

Anatoly Vishevsky
Grinnell College, USA

TIMUR SHAOV AND THE DEATH OF THE RUSSIAN BARD SONG

Timur Shaov is called a “bard,” the word that denotes a long and honorable Russian tradition of poets who performed their songs by the accompaniment of a guitar. The bard’s songs are also called the “author’s songs.” These two definitions are presently synonymous, but I would like to assign them to two different categories. I believe that the “bard’s song” as known from the 1960s and 1970s ceased to exist, yet the author’s song remains active in the field of contemporary Russian culture. I call the “bard’s song” a genre that emerged after the death of Stalin and whose inception was connected to the period of liberalization in the Soviet society and culture. In culture and literature this period is known by the name of the *Thaw*. I apply the term the “author’s song” to the works of the artists who neither chronologically nor thematically relate to the Soviet period. Thus, the songs of Alexander Vertinskii, a Russian early twentieth-century performer of his own songs and a precursor of the bards, will fall into the category of “author’s songs.” The same is true for Timur Shaov, who, while lived and matured as an artist in the Soviet times, sings of a new Russian reality.

One of the most respected Russian bards, Bulat Okudzhava, said this about the genre and its representatives: “The epoch created us, the epoch of the events memorable to all of us and connected to the exposition of Stalin’s cult of personality, big hopes for the renovation of society, and its reconstruction.” (Okudzhava1, 3-4) It was also Okudzhava who stated that the bard’s song is dead:

I think that the author’s song the way we know it is dead. Because it was not just a song, but also rather a means of communication, a means of dialog. It was born in narrow and small Moscow kitchens, and now it has become a mass event, an *estrada* event. Some of these are more successful, some of these are less successful, but in general the author’s song lost its meaning. (Okudzhava2)

Some critics see proof of the vitality of the Russian bard tradition in the number of CDs sold as well as in the festivals of bard songs that take place in all Russophone cities of the former Soviet Union, and in a number of countries with a large percent-

age of Russian emigrants. In Russia alone there are over five hundred such festivals each year. (Smirnov, 161; Sukharev, 199) The poets-singers who win their town festival are sent to the regional festival, and finally to the all-Russian festival. The most famous such forum today is the Grushinsky festival near Samara that gathers close to half a million people. On the bank of the Volga river the guests of the festival create a tent city with its own market, post-office, and shops, with 'streets' and 'squares,' and, of course, with stages where anyone can sing their songs. If anything, such a proliferation is symptomatic not of the vitality but rather of the banalization and deterioration of the original genre; the bard's song that came as an alternative to the mass song, ironically is dying by turning into a mass event itself.

The songs of the bards that emerged after the period of Stalin's totalitarianism, ceased with the political freedoms of contemporary Russia. A parallel from the sciences illustrates the relationship of these social conditions to the existence of the genre: the dependency of pressure over the chemical state of elements. The maximum pressure forces a chemical compound to go to solid state, in which the molecules are kept in a certain place and cannot move. With the absence of any pressure, the chemical compound turns into gas, and the molecules move freely. But if we decrease the pressure without removing it completely, the compound turns into a liquid in which the molecules move around but not freely. It is to this liquid state of a chemical compound that we can compare the genre of the bard songs in the Soviet time.¹

The ability to provide escape made the bard song uniquely a Soviet phenomenon. Gerald Smith defines two main functions of what he calls guitar poetry: the ability "to speak in natural language about everyday life as people know it to be" and "provide myths that promise a palatable escape from everyday life." (231) The bards were poets, composers, and also performers of their songs, which made their message intimate and personal, as well as contrary to the ideological message of the mass songs of the Soviet period. The fact that the bards used the guitar as their medium is also significant, since the instrument was perceived in the early Soviet times, in the words of a critic, as "branded by a curse fruit of the petty bourgeois spirit." (Annenskii, 12) The small audiences at the bards' concerts, the homogeneity of the audience (mostly metropolitan intelligentsia) created a special bond between the bard and the audience. This bond worked even in the long-distance mode, when the songs of the bards were distributed and listened to on old tape-recorders in the privacy of one's home, and often in a circle of like-minded friends.

