

Boris Pasternak (1890-1960), translator



The life of Boris Pasternak

- spanned
- the **heights and depths**,
- the **glories and tragedies**,
- the **joy and pathos** that was Russia of the twentieth century
- (By **THE ASSOCIATED PRESS**).



- Grew up in Moscow, studied philosophy, then **began writing poetry in 1914**
- Initially supported Bolshevik Revolution, published several poetry collections and autobiographical stories in 1920s and 30s



- Disillusioned with Communist ideals after Stalinist terror and purges, **feared publishing own work and began publishing translations instead (most famously Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, *Romeo and Juliet*)**
- *Doctor Zhivago*, in 1946-55, Soviet authorities would not allow novel's publication – first published in Italy in 1957

Reluctant to conform to Socialist Realism, Pasternak turned to translation

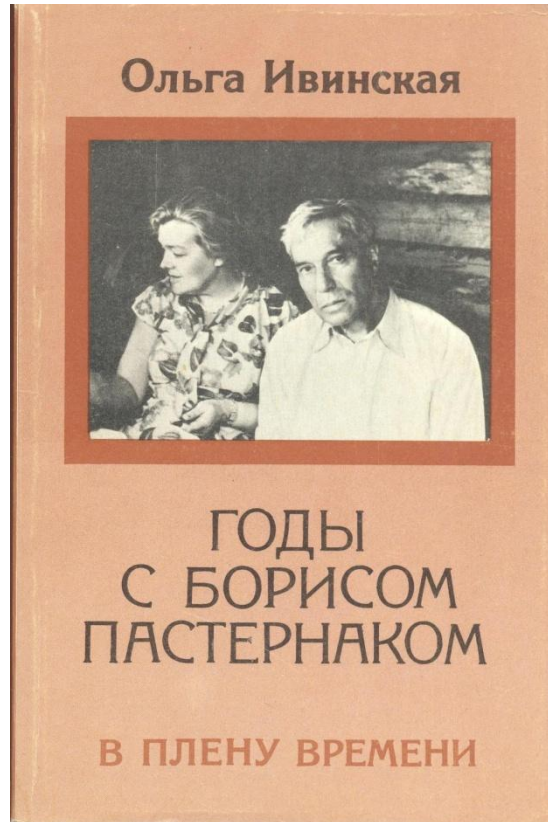
- produced acclaimed translations of
- Sandor Petofi,
- Johann Wolfgang von Goethe,
- Rainer Maria Rilke,
- Paul Verlaine,
- Taras Shevchenko, and
- Nikoloz Baratashvili.

Osip Mandelstam, privately warned him, "Your collected works will consist of **12 of translations**, and only **one of your own work**."



In a 1942 letter, Pasternak declared,

- "I am completely **opposed** to contemporary ideas about translation. The work of **Lozinski, Radlova, Marshak, and Chukovski is**
- **alien to me**, and seems **artificial, soulless, and lacking in depth**. I share the 19th c. view of translation as a literary exercise demanding insight of a higher kind than that provided by a
- merely philological approach."



- The poet's muse, **Olga Ivinskaya**:
- **Translation was not a genuine vocation for Pasternak.**



- “One day someone brought him a copy of a British newspaper in which there was a double page feature under the title, **“Pasternak Keeps a Courageous Silence.”**”

A man is
known by the
silence he
keeps.

Oliver Herford

meetville.com

- **Pasternak Keeps a Courageous Silence.**
- It said that if Shakespeare had written in Russian he would have written in the same way he was translated by Pasternak...
- What a pity, the
- article continued, that **Pasternak published nothing but translations,** writing his own work for himself and a small circle of intimate friends. "What do they mean by saying that my silence is courageous?" [Boris Leonidovich] commented sadly after reading all this. **"I am silent because I am not printed."**



- **8 plays:**
- **Hamlet ,**
- **Romeo and Juliet,**
- **Antony and Cleopatra,**
- **Othello,**
- **two parts of Henry IV,**
- **King Lear, and**
- **Macbeth**





- Critics mostly paid attention to the **fidelity** of the translations to the originals

Relationship between the style of Pasternak's translations and of his original poetry and prose

- L. Borovoi, V. Levik, and Iu. Levin: *the language of his translations is similar to that of his own poetry*
- Anna Akhmatova: *not.*
- Anna Kay France and Henry Gifford: *Pasternak's translations are closer to his style after 1940, which is more traditional and simple than the style of his previous writings.*

