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„The text was considered miraculous”. Magic Words in Pasternak’s *Doctor Zhivago*

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In *Doctor Zhivago*, Pasternak brings scientific and political discourses into dialogue with magical ones. In an emblematic episode, two soldiers from opposing sides each wear a protective amulet containing the „miraculous” text of the 90th Psalm. One dies; one survives. While this discrepancy is easily traced to scientific and socioeconomic causes, the episode is designed to foreground the least rational explanation: that done right, magic actually works. Embodying Pasternak’s interest in the interrelationships among science, politics, poetry, and magic, the textual amulet is especially significant because it represents a magical power that is reserved for *words*. This article finds that Pasternak’s novel contains numerous examples of such efficacious „magical” texts – from the Gospels to peasant songs, from political slogans to Zhivago’s poems – and argues that reading *Doctor Zhivago* by the light of these „magic words” yields insights into the aesthetics and design of the novel.

Keywords: Pasternak; *Doctor Zhivago*; magic; politics; poetics; fairy tale; socialist realism.

A curious incident occurs a little over halfway through Boris Pasternak’s *Doctor Zhivago*. The novel’s protagonist, Iurii Zhivago, is caught in a shootout between a band of Red partisan fighters and a detachment of White Guards. When the Red soldier next to him is shot, Iurii takes his gun and accidentally shoots a White soldier with it. After the battle, when Iurii in his capacity as doctor goes to examine the bodies of the fallen, he finds around the neck of the first man – the one whose gun he took – a textual amulet containing

excerpts from the 90th psalm with the kinds of changes and corruptions that simple folk tend to introduce into prayers, causing them gradually to deviate more

and more from the real version as they are repeated. The excerpts from the Church Slavonic text were transcribed into Russian letters¹.

The narrator tells us that „the text was considered to be miraculous and to protect [the wearer] against bullets”. It has not worked for this man, however; he is dead. Moving on to the body of the White Guardsman he shot by accident, Iurii opens the man’s coat to look for identification, and finds that he too is wearing an amulet, containing a copy of the very same „miraculous” Psalm, this time „in its full printed form and in the original Church Slavonic”. At this moment – miraculous indeed – the young man opens his eyes. It turns out that Iurii’s bullet was stopped by his amulet.

This stark illustration of magic in action might seem out of place in a work of Soviet literature, even a long-unpublishable one like *Doctor Zhivago*. In fact, however, despite the rationalistic and mechanistic worldview advanced by Soviet Socialism, a fascination with magic emerges in the fictions of many prominent Soviet writers – appropriately enough for a culture dominated, as Helena Goscilo writes, „by the brutally utopian slogan: «We were born to make fairy tales come true»”². As Goscilo implies, the Revolutionary belief in the power of ideas and, especially, words, to transform reality is itself a form of magical thinking. Perhaps the most compelling explanation for Soviet writers’ interest in magic, though, is its allure as an alternative way of understanding the world at moments when a culture confronts, „the sometimes exhilarating, sometimes profoundly disquieting fact that the limits of human knowledge and power ha[ve] not been finally established”³. John Mebane, describing such a moment in early modern England, evokes an „intense struggle between those who maintained the continuing validity of traditional sources of knowledge and those who asserted that inherited beliefs must be tested and, if necessary, rejected”. Such struggles occurred more than once during the Soviet era: notably in the 1920s, following the Revolution that swept away old ways of life, and in the 1950s, after the death of Stalin.

¹ B.L. Pasternak, *Doktor Zhivago*, < <http://www.vehi.net/pasternak/>>, 31.07.2012. Further references will be given in parentheses in the text. All translations from Russian are my own.

² H. Goscilo, *Foreword*, in: *Politicizing Magic: An Anthology of Russian and Soviet Fairy Tales*, ed. M. Balina, H. Goscilo, M. Lipovetsky, Evanston 2005, p. X.

³ J. Mebane, *Renaissance Magic and the Return of the Golden Age*, Lincoln 1989, p. 6.

