

A Literature of Conscience: Yevtushenko's Post-Stalin Poetry

by

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## Abstract

The tradition of civic poetry occupies a unique place in the history of Russian literature. The civic poet (*grazhdanskii poet*) characteristically addresses socio-political issues and injustices relevant to the era in opposition to the established authority. This often comes out of a sense of responsibility to the nation. During the Thaw period (1953-63), an interval of relative artistic freedom that followed decades of severe artistic control, Y. Yevtushenko (1932- ) was among the first poets who dared to speak critically about the social and political injustices that occurred during Stalin's dictatorship. At that time, his civic-oriented poetry focused primarily on the reassessment of historical, social, and political values in the post-Stalin era.

The aim of the present study is to evaluate Yevtushenko's position within the tradition of civic poets and to illustrate his stylistic ability to combine lyrical intimacy and autobiographic experiences with national and international issues in the genre of civic poetry. I approach the subject using a methodology of close examination: a formal and structural analysis of select poems in the original Russian. In addition, relevant social, political, and historical conditions are taken into account, as well as Mayakovsky's influence on Yevtushenko's poetry.

This research offers a definition of the term "civic poet" and supplies a historical survey of civic poetry that dates back to the satires of the eighteenth century. I specifically refer to the Russian icons of this genre: G. Derzhavin, A. Pushkin, K. Ryleev, M. Lermontov, N. Nekrasov, and V. Mayakovsky. I start my evaluation of Yevtushenko as a civic poet by examining his narrative poem, *Stantsiia Zima* (1956), and proceed with a detailed analysis of his most important political poems of the Thaw period: "Babii Yar" (1961) and "Nasledniki Stalina" (Heirs of Stalin, 1962). In addition, I assess Yevtushenko's political and cultural acts throughout his career. Finally, I further analyze select poems by Yevtushenko that were published from 1990

to 2005, to offer a new and more complete view of Yevtushenko's place in the canon of Russian civic poets.

The first chapter of this thesis provides a brief historical and socio-political background of poetry in the Soviet Union leading up to the Thaw period. The second chapter is devoted to the literary tradition of the genre of civic poetry in Russian literature. The third chapter focuses on an extensive analysis of Yevtushenko's most important political poems of the Thaw period: "Babii Yar" and "Nasledniki Stalina." The fourth chapter examines Yevtushenko's more recent poetry, as well as his latest cultural activities, to determine his standing as a civic poet from another point of view. The study's conclusion provides some thoughts of Yevtushenko's artistic and public role in contemporary arts.

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and my mother, who always encouraged me to succeed.

In memory of my father

James Norman Safarik

March 16, 1943—February 16, 2007

О, дай мне, Боже, быть поэтом!

Не дай людей мне обмануть!

Oh let me, God, be a poet!

Don't let me deceive people!

Yevtushenko.

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## 1. The Rise of the Post-Stalin Generation of Poets

Поэзия—великая держава.  
Империй власть, сходящая с ума,  
ей столько раз распадом угрожала,  
но распадалась все-таки сама.

Poetry is a great power.  
The imperial authority, driven mad,  
threatened its destruction many times,  
but destroyed was the authority itself.

Yevtushenko. “Poeziia—velikaia derzhava”  
(Poetry is a great power)<sup>1</sup>

During the Soviet era, the development of Russian literature was directly impacted by the Communist Party from the time of the October Revolution of 1917 until Mikhail Sergeevich Gorbachev (1931- ) introduced the policy of *glasnost'* (openness) in the mid-1980s.<sup>2</sup> Artistic control was most severe under Stalin's (Iosif Vissarionovich Dzhugashvili, 1878-1953) regime. After the official sanctioning of Socialist Realism in 1934, the oppression of writers intensified until Stalin's death on March 5, 1953, an event which impacted nearly all aspects of Soviet life. An interlude of relative artistic freedom and varying degrees of censorship followed from 1953 to 1963, paralleling Nikita Sergeevich Khrushchev's (1894-1971) tenure in power.<sup>3</sup> This decade

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<sup>1</sup> For the complete poem, see Evtushenko, Evgenii. *Stikhotvoreniia i poemy*. Vol 2. 142-143, lines 1-4. A Note on transliteration and translation: I will employ the Library Congress Transliteration System; however, I will occasionally deviate from it when citing names with common spellings that do not follow this system, such as Yevgeny Yevtushenko, Mayakovsky, and Yesenin. In addition, I will transliterate non-Russian names from their Russian spellings (Zinaida Gippius and Osip Mandel'shtam). All translations are my own (including poems cited from bilingual editions), except where otherwise indicated. Finally, all poetry citations refer to line numbers with the exception of Yevtushenko's *Winter Station / Stantsiia Zima* and Nekrasov's "Poet i grazhdanin" which are referenced by page numbers.

<sup>2</sup> First, the February Revolution of 1917 (March 1917 on the Gregorian calendar) resulted in the abdication of Tsar Nicholas II, the collapse of Imperial Russia, and the establishment of a Provisional Government under Prince Georgii Evgenevich L'vov and soon after under Aleksandr Fedorovich Kerenskii to replace the Tsar. Then, during the October Revolution (November 7, 1917) orchestrated by Lenin (Vladimir Il'ich Ul'ianov, 1870-1924), the Bolsheviks overthrew the Provisional Government, and Lenin became the first Chairman of the Council of People's Commissars of the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic. Thus, the Union of Soviet Social Republics (USSR) was formed in December 1922 at the end of the Civil War with the union of the Russian, Ukrainian, Belarussian and Transcaucasian Republics, which was made official in 1924.

<sup>3</sup> Khrushchev served as the General Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union from 1953-64.

is conventionally referred to as *Ottepel'* (the Thaw) after Il'ia Grigor'evich Erenburg's (1891-1967) 1954 novel. As part of the new poetic voice of the Thaw, Yevgeny Aleksandrovich Yevtushenko (born Y. A. Gangnus, 1932- ) emerged as a spokesperson for the post-Stalin generation and a representative poet of the 1960s. His poetry, both civic and lyrical, departed from State ideologies that were imposed on writers and reflects the social and political concerns of the time. The artistic freedom that writers began to regain during the Thaw period was monumental, for it was during the early 1920s that writers last had any kind of creative liberty in Soviet Russia.

In *Writers in Russia: 1917-1978*, Max Hayward attributes the difference between Soviet literature and the Russian literature that followed to “a radically altered relationship between writers, society, and the state, and the fact that the choice of subject matter was inevitably dictated by the great historical and social changes wrought by the October Revolution” (52). The only literary group to support the Revolution as a whole was the Futurists with David Davidovich Burliuk (1882-1967), Aleksei Eliseevich Kruchenykh (1886-1968), Velimir (Viktor) Vladimirovich Khlebnikov (1885-1922), and Vladimir Vladimirovich Mayakovsky (1893-1930) as leading members. Their dismissal of bourgeois culture and their advocacy for the reform of art coincided with Bolshevik principles, and so they fervently embraced the Revolution. In return, the Bolsheviks commissioned the Futurists as a propagandistic tool to promote the concept of socialism and proletarian art. The Futurists revolted against traditional conceptions of art in their literary works, and by the same token, they roused the masses with eccentric antics, loud public spectacles, and open air theatre performances, all of which the Bolsheviks, including Lenin, failed to comprehend. However, Anatolii Vasil'evich Lunacharskii (1875-1933), the People's Commissar of Enlightenment, was in charge of cultural affairs, and his attitude of tolerance and

impartiality to various trends in art supported artistic diversity and promoted the advancement of literature. He appointed Mayakovsky and some of the Futurists as editors of *Iskusstvo kommuny* (Art of the Commune), a weekly journal published by the Fine Arts Department of the People's Commissariat of Education. In addition to the Futurists, Valerii Iakovlevich Briusov (1873-1924) and Aleksandr Serafimovich Serafimovich (born Popov, 1863-1949) did not hesitate to join the new regime. Also, Symbolist poet Aleksandr Aleksandrovich Blok (1880-1921) found a kind of mystic hope in the Revolution, which he perceived "as a millennial event, equaled only by the coming of Christ" (Hayward 54), and brilliantly captured the upheaval it created in his narrative poem "Dvenadtsat'" (The Twelve, 1918). Before long Blok grew disillusioned with the regime; he retreated from society and died prematurely. Like Blok, Sergei Aleksandrovich Yesenin (1895-1925), Imaginist and peasant poet, initially regarded the Revolution favourably: he envisioned the change as a move toward a more utopian future. When it soon became apparent to Yesenin that his notion of the new government and the actual government differed, he too retreated from society and tragically took his own life in 1925.

The majority of writers did not share the Futurists' zeal for the Revolution and never accepted the new regime and its anti-bourgeois policies. In *Russian Literature under Lenin and Stalin, 1917-1953*, Gleb Struve lists the following poets who emigrated from Russia between 1918 and 1922: Konstantin Dmitrievich Bal'mont (1867-1942), Zinaida Nikolaevna Gippius (1869-1945), Vladislav Felitsianovich Khodasevich (1886-1939), Erenburg, Marina Ivanovna Tsvetaeva (1892-1941) who returned to the Soviet Union in 1937, Georgii Vladimirovich Ivanov (1894-1958), and Georgii Viktorovich Adamovich (1884-1972) (5).<sup>4</sup> Acmeists Nikolai

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<sup>4</sup> Many prose writers also emigrated at this time: Ivan Alekseevich Bunin (1870-1953), Aleksandr Ivanovich Kuprin (1870-1938), Mikhail Petrovich Artsybashev (1878-1927), Ivan Sergeevich Shmelev (1873-1950), Boris Konstantinovich Zaitsev (1881-1972), Leonid Nikolaevich Andreev (1891-1919), Dmitri Sergeevich Merezhkovskii

Stepanovich Gumilev (1886-1921), Anna Akhmatova (born A. Andreevna Gorenko, 1889-1966), and Osip Emil'evich Mandel'shtam (1891-1938), as well as Symbolist Fedor Sologub (pseudonym of F. Kuzmich Teternikov, 1863-1927) remained in Russia, but they were unable to publish for many years due to their opposition to the State.<sup>5</sup> Furthermore, the Civil War that broke out between the Bolshevik Red Army, the anti-Bolshevik White Army, and other factions in the summer of 1918, left the country with a shortage of paper. This widespread anti-Bolshevik stance among authors and loss of so many notable literary figures in Soviet Russia resulted in a drastic decline in the number of literary works published during the initial years that followed the Revolution. The flurry of innovative and diverse poetry produced at the turn of the twentieth century by the Symbolists, Realists, Futurists, Imaginists, Constructivists, and Acmeists dwindled, and the most prevalent genre of prose focused primarily on the Revolution and the Civil War. A literary revival followed in 1920-21, often referred to by scholars as the "café period." Once again poetry dominated the literary scene, as Mayakovsky, Yesenin, and other writers met at cafes and recited their poems to friends and to the public.

Lenin introduced the New Economic Policy (*Novaia ekonomicheskaiia politika*, or NEP) in 1921, which was designed to restore Russia's economy and to combat the agricultural ruin and resulting famine that plagued the Soviet Union after World War I and the Civil War. The government relaxed its control over writers, and politically neutral writings were permitted. Censorship, however, was not obliterated, and anti-revolutionary writings were forbidden. On June 6, 1922, the Party established the censoring body, Glavlit (*Glavnoe upravlenie po delam*

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(1865-1941), Aleksei Mikhailovich Remizov (1877-1957), Alexei Nikolaevich Tolstoi (1883-1945), V. Ropshin (pseudonym of Boris Viktorovich Savinkov, 1879-1925), and Mark Aleksandrovich Landau Aldanov (1886-1957).

<sup>5</sup> Gumilev was executed in 1921 for alleged participation in counter-revolutionary activities. Akhmatova's poetry was not printed from 1922 to 1946, and even then, it was harshly attacked. Mandel'shtam was virtually banned from Soviet publication after 1930; he died in a transit prison camp in Vladivostok in 1938 and was rehabilitated in 1955. Sologub was unable to publish his works after 1923.

*literatury i izdatel'stv*; Main Administration of Literary and Publishing Affairs and State Publishing House) to gain complete control over all national publications.<sup>6</sup> In *Russian Writers and Soviet Society, 1917-1978*, Ronald Hingley cites Evgenii Ivanovich Zamiatin's (1884-1937) novel *My* (*We*, 1920) as one of the first works banned by this governmental organization (12). Mandel'shtam and Akhmatova were also targeted. During the NEP period (1921-28), many diverse literary groups were formed or further developed. The Serapion Brotherhood (*Serapionovy brat'ia*) can be considered a non-conformist literary group, for its members "each proposed to write as an individual, being united only in disclaiming any ideological or propagandist purpose." (Hingley 193). The group produced one collection: *Serapionovy brat'ia: al'manakh pervyi* (*Serapion Brothers: The First Almanac*, 1922). In opposition, the Proletkult (an abbreviation of *Proletarskie kul'turno-prosvetitel'skie organizatsii*; Proletarian Cultural and Educational Organizations) was founded in 1917 by Aleksandr Aleksandrovich Bogdanov (born Malinovskii, 1873-1928) with Lunacharskii's support. The group aimed to provide the rising class of industrial proletariats with their own literature and art to replace that of the bourgeois (E. Brown, "Proletkult" 353-54). Additionally, the Proletkult held literary workshops to train workers and peasants as writers (E. Brown, "Proletkult" 354). The Smithy (*Kuznitsa*), comprised of proletarian lyric poets who emerged from the Proletkult in 1920, and other literary groups included *Pereval* (*The Pass*), *Lef* (*Levyi front iskusstv*; *Left Front of Art*), and RAPP (*Rossiiskaia assotsiatsiia proletarskikh pisatelei*; *Russian Association of Proletarian Writers*).<sup>7</sup> The members of *Lef*, mainly Futurists, declared that art should serve the proletarian Soviet state by conveying fact with avant-garde forms. Mayakovsky was the editor of the journals *Lef* (1923-25) and *Novyi*

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<sup>6</sup> Glavlit – formerly known as Gosizdat (*Glavnoe upravlenie gosudarstvennogo izdatel'stva*; Main Administration of State Publishing House), which was established in February 1919.

<sup>7</sup> RAPP – a literary organization that developed out of VAPP (*Vsesoiuznoi assotsiatsii proletarskikh pisatelei*; All-Union Association of Proletarian Writers) in 1928.

*Lef* (New Left, 1927-28). All “Soviet writers of non-proletarian and/or non-revolutionary background who were nevertheless willing to accept the ideals of the Revolution and to work constructively within and for the socialist order” were deemed Fellow-travellers (*Poputchiki*) and faced pressure by RAPP to take up proletarian writing (Terras, “Fellow Travelers”). The Central Committee of the Communist Party’s fundamental resolution of 1925 protected the Fellow-travellers, and for a short time the organizations more or less co-existed peacefully.

The diversity in literature during the NEP period was brought to a halt with Stalin’s ascent to power and introduction of the first Five-Year Plan in 1928. The principal literary organization from 1928 to 1932 was RAPP, which was presided over by literary critic Leopold Leonidovich Averbakh (1903-39), literary critic Vladimir Vladimirovich Ermilov (1904-65), and writer Iurii Nikolaevich Libedinskii (1898-1959). In *A History of Soviet Literature*, Vera Alexandrova states: “RAPP’s power was not based on the literary achievements of its members, but came rather from its energetic support of the policy of the Communist Party known as the ‘general line’” (26). The organization exercised censorship and control over all writers who were in opposition and resistance, condemned the non-proletarian Fellow-travellers, and was responsible for the arrest and exile of many authors and literary critics, including Zamiatin, Boris Pilniak (pseudonym of B. Andreevich Vogau, 1894-1937), Konstantin Aleksandrovich Fedin (1892-1977), and Mikhail Mikhailovich Zoshchenko (1895-1958). During this period, Mayakovsky became concerned with writers’ creative freedom under RAPP’s authority. He joined the organization in 1930, though his theory of literature deviated from the accepted one. Mayakovsky shocked the nation when he committed suicide later that year. On April 23, 1932, the Communist Party under Stalin dissolved all literary organizations to form the Union of Soviet Writers (*Soiuz pisatelei SSSR*), a move that fundamentally altered the natural progression of

literature. Initially it appeared that writers would be granted more creative freedom, as the consolidation liquidated the feared RAPP. However, this was the government's first major act to authenticate its ability to exercise strict control over writers, periodicals, and publications. In order for professional writers to have their works published, membership into the Writers' Union and acceptance of propagated theories of art became nearly mandatory, and led the Communist Party to dominate over the arts throughout the remaining years of the Soviet Union.

