

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.25146/2587-7844-2019-8-4-29>

UDK 82.09

THE SOUND OF SILENCE IN BORIS PASTERNAK'S DOCTOR ZHIVAGO

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Abstract

Influence of classical music and composers like Scriabin is clearly visible in the syntax and phonology of Pasternak's poetical language. His "composer's ear" [cf. in De Mallac, 1981] – profound sense of rhythm, harmony, sound, but also silence – is traceable throughout literary language in his famous novel *Doctor Zhivago*, one of the greatest novels about the fall of the Imperial Russia, and the end of the monarchy in war and revolution ever written. This paper investigates some aspects of the relationship between art, violence, and revolution, i.e. between imaginary world of revolutionary and postrevolutionary (Soviet) Russia in *Doctor Zhivago*, and the ways in which the novel captivates those events through sounds of a crowd and city in turmoil, but even more importantly – through intense moments of silence. Departing from the premises that sounds and silence are physical states, but also aesthetic and cultural devices, the aim of this paper is to answer the following questions. What is the meaning of antithesis of sound and silence as a metaphor of "double" meaning in Pasternak's *Doctor Zhivago* where silence indicates violence, war, and revolution as well as contains in itself the energy of creation, creative impulse? Especially in relation to "paradoxical materiality" [Miller, 2007] of silence, where this state of complete muteness and stillness represents simultaneously emptiness – but also plentitude, weightlessness – but also heaviness, the paper analyzes the symbolism of silence in Pasternak's novel. Is Pasternak's profound uses of silence signifier of an amputation of *Doctor Zhivago*'s protagonists from the world of violent revolutionary Russia into their own, private, intimate worlds of introspection, or it is rather a signifier of their resistance against popular representation of revolution as universal political and cultural project of emancipation and freedom for all? In other words, can Pasternak's "rhetoric of silence" in *Doctor Zhivago* be understood as a state of plentitude and knowing (S. Sontag), i.e. as a method of radical speech of silenced and whispering protagonists rather than of their muteness as a consequence of their (bourgeois) laid-backness and passivity?

Keywords: Boris Pasternak, artistic biography, *Doctor Zhivago*, speech, silence, metaphor of silence, modernism, history, war, revolution.

"Everything that can be thought at all can be thought clearly. Everything that can be said at all can be said clearly. But not everything that can be thought can be said." (Ludwig Wittgenstein)

"We go on telling stories in the way we know; and on the other side, if anything, is silence. But we feel that if our death and its silence did come at last, they would probably come, like Malone's, inside a story of our own telling." (Martha Nussbaum)

"We die. That may be the meaning of life. But we do language. That may be the measure of our lives." (Toni Morrison)

1 In his thought-provoking essay *Metaphors of Silence*, Ihab Hassan writes that "men live perpetually in the shadow of their histories," that "what they call the present is already biography," and that "criticism, weighted by its



own skepticism, lags still behind the literature of its day” [Hassan, 1970, p. 81]. In so far as “the frontier of criticism stands somewhere between us and prehistory” [p. 81], Hassan maintains that “the future of criticism [is] to engage new sounds of silence” [p. 81], where silence stands for, in Hassan’s understanding, the universal metaphor of our times. By such metaphors Hassan includes different forms of anti-art (pop art, process art, funk art, computer art, concept art etc.), i.e. art as a game, or discontinuous form (the question of interruption and discontinuity is what Hassan is interested in when he writes about silence), and art which deny language and form to the extent in which it refuses to be interpreted. In so far as the great deal of literature after Holocaust is to some extent concerned with a question about the limits of language in expressing deepest experiences, silence should indeed be one of the central interests of contemporary scholarship.

But how to talk about something absent, or that is at least not visibly present?

The question intrigued Yuri Lotman in *The Structure of the Artistic Text*: how is the information carried by the minus device, by an unused element, related to the text’s structure? What is “the structural role of the zéro-problème” [Lotman, 1977, p. 51], and what is the semantic significance of pause? Specifically, this paper aims to measure the information carried by artistic silence in the context of Pasternak’s *Doctor Zhivago*, the novel which is often attributed as the greatest novel about revolutions, Russian civil war and its aftermath, ever written. The main aim is to offer a reading of a novel from one of its main paired oppositions, that of sound/voice and silence. This problematic field is also interesting at the background of Pasternak’s position in Russian and world literary canon: Pasternak is known primarily through the musicality of his artistic language – in his younger age, before studying philosophy at Marburg University, he planned to be a musician. Family friend Scriabin had a tremendous influence on him, and Pasternak entered literary circles with modern poetry, where music was more than a theme: the very structure of his early literary works was based on his “composer’s ear” (Christopher Barnes). Russian scholar Boris Gasparov argues that, for him, „music was not part of his external experiences that was used as a material for his literary works – his first artistic attempts were at making music. Therefore, the key to understanding this problematic field is not in illuminating the ways in which principles of musical aesthetics influenced the structure of his verbal art. Pursuit of musical theme in Pasternak shouldn’t be directed towards its material but towards its form: the composition of his works“ [Gasparov, 1989, p. 318]. It is thus no surprise that *Doctor Zhivago* distinguishes itself by its rhythm, its sounds: wolves howling are one such “trademark” of the novel. On the other side, perhaps due to the musicality of Pasternak’s artistic language, it often slips research attention that silence is so often attached to the central character of the novel that this “minus-device” (Yuri Lotman), this absence, carries particular meanings and “becomes an organic part of the graphically fixed text” [Lotman, 1977, p. 51]. Silence can also be seen as one of the metaphors that, by being a powerful “speech in silence,” could be observed and understood as a powerful form of aes-

