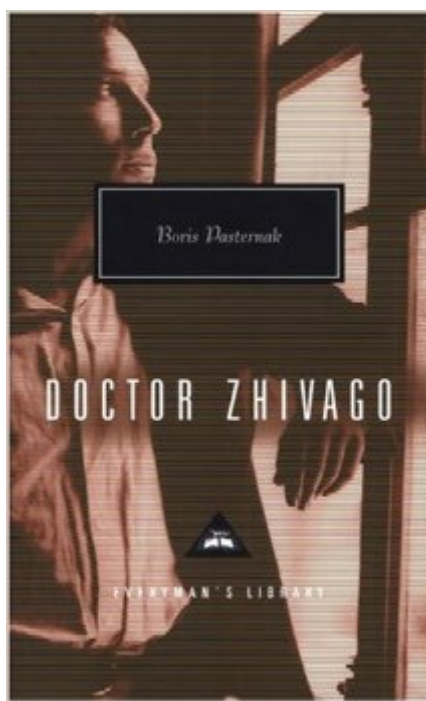


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Doctor Zhivago (Everyman's Library)



Synopsis

Â In the grand tradition of the epic novel, Boris Pasternakâ™s masterpiece brings to life the drama and immensity of the Russian Revolution through the story of the gifted physician-poet, Zhivago; the revolutionary, Strelnikov; and Lara, the passionate woman they both love. Caught up in the great events of politics and war that eventually destroy him and millions of others, Zhivago clings to the private world of family life and love, embodied especially in the magical Lara.Â First published in Italy in 1957, Doctor Zhivago was not allowed to appear in the Soviet Union until 1987, twenty-seven years after the authorâ™s death.Â Translated by Manya Harari and Max Hayward(Book Jacket Status: Jacketed)

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Customer Reviews

Doctor Zhivago by Boris Pasternak is quite remarkably a poet's novel: the writer was a poet, and hence each page is full of beautiful imagery, metaphors and word play. The protagonist is a poet, the novel revolves around his love and life in the first half of twentieth century Russia. The reader, by association, has to be a poet to really relish the saga. It is one of those novels from last century that everyone must read. The ghosts of socialism and Marxism, the excesses that occurred in name of revolution, the transformation of the largest country of the world from centuries old system into a failed ideal: the novel has enough historical significance. Last century was guided, molded, scarred, decorated and defined by the events and ideas that crop up as part of Doctor Zhivago's life. The literary underpinnings are gigantic: a love story with the Russian Revolution as background score: a

Nobel was the least he could have got. Besides the historical perspective, the story itself is a delightful one. The homely Tonya, Dr Zhivago's wife and first love and mother of his children, the sensuous Lara who weaves into and out of Yuri (Dr Zhivago's) life, her husband Pasha Antipov, who at every junction of his life must fight against ghosts and demons of his wife's past and present and in attempt outclass himself, the Uncle Koyla, the intellectual: the list is unending. Characters are crafted from all sections of society, making this novel a representation of whole society at that time. Like Tolstoy's Anna Karenina, the novel provides four or five chief characters, who are immense in their own portrayal, parting with their thoughts, ideas, ideals and philosophies, and possessing unique well-defined characteristics, the novel has another string of about twenty characters who are unforgettable for whatever roles they are assigned. The harshness of winter, the beauty of forests and fields, the man divided in his love for wife Tonya and lover Lara, the poet in exile, the idealists seeking to change the world, Russian history and customs: such ideas find Pasternak displaying his poetic prowess. Many passages in the book are sheer poetry, and I am amazed at seeing how powerful they are in translated language: I wish I knew Russian to find out how delightful the original must have been. It is a long novel, with graphic pleasant and unpleasant sequences and a writing style where it is apparent that either because it is a translation or the writer was a poet attempting prose, the writing is not an easy read. Requires a lot of time and effort and most people prefer the movie that was made in 1965 or so. I think reading Doctor Zhivago is an experience in itself, and in this post cold war era, it contains the perspective and historical lessons that we all must know and understand. An excerpt that presents a preview of all the things this novel incorporates into the love saga of Yuri, where his heart is in strife in his love for two women as is it in strife witnesses changes that challenge every aspect of his being and thinking: "Even more than what they had in common, they were united by what separated them from the rest of the world. They were both repelled by what was tragically typical of the modern man, his shrill textbook admirations, his forced enthusiasm, and the deadly stillness coldly preached and practiced by the countless workers in the field of art and science in order that the genius must remain extremely rare. They loved each other greatly. Most people experience love, without noticing there is anything remarkable about it. To them- and this made them unusual- the moments when passion visited their doomed human existence like a breath of timelessnesses were moments of revelation, of ever greater understanding of life and of themselves." Loved it. Highly recommended.

And see the revolution of the times
Make mountains level, and the continent,
Weary of solid firmness,--melt itself into the sea! "King Henry IV, Part 2, Act III. Scene I
Boris Pasternak's Dr.

