

# Slavophilism, nostalgia and the curse of Western ideas: Reflections on Russia's past in Alexander Proshkin's 2006 adaptation of *Doctor Zhivago*

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*Abstract:* Following the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, Russia experienced a decade in which their television industry produced little new programming. This trend started to reverse in the late 1990s and the early 2000s, when, partly owing to the collapse of the rouble, Russian television networks started to produce many programmes for domestic consumption again. One of the most popular genres to appear during this period was adaptations of Russian literature. These series were, in many ways, meditations on Russian history, the country's place in the world and special attention was given to dissident works from the Soviet period. This paper examines one of the most significant examples of the genre, the eleven-part 2006 adaptation of Boris Pasternak's novel *Doctor Zhivago* (1957) directed by Alexander Proshkin, and the way the series broadly reflects upon Russian history.

*Keywords:* Russia, television, Slavophilism, *Doctor Zhivago*, Vladimir Putin, media

## Introduction

Almost a year after coming to power as president of Russia in 1999 Vladimir Putin, who would become the dominant political force of early twenty-first century Russia, gave a speech in which he said:

Russia's unity is strengthened by its inherent patriotism, its cultural traditions and shared historical memory. Today an interest in Russia's history is returning to art, theatre, and cinema. This is an interest in our roots, in what we all hold dear. I am convinced that this is the start of a spiritual renaissance. (MacFadyen 2008, 13)

Following the many shocks that Russia endured in the last decade of the twentieth century, the search for a stabilising cultural force in the Russian president's estimation could be found by probing the great cultural achievements of Russian history. While Putin for some reason chose to exclude television from his list of important cultural institutions, there was at the time of his statement no cultural institution with greater reach. According to Sarah Oates and Stephen White, by 1991 about ninety-one percent of Russians owned at least one television, making it by far the most accessible medium in post-Soviet Russia (White and Oates 2003, 32). Television proved so important to Putin and his inner circle that they acted swiftly to gain leverage over the three largest networks. The two largest stations ORT (now called Channel One) and RTR (now called Rossiya One)

were renationalised, and through state pressure, the state oil and gas giant Gazprom acquired NTV (Judah 2014, 44). These actions were taken by the Putin government primarily to dominate the news media, but the effects, inevitably, trickled over into television fiction as well.

Narrative drama has been an important site of cultural and historical discourses in the Putin era. After domestic television production had declined sharply in the 1990s, the industry re-emerged in the early 2000s. Kachkaeva et al. note that in the first decade after the collapse of the Communist regime ‘of domestic products, ninety percent of air time was filled with reruns of old Soviet series, like *Seventeen Moments of Spring*’. According to their report, in 1997 one hundred and three Soviet or Russian series aired on Russian television. If ninety percent were old Soviet series that means that only ten or eleven new series were produced (Kachkaeva, Kiriya, and Libergal 2006, 89). They also note that ‘new Russian series of the mid-90s were shot on low budgets, poorly written and under-produced’ (Kachkaeva, Kiriya, and Libergal 2006, 89). The devaluation of the rouble in 1998 encouraged a resurgence in domestic television production because Russian networks were suddenly unable to afford the foreign-produced programmes and therefore had to produce their own (Prokhorova 2003). This increased production, combined with Russia’s renewed sense of confidence and importance under Putin, led to the creation of television series that focused on the Second World War, great figures from the Russian past, and numerous adaptations of Russian and Soviet novels, beginning with the 2003 adaptation of Dostoevsky’s *The Idiot* (2003). By 2006 all the major entertainment networks were producing one or more adaptations a year. One of the most significant was the 2006 adaptation of Boris Pasternak’s *Doctor Zhivago* directed by Alexander Proshkin. Despite the fact that this series drew relatively poor ratings, it remains one of the most interesting adaptations undertaken in post-Soviet Russia. It broadly reflects on the last years of the Russian Empire, the Russian Revolution, the Russian Civil War, and the early days of the Soviet Union. It also tries to address the root causes of Russia’s turbulent twentieth-century history. While, ostensibly, this version of *Doctor Zhivago* represents the events of the early twentieth century as depicted by Pasternak, the series is, in fact, an examination of Russian history since Peter the Great. The way the series answers the question ‘what went wrong?’ explains a great deal about the mindset of elite Russians towards the West in the post-Soviet period. A resurgent nationalist philosophy permeates the series, and as such, it is an important text for understanding post-Soviet Russia.

The series itself is interesting in many respects, but none more so than the fact that Proshkin and screenwriter Yuri Arabov chose to adapt Pasternak’s book much less faithfully than other adaptations from the same period. For example, the 2003 adaptation of Dostoevsky’s *The Idiot* and a 2005 version of the Soviet period’s most beloved novel, Bulgakov’s *The Master and Margarita*

(1967), both took great pains to remain faithful to their respective source material (Brassard 2012). Proshkin for his part adapts *Doctor Zhivago* very liberally, adding and deleting scenes and rewriting much of the dialogue. The most important aspect of the television version is a series of exchanges where characters discourse on Russian history, the Russian soul and philosophy. These discussions attempt not only to make sense of what is happening to the characters at that moment but also to better understand the whole of Russian history. The series is particularly interested in why the Russian people suffered so deeply in the twentieth century.

