

Doctor Zhivago Study Guide

Doctor Zhivago by Boris Pasternak

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Plot Summary

Yura (also Yuri) Zhivago attends his mother's funeral. He is only ten years old and takes the loss hard. A short while later, his father jumps off a moving train, committing suicide. Orphaned and penniless due to his father's squandering of the family's wealth, Yuri is raised by others who send him to school.

Lara, a young schoolgirl, becomes involved in an affair with a much older man, Komarovsky. She tries to shoot him dead one night at a Christmas party. Yuri sees Lara occasionally but does not have any relationship with her at this point.

Yuri earns his degree in medicine and becomes Dr. Zhivago. Lara marries Pasha and starts a family in her hometown, Yuriatin. Yuri marries Tonia, a young woman with whom he had grown up. World War I begins, and Dr. Zhivago serves as a field doctor. Pasha leaves Lara to join the army. She trains to be a nurse and goes to find Pasha, who has been declared missing in action. On the front she meets Dr. Zhivago, who is wounded, and feels a mild attraction for him.

Yuri and his family move to Varykino in the Ural Mountains to escape the hard times in Moscow during the Russian revolution and civil war. They make as good a home as they can. Yuri discovers that Lara lives in a nearby town, Yuriatin. He goes to visit her, falls in love, and begins an affair. Two months later, full of guilt because he's cheated on his wife, Yuri decides to break off from Lara. On his way home, he changes his mind and rides his horse back to Lara. The Red Army stops him and conscripts him as a field doctor.

Yuri serves as a field doctor until he cannot stand war any longer. He deserts during a time that the Red Army fights a decisive battle with the White Army and wins the civil war. Yuri returns to Yuriatin and finds the key to Lara's place. There he falls ill. Lara takes care of him and they build a life together, but the government may want to arrest them. Yuri is under suspicion because he does not embrace the new government. Lara draws attention as the wife of Pasha, who had survived World War I to become an influential commander of the Red Army under the assumed name Strelnikov. Strelnikov himself is under suspicion for knowing too much.

Upon learning that the government will soon arrest them, Yuri and Lara hide out in Varykino. Komarovsky comes back into Lara's life, offering her safe travel to eastern Russia, where she will not have trouble with the government. Yuri does not accompany them due to concerns for his family, now deported to France. Strelnikov comes to Varykino and talks with Yuri. Having lost his country and his family, Strelnikov commits suicide with his own revolver. Yuri departs for Moscow.

Along the way, Yuri encounters a young man that he had met before, and they travel together to Moscow. There they work and share lodgings, but the young man becomes disgusted with Yuri. Yuri takes a common-law wife, which Tonia learns about. Yuri disappears. He later dies of a weak heart on the streets of Moscow.



Lara attends Yuri's funeral. She helps to gather Yuri's poetry together, which becomes published. Her fate is unknown, but the assumption is that she dies in a concentration camp.



Part 1: Chapter 1 - 2 The Five O'clock Express and A Girl from a Different World

Part 1: Chapter 1 - 2 The Five O'clock Express and A Girl from a Different World Summary

Yura (also Yuri) Zhivago attends his mother's funeral. He is only ten years old and takes the loss hard. His uncle, Nikolai Nikolaievich Vedeniapin, takes the weeping boy away from his mother's grave. Yura stays with his uncle at a monastery where Nikolai had at one time been a priest. Yura's father had been a very rich industrialist but had also squandered the family fortune, leaving Yura and his mother very poor. Nikolai takes Yura to Duplyanka to meet a famous author named Ivan Ivanovich, and they hear of a peasant uprising that threatens to become a full rebellion against the Tsarist regime and in favor of Marxist socialism.

After working on a text about politics, Nikolai and Ivan take a break from the revision process before tea. They talk about political change and the need for a spiritual base during the changes, and then notice a train stopping in the middle of a marsh. This unusual event indicates that something is wrong with or on the train. During this time, Yura wanders about the gardens of the Duplyanka estate. He perceives the beauty of nature, prays for his mother, and becomes overwhelmed with emotions. Yura faints for a brief period, then feels better. He considers praying for his missing father and puts it off for another time. Meanwhile, Yura's father jumps from a moving train, thereby committing suicide. The father's lawyer, Giryory Osipovich Gordon, witnesses the father's death. Gordon's son, Misha, sits nearby.

Amalia Karlovna Guishar arrives in Moscow with her daughter Larissa (also called Lara). Amalia takes over a seamstress shop, and upon the advice of her lawyer, Komarovsky, she sends Lara to a school of his choice. Komarovsky seduces Lara when she is sixteen years old. She at first enjoys the attention and going to operas, but she soon becomes sick of the much older man, resentful that he had taken away her innocence and destroyed her self-esteem.

Pasha Antipov's mother, married to a railway worker who is taken under arrest, brings her son to a demonstration sparked by a railway workers' strike. A platoon of dragoons breaks up the demonstration, after which Pasha's mother scolds him, and he complains that he is not the Chief of Police.

Nikolai watches the demonstration and dragoons from a window in a house where he and Yura stay, owned by the Gromekos. Tonia Gromeko is Yura's age. One of his classmates, Misha Gordon, lives in the house as well.



During the time of the Presnia uprising, Lara meets Pasha, who falls in love with her immediately. She considers him to be still a child. The seamstresses in her mother's shop go out on strike with the rest of the workers, which Madame Guishar cannot understand and takes the action personally.

Part 1: Chapter 1 - 2 The Five O'clock Express and A Girl from a Different World Analysis

Pasternak opens the novel with the scene of a funeral and a weeping child, the young Yura Zhivago. Yura neither believes nor disbelieves in the afterlife. His primary concern is that his mother should not suffer if the afterlife exists:

"If there is a life after death, O Lord, receive Mother into Your heavenly mansions . . ."
(p. 20).

Yura feels very deeply for a child. He has not developed much armor against the tragic events in life, such as losing a dearly loved parent, and he must face the loss at an early age. His senses of beauty and love give soaring passion while at the same time opening a dark pit of despair. His mind relieves him from the intense feelings by simply blacking out for a moment, a fainting spell. This clichéd literary technique is usually reserved for women in melodramas, but Pasternak allows Yura an amount of femininity in his character. This also could be the sign of a weak heart, which shows up later in Yura's adult life.

Big changes are happening in Russia. A revolution grows as radical new political thoughts capture the minds of the population. Nikolai represents the old ways of religion-based royalty but with a materialistic twist that allows for political change, as does Ivan but with more zeal and less need for spiritual grounding. The name "Ivan" carries the connotation of the average Russian, while the whole name "Ivan Ivanovitch" is roughly similar to the American "John Doe", and thus implies a lack of distinctive personality. Ivan writes popular books, likely on politics and very likely without much in-depth analysis or objectivity.

The author introduces the other major character who will play a primary role in a tragic love affair with Yura—Lara. She seems to be a few years older chronologically, but due to the destructive affair she has with Komarovsky, a man old enough to be her father, her emotional age is at least a decade more than the still innocent Yura. A minor plot scene in which Yura sees Lara with Komarovsky at a hotel becomes a primary memory for Yura years later. Meanwhile, he lives under the same roof as his future wife, Tonia Gromeko.

Moscow during the early days of the revolution replaces nature as the setting and background. All the workers in the city go on strike to show their solidarity, and gunfire breaks out. People worry about their neighborhoods being shelled as the conflict grows. As the tension mounts, the upper classes, of which Yura is a member even though his

father had left the family in poverty, continue to attend their concerts, operas, and other festivities.



Part 1: Chapter 3 - 4 The Sventitsky's Christmas Party and The Hour of the Inevitable

Part 1: Chapter 3 - 4 The Sventitsky's Christmas Party and The Hour of the Inevitable Summary

By the winter of 1911, Yura attends his final year of university with the intention of becoming a doctor. Besides medicine, literature and writing attract him, and he wants to someday write a grand novel. Until then, he composes poetry. He and Tonia prepare to attend a Christmas party together. Meanwhile, Lara has determined to end the unendurable affair with Komarovsky, even if it means shooting the man dead with a revolver. The night of the party, she hides the revolver in her muff and makes her way through the wintry streets of Moscow. She partakes in the dancing while Yura and Tonia celebrate with their friends in the back of the house. Then in the early morning hours, Lara shoots at Komarovsky, but misses and grazes the hand of another man.

Komarovsky, not wanting the law involved or a scandal to develop, arranges for Lara to live with a female lawyer friend of his. The elderly woman treats Lara with unveiled contempt. Finding this arrangement intolerable, Lara accepts the help of a friend named Kologrivov and moves into her own apartment. However, not knowing the sordid details of the affair, Pasha puzzles over why Lara had tried to murder Komarovsky. They decide to be married in fits of passion, Pasha wanting Lara and Lara trying to confess her sins. After their graduations from the university, the young couple heads out to Yuriatin to begin their lives together.

After the first year of World War I (1914-1918), Yura, now called Dr. Zhivago, or Yuri Andreievich, serves in a Moscow hospital and has brought his wife, Tonia, to the maternity ward. She is about to give birth and does so three days later.

Lara and Pasha enjoy their lives in Yuriatin with their three-year-old daughter, Katenka. Lara works as a housewife and teaches at the gymnasium, and Pasha also works as schoolteacher. The town is friendly, being Lara's hometown, and a big river named the Rynva flows by it. However, Pasha does not believe that Lara actually loves him and feels that they live a false life. He joins the Russian army, despite Lara's objections. Pasha becomes missing in action at the front, after which Lara decides to study and become a field nurse. She takes a hospital train to Mezo-Laborch near the Hungarian border, which is the last place Pasha had been seen.

Misha Gordon takes a Red Cross train to divisional headquarters and visits his childhood friend, Dr. Zhivago. The visit turns into a week long stay. The war rages not too far away while the two men approach within half a mile of the front to care for recently wounded soldiers. The gruesome wounds impress Gordon. Zhivago warns him



not to try anything heroic and assures him that being scared stiff is natural. The two men witness a particularly horrible death, with Lara in attendance as the nurse, but neither Zhivago nor Gordon recognize her. A few days later the Germans break through and force evacuation. An incoming shell explosion wounds Zhivago seriously enough for hospitalization.

Lara tends Zhivago in the hospital, and this time he recognizes her. His roommate says he had known Pasha and has some of his personal affects to give her. The common belief is that Pasha had been killed in battle, but in reality he had been taken captive. Yuri attracts Lara in a way she finds curious but not remarkable. Believing Pasha to be dead, she decides to stop being a nurse and return to Moscow to raise her daughter.

Yuri misses his wife Tonia and his daughter Sasha. He learns that a book he had written has been published in Moscow. News arrives that fighting has broken out in St. Petersburg, which marks the beginning of the 1917 Russian revolution.

Part 1: Chapter 3 - 4 The Sventitsky's Christmas Party and The Hour of the Inevitable Analysis

Lara's character takes on the shape of a comely maiden of the peasant and working classes, a young woman exploited by a much older man, Komarovsky, for sexual favors. In return she experiences the culture of Moscow, but her feelings of entrapment and degradation override anything that concerts and operas offer. She breaks off the unhealthy relationship with a gunshot that, as fortune or design has it, does not hurt anyone badly enough that Komarovsky cannot smoothen things over out of his selfish concerns. However, the damage has been done to Lara's chances for a happy life. She tells her husband Pasha about the affair, and he cannot deal with his feelings about this and doubts Lara's love for him.

