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# Looking Beyond Shostakovich's Thirteenth Symphony

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Claremont McKenna College

**Looking Beyond Shostakovich's Thirteenth Symphony**

Submitted to  
Professor Gary Hamburg  
and  
Professor Anne Dwyer

Written by  
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For  
Senior Thesis

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### *Acknowledgements*

I would like to thank my high school teacher, Mr. Das, for introducing me to Shostakovich. We played the Fifth Symphony for one of our concerts, and I have not forgotten that performance. The symphony was stuck in my head while I was abroad last year. It was not until I visited a cemetery in St. Petersburg, Russia that I realized Shostakovich had composed more than one masterpiece. His music played all through the cemetery, and people were crying as they listened to it.

There is a strong admiration for Shostakovich throughout Russia, so I wanted to learn more about his music. I know that it reflected gruesome events, but I wondered how music so pointedly critical of life in the Soviet Union could gain such popularity. On returning to Claremont, I decided to study an entirely new symphony and to see what aspects of it were controversial. During my first meeting with Professor Hamburg this fall, he mentioned the Thirteenth Symphony, also known as “Babi Yar.” I am grateful to him for sparking my interest in this extraordinary composition. I would also like to thank Professor Anne Dwyer for encouraging me to work through verses by Evgeny Yevtushenko that seemed at first almost impossible to grasp. I also thank my parents for always encouraging me to keep writing, despite how challenging this symphony appeared to me. Thank you all so much!

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## I. Introduction

The premiere of Dmitrii Shostakovich's Thirteenth Symphony took place in the Moscow Philharmonic Orchestra on December 18, 1962 (Hurwitz 13). He had imagined a musical composition, "Babi Yar," after reading verse by Yevtushenko in a mass-circulation literary magazine, *Literaturnaya Gazeta*; in fact, his anger upon reading the verses inspired him to create his next symphony — a work that brought many aspects of Soviet life to public conscience (Volkov 148). Shostakovich incorporated Yevtushenko's five poems into his symphony, and each of the five movements of the symphony is a setting of one poem. The five movements were completed July 1<sup>st</sup>, July 5<sup>th</sup>, July 9<sup>th</sup>, July 16<sup>th</sup>, and July 20<sup>th</sup> respectively (Maes 366). Despite many obstacles he faced premiering the highly political symphony, like finding a conductor and ensuring musicians would not back out due to the strong politics of the symphony as a whole, Shostakovich persevered with the project. And, thank God, he did: his symphony resonated deeply with the audience.

I became interested in Shostakovich when my high school band director suggested that Shostakovich's Fifth Symphony brilliantly captured the history of the Soviet Union during Stalin's purges. Last March, when studying Russian language and culture in St. Petersburg, I toured the Piskaryokskoye Cemetery, where victims of the Leningrad blockade lie in common graves. I discovered that, in this austere war memorial, Shostakovich's music plays all day in tribute to their memories. Moved by the power of Shostakovich's music and its cultural authority, I decided to investigate Shostakovich in my senior thesis.

As I commenced my research, I learned that Solomon Volkov, one of Shostakovich's pupils from the Leningrad Conservatory, has claimed that the Fifth Symphony's artistic subtleties signal the composer's disapproval of the purges (150). In fact, Volkov has argued that many

other works of Shostakovich beyond the Fifth Symphony are “dissident works.” I wondered how this could be so: how can a wordless musical composition convey political or even artistic dissent? Further research revealed that not every expert on Shostakovich’s music shares Volkov’s opinion that Shostakovich wrote the Fifth Symphony or others to communicate his political attitudes.

I brought my question about Shostakovich’s “dissident” music to my thesis advisor, Gary Hamburg, who suggested that one way to test the hypothesis concerning the political intentions behind Shostakovich’s music would be to study the Thirteenth Symphony, which the composer completed in July 1962 at the height of Nikita Khrushchev’s second de-Stalinization campaign. The Thirteenth Symphony is unique in Shostakovich’s symphonic works because he constructed it as a setting for a controversial cycle of poems by Yevgeny Yevtushenko. This cycle, known by the title of its first poem, “Babi Yar,” deals with institutionalized anti-Semitism in Russia, political repression, the endurance of Russian women, fear in Russian life, and the tension between careerism and creativity. The way that Shostakovich incorporated Yevtushenko’s verses into his symphony, which soon became known as the “Babi Yar Symphony, opened for me a window into Shostakovich’s political world that remained closed in his other, wordless compositions.

As I read further about Shostakovich’s music, especially his Thirteenth Symphony, I learned he was known for borrowing musical themes from repressed peoples; in fact, he “quoted” Jewish intonations in his music, even though the Soviet Union did not approve of the Jewish population (Ivashkin and Kirkman 38). These Jewish intonations were already an integral part of his musical language before he wrote the Thirteenth Symphony, but the Thirteenth is perhaps one of the best examples in his works of musical quotation.

As you read this thesis, keep in mind that Shostakovich wrote most of the Thirteenth Symphony after Yevtushenko's poetic cycle "Babi Yar" was published and after it had stirred a debate in the Soviet press. Thus, there was something specific to Yevtushenko's poems that inspired Shostakovich to incorporate them into his own musical masterpiece. His music became a means to amplify Yevtushenko's verses, to lend Yevtushenko's ideas a greater emotional force, and perhaps to change Soviet culture in the process. Ivashkin and Kirkman explain that Shostakovich encoded in his works personal secrets, some more significant than others (Ivashkin and Kirkman 14). In the Thirteenth Symphony, Shostakovich encoded not personal but rather political taboos and his wish to break them.

