



Dramatic Fragments

PASTERNAK's three little known "Dramatic Fragments" appeared in May and June 1918 in the Socialist Revolutionary newspaper *Znamya Truda* ("Banner of Labour").¹ Directed by the left wing critic and publicist Ivanov-Razumnik, who also edited the magazine *Skify* ("Scythians"), the literary section of the paper had already published verse by Andrey Bely, Sergey Esenin, Nikolay Klyuev and the "Scythian" poets; and Aleksander Blok's celebrated poems "The Scythians" and "The Twelve" had also first appeared on its pages in February and March of 1918. Most of the literary contributions to *Znamya Truda* coincided with the "Scythian" group's interpretation of the events of 1917, welcoming them as that mystical revolution of the spirit long prophesied by Russian messianic thought. Some traces of this brand of ecstatic mystic patriotism might be discerned in the main character's impassioned eulogy of his countrymen in the third "Dramatic Fragment" entitled "Dialogue":

I love my homeland so . . . sometimes to the point of madness! In my country that is how all of us love. And what love indeed—for this is the very future of our world! A future which shines through in everything. My countrymen are all men of genius because, like flax, they give up their whole selves, their last fibre, to weave the fabric of this future. . . . But in order to give, to be in a position to give, they also take all that they are able. It turns out that in the state of genius mankind is restoring a proper balance to the shaking, staggering life it leads. The only reason why life in your country is so steady is that it has fallen and lies on the earth, and has not yet risen to its feet.

Although in 1916 he had warned his fellow poets against allowing History to encroach on the virgin territory of pure Lyricism, the impact of the 1917 Revolution could not fail to

affect Pasternak's writing. In the poem called "Kremlin in the Snowstorm: End of 1918" he speaks of how the coming year will undertake "to educate me once again," and readers of the novel will recall Yury Zhivago's thrill at the Revolution's "splendid surgery." Nevertheless the reflection of contemporary events in Pasternak's verse and prose nearly always remained oblique and indirect; his view of history was forever a highly subjective and poetic one. Thus in his longer poems of the mid-1920s which were supposed by orthodox critics to mark his gradual emergence on to the "social platform," he preferred to deal with an earlier revolution in "The Year 1905" and with its hero in "Lieutenant Schmidt." And when finally he graduated to 1917 the February and October Revolutions were witnessed through the eyes of Spektorsky (in the poem of that title published in 1931) and Yury Zhivago, as well as directly by the poet himself in "The Lofty Malady" (1928), all of them artistically sensitive but politically inactive intellectuals. Though sympathetic to the revolutionary forces which removed the Tsarist autocracy, none saw themselves able to come to terms with the inexorable logic of the revolutionary order and the new society without doing violence to their individuality and sensitivity.

Although no reader at the time could have failed to see the French Revolution setting of the first two "Dramatic Fragments" as a simple translocation of the Russian revolutionary scene, Pasternak characteristically sets them in the months of Messidor and Thermidor in the French republican year 1794, with Saint-Just expounding Pasternak's own ideas as he speaks in turn with Henriette and Robespierre. The third "Dramatic Fragment" is set in France too, at a more recent though unspecified time and its principal character, an eccentric Russian traveller, also acts as the vehicle for some recognisably Pasternakian thoughts as he replies to a French police interrogation.

¹ The first two "Dramatic Fragments" in blank verse were reprinted in the 1965 Soviet edition of Pasternak's verse; the third, in prose and entitled "Dialogue" has not so far been republished.

FOR PASTERNAK in 1917 and 1918 the Russian Revolution still represented a feat of splendid elemental power and exhilarating spontaneity. The disabusement when these were sacrificed to the barren conformity of later years was yet to come; the Antipov-Strelnikovs had not yet asserted their full control; and the "Dramatic Fragments" contain little of that fatalism and pessimism which marked Pasternak's later attitudes to the Revolution; indeed, if the dating of the first two fragments is correct, they were written in the summer of 1917, before the October Revolution. When Saint-Just stands musing in the first Fragment he therefore speaks of his work almost as of some artistic act of creation, "a flash of ecstasy unleashed upon the years." For man to live in the fullest sense, he says, it is not sufficient to be born and live self-satisfied and unaware. Man must respond actively to his environment; each must create anew the world in which he has his being. But, prefiguring the sacrificial motif of Pasternak's later writings, Saint-Just's creative act is one in which individual initiative is eventually sacrificed. Raskolnikov-like he is carried along and ultimately destroyed by the forces he has unleashed. Though used to leaving on others the "brand-mark of my own self-immolations," Saint-Just himself is engulfed by the consuming flames, and in the second Fragment he faces his end with the calm conviction of one who has written the "chronicle of the republic" with the glory of his last few exalted days on earth.