thetic reaction of Russian intelligentsia on political, social and cultural changes after the Revolution¹. In that context, I ask can Pasternak's "rhetoric of silence" in *Doctor Zhivago* be understood as a state of plenitude and knowing (as claimed by Susan Sontag), i.e. as a method of radical speech of silenced and whispering protagonists rather than of their muteness as a consequence of their (bourgeois) laid-backness and passivity? What kind of knowledge it provides? If silence is not merely a rhetorical feature, but a form of figurative speech, what is its symbolical meaning in *Doctor Zhivago*? To that end, is it possible to approach silence as an organizing principle of Pasternak's novel?

2. There is such thing as the world's quietest place, it is located in Minnesota, and it is Guinness-certified. It is called "an anechoic chamber." It is a room "designed to completely absorb reflections of either sound or electromagnetic waves" (*Anechoic chamber*), as the word "anechoic," meaning "echo-free" suggests. What I find interesting is that it became almost a mythological place, with different stories, often highly disturbing, describing the experience of "survivors" of chamber. For example, one report says that "It doesn't seem like a potential torture chamber until those vault doors close behind you and the lights go off. That's when the noise level plummets to -9 decibels – quiet bedrooms and libraries are around 30 decibels. With no sounds coming from your surroundings, your attention turns to your own body, which suddenly seems to be a cacophony of digestive gurgles, whistly breathing, and a heartbeat that could be the intro to Black Sabbath's 'Iron Man.' Orfield Labs owner Steve Orfield likes to challenge visitors to endurance tests in the chamber. Most can't stay longer than about 20 minutes and emerge disoriented and unsettled. Orfield himself has trouble staying in the room beyond the 30-minute mark" [Morton, 2014]. As later experiences testified, the claims about universal torture nature of chamber is mythological – people were staying inside for longer than an hour, some of them really enjoyed the time of peacefulness, and used an opportunity to be fully connected with their selves, and with listening to their bodies. What I find interesting is exactly this mythologization of silence as something vicious, depraved, wrong, malicious, evil, as something that is completely unnatural for human beings. The logic behind this mythologization is, I believe, quite simple: absence of sounds signifies absence of space and time coordinates, in other words, the experience is closest to coffin-like feeling. So, generally speaking, silence is equivalent to death. Perhaps experiencing silence in an anechoic chamber is

¹ A brief overview of existing research shows that silence is generally associated with Other and *otherness*, or, to be more precise, with socially marginalized subjectivities and political rhetoric (minority groups, migrants, elderly, often women). In her study *Can Subaltern Speak* (1988), Gayatri Spivak emphasized that the right to speak is not equally open to everyone, i.e. to the voice / silent dialectics as a form of powerful national, race, class, and gender stratification. Therefore, Spivak argues that a postcolonial intellectual is obliged to be interested in "speech of silence": „Part of our 'unlearning' project is to articulate that ideological formation – by measuring silences, if necessary – into the object of investigation“ [Spivak, 1994, p. 92]. Silence is ambivalent also in psychological terms: on one hand, it is a tool for commemoration, honor and respect ("a moment of silence"), i.e. a gesture of sympathy and respect, on the other hand, it can be a technique of torture ("silent treatment"), of isolation of individuals in their moral existence, i.e. a central medium which makes discipline power sustainable [Foucault, 1995, p. 177, 236–237].



closest to how an individual can depict, or imagine, his own death, otherwise unimaginable as it is impossible to see our own face without a mirror. Silence, especially in dark spaces, confronts us with the awareness that, in Le Breton's words, "The reality principle is fragile" [Le Breton, 2017, p. 59]: "Silence and darkness complement one another, depriving us of any sense of direction, leaving us to our own devices. They make us aware of our limitations" [p. 59]. Similar to darkness, "silence is also associated with meaninglessness and therefore with the absence of familiar signs, with the threat of being swallowed up in the void" [p. 60].

If silence makes us aware of our limitations, revolution as historical event is based on the opposite premises: that a human being has no limitations whatsoever. Cultural representations and imaginations correspond to the political imaginary of this event – it is a triumph of a new life in all its spheres: the new man, the new social relations, the new economy, the new past, present and future. Therefore, in representing Revolution, cultural texts (literature, film, music) employed sounds to a greater extent. As A. Blok writes in his essay *Intelligentsia and Revolution* soon after the Revolution, artist's duty was to create new literary forms and new language by grasping an extraordinary music of the Revolution [Blok, 2007]. His revolutionary poem *Twelve* (1918) is one example of such imagination:

"(...) Rat-a-tat-tat!
Around them fires, and fires, and fires...
Rifle straps on shoulders hang...

Hold to the revolutionary pace!
The tireless enemy never sleeps!

Comrade, hold on to your gun, be brave!
Let's put a bullet into Holy Russia –" [Blok, 1918].

Vladimir Mayakovsky's poem *Our March* – another one:

"Is there a gold more heavenly than ours?
Can the wasp of a bullet sting us?
Our songs are our weapons;
Ringing voices – our gold. (...)" [Mayakovsky, 1918].

