On the Reception of Antiquity in Boris Pasternak's *Doktor Živago*[1]

While not the only one, the character of Nikolaj Vedenjapin is probably the most obvious indication of the important function that ancient Rome plays in *Doktor Živago*. In his philosophical reflections, the protagonist's uncle regularly refers to antiquity in order to contrast it with his ideal vision of a Christian society. Characteristic of Vedenjapin's argument is a portrayal of antiquity that is exaggerated and distorted insofar as he largely ignores the cultural achievements of pre-Christian Europe.[2] However, Pasternak was likely less concerned here with retrospectively discrediting the Roman Empire and its emperors. Evidently, he sought rather to take a stand against the political injustices of his time. Accordingly, Vedenjapin's statements about antiquity often conceal a veiled criticism of the Soviet government, whose policies are impossible to reconcile with Pasternak's personal values.[3] In this sense, in *Doktor Živago*, antiquity serves as a symbol of a misanthropic worldview which (analogous to Soviet socialism) runs counter to the historical mission of Christianity. However, the way in which Pasternak conveys this worldview is by no means limited to the characters' spoken remarks. Rather, behind Vedenjapin's dismissive judgements lies a deeper layer of the novel, the full extent and inner logic of which only become apparent upon close reading.

It is therefore even more surprising that – with a few exceptions[4] – scholars have so far paid little attention to Pasternak's reception of ancient authors. This essay attempts to close this gap partially by focusing on the character of the military commissar Ginc and examining his structural function within *Doktor Živago*. After all, although Pasternak devotes relatively little narrative time to the commissar, his symbolic significance for the novel cannot be overstated.

When Ginc is sent to the Western Front at the end of World War I, he is told of a mutinous regiment. Specifically, he is informed that the regiment has been stirred by a few "ringleaders" ("зачинщики") and has since refused to obey its officers. Despite the urgent warnings from the local general staff, the commissar boldly declares his intention to compel the rebellious soldiers to submit. Even though the army command has previously provided a Cossack regiment to disarm the mutineers, Ginc categorically refuses to use force. In his opinion, all that is needed

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[1] This article is an abridged version of a chapter from the author's ongoing doctoral dissertation (working title: *Das Altertum als Referenzpunkt des nationalen Selbstverständnisses – Zur Rezeption antiker Schriftsteller bei Nikolaj Gogol' und Boris Pasternak*)

[2] See Meshakov-Korjakin 1967, pp. 37–39.

[3] For example, see Markov 1959, pp. 21–22: "[T]he sentence about the 'pockmarked Caligulas' who had no idea how inferior the system of slavery is does not smack in the original of a boring textbook on economics; it is a personal and scathing reference to 'the tyrant lacking any real spark of genius,' ('kak bezdaren vsyakii porabotitel') a portrait of Stalin ('pockmarked')."

[4] First and foremost, reference should be made here to Griffiths and Rabinowitz (see Griffiths/Rabinowitz 2011, pp. 176–194), but also to Smirnov (see Smirnov 1996, pp. 109–115).

is a persuasive speech to calm the soldiers and persuade them to hand over their leaders. In practice, however, the commissar's impassioned speech fails to convince the deserters. Worse still, he arouses the displeasure of the very Cossacks deployed to disarm the soldiers. When the mutineers finally accuse Ginc of being an enemy spy because of his German accent, his companions urge him to flee. Nevertheless, relying on his oratorical skills, the commissar makes another attempt at persuasion, but once again fails. Visibly frustrated, he ultimately fuels the deserters' anger by threatening them with the death penalty. In response, one of the soldiers shoots him, whereupon the crowd descends upon his corpse with bayonets.