These interchanges play on common themes in recent Russian historical discourses, most notably on the resurgent nineteenth-century philosophy known as Slavophilism, which proposed that Russia was incompatible with Western philosophy and ideas and that the ultimate source of Russia's struggles comes from efforts to Westernise the country (Walicki 1988, 228). This intellectual movement popular in the nineteenth century came back into vogue following the end of Communist rule and the reemergence of Russian nationalism (Hosking 2006). In their series, Proshkin and screenwriter Yuri Arabov seem to be drawing on the neo-Slavophile tradition articulated by Soviet dissident writer Alexander Solzhenitsyn. He held the view that 'Russia should seek its own new form of government: it could not simply copy the West' and that 'a strong, authoritarian leadership would have to be retained while Russia developed new political structures and reoriented itself spiritually and culturally' (Devlin 1999, 67). According to Judith Devlin, when Solzhenitsyn returned to Russia in 1994 after twenty years of exile he 'was equally scathing about Russia's new rulers [as he had been of the Communists] and the effects of [their] reforms, referring to the post-Soviet period as the "Great Russian Catastrophe" and comparing it with the seventeenth-century Time of Troubles and 1917' (Devlin 1999, 67). She adds that, according to Solzhenitsyn 'contemporary democrats had repeated Peter the Great's mistaken attempt to impose Western political norms in Russia, without regard for her cultural identity and circumstances' (Devlin 1999, 67). As Devlin notes these views were also expressed by others, such as Victor Aksyuchits, the leader of the Russian Christian Democratic Movement, who eventually who 'espoused the idea of a national dictatorship as a [...] short-term solution to the problem of governing Russia' and eventually favoured the restoration of a monarchy' (Devlin 1999, 75). Proshkin and Arabov echo these views in the dialogues that they insert into the *Doctor Zhivago* script. Their neo-Slavophilism is evident since the dialogues they insert point to Peter the Great, the Bolsheviks and democracy as their primary objects of criticism. These sequences present an image of Russia brought to its current dismal state by the importation of Western ideas, which started under Peter the Great and proceeded through the communist period to the present day. Proshkin presents Western ideas as having brought on numerous national tragedies. The most catastrophic

these were Peter the Great's Westernising reforms and the Bolshevik importation of Marxism. Combined with a great deal of nostalgia which surrounds Russia's last Tsar, Nicholas II, the series both blames the West for Russia's trouble and subtly points to autocratic rule as the best solution to the country's ongoing problem. In so doing it implicitly supports both Putin's cultural project to restore pride in the Russian past, reclaim the country's great power status, and his autocratic style of rule.

### The Novel

Before discussing the series, it is important to situate Pasternak's novel historically to establish why it is such a rich source for discussing Russian identity. Pasternak is one of only five Russian writers to have been awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature. He was awarded the 1958 prize, in the words of the Nobel committee 'for his important achievements both in contemporary lyrical poetry and in the field of the great Russian epic tradition' (Volkov 2008, 194). *Doctor Zhivago*, the novel that propelled Pasternak's candidacy for the prize was not, however, the pride of Soviet literature. He had submitted the novel to the prestigious Soviet literary journal *Novy Mir* in 1956. The journal's board subsequently rejected Pasternak's work. In a letter explaining their decision, they noted that 'The thing that has disturbed us about your novel is [...] The spirit of your novel [...] the general tenor of your novel is that the October Revolution, the Civil War and the social transformation involved did not give the people anything but suffering' (Finn and Couvée 2014, 99). While it faced rejection, a manuscript of the novel was taken to Italy by journalist Sergio D'Angelo and given to the Italian communist publisher Giangiacomo Feltrinelli who negotiated with Pasternak in secret for the international rights. Feltrinelli initially planned to publish the novel in Italy after its release in the USSR. When it became clear that the novel would not be published in the Soviet Union, Feltrinelli and Pasternak resisted tremendous pressure from the Communist parties of their respective countries, and eventually, the novel was published in Milan in November 1957. The Soviet state then launched a campaign against the novel, which according to Finn and Couvée helped drive its popularity beyond a small literary elite in the West (Finn and Couvée 2014). The awarding of the Nobel Prize for Literature to Pasternak in 1958 further increased the novel's appeal. At the time the Prize was a highly political issue for the Soviet Union, and the country's leaders saw Pasternak's award as 'a hostile anti-Soviet move, which one official compared to a "literary atom bomb"' (Volkov 2008, 195). The novel even became a weapon in the Cold War, when the CIA arranged to have copies of a Russian version of the novel distributed at the Vatican pavilion of the 1958 Expo in Brussels (Finn and Couvée 2014). After he had been awarded the Prize, the Soviet Writer's Union expelled Pasternak depriving him of his livelihood. He was also denounced in the main Soviet newspaper *Pravda* and other lesser

publications. Pasternak eventually refused the Nobel Prize, but his persecution continued until his death in 1960.

