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Ludmila Lavine

Bucknell University, llavine@bucknell.edu

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THE VISUAL AND THE EPIC IN BORIS PASTERNAK'S 'DEVJAT'SOT PJATYJ GOD'

LUDMILA SCHLEYFER LAVINE

Abstract

In this study I consider the role of poetic description in Pasternak's 'Deviat'sot piatyj god' ('1905') in the context of the genre of the *poema*. Descriptive passages in poetic narratives, as a rule, provide a static setting for a protagonist's actions. In the absence of any single hero in Pasternak's *poema*, topography itself begins to move. I examine the categories of stasis and motion, central to '1905', at the intersection of the visual and the verbal. The idea of reanimating the events of the first Russian revolution twenty years after the fact borders on the ekphrastic in places, where the poet transposes techniques and genres from the visual arts into a verse epic. Finally, I suggest that aesthetic perception itself is the dominant principle in the *poema*, as opposed to documentary faithfulness, which is traditionally emphasized in the scholarship on this work.

Keywords: *Pasternak*; '1905'; *Poema*; *Laocoon*; *Valentin Serov*

I. Introduction

While the dominance of the visual arts in Pasternak's poetry has been treated extensively, 'Devjat'sot pjatyj god' ('1905') has received little scholarly attention in this respect. In this study I consider the role of poetic description in Pasternak's '1905', both on its own terms, as well as within the parameters of the *poema*, as a genre. I use the term "poema" as an extension of its epic

and narrative verse traditions. Pasternak himself characterized '1905' as a series of "epic fragments" (1989-1992, 1: 695), a transition from lyric thinking to the epic (4: 621).¹ Principal to my argument are conceptions of the *poema* as a contrast to lyric poetry, a position that becomes defining for the poets of the Silver Age, as they negotiate the role of their solitary craft in an atmosphere of national upheaval. I engage several fundamental assumptions behind the opposition of lyric versus epic/narrative forms. If the general orientation of lyric poetry is inward, the *poema* is, as a rule, directed outward. Even when the larger context is provided in a lyric poem, it is often subsumed or transformed by a private voice. The *poema*, on the other hand, traditionally positions its individuated protagonist against a larger backdrop.

Description in the genre of the *poema* is the main vehicle for orienting the subject spatially and historically. While in the Romantic *poema*, for example, an exotic setting is quite standard, and in the classical *poema* the action often takes place on a battlefield, in the modernist *poema* the divide between a particular locale and individual voice frequently disappears; it becomes common practice for the modernist lyric hero to internalize and sublimate his/her space of action. Against this context, one can observe a fundamental shift in Pasternak's '1905'. The descriptive passages become the locus of action, no longer performing their conventional function in the *poema* as a setting or a digression, while the individual voice within the story flickers on the periphery. Pasternak subverts the genre's traditional use of time and space: both the epoch and topographical descriptions become the subject of Pasternak's *poema* rather than its backdrop.

The poet's visual techniques are so palpable in '1905' that, in places, they conjure up specific movements in art. Indeed, Pasternak borrows a number of techniques and genres from the visual arts: historic panoramas, landscapes, cityscapes, and seascapes, often approximating the styles of Russian itinerants, impressionists, and cubists. Moreover, several descriptions in '1905' border on the ekphrastic, an important element in the epic tradition.

Descriptive poetry, whether standing on its own or within a larger poetic narrative, began receiving significant theoretical attention in the eighteenth century. Samuel Johnson offered the following definition of "topographical poetry": "local poetry, of which the fundamental subject is some particular landscape [...] with the addition of such embellishments as may be supplied by historical retrospection [...]" (Abrams 2009: 369-370). In epic poetry, a clear distinction is made between plot and descriptive "embellishments". The function of pictorial excerpts, as Johnson suggests, is to provide a setting, physical and historical. For a lyric poem, to capture a place may be an end in itself; place can serve the purposes of pathetic fallacy, meditation, etc. In a *poema*, on the other hand, a description's expected role is to set the stage for action. Descriptive fragments in a narrative provide a reprieve from action; they belong to the realm of the stationary against which its protagonist

acts.² Notably, in the case of Pasternak's '1905', topography itself steps to the forefront and becomes the protagonist.

Because Pasternak's verbal techniques often approximate painting in '1905', it is useful to address briefly the converging as well as diverging effects of the two mediums, visual versus verbal. In his book on ekphrasis, Stephen Cheeke argues that all ekphrastic poetry, to varying degrees, addresses contrasts between the two modes of expression on a theoretical level, dealing with "inter-artistic comparison". He examines ekphrasis through the ages, from the Homeric period, through Ephraim Lessing's treatise on the subject, *Laocoon. An Essay upon the Limits of Painting and Poetry*, to examples from the twentieth century, postulating that the notion "of struggle, a contest, a confrontation, remains central to all thinking about ekphrasis" (2008: 21). Examination of these inter-medial confrontations is extremely fruitful for '1905'. Both painting and the epic tend to treat concrete objects of the external world. However, as Lessing argues, one form of expression belongs to space, the other to time. The process of absorbing a picture often approaches simultaneity; the viewer's chronology of reception is not patterned or fixed. Verbal expression, by contrast, is temporally linear. The process of reading poetry in general, and especially narrative poetry, is diachronic both with respect to the arrangement of lines on a page and, in the case of the *poema*, with respect to the sequence of actions. Time within a work of the visual arts, on the other hand, is perceived to be frozen, capturing a single moment, a *punctum temporis*. Jonathan Holden suggests that a poem's advantage over a painting is its sense of the passage of time (1986: 161). As we shall see below, this paradox between suspension and animation is important for '1905', where narrative action meets the static nature of a painting (which, at best, can merely suggest action).

The present analysis posits the oscillation between stasis and motion, achieved by counterposing the visual and the epic, as one of the central processes in '1905'. To review, for the traditional model of the *poema*, stasis is the category of background against which motion is foregrounded. In Pasternak's *poema* the background and foreground merge, and waver as a single unit, between stillness and animation. Furthermore, in '1905' Pasternak approximates the techniques of a visual artist to underscore these transitions from inertia to dynamism, from *nature morte* to life. The present analysis thereby challenges, through Pasternak's emphasis on the visual, artistic perspective, the established ways of reading '1905' as a faithful versified replica of its documentary sources.