Scholars have already noted that Pasternak was greatly affected by the tragic fate of Fëdor Linde when shaping the character of the commissar.[5] The plotline surrounding Ginc is largely based on the third chapter of *Na vnutrennem fronte* (1922), whose author, Pëtr Krasnov, personally witnessed Linde's murder.[6] Despite the striking similarities between both texts, however, it is important to note that the fictional character of Ginc at times differs significantly from the historical figure of Linde. It is precisely these deviations from Krasnov that merit philological attention. They illustrate a principle that applies to numerous works of world literature: in his retelling of historical events, Pasternak makes extensive use of artistic freedom.[7] But how does this manifest itself in relation to Ginc/Linde, and how does this influence our understanding of Pasternak's novel? In response to this question, this essay aims to interpret the relevant episode in *Doktor Živago* as an engagement with the literary and political legacy of Marcus Tullius Cicero (106 – 43 B.C.). However, Pasternak does not establish this connection by faithfully portraying Cicero's personality. Rather, the reception of Cicero occurs *ex negativo*, as Pasternak constructs the commissar as the exact antithesis of the Roman consul.

Pasternak achieves this, on the one hand, by depriving Ginc of any eloquence – in sharp contrast to the rhetorical brilliance of Cicero. Through his vocabulary, Pasternak implies that the character of the commissar formally belongs to the tradition of Roman rhetoric. Thus, instead of Ginc's proper name, the narrator occasionally uses the antonomasia "оратор" (Eng.: "orator"), a Latinism that establishes a direct connection to the vibrant oratorical culture of the *Forum Romanum*. Although the commissar is thus associated with Rome's leading orators, he

[5] See Pasternak 2004, pp. 679–680. – According to Evgenij and Elena Pasternak, this event not only attracted Boris Pasternak's attention but caused a great stir among the Russian intelligentsia. For instance, Osip Mandelstam's poem *Kogda oktjabr'skij nam gotovil vremenščik…* also addresses Linde's death.

[6] For a detailed comparison of Pasternak's and Krasnov's texts, see Polivanov 2024, pp. 125–133.

[7] Igor' Smirnov attributes these deviations to the fact that the episode involving Ginc is actually based on A. Tolstoj's novel *Sëstry*: "The episode involving Ginc […] does not directly reflect the murder of the real historical figure, F. F. Linde[.] Pasternak's novel points the reader directly to a literary adaptation of this factual material – Tolstoj's *Sëstry* – and to historical reality[.]" (Smirnov 1996, pp. 49–50.)

Smirnov's point is certainly well taken that Pasternak reworks the real events in a literary manner. Whether, however, he refers to *Sëstry* remains an open question.

by no means lives up to the expectations this image evokes in the reader. As soon as he makes his first appearance, he attempts to impress the representatives of the local military administration through his *supposed* talent for oratory: "[H]овый комиссар […] находился перед администраторами военно-бумажного царства, стоял перед ними и ораторствовал."[8] The pejorative connotation of the verb "ораторствовать" (Eng.: "to speechify") foreshadows Ginc's exaggerated self-confidence by revealing his rhetorical ineptitude. Instead of giving the officers a taste of genuine eloquence, he can at best create the appearance of it.[9]

This impression is reinforced as the plot unfolds: Ginc's fruitless efforts to appease the deserters violate fundamental rules of ancient rhetoric. Consequently, both his recklessness and his tendency toward dogmatism reflect shortcomings which, according to Aristotle, are particularly common among young orators.[10] No less characteristic of youth is an idealism, which in the case of the commissar inevitably recalls not only Aristotle's *technē rhētorikē* but also Plato's philosophy. Thus, Ginc perceives the art of rhetoric – analogous to Socrates in *Gorgias*[11] – as a means for the moral education of the population, which must be led to virtue:

> Пусть бунтовщики, пусть даже дезертиры, но это народ, господа, вот что вы забываете. А народ ребёнок, надо его знать, надо знать его психику, тут требуется особый подход. Надо уметь задеть за его лучшие, чувствительнейшие струны так, чтобы они зазвенели.[12]

