

From Russian Professor Timothy Sergay 4/3/17:

Russian Poet Yevgeny Yevtushenko Passes Away at 84



Image source: <http://www.agendalugano.ch/events/21540/alberi-di-betulla-nana-come-simbolo-della-natura-russa>

One of the very last representatives of Russian culture's rebellious and principled "people of the 60s" (*shestidesiatniki*), the poet, novelist, screenwriter, memoirist, director and sometime actor Yevgeny Aleksandrovich Yevtushenko, died at the age of 84 on April 1, 2017 in Tulsa, OK. He had taught Russian and European poetry and cinema for many years at the University of Tulsa, and also at Queens College (CUNY). You can read [a good appreciation of Yevtushenko](#) by Raymond H. Anderson in the April 1, 2017, edition of the *New York Times*. In his poetry, Yevtushenko was a fierce anti-Stalinist and opponent of anti-Semitism. He became a phenomenally popular "stadium poet" in the 1960s and 70s, a friend of such prominent bards as Bulat Okudzhava (1924–1997). Later he was scorned by other poets, e.g., Joseph Brodsky (1940–1996), and dissident intellectuals for his conformism, for collaborating with the ever-hateful Soviet regime and prospering as a modern-day court poet to secretaries general of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. Careful scholars of Russian poetry like Michael Pursglove, writing in Cornwell's *Reference Guide to Russian Literature* (1998), have defended Yevtushenko against such charges. Yevtushenko in later life devoted a great deal of energy to compiling huge anthologies of Russian poetry such as *Stanzas of the Century* (published in English as *Silver and Steel* (1993) and in Russian as *Strofy veka* [1995]) and a projected five-volume collection in Russian *Poet v Rossii bol'she, chem poet* (4 vols. to date, 2013–15). The

title of this collection, “a poet in Russia is more than a poet,” was the first line of Yevtushenko’s “Prayer Before a Poem” (1964); it has entered the Russian language as a folk aphorism signaling a proper Russian poet’s civic courage and reverence for Russia’s poetic tradition. Yevtushenko could be extremely moving in his personal lyric poetry, as in the reflections of an aging mathematics professor in “The Window Looks Out on White Trees” (1955), with its suggestion of T.S. Eliot’s “Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock.” LLC’s Professor Timothy Sergay has long cherished Yevtushenko’s poem “Here’s What’s Going on in My Life...” (1957), which was made famous as a song in Eldar Ryazanov’s romantic comedy film *Irony of Fate* (1976). Here is his prose translation of that poem:

Евгений Евтушенко
(1932–2017)

Со мною вот что происходит...

Б. Ахмадулине

Со мною вот что происходит:
ко мне мой старый друг не ходит,
а ходят в праздной суете
разнообразные не те.
И он не с теми ходит где-то
и тоже понимает это,
и наш раздор необъясним,
Мы оба мучаемся с ним.

Со мною вот что происходит:
совсем не та ко мне приходит,
мне руки на плечи кладёт
и у другой меня крадёт.
А той, скажите, бога ради,
кому на плечи руки класть?
Та, у которой я украден,
в отместку тоже станет красть.

Не сразу этим же ответит,
а будет жить с собой в борьбе
и неосознанно наметит
кого-то дальнего себе.

О, сколько нервных и недужных,
ненужных связей, дружб ненужных!
во мне уже осатанённость...
О, кто-нибудь, приди, нарушь
чужих людей соединённость
и разобщённость близких душ!

1957

Yevgeny Yevtushenko
(1932–2017)

Here's What's Going on in My Life...

For Bella Akhmadulina

Here's what's going on in my life:
my old friend no longer comes to visit,
while various others—not my favorites,
brimming with trivia—do.
He, too, is running with the wrong crowd
and understands that perfectly well;
there's no explaining our falling out,
and both of us agonize over it.

Here's what's going on in my life:
the decidedly wrong woman keeps visiting;
she puts her hands on my shoulders
and steals me away from the other one.
While that other one, tell me, for God's sake,
whose shoulders can *she* put her hands on?
The one I've been stolen from
will take vengeance by turning thief herself.

She'll pay me back, but not right away:
for a good while she'll struggle with herself
and then she'll unconsciously
set her sights on someone far off.

Oh, how many nerve-racking, unhealthy,
and pointless affairs and pointless friendships
have made such a mean-tempered man of me?!
Oh, can't someone appear and put an end to
the union of people with nothing in common
and the separation of soulmates?!

1957

*Translation Timothy D. Sergay
April 2, 2017*