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PROVERBS AND THE POET: A PAREMIOLOGICAL ANALYSIS OF BORIS PASTERNAK'S *DOCTOR ZHIVAGO*

The final line of Boris Pasternak's poem, "Hamlet," attributed to the eponymous hero of his novel, *Doctor Zhivago*, concludes with a well-known Russian proverb: "Жизнь прожить --не поле перейти/To live life to the end is not a childish task."[1] Surprisingly, this summary conclusion to Yurii Zhivago's poem has attracted little scholarly investigation following the novel's 1957 publication.[2] Even less attention has been devoted to an analysis of the remaining forty-one proverbs appearing in the prose portion of the novel. This is especially surprising in light of the imaginative approach that Pasternak takes in the stylistic and thematic use of Russian proverbs throughout the novel.

Traditionally viewed as embodying and transmitting the results of folk wisdom with a goal to teach, moralize, or prescribe a course of action, over time proverbs have come to define and establish positive norms of behavior as well as to possess powers of persuasion.[3] Russian writers as dissimilar as Catherine the Great and Leo Tolstoy have been drawn to this didactic trait of Russian proverbs.[4] Unlike Catherine and Tolstoy, however, in his novel *Doctor Zhivago* Boris Pasternak takes a different direction than this essentially normative approach. While he occasionally inserts proverbial wit and wisdom into the speech of some of the rural inhabitants depicted in the novel, the majority of proverbs appearing in the novel are uttered by Bolsheviks, socialists and other members of Russia's new intelligentsia. In fact, with few exceptions Pasternak reveals the use of proverb speech as a negative aspect associated with those members of the Bolshevik Party elite and other left-leaning sympathizers, whose empty rhetoric and cliché ridden speech Yurii Zhivago most reviles. For example, in his conversation with Liberius Averkevich, the head of the "forest brotherhood," Yurii reveals his exasperation at his captor's naïveté, clichés, and vulgar commonplaces and at the notion that he must accept the empty rhetoric of

Liberius and his kind: "Властители ваших дум грешат поговорками, а главную забыли, что *насильно мил не будешь*./The people you worship go in for proverbs, but they've forgotten one proverb—'*You can lead a horse to water, but you can't make it drink*'" (Д. *Ж.,* p. 349/339).[5]

The "empty rhetoric" that Yurii refers to in this passage operates as a major theme throughout the novel separating the solipsistic, ideologically-oriented revolutionaries and their sympathizers from the more free-minded, nature-oriented Yurii and his Uncle Nikolai Nikolaievich. To be sure, they are assigned one proverb statement each in the novel, but for both Yurii and his uncle the mass-minded provenance and nature of proverbs stand in contrast to their much more individualistic thinking and philosophical views.[6] This counterpoint is first sounded when we are told that Uncle Nikolai Nikolaevich parted from the thinking of contemporary writers, professors, and philosophers of the revolution, who "clung to some dogma or other, satisfied with words and superficialities…" (*Dr. Zh*., p. 7). He resists the mass-oriented spirit of "gregariousness," and by way of contrast opines that "Only individuals seek the truth…" (*Dr. Zh*., p. 9). Yurii demonstrates a similar aversion to this type of inane verbosity, when he observes the behavior of correspondents and journalists at the warfront: "They record their 'observations' and gems of popular wisdom, they visit the wounded and construct new theories about the people's soul. It's a new version of Dal' and just as bogus—linguistic graphomania, verbal incontinence" (*Dr. Zh*., p. 121).[7] Yurii's derogatory reference to "gems of popular wisdom" and to a "verbal incontinence" that he associates with Vladimir Dal' casts little doubt about Pasternak's antipathy toward the verbose commonality of proverbs and proverbial speech.

Much earlier in the novel, we meet the young Gavril Tiverzin—a 1905 socialist-activist involved in a railway worker strike—whose proverb-laced speech clearly places him in the category of the "kind of people," whom the above-mentioned Liberius would praise. In the first of three proverbs associated with his character, Tiverzin states his resentment toward other activists who get bogged down with committee meetings and impede the bolder form of revolutionary work that he prefers. Disparaging their activities, he employs a well-known proverbial

expresson: "Не к чему тогда и комитет, и *с огнем игра* и лезть под землю/What's the point of having a committee…? You *play with fire* and then you duck for shelter" (*Д. Ж.*, p. 28/28).[8]

Tiverzin's defiant character and class conscious personality are reinforced in the form of another proverb he uses just a few pages later in Chapter Two of the novel, when he attempts to save the apprentice Yusupka Gimazetdin from the blows of his work foreman, Piotr Khudoleiev. Finally freeing himself from the ensuing brawl with the surly foreman, Tiverzin exclaims: "*Ты им стараешься добро, а они норовят тебе нож в ребро*/*You try to help them and they come at you with a knife*" (*Д. Ж.*, p. 31/31).[9] His reference to an unspecified "them" certainly is not aimed at the hapless Yusupka, so Tiverzin can only have in mind the working class people whose class consciousness he and the other socialist revolutionaries are attempting to raise. His thoughts reflect the ideological bent of his mind: "He hurried on as though his pace might hasten the time when everything on earth would be as rational and harmonious as it was now inside his feverish head. He knew that all their struggles in the last few days, the troubles on the line, the speeches at meetings, the decision to strike—were separate stages on the great road lying ahead of them" (*Dr. Zh*., p. 31). To his mother's tearful expression of concern for his safety once he has returned home from the strike meeting, Tiverzin self-assuredly replies with a proverbial boast, "С*мелость города берет,* Маменька/ *Nothing ventured, nothing won*, Mother" (*Д. Ж.,* p. 34/33).[10] Thus, we see that in all three proverb utterances, Tiverzin's speech reflects the thoughts characteristic of a community of men rather than those of a single individual or person.[11] In Pasternak's moral universe, however, as reflected in the values of Yurii Zhivago, the premium of integrity is placed only on the individual. Or, as Uncle Nikolai Nikolaievich warned in a more negative vein: "Gregariousness is always the refuge of mediocrities, whether they swear by Soloviev or Kant or Marx" (*Dr. Zh*., p. 9).

