

[1] I. Babi Yar

Nad Babim Yarom pamyatnikov nyet.
Krutoi obryv, kak groboye nadgrobye.
Mne strashno,
mne sevodnya stolko let,
kak samomu yevreiskomu narodu.

Mne kazhetsa seichas – ya yudei.
Vot ya bryedupa dryevnemu Egiptu.
A vot ya, na kryeste raspyaty, gibnu,
i da sikh por na mne – sledi gvazdey.
Mne kazhetsa, shto Dreifus – eta ya.
Meshchanstvo – moi danoschik i sudya!
Ya za reshotkoy, ya papal v koltso,
zatravlennyy, oplyovannyi, obolgannyi,
damachki s bryusselshmi oborkami,
viszha, zontami tichut mne v litso.
Mne kazhetsa, ya – malchik v Bialystoke.
Krov lyotsya, rastekayas pa palam.
Beschinstvuyut vozhdni traktirnoy stoiki.
I pakhaut vodkoy s lukom popolam.
Ya, sapagom otbroshennyi, bessilny,
naprasna ya pogromshchikov molyu.
Pad gogot: "Bey zhidov! Spasai Rossiyu!"
Labaznik izbivaet mat moyu.

O russhy moi narod, ya znayu,
ty pa sushchnosti internatsionalen,
no chasta te, chi ruki nechisti,
tvoim chisteishim imyenem bryatsali.
Ya znayu dobrotu moyei zyeimli.
Kak podla, shto i zhilachkoi ne drognuval,
antisemity narekli sibya:
"Soyuzom russkova naroda."

Mne kazhetsa, ya – eta Anna Frank,
prozrachnaya, kak vyetochka v aprele,
i ya lyublyu, i mne nye nado fraz,
no nado, shtob drug v druga my smotreli.
Kak malo mozhno videt, obonyat!

Nelzya nam listev i nelzya nan neba,
no mozhno ochen mnoga –
eta nezhno drug druga
vtyomnoy komnate obnyat!
– "Syuda idut!"
– "Nye boysa. Eta guly samoi vesny,
ona idyot syuda.
Idi ko mne,
dai mne skoreye guby!"
– "Lomayut dver!"
– "Nyet! Eta ledokhod!"

Nad Babim Yarom shelest dihhk trav,
dyerevyia smotryat grozno, po-sudeiski.
Zdes molcha vsyo krichit,
i, shapku snyav,
ya chuvstvuyu, kak myediemo sedeyu.
I sam ya, kak sploshnoy bezzvuchny krik,
nad tysyachami tysyach pogrebyonnykh,
Ya – kazhdy zdes rasstrelyannyi starik,
Ya – kazhdy zdes rasstrelyannyi rebyonok.
Nishto vo mne pro eta nye zabudet.
"Internatsional" pust progremit,
kogda naveh pokhoronen budet
pasledni na zyeimle antisemit.
Yevreiskoy krovi nyet v krovi moyei,
no nenvisten zloboy zaskaruzloy
ya vsem antisemitam kak yevrei,
ipatomu ya nastoyashchiy russkiy!

I. Babi Yar

There is no memorial above Babi Yar.
The steep ravine is like a coarse tombstone.
I'm frightened,
I feel as old today
as the Jewish race itself.
I feel now that I am a Jew.
Here I wander through ancient Egypt.
And here I hang on the cross and die,
and I still bear the mark of the nails.

I feel that I am Dreyfus.
The bourgeois rabble denounce and judge me.
I am behind bars, I am encircled,
persecuted, spat on, slandered,
and fine ladies with lace frills
squeal and poke their parasols into my face.
I feel that I am a little boy in Bialystok.
Blood is spattered over the floor.
The ringleaders in the tavern are getting brutal.
They smell of vodka and onions.
I'm kicked to the ground, I'm powerless,
in vain I beg the persecutors.
They guffaw: "Kill the Yids! Save Russia!"
A grain merchant beats up my mother.

Oh my Russian people, I know
that at heart you are internationalists,
but there have been those with soiled hands
who abused your good name.
I know that my land is good.
How filthy that without the slightest shame
the anti-Semites proclaimed themselves:
"The Union of the Russian People."