The fate of Russian literature was drastically altered in August 1934 when the doctrine of Socialist Realism (*Sotsialisticheskii realizm*) was officially instituted at the first All-USSR Congress of Soviet Writers. The exact origin of the concept of Socialist Realism is not clear. Scholars have cited it as developing during a meeting (one attendant was Stalin) that was requested by the Politburo of the Central Committee in 1932 to deal with issues associated with the April resolution that called for the unification of writers. The term was first publicly referred to by Ivan Mikhailovich Gronskii (1894-1985), the editor of an official newspaper of the Soviet government *Izvestiia* (News) who became the chairman of the Organizing Committee of the Writers' Union in 1934. On May 20, 1932, Gronskii stated in a speech: "The basic demand that we make on writers is: write the truth, portray truthfully our reality that is in itself dialectic. Therefore the basic method of Soviet literature is the method of socialist realism" (qtd. by Ermolaev, "Socialist Realism" 429, originally published in *Literaturnaia gazeta* [Literary Gazette] on May 23, 1932). During the first plenary session of the Organizing Committee of the Writers' Union (October 29-November 3, 1932), Gronskii and Valerii Iakovlevich Kirpotin (1898-1997), the chief of the Literary Division of the Party Central Committee, announced the guidelines of Socialist Realism (Ermolaev, "Socialist Realism" 429). Experimentation with form, departure from realism using symbolism or other techniques, and focus on the individual were all

banned; a mood of optimism, focus on the collective, contemporary subjects, *partiinnost'* (Party-mindedness), and *narodnost'* (patriotism and a focus on the common people) were valued. By its nature, the genre of poetry languished under these strict rules, while the body of novels and plays grew. Maksim Gork'ii (born Aleksei Maksimovich Peshkov, 1868-1936) has been regarded as the founder of Socialist Realism with his 1906 novel *Mat'* (Mother). Fedor Vasil'evich Gladkov's (1883-1958) 1925 novel *Tsement* (Cement) was also praised by the Communist Party as an exemplary work following the principles of Socialist Realism. In 1934 the doctrine was defined in the following terms:

Socialist realism, being the basic method of Soviet literature and literary criticism, requires from the artist a truthful, historically concrete portrayal of representation of reality in its revolutionary development. Moreover, truth and historical completeness of artistic representation must be combined with the task of ideological transformation and education of the working man in the spirit of Socialism. (qtd. in Slonin, *Soviet Russian Literature: Writers and Problems, 1917-1977* 165, originally published in *Literaturnaia gazeta*, Sept. 3, 1934)

Over time, the Party manipulated the theory to cater to its current focus, and by the time of Stalin's death, the focus of Socialist Realism reflected the dictator's own tastes.

The assassination of Sergei Mironovich Kirov (1886-34) on December 1, 1934 signalled the onset of Stalin's reign of terror. Millions of Soviet citizens suffered horrendously in these years of unlawful arrests, imprisonment, exile, lengthy sentences in the Gulag (forced labour camps where prisoners endured starvation and torture), and murder, all of which peaked in 1937-38. Under Stalin's command, citizens who held high positions in society were the first to be targeted, then members of the Communist Party, and finally ordinary citizens.<sup>8</sup> Soviets involved in the arts—composers, conductors, actors, ballet dancers, and writers—were targeted as “bourgeois nationalists” and did not escape persecution (Conquest 303). In *The Great Terror: A Reassessment*, Robert Conquest asserts that of the Russian intelligentsia, writers suffered “the

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<sup>8</sup> For a complete history of the Gulag, see Applebaum, Anne. *Gulag: A History*. New York: Anchor, 2003.



heaviest toll” (297), in that “[a] theory of correct aesthetic *method* was imposed on them, and at the same time the *content* of their works was subject to intense scrutiny.” (297).<sup>9</sup> Among the many who perished were Isaak Emmanuilovich Babel’ (born I. E. Bobel’, 1894-1941), Daniil Ivanovich Kharms (pseudonym of Iuvachev, 1905-42), Vsevolod Emil’evich Meyerhold (1874-1940), Mandel’shtam, Pil’niak, and Nikolai Alekseevich Kliuev (1887-1937). Conquest quotes the December 28, 1988 publication of *Literaturnaia gazeta*, which reported that “some 2,000 literary figures were repressed, of whom about 1,500 met their deaths in prison or camp” (297). During WWII artistic restraints were somewhat relaxed; much of the literature of this time was patriotic as writers’ own political aims coincided with the Party’s. Alexandrova writes in *A History of Soviet Literature* that during the Soviet-German war, a new heroic figure developed in literature: “ordinary, non-partisan people of the masses” who were not necessarily Communist (234). At the end of WWII, the Central Committee of All-Union Communist Party quickly regained ideological control over writers with the August 14, 1946 decree on literature, entitled “O zhurnalakh ‘Zvezda’ i ‘Leningrad’” (On the Journals *Zvezda* [The Star] and *Leningrad*).<sup>10</sup> In *Political Control of Literature in the USSR, 1946-1959*, Harold Swayze asserts that the resolution was put forth “to emphasize the educative function of literature, the duties of the writer to the people, party, and state, and, above all, the necessary political orientation of art” (37). Andrei Aleksandrovich Zhdanov (1896-1948), the Secretary of the Central Committee from 1944 to 1948 who was in charge of cultural affairs, made several speeches to clarify the decree. He criticized the editorial boards of the monthly literary journal *Zvezda* and *Leningrad* for publishing Zoshchenko and Akhmatova’s works that Zhdanov harshly attacked as anti-Soviet and countering the Party line. Consequently both were expelled from the Union of Soviet Writers

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<sup>9</sup> Italics are the author’s own.

<sup>10</sup> For the full decree, see the August 14, 1946 issue of the newspaper, *Kultura i zhizn’* (Culture and Life).

and ceased to be published, the editors were reprimanded, and *Leningrad* was forced to close. Thus began the era of “Zhdanovism,” 1946-52, the bleakest period in Soviet literature when all originality disappeared. In *The Year of Protest, 1956: An Anthology of Soviet Literary Materials*, McLean and Vickery describe the literature of Zhdanovism as “[bearing] little resemblance to human life of any kind,” depicting “grossly oversimplified or simply falsified” human emotions, and characterized by “an endlessly tedious series of factory or collective-farm moralities,” all of which had “effectively emasculated Soviet literature” (14).

Stalin’s death was met with scores of panegyrics and lamentations for the nation’s loss, although writers’ concerns about the limitations that governed their work also surfaced. As early as January 1953, Ol’ga Fedorovna Berggol’ts (1910-75) spoke out against the artistic restraints on lyric poetry and voiced a plea for official tolerance of personal and individual expressions during a conference on poetry. At the October 1953 Fourteenth Plenum of the board of the Writers’ Union, writers and literary critics openly discussed and criticized the trends of literature in the Soviet Union. Writers took advantage of Khrushchev’s wavering control over censorship and began to push for intellectual liberty, signalling the onset of the Thaw period. Vladimir Mikhailovich Pomerantsev’s (1907-7?) article “Ob iskrennosti v literature” (On Sincerity in Literature), published in the literary journal *Novyi mir* (New World) in December 1953, and Erenburg’s novel *Ottepel’* attacked the absence, or non-existent feature, of sincerity in Soviet literature. This first phase of the Thaw that seemed to signal a new leniency was curtailed with official criticism of Pomerantsev’s article in the Party newspaper *Pravda* (Truth), prompting the Writers’ Union to clamp down on such liberalism. The second “thaw” is marked by the Twentieth Congress of the Communist Party and Khrushchev’s famous “secret speech” (officially known as “On the Personality Cult and its Consequences,” Feb. 25, 1956), which

exposed and denounced Stalin's tyranny and crimes, including the purges of 1937-38, and his cult of personality. Semen Isaakovich Kirsanov's (1906-72) *poema* "Sem' dnei nedeli" (Seven Days of the Week),<sup>11</sup> Vladimir Dmitrievich Dudintsev's (1918-98) 1956 novel *Ne khlebom edinym* (Not by Bread Alone), and the anthology *Literaturnaia Moskva: sbornik vtoroi* (Literary Moscow: The Second Collection, 1956) are among the most notable works of this period, which quickly ended with the uprisings in Hungary and Poland in November of that same year. A significant event illustrating the Party's renewed restrictions over the arts occurred when Pasternak was forced to refuse the 1958 Nobel Prize for Literature, because *Doktor Zhivago* (Doctor Zhivago, 1957) had been published abroad in Italy after Soviet censors rejected it. The October 1961 Twenty-Second Party Congress and the launch of Khrushchev's de-Stalinization policy signalled the third "thaw," ending in 1963 shortly after Khrushchev attacked abstract art and artists at an exhibition in December 1962. This period, though brief, marked a new era in literature reminiscent of artistic freedom that writers had at the turn of the twentieth century. No longer strictly confined to Socialist Realism, writers audaciously began to push for creative liberalization. Previously forbidden topics were tolerated, as well as some criticism of State art, literary discussions and debates, and a common theme that rang out in literature was the desire to seek truth and honesty. Some of the most talented authors of the 1920s who had been persecuted for their writing, such as Anna Akhmatova, were rehabilitated; others, including Marina Ivanovna Tsvetaeva (1892-1941), Babel', Belyi, Mikhail Afanasievich Bulgakov (1891-1940), and Iuri Karlovich Olesha (1899-1960), were done so posthumously. The height of the Thaw period was marked by the publication of Aleksandr Isaevich Solzhenitsyn's (1918- ) *Odin den' Ivana Denisovicha* (One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich, 1962), and Yevtushenko's poems "Babii Yar" (1961) and "Nasledniki Stalina" (Heirs of Stalin, 1962).

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<sup>11</sup> *Poema* – a narrative poem substantial in length.

The late 1950s and early 1960s heralded a poetry revival, and a young generation of poets appeared. Before long the leading figures Yevtushenko, Bella (Izabella) Akhatovna Akhmadulina (1937- ), Robert Ivanovich Rozhdestvenskii (1932-94), and Andrei Andreevich Vosnesenskii (1933- ), in addition to Rimma Fedorovna Kazakova (1932- ), poet and bard Novella Nikolaevna Matveeva (1934- ), and Iunna Petrovna Morits (1937- ), had obtained a significant standing in the literary world.<sup>12</sup> These poets, who were generally born in the 1930s and had grown up under the Stalinist regime, reintroduced personal themes about doubts, hardships and sorrow, and truth and falsehood that had previously been forbidden. In *A History of Soviet Literature*, Alexandrova states that the literary involvement of the young people was completely unexpected, since their generation was “the product of Soviet life,” and therefore seemed “less likely to doubt or question the established order” (328). She continues: “But contrary to all expectation, it was precisely this young generation that showed signs of an awakening social restlessness” (Alexandrova 328). The young poets did exactly that by returning to individual themes and displaying emotion in their works. By expressing themselves through poetry rather than prose, the writers were more often able to evade censorship. Moreover, poetry was quick to compose, and its mobility made it accessible: poetry could be memorized and recited before publication. In the tradition of Mayakovsky, Yevtushenko and the young poets resurrected the poetry recitation. Soviet youth were especially drawn to their poetry, and enormous crowds filled halls, schools, city squares, and stadiums to hear the poets recite. These uninhibited displays of emotion helped to foster the reawakening of a Soviet national conscience

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<sup>12</sup> Vera Alexandrova writes that the appearance of young prose writers, such as Vasilii Pavlovich Aksenov (1932-) and Andrei Georgovich Bitov (1937- ), was “less dramatic” than that of the poets (339), though their literary contributions were significant. The older generation of prose writers, which included Iurii Markovich Nagibin (1920-94), Iurii Pavlovich Kazakov (1927-82), Viktor Platonovich Nekrasov (1911-87), Vladimir Alekseevich Soloukhin (1924-97), Vladimir Nikolaevich Sokolov (1928-97), and Iuri Pavlovich Kazakov (1927-82), should also be noted for their literary output during the Thaw period.

that had been trained to be silent under Stalin. The tradition of *Den' poezii* (Poetry Day) was born in September 1955, when the young poets gathered at Mayakovsky's statue in Moscow to recite their poems. Guitar poets, or bards, Bulat Shalvovich Okudzhava (1924-97), Novella Nikolaevna Matveeva (1934- ), and Aleksandr Galich (pseudonym of A. Arkad'evich Ginzburg, 1918-77) also are key cultural figures of this epoch.

Yevtushenko's poems of the Thaw period depict the intimate and personal portrayal of the human experience, often reflecting on the political injustices of the past, and authentically capturing the reality of emotions in everyday, common settings. His poetry covers a wide range of topics, including relationships (familial, intimate/romantic, and friendships), the struggle of the poet as writer, and most importantly the struggle that the people of the Soviet Union faced as they were forced to re-evaluate their beliefs in the wake of de-Stalinization policies. In *The Heritage of Russian Verse*, Dimitri Obolensky writes:

The outspoken sincerity with which [Yevtushenko] has treated social and political themes has contributed to his reputation, especially abroad. His popularity in his own country is more firmly based on his achievements as a lyric poet. (xxix)

His focus on the individual, a non-existent concept in literature during Stalin's reign, is a prominent theme of the period. The multitude of Yevtushenko's works covers nearly every genre: short stories, novellas, novels, literary essays, literary criticism, photography, screenplays, drama, and especially poetry. He has published over fifty volumes of poetry, and his works have been translated into seventy-two languages. Yevtushenko's thoughts, feelings, and experiences are never removed from his poetry, and thus, it becomes nearly impossible to study his works without taking into account at least some details of his life.

Yevtushenko was born on July 18, 1932 to Aleksandr Rudol'fovich Gangnus and Zinaida Ermolaevna Yevtushenko in Stantsiia Zima, a small railway junction situated near the Trans-

Siberian railway and Oka River in the Irkutsk region of Siberia. In 1935 the family moved to Moscow where Yevtushenko's parents had met during their studies at the Geological Institute of the Russian Academy of Sciences. Aleksandr Rudol'fovich, also a poet, taught Yevtushenko how to read and write at a young age. He instilled in Yevtushenko a love for poetry by reciting the works of a wide range of poets, particularly those dearest to him: Lermontov, Goethe, Poe, and Kipling (Evtushenko, *Avtobiografiia* [Autobiography] 20-21). By the age of eight, Yevtushenko claims he was reading the works of Dumas, Flaubert, Schiller, Balzac, Dante, Maupassant, Tolstoy, Boccaccio, Shakespeare, Gaidar, London, Cervantes, and Wells (Evtushenko, *Avtobiografiia* 21). During the Battle of Moscow in October 1941, when the capital city was under siege by Nazi Germany, Yevtushenko was among many Muscovite women and children who were evacuated to Siberia. He returned to his hometown to be cared for by his maternal grandmother, Mariia Iosifovna, until 1944 (Evtushenko, *Avtobiografiia* 22).<sup>13</sup>

Yevtushenko describes how he recorded the folk songs he heard in villages to preserve folk language, while discovering the versatile beauty of the Russian language in the humorous sayings, proverbs, and metaphorical aphorisms (Evtushenko, *Avtobiografiia* 25). During an interview with Eleanor Wachtel on June 4, 1995, he further explained how he altered lines in songs that he disliked and created new lines to replace the ones he forgot (Wachtel), and it is perhaps this play with sound and rhyme that fostered his appreciation for the musicality of verse. Many of his own poems have been set to music and have become popular songs, including "So mnoiu vot chto proiskhodit..." (Here is What is Happening to Me..., 1957), "Khotiat li russkie voiny?" (Do Russians Want War?, 1961), "Neizvestnyi soldat" (The Unknown Soldier, 1971),

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<sup>13</sup> In his essay "Khrustal'nyi shar pradedushki Vil'gel'ma" (The Crystal Ball of Great-Grandfather Vil'gel'm), Yevtushenko explains that it was at this point he adopted his mother's surname, and at the same time, his year of birth was changed from 1932 to 1933 so that he could return to Moscow without a pass (21). Many sources, including Yevtushenko's *Avtobiografiia*, cite the poet's birth year as 1933.

“Val’s o val’s e (Waltz on a Waltz), and “Bezhit reka, v tumane taet...” (The River Flows in the Fog and Fades), which now preserve Yevtushenko’s own use of folk language. Having been expelled from grade school, Yevtushenko joined his father on geological expeditions to Kazakhstan in 1948 and to Altai in 1950. The Siberian environment has left a lasting imprint on Yevtushenko, profoundly influencing his writings and reoccurring as a theme throughout his ever-expanding oeuvre of creative works, from his early *poema Stantsiia Zima* (Winter Station, 1956) to *Bratskaia GES* (Bratsk Station, 1965) and *Ia sibirskoi porody* (I am Siberian, 1971) and to the more recent *Pre-Morning / Predutro: A New Book of Poetry in English and Russian* (1995), as well as prose works *Avtobiografiia*, *Invisible Threads* (1981), *Iagodnye mesta* (Wild Berries, 1982), and *Divided Twins – Razdel’ennye bliznetsy: Alaska and Siberia* (1988).

As a young teenager determined to have his work published, Yevtushenko devoted much of his time to composing verse and focusing on formal aspects of poetry. He considered the system of rhyme in poetry limiting and repetitive and spent several years working his way through a Russian dictionary, trying to find new rhymes that did not already exist in poetry. He filled an entire notebook with approximately ten thousand new rhymes (Evtushenko, *Avtobiografiia* 40). Afterwards he developed a new system of rhyme taken from Russian folklore, which has since been referred to as “evtushenkovskaia” (Yevtushenko’s rhyme) (Evtushenko, *Avtobiografiia* 40-41). A. L. Babakin has performed a thorough analysis of Yevtushenko’s use of rhyme in *Slovar’: rlfm Evg. Evtushenko* (Dictionary: The Rhyme of Evg. Evtushenko, 2000). Yevtushenko avidly read a wide range of works, including Hemingway, Hamsun, Joyce, Freud, Proust, Steinbeck, Faulkner, Remarque, Saint-Exupery, Nietzsche, Thomas Mann, Walt Whitman, Rimbaud, Verhaeren, Baudelaire, Verlaine, Rilke, T. S. Eliot, Robert Frost, and the Russian classics: Tolstoy, Chekhov, Dostoevsky, Pushkin, Lermontov,

Blok, Yesenin, Mayakovsky, and Pasternak (Evtushenko, *Avtobiografiia* 73-75). Yevtushenko's first poem was published in the daily newspaper *Sovetskii Sport* (Soviet Sport) in 1949 on the approval of editor Nikolai Aleksandrovich Tarasov. Yevtushenko fell under Tarasov's guidance and mentorship, as well as the editor's friends: literary critic V. Varlas and journalist L. Filatov. After this initial publication, Yevtushenko's poems appeared in such newspapers as *Komsomol'skaia pravda* (Komsomol's Truth) and *Literaturnaia gazeta* and such journals as *Iunost'* (Youth), *Ogonek* (Little Flame), *Smena* (Variety), *Novyi mir* (New World), *Molodaia gvardiia* (Young Guard), and *Oktiabr'* (October). Yevtushenko's career began to progress once he was accepted into the Maksim Gor'kii Literary Institute in Moscow in 1951. He studied for four years (1951-54) without receiving his degree alongside Bella Akhmadulina, Robert Rozhdestvenskii, and Mikhail Mikhailovich Roshchin (1933- ). Evgenii Sidorov mentions in his essay, "Golosom vremeni: zametki o poezii Evgeniia Evtushenko" (With the Voice of the Times: Notes on the Poetry of Evgenii Evtushenko), that Yevtushenko also had close contact with Mikhail Kuz'mich Lukonin (1918-76), Evgenii Mikhailovich Vinokurov (1925-93), poet and translator Aleksandr Petrovich Mezhirov (1923- ), and poet Iaroslav Vasil'evich Smeliakov (1912-72) (6). In 1952 Yevtushenko's first poetry collection entitled *Razvedchiki griadushchego: kniga stikhov* (Prospectors of the Future: A Book of Poems) was published, and that same year Yevtushenko became the youngest member admitted to the Union of Soviet Writers.