Further to reinforce this concept of mass crowds, ideas, and trends that accompanied so much of the popular thinking in these revolutionary times, Pasternak inserts yet another Russian proverb into the *skaz* description of events following the Tsar's mani-

festo of October 17th. As revolutionary planners quibble over a protest route in Moscow, leading some to withdraw their support and others to send their own demonstration leaders, the narrator observes: "Это было начинание в духе пословицы «у *семи нянек дитя без глазу*»/But this was a case of *too many cooks spoiling the broth*" (*Д. Ж.* p. 35/ 35).[12] The message that underlies this popular proverb clearly corroborates Tiverzin's earlier observation about the ineffectiveness of work and plans carried out by committees rather than by individuals. Following the brutal attack on the protesters by Cossack dragoons, Tiverzin's mother completes this series of denunciations against mass organizations and group thinking by blaming her son's revolutionary "bunglers and fumblers" for the chaos and confusion: "What do they want, the half-wits? They don't know themselves, just so long as they can make mischief, the vipers. Like that chatterbox…" (*Dr. Zh*., p. 38).[13] The final excoriation of Tiverzin, the elder Antipov, and other protagonists from the 1905 stage of revolutionary activities takes place much later in the novel, when four of them sit as guests of honor at a Party meeting where they are described as being: "Counted among the gods at whose feet the revolution laid its gifts and its burnt offerings, they sat silent and grim as idols. They had become too conceited to be capable of normal human feelings" (*Dr. Zh*., p. 318).[14]

Tiverzin is not a lone voice in Pasternak's vast symphony of proverbial speech echoing the commonality of human experience and popular wisdom. Not surprisingly, the majority of characters who chooe to communicate in proverbs are Bolsheviks or belong either to the Red Army or to partisan groups affiliated with them. The Siberian lawyer, Samdeviatov, whom Yurii meets on the train to Yuriatin, is a case in point. Shrewd and persuasive, Samdeviatov perplexes Yurii first by stating that Marxism is a science and, yet being a Bolshevik he incongruously travels about revolutionary Russia on business. To the latter's question about business activities having been abolished by the new government, Samdeviatov responds: "Of course they have, nominally. But in practice people are asked to do all sorts of things, sometimes mutually exclusive. …This is a transitional period, when there is still a gap between theory and practice. At a time like this you need shrewd, resourceful people like myself" (*Dr. Zh*.,

p. 260).[15] By way of confirming the wisdom of his observation, Samdeviatov summons two local proverbial witticisms: "*Блажен муж, иже не иде, возьму куш, ничего не видя*. А *часом по мордасам*, как отец говаривал./ *Blessed is the man who doesn't see too much.* Also *an occasional punch on the jaw doesn't come amiss*, as my father used to say" (*Д. Ж*., p. 269/261).[16] This disjunction between life and one's actions represents precisely the kind of "lie" that Yurii cannot abide. As their conversation continues, he is told that Mikulitsyn is likely to deny the Zhivago family the shelter they seek on his farm. When Yurii expresses doubt that they should even seek to approach Mikulitsyn, Samdeviatov responds by embroidering upon yet another Russian proverbial expression: "Во-первых, разве *только и свету в окошке*, что Микулицыны?/To begin with, Mikulitsyn is not *the only pebble on the beach*" (*Д. Ж*., p. 270/261).[17] Yurii's initial discomfort with Samdeviatov translates later in the novel into a dreaded suspicion that Lara may have succumbed to his free and easy ways. As it turns out, however, not only is Lara not attracted to Samdeviatov, but she finds his glib self-assurance too similar to that of Komararovsky—the man who defiled her as a girl and forever changed the course of her life (*Dr. Zh*., p. 398).

In the fishbowl universe of Pasternak's revolutionary Russia, not only do the Mikulitsyns extend an unexpected degree of hospitality to Yurii and his family in Yuriatin, but their son, Liberius, as well, plays the role of unwanted "host" to Yurii during two long years of captivity among the Forest Brotherhood. Having returned from the warfront as a thoroughly indoctrinated Bolshevik, Liberius, it will be recalled, was the target of Yurii's verbal quip about the Bolsheviks' predilection for proverbial speech. As if to prove the point of his captive doctor, Liberius responds to Yurii's entreaty for news about the safety of his family with the following proverbial expression: "Опять вы не желаете глядеть *дальше своего носа*./You never want *to see further than your nose*" (*Д. Ж.,* p. 381/371).[18] Ironically, as J. W. Dyck has observed, Liberius' name suggests freedom and liberty yet, as depicted by Pasternak, the partisan commander himself is a verbal slave to limited views and collective wisdom.[19] As elsewhere with proverb use, it is not the collective wisdom, *per se*, that is being questioned here, but the predilec-

tion of Marxist ideologues for cliché thoughts, ideas, and sentiments.

In addition to Liberius and Tiverzin, Pasternak assigns Russian proverbs to a number of less-prominent socialists and Bolshevik sympathizers in his novel. His apparent aim is to debunk their "lofty" and cerebral formulations about a revolutionary "new order" by means of exposing their lack of connection to what Yurii and his uncle would define as "real life." The scene depicting Comrade Lidochka's speech on the Krestovozdvizhensk marketplace is a case in point. Pasternak introduces Galuzina, a grocer's wife, to set the stage for Lidochka's audience of former political exiles, who have assembled to hear his speech. As she aimlessly wanders through her village, Galuzina reflects on the differences between the townspeople, who "relied on their own hands and their own heads, [and]…were their own masters," and the former political exiles now living there as well, like Tiverzin, Antipov, and the anarchist Vdovichenko:

> "They were cunning and they knew their own minds, they had stirred up plenty of trouble in their day, they were sure to be plotting something again now. They couldn't live unless they were up to something. They spent their lives dealing with machines, and they were cold and merciless as machines…These men would turn everything upside down, they would always get their way" (*Dr. Zh*., p. 313).

As the discussion at the meeting meanders from one political platitude to another, Vdovichenko, "a dreamer eternally absorbed in his fantasies [and often] mistaking the views of his opponents for his own, agree[ing] with everything they said,"[20] finds his views supported by the toady, Svirin, who manages to inflict four proverbs or proverbial expressions into the course of a speech that consists of an equal number of lines: "Это *как божий день*, …это ребенок малый понимает. …Теперь наше дело воевать *да переть напролом*. …*Сам сварил, сам и кушай. Сам полез в воду, не кричи-- утоп.*/ *It's as clear as daylight*, …*any child can see it*. …Now our business is just to fight and *to push on for all we're worth*. …*We've cooked our soup, so now we must eat it*. *We've jumped into the water, and we mustn't complain*" (*Д. Ж*., p.

