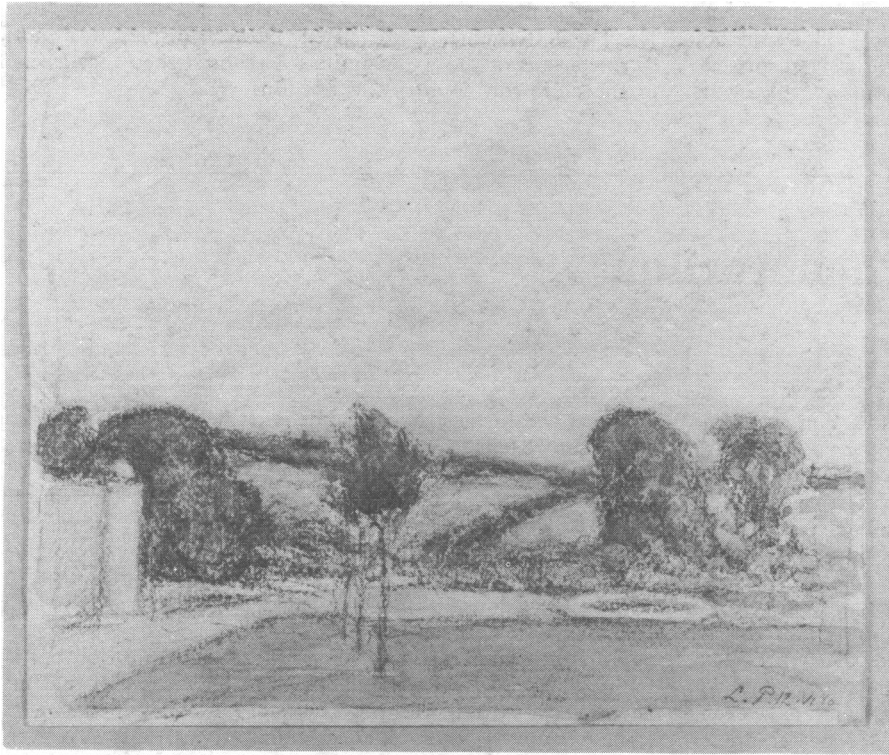


Another exile in Oxford



Seeking for a suitable illustration to Dr Peter Meisner's article, we remembered that about 20 years beforehand the distinguished painter, Leonid Pasternak, had sought refuge in Oxford. His daughter, Josephine, who still lives in Oxford, kindly gave us permission to use a pastel of a scene on the outskirts of the city and has also written this note about her parents.—Ed, *BMJ*.

We first visited Oxford in 1936, when my father, mother, and I stayed with my sister Lydia, who while working in the same laboratory in Munich had met the psychiatrist Dr Eliot Slater and married him. We were, however, living in Germany until 1939, when (as my father's memoirs¹ state) "There were rumours, which proved to be well founded, that all Soviet citizens, without exception, were being expelled from Germany, and that the authorities were working through the alphabet."

We moved to Oxford in May 1939, but my mother died in August. Each week my father, sister, and I used to go to the crematorium, on the outskirts of the city, and in the garden of rest talk and recall the past as if mother was still with us. The study of this part of Oxford (shown in this illustration) is Leonid Pasternak's tribute to her memory.

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Oxford was easy to love: I became used to lunching and dining in Balliol, Oriol, and Queen's Colleges and a number of students generously took us out for meals in restaurants. Somerville gave us Sunday afternoon tea—which turned out to be an extremely pleasant tea dance. I was presented to Sir Hans Krebs, who kindly inquired after some of my teachers in Budapest. We all carried an identification label, which indicated that if we were in trouble Miss Norah Beloff should be telephoned. After a week in the philosopher's house it was discovered that a philosophy student was staying in a doctor's house, so he and I swapped. My host was Dr Sheila Callender, the distinguished Oxford physician, who lived in a lovely stone cottage in Upper Wolvercote at the top of the Woodstock road. Through Sheila I could visit the hospital, and I remember being shown a case of gas gangrene which, I was reassured, did not often occur in this country. I was also given a couple of tickets to the Crazy Gang and one of the Somerville girls kindly accompanied me. English humour did seem different.