If, as Pamela Thurschwell suggests, „Magical thinking is the belief that thoughts and desires can directly transfer themselves to, and transform, the material world, other people, [and] the future”⁴, then both the Revolution and the Thaw represented public outbreaks of magical thinking. In these moments of cultural reconfiguration, political as well as literary figures viewed literature in magical terms. Thurschwell’s thesis about the early twentieth century science of the psychology – that it relied on magical thinking „as a bridge between unconscious desire and worldly effects”⁵ – might equally be applied to the creation of Socialist Realism, which relied heavily on a magical conception of literature as a form of peculiarly efficacious language with the power to „engineer human souls”. The literary word, by virtue of what Sidney in 1595 had called its „sweet charming force”⁶, was supposed to enter and transform the consciousness of the reader, leading in turn to a transformation of society. The chief difference between Sidney’s Renaissance conception of this process and Stalin’s Revolutionary one was the recasting of an essentially magical („charming”) relation as a quasi-„scientific” or technological one.

The Revolutionary attitude to literature, then, seems to conflate the three elements of *language*, *magic*, and *science* – positing a „scientific” relation between words and material reality that, like the nascent science of psychoanalysis, nonetheless relies heavily on a magical model of transmission and transformation. Returning now to Pasternak’s magical amulet, we can see that it, too, unites language, magic and science in a single intervention into material reality. What is interesting about the episode is the way that Pasternak juxtaposes scientific, political, and magical explanations for the soldier’s „miraculous” survival, without fully endorsing or foreclosing any one of them⁷.

Comparing the amulet that worked to the one that didn’t, we find that there is a scientific explanation for the difference: the White Guardsman’s

⁴ P. Thurschwell, *Literature, Technology and Magical Thinking, 1880–1920*, Cambridge 2004, p. 6.

⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 7.

⁶ P. Sidney, *The Defence of Poesie*, <<http://www.bartleby.com/27/1.html>>, 31.07.2012.

⁷ For an interesting close reading of the same episode from a different perspective (focusing not on the amulet but on the philosophical implications of Yuri’s actions in the preceding battle), cf. I. Masing-Delic, *Zhivago as Fyodorovian Soldier*, „Russian Review” 1981, vol. 40, no. 3, p. 300–316.

amulet was housed in a „flat little golden case or snuffbox” around its wearer’s neck, whereas that of the Red partisan was „sewn into a rag”. The metal case is „dented, as if by a nail”, where it successfully deflected Iurii’s bullet. Of course, a metal case could stop a bullet without magical assistance, whereas a piece of rotten old cloth could not; thus the respective success and failure of the two amulets is explicable in purely physical terms. This in turn leads us to a political–economical explanation: the upper–class youth, equipped with both a gold snuffbox and a superior education, escapes the death that claims the poorer, less–educated and less–privileged man. (Aleksandr Etkind suggests a further, political–philosophical interpretation: „Ideas live on among the people that were handed down from the upper classes but which, as a result of repetitions and distortions, are no longer doing the job they were intended to do”⁸) But the timing of the episode, with the soldier opening his eyes just as Iurii discovers the amulet, is designed to foreground the least rational explanation: that done right, *magic actually works*. Correctly constructed, the „miraculous” text does indeed save its wearer’s life.

Pasternak’s choice of magical object here is significant for two reasons. First, as a venerable magical artifact dating back to Roman and Byzantine Egypt and situated „at the nexus of religion, magic, science and written culture”⁹, the textual amulet is emblematic of Pasternak’s interest in the complex interrelationships among the various discourses by which human culture has sought to explain and manipulate the material world. It also serves as a point of convergence between „Western” and Russian magic, and between Orthodox Christian rite and pagan–derived folk custom. A closer scrutiny of Pasternak’s novel reveals that it is rife with examples of such „syncretic” magic, ranging from the „laying on of hands” with which Iurii cures Anna Ivanovna (3.3) to the portentous magpies that fly into the yard of Iurii and Lara’s house in Iuriatin (13.18). Analyzing some of these instances will provide clues about Pasternak’s deployment of magic in the novel as a whole.

⁸ A. Etkind, *Who Wrote Doctor Zhivago?*, „Russian Studies in Literature: A Journal of Translations” 2002, vol. 39, no. 1, p. 80–96.

⁹ D. Skemer, *Binding Words: Textual Amulets in the Middle Ages*, University Park 2006, p. 5.