In section II, I establish the importance of the visual arts in '1905' and explore ways in which theoretical discussions of the visual in poetry bear on Pasternak's text. I proceed to interpret several lengthy passages in the context of ekphrasis in section III. In section IV, I investigate Pasternak's use of specific contemporaneous movements in art and the role of aesthetic perception

amidst the distinct call of the 1920's for "literature of fact". In section V, I conclude by returning to the genre of the *poema* in the context of my discussion of the visual elements in '1905' and suggest ways in which Pasternak attempts to carve out a place for the artist in an age that emphasizes the *chorovoj* background.

II. *The Visual in the Epic*

The influence of the visual arts on Pasternak's verse has been discussed in numerous studies.³ Before the poet's fall from a horse that led to his sudden turn to music, Pasternak dabbled in drawing, and was even pronounced to have some potential in this area by his artist-father (Roziner 1991: 42). The autobiographical speaker of '1905' emphasizes the centrality of the visual and plastic arts during his formative years. The space of his childhood is physically delineated by art: "Вхутемас / Еще – школа ваянья / [...] / Наверху, / Мастерская отца. / В расстояньи версты, / Где столетняя пыль на Диане / И холсты / Наша дверь" (1: 286; "Vchutemas / Is still a school for the plastic arts [...] Upstairs, / is father's studio. / In the space of a verst, / Where century-old dust covers the Diana statue / And canvases stand / Is our door").⁴ The first section of the *poema*, 'Отцу', works in pictorial fragments. The section's opening prompts us visually with the discussion of the physical digits that constitute the year 1905, focusing on the image of zero into which the events seem to fade: "Стерся след, / Словно год / Стал нулем меж девятки с пятеркой" (1: 282; "All trace is gone, / As if the year / Became the zero that is between the nine and the five"). What follows is a picture gallery of the city and its suburbs, with visual hallmarks of the previous generation: trojkas, first railroads, kerosene lighting, rural roads outlined by the textile mills of Savva Morozov, nihilists in "tight-fitting coats", students in "pince-nez" (1: 282-284), etc. The speaker gathers these images in a type of showroom to the nineteenth century. The process of being guided past these stationary objects becomes explicit in a stanza on revolutionary salon circles. The speaker compares the frequent government raids of these circles to confiscations of historical relics for a museum: "Затворницы ж эти, / Не чаяв, / Что у них, / Что ни обыск, / То вызов реликвий в музей" (1: 283; "These anchoresses, / Could not have predicted / That every search at their place / Is a summon of relics to a museum").

As epitomized by a piece of artwork hanging in a gallery, the visuals evoking the atmosphere of the past century exist in a state of suspension. The transition between the two generations, as well as between sections one and two (from 'Отцу' to 'Detstvo') is a transition from stasis to motion: "Эта ночь простоит / В забытьи / До времен Порт-Артура [...] И тогда-то придет / Та зима, / Когда все оживет" (1: 284; "This night will idle / In oblivion

/ Until the times of Port Arthur [...] And precisely then will arrive / That winter, / When everything will come alive"). The speaker sees the times of his "fathers" as "обездушанный калейдоскоп" (1: 283; "a lifeless kaleidoscope"), in which historical details are gathered in one place and hung side by side. Once the speaker's generation is "born" (1, 284; "мы родимся"), we come across a visual description that lays bare precisely the device of infusing the static nature of a *пейзаж* with movement:

Город вымер и словно оглох.
 [...]
 Ни души.
 Дремлет площадь,
 [...]
 Эта ночь простоит
 В забвении
 До времен Порт Артура.
 [...]
 И тогда то придет
 Та зима,
 Когда все оживет.
 Мы родимся на свет.
 Как-нибудь
 Предвечернее солнце
 Подзовет нас к окну.
 Мы одухотворим наугад
 Непривычный закат,
 И при зрелище труб
 Потрясемся [...]
 (1: 284-285)

(The city has died out and apparently gone deaf. / [...] / Not a soul. The town square dozes, / [...] / This night will idle / In oblivion / Until the times of Port Arthur. [...] / And precisely then / Will arrive / That winter / When everything will come alive. / We will be born into this world. / At some point / A pre- evening sun / Will summon us to the window. / We will randomly animate / An unfamiliar sunset, / And at the sight of the pipes / We will shudder [...].)

Not only the view itself, but the action of viewing or witnessing is written into the text. The speaker insists that "we" see something first-hand, even when the generation in question is that of "our" fathers, e.g., "И, однако, / взглядимся" (1: 282; "And yet, / let's look closely"); "Мы глаза / Напрягаем до боли" (1: 283; "We strain our eyes / Till it hurts").

Scholarship on '1905' emphasizes Pasternak's reliance on documentary materials. On the reading proposed here, documentary sources are filtered

through visual arts that surround the poet-speaker as a young man. It is well documented that Pasternak's painstaking engagement in archival research is reflected on the level of the lexicon, and even in the meter, of '1905'.⁵ Historical precision as the text's dominant organizing principle has defined '1905' in criticism to date. To my mind, however, the act of bringing to life through artistic perception is just as central. Art and imagination, a more aesthetic form of seeing, is at the heart of '1905'. As Pasternak notes in 'Neskol'ko položenij', the primary source of art is its raw perception: "[искусство] складывается из органов восприятия" (4: 367). That is, to aestheticize, for Pasternak, is the only way to recapture the immediacy of the event, after archival work with chronicles and memoirs is completed. It is through the aesthetic act of imagination that the poet-artist, as well as "we"-the-readers, breathe life into the lifeless ("одухотворим", "обездушенный").⁶ The notion of witnessing – the importance of the first-hand accounts on which Pasternak relied in his research – is mediated by at least two artistic filters: (i) poetry; and (ii) the visual arts that the poetic passages evoke. The *poema* is less about versifying the eyewitness accounts than putting the poet and his readers in the position of eyewitnesses themselves, something that can be achieved only through art.