From Oxford to Newcastle

In the meanwhile a lot of work went into sorting out our future. I was told that I had a place at the medical school in Newcastle upon Tyne. Once more I felt insecure, but Sheila assured me that I would find Newcastle very pleasant and that she had friends there. I was invited for Christmas by my London cousin and the capital seemed glorious with its Christmas decorations; my second cousin, aged 16 and just back from boarding school, was only too happy to discover London with me. It was enjoyable to discover the collections at the National and Tate Galleries, the British Museum, and the Victoria and Albert, and we even managed to see Robert Helpmann in *The Merchant of Venice* and Rudolf Kempe conducting Brahms and Richard Strauss at the Festival Hall. I also got to appreciate the London parks and Regency terraces.

On 31 December I left London for Newcastle, where I was

met by Captain Dickinson—who will be remembered by many Newcastle students as the supervisor of lodgings. He handed me over to a kind Pole who had offered hospitality and promptly took me to the Polish Club to see in the New Year. All the Poles wished to toast Hungary with me in vodka and I shall never find out how I was taken home and put to bed. The next day, as a new year's treat, I was taken to see the sea; I had never seen this before, as Hungary is landlocked, and it looked grey and angry while my splitting headache did not enhance my appreciation of this national asset.

In the course of the next few weeks I was to be entertained at their homes by Professor Bramble Green (the dean of medicine), Dr Paul Szekely (a Hungarian cardiologist), Dr Brian Schofield (my tutor to be), and Dr Alan Horler, then senior medical registrar, who had worked with Sheila Callender in Oxford, and many others. All this meant that by the time the term started I felt quite at home. The rector, Dr Bosanquet, made me feel most welcome and gave me the details of my scholarship. (Later, when I applied for naturalisation he was to write that as a descendant of a refugee Huguenot he felt that England had always benefited from the refugees she had taken in.) My scholarship was generous and I was to receive it weekly. The rector told me that I could come and see him any time, an offer that I hope he did not come to regret. I now realise that the only reason I never failed and qualified a few days before I would have done in Hungary was to ensure that my scholarship did not have to continue indefinitely.

Irish writers and Hungarian salami

Looking back 26 years later, I find it impossible to believe that a nation could be so uniformly welcoming to a newcomer as England was to me in 1956. What were my first impressions? I was fortunate to have studied English privately and to be reasonably familiar with English literature. At my interview in Vienna I was asked who were my favourite English writers and

he had read the paper critically and his questioning was thorough. Not long after that visit a number of his old collaborators went to a party at his house. We found him in excellent spirits, though he complained, as often before, of "anno domini." When we left he walked with us to our car through the beautiful wooded grounds; after the farewells, I heard him say, "You lucky people, going back to the real world." That was the last time I saw him.

Colebrook has been variously described as "very lovable, warm, and friendly," "modest, with a whimsical sense of humour," "outstandingly honest, sincere, and generous to junior colleagues," "energetic, with great powers of concentration," and "a very good boss; he was demanding and stood no nonsense."¹² Though immensely serious about his work, he never took himself too seriously. Pointing out that I had not referred to some relevant work of his in a paper, he wrote: "You will be hearing from my solicitors, Messrs Kudos and Pique, about this—but now to more serious matters." Oakley, in his memoir for the Royal Society,¹² wrote: "Perhaps he was no great scientist—at least, he never developed any revolutionary theories . . . but his work has been of enormous benefit to his fellow men." Another commentator wrote: "The Colebrooks will never be thanked by those with most reason—the children who will *not* be listed in hospital or coroner's records."¹¹ If not a great scientist, he was certainly a great man.

