The relationship between the individual and historical processes was one of Boris Pasternak’s persistent and central concerns, from his earliest lyrics, to his experiments with long-form poems and prose at mid-career, to his late masterwork, the novel Doktor Zhivago (Doctor Zhivago, 1957). Perhaps in a reflection of this concern, that drove him to more and more involved experiments with genre, Pasternak is, as has been many times remarked, one of the most striking examples of the rather sparse category of ‘renowned poet and renowned novelist’ (comparable, in this, to Thomas Hardy, who, however, progressed in the reverse direction, i.e., from novel to poetry). Undoubtedly, the problem of history was emphatically fixed among Pasternak’s concerns by history itself—in the form of the October Revolution, which the poet, like other members of the Russian avant-garde, experienced as twinned, radical ruptures in both the political life and the aesthetic order, taking place near the inception of his own creative biography. Persistently over the course of his career from 1917 onwards, in many and varied ways, Pasternak’s oeuvre poses the questions of what the lyric poet can say about history, and how to say it. Among his earliest, most complex and perhaps least critically understood attempts to answer this question is the 1920–1923 poetic cycle “Bolezn’” (“Illness”). In particular, the third poem of this cycle, “Mozhet stat'sia tak, mozhet inache” (“It can happen like that, or otherwise”), is among Pasternak’s most dense and enigmatic lyric poems. To our minds, it also contains the central keys to reading the entire cycle “Bolezn’,” as well as to Pasternak’s earliest poetic endeavours.

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ors to make lyric sense of historical experience. The present article is an attempt to read this poem and the cycle that contains it through the counterintuitive potential of the lyric mode, as an instrument for historical thought.

Jonathan Culler has recently proposed that modern theories of lyric generally miss what is most important about it, in part as a result of the tendency to theorize the lyric mode through other genres, such as drama or the novel. Fixated on the Aristotelian conception of mimesis, modern literary theory has described the lyric as a mode of representation of subjective experience or of the speech of a lyric persona, in something akin to a dramatic monologue. In prominent modern accounts, the lyric has been theorized in the negative—as deficient in comparison to other genres—most famously by Mikhail Bakhtin, who contrasted lyric “monologism” with the novel’s capacity for polyphony (Culler 1–3). However, as Culler explains, such an account “deflects attention from what is most singular, most mind-blowing even” about the lyric. Culler calls us to think the lyric otherwise:

Possibilities for an alternative model that treats lyric as fundamentally nonmimetic, nonfictional, a distinctive linguistic event, can be drawn from classical conceptions of lyric as encomiastic or epideictic discourse—discourse of praise or of blame, articulating values, not a species of fiction. Lyric, I conclude, involves a tension between ritualistic and fictional elements. (7)

Culler calls us to read the lyric not as a description of a character in a novel or a play, but as a means for the ritualistic invocation of shared worlds of meaning. In what follows, we will investigate “Mozhet stat’sia tak, mozhet inache” as just such an articulation of the world of Russia in the years of the revolution—as a ritual or an incantation, calling a new world into being out of the remains of the old one. We use the term “ritual” in its anthropological sense—in particular as it relates to rites of passage, as they have been described in classic anthropological literature. As Victor Turner theorized decades ago, by invoking traditional formula and patterns of progression, rites of passage articulate shared orders of meaning at moments of transformation in which the inchoate chaos of time, cosmos and human identity come into view in awe-inspiring or terrifying manner (“Betwixt and Between”). Pasternak’s poem, in an era of revolutionary rupture in human experience, accomplished an analogous feat.

Resistance to a “novelistic” conception of the lyric as a representation of a fictional character in a larger universe is crucial to comprehension of Pasternak’s work on history in this poem, and, we propose, in his oeuvre. History, since the Renaissance at least, is commonly conceived in terms of narrative, and since the early nineteenth century historiographic and novelistic narratives have been locked in a fertile exchange. What, then, might a “lyric history” look like and how might it configure time in distinction from narrative history—from accounts of history as a kind of novel? Susan Buck-Morss has written eloquently of the distinctions between, on the one hand, the intuition
of temporality relevant to the avant-garde, and on the other, that which was characteristic of the Russian political-revolutionary vanguard, which eventually dominated not only the political structures of the U.S.S.R., but its cultural life as well. As she explains:

The “time” of the cultural avant-garde is not the same as that of the vanguard party. These artists’ practices interrupted the continuity of perception and estranged the familiar, severing historical tradition through the force of their fantasy. [...] The effect was to rupture the continuity of time, opening it up to new cognitive and sensory experiences. In contrast, the Party submitted to a historical cosmology that provided no such freedom of movement. Bolshevism’s claim to know the course of history in its totality presumed a “science” of the future [...]. Constrained by the historical goal, revolutionary culture became sedate, conserving a past that appeared to lead meaningfully into the present, eschewing new primitivisms that blurred the line of progress, appealing to the masses by means of conventional art forms in order to mobilize them for movement “forward” in time. (49)

The schematism of her explanation notwithstanding, Buck-Morss’s distinction between avant-garde temporalities, characterized by a conception of revolution as an interruption in time in which a multiplicity of pasts and possible futures intersect in an uncontrollable manner, and vanguard temporality, governed by concrete programs that propel history forward from known pasts to definite futures, is an apt heuristic tool for investigation of Pasternak’s avant-garde and lyric vision of history that, as the first line of the poem under investigation announces, “can happen like that, or otherwise.”

It is not by accident, we propose, that the dominant literary genre of the avant-garde era in Russia was precisely the lyric poem, while the literary form that represents Soviet official culture in its most mature form is the novel (Clark). As Robert Bird has shown, from the moment of the revolution onward, avant-garde poets, including Pasternak, experienced a crisis of lyric form and began to experiment with long form narrative poetry as a means of grappling with the urgent topics of history and public life (“Envoicing History”). It was this tendency that led, eventually, to the triumph of the Socialist Realist novel. We argue, however, that the revolutionary lyric came first, and that it treats history in a fundamentally different manner than do narrative forms. Of course, as theorists from Bakhtin to Gary Saul Morson have shown, novels do have the capacity to model time in its openness to alternative futures and multiple conceptions of the past. Yet the phenomenology of the lyric differs fundamentally from that of all but the most experimental novels. In distinction from novelistic intuitions of temporality, the lyric mode is free of the imperative to master time, to “represent” it in a coherent, sequential pattern. Instead, the lyric enacts moments in time from within. In the hands of Pasternak, as we show below, lyric poetry served as an instrument to invoke the complex fabric of temporal linkages binding Russian culture together at a moment when the temporal sequence itself had been upended in what he envisioned in “Bolezn’” as a purga (“blizzard”) of revolutionary transformation.
Accounting for this multidirectional flux of interwoven temporal relationships requires the reader, as well, to encounter temporality as a non-linear and self-reflective phenomenon. For this reason, our discussion below takes the form of cycles or intersecting trajectories through Pasternak’s text.