I feel that I am Anne Frank,
as tender as a shoot in April,
I am in love and have no need of words,
but we need to look at each other.
How little we can see or smell!

The leaves and the sky are shut off from us,
but there is a lot we can do –
we can tenderly embrace each other
in the darkened room!
– "Someone's coming!"
– "Don't be frightened. These are the sounds of spring,
spring is coming.
Come to me,
give me your lips quickly!"
– "They're breaking down the door!"
– "No! It's the ice breaking!"

Above Babi Yar the wild grass rustles,
the trees look threatening, as though in judgment.
Here everything silently screams,
and, baring my head,
I feel as though I am slowly turning grey.
And I become a long, soundless scream
above the thousands and thousands buried here,
I am each old man who was shot here,
I am each child who was shot here.
No part of me can ever forget this.
Let the "International" thunder out
when the last anti-Semite on the earth
has finally been buried.
There is no Jewish blood in my blood,
but I feel the loathsome hatred
of all anti-Semites as though I were a Jew –
and that is why I am a true Russian!

[2] II. Yumor

Tsari, koroli, imperatori,
vlastiteli vsei zyepli,
komandovali paradami,
no yumorom nye mogli.
V dvortsy rmenitykh osob,
vse dni vozlezhashchikh vykholenna,
Yavlyalsa brodyaga Ezop,
i nishchimi oni vyglyadeli.
V domakh, gde khazha nasledil
svoimi nogami shchuplymi,
Vsyu poshlost Khodzha Nasreddin
shibal, kak shakhmaty, shutkami!

Khotyeli yumor kupit,
da tolko yevo nye kupish!
Khotyeli yumor ubit,
a yumor pokazyval kukish!
Borotsa s nim delo trudnoye.
Kaznili yevo bez kontsa.
Yevo galova otrublennaya
torchala na pike stryeltsa.
No lish skamoroshi dudochki
svoy nachinali skaz,
on zvonko krichal:
"Ya tutochki!"
I likho puskalsa v plyas.

V potryopannom kutsem paltishke,
ponuryas i slovno kayas,
pryestupnikom politicheskim
on, poimanniy, shol na kazn.
Vsem vidom pakornost vykazival,
gotov k nezemnomu zhityu,
kak vdrug iz paltishka vyskalzival,
rukoi makhhal
i – tyu-tyu!

Yumor pryatali v kamery,
da chyorta s dva udalos.
Reshotki i steny kamennye
on prokhodil naskvoz.
Otkashlivayas prostuzhenno,
kak ryadovoy boyets,
shagal on chastushkoy-prastushkoy
s vintovkoi na Zimnyi dvorets.

Privyk on ko vzglyadam sumrachnym,
no eta yemu nye vryedit,
i sam na sibya s yumorom
yumor paroy glyadit.
On vyechen.
Vyechen!
On lovok.
Lovok!
I yurok,
I yurok!
proidyot cherez vsyo, cherez vsyokh.
Itak, da slantsa yumor!
On muzhestvenniy chelovek!

[3] III. V Magazinye

Kto v platke, a kto v platochke,
kak na podvig, kak na trud,
v magazin po-odinochke
molcha zhenshchiny idut.

O, bidonov ikh bryatsanye,
zvon butilok i kastyul!

II. Humour

Tsars, kings, emperors,
rulers of all the world,
have commanded parades
but couldn't command humour.
In the palaces of the great,
spending their days sleekly reclining,
Aesop the vagrant turned up
and they would all seem like beggars.
In houses where a hypocrite had left
his wretched little footprints,
Mullah Nasredin's jokes would demolish
trivialities like pieces on a chessboard!

They've wanted to buy humour,
but he just wouldn't be bought!
They've wanted to kill humour,
but humour gave them the finger.
Fighting him's a tough job.
They've never stopped executing him.
His chopped-off head
was stuck onto a soldier's pike.
But as soon as the clown's pipes
struck up their tune,
he screeched out:
"I'm here!"
and broke into a jaunty dance.