THE SETTING of the third "Dramatic Fragment" (not published here) is less immediately clear and little effort is made to locate the action precisely in time or space. The principal character is a traveller from Russia arrested in some French town for the theft of a melon and for inflammatory public preaching to a crowd which offered him money. A benign, ingenuous and artistic personality, much given to lyrical digressions and easily distracted by incidental poetic observations, he is uncomprehended by his foreign interrogators as he seeks to justify the theft of the melon by contrasting the French and what he claims is his own, Russian, view of life and material possessions. In an interview with Gerd Ruge in 1958 Pasternak stated:

Russians have a different attitude to property and possessions. Russians regard themselves as being mere guests in this life. I suppose the truth is that we Russians are more philosophical than the West. (ENCOUNTER, March 1958)

And in the "Dialogue" a similar contrast is drawn when the main character discerns in Russians a capacity for intensity of experience, for love of and passionate involvement with life, understood in its most general sense, for which the only word is "genius". Where the observer's personality and awareness of self are lost in the ecstasy of contemplation, absorbed and assimilated, as it were, by the very object contemplated—this is a state in which Pasternak the poet constantly dwelt. Isaiah Berlin writes of his poetry being informed by a "metaphysical emotion which melts the barrier between personal experience and brute creation." And in the dramatic "Dialogue" the Russian traveller also finds that in such a state the "human condition" is no longer something finite and delimited by physical bounds—man is not a mere "place in the total space of humanity" as he is in France. To live in the Russian manner means to exist in a non-physical state of burning and furious spiritual activity. Russian man, we understand, loves, works and lives in a more or less compulsive manner wherever he happens to be—"wherever his inflammable nature meets a spark." But, as with Saint-Just, this Russian creative awareness is acquired only by self-sacrifice, by renouncing any claim to control one's physical destiny, for "man finds himself wherever he is driven by the force which ferments within him, wherever the storm tosses him." It is this which explains the eccentric traveller's strange arrival in France and frank acknowledgement of his misdeeds, Robespierre's sense of despair and Saint-Just's acceptance of the ineluctable historical forces which are to destroy the two of them. In fact the "Dramatic Fragments" are perhaps the first clear forecast in Pasternak's work of the characters and fates of his later heroes, Lieutenant Schmidt, Sergey Spektorsky, and Yuri Zhivago.

If this is the chief interest of the Fragments, there is originality too in Pasternak's very use of dramatic form for this his first work on an overtly historical theme. Apart from his numerous translations of drama by Shakespeare, Ben Jonson, Goethe, Schiller, and Kleist, Pasternak used the form only once again at the end of his life in a historical trilogy called "The Blind Beauty" which like the earlier "Dramatic Fragments" has unfortunately survived only as a series of incomplete extracts, posthumously published in 1969.

Christopher Barnes

I

PARIS. *The apartment of Lebas. The windows are wide open. It is a summer's day, and thunder can be heard in the distance. The action takes place some time between the 10th and 20th messidor (29th June and 8th July) in the year 1794.*

SAINT-JUST: Before us Paris lies, a changing city . . .
 What of its past and future? This broad day
 Which lights the world around, like dungeon steps
 That form the threshold of my soul, will not
 Forever be a stormy lantern flame
 That shivers worlds into a fevered order.
 This age will pass; the scorching beam will cool,
 Turn charcoal-black, and curiosity
 One day will pore by candlelight in archives
 For works which thrill and dazzle men today.
 What passes now for clarity and wisdom
 Our grandsons will regard as raving. Gloom and
 Obscurity await. Insanity
 Will claim our day, our God, all light and reason.
 The ages rush and fear to look around.
 And why?—That they might see themselves! They don
 Night's shroud, while other write their epoch's chronicle—
 Snuff out their years to read it in the gloom.
 But who has fame as guest within his soul,
 Fate guides his eye: he draws the shroud across
 His days, himself to write his age's book and
 Inscribe therein his own renown and glory.