In the stanza above, "we" observe something reminiscent of a canvas. The view is furnished with a frame, in the form of a window, which, in turn, reproduces a type of cityscape, with a sunset illuminating the surfaces of the pipes. As in representational landscape painting, the subject is depicted at a specific time of day, complete with a natural light source. Note the trend in landscape painting to allude to time (of day or year) in the titles themselves (e.g., Leonid Pasternak's 'Zimnij vid Kremlja', Isaak Levitan's 'Osen', etc.). Similarly, the lighting that illuminates most of the scenes in '1905' is specified repeatedly, often introduced at the beginning of a description: "С декабря воцаряются лампы" (1: 286; "Beginning in December, streetlamps rule"), "Пресловутый рассвет" (1: 288; "The notorious sunrise"), "Смеркается" (1: 289; "Dusk falls"), "Солнце село. / И вдруг / Электричеством вспыхнул 'Потемки'" (1: 294; "The sun set. / And suddenly / 'Potemkin' blazed up with electricity"), etc. The demonstration in 'Отцу' is literally drenched in darkness: "Этот мрак под ружьем / Погружен / В полусон / Забастовкой" (1: 282; "This darkness under a rifle / Is submerged / Into a half-sleep / By the strike"). Here the time of day becomes a concrete entity that descends on the scene. Finally, the title of the *poema*'s concluding section, "Москва в декабре", unequivocally evokes the genre of landscape painting, directing the reader to understand the work in the context of the visual arts.

The choice of the word "зрелище" in the above stanza reflects the shift from old (and static) to new (and alive) that the passage marks, from the fathers' world of a historical, "lifeless" kaleidoscope, to the speaker's

perception that sets history in motion. In its primary meaning, “зрелище” denotes a fixed *пейзаж* (as in “открывается зрелище”). However, it can also connote a theater, circus, or athletic performance, i.e., a scene of action. It is precisely the image of athleticism and movement that is developed as the scene continues into the next stanza:

Точно Лаокоон,
 Будет дым
 На трескучем морозе,
 Оголясь,
 Как атлет,
 Обнимать и валить облака.
 Ускользящий день
 Будет плыть
 На железных полозьях
 Телеграфных сетей,
 Открывающихся с чердака.
 (1: 285)

(Like Laocoon, / The smoke, / In the crackling frost, / Having denuded itself, / Like an athlete, / Will embrace and pull down the clouds. / Slipping away, the day / Will float / Along the iron rails / Of telegraph wires, / Which open up from the attic.)

The comparison of the view through the speaker's window to the statue of Laocoon (Illustration 1), which itself captures a scene of struggle (albeit frozen in time), is carefully positioned at that moment in the text when images transition from stillness to life. Note additionally that Laocoon's famous words in Virgil's *Aeneid* – “Do not trust the Horse, Trojans / Whatever it is, I fear the Greeks even bearing gifts” – implicitly present in Pasternak's text, sound a note of warning of the bloody events to come, as well as of the Revolution's ultimate defeat.

Here too, the description unfolds along the spatial dimensions of a painting. The pipes of the previous stanza and the rising smoke constitute the vertical division of the canvas, while the telegraph wires, at least initially, appear to cut the canvas horizontally. The emphasis on the angle of vision in this cityscape once again underscores the role of an observer. The line “открывающихся с чердака” establishes a receding point of view along the telegraph wires, a one-point perspective. The image of the wires “opens up” from the attic, creating diagonals that stretch away from the viewer (note “ускользающий день”). The stasis of what initially promises to be a cityscape description, reinforced by verticals and horizontals, is compromised by a suggestion of movement along the diagonal lines. It is important to keep in

mind, however, that the motion in this scene is suspended, harking back to the effect of Laocoon's statue.



Illustration 1. *Laocoon and His Sons*. Year unknown

The mention of Laocoon in one of the most picturesque stanzas of the *poema* is important on another, meta-poetic level. Lessing's *Laocoon: An Essay upon the Limits of Painting and Poetry* is the most significant Western text on the workings of poetry vis-à-vis painting and sculpture. Given Pasternak's extensive study of German philosophy at Marburg, it is likely that he was aware of this treatise, dealing, as it does, with the same issues raised on the

structural level in his own *poema*.⁷ Lessing discusses the lack of “progressive” action in the visual arts, its “stationary” quality, in contrast to poetry (1874: 147-148). He draws his examples from epic verse, particularly from Homer. Lessing points to an ultimate incompatibility between the verbal and the visual arts. The graphic passages in ‘1905’ surpass a Homeric description in one important way. Not only are the descriptions themselves vivid, but the poet-speaker consciously mimics the techniques of a visual artist in his use of shape, color, and the division of space. Instances that constitute detailed pictorial compositions, such as the one discussed above, are too numerous to analyze individually. In essence, the entire text of ‘1905’ comprises one description after another. Moreover, as will be discussed later, some of the descriptive passages may not be pictures that “belong to poetry alone”, as they are suggestive of visual representations of the events of 1905 that circulated at the time.

‘1905’ rests almost entirely on the act of visual perception. The Revolution itself is introduced as “собой недовольный художник” (1: 281; “artist, dissatisfied with him/herself”). The view from the building where the poet-speaker lives (Vchutemas, the school of sculpture at the time) is presented, first and foremost, as a subject for painting: “И на старое зданье почтамта / Смотрят сумерки, / Краски, / Палитры / И профессора” (1: 286; “And, at the old post office building, / Gaze the dusk, / The paints, / Pallets / And professors”), notably, professors of *art*. Again, note the specificity of the natural light source. The “old post office building” was across from the art school (where the Pasternak family lived).⁸ In other places in the text, the subject explicitly “asks” to be painted (“...солнце [...] просится / На полотно”; 1: 301). The descriptions often employ color or paint: “Воздух пучится черною льдиной” (1: 287; “The air is bloated like a black ice-floe”), “Буран / Засыпает все краски на карте” (1: 290; “The snowstorm / Covers all colors on the map”), “В белой рьяности волн” (1: 293; “In the white zealotry of the waves”), “Серый край броненосца / Оранжевым крапом / Рябь” (1: 294; “Orange speckles flickering on the gray ridge of the battleship”), etc. In the section “Morskoj mjatež”, the speaker paints a perfect seascape right before the storm, with colors running and blending into one another:

Пресноту парусов
Оттесняет назад
Одинакость
Помешавшихся красок,
И близится ливня стена,
И все ниже спускается небо,
И падает накошь,
И летит кувырком,

И касается чайками дна.
 Гальванической мглой
 Взбаламученных туч
 Неуклюже,
 Вперевалку, ползком,
 Пробираются в гавань суда.
 Синеногие молнии
 Лягушками прыгают в лужу.
 (1: 294)

(The freshness of sails / Is pushed back / By the sameness / Of blended paints, / And a wall of downpour nears. / And the sky descends lower and lower, / And falls sideways, / And flies tumbling, / And touches the sea floor with seagulls. / Through the galvanized haze / Of stirred up thunder clouds, / Awkwardly, / Staggering, crawling, / The vessels make their way to port. / Blue-legged lightning flashes / Jump into puddles like frogs.)

