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Poema of Lieutenant Schmidt's End: Pasternak's Dialogue with Tsvetaeva through the Prism of Genre

LUDMILA SHLEYFER LAVINE

I am moving from lyric thinking to the epic, although this is very difficult.

Boris Pasternak, "Writers about Themselves"

Boris Pasternak's *poemy* are acutely self-conscious of their place in the epic tradition. *Lieutenant Schmidt* (*LS*) represents one attempt at exploring the parameters of the *poema* itself as the poet makes a "difficult" transition from "lyric thinking" to "the epic." In this article I examine this transition against a contemporaneous example in the genre, Tsvetaeva's *Poema of the End* (*PE*). In *LS*, structural elements of the *poema* are counterposed to those of *PE*. While *PE* amplifies the individual voice, *LS* muffles what is personal for the sake of the public voice. While *PE* is atemporal, *LS* is historical. While *PE* unfolds on symbolic planes, with elements of plot kept to a bare minimum (a single moment of separation), *LS* is a plot-driven account based on concrete, documentary material. Finally, while *PE* is an "overgrown lyric"—representing the "lyric thinking" that Pasternak hopes to transcend—*LS* is an exploration of the possibilities that a more traditional model of the *poema* can offer.¹ Although in the present analysis I draw on several theories of poetic genres, this is by no means an exhaustive study of epic versus lyric forms of poetry. Instead, my analysis focuses on those structural and thematic features of the *poema* that the poets themselves perceived as central to their texts. Pasternak, for his part, develops the structure and thematics of his *poema* in ways that are inspired by *PE*, but also, as we will see, in more significant ways, contrast with it.

Before addressing the structural issues of Pasternak's *poema* as defined against Tsvetaeva's, I will explain why we should read *LS* against *PE*, and not against any other of

I gratefully acknowledge two *Russian Review* referees for their close reading of the manuscript and many helpful comments. All translations from Russian are my own, unless indicated otherwise.

¹Alexander Etkind coined the term "overgrown lyric" to describe a twentieth-century *poema* that behaves like a lyric poem. See his *Tam, vnutri: Russkaia poezia XX veka* (St. Petersburg, 1997), 61.

the numerous examples of “overgrown lyrics” in the modernist period. Here I consider specific allusions to *PE* in *LS* and Pasternak’s general obsession with Tsvetaeva’s *poema* as he writes his own.

POEMA OF THE END AT PASTERNAK’S SIDE

Numerous studies address issues of intertextuality surrounding *LS*. Ronald Hingley traces echoes of Tolstoy’s *Resurrection* in Pasternak’s *poema*. V. N. Al’fonsov relates *LS* to novels of the 1920s and claims that the *poema*’s general tendency is toward prose. Catherine Ciepiela reads Pasternak’s *LS* against Tsvetaeva’s historical allegory, *The Pied Piper*. The critic, additionally, observes the ways in which both *poemy* address Blok’s vision of the revolution in *The Twelve*.²

PE provides a unique profitable subtext against which to read *LS*. Unlike *The Pied Piper* or *The Twelve*, *PE* presents a glance at a private, ahistorical moment of romantic separation. A clearer picture of Pasternak’s attempts at an epic begins to emerge when we consider *PE* as his point of reference. It is important to realize the extent to which Tsvetaeva’s *PE* stirs Pasternak and the state in which he undertakes his own *poema*: “What a great, what a devilishly great, artist you are, Marina! But not another word about the poem or I will be constrained to drop you, my work, my family, and, turning my back on everybody, sit down and write about art.” Years later, in a letter to Ariadna Efron, Pasternak writes: “For you two I wrote *The Year 1905*, for her alone [Tsvetaeva]—*Lieutenant Schmidt*.”³ Instead of writing “about art,” Pasternak responds to Tsvetaeva with another type of *poema*.

The melody of *PE* was present for Pasternak throughout his composition of *LS*. Pasternak’s account of his choice to read *PE* at the Briks’, instead of reading something of his own, suggests that the poet internalizes its every intonation and every gesture as if the text were his own: “After reading it aloud to them (and *how* I read it!) there is silence, surrender. ... How is it achieved? Sometimes by the mere lifting of an eyebrow. I sit bent, bowed, aged. I sit reading as if you were watching me.” In another letter Pasternak quotes *PE* from memory, noting that it has become a part of him to such an extent that he does not need to interrupt the momentum by consulting a copy of the poem that lies at his side. He adds that he would rather misquote a line than give up the pleasure of hearing it for himself, of participating in the living process.⁴

Given the incantatory force that *PE* exerts on Pasternak, the way it engages him on an instinctive, almost physical level, it is sometimes difficult to determine how purposeful a particular allusion to *PE* really is. Sometimes a word choice or the acoustics of a phrase are distantly reminiscent of *PE*. At other times, Pasternak could not have failed to notice

²See Ronald Hingley, *Pasternak: A Biography* (New York, 1983), 113; V. N. Al’fonsov, “Zapis’ so mnogikh kontsov razom (Printsipy poeticheskogo povestvovaniia v ‘Spektorskom’ Borisa Pasternaka),” *Russkaia literatura*, 1988, no. 3:59; and Catherine Ciepiela, *The Same Solitude: Boris Pasternak and Marina Tsvetaeva* (Ithaca, 2006), 131–77.

³Yevgeny Pasternak et al., eds., *Letters, Summer 1926: Boris Pasternak, Marina Tsvetaeva, Rainer Maria Rilke (Letters)*, trans. Margaret Wettlin et al. (New York, 2001), 54, 52. I use this English edition unless the Russian original is relevant.

⁴*Ibid.*, 54.

the direct echoing of Tsvetaeva's text in his own. Viacheslav Ivanov lists *PE* and *LS* as the two ultimate examples of the twentieth-century tendency toward a polymetric *poema*, observing that the former might have exerted an "indirect" influence on the metrical structure of the latter.⁵ Although I will discuss what I consider to be direct reverberations of *PE* in *LS*, Pasternak's *poema* is permeated with Tsvetaeva's beyond quantification. The point here, therefore, is not to provide an exhaustive list of allusions, but rather to establish the connection between *PE* and *LS* in order later to explore Pasternak's variation on the genre.

With this stipulation in mind, we find an early example of a deliberate allusion to *PE* in Schmidt's second letter to his beloved. The letter's conclusion—"Нам с вами надо б съехаться" ("We really ought to get together")—echoes a verbal exchange between *PE*'s speaker and her beloved: "—Нам с вами нужно бы ... (Озноб)" ("We ought to ... (Chills)").⁶ At first glance, the choice of this phrase could indeed appear coincidental, especially considering its conversational nature. However, when we examine the line's meter in conjunction with its place in the poem, the conclusion of Schmidt's letter is revealed to be carefully structured with an eye to *PE*: Section 3 of *PE* is in iambic tetrameter that regularly alternates with iambic trimeter; in Section 3 (Part I) of *LS* iambic tetrameter also alternates with iambic trimeter.⁷ Keeping in mind the polymetric nature of both *poemy*, it becomes significant that only two out of twenty-eight sections are written in this particular meter in *LS*, and, indeed, only two out of fourteen in *PE*.

Section 3 of *LS* begins with a description of early morning at sea and the qualities of the water, recalling the use of water similes in Section 3 of *PE*, as the interlocutors walk along the river. When the subject matter turns to Schmidt in the act of writing his letter, the metrical alternation of four-foot / three-foot iambs becomes regular, closely approximating *PE*'s meter of Section 3. This pattern becomes most prominent as we read further into the letter. The initially astrophic verse begins to break up into quatrains. It consists of thirty-two lines, twenty-four of which comprise six quatrains (short of two syllables) that duplicate the regularly alternating quatrains of Tsvetaeva's Section 3. The line in question belongs to the concluding quatrain of Schmidt's letter which recalls the meter of Tsvetaeva's stanza to which it refers: "Нам с вами нужно б съехаться/ До них и ради них" (compare to *PE*: "—Нам с вами нужно бы ... (Озноб.)/ —Мы мужественны будем?"). The slight metrical deviation from Tsvetaeva's verses here is the masculine cadence in Pasternak's final line.