330/321).[21] The empty rhetoric and worn clichés that permeate the meeting bear no fruit, as the narrator suggests in his observation that closes this section of Chapter Ten: "They talked on a little longer, but what they said made less and less sense, and finally, at dawn, the meeting broke up" (*Dr. Zh*., p. 321). What particularly marks Svirin's brief speech, into which he manages comically to invoke a number of proverbs, is that he apparently becomes so absorbed in his own rhetoric that at one point he manufactures his own proverb in an effort to reinforce the effect he has sought to create with the preceding one. The authentic proverbial wisdom, *we've cooked our soup, so now we must eat it*, fits perfectly well into the context of Svirin's speech, but the expression, *we've jumped into the water, and we mustn't complain*, does not exist as an authentic Russian proverb.[22] Furthermore, the proverbial comparison, *it's as clear as daylight* and the proverbial phrase *any child can see it*, ring a bit humorously as cited by someone as "warmhearted and illiterate" as Svirin. Once again, it is not the folksy quality of his speech that marks Svirin so much as his feeble attempts at mind-numbing rhetoric and formulaic language.

The partisan giant, Pamphil Palykh, is another Bolshevik sympathizer whose language is larded with proverbial speech. He represents the vast number of Russian peasant soldiers during World War I, who "saw the light" on the warfront with the help of Red agitators and propagandists. As he describes to Yurii, the slogans were not without their appeal for those fed up with fighting and looking for a scapegoat: "Солдаты мировой революции, *штыки в землю, домой с фронта, на буржуёв*!/Soldiers of the world revolution, *down your rifles*, *go home, get the bourgeois*!" (*Д. Ж*., p. 360/350). No longer enthusiastic in his initial reception of the revolution, Yurii recognizes how its strident propaganda had shaped and molded the vast masses of peasants, soldiers, and the common people. He understood only too well how attractive men like Pamphil were to partisan chiefs and Party leaders alike, how "their inhumanity seemed a marvel of class-consciousness, their barbarism a model of proletarian firmness and revolutionary instinct" (*Dr. Zh*., p. 349). Yurii is summoned to tend to the emotionally troubled Pamphil, who has experienced considerable stress and concern over the safety of his wife and children with the imminent ap-

proach of the White army. Pamphil commences the visit in proverbial manner: "Скоро, говорят, *сказка сказывается, да не скоро дело делается./They say a tale is soon told, but the job is not soon done*" (*Д. Ж.*, p. 360/349).[23] In one of the many coincidences that weave throughout the novel, Pamphil reveals that, besides his concern for his family, he suffers from the memory of earlier having shot and killed a young White agitator by the name of Gints. The whole story repulses Yurii, who finds Pamphil a "gloomy and unsociable giant, soulless and narrow-minded, [who] seemed subnormal, almost a degenerate" (*Dr. Zh.*, p. 349). Yurii's impressions of Pamphil are justified a few months later when the latter murders his wife and three children with a razor-sharp axe, convinced that they would soon fall victims to the White army. Remarkably, Pamphil chose not to kill himself following his treacherous deed. He wanders aimlessly around the camp while a military council discusses his fate, and by dawn the next day he disappears from the camp, "…*как бежит от самого себя больное водобоязнью бешеное животное/fleeing himself like a dog with rabies*. (*Д. Ж.*, p. 380/370)."[24] In a seemingly prophetic vein, it would appear that the proverb that Pamphil pronounced when he first met Yurii is borne out: his tale was quickly told to the Doctor, but the final deed would be a long time in coming.

It should be noted, however, that Pasternak did not limit his disdain for empty rhetoric to the Bolsheviks and their sympathizers alone. The aforementioned Provisional Government Commissar Gints is a case in point. Boyishly young and of Baltic descent, Gints exudes a naïve idealism and misplaced egotism, which lead him to conclude that his impassioned oratory alone can persuade a band of Russian army deserters to see the error of their ways and return to their outposts. He prepares a speech that he plans to deliver to them, steeped in revolutionary clichés and high-flown rhetoric. Commencing with a list of sacrifices Gints has made on their behalf, the speech levels a pointed accusation: "…you have allowed yourselves to be fooled by a gang of nobodies, you have become a rabble, politically unconscious, surfeited with freedom, hooligans for whom nothing is enough." The speech concludes by likening the deserters to a famous proverbial pig: "…*пусти свинью за стол, а она и ноги на стол/You're* like the proverbial *pig that was allowed in the din-*

ing room and at once jumped on the table" (*Д. Ж.*, p. 141/139).[25] As he listens to the speech that Gints is preparing, Yurii reflects once again on the futility of inflated verbiage marshaled in support of empty thoughts and ideas: "Oh, how one wishes to escape from the meaningless dullness of human eloquence, from all those sublime phrases, to take refuge in nature, apparently so inarticulate, or in the wordlessness of long, grinding labor, of sound sleep, or true understanding rendered speechless by emotion!" (*Dr. Zh.*, p. 139). In the case of Commissar Gints, Yurii will no longer have to suffer the "meaningless dullness of human eloquence" as Gints falls ignominiously into a water barrel at the peak of one of his speeches, and is shot and bayoneted to death by Pamphil and other army deserters whom he sought to inspire by his vaunted oratory.