* * * * *

“Mozhet stat'sia tak, mozhet inache” exists in three versions—one published in 1922 and dated by the poet to 1920, a second in an undated manuscript, and the third as it was published in 1923 in Pasternak’s third collection of poetry, Temy i variatsii (Themes and Variations; PSS 1: 178–79; E. Pasternak, Materialy 341). Below, we offer the text of the poem in that final version and our own translation, which is a modified version of a translation published in our previous work on this text (Platt, “Pasternak’s Poetics” 10–11).

Может статься так, может иначе,
Но в несчастный некий час
Духовенств душней, черней иночеств
Постигает безумье нас.

Стужа. Ночь в окне, как приличие,
Соблюдает холод льда.
В шубе, в креслах Дух и мурлычет—и
Все одно, одно всегда.

И чекан суха, и щека его,
И паркет, и тень кочерги
Отливают сном и раскаяньем
Сутки сплошь грешившей пурги.

Ночь тиха. Ясна и морозна ночь,
Как слепой щенок
—молоко,
Всею темью пихт неосознанной
Пьет сиянье звезд частокол.

Будто каплет с пихт. Будто теплятся.
Будто воском ночь запылала.
Ланой ели на ели сплетнет снег,
На дупле—силуэт дупла.

Будто эта тишь, будто эта высь,
Элегизм телеграфной волны—
Ожиданье, сменившее крик: “Отзовись!”
Или эхо другой тишины.

Будто нем он, взгляд этих игл и ветвей,
А другой, в высотах,—тугоух,
И сверканье пути на раскахатах—ответ
На взыванье чего-то ау.

Стужа. Ночь в окне, как приличие,
Соблюдает холод льда.
В шубе, в креслах Дух и мурлычет—и
Все одно, одно всегда.
Губы, губы! Он стиснул их до крови,
Он трясется, лицо обхватив.
Вихрь догадок родит в биографе
Этот мертвый, как мел, мотив. (ПСС 1: 178—79)

It can happen like that, or otherwise,
But in a certain unfortunate hour,
Stiffer than clergies, blacker than monasticisms
Madness grasps us.

Frost. In the window, night observes
As one would propriety, the cold of ice.
In a fur, in an armchair is the Spirit, and purring — and
It’s always the same, the same always.

And the stamp of a branch, and its cheek,
And the parquet, and the poker’s shadow
Overflow with the sleep and repentance
Of a blizzard that sinned for days straight.

The night is quiet. The night is clear and frozen.
Like a blind puppy drinks milk,
With all the unconscious gloom of fir trees,
The palisade drinks the shimmer of stars.

As if it dripped from the firs. As if they flickered.
As if the night were swollen with wax.
With the paw of spruce on spruce the snow is blinding,
On a hollow is the silhouette of a hollow.

As if this quiet, as if this height,
The elegism of the telegraph wave,
Were the wait, following the cry “sound out!”
Or the echo of some other silence.
As if it were mute — those needles’ and boughs’ glance
And the other, in the heights, were deaf,
And the road’s sparkle in the thunder were a reply
To someone’s call for response.

Frost. In the window, night observes
As one would propriety, the cold of ice.
In a fur, in an armchair is the Spirit, and purring — and
It’s always the same, the same always.

Lips, lips! He clenched them to bleeding,
And trembles, face in hands
A whirlwind of surmisings is born in the biographer
By this dead, like chalk, motif.1

This is an obscure poem — even when seen against the general complexity of the early Pasternak, and even in the context of the generally challenging poetics of the collection Темы и вариаций (Platt, “Pasternak’s Poetics”; Zholkovskii, “Poetika Pasternaka” 74, 78, 426). Here, Pasternak’s typically

1. All English translations are by Kevin Platt, unless otherwise noted.
complex poetic system has been taken to the brink of unintelligibility by a concerted attempt to communicate the sensations of one suffering from illness and nearly in the grip of delirium. According to Viacheslav Ivanov, “Mozhet stat'sia tak, mozhet inache” is a “mysterious, but at the same time openly autobiographical poem [...] possibly the most fully encoded [of Pasternak’s lyrics] [...] It ends with a straightforward announcement of its unconcealed, but at the same time mysterious autobiographical nature” (Ivanov 298–301). As we show below, the crux of its complexity derives precisely from its intertwined evocation of multiple strands of temporal experience, from the biographical, to the political-historical, to the mythic—at a moment of radical transformation in all of them. In our reading, we rely on the rather sparse available biographical data concerning the poet during 1918 and 1919 and on the circumstances of the time and place in which it was written. We adduce keys to comprehension from other texts by Pasternak—most importantly from the other poems in the cycle “Bolezn’.” Finally, we examine allusions in the text to a tradition of literary motifs and images in the works of Charles Dickens, Mikhail Lermontov, Aleksandr Blok and Vladimir Maiakovskii. Our account will attempt to disentangle these strands of historical, intertextual and biographical reference. Nevertheless, let us also admit at the outset that this task will in the end prove impossible: for the base significance of this poem is to articulate the interdependence and interference of these many layers of experience in the revolutionary moment in Russia, a moment in which contradictory intuitions of time and historical transformation converged to “open up” to an unmanageable proliferation of possibilities, rather than closing down towards a known path through time.