The novel is also famous for its overall literary value. According to Angela Livingstone ‘free and outspoken, it conveyed an authentic personal experience of the Revolution with little regard for the restraints that made most writers either “toe the party line” or “write for the desk drawer”’ (Livingstone 1989, 3). She contends that readers in the West ‘experienced it as a renewing of that youthful zest for living which the translation of nineteenth-century Russian novels at the beginning of [the twentieth] century had seemed to bring into the aging culture of Europe’ adding that, ‘it certainly stands out as a large novel about large subjects. We encounter in it a quarter century of tremendous historical changes’ (Livingstone 1989, 4). These changes are presented primarily through the eyes of the novel’s protagonist Yuri Zhivago, a doctor, and poet. The story follows his life from his childhood in the late 1800s until his death in Moscow in the 1930s.

### The Series

One of the results of the Putin administration’s close ties with the television industry has been a renewed focus on bringing the canon of Russian literature to the small screen. Late in 2003 NTV announced that it would be bringing a version of *Doctor Zhivago* to the nation’s television screens in 2005. The station collaborated with the production company Central Partnership and received a large grant from Russia’s state television and film agency. Filming began for the television adaptation of *Doctor Zhivago* early in 2004. The series was originally scheduled for broadcast in December 2005 but delayed its release to avoid competing with Vladimir Bortko’s adaptation of one of the Soviet period’s most popular novels, Mikhail Bulgakov’s *The Master and Margarita* (MacFadyen 2008, 32).

Proshkin’s adaptation marks an attempt repatriate a novel best known for the iconic 1965 film adaptation by British director David Lean. To bring the series to the screen, NTV brought together a prestigious cast and crew. Oleg Menshikov, who plays Yuri Zhivago, is one of Russia’s most popular actors. He had, at the time of *Zhivago*’s filming, acted in several highly-acclaimed films including Nikita Mikhailkov’s *Burnt by the Sun* (1994), which won the Oscar for best foreign film in 1994 and Sergei Bodrov’s *Prisoner of the Mountains* (1996), which was nominated for an Academy Award in 1996. While Chulpan Khamatova, who plays Lara, was not as decorated as Menshikov but at the time the series was filmed she was one of Russia’s leading actresses. Oleg Yankovsky, who plays the diabolical Viktor Komarovsky, is widely recognised as one of the greatest screen actors of the Soviet period. Proshkin, the series’ director, is an acclaimed filmmaker, having won a Soviet film award for his directorial debut, 1988’s *Summer of ‘58*. Yuri Arabov, who wrote the screenplay, is a poet and a

favorite screenwriter of Alexander Sokurov, one of Russia's best-known auteur filmmakers. The series' musical composer, Eduard Artymyev, is renowned for his scoring of many famous Soviet films, particularly Soviet director Andrei Tarkovsky's highly acclaimed *Stalker* (1979) and *Solaris* (1972) and Nikita Mikhalkov's Oscar-winning *Burnt By the Sun* (1994).

Despite its star-studded cast, the actual cultural impact of the series is difficult to judge. The series premiered on NTV in May 2006. Before the series was broadcast a copy of all eleven episodes was stolen, and pirated copies quickly appeared for sale in the Moscow metro. By the time the series aired, it presumably had already been widely viewed. Perhaps because of this piracy, the series attracted very low ratings, of about six percent in the capital and four percent in the rest of the country. While these ratings certainly suggest that the series was not well received by the viewing public, it is hard to estimate the impact of the DVD piracy. Adding to the problems already faced by the series, NTV insisted on running a twenty-five-minute block of commercials during each of the eleven episodes. According to Proshkin, this practice led viewers to purchase the illicit DVD copies rather than endure long commercial breaks. There is evidence that supports the director's conclusions. In Belarus, which shares close cultural and linguistic ties with Russia, *Doctor Zhivago* attracted thirty percent of viewers in the capital Minsk and half of the viewers in the rest of the country. The reason for these much higher ratings seems to be that the station airing the series showed fewer commercials than NTV and that DVD copies of the series were not widely available before airing making the broadcast more appealing. Thus, while the series was considered a commercial failure, it is still possible that there was a large audience that chose to watch it on illicitly purchased DVDs.

### Original dialogues

Despite its commercial failure, the themes the series presents offer an interesting insight into the cultural elite's views of Russian identity. Neo-Slavophilism looms large in Proshkin's dialogues, most notably in a dialogue between Yuri Zhivago and Lara Antipova late in the series. Zhivago has deserted the Red Army faction that earlier had drafted him into military service. He has returned to the city of Yuriatin to find that his family has returned to Moscow and that Lara and her daughter are on the verge of starving. In this scene, Zhivago and Lara are discussing what has happened to each other and are searching for a cause that explains all their sufferings.

*Lara.* Why do we have to go through such torture? Do we really deserve it?

*Zhivago.* Do you know how many generations are punished for the sins of their fathers?

*Lara.* Four.

*Zhivago*. Let's assume that each generation lives for fifty years. That makes it 200 years. What an enormous figure. Where does it all begin then? How did it all begin?

*Lara*. Peter the Great ruled two hundred years ago. We are the fourth generation after him.

