This concluding volume of Christopher Barnes’s acclaimed biography of the Russian poet and prose-writer Boris Pasternak covers the period from 1928 to his death, during which he wrote the famous Doctor Zhivago and was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature. Drawing on archive material, eyewitness accounts and an unprecedented range of biographical and background information, Barnes brings to light many aspects of Pasternak’s personality and private life, while illuminating his relations with Stalin, the Communist régime and the literary establishment. There is a detailed discussion of Pasternak’s original writing (with ample quotation in English translation), and his translations of Goethe, Shakespeare and others. The growth story of Doctor Zhivago is traced, and the personal and political implications of the novel’s controversial publication explored. The biography concludes with discussion of Pasternak’s Nobel Prize award, final years and death, and a brief account of his artistic legacy.
From reviews of Volume 1 of *Boris Pasternak: A Literary Biography*

‘Painstakingly researched, elegantly produced and illustrated and gracefully written . . . This first volume, which covers the years 1890 to 1928, runs to more than 500 pages, and when the second volume appears we will have the most complete biography of the poet in any language. One is tempted to use the word definitive – at least for the present generation – in the case of this book.’  

‘Christopher Barnes’s “Literary Biography”, of which this solid work is the first of two volumes, will certainly become the standard and indispensable guide for students not only of the poet but of his age and literary milieu.’  
John Bayley, *London Review of Books*

‘Christopher Barnes’s biography, first volume in a projected two-volume study, is very nearly everything that a literary biography should be, scholarly, judicious, thought-provoking, and in command of its many sources.’  
*Poetry Review*

‘In this extraordinary book, Barnes does for Boris Pasternak what Joseph Frank, in his brilliant multivolume study, did for Fyodor Dostoevsky – i.e., combine meticulous scholarship with a broad understanding of the times and weave both into an enthralling account of the writer’s life and works.’  
*Choice*

‘Barnes’s book is admirably full and scholarly; it is also self-effacing; he does not offer judgments, but seeks to understand and situate the young Pasternak in his time, against a background of European symbolism, futurism and revolution.’  
*The Scotsman*

‘. . . an impressively thorough and sensitive account of Pasternak’s life in the period up to 1928, with a well judged balance between the private and the public . . . In all, this volume conveys a sharp and consistent intuition of a complex poetic personality.’  
*The Slavonic and East European Review*

‘Christopher Barnes’s book . . . rests on a mountain of scholarly research: when completed, it is likely to become the definitive reference work to Pasternak’s life.’  
*The Sunday Times*
S. Oganisyan, ‘Boris Pasternak’, portrait on wood
Boris Pasternak
A Literary Biography

VOLUME 2
1928–1960

CHRISTOPHER BARNES
In memory of my beloved father

William Barnes
(1906–96)
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Preface

The loose threads left hanging in 1928, at the end of volume 1 of this biography, were symptomatic of a somewhat arbitrary break in the story of Pasternak’s life and creativity. With advancing years the author became increasingly dismissive about his earlier literary achievement, yet in both of his autobiographies Pasternak dwelt at length on his childhood, youth and early professional career and drew regular sustenance from the legacy he had inherited as well as from his own past. In this sense, despite its crises and reversals, his life possessed an organic wholeness.