In direct confrontation with the soldiers, however, it becomes clear that Ginc cannot even come close to living up to his grandiose promises. Contrary to Quintilian's precepts, the commissar is unable to adapt his speeches to either his audience or the circumstances.[13] Even if the commissar's idealism might find a benevolent audience elsewhere, it is undoubtedly out of place among the war-weary soldiers. Thus, while Ginc speaks at length about the civil liberties acquired in the wake of the February Revolution, he shows absolutely no sympathy for the hardships the war imposes on the soldiers. This behaviour perfectly illustrates the Aristotelian principle of apparent slight[14] insofar as the commissar deliberately ignores the soldiers' heartfelt

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[8] "[T]he new commissar […] stood before the rulers of this military-paper kingdom, facing them and speechifying[.]" (DŽ-V/5 – Hayward's and Harari's trans. revised here by B.B.)

[9] In fact, deceptive appearances are a central characteristic of the commissar. Among other things, he strives to give the false impression of maturity: "It probably embarrassed him to be so young and in order to seem older he put on a caustic expression and an artificial stoop[.]" (DŽ-V/5)

[10] See Arist. *rhet.* II, 1389a–b. – Indeed, the commissar's inexperience is repeatedly emphasized in *Doktor Živago*. (See DŽ-V/8: "The commissar is a babe in arms.")

[11] See Plat. *Gorg.* 504d–e.

[12] "They may be rebels, gentlemen, they may even be deserters, but remember, they are people. And the people are like children, you have to know them, you have to know their psychology. To get the best out of them, you must have the right approach, you have to move them, to touch their hearts." (DŽ-V/5)

[13] See Quint. *inst.* XI, 1, 45–47.

[14] In summary, according to Josef König, Aristotle's concept of "anger" (Gr.: "ὀργή") describes the desire for retribution against someone from whom one has previously experienced "apparent slight" (Gr.: "φαινομένη ὀλιγωρία"). We perceive the behaviour of a fellow human being as apparent slight when that person openly prevents us from satisfying an urgent need. (See König 2002, pp. 144–150.)

desire for peace. Instead of appeasing the mutineers, he inflames their desire for revenge, which they seek to satisfy by murdering him.

In summary, Ginc's failure with the soldiers must thus be understood as a direct consequence of his rhetorical incompetence. In fact, the commissar falls short not only of his own unrealistically high expectations, but also of Cicero's requirements for a capable orator:

> Huius est in dando consilio de maximis rebus cum dignitate explicata sententia; eiusdem et languentis populi incitatio et effrenati moderatio; eadem facultate et fraus hominum ad perniciem et integritas ad salutem vocatur. Quis cohortari ad virtutem ardentius, quis a vitiis acrius revocare, quis vituperare improbos asperius, quis laudare bonos ornatius, quis cupiditatem vehementius frangere accusando potest? Quis maerorem levare mitius consolando?[15]

Up to this point we have explained how the commissar falls victim to his own overconfidence and juvenile recklessness. Although he lacks the rhetorical skill necessary to persuade the mutineers, he seeks direct dialogue and seals his fate. As an "orator imperfectus", he thus differs strikingly from Cicero, whom the classical historian Klaus Bringmann retrospectively elevates to the status of Rome's most significant orator.[16] Considering recent research on Pasternak, the comparison between Ginc and Cicero is by no means far-fetched. Konstantin Polivanov briefly mentions the striking similarities between Fëdor Tjutčev's poem *Ciceron* and Živago's euphoria regarding the February Revolution: "Живаго, говоря о революции, отмечает исключительность момента, […] когда становится видно ‚небесное' вмешательство в дарование людям свободы. Его современники становятся подобны тютчевскому Цицерону[.]"[17]

The reference to Tjutčev's *Ciceron* fits perfectly into the specific historical portrait that *Doktor Živago* paints of the Russian Civil War. Accordingly, through his depiction of the February Revolution, Pasternak shows that the Provisional Government in 1917 was heading towards a fate similar to that of the late Roman Republic. As mentioned earlier, however, he does not intend to replicate Cicero's life faithfully. Rather, Pasternak recounts the Roman statesman's political career *ex negativo* by assigning the role of a *pseudo*-Cicero to the commissar.