The main goal of my paper is to identify Shostakovich's critique on the beliefs and practices of the Soviet Union, each of which is related to the movements of the Thirteenth Symphony. I will explain why the Thirteenth Symphony achieved fame and also why "Party activists" rejected it (Ivashkin and Kirkman 153). Despite the public reactions, positive and negative, to the Thirteenth Symphony, Shostakovich knew how to voice his opinion, and how to fashion a powerful message in music. His musical skill and amazing creativity made his music important in 1962 and makes it worth remembering today.

## **II. Thirteenth Symphony's Movements**

This section explains the significance of each of the five movements of Shostakovich's symphony and how each movement fits into the Thirteenth Symphony as a whole.

### **Movement 1: *Babi Yar*.**

Author: Yevgeny Yevtushenko

Composer: Dmitrii Shostakovich

Tempo: Adagio

Movement Written July 1<sup>st</sup>, 1962

Retrieved from ("Dmitri Shostakovich Works")

<http://shostakovich.hilwin.nl/op113.html>

Над Бабьим Яром памятников нет.  
Крутой обрыв, как грубое надгробье.  
Мне страшно.  
Мне сегодня столько лет,  
как самому еврейскому народу.

Мне кажется сейчас - я иудей.

Вот я бреду по древнему Египту.  
А вот я, на кресте распятый, гибну,  
и до сих пор на мне - следы гвоздей.  
Мне кажется, что Дрейфус - это я.

Мещанство - мой доносчик и судья.  
Я за решеткой.  
Я попал в кольцо.  
Затравленный,  
оплёванный,  
оболганный.  
И дамочки с брюссельскими оборками,  
визжа, зонтами тычут мне в лицо.  
Мне кажется - я мальчик в Белостоке.

Кровь льётся, растекаясь по полам.  
Бесчинствуют вожди трактирной стойки  
и пахнут водкой с луком пополам.  
Я, сапогом отброшенный, бессильный.  
Напрасно я погромщиков молю.  
Под гогот:  
"Бей жидов, спасай Россию!" -  
лабазник избивает мать мою.

О, русский мой народ! -  
Я знаю - ты  
По сущности интернационален.  
Но часто те, чьи руки нечисты,  
твоим чистейшим именем бряцали.  
Я знаю доброту твоей земли.  
Как подло, что, и жилочкой не дрогнув,  
антисемиты пышно нарекли себя  
"Союзом русского народа"!

Мне кажется -  
я - это Анна Франк,

No monument stands over Babi Yar.  
A steep cliff only, like the rudest headstone.  
I am afraid.  
Today, I am as old  
As the entire Jewish race itself.

I see myself an ancient Israelite.

I wander o'er the roads of ancient Egypt  
And here, upon the cross, I perish, tortured  
And even now, I bear the marks of nails.  
It seems to me that Dreyfus is myself.

The Philistines betrayed me – and now judge.  
I'm in a cage. Surrounded and trapped,  
I'm persecuted, spat on, slandered, and  
The dainty dollies in their Brussels frills  
Squeal, as they stab umbrellas at my face.  
I see myself a boy in Belostok \*2\*

Blood spills, and runs upon the floors,  
The chiefs of bar and pub rage unimpeded  
And reek of vodka and of onion, half and half.  
I'm thrown back by a boot, I have no strength  
left,  
In vain I beg the rabble of pogrom,  
To jeers of "Kill the Jews, and save our  
Russia!"  
My mother's being beaten by a clerk.

O, Russia of my heart, I know that you  
Are international, by inner nature.  
But often those whose hands are steeped in  
filth  
Abused your purest name, in name of hatred.  
I know the kindness of my native land.  
How vile, that without the slightest quiver  
The anti-Semites have proclaimed themselves  
The "Union of the Russian People!"

It seems to me that I am Anna Frank,  
Transparent, as the thinnest branch in April,

прозрачная,  
как веточка в апреле.  
И я люблю.  
И мне не надо фраз.  
Но надо,  
чтоб друг в друга мы смотрели.  
Как мало можно видеть,  
обонять!

Нельзя нам листьев  
и нельзя нам неба.  
Но можно очень много -  
это нежно  
друг друга в тёмной комнате обнять.  
Сюда идут?  
Не бойся - это гулы  
самой весны -  
она сюда идёт.  
Иди ко мне.  
Дай мне скорее губы.  
Ломают дверь?  
Нет - это ледоход ...

Над Бабьим Яром шелест диких трав.  
Деревья смотрят грозно,  
по-судейски.  
Здесь молча всё здесь кричит,  
и, шапку сняв,  
я чувствую,  
как медленно седею.  
И сам я,  
как сплошной беззвучный крик,  
над тысячами тысяч погребённых.  
Я - каждый здесь расстрелянный старик.  
Я - каждый здесь расстрелянный ребёнок.  
Ничто во мне про это не забудет!

"Интернационал" пусть прогремит,  
когда навеки похоронен будет  
последний на земле антисемит.

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

And I'm in love, and have no need of phrases,  
But only that we gaze into each other's eyes.  
How little one can see, or even sense!

Leaves are forbidden, so is sky,  
But much is still allowed – very gently  
In darkened rooms each other to embrace.  
-“They come!”  
-“No, fear not – those are sounds  
Of spring itself. She's coming soon.  
Quickly, your lips!”  
-“They break the door!”  
-“No, river ice is breaking...”

Wild grasses rustle over Babi Yar,  
The trees look sternly, as if passing  
judgement.  
Here, silently, all screams, and, hat in hand,  
I feel my hair changing shade to gray.  
And I myself, like one long soundless scream  
Above the thousands of thousands interred,  
I'm every old man executed here,  
As I am every child murdered here.  
No fiber of my body will forget this.

May “Internationale” thunder and ring  
When, for all time, is buried and forgotten  
The last of antisemites on this earth.

There is no Jewish blood that's blood of mine,  
But, hated with a passion that's corrosive  
Am I by antisemites like a Jew.  
And that is why I call myself a Russian!