Paints that blend into the diagonal and circular motion of the sky, touching the surface of the water with white streaks of seagulls who, in turn, extend to the “sea floor”, possibly by way of reflection, the blue flashes of lightning in the shape of frog legs, unison (“одинакость”) and depth (marked by the “pushed back” sails and the approaching “wall of downpour”) – all these streaky details evoke a painting of ships in a storm, both in composition and in technique. One might even imagine that, towards the end of the passage, the scene suggests visual representations of the convoy of ships from the *Iliad*, on their way to wreak destruction.⁹

This effect of suspended animation is also achieved by photographic and cinematic means. Indeed, the role of film and photography in ‘1905’ has been noted before. Several scholars observe the distant affinity of Pasternak’s *poema* with Sergej Ėjzenštejn’s *Bronenosec Potemkin*.¹⁰ Pasternak started working on ‘1905’ when Ėjzenštejn was filming his work on the same subject. The observation of reality at varying angles and distances in the *poema* can be compared to a panning camera that zooms in on an individual for a moment, and then zooms out to take in the larger picture. ‘1905’ can be divided into two groups of narrative voices. The first half is dominated by the first person plural, the second by the third person plural, interspersed by very infrequent, unexpected lyrical “I’s”. In both cases, the trend is to start from the big, plural picture and gradually to focus on individual frames. The idea of a moving picture (“motion picture”), i.e., a static image set in motion or a moving image paused, as well as the stream of visual impressions itself, is a palpable technique in ‘1905’. Furthermore, the film medium gives life to its subject matter specifically through the act of viewing, through the ability to

see people in motion beyond their lifespan (an idea that was quite striking in its relative novelty at the time).

The notion of “coming / bringing to life” is connected in Russian with the action of “setting in motion” (“оживать”). The conflation of the two ideas is felt in Pasternak’s signature eradication of the animate-inanimate divide, and frequently appears in ‘1905’ in connection to statues “coming to life”. The first statue mentioned in the *poema* is of the Greek goddess Diana. It sits in the studio of the speaker’s father for generations, immobile under the layers of “century-old dust”. The statue of Laocoon marks the point when the landscape shifts to motion, coinciding with the birth of the new generation, though the statue itself represents suspended motion. The next allusion draws on Puškin’s favorite motif of animated statues chasing protagonists: “О, куда мне бежать / От шагов моего божества” (1: 287).

The Lomonosov statue in the section “Studenty” serves as a stationary point to the scene that spins out of control around it. It introduces a sequence of snap-shot images of corpses in suspended animation, lying in pools of blood: “А на площади группа, / Завяянный тьмой Ломоносов. / Лужи теплого вара / [...] / Группы в позах полета / [...] / Снято снегом, / Проявлено / Вечностью, разом, вразброс” (1: 300; “A group of people in the square, / Lomonosov is wrapped in darkness. / Puddles of warm tar / [...] / Corpses striking poses of flight / [...] / Photographed by the snow, / Printed / By eternity, instantaneously, at random”). Here the snow and eternity play the role of a photographer who captures movement in still images. A relic of the eighteenth century, the stillness of Lomonosov’s statue – amidst the wind, the commotion, and the bloodshed – is pronounced; it anticipates the petrification of the living scene over which it towers, the commotion’s inevitable passage from life into history: “И город [...] Стал собой без стыда. / Так у статуй, / Утративших зрячьсть / Пробуждается статность. / Он стал изваяньем труда” (1: 292; “And the city [...] became itself shamelessly. / This is how statues, / Having lost their sight, / Gain stateliness. / It became a sculpture of labor”). Having lost its ability to see, the city becomes the object of observation itself. Becoming another blind, Lomonosov-esque statue of history, it poses for others. Once the revolutionary events turn into historical relics, they can be reanimated only through “organs of perception”, where art originates for Pasternak.

The topographical passages in ‘1905’ are reminiscent of both a particular school of painting and a transition from one movement in the visual arts to another. Pasternak’s father is one such transitional figure in the history of Russian art. Leonid Pasternak began his career by participating in exhibitions of the itinerants (“передвижники”). Artists with a social consciousness influenced by the pathos of Belinskij and Černyševskij, the itinerants’ aesthetic goal was to reproduce national history in its mirror-like precision. It was not long, however, before Leonid Pasternak joined a group of younger artists

(Valentin Serov, Isaak Levitan, Michail Vrubel') who developed Russian impressionist and post-impressionist trends. In 'Ljudi i položenija', the poet recollects this artistic atmosphere of his childhood: "Сказочностью красок они [ощущения младенчества] восходили [...] к рисункам карандашом, пером и тушью Серова, Врубеля, моего отца и братьев Васнецовых, висевшим в комнатах его [П. П. Кончаловского] квартиры" (4: 296-297). Descriptions in '1905' have at their core the itinerant trend of a collective composition known as "хоровая картина", in which no single figure is significantly more prominent than the rest, although, to be sure, it is still possible to split the canvas into smaller parts that stand on their own. However, techniques representative of impressionism and other modernist movements in the visual arts are also present, which create an image of general flow that no longer allows dissection into smaller segments. The sections "Studenty" and "Moskva v dekabre" contain pictorial, potentially ekphrastic, passages that facilitate my discussion of these visual techniques in verse.

III. *The Ekphrastic*

The most cited example of ekphrasis in the epic tradition is Homer's description of Achilles' shield in the *Iliad*, a technique that was subsequently imitated by all major epic poets. Another example of ekphrasis in epic poetry is directly relevant to our discussion of '1905': Virgil's *Aeneid* contains a famous description of the events depicted by the statue 'Laocoon', i.e., Laocoon and his two sons fighting the sea serpents. It is possible to interpret Virgil's Laocoon as a reverse ekphrasis (from the poet's verbal description to the statue). However, it is generally believed that the statue dates before Virgil's first-century BC epic poem. Whatever the direction may be, the long and central Laocoon simile in Pasternak's *poema* provokes the reader to contemplate the role of the ekphrastic in this work.