(He now addresses Henriette, who sits sewing, and speaks more simply and animatedly)

Then why should men consider that mere birth
 Is warranty for living? Who can prove
 This world is like some inn wherein we pay
 To rest a while in freedom, comfort, warmth? . . .
 When will they understand that man is nothing
 Save the Creator's Sword of Damocles—
 Man's soul has no abode but in a world
 That he himself has snared and recreated?
 But in our towns, Lyon, Bordeaux and Paris
 Men crawl like crabs about the ocean bed,
 Like hunted tigers luring in the reeds.
 Yet reason still can shatter life's dark pane,
 Tear idleness in shreds, and by its actions. . .

HENRIETTE: You say. . .

SAINT-JUST: I mean that action is a flash
 Of ecstasy unleashed upon the years.

HENRIETTE: You go. . .

SAINT-JUST: To lance the abscess of desires.

HENRIETTE: But when. . .

SAINT-JUST: To bleed away impurity.

HENRIETTE: I do not understand.

SAINT-JUST: Is it so often

That Paris's linden trees applaud the thunder,
 That clouds are wroth and heaven's eyes unsealed

To blink with lightning glare in showers? Yet
Here storms are rare, here silence reigns and slumber.
You are not always with me here.

HENRIETTE: Not always?

But there?...

SAINT-JUST: Out there? Attacks at every moment....

HENRIETTE: Out there there is....

SAINT-JUST: No Henriette?

HENRIETTE: Yes.

SAINT-JUST: Not so! Out there you're with me constantly!

Believe me, whether you are mine or no,
No matter were your love no match for mine,
But you are there! The towns, the air of battles
All breathe of Henriette and invade
My inmost heart, so none can stand between us,
'Tween you, cloud-wrapped, and my dilated breast,
Between the heavens and my troubled dreaming.
The guardian of the spirit's cause out there
Is Georges Saint-Just, who holds at bay the dragon
Of mediocrity; in here with you
His strength's a hundredfold reduced, in here
That dragon is a hundredfold more dread.

HENRIETTE: What lance out there can probe such ulcers?

SAINT-JUST: Duty,

The soul, the urgency of my commands!
Used as I am to the consuming fire,
Accustomed as I am to leave on men
The brand-mark of my own self-immolations!
Like dark mulled wine, I love the smokeless flame
Of men intoxicated by the glow
Of flaring nerves, of men immersed in thought
Who burn like candle-wicks when dipped in oil.
At night there is no rest for me. I lie here
Dressed.

HENRIETTE: Dressed for burial!

SAINT-JUST: No rest for me

At night! There are no nights! Only the daylight
Glows dimmer now and drearer than before,
As if the sun were breathing on a window
And tracing out the hours across the pane
And staggering in the dizzy heat. For each
New day's still sicker than the last, each night
Still more bewitched; a heat-haze dusts the stubble;
The sunbeams gleam taut-stretched like skins on drums
Of military bands.....

HENRIETTE: How close to me and how familiar

These thoughts! It's true, it's true! Yet still I sleep,
Yet still I eat and drink; I have my senses,
My sanity; the nights do not seem white;
No violet tarnish overcasts the sun.

SAINT-JUST: How can one sleep when a new world is born, when

The silent storm of one's own thoughts is raging?
For then one hears the converse of the peoples
Who use one's head to play some game or sport.
How can one sleep when one's own silent thoughts

Have set the grasses and the stars aquiver,
 Disturbed the rest of birds, that all night long
 Their din still rises from the sleepless thickets?
 There is no night. The light still lies uncleared,
 Forgotten, cooling; yet no sundown comes
 To end this painful, long, eternal day.

