

The Childhood of Luvers

B.Pasternak

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Apart from *Dr. Zhivago*, Pasternak has not written much prose fiction, and what he has, is short. *The Childhood of Luver*, which is an attempt to write something not obviously auto-biographical, stems from 1918, thus just after the War and the Bolshevik rise to power. It is a nostalgically tainted story about a young girl growing up in Siberia, meaning Perm and later Yekaterinburg. We follow the young girl on the train moving from the former to the latter and thus entering Asia. How exciting is it not for the girl to enter Asia from Europe and she looks eagerly for the signpost, only to realize, more out of amazement than disappointment, that nothing changes, the same trees, the same endless forest. We are in Siberia, where also Pasternak spent time in his youth, and there are changes of seasons, which in those times and in those places, were far more dramatic and intrusive of quotidian time than now. Siberian spring is a dramatic affair, it may only last for a couple of days, enough to effect a transition from winter to full-blown summer. In winter the streets are filled with sledges drawn by horses. One of those horses draws the family carriages, regular 'droshkas' in summer and fall, sledges in snow time. And that horse shies and tramples a pedestrian to death, causing the mother to have a nervous breakdown and a miscarriage. It is hushed up and the girl is moved to a friend for some time while things calm down. This is the end of the story.

The story is written very much in the style of his 'the Last Summer' quite reminiscent of Virginia Woolf. The lyrical novel, one would say, normally represented by Woolf, Gide and Hesse¹, may or may not carry a reader through it. This one is actually less puzzling as to what is going on, but contains a lot of details which may or may not carry through.

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¹ Among my unread books residing on my shelves there is one with the title 'The Lyrical Novel' under-titled *Studies in Hermann Hesse, Andr Gide and Virginia Woolf* and written by a Princeton professor of comparative literature - Ralph Freedman (who does not make it into English Wikipedia but earned a NYT obituary) born in Hamburg 1920, died in Georgia 2016, as found out by an internet search, and the book was actually a revised version of his Yale doctoral thesis. The book I must have bought at Harvard in the mid-seventies. The names of Hesse and Gide were familiar to me through my early reading and thus must have intrigued me; Woolf on the other hand, except for her ubiquitous name, was not. The Lyrical novel is supposed to combine the *Bildungsroman*, with a stream of consciousness and prose poems, the last two being very much the case of Pasternak.