Pasternak's acoustic echoing of *PE* at this point in his *poema* is motivated by plot. Tsvetaeva's lines speak of impending separation, Pasternak's of intended reunion. While

⁵Viacheslav Vs. Ivanov, "Metri i ritm v 'Poeme kontsa' M. Tsvetaevoi," in *Teoriia stikha*, ed. V. M. Zhirmunskii et al. (Leningrad, 1968), 168–69.

⁶Boris Pasternak, "Leitenant Shmidt," in his *Sobranie sochinenii v piati tomakh* (SS) (Moscow, 1989–92), 1:309; Marina Tsvetaeva, "Poema kontsa," in her *Sobranie sochinenii v semi tomakh* (SS) (Moscow, 1997–98), 3:33.

⁷Iurii Levin describes the meter of these lines as iambic trimeter with a dactylic rhyme, as opposed to iambic tetrameter ("Zametki o 'Leitenante Smidte' B. L. Pasternaka," in *Boris Pasternak: Essays*, ed. N. Nilsson [Stockholm, 1976], 85–161). Although Levin's reading is more orthodox, some lines, like "А Севастополь спит еще," have to be read as a tetrameter. Richard Chappell, who stays close to the form of the original in his English translation, indeed uses iambic tetrameter for these verses (Boris Pasternak, *Lieutenant Schmidt*, trans. Richard Chappell [London, 1992]).

Tsvetaeva's speaker anticipates separation from the moment of togetherness, Schmidt proposes to arrange a romantic meeting in his letter, while alone in his cabin. Furthermore, the reunion of lovers is conspicuously absent from *LS* (in contrast to *PE*'s dramatic structure of a face-to-face dialogue). At one point in the narrative, we see the heroine getting progressively closer to Schmidt—on the train to the Crimea, at dinner with the general in hopes of being granted permission to see Schmidt, on a boat ride to the island where Schmidt is kept—but the actual meeting is never presented.⁸

This omission is quite intentional on the author's part. We know that Pasternak often gave up his poetic license for the sake of documentary faithfulness, to the point of modeling his meter on Schmidt's original letters (and to Tsvetaeva's great disappointment, as will be discussed later). We also know that Pasternak used Schmidt's sister's accounts of her brother's meetings with Zinaida Rizberg. The poet's choice not to include the lovers' meeting underscores a decisive shift away from the private sphere, from Pasternak's own formulation of lyric poetry as "the etymology of feelings."⁹

The texts overlap in Section 3 of each work at a central point. In the final two lines of *PE*'s Section 3, after the interlocutors discuss where, literally, to go, the idea of separation is introduced directly for the first time. The "chilling" decision to separate precipitates one of the main subplots of the poem: two epic-scale battles between the interlocutors and the ultimate defeat of its male protagonist. The first battle ends with him being crowned "Caesar" ("— Битвы сей/ Вы— Цезарь"; ["You are the Caesar of this battle"]); the final victory, in the form of the male lover's tears, is hers ("Три девки навстречу./ Смеются. ... Слезам твоим— перлам/ В короне моей"; ["The three girls, approaching./ Laugh ... At your tears—pearls/ In my crown"]).¹⁰ Pasternak's lines also introduce a battle, but this time, significantly, not one between lovers. The mutinous "events" will permanently separate Schmidt from his beloved: "А ну как в их разгаре [событий]/ Я скроюсь с ваших глаз" ("In their [events'] midst I will disappear from your sight").¹¹ The two poles, private and public, conflated in *PE*, are drawn into an antagonistic relationship in *LS*.

The next allusion to *PE* circles back to the one discussed above. In Section 7 of Part III, Schmidt tries to imagine his execution as his death sentence is being read:

Версты обвинительного акта.	Versts and versts long stretched the whole indictment.
Шапку в зубы, только не рыдать!	Hat between your teeth, so as not to cry! ...
...	...
Шапку в зубы – да минуй озноб!	Careful, avoid the chills—bite your cap!
Мысль о казни – топи непролазней:	Thoughts of torture—of some quagmire swampbound:
С лавки съедешь, с головой увязнешь,	Sliding off the bench, your heads well bogged down,
Двинешься, чтоб вырваться, и – хлоп.	Slipping forward to break free, then wham!
Тормошат, повертывают навзничь,	Over on your back, you're poked and prodded,
Отливают, волокут, как сноп. ¹²	Sheaf-like, poured out, promptly sacked and dragged.

⁸There is a brief allusion to the meeting in part III (Pasternak, *SS* 1:328).

⁹This is how Pasternak characterized *PE* (*Letters*, 53).

¹⁰Tsvetaeva, *SS* 3:36, 49.

¹¹Pasternak, *SS* 1:309.

¹²*Ibid.*, 333 (translation adapted from Chappell, *Lieutenant Schmidt*, 79).

Compare these verses to Section 6 of *PE*:

Зубы	I drive my teeth
Втиснула в губы.	Into my lips.
Плакать не буду.	I won't cry.
Самую крепость—	Firmness itself
В самую мякоть.	Into softness itself.
Только не плакать. ¹³	If only not to cry.

In addition to borrowing the phrasing from *PE* (“только не рыдать”/ “Только не плакать”), Pasternak marks the equally borrowed gesture of teeth-grinding with another similarity to Tsvetaeva's text. The line “Шапку в зубы—да минуй озноб!” (“Hat between your teeth; avoid the chills”) anticipates the final rhyme (“сноп”), borrowed from *PE*: “Разительного света сноп. ... — Нам с вами нужно бы... (Озноб)” (“A shaft of striking light. ... We ought to ... (Chills)”)¹⁴ Two sections later Tsvetaeva's female speaker imagines the imminent separation from her lover in the language of an execution: “Перстов барабанный бой./ Растет. (Эшафот и площадь.)” (“The beating of fingers on a drum/ Is growing. [A scaffold and a square]”).¹⁵ Perhaps it is the distant sound of Tsvetaeva's execution drums from *PE* that is heard as Schmidt awaits his literal final hour: “И точно шла работа/ По сборке эшафота,/ Стал слышен частый стук ...” (“And it is as if a scaffold was being erected./ Frequent taps began to sound ...”).¹⁶ Pasternak's side-glance at Tsvetaeva's *poema* at a point in the text when Schmidt's death becomes inevitable raises an important generic contrast between the two *poemy*—symbolic versus concrete—to be discussed in the second part of this analysis.

Tsvetaeva is conjured up more generally in Pasternak's passing reference to Orpheus. While tapping into one of Tsvetaeva's favorite mythological characters, Pasternak focuses on a different part of the myth. In a letter of the same period, Tsvetaeva writes to Pasternak that if she were Eurydice, she would be ashamed to go back, on Orpheus' beckoning, to the world she left behind.¹⁷ For Tsvetaeva, the most productive side of the Orpheus myth is that which allows him to cross the boundary between the two worlds by means of his art (his lyre entices the gods to grant Orpheus permission to enter the underworld), the part of the myth in which his beloved is positioned tragically beyond his physical reach.¹⁸ Pasternak, on the other hand, incorporates the public side of Orpheus into his *poema*: “Чтоб только на миг оттянуть канонаду,/ В нем точно проснулся дремавший Орфей.” (“In order to postpone the cannonade,/ it is as if a slumbering Orpheus awakened in him”).¹⁹ In a less popular aspect of the myth, Orpheus uses his lyre to soften the hearts of the fiercest warriors and to turn their thoughts to peace. This side of the Orpheus story resonates with

¹³Tsvetaeva, *SS* 3:38.

