

At the Intersection of Genres: Galich's Generic Montage

OLGA KARPUSHINA
UNIVERSITY OF PITTSBURGH

In the present article I examine the generic origins of Aleksandr Galich's¹ songs and analyze their status in the modern system of genres. Even a brief comparison between the mainstream bard song and Galich's songs reveals differences, leaving little doubt that the latter form a class of their own.² By mainstream bard song I mean the genre of the so-called tourist or *avtorskaia* song, associated with such artists as Iurii Vizbor, Aleksandr Gorodnitskii, Novella Matveeva, Aleksandr Kukin, Veronika Dolina, Aleksandr Dol'skii, and Sergei Nikitin. Iulii Kim and Bulat Okudzhava can, albeit with some reservation, be placed in the same category. The mainstream bard song of the early 1960s—mid-1970s is generally characterized by lyricism, simplicity of plot line, escapism and/or exoticism, and a mildly didactic or philosophical tone. These songs resemble genres of lyrical poetry such as the elegy, elegiac ode,³ meditation, and lament. The Russian bard song is essentially logocentric. However, music and rhythm also play an important role.

Despite the influence and importance of his works, Galich remained a marginal figure among the bards, a lonely peak at the periphery of the mountain range. Galich's songs come from a different source. The verbal in his songs is privileged over the musical. "Эти песни бесконечно далеки от приятной, бездумной, мурлыкающей напевности. Их трудно петь и зачастую трудно слушать. . . В них пение—просто особо выразительный способ исполнения стихов," writes I. Grekova (23; emphasis added). This is not entirely true. Musical rhythm is indeed significant and meaningful for Galich, otherwise he would have simply recited his poems. Grekova's argument, however, has a rational core. To understand the specificity of these songs, one has to analyze their origins. Galich's songs are syncretic in nature. They combine features not only of the epic and the lyric (as with most ballads), but also the novelistic.⁴ They are very much oriented toward written culture. While not breaking entirely with their lyrical progenitors, these songs owe their originality more to novelistic tradition than to that of the lyric.

Critics have long recognized the hybrid generic nature of Galich's songs. Lev Ventsov defines their genre as "song-dramas" (55). "Жанровое разнообразие песен Галича огромно," notes Grekova, "есть у него песни-сатиры, песни-пародии, песни-стилизации, *песни-романы*, песни-трагедии" (23; emphasis added). Efim Etkind goes even further, acclaiming Galich as the second Balzac and his works as another *Human Comedy*:

Более ста песен-повестей Галича—это наша "человеческая комедия" Песня веселый разговор, например,—это повесть об осиротевшей девочке Повесть? *По многообразию событий и жизненных конфликтов—даже роман*. Персонажи очерчены с удивительной определенностью, *каждый из них может быть развит до романной фигуры*, но все и так—живые, несмотря на предельную сжатость, кажется, что они описаны подробно. (74-75; emphasis added)

Carnivalization

According to Mikhail Bakhtin, "the novelistic genre has three fundamental roots: *the epic, the rhetorical, and the carnivalistic?*" (*Problems* 109). This is also the case with Galich's narrative poems and songs. The epic features come from the bard-song genre itself (the *poema* and the ballad belong to the lyric-epic genres).⁵ The rhetorico-didactic tone is also very strong in Galich's songs (direct appeal to the audience in order to convince it, use of specific devices such as rhetorical questions, exclamations, tropes, and so forth).

The carnivalistic elements are particularly interesting in Galich. Grekova notes that humor deeply penetrates into the very substance of his songs (22). That substance, however, contains more than just humor. Bakhtin lists the major characteristics of carnival, characteristics that later "exercised an immense formal, genre-shaping influence on literature": life turned inside out; free and familiar contact among people; carnivalistic misalliances; profanation; mock crowning and subsequent decrowning of the carnival king; specific speech of the public square; ambivalence (*Problems* 123).

Carnivalistic elements constitute the essential part of Galich's songs. The action is often located in a public space (which parallels the carnival square) where people eat and drink: a snack bar, a cheap restaurant, or a party ("Vechernie progulki," "Ballada o tom, kak odna

printsessa raz v dva mesiatsa prikhodila pouzhinat' v restoran 'Dinamo'," "Na sopkakh Man'chzhurii," "Poema o Staline," "Novogodniaia fantasmogoriia," "Tsyganskii romans," etc.). The setting can also be an official party meeting ("Krasnyi treugol'nik," "O tom, kak Klim Petrovich vystupal na mitinge v zashchitu mira," etc.).

