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The Boris Pasternak Museum in Peredelkino near Moscow, Russia

Final report

Boris Pasternak in the Grey Zone between the Political Repression and the Cultural Opposition

I was happy to use my fellowship to focus on the research problem of the Pasternak case in particular and the role of propaganda during the Cold War in general and, as a result, to be able to expand the archival basis of the Pasternak Museum activities.

Chronological framework

I focused on the milestones in Pasternak's literary career, their official v. unofficial receptions and the interlinking periods, as had been planned. The earliest documents were dated 1956, before 'Doctor Zhivago' was published in Italy in 1957. The end point was 1990, when Pasternak's house in Peredelkino received the status of museum, after 1988, when 'Doctor Zhivago' was eventually published in the Soviet Union. The Soviet campaign against Pasternak in 1957 and its success in Western countries in 1958-59 were well documented in OSA, as well as the ensuing campaign after October 1958, when Pasternak was announced as the winner of the Nobel Prize.

In addition to the documents related to Pasternak himself and his novel, I found some materials on David Lean's film 'Doctor Zhivago' (1965) and its receptions in the Western and Soviet media.

Types of researched materials

I successfully searched the Red Archives for the official Soviet materials published in the Soviet media. Importantly, many of them were translated into English by Radio Liberation / Liberty staff for internal use, so one has the opportunity to look at both Russian and English versions of Soviet propagandist language of a certain period in concordance.

In the Western Press Archives, as I had expected, I found an abundance of opinion pieces in newspaper and magazine clippings. Both in the Red Archives and Western Press Archives there were quite a number of original press agency reports. Also there were RL researcher notes, reports and other internal documents, both in Russian and English. In most instances, it was possible to see connections between the materials in the Red Archives and those in the Western Press Archives, and in some cases either part contained the same clippings or document copies put together according to a certain episode, which seemed an advantage rather than a drawback, because this showed how the staff themselves followed the connections and formed their own attitudes and opinions.

All these materials could be used together with RL broadcasts which are in open access now.

Regarding Radio Free Europe materials, I have only considered some digitised documents available for online research so far.

To broaden my background knowledge, I made use of quite a few of the books on Cold War propaganda and diplomacy, broadcasting and book distribution in OSA collection.

Broader context

In order to contextualise my research, I looked at how some major and minor situations and cases were reflected in OSA.

- ♦ Budapest 1956. Interestingly, many Western journalists emphasised that for Khrushchev Pasternak's affair was a kind of 'intellectual Budapest'. Indeed, Soviet authorities talking about Pasternak initially used the same expressions that they applied to the Hungarian appraisal: 'treachery', 'slander' and so on – way too general. It seems with the Pasternak case they took the chance to broaden their Cold War vocabulary related to literature and writers.
- ♦ Some cases of repressed and then rehabilitated authors, such as those of Isaak Babel and Osip Mandelshtam. They help to see in what sense Pasternak's case was 'ideal' in terms of Cold War propaganda, not ceasing to hold everybody's attention for decades.
- ♦ The case of Mikhail Sholokhov, Pasternak's rival (in a sense). In 1958 the Soviet badly wanted Sholokhov to become the Nobel laureate.
- ♦ Files on Alexei Surkov and some other writer authorities who bullied Pasternak. RL researchers kept their eye on them.
- ♦ The case of Howard Fast, an American writer awarded the Stalin Peace Prize, who was banned in the Soviet Union after he had left the Communist Party USA. Back in the 50s journalists compared his case with Pasternak's, and this kind of comparison still can be enlightening.

Applied methodology

I selected materials from the point of view of how they exemplify propagandist vocabulary(ies) and (under)tone(s) used in the Soviet media, the Western press, RL / RFE internal documents and RL broadcasts respectively. For categorization and conceptualisation of the Pasternak case I used internal descriptive terms of the sources. Just a few examples:

Those involved implied a variety of things referring to Pasternak (and / or his novel) as a 'weapon' (in the Cold War). For Pasternak and many of his defenders it was an insult. Since Pasternak did not know his book was published and distributed with the help of CIA, it is difficult to say whether he would have changed his attitude and decided it was commendable to serve as a 'weapon' if he had known what expectations CIA connected with his novel, as well as with their whole project of book publishing and distribution. In any case, one can notice that Radio Liberation / Liberty, for whom presenting a literary work in their broadcasts was a new project launched exactly in connection with 'Doctor Zhivago', practised using rich, elaborate careful language and 'impartial' tone, which generally corresponded to the CIA plan and the concept of Pasternak-and-his-novel as a kind of 'soft weapon'.

Looking at another angle, one can see that the West was fascinated by the name-calling exercised by 'the Red' and inspired to find out what all that fuss was about. No surprise – Shakespeare was called an 'upstart crow' about 400 years ago, but we still find it energising and illuminating. In any case, many of Western journalists commented that the Soviet were acting against their own propagandist goals – Pasternak campaign would not have taken place had they published the novel in the Soviet Union. What is curious, the same strong language as that used against Pasternak was, in turn, applied to 'Brezhnev and Kosygin's clique of renegades' by Chinese communists in 1967 when some of Pasternak's works (not 'Zhivago') were allowed to be published in the Soviet Union.

After the Sinyavsky-Daniel trial, the Western newspapers started to call Pasternak a 'dissident'. In the meantime, in the Soviet Union new stereotypical expressions were coined: while Pasternak's creative method was called 'subjective realism' – something inferior to Socialist realism but still forgivable and thus acceptable, Pasternak himself was even called 'our guy' in one of Soviet radio programmes, according to researcher notes. Such a presentation of Pasternak and his message was a kind of concession on the part of those who did not lose hope to introduce his novel to the Soviet reader; yet it might have had stultifying effects on potential readers, and one can see RL researchers express this kind of concern.

The utilization of the findings

The first and main goal of my research at OSA was to select a wide range of archival documents for evidence-based museum pedagogy and interactive public events at the Pasternak Museum in Peredelkino near Moscow.

Thinking about our main target audience, Russian young adults, one of the main practical achievements of my research is the opportunity to build and broaden an interactive learning resource on the Pasternak case.

Because most of the materials are both in Russian and English I will be able to create high quality materials for foreign guests who often visit the Pasternak museum.

Here are a few ways in which the documents can be used:

- 1) highlighting the stages of the Pasternak case`
- 2) leading in to other cases and situations
- 3) exemplifying authentic language(s) used by 'the Red' v. 'the Western'
- 4) demonstrating how RL and RFE researchers selected relevant pieces of information and commented on them.

Another goal was to add to the understanding of the socio-cultural background of the Pasternak case. Contextualised by the available archival materials, it can be reconsidered in a new framework: a slight shift of focus can be refreshing. For example, such materials as Howard Fast case, a lesser-known essay on Pasternak by Tomas Merton, a prominent American Catholic writer and mystic, or a number of lesser-known articles from the British press allow to better evaluate American and British views of Pasternak and his novel and to compare them with current views.

Boxes

HU OSA 300-85-48 Box 13

HU OSA 300-80-7 Boxes 248, 249, 323, 341, 342

HU OSA 300-5-151 Box 96

HU OSA 300-120-7 Boxes 151, 152, 153, 8, 56, 127, 128

HU OSA 300-120-1 Box 119

HU OSA 300-120-7 Box 127, 128

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