Wearing a threadbare little overcoat,
downcast and seemingly repentant,
caught as a political prisoner,
he went to his execution.
Everything about him displayed submission,
resignation to the life hereafter,
when he suddenly wriggled out of his coat,
waved his hand
and – bye-bye!

They've hidden humour away in dungeons,
but they hadn't a hope in hell.
He passed straight through
bars and stone walls.
Clearing his throat from a cold,
like a rank-and-file soldier,
he was a popular tune marching along
with a rifle to the Winter Palace.

He's quite used to dark looks,
they don't worry him at all,
and from time to time humour
looks at himself humorously.
He's eternal.
Eternal!
He's artful.
Artful!
And quick,
And quick!
he gets through everyone and everything.
So then, three cheers for humour!
He's a brave fellow!

III. In the Store

Some with shawls, some with scarves,
as though to some heroic enterprise or to work,
into the store one by one
the women silently come.

Oh, the rattling of their cans,
the clanking of bottles and pans!

Pakhnet lukom, ogurtsami,
pakhnet sousom "Kabul."

Zyabnu, dolgo v kassu stoya,
no pakuda dvizhus k nyei,
ot dykhanya zhenshchin stolkiikh
v magazinye vsyo teplei.

Oni tikho podzhidayut,
bogi dobriye semyi,
i v rukakh oni szhimayut
dengi trudniye svoyi.

Eta zhenshchiny Rossii.
Eta nasha chest i sud.
I byeton oni mesili,
i pakhali, i kosili ...

Vsyo oni perenosili,
vsyo oni perenesut.
Vsyo na svete im pasilno, –
skolka sily im dano!

Ikh obschitivatpostidno!
Ikh obveshivat greshno!
I v karman pelmeni sunuv,
ya smotryu, surov i tikh,
na ustaliye ot sumok
ruki pravyyedniye ikh.

[4] IV. Strakhi

Umirayut v Rossii strakhi,
slovno prizraki prezhnikh lyet,
lish na paperti, kak starukhi,
koye-gde yeshcho prosyat na khleb.
Ya ikh pomnyu vo vlasti i sile
pri dvore torzhestvuyushchei lzhi.
Strakhi vsyudu, kak tyeni, skolzilii,
pronikali vo vsye etazhi.
Potikhonku lyudei priurchali
i na vsye nalgali pyechat:
gde molchat by – krichat priurchali,
i molchat – gde by nada krichat.
Eta stala sevodnya dalyokim.
Dazhe stranna i vspomnit teper.
Tayinyi strakh pered chim-to donosom,
tayinyi strakh pered stukom v dver.

Nu, a strakh gavorit s inastrantsem?
S inastrantsem – ta shto, a s zhenoy?
Nu, a strakh bezotchetnyy ostatsa
posle marshei vdvoym s tishinoy?

Nye boyalis my stroit v meteli,
ukhodit pad snaryadami v boy,
no boyalis paroyu smyertelno
razgovarnat sam s soboy.
Nas nye sbili i nye rastlili,
i nedarom seichas vo vragakh
pobedivshaya strakti Rossiya
yeshcho bolshiy rozhdaet strakh.

Strakhi noviye vizhu, svetleya:
strakh neiskrennim byt so stranoy,
strakh nepravdoy unizit idei,
shto yavlyayutsa pravdoy samoy;
strakh fanfarit do odurenya,
strakh chuzhiye slova povtoryat,
strakh unizit drugikh nedaveryem
i chrezmerno sibye daveryat.

There's a smell of onions, cucumbers,
a smell of "Kabul" sauce.

I'm shivering as I queue up for the cash desk,
but as I inch forward towards it,
from the breath of so many women
a warmth spreads round the store.

They wait quietly,
their families' guardian angels,
and they grasp in their hands
their hard-earned money.

These are the women of Russia.
They honour us and they judge us.
They have mixed concrete,
and ploughed, and harvested ...

They have endured everything,
they will continue to endure everything.
Nothing in the world is beyond them –
they have been granted such strength!

It is shameful to short-change them!
It is sinful to short-weight them!
As I shove dumplings into my pocket,
I sternly and quietly observe
their pious hands
weary from carrying their shopping bags.