What may be said to be relatively clear in the poem? The setting is a room where a sick person lies, in which a number of overlapping visions appear—visions apparently linked to the space of the room itself—the parket (“parquet”) ten’ kochergi (“poker’s shadow”)—but also via the window to the space beyond the window—stuzha (“frost”), noch’ (“night”), purga (“blizzard”). In the course of the poem, traces of the winter landscape appear within the room—the objects in the room “Otlivaiut snom i raskaian’em / Sutki splosh’ greshivshei purgi” (“Overflow with the sleep and repentance / Of a blizzard that sinned for days straight”)—while the world of the room affects the external space—“budto voskom noch’ zaplyla” (“as if the night were swollen with wax”)—and the trees apparently come to reflect the state of the sick, feverish patient himself—“budto kaplet s pikht...” (“as if it dripped from the firs”). This presents an extraordinary realization of the typical phenomenon in Pasternak’s lyrics of all-encompassing “contact” between normally separate realms of experience, which has been described by Alexandr Zholkovskii (Zholkovskii, “The Window”; Zholkovskii, “Poetika Pasternaka” 34–39). In the perceptions of the sick person, the world presents itself in a transformed state of universal interpenetration and interrelationship.
Now let us enumerate as well some of the most enigmatic elements of the poem, which far outnumber and outweigh its more accessible content. We may begin with the description of “fir trees” (pikhty) and “spruce” (eli). The first of these, a tree native to the Urals and Siberia, suggests a landscape distant from that of Moscow, although it could also evoke the ornamental plantings of state parks such as the Aleksandrovskii sad, next to the walls of the Kremlin, which is mentioned in other parts of the cycle, as we will discuss in greater detail below. The greatest challenge for comprehension is presented by the poem’s mysterious “metaphysical” action: the purring Dukh (“Spirit”) v shube (“in a fur”) and v kreslakh (“in an armchair”), the series of interlocked images of communication and echoing in the central stanzas of the poem linking together the duplo (“hollow”) with a “silhouette of a hollow” and unnamed and improbable speakers who are nem (“mute”) and tugoukh (“deaf”). This action appears to culminate in the final stanza, when the Dukh or perhaps the sick person himself “triasetsia, litso obkhvativ” (“trembles, face in hands”) in ecstasy, fear or shock, with the pronouncement that that a “mertvyi, kak mel, motiv” (“dead motif, white like chalk”) has given rise to a “vikhr’ dogadok” (“whirlwind of surmisings”) in the biograf (“biographer”) who appears in the last line.

“Biographer” reaches forward in Pasternak’s creative career to another “lyric” character whose epithet is linked to life itself, Iurii Zhivago (“bio” is the Greek root, while “zhiv” is the Slavic root for life). Whether this “biographer” is, as Ivanov suggests, a reference to Pasternak himself, or to us, his readers, is impossible to determine. Regardless of this identification, this last line suggests that an appropriate starting point for comprehension will be to follow the methods of the “biographer” in order to attempt to come to grips with the internal logic of the enigmatic images of this poem. The path of our reading will follow that of a “whirlwind of surmisings” that leads in circular, cyclic fashion through multiple layers and forms of associations.

* * * * *

The author’s illness during the winter of 1918 in Moscow constitutes the most immediate biographical circumstances of the poem’s composition and of the metaphor of illness that structures the cycle as a whole. As Evgenii Pasternak, the poet’s son and biographer, has written:

With the onset of winter and severe cold, Pasternak became ill. This was the terrible influenza epidemic of 1918 that caused countless deaths across the world. Typically, the disease progressed to the point of lung infection. Pasternak, weakened by fatigue and malnutrition, was in critical condition. Firewood was in short supply and it was impossible even to heat sufficiently the room where he lay ill. (Biografiia 310)

In light of the above, sickness certainly links “Mozhet stat’sia tak, mozhet inache” to the concrete time and experience of Pasternak in Moscow in late 1918. Yet it is important to note that the cycle as a whole can hardly be con-
sidered completely or simply autobiographical in character. The fifth poem of the cycle is titled “Kreml’ v buran kontsa 1918 goda” (“The Kremlin in the blizzard of the end of 1918”), while the sixth is titled “Ianvar’ 1919 goda” (“January of 1919”). As the poet’s biographer explains, the poet had already recovered from his illness by the middle of December (Biografiia 310). In this non-synchronicity of biographical time and social or calendrical, Pasternak’s reworking of personal experience in conjunction with broader historical events and processes is already evident.

The poem is linked to biography in another dimension as well—in connection with the marriage of Elena Vinograd, the object of the poet’s passionate affections. The undated manuscript copy of the poem mentioned above was in fact a gift of the poet to Vinograd (E. Pasternak, Materialy 341). Pasternak refers to Vinograd’s marriage directly in the seventh poem of the cycle, “Mne v sumerki ty vse—pansionerkoiu” (“To me, in the twilight, you still seem a schoolgirl”), in a stanza that renders the intersection of the events of private life with those of political history evident via their metaphorical imbrications:

А ночь, а ночь! Да это ж ад, дом ужасов!
Проведай ты, тебя б сюда пригнало!
Она—твой шаг, твой брак, твое замужество
И тяжелей дознаний трибунала. (PSS 1: 181)

And the night, the night! It’s hell, a house of horrors!
Come find out; let them impel you to come!
The night is—your step, your wedding, your marriage
Is weightier than a tribunal’s investigations.

In a draft of this stanza, Vinograd’s marriage is compared with an even more concrete image of the violent circumstances of the historical moment in an alternate version of the final line, “I shum mashin v podvalakh tribunala” (“And the noise of cars in the tribunal’s basements”)—a reference to practices of the Cheka (the “Extraordinary Commission”—the historical predecessor of the NKVD and then KGB), which ran car engines during executions in order to drown out the sound of gunshots.

As the above suggests, the cycle “Bolezni” intermingles profoundly personal considerations, anxieties and reminiscences with references to social and political events and circumstances. Let us therefore turn, for a moment, to consider the cycle’s evocation of these larger contexts. They are most overtly referenced in the cycle’s treatment of the seat of political power, past and present, the Moscow Kremlin (from early 1918, the seat of the Soviet State). The Kremlin appears in the first poem of the cycle, “Bol’noi sledit. Shest’ dnei podriad” (“The sick man watches. For six days straight”), and in the fifth, “Kreml’ v buran kontsa 1918 goda,” mentioned above—in the first together with the Bell Tower of Ivan the Great and in the fifth with the image of the Kremlin towers. In 1918–1919 the Kremlin still retained traces of its bombardment with heavy artillery at the time of the Bolshevik coup at the end
of October and the start of November, 1917. This damage, it seems, forms the basis for its comparison in the first stanza of “Kreml’ v buran kontsa 1918 goda” with a deserted, snow-covered postal or railway station:

Как брошенный с пути снегам
Последней станцией в развалинах
Как полем в полночь, в свист и гам,
Бредущий через силу в валяных. (PSS 1: 179)

Like one thrown from the path to the snows
As a final station, in ruins,
Like one who, through a midnight field, in whistles and uproar,
Is dragging along with last strength in felt wrappings.

The Kremlin is subjected to attacks in the third stanza of the poem:

Как схваченный за обшлага
Хохочущей вьюгой нáрочный,
Ловящей кисти башлыка,
Здоровающею в наручнях. (PSS 1: 180)

As a courier, seized by the cuffs
By a chortling blizzard,
That grabs hold of his cloak’s tassels,
That greets him in shackles.