¹⁴*Ibid.*, 33.

¹⁵*Ibid.*, 35.

¹⁶Pasternak, *SS* 1:334.

¹⁷*Letters*, 154.

¹⁸For ways in which this side of the Orpheus myth contributes to the creation of Tsvetaeva's poetics see Olga Peters Hasty, *Tsvetaeva's Orphic Journeys in the Worlds of the Word* (Evanston, 1996).

¹⁹Pasternak, *SS* 1:323.

Schmidt's political convictions of nonviolence. At this stage in the poem Schmidt has already given up such convictions, but the pacifist instinct awakens as he attempts to "delay the cannonade." Pasternak's reply to Tsvetaeva's Orpheus of private romantic separation, the Orpheus who journeys between worlds, is an Orpheus who deals with public matters of *this* world.²⁰

In an epigraph to her first cycle of poetry, *An Evening Album*, Tsvetaeva quotes Napoleon's words "imagination rules the world." Years later she attests to the constancy of Napoleon's status in her worldview, presenting the figures of Napoleon and Schmidt as interchangeable: "from [the age of] 12 to the present day—love of Napoleon, supplanted briefly in 1905 by the Russian heroes Spiridonova and Schmidt."²¹ In contrast to Tsvetaeva's interpretation of Schmidt as a fierce individualist who wields power through imagination à la Napoleon, Pasternak presents a character who has to set aside not only his private life but also his political convictions (from pacifism to violence). Perhaps it is Tsvetaeva's refusal to be constrained by the times in which she lives that partly motivates Pasternak's initial dedication of *LS* to her (that is, a reply in the form of a *poema* whose protagonist represents the exact opposite). Pasternak knew that he was taking up Tsvetaeva's favorite hero from history and stripping him of the grand pose in which Tsvetaeva cast him in her imagination. Hence, "The Dedication," in the form of an acrostic ("to Marina Tsvetaeva," which was omitted from the complete 1927 publication of *LS*), is a direct response to Tsvetaeva's Schmidt. As the poet writes in a letter to Tsvetaeva, in "The Dedication" (to her), he insists on "the tragic inevitability of history (обреченности истории)."²² In other words, Pasternak replies to Tsvetaeva's imagination-driven world with a world of empiricism beyond a poet's personal, creative will.

To summarize, *LS* references *PE* in several specific instances that point to variations on a shared motif. The first direct reference ("Нам с вами ...") engages *PE*'s theme of a private person, *PE*'s metrics, and the specific rhyme ("сноп"/"озноб") that surfaces later in Pasternak's text. In turn, that passage contains the image of teeth-grinding that sends the reader back to Section 3 of *PE* where the same idea of stoicism in the face of death is introduced. Pasternak's use of the Orpheus motif simultaneously taps into Tsvetaeva's mythopoetic inventory and redirects it away from the universal theme of tragic love and toward history. Below I develop the idea that subservience to history, its "inevitability" in Pasternak's own words, is supported by the choice of genre in its traditional manifestation, with its individual voice contextualized (and often subsumed) by the larger world. This dynamic contrasts with Tsvetaeva's instinct to defy and revise everything from mythological personalities and historical figures to poetic genres.

²⁰Similarly, Ciepiela observes that Pasternak's ambivalent response to Tsvetaeva's *The Pied Piper* is directed toward her "elemental lyricism" that leads to "the loss of this world," as the rats of Hamelin are led to their deaths. The critic reminds us that Pasternak was confronted with *The Pied Piper* at around the time he began his own, rather divergent, historically-based *poemy*, *The Year 1905* and *LS*, which return the revolutionary subject to matters of this world (*Same Solitude*, 162–63).

²¹*Letters*, 76.

²²K. M. Azadovskii et al., eds., *Pis'ma 1926 goda: Rainer Maria Rilke, Boris Pasternak, Marina Tsvetaeva (Pis'ma)* (Moscow, 1990), 104.

“FROM LYRIC THINKING TO THE EPIC”

Tsvetaeva's *PE* guides Pasternak's transition to “epic” thinking even as the latter moves in the opposite direction. Recall that *PE* constitutes an account of one moment locked in the present, a heightened emotional state during a single conclusive episode of a love affair. In contrast to Tsvetaeva's lyric immediacy, atemporality, and insulation, Pasternak employs three distinctive features of epic poetry: individual versus his/her larger context; epic concreteness; and epic distance.

TEXTS WITH(OUT) CONTEXTS

Central to all of Pasternak's works in the genre of the *poema* lies the question of individual choice in the face of history. It is precisely by turning to the *poema* that Pasternak attempts to overcome his tendency to withdraw.²³ Conversely, one of the advantages of the *poema* in Tsvetaeva's poetics is the deeper (and lengthier) exploration for her lyric “I.” The poets' conflicting conceptions of the genre underlie the difference in the space allocated to tragic love and its sociohistoric backdrop in the two *poemy*. If lyric poetry strives to be “a text without context,” “a refuge from epic narrative and from history,” then the *poema* facilitates a return into context and history.²⁴

The Russian term *poema*, with the inexact equivalent in English, “long/er poem,” suggests a deeper relationship to the epic tradition. The term applies more broadly, however, encompassing classical epic verse, Romantic narrative poetry (sometimes called “lyrical *poema*” by Russian scholars), and the modernist *poema*.²⁵ There are, of course, several authors who label their works a “*poema*” more liberally (for example, Gogol's *The Dead Souls* and Erofeev's *Moscow Stations*), but such instances do not apply to this study.²⁶ The *poema* often contains lyrical elements, but neither its practitioners nor its scholars, as a rule, perceive it to be synonymous with a lyric cycle. The *poema*'s wholeness, usually achieved by some type of a reconstructable fabula (as loose as it may be in the modernist period) is opposed to a lyric cycle's fragmentariness. As Dolgoplov observes, from the second half of the nineteenth century, poets refer to lyric cycles (or even collections of lyric poetry) as *poemy* to suggest a certain unity of mood, not one of “plot, events, or characters.”²⁷

²³Igor' Efimov rejects Tsvetaeva's claim that Pasternak is a “pure lyric poet” on the grounds that the poet regards “the fate of one's own feelings” and “the existence of the independent individual” as unworthy subjects for poetry. He concludes, instead, that Pasternak is the first epic poet since Derzhavin on the basis of the poet's balanced sense of proportion between individual voice and historical context. See Efimov, “Intelligent i revoliutsiia v poemakh Pasternaka,” in *Boris Pasternak, 1890–1990*, ed. Lev Losev (Northfield, VT, 1991), 99.

²⁴See Clare Cavanaugh, “Poetry and History: Poland's Acknowledged Legislators,” *Common Knowledge* 11:2 (2005): 187; and Thomas C. Stillinger, *The Song of Troilus: Lyric Authority in the Medieval Book* (Philadelphia, 1992), 22.

²⁵On “lyrical *poemy*” see, for example, V. M. Zhirmunskii, *Bairon i Pushkin* (Leningrad, 1978), 29–30.

²⁶L. K. Dolgoplov proposes several definitions of a *poema*, one of which includes Gogol's novel by virtue of the work's approximation of a “national epos.” See his *Poemy Bloka i russkaia poema kontsa XIX–nachala XX vekov* (Moscow, 1964), 8.

²⁷*Ibid.*, 12.