IV. Fears

Fears are dying out in Russia,
like the wraiths of bygone years;
only in church porches, like old women,
here and there they still beg for bread.
I remember when they were powerful and mighty
at the court of the lie triumphant.
Fears slithered everywhere, like shadows,
penetrating every floor.
They stealthily subdued people
and branded their mark on everyone:
when we should have kept silent, they taught us to scream,
and to keep silent when we should have screamed.
All this seems remote today.
It is even strange to remember now.
The secret fear of an anonymous denunciation,
the secret fear of a knock at the door.

Yes, and the fear of speaking to foreigners?
Foreigners? ... even to your own wife!
Yes, and that unaccountable fear of being left,
after a march, alone with the silence?

We weren't afraid of construction work in blizzards,
or of going into battle under shell-fire,
but at times we were mortally afraid
of talking to ourselves.
We weren't destroyed or corrupted,
and it is not for nothing that now
Russia, victorious over her own fears,
inspires greater fear in her enemies.

I see new fears dawning:
the fear of being untrue to one's country,
the fear of dishonestly debasing ideas,
which are self-evident truths;
the fear of boasting oneself into a stupor,
the fear of parroting someone else's words,
the fear of humiliating others with distrust
and of trusting oneself overmuch.

Umirayut v Rossii strakbi.
I kogda ya pishu eti stroki
i paroyu nevolno speshu,
to pishu ikh v yedinstvennom strakhe,
shto ne v polnoyu silu pishu.

[5] V. Karyera

Tvyerdili pastyri, shto vreden
i nyerazumen Galilei.
(Shto nyerazumen Galilei ...)
No, kak pakazivayet vremya,
kto nyerazumnei – tot umnei!

Uchonyi, svyerstnik Galileya,
byl Galileya nye glupeye.
On znal, shto vyertitsa zhemlya,
no u nyevo byla semya.
I on, sadyas s zhenoy v karety,
svershiv predatelstvo svoyo,
schital, shto dyelayet karyeru,
a mezhdum tem gubil yeyo.

Za asaznaniye planety
shol Galilei odin na risk,
i stal velikim on.
Vot eta – ya ponimayu – karyerist.

Itak, da zdravstvuyet karyera,
kagda karyera takova,
kak u Shekspira i Pastera,
Nyutona i Tolstovo,
i Tolstovo ... Lva?
Lva!
Zachem ikh gryazyu pakryvali?
Talent – talant, kak ni kleimi.
Zabyty te, kto proklinali,
no pomnyat tekh, kovo klyali.

Vse te, kto rvalis v stratosferu,
vrachi, shto gibli ot kholyer,
vot eti dyelali karyeru!
Ya s ikh karyer beru primer!
Ya veryu v ikh svyatuyu vyera.
Ikh vyera – muzhestvo mayo.
Ya dyelayu sibye karyeru tem,
shto nye dyelayu yeyo!

Yevgeny Yevtushenko (b. 1932)

Fears are dying out in Russia.
And while I am writing these lines,
at times unintentionally hurrying,
I write haunted by the single fear
of not writing with all my strength.

V. A Career

The priests kept on saying that Galileo
was dangerous and foolish.
(That Galileo was foolish ...)
But, as time has shown,
the fool was much wiser!

A certain scientist, Galileo's contemporary,
was no more stupid than Galileo.
He knew that the earth revolved,
but he had a family.
And as he got into a carriage with his wife
after accomplishing his betrayal,
he reckoned he was advancing his career,
but in fact he'd wrecked it.

For his discovery about our planet
Galileo faced the risk alone,
and he was a great man.
Now that is what I understand by a careerist.

So then, three cheers for a career
when it's a career like that of
Shakespeare or Pasteur,
Newton or Tolstoy,
or Tolstoy ... Lev?
Lev!
Why did they have mud slung at them?
Talent is talent, whatever name you give it.
They're forgotten, those who hurled curses,
but we remember the ones who were cursed.

All those who strove towards the stratosphere,
the doctors who died of cholera,
they were following careers!
I'll take their careers as an example!
I believe in their sacred belief,
and their belief gives me courage.
I'll follow my career in such a way
that I'm not following it!

English translation by Andrew Huth

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