*Zhivago*. This butchery of ours will bring enough suffering for 200 years to come. No hope for a bright future. We are doomed to suffer and rot. Our children, grandchildren, great-grandchildren.<sup>1</sup>

The two points of historical reference in this dialogue reveal a vision of Russian identity that is distinctly Slavophile. The two historical moments that the dialogue comments on are the reign of Peter the Great and the Bolshevik Revolution. Each of these moments is presented as a disaster that brings two hundred years of suffering to Russia. They are also both moments in which Russia began to transform itself following European philosophies. It was Peter who initially opened Russia to the West. James Cracraft notes that the essence of Peter's reforms was 'a rapid and sweeping Europeanisation of Russian ways of making and doing things, and thinking and talking about them' (Cracraft 2006, 158). He reorganised Russian society, banned the wearing of traditional Russian garb by his noblemen and built a European-style army, navy, and bureaucracy. His rule represented a radical break from the past, making Russia more European and began a historical struggle in Russia between its traditional culture and the pressure to Westernise (Cracraft 2006, 9). According to Evgenii Anisimov, Peter's reforms were so sweeping and total that Peter remained at the center of disputes between Westernisers and Slavophiles from the post-Pushkin era until the fall of the Romanovs. He suggests that 'Slavophiles vehemently denounced Peter for introducing into Russia alien Western principles of life, institutions, and mores that were harmful for the Russian individual and the society as a whole'. For their part, 'Westernisers saw in Peter the tsar-revolutionary who with the aid of strong central authority managed to make Russia into a great power' (Anisimov 1993, 6).

Marxism, the ideology that drove the Soviet Union, was also imported from the West. The Bolshevik ideology once again revolutionised Russian life, displacing the Romanov ideal of 'Orthodoxy, autocracy, and nationalism' that had dominated for three centuries. As Bruce Lincoln notes of the Bolshevik era:

From Moscow, once again restored as Russia's capital, new rulers launched a new era that would repeat all the trials and trauma of Peter the Great's time. Peter had labored to bring Russia into the eighteenth century; Lenin, Trotskii, and Stalin struggled to bring her firmly into the twentieth. In both cases, the task was accomplished only after untold suffering, great agony, and countless deaths. (Lincoln 1983, 747)

<sup>1</sup> Dialogues translated from Russian to English by Jeffrey Brassard.

There is, therefore, a connection between the reforms of Peter the Great and the Bolshevik Revolution; both are inherently related to the influx of ideas into Russia from the West. The result in both cases is death and suffering.

It is easy, therefore, to see where Proshkin's dialogue evokes Slavophilism. Russian suffering is explained by this dialogue as the result of the actions of Peter the Great and the Bolsheviks. Though separated by approximately two hundred years, both were attempts to bring European concepts and ideas to bear on Russian society and culture. Whereas in the view of the Slavophiles, Russia was to purify Europe spiritually, it is the corrupting of Russia by the West that marks this sequence in Proshkin's series. Thus, this version of *Doctor Zhivago* activates a reactionary and essentialist view of Russian culture. The interpretation of Russia's fate by Zhivago and Lara, over-burdened by imperialist-influenced Slavophilism, suggests that Russia's problems then were not authoritarianism per se, but an authoritarianism that had been perverted by Western ideas. This view ultimately echoes Solzhenitsyn's belief that 'the Soviet system was terrible not because it was authoritarian but because it refused to allow moral freedom, requiring citizens to surrender to a lie' (Devlin 1999, 67).

Proshkin's series frequently repeats the Slavophile opposition of Russian and the West. Alexander Gromeko, Zhivago's father-in-law, for example, comments in two dialogues about Western ideas of governance and how they cannot possibly succeed in Russia. The doctor has just returned from military service during the First World War to find that the situation in Moscow is beginning to deteriorate. The provisional government is losing the support of the people, and poverty is widespread. The once neatly maintained Zhivago apartment deteriorates gradually as the family struggles to feed itself and heat the space. During this time, Zhivago and Gromeko, who is very drunk, discuss the Russian characteristics that will lead to the Bolshevik takeover:

*Zhivago.* Father, tell me what's happening, or I will go insane.

*Gromeko.* Nothing is happening. Only trifles: War, despair, revolution.

*Zhivago.* There was war before, with Japan in 1905.

*Gromeko.* We lost everything, Yuri. We have simply lost everything. Our country is gone [...] we placed so much hope on Kornilov's march into Petrograd hoping that he would stop the chaos [...] This son of a Cossack and a peasant woman was the perfect person to lead the country through turmoil [...] Do you know the magic word you can use to petrify any Russian?

*Zhivago.* I know [...] police.

*Gromeko.* No, you fool [...] Democracy. And here's another one: People's rule. Just mention 'people's rule' to any Russian moron, son of a Cossack and a peasant woman, and you will see his eyes go blind with ruthless desire.

