

From civic choice to civic voice: the way to dissidence of the Russian poet Alexander Galich

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1. Introduction

1.1 Civic choice in the dissident poetry of Alexander Galich

Civic duty and civic choice of an artist occupy an important place in the poetry of Alexander Galich. An artist is perceived as a general label for any type of artist, not only a writer or a poet. An artist for Galich is a person endowed with talent, which enables him not only to present his own thoughts in a very convincing and expressive manner, but also to communicate these thoughts to his co-citizens, reach for their hearts and minds and make them ponder over certain matters.

A writer has a voice of his own and this voice was especially important in Soviet Russia, where only officially recognized and approved writers' elite had a physical and legal opportunity to publish their work. The irony and paradox of the situation was of course in the fact that in order to maintain the right of speech a writer was obliged to remain his master's loyal poodle and every line, he wrote, had to be approved by the ubiquitous censorship. Naturally, every talented and civically aware writer was bound, sooner or later, to be confronted with a difficult choice: (i) to speak his mind and try to publish his work, thereby endangering his own existence and that of his family, (ii) to write 'for the drawer', meaning to write freely, following his heart and vocation, but without even trying to publish, just hoping that his work might be published in the future, if the political situation changes, or else (iii) to smother his own free voice and write, whatever the establishment wanted to hear.

This choice between duty and conscience, between the desire of real artistic freedom and self-preservation instinct is ever present in the work Galich. In order to understand the importance of this topic for the author himself, one only has to measure its 'quantitative' occurrence in Galich's poetry. The author addresses this topic in about fifty poems, meaning in every third poem he wrote, considering that his dissident work comprises just about one hundred and fifty poems in total.

This paper is dedicated to the analysis of some of these poems. All citations used have been taken from the electronic edition of Galich's poetry, called *When I come back* (*Kogda ya vernus'*) at <http://www.lib.ru/KSP/galich/galich.txt> (1998). As the original quotations are all in Russian, I have translated them myself into English in order to present them to the English-speaking audience. However, it is necessary to stress here that these translations are merely meant to convey the content but not the form, nor do they by no means carry an aspiration to be read as a literary work. There are, of course, official translations of a number of Galich's poems into English by Joseph Langland, Tamas Aczel & Laszlo Tikos (1977), by Gerald Stanton Smith (1983), as well translations by Gerry Smith for a musical record produced in Israel (1974/1975). However, it did not seem expedient for the purpose of this paper to use the above-mentioned translations because (i) not all of the poems quoted below have been translated, (ii) literary, artistic poetry translation invariably contains changes, additions and omissions in the text, which makes them less useful as an illustration for a scientific paper.

The titles of poems are given in English translation in italics with a Russian transcription in italics in brackets. Underlined text in the quotations does not come from the original text, but

have been added for this paper in order to mark important fragments. Footnotes with an explanation are given for a number of proper nouns and cultural references. The bibliographic references to Russian sources are given in English transcription.

1.2 Place of civic choice in Galich's work

Civic choice occupies a special place in the multitude of subjects addressed by Galich. His topics are in general characterized by the polarity of two contradictory forces : Good and Evil. Galich's Good and Evil are not always univocal nor are they easily recognizable, they switch places once in a while, just as in Soviet society, which was in its way an upside-down structure, where Evil pretended to serve common good and Good was accused of being evil. This can be seen in the poem *Conjuration of Good and Evil* (*Zaklinanie Dobra i Zla*):

Conjuration of Good and Evil:

But Good is, as it is well known, called Good for a reason,
Because it can pretend to be kind and brave,
And turn black into white, if necessary,
And turn merry mercury into silver.

Good is ubiquitous.
Good has everything in its power.
But better be careful with this mister Good.
For I am ready to run away from him as fast as I can
And seek refuge in any hole, anyplace!...(translation L.R.)
 (Galich 1998)

Man is constantly under the influence of these two poles in Galich's work, but man is not a powerless pawn without a will of his own, he can make his own choice consciously, for which he is fully responsible to himself and to society. The greater the influence his choice has on others the bigger is his responsibility. Perhaps, a writer bears more responsibility for his civic choice in Galich's opinion, since a writer was privileged to have a right of speech in Soviet Russia, while millions of others were deprived of it.

1.3 Ways of addressing the civic choice topic

As it was mentioned before, this topic is present in one third of all poems, written by Galich; these poems can be roughly divided in groups according to the manner, in which the topic is addressed and the level of concreteness. As a result of such a conventional division two groups can be formed according to the level of concreteness: (i) poems mentioning really existing writers and (ii) poems dealing with the civic choice duty in general. Each of these groups can be subsequently divided in two sub-groups. Poems referring to real people can be divided into (i) poems dealing with the personal choice of Galich and (ii) the choice of other authors. Poems regarding the issue of civic duty in general can be divided into (i) those, putting writer's civic duty into the broader context of conscience and (ii) those, addressing the civic duty of every person and not just of an artist.