Yevtushenko became actively involved in the literary world, developing his writing, attending and participating in literary discussions. In 1955 he published his second collection of poems *Tretii sneg: kniga liriki* (Third Snow: A Book of Lyrics); thereafter new cycles of Yevtushenko's poems were published nearly every year until the end of the 1960s. *Shosse entuziastov: stikhi* (Highway of Enthusiasts: Poems) and *Stantsiia Zima* (Winter Station), the



first work to bring him significant attention, were printed in 1956, followed by *Obeshchanie: stikhi* (The Promise: Poems) in 1957. *Luk i lira: stikhi o Gruzii; perevody gruz. poety* (Bow and Lyre: Poems about Georgia; Translations of Georgian Poets) and a collected volume of Yevtushenko's verse, *Stikhi raznykh let* (Poems of Several Years) came out in 1959, followed by *Iabloko: novaia kniga stikhov* (Apple: A New Book of Poems, 1960); *Vzmakh ruki: stikhi* (A Wave of the Hand: Poems, 1962); and *Nezhnost': novye stikhi* (Tenderness: New Poems, 1962).

Yevtushenko was drawn to the country of Georgia and its renowned poets like many Russian writers (Pushkin, Lermontov, Pasternak, and Akhmadulina to name a few). His poems on Georgia, as well as his translations of both classic and contemporary Georgian authors, gave rise to *Luk i lira: stikhi o Gruzii; perevody gruz. poety* (Bow and Lyre: Poems about Georgia; Translations of Georgian Poets, 1959), and he returned to this theme in *Tiazhelee zemli: stikhi o Gruzii, poety Gruzii* (Heavy Earth: Poems about Georgia, the Poets of Georgia, 1979) and in *Zelenaia kalitka* (The Green Gate, 1990). He translated works of Buryat poet Dondok Ulzytuev in *Mlechnyi put'* (The Milky Way, 1961), Georgian playwright and poet Tamaz Ivanovich Chiladze in *Seti zvezd* (A Network of Stars, 1961), and Bulgarian poet and playwright Georgi Dzhagarov in *Na koleni ne padat'!* (Don't Fall to Your Knees!, 1961). During the 1960s, Yevtushenko also published a short story, "Kurinyi bog" (Chicken-God, 1963), in *Molodaia gvardiia*, as well as new collections of poetry until the end of the decade: *Kater sviazi* (Torpedo Boat Signalling, 1966); *Kachka* (Swing-Boat, 1966); *So mnoiu vot chto proiskhodit...: Izbr lirika* (Here is What is Happening to Me...: A Collection of Lyrics, 1966); *Stikhi* (Poems 1967); *Stikhi i poema "Bratskaia GES"* (Poems and "Bratsk Station," 1967) and *Idut belye sneg...* (White Snows are Falling..., 1969).

In the 1970s and 1980s, Yevtushenko experimented with a variety of literary forms. Focusing extensively on the genre of *poemy* (long poems), he published: *Kazanskii universitet: poema* (Kazan University, 1971); *Poiushchaia damba: stikhi i poema* (Singing Dam, 1972); *Poet v Rossii—bol'she, chem poet: chetyre poemy* (A Poet in Russia is More than a Poet: Four Poems, 1973); *Sneg v Tokio* (Snow in Tokyo, 1974); *Proseka: poema* (The Glade, 1977); *V polnyi rost: novaia kniga stikhov i poem* (At Full-Growth: A New Book of Poetry, 1977); *Kompromiss Kompromissovich* (Compromise Compromisovich, 1978); *Svarka vzryvom: stikhov i poemy* (Welding Explosion, 1980); *Mama i neitronnaia bomba* (Mama and Neutron Bomb, 1983); and *Fuku!* (1985). *Invisible Threads* (1981) and *Divided Twins – Razdel'ennye bliznetsy: Alaska and Siberia* (1988) both combine Yevtushenko's poetry and photography. Yevtushenko also created numerous prose works, such as collections of essays: *Talant est' chudo nesluchainoe: kniga statei* (Talent is a Miracle that Comes Not by Chance, 1980) and *Sobranie sochinenii* (A Collection of Essays, 1983-84); a novella in verse: *Golub' v Sant'iago: povest' v stikhakh* (A Dove in Santiago: A Story in Verse, 1982), as well as the novella *Ardabiola* (1984). His first novel, *Iagodnye mesta: roman* (Wild Berries, 1981) was based on his short story "Chetvertaia Meshchanskaia" (The Fourth Vulgar Woman, 1959) and became a finalist for the Ritz Paris Hemingway prize in 1985. His play *Under the Skin of the Statue of Liberty* (1972) was first staged in Moscow and later performed in the United States. Yevtushenko travelled to Cuba and worked with Enrique Piñeda Barnett to write the screenplay *Ia Kuba*, also known as *Soy Cuba*, (I am Cuba, 1964) for director Kalatozov and has produced his screenplays *Detskii sad* (Kindergarten, 1983) and *Pokhorony Stalina* (Stalin's Funeral, 1990). *Net Let: Liubovaia lirika* (No Years: Love Lyrics) was published in 1993 and *Pre-Morning / Predutro: A New Book of Poetry in English and Russian* in 1995. His collection of essays, *Fatal Half Measures: The*

*Culture of Democracy in the Soviet Union* (1991) and second novel, *Ne umirai prezhde smerti* (Don't Die before You're Dead, 1993), are significant prose works of his later publications. Yevtushenko has also compiled an anthology of Russian poetry: *Strofy veka: antologiiia russkoi poezii* (Stanzas of a Century: An Anthology of Russian Poetry, 1999). Among his most current publications are *Walk on the Ledge / Progulka po karnizu: A New Book of Poetry in English and Russian* (2005), *I Came to You, Babi Yar...* (2006), *The Most Famous Symphony of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century* and *Shestidesantnik: memuarnaia proza* (Paratroopers of the 1960s: A Memoir in Prose, 2006).<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> For a complete bibliography of Yevtushenko's works, see P'ianykh, M. F. "Evtushenko." *Russkaia literatura xx veka. Prozaiki, poety, dramaturgi, biobibliograficheskii slovar'*. Ed. N. N. Skatova. Tom 1. Moscow: OLMA-PRESS Invest, 2005. 687-690.

## 2. Yevtushenko and the Tradition of Civic Poetry

Поэты ходят пятками по лезвию ножа  
и режут в кровь свои босые души.

Poets walk barefoot along the blade of a knife  
and slash their bare souls to ribbons.

Vladimir Vysotskii. "O fatal'nykh datakh i tsifrakh"  
(On Fatal Dates and Figures)<sup>15</sup>

The Russian people have a close affinity with their nation's most talented poets and approach poetry with a passion that is unmatched in the West. "Since the 'Golden Age,'" asserts literary critic George Reavey, "...Russians have always taken great pride in their poetic achievement as the art closest to the national heartbeat, to the emotions and aspirations of their ideal national selves" (ix). The poet, a maker of verses, is often deemed as prophet or teacher. In Russian society the poet is further valued for embarking on a mission to reveal the truth to the voiceless nation, especially when suppressed by a regime, and to offer consolation and hope in times of need. In *Arrested Voices: Resurrecting the Disappeared Writers of the Soviet Regime*, Vitaly Shentalinsky states: "For lack of democratic institutions, the Russian writer has never just been an artist, but a spokesman for the truth and a public conscience as well. Alexander Herzen called Russian literature the 'second government', the true authority in society." (5). The tradition of civic-oriented poetry in Russia dates back to the eighteenth century, continuing into the twentieth century most notably through the works of Blok and Mayakovsky. The *grazhdanskii poet* (civic poet) characteristically expresses social and political concerns and inequities relevant to the era through poetic forms frequently using caustic satire, and whose primary task it is to communicate the truth out of a sense of duty to the nation. In *The Modern Encyclopedia of Russian and Soviet Literatures*, Thomas Gaiton Marullo broadly defines

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<sup>15</sup> Vysotskii, Vladimir. "O fatal'nykh datakh i tsifrakh." *Vladimir Vysotskii. Chelovek. Poet. Akter*. Comp. Iu. A. Andreev and I. N. Boguslavskii. Moscow: Progress, 1989. 45-46, lines 23-24.

Russian civic poetry as a “literary movement dating from approximately 1830 to 1880 whose writers sought to invest Russian verse with social awareness” based on the concept of *narodnost*’ (nationality): an emphasis on the people of Russia and their sufferings (209) in a realistic portrayal. For example, Aleksandr Sergeevich Pushkin (1799-1837) and the Decembrist poets voiced their dissatisfaction with Emperor Nikolai I,<sup>16</sup> Nikolai Alekseevich Nekrasov (1821-78) directed his work more specifically at the plight of the peasants, and during the Thaw Yevtushenko referred to the crimes and horrors that occurred during Stalin’s dictatorship to address the political and social realities of the post-Stalin era.

The development of civic verse was undoubtedly influenced by the satirical mode and eighteenth-century writers; thus, its origins can be traced earlier than indicated in *The Modern Encyclopedia of Russian and Soviet Literatures*. A sign of national consciousness—the dissatisfaction with the autocratic governing system—was evident in Russian literature during the Age of Enlightenment (the late eighteenth century).<sup>17</sup> Literary historian and scholar Marc Slonim contends in *The Epic of Russian Literature: From its Origins through Tolstoy* that “the satirical tendency was significant of the awakening of liberal forces in Russia” and of “the moral and civic education of cultivated society” (37). In 1769 Catherine the Great<sup>18</sup> introduced the publication of satirical journals aimed at “combating the ignorance and backwardness of the

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<sup>16</sup> Nikolai I (Pavlovich; 1796-1855) – emperor of Russia from 1825-55.

<sup>17</sup> While the present paper deals more specifically with poetry, one should note that a civic strain appeared in other literary genres, as the following examples demonstrate. Dramatist and poet Iakov Borisovich Kniazhnin (1742-91) displayed in his works what D. S. Mirsky describes in *A History of Russian Literature* as “an almost revolutionary spirit of political freethinking” (52), evident in his opera *Neschastie ot karety* (An Accident with a Carriage, 1779). Denis Ivanovich Fonvizin (1745-92) held a position with Count N. Panin, who advocated a liberal constitution for Russia, and his social satires *Nedorosl’* (The Minor, 1781) and *Brigadir* (Brigadier, 1769) are also focused on the faults of society. In *The Epic of Russian Literature: From its Origins through Tolstoy*, Marc Slonim states: “Fonvizin contended that a writer should be ‘the guardian of general welfare, and raise his voice against abuses and prejudices.’” (40). Mikhail Alekseevich Matinsky’s (1750-after 1818) comic opera, *Sankt-Petersburgskii gostinyi dvor* (The Arcades of St. Petersburg, 1781-82) and Vasily Vasilievich Kapnist’s (1757-1823) comedy, *Iabeda* (Chicaner, 1798), follow the same principles.

<sup>18</sup> Catherine II of Russia, known as the Great, (1729-96) – empress of Russia from 1762-96.

country” (Slonim, *Epic* 37). Nikolai Ivanovich Novikov (1744-1818), journalist, literary critic, publisher, and editor, challenged the Empress’s notion of satire as harmless and humorous by printing in his own journals serious social satires that addressed “the very core of contemporary society—the system of serfdom” (Mirsky 56). He continued to publish such works until the Empress, reacting to the onset of the French Revolution, abandoned her liberal tendencies in 1789, which led to the closure of Novikov’s publishing house and his imprisonment. The satirical tendency continued into the nineteenth century with poets expressing their political dissatisfaction through satirical odes. Poet Gavrila Romanovich Derzhavin (1743-1816) can be named as a forerunner of civic poetry. For example, in “Vlastiteliam i sudiiam” (To Rulers and Judges, 1780), an adaptation of Psalm 82, Derzhavin criticizes the corruption of Catherine the Great’s government and exploitation of the lower classes. In the ode the highest god, while addressing the earthly gods for their greed and mistreatment of the vulnerable members of society, realizes that tsars are not free from a ruling power: they are dictated by their passions. The poem poignantly ends with the highest god summoning “боже правых” (the god of justice): “...карай лукавых, / И будь един Царем земли!” (...punish the wicked / And be the sole earthly tsar!) (Derzhavin 25, 27-28). Derzhavin’s poem, however, was considered too liberal and was banned by censors. (Slonim, *Epic* 35). Furthermore, the role of philosopher and writer Aleksandr Nikolaevich Radishchev (1749-1802) who “marked the beginning of Russian radicalism” cannot be excluded in an analysis of the foundation of civic poetry (Slonim, *Epic* 43). Radishchev is celebrated for his revolutionary-spirited odes, such as “Vol’nost’: oda” (Ode to Liberty, 1783), and his book *Puteshestvie iz Peterburga v Moskvu* (A Journey from Petersburg to Moscow, 1790). The latter is a traveller’s account of his interactions with peasants. Mirsky writes that this “furious attack against existing social and political conditions....was

directed against serfdom, but it also contained expressions of anti-monarchic feeling and materialistic opinions” (57). Like Novikov, Radishchev was arrested by Catherine the Great and sentenced to ten years of hard labour in Siberia. Although he was later freed, Radishchev took his own life in 1802. Slonim describes Radishchev’s works as signifying the increasing tendency toward a more direct expression of radical sentiments moving away from satire, as well as his tremendous influence on later writers of the nineteenth century (*Epic* 45).

Pushkin, Russia’s most celebrated poet, created a diverse treasury of remarkable literary works, and a civic strain is evident in a number of his lyric poems. Reminiscent of Derzhavin’s “Vlastiteliam i sudiiam,” Pushkin’s “Vol’nost’: oda” (Ode to Liberty, 1817) is a proclamation that no one, not even the tsar, should be placed above the law, and this was one of the contributing factors that led to his exile. Pushkin also condemned the system of serfdom. In “Derevnia” (In the Countyside, 1819), for example, Pushkin’s narrator finds pastoral refuge from the “порочный двор” (the vicious court) and “от суетных оков” (from the bondage of vanities) in the countryside, where he can reflect in peaceful solitude (Pushkin, “Derevnia” 5, 21). However, he feels “невежества убийственный позор” (the murderous shame of ignorance), upon the sight of exploited serfs, to whom he refers as “...рабство тощее влачится по браздам / Неумолимого владельца” (an emaciated bondage dragged by the reigns / Of inexorable owners.) (Pushkin, “Derevnia” 38, 45-46). In the final stanza, the narrator questions if he will see the end of the nation’s oppression and that of the serfs (Pushkin, “Derevnia” 57-60). “К Чаадаеву” (To Chaadaev, 1818) and “Kinzhal” (The Dagger, 1821) further demonstrate Pushkin’s longing for the nation’s freedom. In regards to Pushkin’s civic poetry, Slonim states:

Pushkin was convinced that a true poet was a sounding board responsive to the voices of contemporary life. He wanted the poet to be actively interested in the ideas and events of his time. A series of his poems on political themes proves that he put this theory into

practise. He was also of the opinion that a free, independent writer was bound to produce works of social and moral significance. (*Epic* 91)

Slonim also writes: “According to Dostoevsky, his universality was not only the main feature of Pushkin’s work and mentality, but it made him the most typical representative of the Russian spirit in so far as the latter always tends to transform the national into the universal.” (*Epic* 96).

The notion of *grazhdanstvennost’* (civic consciousness) in literature also stemmed from poetry written by, or regarding, the Decembrists<sup>19</sup> and the ideal of civic Rome and poet as patriotic citizen. Decembrist poetry, indebted to both Classicism and Romanticism, is distinct in its devotion to civic themes. The Decembrists, many of whom were writers, facilitated their cause of reform with poetry that advocated equality and justice in a democratic system of government and focused on the *narodnost’*. Kondratii Fedorovich Ryleev (1795-1826) became a leader of the Decembrist’s Northern Society after joining the group in 1823. The Northern Society’s members were united in their dissatisfaction with the tsar’s abuses of power, feelings of patriotism for their country, and the dream of liberating the Russian people. Having worked in St. Petersburg’s criminal court, Ryleev was exposed to the cases of peasants, which increased his awareness of the inequities in society. Ryleev was actively involved in *Poliarnaia zvezda* (Polar Star), a literary almanac that reflected the Decembrists’ notions of reform and modernization for Russia, and his own literary works include lyric poems, satires, *duma* (historical poems that glorify a hero of the past), and agitational songs often co-authored with Aleksandr Aleksandrovich Bestuzhev (Marlinskii) (1797-1837). In the lyric poem “Derzhavin” (1822),

Ryleev describes the poet’s role:

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<sup>19</sup> Upon returning from the defeat of Napoleon in 1815, many young officers became aware of the social and political backwardness of their country. United by a mounting dissatisfaction, the Decembrists, as they were later known, formed the Northern Society with branches in St. Petersburg and Moscow (the Southern Society was located in Ukraine). On December 14, 1825, the day Senate and guard regiments in Petersburg were to swear an oath of allegiance to Tsar Nicholas I, the Decembrists attempted a rebellion. The poorly organized revolt was quickly suppressed by Nicholas I; five leaders, including Ryleev were hanged, and others were exiled to Caucasus or Siberia.