Translators' maxims

- V. Trediakosky: “**A translator differs from the creator in name alone**”
- V. Zhukovsky: “**The translator of prose is the slave of the author, and the translator of poetry is his rival,**”

Pasternak's translations

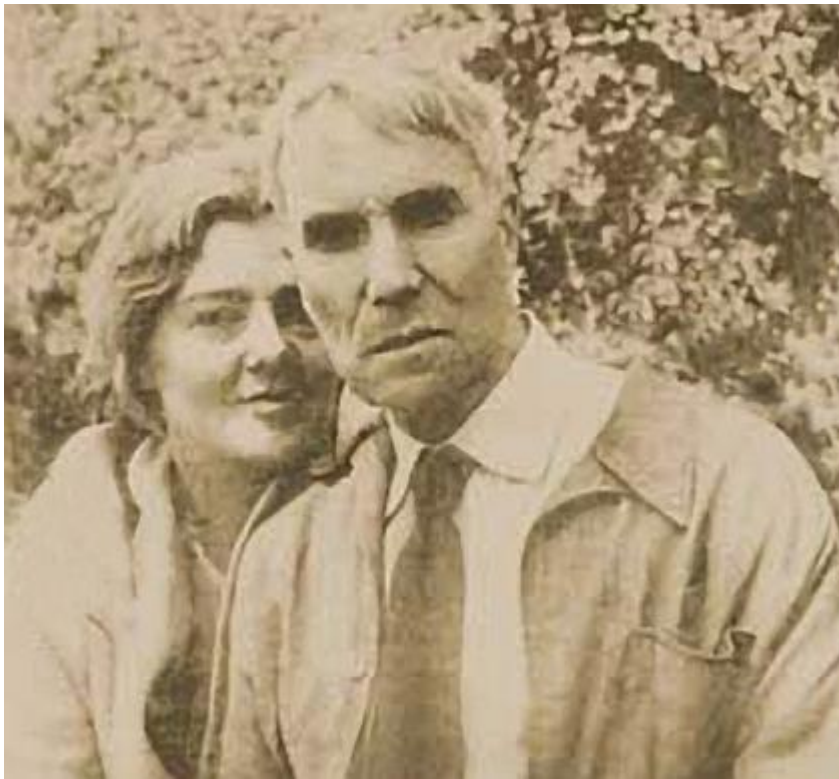
- have features **marking them apart** from other Russian renderings of Shakespeare.
- Peculiarities:
- appositional compounds,
- substantive adjectives,
- **folkloric elements,**
- **allusions to contemporary events,** and a great number of idiomatic expressions and other colloquialisms.

Pasternak's translation maxims



- Rabindranath Tagore (bengali):
- "1) bring out the **theme of the poem, its subject matter**, as clearly as possible;
- 2) tighten up the **fluid, non-European form by rhyming internally**, not at the end of the lines;
- 3) use **loose, irregular meters**, mostly ternary ones. You may allow yourself to use assonances."

Pasternak's translation maxims



- Vítězslav Nezval
- "Use the literal translation only for the meaning, but **do not borrow words** as they stand from it: they are absurd and not always comprehensible. **Don't**
- **translate everything**, only what you can manage, and by this means try to **make the translation more precise than the original** – an absolute necessity in the case of such a confused, slipshod piece of work."



- **Translating Goethe**

- The 1 st part of FAUST led him to be **attacked** in the August 1950 edition of *Novy Mir*.
- “Pasternak is **distorting** Goethe's "progressive" meanings;
- introducing **individualist' values**.
- But despite the attacks his contract for the 2nd part had not been revoked

In a 1956 essay, Pasternak wrote,

- "Translating Shakespeare is a task which takes time and effort. Once it is undertaken, it is best to **divide it into sections** long enough for the work to not get stale and **to complete one section each day**. In thus daily progressing through the text, the translator finds himself reliving the circumstances of the author. **Day by day**, he reproduces his actions and he is drawn into some of his secrets, not in theory, but **practically, by experience.**"

Pasternak's translations

- Of Romeo and Juliet, Antony and Cleopatra, Othello, King Henry IV (Parts I and II), Hamlet, Macbeth, King Lear
- remain deeply **popular** with Russian audiences because of their **colloquial, modernised dialogues**.
- Paternak's critics, however, accused him of "**pasternakizing**" Shakespeare.