The first movement of Shostakovich's Thirteenth Symphony "*Babi Yar*" is the longest section musically, ranging around seventeen minutes ("Dmitri Shostakovich – Babi Yar"). Shostakovich's music accompanying the poem is marked Adagio, indicating a slow tempo (Lesser 179). The tempo is typical for sad songs, which demand that listeners ponder thoughts and feelings (Gaylord). Shostakovich's decision to start with a slow versus fast rhythm also breaks the convention observed in most symphonies, where the first movement is usually played Allegro ("The Symphony"). In a remembrance of Babi Yar, the meditative tempo is appropriate. This poem was the piece that initially sparked Shostakovich's interest in developing a whole symphony, and deciphering the poem creates a whole visual picture that he meant to convey musically.

When we hear the words "Auschwitz" and "Rwanda," we instantly recall the tragedies associated with the names. Rare artists like Yevtushenko have had the courage to remember these events and to honor their victims (Peterson 585). The first movement of Shostakovich's Thirteenth Symphony includes a recitation of Yevtushenko's poem, "Babi Yar." The poem recalled the massacre of thirty-three thousand Jews from Kiev in the Babi Yar Ravine, on September 29 – 30, 1941. The killings, which were ordered by the army police commander Kurt Eberhard, by the S.S. leader Friedrich Jeckeln and by *Einsatzgruppe C* commander Otto Rasch, constituted a terrible war crime – one of the worst committed on Soviet soil and one of the worst of the twentieth century. By repeating Yevtushenko's poem, Shostakovich signaled his own opposition to the anti-Semitism during World War II (Peterson 246).

"Babi Yar" opens by noting the absence of a monument in Kiev, "Над Бабьим Яром памятников нет. / No monument stands over Babi Yar" (line 1). In 1962, the ravine still had no marker to the thousands murdered there. A memorial was raised near the ravine in 1976, but its

placard did not indicate that the people killed there were Jews (Peterson 585). Not until 1991 was a six-foot menorah finally built to honor the lost Jews buried there (“Ukraine to allocate \$1 million for Babi Yar memorial”). Yevtushenko wrote his poem partly to decry the lack of a monument at Babi Yar, partly to plead for one in the future, and partly to call upon the Soviet government and Russian people to change their attitudes toward Soviet Jews (Yevtushenko 116). Along with Shostakovich, Yevtushenko and other writers changed the cultural atmosphere in Russia and Ukraine, for today there are commemorations, such as “To the children shot in Babi Yar” which specifically honors the lives of children lost in September 1941 (“Commemoration of Jewish Victims”).

Yevtushenko’s poem constantly repeats the pronoun “I,” which shows the poet’s personal identification with the Jews. Shostakovich was brave to keep the poem exactly the same in his music: in the Soviet Union no one before Yevtushenko had dared for a long time to speak so openly and publicly about domestic anti-Semitism. “Babi Yar” directly confronted the Soviet authorities for their complicity with anti-Semitism (Volkov 273).

The poem’s various sentences focus on different instances of historical anti-Semitism, the first being the Soviet failure to raise a monument at Babi Yar. Yevtushenko’s poem corrected this problem by fashioning a literary monument to Kiev’s murdered Jews, and Shostakovich’s integration of the poem into his symphony added a musical monument. Even though a physical monument specifically made for the Jews was not present until years later, Yevgeny Yevtushenko and Dmitri Shostakovich chose to recognize the victims through poetry and music.

The poem then addresses the biblical history of the Jews, starting with the enslavement of Israelites in Egypt. In line 6, the poet says: “It seems to me that I am a Jew,” a call on Russians imaginatively to put themselves in the subordinated position of Jews, who were mistreated and

held captive by Pharaoh. By alluding to history of Egyptian persecution of Israelites, Yevtushenko refers to a religious injustice across history that Russians had not understood: they had not put themselves in the shoes of the discriminated people.

Yevtushenko then alludes to Jesus' identity: he was from ancient Judea and "was born, lived, and died as a Jew." Yevtushenko's refers to Jesus's crucifixion because he hopes the link between Jesus and the people of Israel will help Russian Christians to sympathize with Soviet Jews.

Yevtushenko then writes about Alfred Dreyfus (10-11), the Jewish artillery officer in the French army who was unjustly charged with treason for sending a secret military document to a German embassy in 1894. The French writer Émile Zola demonstrated Dreyfus' innocence ("Alfred Dreyfus and the 'Dreyfus Affair'") – a fact likely known to every Soviet intellectual.

In another reference, the poet self-identifies as a boy in Belostok. This alludes to the 1906 anti-Semitic pogrom in Belostok, a small city in the Jewish Pale of Settlement where a Christian mob killed as many as two hundred Jews (Lambroza 293). This allusion ties anti-Semitism to the Russian Empire, and specifically to the radical right-wing "Black Hundreds" group and to the anti-Semitic party, "The Union of the Russian People." Yevtushenko uses olfactory and gustatory imagery to depict the pogrom. He writes: "The barroom rabble-rousers give off a stench of vodka and onion" ("Babi Yar" by Yevgeny Yevtushenko"). The decision to mention vodka and onion emphasizes how unbearable it must have been to be near such a mob: vodka is hard on the throat, and onion makes your eyes teary.

Yevtushenko's poem also mentions Anne Frank, the young Jewish girl whose diary fleshed out her hopes and terrors as she hid from the Nazis in the Netherlands between 1942 and 1944 (Foray 330-331). Yevtushenko writes: "I seem to be Anne Frank transparent as a branch in

April... We are denied the sky. Yet we can do so much---tenderly embrace each other in a darkened room” (lines 35-42). Since there were many Jews that were killed in concentration camps during the Holocaust, Yevtushenko links the sky to freedom. The imagery of embracing evokes love but also the fear gripping the Jewish people in those awful years.