Pasternak once wrote to his sister: "Ах, какая тоска. Какой ужасный '1905 год'! Какое у нас передвижничество!!" (*Pis'ma*; 1990: 58). No doubt Pasternak's mention of an artistic movement with a social imperative and mirror-like technical precision is motivated by the poet's own complicated transition to topics of social significance, as well as his nuanced understanding of realistic representation in art. However, we also have to appreciate the sphere of the visual arts that defines Pasternak's thinking on '1905' in the above statement. The scholarship's repeated concern with the *poema*'s reliance on chronicles, newsprint, and memoirs is certainly suggested by Pasternak's own statements on '1905', regardless of whether they are serious or tongue-in-cheek (e.g., "это не поэма, а просто хроника о 1905 годе в стихотворной форме"; 1: 695). However, one also has to bear in mind that

the poet's personal memories of the events of 1905 rely on the visual as well, from photographic and cinematic images to those from the realm of painting. As mentioned in the *poema* itself, at the time of the 1905 Revolution the poet-speaker lives above an art studio, surrounded by artifacts, observing everything through that "window", literally and figuratively.

A tremendous amount of sketches and postcards circulated in the capital cities in the years of 1905-1907.¹¹ According to Pasternak, his father also left some sketches of the events of 1905: "among my father's papers are some sketches he made at the time: a woman agitator, who was making a speech on the balcony, is being shot at by dragoons [...]" (*I Remember*; 1959: 47). Pasternak must have been familiar with Serov's painting of 1905 that deals with the subject by the same name, *Devjat'sot pjatyj god* (as well as Serov's other works depicting events of 1905, such as *Soldatuški, bravy rebjatuški, gde že vaša slava?* and *1905 g. Posle usmirenija*). Some descriptions in Pasternak's *poema* are generally reminiscent of the sketchy motion captured in these works by Serov. Moreover, several passages contain suggestions of the ekphrastic.



Illustration 2. *Pochorony Baumana* (1905). Valentin Serov (Cat. No. 468)

For instance, the first scene in the section "Studenty" bears a striking resemblance to Serov's 1905 painting *Pochorony Baumana* (Illustration 2). Serov's streaky composition of Bauman's funeral blends the crowd into such a general commotion that it is impossible to divide the picture into coherent individual units. Serov depicts the masses united in a single motion. In '1905', the monolithic description of Bauman's funeral is achieved through several linguistic ambiguities. In Pasternak's funeral march, all elements –

the marchers, balconies, and people who bow their heads to look at the procession – are “in step” with one another:

Шагом,
 Кланяясь флагам,
 Над полной голов мостовой
 Волочились балконы,
 По мере того
 Как под ними
 Шло без шапок [...]
 (1: 298)

(In step, / Bowing to the flags, / Over the pavement full of heads / The balconies stretched, / In measure with / The hatless, / Walking beneath them [...].)

“Шагом”, an adverbial expression modifying the gerund “кланяясь”, can refer to two separate actions: either the balconies stretching “in step” or the crowd marching “in step”. To take the ambiguity further, the balconies themselves are “in step” with the procession beneath them (“in measure with”). Gerunds in Russian refer to the subject of the matrix clause. In this case, “Шагом, / Кланяясь флагам” should have as its antecedent “балконы”, which is semantically problematic. Common sense suggests that the phrase “in step” modifies the action of walking by the masses, mentioned several lines later. This semantic uncertainty reflects the larger spirit of the scene, i.e., the merger of everything in sight, underscored by the impersonal verb form “шло”. The image is that of an entire crowd of people having removed their hats for the grievous occasion. The verb “шло” refers to a single, amorphous being of a genderless, unified demonstration. The marchers are referred to as “rows/ranks”, presented as a single piece of cloth blown by the force of Bauman’s name: “Ряды колыхавшее имя” (1: 298; “The name that swayed the ranks”). The flags, anticipated by the motion of the “swaying” or “fluttering” rows of protestors, are introduced two lines later. The effect of the wind on the crowd is repeated in the closing lines: “Вихри сахарной пыли, / Свистя, / Пронеслись по рядам” (1: 298; “Whirlwinds of sugary dust, / Whistling, / Carried through the ranks”). This description evokes the dynamism of Serov’s painting, suggested by condensed diagonal strokes from the bottom right hand corner to the top left. In Serov’s treatment, the flags waving above the crowd in the same direction do more than suggest mere windiness. The marchers appear to be merged with, overtaken and directed by the wind. Pasternak’s “sugary dust” (ostensibly snow) performs the same function as Serov’s flags: it converts the forces of the wind into a visual, unifying image. As Pasternak’s white dust moves along the rows of marchers, it conjures up the light strokes that help to denote the movement of the march in Serov’s painting.

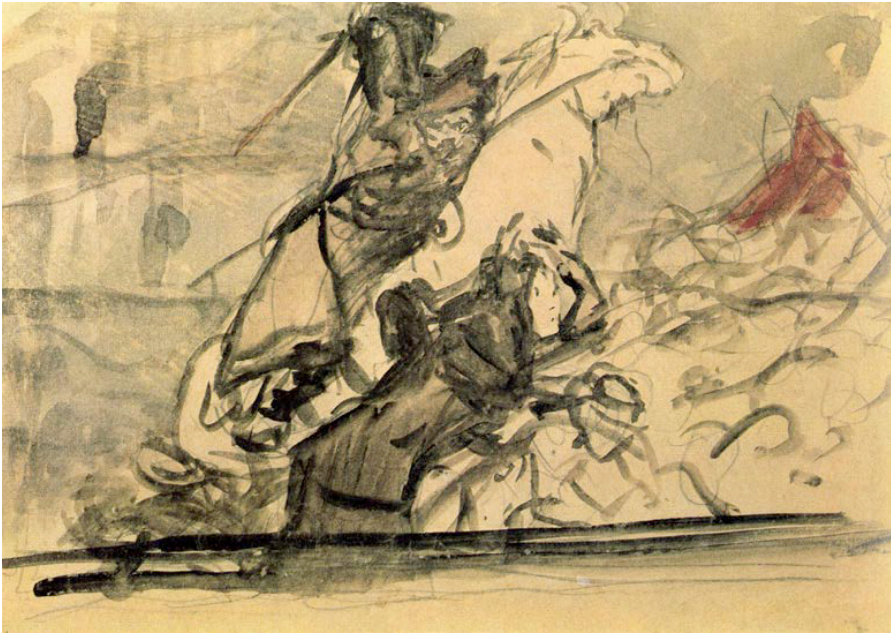


Illustration 3. *Devjat'sot pjatyj god* (1905). Valentin Serov (Cat. No. 487)