However, although the fear of silence seems universal and transnational, it is, in fact, historically and culturally variable. In his book *Language and Silence. Essays on Language, Literature and the Inhuman*, George Steiner writes that this fear was brought by a Christian sense of the world – at a certain point in history, Western tradition placed primacy of the word: "The primacy of the word, of that which can be spoken and communicated in discourse, is characteristic of the Greek and Judaic

genius and carried over into Christianity. The classic and the Christian sense of the world strive to order reality within the governance of language. (...) The code of Justinian, the Summa of Aquinas, the world chronicles and compendia of medieval literature, the Divina Commedia, are attempts at total containment. They bear solemn witness to the belief that *all truth and realness – with the exception of a small, queer margin at the very top – can be housed inside the walls of language*” [Steiner, 1986, p. 13–14, emphasis ours]. Roughly from 17th century, “the sphere of language encompassed nearly the whole of experience and reality” [p. 24]. From futurism in cultural terms, and October Revolution and First World War in historical terms, language “comprises a narrower domain”: “It no longer articulates, or is relevant to, all major modes of action, thought, and sensibility. Large areas of meaning and praxis now belong to such non-verbal languages as mathematics, symbolic logic, and formulas of chemical or electronic relation. Other areas belong to the sub-languages or anti-languages of non-objective art and musique concrete. The world of words has shrunk. One cannot talk of transfinite numbers except mathematically; one should not, suggests Wittgenstein, talk of ethics or aesthetics within the presently available categories of discourse. And it is, I think, exceedingly difficult to speak meaningfully of a Jackson Pollock painting or a composition by Stockhausen. The circle has narrowed tremendously, for was there anything under heaven, be it science, metaphysics, art, or music, of which a Shakespeare, a Donne, and a Milton could not speak naturally, to which their words did not have natural access?” [p. 24–25]. The question is complicated by another factor: Steiner here refers not only to the “non-art” forms, mentioned previously in the context of Hassan’s writings, but also to the inexpressibility, unrepresentability of the deepest emotional experiences, when silence serves as exclusive, universal and perhaps only possible ethically righteous answer to the last century’s historical traumas. It is worth noticing a kind of inverse proportionality between historical events and artistic articulation of personal experiences of those events, which corresponds to Steiner’s claim that, indeed, not all realness can be housed inside the walls of language [p. 14]. To that end, it is interesting to repeat Picard’s observation that “roughly since the French Revolution man has taken note only of the loud facts of history. He has overlooked the things of silence which are just as important” [Picard, 1948, p. 73]. The inverse proportionality is related to the fact that alongside the loudness of historical events, artists were “silencing” art works, they were reducing them to emptiness. Silence as art device occupies a key position in modern art: “Modernist arts have engaged silence to an unprecedented degree. Silence, of course, has been a long-standing site of artistic, philosophical, and spiritual rumination, but it was not until the 20th century that it assumed such an extensive presence in artistic creation. As for music, silence forms a large part of the sound worlds explored by modernist composers. To be sure, silence appears prominently in works from previous periods, as in the engulfing pauses of Beethoven and Bellini, for example, but it was never mined so deeply or used to such diverse effects prior to the last century. As Salvatore Sciarrino, a master calligrapher of quiet, has



remarked: ‘Sound has an intimate relationship with silence, the consciousness of that connection is new’” [Metzer, 2006, p. 334]. Reduction to silence advert our attention to Hölderlin and Rimbaud – Steiner emphasizes that these two poets were “principal masters of the modern spirit” [Steiner, 1986, p. 47]. Their silences serve as “active metaphors of the modern literary condition” [p. 47], whereas reevaluation of silence is “the most original, characteristic act of the modern spirit” [p. 48].

To conclude: symbolical meaning of silence is situated at the crossroad of theme of death and human mortality and culture of modernity. Both is symptomatic for Pasternak’s prose and poetry: he was one of the leading authors of Russian literary modernity, whereas death, dying and dead occupied his lifelong attention and is mentioned so frequently in his writings that it could be argued that he observed the world from the perspective of death. Moreover, death elicits his artistic creativity and this preoccupation heavily influenced his writing. It also runs throughout *Doctor Zhivago*. In famous passage Yuri (whose surname, suitably, means “alive”) contemplates reciprocal reinforcement between art and mortality: “In answer to the desolation brought by death to the people slowly pacing after him, he was drawn, as irresistibly as water funneling downward, to dream, to think, to work out new forms, to create beauty. More vividly than ever before he realized that art has two constant, two unending concerns: it always meditates on death and thus always creates life” [Pasternak, 1958, p. 145]².

3. *Doctor Zhivago* is undoubtedly one of the most analyzed novels in world literature. At the same time, it remained one of the most puzzled literary works [Bykov, 2010, p. 720], mostly because it continuously extends the horizon of expectations beyond easily recognizable literary conventions. From unstable narrator’s position (Zhivago is sometimes author’s *alter ego*, sometimes he is the object of representation³), the inconclusiveness of the epic plot, to Yuri Zhivago’s poems – the novel didn’t correspond to existing genres: realistic or postrealistic genre conventions,

