

ZESZYTY NAUKOWE WYŻSZEJ SZKOŁY PEDAGOGICZNEJ W BYDGOSZCZY  
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IN SEARCH OF THE WORD:

AN ANALYSIS OF PASTERNAK'S POEM "ТАК НАЧИНАЮТ..."

Так начинают. Года в два  
От мамки рвутся в тьму мелодий,  
Шебечут, свищут, - а слова  
Являются о третьем годе.

Так начинают понимать.  
И в шуме пущенной турбины  
Мерещится, что мать - не мать,  
Что ты - не ты, что дом - чужбина.

Что делать страшной красоте  
Присевшей на скамью сирени,  
Когда и впрямь не красть детей?  
Так возникают подозренья.

Так зреют страхи. Как он даст  
Звезде превысить досяганье,  
Когда он - Фауст, когда - фантаст?  
Так начинаются пытане.

Так открываются, паря  
Поверх плетней, где быть домам бы,  
Внезапные, как вздох, моря.  
Так будут начинаться ямбы.

Так ночи летние, ничком  
Упав в овсы с мольбой: исполнься,  
Грозят заре твоим зрачком.  
Так затевают ссоры с солнцем.

Так начинают жить стихом.

This article is devoted to a poem by Pasternak which, believe, is representative of the author's poetic Weltanschauung as well as his poetic techniques. It is no accident that Marina Tsvetaeva asked Pasternak to dedicate this poem to her, that André Malraux chose to recite it when he introduced Boris Pasternak to the audience at the International Writers' Congress for the Defense of Culture in Paris in 1935, or that it has been frequently translated into a number of European languages. The significance of the poem transcends its subject matter; we may view it, in effect, as a complex and deep response to the conflicting tendencies in Russian poetry of that time. Oddly enough it has not received the attention it deserves on the part of literary critics, and until recently no special essay has been devoted to its analysis.

Pasternak's early poetry had a reputation for extreme obscurity. Its notoriously fortuitous, deliberately dense verbal texture led some of his contemporary critics to claim that no clear meaning could be extracted from his poems or lyrical utterances, that they even bordered on nonsense, transsense language /so-called zaum'/. The very first line of our text exhibits these properties of the early Pasternakian style, and the opening phrase displays the intentional obscurity of his language. As if deliberately violating the rules of grammar, Pasternak uses the form НАЧИНАЕТ without an infinitive. This syntactic eccentricity parallels another device of "estrangement": the opening phrase belongs to a type of sentence known as "generalized personal statements" in which the 3rd person plural of the verb is used without specifying the

subject. The grammatical meaning excludes reference to any specific agent. It could thus be said that we encounter here an obscurity of two kinds: first, the agent of the action is merely implied /one may recall here Roman Jakobson's observation that in Pasternak's lyrics the first person is pushed into the background /2/ /; second, we do not know what the action is about, since the predicate lacks the infinitive complement and we are only vaguely made aware of its "beginning". The fact that this patently strange sentence appears in the opening line produces an effect of unresolved tension, of a riddle that must be solved. But no such resolution is offered in the rest of the stanza; its reading provides no information as to the actions implied in the first sentence, nor as to personages involved. The generalized personal predicate encroaches upon the second sentence as well, and the intentional vagueness of the events is reinforced by the fact that the verbs of the following sentence pertain to completely different spheres of life. While От мамки рвутся в тьму мелодий /"They rush from a wet-nurse into a swarm of tunes"/ unequivocally refers to human beings, the other two predicates -- щебечут, свещут /chirp, babble/ -- point in an equally clear manner to nestlings. The sequence of verbs might suggest that the "ornithological" terms function as mere "metaphors", but this does not provide a solution with respect to the performers of all these actions. The only connection that could possibly be established is that the apparently random sequence of actions is united by the motif of music /ТЬМА МЕЛОДИЙ birds' singing/.