The last section, “Moskva v dekabre”, closes with another scene of commotion, suspended in time, reminiscent of Serov’s watercolor *Devjat'sot pjatyj god* (Illustration 3):

Ад дымит позади.
[...]
Но дымитя шоссе,
И из вихря –
Кзаки верхами.
[...]
Пресня стлалась пластом,
[...]
Роем бабьих платков
Мыла
Выступы конного строя
И сдавала
Смирителям
Браунинги на простынях.
(1: 305)

(Hell steams in the background. / [...] / Yet the road is steaming, / And out of the whirlwind / Appear Cossacks on horses. / [...] / Presnja spread itself flat, [...] / With a whirl of women's kerchiefs / It washed / The protrusions of mounted horsemen / And handed over / To its suppressors / Browning machine guns on bedsheets.)



Illustration 4. *Razgon kazakami demonstrantov v 1905 godu* (1905) (Cat. No. 485)

The title of the sketch for Serov's painting – *Razgon kazakami demonstrantov v 1905 godu* (Illustration 4) – makes it clear that Pasternak describes the same exact participants in “Moskva v dekabre”. In Pasternak's text, the foreground (Cossacks on horses) appears out of the background of the fires of hell (“И из вихря”). Again, the background in this scene gives birth to its moving subjects (Cossacks), rendering the distinction between foreground and background superficial. Similarly, the two decipherable subjects in Serov's painting are formed by the general flow of strokes, condensing to delineate the sketchy movement replicated in the background. The suggestion of fires in Pasternak's text (“Ад дымит позади”) parallels the uneven watercolor wash in the background of Serov's picture. The two subjects of Serov's image are: 1) a galloping Cossack with a drawn saber, indeed in the pose of a “смиритель”; and 2) a peasant woman, holding her head, covered by a “платок” in her hands. She is positioned at the foot of the horseman, as

in Pasternak's text ("Пресня мыла выступления конного строя роем бабьих платков", to paraphrase the above lines).

There are, undoubtedly, numerous visual representations of the Revolution of 1905 for which a similar case can be made. In Pasternak's painstaking research through historical sources, he must have come across a plethora of drawings and paintings on the subject. But more importantly, he was surrounded by art at the time of the 1905 Revolution, a circumstance encoded into the text itself. In this section, I have sought not only to identify specific instances of ekphrasis, but to demonstrate more generally other lenses used in '1905' to serve as an aesthetic counterbalance to the historic sources behind Pasternak's text.

IV. *The Viewer-Narrator*

In '1905' Pasternak engages the competing artistic movements which were active during the first two decades of the twentieth century, from modernist experimentation to faithful reproduction of reality. The flickering autobiographical voice reminds the reader both of the artist behind the art, as well as the exclusion of the artist from the story he tells. In this section I examine Pasternak's position on the role of the artist by focusing on the specific artistic techniques the poet engages in his descriptions.

In the article 'Pasternak i živopis'', Dasha di Simplicio explores Pasternak's attitudes toward the artistic trends propagated by his father and the poet's affiliation with cubism through the futurist school. Di Simplicio refers to Pasternak's transition from the itinerant to impressionist worldview as the "first stage" of artistic influence in his work (1989: 201). The "second stage", according to di Simplicio, is a shift from impressionism to cubism, which reflects the poet's organization of material. Pasternak favors the cubist tendency in art towards movement and the multiplicity of perspectives (208). In '1905', we see di Simplicio's first stage, in which the more traditional "хоровая картина" and landscape are transformed into the lines and strokes of impressionist descriptions, and combined into di Simplicio's second stage of dynamic segments of a cubist-like composition.¹² Notably, Pasternak observes that the underlying cause for the shift from realism to modernism is not the search for new forms of creative expression, but the changing reality itself: "Они писали мазками и точками, намеками и полутонами не потому, что им так хотелось [...]. [...] действительность [...] вся была в переходах и броженьи" (4: 396; 'Pol'-Mari Verlen'). The new reality for the poet is now reflected through the lens of modernist tendencies.

In terms of the text's larger structure, various perspectives at varying distances are set side by side in the manner of synthetic cubism (a combination of objects and chunks of objects) or cubo-futurism (Pasternak's "se-

cond stage”, according to di Simplicio). Juliette Stapanian observes that in the case of Majakovskij’s works a cubo-futurist transposition of conventional still-lives erases the distinctions between the background and subject, between animate and inanimate categories (1986: 14). Pasternak achieves this exact effect visually as well, borne out continuously in ‘1905’. The poet communicates his tendency towards eradicating the distinction between the animate subject and its inanimate setting in his description of the revolutionary fervor of 1917: “вместе с людьми митинговали и ораторствовали дороги, деревья и звезды. Воздух [...] казался личностью с именем, казался ясно-видящим и одушевленным” (‘Ljudi i položenija. “Sestra moja – žizn”’; 4: 790-791). As the backdrop comes to life and acquires human characteristics, it becomes significantly more difficult to create a protagonist that would not blend into it. The narrator of another one of Pasternak’s *poemy*, ‘Spektorskij’, struggles with this exact problem: “Неужто, жив в охвате той картины, / Он верит в быль отдельного лица?” (1: 365; “How can it be that, living in the breadth of this canvas, / he believes in the existence of a separate entity?”). Once again, Pasternak comprehends the epic sweep through visual vocabulary (“охват картины”), diminishing the possibility of an individual’s “быль” (both “existence” and “myth” of an individual) against such a background.