Perhaps the first magical event of the novel is a negative one – the inverse of the White Guardsman's „miraculous” use of liturgy to save his life. Having prayed for the soul of his late mother, the boy Iurii faints, and, coming to, realizes that he has neglected to pray for his missing father. But he chooses not to remedy the omission: „[H]e thought that nothing terrible would happen if he prayed for his father some other time [*kak–nibud' v drugoi raz*]” (1.6). In fact, however, Iurii's father throws himself from a train that very same afternoon. Again, the reader here is fully acquainted with the various „rational” reasons for the suicide of Zhivago *père*: economic and/or legal problems, emotional agitation, excessive consumption of alcohol. But the timing suggests that, like that of the unfortunate Red partisan with the illiterate amulet, Iurii's father's death represents the failure of a would-be supernatural intervention on his behalf (the garbled psalm, the omitted prayer).

Later in the novel, Iurii *does* intervene to prevent a death – that of his future mother-in-law, Anna Ivanovna Gromeko. The incident is an exact complement to the one in which Iurii decides to pray for his father „some other time”: here he uses the same words, offering to postpone his conversation with Anna to „some other time” (*kak–nibud' v drugoi raz*), but at her urging, forges ahead with his „lecture” on „death, consciousness, belief in resurrection...” (3.3). What he offers to share with Anna is his „scientist's opinion” (*moe mnenie estestvennika*), but the „lecture” that follows is more spiritual in nature, culminating in yet another reference to a religious text, the Revelation of St. John (incidentally also a popular text for use in textual amulets)¹⁰:

There will be no death, says John the Apostle; and listen to the simplicity of his argument. There will be no death, because the past is over. It's almost as if there will be no death because we have already seen that, it's old and boring, and now we need something new, and the new thing is life eternal.

Iurii then lays his hand on Anna's forehead and tells her to go to sleep; she complies. Leaving the room, Iurii is surprised at his own behavior, ruminating „I'm becoming some kind of charlatan. I recite incantations, heal by the laying on of hands”. But – as the very next sentence reveals – Anna's health is better the next day. As usual, there is a scientific explanation:

¹⁰ Ibidem, p. 132, 141.

already upon entering the invalid's room, Iurii has noted that, contrary to the official diagnosis, Anna has „All the symptoms of lobar pneumonia. It seems to be the crisis”. Knowing Iurii to be a skilled diagnostician, we can assume that he is correct here and that Anna's recovery is unrelated to Iurii's „laying on of hands” or his invocation of St. John. However, the text is once again configured to offer the news of Anna Ivanovna's recovery immediately following Iurii's „incantations” – making them the proximate cause, in a literal, spatial sense – whereas a gap of some two pages separates the medical outcome from Iurii's real „scientist's opinion”, his diagnosis of her condition.

Pasternak's trick of manipulating the spatial arrangement of the text itself to create „magical” effects comes into play again in the typhus episode in Part 6. A patient of Iurii's blames her illness on a supernatural event:

[The patient's husband] explained that they had bought for a trifle an antique, broken chiming clock that had long since ceased to work.... And suddenly the clock, unwound for years, started up of its own accord, rang out its complicated minuet on little bells, and stopped again. His wife was seized by terror, convinced that her final hour had struck, and now there she lay... (6.11).

The sick woman attributes her illness to supernatural causes, but her husband – following the tendency of early twentieth-century psychoanalysis to employ magical thinking as a „bridge” between the psychic and the somatic – attributes it to nervous shock: because she *believes* „her final hour has struck”, her body has responded by producing seemingly fatal symptoms. Iurii, skeptical of both explanations, deduces from the patient's symptoms that she has typhus – a disease whose symptoms include mental „haze” (from which the disease derives its name) and delirium. In other words, the husband's quasi-magical diagnosis has it exactly backwards: his wife's psychic disturbance is caused by the physical infection, not the other way around.

The interesting part, though, comes a few pages later when Iurii arrives home. There it transpires that an exactly similar event – the uncanny self-resurrection of a broken and unwound clock – has taken place in his absence. „My typhus hour has struck”, jokes Iurii, sharing the tale of his patient and the antique clock (6.13). The narrator demurs: „But he caught

typhus much later [*No tifom on zabolet gorazdo pozdnee*]” (6.14). In narrative time, Iurii’s „hour for typhus” does indeed come „much later” – months after the recovery of the original patient with the chiming clock, as we learn in the next paragraph. But spatially, all that separates the uncanny ringing of the alarm clock from the onset of Iurii’s typhus is two short paragraphs – less than half a page. Further emphasis is lent to the connection by the fact that the two events – the ringing of the clock and the onset of the disease – conclude successive sections of the chapter (6.13–14). In this way, the author contrives to create a poetic coincidence between the two events, paralleling the experience of the patient with the chiming clock, even as the „facts” of the narrative play out differently. Like the husband of the original patient, the reader is led into thinking about the causality of the illness in a magical, rather than a scientific, way.