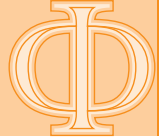
² Another, and final thing that I want to emphasize before moving on to the analysis of Pasternak’s acclaimed novel is that there is no such thing as pure, “raw,” or absolute silence. This is something John Cage wrote about in his book *Silence* (originally published in 1939, and often reprinted since): „THERE IS NO SUCH THINGS AS SILENCE. GET THEE TO AN ANECHOIC CHAMBER AND HEAR THERE THY NERVOUS SYSTEM IN OPERATION AND HEAR THERE THY BLOOD IN CIRCUALTION“ [Cage, 1969, p. 51; emphasis in original]. When we talk about silence we are not talking about absence (there is no such thing as pure silence as there is no such thing as empty space, Sontag 1967: IV) – we are talking about eloquence (no matter how fragile it is or might become), about something that through absence speak about presence. Max Picard, for example, writes that “Silence contains everything in itself. It is not waiting for anything, it is always wholly present in itself and it completely fills out the space in which it appears” [Picard, 1948, p. 1]. He further elaborates that “When language ceases, silence begins. But it does not begin *because* language ceases. The absence of language simply makes the presence of Silence more apparent” [p. ix]. Despite word has supremacy over silence (it is not silence that makes us humans), silence is not the negative condition “that set sin when the positive is removed” [p. ix]. Moreover, „Language and silence belong together: language has knowledge of silence as silence has knowledge of language“ [p. x]. Similar argument is put forth in different other scholarly works: silence is the place where the language begins, and it can be a powerful voice of knowledge.

³ Croatian scholar Josip Užarević, for example, writes that in *Doctor Zhivago*, „the lyrical I in *The Poems of Yurii Zhivago* creates the paradoxical parity of literary character (Zhivago) and author (Pasternak)“. To that end, autobiographical element in *Doctor Zhivago* is assigned through „double fictionalization, i.e. through ‘novel’s character’ (Zhivago) and lyrical I that seemingly belongs to that character“ [Užarević, 2006, p. 190].

including the modern stream of consciousness technique [see Junggren, 1984, p. 228; Gasparov, 1989; Han, 2015, p. 274]. Boris Gasparov, for example, writes that “*Doctor Zhivago* heavily surpassed its predecessors in quantity and level of transgression in relation to the conventions of ‘appropriate tone’ of epic prose writing” [Gasparov, 1989, p. 316]. Fellow writers reacted in a corresponding manner. Varlam Shalamov wrote, for example, that for a long time he didn’t have an opportunity to read something genuinely Russian, close to the literary works by Tolstoy, Chekhov or Dostoevsky. Pasternak’s long-term friend, poet Anna Akhmatova, praised verses and genius landscapes (which are – as Akhmatova claims – more skillful than those by Turgenev or Tolstoy), but added that some parts are written so badly that they must have been created by Ol’ga Ivinskaia, Pasternak’s wife at the time. Vladimir Nabokov saw *Doctor Zhivago* “a sorry thing, clumsy, trite and melodramatic, with stock situations, voluptuous lawyers, unbelievable girls, romantic robbers and trite coincidences” [see Hughes, 1989].

This paper proposes a novel analysis which engages in the ways history (Pasternak’s novel offers complex and rich description of social and historical events in Russia and Soviet Union during turbulent long first third of 20th century, with an epilogue during Second World War and its aftermath) is translated in literary discourse through particular management of antithesis of sound (voice, noise) and silence (speaking silently, “in low voice,” whispering). Considering previously mentioned different cultural meanings of silence (historical/anthropological, aesthetical, political/social), the paper attempts to examine silence as one of the key structural elements of the novel, which enables us to connect the novel more firmly to (postwar) literary modernity.

Two episodes, both taking place closer to the end of the novel, are of key importance in the analysis. In the famous episode, describing the meeting of Zhivago and Pasha Strelnikov, the latter (the most persistent revolutionary character in Pasternak’s novel) speaks incoherently, “jumping from confession to confession” [Pasternak, 1958, p. 729]. Pasha “had some personal reason for talking ceaselessly” [p. 728], he was “doing everything possible to keep the conversation going, in order to avoid being alone” [p. 727–728]. Yuri Zhivago, relatively silent during passionate Strelnikov’s monologue, comments that his behavior “was the disease, the revolutionary madness of the age,” proving “that at heart everyone was different from his outward appearance and his words. No one had a clear conscience. Everyone could justifiably feel that he was guilty, that he was a secret criminal, an undetected impostor” [p. 729]. The episode ends with a description of Zhivago’s night: he slept well, with several short, kaleidoscopic dreams of his childhood – which seemed so “detailed and logical that he took them for reality” [p. 739]. Especially one dream intrigued him: of his mother’s watercolor suddenly dropping from the wall, which left him aroused by a sound of breaking glass. In the morning he, however, realizes that the sound he heard in his dream he mistaken for mother’s watercolor dropping was, in fact, a sound of Strelnikov shooting himself: “The snow was a red lump under his left temple where he had bled. Drops of



sputing blood what had mixed with the snow formed red beads that looked like rowanberries” [p. 741]. Silence, as this episode testifies, is not mythologized as something foreign, evil, or unnatural; quite opposite seems to be the case: sound corresponds death, it serves as the foundation of human mortality and it signifies death.