II

PART of a scene on the night of the 9th to 10th thermidor, 1794.
The interior of the Hotel de Ville, Paris. Off-stage one hears the sound of preparations for the siege, the rumble of guns being wheeled into position, people shouting etc. Coffinhal has just read the decree of the Convention, addressing the audience seated in the boxes as he proclaimed the list of outlaws. The hall of the Hotel de Ville is vacated for a moment and it echoes empty. The first signs of dawn are glowing on the capitals of the pillars, while the rest of the scene is plunged in gloom. In the centre of the tiled floor stands a large office desk with a candle burning on it. Hanriot is lying on one of the benches in the vestibule. Upstage Coffinhal, Lebas, Couthon, Augustin, Robespierre and others walk about talking among themselves and come up to Hanriot. During the opening scene none of their speech can be heard. Downstage Maximilien Robespierre sits at the desk while Saint-Just paces up and down. Both are silent. There is an atmosphere of alarm and stupefaction.

ROBESPIERRE: Don't pace so restlessly, Saint-Just! I had
 A thought just then!

SAINT-JUST: Oh! I'm disturbing you?

(Long silence)

ROBESPIERRE: Tell me, Saint-Just, where did it all take place?—
 Versailles, October, August, the Bastille?

(Saint-Just stops in surprise and looks at Robespierre)

ROBESPIERRE: Well, are they there?

SAINT-JUST: I cannot hear.

ROBESPIERRE: Saint-Just,

I asked you! I am trying to recall.—

Did Augustin give warning to Duplay?

SAINT-JUST: I do not know.

ROBESPIERRE: You do not know.

Then ask no questions. I cannot collect

My thoughts.—But hark! The chimes! What hour is it?—

I have a plan.—Why are you here?—Away!

Begone! Your presence gnaws me like a dormouse,

And I forget to think.—But still, perhaps

The hour is not too late.—Yes, wait. Please stay.

I'll find some way.—Just now I had the answer!—

Please do not go. I need you.—Curse upon it!

What torment! Who remembers? Who can tell me

What I was thinking of?—I must recall!

(Silence. Saint-Just walks to and fro)

ROBESPIERRE: Tread softer, lest they hear. Give me your kerchief.

SAINT-JUST: My kerchief?

ROBESPIERRE: Yes. I need you. Curse upon it!
 No, leave me! We are lost! I cannot think!
 No thoughts, a whirlwind rushes through my head!

(Robespierre beats his forehead with his hand and hoarsely addresses the following words to his head)

The final hour—this foolish head refuses
 To save itself! This wonder-working mind
 Shies like a stubborn mare. Bring women, wine!—
 What mockery! The so-called “incorrupt”
 Robespierre pledged to the cause a head which now
 Betrays its master to his murderers!
 I dedicated time to it that others
 Devote so willingly to hours of passion.
 That simpleton Danton could never grasp
 My schemes! He never dreamt what barricades
 Of concepts I erected, fortresses
 Of intellect and reason; mutiny
 Of dreams he never knew, nor ecstasy
 Of lofty, pure ideas in revolt!
 Suppose he was a criminal—what matter?
 Danton was sacrificed for me, Robespierre,
 And for the honour of this brain, this mind,
 The one false god I deigned to recognise.

SAINT-JUST: Robespierre, what troubles you?

ROBESPIERRE: The traitorous
 Confusion of this mind enrages me!
 I try, yet cannot think. Cold perspiration,
 Dry fog and mist are all it will produce.
 My throat runs dry. My skull's an aching void,
 An emptiness unvisited by thought.
 No, thoughts there are! But how can I convey
 Their rapid scuttling and their rat-like patter?
 There goes a thought!—I chase it.—Gone!—Again
 A thought!—But no!—I pounce once more—in vain!
 Oh, for a second head! I'd sacrifice
 The first together with its wanton thoughts!

SAINT-JUST: Do not torment yourself. Allow your thoughts
 To wander. Let them roam unhindered, freed
 For one last time.

ROBESPIERRE: No. For the first time! Hence
 My anger. What a time to choose! Enough!
 No more! My sole recourse is now to yield,
 To curse this mind's betrayal and surrender.

SAINT-JUST: Permit your mind just once to roam. You asked
 Where did it all occur: October, August,
 And June the second....

ROBESPIERRE: *(interrupting, and absorbed in his own thoughts)*
 I remember!

SAINT-JUST: Useless!
 I thought of that myself.

ROBESPIERRE: *(still absorbed)* For one brief instant
 I had it!

SAINT-JUST: Useless! I myself have meanwhile
 Explored that question—how it all occurred....

ROBESPIERRE: (*bitter*) I beg of you! While we have been discussing....

So must it be!...