The tides that sweep over Russia during this period threaten to destroy Lara and everybody else's chances for happy lives. Peasant uprisings during the early years of the twentieth century lead to a greater revolution in 1917, an event that takes Russia out of the First World War and leads to the civil war between the Red and White armies in 1918. The Reds are radically Marxist, the Whites conservative and intellectual.

When Pasha leaves Lara and joins the army during the First World War, he trains to be an officer and regrets his hasty move. Lara loves him, but not in the way he expects of his wife. She and Pasha have a good life in Yuriatin, better than Pasha realizes. His impetuosity throws this away during a period that any amount of happiness should be cherished and preserved as long as possible.

Lara thinks of herself as a bad person, but her actions contradict her self-image. She is the victim, and yet she carries the guilt that others, such as Komarovsky, should feel but do not. She works hard and with joy while building the family, but Pasha fails to appreciate just how lucky he is. Nevertheless, Lara takes on the duties of a wartime nurse to seek out her husband, a sacrifice that Pasha does not deserve. The only



criticism that can be made about Lara's character is that she likes sex, which is tantamount to accusing someone of liking to eat or sleep.

Dr. Zhivago does not realize how important Lara will become to him yet. He does his duty as a wartime doctor, experiences the horror of battlefield wounds but carries through without complaint. His mind dwells on ideas beyond the common outrages of a world at war and a country heading toward civil upheaval. Fate, however, cannot be denied. An exploding shell sends him to the hospital and to Lara, who at this time is an attraction but not a passion. That is to grow later from the mild flickers of romantic love both vaguely feel for one another.



Part 2: Chapter 5 - 6 Farewell to the Old and The Moscow Encampment

Part 2: Chapter 5 - 6 Farewell to the Old and The Moscow Encampment Summary

The new Russian government elects Lara and Yuri to positions for the small town of Meliuzzeievo, and their work brings them together often. Yuri writes to Tania about Lara and some of their work. He has resigned his office and plans a return to Moscow. Tania writes back, upset that perhaps Lara has become Yuri's new love interest. Yuri immediately writes back that he does not know much about Lara outside of work.

A man named Blazheiko sets up a region as an independent republic, Zybushino, backed by a force of deserters from the 212th Infantry and with the help of a deaf-mute man, supposedly brilliant in politics. However, the Provisional Government takes back the territory a few weeks later. The short-lived republic tries to enlist the aid of Dr. Zhivago, but he has little interest and only wants to leave for Moscow. He drops in to visit Lara before leaving. They talk about the big changes going on and the deaf-mute political leader. Yuri meets the man, whose name is Maxim Aristarkhovich Klintsov-Pogorevshikh, on the train to Moscow. Pogorevshikh tells Yuri about his involvement with Zybushino and his pro-anarchy views, which disturb Yuri. Pogorevshikh accepts the anarchy that Russia is experiencing is a necessary stage for rebuilding from the foundations up.

In Moscow, Yuri finds an economy in ruins. The old market is shut down due to having no goods to sell, and the people barter among themselves in rationed food and tobacco. He meets with old friends and Tonia at her father's house. Yuri learns that his uncle Nikolai Nikolaievich is nearby in the countryside and has joined with the Bolsheviks. Tonia and Yuri arrange their living quarters in the house, which has been split up to house others and an agricultural school. They throw a modest party during which Nikolai and Tonia's father argue politics.

Dr. Zhivago takes a medical position with a hospital but cannot resolve his thinking on choosing one political stance or the other, and so he becomes apolitical but practical. A harsh Russian winter approaches. Having enough food and fuel to survive are primary concerns. In October, fighting breaks out between supporters of the Provisional Government and the Bolsheviks. Within the month, the Bolsheviks win, form a Soviet of People's Commissars, and establish a dictatorship of the proletariat.

The winter turns very bad. Yuri and his family starve, and a typhus epidemic breaks out in the city. Yuri tries to do his duties as a doctor while Tonia struggles to find enough food and firewood. Typhus finally knocks Yuri down, but during his illness, a half brother of his named Evgraf from Omsk comes to the family's aid. Evgraf arranges for better supplies through his connections in the government.



Part 2: Chapter 5 - 6 Farewell to the Old and The Moscow Encampment Analysis

Yuri makes what seems an innocent mistake by writing to Tonia about Lara. Tonia's interpretation of the letter as a declaration of love for Lara may arise from her feelings of insecurity or she may read between the lines and understand that Yuri has deeper feelings for Lara than he consciously understands. Pasternak leaves the issue open, but Tonia's reaction foreshadows an affair to come. She intuits what Yuri feels.

Life in Moscow becomes steadily worse during the revolution. The government and economy destabilize, affecting all citizens in the cities first, where the rudimentary needs must be imported from afar. People in the country where food is produced and firewood harvested can at least take care of their own needs. The October struggle between the Bolsheviks, who are sternly Marxist, and the other parts of society that support the Provisional Government established after toppling the Tsar, promises to develop into a full-blown civil war.

Caught in this situation, Yuri and Tonia must do as best they can, but fortunately they receive help from Yuri's half brother, Evgraf. Evgraf stands in awe of Yuri and has read everything he has published. The doctor cannot help his family much due to the restrictions imposed by the Bolsheviks, but the writer can, even while stricken with typhus. Pasternak injects a certain amount of mysticism through Yuri's feverish dreams and visions, yet stays away from a complete shift to the metaphysical by associating how reality impacts Yuri's mind through the fever. Nevertheless, a parallel starts developing between the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, along with the needs and sufferings of Mary Magdalene, in reference to the great changes going on in Russia. The old Russia has already died. It must suffer before rebirth in another form, and so must the apolitical Yuri. There is no escape.

The author reveals the thinking of armchair political analysts through argumentation dialogs. As might be expected, some have absolute faith in their ideals, such as the deaf-mute Pogorevshikh. These are generally dangerous people who try to push desired results through undesired and uncontrollable realities. Pogorevshikh literally embraces chaos as a necessary part of change, while others wish to keep an amount of order at all times. Pasternak lumps conservatives, moderates and liberals together as opposing the Bolshevik idealists. The primary conflict involves order versus chaos, and a secondary conflict revolves around a certain Marxist ideal—the eventual withering away of a dictatorship in favor of democratic socialism. Tied to this are the local, regional and central power struggles. On a personal level, the war and famine reduce people from civilization to extreme brutality, in which political theory means nothing. The first indication of this is how the Zybushino republic is destroyed—the soldiers of the Provisional Government kill a young idealist, first with a rifle shot and then with bayonets, just to make sure he is very dead.



Part 2: Chapter 7 Train to the Urals

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In the early spring, Yuri and his family leave Moscow for Varykino on a train. They have no idea what to expect there and have only a shred of hope that the townspeople will remember Yuri's father, who had once owned a factory in the town, forestland around it, and an estate. Yuri gives his medical services to a well-connected family and receives credits for food and goods from a central distribution center in return. While waiting for train passage, the family gathers together items to sell or use for barter along the journey and once in Varykino.

At last on the train and heading toward Varykino, the Zhivagos travel in a cramped boxcar along with a mixture of professionals, conscripted workers and peasants. When the train stops, the passengers go behind the train stations where locals sell various goods illegally, most of it being foodstuff. Tonia trades an embroidered towel for half a roasted rabbit. A soldier from a special car just for the military eats milk and pies without paying or trading anything. Nobody comes to the robbed woman's defense because the soldier is armed, and nothing can stop him from shooting indiscriminately.

The train comes to an area where big snowdrifts cover the track, thus making further progress impossible. The passengers split up into work teams, and with shovels borrowed from a nearby village, clear the tracks in sections. The physical labor cheers everybody up, and they use a half-burned railway station as shelter. On the third day of work, they finish clearing the tracks: "As far as the eye could reach, groups of people with shovels in hand stood at intervals along the line. Seeing themselves for the first time in full force, they were astonished at their numbers" (p. 209).

Moving onward, the Zhivagos leave the snowy plains behind and enter the mountains. Yuri hears from other passengers that the White Army has taken control of the northern mountains from the Red Army. He knows the leader of the White forces, a man named Galiullin. Taking advantage of a moment in the night, four conscripted workers escape. Yuri takes a walk near a river and is accosted by guards. They arrest Yuri and take him to the Red Army Commissar, Strelnikov.

Strelnikov takes Yuri into his office and asks questions about Yuri's military service and destination. Realizing that the guards had no reason to arrest Yuri, and that Yuri had already served his required time during World War I, Strelnikov releases him, but with a prediction that they would meet again. Strelnikov thinks about his previous life as a school teacher and about a young prisoner from the White Army who may have been one of his students.



Part 2: Chapter 7 Train to the Urals Analysis

The Russian civil war involves three groups—the White Army, Red Army and Green forces, which are groups of peasants that fight both the Whites and Reds. The Greens are considered anarchists who do not want governments of either color telling them what to do.

Yuri tells Strelnikov that he wants the peace and anonymity of the country life, but with so much war going on, Strelnikov believes this to be an impossible dream. At some future time the war will sweep Yuri along whether he wants to or not, but for now he can answer Strelnikov's prediction: "I know what you think of me. From your point of view you are right. But the issue you wish me to discuss with you is one I have been arguing with an imaginary accuser all my life, and it would be odd if I had not by now reached some conclusion. Only I could not put it into a couple of words. So if I am really free, permit me to leave without having it out with you. If I am not, then you must decide what to do with me. I have no excuses to make to you" (p. 228).

The position Yuri wishes to take with the Russian civil war is none at all. Strelnikov thinks that everyone must decide one way or another, or fight everyone like the Greens. This issue does stand before Yuri, but he wants to ignore it for the time being.

Passengers on the train work together to clear the tracks of snow, and because they have a common purpose, they find joy in their labor. The task accomplished, all marvel at how much they had done in a short time. They appreciate the sheer beauty of the long track bordered by high piles of snow. While Russia fights its internal war, which reduces people to subsistence living and causes much death, hope still exists that once stabilized, Russians will again work together for common purposes.

Pasternak gives vignettes of the passengers that illustrate the various positions in which the general population land. The wealthy seem not worried about the civil war, even though their status in society is threatened. Conscripted workers, who will end up digging trenches near war fronts, flee when they can, as if criminals. The soldiers, segregated from the rest of the passengers, live in a completely different world. They go to the front lines to fight and die. Even the general rules of a degraded civilization do not apply to them, and so they do not offer labor to keep the train running and take what they want without payment. However, the soldiers do help to clear the tracks of snow, as this is a pleasurable duty. Like Yuri, the soldiers have learned to take whatever small pleasures that life in wartime offers.



Part 2: Chapter 8 - 9 Arrival and Varykino

Part 2: Chapter 8 - 9 Arrival and Varykino Summary

When the Zhivagos arrive at the train station near Varykino, a station master helps them arrange for transportation. Warned ahead of time that the estate Yuri's father had lost is run by a difficult man, Yuri gently pleads with him, a man named Mikulitsyn, knowing that at first he will protest but then give in. Mikulitsyn lets the Zhivagos stay in a small building with space for a garden.

Yuri starts a notebook in which he keeps various writings about his life at Varykino. He loves doing the physical labor of gathering food, harvesting timber, and the other regular chores involved with living the simple life. Technically speaking, the wood he takes from the forest is stolen property, as somebody else owns the land. However, since Mikulitsyn and his wife also must take wood illegally, and because anybody who would care is absent or off to war, Mikulitsyn tolerates this minor infraction.