In addition to escape, the bards' songs gave their listeners hope. In many of his songs Bulat Okudzhava drew a magical circle of friends to protect them all from the evil of their world: «Возьмемся за руки, друзья, чтоб не пропасть пооди-

¹ I thank Martin Minelli, Grinnell College Professor of Chemistry, for helping me come up with this comparison.

ночке» (“Let’s hold hands, friends, so that we do not perish one by one.” (“The Brotherhood of Friends” «Союз друзей»). (Okudzhava3, 137) The poet is talking about gathering his friends around a table of food and wine (“Georgian song” «Грузинская песня»); about the trolley that picks up and saves people stranded at night: «подобрать потерпевших в ночи крушенье» (“The Last Trolley” «Последний троллейбус»). (Okudzhava3, 39) Faith, Hope, and Love (*Вера, Надежда, Любовь*) are the three sisters that help him survive in this world (“Three Sisters” «Три сестры»); and the bard’s native land, his “Fatherland” is the courtyard of the Moscow Arbat district (“Song about Arbat” «Песенка об Арбате»).

Alexandr Galich was a more open adversary of the system, the fact that brought him into the ranks of dissidents and eventually led to the poet’s exile. In his songs, the bard sees himself as a rank and file fighter (“I was a Soldier” «Я был рядовым»); who is not about to pardon anyone who is guilty of collaboration with the regime — in one song he sarcastically calls for pity to ailing executioners: «Пожалейте, люди, палачей!» (“Dance Tune” «Плясовая»). (Galich, 23) Yet Galich does not lose hope, and one of his most famous songs speaks of the bard’s metaphysical, if not physical return to a new Russia (“When I return” «Когда я вернусь»).

Vladimir Vysotskii also speaks of his return: «я, конечно, вернусь весь в друзьях и мечтах» (66) (“The Parting” «Прощание»). While a number of songs of this bard are angry and end in tragedy for his heroes, his most famous songs contain the message of hope and an encouragement to take destiny into one’s own hands. The song where the hero is a hunted wolf ends in a victory of the hero over his adversaries: «Обложили меня! Обложили! Но остались ни с чем егеря» (92) (“Wolf Hunting” «Охота на волков»). In a song-parable about cars that create a comfortable rut by following each other, the hero breaks out of this pattern, and urges others to follow his example, but not his road: «выбирайтесь своей колеёй!» (231) (“Somebody Else’s Rut” «Чужая колея»). One of Vysotskii’s songs is called “It is Not an Evening Yet” («Еще не вечер»), a phrase that in Russian came to signify hope and a chance for a good outcome; in the key text of Vysotskii, his “Song about Russia” («Песня о России»), the poet sees himself standing in front of his great and wondrous land («стою ... перед великою да сказочной страной»), and a fairy tale bird Gamaion brings him hope for the future: «птица Гамаюн надежду подает». (361)

The hope that the bards brought to their listeners was counterposed against the presence of some force that held both the bards and their audience under constant pressure. This force, the political system, was the final barrier to happiness; it was perceived as the main if not the only reason for all evils that befell the bards’ circle. No matter how sad a song would be and how tragic the outcome for its heroes, there always was this understanding that if the tenets were gone, life would be different.

It is exactly this hope that is missing from the songs of Timur Shaov. Shaov started writing his songs at the end of 1980s, thus at the time when the system that

gave birth to the phenomenon of the author's song was crumbling. Timur Shaov was brought up on the songs of the bards, and he considers himself their student. In his "A Shitty Song" («Говенная песня»), Shaov directly comments on the bard tradition and the present day situation with the author's song, lamenting his bard's fate in the new Russia («Ой ты, доля моя бардовская, / Барданутая доля моя!»), where even critical stabs at the leaders of the country pass unnoticed by them: «Но щас — даже пасквиль напишешь на Цезаря, / А ему — высочайше плевать.» (All references to Shaov's songs are from the CD albums listed in the bibliography.)