Even the brief remarks about Ginc's background are enough to suggest that his life story is deliberately constructed in contrast with Cicero's biography in many respects. When the commissar first appears, the narrator mentions: "Говорили, будто он из хорошей семьи, чуть ли

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[15] "It is the part of the orator, when advising on affairs of supreme importance, to unfold his opinion as a man having authority: his duty too it is to arouse a listless nation, and to curb its unbridled impetuosity. By one and the same power of eloquence the deceitful among mankind are brought to destruction, and the righteous to deliverance. Who more passionately than the orator can encourage to virtuous conduct, or more zealously than he reclaim from vicious courses? Who can more austerely censure the wicked, or more gracefully praise men of worth? Whose invective can more forcibly subdue the power of lawless desire? Whose comfortable words can soothe grief more tenderly?" (Cic. *de orat.* II, 9, 35.)

[16] See Bringmann 2014, p. 12.

[17] "Speaking of the revolution, Živago notes the exceptional nature of the moment […] when a 'divine' intervention becomes visible in the granting of freedom to the people. His contemporaries come to resemble Tjutchev's Cicero." (Polivanov 2024, p. 121.)

не сын сенатора[.]”[18] Contrary to this relativizing phrasing, the attentive reader will already be aware that the commissar was born into the wealthy intelligentsia. Accordingly, in the second part of the novel, the Ginc family is among the select guests attending the chamber concert at the Gromekos' home.[19] Consequently, by virtue of his background, the commissar enjoyed the typical privileges of the upper class, which were likely to have significantly advanced his professional career. As the presumed son of a senator, he thus differs not only from all those Baltic Germans in the Tsarist Empire who had to work their way up in society on their own[20] , but also from Cicero. Originally from the Roman equestrian order, the latter, according to Blom, cultivated the image of an exemplary “homo novus”, whose political success was based solely on competence and hard work. In this way, he distinguished himself from his rival Lucius Calpurnius Piso, who had been able to pursue the course of honours only thanks to his famous ancestors[21] :

> Is mihi etiam gloriabatur se omnis magistratus sine repulsa adsecutum? Mihi ista licet de me vera cum gloria praedicare; omnis enim honores populus Romanus mihi ipsi non nomini detulit. Nam tu cum quaestor es factus, etiam qui te numquam viderant tamen illum honorem nomini mandabant tuo. Aedilis es factus: Piso est a populo Romano factus, non iste Piso. Praetura item maioribus delata est tuis: Noti erant illi mortui, te vivum nondum noverat quisquam. Me cum quaestorem in primis, aedilem priorem, praetorem primum cunctis suffragiis populus Romanus faciebat, homini ille honorem non generi, moribus non maioribus meis, virtuti perspectae non auditae nobilitati deferebat.[22]

Although Ginc (like Piso) was already part of the social elite by birth, he does not conceal his origins. Rather, he openly points to them to underscore his unconditional devotion to the Russian people. To this end, he employs Cicero's argument, insofar as he reverses it and claims that it was precisely his noble birth that made his entry into politics difficult:

> [П]оглядите на меня. Вот я, единственный сын, надежда семьи, ничего не пожалел, пожертвовал именем, положением, любовью родителей, чтобы завоевать вам свободу, равной которой не пользуется ни один народ в мире. Это сделал я и множество таких же молодых людей, не говоря уж о старой гвардии славных предшественников, о каторжанах-народниках и народовольцах-шлиссельбуржцах. Для себя ли мы старались? Нам ли это было нужно?[23]