Note, for instance, Mayakovsky's impressions of Khlebnikov's *poemy*: "Khlebnikov does not have any *poemy*. The completeness (*zakonchennost'*) of his published works is fiction."²⁸ Again, Mayakovsky has in mind a finished whole, in contrast to the deliberate incompleteness of a lyric poem, or the concatenation of fragments in a lyric cycle. Furthermore, the term *poema* implicates two axes: the individual voice of a protagonist or narrator, the locus of the lyric component; and a larger backdrop against which this individual voice is set.

According to Theodor Adorno, lyric poetry is both a "descent into individuality" and a "protest." Adorno views lyric poetry as social in nature, but in a peculiarly anti-social way. It is a "a protest against a social condition which every individual experiences as hostile, distant, cold, and oppressive."²⁹ Czeslaw Milosz discusses Pasternak's central place in the tendency of lyric poetry to present a man estranged from society's "falsities."³⁰ It follows that, by contrast, the epic reinserts a poet into the world. It is inherently hardwired to contextualize an individual voice.³¹ Whenever the larger world is absent in a *poema*, which happens frequently in the modernist period and even more frequently in Tsvetaeva's *poemy*, this absence is pronounced. In *PE* Tsvetaeva creates a hyper-lyric voice that conspicuously overflows into areas where context is expected; the intimate realm is metaphorically amplified to epic proportions. The larger background and specific references to time and space ("time: six o'clock"; Prague) no longer perform their traditional narrative function of contextualizing the speaking subject and are favored for the symbolic potential that they carry (Prague suggests the mountainous outskirts of Jerusalem; six o'clock is the hour of Christ's sentencing). Even the epic subtexts in *PE*—for example, caesarian battles and conquests—represent the speaker's inner tragedy. In sharp contrast to *PE*'s omniscient "I," in *LS* the private man is kept in check by history. Whereas in *PE* historical episodes (Marina Mnishek, a Jewish pogrom, and so on) are superimposed onto the speaker's personal tragedy, used to intensify it, in *LS* the public sphere and romantic love unfold on two mutually exclusive planes. Ultimately, Schmidt's separation from his beloved translates into his availability for the role that history assigns him.

One can find numerous examples in Tsvetaeva to support Adorno. Significantly, many of these examples come from works that refer to the genre of the *poema* in their titles, a genre that carries expectations of the explicit presence of a world larger than its lyric hero. The following verses from *PE* express this individual protest against the "social condition": "Жизнь, – только выкрестов терпит, ... Право-на-жительство-свой лист/ Ногами топчу! ... В сем христианнейшем из миров/ Поэты – жидаы!"

²⁸V. V. Maiakovskii, "V. V. Khlebnikov," in his *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii* (Moscow, 1955–61), 12:23.

²⁹Theodore W. Adorno, "Lyric Poetry and Society," in *The Adorno Reader*, ed. Brian O'Connor (Oxford, 2000), 213, 214. Mark Jeffreys summarizes lyric poetry similarly: it is "a subversive protest ... lyric refuses to acknowledge the reality of the cultural situation." Sharon Cameron discusses lyric poetry as an experience that "is arrested, framed, and taken out of the flux of history." See, respectively, Mark Jeffreys, "Ideologies of Lyric: A Problem of Genre in Contemporary Anglophone Poetics," *PMLA* 110 (1995): 199; and Sharon Cameron, *Lyric Time: Dickinson and the Limits of Genre* (Baltimore, 1979), 71.

³⁰Czeslaw Milosz, "On Pasternak Soberly," in his *To Begin Where I Am: Selected Essays* (New York, 2002), 407.

³¹Indeed, Soviet scholarship on the *poema* emphasizes the genre's tendency to historicize an individual's story. See M. M. Chislov, "Prostory sovremennoi poemy," *Voprosy literatury*, 1981, no. 1:78; and V. V. Bazanov, "Ob izuchenii russkoi sovetskoi poemy 20-kh godov," *Russkaia literatura*, 1973, no. 1:165–86.

("Life tolerates only converts, ... My permission-to-live certificate/ I trample under my feet! ... In this most Christian of worlds/ Poets are Yids").³² Tsvetaeva chooses an oppressed minority to represent a poet's rejection of his/her world order. Contrast this speaker's bravado to Schmidt's subdued reaction to being sentenced to death: "И я приму ваш приговор/ Без гнева и упрека" ("And I will accept your sentence/ Without anger or reproach").³³ Schmidt declares his life and death to be outside of his control, accepting his prescribed place in history without protest.

Just as the character of Schmidt is limited by his epoch, the author's voice is minimized in favor of verisimilitude. While working on *LS*, Pasternak writes to Tsvetaeva that he is going through a difficult period of "trying to master realism through poetry."³⁴ In the spirit of authorial restraint, Pasternak introduces "his own voice" only as a brief personal flicker of an otherwise disengaged narration: "In *Schmidt* there is one part, very emotional, very much my own, that flashes forth, then sinks wearily."³⁵ The general tendency of Pasternak's longer works is to emphasize the author's absence (for example, *Spektorsky* and *The Year 1905*, in addition to *LS*).³⁶ Tsvetaeva takes issue precisely with this aspect of his *poema*: "Boris, now it is all clear to me: I would like to see a *mute* (*nemogo*) Schmidt. Yes, a mute Schmidt and a talking (*govoriashchego*) you."³⁷ This comment represents the juncture at which the two *poemy* depart from each other. In defining the nature of *PE*'s cohesion, Pasternak attributes it to lyric insulation: "*Poema of the End* is its own, lyrically insulated (*zamknutyi*) world, affirmed to the highest degree ... the one depicted increases tenfold the merits of the one who depicts."³⁸ In *LS*, the poet strives for the opposite, namely to shift the focus from the one who "depicts" to the one who is being "depicted."

Tsvetaeva criticizes Pasternak for ruining Schmidt's essence through excessive documentariness: "I am convinced that the letters are transcribed almost literally—so unlike you are they. ... Only documents can be so unreal."³⁹ Pasternak addresses Tsvetaeva's demand for Schmidt as a Romantic personality by consciously impoverishing his

³²Tsvetaeva, *SS* 3:48.

³³Pasternak, *SS* 1:334.

³⁴*Letters*, 144.

³⁵*Ibid.*, 90.

³⁶It has been observed that Pasternak's lyric poetry contains the lyric "I" to an even lesser extent than his *poemy*. This notwithstanding, the limitedness of the poet's place is not as emphatic in his lyric verse as it is in his *poemy*. To be sure, Pasternak's lyric poetry presents an unusual shift in perspective that subsumes the speaking "I" by what is being observed. Still, however implicit, the individual voice is encoded in the very nature of the lyric. As Siniavsky observes, the poet's distribution of the lyric "I" is "не я про весну, а весна про меня" ("not me about spring, but spring about me") (A. D. Siniavskii, "Vstupitel'naia stat'ia," in *Boris Pasternak: Stikhotvoreniia i poemy* [Moscow-Leningrad, 1965], 20). This move makes the speaker an unstated subject of his own utterance. In Pasternak's epic works, rarely does the poet emerge as the subject. He is bypassed altogether in the third-person narration of *LS* (Levin insists that even elements characteristic of Pasternak's poetic style are consciously excluded from this work). Even when the poet-speaker briefly surfaces in *The Year 1905*, as in the Section "Childhood," it is mostly to underscore the extent to which he is an outsider, literally a child, to the events described.

³⁷*Pis'ma*, 160.

³⁸*Ibid.*, 145.

