

Yevgeny Yevtushenko, a rock-star poet riding the wave of the Khrushchev thaw in literature, published this poem in Moscow in 1961. It caused a sensation for saying the previously unsayable about the murder of Jews and linking it to Russian antisemitism. Later, Yevtushenko was denounced as a mouthpiece of Soviet propaganda because he remained free and in

favor while others, Jewish poets and writers, were persecuted and repressed. SS

Babi Yar

By Yevgeni Yevtushenko Translated by A.Z. Foreman Requested by Ruth Blumenthal

No monuments stand over Babi Yar, A sudden drop sheer as a gross graveslab. I am here terrified.

Today I am As old as all the Jewish people are.

Now it seems that I am

an Israelite.

There I am wandering Ancient Egypt's lands, And there I perish, pierced and crucified, And to this day bear nail-scars on my hands. And Dreyfus too is

me,

there I have been

Sentenced, sold out

by petty philistines.

I am behind bars,

rounded up and battered,

I have been

hounded, hunted,

slandered, spat on,

And demoiselles dolled up in Brussels lace
Shrieked as they poked their parasols in my face.

And now I am

a boy in Białystok.

Blood runs across the floor. Blood on the wall.
The bar-room rabble-rousers run amok
Reeking of onion and hard alcohol.
Boots kick my body aside, helpless. Head gushing,
I plead in vain with thugs of the pogrom
To hoots of

"Smash the fucking kikes! Save Russia!" And some grain-seller beats and rapes my mom. My People! Russian nation!

I know,

you

Are internationalist at the core,
But men with filthy hands too often boomed
Your clean sweet name into a jingo roar.
I know the good, the kindness of your land.
How vile it is

that, with no pinch of scruple, those pompous antisemites tried to brand themselves a "Union of the Russian People." To me it's as if I am

Anne Frank

Transparent

as a fragile April branch.

And I love.

And I need no puffy phrase.

I need for us

to meet each other's gaze.

So little we can see or smell,

we who

Have been denied the sky,

denied the leaves.

But we can do so much:

to tenderly

Embrace each other in a darkened room.

"They're coming!"

"Don't be scared.

That's just the clamor

of early spring.

It is spring coming here!

Come here.

Give me a kiss, quick."

"Are they ramming

The door?"

"Shhhh...no, that's cracking ice you hear."

The wildgrass rustles over Babi Yar.

Trees stare down stern,

judicial,

cold as day.

All things scream silent here.

Hat in my arm,

I feel myself now

slowly growing grey.

I myself am

one all-out soundless scream

For the thousand buried thousands in this char.

I'm every old man

shot in this ravine,

I'm every baby

burned in Babi Yar.

No fiber in me

will forget this ever.

Let the Internationale

thunder forth

When we have buried, finally and forever, The final antisemite on this earth.

There is no Jewish blood in me, it's true. But with their callous ossified revulsion Antisemites must hate me like

a Jew

And that is what makes me

a real Russian.