Certainly, such division is not only conventional but also artificial since the boundaries between concrete references and generalizations, between autobiographic references and references to other writers are not clearly visible nor are they always straight forward, they are often intertwined within the text of one and the same poem.

Since this particular paper deals with the civic choice of the author himself, it contains only an analysis of the poems and autobiographic elements, in which Galich in one or another way mentions his own civic choice.

2. Personal choice of Alexander Galich

2.1 Biographical parallel

It is hardly a coincidence that the issues of civic duty and civic choice have become of a paramount importance in Galich's work because Galich as a dissident was born from Galich a conformist, a talented but otherwise loyal to the regime actor, script-writer and film producer.

Many topics in his dissident poetry were not anchored in his personal experience. He did not spend long years in the Gulag-camps suffering from 'the cold, the guards, the lice' (*Fantasies on the Russian theme for a singer accompanied by an orchestra and two soloists – a tenor and a baritone*, (*Fantazii na Russkii temy dlya golosa s orkestrom i dvuch solistov – tenora i baritona*, Galich 1998), he did not lead a miserable existence like his poor and pitiful characters. Before he became a dissident, Galich was a successful and a well-off artist, a favorite of fortune, who lived 'like a lord' (Kim (a) 1988:10; Kim (б) 1988 : 91; Akel'kin 1988: 12), a sybarite, who knew neither hardship, nor bad luck. The only pain he had experienced himself and an insight he had gained through personal suffering was his dilemma of civic choice.

The whole work of Galich may be considered an example of realism, everything he wrote looks like snapshots, footage, short films or documentaries but two subjects appear even more real because they are autobiographic, these are the subject of civic choice and the closely connected to it the subject of conscience.

The authorities were furious about Galich's personal choice because it was a purely moral choice, not influenced by personal circumstances (like in case of Solzhenitsyn) of family history (like in case of Okudzhava). Neither Galich nor his family besides his cousin (Shatalov 1991(б):177) were ever persecuted by the Soviet regime. Galich openly sang his dissident songs for the first time at the festival Bard-68 (the Russian name for singers-authors) in Novosibirsk, when he was already fifty years old. This means that he had only ten more years to go until his retirement with all the perks and privileges he would have had as a member of the prestigious Writers' Union and Cinematographers' Union, with access to special shops and resorts scattered all over the country, enjoying all the due respect and wealth (Svobodin 1988:32; Zhovtis 1988:141).

Then suddenly came such a dramatic 180-degree turn, at least it seemed sudden to outsiders and caused many violent and even virulent reactions, from astonishment to plain indignation (Michalyov 1990:63; Shatalov 1991(a):8). For instance, the playwright Arbuzov accused Galich of pretending to be someone else and misappropriating other people experiences since Galich had never been imprisoned and had never known hardship or poverty (Nagibin 1989:195), «it would had been different if he had been imprisoned himself!...» (*translation L.R.*). Galich's later reaction to this accusation was: «They do understand the saying «Vengeance is mine; I will repay», but the saying «Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends » - is quite incomprehensible for a modern soviet philistine.» (Galich 1991:177) (*translation L.R.*).

Galich's first official concert became his last one as could be expected (Zhovtis 1988:140; Zyslin 2005). Later, he only sang for friends and at private, unofficial concerts organized for a small audience in private apartments but the audio records of these concerts spreaded quickly all over the country. Galich's fame reached the West and in 1969 the publishing house Posev published a first book of his poetry called *Songs (Pesni)* (Galich 1969), on the cover of which Galich was described as a former prisoner of Gulag who had spent almost twenty years in the camps. This embarrassing mistake and lack of understanding among his colleagues made it obvious for Galich that it was indeed necessary to clarify his choice to become a dissident. He may have felt the need to explain that civic awareness sufficed to act according to one's conscience and that he made this step consciously.

2.2 Galich about his choice

This paper aims only at the analysis of Galich's poetry, all other extra-textual sources such as interviews, letters, memoirs etc. fall outside its scope.

Everything that Galich mentioned in his poems about his choice to become a dissident can be, once again conventionally, divided into (1) motives, (2) consequences and a hind-sight evaluation of the made choice, and (3) estimation of the historical impact of his rebellion.

2.2.1 Motives: Galich as a Decembrist

Galich describes his motives in two ways: (i) by drawing an analogy between himself and other historical personalities/ events and (ii) by speaking directly about himself. Since allegory and Aesopian language are not typical of his poetry (Ostrovsky 2002), one could assume that the narrator in the selected poems expresses author's point of view.