Pasternak quotes from Yuri's notebook. Yuri enjoys the winter season, suspects that Tonia is pregnant, and lists the books that they read and reread. He comments on the poetry of Alexander Sergeevich Pushkin, recognizing the importance of meter and originality. In the springtime thaw, Evgraf brings a sick peasant to Dr. Zhivago, who at first refuses to diagnose the illness. He then gives in, and determines that the man has lupus. Evgraf stays for two weeks and promises to make things easier for the Zhivagos, but avoids any direct answers regarding his political connections. In the final notebook entry, Yuri writes: "It is truly extraordinary. He is my half brother. We bear the same name. And yet I know virtually nothing about him.

"For the second time he has burst into my life as my good genius, my rescuer, resolving all my difficulties. Perhaps in every life there has to be, in addition to the other protagonists, a secret, unknown force, an almost symbolic figure who comes unsummoned to the rescue, and perhaps in mine Evgraf, my brother, plays the part of this hidden benefactor?" (p. 257).

Yuri goes to a nearby town named Yuriatin and reads books in the public library. There he notices Lara, has an immediate impulse to talk with her, but resists and simply admires from afar. After she leaves, Yuri examines the books she has returned. They all have to do with Marxism. He then sees her address on the order slips, simply the house on Merchant Street across from the house with sculptures. Another reader enlightens him to the exact location in town.

At the beginning of May, Yuri decides to visit Lara. She welcomes him with delight, and they catch up on old times. He meets Katenka, Lara's eight-year-old daughter. They talk about current politics. Yuri learns that Strelnikov is actually Lara's husband, Pasha, who has taken the false identity to avoid some kind of unknown repercussions. Yuri ends up spending the night with Lara, the beginning of a two-month affair.



Guilt over his unfaithfulness to Tonia drives Yuri to break the affair off. He has second thoughts on his way home and rides his horse at a gallop back toward Lara. Along the way, members of the Red Army forcibly conscript him as a field doctor.

Part 2: Chapter 8 - 9 Arrival and Varykino Analysis

Two kinds of love drive Yuri. He wants the domestic life and appreciates how this works out in Varykino, yet Lara stimulates a passion within him that Tonia cannot arouse or satisfy. Life situations have pushed the Zhivagos into poverty, but this status is also one full of mutual respect and love during a time that draws people together for survival and also strips away the mundane concerns of the upper classes. Yuri finds what true love is within his family. He learns to appreciate the beauty of nature and the satisfaction of caring for the basics—food and fuel.

Lara, without conscious purpose, tempts him away from family life. She cannot be held responsible for what Yuri feels for her, nor can Yuri control his attraction. The wise course of action for Yuri is to forget about Lara and continue working with his family, not out of passion but for a calmer sense of security within the social group. But Yuri is a passionate man. He cannot deny this trait and must return to Lara, regardless of how harmful this may be to him and his loved ones.

Yuri sees in Lara perfection of the feminine. Lara does not try to enhance her impact on men, probably from observing how men react to her. She has been cursed with beauty and grace. She has also been cursed with love for Yuri, who is not an especially attractive man, but who has a beautiful mind. Unfortunately for her, he is also married, but she is married too. From that standpoint, their affair is wrong. From the viewpoint of love, which has no sense of artificial legal and social rules, the affair must happen. The passions must be consecrated through the most intimate means of human touch.

Had Yuri kept to his decision to drop Lara and embrace his family, he may not have been forced back into military service as a field doctor. Yet this is exactly what happens. For the passion of love, Yuri loses both his family and Lara, a tragic and unforeseen turn of events. However, it may not have been entirely by chance. Lara's husband, the former Pasha and now Strelnikov, could very well have been monitoring Yuri's movements. Strelnikov's motivation may have been to take Yuri away from Lara. If Strelnikov cannot have her, then nobody can. This puts Lara into a similar tragedy, where she has neither husband nor lover, only her daughter.



Part 2: Chapter 10 - 12 The Highway, The Forest Brotherhood and The Rowan Tree

Part 2: Chapter 10 - 12 The Highway, The Forest Brotherhood and The Rowan Tree Summary

Over the next year the Red Army continuously pushes the White Army back. Yuri has relative freedom as long as he does not try to escape the Red Army altogether. He attempts escape three times, fails, and decides that he had better not push his luck. During a battle, Yuri goes against Red Cross rules and takes up a rifle. He shoots a boy, thinks he is dead, but after the battle, Yuri discovers that the bullet had been stopped by a small metal box containing a protective prayer.

Yuri observes that the constant warfare has caused many people to develop mental illnesses. He talks with a soldier named Pamphil, who suffers from hallucinations in the form of ghostly visitations from a man that Pamphil had shot. Pamphil worries about his wife and children, should the White Army win the civil war. This and his war experiences have driven him out of his mind. When his family joins him in camp, he gets better.

At a campsite surrounded by thick, marshy sub-arctic forest, Yuri discovers a rowan tree growing on a piece of high ground. The tree stands out as being deciduous among conifers and is covered with red berries. Near this place a group of soldiers guilty of illegally distilling vodka are executed by firing squad. Later, the White Army deposits a mutilated, barely alive man for the Reds to discover as a warning about war atrocities. Then Pamphil goes completely insane and kills his family with an ax. Yuri, having cached skis and supplies in the forest, leaves the camp in the night and heads back to Yuriatin with hopes of finding Lara.

Part 2: Chapter 10 - 12 The Highway, The Forest Brotherhood and The Rowan Tree Analysis

Pasternak uses these three chapters to present more vignettes that are loosely connected with the main plot and that illustrate the steady decline of Russia during the civil war. The regional governments depend upon the central government to distribute food and goods, but the nature of the central government keeps changing. War supplies supersede supplies for civilians, black markets develop, and people struggle for toeholds on life.

War brutality increases to the point that Yuri risks being killed as a deserter rather than put up with it another day longer. The rowan tree stands as a symbol of something better in the world and does, at a point, remind Yuri of Lara. His choice is simple—live in the misery of war or die trying to get back to Lara. The tree symbol also may grow atop



an ancient burial mound, which adds a connotation that something better will grow out of the civil war once it ends.

Yuri spends eighteen months with the division of the Red Army known as the Forest Brotherhood. He must listen to an obnoxious officer who is addicted to cocaine ramble on and on about nothing. Yuri's annoyance grows to the point of wanting to kill the officer just to shut him up, a common feeling among the Russian population who must listen to the non-stop Bolshevik party line. Yuri detests the overly idealistic and grand notions about changing the course of the world, repeated to the point of becoming meaningless slogans.

However, the White Army has more serious problems. Deserters leave for the Red Army in droves. The Reds surround the Whites just before Yuri leaves, and so he has a chance of escaping without pursuit while the civil war moves toward a decisive end.



Part 2: Chapter 13 Opposite the House of Sculptures

Part 2: Chapter 13 Opposite the House of Sculptures Summary

The Red Army had defeated and chased out the White Army from Yuriatin by the time Yuri arrives. The government has stabilized and posts its requirements and warnings on the house of sculptures, just across from Lara's old house. Yuri trudges to the door, weakened from his journey, cold from having lost or bartered his fur coat. He finds a note from Lara addressed to him and the house key, which gives Yuri great happiness. The note tells him that Lara has gone to Varykino, an indication that his family no longer lives there. Before Yuri enters Lara's place, he must read up on the new regulations posted across the street because being unaware of them could cost his life.

When he does open the door and walk in, a rat-infested house confronts him. He looks the place over, and finding a room with a tight door, he decides to work on keeping the rats out of only this area. Feeling strangely excited, a sign of an oncoming illness, Yuri leaves to borrow scissors from a nearby seamstress shop. He wants to cut his hair and trim his beard. The head seamstress, a stern old woman who had once been a barber, gives him the haircut and a straight-razor shave. She talks with him about all the horrible things that have happened, how Lara always stood up for people and tried to help in any way she could, and tells about the Varykino evacuation. Yuri assumes that Tonia and his son have gone to Moscow.

Yuri returns to Lara's place, stops up the rat holes in his room, and lights a fire in a Dutch stove. He then finds something to eat and falls asleep. A fever grips him. He has delirious thoughts and dreams. Then he wakes up in a bed. Lara had found him, cleaned him up, and cared for him until the fever broke.

Lara insists that Yuri must go back to his family despite their love for each other. He must also be careful, due to having deserted the Red Army, now that the Reds have defeated the Whites. Also, Lara wishes to stay near to her husband, Strelnikov (Pasha), who may be in trouble with the new government. She tells Yuri that he has a new daughter named Masha.

The conversation takes a turn that includes Lara's early-life affair with the much older Komarovsky. She still carries deep wounds from that abuse and believes that something is wrong with her. Yuri tries to assure her that she is not to blame and has always been a very good person. He tells her that Komarovsky may have caused the suicide of his father, and so they share a common evil nemesis from childhood.

Lara explains how her feelings of impurity caused her to seek purity, and Pasha was the person she sought. She puts full blame on the revolution and civil war for Pasha leaving



her. Yuri tells her that he has no ill feelings toward Pasha and will do nothing to harm their relationship.

During the summer, Yuri takes three temporary jobs in medicine to make ends meet during a period of high monetary inflation. Lara cares for the house, cooks, and watches over her daughter. The temptation is strong for Yuri to consider this his family, but he controls his feelings and keeps his distance. He tells Lara in the fall that he does not think the jobs will hold out, partly because the hypocrisy of toeing the party lines and partly because people suspect him of being a Tsarist sympathizer. Lara worries about being caught up in the frenzies of the time and being arrested due to her marriage to Pasha. As winter approaches, Yuri receives a letter from Tonia informing him that she and the children are to be deported to France. The letter is five months old.

Part 2: Chapter 13 Opposite the House of Sculptures Analysis

The end of the Russian civil war leads to a period of time that is dangerous for nearly everyone. Yuri has ties to the old capitalistic wealth, his rich father who squandered away all his money and committed suicide, which was possibly a murder. Ironically, when Lara and Yuri learn of their common childhood nemesis, they draw even closer. However, Lara's connection with Strelnikov may get her arrested too. Anybody who may have suspicious ideas are potential targets to be politically purged from the emerging Soviet regime. Fortunately, Yuri and Lara have a fair amount of breathing room due to the chaotic new government not being able to accomplish much of anything.

Lara interprets why Pasha left her: "This social evil became an epidemic. It was catching. And it affected everything, nothing was left untouched by it. Our home, too, became infected. Something went wrong in it. Instead of being natural and spontaneous as we had always been, we began to be idiotically pompous with each other. Something showy, artificial, forced crept into our conversations—you felt you had to be clever in a certain way about certain world-important themes. How could Pasha, who was so discriminating, so exacting with himself, who distinguished so unerringly between reality and appearance, how could he fail to notice the falsehood that had crept into our lives?

"And at this point he made his fatal, terrible mistake. He mistook the spirit of the times, the social, universal evil, for a private and domestic one. He listened to our clichés, to our unnatural official tone, and he thought it was because he was second-rate, a nonentity, that we talked like this. I suppose you find it incredible that such trivial things could matter so much in our married life. You can't imagine how important this was, what foolish things this childish nonsense made him do" (p. 356).

Lara sums up the problem with the entire Russian civilization during its time of revolution and civil war. Politics become life for too many people unaccustomed to its slickly worded propaganda and artificial ideologies. The poison creeps into the soul, and this can result in marriages failing. Lara deeply admires Yuri because he has not let the political yammering infect his soul. But this is just one of the disasters that happen, and

both Yuri and Lara must decide what to do next. Staying in Yuriatin is not an option. Eventually the authorities, however wrong they might be, will consider these two enemies of the state. Yuri considers going to Moscow as a viable option, but the news that his family has been deported to France turns that idea cold.