The general meaning of the quatrain may thus be summarized as follows: whatever Так начинают may turn out to mean, it deals with the juxtaposition of non-verbal and verbal stages in one's life. The transition to the verbal stage is interpreted in terms of a risky and nearly rebellious step which entails the rupture of relations with one's immediate milieu, no matter how conscious or unconscious this rupture may be. It echoes a constant Pasternakian theme that is encountered in his "Safe-Conduct" /1929-1931/ and that corresponds to the programs of the Avant-garde era, namely: growing up is unthinkable without breaking ties with one's surroundings. The deeper, more intimate subtext of this stanza was disclosed in Pasternak's later, second autobiography "An Essay in Autobiography" 1956 where we are told of an episode which occurred when the author was three. Once, in the middle of the night, he was suddenly awakened by a "sweet, nostalgic torment", more violent than he had ever experienced before: "I cried out and wept in fear and anguish". It was the poet's first "plunge into a swarm of tunes": the Tchaikovsky Piano Trio was played by the poet's mother with two other musicians; among the listeners, as Pasternak later learned, was Lev Tolstoy. It is obvious that the first quatrain of our poem and the paragraph quoted from "An Essay in Autobiography" refer to different aspects of the same event which, as the author put it, marked for him the end of his "unconscious state of infancy". /3/ It is appropriate to recall, in this connection, that for Pasternak his literary oeuvre was a kind of corollary

to his musical past -- to his "babble", as it were, as a composer; the concept of the word was for him a derivative from that of music.

In this discussion I do not propose to give a comprehensive, word-by-word analysis of the poem. What must, however, command our attention is the strikingly bipartite structure of the first stanza which can be observed throughout the text. The poem exploits a counterpoint of two opposing semantic layers. The term levels might perhaps be more appropriate in our context, but I have opted for layers, since levels implies a kind of hierarchy whereas the relations in question are those of coordination rather than of subordination. Thus, Так начинают -- the first layer in the I stanza -- is opposed by the remaining part of the quatrain: Года в два от мамки..., etc. Both layers interweave in the text and make themselves felt in each stanza. Their opposition is both formal and semantic. We cannot but notice that the first phrases in the two opening quatrains appear at first glance to serve as a kind of commentary of what follows, on what is being told in the rest of the stanzas. Within this apparent design, the second layer which describes the occurrence of events might be referred to as the thematic /or topical/ layer -- whereas the first layer /for example, Так начинают / which contains the author's or some observer's remarks about the events may be labelled as the metathematic /or comment/ layer. The phrases which make up the comment layer tend to be placed at the beginning and the end of stanzas. On the quantitative side, both layers are of uneven size. Formally they differ from one another in that the

metathematic, comment layer is marked by the presence of an anaphoric construction, while the larger, thematic part lacks anaphora.

We can now see that the anaphoric constructions involved in the metathematic layer permeate our entire text. Yet they are never fully identical -- they keep changing in size and they modify their semantic meaning. Only the initial adverb Tak retains its firm position within the verse line; all other elements of the reiterated construction are subject to change. What seems to me a matter of special import is the fact that this seemingly chaotic poem is organized around two correlated, interdependent layers which form a sort of dialogue.

The second stanza is introduced as a clarification of the first one. More precisely, this stanza is an attempt to clarify the first -- metathematic -- layer which appears at the very beginning of the poem. The first, basically ungrammatical, phrase, ТАК НАЧИНАЮТ, recurs here, in the second quatrain, in a grammatically correct form / ТАК НАЧИНАЮТ ПОНИМАТЬ /. But it would be illusory to assume that ТАК НАЧИНАЮТ ПОНИМАТЬ provides the information omitted earlier, at the outset of the text. The second, "extended", variant serves only as one of the many possible realizations of potentially diverse meanings implied in the first "blank" sentence ТАК НАЧИНАЮТ -- and it can by no means be considered as the solely correct one.

More tempting is a comparison of the mutual relations between the two contrasting layers within the first stanza and the two contrasting layers in the second. Whereas the elliptical ТАК НАЧИНАЮТ may be considered a "title" covering the events

to be described in the rest of the stanza, the relations inside the second quatrain are more complex. ТАК НАЧИНАЮТ ПОНИМАТЬ virtually contradicts the situation represented in the lines that follow: instead of a triumphant resolution of the meaning, announced by or implied in the fifth /opening/ line, the second stanza introduces an element of uncertainty and confusion, so that what may appear obvious and true is unexpectedly questioned and denied:

Мерещится, что мать — не мать,  
Что ты — не ты, что мир — чужбина.