2.2.1.1 Parallel between Galich and historical personalities/ events

The three most important poems in this group are *Petersburg Romance (Peterburgsky romans)*, *In the Memory of Zhivago (Pamyati Zhivago)* and *Hussar's Song (Gusarskaya pesnya)*, all of them are directly or indirectly connected to the beginning of the 19th century and the Decembrist Revolt of 1825. Galich uses two techniques to draw parallels : (i) epigraphs and (ii) historical references. It is known from the testimonies of his friends and colleagues that Galich knew a lot of poetry by heart, including the poetry from the above-mentioned period; it is also known that he liked to quote and even to rewrite other authors' texts, that is actually how first of his own poems came into being (Krylov 2001; Volin 1979). Intertextuality is ever present in his own poetry, including the three above-mentioned poems, where the epigraph, the historical context and Galich's own situation are melted in one kernel of meaning.

It is possible that Galich found the subject of the Decembrists inspiring and he identified himself with them to a certain degree. Also his alias «Galich» (his real last name was Ginsburg) is connected to the topic, even though there are different hypotheses about its origin. According to one of them, the alias was a surname of Alexander Ivanovich Galich, who taught Latin in the Imperial Lyceum, gave lesson to Pushkin and was also professor at the university of Saint-Petersburg; he was fired by the university for his liberal ideas (Novikov 1990:65). This association might seem a bit far-fetched but it is known that Galich was very fond of Pushkin's poetry and knew it really well, he was also very proud of the fact he was born on the day when the Imperial Lyceum was opened, it may be also important that

Galich's uncle, professor of the university of Moscow, specialized in Pushkin. (Kandel' 1994:153).

A parallel with the Decembrists is made in the poem *Petersburg Romance*, which is dedicated to the December Revolt. The first two stanzas picture the main character of the poem, colonel Trubetskoi, the only mature participant of the revolt, who, in the end, failed to find enough courage to come to the Senate Square, where the revolt took place (Frizman 2001: 34-36). However these stanzas are applicable to Galich as well:

...I wish I were a bit calmer,
Don't just seem but be!
 ...Bridges are like horses here -
 Prancing at night!

There are always troops standing here
 In a square formation at dawn -
 From the Synod* to the Senate¹,
 Like four lines of text! (Galich 1998)

Being calm in Galich's work is usually associated with being passive and indifferent, if one looks, for instance, at another poem *Train (Poyezd)*, in which the author lashes out against people who are deaf to the call of conscience:

We have such a **calm** disposition,
That we effortlessly
Consider a devious way to be
The shortest of ways.
 ...
 In our age of speed we live
 Half asleep, not really alive among the living...
Not hearing one's conscience is
The most convenient form of eccentricity!
 (Galich 1998)

The same tranquility is present in the quotation from Karamzin, which serves as an epigraph to the poem *Petersburg Romance*:

"He deserves no pity,
 ...he is himself to blame for all his troubles,
Since he endures things, that no one can endure without being a scoundrel..."
 N. Karamzin
 (Galich 1998)

The last three stanzas take the reader back to the present and draw a parallel with the past:

Oh for how long,
 Not only here but everywhere
 Pytor Klodt's horses²
 Will obey their bridles?!

In the same way, not any easier,
 Our time puts us to a test -
 Can you come to the square,
 Do you dare to come to the square,
Can you come to the square,
Do you dare to come to the square,
At the agreed hour?!

¹ The Synod and the Senate are two buildings on the Senate Square in Saint-Petersburg, where the revolt took place. (comment L.R.)

² Pytor Klodt's four famous sculptures – wild horses are to be found on a bridge in Saint-Petersburg (comment L.R.)

Where troops are standing waiting
 In a square formation at dawn -
 From the Synod to the Senate,
 Like four lines of text!
 22 August 1968 r.
 (Galich 1998)

In this part of the poem the author speaks of the present time about the rebels fighting against the 'bridle' of the Soviet regime and the dilemma they are facing now. Interestingly, this poem is dated while most of Galich's poems are not. This can indicate a special and an important date, August 1968 was such a date: on 21 August Soviet troops invaded Czechoslovakia and their tanks crushed all liberal thinking in this country for decades. Many Soviet people were sincerely offended by these events but only few dared to speak about it openly. Nevertheless, seven people literally came to the square on 25 August 1968 (Frizman 2001:38; Sviridov 2001:130), only to the Red Square in Moscow and not to the Senate Square in Leningrad (Frizman 1992:14). Galich was not among them, he came to the square already before that, in March 1968, his 'square' became the stage of the Bard-68 festival in Novosibirsk.

The parallel between Galich and the Decembrists is going even further since his social status is comparable with theirs and in both cases it caused the fury of the powers that be. In both cases the rebels belonged to the elite, who had nothing to complain about, who were well off, respected members of the society and who rebelled purely out of principle in the name of others. The reason for indignation of the authorities was reflected in the joke of Rostopchin³, which became well-known thanks to the Russian writer Nekrasov:

Cobblers in Europe rebel to become gentry,
 Which is quite understandable!
In Russia it is the aristocracy who rebel:
Do they want to become cobblers or what?»
 (Frizman 2001: 33).

This short verse about the Decembrists is applicable to Galich too.