Pasternak inserts a reference to Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*, delivered by Yuri, and thus ties the two romantic tragedies together. In the Shakespearian play, the two doomed young lovers take their own lives. Yuri and Lara may lose their lives in some similar manner; however, it is not their families that make war, but their country with itself. However their love works out, it can have no happy ending.



Part 2: Chapter 14 Return to Varykino

Part 2: Chapter 14 Return to Varykino Summary

Yuri and Lara's positions hold out into the winter, but then Komarovsky, their childhood nemesis, shows up. He hangs around, making annoying conversation while drinking cheap vodka, and the air becomes thick with tension. At one point, he offers to help the two out of Yuriatin, a kind of deal with the devil. Nobody signs away the soul. Lara tries to get rid of him but finally lets the pathetic old drunk sleep in one of the rooms full of rats. Komarovsky says he does not mind the rats. Yuri later throws him out of the house.

Lara hears a rumor that the Executive Committee plans to arrest her and Yuri soon. They borrow a horse and sleigh and leave town for Varykino in the morning. They take Mikulitsyn's house and suspect that someone else had been living there. They settle in as best they can under the circumstances. Yuri takes to writing poetry again and feels domestic bliss.

Two weeks later, Komarovsky comes by while Yuri tends the horse. Komarovsky engages in a confrontation with Lara in the house, of which Yuri hears portions. Lara gives in to Komarovsky's offer of safe passage by train to Vladivostok in the east, where she and her daughter will be safe. Yuri does not want to accompany them but puts up a pretext that he will follow Komarovsky's sleigh in the borrowed one in order to convince Lara to go. Lara leaves and Yuri does not follow.

Yuri stays on at the house, drinks vodka, and writes about Lara. He somewhat loses his mind and finds the writing to be soothing, as is the liquor. Several days later, the person who had been living in the house comes back, and it turns out to be Strelnikov, Lara's husband.

Strelnikov talks endlessly about his experiences, how he has been hiding out from a bogus court martial, and how he may soon be captured and shot. Yuri tries to tell Strelnikov how much Lara loves him, and he asks for more details. The next morning Yuri discovers Strelnikov's body in the snow. He had shot himself in the head.

Part 2: Chapter 14 Return to Varykino Analysis

Yuri reaches the pinnacle of happiness for a very brief time while living with Lara and her daughter in Varykino. But this height cannot be maintained for long. Pressures still mount, symbolized by the wolves that he sees on the property and presented in fact by Komarovsky. Lara must leave for the relative safety in the eastern part of Russia to protect her child, but this will cost her dearly through her psychological indebtedness to Komarovsky. Yuri has his own family to consider, who are now in France, perhaps in Paris. Yet his decision not to go with Lara and Komarovsky leads to a period of despair and inaction. He needs to move quickly before the authorities arrest him.



When Komarovsky first appears in Yuriatin at Lara's place, he offers the escape plan and is rejected. When he offers it again, conditions have changed from bad to desperate for Lara. Just what motivates Komarovsky to travel out to Varykino to make the offer and press the arguments to accept is not obvious. He may be trying to make up for his past transgressions against Lara, and his inclusion of Yuri in the offer indicates a genuine concern for their safety and future happiness. On the other hand, he may have anticipated Yuri's decision to stay. He may be trying to reestablish his evil influences on Lara for some parasitic reason.

Contrasting with Komarovsky, Strelnikov's motivation is clear. He runs from the trumped-up court martial charges to save his skin, now that the thing he had helped create has turned monstrous. He has witnessed too much and has too much integrity to be tolerated. Yuri and Strelnikov get along very well for being in a love triangle because Yuri considers him an equal, and Strelnikov knows that he had lost Lara six years before when he decided to join the military.

Yuri brings home deep anguish by telling Strelnikov how much Lara loves him. Up until that moment, Strelnikov could push the memories back through his work on the war and his current survival efforts. He then realizes how much he has lost. With virtually nothing to live for besides court martial and execution, he speeds up the process with his own revolver. Pasternak adds to the tragedy with a reference to the rowantree: "Drops of spurting blood that had mixed with the snow formed red beads that looked like rowanberries" (p. 408).

The rowantree that Yuri had admired symbolizes what could have come out of the civil war, but with Strelnikov's suicide, the tree seems to have been felled, the berries now strewn in the snow. The ideals of the revolution have become meaningless phrases to be mindlessly reiterated in a world that holds no hope for Yuri.



Part 2: Chapter 15 Conclusion

Part 2: Chapter 15 Conclusion Summary

Yuri drifts back to Moscow during the Soviet NEP (New Economic Policy) period. He loses his skills as a doctor and hangs around with a young man named Vasia. They keep away from conversations and society. If unavoidably among friends, they stay in a corner and do not speak a word.

Yuri makes money writing books. Vasia studies book binding and design. Yuri petitions the government to allow his family's return to Moscow and to obtain a passport to France, but his efforts are half-hearted. He sinks into depression and starts neglecting himself. While being made fun of, a woman named Marina comes to his defense. They become friends, and she decides to live and care for Yuri as his common-law wife. When he learns that Tonia has discovered his situation, Yuri disappears. He sends money to Marina that a friend had given him and works on getting his life together. The issue of his first family gnaws at him. Then one day while riding a trolley, Yuri's heart gives out. He dies in the street. Lara shows up for his funeral. She helps arrange his papers, but then leaves to never be seen again: "She vanished without a trace and probably died somewhere, forgotten as a nameless number on a list that afterwards got mislaid, in one of the innumerable mixed or women's concentration camps in the north" (p. 441).

Part 2: Chapter 15 Conclusion Analysis

Yuri's journey back to Moscow takes him through a war-torn land. He survives on field gleanings and whatever he can scrounge in the wrecked houses along the way. His dark and silent ways reflect a cheerless soul who has experienced and seen too much of life, and his listless efforts at bringing his family back from France speak to his utter lack of hope. The only bright spot that he can find is the relationship with Marina, a shadow of a relationship that he quickly abandons.

Nevertheless, Dr. Zhivago's mind and writing skills produce collectible books that the Russian intellectuals study. He could become a highly productive man if the government would somehow encourage his recovery, but that cannot be. The government is afraid of Yuri and his influence. Pathetically, Yuri dies in the street from a weak heart that cannot carry on and has no purpose to do so.

Lara's appearance at his funeral brings the life of Dr. Zhivago to its full closure. Her efforts compiling Yuri's life work results in a cherished book of poetry, but she leaves before its completion. Her fate is unknown yet obvious, considering the times and her inability to mesh with the new Russian government.



Part 2: Chapter 16 Epilogue

Part 2: Chapter 16 Epilogue Summary

Gordon, now a second lieutenant and just coming off a service assignment in Moscow, cleans up in a river with a man named Dudorov, a major. They cannot identify the river, but guess it may be the Christina, named after a war heroine that had infiltrated the German lines and blown up a fortification. She had died during the mission and is considered a war martyr. This leads to reminiscing about World War II and the sufferings while being prisoners of war. The conversation turns to collectivism as being the wrong thing to do, but also a mistake to which nobody could admit.

The two soldiers remember the horrors of the World War II. As it turns out, one of the soldiers had taught Christina while she was still young and during a time when students reeducated teachers in the new political ways. After finishing their wash chores, the two soldiers walk through a bombed-out town.

Many homeless people poke through the rubble in search of anything of value. Others make dugout shelters roofed with turf. Various trucks and soldiers from scattered units fill vacant lots, sorting themselves out. Gordon and Dudorov come upon their unit, where a washing woman named Tania talks about meeting Major-General Zhivago, Yuri's half brother Evgraf. Evgraf seeks eyewitnesses of Christina's heroism and self-sacrifice. Tania had been Christina's friend. She tells Gordon and Dudorov the story.

She remembers having a father named Komorov, not her biological parent, as a little girl while growing up during the Russian civil war in the White-controlled part of Mongolia. Then she and her mother needed to leave because the Red Army approached. Her mother ends up giving Tania to an aunt, but life with the aunt becomes unbearable. Tania goes with a Red Army train, after which she becomes the washer woman. Gordon and Dudorov realize that this woman is Lara's daughter, grown now and under the care of Evgraf.

Years later, the two old friends sit together and look out a window onto Moscow after having read an album of Dr. Zhivago's writings. They reflect on what the future may bring: "Although victory had not brought the relief and freedom that were expected at the end of the war, nevertheless the portents of freedom filled the air throughout the postwar period, and they alone defined its historical significance.

"To the two old friends, as they sat by the window, it seemed that this freedom of the soul was already there, as if that very evening the future had tangibly moved into the streets below them, that they themselves had entered it and were now part of it. Thinking of this holy city and of the entire earth, of the still-living protagonists of this story, and their children, they were filled with tenderness and peace, and they were enveloped by the unheard music of happiness that flowed all about them and into the



distance. And the book they held seemed to confirm and encourage their feeling" (p. 454).

Part 2: Chapter 16 Epilogue Analysis

The tragic romance of Romeo and Juliet ends with an uplifting scene where the two warring families make peace and erect statues to the two young lovers. Pasternak creates a parallel by giving the aftermath of World War II as the beginning of a new age for Russia, which is to become the USSR.

The addition of Lara's daughter adds a little closure for Lara's life. The mother's fate still unknown, at least the reader understands that her daughter will live under the protection of Evgraf. Tania's memory of her non-biological father, Komorov, is actually Komorovsky, and she has no fondness for him. An assumption can be made that Lara had felt the same way, and worse due to the history she has with the lecher.

Yuri's writings carry his messages far past the grave, which is the magic of literature. His poetry stands as inspiration for his friends and all of Russia, carrying truth unadulterated with politics and universal regardless of heritage or national loyalties. Unlike the German Nazis with whom Russia fights during World War II, the emerging nation does not ban literature; it takes great literature to heart as a national treasure with writers like the fictional Dr. Zhivago and the actual Boris Pasternak, who contributes a short book of Yuri's poetry at the end of the novel.



Part 2: Chapter 17 The Poems of Yuri Zhivago

Part 2: Chapter 17 The Poems of Yuri Zhivago Summary

The poems section consists of twenty-four pieces, supposedly the collection that Gordon and Dudorov read at the end of the epilogue. This could also be the work published after Dr. Zhivago's death in Moscow. Themes expand on the novel and Yuri's character or compress complexity into verse.

Pasternak writes Yuri's take on poetry within the story, so the poetry follows structure within the Russian language because Yuri understands the power of meter and rhyme. He does not write free verse. However, in English translation the meter and rhyme cannot be accurately recreated. This is not the fault of the poet or translator, but an unfortunate condition of a world with many different languages, all with their unique characteristics.

The best that can be accomplished is to bring the meanings to light. If meter can be preserved, this is all the better. Rhyme seldom translates at all, especially from the Slavic-based Russian to the Germanic/Latin-based English.

Part 2: Chapter 17 The Poems of Yuri Zhivago Analysis

Hamlet (p. 457)

The future cannot be foretold, yet fate draws all along a predetermined path. If only we could be released from this, but no, the script of the play must be finished to the "final curtain's fall." Yuri stands alone, and "to live life to the end is not a childish task."

The title of the poem reestablishes the parallel with Shakespeare. The last line, quoted above, summarizes the tragic romance that is Dr. Zhivago's life. He cannot cut it short, as this would be the act of a child (or coward), not an adult (or hero).