In general, “Babi Yar” highlights all sorts of injustices toward the Jews. The image of “grass that rustles” while the trees look upon in judgment captures the disgrace of a missing monument (49-51).

Since there was such fury over the Soviet anti-Semitism highlighted in the Thirteenth Symphony, there were two versions written (Norris, 1982). The first version depicted the Jews as the victims. Later, Yevtushenko rewrote Babi Yar to depict the victims not exclusively as Jews, but also including Russians, to soften the criticism of anti-Semitism— a concession to the official Soviet line (Steinback 244). Shostakovich did not wish to use the new censored version because he felt that it would silence his original opinion (Steinback 244). This is important to recognize because the goal of Babi Yar is to discuss an injustice for what really happened, not try to make it better, or censor it, in fear that the Soviet Union might not approve.

The end of the poem emphasizes Yevtushenko’s goal for his Russian audience: to stop ignoring what happened at Babi Yar and to remember the tragic deaths of Kiev’s Jews. Yevtushenko had long wanted to write a poem on anti-Semitism, and he immediately wrote it after he had seen Babi Yar with his own eyes: he was so agitated, he had to express his disappointment with the Soviet Union’s anti-Semitic history (116-117). Yevtushenko writes: “In their callous rage, all anti-Semites must hate me now as a Jew. For that reason, I am a true Russian!” (lines 64-66). Yevtushenko really wants Russians to put themselves in the shoes of a Jewish person, to care for all Jews. He thinks Russians are capable of this empathy: indeed, this

caring is what actually makes a true Russian (Yevtushenko 121-122). Ostriker writes that Soviet people knew about Babi Yar long before the poem was created, but they were silent (Ostriker 145-148). This poem broke the silence. Similar to Yevtushenko, Shostakovich was angry about Babi Yar; he wanted to further highlight the political controversy the poem initially caused in the *Literaturnaya Gazeta* because he knew it had long been out of the public's conscience (Hakobian 214). Thus, the entire Thirteenth Symphony was titled "Babi Yar," because Shostakovich wanted to speak of the injustice, the murder of the Jews, that the Soviet Union failed to remember.

## **Movement 2: Humor**

Author: Yevgeny Yevtushenko

Composer: Dmitrii Shostakovich

Tempo: Allegretto

Movement Written July 5<sup>th</sup>, 1962

Retrieved from ("Dmitri Shostakovich Works")

<http://shostakovich.hilwin.nl/op113.html>

Цари, короли, императоры,  
Властители всей земли  
Командовали парадом,  
Но юмором - не могли.

В дворцы именитых особ,  
все дни возлежащих выхоленно,  
являлся бродяга Эзоп,  
и нищими они выглядели.

В домах, где ханжа наследил  
Своими ногами щуплыми,  
Всю пошлость Ходжа Насреддин  
Сшибал, как шахматы, шутками.

Хотели юмор купить -  
Да только его не купишь!  
Хотели юмор убить -  
А юмор показывал кукиш!

Бороться с ним дело трудное.  
Казнили его без конца.  
Его голова отрубленная  
Качалась на пике стрельца.  
Но лишь скоморошья дудочки  
Свой начинали сказ  
Он звонко кричал:  
"Я туточки!" -  
И лихо пускался в пляс.

В потрёпанном куцем пальтишке,  
Понурясь и словно каясь,  
Преступником политическим  
Он, пойманный, шёл на казнь.  
Всем видом покорность выказывал:  
"Готов к неземному житью".  
Как вдруг из пальтишка выскальзывал,  
Рукою махал ...  
И тютю!

Tsars, kings, emperors, rulers of all the world,  
have commanded parades but couldn't  
command humor.

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 humor, but he just  
wouldn't be bought! They've wanted to kill  
humor, but humor 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  
screamed 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  
wiggled out of his coat, waved his hand and –  
bye-bye!

Юмор прятали в камеры,  
Да чёрта с два удалось.  
Решётки и стены каменные  
Он проходил насквозь.  
Откашливаясь простужено,  
как рядовой боец  
шагал он частушкой-простушкой с  
винтовкой  
на Зимний Дворец.

Привык он к взглядам сумрачным  
Но это ему не вредит,  
И сам на себя с юмором  
Юмор порою глядит.  
Он вечен.  
Он ловок и юрок.  
Пройдет через всё, через всех.  
Итак, да славится юмор!  
Он - мужественный человек.

They've hidden humor 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 humor  
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 humor!  
He's a brave fellow!

The poem titled “*Yumor*” (“Humor”) is recited in the second movement of Shostakovich’s Thirteenth Symphony. Marked Allegretto, the second movement is meant to be played almost twice as fast as the first movement, *Babi Yar* (Hurwitz 173). Indeed, the new movement is moderately fast, light, and quite graceful. While there is a sad tone in the first movement, the second movement is meant to be humorous for the audience. The poetic form follows a classic ABACA shape (Hurwitz 173).

The poem compares wily rulers to their subjects, who have used humor to escape unjust imprisonment and other punishments. (“*Nasreddin in Russia Newspaper*”). According to the poem, tsars, kings and emperors are lazy: they “spend their days sleekly reclining” (3-4). The poem implies that past rulers should have focused on serving their people instead of relaxing. The tsars, kings and emperors had a difficult time managing humor because it was uncontrollable.