Proshkin has Gromeko repeat a common platitude about Russia and democracy. Russians, according to this view, need a strong leader or autocratic governance rather than a democratically elected government. As Shevtsova reports ‘Seventy-nine percent of [Russian] citizens had decided by 2001 that “Russians can’t manage without a strong hand” and as such democracy must be sublimated in the name of strong, effective rule’ (Shevtsova 2005, 171). Instead of speaking about the crimes of either the Tsarist regime or the Bolsheviks, Proshkin’s Gromeko attacks democracy. Its importation into Russia cannot possibly succeed because it stands in stark opposition to the Russian character. The feeling that Russia is different from other nations connects back to the ideas of Slavophilism and gives Russians few options for governing their country. By implying that democracy is incompatible with Russianness, the series’ philosophy limits the choices of governance to forms of autocratic rule.

The series goes on to further discredit ideas of governance that come from the West by attacking Bolshevism. When Gromeko discusses the Bolsheviks, he suggests that they too will fail to impose order because of the nature of the Russian people. In this scene, Zhivago has just returned from the Ural city Yuriatin to the family’s refuge at their old estate at Varykino. He tells his father-in-law that the Bolsheviks have executed the Tsar and his family. Gromeko responds with a tirade about the Bolsheviks:

*Gromeko.* I guess I was wrong about my people. We took their dumbness begotten by servitude and vodka for meekness. And we took their pride and whimsical fantasy for spirituality. We forgot the complete inability of the Russian people to organise as a society. The Communists want to put on them a metal leash of governance, but when the metal rusts chaos, anarchy and debauchery will ensue as it did during the last year of the war with Germany.

Again, Gromeko is offering a summary judgment about the fundamental disjunction between the manner by which the Bolsheviks wish to rule and the nature of the Russian people. The dialogue is not speaking of Marxism in general as an untenable ideology but addresses only the Russian case. Because of a fundamental incompatibility, the Bolsheviks with their Western-influenced ideology are doomed to fail. It is clear once again that Proshkin, taking the Slavophiles’ view, excuses Russia’s political leaders for repeatedly failing to create a humane state and chooses instead to appeal to the uniqueness of the Russian people as the reason outside forms of governance cannot work.

The screenwriters do not limit their critique to general ideas of governance. The director also points to a specific institution that is incompatible with the goals of the Russian people, namely the bureaucracy. This excoriation is fitting since, as Tomas Masaryk suggests, ‘the bureaucracy was Westernist in so far as since the days of Peter the administration had sought its models in Europe’ (Masaryk 1968, 344). A vast and corrupt bureaucracy also dominated the Soviet

State. Again, according to Slavophilism, this is a European social invention foisted upon the Russian people. The Slavophiles saw the bureaucracy as an unnecessary imposition on the Russian people, particularly on the villages (Christoff 1961, 327). The bureaucracy would continue, and grow its importance under the Bolsheviks. A dialogue between Yuri Zhivago and Victor Komarovsky, a bureaucrat, points to the inherently corrupt and parasitic nature of the bureaucracy in Russia. Zhivago has just taken Komarovsky for medical attention after he was struck unconscious in the street and robbed. While he is bandaging his wound, they discuss the causes of the revolution:

*Zhivago.* Finish with your achievements and revolutions or next time you will end up with a crushed skull.

*Komarovsky.* Why do you think all this happened?

*Zhivago.* Because of the war.

*Komarovsky.* Your view is naïve. The war only triggered the whole thing. The real reason, young man, was property. Remember that! It happened so that people like you and me could do what we wanted with this property without asking the police, the church or the Tsar for a blessing. Everything else is fog, a smokescreen. Freedom, equality, brotherhood: that is for the lower-class scum. They will cut each other's throats by the time they figure out what freedom means. We are going to own it all, and we will be free.

*Zhivago.* I think you have made a mistake. The genie you have released from the bottle will be impossible to put back in.

*Komarovsky.* We do not need to put him back into the bottle. We must be standing next to him.

Komarovsky's explanation of the reasons for the revolution tells the viewer a great deal about Proshkin's view of the Russian bureaucracy. The bureaucrat changes affiliation constantly, showing deference only to whoever is in power, to enhance his position in Russian society. His speech also sets him apart from the Russian people. He is not one of them but instead is merely there to siphon off as much wealth and power as possible. This view is consistent with Solzhenitsyn's understanding of Russia's governing elites. He suggested that one of the most serious problems facing Russia was that the Westernised governing elites in Moscow and the rest of the country exist in fundamentally different spheres (Devlin 1999, 66). Arabov echoes this view in an interview with Tatyana Rasskazova about the series. He stated that '[Russia] is broken [...] The rural population of Central Russia, which once supported the state, now lives in the most miserable conditions [...] We have many political scientists, but the people have been lost. The last century obliterated them' (Arabov 2005).<sup>2</sup> Arabov's statement points to the same divide between the elites in Moscow and

<sup>2</sup> Translation from Russian to English by Jeffrey Brassard.

the average people in the rest of the country suggested by Solzhenitsyn. The Westernised bureaucracy, imported from abroad, therefore shows itself to be fundamentally hostile to the Russian people.