The blizzard surrounding the Kremlin constitutes a metaphor for revolt or revolution, in similar fashion to the imagery of Aleksandr Blok’s influential long poem of January, 1918 “Dvenadtsat’” (“The Twelve”), in which the raging snowstorm communicates the dynamism and destructive force of revolutionary events yet also the transcendent character of history, that leads towards sacral goals out of the dross of human passions and violence. With its images of a cloak and a lost traveller or courier, Pasternak’s lines evoke as well the opening chapters of Aleksandr Pushkin’s classic historical novel Kapitanskaia dochka (The Captain’s Daughter), in which Pugachev appears to the lost protagonist Grinyov in the midst of a blizzard—here too serving as a figure for revolt.

Yet in addition to the figure of revolt as a blizzard, bolstered by these literary references, “Kreml’ v buran kontsa 1918 goda” also compares the Kremlin with a ship that has broken loose from its anchor in its fourth and fifth stanzas:

А иногда!—А иногда,
Как пригнанный канатом нáкороть
Корабль, с гуденьем, прочь к грядам
Срывающийся чудом с якоря.

Последней ночью, несравним
Ни с чем, какой-то странный, пенный весь,
Он, Кремль, в оснастке стольных зим,
На нынешней срывает ненависть. (PSS 1: 180)
But at times! But at times,
Like a ship, bound by a short line,
Tearing free by a miracle from the anchor
Away to the sandbanks with a rumble
That last night, not comparable
To anything, somehow strange, all foamy,
The Kremlin, in the tackle of so many winters,
Unleashes its hatred on this one.

The comparison of Kremlin with a ship calls to mind yet another of Pasternak’s texts from the first half of the 1920s, the long poem “Vysokaia bolezn’” (“Lofty Malady”) of 1923–1928, in which the ship serves as a metaphor for the country as a whole or the state, engulfed in revolution:

Опять фрегат пошел на траверс
Опять, хлебнув большой волны,
Дитя предательства и каверз
Не узнает своей страны. (PSS 1: 258)

Once more, the frigate makes a traverse
Once more, drinking in a great wave,
The child of treason and intrigues
Does not recognize his country.

We should note, as well, that the title of this latter poem, “Vysokaia bolezn’,” refers to the revolution itself, in lyric refraction, and deploys the metaphor of blizzard to describe the revolution (Bird 66–68). All of which suggests, in sum, that the figure of illness in the cycle “Bolezn’” as a whole and in “Mozhet stat’sia tak, mozhet inache” in particular, as well as the interlinked metaphors of blizzard, journey and ship, refer not simply to physical illness or to the biography of the author, but rather are figural condensation points that tie together the individual, the Kremlin, Moscow, poetic refractions of these, and Russia itself—all of which are forging ahead as a messenger, ship or train in a difficult journey, undergoing a transformative moment in which consciousness, poetics and world itself are subject to radical revisions experienced as a delirium or mystic vision. In distinction from the literary works that Pasternak references with his own deployment of these figures—Blok’s metaphysically charged “Dvenadtsat’” and Pushkin’s novel Kapitanskaia dochka—Pasternak’s poem interlaces the biographical and the historical in tight, multiply mediated relationships and equations that offer little purchase for conclusions that reorient experience of temporality. This is history, lyricism and biography as whirlwind.

* * * * *

So let us return, following the cyclic motion of the whirlwind, to the biographical references that propelled us out into the blizzard of history—those relating to Vinograd. Another poem in Temy i variatsii, the last in the cycle that
follows “Bolezn’,” “Razryv” (“The Break”), is also linked to the end of Pasternak’s relationship with Vinograd. It concludes with the lines: “В наши дни и воздух пахнет смертью / Открыть окно, чтоб жили отвориа” (“In our times the air itself smells of death / To open the window is to open your veins”). Here, as in the cycle “Bolezn’”, the poet’s painful romantic experiences are intertwined with his impressions of the social-historical context in precisely the sort of intersection that Pasternak would several years later refer to as an “intimization of history” (PSS 7: 707). As we have observed, “Bolezn’” contains not only impressions of present biographical circumstances, but also references to more and less remote moments of the past—as is attested by the title of “Мне в сумерки ты всес—дворянкой,” for instance (Pasternak had first met Vinograd in 1909 when she was still a schoolgirl). In this same poem, the last in the cycle, the past appears not only in reminiscences concerning his beloved, but also in the details of everyday life and the sounds of the city:


[...] Do you remember the times? The shopgirls? The stalls? The crowds? Changing money Cold and ringing,—remember, remember the long past Bells’ pre-holiday ringing?

Turning from this last poem to the first, at the very start of the cycle, there, the ringing of bells, real or imagined, is connected with the winter of 1918–1919 and with the figural cluster we have already observed of Kremlin, blizzard, ocean and illness:


The sick man watches. For six days straight Whirlwinds rampage without tiring. They roll across the roof, invigorate, Rage, and fall in torpor.
Pasternak in Revolution  

Christmas passes in blizzards.  
He has a dream: they’ve come and woken him up.  
He leaps up: “Is it him?”  
There was a call. There was ringing. Was it the New Year’s?  
In the distance, in the Kremlin, Ivan resounds  
It sails, and dives and plunges.  
He sleeps. The blizzard, like an ocean  
In scale, may be called pacific.

This initial poem of “Bolezn’” establishes its temporal scene as the end of the year 1918 and the start of 1919—the weeks of Christmas and the New Year. Note, too, that, as attested years later in Doktor Zhivago, Aleksandr Blok and his works were tightly linked in Pasternak’s conceptions with the mythology and imagery of Christmas—to the extent that “Dvenadtsat’” “is to Zhivago Blok’s main contribution to the genre ‘Christmas poems’” (Masing-Delic). Let us recall as well that, as a result of the Bolshevik introduction of the new civil calendar, the holidays passed for the first time in a new order, with the celebration of Christmas coming before New Year’s day, on December 25 for western churches, and afterwards, on January 7, for Orthodox churches.

The possibility suggested here of somehow “missing” Christmas, as well as the sick sufferer’s dream of a mysterious night time visitor in this poem, suggests an additional key to decipherment of “Mozhet stat’sia tak, mozhet inache...,” for in this context the Dukh sitting in the armchair evokes the ghost of Jacob Marley, or perhaps of the spirits of Christmas past, present and future, who visit Ebenezer Scrooge in Charles Dickens’s A Christmas Carol. The ghost of Marley appears to Scrooge, we note, not sitting in an armchair himself, but when the latter is sitting in his own armchair. Pasternak refers to Dickens’s work in other early works as well (Sergei, 98), and it is openly named in the first stanza of the sixth poem of the cycle, “Ianvar’ 1919 goda”:

Тот год! Как часто у окна  
Напецывал мне, старый: «Выкинься».  
А этот, новый, все прогнал  
Рождественскою сказкой Диккенса. (PSS 1: 181)

That year! How often at the window  
The old one whispered to me: “Jump.”  
And this, the new one, chased it all off  
With the Christmas tale of Dickens.