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[18] “He was said to come of a good family (the son of a senator, some people thought)[.]” (DŽ-V/5)
[19] See DŽ-II/20.
[20] On opportunities for advancement for ethnic minorities in the Tsarist Empire, see Lecke 2015, p. 20.
[21] See Blom 2010, pp. 50–54.
[22] “Does he even pride himself before me on having obtained all the magistracies without a rebuff? I can take a true pride in making that assertion of myself; for upon myself and for myself the Roman people bestowed all its offices. But when you were made quaestor, even men who had never seen you conferred that honour upon – your name. You were made aedile; it was a Piso – not you who bear that name – who was elected by the Roman people. So also it was upon your ancestors that the praetorship was bestowed. They were dead, but all men knew of them; you were alive, but as yet not a single man knew you. But when the Roman people by their general suffrages returned me high on the poll as quaestor, and successively as first aedile and first praetor, it was to a man that they paid that distinction, not to a family, to my character, not to my ancestors, to approved merit, not to reputed nobility.” (Cic. *Pis.* 1, 2.)
[23] “Take my own case. I am an only son, the only hope of my parents, yet I haven't spared myself. I've given up everything – name, family, position. I have done this to fight for your freedom, greater freedom than is enjoyed by any other people in the world. This I did, and so did many other young men like myself, not to speak of the old guard of our glorious forerunners, champions of the people's rights, who were sent to hard labour in Siberia or locked up in the Schlüsselburg Fortress. Did we do this for ourselves?” (DŽ-V/5)

Paradoxically, however, this supposed selflessness does not prevent the commissar from unduly emphasizing his own merits to the state as well as those of his comrades. Indeed, such a penchant for self-praise was by no means foreign to Cicero either, who constantly boasted of his foresight in thwarting the Catiline Conspiracy. Although Cicero (like Ginc) also acknowledged the achievements of his contemporaries, his self-adulation often caused offense in public:

> Καὶ μέγιστον μὲν ἴσχυσεν ἐν τῇ πόλει τότε, πολλοῖς δ᾽ ἐπίφθονον ἑαυτὸν ἐποίησεν ἀπ᾽ οὐδενὸς ἔργου πονηροῦ, τῷ δ᾽ ἐπαινεῖν ἀεὶ καὶ μεγαλύνειν αὐτὸς ἑαυτὸν ὑπὸ πολλῶν δυσχεραινόμενος. Οὔτε γὰρ βουλὴν οὔτε δῆμον οὔτε δικαστήριον ἦν συνελθεῖν, ἐν ᾧ μὴ Κατιλίναν ἔδει θρυλούμενον ἀκοῦσαι καὶ Λέντλον, ἀλλὰ καὶ τὰ βιβλία τελευτῶν κατέπλησε καὶ τὰ συγγράμματα τῶν ἐγκωμίων, καὶ τὸν λόγον, ἥδιστον ὄντα καὶ χάριν ἔχοντα πλείστην ἐπαχθῆ καὶ φορτικὸν ἐποίησε τοῖς ἀκροωμένοις, ὥσπερ τινὸς ἀεὶ κηρὸς αὐτῷ τῆς ἀηδίας ταύτης προσούσης. Ὅμως δέ, καίπερ οὕτως ἀκράτῳ φιλοτιμίᾳ συνών, ἀπήλλακτο τοῦ φθονεῖν ἑτέροις, ἀφθονώτατος ὢν ἐν τῷ τοὺς πρὸ αὐτοῦ καὶ τοὺς καθ᾽ αὑτὸν ἄνδρας ἐγκωμιάζειν, ὡς ἐκ τῶν συγγραμμάτων λαβεῖν ἔστι.[24]

Although Plutarch's harsh criticism is likely to meet with approval even among those inclined to favor Cicero, this in no way diminishes the consul's personal commitment to the Roman Republic. During his consulship Cicero not only thwarted the Catiline Conspiracy but also took numerous other measures to protect the republican constitution.[25] In this sense, the ostentatious self-praise of the "pater patriae" (Eng.: "Father of the Fatherland") – Cicero's honorary title – may seem distasteful, but despite all reservations, is not entirely unjustified.[26]

Ginc's political record, on the other hand, is limited to the mere fact that he is "said […] to have been one of the first to march his company to the Duma in February."[27] Even if the commissar was somehow involved in the overthrow of the Tsarist government, this by no means justifies his arrogance. By presenting himself as a key figure in the Russian struggle for political freedom and civil rights, he clearly overestimates his own importance to the revolutionary movement (see "Вот я [...] ничего не пожалел, пожертвовал именем, положением, любовью родителей, чтобы завоевать вам свободу, равной которой не пользуется ни один народ в мире."[28]). While Cicero merely points to his successes in an overly assertive manner, the commissar thus assigns himself a role that he never actually held. In other words, although Ginc does not even come close to a politician of Cicero's rank, he behaves as if he were one.