О, так! нет выше ничего  
Предназначения поэта:  
Святая правда—долг его;  
Предмет—полезным быть для света. (49-52)

Oh! There is no higher  
Destiny for the poet:  
His duty—sacred truth;  
His purpose—to be useful to the world.

The stanza clearly outlines Ryleev's view that the poet has a responsibility to serve a social purpose. Furthermore, in "A. A. Bestuzhev" (To A. A. Bestuzhev, 1825), Ryleev proclaims: "Я не Поэт, а Гражданин." (I am not a Poet, but a Citizen.) (21). In 1860 Nikolai Platonovich Ogarev (1813-77) described Ryleev as:

a poet of the public life of his time. Although he wrote of himself: 'I am not a poet, but a citizen,' one must recognize in him as much of the poet as the citizen. Having thrown himself passionately into the field of politics with a spotless purity of heart, mind, and activity he strove to express in this poetic writings the feeling of truth, right, honor, freedom, and love for his country and people, and a sacred hate for all oppression. (qtd. in Os'makov 338)

Pushkin, although not a Decembrist himself, sympathized with their cause and composed "Vo glubine sibirskikh rud" (In the Depth of Siberian Mines, 1827) after the defeat of the December uprising.

He conveys a sense of hope for the Decembrists:

Оковы тяжкие надут,  
Темницы рухнут—и свобода  
Вас примет радостно у входа,  
И братья меч вам отдадут. ("Vo glubine sibirskikh rud" 13-16)

The heavy shackles will fall,  
The dungeons will crash down—freedom  
At the entrance you will joyously gain,  
And, brothers, to you the sword will be returned.

He reassures the Decembrists: “Не пропадет ваш скорбный труд / и дум высокое стремленье” (Your sorrowful toil and thoughts of high aspirations are not in vain) (“Vo glubine sibirskikh rud” 3-4), also revealing his own desire for the nation’s freedom.

The next significant civic poet was Mikhail Iur’evich Lermontov (1814-41), who gained fame for his poem on Pushkin’s death, “Smert’ poeta” (The Death of a Poet, 1837). The poem opens: “Погиб Поэт!” (The Poet is killed!) (1), illustrating Lermontov’s outrage over the tragic loss of the writer. The poem also conveys Lermontov’s anger at the tsar (who personally acted as Pushkin’s censor) and at society, whom he holds responsible for Pushkin’s death. As punishment for the poem, Lermontov was arrested, tried, and exiled to the Caucasus; one year later he was allowed to return to the city. Lermontov’s works are permeated with his sombre outlook on life, his sense of dissatisfaction and hopelessness for the future, and his struggle to gain a high standing in society (a strong desire of his, although paradoxically he viewed society as corrupt). His poem, “Pervoe Ianvaria” (The First of January, 1840), expresses his disdain of the aristocracy, bitter torment, and loneliness; “I skuchno, i grustno” (I am Bored and Sad,” 1840) concludes with the despairing lines: “И жизнь... / Такая пустая и глупая шутка...” (And life... / is such a hollow and stupid joke...) (11, 12). Lermontov followed the footsteps of previous civic poets, in the sense that he was an avenger against the degradation of society and social injustices.

During the mid-nineteenth century, prominent literary critics had a tremendous influence on writers. Vissarion Grigor’evich Belinskii (1811-48), a well-respected literary critic, upheld the philosophy that Russia would find “salvation in reforms, in enlightenment, and in the progress of civilization and humanity” (Slonim, *Epic* 138), and on these principles he based his literary criticism. Belinskii was a proponent of *deistviteil’nost’* (naturalness or reality) in

literature. He valued content over form, believing that writers have a social responsibility and their literature should be inspired by a conscious goal. To illustrate, in “Pis’mo N. V. Gogoliu” (Letter to N. V. Gogol’, 1847), Belinskii states:

[the public] looks upon Russian writers as its only leaders, defenders, and saviours against Russian autocracy, orthodoxy, and nationality, and therefore, while always prepared to forgive a writer a bad book, will never forgive him a pernicious book. (Belinsky 89)

Belinskii worked as an editor first for the liberal journal *Otechestvennye zapiski* (Notes of the Fatherland) and then for *Sovremennik* (The Contemporary), and he published formative literary reviews on the works of Pushkin, Lermontov, Nikolai Vasil’evich Gogol’ (1809-52), Fedor Mikhailovich Dostoevsky (1821-81), Ivan Sergeevich Turgenev (1818-83), Ivan Aleksandrovich Goncharov (1812-91), and Nekrasov. In the 1860s Nikolai Gavrilovich Cherneshevskii (1828-99), Nikolai Aleksandrovich Dobroliubov (1836-61), and Dmitrii Ivanovich Pisarev (1840-68) became key political thinkers and literary critics.<sup>20</sup>

Nikolai Aleksandrovich Nekrasov (1821-77), the leading civic poet of the nineteenth century, portrays a deep sense of compassion and sympathy for the lower classes in his work at a time when the novel overshadowed poetry. Characteristic of civic poets, Nekrasov felt he had a duty to his country and people, and he believed that writers should serve the people. In what has become a famous poetic slogan, Nekrasov wrote in “Poet i grazhdanin” (Poet and Citizen, 1855-56): “Поэтом можешь ты не быть, / Но гражданином быть обязан.” (It is possible for one not

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<sup>20</sup> Less prominent poets whose works contain a sense of civic-mindedness include: poet and publicist Ivan Petrovich Pnin (1773-1805); Dmitrii Dmitrievich Minaev (1835-89); Mikhail Larionovich Mikhailov (1829-65), a radical poet and prose writer who wrote, among other works, agitational verses and political satires, and called for violence to achieve social change; Ivan Savvich Nikitin (1824-61) who realistically depicted the suffering of the peasants in his works; Nikolai Platonovich Ogarev (1813-77), poet and co-editor of *Poliarnaia zvezda* (Polar Star) and *Kolokol* (The Bell); Aleksei Nikolaevich Pleshcheev (1825-93), poet, prose writer, translator, and playwright who was involved in the Petrashevsky Circle (a literary group formed in reaction to the strict ruling of Nicholas I); Semen Iakovlevich Nadson (1862-87) who expressed sentiments of despair; Vil’gel’m Karlovich Kiukhel’becker (1797-1846), a Decembrist.

to be a poet, / But one is obliged to be a citizen) (66). His narrative portraits of peasants and their sufferings, and his particular sympathy for women and the heavy burden they carry, are composed in the trend of realism, authentically capturing the sorrowful and tragic fate of the lower classes. In the poem, “Vcherashnii den’, chasu v shestom” (Yesterday at Six O’Clock, 1948), Nekrasov identifies his muse’s sister in a peasant girl who is beaten unmercifully; his muse is one of vengeance and sorrow, and in his poem, “Stikhi moi! Svideteli zhivye...” (My Verses! Living Witnesses 1858), he writes: “Стихи мои! Свидетели живые / За мир пролитых слез!” (My verses! Living witnesses / of tears for this forlorn earth!). (1-2). The formative years of Nekrasov’s childhood were shaped by witnessing human suffering, and his own experiences made him sensitive to the suffering of others. Nekrasov’s abusive and alcoholic father mistreated both Nekrasov’s mother and the peasants of the family’s estate, and upon moving to St. Petersburg to attend university against his father’s wishes, Nekrasov spent three years in poverty and hunger and came to know the hardships of others. Nekrasov’s mother, in contrast, was a loving and compassionate figure, despite her own tribulations, and in Nekrasov’s poetry, his deep love for his mother and her martyr-like image is depicted in a number of his poems. Nekrasov’s literary career as a poet was a direct result of his friendship with Belinskii, to whom he was introduced in the early 1840s. He worked as a book reviewer for *Sovremennik*, a periodical of revolutionary democracy in Russia founded by Pushkin in 1836, and under Belinskii’s influence, he solidified his decision to continue writing poetry. Nekrasov was on the editorial board of *Sovremennik*, which he purchased in 1846 with Panaev, becoming the sole owner of the journal by 1862. After the attempted assassination of Tsar Aleksandr II in 1866, *Sovremennik* was closed by the government, although he took over the equally influential *Otechestvennyi zapiski* in 1868. In his short poems, “Poet i grazhdanin” and “Prorok” (Prophet,

1874), Nekrasov expresses his political motivations: freeing the peasants from serfdom. After the emancipation of the serfs in 1861,<sup>21</sup> Nekrasov emphasized the injustice of the resulting benefits and advantages for landowners and not the serfs. He also called attention to the plight of the peasants in “Orina, mat’ soldatskaia (Orina, a Soldier’s Mother, 1863); “Zheleznaia doroga” (The Railroad, 1864), based on the misery of peasant railroad workers; *Krest’ianskie deti* (The Peasant Children, 1861), *Russkie zhenshchiny* (Russian women, 1871-72); and *Кому на Руси жить хорошо?* (Who is Happy in Russia?, 1863-77). The term, *shestidesiatniki* (men of the 1860s), now refers to the group of civic poets under Nekrasov.

The close relationship between the poet and the public survived during the Soviet regime. Mayakovsky, the “drummer of the Revolution,” was the most vocal and active poet during the 1920s and the most notable civic poet of the twentieth century. Mayakovsky embraced the Bolshevik’s cause and the opportunity to serve the State using his poetic talent. After the Revolution of October 1917, his poems contained optimism for the future under the new regime. Mayakovsky was involved in political activity early in his youth. Having joined the Russian Social Democratic party at the age of fourteen, Mayakovsky was subsequently arrested for copying material with an illegal printing press. After this incident, he was arrested two more times, the last of which resulted in a six-month jail sentence, including a period of solitary confinement in Butyrki prison. Mayakovsky utilizes poetry as a loudspeaker for proclaiming revolutionary zeal and calls himself “агитатор, / горлан-главарь” (an agitator, / rabble-rouser) in “Vo ves’ golos: pervoe vstuplenie v poemu” (At the Top of my Voice: First Prelude to the Poem, 1929-30) (70-71). He likens the Revolution to the coming of the second flood in his poem, “Nash marsh” (Our March, 1918), a march to the future for which “[сердце] наш барабан.” (The heart is our drum.) (8). In an outpouring of energy and exuberance, Mayakovsky

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<sup>21</sup> The Emancipation Act occurred on February 19, 1861.

declares: “Наше оружие – наши песни. / Наше золото – звенящие.” (Our songs are our weapons. / Our ringing voices – our gold.) (“Nash marsh” 11-12). Mayakovsky intended his verse to reach the masses and encompassed oral and visual media. During a period when there was a shortage of paper, Mayakovsky made posters and placards and painted display windows for the Russian telegraph agency ROSTA. He travelled and performed poetry recitals in the Soviet Union and abroad to Riga, Latvia (May 1922), Germany and France (October – December 1922), North America, Poland, and the former Czechoslovakia.

During the Thaw the tradition of civic poetry was continued by Yevtushenko who uses his verse as a means of achieving societal change. Yevtushenko’s understanding of civic poetry is touched upon in a conversation between the poet and Evgenii Iur’evich Sidorov published under the title “Sorokalet’e—strogaia pora...: dialog vmesto predisloviia” (Forty is a Demanding Age...: Dialogue between Poet and Critic). Sidorov comments on the political and civic pathos of Yevtushenko’s poems, in which oratorical notes actively resound and lead one to recall the tradition of Mayakovsky (39). He further states that “[the] concept of civic responsibility in poetry has now grown unquestionably more complicated. One does not solve problems with slogans and appeals in poetry alone” (39), to which Yevtushenko responds:

If Mayakovsky was alive today, he would write his poetry differently. This does not mean that there is no need for agitation in general, but the agitator, the tub-thumper, the tribune of today, has to provide the masses with poetic appeals that correspond to both the matured consciousness of the people and the greater complexity of the problems of the second half of the twentieth century. (Sidorov, “Forty is a Demanding Age...,” 40)

The quoted passage underscores the delicate relationship between the civic poet and the public. Yevtushenko has demonstrated his ability to effectively gauge the mood of the nation and reach the masses in his revival of the poetry recitation, performing both in the Soviet Union and abroad, during the Thaw period and ever since. Yevtushenko’s captivating and dramatic poetry

readings that engage the audience have proven to be a continued success into the twenty-first century. In connection to this topic, R. R. Milner-Gulland describes Yevtushenko as the following:

He stands out above all others as the leading figure of the post-Stalin epoch of Soviet literature, and has blazed the trail for a remarkable revival of poetry among young writers. He is not the finest poet the Soviet Union has produced, but he has claims to being one the most important. His finger has been more sensitive than almost any other to the pulse of the times; and since his work strives more than anything else towards honesty and frankness, he grants us an unparallel glimpse into the emotions of a Soviet intellectual of the newest generation. At the same time, he is a poet whose significance stretches far beyond the boundaries of his own country. (vii)

In the moment of relaxation of the stringent Socialist Realism rules, Yevtushenko brought to the public an inner accountability, and it was these expressions of human experience and emotion that first drew people to his work. Yevtushenko often reminds his readers and listeners that he loves his country, but must fight against the hypocrisy of the past, the Communist system, and bureaucracy, which he considers his vocation as a poet. The fact he wrote personal poems was a civic act in itself, as he went against the accepted method of writing. Yevtushenko writes in “Cradle of Glasnost” (1987) that his first poems to attract a significant audience were his love poems, which, he adds, “...to some degree, independent of my wishes, became political, since in them I defended man’s great right to the personal property of his individual feelings and thoughts and rose up against the criminal collectivization of human souls” (35).

Yevtushenko describes the day he went to view Stalin’s coffin in Trubnaia Square as a turning point in his life and in his writing (*Avtobiografiia* 101), as his perception of the former leader began to change. In an insightful passage in *Avtobiografiia*, he recounts this experience. As the enormous crowd of mourners rushed forward to see Stalin’s body, people were trampled to death underfoot and smashed against army trucks that police officers refused to move because they were not instructed to do so. Yevtushenko describes the nation’s reaction to Stalin’s death:

Было какое-то всеобщее оцепенение. Люди были приучены к тому, что Сталин думает о них о всех, и растерялись, оставшись без него. Вся Россия плакала, и я тоже. Это были искренние слезы горя и может быть слезы страха за будущее. (97)

It was a kind of universal torpor. People had been trained to believe that Stalin thought about all of them and were left confused and lost without him. All of Russia was crying, and I too — sincere tears of grief and perhaps tears of fear for the future.

He also writes: “... you can only restore what is in ruins” (*Autobiography* 102), implying that change is not possible without first acknowledging previous errors.

The first work to bring Yevtushenko significant attention was *Stantsiia Zima* published in the literary journal *Oktiabr'* (October) in 1956. He composed the poem between 1953 and 1956, when Soviet citizens' perception of Stalin began to crumble with the public announcement in 1953 that the Jewish doctors involved in the alleged plot to kill Zhdanov and other high-ranking officials were innocent, and prisoners were rehabilitated and returned from labour camps.

Yevtushenko travelled to Stantsiia Zima at this time to find out if people throughout the Soviet Union were experiencing the same feelings caused by the revelations of these political injustices as they were in Moscow, and he based the poem on his experiences there. The poem is structured on a series of sketches of Yevtushenko's encounters with his relatives and people in the town, as well as on his own musings, as he returns “за силой, / за мужеством, за правдой и добром” (for strength, / for courage, for truth and goodness) (Yevtushenko, *Stantsiia Zima* 18). In

*Stantsiia Zima* Yevtushenko diverges from the principles of Socialist Realism with the use of first person narration to create a personal and autobiographical narrative *poema*.

Yevtushenko's poetic development is evident in *Stantsiia Zima*, displaying the beginning of his ability to effectively combine lyrical and political elements, which can be ascribed as civic elements, a trait that resurfaces throughout his poetry. The lyric aspect of the poem, that is, the author's expression of emotions, is achieved primarily through the use of first person narration



and descriptions of the Siberian landscape. Yevtushenko formed a close bond to the Siberian land and people as he spent half of his childhood in Stantsiia Zima, and the attachment to his childhood home that one so often develops is evident in *Stantsiia Zima*. He writes, “Я выросал на станции Зима / и полюбил тайгу, поля и горы / и тихие зиминские дома” (I grew up in Stantsiia Zima / and fell in love with the taiga, fields and mountains / and the peaceful homes). (12). By returning to his place of birth, Yevtushenko attempts to regain some of his childhood innocence and simple perception of life. The following stanza from *Stantsiia Zima* illustrates the delicate images Yevtushenko creates of his beloved Siberia land:

Я шел вдоль черных пашен, желтых ульев,  
смотрел, как, шевелясь еще слегка,  
за горизонтом полузатонули  
наполненные светом облака. (12-14)

I walked along blackened fields, past yellow beehives,  
and saw how behind the horizon  
floating gently and sinking a little,  
the clouds were filled with light.

Through such vivid portraits of nature found throughout the poem Yevtushenko’s love for his homeland is unmistakable, as his soul is deeply rooted in his homeland. The serenity of the landscape is contrasted to the inner turmoil that Yevtushenko and others are experiencing, and the fact that Yevtushenko is only able to obtain fleeting moments of happiness troubles him.

Yevtushenko’s use of the personal narrative enables him to subtly address political issues associated with Stalin’s dictatorship. His sister asks if he was at the Hall of Columns in March (20), indirectly inquiring if he had viewed Stalin’s coffin; his Uncle Volodia wonders aloud about the innocence of the Jewish doctors and Beria’s role in these crimes (23); the old man Yevtushenko meets at the Oka River speaks of the negative impact of Communism (28-30). Yevtushenko is reassured by his childhood friend Vovka that everyone is experiencing similar

doubts that will be understood over time (70). When deliberating on the political deception, Yevtushenko declares:

Хочу я биться храбро  
но так, чтобы во всем, за что я бьюсь,  
горела та единственная правда,  
которой никогда не поступлюсь. (64)

I want to fight courageously,  
so all that I will fight for  
shines with that sole truth,  
which I will never forgo.