I have drawn gratefully on Professor W C Noble's biographical

study, *Coli: Great Healer of Men*, and I thank Mrs Vera Colebrook for permission to reproduce two photographs.

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To please his parents, who wanted him to choose a "respectable career," Leonid Pasternak read first medicine then law, graduating in Odessa. He spent a few terms in the Munich Royal Academy of Fine Arts (which at the time was second only to the private Paris Studios of French Artists). In 1889 Leonid Pasternak married the famous pianist Rosa Kauffmann, and they settled in Moscow, where he joined the circle of young avant garde painters around V D Plenov. They tried to liberate painting from the tendentiousness of the realistic approach to art, which dominated the famous Petersburg Fellowship of the Wanderers. In 1903 they formed the Union of Russian Artists in Moscow, which with its annual exhibitions became the focal point of Russian art activities. (They believed in personal freedom, there was no hanging committee, each artist was his own judge.) Diaghilev made sure that the work of Pasternak and other Moscow painters appeared in the exhibitions of the World of Art.

In 1893 Leonid Pasternak met Tolstoy, whom he revered. The writer must also have valued the painter highly: after a long period of devoting himself to philosophical and religious writing, Tolstoy chose Leonid Pasternak as an illustrator of his new novel *Resurrection*.

In 1921 Pasternak took his ailing wife to Berlin, where she had treatment for her heart disease. In that city he was feted as one of the foremost European portrait painters, a master of draughtsmanship, one who was able to retain in his pictures fleeting impressions of movement, colours, and the expressions on human faces. He worked in different media, some experimental, and introduced new techniques. His subject matter too ranged widely; his portraits, apart from their intrinsic value, are of historical importance. As well as his many portraits of "ordinary people" there is a real picture gallery of illustrious men, both Russian and Western, including Einstein, Rilke, Shaliapin, Scriabin, Rachmaninov, Hauptman, Rubinstein, Prokofiev, Gorky, Gordon Craig, Tolstoy, Prince Krapotkin, Lenin, to mention only a few. His works may be found in public and private collections in Russia and in the West—in England in the Tate Gallery and the Victoria and Albert and the British Museums, as well as in provincial galleries and in private

collections. The most extensive collection is owned by the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford.

My mother, Rosa Kauffmann, was a child prodigy, her biography being published in Odessa in 1885, when she was only 18. On many occasions the family tried to persuade her to let them bring this up to date but her modesty as well as the strains of the times prevented this. Most interesting would have been her accounts of meetings and conversations with the composer and pianist Anton Rubinstein, who assessed the girl's musical genius so highly that he considered that the Petersburg Conservatoire was not good enough for putting the final touches to her piano studies. Only one man in the world, he would say, was qualified to round off her musical and artistic education, and he insisted that she should go to Vienna to study with Professor Leschitzky.

In 1936 my father fell in love with Oxford. It was "enchanting." An enthusiastic undergraduate who had become fond of my parents showed him round Oxford—Christ Church, New College (which was "only" some 400-500 years old), Magdalen. The beauty of the last was revealed by the facade when they turned from Long-Wall Street into High Street. With the dreamy smile which appeared on Pasternak's face when he had "caught" his sitter's expression he remarked: "Who knows? . . . One day perhaps Charles (his grandson and my son, then 6 years old and living in Munich) might become an undergraduate here. . . ." His dream came true: his grandson entered the college.

When he settled in Oxford for good in 1939 things were different. He had succumbed to grief at the loss of his wife; appalled by the inhumanity of the war, he was suffering from angina and was frail. Nevertheless, he still worked and did not lose faith in a better future. Nor did his sense of humour desert him. Approached about the arrangement of an exhibition of his work, he commented: "An exhibition in Oxford? But who would be interested in it? Oxford consists of old ladies and young students. They don't care about art; they are interested only in literature." He died on 31 May 1945, and was spared the news of the horror of Hiroshima.