Okudzhava reference can be found in "The Morning Song of the City" («Утренняя песнь города»). While this song is directly associated with the mass songs of the Stalin's times, and in this case Vasiliï Lebedev-Kumach's "Moscow in May" («Москва майская»), it indirectly comments on the Moscow of Okudzhava courtyards. That Moscow is gone, and the author symbolizes the life of the city and its inhabitants with a factory smokestack: «Торчит фабричная труба, как наша общая судьба». In place of the morning sun that paints red the walls of Kremlin in the famous Soviet song, Shaov's morning paints the "jewel box with poor Lenin" («утро красит кумачом шкатулку с бедным Ильичем»). The irony is intensified by the mixture of styles; the words from a Soviet mass song are blended with quotes from Alexander Pushkin, and the present-day colloquial and slang expressions. For example, the road police GAI is directing traffic, including Pushkin's high flight of the angels and the underwater movement of sea creatures: «и горный ангелов полет, и гад морских подводный ход»; Lenin watching Moscow from above is depicted like Pushkin's Genius of Pure Beauty («глядит с кремлевской высоты наш Гений чистой красоты»), and the visitor to the city calls the place "madhouse" («Мамочки, дурдом! Как вы живете тут?»).

In Shaov's "Fairy Tales of Our Epoch" («Сказки нашего времени»), a song that also brings to mind Vysotskii's "There is No More Lukomor'e" («Лукоморья больше нет»), Vysotskii's ironic rendering of the fairy-tale lore caught in the Soviet reality is complemented by images from the epoch of globalization: the three sons, all of them fools, from the Russian fairy tale are named Atos, Portos, and Buratino (Pinocchio). The B-movie Godzilla crushes three little kittens from Sergei Mikhalkov's children's rhyme and the fairy-tale seven little goats. Another B-movie monster, King Kong, kills the Mermaid («Пришел Кинг Конг, Русалочка убита»). Unlike Vysotskii's song that expresses nostalgia for the realm of the Russian folklore, so distant from the poet's contemporary reality, in Shaov's song the fairy-tale elements are merged with literary allusions and important historical events, which creates an Apocalyptic imagery: Raskolnikov from Dostoevsky's novel kills the fairy-tale old woman, the three fairy-tale fools blow up the princess and her palace with dynamite («горошина тротила»), and the old man from a Russian fairy tale kills Archduke Ferdinand in Sarajevo. At the end, God enters

the song, and unlike his proverbial function in the famous Ivan Krylov's fable («вороне как-то Бог послал кусочек сыра»), here God becomes an active player and reacts to the events and characters in a typically postmodern way — he sends them all to Hell:

Ворону как-то Бог послал, послал конкретно
Прям вместе с сыром, и с лисой, и с баснописцем.

Shaov directly comments on his place in the bard tradition in the song “Conversation with the Critic” («Разговор с критиком»). The hero enters into a dialog with an imaginary critic who reproaches him for polluting bard culture with substandard vocabulary. The word in question here is “orgasm.” Shaov presents a stylized attack of the critic, where the latter calls the poet to sing of tents and bonfires, and the enthusiasm of tourists and names the poet a ringworm in the guts of a suffering culture:

Нет, спеть бы про палатки и костер,
Про то, как нам не страшен дождик хмурый!
Но ты засел, как вредоносный солитер
Во чреве истрадавшей культуры!
Культуры —
Мультикультуры,
Куль-куль-куль-куль,
Муль-муль-муль-муль.

The hero, under the impression of this conversation with the critic, has a revelatory dream in which Afanasii Fet, a 19th century Russian poet famous for his lyrical descriptions of nature, cruelly and in a manner of the present day street gangs, beats up and mutilates Ivan Barkov, a Russian poet of an earlier period, well known for his indecent poetry:

Он лупил его кастетом,
Приговаривал при этом:
«Я пришел к тебе с приветом
Рассказать, что солнце встало,
Что воспитанным поэтам
Выражаться не пристало».
А Барков просил прощенья,
Сжег поэму про Луку.
Вот такое вот знаменье
Мне приснилось, дураку.