“*Yumor*” is about the power of humor, specifically laughter, which the poet considers strong enough to overwhelm those in power (Hakobian 215). Humor is anthropomorphized as a prankster. The poem states: “It’s a difficult task to fight him. They [the authorities] execute him without fail” (14-15). The prankster “breaks into a jaunty dance” (18-19), and plays tricks on the authorities. The end of the poem treats the prankster as talented, even heroic. Although at several points the poem depicts humor being executed, humor survives because it is eternal: the authorities cannot kill it! The references to Nasreddin and Aesop show that oppression occurs all over the world and in all ages. Yevtushenko chose the folk character Nasreddin, because of his reputation of escaping from troubles through humor (“*Nasreddin in Russia Newspaper*”). The talented employ humor in spite of the rulers’ threats of retaliation. Yevtushenko writes: “So then, three cheers for humor! He’s a brave fellow!” (38-39).

Shostakovich integrated this poem to the symphony, and he cleverly connected it back to Babi Yar despite it being humorous. The immortality of humor connects back to the Babi Yar movement because Babi Yar was supposed to serve as a musical monument, something to be remembered forever, not something you can just forget about after death. In the Thirteenth Symphony, there is an allusion to what happened at Babi Yar as the authorities try to kill humor. The authorities try to chop off humor's head off and try sticking it onto a soldier's pike; however, humor comes back to life (Hurwitz 174). Thus, Shostakovich wanted the themes of remembrance and respect for the Babi Yar victims to be a highlighted theme in his symphony.

### **Movement 3: In the Store**

Author: Yevgeny Yevtushenko

Composer: Dmitrii Shostakovich

Tempo: Adagio

Movement Written July 9<sup>th</sup>

Retrieved from ("Dmitri Shostakovich Works")

<http://shostakovich.hilwin.nl/op113.html>

Кто в платке, а кто в платочке,  
как на подвиг, как на труд,  
в магазин поодиночке  
молча, женщины идут.

О! бидонов их бряцанье,  
звон бутылок и кастрюль!  
Пахнет луком, огурцами,  
пахнет соусом "Кабуль".

Зябну, долго в кассу стоя,  
но куда движусь к ней,  
от дыханья женщин стольких  
в магазине всё теплей.

Они тихо поджидают -  
боги добрые семьи,  
и в руках они сжимают  
деньги трудные свои.

Это женщины России.  
Это наша честь и суд.  
И бетон они месили,  
и пахали, и косили ...  
Всё они переносили,  
всё они перенесут.  
Всё на свете им посильно, -  
сколько силы им дано.  
Их обсчитывать постыдно.  
Их обвешивать грешно.

И, в карман пельмени сунув,  
я смотрю, суров и тих,  
на усталые от сумок  
руки праведные их.

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! 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.

The third movement “*V magazine*” (“In the Store”) celebrates the endurance and heroism of Soviet women during World War II. This movement is marked with the tempo Adagio (“Dmitri Shostakovich – Babi Yar”). It is a tribute to Russian women, which is symbolically represented through their patience as they wait in line at the store.

The poem describes women’s everyday tasks – from working as industrial laborers (“They have mixed concrete”) to farming (“They have ploughed, and harvested”), from waiting in line to buy food, to squeezing hard-earned cash in their calloused hands. They have endured a lot. Yevtushenko criticizes men who do not honor all that these women have done. In the poem, the narrator steals dumplings (“I shove dumplings into my pocket”): the store will now have to “short-change” and “short-weigh” these hard-working women to cover the losses caused by the narrator, who stole dumplings since he did not want to wait patiently in line (21-28).

Yevtushenko underscores how shameful it is to deceive these women laborers: he thinks their unbelievable grit must be appreciated and respected. Yevtushenko’s poem declares:

These are the women of Russia. They honor  
us and they judge us. They have mixed  
concrete, and ploughed, and harvested ...  
They have endured everything, they will  
continue to endure everything. (15-19).

Hurwitz explains that anyone who cheats these women should be punished, for they are amazing because of all that they have lived through (175). Thus, the narrator’s actions are regarded as the ultimate shame.

Just as the first movement, “Babi Yar,” serves as a literary monument honoring the Jews, this movement is a tribute to Russian women. Yevtushenko writes: “They [Russian women] wait quietly, their families’ guardian angels” (12-13). Additionally, the music of the piece created on castanets and woodblock is distinct because Shostakovich chose for it to closely resemble a

clock's ticking sound. The ticking sound serves as a reminder of passing time, of the rhythm of history during which women need to be honored and appreciated. Similarly, Babi Yar also needs to be remembered.

**Movement 4: Fears**

Author: Yevgeny Yevtushenko

Composer: Dmitrii Shostakovich

Tempo: Largo

Movement Written, July 16<sup>th</sup>

Retrieved from: ("Dmitri Shostakovich Works")

<http://shostakovich.hilwin.nl/op113.html>

Умирают в России страхи  
словно призраки прежних лет.  
Лишь на паперти, как старухи,  
кое-где ещё просят на хлеб.

Я их помню во власти и силе  
при дворе торжествующей лжи.  
Страхи всюду как тени скользили,  
проникали во все этажи.  
Потихоньку людей приручали  
и на всё налагали печать:  
где молчать бы -  
кричать приучали,  
и молчать -  
где бы надо кричать.

Это стало сегодня далёким.  
Даже странно и вспомнить теперь.  
Тайный страх перед чьим-то доносом,  
Тайный страх перед стуком в дверь.

Ну а страх говорить с иностранцем?  
С иностранцем-то что, а с женой?  
Ну а страх безотчётный остаться  
после маршей вдвоём с тишиной?

Не боялись мы строить в метели,  
уходить под снарядами в бой,  
но боялись порою смертельно  
разговаривать сами с собой.  
Нас не сбили и не растлили,  
и недаром сейчас во врагах,  
победившая страхи Россия,  
ещё больший рождает страх.

Страхи новые вижу, светлея:  
страх неискренним быть со страной,  
страх неправдой унижить идеи,  
что являются правдой самой!  
страх фанфарить до одурения,  
страх чужие слова повторять,  
страх унижить других недоверьем  
и чрезмерно себе доверять.