Sonnet 66, translated in 1936

Tired with all these, for restful death I cry,-
As, to behold desert a beggar born,
And needy nothing trimm'd in jollity,
And purest faith unhappily forsworn,
And gilded honour shamefully misplac'd,
And maiden virtue rudely strumpeted,
And right perfection wrongfully disgrac'd,
And strength by limping sway disabled,
And art made tongue-tied by authority,
And folly (doctor-like) controlling skill,
And simple truth miscall'd simplicity,
And captive good attending captain ill:
Tired with all these, from these would I be gone,
Save that, to die, I leave my love alone.

Sonnet 66, translated in 1936

**Tired with all these, for
restful death I cry,-
As, to behold desert a beggar
born,
And needy nothing trimm'd
in jollity,
And purest faith unhappily
forsworn,**

- **Утомленный всем этим, о
спокойной смерти я молю,
Как видеть достоинство,
рожденное в нищете,
И духовное ничтожество,
украшенное весельем,
И чистую веру, злобно
оскверненную,**

Sonnet 66, translated in 1936

- Измучась всем, я умереть хочу.
- Тоска смотреть, как мается бедняк.
- И как шутя живется богачу,
- И доверять, и попадать впросак,

Tired with all these, for
restful death I cry,-

As, to behold desert a beggar
born,

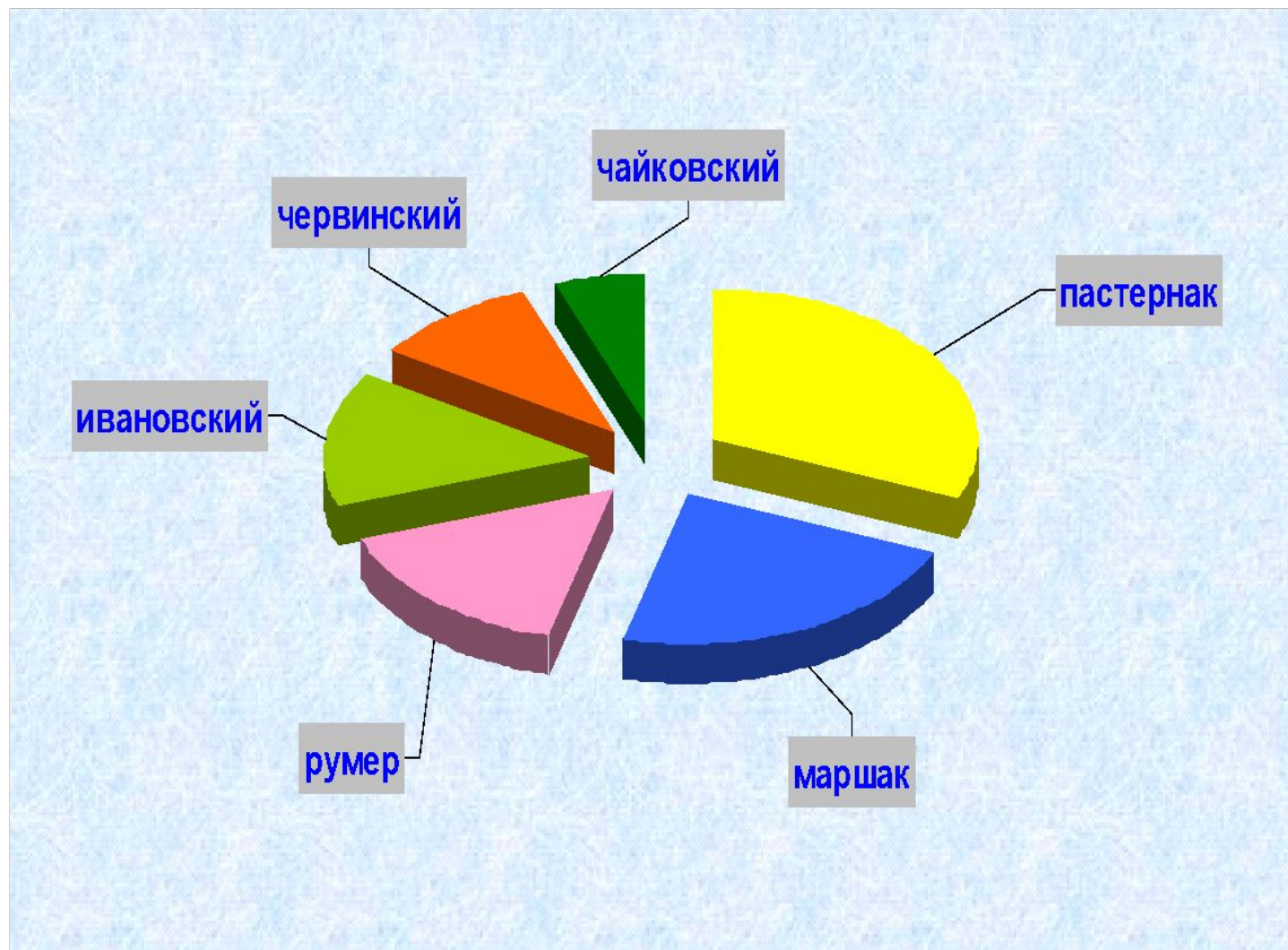
And needy nothing trimm'd
in jollity,

And purest **faith** unhappily
forsworn,

Sonnet 66, translated in 1936

- **Измучась** всем, я **умереть** хочу.
Тоска **смотреть**, как **мается** бедняк,
И как **шутя** **живется** богачу,
И **доверять**, и **попадать** впросак,
И **наблюдать**, как наглость **лезет** в
свет,
И честь девичья **катится** ко дну,
И **знать**, что ходу совершенствам нет,
И **видеть** мощь у немощи в плену,
И **вспоминать**, что мысли **заткнут** рот,
И разум **сносит** глупости хулу,
И прямодушье простотой **слывет**,
И доброта **прислуживает** злу.
Измучась всем, не **стал бы жить** и дня,
Да другу трудно будет без меня.

Tired with all these, for restful **death** I
cry,-
As, to behold desert a beggar born,
And needy nothing trimm'd in jollity,
And purest faith unhappily forsworn,
And gilded honour shamefully misplac'd,
And maiden virtue rudely strumpeted,
And right perfection wrongfully disgrac'd,
And strength by limping sway disabled,
And art **made tongue-tied** by authority,