In this connection, we may note as well that in Dickens’s novel Scrooge’s business is repeatedly referred to as a “counting-house”—a detail that may underpin the images of changing “cold, ringing” money in the pre-holiday season of commerce and gifts in the stanzas from “Mne v sumerki ty vse—pansionerkotu” cited above. Pasternak’s evocation of Dickens with the nighttime visitor of “Boi’noi sleid. Shest’ dni podriad,” with the Dukh of “Mozhet stat’sia tak, mozhet inache,” and with the personifications of the Old and New
Years in the stanza cited here inscribes the biographical scene of “Bolezn’” into an additional construction of temporality, in addition to the biographical and political-historical that we have been describing—that of timeless moral imperatives reiterated in cyclic patterns of human life and death, patterns which reecho the divine promise of spiritual salvation and rebirth encoded in the Christmas story.

Yet Pasternak’s “Christmas tale,” unlike Dickens’s, is a tale of revolution, too: the ringing of coins in “Mne v sumerki ty vse—pansionerkoiu,” linked to the ringing bells in the Kremlin, ties Dickens’s parable about the evils of capitalist greed to the anti-capitalist revolution of Pasternak’s present, linking personal experience and Christian salvation to Marxist horizons of historical thought as they appeared in the social cataclysms of the twentieth century. Here, then, is Pasternak’s version of the intersections of Christian and revolutionary eschatology, emerging out of the chaos of the blizzard, just as in Blok’s “Dvenadtsat’.” Yet in distinction from Blok’s vision of the transformative forward drive, volens nolens, of revolution—“Vpered, vpered / Rabochii narod!” (“Onward, onward / Working people!”)—ironically following the way of Christ, Pasternak’s blizzard follows the cyclic and circular path of the whirlwind, that returns us chaotically yet persistently to a present, charged with a palimpsest of reminiscences and anticipations, Christian and revolutionary history.

* * * * *

This whirlwind of reminiscences and anticipations propels us into a new trajectory through intertwined biographical and political experiences referenced in “Mozhet stat’sia tak, mozhet inache.” Consider stanzas four and five of the poem, that describe a winter night of glistening stars and a landscape of eli and pikhty that is swollen with wax. These may well be linked with Pasternak’s recollection, many years later, of his impressions “skvoz’ son’” (“in sleep”) of a journey by horse-drawn transportation from Tikhie gory on the Kama River, where the poet had been working in the office of a chemical factory, to Moscow at the very start of the events of the revolutionary year, in March, 1917. Pasternak’s mysterious depiction in his 1956 sketch “Liudi i polozheniia” (“People and situations”) of a winter night-time journey, undoubtedly connected in many and various ways with his experience of the eve of a new era in Russian history, includes nearly the same group of images as the central stanzas of “Mozhet stat’sia tak, mozhet inache”: the twinkling of stars, branches of fir trees weighted down with snow, a gleaming, snowy landscape and a burning candle:

When we heard at the factory in March, 1917 about the outbreak of revolution in Petersburg, I departed for Moscow... From Tikhie gory we drove in a wagon, a covered cart on runners, all evening, through the night, and part of the following day. Wrapped in three aziam caftans and sinking into the hay, I rolled back and forth in a heavy bundle on the bed of the sleigh, deprived
of any ability to move. I dozed, nodding my head, dropping off and waking, closing and opening my eyes. I saw a forest road and the stars of a frozen night. High snowdrifts were piled like mountains across the narrow trail. Frequently, the roof of the cart ran up against the branches of overhanging fir trees [pikhty], shaking the hoarfrost from them and dragging with a crunch beneath them pulling them along. The whiteness of the snowy coverlet reflected the glimmering of stars [belyna snezhnoi peleny otrazhala mertsanie zvezd] and illuminated the path. The gleaming snowy mantle menaced us from the depths, the interior of the woods, like a candle placed in the middle of the forest. Three horses, harnessed in a single file, one after the other, rushed the sledge along. Now one, then the other would pull to the side, getting out of line. The driver had to straighten them out every minute and, when the cart would tilt to the side, leaped off of it, ran alongside and supported it with his shoulder to keep it from falling over. [...] 

The camp of the drivers in the forest, just like one from folk tales of robbers. A little fire in the hut. A samovar hisses and a clock ticks. While the driver takes off his coat, warms up after the frost, and quietly talks with the camp-mistress, in the hushed tones of night out of respect for those sleeping behind the partition, another wipes his mouth, buttons up his heavy coat and goes out into the frost to harness a new troika.

Then once again: driving at full speed, the whistle of the runners, dozing and sleep. (PSS 3: 328–29)

Here, in Pasternak’s reminiscences four decades after the events described, we find a similar mysterious locale, the atmosphere of which is created not only by the snowy landscape but also by the driver and the “tales of robbers.” This, in turn, evokes once again Grinyov’s encounter with the mysterious guide, the future Pugachev himself, on the eve of the eighteenth-century rebellion that is remembered with his name in Pushkin’s Kapitanskaiia dochka, as discussed above.

Let us note, too, that approximately the same landscape, also colored by Pushkinian associations, yet now in connection with the Russian Civil War, is described in Doktor Zhivago:

There was something inaccessible, unexpressed about the locale. It exuded the atmosphere of the Pugachev Rebellion as refracted through Pushkin, or of the Asiatic in Aksakov’s descriptions.

The area’s secretive air was complemented by the ruination and diffidence of the few remaining inhabitants, who lived fearfully, avoided any new arrivals from the train and did not communicate with one another out of fear of informers. (PSS 4: 258)