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.

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

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.

The fourth movement “*Strakhi*” or in English “Fears”, which highlights all of life’s terrors, is the only movement that Yevtushenko planned and wrote specifically for this symphony, upon request from Shostakovich (Lesser 179). Apparently, Shostakovich commissioned this poem because he himself felt a strong need to address the subject. In just forty-three lines the poem uses the words “*strakh*” [fear] and *strakhi* [fears] fifteen times, the verb *boiat’sia* [to fear, to be afraid] twice, the word *molchat’* [to be silent] twice; the poem also refers to *torzhestvuiushaia lozh’* [triumphing lie] once, to *donos* [denunciation] once, to the verb *fanfarit’* [to boast] once, to the construction *unizit’ drugikh* [to humiliate others] once. It recalls a time when triumphant lies “slithered everywhere like shadows, and intruded into every story of an apartment house.” It mentions *trainyi strakh pered stykom v dver’* [the secret fear of a knock on the door].

The poem invokes the fears of being untrue to one’s country, of distrusting others, and even over trusting yourself. Yevtushenko writes:

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 (27-30).

Fear haunted Russia in the past, and fear haunts Russian citizens in the poet’s day. The music uses a lot of quivering and vibrating sounds, known as trills, to punctuate how the body feels to be fearful during Stalin’s reign of terror (Hurwitz 177).

This movement, marked Largo, has the slowest tempo of all five movements. The tempo ranges typically from forty to sixty beats per minute, compared to sixty-six to seventy-six beats per minute in Adagio (Hurwitz 176). This movement is musically distinct from earlier

movements: “Fears” communicates suffocating terror through the use of the bassoon and bass clarinet. The poetic form of this movement is ABACDAEA.

Although the period from 1956 to 1962 witnessed two official campaigns to de-Stalinize the Soviet Union and thus to denounce fear, frightful things still occurred. During the decade from 1956 to 1965, nine out of every ten remaining synagogues in the Soviet Union were closed, and the government conducted systematic propaganda against Orthodox Christianity (“Jews and Jewish Life in Russia and the Soviet Union”). The poet exclaims: “Fears are dying out in Russia,” and yet he “sees new fears” – among them lacking the courage to confront injustice:

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. (35-40)

Like the narrator in the poem, Shostakovich had secretly feared “a knock at the door” and today feared not challenging injustice (15-16). Because of his own fear or simply to be cautious, he did not explicitly express negative judgments, however, about Soviet life in 1962. This poem fits into the symphony because it is a dark poem, just like Babi Yar. The poem ends with the narrator discussing the biggest fear, “not writing with all my strength” (40). This is related to the idea that Shostakovich’s music might not be powerful enough as a musical monument because it might be too subtle, and that would mean that his symphony’s message is in danger of not being clear for the audience.

**Movement 5: A Career**

Author: Yevgeny Yevtushenko

Composer: Dmitrii Shostakovich

Tempo: Allegretto

Movement Written on July 20<sup>th</sup>

Retrieved from: (“Dmitri Shostakovich Works”)

<http://shostakovich.hilwin.nl/op113.html>

Твердили пастыри, что вреден  
и неразумен Галилей,  
но, как показывает время:  
кто неразумней, тот умней.

Ученый, сверстник Галилея,  
был Галилея не глупее.  
Он знал, что вертится земля,  
но у него была семья.

И он, садясь с женой в карету,  
свершив предательство своё,  
считал, что делает карьеру,  
а между тем губил её.

За осознание планеты  
шёл Галилей один на риск.  
И стал великим он ...  
Вот это я понимаю - карьерист!

Итак, да здравствует карьера,  
когда карьера такова,  
как у Шекспира и Пастера,  
Гомера и Толстого ... Льва!

Зачем их грязью покрывали?  
Талант - талант, как ни клейми.  
Забыты те, кто проклинали,  
но помнят тех, кого кляли.

Все те, кто рвались в стратосферу,  
врачи, что гибли от холер, -  
вот эти делали карьеру!  
Я с их карьер беру пример.

Я верю в их святую веру.  
Их вера - мужество моё.  
Я делаю себе карьеру  
тем, что не делаю её!

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!

The fifth movement incorporates the poem “*Karyera*,” also known as “A Career” into the symphony. It refers to intellectuals like Galileo, Shakespeare, Pasteur, Newton, and Tolstoy, who stood up for the truth despite the consequences. The structure of the poem is ABACA form. The music accompanying this poem is marked Allegretto (Hurwitz 177).

Galileo was charged with heresy because he declared that the earth revolves around the sun – a position contradictory to the cosmology favored by the Catholic Church (“Galileo is convicted of heresy”). In 1616, after being tried by the Inquisition, Galileo renounced his radical position and was placed under house arrest for the rest of his life. Meanwhile, his books on heliocentrism were banned. In the nineteenth century, the Church removed its ban on reading Galileo’s books; in 1992, Pope John Paul II acknowledged that Galileo’s position on heliocentrism had been correct, and that the Church’s position had been erroneous (“Galileo is convicted of heresy”). In the Soviet Union, intellectuals of Yevtushenko’s day honored Galileo for his beliefs.

Yevtushenko’s poem “A Career” imagines an unknown scientist in Galileo’s time who also knew that the earth revolved the sun; however, unlike Galileo, this scientist kept quiet to protect his family (“He knew the earth revolved [around the sun], but he had a family.”). The poem depicts this anonymous contemporary of Galileo seated with his wife in a carriage after having denounced Galileo. The poem declares: “He imagined that he had made his career, but he had ruined it instead.” Yevtushenko writes:

For his discovery about our planet  
Galileo faced the risk alone,  
And he was a great man. (14-17)

The poet-narrator celebrates Galileo as a risk-taker who changed the world, and the poet-narrator approves of a “career” like that of Galileo, Shakespeare, Pasteur, Newton or Lev Tolstoy. He also praises those who “strove towards the stratosphere,” the doctors who “died of cholera.” (29-35). Ironically, the poet-narrator who so admires the “careers” of these heroic risk-takers, describes himself as a “careerist” – that is, someone resembling Galileo’s fearful contemporary. The poem bitterly asks about heroes: “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” (21 – 24). The poet condemns those who condemn others [*zabyty te, kto proklinali*].