Nevertheless, in the later 1920s Pasternak was pursued by a vaguely perceived but unambiguous sense of impending finality. Personal and family circumstances, the natural force of artistic evolution, as well as events in Russian political, social and cultural life, coincided to make the turn of the decade into a general biographical watershed for Pasternak. Some of these changes are recounted in the first few chapters below. Moreover, the sum total of these transformations affected not just the substance of Pasternak’s life but also the manner in which its story can be told. Apart from a selective reticence about some personal matters, his sense of inadequacy to compose – let alone force through the censorship – any coherent account of the Stalinist period explained the abrupt curtailment of his Autobiographical Essay written in the 1950s (see volume I, x–xi). Pasternak’s own inability to articulate, and his evident malaise and faltering creative output during this carnivorous period of Russian history were signs of a problem that has not been fully overcome in the present narrative. By contrast with volume I, we thus have no continuous autobiographical accounts to flesh out and illustrate our story. Largely thanks to Lazar Fleishman and Evgenii Borisovich Pasternak, this biographical segment is no longer perceived as a mere series of melodramatic prominences, or in the terms of memoirists with a penchant for confabulation (Vilyam-Vilmont), with a personal agenda (such as Ivinskaya), or who (like Gladkov, Maslenikova and others) were largely reliant on what Pasternak himself told them and saw their own role in the retelling of this. However, one still regrets that Pasternak never had his Boswell, or a constant companion with the intellect and accurate recall of a Nadezhda Mandelstam.
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Despite the availability of private family correspondence or recollections by intimate eyewitnesses, some still alive, the fabric of this account of the 1930s and later years is qualitatively different from what was achieved with Pasternak’s earlier life. One reason lies in the major conundrums that remain unsolved: the actions and opinions of many official personages now deceased were wrapped in secrecy, destroyed, or never committed to paper, and even in the present age of open archives they are beyond our reach. Furthermore, some of Pasternak’s more intriguing contacts – with Bukharin, Pilnyak or Fadeyev – were largely in the form of \textit{via voce} exchanges whose details were never recorded.

Pasternak’s personality also, inevitably, tantalises his biographers. If in younger years he showed a waywardness and obscurity that emerged mainly in his poetic personality, this in the thirties and afterwards was extended to real-life situations, major issues and public attitudes, resulting in a baffling (and perhaps partly protective) choreography of naïveté and mystification. Frequently, too, as Hingley and other biographers have noted, Pasternak showed a propensity for being mortified by personal and historical circumstance, only to be ‘reborn’, or to survive and seemingly accept the intolerable. The present account of his life makes no claim to explain or ‘iron out’ every such paradox. Generally, though, and despite everything, Pasternak was not one to turn his back on experiences, personalities, and on his own past; this ability to assimilate explains many factors in his life – his view of the political regime, of artistic creativity, his dealings with women and with often pernicious friends such as Aseyev, Fadeyev, Fedin and Feltrinelli. Ultimately his life story was one of organic growth.

As in his youthful piano-playing, Pasternak in many of his life’s activities remained an inspired and sometimes naive improviser. Cunning intelligence, foresight and causation are not always in evidence in his artistic or everyday behaviour; I have often therefore been content to ‘tell the story’ rather than force a conceptualised view of his behaviour. Thus, there seemed no masterful intelligence behind his handling of the Zhirago and Nobel Prize affairs. Nor does there seem to be a final answer to the question of his survival during the Stalinist regime when so many more conformist contemporaries perished. While some persuasive factors are considered, there was an element of sheer good fortune in play; Pasternak had no complete answer, and in 1956 needed urgent reassurance from Isaiah Berlin that no one believed he could ever have ‘done something for them’.

Pasternak’s resort to translation work during the mid 1930s, war period and later 1940s, adds a further layer of enigma to his literary personality. Although his best translations of Shakespeare and Goethe were genuinely inspired, his
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selection and interpretation of other men’s writings was, at best, an indirect key to his own life and thought. At worst, translation work was, as he later told Zoya Maslenikova, a form of existence at the expense of other people’s thought. In any event, for lengthy periods during the years covered by this book, there is neither the volume nor continuity of autobiographically based writing that assisted my efforts in volume I.

As in the discussion of Pasternak’s earlier works, the approach here is descriptive rather than critical, although evaluative remarks are not excluded. There is no separate lengthy discussion of Pasternak’s novel (I have tried to avoid what Gerald S. Smith calls a ‘Zhivago-telic’ view of his career), and an account of its gradual composition is included, with discussion of only a handful of critical assessments with which Pasternak was personally familiar.