March (pp. 457-458)

An ode to spring, Yuri sees the winter melting away, but slowly. New life asserts itself within the barn, where "The pile of manure—is pungent with ozone."

Yuri always feels excited about the Russian early spring. Partly this is due to the relief from the depths of winter and partly from the promise of new life. The use of the term "ozone" does not seem to fit with the odor of manure, as the smell is more reminiscent



of chlorine gas. This may be a poor translation or an intentional misdirection, the blending of a crisp odor with that of a scat image. Use of the dash does hint that something surprising follows.

Holy Week (pp. 458-460)

Describing the week before Easter, nighttime and natural images bring forth a feeling of deep coldness and exposure while "A god is being interred."

"And if the earth could really have its way / It would sleep through all of Eastertide"

The above lines appear in the first stanza and reiterate the idea of undeniable fate. The entire Easter season must be endured to reach the "better weather" when "Death itself can be overcome / Through the power of the Resurrection."

White Night (pp. 460-461)

Yuri remembers a night in a house on the St. Petersburg side of the Neva River, which connects Lake Ladoga to the Baltic Sea. A full moon must light the countryside, making all things appear white. He looks out a high window with someone he calls "darling," probably Tonia, who was "born in Kursk".

This could possibly be their wedding night, the newly married couple having made love and now talk softly at the window sill, the "Night, like a barefooted pilgrim woman" eavesdropping while "The nightingales roll and trill their paeans".

The poem was most likely composed while Yuri served as a field doctor, either in World War I or with the Red Army. He has "visions of a remote time", indicating that he is far from the calm and loving "white night which has witnessed so very many things".

Bad Roads in Spring (pp. 461-462)

A horseman, likely Yuri, makes his way during the spring runoff to a "remote farmstead in the Urals", Varykino. The water makes great noises, grinds rocks together and "uprooted tree stumps". Adding to the din and chaotic runoff, a nightingale "raged in frantic song", while "The earth and sky, the field and forest / Harkened to catch each unique note, / These measured doles of sheerest madness, / Of pain, of happiness, of anguish".

The nightingale's mad singing reflects Yuri's feelings of "pain, of happiness, of anguish" that probably arise from his guilt over the affair with Lara. He, Tonia, and Tonia's father have created a happy home in the midst of upheaval, not a small accomplishment, yet he risks it all for the love of Lara. Like the uprooted tree stumps, he has no control over the emotions and not enough strength to avoid his actions. That all this goes on at sunset indicates that the affair is nearly over, but as fate has it, the Red Army will put a stop to it more quickly than he now imagines.

Explanation (pp. 462-463)



Yuri tries to explain the inexplicable—why he must break off the affair with Lara and thus bring undeserved misery into her life. The best he can do is "brushing up on excuses" and the discomfiting self-blame that he is weak "before the miracle" that is Lara. Wishfully, "The pull of separation is still stronger / And I have a beckoning passion for the clean break".

Clean breaks never happen if passion still exists in a relationship, however doomed it may be. Even breaks from bad relationships leave residual emotions that often make no sense. Perhaps by writing the poem, Yuri sheds some of his guilt for cheating on Tonia and hurting Lara.

Summer in Town (p. 464)

"With an impatient gesture", an unidentified woman sweeps up her hair and becomes "a woman in a helmet". Apparently, the Explanation did not work, or a confession of infidelity has hardened Tonia's feelings. A summer storm threatens but does not cut loose. "Not a word breaks the silence / The air is as sticky as it was before". The emotional storm does not come either, and for the linden flowers the next morning, they "Have a glum look about them / Because they haven't slept themselves out".

Nor have the emotions of this situation been resolved. This may be impossible to do, a wound that does not heal over time and can only be tolerated.

Wind (p. 465)

The wind "Makes the country house and the forest rock . . . so that in its desolation / It may find words to fashion a lullaby for you".

Yuri has died within, probably after deciding to break off from Lara, who is "still among the living". This may be a precursor poem to Explanation. Yuri cannot find the words. Perhaps the wind storm will.

Hopbines (p. 465)

The hopbine is a stage in the life of the hop, during which the plant climbs like a vine. For some reason this is a greater threat than inclement weather, and Yuri suggests that he and his companion use their raincape as a rug rather than protection from the storm. The hopbine may be choking off the life of the willow that it climbs, and so the raincape rug could protect from the hopbine choking off their lives.

The meaning of this two-stanza poem is elusive without knowing what the hopbine symbolizes, and this may depend on knowledge of Russian folklore.

False Summer (p. 466)

While "The house shakes with laughter, the windowpanes ring", Yuri's wife pickles something with peppers and cloves. He writes impressions of the fall season, appealing to the simple over the complex. "And because for all things there's a predestined end".



The theme of predestined fate reappears. This is certainly true about the seasonal changes. Nobody can philosophize away autumn. However, one can simply enjoy what life offers as "The house hums with laughter and housewifely bustling". As surely as autumn has its false summers, winter will follow bitterly.

Wedding (p. 467)

The sounds of wedding celebrations come into a chamber during "the sleepest time of the morning / When one could sleep forever". Someone plays an accordion and another toots on a harmonica "While one wench, as white as snow . . . Once more did her peahen dance".

Yuri allows the disturbance of his sleep without protest because "life, too, is only an instant, / Only the dissolving of ourselves / In the selves of others / As if bestowing a gift".

The shortness of life not only allows for celebratory disturbances, but encourages Yuri to accept them as gifts, like his short poems are gifts for all of humankind.

These are "Only wedding noises / Soaring in through a window; / Only a song, only a dream / Only a gray pigeon".

Autumn (p. 469)

Yuri has "let all the members of my household go their ways", indicating that this poem is written for Lara after he deserts the Red Army. This is also in Verykino during the height of Yuri's domestic happiness that lasts so briefly: "And now I am here with you in the forester's hut". Yet this occurs in winter, so the title of the poem misdirects into the feelings of autumn—"Swoon, or go half insane!"

None of the guilt remains. Yuri loves Lara without reserve: "We shall go down to perdition openly . . . The root of beauty is audacity, / And that is what draws us to each other".

Fairy Tale (pp. 470-473)

A fairy-tale knight rescues a damsel in distress, kills the dragon, but lays unconscious. So does the damsel, and neither ever wake up again. They sleep together, oblivious of each other.

This story has an unresolved ending. It seems like an allegory for the unresolved love between Yuri and Lara, or this could be illustrating how Russia stands in suspension during the civil war.

August (pp. 473-474)



Yuri awakens from a bad dream in which a group of people gather to bury him. "Death stood like a state surveyor . . . as if in thought / How best to dig my grave to proper measure".

He talks to the people in the dream and bids farewell during "this predestined hour" to the August celebration of Christ's Transfiguration, to the physical body that "threw / Your woman's gauntlet to an empty abyss of degradations", and to his ability to write anything further.

The poem addresses Yuri's greatest regrets. He has hurt the women he loves and has not written enough. Also, the beauty of nature will be gone at death. He may not have appreciated it as much as he wanted to.

Winter Night (p. 475)

Two lines repeat throughout the poem: "A candle burned on the table; / A candle burned". Yuri likens the falling snow beating against the windowpane to bugs being attracted to the flame during summer time. Shadows move about as the candle flickers, and "Two tiny shoes fell to the floor".

The candle is an obvious symbol of hope during a snowy February, like the seeds sleeping in the earth to grow again in the spring. The impressionistic poem adds mystery with the shadows and tiny shoes, which may belong to either a child or a woman, but most likely a woman: "And the white fever of temptation / Upswept its angel wings that cast / A cruciform shadow". That Yuri feels temptation and fever strongly hints that the woman is Lara, although the whiteness of the fever could indicate the guiltless purity of making love with Tonia. In this case the candle may be a metaphor for the ongoing flame that Yuri has in his heart for Lara.

Parting (pp. 476-477)

Yuri describes his feelings after Lara leaves Varykino with Komarovsky. He stares into the house and recognizes nothing. Lara's hasty packing for the trip to the eastern part of Russia has left a chaos of things on the floor. Yuri draws an analogy of the sea bringing her to him with the incoming tide, "She had been cast up from the depths / By a high wave of destiny".

Yuri "falls to sobbing. Softly". Destiny has brought Lara to him, and destiny has taken her away. He can do nothing else.

Encounter (pp. 477-478)

Lara stands while snow falls thickly. She tries to keep calm. "It is as if your image / Were being etched forever . . . Upon my very heart".

The image seems to be from memory. "For who are we, and where from. / If after all these years / Gossip alone still lives on / While we no longer live?"



Additionally, the image may be a hallucination during the time directly after Lara leaves for eastern Russia: "If I step out to stretch my legs / I will see you from the door".

Star of the Nativity (pp. 479-481)

Yuri places the Nativity scene "In the cave on the slope of a knoll". The three Magi follow the new star and shepherds gather. Snow has fallen. Unseen angels leave "Tracks of bare feet, glinting like mica".

The poem moves the Christ child and mother from the desert to sub-arctic Russia. Yuri relates the Nativity to all the future Christmas celebrations: "All the yule trees on earth, all the dreams of small children." In this way he makes the celebration fully his and his family's own while still paying homage to mother and child.

Dawn (p. 480)

An ode to the working classes, Yuri offers a scene of people rushing off to their jobs during a blizzard. Then the war comes, "And for a long, long time there was / No word from you, not even a sign".

In the ending, "All these are victors over me— / And therein lies my sole victory".

All the working people, the children and the stay-at-homes are a part of Yuri, each person a victor over him. That he can contain them all is his only victory over life and its destinies.

Miracle (pp. 483-484)

Christ, on his way to Jerusalem, comes upon a barren fig tree. He causes the barren tree to be "instantly consumed to ashes".

Yuri wonders, "If at that point but a moment of free choice had been granted . . . The laws of nature might have contrived to intervene".

He laments the lack of free choice, and thus when a miracle of God happens, it "confounds us". Along with his repeated theme of destiny, the only free will around is God, who may intervene in the laws of nature in ways that humans can never understand.

Earth

The earth speaks about how "High-handed spring barges" into houses, causing people to put away furs and take out the summer clothes. People put out the young flowers, "The selfsame white buds beget their swellings, / Whether on windowsill or at crossroads, / Whether in the street or in a workshop".

All is not cheerful. "Why, then, does the distance weep in a mist / And humus have so sharp an odor?" Because people do these things "So that the secret stream of sorrow /



May impart some warmth to the chill of being". This echoes themes of finding joy wherever possible during a life filled with misery against which humans cannot hope to defy their destinies.

Evil Days (pp. 485-486)

The evil days are those that lead up to Christ's crucifixion. Jesus enters Jerusalem: "He was hailed with thunderous hosannas; / The people ran in His wake, waving palm branches".

But the Pharisees plot against Christ. He remembers the devil's temptation, his walking on water and the resurrection of Lazarus: "And His going down into a cellar by the light of a taper / Which had suddenly gone out in affright / When the man risen from the dead was trying to get to his feet".

Yuri's evil days may be the ones he spends in Moscow before his death. Nothing seems to work out for him. His destiny appears to be certain death on the streets of the city.

Magdalene (pp. 486-488)

Mary Magdalene laments her past as a prostitute. She praises Jesus for saving her soul and prepares him for crucifixion by anointing his feet with myrrh. She then receives a vision: "I see the future in such detail / As if Thou hast made it stand still".

She gives the detail of the crucifixion and her reactions to it, and then: "I shall, even before the Resurrection, attain my full stature".