The public space of *shalman* or *vertep*, the words so frequently used by Galich, is also the place where revelation occurs. This can be seen as the carnivalesque juxtaposition/combination of the incompatible elements of the profane and the holy. *Shalman*, a space reeking of tobacco smoke and alcohol, populated by whores and drunkards, parallels hell:

Повстречала девчонка бога,
 Бог шёл горькую в монопольке,
 Ну, и много ль от бога прока,
 В *чертовне* и *чаду* попойки? ("Tsyganskii romans" 1-4)

This is exactly the place, however, where one talks of God or has some kind of spiritual experience, as do barmaid Tamarka and her customers in "Na sopkakh Man'chzhurii," or the narrator in Chapter 5 of "Poema o Staline":

Потолкавшись в отделе винном,
 Подойду к друзьям-алкашам,
 При участии половинном
 Побеседуем по душам,
 Алкаши наблюдают строго,
 Чтоб ни капли не полилось.
 "Не встречали,—смеются,—Бога?"
 "Ей же Богу, не привелось".
 Пусть пивнуха—не лучший случай
 Толковать о добре и зле,
 Но видали мы этот "лучший"
 В белых тапочках на столе. (45-57)

"Ballada o tom, kak odna printsessa raz v dva mesiatsa prikhodila pouzhinat' v restoran 'Dinamo,'" as the title suggests, is set in a restaurant. The heroine is a modern Cinderella, who once every two months (recalling the cyclical nature of carnival) appears at the Dinamo as a princess (she is given the disdainful title "Princess of Nizhniaia Maslovka," which underscores her ambivalent position). She is "crowned" for a short period of time (Galich characterizes her as "a comet," "a king's daughter," and "Lady Hamilton") to be soon "decrowned," scorned, and thrown away, back to her usual humble

social status (she wears a cheap ring; she cannot afford Champagne or a taxi):

А время, подлое, течет,
 И зал пройдя, как пасеку,
 “Шестерка” ей приносит счет,
 И все, и крышка празднику! (41-44)
 А ей—не царство на веку,
 Посулы да побасенки,
 А там—вались по холодку,
 “Принцесса” с Нижней Масловки! (57-60)

“Koroleva materika” provides an even more convincing example of long-lived carnivalescent acts: public space, misalliances (convicts stay in one line with their guards, living people along with the dead), the oxymoronic and ambivalent nature of “Her Majesty White Louse” (a louse and a Queen), profanation and carnivalescent blasphemous actions (ritualistic urination in the fire; “Lousy Way” crossing Milky Way), etc. The song even features a classic carnival ritual of a triumphantly burning “hell”:⁶

Когда сложат из тачек и нар костер,
 И волчий забыв раздор,
 Станут рядом вохровцы и ээка,
 И напишут в тот костер.
 Сперва за себя, потом за тех,
 Кто пьет теперь божий морс. (31-36)
 О, как они ссали б, закрыв глаза,
 Как горлица воду пьет!
 А потом пропоет неслышно труба,
 И расступится рвань и голь,
 И Ее Величество Белая Вошь
 Подойдет и войдет в огонь.
 И взметнутся в небо тысячи искр,
 Но не просто, не как-нибудь—
 Навечно крестом над Млечным Путем
 Протянется Вшивый Путь! (41-50)

“Nochnoi razgovor v vagone-restorane” (Chapter 4 of “Poema o Staline”) displays similarly carnivalescent features: public spaces (a barrack and a railway station); a unity of incompatible elements and social antipodes (“все стоим ревя режем, / И вохровцы, и эки!” [60-61]); substitution of the sacred for the diabolic/profane (Celestial Father for the Father and the Genius; The Cathedral of Christ the Savior for

a statue of Stalin); and subsequent decrowning of the Father:

Кум докушал огурец
И закончил с мукою:
“Оказался наш Отец
Не отцом, а сукою...”
Полный, братцы, ататуй!
Панихида с танцами!
И приказано статуй
За ночь снять на станции. (29-36)⁷