Yevtushenko finally asks Stantsiia Zima how to obtain happiness and receives the reply: “Да, правда хорошо, а счастье лучше, но все-таки без правды счастья нет” (Yes, truth is good, but happiness is better, / though all the same, without truth happiness does not exist) (74). The poem resonated with readers, and in *A History of Soviet Literature*, Vera Alexandrova states that it “came to readers, after decades of bombast and rhetoric, as a blessedly welcome message” (331).

Yevtushenko has been a political activist since the early years of the Thaw, and his views on current political and social issues are often entwined with his creative works. In 1956 he fell out of the Party’s favour as one of the few who spoke out in defence of Vladimir Dudintsev and his novel, *Ne khlebom edinym* (Not by Bread Alone, 1956). Consequently, Yevtushenko was expelled from the Maksim Gork’ii Literary Institute and the Komsomol, though his privileges were later restored. He was reinstated to the Komsomol and became secretary for the Institute for four years. By the early 1960s, Yevtushenko had received international success, travelling throughout the Soviet Union and abroad in Western Europe (first in Bulgaria and Romania) and then to the US, Africa, and Cuba. In 1961 Yevtushenko was again subjected to an attack by the Party upon the publication of his controversial poem, “Babii Yar,” which will be addressed in the

following chapter. From 1962 to 1969, he served on the editorial board of the literary journal *Iunost'* (Youth) and joined the Moscow branch of the Writers' Union in 1967. Yevtushenko was more severely reprimanded by the Party in 1963. While Yevtushenko was abroad, his *Avtobiografiia*, which included critical portrayals of Stalinism, was published by the French journal, *L'Express*, thus evading Soviet censorship.<sup>22</sup> Yevtushenko was summoned back to the Soviet Union and banned from leaving the Soviet Union from 1963 to 1965. Yevtushenko protested once again politically and poetically in 1968 during the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia. He sent a telegram on August 21, 1968 to Leonid Il'ich Brezhnev, the General Secretary of the Communist Part from 1964-82. In reaction to the shame he felt for his country's actions, Yevtushenko additionally composed the poem, "Tanki idut po Prage" (Russian Tanks in Prague, 1968), which was circulated *samizdat*, or illegally copied and circulated in a kind of "self-publication" and distribution, before its first publication in 1989.<sup>23</sup> The image of the rolling tanks symbolizes all the destruction the invasion caused: obliterating truth, conscience and honour, and the temptation to live freely. In *Fatal Half Measures*, Yevtushenko writes that he responded out of "moral duty" to "a cruel blow to Czechoslovak-Soviet friendship and to the world Communist movement" (3). In his essay, "Поэма, котораia spasla sotni zhiznei," (A Poem that Saved a Hundred Lives), he writes: "для меня это было крушением всей моей революционной романтики, надежд на социализм с человеческим лицом" (for me it was the collapse of all my revolutionary romanticism, hope for socialism with a human face) (316), illustrating the impact that this event had on him.

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<sup>22</sup> *Avtobiografiia* was first published in the German magazine *Stern* in 1962, the French journal *L'Express* in 1963, in London in 1963, and finally in *Nedeliia* (the weekly supplement of *Izvestia*) in the Soviet Union in 1989.

<sup>23</sup> *Samizdat* became increasingly important during the dissident movement beginning in the mid-1960s. Manuscripts of books, petitions, appeals, letters, poetry, and other documents were circulated within a circle of friends and copied avoiding censorship and then more widely distributed. *Samizdat* publications included journals, such as *Phoenix*, *Syntax*, and *Chronicle of Current Events* (1968), and the transcripts of the Siniavskii and Daniel trial.

Following the Thaw period, dissident writers circulated collective letters of protest petitioning for such things as the release of political prisoners to be signed by cultural figures, in order to place pressure on the Soviet government.<sup>24</sup> However, Yevtushenko never became actively involved in the dissident movement and has stated that he believed these letters had little effect on the government (*Fatal Half Measures* 44), although he did sign a collective letter against the trial of Siniavskii and Daniel. Instead, Yevtushenko wrote personal letters to the government in defence of Brodskii, Gorbanevskaia, Marchenko, Ratushinskaia, Timofeev, F. Svetov and others, and he states in *Fatal Half Measures* he also wrote letters to advocate “those who were not subjected to criminal prosecution but just as damaging civil persecution” (53). In his short essay, “Cradle of Glasnost” (1987), Yevtushenko reflects on his poem *Stantsiia Zima*, which he calls “the first truth-seeking poetry after so many years of official lies,” at a time when there were no dissidents and few freedoms (34). He also states, “In 1953 it seemed I was all the dissidents rolled up into one.” (*Fatal Half Measures* 34).

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24 Key dissident writers and human rights activists include Anatolii Tikhonovich Marchenko (1938-86), Vladimir Konstantinovich Bukovskii (1942- ), Lev Zinov’evich Kopelev (1912-97), Petr Grigorenko, Petr Ionovich Iakir (1923-82), Elena Georgievna Bonner (1923- ), Andrei Alekseevich Amal’rik (1938-80), and poets Natal’ia Evgen’evna Gorbanevskaia (1936- ) and Irina Borisovna Ratushinskaia (1954- ).

### 3. “Babii Yar” and “Nasledniki Stalina”

Поэзия –  
не мирная молельня.

Поэзия –  
жестокая война.

Poetry  
is no chapel of peace.

Poetry  
is savage war.

Yevtushenko. “Poeziia” (Poetry)<sup>25</sup>

During the final years of the Thaw period, 1961 to 1963, Yevtushenko daringly spoke out against two controversial issues in the Soviet Union: Soviet anti-Semitism in his poem “Babii Yar” and neo-Stalinism in “Nasledniki Stalina.” By bringing these taboo subjects to light, Yevtushenko initiated a discourse surrounding the accountability of Communist Party members for their involvement in past and present injustices. With the topical nature of his poems, Yevtushenko ventured past the official boundaries of political freedom and tolerance in Soviet art. Through the composition of these verses alone (notwithstanding numerous other previous and future literary achievements), Yevtushenko has attained a monumental standing as a civic poet, and arguably these works can be considered his most significant contribution to the canon of civic verse.

Yevtushenko’s poem “Babii Yar” is named for a ravine located in the Zhytomyr province of Kiev, Ukraine (between the districts of Lukyanovka, Kurenyovka, and Syrets) where thousands of people, primarily Jewish citizens, were brutally massacred by Nazi executioners and local collaborators during World War II. On June 22, 1941, Nazi Germany carried out Operation Barbarossa and invaded the Soviet Union, breaking the Treaty of Non-Aggression

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<sup>25</sup> Evtushenko, Evgenii. “Poeziia.” *Nezhnost’: novye stikhi*. Moscow: Sovetskii pisatel’, 1962. 56-58, lines 1-4.

between Germany and the USSR signed in August 1939.<sup>26</sup> In Wendy Lower's recent publication, *Nazi Empire-Building and the Holocaust in Ukraine*, she writes: "The Nazi Weltanschauung viewed the attack against the Soviet Union as a war of annihilation in the racial-political struggle against Judeo-Bolshevism," which targeted "Jews, Soviet prisoners of war, and other so-called racial and political undesirables" in their campaign of genocide (31). Boris Zabarko reports in *Holocaust in the Ukraine* that approximately 1.5 million Jews were killed during the Nazi occupation of Ukraine (xiii). Entire cities, towns, Jewish communities, and many places of Jewish cultural importance, such as synagogues and cemeteries, were completely destroyed. By the time the Nazis arrived in Ukraine, nearly all able-bodied Jewish men had been conscripted into the Red Army or evacuated to work at factories. The most vulnerable and innocent members of society remained in the cities where they perished at the hands of the Nazis. Yevtushenko's poem has been influential in drawing international attention to the massacre at Babi Yar, though it is only one of hundreds of sites.<sup>27</sup> There are many mass graves in Ukraine that still do not have any commemorative markers and many more that have yet to be uncovered. Father Patrick Desbois, President of Yahad-In Unum, and his team have located more than 600 mass graves out of an estimated 2,500 in Ukraine by conducting interviews with hundreds of living witnesses and by working closely with the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (Sciolino; Desbois). Joshua Rubenstein stated in his October 26, 2007 lecture, "The Holocaust in German-Occupied Soviet Territories and the Response by Soviet Jewish Intellectuals," that in addition to Babi Yar, the most widely known killing sites located in the former Soviet Union include Ninth Fort in Kaunas, Ponary near Vilnius, Rumbula Forest near Riga, Maly Tras'tsianets in Minsk, Drobitsky

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<sup>26</sup> The Treaty of Non-Aggression is also known as the Hitler-Stalin Pact, the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, and the German-Soviet Non-Aggression Pact.

<sup>27</sup> The standard Western spelling of the ravine, Babi Yar, is retained, except in quotations of authors' works.

Yar in Kharkov, and Bogdanovka in Transnistria (located within the internationally recognized borders of Moldova). Thus, practically any occupied township in Lithuania, Latvia, Belarus, Ukraine, and Poland has such a tragic place.

The human butchery at Babi Yar occurred over two days in the fall of 1941. On September 28, 1941, the Nazis distributed two thousand posters in Kiev calling for all Jews to gather near the Russian and Jewish cemeteries on the morning of September 29, 1941 with their documents, money, valuables, and warm clothing. The order stated that any Jews who disobeyed would be shot, and any citizen who attempted to enter the emptied apartments and steal property or hide Jews would be shot. Most Jews in Kiev were unaware of Hitler's anti-Jewish policies, the treatment of Jews in Germany, or of the large Jewish communities in Bialystok and L'vov that had already been exterminated. Soviet officials suppressed this information after the Non-Aggression Pact was established, and many Jews believed the Nazi propaganda that they would be resettled. Instead, a systematic and brutal massacre ensued. Nazis and local collaborators herded the crowd that had assembled near the cemetery towards the ravine. They demanded that the Jews hand over their documents and possessions, forced them to strip naked, and drove them out in groups to the edge of the ravine. There the Jews were gunned down in front of their fellow sufferers who would soon perish. The wounded victims and bodies fell into the pit below; children were thrown into the ravine alive. Then the next group was led to the edge or made to lie over the layers of bodies and shot.<sup>28</sup> According to Nazi records, 33,771 people were killed over these two days. The account of Einsatzgruppe C dated October 2, 1941 and entitled "Operational Situation Report USSR No. 101" reads as follows: "Sonderkommando 4a in collaboration with Einsatzgruppe HQ and two Kommandos of police regiment South, executed

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<sup>28</sup> For survivor and witness testimonies on the Babi Yar massacre, see A. Kuznetsov's *Babi Yar: A Document in the Form of a Novel*, B. Zabarko's *Holocaust in the Ukraine*, and I. Erenburg and V. Grossman's *Black Book*.

33,771 Jews in Kiev on September 29 and 30, 1941.” (Arad 168).<sup>29</sup> Thousands of Jewish citizens were executed in the massacre, as well as some Ukrainians, Russians, Poles, and Roma (Gypsies). In his November 28, 2006 lecture, “Death in the Ukraine,” Stephen Berk stated that throughout the Holocaust, the Nazis claimed the most deaths in the shortest period of time at Babi Yar. The killings continued into the first week of October, and the Nazis continued to use Babi Yar as an execution site during their occupation of Kiev until 1943. Lower reports in *Nazi Empire-Building and the Holocaust in Ukraine* that “[in] Zhytomyr the Germans and their local collaborators killed as many as 180,000 Jews between the summer of 1941 and the autumn of 1943—most of the women, children, elderly, and infirm died in August and September 1941.” (70). When the Red Army approached Kiev to retake the city in 1943, the Nazis began what Anatolii Vasil’evich Kuznetsov (1929-79) describes in his novel, *Babii Yar: A Document in the Form of a Novel*, as “the final phase of Babi Yar” and “the first attempt to erase it from the pages of history” (373). In order to eradicate the evidence of their heinous crime, the Nazis forced Soviet prisoners of war to exhume the corpses, burn them, and pulverize the bones. After the task was completed, the prisoners were executed as well (Kuznetsov 370-398). However, there were too many bodies for the prisoners to destroy, and thick gray human ashes with bits of bones covered the land (Kuznetsov 16-17), clearly marking the location of a mass grave.

The persecution of Jews has existed in Russia and Ukraine for centuries. Prior to the first partition of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth in 1772, Jews were banned from entering the Russian Empire, and afterwards, they were legally authorized to reside in the Pale of Settlement

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<sup>29</sup> Einsatzgruppen – “Task Force.” The Einsatzgruppen were mobile killing units composed of police and security services forces formed initially to arrest and murder active and potential political opponents and to annihilate Jews. Their primary function eventually became the mass murder of Jews.



until 1917 when the restrictions were lifted.<sup>30</sup> Following the assassination of Tsar Aleksandr II in 1881, anti-Jewish pogroms were prevalent in major cities and reoccurred in 1903, in 1905-6, in 1918-19 after the October Revolution and throughout the civil war that followed. Lower explains that during Simon Petliura's fight for Ukrainian independence in 1918-19, thousands of Jews were killed with the worst pogroms occurring in Zhytomyr, Vinnytsia, and Berdychiv (14). After World War II silence around these issues persisted, because the Soviet government targeted Jews in their anti-Western campaign of cosmopolitanism, as well as for bourgeois nationalism during the period of Zhdanovism. For example, the Jewish Antifascist Committee that worked with Jewish groups abroad to publicize the Soviet war effort fell under Party suspicion for its ties to the West and was closed in 1948, as John D. Klier describes in "Outline of Jewish-Russian History, Part 1: 1772-1953" (629-30). Yiddish actor Shloyme Mikhailovich Mikhoels (1890-1948), who headed the committee, was executed that same year (Klier 630). Other leading members, including David Bergelson, Itsik Fefer, Perets Markish, and Leib Kvitko, were arrested and executed four years later on August 12-13, 1952, which is now referred to as *Noch' kaznennykh poetov* (Night of the Murdered Poets) (Klier 630). In *Censorship in Soviet Literature, 1917-1991*, Herman Ermolaev notes that in the 1955 reprint of Vladimir Dal's 1880-82 edition of *Explanatory Dictionary of the Living Great-Russian Language*, the entry for "yid" in both neutral and negative connotations was eliminated, for which he attributes to "no more than a part of the smoke screen concealing the anti-Jewish sentiment smoldering in the upper echelon of the ruling Party." (169). Furthermore, the Doctors' Plot of January 13, 1953 illustrates Stalin's continuous ploy of using anti-Semitism as a political weapon, since eleven of the

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<sup>30</sup> Pale of Settlement – a residency restriction placed on most Jews to stop them from living in the interior of Russian Empire that was established after the second partition of Poland in 1793 (now Poland, Lithuania, Belarus and Ukraine).

thirteen doctors who were alleged to have poisoned Party officials were Jews. Scholars have debated whether the Doctors' Plot was to be the beginning of Stalin's own plan to destroy the Jewish people before his death halted further crimes.

Soviet authorities blatantly refused to acknowledge that of those killed at Babi Yar—Jews, Russians, Ukrainians, Poles, and Roma—the vast majority were Jews, specifically targeted because of their Jewish heritage, as the Nazis attempted to eradicate all Jews. Because the massacre was largely ignored by officials during the Soviet campaign against Jewish culture, all attempts to have a memorial built were overruled. After World War II, monuments were erected at some sites of Nazi crimes in the Soviet Union, but Babi Yar was purposefully neglected to the point that it was clearly intentional. Viktor Platonovich Nekrasov (1911-1987), a writer and journalist who was raised in Kiev, made an impassioned plea published in *Literaturnaia gazeta* on October 10, 1959 to have markers placed at the locations of mass murders and railed against building a stadium at Babi Yar (Sheldon 133-134). In the article, "The Transformations of Babi Yar," Richard Sheldon notes that Nekrasov did not specifically refer to the Babi Yar massacre as a Jewish tragedy to keep his plea neutral, though there was still little done to honour the victims who suffered horrendously (134). Several Jewish writers attempted to commemorate the massacre in their writing. Ol'ga Nikolaevna (Shteinberg) Anstei (1912-1985), who witnessed the atrocity, wrote "Kirillovskie Iary" (Kirillov's Ravines) in 1941; Savva Evseevich Golovanivskii (1910-19??), a Ukrainian author, composed the poem, "Abraham" in 1943; Itsik Kipnis (1867-1974) addressed Babi Yar in a 1944 article and 1947 story written in Yiddish; and Perets Davidovich Markish (1895-1952) included the massacre in his epic poem "Milkhome" (War, 1941-48). Lev Adol'fovich Ozerov (1914-1996) composed his poem "Babii Yar" in 1944-45, which appeared in the April-May 1946 issue of *Oktiabr'*, as well as in the 1947 collection of his

poems. However, nearly twenty years had passed before the poem was reprinted for the third time, appearing in his 1966 collection *Lyrics: Selected Poems*. Ozerov also wrote an essay entitled “Kiev, Babi Yar” that was included in the Erenburg and Grossman publication, *Black Book*, a collection of testimonies and essays on the Holocaust in the Soviet Union. Il’ia Erenburg also wrote a poem entitled “Babii Yar” in 1945, in which he expresses strong emotion for the loss of so many lives. In 1947 Erenburg’s novel, *Buria* (The Storm), was published in *Novyi mir* (New World, nos. 4-8) and describes “Hannah and her granddaughter being sent to their deaths at Babi Yar” (Sheldon 128). In addition to Yevtushenko, Kuznetsov and Brodskii are among authors who wrote on Babi Yar after Stalin’s death.<sup>31</sup> Kuznetsov’s novel *Babii Yar: A Document in the Form of a Novel* is a testimony of the author’s experiences as a child growing up in German-occupied Kiev that contained previously unknown information about the city during the time of upheaval. His book offers a critical perspective on the Soviet regime and also evoked a deep interest from people of all walks of life and faiths at the time of its publication.<sup>32</sup> The editorial staff of *Iunost’* published the novel in 1966, but it appeared in a brutally censored form containing over three hundred political revisions (Ermolaev, *Censorship* 186). In 1969 Kuznetsov defected to England, and his original manuscript of *Babii Yar* was published in Germany under the name of A. Anatoli a year later. By italicizing the text that was previously removed, Kuznetsov identifies the kinds of material that the censors would not allow. For example, his text illustrates the Party’s attempt to minimize Soviet anti-Semitism. Having analyzed the novel, Ermolaev states that “the official policy interdicted singling out the Jews among the victims of the Babii Yar executions,” “played down the hostility shown against Jews

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<sup>31</sup> For additional poems on Babi Yar by Russian, Ukrainian and Jewish writers, see: *Bol’: poeticheskii sbornik*. Comp. I. A. Zaslavskii. Kiev: MIP “Oberig”, 1991.