Yuri may be giving homage to Magdalene through the poem, or he may be promising redemption to Lara by drawing a parallel between her love for him and Magdalene's love for Jesus. However, the parallel is very light. Yuri has not lived a Jesus-like life, nor has Lara loved the Son of a God. If any redemption is to be given, it will be through Jesus, not a poem by Dr. Zhivago. However, the poem makes a very nice prayer, and one that may be answered.

Garden of Gethsemane

Jesus goes to the Garden of Gethsemane. "And now was as all mortals are, even as we". Jesus must die on the cross, so he prays, "His brow sweating blood".

"Having eased His mortal anguish through prayer, / He left the garden". The story goes on to the sleeping disciples and the approach of Judas to deliver the betraying kiss.

The last verse reaffirms the vision from Magdalene:

"I shall descent into my grave. And on the third day rise again / And, even as rafts float down a river, / So shall the centuries drift, trailing like a caravan, / Coming for judgment, out of the dark, to me".



As Jesus prepares for his death, so does Yuri. Dr. Zhivago is but a mortal who relates to the natural fear of death that Jesus must face. If the poem Magdalene is a prayer for Lara, this poem is a prayer for Yuri.



Characters

Dr. Zhivago (Yuri)

Dr. Zhivago, also called Yura in his early life and Yuri later on, grows up during the time directly before World War I, the Russian revolution, and the Russian civil war. He selects medicine as his profession, being a member of the upper classes, even though his father had squandered away all the family wealth. Yuri also writes poetry and short books.

He sees Lara while still a schoolboy and she a sixteen-year-old, but does not realize his love for her until later on. Yuri marries Tonia, whom he meets at about ten years of age and grows up with under the same roof.

During World War I, Yuri serves as a field doctor for the Russian army. The Russian revolution and resulting civil war takes the nation out of the World War I struggle as the Red Army fights against the White Army. Yuri and his family leaves Moscow for Varykino in the Ural Mountains, where they try to live a normal life. However, Yuri falls in love with Lara, who lives in the nearby town of Yuriatin, and begins an affair that lasts for two months. Just as Yuri decides to confess the affair to Tonia but then changes his mind and rides his horse back to Lara, the Red Army conscripts him against his will.

Yuri becomes sick of the war and leaves the Red Army about eighteen months later when a decisive battle between the Reds and Whites begins. He returns to Yuriatin greatly weakened from his travels in the war-torn countryside and finds that Lara has been expecting him. She leaves him a note and a key to her house in a hiding place they both know. He then falls ill. Lara discovers him in her house and nurses him back to health. They realize that the new government will probably arrest them as enemies of the state, so they go to Varykino and hide out. Yuri finds brief happiness there until Lara decides to accept an offer to go east, where she and her daughter will be relatively safe. After deciding to stay due to his own family, now deported to France, Yuri falls into deep depression.

Lara's husband, Pasha, shows up. He talks about the war, and Yuri tells him how much Lara loves him. Something snaps in Pasha. He commits suicide the next morning. Yuri goes back to Moscow with a young friend, Vasia, where they do what they can to get by. Yuri halfheartedly tries to bring his family back from France. He takes a common-law wife and finds some happiness in that relationship, but it is short-lived. He disappears from society until one day his heart gives out while riding a trolley. Yuri dies in the street.

Lara and Yuri's half brother, Evgraf, attend Yuri's funeral. Evgraf had helped Yuri out during the worst of times and has some kind of connection to the new government. What happens to Lara after the funeral is unknown, although under the circumstances she probably dies in a concentration camp. Friends of Yuri publish a collection of his poems.



Lara

Lara is a beautiful young woman who grows up in the Russian countryside town of Yuriatin and goes to Moscow with her mother. She meets a much older man there, Komarovsky, who initiates an affair with the then sixteen-year-old Lara. Although attracted to the excitement of sex, Lara's psyche takes serious wounds. She hurts so much that she attempts to shoot Komarovsky at a Christmas party, but she cannot carry out the murder and misses her mark, although she has developed accuracy with the pistol.

Komarovsky puts Lara in a boarding house to keep her away from the police and to squelch rumors. She soon moves out with the help of a benefactor and takes her own apartment. Admiring the young man's character, Lara marries Pasha. They begin their family in Yuriatin. Lara takes to the domestic life well, but Pasha becomes wrapped up in politics. Thinking their life as somehow phony, Pasha leaves Lara and joins the army. He is shipped out to the World War I front, where he becomes missing in action. Lara studies to be a nurse and goes to find her husband. She meets Dr. Zhivago, but only feels a mild attraction to him.

When Yuri goes to see Lara in Yuriatin as the Russian civil war heats up, their love for each other rapidly blooms. They begin an affair that lasts for two months, until Yuri cannot stand the guilt any longer. Lara accepts the breakup as best she can.

Dr. Zhivago returns to Yuriatin, and Lara nurses him back to health. She takes on the domestic chores as Yuri works for local hospitals. She goes with him to Varykino when they must hide out from the government, but then Komarovsky, who had visited them before and offered to bring them both to safety, comes by the house. He convinces Lara to go with him for the sake of her daughter. Yuri pretends to accept the deal to help Lara find safety, but she ends up leaving without him.

Lara attends Dr. Zhivago's funeral with his half brother, Vasia. She helps to arrange Yuri's papers, but then leaves and is not seen again. Her fate is probably death in a concentration camp.

Pasha

Pasha is an upright and honest man who catches the eye of Lara and becomes her husband. They build a life for themselves in Yuriatin, where they both teach school. Lara gives birth to a daughter and enjoys her domestic life, but Pasha feels that their happy lives are phony while Russia goes through its turmoil. He leaves Lara and joins the army. While fighting in World War I, Pasha becomes missing in action and is rumored dead.

However, Pasha survives and takes on a false identity, Strelnikov. Strelnikov joins with the Red



Army during the Russian civil war and rises in the ranks to become an influential officer. He becomes aware of Yuri's affair with Lara, which may cause him to order the forced conscription of Yuri into the Red Army. Strelnikov later visits with Yuri in Varykino while on the run from trumped-up court martial charges. Strelnikov then commits suicide with his own revolver, having lost both his country and his family.

Tonia

Tonia grows up with Yuri under the same roof and marries him. She is beautiful and dedicated to the family but cannot offer the passion that attracts her husband to Lara. She goes with Yuri and her father to Varykino, where they try to make as good a life as they can. After the Red Army conscripts Yuri, she returns to Moscow and is deported to France. There she raises her children to adulthood. She hears of Yuri's common-law wife, which upsets her and her father.

Komarovsky

Komarovsky is a Moscow lawyer who may have instigated Yuri's father's suicide and initiates an affair with the very young Lara. He tries to keep her under his thumb, but she succeeds in escaping him physically, if not emotionally. The much older Komarovskiy leaves deep psychological wounds in Lara's self-image. He again enters her life while she and Yuri hide out from the government. Through his influence, he takes Lara to eastern Russia and relative safety. He may be motivated out of responsibility, guilt, or a continuing desire to keep her under his thumb.

Nature

Pasternak's writing style brings nature in as a living character. His vivid descriptive narratives create scenes that interact with the other characters in significant ways. The beauty instills great pleasure and inspiration, while the harsh winters bring suffering; thus, nature becomes more than setting backdrops. The character affected the most is Yuri, because he has a sensitive and observant poet's soul.

Misha

Misha is a childhood friend of Yuri's who witnesses his father's suicide. Misha helps Yuri during the hard times and stays loyal to him through to his death. After Yuri dies, Misha and Lara work to compile a book of Yuri's poetry, which becomes a cherished volume.

Evgraf

Evgraf is Yuri's half brother and a mysterious benefactor. When everything looks hopeless for Yuri, Evgraf shows up with help. He has some kind of influential position



with the new government about which he never speaks. Evgraf attends Yuri's funeral with Lara, which may indicate a close association with her in eastern Russia.

Pogorevshikh

Pogorevshikh is a deaf-mute revolutionary who Yuri meets on a train. Pogorevshikh explains to Yuri that all the suffering going on in Russia is a necessary step along the way to a better nation than existed under Tsarist rule. The revolutionary is also an anarchist, a position that Yuri cannot accept.

Pamphil

Pamphil is a soldier in the Red Army. Yuri tries to psychoanalyze the shell-shocked man but lacks the needed skills, which have not been well developed in the Russian civil war period. The arrival of Pamphil's family in camp cheers him up, but he fears the White Army so much that he ends up killing his family.

Vasia

Vasia is a young man that Yuri meets on the train to Varykino. Conscripted as a worker for the trench warfare of the World War I period, Vasia escapes during a train stop near a roaring waterfall. He is not seen again until Yuri makes his way back to Moscow. Vasia accompanies Yuri and they share lodgings in the city. Then Vasia becomes disgusted with Yuri's lack of concentrated effort to bring Tonia and the children back to Moscow. The two part company.



Objects/Places

Moscow

Moscow is where Yuri grows up and becomes Dr. Zhivago. He marries Tonia in Moscow and returns there toward the end of his life. Yuri dies in the streets of Moscow.

Varykino

Varykino is where Yuri's father once had businesses and an estate. Yuri and his family go to Varykino and try to make as good a life as they can. When hiding from the government, Yuri and Lara go to Varykino.

Yuriatin

Yuriatin is Lara's hometown. She and Pasha start their married lives together in Yuriatin. Lara and Yuri have their affair in the town, and Yuri returns to it after deserting the Red Army.

Train

The train is the major form of transportation in Russia during the time. Yuri and his family travel by train. The Red Army travels by train.

Winter

Winter is both a season and an object, a very hard and harsh object in the sub-arctic Russia. Fuel becomes a primary objective for everyone, and there never seems to be enough to ward off the cold.

Rowantree

The rowantree is a symbol for the new Russia that begins emerging with the civil war. The red berries may foretell the victory of the Red Army over the White.

Horse-drawn cart/sleigh

The other major form of transportation in Russia during this time is horse-drawn cart or sleigh. Yuri and his family go to Varykino in a horse-drawn cart. Lara and Yuri move from Yuriatin to Varykino in a horse-drawn sleigh, and Lara leaves with Komarovsky in one.



Yuri's poetry

Yuri's poetry allows him to express his deepest feelings. The poems are gathered together after his death and published.

Politics

Politics change everyone's lives. Its force cannot be denied, nor can it be controlled very much. Lara believes that politics had infected her home with Pasha and caused him to leave her.

Love

More powerful than politics, love causes Yuri to cheat on his wife and go running into the arms of the Red Army. Love also brings great happiness to him for times that are brief but appreciated.



Social Sensitivity

Revolution and its aftermath are the paramount social issues Pasternak explored in *Doctor Zhivago*. A multitude of internal and external forces had brought on Russia's convulsions in 1917 which provide the backdrop to Part I of the novel, Zhivago's early life.

The Bloody Sunday massacre of 1905 during the disastrous Russo-Japanese War marked liberal demands for the establishment of a Russian *duma* (legislative assembly), but those reforms granted reluctantly by the largely ineffectual Nicholas II proved transitory.

When war with Germany erupted in August 1914, the Russian Army was badly led, ill-equipped, and consumed with unrest, just as the Russian population as a whole was beset by inflation and food shortages and the strains of a foreign-financed, expanding industrial growth.