Bakhtin claims that carnivalization lies at the heart of the menippea, “permeates its external layers and its deepest core” (*Problems* 133). He lists some features of the menippea that later entered the novel: the menippea is fully liberated from the limitations of history and memory; unrestricted use of the fantastic (to search for and test truth) is combined with philosophical universalism; oxymoronic blend of the symbolic and the naturalistic; scandals; use of imbedded narratives and inserted genres; etc. Almost all of these elements can be found in Galich’s “Поэма о Сталине,” which begins as a typical menippea. In the fantastic settings (the chronotope of the unreal where time and space lose their boundaries and significance, uniting Wilhelm and Russia, the end and the beginning), the Earthly Father comes to see the newborn Son of Man. The action, typical for Galich’s songs, takes place in the public space of a den where “спал младенец в колыбели / И причмокивал во сне”:

Уже светало, розовело небо,
Но тут раздалась гулко у вертепа
Намеренно тяжелые шаги,
И мать Божья замерла в тревоге,
Когда открылась дверь и на пороге
Кавказские явились сапоги.
И разом потерявшие значенье
Столетия, лихолетья и мгновенья
Сомкнулись в безначальное кольцо,
А он вошел и поклонился еле,
И обратил неспешно к колыбели
Забрызганное оспою лицо.
“Значит, вот он—этот самый
Жалкий пасынок земной,
Что и кровью, и осанной
Потягнется со мной...” (23-40)

Stalin's imaginary (or real?) argument with Christ closely resembles the dialogue between the Grand Inquisitor and Christ in Dostoevsky's *Bra't'ia Karamazovy*. In both cases Christ does not reply. However, his very presence enables the interlocutors to anticipate and disagree with his unspoken words (“Ладно, ладно, я не прекословлю,— / Ты был первый, Ты и начинай” [*General'naia repetitsiia* 7-8]). Their arguments exemplify what Bakhtin calls “the word with a sideward glance” (*Problems* 210). Both the Grand Inquisitor and Stalin proclaim their own earthly kingdom instead of the heavenly one promised by Christ (“Если ж я умру,—что может статься,— / Вечным будет царствие мое!” asserts Stalin [*General'naia repetitsiia* 35-36]). Chapter 3 ends with the metaphorical/ideological decrowning of the omnipotent tyrant. As a human being, Stalin subdues the higher power:

Не приказанный, не положенный
 За окном колокольный звон.
 И, упав на колени: “Боже мой!”—
 Произносит бессвязно он,—
 “Молю, Всевышний, Тебя, Творца,
 На помощь вышли скорей гонца!
 О, дай мне, дай же—не кровь, вино...
 Забыл, как дальше... Но все равно,
 Не ставь отточий,
 Конца пути,
 Прости мне, Отче,
 Спаси... прости...” (53-68)

In the following chapter the material image of Stalin's power, his statue, is destroyed. In Chapter 5 the same happens to Stalinist ideology and to the general idea of the Leader who is “в ответе / один за всех” (25-26), who knows what is to be done, and who liberates people from moral responsibility for their actions:

Неисповедимы дороги зла,
 Но не надо, люди, бояться!
 Не бойтесь золы, не бойтесь хулы,
 Не бойтесь пекла и ада,
 А бойтесь единственно только того,
 Кто скажет: “Я знаю, как надо!”
 Кто скажет: “Тому, кто пойдет за мной,
 Рай на земле—награда”. (37-44)
 Гоните его! Не верьте ему!
 Он врет! Он не знает—как надо! (65-66)

The work ends with a new allusion to the New Testament in Chapter 6 (“Ave Mariia”). “It brings the work full cycle by going back to the biblical setting of the first chapter and again undercutting it with Stalin’s Russia,” concludes Gerald Smith (201). This imitates the cyclic nature of ancient carnival, called to celebrate death and resurrection, the end of one cycle and the beginning of a new one.

Another carnivalistic element is the figure of the rogue, fool, or clown, which, as Bakhtin states, “influenced the position of the author himself in the novel . . . as well as the author’s point of view” (“Forms” 160). The fool has the right to “not understand” the reality around him; thus the reader (or the listener) sees the milieu through the fool’s eyes as estranged and notices what previously escaped his or her attention. Such is Klim Petrovich Kolomiitsev, who does not understand why his workshop cannot have an honorary title, or rebels against providing economic aid to Third-World countries (the cycle “Kolomiitsev v polnyi rost”).