A final example of such „syncretic” magic, in which natural and supernatural explanations of the same event are superimposed on one another, occurs in Part 13, when Iurii and Lara are residing precariously in Iuriatin. Iurii is resting and listening as Lara and Sima Tuntseva, in the next room, conduct „a conversation in the nature of a lecture, which the guest was delivering to the hostess” (13.17). (The scene thus forms a kind of counterpart to the earlier one in which Iurii „heals” Anna Ivanovna, where he too finds himself delivering an impromptu lecture, on similar themes.) As Sima discourses on the meaning of the Christian liturgy, two magpies alight in the yard. Iurii thinks to himself: „Magpies mean snow”. At the same moment, Sima interrupts herself to say „Magpies mean news. You’re going to receive guests, or else a letter” (13.18). As we have by now come to expect, both Iurii’s „scientist’s opinion” and Sima’s more mystical, folkloric interpretation of the signifier are borne out by subsequent events – and as we have also learned to expect, the magical effect is presented as more proximate. In the very next sentence, both the prophesied guest and the letter arrive: a ring at the doorbell announces Sima’s sister Glafira, who has brought a letter from Tonia. The letter in turn announces two important pieces of news, one for each magpie: the birth of Iurii’s daughter, and the deportation of Tonia and her family. Finally, as Iurii finishes reading the letter, snow is falling. His scientific prediction is thus fulfilled – but cedes the precedence to Sima’s „magical” one.

It will be observed that the examples given above form a subset of one the novel's most-remarked structuring devices, the coincidence. Indeed, Pasternak's use of magical omens and events works in a similar way to his use of coincidences, dismantling the deterministic logic of Marxist materialism and replacing it with a more ambiguous, even mystical logic that demands a „poetic” interpretation¹¹. As we have also noted, in each of the above examples, rational logic works alongside magical logic, yielding multiple explanations for the same phenomena, just as several different reasons for the survival of the White Guardsman with the amulet are allowed to co-exist. The incident with the amulet is thus emblematic of a technique we might call multiple causality”, which Pasternak employs throughout the novel. Like the coincidences to which the reader's attention is continually drawn, Pasternak's principle of multiple causality becomes both an important structural device and a metaphor for the function of art.

Before broaching these larger topics, however, let us turn to the second reason the amulet episode is particularly significant: it represents a magical power that is specifically reserved for *text*. Getting the text exactly right, as we learn from the example of the two soldiers, is crucially important. Again, an examination of Pasternak's novel reveals numerous examples of „magical” texts, ranging from Biblical selections to Russian folk songs (both typically overheard by the novel's protagonists at crucial turning-points in their lives), and from political slogans to the poems that Iurii works to get, like the „miraculous” amulet text, exactly right.

To catalogue all the available examples in detail would take more space than the current study permits. But any reader of *Doctor Zhivago* can recall the most notable: Lara, in church, hearing the psalmist „rattle off” the Beatitudes and thinking „This was about her” (2.17); Iurii, in a parallel experience, „listening to the requiem service as to a communication addressed to him and concerning him directly” (3.15); the old woman Kubarikha's folk song, with its evocative refrain „I'll escape my bitter captivity,

¹¹ On Pasternak's coincidences, cf. the works by K. Pomorska, *Themes and Variations in Pasternak's Poetics*, Lisse 1975; A. Livingstone, *Pasternak: Doctor Zhivago*, Cambridge 1989; *Doctor Zhivago: A Critical Companion*, ed. E.W. Clowes, Evanston 1995 and M. Langleben, *The Rhythmical Composition of Doctor Zhivago*, in: *Twentieth-Century Russian Literature: Selected Papers from the Fifth World Congress of Central and East European Studies, Warsaw 1995*, ed. K.L. Ryan, B.P. Scherr, New York 2000.