And folly (doctor-like) controlling skill,
And simple truth miscall'd simplicity,
And captive good attending captain ill:
Tired with all these, from these would I be
gone,
Save that, to die, I leave my love alone





- So have I heard and do in part believe it.
But look, the morn, in russet mantle clad,
Walks o'er the dew of yon high eastward hill.
Break we our watch up; and by my advice

- **Horatio monologue**
- **Монолог Горацио**
- Слышал и я, и тоже частью верю.
Но вот и утро в розовом плаще
Росу пригорков топчет на востоке.
Пора снимать дозор. И мой совет:

Монолог Горацио

- Let us impart what we have seen to-night
Unto young Hamlet; for, upon my life,
This spirit, dumb to us, will speak to him.
- Поставим принца Гамлета в известность
О виденном. Ручаюсь жизнью, дух,
Немой при нас, прервет пред ним молчанье.

Монолог Горацио

- Do you consent we shall acquaint him with it,
As needful in our loves, fitting our duty?
Let's do't, I pray; and I this morning know
Where we shall find him most conveniently.
- Ну как, друзья, по-вашему?
Сказать,
Как долг любви и преданность внушают?
По-моему, сказать. Да и к тому ж
Я знаю, где найти его сегодня.



Boris Pasternak in 1943 translating *Romeo and Juliet* in Chistopol, where his family was evacuated during World War II.



«I am in big to debt to Chistopol ... I always loved our solitude, the small towns and rural areas more than capitals. And Chistopol is dear to my heart, and winters in it, and inhabitants, and houses as I saw them in the winter of 1941 when had arrived to the evacuated family ...



- I mean **anonymous communications, meetings with the unfamiliar on the street, a general view of the city, a wood engraving at windows and on gate.** All this was pleasant to me, all this **sincerely fed me**".
- **February 6, 1951.** (From a letter of B. Pasternak to Chistopol students)



- **Black spring! Pick up your pen, and weeping...**

- Black spring! Pick up your pen, and weeping,
- Of February, in sobs and ink,
- Write poems, while the slush in thunder
- Is burning in the black of spring.

- **Февраль. Достать чернил и плакать...**

- Февраль. Достать чернил и плакать!
Писать о феврале навзрыд,
Пока грохочущая слякоть
Весною черною горит.

References

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