Generic montage

If, according to Bakhtin, carnivalization is the ideational core of the novel, polyglossia then forms its stylistics. Bakhtin lists the basic compositional-stylistic unities that constitute the novel as a whole:

1. Direct authorial literary-artistic narration . . . ;
2. stylization of the various forms of oral everyday narration (“skaz”);
3. stylization of the various forms of semi-literary (written) everyday narration (the letter, the diary, etc.);
4. various forms of literary but extra-artistic authorial speech (moral, philosophical or scientific statements, oratory . . .);
5. the stylistically individualized speech of characters. (“Discourse” 263)

Now let us look at one of Galich’s narrative poems, “Kadish.” The title itself is confusing: *kadish* belongs to a religious rather than purely literary genre; it is a Jewish prayer that a son pronounces in memory of his dead father. However, “Kadish” displays novelistic features. Its structure is intricate: prose alternates with music and verse, the narrator’s voice often cannot be distinguished from that of the protagonist, and so on. “Kadish” begins with a dedication to Janusz Korczak, which also serves as a historical reference (who he is, what he did, and why he was killed). The dedication, written in prose, is followed by Korczak’s inner monologue in verse. Then what we assume to be narrator’s voice adds: “А по вечерам все так же как ни в чем не бывало

играет музыка.” The subsequent quotation from the song “St. Louis Blues” (“И поет мой рожок про дерево, / На котором я вздерну вас! Да-с, да-с...” [9-10]) contrasts with the prosaic quote from Korczak’s diary (“Я никому не желаю зла, не умею, просто не знаю, как это делается”). Then follows a lyrical monologue, the first-person narration of Korczak’s life story given in a series of flashbacks. The unidentifiable prose voice (is it Korczak’s or the narrator’s?) introduces the story of the orphan girl Natia, followed by her first-person song. The same narrative voice tells us about a watchman, Petr Zalewski, killed in the orphanage yard by Polish fascists. Galich employs prose to show the past from a bird’s-eye view; when he muses on or judges the past, he switches to verse. The prose narrative voice is the voice of a historical document, of a chronicler. The prose passages establish historical distance between the reader/listener and the characters, whereas the subsequent lyrical counterparts create a zone of maximal contact between them,⁸ describing the same past event as a personal experience: (“Он убирал *наш* бедный двор, / Когда *они* пришли” [1-2; emphasis added]).⁹ Then once again the dry voice of the chronicle tells us about the day when the Jewish children from Korczak’s orphanage are sent to Treblinka. The prose discourse of the historical document is paralleled by Korczak’s “I”-voiced account of the event. Through the relativistic time of the novel we enter an epic, absolute time. Korczak knows what will happen in thirty years. He knows that what is happening now will become legend, the absolute past:

Дальше начинается преданье,
 Дальше мы выходим на перрон.
 И бежит за мною переводчик,
 Робко прикасается к плечу:
 “Вам разрешено остаться, Корчак”,—
Если верить сказке, я молчу. (44-49; emphasis added)

The narration “zooms” in and out. It moves in for a closer view of the depicted events by switching discourses and genres: from the chronicle to the third-person lyrical description and then to the fairy tale Korczak relates. From his own time, the narrator (now his voice is clearly distinguished from Korczak’s) begins a direct dialogue with the hero: “Но из года семидесятого / Я вам кричу: ‘Пан Корчак! / Не возвращайтесь!’” (5-7). He also passionately argues with those who are now in power in Poland (once again “the word with a sideward glance”), opposing the glamorized national past to the shameful

present:

Дали зрелищ и хлеба,
 Взяли Вислу и Татры,
 Землю, море и небо,
 Все, мол, наше, а так ли?!
 Дня осеннего пряжа
 С вещим зовом кукушки
 Вапа? Врете, не вапа!
 Это осень Костюшки!
 ...
 Это небо Тувима!

...

Это сосны Шопена! (17-32)

The piece comes full circle, repeating the beginning in reversed order (“St. Louis Blues,” followed by the quote from Korczak’s diary and then by the initial quatrain).