It should be noted, incidentally, that the Russian impersonal verb МЕРЕШИТСЯ has two different senses, both appropriate in this context: 1/ is 'appears dimly', and 2/ it 'appears mistakenly.' The choice of either of them alters the meaning of the entire utterance. On the whole, it may be said, the seeming clarification advanced in the second stanza clarifies nothing; one uncertainty is compounded by another, and even the introduction of such phatic terms as mother and you fail to elucidate the "personal" relation of the participants. The relation of the first two stanzas leads one to a conclusion of some general value: the progression of verse is a kind of a pendulum oscillating between clarification and concealment of meaning; as Marina Tsvetaeva put it, "lyric poetry, let us not forget, elucidates the obscure and obscures the lucid". /4/

Thus, it is not by chance that the poet sets out to question the relation of the two layers in the poem. The third quatrain reverses their order — the metathematic component is now

snifted to the final position. This marks a sharp switch in the compositional function of this layer within the confines of the stanza: what was intended to be both a line and a stanzaic anaphora turns out to be a stanzaic epiphora which retains some of its anaphoric properties. No less dramatic is the change which occurs in the remaining lines of the stanza: the affirmative sentence which formed the thematic, topical layer suddenly turns into an interrogative sentence; that is, into a rhetorical question -- a move which, theoretically speaking, entails a rearrangement of the definite and indefinite components of the utterance and which strengthens the tension between them. /One may recall that this very conflict played a decisive role at the beginning of the poem./ Indeed, the rhetorical rephrasing here of the topical layer ascribes the criminal act of stealing the children not to a person or even to an object /a lilac tree/, but to its quality /СТРАШНАЯ КРАСОТА/ /5/ as if that quality were endowed with an autonomous existence. In accordance with the change that took place in the thematic layer, the metathematic, comment sentence introduces the motif of suspiciousness. This motif develops the previously raised theme of "understanding" which it enriches with a somewhat more dramatic nuance. Between the "thematic" part of the stanza and its seemingly logical deduction one can discern a discrepancy, for -- if the abduction of children is, indeed, such a common practice, as the stanza appears to suggest, then something stronger than "suspiciousness" would be called for; whereas, if the stealing of children by the lilac's beauty is but a metaphor, then



"suspicions" seem to be greatly exaggerated and out of place, and the shift from НАЧИНАЮТ ПОНИМАТЬ to ВОЗНИКАЮТ ПОДОЗРЕНИЯ appears farfetched and unmotivated.

In an apparent attempt to reinforce the point, the poet opens the next stanza with the mention of fears. They are inserted into the text in such a way as to bring together the two members of the metathematic layer: they follow hard on each other without the previously established distance. Moreover, this diminishment of their distance surmounts the interstanzaic interval between them. It is not by chance that all this happens in the middle of the poem, involving -- for the first time -- the double appearance of this layer within a stanza. The quatrain is highlighted by its being framed by utterances that clearly belong to the metathematic layer.

As to the thematic, topical part of the fourth stanza, it is worth noting that it introduces for the first /and only/ time in the poem a concrete protagonist -- though, again, in the guise of a rhetorical question. The importance of this turn becomes evident if we compare it with the initial situation which provided no inkling as to the personal status of the subject of the actions. The emerging protagonist becomes promptly drawn into the typically Pasternakian play with naming and unnamng, so that he receives both a proper name that belongs to a literary tradition /Faust/ and an appellative /fantast, 'dreamer'/. As in other cases with Pasternak, we cannot be sure whether these names designate the person described or whether they were introduced in a figurative sense. Without dwelling on the extra-textual

reasons which might have prompted Pasternak to evoke Faust, I would like only to mention that two other poems, "Mefistofel'" and "Margarita," in the same collection, "Themes and Variations" /1923/, directly refer to Goethe's drama /6/. Generally speaking, the poetic myth of Faust is linked in Pasternak's writings with the motif of the second birth which is so relevant in his poetry. As for the internal reasons for Faust's appearance in "Tak nachinajut...", we may suppose that he symbolizes longing for the infinite; hence his rivalry with a star.

But here we confront an enigma: what does this exalted hero have in common with his immediate neighbors in the fourth line? The poem unquestionably leads us to assume the presence of some relationship. Curiously enough, the gipsies burst upon us through the manifestly ungrammatical use of the reflexive form of the verb НАЧИНАЮТСЯ which, as is well known, may be used only with reference to inanimate objects.