The next poem chosen for analysis, *In the Memory of Zhivago*, contains an autobiographic association with another uprising, namely the October uprising of cadets in Moscow in 1917. This poem, just as the previous one, has an epigraph, this time from Pushkin. This epigraph allows to understand the autobiographic association:

"...Two oxen, pulling a cart, were slowly
 going up a steep hill. Some Georgians
 were walking beside the cart.
 - Where are you coming from? - I asked them.
 - From Teheran".
 - What is in the cart?
 - Griboyedov".⁴
 A. Pushkin "Travel to Erzerum"
 (Galich 1998) (translation L.R.)

Griboyedov was killed by a furious mob during an insurgence in Teheran in 1829. In the poem *In Memory of Zhivago* Moscow cadets are also fighting a dangerous mob of fanatics,

³ Rostopchin was a conservative statesman during the rule of the tsar Paul I.
 (Comment L.R.)

⁴ Griboyedov was a famous Russian writer, poet and diplomat. (Comment L.R.)

only this time there are not religious fanatics, who killed Griboyedov in Iran, but communist fanatics during the October Revolution:

Moscow is again in the rage of fires,
 Filthy ice crust is covered in blood,
Only this time the enemy is not the Mongols,
This is a home-grown foe who is even worse than Chengiz-Khan!

With a premonition of a terrible end
 October rages from the early morning on,
 The cadets are trying to break through
 In single file on Malaya Nikitskaya⁵,

Stop it, leave it, stand down!
We already know the result!
The snow will have to melt down and
Disappear together with the blood in the sewer.

But their repeated shouting
 - Hurrah! - is heard through the muffled shooting.
 And the hair of the Moscow snobs
 Is dancing along with the rhythm of the shots!
 (Galich 1998)

This is a description of another rebellion launched purely out of principle. The last stanzas of the poem take the reader back to the present, just as in *Petersburg Romance*, thereby making a parallel with the Soviet era and warning the reader that history might repeat itself:

You will start crying and will even
 Bend down racked with dull pain.
While someone cheeky will waive
His cap over the crowd in frenzy!

Cheeky, belligerent, frenetic
He will start stirring up the populace!..
And carts with their bloody load
Are squeaking by the Nikitsky gate...^{6*}

So there is it, your victory!
"The dawn of that long-awaited day!"
"What is in the cart?" -
"Griboyedov".
For whom the funeral bell tolls? -
For me!
 (Galich 1998)

The «cheeky and frenetic» character with a «cap» is possibly an allusion to Lenin, who was famous for his passionate speeches, waiving his cap at the crowd, and who managed to stir up the mob, which obliterated everything on its way, just like the mob, which killed Griboyedov. The same kind of mob, instigated by ideological nonsense can rise anytime and kill new rebels, including Galich.

The third historical poem with an autobiographical reference is dedicated to one of the ideological predecessors of Galich, a 19th-century dissident poet, Alexander Polezhaev, who suffered persecution for his subversive poems after the December Revolt. The poem dedicated

⁵ Malaya Nikitskaya is a street in Moscow. (Comment L.R.)

⁶ Nikitsky gate is a place in Moscow. (Comment L.R.)

to Polezhaev, called *Hussar's Song*, belongs to the so-called 'Alexandrian series' of Galich, which includes dedications to three Alexanders: Blok, Polezhaev and Vertinsky. From these three the destiny of Polezhaev is most comparable to that of Galich since they were both dissident poets and both were persecuted for this. Galich tentatively points out the resemblance in the first two stanzas:

From a Palekh miniature^{7*}
 Somebody made a tapestry
 With Alexander Polezhaev
 In a black felt cloak on a horse.

He is my namesake and secret envy
 Warms up my heart!
 Secret envy, "lethal" envy-
 As doctors would say.

(Galich 1998)

Further on Galich describes the arrest of Polezhaev:

The trouble happened after midnight,
 But not as a bullet in the head,
 Just a cart that departed
 into the night with great significance.

So that is it, no singing, no vodka,
 No toasting with a glass!
Just three people in the cart,
Polezhaev in the middle, a policemen on every side.

(Galich 1998)

Still further on, Galich brings Polezhaev's situation nearer to his own:

Where are your friends and comrades now?
There is nobody to save you!
It all began with a song.
And then it went on and on!

Now there is suffering like torture in front of you...
Now you can think about what to do,
To become a poet,
Or to go straight to a madhouse...

(Galich 1998)

The expression «it all began with a song» is ambiguous in this context: on the one hand, it is a Russian colloquial expression for the beginning of all trouble, on the other hand, it also has a literally meaning, which refers particularly to Galich and not to Polezhaev, who never wrote songs, only poems and never try to sing them.

In the end of the poem Galich again establishes a parallel between himself and Polezhaev:

Oh artist, leave the fantasy,
Don't make heroes out of us,
The destiny gave us no banner,
But a bloody handkerchief...

(Galich 1998)

The plural pronoun 'us' is a link between the two poets, just like their views and destiny.

⁷ Palekh miniature is a Russian folk handicraft of miniature painting. (Comment L.R.)