We can quickly single out all the basic compositional–stylistic unities that, for Bakhtin, comprise the novelistic whole. In Galich’s songs the dependence on the novelistic tradition is very recognizable. His discourse is always aware of the presence of the other’s discourse. Galich’s favorite technique is to cause a clash between stylistically heterogeneous strata. For this reason he is obsessed with citation. His texts are usually prefaced by several epigraphs, in prose or verse, which fulfill different functions: summarizing or affirming the work’s major ideas (“Pesnia iskhoda”), or providing the dialogizing background, as the epigraph from Aleksandr Blok’s “Neznakomka”¹⁰ does in “Ballada o tom, kak odna printsessa....”

The epigraph is always reflected in the work. In “Ballada o tom, kak odna printsessa....” the meter of Blok’s poem sets the rhythm. Meter also defines the stylistic tone of the “princess,” who is indeed Blok’s *neznakomka* amidst the swindlers, parasites, and drunkards. The high-style discourse of “Neznakomka” is mirrored in the narrator’s low-style discourse; Blok’s meter, however, remains intact. All that remains is an empty form, filled with the sociolect of the working class:

И все бухие пролетарии
 Все тунядцы и жулье
 Как на комету в планетарии
 Глядели, суки, на нее. (*General'naiia repetitsiia* 13-16)

At times Galich reverses the commonly accepted relationship between

text and epigraph. Sometimes it is the other text, the epigraph, that must be explained, and not vice versa. The song “Bez nazvaniia” is preceded by lines from Anna Akhmatova in which she glorifies Stalin:

. . . И благодарного народа
Он слышит голос: “Мы пришли
Сказать: где Сталин, там свобода,
Мир и величие земли!”

The song unfolds as an explanation of how it happened that the great Russian poet could write something so false and shameful. This occurred, Galich reflects, because she had to save her son:

. . . По белому снегу вели на расстрел
Над берегом белой реки.
И сын Ее вслед уходящим смотрел
И ждал—этой самой строки! (13-16)

Sometimes Galich’s text takes issue with the epigraph.¹¹ For example, the last line of “Priznanie v liubvi” (“Я люблю вас люди! Будьте доверчивы!”) is a negative image of the epigraph from Julius Fuček’s “Люди, будьте бдительны!” In “Pamiati Pasternaka,” Pasternak’s stanza reappears in the text and is immediately dialogized:

“Мело, мело по всей земле
Во все пределы.
Свеча горела на столе.
Свеча горела”.
Нет, никакая ни свеча,
Горела люстра!
Очки на морде палача
Сверкали тускло. (21-28)

The text, therefore, appears at the intersection of different styles, genres, and traditions and is open to multiple, even opposite interpretations. The epigraphs “tune” the reading. For example, “Vozvrashchenie na Itaku” has two prefacing texts: a prose memoir of the unidentified person who took part or was told about the described events and a quote from Mandel’shtam’s poem. The reader/listener can choose whether to view Galich’s text as some sort of historical writing (a memoirist approach) or to consider it within the Russian Silver Age poetic tradition (a “tune” or approach suggested by Mandel’shtam’s lines). Actually, Galich’s text occupies an intermediate position. The prose and poetic texts of the epigraphs form the boundaries within which exists the stylistic/generic blend called “Vozvrashchenie na Itaku.” Galich includes musical quotations from a

popular song, to which Mandel'shtam's next-door neighbors listen while, unbeknownst to them, his apartment is being searched. Thus the pop song's vulgar lightheartedness and exteriority is contrasted to the horrifying reality inside the room. "Ramona" clashes with Mandel'shtam's verse (given as the poet's inner soliloquy) creating a stylistic, generic, and contextual multilayeredness:

А пальцы искали крамолу, крамолу...
 А там, за стеной, все гоняли "Рамону":
 "Рамона, какой простор вокруг, взгляни,
 Рамона, в целом мире мы одни".
 "... А жизнь промелькнет
 Театрального капора пеной..." (13-18)