There have been many attempts to circumvent the difficulties of deciphering Pasternakian texts by resorting to the help of such commonly known and acceptable terms as metaphor and metonymy. Their presence in the Pasternakian language is quite obvious. Yet what is unique to Pasternak is not the abundance of tropes, as is usually thought, but the way in which they are employed. Paraphrasing Albert Einstein, Pasternak called his literary method "a general principle of poetic relativity" /ВСЕОБЩИЙ ПРИНЦИП ПОЭТИЧЕСКОЙ ОТНОСИТЕЛЬНОСТИ / 7/. How should we understand this principle and how does it work in Pasternak's poetry? What we observe so frequently in the poet

is that a text is deliberately composed in such a way as to make it impossible to decide whether an expression is used in a figurative or non-figurative meaning. All the vehicles of verse at the author's disposal seem, in fact, to be mobilized to blur the distinction between a trope and a non-trope in the reading of his poems. In most cases, both interpretations are equally valid, suggesting thereby a plurality of readings. As a rule, Pasternak metaphorizes the elements of a text to the same extent, and almost at the very same moment, as he demetaphorizes them.

The gipsy line is a case in point. Gipsies can be regarded as a metonymy denoting one's perennial lack of attachment to the land -- in the same way in which the mention of Faust implies the mind's perpetual striving for transcendence. But besides the figurative, there is a more "literal" meaning: the gipsies are evoked to develop the motif of the stealing of children, for, as we know, this crime was universally attributed to gipsies. Yet in the third stanza the theft of children appeared only as a metaphor for, let us say, the initiation into beauty, art, or artistic inspiration. Here, in the fourth stanza, it loses its figurative function and joins the "story-line" of gipsies in its non-figurative meaning.

Thus, the same component of a text may acquire and lose its figurative meaning -- depending on the position it occupies within the text. But this is possible because of another striking feature of Pasternak's poetics: an object and its attributes exist within the text, as if independently of each other, each leading its own nomadic life and entering into

interchangeable combinations. Not only lexemes are involved in this perpetual play, but also the smallest units of meaning, the semes, to use a term taken from linguistics. In terms of semes we may trace a continuous line from ОТ МАМКИ ДВУТСЯ in the first stanza to the breaking of ties with home and family in the second stanza, to the stealing of children in the third stanza. It goes without saying that such operations have nothing to do with the traditional labelling of the Pasternakian style as "metaphoric."

The "relativistic" make-up of our text becomes more conspicuous as we arrive at the last two stanzas. The first thing that strikes us here is that the "thematic", topical layer of the poem usurps the place of its metathematic counterpart — by taking over the anaphoric adverb Так. As a result, the strong formal distinction between the two becomes blurred. What nevertheless remains in the fifth quatrain is a clear-cut semantic opposition between the two phrases which generate it: Так будут начинаться ямбы shows the same "distance" from the thematic part in this quatrain as Так возникают подозрения from the "menacing beauty" in the third stanza.

Yet Так будут начинаться ямбы carries even more interesting implications. This line lays bare an important aspect of the poem's content, namely that we are dealing with a poem about poetry. After this is revealed, the members of the metathematic invite for a rereading inasmuch as we must assume that they are all closely interconnected and constitute various transformations of each other. From this point of view,

the gipsy line again draws our attention, since it openly deviates from the purely "psychological" character of all the previous manifestations of the comment layer. Earlier we gave this line a semantic interpretation which rested upon its paradigmatic comparison with the other members of the topical, thematic layer. This semantic interpretation no longer suffices. What arouses our doubts is the fact that this interpretation is unable to bridge the gap between the "psychological" components /such as ТАК НАЧИНАЮТ ПОНИМАТЬ, ТАК ЗРЕЮТ СТРАХИ / and the metapoetic component /ЯМОН, 'iambic' / of the same metathematic, comment series of the poem. A kind of "hole" appears here which the Pasternakian texts do not tolerate. Let us then turn to the gipsy line once again.

