

Abbey of Gethsemani
Trappist P.O.
Kentucky, USA.

Aug. 22, 1958.

My Dear Boris Pasternak:

Although we are separated by great distances and even greater barriers it gives me pleasure to speak to you as to one whom I feel to be a kindred mind. We are both poets-- you a great one and I a very minor one. We share the same publisher in this country-- New Directions. At least for our poetry: for your prose work is appearing under the Pantheon imprint and mine appears in another house.

I have not yet had the pleasure of reading your recent autobiography although I am familiar with the earlier one, Safe Conduct by which I was profoundly impressed. It may surprise you when I say, in all sincerity, that I feel much more kinship with you, in your writing, than I do with most of the great modern writers in the west. That is to say that I feel that I can share your experience more deeply and with a greater intimacy and sureness, than that of writers like Joyce whom I nevertheless so well like and understand. But when you write of your youth in the Urals, in Marburg, in Moscow I feel as if it were my own experience, as if I were you. With other writers I can share ideas, but you seem to communicate something deeper. It ~~is~~ is as if we met on a deeper level of life on which individuals are not separate beings. In the language familiar to me as a Catholic monk, it is as if we were known to one another in God. This is a very simple and to me obvious expression for something quite normal and ordinary, and I feel no need to apologize for it. I am convinced that you understand me perfectly. It is true that a person always remains a person and utterly separate and apart from every other person. But it is equally true that each person is destined to reach with others an understanding and an unity which transcend individuality, and Russian tradition describes this with a concept we do not fully possess in the west-- sobornost.

It gives me pleasure to send you under separate cover a kind of prose poem or meditation on Prometheus which has been privately printed near here recently. At least you will like the handsome printing. I hope the book reaches you. I am writing to you in your village home near Moscow-- of which I happened to read in an English magazine. If you get this letter, and not the book, I hope you will let me know. I will try again.

It is my intention to begin learning Russian in order to try to get into Russian literature in the original. It is very hard to get much in the way of translations. I would much prefer to read you in Russian, though it will probably be a long time before I am able to do so. What I have read of modern Russian poets in translation is to me very stimulating. I have no difficulty in admitting a certain lassitude and decadence in much western literature. I like Mayakovsky and also I am very much interested in Khlebnikov (is that how you spell it?) What do you think of him? Blok of course I find very interesting. What about the new poets? Are there some good ones? Whom do you recommend? Do you know of the many very fine poets there have been in Latin America? I am particularly fond of a great Negro poet of Brazil, Jorge de Lima. Neruda, of Chile, is probably well known in the USSR and I presume you know him.

My dear Pasternak, it is a joy to write to you and to thank you for your fine poetry and your great prose. A voice like yours is of great importance for all mankind in our day -- so too is a voice like that of Shostakovitch. The Russian leaders do not perhaps realize to the full how important and how great you are for Russia and for the world. Whatever may lie ahead for the world, I believe that men like yourself and I hope myself also may have the chance to enter upon a dialogue that will really lead to peace and to a fruitful age for man and his world. Such peace and fruitfulness are spiritual realities to which you already have access, though others do not.

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These are the realities which are important. In the presence of these deeper things, and in witness of them, I clasp your hand in deep friendship and admiration. You are in my prayers and I beg God to bless you.

Fraternally yours in Christ