Whether this complex of images, reminiscences of revolution and references to classic Russian literature is filtered, in 1956, through Pasternak’s earlier ruminations on these experiences in the cycle “Bolezni,” or whether we should see this as a representation of the author’s longstanding sense of his core perceptions relating to the revolutionary year, as expressed in all of these texts, is impossible to answer. Yet in reading to “Bolezni,” we must recognize how, for us, this text persists in maintaining its position in time as a nodal point in which multiple threads of pasts and futures intersect in non-linear fashion. This deployment of the lyric mode grabs hold of history not as a representation of a “chapter” in the narrative, a slice out of the unidirectional flow of time, but as a window into a moment of temporal openness, witness to the chaotic interplay of diverse layers of time.
The blizzard not only connects, but also disrupts and destroys, and so it is with Pasternak’s perceptions of revolutionary transformation and temporality. Among the most marked and enigmatic features of the landscape, as noted above, is the theme of disturbed communication between mysterious speakers linked with life on earth and life “above,” between the “mute [...] needles’ and boughs’ glance” (“Budto nem on, vzgliad etikh igl i vetvei”) and the deaf “other, in the heights” (“A drugoi, v vysotakh,—tugoukh”), while the “road’s sparkle in the thunder” (“sverkan’e puti na raskatakh”) appears to reply to “someone’s call for response” (“vzyvan’e ch’ego au”). The “elegism of the telegraph wave” (“elegizm telegrafnoi volny”)—the only reference to poetic form in the poem—combines an image of punctuated connectivity (one thinks of the elliptical syntax of telegraph messages, or the sparse condensation of information in Morse code) with evocation of the genre of entropic loss. The deafness of the “other” in the heights and the lack of response recalls Pasternak’s line in his 1917 poem “Opredelenie poezii” (“Definition of Poetry”), “vselennaia mesto glukhoe” (“the universe is a soundless place”). In combination with the image of speaking and hearing stars, these lines in “Mozhet stat’ia tak, mozhet inache...” evoke an analogous set of images from the conclusion of Maiakovskii’s 1914 “Oblako v shtanakh” (“A Cloud in Trousers”):

Я иду
Глухо
Вселенная спит положив на лапу
С клещами звезд
Огромное ухо. (Maiakovskii 1: 108)

I’m coming
Soundless
The universe sleeps, setting down on its paw
A star-infested
Enormous ear.

Both Pasternak’s and Maiakovskii’s lines represent variations on Lermontov’s canonical 1841 poem “Vykhozhu odin ia na dorogu” (“I go out alone on the road”), the first two stanzas of which are reproduced here:

Выхожу один я на дорогу;
Сквозь туман кремнистый путь блестит.
Ночь тиха. Пустыня внемлет богу
И звезда с звездою говорит.
В небесах торжественно и чудно!
Спит земля в сиянье голубом...
Что же мне так больно и так трудно?
Жду ли чего? Жалею ли о чем? (Lermontov 2: 83)
I go out alone on the road;  
Through the fog the flinty path glimmers.  
The night is quiet. The desert watches God.  
And one star speaks with another.  
The heavens are awesome and miraculous!  
The earth sleeps in a bright blue glow...  
Yet why is it all so painful and hard for me?  
What am I waiting for? What do I regret?

Likely, the first line of the fourth stanza of “Mozhet stat’ia tak, mozhet inache...” — “Noch’ tikha. Iasna i morozna noch’” (“The night is quiet. The night is clear and frozen”) — is an allusion to Lermontov’s poem, as are the series of subsequent images relating to communications involving stars and the reflections and glimmering of starlight on the snowy ground. Pasternak’s images draw on Lermontov’s conception of the poet, isolated from a meaningful and spiritually charged universe, and project them into a landscape that is suffused with significance — yet significance that cannot quite bring the earthly and the heavenly together (Platt 18–19).

Pasternak’s redaction of Lermontov’s Romantic motif of abandonment by an uncaring universe may also be connected with Pasternak’s conception of Russia itself as abandoned by God in the revolutionary year — a conception that surfaces in a separate poem by Pasternak of 1918, which was never published and preserved only by an accident of fate:

Боже, Ты создал быстрой касатку,  
Жжется зарей, щебечет, летит,  
Низясь; Зачем Ты вдунул десятку  
Приговоренных Свой аппетит?  
Чем утолю? Как заставлю зардеться  
Утром ужасным, когда — Ничто  
Идол и доля красногвардейца  
В это ужасное утро — То?  
Стал забываться за красным желтый  
Твой луговой, вдохновенный рассвет.  
Боже, на чьи небеса ушел Ты  
Здесь над русскими, Здесь Тебя нет. (PSS 2: 225).

God, You created the swift swallow;  
It burns in the dawn, twitters, flies,  
Diving low; Why did you inspire ten  
Condemned men with Your own appetite?  
How can I slake it? How can I force  
A blush on a horrible morning, when—as nothing  
Are the idol and the lot of a Red Army Man  
On this horrible morning—and so?

2. One may note deployment of intertextual reference to Lermontov’s canonical poem, as well as figural clusters similar to Pasternak’s in Osip Mandel’shtam’s “Sumerki svobody” (“Twilight of Freedom,” 1918) and “Kontsert na vokzale” (“Concert in the Train Station,” 1921).
Pasternak’s intuitions of humanity, orphaned in revolutionary cataclysm, find maximal expression in this poem.3 Yet “Mozhet stat’sia tak, mozhet inache...” also refracts the Romantic tradition in a more hopeful key. The unique relationship of the poet, of the artist, to the course of events is emphasized in its second line, “No v neschastnyi nekii chas” (“But in a certain unfortunate hour”), which alludes to yet another canonical poem of the Romantic tradition, Fedor Tiutchev’s 1829 lyric “Videnie” (“Vision”), which begins:

Есть некий час, в ночи, всемирного молчанья,
И в опять час явлений и чудес
Живая колесница мирозданья
Открыто катится в святилище небес. (Tiutchev 79)

There is a certain hour, at night, of silence the world over,
And in that hour of epiphanies and miracles
The living chariot of the universe
Openly rides across the sacred heavens.

As for Tiutchev, so too for Pasternak, the poet or artist has the ability to see that which is hidden from others. Pasternak’s poem enacts this transcendent insight, and while he describes the visionary hour as neschastnyi (“unfortunate”), it nevertheless reverberates with Tiutchev’s spiritual uplift.

In this connection, the figure of the purring Dukh “v shube, v kreslakh” of the second stanza, that we have linked above with the transformed vision of the sickbed and the visitations of Marley and Christmas spirits to Dickens’s Ebenezer Scrooge, evokes Tiutchev’s poem as well. Yet we might speculate that this image refers to a whole series of mutually interlinked “visionary scenes” in the works of previous poets and authors. Perhaps the earliest of these is Derzhavin’s 1782 or 1783 “Videnie murzy” (“Vision of the Mirza”) which might be signaled here by the parquet (“parquet”) (Derzhavin’s poem begins with an image of moonlight reflections on a lacquered floor) as well as