By using the proper noun Faust Pasternak alluded to certain subtextual or intertextual possibilities contained in the stanza and in the text as a whole /whether or not the poem intends to invoke Goethe's treatment of the Faust legend in its entirety/. By passing to the opposite layer this stanza does not lose its ability to carry its "subtextual" associations, no matter how prominent the border between the two layers may be. After all, the appearance of the gipsy line was, as we have seen, motivated and prepared by the preceding members of the thematic -- and not of its own, metathematic -- layer. But if we seek "subtextual" valencies of the "gipsy" line, Pushkin's name is the first to come to mind: the gipsy theme which played such an important role in Russian literature goes back to the early nineteenth century and, first of all, to Pushkin's famous poema of 1824. This conjecture acquires additional weight if we recall that

Pushkin took up the Faust theme exactly in the same period he wrote "Tsygany" /The Gipsies/. The connection with Pushkin gains further strength in the following, fifth stanza, where the phrase ТАК ОТКРЫВАЮТСЯ МОРЯ suggests a reference to Pushkin's lyric poem "K moriu" /To the Sea/, written in the same year, 1824. One should keep in mind Tsvetaeva's well-known essay on Pushkin in which she claims that Russian literature owes the emergence of the "sea" theme to Pushkin and in which she shows how inextricably the theme of the sea is linked with the image and art of Pushkin /8/. The use of the plural МОРЯ /'seas'/, of its attribute ВНЕЗАПННЕ /'sudden'/, of the predicate ОТКРЫВАЮТСЯ /'are revealed'/ that appeared in the fifth stanza create the indispensable context and subtext which impart sense to the entire poem.

It should be noted that all the mentioned works by Pushkin, "Tsygany", "K moriu", "Stseny iz Fausta", were traditionally considered as the turning point in Pushkin's literary activity, marking, as it were, a sharp, sudden transition from the so-called "Romanticism" to "Realism" in Russian literature. Historians of literature still cannot agree as to whether these texts belong to the early, Romantic stage of Pushkin's career or to the new period. In Pasternak's time this transition was commented upon as Pushkin's rejection of previously employed conventional poetic clichés in favor of a poetry of reality. By the way, as is well known, the situation described in Pushkin's "The Gipsies" partially reflects the episode of the author's own life when he temporarily joined a vagrant gipsy camp, severing all his ties

with civilization.

If this surmise is correct and the gipsy line really evokes allusions to Pushkin, then we might discover some other hints of the same "prototype" in our text -- Pushkin's "orphanhood" and the loneliness of his childhood /emphasized in the famous novel by Iurii Tynianov/, and his growing up outside his family home. The phrase "что дом -- чужбина" can serve as an allusion to Pushkin's motto /from a poem written in the same, "gipsy," period/: "Нам целый мир -- чужбина, Отечество нам -- Царское Село." As I mentioned above, the indirect reference to Goethe in our text is echoed in two other poems included in the same collection, "Themes and Variations". An even more oblique reference to Pushkin finds even stronger support in the cycle of poems on Pushkin which gave the title to the whole book and which include such themes as the sea, gipsies, and rivalry with a star. Like some other great artists of our century, Akhmatova, Tsvetaeva and Sergei Eisenstein, Pasternak tended to attribute the real coming-of-age of Pushkin the poet, the real beginning of Pushkin's mature work, to this particular juncture in his career, 1824, the year when "The Gipsies" was written.

All this reinforces the "metathematic" nature of the "gipsy" line, whereas, as we have seen, its appearance was semantically motivated by the components of the "thematic" storyline /"от мамки рвутся," the motif of stealing the children/. It compels us to note that our text consistently violates the composition-  
al scheme which it set out to construct. In what follows I

intend to show precisely how it does so.

One notices that, in addition to a regular stanzaic /quatrain/ structure established at the very beginning, the poem is constructed of larger units, i.e. pairs of stanzas, which display a particular tension between the comment and the topical layer. As we have seen, the first pair of stanzas exhibits a certain order which is reversed in the following pair. However, the fourth stanza, with its double representation of the metathematic layer and with its two-faceted gipsy line, reveals a very characteristic trait of Pasternak's poetry: his verse texts are frequently based on the principle of covering up the author's tracks, of misleading the reader, of "spoiling" his game /or, as Tsvetaeva said of a poet, "ОН — ТОТ, КТО СМЕШИВАЕТ КАРТЫ" /. As I mentioned before, the fifth and the sixth stanzas follow this tendency by renouncing the formal difference between the two layers which was conveyed by the absence and presence of the anaphoric adverb Tak in the respective thematic and metathematic layers. From now on this adverb is granted to both parts of each stanza, while the semantic difference between them appears to hold. But in the sixth and last stanza Pasternak suddenly switches again to a new pattern: not only does the neat formal difference between the two layers disappear, but also the semantic distance manifested in the poem's penultimate /fifth/ stanza seems to give way. Between the first sentence and the last line of the stanza VI there is no longer that sharp distinction which prompted us earlier to juxtapose the two layers and to call them a thematic, topical, and a metathematic, comment one.