Part II of *Doctor Zhivago*, centering on the lyrical love story of Yuri Zhivago and Lara, takes place in the harrowing years after the February Revolution of 1917, when the moderate Aleksandr Kerensky tried to solidify a central democratic authority in Russia. For a little while, Pasternak was able to celebrate "a moment that transformed everything and opened up hearts and minds," but in October of 1917 (Old Style) the Bolshevik wing of the leftist Social Democratic Party, led by Lenin, seized the government. Lenin signed the humiliating Brest-Litovsk Treaty early in 1918 to end Russia's involvement in World War I, and during the two years of devastating civil war which followed, Zhivago and Lara loved and lost each other.

In the NEP, a brief capitalistic interlude the Soviets had to allow to bring the country out of its postrevolutionary economic disaster, Pasternak had experimented with expressionistic short fiction to convey his concept of the artist's relation to society, which he finally crystallized in the conclusion of *Doctor Zhivago*, as Lara stands beside Zhivago's coffin. She realizes then that their love had made them "an element in the beauty of the cosmos," far transcending the political realities that had torn them apart: "This unity with the whole was the breath of life to them . . . [but] the elevation of man above the rest of nature . . . a social system based on such a false premise, as well as its political application, struck them as pathetically amateurish and made no sense to them." As Ronald Hingley has noted, "Pasternak's greatest sin against Communism was not to take it seriously," and both Pasternak and Olga Ivinskaya paid the price.

Techniques

In 1934, Pasternak declared that poetry was "pure prose in its pristine intensity," acknowledging the interrelation he sensed in the two genres. He considered Doctor Zhivago "the only worthwhile thing I have ever achieved," but commentators have noted passages in it where Pasternak seemed ill at ease with the novel form.

Nevertheless, his deliberately low-key style as well as his impressionistic shifts in time and place and his use of symbolic coincidence carry the Russian epic novel form into a new, altogether individual, mode of artistic expression.

Pasternak also chose a tripartite form for Doctor Zhivago often compared to a religious triptych and to a "literary sonata." The three panels of his novelistic altarpiece, like three movements of a monumental sonata, are Part I, Zhivago's early life, in which Pasternak announces his themes; Part II, Zhivago's love for Lara, Pasternak's exposition, followed by his codalike chapter 16, an epilogue which pronounces the meaning of Zhivago's earthly life; and "The Poems of Yuri Zhivago," some of the greatest Christian poetry in any time or any language, a cycle of the liturgical year which elevates Zhivago's life to the supernatural plane of redeemed mankind. The musical metaphor for the novel's form may have been closest to Pasternak's heart; he always loved the work of the Romantic composer Frederic Chopin, because he felt Chopin "regarded his own life as a means of apprehending every life in the world," and he considered Chopin's "wider significance," especially in his monumental Etudes, as teaching first "a theory of childhood," then "an introduction to death," and at last no less than "the structure of the universe" (Pasternak's italics).



Themes

Impossible Love

The love that Yuri has for Tonia and that Lara has for Pasha has the sense of normal human relations. This kind of love grows with time and is learned along the way. It can start with admiration and fondness, or even mild attraction. However, the love that Yuri and Lara have cannot survive as a normal human relationship. The civil war tears it apart, but even in peacetime the passions involved may not be tolerable.

War complicates everything, especially passionate love. The separations that Lara and Yuri experience keep their love from destroying each other, yet they are drawn back together from this love as well. The time they spend together is never secure and relaxed. Either Yuri must sneak around behind Tonia's back, or the government wants to arrest them both. The couple never has a chance to get into an argument that escalates to a fight. Without conflict and resolution, the relationship is impossible.

Having had married other people also kills the relationship. Yuri and Lara cannot simply go running off somewhere together. Lara has her daughter's safety to consider and Yuri has his family.

Revolutionary Upheaval

The revolution kicks the Tsar out of power, but then the hard part begins—civil war. Two major factions arise, the Reds and the Whites, with the Reds being Marxist and the Whites being capitalistic. A third force consisting of peasants fight against both factions and are referred to as Greens. Those not in any of the armies suffer deprivation.

The war pushes Yuri and his family away from Moscow. It snatches up Yuri from his relatively happy life in Varykino, although the affair with Lara may have something to do with this. The war then becomes a handy place to put Yuri where he cannot have Lara.

The Marxists envision a fair, self-governed working class society, but what develops is a government full of corruption and paranoia. Not only are Lara and Yuri at risk, but one of the Red Army's top commanders, Strelnikov, is as well. He knows too much. The government does not trust Lara due to her connection to Strelnikov. It does not trust Yuri because he was a member of the old upper classes and does not fully embrace the new government with its hollow slogans. Even long after the shooting stops, the government continues its purge of potential agitators.

Human Exploitation

The Russian revolution comes about because the working and peasant classes feel exploited. The thoughts of Marx and others seem to make sense, and so the lower



classes rise up against the Tsar and put up a provisional government. Yet exploitation continues. The army conscripts workers and soldiers to fight in World War I. The Red Army does the same during the civil war. Once the government stabilizes a bit after the civil war, rationing and inflation continue onward, while committees of many types issue decrees that often do not make sense and are impossible to follow.

Pasternak keeps neutral about the ethics of human exploitation. The author presents the conditions without comment. Sometimes people help each other through tough periods and sometimes not. For Yuri, he receives quite a bit of help from his family and friends. Lara maintains her good reputation in her hometown of Yuriatin, and her friends there offer help. She is the victim, however, of another kind of human exploitation.

Komarovsky steals Lara's innocence and continues to use her for his lecherous pleasure until she finally breaks away from his physical grasp. The Tsarist regime may have been exploiting Lara and her people economically, but that does not leave deep psychological scars. The people of her hometown know how to live happily without much. The kind of exploitation that Komarovsky does needs no comment. It is inherently an evil thing, universally condemned and not forgiven.

An argument can be made that Lara enjoys parts of the sexual exploitation, and this may imply consent. However, Komarovsky is an old man. He should know better than to use a young woman in this manner and that no good can come from it. By sheer luck, he survives Lara's desire to shoot him dead, that luck being Lara's inability to murder.

Significant Topics

Yuri Zhivago's very name announced the great theme Pasternak drew from the peculiarly Russian belief he shared with Tolstoy and Dostoevsky in the physical resurrection of the dead.

"Why seek ye the living (zhivago) among the dead?" the angels in the Russian Bible ask the women who search for Christ on Easter morning, and from the first paragraph of Doctor Zhivago to the poem "Magdalene" which closes the novel, Pasternak reiterates his belief in the central mystery of Christianity. Zhivago's Christian name "Yuri" suggests the special Russian insight into the price of resurrection, the suffering and death undergone for love: yurodiviy, "fools of God," fitfully illuminate the course of Russian history, daring to speak the truth to the Tsars of All the Russias. Pasternak's title carries his message still further; in its oldest sense, "doctor" describes the teacher who heals the soul much as the physician tends the body. Doctor Zhivago speaks to man's deepest longing, teaching that even in the unparalleled agony Russia has undergone in the twentieth century, man must lose his life in pain before he finds it again, reborn in love.

Like every Russian novel of stature, Doctor Zhivago echoes with a multitude of secondary themes. Pasternak stresses humanity's right to choose freely between salvation and damnation; he opposes not only Marxist political oppression but any



system which denies man the place that Orthodox Christianity claims for him, closer to God than the angels, but still subordinate to Divinity; and in the losing battle Yuri Zhivago wages on the side of good against evil, Pasternak depicts humanity's capacity to endure by following the path of love, Alyosha Karamazov's Christlike kiss of peace. The novel also offers a hymn of devotion to the Russian earth and a confirmation of Pasternak's conviction, as Olga Hughes has remarked, that art can reconstitute archetypes that symbolize man's oneness with the universe; but all lesser themes and motifs merge in Pasternak's statement that "individual human life became the story of God." Robert Payne believes that Pasternak "is saying as clearly as a man can that Doctor Zhivago is a divine mystery."



Style

Point of View

Pasternak narrates the story from Dr. Zhivago's point of view, but offers insights into the depths of Lara's feelings as well by use of the omniscient narrator. All the other characters are presented without revealing their internal feelings or thought processes other than what they express to Yuri.

Often through melodramatic dialog, the passions of the main characters flow without restraint. All of Russia seems to wear their heart on their sleeves, which may or may not be an accurate representation of the time. The story appeals to the romantic side of readers, those who thrill to expansive scenery and passionately felt expressions of two lovers hopelessly gripped by their hearts and tragically separated. Pasternak's direct allusion to Romeo and Juliet adds to the effect.

Yuri and Lara have no trouble seeing the world for what it is. They cannot embrace the political propaganda, nor do they expect anything better from what they once had before the war tears Pasha from Lara, and the Red Army abducts Yuri from Lara and his family. However, at this one point, Yuri cannot think straight due to his passion for Lara. He rides straight into the Red Army's hands, saving them the problem of a search. The temporary loss of sight quickly changes to the harsh reality of being a field doctor for the Reds.

Setting

The grand setting of Moscow and the Urals dominate, with war as a primary component in the Urals. Beauty and horror intermingle in the war scenes, with depressing wastelands separating intact towns from the battlegrounds.

The opening scenes in Moscow present a high society with Christmas parties and schools, a very temporary setting that will soon turn to famine and need. Lara enjoys her simple life with Pasha in Yuriatin, but then must take the hovel that Yuri finds her in after Pasha leaves for the army. The place in town degenerates further as the war continues. Varykino offers humble but pleasant enough settings until Pasha commits his suicide there. Then Yuri can do nothing else but go back to Moscow.

He finds a city that is sick from war and struggling to regain its footing. Still, he finds a way to publish books and make a living, but his time in the recovering Moscow is limited. He dies from his weak heart in the mean setting of the city streets.

Yuri receives a nice enough funeral, probably paid for by his friends and half brother. This particular setting brings back a level of civilization with which the story opens and serves as the anticlimax of the story. Pasternak carries on with a conclusion and epilogue that contributes little to the sweeping life of Dr. Zhivago, other than to



speculate on Lara's fate and to announce the publication of Yuri's poetry. All the major settings come full circle at Yuri's funeral.

Language and Meaning

Being a translation from Russian, the language suffers a bit from the use of clichés, but this fault can be easily overlooked. Pasternak uses language like a poet, which he is better known for in Russia. He masterfully paints a scene with the right words and not too many of them. Characters receive distinctive faces and personalities.

Dialog seems over-inflated, but this could be a trait of the Russian culture, judging by the length of the typical Russian novel. People love to talk and talk about politics, conditions, experiences, and relationships. Understandable for the time, the talk about politics seems everywhere.

Pasternak uses scenes more often than descriptions to bring in moods. A child sleds down a hill and always smiles. A soldier drags the butt of his gun as he walks. A sentry on skis rapidly approaches. A wounded soldier screams and dies from a large piece of shrapnel embedded in his face. Lara's hair cascades upon Yuri's face while he recovers from illness.

As in poetry, the exact meaning is often left open for the reader to interpret, or there may be no exact meaning at all but several possibilities from many impressions. Primarily, the story is a romantic tragedy that leaves feelings of grief and hope. The language accomplishes this goal. Just what this means may be irrelevant.

Structure

The story has two parts with fourteen primary chapters and end-matter consisting of a Conclusion, Epilogue, and The Poems of Yuri Zhivago. The use of a conclusion chapter, a rarity after the 19th century, is a second anticlimax. The primary climax occurs when Yuri and Lara separate for the last time, and the first anticlimax is Yuri's death.

Time moves chronologically for the most part, with a few flashbacks. Each chapter consists of several numbered sections, usually separated by scene but sometimes two or three parts of the same scene follow one another. This reflects the serialization of the book in its first publication. Subplots exist, but they are usually addressed as reflections rather than concurrent events. This story is about Dr. Zhivago, and that is how it is told.