Some of the ideas that the director introduces in the series are surprising given that authenticity was one of the stated goals of the production. Proshkin insisted that he wanted to reclaim Pasternak's legacy and create a more authentic version of the story than British director David Lean's 1965 film or the 2002 BBC adaptation that starred Kiera Knightley (Myers 2006). However, the director's relentless critiques of Bolshevism are not evident in the original novel. Describing the initial stages of the Bolshevik revolution, Pasternak's *Zhivago* takes a very nuanced approach to the Revolution saying:

What splendid surgery! You take a knife, and with one masterful stroke you cut out all the old stinking ulcers [...] Quite simply, without nonsense, you take the old monster of injustice which has been accustomed for centuries to being bowed and scraped and curtsied to, and you sentence it to death. (Pasternak 1997, 195)

Some even accused the novel at the time of its publication of being pro-Bolshevik. This position was championed by Russian émigré writer Vladimir Nabokov (Livingstone 1989, 10). Nabokov reportedly hated the novel because 'the Bolshevik revolution and its leader, Lenin, were depicted as a legitimate phenomenon: a position unacceptable for Nabokov' (Volkov 2008, 200). Frank O'Hara claimed that 'If Pasternak is saying that the 1917 revolution failed, he must have felt that the West never even made an attempt. Far from being a traitorous work [*Zhivago*] is a poem on the nobility of the Soviet failure to reconstruct society in human terms' (Livingstone 1989, 11). Certainly, Pasternak's novel is, in the end, opposed to the result of the Bolshevik revolution, but not unambiguously. There is a certain admiration for the idea of remaking society along more equitable lines, even if the Soviets ultimately failed to do so. Thus, the passages in the series that blame all of Russia's tribulations on the corrupting influence of Western ideas are inserted by Proshkin and Arabov and an attempt to graft their neo-Slavophilism onto the meaning of *Doctor Zhivago*.

### Nostalgia

The second element that Proshkin uses to reflect on what went wrong in Russia's twentieth-century history comes in the form of imperial nostalgia. The historical longing expressed in the series manifests in two ways: the portrayal of Tsar Nicholas II and the main musical theme. Regarding the first, once the First World War begins, the director attempts to rehabilitate the image of Tsar Nicholas II by minimising the impacts of the First World War. The mise-en-scène chosen for the army unit to which *Zhivago* belongs, reveals Proshkin's nostalgic bias. While Pasternak gives almost no description of *Zhivago*'s posting, short of saying that it is in a miraculously preserved town, Proshkin chooses a staging

reminiscent of the American television series *M\*A\*S\*H* (1972–83). Zhivago is living in an encampment, performing surgery in a large central tent and living in a smaller tent on the edge of the camp. While there are certainly wounded soldiers with missing legs and arms or bandaged heads strewn across the camp, Proshkin falls short of depicting the misery of trench warfare. No mention is ever made of any supply shortages and, aside from the occasional sound of German artillery, little is said about the war at all. This depiction makes the Eastern front seem tolerable and therefore exonerates the Tsar from his decision to involve Russia in a war for which it was disastrously unprepared.

Even when directly addressing the role of the Tsar in the events that led to the Russian Revolution, Proshkin chooses to portray the monarch sympathetically. When Misha Gordon, Zhivago's childhood friend, visits the doctor's unit as the official photographer for a Russian newspaper, they discuss the Tsar and the reasons why he is ultimately doomed.

*Zhivago.* How is his majesty?

*Gordon.* I could not see him well through the viewfinder.

*Zhivago.* I think he has lost his stature. Another would have yelled to the soldiers, "Forward! Hurry!" or said that his sword and his people were one. Something along those lines. He should have mentioned the people; that's a must. But he was so tragically above banality. A true Russian. In Russia we do not care for staged performances, don't you think? [...] He has lost his stature because he is doomed.

These words are taken virtually verbatim from the novel. However, original text prefaces this dialogue with Zhivago's impressions of the Tsar as a weak man constantly looking to his brother for support and guidance (Pasternak 1997, 120). Proshkin's series, on the other hand, frames Nicholas II as a tragic figure betrayed by history rather than as the incompetent autocrat who led his country into the disastrous Russo-Japanese War and First World War, despite being badly outmatched in both. Proshkin would have his audience believe that Nicholas was merely a microcosm of Imperial Russia already doomed by forces beyond its control. The series chooses to forget the tremendous inequalities that existed in Tsarist society and the virtual famine that the First World War imposed on the Russian Empire. None of these reasons, in Proshkin's presentation, have anything to do with the reason the Tsar and his empire are doomed.

Proshkin's presentation in this instance is consistent with those that dominated the popular imagination of the Tsar, as emphasised by the Russian Orthodox Church, in the post-Soviet period. According to Kathy Rousset in post-Soviet Russia, the Tsar is portrayed as being compassionate to his subjects, upholding the Orthodox faith and opposing Western liberalism. According to her, contemporary accounts recast 'his meekness, the goodness of his heart, his modesty and simplicity' as Christian virtues, rather than weaknesses (Rousset