"Quarrelling with the sun" /in line 24/ immediately stems from the previous line where nights "threaten the daybreak with /your/ pupil." How indeed could we now maintain that any bifurcation -- be it grammatical or semantic one -- still persists?

This important shift -- the seeming /or obvious/ elimination of the opposition of the two layers -- coincides with another change, which occurs within the realm of the "personal" structure of the text. The importance of this structure was stressed at the very outset of the poem. Now, in the last line of the sixth stanza, the generalized personal status of the predicate is reinstated after it seemed to have vanished from the middle stanzas: as we have seen, the continuing "personalization" led in the fourth quatrain to the appearance of the proper noun. Thus, we are observing a process in which the text reverts to its starting point. The degree of personal "definiteness" achieved in the unfolding of the poem comes to be cancelled in the sixth stanza, creating the impression of a circular movement. The grammatical second person reappears here, on the other hand, in a much more definite /though "reduced" /9// form than in the second stanza, where it originally carried the function of the "generalized personal" grammatical meaning. It would not be inappropriate to identify this "you" with the lyrical author, with the lyrical "I". As a result, the last stanza reinforces both the impersonal and the personal implications of the text.

This seems to be all the more significant inasmuch as

"quarrels with the sun" became a distinctive mark of a certain literary trend which was very close to Boris Pasternak: it acquired the status of a poetic myth promoted by the Russian futurists. Suffice it to mention its use in the work of Mayakovsky /10/ /with its remarkable transformation in his 1920 poem, "Необычайное приключение, бывшее с Владимиром Маяковским на даче"/or the production of "Победа над солнцем" /Victory over the Sun/ by Kruchenykh, Matiushin and Malevich in 1913. The heliomachian theme served at the time as a "militant" metaphor of the relations between art and life, so significant for futurist poetry, and echoes in the first stanzas of our poem the motif of breaking off ties with one's own milieu.

Why, then, did Pasternak avoid, with such particular obstinacy, any specific indication as to the origins of this literary program? Why did he decide to impart to this motif an impersonal character? Let us turn again to the last line of the fifth stanza /line 20/. As has been mentioned before, this line unequivocally represents the metathematic layer in the poem and is one of the metathematic utterances that run through the whole text. In contrast to the "gipsy" line, the verb НАЧИНАТЬСЯ is used here in a grammatically correct way /it is governed by an inanimate object, the iambs/. But then another puzzle arises. Why does the poet switch /for the first time in the text/ to the Future tense and to the compound form of the predicate /БУДУТ НАЧИНАТЬСЯ as opposed to НАЧНУТСЯ / which designates repeated action? The very unusual nature of this poetic forecast is obvious, especially

if we consider it in the context of those literary tastes which dominated Pasternak's immediate surroundings. Among the participants of the Russian avant-garde movement it was generally believed that iambic verse, canonized by Pushkin, was hopelessly doomed, that this metrical pattern had no chance of surviving the stormy prosodic experiments of that period. Yielding to this prejudice, Pasternak himself attempted at one point to switch to vers libre, failing, however, in this endeavor /11/. This occurred around 1915, just a few years before the poem "Tak nachina-iut..." was written. Thus, the metathematic line of stanza V contains intimate, hidden polemical connotations: for Pasternak it is not enough to make an allusion to the turning point in Pushkin's development as a poet; he goes further. In this poem on poetry, written in the midst of a literary upheaval, he appeals to the very heart of Pushkin's contribution to Russian verse -- his canonization of the iamb -- insisting on its perennial, absolute validity. Those allegedly outdated iambs are attributed here not to a particular literary trend or period, not to a specific literary fashion or tradition, but to poetry itself, to poetry as a whole, in complete disregard of the literary turbulence surrounding the issue. Exactly the same logic has forced Pasternak to evade any specific reference to persons involved in a quarrel with the sun. This arrogant behavior is now attributed to the entire art of poetry, not merely to one of the stages in its recent history.