³⁹*Letters*, 217. For a discussion of those passages in *LS* that approximate archival documents see Levin, "Zametki," 98. A. N. Lur'e also observes in the *poema* a certain "documentary exactness" in his *Poeticheskii epos revoliutsii* (Leningrad, 1975), 15–19.

protagonist's possibilities in the real world, reducing him in size. In opposing his *poema* to Tsvetaeva's *PE*, Pasternak concludes: "an examination of history leads one to think that idealism exists mostly so that it can be refuted."⁴⁰

Given the characteristic elusiveness of Pasternak's style, it is not surprising that the stanza which the poet identifies as a rare instance of his own voice presents the most problems for the reader. The author's position becomes more decipherable, however, when contrasted to the main thrust of Tsvetaeva's *poema*. Pasternak rejects the idea of a poet-recluse. In point of fact, Pasternak refers to this passage as having been influenced by *PE* in a letter to Tsvetaeva:

<p>О государства истукан, Свободы вечное преддверье! Из клеток крадутся века, По Колизею бродят звери, И вечно тянется рука В столетий изморось сырую Гиену верой дрессируя, И вечно делается шаг От римских цирков к римской церкви И мы живем по той же мерке, Мы, люди катакомб и шахт.⁴¹</p>	<p>O, an idol of state, Liberty's never-yielding door! Out of their cages aeons sidle, Beasts roam the Colosseum floor; An outstretched hand is ever reaching Into the ages' sodden gloom, By faith the fierce hyena teaching, And a step is eternally taken From Roman circuses to the Church of Rome, And we live by the same measure, We of the mines and catacombs.</p>
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Barnes interprets the images of "catacombs" and "mines" in the final verses of this stanza as a Dostoevskian image of a Russian intellectual, brooding in isolation from society.⁴² At the same time, however, Schmidt-the-intellectual is inextricably tied to the events of his age. The passage is more reminiscent of *The Bronze Horseman* than of *Notes from Underground*. The relationship between a private person and history, which Pasternak maintains, follows the classical model of the *poema* that Pushkin uses in his own work. Evgenii is utterly subjugated to the will of the monarch (as is Schmidt to the "revolutionary" cause). The very first line of Pasternak's stanza suggests this comparison: note that Pushkin's narrator refers to the awe-inspiring will of the state, embodied in the image of Peter's statue, as "истукан" ("idol"/"graven image"). Both in Pushkin and in Pasternak, the term is surrounded by pre-Christian, pagan images. In Pushkin's work, the "eternally outstretched hand" becomes a metonymy for the equestrian statue; it is present in nearly every allusion to the statue. Affinity with Pushkin's *poema* is further suggested by *LS*'s markedly Petersburgian atmosphere ("изморось сырая" ["damp drizzle"]), by the *poema*'s watery setting in general and, finally, by the idea of "taming" the state's subjects to believe and obey (Evgenii goes insane upon committing the slightest act of rebellion). The image of the "eternally outstretched hand" of the state underscores the impossibility, in Pasternak's world, for any cerebral seclusion along the lines of Dostoevsky's underground man, or

⁴⁰*Letters*, 90. Lazar Fleishman points out that what bothers Tsvetaeva about the depiction of Schmidt is Pasternak's anti-Romantic conception of him. She sees the revolutionaries of 1905 as sublime heroes, while Pasternak curbs the instinct to idealize (Fleishman, *Boris Pasternak: The Poet and His Politics* [Cambridge, MA, 1990], 142).

⁴¹*Pis'ma*, 80 (translation adapted from *Letters*, 90).

⁴²Christopher Barnes, *Boris Pasternak: A Literary Biography* (Cambridge, England, 1989), 362.

Tsvetaeva's defiant "I." The stone-like rigidity of social systems ("государства истукан") conscripts an individual, disallowing the kind of refuge Barnes suggests.

This inability to withdraw is even more apparent when one considers Pasternak's explication of the stanza in terms of *PE*: "Тут в теме твое влияние (жид, выкрест и пр. из Поэмы конца ...)" ("Here, your influence is thematic (a Jew, a convert, etc. from *Poema of the End* ...").⁴³ The "Church of Rome" in Pasternak's lines, when coupled with the "Jew" and "convert" of Tsvetaeva's poem, evokes the tyranny of the state (in this particular image, of a state religion). While Tsvetaeva sings defiance and denounces compliance or "conversion," Pasternak emphasizes the complexity of sustaining such a stance when history becomes the subject matter. The line "От римских цирков к римской церкви" ("From Roman circuses to the Church of Rome") illustrates a transition from one form of violence and subservience (gladiators were either slaves or prisoners of war) to another (inquisitions by the Roman Church). Note that the term "catacomb," in its original meaning, is a place of hiding from persecutions for early Christians in ancient Rome, evoking another link of oppression in a chain that stretches from pre-monotheism to the post-theism of Pasternak's Russia. Rather than the idea of escape into "one's own, enclosed world," the images of "catacombs" and "mines" communicate the inherent violence of social systems that leads "us" to construct such hiding places. "We" are all, willingly or not, subjects of these historical transitions. No poet or intellectual can escape into the recesses of his/her underground in the spirit of Adorno's lyric protest.⁴⁴

Ciepiela argues that Pasternak mentions the birth of Christianity here as a "model for all progressive historical change, including the revolution... from the rule of violence to faith, from slavery to freedom," interpreting "a step is eternally taken" as a step that is never actually made.⁴⁵ On my analysis, the exchange between the "Church of Rome" and "circuses of Rome" implies no qualitative difference; each is just as enslaving to the individual. I propose that this "step" contains no progressive consequences, though, to be sure, it *is* eternally taken. The final version of the above passage departs slightly from the draft that Pasternak quotes to Tsvetaeva. Lines five through seven read: "И проповедника рука/ Бесстрашно крестит клеть сырую,/ Пантеру верой дрессируя" ("And a preacher's hand/ Fearlessly makes the sign of the cross over a damp cage,/ Taming a panther with faith").⁴⁶ The word "faith" is stripped of its liberating connotations when applied to a preacher who uses it to "tame" a panther. The type of faith in question here is the one used to control its subjects. Furthermore, the stanza above concludes the Section in which Schmidt realizes the "servility" of his "mission" ("каторжность миссии").

This Section presents a mass demonstration in Sevastopol for the release from captivity of the Potemkin crew. The only spokesperson singled out from a "hundred-headed crowd"

⁴³*Pis'ma*, 80.

⁴⁴According to K. M. Polivanov, Pasternak's interest in politically engaged, ideological poetry coming out of Germany—with its "[belief] in historical possibilities" (as the poet terms)—overlaps in time with his own poetic treatments of history. Left-leaning trends in German poetry provide important examples and support for what Pasternak calls "intimization of history" in his *poemy* (Polivanov, *Pasternak i sovremenniki: Biografiia. Dialogi. Paralleli. Prochteniiia* [Moscow, 2006], 81–83).

⁴⁵Ciepiela, *Same Solitude*, 171.

⁴⁶Pasternak, *SS* 1:312.

is a woman who is far from the image of an intellectual: “агитаторша-девица/ С жаргоном из аптек и больниц” (“an agitator lady/ In the jargon of drugstores and hospitals”). The protest is presented in the language of confinement: “И каторжность миссии: переорать/ (Борьба, борьбы, борьбе, борьбою,/ Пролетарьят, пролетарьят)” (“And the servility of the mission is to out-scream the other/ [Struggle, of struggle, about struggle, with struggle,/ Proletar'iat, proletar'iat]”).⁴⁷ The declension of the noun “struggle” undermines its meaning of resistance by turning the uprising into a classroom exercise. Schmidt himself, the intellectual who initially resists participating in the insurrection, is drawn in as its leader. This age has no tolerance for individual stances.