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[24] "So at this time Cicero had the greatest power in the state, but he made himself generally odious, not by any base action, but by continually praising and magnifying himself, which made him hateful to many. For there could be no session either of senate or assembly or court of justice in which one was not obliged to hear Catiline and Lentulus endlessly talked about. Nay, he even went so far as to fill his books and writings with these praises of himself; and he made his oratory, which was naturally very pleasant and had the greatest charm, irksome and tedious to his hearers, since this unpleasant practice clung to him like a fatality. But nevertheless, although he cherished so strong an ambition, he was free from envying others, since he was most ungrudging in his encomiums upon his predecessors and contemporaries, as may be gathered from his writings." (Plut. *Cic.* 24)

[25] See Fuhrmann 2011, pp. 91–103.

[26] Quintilian offers an alternative perspective, arguing that Cicero was often forced to engage in such self-praise due to external circumstances (see Quint. *inst.* XI, 1, 17–19).

[27] "Говорили, будто он [...] в феврале один из первых повёл свою роту в Государственную думу." (DŽ-V/5)

[28] "I haven't spared myself. I've given up everything – name, family, position. I have done this to fight for your freedom, greater freedom than is enjoyed by any other people in the world." (DŽ-V/5)

The fatal consequences of this discrepancy between self-perception and reality are revealed, in turn, by Ginc's violent death. This event proves so pivotal that it is revisited at a later point in the plot of *Doktor Živago*. In the eleventh part of the novel, Pamfil Palych confesses to the protagonist that he murdered the commissar, an act for which he still feels remorse:

> Много я вашего брата в расход пустил, много на мне крови господской, офицерской, и хоть бы что. Числа-имени не помню, вся водой растеклась. Оголец у меня один из головы нейдет, огольца одного я стукнул, забыть не могу. За что я парнишку погубил? Рассмешил, уморил он меня. Со смеху застрелил, сдуру. Ни за что.[29]

What at first glance seems to be a 'simple' confession of guilt is – within the internal logic of the novel – actually of central importance. During the civil war Pamfil serves as a red partisan in the very unit commanded by Liverij Averkievič Mikulicyn. As various allusions to Sallust in the eleventh part of *Doktor Živago* suggest, the latter character is based on none other than Lucius Sergius Catilina (108 – 62 B.C.). In accordance with the contrapuntal structure of the novel[30], Palych functions as an intratextual link between Ginc and Mikulycin, who in turn embody Cicero and Catiline, respectively. Therefore, these two characters – analogous to their ancient role models – indirectly rival each other, even though they do not formally encounter one another. Pasternak thus projects the power struggle between the Roman consul and perhaps his most bitter adversary onto the context of the Russian Civil War. However, in *Doktor Živago* it is the conspirators, who triumph. Since the commissar possesses neither the oratorical nor the political talent of the real Cicero, he is powerless to stop the growing influence of the Bolsheviks. Instead, Pamfil succeeds with Ginc's murder, something Catiline's followers failed to do on multiple occasions: the future follower of Mikulycin (that is, the Bolshevik Catiline) eliminates the Russian (pseudo-)Cicero.