Both narrative description and dialog tend to be heavy but not overweight, like syrup, or in the case of the war scenes, blood. Pasternak favors sweetly loving scenes over graphic sex or violence, those being implied and offstage, as in a Shakespearian tragedy.



Quotes

"How enchanting this place was! Orioles kept making their clear three-note calls, stopping each time just long enough to let the countryside suck in the moist fluting sounds down to the last vibration. A heavy fragrance, motionless, as though having lost its way in the air, was fixed by the heat above the flower beds. This brought back memories of Antibes and Bordighera. Yura turned this way and that. The ghost of his mother's voice was hallucinatingly present in the meadows. He heard it in the musical phrases of the birds and the buzzing of the bees. Now and then he imagined with a start that his mother was calling him, asking him to join her somewhere" p. 20

"The Petrovka looked like a corner of Petersburg in Moscow, with its matching houses on both sides of the street, the tastefully sculptured house entrances, the bookshop, the library, the cartographer's, the elegant tobacco shop, the excellent restaurant, its front door flanked by two gaslights in round frosted shades on massive brackets.

"In winter the street frowned with a forbidding surliness. Its inhabitants were solid, self-respecting prosperous members of the liberal professions" p. 48

"As early as the spring of 1906—only a few months before she would begin her last year in the gymnasium—six months of Lara's liaison with Komarovsky had driven her beyond the limits of her endurance. He cleverly turned her wretchedness to his advantage, and when it suited him subtly reminded her of her shame. These reminders brought her to just that state of confusion that a lecher requires in a woman. As a result, Lara felt herself sinking ever deeper into a nightmare of sensuality which filled her with horror whenever she awoke from it" p. 71

"The rain poured with a dreary steadiness, neither hurrying nor slowing down for all the fury of the wind, which seemed enraged by the indifference of the water. Gusts of winds shook the creeper on one of the houses as if intending to tear it up by the roots, swung it up into the air, and dropped it in disgust like a discarded rag" p. 97

"Gray-haired, pink-cheeked, and disheveled, Mademoiselle Fleury shuffled about in bedroom slippers and a floppy, worn-out housecoat, apparently as much at home in the hospital as she had been in the Zhabrinsky family. She told long stories in her broken Russian, swallowing the ends of her words in the French manner, gesticulating, struck dramatic poses, and burst into hoarse peals of laughter that ended in coughing fits" p. 126

"All around people were shouting, bawling songs, quarrelling, and playing cards. Whenever the train stopped, the noise of the besieging crowds outside was added to this turmoil. The roar of the voices was deafening, like a storm at sea, and, as at sea, there would be a sudden lull. In the inexplicable stillness you could hear footsteps hurrying down the platform, the bustle and arguments outside the freight car, isolated from people, farewells spoken in the distance, and the quiet clucking of hens and rustling of trees in the station garden" pp. 145-146



"One day he received an allocation of wood at the official price. He had to bring it from the Vindava Station. Walking home along the endless stretches of Meshchanskaia Street—keeping an eye on the cart loaded with his unexpected treasure—he noticed that the street looked quite different; he found that he was swaying from side to side, his legs refusing to carry him. He realized that he was in for a bad time, that he had typhus. The driver picked him up when he fell down and slung him on top of the wood. The doctor never knew how he got home" p. 187

"Varykino! That's why I've kept wondering whom your daughter reminds me of! So it's Varykino you want! That explains everything! Old man Krueger and I built this road together. I'll see to the horse right away, I'll call one of the men and we'll see about a cart—Donat! Donat! Take these things into the waiting room for the time being. And how about a horse? Run over to the tearoom and see what can be done. Bacchus was hanging around here this morning. See if he's still there. Tell them four passengers for Varykino. They're new arrivals. They've got hardly any luggage, tell them. And make it snappy. And now, lady, may I give you a piece of fatherly advice? I purposely didn't ask how closely you were related to Ivan Ernestovich. Be very careful what you say about it. You can't talk too much with everyone in times like these" p. 239

"Yuri Andreievich dropped his reins, leaned forward in his saddle, flung his arms around the horse's neck, and buried his face in its mane. Taking this display of affection for an appeal to its strength, the horse broke into a gallop" p. 271

"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'—and they've got into the habit of liberating and of showering benefits on just those people who haven't asked for them. I suppose you think I can't imagine anything in the world more pleasant than your camp and your company. I suppose I have to bless you for keeping me a prisoner and thank you for liberating me from my wife, my son, my home, my work, from everything I hold dear and that makes life worth living for me!" p. 300

"But what made the high place in the forest remarkable was something else. All along its edge was locked in by granite boulders standing on end, looking like the flat stones of prehistoric dolmens. When Yuri Andreievich came across this stony platform for the first time, he was ready to swear that it was not of natural origin, that it bore the mark of human hands. It might well have been the site of an ancient pagan shrine, where prayers and sacrifices had once been offered by unknown worshippers." p. 312

"High winter came with its severe frosts. Torn, seemingly disconnected sounds and shapes rose out of the icy mist, stood still, moved and vanished. The sun was not the sun to which the earth was used, it was a changeling. Its crimson ball hung in the forest and from it, stiffly and slowly as in a bad dream or in a fairy tale, amber-yellow rays of light as thick as honey spread and, catching in the trees, froze to them in midair. "Invisible feet in felt boots, touching the ground softly with padded soles, yet making the snow screech angrily at each step, moved in all directions, while the hooded and fur-jacketed torsos belonging to them sailed separately through the upper air, like heavenly bodies" p. 327



"Even more than by what they had in common, they were united by what separated them from the rest of the world. They were both equally repelled by what was tragically typical of modern man, his textbook admirations, his shrill enthusiasms, and the deadly dullness conscientiously preached and practiced by countless workers in the field of art and science in order that genius should remain a great rarity" p. 349

"Your Tonia and my Pasha are a thousand times better than we are, but that isn't the point. The point is that the gift of love is like any other gift. However great it is, it won't thrive without a blessing. You and I, it's as though we have been taught to kiss in heaven and sent down to earth together, to see if we know what we were taught. It's a sort of crowning harmony—no limits, no degrees, everything is of equal value, everything is a joy, everything has become spirit. But in this wild tenderness that lies in wait for us at every moment there is something childish, unrestrained, irresponsible. It's a willful, destructive element, hostile to domestic happiness, such a love. It's my duty to be afraid of it and to distrust it" p. 382

"He lit the kitchen range, picked up a bucket, and started toward the well. A few yards from the door, Strelnikov lay across the path with his head in a snowdrift. He had shot himself. The snow was a red lump under his left temple where he had bled. Drops of spurting blood that had mixed with the snow formed red beads that looked like rowanberries" p. 408

"Such an understanding filled her now, a dark indistinct knowledge of death, preparedness for death, a preparedness that removed all feeling of helplessness in its presence. It was as if she had lived twenty lives, and had lost Yuri countless times, and had accumulated such experience of the heart in this domain that everything she felt and did beside this coffin was exactly right and to the point" p. 439



Adaptations

Doctor Zhivago was adapted for the screen by Robert Bolt, produced by Carlo Ponti, directed by David Lean, and released in 1965 by Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer. The film's six Academy Awards went to Bolt, for his screenplay; to Freddie A. Young, for cinematography; to Maurice Jarre, for the musical score; to Dario Simon, for set decoration; to Phyllis Dalton, for costume design; and to John Box and Terry March, for art direction. Tom Courtenay was nominated for Best Supporting Actor for his Pasha, but Julie Christie won her 1965 Best Actress Academy Award for Darling, not for her Lara in Doctor Zhivago. Other powerful performances came from Omar Sharif, a passionate and sensitive Yuri Zhivago; Geraldine Chaplin, as Zhivago's gentle forgiving wife Tonya; Rod Steiger as the suave amoral survivor Komarovskiy; and Alec Guinness as Zhivago's enigmatic half-brother Yevgraf, who narrates the film in Bolt's largest, although not disruptive, departure from Pasternak's anonymously narrated novel.

Despite being produced in America, the film version of Doctor Zhivago dramatically extends the Russian artistic tradition, posing the interrelations of its characters against the immense Russian landscape which molds and often masters them. In the context of the twentieth century's most cataclysmic upheavals of revolution and civil war, Yuri Zhivago and the people close to him touch each other's lives all the more intimately for being separated so abruptly by circumstance. The essence of Pasternak's Christianity appears in the film's persevering image, the lonely candle glowing through an icy window, drawn from "Winter Night," one of the poems Yuri Zhivago composed at Varykino: Fidelity to his inmost self sustains not only the artist but those whom his life warms and consoles and offers hope, no matter how frail and futile his attempt may seem to the uncaring world around them. The film of Doctor Zhivago enjoyed wide popularity in its original appearance and its several re-releases, as well as on television, where it received one of the largest viewing audiences of a motion picture to date.



Topics for Discussion

Why does Yuri choose medicine as his career?

What harm does Komarovsky cause Lara?

Describe the love between Lara and Yuri.

Compare and contrast Yuri's love for his family and Lara's love for hers.

In what ways do Russia's revolution and civil war change its government?

How is the novel *Dr. Zhivago* similar to the play *Romeo and Juliet*?

Speculate on how the relationship might have turned out had Yuri married Lara first.

What character traits do Lara and Yuri share in common?

Why does Komarovsky call Siberia the New America?

Why is Yuri not jealous of Pasha?

Literary Precedents

According to Ronald Hingley, "Pasternak is more justly summed up as a poet who was also a prose writer than as one whose attainments in the two areas are of comparable importance."

As a young poet, Pasternak at first idealized, then repudiated, the flamboyant iconoclastic Mayakovsky. Pasternak's own early work had combined elements of the Russian Futurist and Symbolist Schools, but he soon developed his own poetic voice, fresh, impassioned, and rich in striking metaphor. His dazzling originality fused with his affirmation of life so uniquely that his friend and defender Lydia Chukovskaya called him "the only non-tragic Russian poet" and claimed that "His voice always sounded in the major key."

In *Doctor Zhivago*, Pasternak shares the religious and moral idealism of Dostoevsky and Tolstoy's vast panorama of all the levels of Russian society, but prose fiction lacks the disciplining structure of the conventional poetic forms Pasternak used, and *Doctor Zhivago* thus has a more nebulous focus than Pasternak's nineteenth-century predecessors had achieved. The impressionistic nimbus that surrounds *Doctor Zhivago*, however, is its distinguishing mark of sainthood, drawn from a mystical vision Pasternak had experienced in the works of the late nineteenth-century religious philosopher Soloviev. Soloviev's *Sophia*, the incarnation of divine wisdom, was the forerunner to those suffering women of Pasternak's who light Yuri Zhivago into eternity.



Related Titles

Other than the whole of Pasternak's poetry, which with *Doctor Zhivago* forms his spiritual autobiography, the work most closely related to his only novel is "The Childhood of Zhenia Luvers," a long short story he wrote between 1917 and 1919, originally intending it for the opening of a novel.

Pasternak's "Lara," Olga Ivinskaya, herself called the child Zhenia "the Lara of the future." The little girl first apprehends her world through sensory impressions that grow more complex as she learns to understand her own emotions. As the world of childhood shatters around her, Zhenia suddenly understands that she is no longer the center of a little universe, but a member of the suffering Body of Christ, a singularly Russian epiphany of the brotherhood of pain for whom Pasternak later created his *Doctor Zhivago* to comfort and to heal.



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