Zhivago takes us back to a time when fate took Russia through a perfect storm of revolution, war, revolution, and civil war. This was a time that did not just level mountains and melt a continent but also melted and cruelly leveled the lives and fates of untold numbers who were caught in these turbulent waters. Josef Stalin is reported to have said that "One death is a tragedy. A million deaths is just a statistic." What Pasternak has done so masterfully in telling this story is to paint a picture on a huge canvas that stretches from Moscow to Siberia while at the same time telling an intimate story that allows the reader to maintain that feeling of tragedy. I've had a copy of *Dr. Zhivago* sitting on my shelf for decades, one of the books I inherited from my father's collection. I never bothered to pick it up. I'd seen David Lean's classic film and wrongfully decided that there was no need to invest any time in reading an epic novel about the tragic romance of Yuri Andreevich Zhivago and Larissa Fyodorovna Antipova. When I saw that Pevear and Volokhonsky had done a new translation I decided to give *Zhivago* a shot. What a revelation. As good as the movie was it didn't begin to plumb the depths of the book. The movie focused, understandably enough, on the relationship between Yuri and Lara and it seemed that the Russian Revolution and Civil War was merely the back-story to the relationship. But in Pasternak's hands I think it was close to being the other way around. The first two-thirds of the book takes two separate lives that contain just a few incidental touch-points where those lives intersected. The emotional heart of the story for me was elsewhere. It was a story of the dissolution of Russian life in the years between the 1905 Revolution and WWI where the decadence and debauchery of a life lived in fancy clothes and salons played out against the turmoil bubbling beneath the surface. It was a story of the disruption and destitution set in motion by WWI and the October revolution. It was a story of the story of hunger and desperation brought on by a vicious Civil War in which the phrase "man is wolf to man" comes to the fore and the fragile web that keeps a society civilized is swept away in a sea of inhumanity. It is into a world that has already been rent asunder that the relationship of Yuri and Lara comes into bloom. The story of Yuri and Lara almost seemed to me to be the back story, the context that illuminated the age of unreason that Pasternak wrote about. One passage set this out for me in stark terms: "This was the sickness of the age, the revolutionary madness of the epoch. In thought everyone was different from his words and outward show. No one had a clear conscience. Each with good reason could feel himself guilty, a secret criminal, an unexposed deceiver." The passage concludes that people denounced themselves, "drawn on by a destructively morbid inclination, of their own free will, in a state of metaphysical trance and passion for self-condemnation that, once set loose, could not be stopped." This struck me immediately as Pasternak's version of Yeats' "Second Coming" where the centre cannot hold and where "the best lack all conviction, while the worst are full of

passionate intensity. It was one of the many touch-points in the book that were immensely moving to me. The Russian poet Yevgeny Yevtushenko has said, perhaps tongue-in-cheek, that a "translation is like a woman. If it is beautiful, it is not faithful. If it is faithful, it is most certainly not beautiful." My high-school level Russian does not permit me to speak to this translation's faithfulness but I can certainly attest to its beauty. Pasternak's prose, as rendered by the team of Pevear and Volokhonsky, flows beautifully. As I read through the book I did not feel I was reading a translation. Any time I read a piece in translation and feel compelled to underline or highlight particularly noteworthy passage I think of the translation as one that does justice to the book. Time after time I found myself highlighting passages that I wanted to remember. This strikes me as being my own testimony not just to the beauty of the translation but what also must be its faithfulness. Dr. Zhivago is not, as I imagined, a eulogy for a pair of tragic Russian lovers but an elegy for an age in a specific time and place. It is a beautiful, moving story that was a pleasure to read. L. Fleisig

I read Zhivago for the first time in high school. I loved it, but didn't pick it up again for 20 years. I was surprised to find it rough going at the beginning. When I had first read the book, it had been precisely the first 100 or so pages that had enchanted me and pulled me into the novel. This time around, it was the complex and often frustrating last half of the book that really moved me. I guess this is a measure of how the book grows with the reader. Doctor Zhivago is a complicated book that seems to me largely about how people get involved with circumstances (politics, love affairs) that do not interest them, simply because life leaves them vulnerable. That makes for a strange reading experience, because it is not a message that wraps itself up neatly. The texture of the novel is in part about ends-- loose ends, dead ends, character cul-de-sacs. A more experienced author wouldn't have tried to work this theme out in prose using the same methods that Pasternak employed. The book rolls from melodrama to nearly documentary realism. He uses diary form, letters, even poetry to complete the work. I guess it was his lack of experience that allowed him to (very nearly) achieve the impossible. The feeling of the book is an awful lot like life. There are certainly more polished and perfect novels and novelists out there. Doctor Zhivago would not have profited from their example. As the title of this review says, Zhivago is great precisely because it isn't perfect. It is a great sprawling messy wonderful world of a book. Recommended for readers of all ages.

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