(There is a pause in which Coffinhal, Lebas and the others leave, and the upper stage empties except for Hanriot who still lies sleeping)

ROBESPIERRE: (*hoarsely and in despair*) If only.... Never mind,

Please do continue. You were telling me....

Now all is lost. I said I would surrender.

Please finish. Pardon me. I'm overwrought....

SAINT-JUST: Such words are natural:—when you compare

Me to a mouse, and your own thoughts to rats,

It's true. Your thoughts are scurrying like rats

Trapped in a blazing house. They sense the fire

And raise their snouts before the flames and sniff

The heated air; and yet, not just your brain

Is seething, but the kingdoms of the world

Within throb to the scuttling of those rats,

Those hordes of loathsome thoughts which swarm in frenzy,

Each tainted by the horrid fumes of death.

Not we alone, no, all have known the dread

Realisation. All men have endured

The numbness of their final day and hour.

Yet some, who overcame the infernal din

And brazen uproar, smiled and laid their heads

Triumphantly beneath the guillotine.

And those brief days preceding their demise

Compose the history of our republic.

For no man's end perhaps comes unexpected;

No one is visited unwarned by death.

ROBESPIERRE: (*distractedly*) Where's Augustin?

SAINT-JUST: He's with Couthon.

ROBESPIERRE: With whom?

SAINT-JUST: Couthon.

ROBESPIERRE: But that's no answer. Where's Couthon?

SAINT-JUST: Upstairs. They've gathered in the upper hall.

Now Frenchmen will no longer rack their brains

And question what the morrow holds in store.

All secrets are uncovered. All who passed

Across that square, where mysteries lay revealed

And deaths exhibited, could witness there

The course and outcome of their fates enacted.

ROBESPIERRE: Why such remorse?

SAINT-JUST: No, these are no regrets. But,

The very chronicle of the republic

Recounts the greatness of our dying days.

It seemed the very country kept some journal

Of lives beyond the grave. France was unlit by

The flickering of changing nights and days;

For worlds in revolution, the universe's

Last twilight, death's black occident were France's

Grim sentinels. They stalked our every move....

June-July 1917.

Translated by Christopher Barnes

Oscar Handlin

The Vulnerability of the American University

A YEAR AGO, when I began to set down these notes on the turmoil in the American universities, I imagined that I would be dealing with a problem that was real but somewhat abstract from a personal point of view. By the time the first draft was complete, the institution within which I had spent my whole academic career was in danger. Returning to the typescript months later, I toyed with the idea of converting this essay into an account of the events at Harvard, not because Harvard was unique but because it was so typical that it exemplified almost every point I wished to make. Ultimately I rejected that temptation, mostly because the struggle to save the University is still in progress. These notes therefore deal in general with a certain type of American university rather than in particular with what occurred at one of them.

Most of the writers about the current disorders have also been participants, involved to a greater or lesser degree in the dramas they described. Accordingly they have also vacillated between emphasis on the particularities which make each situation seem unique and emphasis on the world-wide scope of the outbreaks which lends countenance to theories of universality, inevitability, or conspiracy.

No doubt there are both general and particular elements in the student attacks upon the universities. In so far as they are world-wide, they spring from ubiquitous institutional pressures and from the prevailing disorientation of the age group the university serves. But since there are important national differences both among the systems of higher education and among the young people enrolled in them, the nature of the grievances, the forms of protest, and the consequences of student action vary widely from society to society.

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THE UNIVERSITIES of the United States have experienced the effects of undergraduate unrest just as have their counterparts in other areas of the globe. The intensity of the attack has been a measure of the vulnerability of the American institutions. But that vulnerability had sources that, until now, existed in no other country. The rebels in the United States conformed to none of the special indices described by such analysts of the problem as Professor S. M. Lipset. The American students were not politically active; they lacked an autonomous café culture; and they came from upper- and middle-class families rather than from the ranks of the poor. None of the universities that supplied the chief targets was in a national or state capital; student-faculty relationships in all of them were particularly close; and all could boast of excellent facilities and abundant financial support. The sources of unrest common to other parts of the world were thus not present in the United States. There the vulnerability of the universities was rather the product of the way in which they developed and of the character of their faculties.

That the students of the 1960s "rebelled" was not surprising. They always did, perhaps always should.