Considered within this context, the 24th line unexpectedly reveals to us the metathematic side which we might have overlooked in the reading of the poem had we not been alerted to

the tension between the metathematic /comment/ and the thematic /topical/ layers of the text.

One might argue that my focus on the compositional aspects of the anaphoric/ epiphoric construction /which constitutes the metathematic layer/ is an all too obvious and formal approach to the text which leads to an oversimplification of its content. While this may be true to some degree, one should not forget that only by reiterating one or another of formal devices of artistic speech do the different rhythmic patterns of a poem come to life. Only by discovering the inner grammatical, compositional and semantic values of recurrent passages and parts do we come to grasp their rhythmical role in the overall artistic organization of a work. We know that the unique role of rhythm in verse manifests itself in the weight of the inner boundaries within the diverse segments of a text. Consequently, all kinds of beginnings and ends at every level of poetic expression acquire artistic values which do not, as a rule, arise in prose. The linear movement of a text from its beginning to its closure and resistance to this movement, by means of recurrent divisions and boundaries, makes up the very essence of poetic speech.

This fact may also shed light on the function of the last, "unstanzaic" or "post-stanzaic", line of our poem. Although it is prosodically attached to the sixth stanza /as indicated by its rhyme/ it stands, for some reason, alone. Here, again, the anaphoric/ epiphoric organization of the text suggests the reason. The whole dynamic movement of our poem may be viewed

as a search for the proper word /or words/ which was /were/ absent in the first phrase of the first stanza -- as if the first line were awaiting its completion in all the following predicates of the text. The last line of the poem, though it still adheres to the principle of suppressing -- of non-naming -- the subject, names the "action", complements the predicate which was left undisclosed in the beginning and received different interpretations in the unfolding of the poem. The last line can, therefore, be considered a generalization of all the particular elements of the metathematic, comment layer. But it is formulated in such a way as to force us to conclude that it is not a generalization of only one of the two layers. It is extremely difficult to translate this sentence into plain English, but its meaning may amount to something like: "Thus they begin to live inside poetry, to breathe inasmuch as the making of poetry goes on..." From the semantic point of view, this line would thus encompass both layers of the text, bridging the gap between them far more explicitly than the preceding, "gipsy" line. Indeed, the distinction between the two layers stemmed from the implicit discrepancies between the events in one's life and verbal commentary on their meanings. Now the barriers between "life" and "the word" are surmounted, and the gap between the meta-text and the text is filled. We come now to understand why the attempt has been made to intertwine the separate layers of the last two stanzas following the gipsy line.

Now the full extent of the relativity of the textual

components comes into force. The evolving meanings and formal patterns convert into their polar opposites. The stanzaic structure is crowned by an a-stanzaic monostich. The last, 25th line makes it impossible even to distinguish clearly between anaphora and epiphora -- two phenomena introduced in the text only to lose their distinctive features by poem's end. The same tendency to merge opposites is obvious in the treatment of the poem's two opposing themes -- that of Pushkin and that of the futurists. The real, and profound, subject of the poem turns out to be poetry itself -- understood as the process of giving birth to words. In this respect, not only the poem's commencement and the closure, but also the text as a whole serves as a confirmation of the poet's assertion in his "Safe-Conduct" that the only real theme of a work of art is the story of its own birth.