Another for this analysis important narrative episode also ends with death, or at least with its presumption and declaration. After Yuri arrived to Moscow at the beginning of NEP, he, “dressed in a grey sheepskin hat, puttees, and a worn-out army overcoat stripped of all its buttons like a convict’s uniform” [p. 742], meets Marina, whose “voice was her protection, her guardian angel” [p. 764] because “no one could wish to hurt or distress a woman with such a voice” [p. 764]. During unhurried, lazy summer conversations between him and childhood friends Gordon and Dudorov, Yuri – the only one of the three who had an adequate supply of words to carry on a conversation “naturally and intelligently” [p. 767] – leaves the conversation because “it’s hot and stuffy” and he needed “to get some air” [p. 770], pronouncing the following: “Microscopic forms of cardiac hemorrhages have become very frequent in recent years. (...) It’s a typical modern disease. I think its causes are of a moral order. The great majority of us are required to live a life of constant, systematic duplicity. Your health is bound to be affected if, day after day, you say the opposite of what you feel, if you grovel before what you dislike and rejoice at what brings you nothing but misfortune. Our nervous system isn’t just a fiction, it’s a part of our physical body, and our soul exists in space and is inside us, like the teeth in our mouth. It can’t be forever violated with impunity” [p. 771].

Gordon, his loyal friend from childhood, answers that he “got unused to simple human words, they don’t reach you any more” [p. 771]. Yuri abandons Marina and their daughters, leaving behind, in fact, everything but his poetry. Soon after, he passes away.

It is important to emphasize that both deaths – of Yuri Zhivago and Pasha Antipov Strelnikov (in anthropological terms, death is the state of final and eternal silence) – are preceded by a particular dreamlike sound, or the word (in contrast to what implies the example of the chamber mentioned at the beginning of this analysis, where silence was associated with death and radical disorientation). In both quoted examples the act of listening of other people words brings protagonist to conclude that the words are, regardless of their content, empty sounds (not only that silence in both examples is “fuller of meanings” than words – these two examples showcase that language becomes emaciated if it loses its connection with silence, Picard, 1948, p. ix). On the other side, the voice is utilized to express illness of time, of a whole revolutionary and postrevolutionary Soviet generation. In those constellations, silence reverberates healthiness, fullness, and true content. Such a semantic series suggests that Pasternak’s novel reverts stereotypical social, cultural, and literary script: silence, rather than sound, represents a positive pole of paired opposition.

Complexity of the problematic field is especially intriguing because novel’s creator, Boris Pasternak, and novel’s main character, Yuri Zhivago, share similar increased sensitivity to sounds, voices, and auditory stimuli in general. In that context it should be mentioned that auditory element is often central component in charac-

terization of novel's protagonists. For example, when Yuri hears his son crying for the first time, he concludes: "Yuri Andreievich had already decided that his child was to be called Alexander in honor of his father-in-law. For some reason he imagined that the voice he had singled out was that of his son; perhaps it was because this particular cry had its own character and seemed to foreshadow the future personality and destiny of a particular human being; it had its own soundcoloring, which included the child's name, Alexander, so Yuri Andreievich imagined. He was not mistaken. It turned out later that this had in fact been Sashenka's voice. It was the first thing he had known about his son" [Pasternak, 1958, p. 272–273]. The novel often offers detailed descriptions of other characters through speech manners, way of talking and communication with other characters in general (see, for example, descriptions of speech styles by Gordon and Dudorov, p. 278–279, and Alexander Alexandrovich, p. 284–285), and this gives an in-depth idea of their personalities to the reader. Lara's character reinforces this literary device in a more subtle way. As I have mentioned earlier, Marina's distinctive feature is her voice: in the context of pivotal space credited to audible elements in Zhivago's perception and understanding of the world, one gets an impression that he couldn't – after cosmic, unconditional but also unattainable relationship with Lara – have established an irrevocable relationship with anybody else except her, *exclusively because of her unique voice*. Lara, on the other side, is associated with whiteness (for example, her "strong white arms," p. 599) in both direct and figurative meaning of a word. But it often slips under the readers' radar that Yuri became fully aware of his feelings of love to Lara, and of his readiness to follow the feeling, after he recognized that the mystical woman's voice he heard in his muddled dream, the voice "sounding in the air," "deep, soft, husky" [p. 451], actually belongs to Lara, then a librarian in Varykino: "She was sitting with her back to him, speaking in a low voice with the sneezing librarian, who stood leaning over her. (...) His first impulse was to get up and speak to her. But a shyness and lack of simplicity, entirely alien to his nature, had, in the past, crept into his relationship with her and now held him back. He decided not to disturb her and not to interrupt his work. To keep away from the temptation of looking at her he turned his chair sideways, so that its back was almost against his table; he tried to concentrate on his books, holding one in his hand and another on his knees. But his thoughts had wandered far from his studies. Suddenly he realized that the voice he had once heard in a dream on a winter night in Varykino had been Antipova's. The discovery dumfounded him, and startling his neighbors he jerked his chair back to be able to see Antipova. He began to look at her. (...) His mind stopped darting from subject to subject. He could not help smiling; Antipova's presence affected him the same way as it had affected the nervous librarian" [p. 465–466]. It is worth remembering that he was so bothered with the question of whom does the voice belong to that he even tried to detach himself from Tonia in a symbolical gesture: "I thought it might be Tonia's, and that I had become so used to her that I no longer heard the tone of her voice. I tried to forget that she was my wife and to become sufficiently detached