2013, 154). She also notes that the Russian Orthodox Church consistently perpetuated an apolitical view of the last Tsar in years leading up to the canonisation of the imperial family. She remarks that ‘The Canonisation Committee did not formulate any political judgment of Nicholas II’s reign’, adding that ‘referring to “Bloody Sunday” [...] when striking workers and their families [...] marching to deliver a petition to the Tsar were shot down by the Imperial Guard the commission specified that [...] no document could prove that he gave the order to shoot’ (Rousselet 2013, 154). As a result, the Tsar was portrayed by the Orthodox Church as not being culpable for the massacre. Rather than a brutal tyrant, the Tsar and his family are presented as tragic figures who come to represent the destruction of authentic, Orthodox Russia, by the Communists. Wendy Slater asserts that hagiographies of the lives of the Imperial family as saints flourished in the first decade after the collapse of communism. The popularity of these accounts was partly responsible for the Church’s eventual decision to declare the entire family saints. Slater notes that in these accounts ‘The Tsar becomes a deeply tragic figure, modeled upon Job “the Much Suffering,” on whose saint’s day Nicholas was born [...] The hagiographies disregard Nicholas’ political role, except to credit him with Russia’s rapid economic development’ (Slater 2005, 64).

Thus, Proshkin’s representation of the Tsar fits well with the post-Soviet cultural projects that have used him as a link to the Russian past. As such, Proshkin’s depiction is a form of restorative nostalgia (Hosking 2006, 401). Svetlana Boym suggests that this type of nostalgia ‘proposes to rebuild the lost home and patch up the memory gaps’ adding that ‘restorative nostalgia is not the sentiment of distance and longing but rather the anxiety about those who draw attention to historical incongruities between past and present and thus question the wholeness and continuity of the restored tradition’ (Boym 2002, 45). This definition by Boym fits in well with Fred Davis’ notion that nostalgia is ‘one of the means – or better, one of the more readily accessible psychological lenses – we employ in the never-ending work of constructing, maintaining, and reconstructing our identities’ (Davis 1979, 31). He adds that ‘in the clash of continuities and discontinuities with which life confronts us, nostalgia clearly attends more to the pleas for continuity, to the comforts of sameness and to the consolation of piety’ (Davis 1979, 33). Memories of the past, therefore, are reshaped to allow the mind to create continuity. This need for continuity is particularly important to a society that has experienced a historical shock. The use of restorative nostalgia in Proshkin’s television series essentially effaces the worst aspects of Nicholas so that he might be a usable building block in connecting post-Soviet Russia to its Imperial predecessor. He becomes, like Russia itself, a tragic figure brought low by the communist period, and as such he acts as a link to the past. Russians can, consequently, link their true cultural identity with Nicholas II, allowing them, in a sense to see themselves as heirs to the glory of Imperial Russia, rather than the inheritors of the largest portion of the failed

Soviet empire. Among other things, this has allowed modern Russia to import the Romanov tricolour flag and Romanov double eagle crest as national symbols (Hosking 2006, 401). Linking pre and post-Soviet Russia also implies that the error of the past lay in abandoning Russian values, embodied by Nicholas, and adopting communism in 1917 and liberalism in the 1990s. Thus, Proshkin is building on and adding to a well-established trend in Russian society of looking back nostalgically at the Russian Empire and then using a cleansed image of its past to construct current national identity. This practice ignores the problematic nature of the Tsar's rule and thus, is ultimately revanchist.

The type of restorative nostalgia discussed above is not the only type on display in the series. The series' musical score articulates the sense of longing and loss that Boym referred to as reflective nostalgia. She describes reflective nostalgia as a type of remembrance that 'dwells in the *algia*, in longing and loss, the imperfect process of remembrance' (Boym 2002, 41). The musical score enables a type of remembrance that blurs the troubling aspects of pre-Soviet history in the series. Non-diegetic music is an often-overlooked aspect of film and television but one that is essential in establishing the affective qualities of a series. In Proshkin's adaptation, the haunting 'main theme', written by famed composer Edward Artemyev, appears during the opening credits for each episode. While the theme music plays the camera pans over letters and old photographs of scenes that occur during the series. These pictures are mostly in sepia tones and depict the last years of Tsarist rule exclusively. The pictures show happier moments, such as weddings and family portraits. The music and pictures suggest that the period these pictures portray was one in which people were happy, and families were united. This melancholic reflection is not, however, the restorative nostalgia seen elsewhere in the series. Rather, it dwells on the images of things lost during the Revolution and Russian Civil War. Other instances where the same music appears in the series correspond to this nostalgic longing and loss. This melancholic nostalgia is particularly notable when compared to the music from the 1964 David Lean film adaptation of the novel.

For his adaptation, Proshkin chose a musical composition that was pointedly different from the now-classic romantic melody 'Lara's Theme' composed by Maurice Jarre. One of the most prominent features of that piece was the inclusion of the balalaika, a Russian folk instrument. In an interview with the New York Times, Proshkin asserts that 'From the point of view of the class that is shown in the movie, the balalaika has about as much to do with them as the saxophone' (Myers, 2005). His rather dismissive comment suggests that his adaptation had a larger ideological purpose. *Doctor Zhivago* was now ready to be brought home and made according to distinctly Russian, not Western, sensibilities. Thus, Artemyev chose to compose a score that was reliant primarily on traditional symphonic instruments rather than Russian folk instruments. String instruments and the piano dominate the series' 'main theme', disengaging it from the Western orientalism and romanticism that dominates Jarre's score. The

melody is slow and mournful. It rises slowly and maintains the higher notes before descending again. Artymyev's music imprints feelings of nostalgic sadness and loss on the minds of the audience from the moment the opening credits of the series play.