Unlike Barkov, who pleads for mercy and admits his mistakes, Shaov's hero-poet rebels and writes a song about a couple having an orgasm, albeit ironically

in the tent, by the bonfire, and with an accompaniment of a guitar song (a bard's song, we assume):

Но я песню написал назло врагам,
Как одна возлюбленная пара
У костра, в палатке, под гитару,
Получила пламенный оргазм.

The dream episode contains additional irony since Fet is the author of a famous poem where a sexual act ending in an orgasm is described through such subtle imagery that the poem has been seen proper enough to be included even in school readers (“Whisper, timid breathing...” «Шопот, робкое дыханье»).

While Shaov calls himself a “bard,” his songs are devoid of the hope and ideals that characterize the songs of his predecessors:

Нас лишили многого, нам развеяли иллюзии,
Коммунизм, демократия — обернулись пустяком,
Идеалы наши стырили, горизонты наши сузили
И хотят отнять последнее — буженину с чесноком!
(“A Very Unwholesome Song” «Очень вредная песня»)

The hero believes that there must be something sacred in this world, and he turns to the art as the last resort: «Должно же быть что-то святое, / Прекрасное и не крутое». But his verbal crystallization of the sacred, his formula for the eternal goodness is ironic and sounds like a familiar Soviet cliché stating the immortality of Lenin and Leninism; in Shaov's version it is: “Hendel lived, Hendel lives, Hendel will always live!” (“Nostalgia for the classics” «По классике тоскуя»). The lack of hope is grounded in Shaov's songs in the author's view of the world as a doomed and dying place.

Shaov's view is Apocalyptic; in his world the malaria-carrying mosquitoes are flying in the black sky, the pale horse is grazing at the gate, and someone is watching and warning us through the ozone hole (“What Does Life Teach Us?” «Чему нас жизнь учит?»). This world is full of dark predictions and self-fulfilling prophecies. In “The Night Whistler” («Ночной свистун»), contemporary astrologers scare people with predictions of the star Wormwood and world destruction. The author uses references to children's literature and horror films to bring Biblical allusions to the everyday plane, thus making the end-of-the-world imagery more realistic and therefore more gruesome: the fairy-tale piglet Piatachok slaughters his friend baby-bear Winnie Pooh («и Пятачок зарежет Винни Пуха»); and Freddy Kruger replaces the “auntie horse” (*тетя лошадь*) from the children's rhymes; he is asked to rock the baby to sleep: «Приходи к нам Фредди Крюгер нашу детку покачать».

Allusions to children's rhymes and to the primer in literature often suggest pure and uncorrupted perception. Shaov breaks these quotes by polluting them with foreign elements and thus creates irony. In the song "We Will Choose Our Own Path" («Мы пойдем своим путем»), Shaov uses the famous Samuil Marshak's poem "Story of an Unknown Hero" («Рассказ о неизвестном герое») to raise a pressing question about "Russia's Way":

Ищут пожарные, ищет милиция,
Машут Бердяевым и Солженицыным.
Ищут, бедняги, не могут найти
Путь, по которому надо идти.

It is a drunken bum, another child in his present mental state, who answers this eternal Russian question asked in the manner of a children's rhyme; he sends everything and everyone to hell:

И сказал мне бомж
С початым пузырем
Ой, да пошли вы все!...

In the song "On the Fate of Intelligentsia" («О судьбе интеллигенции») the hero's neighbor at a drinking party is posing similar Russian questions of "What Is to Be Done?" and "Who Is to Blame" in their contemporary verbal arrangement: ««Что делать, блин!» — и: «Кто, блин, виноват?»»