Several readers have noticed, most notably Tsvetaeva, that Pasternak’s protagonist cannot sustain the force of history and is rather weak in the face of it.⁴⁸ This “weakness” sharply departs from Tsvetaeva’s *PE* as “sheer masculine power.”⁴⁹ In her article, “Poets with History and Poets without History,” Tsvetaeva writes that Pasternak, “out of respect for history, for naked factuality ... maintained the hero as he really was. ... Not only did he not strengthen him, he diminished him with the grandeur of the background; he simply murdered him.”⁵⁰ Pasternak continues to preserve his own view of Schmidt, to emphasize the importance of context or “background” in his *poema*, despite Tsvetaeva’s numerous attempts to convince him to do otherwise.⁵¹

Given the *poema*’s centrality in the age of Romanticism, it is ironic that one way in which Pasternak seeks to reject Romanticism is by exploring the genre of the *poema*, a text *with* context. For Pasternak, reconciliation with reality entails engagement of an individual personality with the historical events that shape it.⁵² Their ultimate *interdependence* is counterposed to Tsvetaeva’s self-proclaimed *independence* from her reality.

THE CONCRETE VERSUS THE SYMBOLIC

We now turn to Pasternak’s comments on *PE* as a source text for his own idea of the epic. Pasternak reveals Tsvetaeva’s influence on *LS* in terms suggestive of one of the genre’s distinctive features: “Here, your influence is thematic (a Jew, a convert, etc. from *Poema of the End*.) But you took all this as a symbol and eternally, tragically. I, on the other hand,

⁴⁷Ibid., 311.

⁴⁸Mirsky argues that, in the context of history, the voice of Pasternak’s Schmidt is muffled; his letters are “weak” and “sparse” (quoted in Barnes, *Boris Pasternak*, 362). Furthermore, Tsvetaeva observes that the act of writing itself conjures up the image of an idle intellectual, not a man of action (*Pis'ma*, 159).

⁴⁹E. B. Korkina and I. D. Shevelenko, comps., *Dushi nachinaiut videt': Pis'ma 1922–1936 goda, Marina Tsvetaeva and Boris Pasternak* (Moscow, 2004), 190. For a discussion of Pasternak’s presentation of Schmidt as a male hysteric see Ciepiela, *Same Solitude*, 166–67.

⁵⁰Tsvetaeva, “Poety s istoriei i poety bez istorii” (1934), *SS* 2:406.

⁵¹Pasternak does remove one of Schmidt’s letters upon Tsvetaeva’s suggestion, but the main principle of limiting his hero’s powers remains.

⁵²Levin builds his analysis of *LS* on the interaction of three levels: the individual (*chastnyi chelovek*), nature, and history (“Zametki”). Henry Gifford asserts that in *LS*, Pasternak comes closer to resolving the problem of bringing together the private and the public (*Boris Pasternak: A Critical Study* [Cambridge, England, 1977], 110–14). Lur’e deals with the same spheres of individual and society, though arguing that they complement, rather than contradict, each other (*Poeticheskii epos revoliutsii*, 20).

took it concretely, as a constant transition, almost an ornamental canon of history."⁵³ In offering another, more traditional, use of the genre, Pasternak supplies the larger historical context "in its concreteness." Although *PE* draws on the epic subtexts of battle and victory, the speaker raises her romantic separation to the level of national tragedy. Pasternak transforms her subtextual Caesars and Cleopatras into concrete historical figures.

Pasternak's comment on the differences between his *poema* and Tsvetaeva's resonates with the genre's treatment in scholarship. Frederick Pollack, for instance, claims that in a lyric poem the importance of symbol increases while that of events diminishes. An anecdote embedded in a lyric functions more as a symbol than a narrative.⁵⁴ Hence, even though *PE* unfolds sequentially (as the lovers walk through Prague), the single event of separation refracts into innumerable figurative levels. This is not to say that *LS* is stripped of symbolic signification (or that any literary text can be)—in fact, Pasternak's *poema* shares one subtext with *PE*, namely the story of Christ, discussed below—but the poem's orientation is on the plot proper, on one person's concrete choices at a specific point in time.

Lydia Ginzburg suggests a similar distinction between lyric and epic. She sets up two categories for lyric poetry: deductive and inductive. Deductive poetry deals with universals in fossilized poetic formulae, while inductive poetry arrives at universal truths by setting up concrete, individuated episodes. It is for this reason, Ginzburg observes, that the latter type tends toward the epic.⁵⁵ It appears that both *PE* and *LS* fit into Ginzburg's category for inductive poetry. The difference here, which brings us back to the individual-versus-context dimension of my argument, is in scale. The private event in an individual's life explodes in Tsvetaeva's poem to such an extent that it displaces the background. By doing so, the poem begins to ring with the voice of everyman and, in this way, approaches the principle of lyric universality.⁵⁶ Suppression of the larger context accords the lyric its refracting symbolism. Conversely, by Pasternak's localizing Schmidt in history, the protagonist's immediate story becomes primary. Schmidt's persona is limited by his concrete situation. The author's generalizations on revolution, on human nature, on an individual's role in history are, of course, an important part of the poem. However, these generalizations are, as a rule, not on the text's surface.

There are indeed a number of thematic correlations between the two *poemy*, as Pasternak notes. These correlations tend to cluster around two opposing literary modes—the symbolic versus the concrete—with their respective generic underpinnings. As a response to the space of symbolic militarism in *PE* (the space of "махорка" [cheap tobacco smoked by soldiers], of "drawing sabers" and of "ров и рой" [moat and ditch], the sinking-ship simile at the end of *PE*, and so on) and to the war-like battles and conquests between lovers, Pasternak presents a naval confrontation that is of historical importance, where the same references (to "махорка," to battleships, to victories and defeats) constitute the *poema*'s

⁵³*Pis'ma*, 80.

⁵⁴Frederick Pollack, "Rebirth of a Non-Tradition," *New England Review and Bread Loaf Quarterly* 8 (Autumn 1985): 52.

⁵⁵Lydia Ginzburg, *Literatura v poiskakh real'nosti: Stat'i, esse, zametki* (Leningrad, 1987), 97.

⁵⁶Levin discusses this principal paradox of lyric poetry as the coexistence of *edinichnost'* and *vseobshchnost'* in his "Zametki o lirike," *Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie*, 1994, no. 4:62–72.

literal space of action. As opposed to the speaker's anticipation of figurative executions in *PE*, Pasternak presents Schmidt's final hours before his actual execution.

The theme of martyrdom, central to both *poemy*, is polarized into the same division between the metaphoric and the literal. One organizational principle for *PE* is the Fourteen Stations of the Cross, that is, the story of Christ's path to Golgotha. Pasternak also models Schmidt (and the choices that lead him to his "Golgotha") on the figure of Christ. In one of Schmidt's letters, his voice converges with that of Christ stylistically: "Жребий завиден. Я жил и отдал/ Душу свою за други своя" ("My fate is enviable. I lived and laid down/ my soul for my friends").⁵⁷ In the final speech before his execution, Schmidt speculates on the nature of historical processes as defined by Christ's predicament: "Одним карать и каяться,/ Другим—кончать Голгофой" ("Some are destined to punish and repent./ Others to end their life at Golgotha").⁵⁸ The crucial difference in the two poets' use of this subtext is that, for Tsvetaeva, Christ's walk to the place of his execution is a subplot that unfolds simultaneously with the speaker's conclusion of a love affair, that is, the path to her metaphorical Golgotha. The speaker's entire world is defined by her personal tragedy. *LS*, on the other hand, directly follows Christ's story of renouncing the personal for the larger world.

The figure of Christ itself allows both for a symbolic as well as historical reading. By structuring her *poema* around the Fourteen Stations of the Cross, a religious observance that itself belongs to the realm of symbolism, Tsvetaeva's speaker is twice removed from the historical Christ. In *LS*, on the other hand, the protagonist closely approximates Christ's storyline. The Christ that serves as a model for Pasternak's hero is himself important not "as a symbol," to borrow the poet's own words, but "concretely," as a person in history ("ornamental canon of history"). In the concluding lines of his speech, Schmidt explains his execution as the boundary between two historical periods:

Я знаю, что столб, у которого Я стану, будет гранью Двух разных эпох истории, И радуюсь избранью. ⁵⁹	I know that the pillar, by which I shall stand, will mark the border Between two different historical epochs. And I rejoice at having been chosen.
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Schmidt and the type of social change that he represents divide Russia starkly into pre- and post-Revolutionary periods, approximating the division of the modern calendar into "before Christ's birth" and "since Christ's birth."