to find out” [p. 452]. While Yuri usually gets tired from conversations with other novel’s protagonists, and therefore he often hides behind the silence (he had spent a term of his four-year course in the dissecting room, surrounded by bones, and quietly dissecting corpses, trying, perhaps, to work through his own childhood trauma of having to bury his mother in an early age, p. 106), he enjoys “subdued” [p. 630] conversations with Lara. Not only that: the very fact that they were spoken in low voice made them “as full of meaning as the dialogues of Plato” [p. 630]. Because – and that is how the meanings are produced in Pasternak’s novel from the point of view of the antithesis of sound and silence – loud revolutionary times render sound and voice obsolete, and only silent words can be genuinely significant, meaningful and far-reaching. In that analytical framework, Lara is not only the metaphor of Russia that was “his incomparable mother; famed far and wide, martyred, stubborn, extravagant, crazy, irresponsible, adored, Russia with her eternally splendid, and disastrous, and unpredictable adventures” [p. 624]; of Russia’s tradition and cultural memory that were lost in revolutionary blizzard. She is also life’s (i. e. *Zhivago*’s) and existence’s “representative, (...) expression, in her the inarticulate principle of existence became sensitive and capable of speech” [p. 624]. After all, almost at the beginning of a novel she rediscovers to the reader the purpose of her life: “She was here on earth to grasp the meaning of its wild enchantment and to call each thing by its right name, or, if this were not within her power, to give birth out of love for life to successors who would do it in her place” [p. 123]. To that end, let us not forget that the story about Lara’s post-Yuriatin life was told to Dudorov and Gordon by the local laundress Tania, Lara’s and Yuri’s daughter he never knew he had.

It is important to foreground that the antithesis of sound and silence cannot be analyzed outside tense relationship between the literary work, its aesthetic values and claims, and the historical context of revolution, war and violence. Interrelatedness and mutual constitutiveness of artistic and historical claims of Pasternak’s novel is also implied by other examples in the novel – seemingly relaxed chatting is often an expression of inability of an individual to process witnessed historical violence. For example, when Nikolai Nikolaevich, Tonia’s father, bursts into Yuri’s room with information about a battle in the street between the cadets that support the Provisional Government and the garnison soldiers who support the Bolsheviks, he – despite his intention to bring Yuri to the street to witness the grand history in the making with his own eyes – remains immovable because of his endless and compulsive talking: “Nikolai Nikolaievich burst into the room as impetuously as the wind coming through the open window. ‘They’re fighting in the street,’ he reported. ‘(...) Hurry up, Yura! Put your coat on, let’s go. You’ve got to see it. This is history. This happens once in a lifetime.’ But he stayed talking for a couple of hours” [p. 301].

The novel’s epilogue offers resolution of story’s action through further emphasis of paired silence / sound opposition. Namely, as tragic and self-contradictory it seemingly appears, the Second World War brings salvation because “its real horrors, its real dangers, its menace of real death were a blessing compared with the inhuman reign of

the lie, and they brought relief because they broke the spell of the dead letter” [p. 809]. Strelnikov and Zhivago are dead; destinies of female protagonists, Tonia and Lara, remain relatively unknown. Former loud blabbers (and former Gulag’s prisoners), Misha Gordon and Nika Dudorov⁴, strolling under the trees in silence, at the very height of the Second World War, in 1943, speak in low voice after hearing Tania’s story. Gordon concludes that “It has often happened in history that a lofty ideal has degenerated into crude materialism. Thus Greece gave way to Rome, and the Russian Enlightenment has become the Russian Revolution. There is a great difference between the two periods. Blok says somewhere: ‘We, the children of Russia’s terrible years.’ Blok meant this in a metaphorical, figurative sense. The children were not children, but the sons, the heirs, the intelligentsia, and the terrors were not terrible but sent from above, apocalyptic; that’s quite different. Now the metaphorical has become literal, children are children and the terrors are terrible, there you have the difference” [p. 826].

4. How this particular reading of Pasternak’s novel from the perspective of sound and silence contributes to the existing readings of *Doctor Zhivago*?

Firstly, the uses of silence in *Doctor Zhivago* show that silence can be, indeed, as emphasized by Susan Sontag, “highly social gesture.” Sontag writes that silence is “a form of speech (...) and an element in a dialogue” [Sontag, 1967, p. IV] that becomes particularly relevant under particular historical and cultural circumstances, when the world “refuses” to be explained through language. In the times of “the glittering phrase, first the Tsarist, then the revolutionary” [Pasternak, 1958, p. 645], a word, written or said, could literally kill: by writing *Doctor Zhivago* in post-Second World War times, Pasternak daily committed acts of suicide. To that end, Sontag’s explanation of political uses of silence offers a valuable insight: Pasternak’s aesthetic gesture is simultaneously political because, on one side, language is “a privileged metaphor for expressing the mediated character of art-making and the art-work” [Sontag, 1967, p. VIII], on the other, however, “language is the most impure, the most contaminated, the most exhausted of all the materials out of which