NOTES

- 1 Борис Пастернак, СТИХОТВОРЕНИЯ И ПОЭМЫ / Москва - Ленинград: "Советский писатель", 1965/, стр. 178-179.
- 2 Roman Jakobson, "The Prose of the Poet Pasternak", in Donald Davie and Angela Livingstone /eds./, Pasternak. Modern Judgements /London: Macmillan, 1969/, pp. 135-51; cf.: Andrey Sinyavsky, "Boris Pasternak", ibid., p.168.
- 3 Борис Пастернак, "Люди и положения. Автобиографический очерк," Воздушные пути: Проза разных лет /Москва:Советский писатель, 1982/, стр.16-17; Boris Pasternak, An Essay in Autobiography /London: Collins and Harvill Press, 1959/, pp. 34-36 /Manya Harari's translation/.
- 4 Марина Цветаева, "Эпос и лирика современной России. Владимир Маяковский и Борис Пастернак," Избранная проза в двух томах /New York: Russica Publishers, Inc., 1979/, том 2, стр. 17 ; Marina Tsvetaeva, "Epic and Lyric in Contemporary Russia: Mayakovsky and Pasternak", Russian Literary Triquarterly 13 /Fall 1975/, p. 531 /translated by Angela Livingstone/.
- 5 These first lines of stanza III are reminiscent of Mikhail Vrubel's famous painting, "Lilac" /1901/.
- 6 See also Boris Pasternak's two other poems of this period, "Liubov' Fausta" and "Zhizn" /1919/, in Борис Пастернак, Избранное в двух томах /Москва: Художественная литература, 1985/, том 2, стр. 391-2.

- 7 Н. Вильмонт, "Борис Пастернак: Воспоминания и мысли," Новый Мир, 1987, No.6, стр. 210.
- 8 Марина Цветаева, "Мой Пушкин", Избранная проза в двух томах, том 2, стр. 273-9.
- 9 Compare "твоим зрачком" /with your pupil/ to "что ты -- не ты" /you are not you/.
- 10 Henry Gifford, Pasternak: A Critical Study /Cambridge University Press, 1977/, p.83.
- 11 Л. Флейшман, "Неизвестный автограф Б. Пастернака," Тартуский государственный университет. Материалы XXVI научной студенческой конференции. Литературоведение. /Тарту, 1971/, стр. 34-7.

В ПОИСКАХ СЛОВА: РАЗБОР СТИХОТВОРЕНИЯ ПАСТЕРНАКА "ТАК НАЧИНАЮТ..."

#### Резюме

Стихотворение "Так начинают..." показателью как для мироощущения, так и для поэтической системы Пастернака. Оно, кроме того, являет собой глубинный отклик на противоборствующие тенденции в русской поэзии того времени.

Первый стих отсылает к раннему, так сказать, заумному стилю Пастернака: в нем крайне неопределенны как субъект /кто начинает/, так и объект /что начинается/, и это оборачивается тре-



будущей своего разрешения задачей всего текста. Хотя первая строфа отправную загадку так и не рассекречивает, тем не менее ее основной смысл определяется как соположение в чьей-то жизни не-словесного и словесного рядов. Переход в словесный ряд интерпретируется в терминах риска и едва ли не бунта против ближайшего окружения, независимо от степени осознания этого разрыва.

В результате здесь явственно вычленяются две существенных плоскости / *layer* / - тематическая и математическая с их последующими динамическими отношениями и с выходом в область авто- и мета-поэтики, где включается в литературный контекст - Пушкин, его ямб, "Цыганы", "К морю", "Сцены из Фауста", обычно толкуемые как переломный момент в творчестве Пушкина, в частности, как переход от "романтизма" к "реализму".

Последняя строфа отсылает к гелиомахии футуристов /м. пр., к "Победе над солнцем" Крученых, Матюшина и Малевича/. Но за этим стоит и бунтарское отношение авангарда к Пушкину и к его, ставшим каноническими, ямба. Сохраняя же ямб собственного стихотворения, Пастернак восстанавливает не только сущностный вклад Пушкина в русский стих - его канонизацию ямбов, но демонстративно отстаивает их абсолютную ценность. Ямб, в итоге, получают тут статус носителя поэтического вообще, а не частного признака некоторого литературного периода или течения. По этой же логике Пастернак избегает и уточнения тех, кто "затевают ссоры с солнцем": и это аrogантное поведение соотносится тут не с отдельной литературной формацией, а с поэтическим искусством вообще, с его сущностью.

Строфической композиции текста противостоит в конце а-строфический моностих, в котором, наконец, и выявляется истинная глыв-

Общая тема стихотворения: она оборачивается поэзией как таковой, понимаемой как процесс, порождающий жизнь слов. В этом отношении не только начало или конец стихотворения, но и весь текст целиком оказываются реализацией известного Гастернаковско-го утверждения в его "Охранной грамоте", что настоящей темой произведения искусства является история его собственного рождения.