The speaker’s exclusion from the sphere of action is established at the very beginning of ‘1905’. Whenever the speaker refers to himself, he is emphatically a child. Following a momentary turn to the lyric “I” at the end of “Detstvo” – “Я грозу полюбил” (1, 255; “I fell in love with the storm”) – the poem switches to the third-person plural exclusively. In this way, the text approaches the classical epic perspective, i.e., the non-involvement of the narrator in the action of his narrative.¹³ In the section “Detstvo”, the speaker-protagonist divide is clearly drawn between “we”-the-schoolboys and those students old enough to be in “the party”: “Те, что в партии, / Смотрят орлами. / Это в старших. / А мы: [...] / На уроках играем в парламент [...]” (emphasis added – L.S.L.; 1: 289; “Those in the party / Eagle-like, look down at us. / That’s in the upper grades. / While we... / Play parliament in class”). The speaker’s world of imagination is contrasted to the world of “real” action.¹⁴

Unlike Pasternak’s ‘Lejtenant Šmidt’, which examines a single revolutionary episode, ‘1905’ contains no individuated “личности” at the center of its action. As Sinjavskij describes Pasternak’s verse in general, “the primary thread of the narrative is indiscernible from the background”. This statement characterizes the structure of ‘1905’ perfectly. The foreground in ‘1905’ is virtually non-existent. No single character dominates the realm of action; there is neither a third-person protagonist nor any significant presence of the first-person biographical hero on the level of plot.¹⁵ The two poles of the *poema* genre are reversed: the usual background of epic poetry (a historic

event) assumes the place of an actor, while the individual is relegated to inconsequential actions in the face of history. That said, the minimal presence of the biographical first-person protagonist in the *poema* should not be confused with the poet-speaker, "pallet in hand". His vantage point is, in many respects, more important than the facts that he documents.

In her discussion of the visual in Pasternak's 'Ochrannaja gramota', Angela Livingstone emphasizes the act of perceiving as central in his understanding of creativity; our perception is what gives life to the objects perceived (2004: 274). This concept unravels on the pages of '1905', where the viewer-narrator animates history through conjuring it up visually. While documentary faithfulness underlies the text, what gives the revolutionary events their reality is, paradoxically, the poet's and reader's creative observation. Pasternak describes '1905' as his experimentation with and transcendence of "the actual" in the following way: "В стремлении научиться объективному тону и стать актуальнее я в этих отрывках зашел в такой тупик [...] Хочется верить, что я в нем не останусь [...] Все силы положу на то, чтобы '1905 г.' оказался поворотным пунктом [...]. А об эту стену надо было стукнуться" (quoted in E. Pasternak 1989: 413). Though Pasternak characterizes '1905' mainly as a necessary, though futile exercise in objectivity, he also sees it as a "turning point" out of the "dead end" of "actuality".¹⁶

The year of publication of '1905' as a book is also the year that marks Pasternak's break with the futurist journal *Novyj Lef* and its emphasis on documentariness in art. Evgenij Pasternak suggests that in 'Lejtenant Šmidt', which was partially published in *Novyj Lef*, his father was able to show the narrowness of the journal's approach to representations of reality and the reductionism of its editors' call for "literature of fact" (1989: 425).¹⁷ As Pasternak undertook a poetic narrative based on historical facts, he had to resolve his own unique interrelationship between the actual and the imaginative. Although the historic narrative excludes the speaker as a protagonist, the "actual" events extend into the present solely through his faculty of imagination (and, in this case, literally his faculty of image-creation, "вообра[э]-жение").

V. Conclusion

On the basis of Pasternak's verbal visualizations, Lotman, for instance, disputes the conception of the poet as a pure lyricist: "sketches and landscapes loom larger than lyricism in Pasternak's drafts" (1978: 21). The genre of the *poema* allows for this tendency in Pasternak's poetry to receive a fuller treatment. According to Lotman, the external world of the epic corresponds to Pasternak's "orientation toward the object" (24). However, as Pasternak

explores the genre that fits his approach to poetry, the framework of the genre itself shifts. The epic dimension of background is amplified (the chronotope taking over the individual), while the lyric elements found at the foreground of a traditional *poema* (such as individual voices, those of speakers as well as of protagonists) are diminished and incorporated into a larger chorus. The speaker is positioned on the other side of the canvas, prevented from participation.¹⁸ As the backdrop is animated, the poet's challenge is to find an appropriate distribution between the individual and his/her context. As illustrated by the Cossacks on horses appearing out of the whirlwind, it is precisely the setting that gives birth to and galvanizes its actors.

This perspective on revolution, where an epoch, a larger "musical flow" (Blok's "единый музыкальный напор") controls its protagonists and sucks them into its gyre, reverberates with the treatment of the Bolshevik Revolution in *The Twelve*. However, while Blok's *poema* contains a story of an individual love triangle, Pasternak goes further to exclude any meaningful romantic plot in this work, pushing "pictures" of the age ("визуальный напор", as it were) to the forefront of action. At the same time, while divesting himself from the plot and encoding epic distance into his narrative, the poet-speaker is more than a recorder of history. He is the one who makes history come alive.

Artistic and literary techniques were vigorously discussed in the mid 1920s, before socialist realism was decreed the only official method to represent reality. In the world of the visual arts, for instance, the first three decades of the twentieth century (which encompass both the events of 1905 and the representation of these events in '1905') see a healthy competition between traditionalists and experimentalists. At the time of Pasternak's composition of '1905', the recently emerged artistic association, "Ассоциация художников революционной России" (AChRR), continues the tradition of the itinerant school of realism in art, while the avant-garde artists (cubo-futurists, constructivists, suprematists) posit their own, as-of-yet still officially legitimate methods. '1905' evokes the entire spectrum of disparate artistic techniques. However, on the whole, scenes where the time of day condenses into a physical entity that drenches the crowd, and where the backdrop becomes an actor with frog legs, cannot be ascribed to the realistic method.

'1905' is far from the factographic trends in literature that are so enthusiastically lauded in the 1920s, far from the "simple versified chronicle", as Pasternak once either unfairly or flippantly called it (1: 695). The poet's commitment to documentary faithfulness is only part of the story of the composition of '1905'. As Pasternak struggles with the changing role of the artist in Soviet Russia, lamenting '1905' as an "itinerant" product, commissioned by the times and described as something between "служба" and "писательство" (*Pis'ma*; 1990: 179), he simultaneously questions, on the very pages of this "служба", the plausibility of an artistic chronicle minus

the artist. His presence as an observer of the scenes he depicts is a departure from the traditional epic narrator who strives to devalue his role as the creator of his text. In '1905', Pasternak advocates for art, in whatever form it takes, as the only vehicle for bringing historical facts to life. He uses, but more importantly, *departs* from documentary sources by centering on the visual and the ekphrastic elements of poetry, by focusing on the pictorial composition of his unique perspective, by calling attention to authorial presence by means borrowed from the modernist visual artists, where a self-portrait is no longer the sole way to remind the viewer of the artist behind the art. While emphasizing his own exclusion from the events of the *poema*, the speaker is, nonetheless, the most important viewer in it. In turn, he expressly asks the reader to "look" closely ("вглядимся"), to share in the creative process of setting his "epic fragments" in motion.