Work on the present volume has been greatly facilitated by earlier monographers and memoirists. In particular, I have profited from Lazar Fleishman’s biographical studies centred on the writer’s professional activities and their political implications, and from Evgenii Pasternak and his wife’s many publications, in addition to his own invaluable Materials for a Biography (Materialy dlia biografii). Of the biographies that appeared before the release of new information in the latter days of the Soviet period, Ronald Hingley’s life of Pasternak remains especially admirable. Thanks to recent liberated publishing conditions in Russia, and to the 1990 centenary of Pasternak’s birth, there has been a spate of archival, memoir, interpretative and bibliographical publications on which I have been able to draw. In fact, in view of the abundance of material now available, both the narrative and the notes and bibliography in this second volume are very selective. More than in volume I, the apparatus serves as only a partial guide to further reading. Partly for this reason, it would be wrong to claim infallibility or final authority for this account of Pasternak’s life; we are now at a stage where only triple- and multi-volume treatment could do justice to the wealth of accumulated detail and understanding. While working on these two volumes, I have not wanted for good advice and for a rich supply of first-hand information – particularly from Elena and Evgenii Pasternak, and various of Pasternak’s other relatives, friends and correspondents. For errors of fact or judgement that have slipped through the net I take sole responsibility.

The transliteration and typographical procedures established in volume I are adhered to in this second volume. A brief reminder: versions of Russian names in the text represent a compromise between accepted renderings (if they exist) and the dictates of elegance and consistency. Quotation of Russian in the narrative text and the notes and bibliography, however, use the transliteration system employed in the journal Oxford Slavonic Papers.

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Affectionate diminutive versions of Russian forenames are by and large avoided with one or two exceptions, e.g. Aunt ‘Asya’ Freidenberg. The form ‘Zhenya’ was in currency among family and friends to refer both to Pasternak’s first wife Evgeniya Vladimirovna and to their son Evgeni. To avoid confusion in this account, Evgeniya is always referred to by her full name; ‘Zhenya’ is applied only to her son during his childhood and youth. Pasternak’s two sisters were long resident in England, and are referred to by the English forms Josephine and Lydia, instead of the Russian Zhosefina and Lidiya. Fyodor Karlovich Pasternak (‘Fedya’) also had Austrian and English hypostases, as Friedrich and Frederick, and he is variously referred to depending on context.

Titles of plays, books and other publications are italicised and in English, with the Russian original in brackets on their first occurrence. Foreign-language newspapers and journals retain their original Russian (or other) titles. Even though not always issued as separate books, the major works of Pasternak, including stories, poetic cycles, longer narrative poetry, articles and essays, are usually italicised. Translations are in every case my own, except where stated otherwise. The omission of text from quotations is indicated by [...].

Since publication of volume I of this Biography, a five-volume edition of Pasternak’s works – Sobranie sochinenii v pyat’ tomakh – has appeared in Moscow, and this will clearly for many years to come be the authoritative textual source. Its appearance superseded the earlier Michigan University Press Sochineniya (1961), the ‘Biblioteka poeta’ Stikhotvoreniya i poemy (1965), Vozduhnye put’i (1982), and Izbrannoe which were main sources of reference in volume I. For consistency’s sake we have adhered to our established page-reference practice, but have in each case appended page references to the five-volume edition. Thus, bracketed page references within the text will usually consist of three elements: a volume number in Roman numerals followed by a page number, referring to Sochineniya (1961); a reference consisting of SP or VP followed by a number, referring to Stikhotvoreniya i poemy (1965) or Vozduhnye put’i (1982); and the letters SS followed by a Roman numeral, which locate the reference in the five-volume Sobranie sochinenii. Although the Feltrinelli text of Pasternak’s novel is faulted in some textual details, reference is made to it where relevant, for consistency’s sake with volume I. Citations from Doctor Zhivago are thus usually indicated by DZh plus page number, denoting the 1957 Feltrinelli edition, followed by a page reference to the fully authenticated text in volume III of Sobranie sochinenii.

