In his earlier book, *Boris Pasternak v dvadtsatye gody* (München, 1981), Lazar' Fleishman examined the poet's position in the literary struggles of the decade and, in particular, his alternation between attitudes of cautious cooperation and of rebellion vis-à-vis the authorities, culminating in the writing of *Okhrannaia gramota*. The central theme of the book was Pasternak's rejection of the ideological poetics of LEF and Maiakovskii and his assertion of a Tolstoian "oppositional" role for art even under socialism. What was particularly novel about Fleishman's analysis was his demonstration that Pasternak himself, far from being a passive spectator of the debates and manoeuvres of the period, as had previously been thought, was an active and committed participant in them.

The present book resumes these themes and problems: the issue of Maiakovskii continues to be just as controversial and Pasternak's own involvement no less intense. The difference is that these questions are now fought out on a much larger and more dramatic scale: it is not only Pasternak's conception of poetry and his place in Soviet poetry that are at stake, but international relations and the political struggle at the highest levels of the Soviet Union. The appalling difficulties and ambiguities of Pasternak's position are revealed and analyzed in Fleishman's new book with a mastery of a wide range of sources and a passionate awareness of the wider issues involved, so that despite the mass of detail and analysis the argument and narrative never flag.

The period falls roughly into two parts. In the first, lasting until about the middle of 1935, Pasternak was generally disposed to cooperate with the regime, as may be seen from *Vtoroe rozhdenie* (1932). Despite his horror at the realities of Soviet life that he witnessed on his two trips to the Urals (Fleishman has discovered evidence of an earlier trip, which had not been previously recorded), Pasternak found new heart in his experience of Georgia and his friendships with the leading poets of that country. This in turn led to his translations of their poetry, and even of Mitsishvili's ode, "Stalin," which was to become the prototype for innumerable other such "translations" from the literatures of the national minorities. In these years Pasternak was generally accepted as the greatest living Russian poet, and his work in translation was singled out for special praise. Even when Soviet critics expressed disappointment with his failure to write in a more accessible style or on more conventionally Soviet themes, their remarks were addressed at the friends and admirers of Pasternak rather than to the poet himself. A consensus seemed to be emerging that Pasternak was to be the poet of the 1930s as Maiakovskii had been of the 1920s (at least in retrospect). This trend culminated in the Writers' Congress of 1934, at which an attempt was made (notably in the speech by Bukharin) to elevate Pasternak officially to that "empty and dangerous vacancy" and to make a decisive break with the cult of agitational and ideological literature, sanctioned by a selective and simplistic reading of Maiakovskii.

Particularly interesting is the examination of the way in which foreign public opinion, especially in France, was expressed in support of the Gor'kii-Bukharin-Pasternak wing of Soviet literature in an attempt to influence and liberalize the direction of the regime. Several Western observers had noted publicly the alarming parallels between the cultural practices of the Nazis and the Russian Communists. If the spectacle of book-burning in university cities of Germany (among the victims was a book devoted to the art of Pasternak's father) and the Nazi advocacy of crudely propagandist art probably strengthened Pasternak's willingness to give the Soviet regime the benefit of the doubt as long as possible, it also confirmed the dangers inherent in the politicization of culture, against which he had been warning since the 1920s. It was only after Western pressure that the Soviet authorities, who had already forbidden Gor'kii to travel to Paris for the
Congress of June 1935, finally consented to send Pasternak as a representative of Soviet poetry.

In the second half of 1935 this balance of forces shifted dramatically. In December Stalin’s canonization of Maiakovskii was promptly taken up in the press, and the “competition” between the two poets effectively came to an end. Bukharin’s praise for Pasternak in 1936-37 was used to suggest that Pasternak too was an “enemy of the people” who used obscurity simply as a way of smuggling anti-Soviet sentiments into print. The attacks soon took on the ritualized character typical of such campaigns in the Soviet press. Pasternak, however, fought back vigorously and even recklessly, as is shown in the chapter “Bunt Pasternaka.” The sinister nature of the insinuations and Pasternak’s refusal to indulge in any substantial self-criticism seemed to indicate that his days were numbered, but after some seven months the charges unexpectedly took a milder turn. Some sources have suggested that it was Stalin himself who intervened on the poet’s behalf, but Fleishman concludes that this is unlikely and that Pasternak’s own view of his survival as largely due to chance is nearer the truth. The year 1937, however, marks the end of Pasternak’s active participation in Soviet literary debates and the beginning of his reputation for “aloofness,” a view that has since been extended to cover his earlier career as well.

Many of the events of this period and Pasternak’s involvement in them have acquired the status of legends in which fact and fiction seem inextricably interwoven: the suicide of Maiakovskii, the suicide of Nadezhda Allilueva and Pasternak’s extraordinary postscript to the conventional letter of condolence addressed to Stalin by the Union of Soviet Writers; the arrest of Mandel’shtam and Pasternak’s telephone conversation with Stalin; the murders of Kirov and Gor’kii; some of the open letters that Pasternak signed, e.g., the denunciation of Tukhachevskii, and, conversely, the letter that he wrote to Mme Bukharina, declaring his belief in her husband’s innocence after his arrest in 1937, at a time when Pasternak himself seemed to be doomed. Fleishman analyzes each of these events in detail, but he does more than merely narrate and analyze. At the heart of his book is the desire to understand Pasternak’s position and his actions in those appalling times and to counter the faint praises awarded him by Akhmatova and Nadezhda Mandel’shtam (e.g., “krepaia chetverka,” a solid B+ for his phone conversation with Stalin).

Fleishman constantly reminds us that at the time the outcome of events did not seem as inevitable as it does to us in retrospect, and he deals with these complex issues by a meticulous examination not only of Pasternak’s texts, among them some that were published but have remained unknown, and some that were never published, but also of the circumstances in which they were composed. By detailed comparisons with the texts that Pasternak’s contemporaries either composed themselves or consented to sign, he argues that Pasternak succeeded in preserving some freedom of movement, while ostensibly complying with the demands made on him. These explanations may not entirely satisfy all readers, but they do provide a more intelligible account of the poet’s conduct throughout these times than has been offered before.

Besides the solitary and embattled poet at the center of this book Fleishman has much that is new to say about other important figures of the time, Mandel’shtam, Pil’nik, Sel’vinskii, Mirskii: and among minor figures he reminds us of the courageous literary critic Mustangova and, at the other extreme, of the unspeakable careerist Dzhek Altauzen. The most fascinating figure in the book, after Pasternak himself, however, remains Maksim Gor’kii. As Fleishman shows, his role was complex and ambivalent, oscillating between a reverence for the cause of Russian culture and an irritation that so few of its representatives lived up to its lofty calling, between a devotion to liberty of thought and speech and a dangerously uncritical weakness for “strong” leaders. He was an old and sick man in the 1930s, of course, and it would be difficult to make out the same consistency for him as Fleishman has done for Pasternak. Nonetheless his role is of crucial im-