Not all those who couch their hackneyed views in proverbial clichés are associated with the military—be it Red, White, or partisan. At several points in his novel Pasternak stresses how life—especially the life of everyday Muscovites—had been transformed by the Revolution. When Yurii returns home from Meliuzeievo, for example, we learn that even Uncle Nikolai Nikolaievich has been "Bolshevized." We are told that Yurii's friends have become "strangely dim and colorless. Not one of them had preserved his own outlook, his own world" (*Dr. Zh.*, p. 174). Yurii finds that all around him "people continue to deceive themselves, to talk endlessly" (*Dr. Zh.*, p. 184).[26] A case in point is the prosector at the Holy Cross Hospital where Yurii works after his return to Moscow. In the midst of a discussion about how properly to fix the Zhivagos' wood-burning stove in their apartment, the prosector reassures Yurii: "А вы потерпите. *Не в один день Москва построилась. Печку топить это вам не на рояли играть.*/Be patient. *Moscow wasn't built in a day. Getting a stove to work isn't like playing the piano*" (*Д. Ж.*, p. 190/187).[27] The first proverb that the prosector calls upon to support his observation is a Russian version of the original Latin proverb, *Roma non fuit una die condita*,[28] and resonates with the spirit of the "new times" associated with the ongoing construction of the new Bolshevik order in Moscow and throughout Russia. Perhaps as indicative of this new order is the second proverb-like statement, which the prosector himself creates, seemingly to reinforce the message of the first proverb. If man can

render a new city, a new political order and way of life, then why can he not create a new proverb for the times? The philistine suggestion that it takes more "skill" to fix a stove than to play a piano is also very consistent with the Bolshevized spirit of the times. Unknowingly, the prosector further chronicles the absurdities of the changing way of life in Moscow by referring Yurii to a church janitor ("He's an expert at stealing wood) and an exterminator ("…an old woman who is doing a big business in wood. She's got it all set up on a proper business footing—buys up whole houses for fuel") (*Dr. Zh*., p. 187).

Similarly suggestive of the vagaries and venalities of Moscow's new order is the advice the Yaroslavsky Train Station porter gives Yurii, when making plans for his family's exodus to Yuriatin at the suggestion of his brother, Yegraf. Advising him to get a business priority pass, the porter recommends that Yurii show up every day to make sure that a train will be leaving, and then adds some proverbial advice: "Поезда теперь редкость, дело случая. И само собой разумеется… (носильщик потер большой палец о два соседних)… Мучицы там или чегонибудь. *Не подмажешь--не поедешь.*/ Trains are rare nowadays, it's a question of luck. And of course (he rubbed two fingers with his thumb) a little flour or something… *Wheels don't run without oil,* you know…" (*Д. Ж*.,pp. 214-215/210).[29] The militarization of Russian life and society in the early months and years following the Revolution is reflected, as well, in the proverbial speech of a stationmaster along the railway to the Urals, who informs Yurii that a corps of labor conscripts will help remove miles of snow from the rail line: "А как же. *Навалом*,--говорится—*города берут*./Of course we can. *With plenty of troops you can take a city*, they say" (*Д. Ж*., p. 233/228).[30] A little while later on their journey to Yuriatin, Yurii is found wandering late one night along the train tracks by a railway sentry who manages to lace two proverbial expressions into comments he makes at finding Yurii: "Тут и думать нечего. *Видно птицу по полету*. «Это какая станция, это какая река?» Чем вздумал *глаза отводить*./There's no doubt about it. *You can tell this kind of bird at a glance*. 'What's this station?' 'What's this river?' *There's dust in your eyes!*" (*Д. Ж*., p. 249/244).[31]

It is telling that the only instance in his novel where Pasternak places a Russian proverb into the mouth of his narrator is by way of a searing commentary regarding the brutal hardships faced by Yurii and other soldiers, deserters, and travelers, in general, during the Russian Civil War. Following his escape from the Forest Brotherhood, we learn that Yurii encounters armed bands of highwaymen, escaped criminals, and political fugitives as he makes his way on foot in the dead of winter to Yuriatin. The narrator assesses Yurii's ordeal in the form of a proverb-comment: "Это время оправдало старинное изречение: *человек человеку волк*./That period confirmed the ancient proverb, "*Man is a wolf to man*" (*Д. Ж*., p. 388/378).[32] The full meaning of this proverb for Yurii becomes clear in the narrator's description:

> Traveler turned off the road at the sight of traveler, stranger meeting stranger killed for fear of being killed. There were isolated cases of cannibalism. The laws of human civilization were suspended. The jungle law was in force. Man dreamed the prehistoric dreams of the cave dweller. …Only nature had remained true to history…" (*Dr. Zh*., p. 378-379).

Pasternak extends this "Man is wolf to man" metaphor beyond the confines of life among the wintry snowdrifts and frozen tundra of Western Siberia. Safely arrived in Yuriatin, Yurii recognizes that he cannot stand about idly waiting for Lara to return home. As the narrator observes: "One of the most urgent [things to do] was to read the texts of the decrees posted in the street. It was no trifling matter in those days to be ignorant of the regulations; *it might cost you your life* [italics added]" (*Dr. Zh*., p. 380). Once again, the tenacious tentacles of Bolshevik ideology extended beyond the limits of Moscow and St. Petersburg all the way to the Urals. As had been true of distant urban life in the Russian capital when Yurii's family left Moscow, everyday life in the provinces was now threatened by the evil inhumanity of an ideology remote from and antithetical to real life as he understood it. The empty rhetoric and artificial wisdom of Marxist verbiage clearly sadden Yurii:

> There were newspaper articles, texts of speeches at meetings, and decrees. Yurii Andreievich glanced at the headings. "Requisitioning, assessment, and taxation of members of the propertied classes." "Establishment of workers' control." "Factory and plant committees." These were the regulations the new authorities had issued…. No doubt, Yurii Andreievich thought, they were intended as a reminder of the uncompromising nature of the new regime, ….But these monotonous, endless repetitions made his head go around. …Only once in his life had this uncompromising language and single-mindedness filled him with enthusiasm. Was it possible that he must pay for that rash enthusiasm all his life by never hearing, year after year, anything but these unchanging, shrill, crazy exclamations and demands, which became progressively more impractical, meaningless, and unfillable as time went by? …What kind of people are they, to go on raving with this never-cooling, feverish ardor, year in, year out, on non-existent, long-vanished subjects, and to know nothing, to see nothing around them? (*Dr. Zh*., pp. 381-382).