<sup>32</sup> In his novel, Kuznetsov includes the testimony of Babi Yar survivor Dina Mironavna Pronicheva, who told the author how she escaped from Babi Yar. Pronicheva later presented her testimony during military tribunals in Kiev after World War II.

by Soviet citizens,” and “[concealed] the fact that a part of the local population applauded the mass murder of the Jews and some helped the Germans carry it out” (*Censorship* 208-209). Prior to the publication of Yevtushenko’s “Babii Yar,” literary works focused solely on the tragic nature of the Babi Yar massacre; anti-Semitism remained a forbidden topic. In one of Yevtushenko’s more recent publications, *I Came to You, Babi Yar...* (2006), which the poet dedicated to the sixty-fifth anniversary of the Babi Yar tragedy, Yevtushenko relates how he learned about the massacre through the poems of Ozerov and Erenburg (6). He also credits Olga Anstei as the true pioneer of the Babi Yar topic (6). Yevtushenko writes:

After WWII, the theme of Babi Yar completely disappeared from the pages of the Soviet Press. Cold War, Iron Curtain, mutual mistrust created [a] poisoned climate for epidemic, anti-Semitism. When I saw, in 1961, that the burial place of tens of thousands of innocent victims had become a dump, I wrote a poem that broke the conspiracy of silence. Shostakovich’s *Thirteenth Symphony*, based upon my words, due to such mighty music, became the first sound monument over Babi Yar. (*I Came to You, Babi Yar...*6)

On March 13, 1961 heavy rains caused the dam built at one end of Babi Yar to collapse, killing approximately 145 people (Sheldon 135). Yevtushenko and fellow writer Kuznetsov were immediately prompted to travel to Kiev and visit the site following the disaster. A few days later Yevtushenko composed his famous poem “Babii Yar.” Yevtushenko’s “Babii Yar,” the poet’s best known work, uniquely confronts the presence of anti-Semitism in Russia and immediately received international attention, as the topic of anti-Semitism resounded with individuals. Rather than reflecting on the social situation subtly or as an underlying current in his poem as he did in some of his earlier civic works, Yevtushenko deals with the controversial issue in an overt manner.

Yevtushenko’s “Babii Yar” is a poem that combines political issues with lyrical intimacy. Yevtushenko did not hesitate to expose anti-Semitism within the Soviet Union. The poem opens: “Над Бабьим Яром памятников нет. / Крутой обрыв, как грубое надгробье.” (No monument

stands at Babii Yar. / A steep drop as a crude gravestone.) (1-2). Yevtushenko directly addresses the absence of a monument at Babi Yar and attributes this to the anti-Semitism of Soviet officials. The only thing to mark the presence of the grave is the steep drop of the ravine itself. This strong and straightforward opening targets the officials in power and their decision not to acknowledge this horrendous crime. The poem's haunting tone and ghostly atmosphere reflect the site of Babi Yar, where "[все] молча здесь кричит" (everything here screams silently) (69). Although Yevtushenko is not Jewish himself, he feels for those who died and is unable to comprehend the injustices committed by the government. The poem is structured on a series of comparisons, as Yevtushenko (the narrator) imagines himself as various Jews persecuted for their Jewish heritage. (Because the poem is based on a highly personal experience of the author, it is accurate to identify the narrator as a persona of Yevtushenko). Yevtushenko relates to the victims, as though he, too, has experienced their pain. "Babii Yar" follows the poetic embodiment of Yevtushenko throughout the history of the Jewish nation, beginning as a Jewish man in ancient Egypt; to Dreyfus (a French artillery officer who was imprisoned at Devil's Island in 1894 for his Jewish descent under the guise of betraying military secrets, an affair that resonated throughout the world); then moves to a young Jewish boy suffering in Bialystok; and ends with Anne Frank hiding from approaching enemies. Using the poetic device of anaphora, Yevtushenko writes: "Мне кажется сейчас – я иудей." "Мне кажется, что Дрейфус – это я." "Мне кажется – я мальчик в Белостоке." "Мне кажется – я – это Анна Франк." (Now I seem to be a Jew. I seem to be Dreyfus. I seem to be a child in Bialystok. I seem to be Anne Frank.) (6-7, 11-12, 22-23, 43-44). The repetition of the phrase, "мне кажется," strengthens the personification in the poem. In Sheldon's essay, "The Transformations of Babii Yar," he comments on the success of Yevtushenko's passage on Anne Frank, although he criticizes the

“quick successions” (the series of parallels) in the following manner: “...this extravagant, presumptuous list of parallels imparts to the poem a bombastic, egocentric quality that does not accord well with the subject matter” (138). In contrast, the extended metaphor of the series of people can be regarded as a sort of individualistic dualism. Yevtushenko’s extensive use of first-person narration serves to counteract the depersonalization of mass murder. By individualizing those who were killed, he draws on particular figures to increase or heighten the emotional reaction of his audience (or reader). At the same time, by drawing a parallel from one figure to the next, Yevtushenko links their sufferings together. He identifies Jews in various countries—Egypt, France, Poland, Russia, Germany, Ukraine, and other countries—throughout history. In lines 73-81, Yevtushenko continues his use of poetic embodiment of Jewish victims, ending with all those who perished at Babi Yar:

И сам я,  
как сплошной беззвучный крик,  
над тысячами тысяч погребенных.  
Я –  
каждый здесь расстрелянный старик.  
Я –  
каждый здесь расстрелянный ребенок. (73-81)

And I myself,  
am one massive, soundless scream  
above the thousands and thousands buried here.  
I am  
each old man here shot dead.  
I am  
every child here shot dead.

The shift from the impersonal or passive structure “мне кажется” (it seems to me) to the personal construction “Я” (I) symbolizes the empowerment of the narrator. He feels the pain of every innocent life destroyed by the inhumane acts of violence. Yevtushenko rejects the notion, which was then widely accepted in the Soviet Union, that Soviet Jews had no connection to Jews

elsewhere in the world. He also rejects the view that Babi Yar was an isolated tragedy. In his epic poem, Yevtushenko links the massacre at Babi Yar to other acts of persecution against the Jews, insisting and proving that the Jews are united as one culture or people. Furthermore, Yevtushenko brings forth the issue of accountability in relation to the shameful period of pogroms in Imperial Russia and the anti-cosmopolitan campaign in the Soviet Union from 1946-53. In lines 28-30, the pogrom bullies who beat the young Jewish boy shout “Бей жидов, / спасай Россию!” (Beat the Kikes, Save Russia!). He writes against anti-Semitic sentiments in both past and present day Russia and other countries in one clear outrage. This issue of xenophobia sounds hauntingly familiar in contemporary Russia, where Russian nationalists, skinheads, and fascists are taking Slavophil notions to the extreme to purify Russia of Jews and people from the Caucasus. Yevtushenko is presently taking up the same position against all kinds of xenophobia, including *molodezhnoe dvizhenie* “*Nashi*” (the youth movement, Ours), a racist and discriminatory group funded by the Kremlin, not unlike The Hitler Youth. At the end of the poem, Yevtushenko passionately declares:

Еврейской крови нет в крови моей.  
Но ненавистен злобой заскорузлой  
я всем антисемитам, как еврей,  
и потому –  
я настоящий русский! (88-92)

In my blood there is no Jewish blood.  
In their callous rage, all anti-Semites  
must hate me now as a Jew.  
For that reason  
I am a true Russian!

Yevtushenko attacks Soviet anti-Semitism, knowing that he, too, will be hated by anti-Semites as if he was a Jew. The poem’s final lines emphasize Yevtushenko’s message that anti-Semitism is not a national characteristic of Russia.





author grieves over the lives mercilessly taken by the Nazis. His occasional use of first person narration heightens the personalization of the poem, which ends with an ominous message that together with the deceased:

Мы понатужимся и встанем,  
Костями застучим - туда,  
Где дышат хлебом и духами  
Еще живые города.  
Задуйте свет. Спустите флаги.  
Мы к вам пришли. Не мы - овраги. (Erenburg 19-24)

We'll gather all our strength and rise,  
Our bones will clatter as we wend—  
We'll haunt the towns still left alive,  
Where bread and perfumes waft their scent.  
Your candles sputter. Flags rip out their seams.  
We've come to you. Not we—but the ravines. (Gillespie 19-24)

He likens the heavy burden of the loss and memories of his friends to “каторжник ядро” (3) (a convict hauling cannon) (Gillespie 3). The phrase “когда я был с живыми” (13) (when I still lived among the living) (Gillespie 13) implies that he feels as though he has been killed by the devastation, and despite not knowing each of the victims, he has the sense that he is connected to them all. Ozerov’s poem, also written in 1944 to 1945 and entitled “Babii Yar,” contains only first person narration with the speaker standing at the site of Babi Yar, as does Yevtushenko’s poem. Yevtushenko takes Ozerov’s lines 2-4: “Если возраст у горя есть, / Значит, я немислимо стар. / На столетья считать—не счесть.” (If age was grief, / Then I would be inconceivably old. / To measure by centuries—too many to count.) and echoes: “Мне сегодня столько лет, / как самому еврейскому народу.” (Today I am as old in years, / as all the Jewish people) before beginning his series of personifications (4-5). Yevtushenko slightly revises the metaphor of the indescribable nature of grief likened to the unimaginable vision of past centuries. Ozerov brings in nature, pleading with the land, “Говори мне,” (talk to me) and break

the silence (8). He describes “гудит у тебя в груди” (the rumbling in your chest) as “То вода под землей гудит / Или души легших в Яру” (either the water rumbles under the land / or the souls lying in the ravine) (9, 11-12). Similarly Yevtushenko writes, “Деревья смотрят грозно, / по-судейски” (The trees look ominous, / like judges), emphasizing that there were few survivors at the ravine, and the only remaining life there is found in nature (67-68). The environment at Babi Yar brings Ozerov’s speaker back to those two horrific days and describes the haunting images as if he had witnessed the massacre firsthand. Yevtushenko’s narrator, however, does not take the non-influential stance of a bystander, but feels with the victims as though he himself had been one. This perspective intensifies the emotional reaction evoked in the reader.

Yevtushenko first recited “Babii Yar” at the Moscow Polytechnical Museum in September 1961. The poem circulated in *samizdat* and was published in *Literaturnaia gazeta* on September 19, 1961, the twentieth anniversary of the massacre.<sup>33</sup> Yevtushenko was harshly criticized. On September 24, 1961 Aleksei Markov refuted Yevtushenko’s poem with his own, “Moi otvet” (My Reply), which appeared in the newspaper *Literatura i zhizn’* (Literature and Life). Although Markov does not mention Yevtushenko, the opening lines of “Moi otvet” are an obvious reference to “Babii Yar.” He challenges Yevtushenko’s claim of being a “настоящий русский” (“Babii Yar” 92), declaring: “Какой ты настоящий русский, / Когда забыл про свой народ” (What kind of true Russian are you, / When you have forgotten your own people) (Markov 1-2). He also criticizes Yevtushenko for having forgotten the “свастикою ржавой” (rusty swastika) and the suffering the fascists inflicted upon the Russian nation during World War II (Markov 5). Furthermore, Markov accuses Yevtushenko of dishonouring the young Russian soldiers who were killed in World War II. In the final lines of his poem, Markov writes:

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<sup>33</sup> See Yevtushenko’s *Avtobiografiia* for a detailed, though somewhat romanticized, account of how the poem came to be published and how Shostakovich became involved musically with Yevtushenko’s poems.

“Пока топтать погосты будет / Хотя б один космополит, — / Я говорю: я русский, люди!”

(As long as graves will be trampled on / By even a single cosmopolitan, — I say: I am Russian,

people!) (29-31). Three days later on September 27, 1961 *Literatura i zhizn'* published Dmitri

Starikov's denunciation of “Babii Yar” in the article, “Ob odnom stikhotvorenii” (On One

Poem). Starikov finds similar faults in Yevtushenko's poem as Markov, though he makes no

attempt to conceal the target of his attack in his article. Despite official controversy,

Yevtushenko's poem resonated with the general public and people all over the world.

Yevtushenko claims in *Avtobiografiia* that of the 20,000 letters he received on “Babii Yar,” only

20 or 30 were aggressive (124). Yet Yevtushenko was not alone in his persecution. The editors

of *Literaturnaia gazeta* supported Yevtushenko and did not run an apology for the publication of

“Babii Yar”; however, Valerii Kosolapov, the editor who published Yevtushenko's poem, was

later fired as he expected. On March 8, 1963, Khrushchev gave a speech to Party officials and

leading cultural figures in the Soviet Union on Soviet literature and art, during which he spoke

about Yevtushenko's “Babii Yar”:

What was the poem being criticised for? It was criticised because the author was unable truthfully to show and condemn the fascist, particularly the fascist criminals who were responsible for the mass slaughter at Babi Yar. The poem represents things as if only Jews were the victims of the fascist atrocities, whereas, of course, many Russians, Ukrainians, and Soviet people of other nationalities were murdered by the Hitlerite butchers. The poem reveals that its author did not show political maturity and was ignorant of historical facts. (qtd. in Laqueur 36, 38)

He fails to mention anti-Semitism, instead stating:

Since the October Revolution Jews have enjoyed equal rights with the other peoples of the Soviet Union in all respects. There is no Jewish question in our country, and those who invent it are slavishly repeating what other people say. (qtd in Laqueur 38)

The cited criticism not only reflects both the official and dominant political attitude toward Jews,

but also indicates the courage Yevtushenko had to publish “Babii Yar.” Yevtushenko later

modestly wrote in “Razgovor s amerikanskim pisatelem” (Conversation with an American Writer, 1961), that “простую честность / называли смелостью...” (plain honesty / was called courage...) (26-27). In reference to the reception of “Babi Yar,” Yevtushenko has stated: “trying to discredit me, our propaganda makers failed. I had more and more readers and listeners. I wrote at that time: ‘How tender is the outrage of my Russian people.’” (*I Came to You, Babi Yar...3*).

Dmitrii Dmitrievich Shostakovich (1906-75) composed his famous *Symphony No. 13, Op. 113* subtitled “Babii Yar” for bass soloist, chorus, and orchestra. The opening movement is set to the text of Yevtushenko’s “Babii Yar” followed by four additional poems by Yevtushenko: “Iumor” (Humor, 1960), “V magazine” (At the Store, 1956), “Strakhi” (Fears, first published in 1966), and “Kar’era” (A Career, 1957). Official controversy surrounding “Babii Yar” affected the symphony before it even premiered: both the original conductor, Evgenii Aleksandrovich Mravinskii (1909-88), and bass soloist, Boris Romanovich Gmyria (1903-69), withdrew, leaving Kirill Petrovich Kondrashin (1914-81) to conduct and understudy Vitalii Aleksandrovich Gromadskii (1928- ) to perform. Also, the symphony premiered in Moscow on December 18, 1962 without the customary text in the program. After the performance, the symphony was further scrutinized by officials, and the Soviet government reacted by threatening to ban the Symphony, because “Babii Yar” did include specific mention of Russian, Ukrainian, and other citizens who were also murdered. Yevtushenko was forced to alter “Babii Yar.” Twenty years after the tragedy at Babi Yar, Soviet officials continued to inaccurately portray the massacre as a crime against Soviet citizens, and not the deliberate slaughter of the Jewish community. Yevtushenko did modify his poem (substituting lines), although afterwards he stated he did so at Shostakovich’s request—not the officials’. He replaced lines 5-8 with:

I stand here, as if by a well,  
That gives me faith in our brother.

Here Russians lie and Ukrainians;  
They lie with Jews in the same earth. (Sheldon 140)

Thus, he retracts the focus on the Jews. He also changed lines 43-46 to:

I think of Russia's exploit  
when it barred the way to  
Fascism with its own body;  
To the tiniest drop  
Russia is dear to me in its whole substance and fate. (Sheldon 140)

The third performance did not take place until February 10, 1963 and the fourth, on November 20, 1965, but *Symphony No. 13* was met with outstanding success. The symphony had a deep cleansing effect on Soviet society, breaking the taboo of discussing issues of anti-Semitism, and became a kind of memorial itself to those who perished at Babi Yar. The fact that Yevtushenko was not severely reprimanded for "Babii Yar," as he most certainly would have been in the past, is significant and captures the moment of creative relaxation during the Thaw period. Once this interval of freedom ended in 1963, "Babii Yar" was not republished in the Soviet Union until 1989. In 1976 an official monument of entwined people was erected to commemorate the Soviet citizens who died. The plaque states in Russian, Ukrainian, and Hebrew: "Here in 1941-43 German Fascist invaders shot over 100,000 citizens of Kiev and prisoners of war," and there is no specific mention of the mainly Jewish citizens who were slaughtered. A memorial of a large menorah for the Jewish victims was finally added in 1991, but it was the Jewish community, not the Soviet government, who was responsible for its construction. Also at the site, a simple wooden cross reads: "I will put my breath into you, / and you shall live again..." (Ezekiel 37:14). Finally, on the sixtieth anniversary of the Babi Yar massacre, a commemorative stone was laid at the site. Yevtushenko's poem is now displayed at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, DC as part of an exhibit on Babi Yar. As a civic poet, Yevtushenko has been instrumental in breaking the decades of silence that resulted from Stalin's oppressive

leadership. “Babii Yar,” a poem that shook the world, impacted the Russian nation’s approach to the issues of collaboration, complicity, accountability, and indifference to Nazi genocide.