Pasternak provides a grounded reply to Tsvetaeva's hyperbole in yet another way. I have discussed elsewhere ways in which Tsvetaeva engages two contradictory subtexts in *PE*: epic battles, and Christ's walk to Golgotha.⁶⁰ It follows that the female speaker's

⁵⁷Pasternak, *SS* 1:326; cf. John 15:13.

⁵⁸Pasternak, *SS* 1:334.

⁵⁹Pasternak, *SS* 1:335.

⁶⁰See my "The Epic, the Lyric, the Dramatic, and Marina Tsvetaeva's *Poema of the End*," *Die Welt der Slaven* 49 (2004): 95–112, where I discuss Tsvetaeva's conflation of subtexts from two opposing spheres of poetic expression: "epic battlefields" and the lyric structure inspired by *The Song of Songs*, mirrored thematically in a dialogue between lovers who wage war in two battles. For a discussion of *PE* as Christ's walk to Golgotha see Tomas Venclova, "Poema gory i Poema Kotsa Mariny Tsvetaevoi kak Vetkhii i Novyi Zavet," in *Marina*

victory in the final section, in which she assumes the role of Caesar on one symbolic plane, coincides with the final Station of the Cross, that is, the crucifixion, on another parallel plane. Hence, the end of *PE* conflates the speaker's opposing identifications with both the Christ-like martyr/the persecuted Jew and a Caesar-like victor/persecutor. Tsvetaeva's "eternal symbolism" allows the object to contain its opposite. The end of *LS* contains a response to this lyric convergence by separating victor and martyr into two mutually exclusive time periods. In his final speech, Schmidt declares to his executioners: "Как вы, я— часть великого/ Перемещенья сроков" ("Like you, I am part of the great/ Shift of epochs").⁶¹ "Shift of epochs" is encoded into the author's perspective: by the time Pasternak writes his *poema*, the successful Revolution of 1917 changes the position of martyr versus victor vis-à-vis the Revolution of 1905. This switch is separated in history by twelve years. In any given historical epoch, the one who suffers punishment cannot at the same time be the one who inflicts it. Al'fonsov points out that the ability not only to "punish," but also to "punish and repent" ("качать и каяться") belongs to Pontius Pilate.⁶² The two figures, Christ and Pilate are eternally on opposite sides; the two sides are explicitly separated in *LS*.

Pasternak replies to Tsvetaeva's description of an atemporal lyric moment (that allows for the simultaneity of opposites) with a diachronic narrative. The motifs shared with *PE* are incorporated into the plot proper, which allows the poet to spread out *PE*'s conflicting subtexts into consecutive stages in a narrative. *PE*'s thematic ingredients—a love affair, a battlefield, and an execution—follow one another in a chain of cause and effect in *LS*: Schmidt's turn from love frees him to turn to the revolt, the failure of which leads to his execution.

Schmidt's choice to join the mutiny forces him into the role of a unidimensional protagonist—a fighter. In other words, Schmidt's process of becoming the protagonist of the *poema* is a process of molding himself into an epic hero who, as a rule, is associated with a single feature. The following verses sum up this idea:

Но повалила волна депутатий, Дума, эсдеки, звонок за звонком. Выехать было нельзя и пытаться. Вот и кончаю бунтовщиком. ⁶³	But the deputations kept coming in waves, The Duma, social democrats, call after call. It was futile even to try and leave. And so I conclude my life as a rebel.
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Schmidt's awareness of unrealized sides of himself—dying as nothing more than a rebel—lends him more knowledge than his counterparts in classical epics, making his choice to follow their narrow path all the more painful. In a letter to Tsvetaeva, Pasternak sums up the main tragedy of his work in the following way: "a man becomes a hero for a cause he does not believe in, his spirit breaks, he perishes."⁶⁴

Tsvetaeva: One Hundred Years. Papers from the Tsvetaeva Centenary Symposium, Amherst College, Amherst, Massachusetts, 1992, ed. Victoria Schweitzer et al. (Berkeley, 1994).

⁶¹Pasternak, *SS* 1:334.

⁶²Al'fonsov, "Zapis'," 37.

⁶³Pasternak, *SS* 1:327.

⁶⁴*Letters*, 171.

LYRIC IMMEDIACY VERSUS EPIC DISTANCE

While Tsvetaeva's *poema* unfolds in the eternal, lyric present (as Pasternak notes "вековечно"), Pasternak's choice of subject matter itself marks time and history. Allusions to the hour of the lovers' meeting in *PE* ("quarter to," "six," "going on seven") suggest a ticking bomb that is to go off any minute. The counting of time concentrates the reader's energy on this private union and its imminent explosive annihilation (underscored by repeated allusions to "explosion," "crumbling," "thunder," "hour of death," and so on). Who will initiate the separation? Who will cry first? Who will perish? This ticking immediacy combines with the dramatic structure of the poem to achieve a heightened sense of the present moment. Conversely, throughout his experiments in the genre of the *poema*, Pasternak consistently chooses events that are historically remote. Il'ia Serman observes that the poet was devoted to this element of epic poetry, reading the presence of Troy in the opening of *The Malady Sublime* as Pasternak's assertion of the necessity in the genre for some temporal distance between the speaker and his subject matter.⁶⁵ The epic notion of temporal distance is encoded in *LS* in several, at times unexpected, ways.

Despite the immediacy of many passages in *LS* (especially in letters), the *poema* is framed by the past tense of its first and last sections, introducing and returning the reader to its historical framework. Although the speaker's voice does at times merge with that of the protagonist, it does so in an unconventional way. In a Romantic *poema*, for instance, the narrator typically possesses no surplus of knowledge regarding his protagonist. In *LS*, even the present and the future tenses are compromised by the past orientation of the text. Not only does the speaker know the outcome of his narrative, but so does the reader and, at times, the protagonist himself. While in a Romantic *poema* the speaker's voice merges with the protagonist's in the present moment, in *LS* this is achieved by raising Schmidt's awareness to the speaker's retrospective glance.

Along with history books on the Sevastopol insurrection, Pasternak used several memoirs to construct Schmidt (the memoirs of Schmidt's sister, reminiscences of Schmidt's beloved, Zinaida Rizberg, and accounts by several participants in the rebellion). As a result, the retrospective viewpoint is included in the narrative itself. For instance, both Schmidt and his love interest ponder the future mutinous events from the position of hindsight. When Schmidt's beloved is introduced in Part III, she appears in an entirely different time zone from the rest of the action, closer to that of the speaker-author. The stanza in which the heroine sails to the island where Schmidt is kept simultaneously presents the unfolding action and the idea of looking back at it:

Как памятен ей этот переход!	How memorable for her that crossing is!
Приезд в Одессу ночью новогодней.	On New Year's Eve arriving in Odessa.
С какою неохотой пароход	With what reluctance did the boat begin
Стал подымать в ту непогоду сходни!	To raise its gangplank in such squally weather.
И утренней картины не забыть.	That morning's scene she never could forget.

⁶⁵Il'ia Serman, "Vysokaia bolezn' i problema eposa v 1920-e godu," in *Boris Pasternak, 1890–1990*, 80.

В ушах шумело море горькой хиной. The sea throbbed in her ears like bitter quinine.
 Снег перестал, но продолжали плыть The snow had stopped but stormclouds torn to shreds
 Обрывки туч, как кисти балдахина.⁶⁶ Like tassels of a canopy still drifted.