Shaov's hero-narrator has answers to both of these questions; he is completely indifferent to the present state of things, and just observes and drinks his beer:

А я и не злорадствую
И славу не пою.
Я в этом не участвую,
Я просто пиво пью...
Я просто пиво пью...
("Spring Song" «Весенняя песенка»)

Similarly, in "The Song of the Gliderfliers" («Песня дельтапланеристов») the hero is flying a glider over Moscow, Russia, the former Soviet Union, and the whole world; he just observes and describes — without passing judgment or drawing and conclusions:

Вижу голеньких влюбленных, кверху попками во ржи
И недоенных буренок, мирно срущих у межи,
Вижу пьяных трактористов, вижу трезвую козу,
Демократов, коммунистов, копошащихся внизу.
...

Я летаю над кремлями, над лесами и полями,
Над приличными людьми, над столичными ...дями.

In his song “Shao-De Dzin” the hero laments the fact that people lost the “culture of laziness,” that they do not know how to observe and contemplate anymore («нет у нас культура лени, / разучились созерцать»), and in a way gives the answer to the question of the “Way” — his way is in the lack of action.

Instead of dealing with civilization and its problems, in the song “We Will Go to Nature” («Мы поедем на природу») the narrator proposes to escape; to flee from the evils of the city to the village, and from the problems and burning questions to alcohol, an old Russian remedy for the aching soul:

Нам надо на травку,
Нам надо в лесочек.
Потрогать козявку,
Понюхать цветочек.
По маленькой жажнем — Эх! —
Да в реченьку чухнем — Ух! —
Иначе зачажнем,
Иначе протухнем,
Иначе — кранты.

The hero sees the border between the world of civilization and nature as a fence that he and his friends need to overcome in order to escape; they take some cheap fortified wine (кагор) and have a party by the river: «Как молодые босяки, / устроим шабаш у реки» (“The Buttermilk Rocknroll” «Кефирный рок-н-ролл»). The Sentimentalist set up where the evil and corrupted city is divided by the river and juxtaposed to pure and natural countryside, brings to mind Nikolai Karamzin’s “Poor Liza,” except in this case one cannot but recall another classical Russian text by Pushkin: “A Feast in the Time of Plague.”

The beauty of simple village life, away from the city with its “crowds, cops, cars, piles of garbage, stench, racket, stress, whores, and pyramid schemes” («толпа, менты, машины, мусорные груды, / вонь, рэкет, стрессы, шлюхи, МММ») takes the narrator to the village in the song “A Little Village” («Деревенька») where he again draws a pastoral picture of pure and simple life. The pastoral theme enters the songs directly: in “The Dreamer-Shepherd” («Мечтательный пастух») Shaov presents a lyrical yet ironic picture of a drunken village shepherd who imagines himself to be a bullfighter. The drunker the shepherd becomes, the loftier are his dreams, and finally he sees a burning Rome under his imperial feet and drinks for *bruderschaft* with Attila the Hun and first Russian prince Rurik. The song ends with the sobering shepherd returning home to his wife and the routine of everyday life: «Мечтательный пастух, трезвеющий и слабый, / ведет коров домой и думает за жисть...» In the song “The 20th Century has Passed («XX век прошел»)

Shaov's hero again sees himself and his circle of friends in the bucolic landscape frolicking on a lawn in view of the encroaching catastrophe. Now the hero sees himself as a shepherd who is playing a tune about the beauty of tomorrow and is oblivious of the evils of today, as well as of his own fate:

Ах, вожделенный наш рай!
 Место, где можно лежать, ковыряя в носу.
 Ты, пастушок, доиграй —
 Завтра тебя злые люди повесят в лесу.

Shaov comes to his audience in the mask of his narrator — a simpleton, an ancient Russian traveling performer or “holy fool” («скоморох и юродивый»), as critic Annenskii calls him. (345-6) This narrative mask can also be identified as that of Petrushka, a Russian Punch from the fair shows called *balagan*. The *balagany* were popular in Russia since 18th century, and it is interesting to note that 18th century Sentimentalist culture also appears in Shaov's songs in the recurring motif of a shepherd, only in Shaov's case this image of a simple and unspoiled soul is given an ironic rendering, as if presented in the Petrushka's *balagan*.