Yevtushenko’s publication was not without risks. In 1964, Brodskii was arrested on charges of “social parasitism” (*tuneiadstvo*). Because Brodskii was not a member of the Writers’ Union, Soviet authorities deemed his work as a poet and translator as anti-Soviet and determined his guilt before his hearing (Rothberg 128). He was sentenced to internal exile and five years of hard labour in the Arkhangelsk district. However, artists and intellectuals, such as Kornei Chukovskii, Samuil Marshak, Konstantin Paustovekly, and Dmitrii Shostakovich petitioned on Brodskii’s behalf (Rothberg 128). Also, portions of Brodskii’s trial, which a journalist had illegally smuggled out of the Soviet Union, were published abroad and drew worldwide attention to his case. As a result, Brodskii was released after eighteen months, though he was later forced to emigrate. The dissidents additionally reacted to the unlawful 1966 show trial of writers Andrei Donatovich Siniavskii (pseudonym: Abram Terts; 1925-97) and Iuli Markovich Daniel (pseudonym: Nikolai Arzhak; 1925-88), who published satires of the Soviet government abroad under pen names. Their trial signalled “the first time anyone had been put on trial not just for vagrancy, but because of the actual content of their literary work” (Applebaum 534). Siniavskii and Daniel also were sentenced to five and seven years in the Gulag on Feb. 14 1966. Among other injustices, the dissidents petitioned against the 1968 trial of Aleksandr Arkad’evich Galich (pen name of Ginzburg; 1918-77) and Yuri Timofeevich Galanskov (1939-72). Galich was arrested in 1967 for compiling the *White Book*, which detailed the Siniavskii-Daniel trial and was smuggled to the West; Galanskov was one of his defenders. Furthermore, on April 30, 1968, the first edition of Chronicle of Current Events (*Khronika tekushchikh sobytii*), a periodical that documented violations of civic and human rights by the Soviet authorities, was circulated (Tökés

109). *Psikhushki* (psychiatric hospitals for political dissidents) were instituted to discredit the dissidents, who underwent horrendous torture, such as painful forced feedings in reaction to hunger strikes, at these hospitals. In *Dissident in the USSR: Politics, Ideology, and People*, Rudolf Tökés names General Grigorenko, Ivan Iakhimovich, Vladimir Bukovskii, Natalia Gorbanevskaia, Viktor Fainberg, Vladimir Borisov, and Vladimir Gershuni as the best-known dissidents committed to these institutions (86), another method of eliminating contradictory political and social views. Galich, the editor of *Syntax*, was sentenced to a two year labour term in 1959. On September 1, 1967 Bukovskii received three years after having been forced to stay in a mental hospital as a punishment for his dissident actions. Other writers either voluntarily left the Soviet Union or were expelled: A. Kuznetsov in 1969; Siniavskii in 1973; both Maksimov and Nekrasov in 1974; Gorbanevskaia in 1975; Gladin in 1976; and Aksionov and Voinovich in 1980. Solzhenitsyn was expelled in 1974. “Babii Yar” was published shortly before the Twenty-Second Party Congress and the introduction of Khrushchev’s de-Stalinization campaign, marking the beginning of the third period of liberalization during the Thaw, which perhaps is why Yevtushenko was not severely reprehended. His international fame also gave him some immunity. Because Yevtushenko was not imprisoned or sent to a psychiatric hospital or labour camp, he has often been perceived by critics in the Soviet Union and abroad to have collaborated with officials. When Yevtushenko was appointed in 1987 as an honorary member of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, Brodskii resigned in protest. Yet Yevtushenko has often spoken out in solidarity, as his defence of Dudintsev and the publication of his novel *Not by Bread Alone* in 1957 illustrates. In the article, “A Time for Summing Up” Yevtushenko states:

The poets of my generation help prepared these new leaders... My generation of poets did a lot to break down the Iron Curtain. We cut up our bare hands assaulting that curtain. Sometime we won, sometimes we lost. (264-265)

In regards to the 1950s and 1960s, he also has stated: “Writers and poets protected ideals and conscience like two hands protecting a candle against the wind. We began to transform those candles into big torches. The poetry of our generation was the cradle of glasnost.” (Yevtushenko, “A Time for Summing Up” 265). He continues: “Hidden glasnost [has] always existed in Russian literature, which is the literature of conscience.... Our generation didn’t face the threat of death that earlier generations faced under Stalin. So we kept speaking on the behalf of the voiceless people.” (Yevtushenko, “A Time for Summing Up” 265).

The devastation of the Babi Yar massacre resounds today. On June 5, 2007 *BBC News* reported in the article, “Ukrainian Mass Jewish Grave Found,” that several thousand Holocaust victims were found in a mass grave in the village of Gvozdavka-1 in Ukraine. In the article, Holocaust expert and director of the Israel office of the Simon Wiesenthal Center, Efrain Zuroff states: “Ukraine was an enormous killing field, hundreds of thousands were killed there” (“Ukrainian Mass Jewish Grave Found”). As recent as October 27, 2007, *BBC News* reported that Ukrainian authorities gave proper burials to approximately two thousand victims of Soviet terror who were found and dug up at the site of Bykovnproper (“Ukraine Reburies Stalin’s Victims”). In Yevtushenko’s essay, “Kamni—v Bulgakova” (Stones into Bulgakov), he describes how in 1991 he was astonished to see revolting graffiti aimed at Jews in the center of Kiev in a cruel act of anti-Semitism (427-428). An article in *International Herald Tribune* published on February 4, 2008 states that swastikas and other offence signs were painted on Jewish graves in Southern Hungary, demonstrating that the presence of anti-Semitism continues (“Vandals Paint Swastikas, Extremist Symbols on Jewish Graves in Southern Hungary”).

Yevtushenko’s anti-Stalinist poem, “Nasledniki Stalina,” published on October 21, 1962 in the newspaper *Pravda*, portrays the removal of Stalin’s coffin from Lenin’s Mausoleum,



which was part of the Soviet government's de-Stalinization campaign under Khrushchev's leadership. Yevtushenko emphasizes that this act was an empty symbol that did not rid the Kremlin of its Stalinist principles. Having been on display in the Mausoleum since 1953, Stalin's coffin was buried outside of the Kremlin walls on October 31, 1961. Yevtushenko conveys that as long as Stalin's heirs remain in government, the presence of Stalin will live on. The poem opens with Stalin's coffin being carried out of the Mausoleum. The repetition of "безмолвно" (silently) in relation to the marble, the glass, and the sentries establishes a grave and solemn tone and atmosphere appropriate for a funeral procession and not unlike the opening of a eulogy (1, 2, 3). However, the sombre imagery in the first four lines shifts with the subtle irony in lines 5-8: "А гроб чуть дымился. / Дыханье сквозь щели текло, / когда выносили его из дверей Мавзолея." (And the coffin smoked a little. / And breath was floating through the cracks, / when they carried him out through the Mausoleum's doors). Yevtushenko again uses repetition in his description of Stalin, who "тоже безмолвным был...но грозно безмолвным" (also was silent...but menacingly silent) (10, 12). Once Yevtushenko reveals that the former dictator is in the coffin, only "притворившийся мертвым" (pretending to be dead) (25), his menacing silence intensifies the level of irony in the poem, as Stalin memorizes the faces of his pallbearers and plots to rise from the grave and reach for them.

The poem shifts focus upon the introduction of the first person narration, a persona of Yevtushenko, who insisted that the Mausoleum should have more guards. By positioning "удвоить" and "утроить" (double, triple) (29-30) on stepped lines, Yevtushenko highlights his efforts to stop Stalin from rising again, as well as the dictator's crimes of the past. He makes specific reference to the atrocities of Stalin's regime: the neglect of people's welfare, false charges, the arrests of innocent people, while stressing the honesty of the nation:



The poem is structured on quatrains that are fragmented into “steps” with the use of *lesenka* without any visual division between stanzas. For example, the quotation above is two sentences that are split over five lines and staggered on the page. These lines also have a mirrored structure that is a characteristic of Yevtushenko’s poetry with the rhyme “вынесли” / “вынесли” falling at the beginning and end of the quoted passage with “Сталина” repeated near the center in lines 69-70. The use of the stepped line also emphasizes internal rhymes; for example, “плыл” and “был” in lines 8 and 10, “флаг” and “благ” in lines 39 and 42, “считают” and “ругают” in lines 72 and 75. Yevtushenko scathingly describes Stalin’s former Party officials as hating the current times with its emptied prison camps in a strong condemnation of the Gulag. He concludes: “Покуда наследники Сталина есть на земле, / мне будет казаться, / что Сталин еще в Мавзолее.” (As long as the heirs of Stalin still roam the earth, / it seems to me, / that Stalin still remains in the Mausoleum) (92-94). Yevtushenko’s civic sense of duty is reflected in the lines “спокойным я быть / не сумею” (to be calm- / I can’t) (90-91); he portrays himself as almost incapable of remaining silent and indifferent to key social and political issues. Although Yevtushenko’s most successful poems are driven by topical issues, as “Babii Yar” and “Nasledniki Stalina” demonstrate, the poet often responds with his pen too quickly to such matters, which results in many weaker poems. In “Nasledniki Stalina” Yevtushenko fails to mention his own guilt as an “heir of Stalin.” Yevtushenko, who grew up under Stalin’s leadership, believed in the cult of personality surrounding the dictator, and he portrays in his film *Pokhorony Stalina* (Stalin’s Funeral, 1990) how he believed the Jewish doctors involved in the alleged plot were guilty. He also writes in *Avtobiografiia* how he wept with grief when he learned of Stalin’s death. In his poem “Neuverennost,” Yevtushenko writes: “О, дай мне, Боже, быть поэтом! / Не дай людей мне обмануть!” (Oh let me, God, be a poet! / Don’t let me

deceive people!) (19-20), and it is not inaccurate to state that Yevtushenko has taken many risks as a civic poet.

#### 4. Yevtushenko: 1990-2008

И когда я пишу эти строки,  
и порою невольно спешу,  
то пишу их в единственном страхе,  
что не в полную силу пишу...

While I write these lines,  
and my pen is compelled to hurry,  
I write them with a single fear –  
to write them without all my strength...

Yevtushenko. "Strakhi" (Fears)<sup>34</sup>

Yevtushenko, a prolific writer, has delved into an array of creative forms since his debut during the Thaw period. However, he frequently returns to the genre in which he is most proficient: poetry. Whatever mode of expression he chooses, a permanent feature that reoccurs throughout Yevtushenko's works is the coalescence of political or civic themes with intimate and often autobiographical elements. In more recent years, Yevtushenko has once again turned to poetry with the publication of *Pre-Morning / Predutro: A New Book of Poetry in English and Russian* (1995) and *Walk on the Ledge / Progulka po karnizu: A New Book of Poetry in English and Russian* (2005). Many of the poems in these two collections focus on current political problems in Russia and produce his vision of how they should be resolved. Both of these anthologies also include a significant segment of lyrical poetry that deals solely with autobiographical themes. Thus, after the collapse of the Soviet Union, Yevtushenko responded to the changes that faced the nation by expressing his feelings in his poetry, which perhaps reflect those of his generation, as he had done after Stalin's death.

Yevtushenko, who has always professed his socialist beliefs, is primarily occupied with his struggle to let go of the failed aspects of these beliefs in the politically- centred poems of *Pre-*

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<sup>34</sup> See Yevtushenko, Yevgeny. "Strakhi." *Yevgeny Yevtushenko: Early Poems*. Ed. and Trans. George Reavey. London: Marion Boyars, 1989. 218, lines 37-40.

*Morning / Predutro*. His poem “Proshchai, nash krasnyi flag” (Goodbye, Our Red Flag, 1992) is selected to illustrate the above. Yevtushenko bids farewell to the Soviet Union and to the end of the Communist regime, the only era he had known, through a symbolic apostrophe to the Soviet flag.<sup>35</sup> Having been raised to revere the ideals of Leninism and the glory of the October Revolution, Yevtushenko and his generation were once again forced to reassess the validity of their system of beliefs with the failure of Communism. Yevtushenko succinctly describes his generation as “родились в стране, / которой больше нет” (we were born in a country / that exists no more) (Yevtushenko, “Proshchai, nash krasnyi flag” 65-66). The same motif of this inner turmoil is evident in “Brodiachii Gimn” (A Vagrant’s Hymn, 1995), in which he states with sincere grief: “Из свой эпохи вырванный, / но, совсем не став другим” (I’m torn from my era, / but can’t quite belong to the new one) (31-32). His poetic cry in the next poem, “Poteriia” (Loss, 1991), is also a vivid example of the frustrations of his generation: “мы запуталась – / чьи имена и знамена несем” (we are confused – / which names and banners to carry) (37-38). This poem, as most of the others in the anthology, conveys the internal conflicts that trouble a significant part of his generation. In spite of his inherent socialist beliefs, Yevtushenko confronts the ambiguity of the Communist Party in his monologue to the flag – “брат и враг” (a brother and enemy) (“Proshchai, nash krasnyi flag” 12). He expounds:

Ты был дружкой в окопе,  
надеждой всей Европе,  
но красной ширмой ты  
загородил Гулаг  
и столько бедолаг  
в тюремной драной робе. (“Proshchai, nash krasnyi flag” 13-18)

You were a friend in the trenches,  
a hope for all of Europe,  
but like a red screen you  
concealed and framed the Gulag

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<sup>35</sup> In 1991 the tri-colour flag was reinstated to replace the red Soviet flag.

and its many miserales  
in their torn prison clothes.

By specifically mentioning the Gulag, Yevtushenko emphasizes the severe deception that surrounded the arrests, mass murders, concentration camps, and all the cruelty and horrors for which the Communist Party was responsible. He poignantly selects Pasternak's *Doktor Zhivago* to illustrate the longevity of the regime's corruption and underlines the symbolic guilt in the destruction of the Russian intelligentsia. This is especially visible in the following lines: "Не растоптать бы вновь / очкарика "Живагу" (Do not trample and destroy once again / these types of the intelligentsia like Iuri Zhivago) ("Proshchai, nash krasnyi flag" 43-44). In the final lines of the poem, the tone abruptly shifts to Yevtushenko's semi-apologetic mode of narration, where he denies any personal responsibility in the past events:

Я Зимнего не брал.  
Не штурмовал рейхстаг.  
Я – не из "коммуняк."  
Но глажу флаг и плачу... (74-77)

I did not take the Winter Palace.  
I did not storm the Reichstag.  
I am not a "commie."  
Yet I grasp the flag and cry...

While no longer blindly praising the state or its previous achievements, Yevtushenko reveals his nostalgia for the past and the way of life that was comfortable for him. He also considers post-Soviet Russia in a slightly more critical view. A democratic system of government has yet to be achieved in Russia, and Yevtushenko addresses the presence of censorship and the relentless persecution of writers. A dedication to Dima Kholodov, a journalist who was murdered in 1994, is included in "Na vtoroi grazhdanskoi voine" (At the Second Civil War). In addition, he elaborates on the 1995 death of journalist and television anchor Vladislav Listyev and commemorates his death in "Neprochtennyye 'Besy'" (Unread *Devils*). In short, the absence of

freedom of speech as a human right in Russia continues to plague the country. In the early 1990s, Yevtushenko addressed this troubling issue of journalists targeted for their writing, which is still occurring in present day Russia and has only become a focus of the international media in the last few years, illustrating his sensitivity to respond to the world around him.

Another issue of contention that Yevtushenko does not neglect in recent years is violence within Russia, which has affected the youngest generation, the nation's children. Yevtushenko's poem, "Shkola v Beslane" (School in Beslan, 2004), centres on the Beslan school siege of 2004. On September 1, the first day of school in Russia, a group of armed Chechens and their supporters stormed School #1 (located in Beslan in the Republic of North Ossetia-Alania in southern Russia) and held over 1, 200 children and teachers hostage in a crowded gymnasium without any water or food. On the third day, the hostage takers and Russian security forces exchanged gunfire, explosions set the building on fire, and the roof of the burning building collapsed. Over 336 civilians were killed, 186 of whom were children, and hundreds were left wounded. This terrorist attack that specifically targeted innocent children resounded around the world, and the Russian government was criticized for the manner in which they dealt with the crisis that resulted in so many deaths. The poem is narrated in the first person from Yevtushenko's perspective, who writes as though he travelled to Beslan in search of answers surrounding this horrible massacre. As he tries to make sense out of the innocent lives that were lost, he is overcome with a sense of helplessness. He writes:

И прошлое, смотря на нас, дрожит,  
а будущее, целью став безвинно,  
в кусты от настоящего бежит,  
ну а оно ему стреляет в спины. (21-24)

The past, looking at us, trembles,  
and the future, innocently becoming the target,  
runs away from the present



that shoots it in the back.