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3. An additional possible intertext for Pasternak’s conceptions of Russia as “abandoned” by God, both in “God, you created the swift swallow” and implicitly in “Mozhet stat’sia tak, mozhet inache,” as well as a possible reference for Pasternak’s Dukh, may be found in Zinaida Gippius’s 1917 poem “Gibel!” (“Perdition”), that concludes with the lines: “Твой образ гибнет... Где Ты? / В сияние одетый, бессильно смотришь с высоты? / Пускай мы тень. Но тень от Твоего Лица! / Ты вдунул Дух—и вынул? / Но мы приедем в последний день, мы спросим в день конца,— за что Ты нас покинул?” (Gippius 218). (“Your image perishes... Where are you? / Arrayed in radiance, watching powerlessly from the heights? / Yes, we are only a shadow. But a shadow of Your Face! / You breathed the Spirit into us—and then removed it? / But we will come in the final day, and ask on the day of the end: / Why have You abandoned us?”)
by Derzhavin’s self-portrait in his poem “Tonchiui” (“To Tonchi”) “skutannyi
shuboi” (“wrapped in a fur coat”) and “v zhestokii mraz s og nem dushii” (“in
cruel misery and with flame in the soul”), where, just as is the case with
Tiutchev, the poet, chosen by the muses, occupies a special place in the cos-
mos: “filosofia i muzy—oni nas slavnymi tvoriat” (“philosophy and the
muses—they bring us glory”).

The topos of the mystical figure appearing in a nighttime vision may return
us once more to the revolutionary appearance of the guide Pugachev out of
Pushkin’s blizzard. Yet there are other resonances of the Dukh in the armchair
with Pushkin’s works. “Noch’ tikha” (“The night is quiet”) evokes not only
Lermontov’s poem, but also, in the context of the Christmas and New Year
themes of Pasternak’s poem, the well-known Christmas hymn “Stille Nacht,
heilige Nacht,” written in 1818 by Franz Xaver Gruber with lyrics by Joseph
Mohr. Let us note, however, that until 1855 there was considerable confusion
concerning the authorship of the hymn—in particular, some attributed the
poem to Johann Michael Haydn, the younger brother of Joseph Haydn whose
Requiem was thought to have exerted a considerable influence on Mozart’s
Requiem. In light of these debates concerning the authorship of “Stille Nacht,
heilige Nacht,” one may propose, with some degree of speculative daring, a
peculiar refraction of the many intertexts and images assembled above, evok-
ing in sum the mysterious figure who orders Mozart’s requiem in Pushkin’s
Mozart and Salieri—yet another spirit, like Marley or Pugachev.

Yet Christmas and the New Year, revolution and transformation—neither
these elements of Pasternak’s vision, nor “Bolezn’” as a whole, may be re-
duced to dark premonitions of death. The poem is populated with images
evocative of the creative potential of art in the world, itself figured as cre-
ation, familiar from the works of the Symbolists. Pasternak’s oxymoronic
“Ekho drugoi tishiny” (“Echo of another silence”) evokes Briusov’s “zvonko-
zvuchnaia tishina” (“roundly-resounding silence”) in his 1895 programmatic
poem “Tvorchestvo” (“Creation”). The bezume (“madness”) that afflicts
Pasternak’s poetic consciousness, however, is potentially not only an afflic-
tion, but also a state of creative uplift, as in Blok’s 1914 poem “O ia khochu
bezumno zhit’” (“Oh, I madly want to live”). And the revolution itself is
linked to creativity, as well. A few years after the publication of “Bolezn’,”
in the long poem of 1926 “Deviatsot piatiy god” (“The Year 1905”), Pasternak

4. Pasternak’s reference to Derzhavin’s “Tonchiui” may be mediated via self-reference to his
own poem “Marburg” (1916), which presents a similar scene of spiritual and poetic awakening
linked to moonlight reflected in the parquet: “Ведь ночи играть садятся в шахматы / С моей
на лунном паркете полу, / Акацией пахнет, и ока растопят, / И страсть, как
видитель, селет в утня” (“Indeed, the nights sit down to play chess / With me on the moon-
light parquet floor, / There’s the scent of acacias, with windows thrown open / And passion, as
a witness, grows grey in the corner.”) The authors wish to thank Irene Masing-Delic for this as-
tute observation.
will compare the revolution to an “artist, unhappy with himself” (“nedo-
vol'nyi soboi khudozhnik”). Winter and the winter holidays are times both of
ending and of rebirth, and as with Yuletide fortune-telling, one looks forward
to optimistic and hopeful turns of fate. As Pasternak explains in the last lines
of “Ianvar’ 1919 goda,” “Na svete net toski takoi / Kotoryi sneg by ne
vylechival” (“There is no anguish on Earth / That snow could not cure”). In
that same poem, we must recall as well the positive outcome of Pasternak’s
overt deployment of A Christmas Carol, in which the New Year “chased off”
the morbidity of the old with Dickens’s work.

Both the sick speaker and the surrounding world are fated to recover, it
seems. This dual perception of this complex historical moment reflects
Pasternak’s “ambivalent” reception of the revolution, which has been well de-
scribed by Lazar Fleishman (336–68). All of which leads us back towards
the poem’s penultimate lines, following blizzard, visions and delirium, in which
“Vikhr’ dogadok rodit v biografe / Etot mertvyi, kak mel, motiv” (“A whirl-
wind of surmisings is born in the biographer / By this dead as chalk motif”).
We, Pasternak’s “biographers,” face the task of locating the poet in the flow
of history and cosmos, alone at a time of holiday transformation, in the face
of death and the whirlwind of revolution.

* * * * *

In his “Theses on the Philosophy of History,” Walter Benjamin describes a
mode of historical consciousness that he terms “historical materialism,”
which, in order to grasp the revolutionary possibilities of the present, reads
both past and future as a fluid and precarious multiplicity of possibilities, of
variant memories and potential futures, rather than a fixed trajectory from a
known past to a determinate future.

To articulate the past historically does not mean to recognize it “the way it really was” (Ranke).
It means to seize hold of a memory as it flashes up at a moment of danger. Historical material-
ism wishes to retain that image of the past which unexpectedly appears to man singled out by
history at a moment of danger. The danger affects both the content of the tradition and its re-
ceivers. [...] In every era the attempt must be made anew to wrest tradition away from a con-
formism that is about to overpower it. The Messiah “comes not only as the redeemer, he comes
as the subduer of Antichrist.” (255)

Benjamin’s conceptions, which we view as the avant-garde conception of tem-
porality par excellence (and let us note that Susan Buck-Morss is herself a
scholar of Benjamin), imagine a maximally open present, a present that has
“come to a stop” in order to “blast open the continuum of history,” a present
that is “shot through with chips of messianic time.” Pasternak’s grasp of his-

ory in “Mozhet stat’ia tak, mozhet inache” presents a literary analogue to
Benjamin’s concept—a moment in which time comes to a standstill, when
multiple strands of past, present and future intersect in non-linear manner, mu-
tually interrelated with one another in a multiplicity of cyclic, linear, mythic and cultural interconnections—a moment of pure delirious potentiality.