I'll escape to my little berry, my beautiful love", which connects the frozen rowan tree to Lara and foretells (or even propels) Iurii's escape from the Forest Brotherhood in search of his lost love (12.6, 9)¹²; the wall texts in Iuriatin rhetorically establishing „Workers' Control", „Factory Committees" and so on (13.3). What these texts have in common is their *magical function*, characterized by the linguist Kenneth Burke as “a transference of linguistic function” from „the realistic use of addressed language to *induce action in people*” to „the magical use of addressed language to *induce motion in things*”¹³. In this case, the „motion” to be induced – various transformations in the lives of the protagonists and of society – still requires people to set it going; these texts do not quite aspire to work their transformations in the absence of human agency. But each of them overflows, or aspires to overflow, the bounds of its Jakobsonian „contact”, reaching an addressee and/or signifying a meaning that extend beyond the limits encoded by the genre of the communication and the mode of its transmission¹⁴. In this way, they not only enact the „magical” quality of connecting ideas to reality in ways that are not rationally explicable, but also provide a model for the function of poetic language in the novel.

So far, I have not discussed the numerous allusions to fairy tales, with their particular brand of folk magic, which make up an important thread of

¹² A similar, and reinforcing, enchantment is wrought on Iurii by the magical tale Kubarikha tells a few pages later: „Or as sorcerers of old would reveal: this woman has grain in her, or honey, or marten fur. And the knights would bare the woman's shoulder, like unlocking a casket, and with a sword pull out of her shoulder blade a measure of wheat, or a squirrel, or a honeycomb” – Part 12, Ch. 7. The magical treasure–woman materializes in Iurii's imagination as Lara. Jerzy Faryno compellingly connects the materials of Kubarikha's „magical” narratives and songs to the deeper structural matrices he identifies as the „archaeopoetics” of the novel: see for example J. Faryno, *Muarovaia kapusta i tetrad' otkrovenii (Arkhaeopoetika „Doktora Zhivago” 2)*, „Studia Slavica Hungarica” 2011, vol. 56, no. 1, p. 160, 167.

¹³ K. Burke, *A Rhetoric of Motives*, Berkeley 1969, p. 44, 42.

¹⁴ „The ADDRESSER sends a MESSAGE to the ADDRESSEE. To be operative the message requires a CONTEXT...seizable by the addressee, and either verbal or capable of being verbalized; a CODE fully, or at least partially, common to the addresser and addressee...; and, finally, a CONTACT, a physical channel and psychological connection between the addresser and the addressee, enabling both of them to enter and stay in communication” – R. Jakobson, *Closing Statement: Linguistics and Poetics*, in: *Style in Language*, ed. T.A. Sebeok, Cambridge 1960, p. 353.

the novel. They extend from the novel's first chapter – „at one time in Moscow, one could cry to a sleigh driver «To Zhivago!»...and he would bear you away to a fairytale realm [*v trideviatoe tsarstvo*]” (1.3) – to its last (Iurii's poem „Fairy Tale”), and have been extensively studied by critics¹⁵. It will suffice here to mention just two examples that are particularly salient for our topic. The first concerns the country magic of the old woman Kubarikha, whom Iurii encounters during his forced tour of duty with the Forest Brotherhood, and who – like a poet – conjures with names¹⁶:

You have to know everything. Agafiushka, biddings, forbiddings, the word for escaping, the word for protecting. You look there and think it's a forest. But it's the Evil One there fighting with the angelic hosts, like your lot with Bassalygo's...
 Or again, take your red banner. You think what, it's a flag? But see, it's not a flag at all, but the death maiden's alluring crimson kerchief... She lures the young lads by waving her kerchief and winking, lures them to the slaughter... And you thought it was a flag, „come to me, proleters and paupers of the world” (12.7).

Kubarikha transforms the real into the folkloric through the creative use of language, a „magical” metamorphosis that recalls those of Ovid – and parallels Zhivago's own creative process, as it is described in Part 14 of the novel:

The wolves he had been remembering all day were no longer wolves on the snow under the moon, but had become a theme about wolves, a representation of a hos-

¹⁵ On fairy tales and related folklore in *Doctor Zhivago*, see the works by R. Lamont, *Yuri Zhivago's „Fairy Tale”: A Dream Poem*, „World Literature Today: A Literary Quarterly of the University of Oklahoma” 1977, vol. 5, p. 517–521; E. Wilson, *Symbol in „Doctor Zhivago”*, „Encounter” 1959, vol. 12, no. 6, 1959, p. 5–16; L. Gorelik, „Duratskie” *voprosy Eleny Proklovny kak prolog k ural'skim glavam „Doktor Zhivago”*, in: *The Life of Boris Pasternak's Doctor Zhivago*, ed. L. Fleishman, Stanford 2009; D. Magomedova, *The Relationship of Lyrical and Narrative „Plot” In „Doctor Zhivago”*, in: *Doctor Zhivago: A Critical Companion*, ed. E.W. Clowes, Evanston 1995; J. Bayley, *Pasternak's Great Fairy Tale*, „The New York Review of Books” 1991, vol. 38, no. 5, p. 12–15 and M.P. Rowland, *Pasternak's use of Folklore, Myth, and Epic Song in Doctor Zhivago*, „Southern Folklore Quarterly” 1961, vol. 25, p. 207–222.