Proshkin inserts a variation on Artymyev's main theme throughout the series to highlight feelings of loss and highlight the director's ideological message. Over the course of the series, the tone of the music gradually shifts, and the melody plays much more slowly, growing more mournful. This slow transformation of the main theme corresponds with the progression of the revolution and the fracturing of the characters' lives. One of the most notable instances of this increasingly mournful music is heard just after the beginning of the Revolution. Zhivago is on the front and watches while military discipline breaks down and the nation plunges into chaos. The doctor is sitting with a group of dejected-looking officers, drinking what appears to be pure alcohol. They learn through a messenger that both the Tsar and his brother have abdicated the throne, leading one officer to note that 'Russia now has no dynasty and no Tsar'. As a variation of the 'main theme' plays, Zhivago burns a bowl full of alcohol. A lone oboe dominates this arrangement of the music. It plays slowly, giving the theme a lonely mournful sound. The combination of this visual metaphor with the music implies regret for the loss of the Russian empire.

The sense of reflective nostalgia, of loss and longing, continues to build throughout the series and becomes particularly acute in the final episodes. These feelings are particularly evident when Zhivago returns from his division of the Red Army to Lara's home in Yuriatin. At this point in the series he is clearly a broken man. His clothes are tattered, he has a long unkempt beard, and he is catatonic. As the theme music plays, Lara is preparing to cut Zhivago's hair and tells her daughter 'with these magic scissors we will take the spell off him and turn him back into our Zhivago'. What Lara is proposing is, of course, impossible. The doctor is no longer the Tsarist-era poet that he was when Lara first met him. The years of revolution and war have left deep psychological scars. It is a mournful look back at what was, and a failure to recognise the impossibility of returning to the past.

The expression of nostalgic longing reaches its climax late in the series when a new arrangement of the 'main theme' accompanies the suicide of Pavel Antipov, who for much of the story appears under his revolutionary pseudonym Strelnikov. His character represents revolutionary idealism, and the series presents him as a single-minded idealist committed to the principles of the Revolution. He has served for several years in the Red Army as a commander, fighting against the remnants of the Imperial Army. With the war nearing its conclusion, he has served his purpose and is about to be executed by the Bolsheviks. Antipov, as romantic as Zhivago in his own way, has no place in the

post-Revolutionary world. Instead of being executed he chooses to commit suicide, shooting himself with a pistol while standing alone in a snow-covered field. Moments after his death the 'main theme' plays, but with an arrangement that is unique in the series. Instead of instruments, a Russian Orthodox choir sings the theme. This arrangement is dominated primarily by male bass and female alto voices singing in Russian. The effect is a powerful feeling of loss and spiritual emptiness that evokes the mysticism of Russian Orthodoxy. Antipov, who represented the revolutionary ideal, has died realising that the Revolution has been thoroughly corrupted. The music reclaims his idealism, dissociating it from the Bolshevik ideology and connecting it with the Orthodox Church and Tsarist Russia. Just as there is no place for Antipov in the post-Revolutionary world, there is little room for idealism because the Bolshevik ideology has betrayed Russia. Thus, Antipov's death points back to Imperial Russia as the only authentic path for Russians to follow.

In its feelings of longing and loss, the series points back to the late days of the Russian Empire as a time that lacked the problems of the Soviet Union. In so doing, it sublimates the social conditions that led to the unrest, which originally led to the Bolshevik revolution. One of the effects of this sublimation is to make the style of governance that was practiced by the Tsars appear to be a viable way forward. Ultimately, these representations allow Putin's gradual retrenchment of autocracy to appear tolerable. Since according to Proshkin's representation, Russia's golden age occurred under autocracy, there would be little reason to seek a different style of governance. Thus, the series links the autocratic Putin government to the golden age of the Tsars, circumventing the problematic Soviet period altogether.

### Conclusion

Proshkin's series downplays the role of the Imperial regime in instigating the wars and revolutions that ultimately led to Sovietism. Certainly, the Russian director has provided a Russocentric adaptation of Pasternak's novel. He has not, however, provided a version that accurately represents Pasternak's view of the Soviet experiment or an accurate vision of Russian history. Instead, he chooses to portray events in line with current political orthodoxies or popular thinking about Russian identity, making the series fit into the broader context of Vladimir Putin's post-Soviet nation-building project. Ultimately, this series places the blame for Russia's woes on the corrupting influence of the West. The series frequently plays on feelings of national pride and popular, somewhat xenophobic, clichés of Russian identity. It also strongly supports the notion that a Tsarist-style autocracy represents the best hope for stability and prosperity in Russia. Ultimately, this amounts to a tacit endorsement of Vladimir Putin and his regime. Putin and his style of government loom as central figures even in

this adaptation of the prestigious Soviet novel and supporting the current government becomes part of its *raison d'être*.

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