⁴ It should be mentioned that they are Zhivago's childhood friends, which is important because Pasternak’s novel foregrounds the idea that wars and revolutions are continuation (with real weapons instead of wooded ones) of childhood war games. In first drafts, the novel was even entitled *Boys and Girls* (*Malchiki i devochki*). Final version begins with description of a funeral of Yurii’s mother and his childhood, in which prominent place in cultivating boyhood belonged to the war games. The theme of revolution is narratively introduced for the first time through the eyes of young Pavel Antipov (Lara attributes him with his childhood nickname Pasha or Patulia, which brings back a memory of Pavel Korchagin, the main character of socialist realist famous Ostrovsky’s novel *How the Steel Was Tempered*), who, as a little boy, witness revolutionary events. It is worth noting that auditory element occupies a prominent role in its description: “The snow fell thicker and thicker. When the dragoons charged, the marchers at the rear first knew nothing of it. A swelling noise rolled back to them as of great crowds shouting ‘Hurrah,’ and individual screams of ‘Help!’ and ‘Murder’ were lost in the uproar. Almost at the same moment, and borne, as it were, on this wave of sound along the narrow corridor that formed as the crowd divided, the heads and manes of horses, and their saber-swinging riders, rode by swiftly and silently. Half a platoon galloped through, turned, re-formed, and cut into the tail of the procession. The massacre began” [p. 61-62]. Established link between boyhood, i.e. immature masculinity, and violent historical events, is relevant for understanding complex Zhivago’s viewpoint on war and revolution, but also in relation to the constructive role attributed to silence in the semantic series sound – revolution / war – immature masculinity. In narrower context of Pasternak’s poetic biography, prominent role of silence could be read as Pasternak’s commentary on his creative biography, where silence symbolizes his creative self-renewal. In a letter to Ol’ga Freidenberg, he writes that he “finally begun to write a large prose novel. That is my first major piece of art” [Han, 2015, p. 273; see also Gasparov, 1989, p. 317].



art is made” [p. VIII]. Sontag’s emphasis on dual character of language – its abstractness and its “falseness” in history, where language is “experienced not merely as something shared but something corrupted, weighed down by historical accumulation” [p. VIII], is especially relevant in the context of abovementioned Pasternak’s profound sense of language. The sense of the work of art as entrapped, diminished when it is given articulate form [Steiner, 1986, p. 49] connects Pasternak to other modernist writers for whom the word, as Steiner noted, “may be losing something of its humane genius” [p. 49]. In that vein, silence in Pasternak’s novel should be understood as “a metaphor for a cleansed, noninterfering vision,” i.e. “to a speech beyond silence,” “certifying the absence of renunciation of thought” [Sontag, 1967, p. XIII].

Apart from this, predominantly pragmatic use of silence, it is important to emphasize that especially in revolutionary times, the “uselessness” of silence becomes more apparent (because it simply *is*, it cannot do or make anything in the cacophony of revolutionary sounds). October Revolution was culturally remembered and stored as one of the loudest moments in Russian history. In that respect, one could argue that the uselessness of silence (in historical terms) in Pasternak’s novel is somewhat close to “holy uselessness” (the phrase is borrowed from Picard, 1948, p. 3) because Zhivago’s silence is in fact the key place in which his profound and finite metamorphosis into poet takes place: as if the novel suggests that the uselessness in historical sense is prerequisite for artistic ability to create.

Here it is worth remembering that *Doctor Zhivago* was refused publication in the Soviet Union not only because of its seemingly negative stance on the October Revolution, but also because Pasternak (alias Zhivago in the novel) was reluctant to talk politics, and to analyze the reasons behind historical events. In the novel, for example, New Economic Politics is described with only one short sentence: it was „the most ambiguous and hypocritical of all Soviet periods” [Pasternak, 1958, p. 742]. All protagonists of his novel are highly inflicted by historical events (wars and revolutions shape all spheres of their lives), they eyewitness the history, but they nevertheless behave as if they are not interested at all in addressing the reasons (economic, political, social, cultural) which brought to the grand political changes in a first place. The common reader, used to detailed treatment of historical events (such as in Tolstoy’s *War and Peace*)⁵, was not only intrigued, but also irritated by Pasternak’s historiographical negligence.

The conclusion that this analysis enables is that the silence was the place where seemingly neglected historical and aesthetic claims of the novel meet – silence is the place where historical becomes articulated from the perspective of an individual, where the boundaries between fiction and historical reality are not as firm as they initially seem, where Revolution becomes “entrapped” in art, and the process of re-evaluating its historical significance begins. Silence is a privileged place where history unfolds (by watching silent moments, we see history unfolding itself), and it is at the same time

⁵ This problematic axis is especially intriguing if we remember that Tolstoy had tremendous influence on Pasternak’s writings. According to Marc Slonim’s reading of *Doctor Zhivago* in the *New York Times Book Review*, Tolstoy played enormous role in “the ethical formation of Pasternak, particularly in his developing attitude toward history and nature” (*Boris Pasternak*).

the place of Pasternak's poignant and profound commentary of historical events. They are mutually constitutive: revolution, and (post)revolutionary Russia, and silence is its signifier. In that analytical framework Dmitry Bykov's description of a novel as a "symbolist novel, written after symbolism" [Bykov, 2010, p. 721] proves its relevance. Pasternak's exclusion of concrete historical data and their analysis was conscious ethical and aesthetic act. Description of Zhivago's passing through the city, after the revolutionary storm changed the landscape forever, vividly speaks about absolute social, cultural and political void it left – in that landscape silence is, indeed, authentic form of expression: "At about 10 P.M. one evening in late October (Old Style) Yurii Andreievich went without any particular necessity to call on one of his colleagues. The streets he passed were deserted. (...) He had turned down so many side streets that he had almost lost count of them when the snow thickened and the wind turned into a blizzard, the kind of blizzard that whistles in a field covering it with a blanket of snow, but which in town tosses about as if it had lost its way. There was something in common between the disturbances in the moral and in the physical world, near and far on the ground and in the air. Here and there resounded the last salvos of islands of resistance. Bubbles of dying fires rose and broke on the horizon" [Pasternak, 1958, p. 304–305].