The tempo of this movement is marked Allegretto (“Dmitri Shostakovich – Babi Yar”). Whereas the other movements focus primarily on past events, the fifth movement concentrates on the past and present moment in equal measure. The first movement, “Babi Yar,” is a reference to a historical tragedy. The second movement, “Humor” is commentary about the inability of tsars, emperors, and kings to rule. The third movement, “In the Store,” is a tribute to Soviet women. The fourth movement is about the fears in Stalinist Russia. Finally, the fifth movement defines for Soviet people the significance of a genuine “career” and the danger of being a mere “careerist.” This movement fits in with the idea of values identified in the poem because it brings into conscience that people need to recognize risk taking in careers as the right path. This movement is dedicated to those who stood up for what they believed to be the truth, regardless of how dangerous it was for them to believe something contradictory to what was deemed accepted. The courage of these brave people is why we remember them. Thus, remembrance as a theme is also present in this movement.

### Chapter III. Shostakovich's Politics

For many Soviet citizens in 1961 – 1962, the killings at Babi Yar remained controversial despite the passage of twenty years. Virtually all the Germans' victims on September 29 – 30, 1941 were Jews, targeted on the basis of the Nazis' anti-Semitism. Although the Babi Yar massacre was part of a genocidal "war against the Jews," in the Soviet Union there had been little discussion about the killings since the late 1940s, when the government ordered the confiscation of Il'ya Ehrenburg's and Vasilii Grossman's *Black Book* on the murder of Soviet Jews. In 1961 – 1962, however, Yevtushenko and Shostakovich used poetry and music to speak about the tragedy and to pay tribute to the slain Jews (Volkov 273).

Yevtushenko regarded poetry as an efficient way to spread news and opinions in a country where the mainstream media did not keep up with the rapid changes in the life of the country (MacAndrew 96). He wanted his poetry to be heard by a large audience large, so he spoke at mass poetry readings. He tried to speak truth, not what Soviet literary officials expected writers to say. Yevtushenko's duty was to remove the "dirt that was about to drown the ideals of my two vanished grandfathers."

On September 19, 1961, after his visit to Kiev, Yevgeny Yevtushenko published a poem, "Babi Yar," which addressed anti-Semitism — a taboo topic in the Soviet Union since the anti-Zionist campaigns of the late 1940s (Peterson 588). Yevtushenko and many other writers knew that 33,771 Jews had been killed at Babi Yar, yet newspaper accounts referred to the victims as "Soviets" or "Russians." Before reciting his poem, Yevtushenko recalled: "Ordinarily I recite my poems by heart but this time I was so agitated that I had to have the text in front of me" (MacAndrew 117). Even though Yevtushenko received criticism for writing Babi Yar, many in

his audience praised the poem's truthfulness. The reactions were not unique to this circumstance: after reciting other poems, he heard insults but also applause (MacAndrew 111).

Like Yevtushenko, Shostakovich opposed Soviet anti-Semitism. Shostakovich took note that Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev had attacked Yevtushenko's poem, and that Yevtushenko had held his ground (Miller). Khrushchev had declared that Yevtushenko's poem had ignored the real "historical facts"; according to Khrushchev, the poem's problem, so it was therefore irrelevant (Miller). The controversy swirling around "Babi Yar" made Shostakovich determined to speak about anti-Semitism: he remembered the official anti-cosmopolitan campaign of the late 1940s. Having read Yevtushenko's poem, Shostakovich felt a conscience-bound to bring the unspoken murder of Jewish people into public awareness ("Dmitri Shostakovich, Symphony No. 13, OP. 113 'Babi Yar'"). In earlier musical pieces, Shostakovich may have expressed his opinion on political issues through folk music "quotations" and through elaborate musical references to psychological contexts (Volkov 271). After reanalyzing the language he used in his music, he decided that incorporating Yevtushenko's poetry into his music would convey a stronger remembrance of the Jewish lives lost in Babi Yar (Volkov 272). Thus, Shostakovich proceeded to set Yevtushenko's poem into music. Interestingly enough, Shostakovich wrote Babi Yar almost entirely while he was at a hospital in 1962 (Lesser 209). Shostakovich once said: "I am thinking much about life, death and careers... Well, it's because I have undoubtedly lived longer than I should have done" (Lesser 209).

The Thirteenth Symphony frightened several conductors, who did not want to risk conducting a politically controversial piece (Lesser 181). When Kirill Kondrashin agreed to conduct the symphony's premiere, Soviets bureaucrats tried to change his mind in order to interfere with the premiere (Volkov 272). The problem with Shostakovich's symphony was that

it dramatically confronted authorities responsible for anti-Semitic policy. It used music to emphasize the words of Yevtushenko's poem. Unlike Shostakovich's previous symphonies, which he created on his own, resisting the revisions and help of others, the Babi Yar Symphony was truly a collaborative project (Lesser 73).

As I noted above, "Babi Yar" is a significant poem because Yevtushenko stands in solidarity with the Jewish people despite the absence of Jewish blood in his veins. He uses the slogan, "Beat Yids, save Russia," to emphasize the cry shouted by the Black Hundreds in the pogroms (Gellately 69). Yevtushenko's poem recognizes the fact that, for a long time, Jews have been targets of violence. As a Russian, he finds such violence unacceptable. In addition to the poem conveying a message literally and musically, it also has a lot of graphic allusions, where you can picture the little boy from Belostok or the grass rustling with the wind. This makes the piece artistically stronger.

