

jhs

Abbey of Gethsemani
Trappist P.O.
Ky.

Sept. 1, 1958.

Dear Helen Wolff:

Robert Macgregor of New Directions wrote and told me that he had asked you to send me a copy of DR ZHIVAGO, and now it has arrived and I am well into it. I am very glad indeed that he asked you to send me the book, I had heard about it and had been wanting to get it for a long time. I am deeply grateful. I have no hesitation in telling you how deeply impressed I am, since for a long time now I have been under the spell of Pasternak (in translations I have come across here and there in various languages).

Really, to my mind, the appearance of DR ZHIVAGO is the most prodigious event in twenty five years of American publishing. So many books are hailed as "great" on all sides that it has become almost meaningless to acclaim a new novel as a masterpiece. Yet anyone who opens this book will immediately see that this time he is face to face with a genius of towering proportions, a writer of the stature of Tolstoy and Dostoevsky. Comparisons are odious, but it seems to me that many of the most important novelists of the west-- Proust for instance-- are dwarfed by Pasternak. His dimensions are not those merely of a great writer: he speaks with the overwhelming authority of a prophet; not in the sense of one who foretells the future so much as of one who speaks out definitively and forcefully to declare, in mystery, the great realities of his age. It is this prophetic character that sets him apart even from the greatest and most significant writers of the west. The "religious" content of his work has rightly been emphasized. His Christianity is of the Russian tradition, but it bursts out of all conventional limitations and does not permit itself to be fitted easily into a category. Conventional minds will look to him perhaps vainly for a definite sign that Russia is waiting to embrace our western ideas about religion. But that is not the significance one must expect to see in Pasternak, and one must not approach him asking for such a "sign". All he asks us is to open our eyes and see, as he sees, the dazzling and terrible presence of Christ in the history of our time. This is the religious reality that is actually the most urgent for us, and the one which we seem to excel in forgetting.

I was especially grateful and agreeably surprised to find the many fine poems at the end of the volume-- those which I presume he has been unable to publish in Soviet Russia. Thank you again for sending me this marvelous book.

Very sincerely yours in Christ