2.2.1.2 Galich about himself

In this group of poems, there are six especially salient ones: *I choose freedom* (*Ya vybirayu svobodu*), *A draft of an Epitaph* (*Chernovik epitafii*), *Without a title* (*Bez nazvaniya*), *Falling asleep and waking up* (*Zasypanya i prosypayas'*), *An evening stroll* (*Vechernii progulki*), and *The Holy Spring* (*Svyashchennaya vesna*), the last one is the only one, in which the author not so much as motivates his choice but describes his way to it.

In the first part of *An Evening Stroll*, a poem consisting of several separate pieces, Galich describes his thoughts while walking next to a church:

Have you been to the Church of the Saviour on Blood?
There is a garden there with paths
And shade.
Why don't we take a walk before going to sleep,
And chat about the oddities of love?

It is getting dark.
It is a blessed time for cats.
Oblique shadows crawl over the curtains,
And I am ready to confess in whisper to pride,
I am ready to confess to bloody anything!

It is time to relieve those who are tired of hanging on the cross
It is time to sew epaulettes on to my sweater,
And to become a poet even though in my old age,
And never to write anything trivial anymore!
(Galich 1998)

The third stanza regards Galich exclusively, it was him, who became a real poet and started to speak his mind 'in his old age'. The author leaves no doubt about his self-sacrifice: «It is time to relieve those who are tired of hanging on the cross», i.e. Jesus Christ. Galich became an orthodox Christian of his own accord, following his own conviction, there are many biblical references in his poetry so this comparison to Christ is not a coincidence. The third stanza contains yet another important reference «to sew epaulettes on to my sweater», on the sweater, in which Galich is so often seen on photographs. These epaulettes refer to the uniform of the Decembrists and of the cadets.

The motives behind this radical step are given in the poem *Without a Title*:

So my hair has turned grey,
The crows around me are shouting!
"Don't judge and you won't be judged..." -
Liars are entreating me.

...
Lets us, my friends
triple our forces,
"You leave us alone, we leave you alone..." -
So we sang! And more than once!..

"Do not judge!"
Be meeker than Abel.
Bring thanks on your knees for food and a roof over your head...
OK, there was some writer Babel,⁸
And then he was no more, so what!

" Do not judge!"

⁸ Isaac Babel was a Russian writer, died during Stalin's repressions. (Comment L.R.)

There is no measure,
 All is allowed except for words...
OK, there was some Marina⁹
Who choked in a noose, so what!

"Do not judge!"
 Go on painting beautiful dawns,
 Playing the Domino game...
OK, there was some moron in a camp who
Kept shouting about 'Fedra'¹⁰, so what!

- I will never hear the famous 'Fedra'
 In an ancient theatre!..
 ...He will never hear the famous 'Fedra'
 In an ancient theatre! -

My judgment is veiled by my ignorance,
 So I plea to a historian:
 'Share a least a little bit
 Of your knowledge and wisdom with me!'

'I am not seeking to become a dissenter,
 I am ready to abide by the rules!
 Put my worries at rest,
 Explain it to me, stupid as I am!'
 But the historian replies:
 "I know no other country like this..."¹¹

Be happy, go on voting,
Go on marching in rows,
Those, who are chosen, can judge,
Entry is forbidden to all others!

Oh, how terribly quickly
 We are turning grey...
" Don't judge and you won't be judged..."
So that is it then, don't judge?!

So that is it then, sleep well
And drop your coins daily in the metro?!
Why would we judge and arbitrate?!
" You leave us alone, we leave you alone..."

No! This way of life is despicable
in its very essence!
Those, who are chosen, can judge,?!
I have not been chosen, but I am a judge!
 (Galich 1998)

This poem contains the same references to age as *An evening Stroll* «So my hair has turned grey», «We are turning grey», and just like in *Petersburg Romance*, Galich condemns the tranquility of people, which enables the authorities to do, whatever they like.

Galich also assumes the role of a judge and avenger in the poem *Going to sleep and waking up*:

⁹ Marina Tsvetaeva was a Russian poet, arrested during the Stalin's repressions, who committed suicide by hanging herself. (Comment L.R.)

¹⁰ 'Fedra' is an opera. (Comment L.R.)

¹¹ This is quotation from a song idealizing communist Russia. (Comment L.R.)

January snow has covered everything,
 Long nights have become colder...
 Just because I am supposed to,
 I am asking forgiveness from people.

Sparrows sit hidden in their nesting boxes,
 Starlings have flown away beyond the seas...
Oh sinners, forgive, a sinner,
Oh villains, forgive me, a villain!

My Shabbat star is shining,
 Indifferent to flattering or insult...
 I will put on clean underwear,
 And put seven candles on the table.

Stupid musician will fill the coming night with noise:
 The devilish noise of wind and blizzard...
 I will fall asleep and in my dream I will smell
 Wet wool, snow and fire.