Lara, too, shares Yurii's concern over wolves, as she confides to him during a conversation of how best to elude certain arrest in Yuriatin. She tells him about a recurring pattern that she has observed in the Bolsheviks' bid for absolute control. Following the first stage, a spirit of criticism and struggle against prejudices, there follows a more odious second stage characterized by false sympathizers and informers bent on intrigue and filled with malice. It is at this point that Lara recalls that Tiverzin and the elder Antipov have recently been transferred to the town's Revolutionary tribunal. She especially detests this second stage, noting that "…people like Tiverzin and Antipov are more frightening than wolves" (*Dr. Zh*., p. 409). As Pasha's wife and Antipov's daughter-in-law, Lara is fully aware of the tenuous nature of her and her daughter's safety. During the final days that Yurii and Lara spend together at Varykino, the metaphor develops beyond the lupine predators that the two so dread: "The wolves he [Yurii] had been remembering all day long were no longer wolves on the snowy plain under the moon, they had become a theme, they

had come to symbolize a hostile force bent upon destroying him and Lara and on driving them from Varykino" (*Dr. Zh*., p. 440). It is no mere coincidence that the largest predator in Lara's life, Viktor Ippolitovich Komarovsky, appears shortly after this discussion about being driven from Varykino by wolves.

Now a high ranking official in the new Soviet government, Komarovsky comes to Varykino with news that Strelnikov has been executed by the new regime, and that a similar fate awaits both Yurii and Lara. He implores them both to leave with him on a special train bound for the Far East. Like other Bolsheviks and their sympathizers in the novel, in this scene Komarovsky frequently sprinkles his language with Russian proverbs, at times to speak from the authority of the ages, at others to berate Yurii or, just the opposite, to promote confidence and trust in him. At the end of their second week in Varykino, Yurii returns home early one afternoon to the sound of voices coming from the house. He recognizes them as belonging to Lara and Komarovsky, and senses that the latter

> "…завел в эту минуту речь именно о нем, предположительно в том духе, что он человек ненадежный («*слуга двух господ*» --почудилось Юрию Андреевичу), что неизвестно, кто ему дороже, семья или Лара, и что Ларе нельзя на него положиться, потому, что доверившись доктору, она «*погонится за двумя зайцами* и *останется междудвх стульев*».
>
> …was speaking about him [Yurii], saying something to the effect that he should not be trusted ("serving two masters," he thought he heard), that it was impossible to tell if he were more attached to Lara or to his family, that Lara must not rely on him, because if she did she would be "running with the hare and the hounds" and would "fall between two stools" (Д. Ж., p. 457/445).33

Komarovsky's awkward attempt to incorporate what he considers three authentic proverbs and proverbial expressions into the same sentence speaks volumes about his character. As Joanna Perelmuter has noted in her study of language and style in *Dr. Zhivago*, Pasternak rarely used speech indiscriminately as he had done in his earlier works, opting for a much more strict

had done in his earlier works, opting for a much more strict justification for the use of the vernacular in his mature writing.[34] One can only assume Komarovsky feels that by inserting proverbial language into his plea for Lara to leave Yurii, he somehow brings greater rhetorical weight and power of persuasion to his cause. In this respect Komarovsky addresses one of Yurii's most detested tendencies of the Bolsheviks' manipulation of language, when empty clichés and pompous rhetoric substitute for real life. J. W. Dyck's perceptive discussion of Yurii's philosophy makes the following point in this regard: "Rhetoric and empty cliché mould man into types, and Pasternak is convinced that if man becomes a type, it will be the end of him as a man."[35]

What makes Komarovsky's use of Russian proverbs even more absurd is his conflating of two separate proverbial expressions into one: the second half of the bipartite structure following "*погонится за двумя зайцами*/*running with the hare and the hounds*" is "*ни одного не поймаешь*/*you will catch neither*," not "*останется между двух стульев*/*remain between two chairs*," as he says. The proverbial expression which Komarovsky uses is correctly expressed as *"сидеть между двух стульев*/*to sit between two chairs*, which is used metaphorically to mean "*to sit on the fence*." If we consider that Komarovsky has inadvertently borne out the "wisdom" of his intended proverb, that is, by pursuing two witticisms, he has been eluded by both, we see how Pasternak has rendered his cruel and greedy lawyer even more ridiculous. It will be recalled, of course, that Victor Ippolitovich is now a high-ranking official in the Soviet Ministry of Communications. The final proverb associated with Komarovsky's character similarly casts him in a questionable light and further identifies him with the camp of cliché-speakers. In what has to be the greatest understatement of the novel, Komarovsky addresses Yurii: "Я знаю, вы *слов на ветер не бросаете* и отказа поехать с нами не перемените. Вы человек твердых решений, я знаю./I realize that *you are not in the habit of speaking lightly*, you are not the man to go back on your decisions, and you have made up your mind not to go with us" (*Д. Ж.*, p. 459/447).[36] The irony of this part of their discussion derives from the fact that unlike Komarovsky, who constantly bandies his words in this conversation, Yurii speaks,

as always, with great reserve and precision. Nonetheless, the former gains his goal in departing alone with Lara and Katenka.

Of course, not all proverbs in Pasternak's novel fall under the category of empty rhetoric or cliché thoughts, sentiments, or ideas associated with Bolshevik ideology. Geoffrey Hosking has shrewdly observed, in fact, that Pasternak played an important role in the rediscovery of folk culture in Russian literature and a move away from what he describes as "pseudo-narodny" and back to "real philosophy and real contact with the language and outlook of the people."[37] As might be expected, the further a character is removed from Moscow in Pasternak's novel, the more his or her speech is likely to reflect the earthy wisdom of peasant experience. Averii Stepanovich Mikulitsyn, Liberius' father, at whose Yuriatin estate the Zhivago's seek shelter, is a case in point. He expresses surprise and indignation that Yurii and his family would turn to them of all people for help. To Yurii's question if it is too much to ask for a small plot to grow some fruit and vegetables, Averii responds with a proverbial expression, "Да, *но свет широк*./True, *but the world is a big place*," (*Д. Ж*., 280/271) to register his disinclination to accede to Yurii's request. A bit later in their conversation, the disgruntled Mikulitsyn calls upon three more proverbs and proverbial expressions to support his argument about the difficult position in which Yurii's has placed him : "И без вас не сладко. *Собачья жизнь*, сумашедший дом. Все время *меж двух огней*, никакого выхода. Одни *собак вешают*, отчего такой красный сын, большевик, народный любимец. Другим не нравится, зачем самого выбрали в Учредительное собрание./Things are bad enough without you. *It's a dog's life*, a madhouse. I am *caught between two fires*. Between those who make my life a misery because my son is a Red, a Bolshevik, the people's favorite, and those who want to know why I was elected to the Constituent Assembly" (*Д. Ж*., p. 281/272). In the end, however, Mikulitsyn gives in to Yurii's request: "Хорошего, конечно, в переди ничего не вижу, но сие есть *темна вода во облацех*…./Not, of course, that I can see any good coming of it, but '*we see as in a glass darkly*'" (*Д. Ж*., p. 281/273).[38]