Consequently, the antipodes Ginc and Mikulycin allude to two historical conflicts at once, reflecting both the struggle between the Provisional Government and the Bolsheviks and that between the Roman Senate and Catiline. The commissar thus becomes the face of the February Revolution for two reasons. On the one hand, he is the one and only character in *Doktor Živago* who officially represents the Provisional Government. On the other hand, through his idealism as well as through his failure he embodies the Provisional Government's *de facto* incapacity to act. Although the government granted the population fundamental civil liberties, it postponed urgent social reforms given the foreign policy threat.[31] The fatal miscalculation that the war

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[29] "I've done away with a lot of your kind, there's a lot of officers' blood on my hands. Officers, gentry. And it's never worried me. Spilt it like water. Names and numbers all gone out of my head. But there's one little fellow I can't get out of my mind; I killed that brat and I can't forget it. Why did I have to kill him? He made me laugh, and I killed him for a joke, for nothing, like a fool." (DŽ-XI/9)

[30] On the principle of counterpoint in *Doktor Živago*, see Gasparov 1989.

[31] See Hildermeier 1998, pp. 82–83.

could be continued while still securing the support of the population finds its counterpart in the commissar's overconfidence. By persisting in Russia's war aims, the cabinet misjudged its own room for manoeuvre and consequently sealed its fate. In this sense, Ginc's death in *Doktor Živago* foreshadows the fall of the Provisional Government, which, though committed to a free Russia, was ultimately unable to meet the historical challenges of the time.

The commissar thus fulfils a symbolic function similar to that of Cicero himself, who, in his conflict with Mark Antony, became the symbol of a dying state. In his *Philippicae orationes,* Cicero strongly condemned Antony's arbitrary actions and secured the Senate's declaration of the general as a public enemy.[32] Although Cicero was able to curb Antony's power for the time being, he simultaneously inflamed his desire for revenge. Thus, after joining forces with Octavian and Lepidus to form the Second Triumvirate, Antony placed his former adversary on the proscription list. Shortly thereafter, while fleeing, Cicero was captured and murdered by Antony's henchmen, who, acting on orders, cut off his head and his hands. Subsequently, the triumvir staged an unmistakable demonstration of power by displaying the remains of the former consul in the *Forum Romanum*.[33] According to Fuhrmann, Cicero's death on December 7th, 43 B.C., marks the symbolic conclusion of the centuries-long history of the Roman Republic:

> "[D]ie langwierige, von Bürgerkriegen erfüllte Krise Roms, der Übergang von der Republik zur Monarchie, raffte gerade die erbarmungslos dahin, die sich ganz und gar […] ihrer Sache verschrieben. Gewiß hatte sich keiner […] bei seinem in den persönlichen Untergang führenden Handeln so sehr von Illusionen leiten lassen wie Cicero. Andererseits galt gerade sein Wirken, sein politisches wie sein literarisches, einer Realität: der in Jahrhunderten gewachsenen römischen Adelsrepublik; und so war es mehr als ein äußeres Zusammentreffen, daß sein Leben nur zehn Tage nach jenem 27. November endete, an dem die Dreimännerherrschaft de jure begonnen und hiermit die Verfassung der alten res publica für immer beseitigt hatte. Ciceros Tod war […] Symbol für den Untergang der republikanischen Freiheit.[34]

Although Ginc differs from Cicero in many respects, both meet a similar fate. Like the Roman politician, the young commissar devotes himself completely to a state he does not yet believe to be lost. The fact that he is not discouraged by the hopeless situation and sacrifices himself for his ideal of freedom makes him a symbol of a declining state. The subsequent civil war in both cases illustrates the drastic changes following this upheaval for both politics and the population. In Rome, however, Octavian – a man possessing a certain ambivalence – rose to sole power. To consolidate his authority, the future emperor often acted ruthlessly and frequently did

[32] See Bringmann 2014, pp. 256–257.
[33] See Fuhrmann 2011, pp. 304–306.
[34] [T]he protracted crisis in Rome, marked by civil wars, and the transition from republic to monarchy, swept away precisely those who had devoted themselves entirely to their cause […]. Certainly, no one […] had been as guided by illusions in his actions, which led to his personal downfall, as Cicero. On the other hand, his work – both political and literary – was dedicated to a reality: the Roman aristocratic republic that had grown over centuries; and so it was more than a mere coincidence that his life ended just ten days after that November 27th, on which the triumvirate had been established de jure and thereby abolished the constitution of the old res publica forever. Cicero's death was […] a symbol of the downfall of republican freedom." (Ibid., pp. 306–307.)