The song discloses its hierarchically organized structure and network of various discourses. Mandel'shtam's discourse ("someone else's discourse," in Bakhtin's terms) defines the highest stylistic tone. The stylistic key of Mandel'shtam's fictional discourse ("stylistization")¹² is lower but still higher than that of direct authorial narration. The narrator's voice comes from the lower stylistic stratum:

И глядя как пальцы шуруют в обивке,
 "Вольно ж тебе было,—он думал,—вольно!
 Глотай своего якобинства опивки!
 Глотай своего якобинства опивки!
 Не уксус еще, но уже не вино".
 Щелкунчик-скворец, простофиля Емеля,
 Зачем ты ввязался в чужое похмелье?!
 На что ты истратил свои золотые?! (*General'naiia repetitsiia* 19-27)

Galich's texts are initially directed toward someone else's discourse and highly dialogized. They were born of the hidden polemic with the forced official or forbidden *samizdat* cultural-political discourses as much as of the dialogue with classical texts. Not only do they exhibit most features of the novel as a genre but they also share the same origins. At the same time, these songs belong to the oral and performative genres. Situated at the intersection of genres and media, they constitute the unique genre of the oral novel.¹³

Notes

1. Aleksandr Galich was the pen-name of Aleksandr Arkadievich Ginzburg (1919-1977).
2. Galich occupies his own niche among the bards. At the same time, the neighboring

genre of the mass-song [*estradnaia pesnia*] exerted almost no influence on him, but rather served as a source of material for his songs. Sometimes Galich uses popular tunes and motifs as a kind of sociolect to provide a dialogizing background. See my commentary on “Vozvrashchenie na Itaku.”

3. For example, Okudzhava’s “Len’ka Korolev” or Vizbor’s “Serega Sanin.”
4. On the development of the ballad, see Vávra.
5. Critics such as Leonid Pliushch consider Galich a writer of the epic, the creator of the “philosophical epos” (313), “the Homer of our time” (325).
6. Bakhtin writes:

Deeply ambivalent is the image of fire in carnival. It is a fire that simultaneously destroys and renews the world. In European carnivals there was almost always a special structure (usually a vehicle adorned with all possible sorts of gaudy carnival trash) called “hell,” and at the close of carnival this “hell” was triumphantly set on fire (*Problems* 126)
7. Not unlike carnival elements in Dostoevsky’s novels, this carnivalesque action lacks joyfulness: it is painful for *kum* (he concludes in torment that the Father is only a bastard) and for the convicts (they wail). For a discussion of joyless laughter in the post-Romantic era, see the introduction to Bakhtin’s *Tvorchestvo Fransua Rable*.
8. Bakhtin introduces this term in “The Epic and the Novel.” The novel, he believes, blurs the boundaries between the present and the absolute past, the boundaries set by the epic.
9. See “The Epic and the Novel.”
10. “И медленно, пройдя меж пьяными, / Всегда без спутников, одна” (13-14).
11. Bakhtin claims that the novel’s distinguishing feature is that every alien, outside element is immediately dialogized upon entering the sphere of the novel. See “From the Prehistory of Novelistic Discourse” and “Discourse in the Novel.”
12. For the types of prose discourse, see Bakhtin, *Problems* 181-203.
13. Unlike Bakhtin, Walter Benjamin insists that the novel entirely depends on the book: “What differentiates the novel from all other forms of prose literature—the fairy tale, the legend, even the novella—is that *it neither comes from oral tradition nor goes into it*” (79; emphasis added). Obviously, the case of Galich disproves this assertion. His works belong simultaneously to storytelling (emphasis on the oral, *skaz*) and to the novel. Like Benjamin’s storyteller, Galich’s narrator “has counsel for his readers,” moralizes and gives “practical advice” (Benjamin 79) in the form of a (usually inverted) maxim or proverb: “Я люблю вас люди! Будьте доверчивы!” (“Priznanie v liubvi”), “Не надо, люди, бояться!” (“Роман о Сталине”), or “Промолчи—попадешь в палачи!” (“Staratel’skii val’sok”). Galich also often postulates that the stories he retells are “real,” overheard somewhere (“Zapoi pod Novyi god”) or related by someone else (as in “Nochnoi razgovor v vagone-restorane,” “Rasskaz, kotoryi ia uslyshal v privokzal’nom shalmane,” or the cycle “Kolomiitsev v polnyi rost”).

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