In his poem Yevtushenko refers to the revolutionary song, "Internationale" (Katz). He writes:

Nothing in me shall ever forget!

The "Internationale" let it thunder

when the last antisemite on earth is buried forever. (Yevtushenko, 1961)

Since Yevtushenko writes about the "Internationale" instead of the State Anthem of the Soviet Union, he wants his audience to grasp that Russia shouldn't be ethnocentric (Katz). Instead, Russians should return to the values of the earlier anthem — acceptance of everyone in the human race.

Having read Yevtushenko's poetry, Shostakovich asked Yevtushenko for permission to musicalize the poem. This was not the first time that Shostakovich publicly defended the Jews,

for he had protested against official mistreatment of Soviet Jews, such as the actor Shlomo Mikhoels, who was arrested and murdered on Stalin's order in 1948 (Volkov 246). In an interview with BBC News, Yevtushenko said: "We have to write about such things. We cannot allow future generations to forget" ("Babi Yar Massacre: Poet Yevgeny Yevtushenko Recollects"). Thus, it made sense that Yevtushenko helped Shostakovich further emphasize the injustice of Soviet anti-Semitism and the need to recognize the forgotten Jewish people. Shostakovich shared the same empathy for Jews that Yevtushenko did (Volkov 273). For this reason, Shostakovich wrote about the Jews. Additionally, like his poem "A Career," he took a risk that most people would not take in their careers; however, this led to him creating a symphony that is partly the reason for why he is also remembered today.

Yevtushenko's poem impacted the people of Russia, because of, not in spite of, its political content. The fact that he made himself vulnerable and put himself into the shoes of Jewish people showed that his pain for the persecution of Jews was wholehearted. He constantly inserted himself into the poem using first-person, indicating empathy for the Jews. By giving his honest opinion, he voiced the unspoken truth felt by many genuine Russians. Yevtushenko imagines himself as a Jew, but he ends the poem still preserving his identity as a Russian:

There is no Jewish blood that's blood of mine,

But, hated with a passion that's corrosive

Am I by antisemites like a Jew.

And that is why I call myself a Russian! (Yevtushenko, 1961)

He is Russian because he is conscious of the truth. Russians should care and remember Babi Yar because the pain they felt for the lost lives of people was similar to the pain the Jewish people felt towards the Jews they had lost.

Shostakovich's contribution to addressing anti-Semitism was significant because he combined two forms of art, poetry and music, to remember Babi Yar. Shostakovich used elements of Jewish music, specifically Jewish intonations, in the Thirteenth Symphony, as he had done in certain quartets and other musical pieces he wrote (Kirkman 38). The combination of poetry and music expressed the emotion he wanted the audience to experience.

#### **Chapter IV. Conclusion**

While all the movements of the symphony are related to Soviet life, Shostakovich's greater intent was to unify the five themes by bringing ideas into conscience. The poems used in the symphony discuss the need for a monument at Babi Yar, irrepressible irreverence of humor, the strength of women, and the power of both moral courage and art to preserve truth.

The first poem "Babi Yar" is the title Shostakovich chooses for the Thirteenth Symphony, because it brings the movements together in some form or another, with the goal of the movements representing a literary monument altogether. "Babi Yar" is a dark poem evoking the massacre of many Jews. It is connected with movement two, "Humor," because humor the hero cannot be killed. The second movement exhibits the authorities' violence toward the prankster humor, and thus refers to the way the Germans slaughtered Jews at Babi Yar in 1941. The third movement connects to Babi Yar by referring to mistreating women and disrespecting them — that is, to the lack of respect for human dignity that had led to the killing of non-Russians at Babi Yar. The fourth movement is similar to "Babi Yar," because it also has a dark theme. It talks about living in fear in Stalinist Russia: Soviet people harbored the "secret fear of a knock at the door.". The fifth movement is connected to "Babi Yar," because it talks about the dangerousness of speaking the truth, like bringing into awareness that a monument is missing at Babi Yar. Shostakovich risked his career when he composed the "Babi Yar" symphony. He

could have been punished for creating music that was “cosmopolitan,” but he did his best to bring ideas together through more than just music. His symphony used poetry, imagery, and scenery in the premiere to convey his message: to bring repressed aspects of Soviet life to public awareness.

Along with Yevtushenko and Shostakovich, other artists like Kuznetsov and Volkov expressed disappointment over the missing monument at Babi Yar (Peterson 598). It is clear that even though Shostakovich’s symphony did not explicitly ask for a monument, it addressed a festering problem. He wanted Russians to overcome their fear of authorities, to do the right thing. At long last, in 1976, eleven bronze statues were raised at Babi Yar. Among these statues were a Communist guerrilla fighter, a Red Army soldier with clenched fist, and a sailor. None of the bronze figures represented the Jewish victims (“Ukraine to Allocate \$1 Million for Babi Yar Memorial.”). Fortunately, Yevtushenko’s poem “Babi Yar” and Shostakovich's Thirteenth Symphony will outlast the bronze markers as memorials to Kiev’s murdered Jews. It was not until 1991, after the fall of the Soviet Union, that the victims at Babi Yar finally got a commemoration with a menorah-shaped monument (“Ukraine to Allocate \$1 Million for Babi Yar Memorial”). The Thirteenth Symphony, which antedated the Babi Yar menorah by three decades, represented the unspoken truth Russian citizens were too afraid to express. It used the taboo topic anti-Semitism, found in Yevtushenko’s “Babi Yar,” as the basis for raising public awareness of the Soviet Union’s darkest problems.

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