The grocer's wife, Galuzina, in Chapter Ten, is another example of a provincial woman whose simple life and individual

values are often couched in the metaphoric language of Russian proverbs. Distraught at the prospects that her son, Terioshka, might be drafted into the army, she wanders aimlessly through her small town lost in gloomy thoughts, while her husband "was traveling up and down the highway making speeches to the new recruits, exhorting them to mighty feats of arms.[39] To describe her musings, Pasternak engages in narrative *skaz*, represented discourse, and, as Joanna Perelmuter has observed, folkloristic speech—including proverbs—plays an integral role in *skaz*.[40] Reflecting on her husband, Vlas, and his supposed daughter from a previous marriage, Galuzina poses a rhetorical question in proverbial form: "Разве *в мужскую душу влезешь*?/Could you ever *see into a man's heart*?" (Д. Ж., p. 319/309).[41] Galuzina then turns her thoughts to happier times, to the days of her father:

> They had lived off the fat of the land. …And everything in those days had been fine and rich and seemly…. And Russia too had been a marriageable girl in those days, courted by real men, men who would stand up for her, not to be compared with this rabble nowadays. Now everything had lost its glamour, nothing but civilians left, lawyers and Yids clacking their tongues day and night. Poor old Vlas and his friends thought they could bring back those golden days by toasts and speeches and good wishes! (*Dr. Zh*., p. 310).

Galuzina's thoughts then turn to reflect a major theme of Pasternak's beliefs and, certainly, of his novel as well—the variance between the influx of ideology that had absorbed Moscow and city life, in general, and the more simple way of life in the countryside, where people could live as individuals. Once again in the form of skaz narration, she concludes her reflections with a proverbial statement:

> Беда в городах. Не ими Россия держится. Польстились на образованность, потянулись за городскими и не вытянули. *От своего берега отстали, к чужому не пристали*.

> Her [Russia's] misfortune was the towns. Not that the country stood or fell by the towns. But the towns were educated, and the country people had had their heads turned, they envied the education of the towns and tried to copy their ways and could not catch up with them, so now *they were neither one thing nor the other* (*Д. Ж.*, p. 322/312). [42]

Galuzina hesitates in this line of thought to consider whether "ignorance" was the root of life's difficulties in the countryside. She then formulates her thoughts in the form of two Russian proverbial expressions, contrasting the educated person/ учёный, who "…*сквозь землю видит, обо всем заранее догадается*/…sees through walls, [who] knows everything in advance" and country people, who "…*когда голову снимут, тогда шапки хватимся*/"…*only miss our hats when our heads have been chopped off*" (*Д. Ж.*, p. 322/312). Perplexed over this question, Galuzina finds some solace in yet another proverbial expression: "*Сам чорт ногу сломит*./Even *the devil couldn't make head or tail of it*" (Д. Ж., p. 322/312). This extended *skaz* passage finally concludes with a judgment that Galuzina makes against the city people—"cold and merciless as machines"—and in favor of country people: "*Своя рука владыка*, себе головы, хозяева./They relied on their own hands and their own heads, *they were their own masters*" (*Д. Ж.*, p. 322/312). Unlike the previous use of proverbial speech by Bolshevik ideologues and their Red and Green supporters, Galuzina's string of proverbs and proverbial expressions in this passage reflect her own *individual*, *personal* concerns with her family and her community. She prefers the old days, before the Revolution, when there was less verbosity and fewer empty ideals.

In conclusion, then, what is it that differentiates the use of proverbs by some—ideologues and revolutionaries—in the novel from those employed by the more rural inhabitants of Russia's vast countryside? We can point, first of all, to the greater degree of *individualism* exhibited by the latter group. As early as the first two chapters of the novel, Pasternak establishes a dichotomy between the collective mindset, which people like Nikolai Nikolaievich scorn, and a more individualistic, or personal, philoso-

phy grounded in the activities of day-to-day life rather than a staid ideology. That is, while characters associated with Bolshevik views or leanings, like Liberius or Komarovsky, sprinkle their speech with proverbs and proverbial expressions in situations having an ideological basis, the more rural-oriented Averii Mikulitsyn and Galuzina focus much closer to the personal lives and relationships, when invoking the traditional wisdom of Russian proverbs. In this regard, we might also note Nikolai Nikolaievich's preferences for the parables spoken by Christ in the Gospels over the ethical teachings and commandments in the Bible. What he particularly values is that the source of the parables derives from the realities of daily life, rather than from instructions and speculative theories about life. J. W. Dyck notes in this regard that "Pasternak's mission was and remained the concern for man. Not man as an abstract philosophical concept, but man as an individual, who in coping with everyday realities, must find a generally acceptable way of communicating, of having communion with his fellow man."[43]

The numeric preponderance of proverbs and proverbial expressions that are associated with characters or values inconsistent with Yurii's beliefs also warrants comment. Of the 42 proverbial utterances that appear in Pastenak's novel, fully 31 are spoken by Bolshevik ideologues or sympathizers. Yurii himself suggests Pasternak's aversion to this form of proverbial speech, in particular, and, as can be seen from the following excerpt, metaphoric and formulaic speech, in general, in Chapter Nine, "Varykino," when he reflects on his goals in life:

> What is it that prevents me from being a doctor and a writer? I think it is not our privations or our wanderings, or our unsettled lives, but the prevalent spirit of high-flown rhetoric, which has spread everywhere—phrases such as "the dawn of the future," "the building of a new world," "the torch-bearers of mankind." The first time you hear such talk you think "What breadth of imagination, what richness!" But in fact it's so pompous just because it is so unimaginative and second-rate" (*Dr. Zh*., pp. 284-285).

Yurii and, by extension, his creator feels that this kind of ideological rhetoric and vapid cliché combine to transform mankind

into mere types, the first step in a process of being robbed of our humanity.