And then from an endless past
 I will hear the weak voice of
 Arina Rodionovna¹² saying:
 "Nit gedaige¹³, sleep, my son."

Prisoner's robe has rotten away in the disinfection block,
All the grieves are left behind us,
Around the Babi Yar¹⁴ there is laughter and music...
So all is well, sleep well, my son.

Sleep well, but in your fist hold a weapon -
An ancient sling of David!"
...People will forgive out of indifference,
But I will not forgive them their indifference!
 (Galich 1998)

Galich is not about to forgive anyone for anything, including himself, because he also went with the stream for a long time, he also dropped daily 'coins in the metro'. In the second stanza he calls himself a sinner and a villain and not only in this poem but also in a number of other poems, in which he often assumes joint responsibility for the tragedy of Soviet society by using the pronoun 'we' to indicate the guilty, for example in the poems *Train (Poezd)*, *Golddiggers waltz (Staratel'sky walsok)*, *A Ballad about Clean Hands (Ballada o chitych rukach)* (Frizman 1992:10-11).

In the poem *A draft of an Epitaph*, he presents the way of dissent as a moral duty of a decent person:

I suffered so much, oh so much...
 But the moment I start talking about it,
There comes a question about where I got these ideas from,
Where I heard them, who put them in my head?
 ...
It is actually not my pain,
So why am I rushing into fight?
Because I was called into this fight by my destiny,
Like a soldier called by a trumpet!

¹² Arina Rodionovna - the nurse of Pushkin (Comment L.R.)

¹³ "Nit gedaige" - yiddish, «don't be upset» (Comment L.R.)

¹⁴ Babi Yar is the place where the Nazis massacred thousands of Jews during the II World War

...
Would it have been easier for you to understand,
That what I did, I did because I listened to my conscience or because of other
reasons?
 Why do I keep sounding the alarm like a guard,
 Hitting myself till I bleed?!
 (Galich 1998)

Galich says quite unambiguously that he became dissident following the call of his conscience, that nobody influenced his decision, that he decided to protect others, who were in pain, and that he did not have any other choice. In one of his last interviews in Russia he said: «I understood that I could no longer continue like this, that I had to start speaking my mind, had to start telling the truth» (Galich 1989:7)

The same undertone is present in the poem *I Choose Freedom*:

...
I choose Freedom, -
But not the freedom to flee the fight but to rush into it,
I choose Freedom
Just to be myself.

...
 Your lies are not sweeter,
 Then the pride of my suffering,
 The freedom of rationed food,
 The freedom of a gulp of water.

I choose Freedom,
 Today I am drinking together with it.
I choose the freedom of
Norilsk and Vorkuta.¹⁵

Where a whip will dance
 Again as a hoe over the rising harvest,
 Where they will silence me one day
 With a gag or a bullet.

...
I choose Freedom, -
Even if it is ugly and crude,
And you, the rest, can
"Go on and be a good slave"!
 (Galich 1998)

Galich's decision was made with full awareness, it was neither sudden nor easy, which is reflected in the poem *The Holy Spring*:

We came together on winter evenings,
We discussed the same as the day before...
Sometimes these evenings became
Almost unbearable to me.

We discussed all the omens of a trial,
We turned complexity into simplicity,
While my Misfortune was looking
At me sidelong and further in the void.

I was puzzled by this strange look,
 This dark look, like intoxicating water,

¹⁵ Norilsk and Vorkuta, two cities in the North of Russia, where many camps were situated (Comment L.R.)

I had been so many times cheated by success,
That I got engaged with my Misfortune!

The winter dragged on, it refused to thaw,
 Fighting my boredom –
 I hurried home to Moscow from Tallinn,
 And from Moscow I hurried on to the countryside.

The sky was the hue of red,
 April was chasing away a white blizzard...
 Then suddenly I heard the first drops of thaw,
 Listening to the falling darkness.

The spring came holier, than holy,
Broken free at once from its prison!
And I guessed the simple secret of the communion
In the thawing snow.

And when the water rose in the mist,
 like in a cloak above the river bank
My misfortune gave me an icon
Of the Kazanskaya Virgin!

...It was quiet in the house. It smelt of malt.
 A pine tree squeaked softly by the window.
 That spring was pierced by
 Almost autumn-like merry gold!

That spring of Forgiveness and Farewell,
That autumn-like spring of mine,
That teased me with painful promises
 That tormented me and gave me sleepless nights.

As if before a long journey,
 As if going into darkness, guessing that there is a dawn coming,
 I touch your holy gift with my hand
 And say almost without sound:

- In difficult times of a new scattering,
Now and for the times coming and forever,
I am accepting Salvation with great pride from
You my Misfortune!
 (Galich 1998)

That Holy spring was the spring of 1968, when Galich took part in the festival Bard-68 in Novosibirsk in March. This poem is probably the only one, in which the author speaks about the difficulty of the choice-making.