Benjamin’s “Theses” are cast in the form of a series of short, suggestive passages that eschew any overarching argumentation. This is unsurprising, given the philosopher’s intent to counter modes of history intent on “telling the sequence of events like the beads of a rosary” in order instead to “blast a specific era out of the homogenous course of history” (263). Pasternak, writing decades before Benjamin, operated in analogous fashion, telling history in the form of a lyric cycle that gathers the layers and folds of time around itself like skirts. Roman Jakobson, in his seminal definition of poetic form, explains that “the poetic function projects the principle of equivalence from the axis of selection onto the axis of continuity” (“Closing Statement” 358). In effect, “Mozhet stat’ia tak, mozhet inache,” and the cycle “Bolezn’” as a whole, apply this quintessentially lyric principle to the organization of temporality, linking distant and more recent pasts and futures in non-linear linkages that break time’s continuity, activating principles of “selection” that reorganize the “axis of continuity”—the chronological axis. This is, to return to Culler’s conceptions, lyric as a form of ritual that calls a world into being, marshaling the chaos of a moment of transition when identity is caught, in Turner’s terms, “betwixt and between,” rather than as a monologue of selfhood in a larger dramatic or novelistic narrative (46).

“Bolezn’” was among the first in a series of experiments in lyrical history that took the most varied forms in Pasternak’s career. The next steps in this creative path were the long poems “Vysokaia bolez’,” “Deviatsot piatiy god,” “Spektorskii,” and the final and most extensive contribution to the project was Doktor Zhivago (Bird, Polivanov). Undoubtedly, the principles of these experiments were varied, yet they each in their own way responded to the question posed at the start of this article—how may the lyric poet address history?—and reflected Pasternak’s imbrication of lyric intuitions concerning historical experience with the phenomenology of avant-garde temporality.5

In Doktor Zhivago, this complex of concerns was expressed, of course, in Zhivago’s poems and their eccentric position in the narrative structure, “blasting open the continuum of history,” as Benjamin might say. “Stikhi Iuriia Zhivago” (“The Poems of Yury Zhivago”), the seventeenth and concluding part of the novel, references history in far more direct and literal fashion than “Bolezn’,” as for instance in the line “Vse tonet v fariseistve” (“Everything drowns in Pharisaism” in “Hamlet”; PSS 4: 515), or the characterization of “gody bezvremenshchin” (“years of timelessness”) in “Avgust” (“August”; PSS 4: 532), the latter of which might be said to encaps-

5. For a description of Pasternak’s later and more schematic lyric intervention into Soviet progressive conceptions of history, see the treatment of his 1931 poem “Stoletie s lishnim—ne vchera” (“A century and then some—it’s not just yesterday”) in Platt, “Stoletie s lishnim.”
sulate avant-garde temporality from an external or retrospective position. Certain principles of lyric history that Pasternak developed in “Bolezn’” resurface, however, as in the lines “Vezde sledy razgroma. / Povsiudu v komnate khaos” (“All over are traces of destruction. / Everywhere in the room there is chaos”) in “Razluka” (“Parting”; PSS 4: 534), in which contemporaries could see a reference to a scene of arrest and search for evidence—a metaphorical intersection of intimate and political history in a vertiginous, non-linear equivalence. Then too, the motif of the “renovation” of historical time clearly links together all of Zhivago’s poems treating the events of 1917 in terms of the cycle of Christian holidays from Christmas to Easter in a mythic rewriting of revolutionary history that is reminiscent of “Bolezn’,” yet which is staged far more emphatically in Pasternak’s novel—as a victory over the “years of timelessness” (Raevsky-Hughes; Polivanov 218–27).

In the prose fabric of the novel, too, the principle of lyric history as a non-linear imposition on the causal and progressive logic of narrative unfolding, a projection of equivalences from the poetic “axis of selection onto the axis of continuity” is expressed in the phenomenon of the uncanny coincidences that structure the lives of Pasternak’s characters. Here, too, however, this principle takes a far more definite form—that of a superhistorical fate. As Krystyna Pomorska explained in her classic application of Jakobsonian poetics to Pasternak’s novel,

We are struck by a new motif: determinism. The coincidences turn out to be historical laws. [...] In Doctor Zhivago everything is coincidental; coincidences in turn are symbolic because they are meaningful. Such is the very essence of our life, which Pasternak saw as a “drama,” in which “produman rasporiadok deistvi, / I neotvratim konets puti” (“the order of the acts has been schemed and plotted, / and nothing can avert the final curtain’s call”; ‘Hamlet’). (144–45; italics in the original)

In Zhivago, we might conclude, Pasternak ultimately transcended the temporality of the avant-garde, yet not via capitulation to a new progressive version of history, but rather by means of a new emphasis on superhistorical principles of temporality comparable with those of epic or myth. In contrast, “Bolezn’” remains his purest, yet also most enigmatic invocation of the experience of history of the avant-garde—a history that “can happen like that, or otherwise.”

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Тезисы
Константин Поливанов и Кевин М. Ф. Платт
Пастернак в революции: Лирическая темпоральность и интимизация истории

Отношения человека и явлений истории всегда оказывались в фокусе внимания Пастернака-художника: и в ранней лирике, и в «революционных» позмах 1920-х, и в романе «Доктор Живаго», который он считал главным делом своей жизни. Пастернака всегда волновали вопросы о том, что и как способен лирический поэт сказать об истории. Цикл «Болезнь» в книге «Темы и вариации» (1923) был одной из первых попыток ответить на эти вопросы. В частности, это относится к третьему стихотворению цикла — «Может статься так, может иначе», одному из самых темных и загадочных стихотворений поэта. На наш взгляд, оно играет ключевую роль для понимания данного цикла и одновременно представляет одну из первых попыток понимания поэтом истории с помощью лирического высказывания. В статье предлагаются контекстуализация и анализ данного стихотворения, цикла «Болезнь» в целом и, посредством этого, парадоксальной способности лирической речи служить инструментом для постижения исторического опыта. Стихотворение анализируется с помощью выделения сложной системы перекличек с разнообразными текстами от Лермонтова, Тютчева до Диккенса, на фоне биографии поэта и с учетом недавних исследований лирической и авангардной темпоральности в культуре начала ХХ века. Стихотворение «Может статься так, может иначе...» интерпретируется как демонстрация сложных связей, скрепляющих русскую жизнь и культуру в тот момент, когда, в представленной Пастернака, все законы истории были поставлены вверх ногами «пургой» революции.