Lara, too, displays a similar aversion to empty clichés and phrase-mongering in her description to Yurii of the breakdown of Russian life, which she traces to the outbreak of World War I and its aftermath leading to the Revolutions of 1917:

> It was then that untruth came down on our land of Russia. The main misfortune, the root of all evil to come, was the loss of confidence in the value of one's own opinion. People imagined that it was out of date to follow their own moral sense, that they must all sing in chorus, and live by other people's notions, notions that were being crammed down everybody's throat. And then there arose the power of the glittering phrase, first the Tsarist, then the revolutionary. …Instead of being natural and spontaneous as we had always been, we began to be idiotically pompous with each other (*Dr. Zh*., p. 404).

Clearly, what Yurii and Lara object to is the enslavement of men's souls by the mindless rhetoric of cliché, or what Henry Gifford labels the "despotism of the phrase."[44] This is not to say, of course, that they have Russian proverbs exclusively in mind in their attacks on pompous and empty rhetoric. Rather, they cast a wider net to extend to all ornamental and metaphoric speech in general, whose "logic" and acceptance derive from dogma rather than from reflecting the specifics of man's everyday human existence, particularly the freedom of personality.[45] The very fact that Russian proverbs are associated in the novel with both ideologues and peasants alike is proof that Pasternak was not assaulting the proverb *per se*. As we have seen, however, the formulaic language of proverbial speech provided him an effective linguistic device to juxtapose the commonality of the shared ideological experience of Bolshevik sympathizers to his and Yurii's own more personal, individual, and intuitive understanding of the universe.

Notes:

[1]Борис Пастернак, *Доктор Живаго* (Ann Arbor, Michigan: The University of Michigan Press, 1958), p. 532. The translation for this poem, as well as subsequent English language quotations from the novel, are taken from the Max Hayward and Manya Harari edition of *Doctor Zhivago* (New York: Random House, 1991), p. 523. Page references taken from the Russian edition will be placed in parentheses in the text of this article as *Д. Ж.* Page references taken from the Hayware/Harari translation similarly will be placed in parentheses as *Dr. Zh*. When both the Russian and English versions are used, the first page reference will be to the Russian original, followed by the English translation. This proverb is cited in C. Krylov, *Russian Proverbs and Sayings in Russian and English* (New York: US Army Russian Institute, 1973), No. 814, p. 68. The closest English language equivalent is *Life is not a bed of roses*; literally, the proverb translates as *Living life is not like crossing a field.*

[2] Aside from cursory reference in scholarly monographs to this poem's proverb *coda*, there is only one full-length article that analyzes the paremiological aspects of the poem: Vadim Liapunov and Savelii Senderovich, "Об одной пословице и трех функциях плана выражения пословиц," *Russian Literature*, 19, no. 4 (1986), pp. 393-404. The authors, however, devote more attention to an analysis of the binary and poetical structure of the proverb than to discussion of its use in the poem or, more generally, the novel itself. For its rich bibliographic compendium of scholarly literature devoted to Pasternak's novel, I want to acknowledge Munir Sendich and Erika Greber's, *Pasternak Doctor Zhivago: An International Bibliography of Criticism*, 1957-1985 (East Lansing, Michigan: *Russian Language Journal*, 1990), and Sendich's more recent *Boris Pasternak: A Reference Guide* (New York: G. K. Hall, 1994).

[3] As in other folk cultures, Russian proverbs are considered as deriving from a long oral tradition. Written forms of Russian proverbs are found as well, of course, in the biblical Book of Proverbs and the Book of Job as well as the New Testament and other forms of ecclesiastical works, largely translated from Greek. The influence of this latter category is felt in the eleventh-century translation of the famous Byzantine collection of sayings, *The Bee* (*Melissa*) and, later, in the *Household Rules* (*Domostroy*), sixteenth-century ethical and social codes addressed to the Russian merchant class as well as the nobility, or boyars. Writers of more imaginative fiction from the late eighteenth to nineteenth centuries, ranging from Catherine the Great to Pushkin, Griboedov, Gogol, Dostoevsky, and Tolstoy, have regularly and creatively interspersed Russian proverbs into their fictional works.

[4] With the failure of her 1767 Legislative Assembly to embody the principles Catherine had expounded in her *Nakaz* (*Instructions*), the Russian empress turned to writing a series of periodical essays in her literary journal, *Vsiakaia Vsiachina* (*All Sorts and Sundries*), which employed numerous Russian proverbs designed to instruct and persuade her readers to live in a more "enlightened" fashion. For more discussion on this topic, see: Kevin J. McKenna, "Proverbs and the Empress: The Role of Russian Proverbs in Catherine the Great's All Sorts and Sundries, " in Kevin J. McKenna (ed.), *Proverbs in Rus-*

sian Literature: From Catherine the Great to Alexander Solzhenitsyn (Burlington, Vermont: Supplement Series of *Proverbium: Yearbook of International Proverb Scholarship*, 1998), pp. 25-42. Leo Tolstoy made frequent mention of the didactic powers of Russian proverbs, and even attached proverb titles to some of his plays and short stories. See: Andrew Donskov, "Tolstoy's Use of Proverbs in *The Power of Darkness*," in McKenna, *Proverbs in Russian Literature*, pp. 61-74; E. E. Zajdenshnur, "Народная песня и пословица м творчестве Л. Н. Толстого,: in*: Д. Д. Е́лагой, Лев Никола*евич *Толстой: сборник статей и* материалов (Москва: Академия наук, 1951), pp. 511-576. For an extensive listing of scholarly articles on this topic, see Wolfgang Mieder's "A Bibliography of Proverbs in Russian Literature," in McKenna, *Proverbs in Russian Literature*, pp. 99-112. I want to acknowledge Professor Mieder's helpful suggestions in reading this article in manuscript form.

[5]This proverb is cited in С. С. Кузьмин, Н. Л. Щадрин, *Русско-английский словарь пословиц и поговорок* (Москва: «Русский язык,» 1989), p. 144.