He cites the problems between Russians and Chechens as originating during Stalin's regime when Chechens were exiled to Kazakhstan and "террор грядущий зарождался ..." (the terror of the future was born...) (35). Yevtushenko additionally blames Yeltsin: "И Ельцина плебейская спесь, / и хвастовство грачевского блицкригства / их подтолкнули к первым взрывам здесь" (And Yeltsin's plebeian arrogance, / boasting of the attack / pushed them to the first explosions here) (49-52). He writes, "Спаси, многоименный Бог, от мести. / Пока еще живые дети есть, / давайте не забудем слова «вместе»" (Save us, multi-named God, from vengeance. / While children still are living / let's not forget the word "together") (57-60). Because of the poem's content, it first was published by the newspaper *The Guardian* in an English translation on September 15, 2004 shortly after the massacre.

Yevtushenko has been internationally recognized for his poetry of political protest and his civic activities. In 1989 he was elected into the Congress of People's Deputies in the Ukrainian city of Kharkov. In his speech at the First Congress of the People's Deputies, he quite openly criticized the state's cult of personality that had led to a state monopoly, which he likened to "a clumsy dinosaur with rickety little legs bending under the body's weight, and a tiny brain in a head too far from the tail" (*Fatal Half Measures* 7). He called for the privatization of the economy, equal rights to consumer services and health care, and to annul dissident trials, among other issues. He was elected as an honorary member of the American Academy of Arts and Letters in 1987, and in the autumn of 1988, Yevtushenko was elected as a co-founder of the Memorial Society, which honours the memory of victims of Stalinist repression. In addition, he participated in "Writers in Support of Perestroika" within the Union of Writers (Aprel') and is a member of the Russian PEN Centre. He has been awarded with the American Liberties

Medallion by the American Jewish Committee and received the medal “For Permanent Activities in the Protection of Human Rights” from the American Jewish National Committee in 1992. In the 1990s, he received an honorary PhD from Queens College of the City University of New York, where he worked as a professor, and he also teaches Russian poetry and Russian and European film at the University of Tulsa in Oklahoma. He was the first non-American to receive the Walt Whitman Poets-in-Residence Award in 1999. In 2004 Yevtushenko refused one of the highest decorations in Russia, “Great Achievements for the Motherland,” from President Vladimir Putin as a statement against the war in Chechnya. He also received the Italian award, Premio Grinzane Cavour, in January 2005 and was awarded a medal from the Danish Raoul Wallenberg Society for his achievements in literature and the arts in September 2006.

Yevtushenko appeared on the literary scene precisely during the precarious time of the post-Stalinist Thaw, and despite all his literary and political risks, he escaped relatively unharmed while other writers were not so fortunate. This has certainly led many to wonder how he managed this. In “Progulka po karnizu” (Walk on the Ledge, 2004), the title poem of his 2005 collection, Yevtushenko poses the question himself: “Как в годы сталинские я выжил?” (How did I survive the years of Stalin’s time?) (1). In the first stanza, he metaphorically describes himself as walking along a ledge, “неведомо кем ведомый / и стопку водки в руке держа” (being led by I don’t know who / and holding a shot of vodka in my hand). (5-6). He playfully attributes his courage to the guidance of an unknown and god-like figure and vodka. He portrays himself as a naïve but daring youth, undertaking a feat not unlike the circus act of tightrope walking, and to whom the rules do not apply. As a member of a generation blinded by Stalin’s cult of personality, Yevtushenko seems to insinuate that he was participating in a kind of child’splay at a distance safe from danger, rather than genuinely pushing limits and boundaries.

Oftentimes Yevtushenko credits the writers of his generation as the harbinger of the artistic freedom of *glasnost* and places particular emphasis on his own role. Once again he does not fail to include this assertion. He depicts the young generation of writers walking along an iron ledge not far from Rome and Paris and “по казарменному коммунизму” (along the barracks of communism, 37-8). In the final stanza, Yevtushenko describes how he would react if Russia were to fall into “казарменный капитализм” (militant capitalism) (40), declaring: “а просто так пойду по карнизу – / ну а иначе я не поэт!” (I’d walk along that ledge again / otherwise I am not a poet!) (46-47). He concludes that without taking such risks, he would not be a poet. Yevtushenko often creates a heroic image of himself and displays a simplified and romantic vision of reality. Although he claims to write only with honesty, he tends to skip over details through the use of elaborate metaphors. “Progulka po karnizu” also suggests that his socialist beliefs have contributed to his idealistic view of the world. He is clearly aware of accusations that he has collaborated with the Soviet Communist Party, and although he has tried to refute this statement, as a poet he is not always very convincing. For example, in “Korrida” (La Corrida), Yevtushenko explains that spectators at a bullfight are only satisfied if the bull is killed as an analogy for the public’s reception of a writer. He includes a more critical view of himself as a writer than he usually allows in “Monolog chuchela” (Monologue of a Scarecrow, 1992). He states: “Я торчал слишком долго, / как чучело романтическое” (I stuck around too long, / like a romantic scarecrow) (14-15) in recognition that he stayed in the public eye for longer than he probably deserved.

Yevgeny Yevtushenko’s longevity in Russian culture continues to evoke a number of memorable events. A recent three-day conference entitled “In the Shadow of Babi Yar: Holocaust Commemoration in Soviet and Post-Soviet Ukraine” was held at the University of

Maryland and dedicated to the legacy of Babi Yar. Scholars Wendy M. Lower, Joshua Rubenstein, Zvi Gitelman, Larissa Dedova, film director Sergey Bukovsky, and Yevtushenko participated in the conference. Yevtushenko's work was not only prominently featured at the event, but was the central point of the gatherings. In addition to his presentation, "The Making of Babi Yar," Yevtushenko gave a poetry reading, his film *Stalin's Funeral* was screened,<sup>36</sup> and the University of Maryland Symphony Orchestra and the Men of University of Maryland Choirs performed Shostakovich's *Symphony No. 13*, during which Yevtushenko himself recited the opening reading of "Babii Yar." This is only one example that Yevgeny Yevtushenko has remained a popular cultural figure and writer.

At the conference Yevtushenko brought an undeniable passion and energy to his poetry recitation, engaging the audience in his dramatic performance of both old and new poems in English and in Russian. He also had the energetic assistance of two drama students. Afterwards Yevtushenko responded to questions posed by audience members, which tended to lean toward the topic of Babi Yar. While speaking on this subject, Yevtushenko stated:

I don't like when some people call my poetry "civic poetry" or "political poetry." I consider it simply human poetry. I write many of my poems not because of my political convictions. I've never been a member of the Party, and I hope that in the future (the concept of the political) party will fall apart. I think that in Russia or America or elsewhere in the world there are just political connections. That's why I don't think my poetry is political. I think most of my so-called political poetry is written because of my shame. Shame for something in my country or in other ones. (Yevtushenko Poetry Reading in Russian and English)<sup>37</sup>

In his interactions with the audience, Yevtushenko was brisk and sometimes hard to follow, most probably because the question period was conducted in English. In addition, the logic of his discourse often was not fluid. The above example illustrates well the rapid changes in Yevtushenko's train of thoughts: he begins by speaking about genre (civic and/or political

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<sup>36</sup> In addition to being the scriptwriter and director of the film, he also played in a small acting role.

<sup>37</sup> The quotations from the conference are from my personal recording of the three-day event.

poetry), turns to his political convictions, and unexpectedly finishes with what inspires his civic poetry. Initially one may find Yevtushenko's refusal to classify his poetry as "civic poetry" surprising, since he has never shied away from politics in his writing or in his public life.

Because civic poetry in regards to Yevtushenko's work is central to my thesis, I asked him the following:

SAFARIK. In regards to the tradition of civic poetry in Russia dating back to the nineteenth century with writers Ryleev, Pushkin, Nekrasov, and in the twentieth century, Mayakovsky, I am wondering: if you don't perceive yourself fitting in this tradition, how would you like...

YEVTUSHENKO. (interrupting) You know, I was now, I just came back from Italy where I was given two different prizes. So, they gave me one prize for love poetry and another prize for civic poetry. The answer to your question. They said, "Yevtushenko combines in his poetry styles of civic poetry of Pushkin. Nekrasov. Yesenin. He combines many different poets." You could not be a poet without this tradition; couldn't be a poet, artist, scientist, any profession – you have to follow tradition. You never could be born [in] an empty place. That's why...some young poets they don't read poetry. Some explained to me, "I don't want to imitate others, so that why I don't read poetry." When they don't read, they imitate them.

From his answer, one can immediately sense that the poet had no objections to be included in the line of Russia's greatest writers. The other part of his response sometimes elusively and sometimes directly reflects on his indignation at being labelled as an eclectic poet who simply is a blind follower of the named poets above. In the responses that followed, there were even more elusive answers to the audience's questions. One of the only clear notions was Yevtushenko's opposition to the idiosyncrasies of any "–isms," including references to him as an activist.

On December 12, 2007 at Moscow's Olympic Stadium, one of Yevtushenko's latest projects debuted: his poetry- performance, rock-opera *Idut belye snegi* (White Snows are Falling). Evgeniia Drozdova's article, "Stikhi snova v mode" (Poetry is Back in Fashion), which was published in *Novye izvestiia* on Dec. 14, 2007, reports that over fifty artists took part in the performance, including an orchestra, chorus, soloist, actors, dancers, and a ballet troupe, with

Yevtushenko's lyric poetry set to music (Drozdova). During the second half of the performance, Yevtushenko, "маэстро поэтического искусства" (the maestro of the poetic art) (Drozdova), recited his civic lyrics while images of Moscow and portraits from the poet's life were projected onto a giant screen (Drozdova). As usual, Yevtushenko was dressed eccentrically in checkered pants, a loud shirt, and a bright yellow tie, and one cannot help but be reminded of Mayakovsky's yellow blouse and the shocking antics of the Futurists in the 1920s. It would seem as though Yevtushenko is deliberately trying to align himself with this talent of the past, though whether his show has provoked a similar reaction among the crowd is doubtful. Yevtushenko has voiced his desire to revive the popularity of poetry among the younger generations of Russians, and it was reported that many young people indeed were in the large crowd that was drawn to the rock-opera (Drozdova). During the premiere, *Novye izvestiia* also presented Yevtushenko with the award "Geroi nashego vremeni" (Hero of our Time) as "Poet of the Decades," with which he had been honoured in the previous month of November (Drozdova). Yevtushenko's attempt to revive poetry through rock music with *Idut belye snegi* is certainly a creative and unique endeavour.

## 5. Conclusion

Yevgeny Yevtushenko's contribution to Russian literature and culture is significant. As a young poet of talent, he composed poems with genuine expressions of his emotions and gained command of the lyric poem. Since the appearance of "Babii Yar," "Nasledniki Stalina," and *Bratskaia GES*, as well a significant number of first-rate lyrical poems throughout the late 1950s, 1960s and early 1970s, Yevtushenko has not disappointed his readership in his literary output. During his literary career, he has worked in many genres, including prose with novels *Iagodnye mesta* (Wild Berries, 1981) and *Ne umirai prezhde smerti* (Don't Die before You're Dead, 1993) and his more recent autobiographical compilation *Shestidesantnik: memuarnaia proza* (The Paratroopers of the 1960s: A Memoir in Prose, 2006), as mentioned in Chapter One. In "Molitva pered poemoi" (Prayer before the Poem), Yevtushenko famously wrote: "Поэт в России, / больше чем поэт" (a poet in Russia is more than a poet) (1-2). While considering Yevtushenko's oeuvre, one may pose the following quandary: Once the poet becomes a "поэт трибун" (poet tribune), does he simultaneously sacrifice some of his artistic values and his inner truth, as Mayakovsky did? To a greater degree, Yevtushenko, Mayakovsky's follower, experienced a similar dilemma and suffered artistically as a result.

In spite of his steady popularity, Yevtushenko has never been able to achieve a similar qualitative and quantitative response from readers around the globe, as he had with the publications of his civic poems of the Thaw period. In fact, one may argue that of Yevtushenko's works—some poor, some mediocre, some good, and some excellent—the sheer volume of his artistic opus detracts from the individual quality of each work. The anthology of Russian poetry that Yevtushenko has compiled and published in English under the title, *Twentieth Century Russian Poetry: Silver and Steel, an Anthology* (1993), and in Russian as *Strofy veka: antologiya*

*russskoi poezii* (Stanzas of a Century: An Anthology of Russian Poetry, 1999) has received little acclaim, even though it has many users and is often out of print. At present Yevtushenko is compiling another anthology, *Desiat' vekov russskoi poezii* (Ten Centuries of Russian Poetry), a portion of which appears weekly in *Novye izvestiia*, and perhaps it will be these works that prove to be a long-standing addition in the literary sphere. The recognition Yevtushenko has earned particularly for the composition of "Babii Yar" is most certainly well-deserved. His poem continues to shed light on the tragedy at Babi Yar and similar sites located in parts of the former Soviet Union and Europe, as well as more recent acts of genocide in such places as Rwanda, Darfur, the Democratic Republic of Congo, and Chechnya. Thus, the publication of "Babii Yar" remains the pinnacle of Yevtushenko's career. But over forty years have passed since the poet wrote "Babii Yar," a thread to the past which he cannot seem to let go. A criticism that has plagued Yevtushenko is that he only takes literary risks on political subjects sanctioned by the leading party and is a careerist. In part, these accusations bear some truth. He has been careful not to choose political subjects that would severely ruin his career, while at the same time continues to produce more works in an attempt to relive his early fame. Yevtushenko often responds immediately to occurrences in a journalistic kind of reaction in his poetry, and his personality is reflected in his literary production. After he gained the public's attention during the Thaw period, he had a choice: to follow his muse or glory. His potential was jeopardized by his fondness of the comfortable lifestyle that the State provided him as a professional Soviet writer. He immodestly tried to replicate or mimic his initial success by writing on similar topics to no avail. Galich (born A. Ginzburg), an author and civic bard, foretold Yevtushenko's downfall as a writer. He composed a lyric entitled "Evgeniiu Evtushenko" (To Yevgeny Yevtushenko) that appeared in his 1974 collection *Pokolenie Obrechennykh* (Generation of the Doomed). In the



poem, Galich uses a series of metaphors to describe his impressions and feelings toward Yevtushenko as the poet develops over the years. Galich begins with the image of a glorious stallion with golden hooves that prances around, ringing the coins braided in his mane. The poem reads as follows:

Евгению Евтушенко

*У одного поэта есть такие строки:  
«В воде проживают рыбы,  
На солнце бывают пятна...  
Поэты дружить могли бы,  
Но мнительны невероятно».*

В майский вечер, пронзительно дымный,  
Всех побегов герой, всех погонь,  
Как он мчал! Бесноватый и дивный,  
С золотыми копытами конь.

И металась могучая грива,  
На ветру языками огня,  
И звенела цыганская гривна,  
Заплетенная в гриву коня.

Воплощенье веселого гнева,  
Не крещенный позорным кнутом.  
Как он мчал – все налево, налево...  
И скрывался из виду потом.

Он, бывало, нам снился ночами,  
Как живой – от копыт до седла.  
Впрочем, все это было в начале,  
А начало прекрасно всегда.

Но приходит с годами прозренье,  
И томит наши души оно,  
Словно горькое, трезвое зелье  
Подливает в хмельное вино.

Постарели мы и полысели,  
И погашен волшебный огонь.  
Лишь кружит по своей карусели  
Сам себе опостылевший конь!

Ни печали не зная, ни гнева,

По-собачьи виляя хвостом,  
Он кружит все налево, налево,  
И направо, направо потом.

И унылый сморчок-бедолага,  
Медяками в кармане звеня,  
Карусельщик – майор из ГУЛАГа,  
Знай, гоняет по кругу коня!

Круглый мир, намалеванный кругло,  
Круглый вход охраняет конвой,  
И топчет дурацкая кукла,  
И кружит деревянная кукла,  
Притворяясь живой. (141-142)

In the first four stanzas, Galich presents a somewhat nostalgic portrayal of Yevtushenko during the beginning of his literary career, when his sincere poetic expressions conveyed the moods and feelings of the Soviet nation. During the period of great change that followed Stalin's death, Soviet citizens were able to find hope in Yevtushenko's poetry. By devoting nearly half of his poem to a predominantly favourable view of Yevtushenko, Galich draws his readers back to the young poet's talent, strengths, and successes during the Thaw period.

The tone of the poem shifts in the fifth stanza, paralleling Galich's change in perception of the poet as he evolved over the years. Galich emphasizes that Yevtushenko's constant presence in the public eye detracted from his literary talent and his social and civic calling. Thus, the image of the proud stallion, the symbol of Yevtushenko during his poetic debut, is replaced with that of a wooden carousel horse. Galich then likens the carousel horse to a little dog wagging his tail and running around in circles in whatever direction that he is led, a particularly poisonous image that presents Yevtushenko as influenced by a mid-ranking KGB officer. The depiction of the dog circling again and again to the left and then to the right indicates Galich's view that the poet is an easily controlled political pawn. At times he advocates for civil rights and social equality, while at others, he helps reinforce the Party's ideology. Galich's

representation of Yevtushenko becomes even more critical. He describes the carousal-operator that drives the merry-go-round in circles as “майор из ГУЛАГа” (a major of the Gulag) (31). Galich then implies that the entrance to the merry-go-round that Yevtushenko is guarding represents the entrance to the Gulag. In the final stanza, Galich likens Yevtushenko to “дурацкая кукла” (a foolish doll) and “деревянная кукла” (a wooden puppet), that circles around and around, pretending to be alive (35-36). In short, Galich’s portrait of Yevtushenko ends with a strong satirical treatment of his former idol.

Despite these painfully critical views, one can still find sincere tributes to Yevtushenko in some of the latest academic publications. In the article, “Negative Images of Jews in Recent Russian Literature,” N.G.O. Pereira addresses the rise of Russian anti-Semitism among both intellectuals and non-intellectual youth. Pereira draws on Yevtushenko as one of the brave voices fighting against anti-Semitism in Russia (54). Furthermore, generations of readers continue to value Yevtushenko’s immaculate poetic debut during the Thaw period, when he genuinely displayed the qualities of a true civic poet.

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