2.2.2 Consequences and a hind-sight evaluation of the made choice

Once his choice was made, Galich never deviated from it or regretted it, at least not in his poetry. However, he never denied, that he had to pay a dear price for his sense of civic duty, which can be found in the poem *A draft of an Epitaph*:

The stupid ones think it is funny,
 The squeamish ones turn away in disgust...
How easily could I have broken,
And have lost it and drunk myself to death!

...
How many times I was denounced,
How some were surprised that I was still a free man,
What if I had been rotting in a camp,
Would you feel better then?

...
 I understand that I'm asking it in vain,
 That a wake is only held for more famous and known!
All right, not a wake but in some way,
Even without booze try to remember me!

Just because I believed in a miracle,
Just for my poor singing,
But please never remember,
How I suffered!
 (Galich 1998)

Galich does not hide his suffering, the hostility around him, the denunciation by his enemies. His request to hold a wake even without booze and to remember his sacrifice, is really touching.

In the beginning of the 70^s the Kremlin decided that the best way to get rid of all these annoying and embarrassing dissidents was to expel them from the country (Frizman 1992:83). Many important dissidents were driven out in this period, among them were Alexander Solzhenitsyn, Josef Brodsky, Vladimir Maksimov, Viktor Nekrasov and Alexander Galich. It was especially Jewish dissidents who were pushed to emigrate, the authorities said that as Jews these people were never really Soviet citizens at heart, that they had much more feelings for Israel, which was their historical country of origin. Therefore, Jewish dissidents were accused of becoming a dissident because they deliberately wanted to harm the Soviet Union. Galich was among those, who were pushed to leave the country and accused of the lack of patriotism (Akelkin 1988:12; Shatalov 1991(6):171), he mentions it in a number of poems, among others in the poem *Paternal House (Otchy Dom)*:

I see you so often in my dreams, my Paternal House,
 My short golden century.
 Everything what happened to me afterwards, -
 Started right here!

Here I came to life once, an earthly child,
 And I saw light.
 Here my first thunder talked to me
 And I understood its language.

How frightening it was for me later, my Paternal House,
When Someone with an empty face
Said with a smile that I was only a tenant
In that house and not a son.

Just a mere tenant who is saving money -
To pay for his food and a place to live.
He is saving money and he is always in debt,
And he will never be free of these debts!

- So many people swore repeatedly that they were loyal
Like sons in this world! -
That is what that Someone with an empty face said
And squinted his leaden eye.
 (Galich 1998)

The fact that he could not publish his work was also very painful for Galich, which can be seen in the poem *A Song about a Bicycle (Pesnya pro velosiped)*:

When I was a boy, how much I wanted
 To ride a bicycle,
 Not a three wheels children's bicycle, -

But a real bicycle!

...

Now a bicycle stands in my corridor
All covered in dust.
It has been covered in dust,
For at least ten years.
The boy from the past
Does not exist anymore,
And as a grown-up I don't
Need a real bicycle for adults!

But now as a grown-up I would like so much,
To touch a book,
And read a name on the cover,
Not just someone's but my own !..

I cannot bring back that boy anymore,
He's gone forever like someone killed in a battle...
But if the boy is gone,
And there is no way back to the past,
Maybe I can have a book?! Just a book!
Why can't I have it?!

Majestic as an autograph,
He hold his books under his arm.
- Hi my friend, the snitch,
Congratulations with your new book!

A party epos!
A groveling ode in a luxurious edition
I don't need like it this, don't want it -
Let it be only a thousand copies as a whole print run!

If it is too expensive with a dust-cover,
Then let it be without!
But there is not dust-cover,
And no book,

...Soon, very soon,
Maybe over some thirty years,
There will be that book,
In this century, not in the next one!
A boy will take it off the shelf
In a library!
While you kept saying I was talking nonsense!
(Galich 1998)

Author's dream came true, even though it was after his death, but he guessed pretty accurately, his books were published thirty years later and everyone can take them now off a library shelf.

In the beginning of his public dissidence Galich was called on the carpet account, but he remained adamant in his choice, he describes the ordeal in the poem *'From my petty trouble...'* (*'Ot bedy moyei pustyakovoi...'*):

...

But once in a oak chamber,
I was called on the carpet,
I saw such terrible faces
That were scarier than carnival masks!

They were no bears or lions or foxes,
or goblins, or owls, -
They had faces almost like faces,
Their words were almost like words.

In all their bureaucrat
Modern appearance
They let forth a stream of swearing
Without a beginning or an end

Around a square table,
And with my guilt as a background
They took turns in swearing
Loyalty to each other!

Then suddenly like candlelight in darkness,
 From a far past
 I heard the sweet and soft sound
 Of a flute.

Suddenly the terrible faces froze,
 Opening their soundless mouths,
 Like scarecrows made from cloth,
 Like roosters at the verge of a night.

Then I bowed boldly,
As I thought, but actually it was funny,
And still hearing the melody from my youth
I smiled and left.