[6]Yurii, for example, assures his wife, Tonia, that "There *certainly isn't any sense crying over spilt milk/Снявши голову, по волосам не плачут"* when they arrive in Varykino and realize that she is bound to be recognized as the granddaughter of Gromeko. [*Д. Ж.*, p. 273. Cited in Кузьмин, p. 246.] Nikolai Nikolaievich notes that he has "*jumped out of the frying pan into the fire/попал из огня в полымя*" once he moves to Moscow from what he originally had anticipated to be a quiet, peaceful period of writing in St. Petersburg. [*Д. Ж.*, p. 39. Cited in C. Krylov, No. 1574, p. 136.] As will be seen in the discussion that follows, neither of these proverbs, nor the circumstances in which they are uttered, fits into the scheme that Pasternak establishes for the Bolshevik Party members and their sympathizers.

[7]Dal', it will be recalled, was the well-known author of a *Dictionary of the Living Russian Language* as well as a compiler of *Proverbs of the Russian Language* (Москва, 1861-1862 and Санкт-Петербург: ЛИТЕРА, 1997).

[8]This proverbial expression is cited in Piotr. Borkowski, *The Great Russian-English Dictionary of Idioms and Set Expressions* (London: Mr. Piotr Borkowski, 1973), p. 202.

[9]It would appear that Tiverzin creates his own proverbial statement here as all attempts to locate a source for this proverb have met with failure.

[10]This proverb is rendered as "Boldness conquers all" in C. Krylov, No. 2328, p. 202.

[11]For an interesting discussion of this distinction, see Guy de Mallac, *Boris Pasternak: His Life and Art* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1981), pp. 314-315.

[12]Cited in C. Krylov, No. 423, p. 35. The literal translation of this proverb is *A child with seven nannies often has an eye missing*.

[13]*Doctor Zhivago*, p. 38.

[14]Ibid., p. 318.

[15]Ibid., p. 260.

[16]*Доктор Живаго*, p. 269/261.

[17]Cited in C. Krylov, No. 2218, p. 192, the complete version of this proverb is: "*Не только свету, что в окошке: на улицу выйдешь--больше увидишь*, which translates literally as: *There's more to the world than you can see through your window: get outside and you'll see more*.

[18]This proverb is cited in Peter Mertvago, *The Comparative Russian-English Dictionary of Russian Proverbs & Sayings* (New York: Hippocrene Books, 1995), No. 62, p. 104.

[19]*Boris Pasternak* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1972), p. 142.

[20]Ibid., p. 318.

[21]The proverbial expression, "Божий день," is cited in Piotr Borkowski, p. 78. The first proverb is cited in Peter Mertvago, No. 38, p. 308. The second proverbial expression was not located in any of the sources I checked. Attempts to locate the second proverb have been futile, although its metaphoric twist and bipartite structure leave no doubt about its proverbial status.

[22]In addition to the sources cited elsewhere in this article, the author has searched Dal's *Пословицы русского народа* as well as consulted with numerous native Russian speakers to identify a source for Svirin's proverb—to no avail.

[23]Kuz'min renders this proverb with the more famous American equivalent, "*Give him an inch and he'll take a mile*." It literally translates as "Allow a pig to sit at a table, and it will put its legs on it." С. С. Кузьмин, p. 201.

[24]While not a recognizable Russian proverb, this narrative description certainly qualifies as a proverbial comparison.

[25]This proverb is cited in C. Krylov, No. 2231, p. 193. While I concur with the criticism that Munir Sendich has leveled against the overall quality of the Hayward/Harari translation of *Dr. Zhivago*, I find that the English-language equivalent they give for this proverb to be preferable to the one he cites in his review of the novel (*Russian Language Journal*, vol. 32, no. 113, 1978, p. 248). It should be noted, though, that both versions are cited in С. С. Кузьмин, p. 201.

[26]Ibid., p. 184.

[27]The first proverb is a variant of the original saying, *Москва не сразу строилась*, cited in C. Krylov, No. 1356, p. 117. The second proverb is more likely an invented proverb built by the prosecutor according to traditional proverb structure.

[28]Guula Paczolay, *European Proverbs* (Veszprémi Hungary: Veszprémi Nyombda, Rt., 1997), p. 449. Paczolay confirms the version of this proverb as cited in C. Krylov, p. 451.

[29]This proverb is cited in Peter Mertvago, No. 370, p. 247.

[30]This is a variation of the Russian proverb *Смелость города берёт*/ *Boldness conquers all* [literally: *Boldness takes cities*], cited in C. Krylov, No. 2328, p. 202.

[31]The first proverb is cited in С. С. Кузьмин, p. 339; the second is found in C. Krylov, No. 413, p. 35.

[32]This proverb is cited in C. Krylov, No. 2798, p. 242. The Latin original for this proverb is "Homo homini lupus."

[33]The first proverb, "*serving two masters*," derives from the bible (Matthew 6:24 and Luke 16:13), and is cited in Gyula Paczolay, pp. 283-285. The

first half of Komarovsky's attempt at the second proverb is cited in С. С. Кузьмин, p. 89, who correctly completes the proverb as follows: *За двумя зайцами погонишься, ни одного не поймаешь*. The proverbial expression, which Komarovsky uses incorrectly to complement the first half of this proverb is cited in Piotr Borkowsky, p. 307.

[34]"Reflection of Urban Speech in the Language of Doctor Zhivago," *Russian Language Journal*, No. 113 (1978), p. 14.

[35]*Boris Pasternak* (New York: TWAYNE Publishers, 1972), p. 133.

[36]This proverb is cited in Sophia Lubensky, *Russian-English Dictionary of Idioms* (New York: Random House, 1995), pp. 51-52.

[37]*Beyond Socialist Realism* (New York: Holmes and Meier Publishers, 1980), pp. 32-33.

[38]This proverb is cited in C. Krylov, No. 268, p. 22, who gives a literal translation as: *The water in the clouds is dark*.

[39]*Doctor Zhivago*, p. 309.

[40]Perelmuter, p. 17.

[41]C. Krylov lists suggests the English language equivalent as: *You never really know what makes a man tick*, No. 760, p. 64. The literal translation of this proverb is: *You can't climb into someone else's soul*.

[42]While the rhyme and bipartite structure assure that this is a proverb, no source was located for it.

[43]*Boris Pasternak*, p. 118.

[44]*The Novel in Russia: From Pushkin to Pasternak* (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1964), p. 191.

[45]It will be recalled, however, that at one point in a conversation with Liberius Yurii does launch a specific complaint that "The people you worship go in for proverbs…;" *Doctor Zhivago*, p. 339.

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