Doctor Zhivago foregrounds the idea that what follows after revolutions and wars is a wasteland, that gains voice and enters into language (and in doing so – remains authentic, and not false and contaminated) solely and exclusively through silence. In those circumstances perhaps silence is, indeed, endemic to authenticity⁶.

In Pasternak's novel silence is, similarly as in Rimbaud's poetry, the place of its unfolding and its sovereign logics. Moreover, since the novel begins and ends in silence in very concrete way, it could even be claimed that his novel originates in that void – novel posits silence as ground of its being. Let us remember that the novel opens during a funeral liturgy, *panikhida*, for Yuri's mother, when – despite expectations – he again choses silence:

The coffin was closed, nailed, and lowered into the ground. Clods of earth rained on the lid as the grave was hurriedly filled by four spades. A little mound formed. A ten-year-old boy climbed on it. Only the state of stupor and insensibility which is gradually induced by all big funerals could have created the impression that he intended to speak over his mother's grave. (...) His snub-nosed face became contorted and he stretched out his neck. If a wolf cub had done this, everyone would have thought that it was about to howl [p. 8–9].

The novel has closed, circular structure: it ends in the same place (death / silence) it began (death / silence). The silence therefore symbolizes emptiness of history, but plentitude of creativity. To that end, the novel interestingly reverberates Kierkegaard's request:

⁶ Pasternak's quest for authenticity was one of the imperatives of his prose and poetry writings. As Andrey Sinyavsky pointed out, "authenticity – the truth of image – is for Pasternak the highest criterion of art. In his views on literature and his practice as a poet he is filled with the concern 'not to distort the voice of life that speaks in us'" [Sinyavsky, 1969, p. 171]. The very fact that authentic voice in *Doctor Zhivago* he identified with silence, makes this choice even more intriguing.



“The present state of the world and the whole of life is diseased. If I were a doctor and were asked for my advice, I would reply: Create silence! The Word of God cannot be heard in the noisy world of today. And even if it were blazoned forth with all the panoply of noise so that it could be heard in the midst of all the other noise, then it would no longer be the Word of God. Therefore create Silence” (S. Kierkegaard, cf. in Picard, 1948, p. 251). Pasternak’s *Zhivago* could be *the* doctor Kierkegaard was craving for – after all, the imaginary world of a novel not only grows from Yuri Zhivago’s silence, but it gives voice to a whole Thaw generation, so called “Zhivago’s children” [Zubok, 2009].

At the end, I would like to add that while word is finite (it is fixed and definitive), silence is infinite (it is limitless and endless, cosmic as Lara). Different scholars noticed centrifugal quality of Pasternak’s poetry (finally, he entered literary circles within literary group “The Centrifuge”). One of its distinctive features is the fact that centrifugal poetical imaginary creates the sense of openness towards (new) possible beginnings. This analysis enables us to conclude that – if a new beginning exists – than the silence cuts its way through.

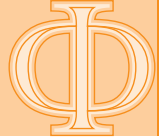
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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.25146/2587-7844-2019-8-4-29>

УДК 82.09

ЗВУКИ ТИШИНЫ В РОМАНЕ Б. ПАСТЕРНАКА «ДОКТОР ЖИВАГО»

Д.Л. Вукас (Загреб, Хорватия)

Аннотация

Влияние классической музыки и композиторов, таких как Скрябин, хорошо видно в синтаксисе и звучании поэтического языка Пастернака. Его «композиторское ухо» (ср. De Mallac, 1981), т.е. его глубокое чувство ритма, гармонии, звука и тишины, повлияло на литературный язык в его знаменитом романе «Доктор Живаго», который является одним из величайших романов о падении имперской России и о конце монархии в результате войны и революции. Настоящая статья является попыткой анализа некоторых аспектов взаимосвязи между искусством, насилием и революцией, т.е. между воображаемым миром революционной и послереволюционной (советской) России в «Докторе Живаго», и тем, как роман изображает эти события через звуки толпы и города в смятении, но еще более важно – через интенсивные, длинные периоды молчания. Исходя из того что звуки и тишина не только физические состояния, но и эстетические и культурные приемы, целью этой работы является попытка ответить на следующие вопросы: в чем значение антитезы звука и тишины как метафоры «двойного» значения? Где молчание одновременно указывает на насилие, войну и революцию и содержит в себе энергию творения, креативный импульс? В статье анализируется символика молчания в романе Пастернака, особенно в отношении «парадоксальной материальности» [Miller, 2007] тишины, где это состояние полной бессловесности и неподвижности представляет одновременно пустоту и изобилие, невесомость и тяжесть. Глубокое использование Пастернаком молчания означает перенесение главных героев «Доктора Живаго» из мира насильственной революционной России в их собственные, частные, интимные миры самоанализа, или это скорее показатель их сопротивления общепринятому представлению революции как универсального политического и культурного проекта эмансипации и свободы для всех? Следует ли «риторику молчания» в этом романе рассматривать как состояние могущества и сознания (С. Сонтаг), т.е. как образ радикальной речи якобы молчаливых героев, а не как следствие их (буржуазной) беспечности и пассивности?

Ключевые слова: Борис Пастернак, творческая биография, Доктор Живаго, речь, тишина, молчание как метафора, модерн, история, война, революция.

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