¹⁶ As Susanna Witt suggests, „Kubari[k]ha can be regarded as a parallel to Z[h]ivago”, whose magical/folkloric gifts of healing and song present a „distorted mirror image” of Iurii's own gifts as a doctor and poet. Cf. S. Witt, *Creating Creation: Readings of Pasternak's Doktor Živago*, Stockholm 2000, p. 17.

tile force that aimed to destroy him and Lara... The idea of this hostility developed by the evening such force that it was as if the tracks of an antediluvian monster had been found in the Shutma, and a fairytale dragon of gigantic proportions was lying in wait...

Gradually reworking what he had written, Iurii Andreevich began in the same lyrical manner to retell the legend of St George... He heard the horse's hoofs striding across the surface of the poem, as one might hear a horse's ambling gait in one of Chopin's ballads. St. George was galloping on his steed across the boundless expanse of the steppe, Iurii Andreevich could see him from behind as he grew smaller and smaller in the distance (14.9).

Like Kubarikha, Zhivago transforms ordinary material reality – wolves glimpsed momentarily against the snow – into the stuff of fairytale (dragons, which in turn conjure St. George to vanquish them). Using poetic means, he brings to life a vision of St. George so real that it becomes, in turn, almost materially palpable: like the characters in Bulgakov's *Master and Margarita* who inadvertently conjure the devil by verbal allusions to him, Zhivago here conjures St. George through (poetic) language, namely a specially crafted three-beat verse. The resulting poem, „Skazka” („Fairy Tale”), thus functions as an incantation, intervening in material reality much like the spells of Kubarikha or the Psalm in the amulet.

Like the magic of the textual amulet, then, the magic of the fairytale realm is directly paralleled to the magic of the poet's own words. In this connection, it is surely significant that Iurii responds to the first (February) Revolution in the magical language of the fairy tale – „Mother Rus' is moving, she walks and can't stop walking, talks and can't stop talking [*khodit ne nakhoditsia, govorit ne nagovoritsia*]... Stars and trees have come together to converse, night flowers are philosophizing and stone buildings are holding meetings (5.8)”¹⁷ – whereas he responds to the

¹⁷ Iurii himself goes on to characterize this state of affairs as „Evangelical” („Chto-to evangel'skoe, ne pravda li?”), again forging a link between Biblical text and natural magic (such as is seen in the case of the amulet). I. Smirnov argues that this passage, in which „apostolic Christianity (of the Cathars and Saint-Simon) becomes...a phenomenon of the natural world”, forms a bridge between „natural utopianism and heretical aspirations” – part of a larger critique of utopianisms in the novel. Cf. I. Smirnov, *Roman tain „Doktor Zhivago”*, Moscow 1996, p. 95.

second (October) Revolution in the scientific language of his medical profession: „What magnificent surgery!” (6.8). Though both reactions seem unreservedly enthusiastic, the language in which they are encoded reveals the fate of magic – and by association, of creativity – in an evolving Revolutionary reality. The „fairytale realm” promised by the fall of the Tsar is appropriated and absorbed by the „scientific” discourse of Bolshevik materialism: the „magician” is re-educated as a technician, the poet as an „engineer” of human souls.

Pasternak’s achievement in *Doctor Zhivago* is to rescue magic from its subjection to Bolshevik science, in much the same way as he salvages the mystical concepts of fate and coincidence from the mechanistic view of causality imposed by dialectical materialism. In saturating his novel with examples of magic – particularly the magic of words and text – Pasternak reclaims magic as the province of poetry, restoring the tradition of Sidney’s „sweet charming force” and Ovid’s *carmen* (meaning, in Latin, both „song” and „charm” or „spell”). The writer turns out to be no engineer but something akin to Kubarikha’s „sorcerers of old”; the literary text is not scientific, but, like the Psalm in the amulet, „miraculous”.