The bibliography of belletristic writings by Pasternak at the end of this book does not attempt to catalogue all his lifetime publications, but simply lists the
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main posthumous collected editions giving access to texts and their variants. A detailed account of archival versions, successive editions, and the publication story of individual works can be reconstructed from the bibliographies and the apparatus in these various collected works.

Similarly, no attempt is made to list all the lifetime and posthumous editions of Pasternak’s translations. Information on these can be gleaned from other separate major bibliographical sources listed on p. 440, and from monographs and other sources given in the end notes.

Although containing 345 letters, volume V of Sobranie sochinenii v peti tomakh presents only part of Pasternak’s enormous correspondence. The bibliographic section at the end of the present book forms a supplement to that fifth volume and includes most of the important additional published correspondence relating to the second half of Pasternak’s life.

I would like here to reiterate my gratitude to all the many individuals who assisted me with the first volume of this work. Many of these have continued to provide me with help in completing the present volume. Among them, some notable mentions must be made.

In Moscow, Elena and Evgenii Pasternak have now helped me for close on thirty-five years with various endeavours bound up with their father/father-in-law, and they more than anyone else have made this work possible by their friendship, encouragement, countless hours of consultations, and hospitality during the writing of this book. To the ‘Oxford Pasternaks’ and members of the Pasternak Trust, and notably to Ann Pasternak Slater, I also wish to express my warm thanks – for their help with illustrations and many factual queries. Vyacheslav Ivanov kindly agreed to be interrogated for many hours during his guest professorship in Toronto in 1991. To Rima Salys I am immensely grateful for her help in unravelling texts and queries concerned with the Pasternak family correspondence. I thank Jacqueline de Proyart for her generous time and trouble in discussing with me various aspects of Pasternak’s latter years and for checking large sections of my manuscript.

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Among those who were thanked in volume I, I would also like to state my particular appreciation again to Boyara Arountouna, Neil Cornwell, Richard Davies, Martin Dewhirst, Lazar Fleishman, Henry Gifford, Jane Grayson, Bengt Jangfeldt, Angela Livingstone, Roger Keys, Anna Ljunggren, John Malmstad, Gordon McVay, Aleksandr Parnis, Donald Rayfield, Aleksandr Zholkovsky.

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I have been strongly dependent on, and am grateful to, the staff of various libraries, in particular: the Russian (former Lenin) State Library and Gorky Institute of World Literature in Moscow, the University Library of St Andrews, Scotland, the Leeds Russian Archive, the Robarts Library in the University of Toronto, the Widener Library of Harvard University, the University Libraries of Colorado at Boulder, the Nobel Library of the Swedish Academy, and the University of Michigan Press archives.

At Cambridge University Press I enjoyed the support and sympathetic interest of Katharina Brett and latterly of Linda Bree and Con Coroneos, who together invested much patience and good counsel in preparing this Biography for publication.

Finally, closer to home, my predicament in relation to near and dear ones has often seemed well reflected in the horseback ponderings of the hero of Pasternak's District Behind the Lines, which could be paraphrased as follows:

I rode at walking pace, and thought of my family and of the wife to whom I was returning. And as I thought of them, I found myself reflecting that they would never know I had been thinking of them on the way. They would believe that I did not love them sufficiently, and that the love they desired of me was something I felt only for other things - things remote, like solitude, my book, or the pacing of the horse. Yet I would be powerless to explain to them that all this was them . . .

I hope that all those who have supported me in this endeavour will find themselves at least partly rewarded in the pages that follow.
Acknowledgements

The dust-jacket portrait is from a woodcut by S. Oganesyan. The photograph of Pasternak in his study is reproduced with grateful thanks to David Floyd. Gordon McVay kindly provided the pictures of Zinaida and Boris Pasternak with Leonid Pasternak and Kruchenykh, and of Pasternak with Bannikov, Ivinskaya and her daughter. The remaining pictures appear by kind courtesy of the Pasternak Trust.