NOTES

- 1 For reasons of space, the span of years in reference to Pasternak's *Sobranie sočinenij* is henceforth omitted.
- 2 Page Dubois discusses the difference between the use of ekphrasis in lyric and epic poetry, suggesting that in lyric poetry ekphrasis has the capacity to freeze time and to imitate "ideal stasis", while in the epic it represents a break in the continuity of a narrative line (1982: 7).
- 3 See Lotman (1978); Roziner (1991); Egeres (2006); Salys (1992); Levina (1990); Rusakov (1991); Livingstone (2006).
- 4 I provide translations for the poetic passages only, in order to clarify my interpretation of particular verses.
- 5 K.M. Polivanov asserts that '1905' belongs squarely to the "historiographic" tradition in depictions of the first Russian Revolution, providing a side-by-side comparison of Pasternak's text with memoirs of the event (2006: 66-68).
- 6 In his discussion of Robert Browning's ekphrastic poem 'Eurydice to Orpheus', Cheeke anthropomorphizes an image this way: "a picture desires to be brought into a relation with a viewer and to be made alive; 'one immortal look' will realize the will to live of the image" (2008: 15). In fact, by presenting an image rather than narrating a story, we are asked to rely on our visual rather than analytical perception; the act of observation is more immediate than that of reading. Similarly, an image is positioned in a more unmediated relationship to reality than a word is (2008: 25-27).
- 7 Olga P. Hasty draws on Lessing's text in her discussion of Pasternak's 'Groza, momental'naja navek', without claiming direct allusion on Pasternak's part (2004: 117).

- 8 In her article on Pasternak in the context of Michail Larionov's visual techniques, Egeres notes that Pasternak's description of the same post office building in 'Ochrannaja gramota' is executed in the spirit of Larionov's artistic style of rayonism (2006: 329).
- 9 Robert Payne, in his chapter on '1905', suggests that Pasternak "serves notice" that his description of mutiny at sea will be Homeric. Significantly for my argument, Payne observes that the poet is no more concerned here to provide a historically authentic account of the mutiny than Homer was concerned to write a history of the Trojan war (1963: 40-41).
- 10 Barnes (1989: 358); Gifford (1977: 104-105); Rudova (1997: 89).
- 11 See, for instance, Roščupkin (1975: 56). E.V. Orlovskij, a student at The Moscow Art University, was a prolific artist in this movement, capturing scenes like *Rannee utro na barrikadach*, *Črezvyčajnaja ochrana na ulicach Moskvy*, *Draguny natolknulis' na barrikadu*, and *Patriotičeskaja manifestacija* (a demonstration of the Black Hundreds), etc.
- 12 Roman Jakobson also compares Pasternak's poetic technique to cubism in the visual arts (1987: 332).
- 13 Gifford suggests that four of the six sections have some personal connection for the poet, hence '1905' lends itself to a lyrical treatment (1977: 107). In her 'Poëty s istoriej i poëty bez istorii', Marina Cvetaeva argues that both '1905' and 'Lejtenant Šmidt' represent pure lyricism because they constitute poetic reminiscences of childhood (1997: 101). Igor' Efimov, however, suggests: "В истории русской поэзии Пастернак – первый по-настоящему эпический поэт [...] со времен Державина [...]. Какой же это лирик, если для него судьба собственного чувства, да и бытие отдельной личности – предметы недостойные поэзии?" (1991: 98-99). Cvetaeva's perspective is true on the level of fragments, but the poem's larger structure cannot be understood as purely lyrical. Wladimir Weidle, for instance, claims that the majority of the poem is artificial and lifeless precisely because of the lack of personal involvement. According to Weidle, only those sections that deal with the poet-speaker's biography are successful (1970: 123). In a similar vein, Barnes notes that '1905' is not "organically bound up with Pasternak's personality" (1989: 358). I propose that the text, though largely excluding personal experience, very much pivots on a more distant personal observation. The boundary between these two categories in Pasternak's *poema* is carefully demarcated, with the image of a canvas or a camera lens constituting the divide between the artist and his subject matter.
- 14 In a letter to his editor, Pasternak explains that in this section of '1905' he plans to present a sharp divide between participants in the revolutionary events and the sheltered world to which the poet-speaker belongs: "Верно воспользуюсь авторским и личным 'Мне четырнадцать лет' [...], и этою же фразой открою воспоминанье рабочего, может быть, бунтовца, или вообще рабочего с дека, который к 14-ти годам уже вполне человек и на баррикадах, а там в гимназии в снежки играют и Скрябин" (quoted in E. Pasternak 1989: 412).

- ¹⁵ Angela Livingstone suggests that Pasternak generally conceals "the poet as person" in his work in order to avoid the "Romantic manner" (2004: 264).
- ¹⁶ I discuss 'Lejtenant Šmidt' as a counterpoint to Cvetaeva's notion of a Romantic personality, something that Pasternak consciously rejects through his emphasis on historical factuality, which limits his protagonist's possibilities in the real world (*Russian Review*, to appear). At the same time, in '1905', a closely related work, I suggest that Pasternak considers the limitations of adopting historical documentation as an artistic method.
- ¹⁷ See Lazar' Flejšman's *Boris Pasternak v dvadcatye gody* on the poet's break with *Lef*, primarily over what Pasternak perceived to be the journal's note of servility (1997: 67-99). Flejšman assigns Pasternak's rejection of the journal's anti-aesthetic stance to the late 1920's, expressed most fully in 'Ochrannaja gramota' (132-133). In my view, the poet was in the process of formulating this position at least as early as in '1905', where he had to confront the issue of artistic reworking of documentary materials.
- ¹⁸ Brigitte Peucker's first category of pictorial poetry, poetry of distance, is particularly useful to this discussion. The critic suggests that poetic description is realized by closing off the speaker's entry into the scene (1981: 904-913). J.W. Foster also points out the speaker's non-involvement in descriptive poetry: "Paradoxically, the topographical poet, with immense care and control, constructs in his poem a world in which he is finally, as an individual, redundant" (1970: 406).

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