Pasternak includes not only the content of Zinaida Rizberg's reminiscences, but also their temporal perspective. Note the persistent theme of memory. The entire section that opens with the stanza above is presented as recalled by the heroine, rather than observed. The section preceding the ride to the island contains a future tense that reads like the past. In Section 2 of Part III the heroine's train ride to Romny is narrated. The state of anticipation is simultaneously one of recollection:

Тогда начнутся поиски, и происки, и слезы,
 ...
 И смерть скользнет по повести, как оттиск пятерни,
 И будет день посредственный, и разговор в передней,
 И обморок, и шествие по лестнице витой,
 И тонущий в периодах, как камень, миг последний,
 И жажда что-то выудить из прорвы прожитой.⁶⁷

[And then the searches, scheming and the tears find their beginning,/ .../ And death will slide across the tale, imprinting like a hand,/ An average day will come with conversations in the hallway,/ Processions down the spiral stairs and then a sudden faint./ Until the final instant, into epochs stone-like falling/ With thirst to fish just something out from shoals of bygone days.]

The scene in the future tense acquires a sense of certainty that is possible only in the past. The randomness of specific details (the conversation, the fainting spell, the spiral ladder) describes an experience that has already been lived through.

Schmidt's letters present another crucial complication in the *poema's* temporal perspective. One would expect a letter to introduce extemporaneous impressions, unmediated by a knowing narrator or the passage of time, and to serve as a window into the character's present state of mind (consider the famous examples from Russian literature of letters embedded in a narrative—Tatiana's and Onegin's—both risky precisely because their authors do not allow themselves time for reconsideration). This is not so in *LS*. The first letter in the poem, to Schmidt's beloved, is centered on an account of Schmidt's past meetings with the heroine. Similarly, Schmidt's letter to his sister presents reminiscences from the hero's childhood. Moreover, many of Schmidt's letters serve the function of informing their addressees (and the reader) of the revolutionary events that have already occurred. Even though these events are part of the *poema's* temporal scope, the reader does not learn about them chronologically, but rather through these letters. The reader witnesses the events becoming part of the past for the protagonist himself.

Another function of the letters is to provide a retrospective glimpse into Schmidt's state of mind. Often it becomes clear that the protagonist makes decisions in the present while fully knowing their future outcomes:

⁶⁶Pasternak, *SS* 1:328 (translation adapted from Chappell, *Lieutenant Schmidt*, 67).

⁶⁷Pasternak, *SS* 1:328 (translation from Chappell, *Lieutenant Schmidt*, 65).

В вечер ее получения [телеграммы] был митинг.
 Я предрекал неуспех мятежа,
 Но уж ничто не могло вразумить их.
 ...
 О, как рвался я к тебе! Было пыткой
 Братся и знать, что народ не готов.⁶⁸

[A meeting was held the night I received it [your telegram]./ I was foretelling the unsuccessful outcome of the revolt./ But nothing could bring them to their senses.
 ... Oh, how I longed to see you! It was torture/ Taking up [the cause] while knowing that the people were not ready for it.]

The “night” refers to the scene back in Part II, when a sailor comes to visit Schmidt and convinces him to lead the rebellion. The process of reading is reversed: the reader is informed in Part III of the events of the fateful night mentioned briefly in Part II. Not only do the speaker and reader know the conclusion to these historical events, but so does the protagonist at the time of their unfolding.

In addition to the biographical distance between Pasternak’s undertaking to write the *poema* in 1926 and its subject of 1905, the poet incorporates epic distance into the narrative time itself by including not only action, but also interpretation of that action through Schmidt’s letters. Note that Tsvetaeva’s speaker does not have this luxury of hindsight. Insulated in the present moment, she expresses confusion at what is happening (“What are we doing?”), noting that only “time will tell” the nature of the bond they are in the midst of breaking.⁶⁹

IN CONCLUSION

In a letter to his sister of March 1926 (the month he begins his work on *LS*), Pasternak describes the following impression that Tsvetaeva’s *PE* makes on him: “And then you sense, oh, how burdensome, yet honorable, is the tragedy in which we perform here, while paying for it with our spirit! No one can write such a thing here. Oh, what sorrow. How horrible *The Year 1905* is! What Itinerantism!!”⁷⁰ Despite the letter’s undeniable note of resignation, Pasternak’s feelings on relinquishing some of poetry’s independent spirit to state-endorsed subjects are not unidimensional. While claiming that no one can write poetry of Tsvetaeva’s caliber in Soviet Russia, that Soviet poets face “the tragedy” of being “burdened” by a responsibility to history akin to that of an Itinerant artist, he concedes that this tragedy is “honorable.” Even if we imagine quotes around the word “honorable,” spoken from the parodied perspective of Soviet officialdom, we cannot dismiss the seriousness and involvement with which Pasternak undertook his transition to epic subject matter in general, and his work on *LS* in particular. Most important to Pasternak is the contrast that Tsvetaeva’s *poema* provides to all Soviet poetry, including Pasternak’s own work at hand. Furthermore,

⁶⁸Pasternak, *SS* 1:326.

⁶⁹Tsvetaeva, *SS* 3:44, 46.

⁷⁰*Pis'ma*, 58.

LS's inversions of *PE*, discussed in this paper through the prism of genre, have obvious biographical underpinnings. Pasternak returns the genre of the *poema* to its traditional roots, to "text *with* context," as he contemplates poetic possibilities defined by his own place in history, with all of his insistence on his contemporaneity and this world. Tsvetaeva's expansion of her own lyric "I," with explicit derision for its larger context, feeds on her personal circumstances of removing herself from this imposing historical imperative and choosing to work in immigration.

Though Pasternak may not have intended to make a dialogue about genre his ultimate goal in *LS*, the presence of Tsvetaeva's *poema* as a counterexample, both generic and thematic, shapes the outlines of his own text. One could argue that, on all levels of the text (character, plot, and genre), lies the poet's own submission to his age, with an eye to the post-Revolutionary necessity to return to traditional methods of literary expression, to larger forms and to "objectivity." To counteract an émigré poet's lyric immediacy and solipsism, Pasternak emphasizes the concrete and the historical, and uses a distanced, nearly absent, narrator in response. It is important to remember that *LS* grows out of a project (*The Year 1905*) that belongs to a prolific period of commissioned literature on the twentieth jubilee of the Revolution. However, I would suggest that *LS*'s counterpoints to *PE* are neither about selling out, nor about competing with Tsvetaeva on her own artistic turf (that is, in the same genre), nor even about the fear that makes him turn away from Tsvetaeva's elemental lyric abyss. Though Schmidt's character submits to the will of the state, both the state and the Revolution that opposes it are equally alien and hostile to him as an individual. In fact, Pasternak's use of the opposite model of the *poema* (*PE*) as one subtext for his own epic attempt could be seen as an impulse to construct a type of "catacomb" where the possibility of Tsvetaeva's form of lyricism is preserved, if only intertextually.⁷¹ While at work on *LS*, Pasternak writes to Tsvetaeva that all his efforts are "aimed at restoring to history a generation that seems to have dropped out of it, the generation to which *you and I belong*."⁷² The dialogue established between *LS* and *PE* is not necessarily one of antagonism or disagreement with Tsvetaeva's positions on poetry. Neither does this dialogue have to suggest Pasternak's veiled justifications for his artistic failings in *LS*, in light of what he sees as an infinitely superior example within the genre. In fact, the task Pasternak sets for himself in his work on *LS* is rather lofty: to restore to history both himself *and* Tsvetaeva, with all their diverging circumstances and contemplations on the role of poetry at this particular point in time.

⁷¹I thank an anonymous referee for suggesting this point.

⁷²*Letters*, 84.