not hesitate to use force to achieve his goals. After seizing power, he in turn proved to be a far-sighted monarch who put an end to the turmoil of the civil wars and secured long-term domestic peace.[35] In contrast, the Bolsheviks prevailed in Moscow, their power largely based on state-sanctioned terror.[36]

From this derives the particular tragedy inherent in the character of the commissar. If one considers the fifth part of *Doktor Živago* in isolation, Ginc may appear overambitious, at times even oblivious to reality. That he misinterprets the situation and treats the soldiers with contempt, however, is less an expression of malice than a consequence of his (in the Aristotelian sense) youthful naivety. When viewed within the broader context, it becomes clear that the idealistic commissar believes he is acting in the very best interests of the people. This consideration ultimately explains both Pamfil's pangs of conscience and the consternation of station-master Povarichin. Talking to the protagonist, the latter is visibly shocked after witnessing the commissar's murder:

> Вот тут он лежал. Удивительное дело, навидался я за войну всяких ужасов, пора бы привыкнуть. А тут такая жалость взяла! Главное – бессмыслица. За что? Что он им сделал плохого? Да разве это люди? Говорят, любимец семьи.[37]

Shortly thereafter, street battles break out in Moscow between supporters of the Provisional Government and the Bolsheviks, leading directly to the overthrow of the interim government. Although various characters address the level of violence, detailed descriptions of the events are absent, much as they were during the February Revolution.[38] After Jurij is briefly informed by his acquaintances of the intensity of the clashes, he and his family hide in their apartment for several days. When the doctor first ventures out onto the street on his way to the hospital, the fighting has already subsided. There, during a gathering snowstorm, he buys a freshly printed special edition from a newspaper boy that heralds the victory of the Bolsheviks.[39]

From the casual manner in which *Doktor Živago* refers to the Soviets' seizure of power, the inattentive reader might conclude that, from an intra-fictional perspective, it was an insignificant event. However, this impression is deceptive, as the character of the commissar makes clear. For his death illustrates why the February Revolution's promise of freedom was not

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[35] See Bringmann 2007, pp. 13–14.
[36] Between December 1917 and February 1922 alone, an estimated 280,000 people fell victim to the so-called "Red Terror" carried out by the Soviet secret police, *ČK*. (See Hildermeier 1998, p. 151)
[37] "This is where he lay. It's a funny thing. I've seen some bad things in the war, you'd think I was used to anything. But I felt so sorry, somehow. It was the senselessness of it as much as anything. What had he done to them? But then they aren't human beings. They say he was the favourite son." (DŽ-V/12)
[38] Angela Livingstone highlights this approach as a distinctive feature of Pasternak's novel: "It is symptomatic of Pasternak's method that both the 1917 revolutions, which most Soviet novels depict as crowd scenes filled with noise, speeches, and collective excitement, are reflected by him in the reaction of a single man hearing the news from afar." (Livingstone 1989, p. 69.)
[39] See DŽ-VI/8.

destined for long-term success and why, instead, a socialist one-party rule was able to establish itself in Russia. The fact that Pasternak draws a comparison here with Cicero is by no means a mere display of intellectual erudition. He was deeply shaken by the communists' seizure of power, an event that left a lasting mark on world history. Consequently, Pasternak seeks to demonstrate that the October Revolution was a political disaster whose dramatic consequences were no less significant than the fall of the Roman Republic.

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[40] *Doktor Živago* is referenced in the notes using the abbreviation "DŽ". To facilitate locating the quotations in editions other than the one used here, the corresponding abbreviation is subdivided into the 16 parts (Roman numerals) of the prose narrative and supplemented with the relevant chapter (Arabic numerals). Page numbers are therefore not indicated when citing *Doktor Živago*.

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