(Galich 1998)

In the poem *A Letter to the 17th Century (Pis'mo v semnadtsaty vek)* Galich also writes about his unyielding position and his feelings, while he is sitting on a bench just opposite the country house of a high Party official, who started the persecution campaign against him. One can read it from the testimony of the author himself that serves as an introduction to the poem:

...In the evening, after I had written my obligatory ten pages (I was writing my play 'The Dress Rehearsal' at that moment) I would go for walk. I was invariably accompanied by a street mongrel called Duke. I would sit on a bench and smoke while Duke would lay down at my feet, we both looked at the streaming water and at the opposite bank of the river. On the right there was a Church, Lykov's Trinity, which was transformed into a wood storage, and on the left one could see the spacious estate of a Party country house number five. There lived D.Polyansky, at that time still a member of the Politbureau, to whose august wrath I owed the loss of my civil rights.

A.Galich

...

I am sitting by the water once again.
 On my right the Lykov Church of the Trinity,
 On my left, the country house number five.
In this Party country house
Lives an illustrious person,
To whom I would gladly dedicate
A prayer of gratitude!
For all his attention,
For that phone call full of fatherly concern,
For the fact that I failed
To amuse him with my contrition!
For my ugly nickname,
For the moment when I didn't avert my cheeky eyes,
When he was passing to the toilet
Followed by his snitches!

(Galich 1998)

2.2.3 Estimation of the historical impact of his rebellion

Galich became a dissident with a perfect understanding that his voice was no more that a voice in the desert, that his poems would not shutter the foundations of the regime. Yet Galich thought that even a drop of water can wear off a stone and for him it was enough. In the poem

'Some Shrewd Historian...' ('*Kakoi-nibud' doshly istorik...*') he puts his own protest as a dissident into historical perspective:

One day some shrewd historian
will write about us,
His slowly-narrated story
Will be funny and sad.

He will write very thoroughly,
Take all the mistakes into consideration beforehand,
He will put everything in its place,
And will get to the bottom of everything.

...
Scraps, bits and pieces,
Crumbs of someone else's fire:
And in the footnote -
Precisely in the footnote -
The historian will mention me.

It means that I made my own prison,
Took up my cross,
For this one miserable line,
One drop of ink.

It means that I said good-by
To the merry and generous life
For this one line of text,
Which time just tossed me like a tip.

I caused my loved ones to age quicker,
I crossed all limits with my songs,
I made my loved ones cry,
And I refused to hear them crying.

But my echo will be heard
Until the Judgment Day...
So it's not really important
That the historian will only mention me in a footnote!
(Galich 1998)

The same tone is heard in the poem *A Raven comes at night* (*Priletaet po nocham voron*):

A raven comes at night,
He is the helmsman of my sleepless nights,
Even if I scream,
My scream does not get any louder.

It is only heard about five steps away,
But even this is too loud, they say.
Yet it is already a gift of God, -
To be heard five steps away!
(Galich 1998)

Once again the same thought is present in yet another poem *Exercises for the Right and the Left Hands* (*Uprazhneniya dlya pravoi i levoi ruki*):

...Think at least once in a while about the others!
The Word should come to everyone alike.
Is it then wise to sing solo,
Instead of singing in a choir?!

Don't be hasty,
There is still a long way before you.
If you cannot become a weapon, become a tool then.

But try to convey at least something with your shouting,
Leave at least something you could be remembered by!
 (Galich 1998)

Galich wanted his work to live on, not to be forgotten, he wanted his voice to reach people's minds and hearts even if the regime continued to exist for years to come, as one can see in the poems *After a Party (Posle vecherinki)*:

In the early hours of the morning when
 Love, sadness and envy will get tired,
 When the guests will kill their hangover
 with a bit vodka on the rocks,
 The hostess will ask:
 Would you like to listen to an old record? -
 And my muffled voice will
 Invade this unknown house
 ...
 Then one of the guests will say with fright:
 - His jokes are dangerous,
 The author is wrong if he thinks,
 That he is invincible!
 - Don't you worry Ivan Petrovich, -
 The lady of the house will answer, -
 The author has nothing to fear,
 He has been dead for a hundred years...
 (Galich 1998)

3. The role of the autobiographic element in the civic choice topic

It is not surprising that Galich has introduced an autobiographic aspect in this topic since his own life was closely connected to this choice. However, this aspect is not only a reflection of a personal experience, it serves a certain purpose. On the one hand, it explains Galich's personal choice, on the other hand, it illustrates a possible choice. Galich uses his own example to show a possibility of a right choice.

He tells about the motives behind this step, he says, whom he took as an example, how difficult the decision was and how disastrous were the consequences. Nevertheless, he also accentuates the fact that has no regrets, that this choice was unavoidable, even if it was a free choice, it was the only possible one for a real artist. A real artist cannot sell his talent as a prostitute, he has to follow his heart sooner or later and start speaking his mind. Maybe Galich even hoped that his example would inspire others and give them courage to make the right choice.

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