised in a sustained and detailed scene that fills eight full pages in the seventy-four page translation by Nicholas Anning.[52] The tale within 'The Tale' begins as a letter to the editor Kovalenko expounding the plot of the proposed story, then begins to tell the story itself. Alongside the telling of the tale, the physical creation of Seriozha's draft is underlined, with asides noting in detail the transfer from letter to quarto paper and even the sitting position of Seriozha, 'like every writer, at an angle to the table'.[53] The reader never discovers how the story ends, for the writing process is interrupted and the manuscript ends with an ellipsis, perhaps the most fitting punctuation mark for a tale that has not finished writing itself. In a letter to his parents of 1937, Pasternak refers to his 'Tale', calling it a 'terribly slowly growing manuscript'.[54] He writes that 'again, after an interval of years', he is writing a 'new work' that is 'growing into something

[51] Pasternak 1958, 487.

[52] In Seriozha's tale the hero is given the cypher-name Y3, an indication of the allegorical nature of the story, but also of his place in a hastily-written draft that will subsequently be fleshed out in greater detail. The plot of the story is as follows: Y3, in a grand sacrificial gesture, decides to auction himself off as a slave and give the proceeds of the transaction to the poor and needy. The man who 'buys' Y3, thus gaining the power of life and death over him, turns out to be a philanthropist who returns the hero to freedom. The story ends abruptly, however, just as the plot is thickening and the poor neighborhoods amongst which Y3 has spread his wealth, are erupting in violence.

[53] Pasternak 1977, 231.

[54] Lydia Pasternak-Slater, *Pasternak: Fifty Poems* (London: Unwin Books, 1963), 17.

big'.[55] Only with this 'big work', the novel *Doctor Zhivago*, would Pasternak transform the manuscript-in-process into a fair copy, thus signaling his solution to the obstacle of *dopisyvanie* and his readiness, at last, to complete his project of a prose treating the artist and the Revolution.

[55] Pasternak-Slater, 17.