

jhs

Oct 31, 1958

Dear Helen Wolff:

It would be hard to tell you how grateful and how moved I was when I received your letter and its enclosure from Pasternak. The German was not too hard, and I think I got his full meaning. I can ask no greater satisfaction than this thought that I have really been able to give this great man at least a small part of the understanding and appreciation he deserves. He has more than amply repaid me by assuring me that I was not wrong to believe that I really had entered into the depths of his thought, and that there was a very great deal in common in our ideas and aspirations. This is to me a matter of great wonder and significance, for from the very beginning I had the feeling that there was no other modern writer who said the things I myself believed and felt in the way Pasternak did. This is not a matter of "ideas" and concepts, but of a deeper and more fundamental grasp of life, in and through life itself. I am awed by the community of ideals and purposes that has made itself evident.

This is of course all the more reason to feel deeply shocked at his tragic situation. I wonder how any man is going to be able to stand the shock of what he must have gone through. After years of isolation, isolated by his own greatness as well as by the pharisaism all around him, his fate of being on the stage taking part in a play for which he was not cast, after all this it finally seems that his part in it has become clear-- and he is thrown out of the theater. To have the Nobel prize in one's hands and to have it snatched away by fools. I know Pasternak does not care for prizes or for money, but he is human as anyone else is, and what man would not suffer when his nation brutally forbids him to be loved and understood by the world! And then to be thrust into complete solitude I have a suspicion that this in itself will not worry him, but there will be ~~such~~ such poverty, such hardship. Will they let him do any work? I hope nothing worse happens.

I did not know when I wrote you the other day that he had already been forced to reject the prize. My letter must have been a little quixotic, but you must understand that we see and hear almost nothing down here, and it is a miracle that I ever heard of Pasternak or read him in the first place, and then heard of the Nobel Prize affair. Be sure that if my letter is good for anything, you should not hesitate to use it in any way you see fit, and use me to support any move on behalf of Pasternak. That is the least I can do. I pray for him constantly, and will say mass for him when I get a stipend for my own intention.

I was profoundly struck by what he said in his letter, about the need to go beyond the good that has already been accepted. This I take very much to heart. This contact with Pasternak leaves me with a sense of great responsibility to transcend not only the good but the best-- or at least to strive in that direction and accept the sacrifices this involves. One cannot resign oneself to comfortable mediocrity in the presence of the words and example of such a man. He has shown the world something of the fire and the light that belong to man's future on earth and in heaven. He is one of the only men who has a spiritual message that is new and makes real sense, and points out a real way through our darkness. Obviously such a man cannot survive long in a world like this, especially in Russia, where all that is trivial and stupid is placed on a pedestal and must not be questioned.

I am deeply grateful to you for passing on my letter to him and sending me this reply. Cordially and faithfully yours in Christ