The 18th century culture and its icons were popular at the beginning of the last century, when the elite culture appropriated the images of the 18th century French court with its loving couples a la shepherd and shepherdess in neatly trimmed French parks, on the lawns or by the fountains. In the Russia of the 20th century this 18th century entourage was adopted side by side the Commedia dell'arte characters: Pierrot, Harlequin, and Columbine. It is precisely by his mask of the “sad Pierrot” (Annenskii, 9) that Vertinskii, the precursor of the bards became known at the beginning of the 20th century. Vertinskii laughed at the world and himself through this mask («я сегодня смеюсь над собой», 276), and his was a prophetic laughter though tears («как бледен Ваш Пьерро, как плачет он порой», 279) at the dawn of the 20th century. A parallel can be drawn with Shaov, this Petrushka, a Russian folk Pierrot counterpart, whose chilling laughter and bitter tears of reality close the century and everything that it brought to life, including the Soviet bard movement.

Bibliography:

- Annenskii Анненский, Лев. *Барды*. Иркутск, 2005.
 Galich Галич, Александр. *Я верил в чудо*. Москва, 1991.
 Okudzhava1 Окуджава, Булат. «Музыка души». Предисловие к антологии авторской песни: *Наполним музыкой сердца*. Москва, 1989.
 Okudzhava2 Okudzhava, Bulat. Video recording of a concert and talk at Middlebury College in the summer 1990.
 Okudzhava3 Окуджава, Булат. *65 песен*. Редактор В. Фрумкин. Анн Арбор, 1980.

- Shaov Шаов, Тимур. Дискография:
 «От Бодлера до борделя», 1997.
 «Любовное чтиво», 1998.
 «Итоги пятилетки», 2001.
 «По классике тоскуя», 2002.
 «Верните, твари, оптимизм!», 2004.
 «Сказки нашего времени», 2004.
 «Выбери меня!», 2004.
- Smirnov Смирнов, С. Н. «Политические аспекты бардовской песни в современной России». *Мир России*, № 3, 2005.
- Smith Smith, Gerald Stanton. *Songs to Seven Strings: Russian Guitar Poetry and Soviet "Mass Song."* Bloomington, 1984.
- Sukharev Сухарев, Дмитрий. «Введение в субъективную бардистику». *Знамя*, № 10, 2000.
- Vertinskii Вертинский, Александр. «Дорогой длиною». Москва, 2004.
- Vysotskii Высоцкий, Владимир. *Избранное*. Москва, 1988.

Анатолий Вишевский

ТИМУР ШАОВ И КОНЕЦ БАРДОВСКОЙ ПЕСНИ

Резюме

В статье рассматривается творчество Тимура Шаова на фоне более широкого вопроса об авторской песне и бардовской традиции в русской культуре. На основе анализа песен Шаова, а также их сравнительного анализа с песнями бардов 60-х–70-х годов (Булата Окуджавы, Александра Галича, Владимира Высоцкого), автор статьи предлагает отличать авторскую песню от песни бардовской, выделяя бардовскую традицию, как неотъемлемо связанную с советской эпохой, и соответственно укладывая ее в определенные временные рамки.

Anatolij Wiszewski

TIMUR SZAOW I KONIEC PIEŚNI BARDÓW

Streszczenie

W artykule twórczość Timura Szaowa rozpatrywana jest na tle problematyki pieśni autorskiej i tradycji bardów w rosyjskiej kulturze. Na podstawie analizy utworów tego autora, a także ich porównania z pieśniami bardów lat 60.–70. (Bułata Okudżawy, Aleksandra Galicza, Władimira Wysockiego) autor proponuje odróżnienie pieśni autorskiej i bardowskiej, traktując tradycję bardów jako nieodłącznie powiązaną z epoką radziecką i odpowiednio usytuowaną w określonych ramach czasowych.