

1.4. "Babi Yar" by Yevgeny Yevtushenko

Yevgeny Yevtushenko, a Russian poet born in 1933, wrote this poem in 1961 in part to protest the Soviet Union's refusal to identify Babi Yar, a ravine in the suburbs of Kiev, as a site of the mass murder of 33,000 Jews on September 29–30, 1941. Dmitri Shostakovich's "Thirteenth Symphony" is based, in part, on this poem.

Source: The Collected Poems 1952–1990 by Yevgeny Yevtushenko. Edited by Albert C. Todd with the author and James Ragan (Henry Holt and Company, 1991), pp. 102-104. Used with permission of the author.

No monument stands over Babi Yar.
A drop sheer as a crude gravestone.
I am afraid.

 Today I am as old in years
as all the Jewish people.
Now I seem to be
 a Jew.

Here I plod through ancient Egypt.
Here I perish crucified on the cross,
and to this day I bear the scars of nails.
I seem to be
 Dreyfus.

The Philistine
 is both informer and judge.
I am behind bars.

 Beset on every side.
Hounded,
 spat on,
 slandered.

Squealing, dainty ladies in flounced Brussels lace
stick their parasols into my face.
I seem to be then

 a young boy in Byelostok.
Blood runs, spilling over the floors.
The barroom rabble-rousers
give off a stench of vodka and onion.
A boot kicks me aside, helpless.
In vain I plead with these pogrom bullies.
While they jeer and shout,

 'Beat the Yids. Save Russia!'
Some grain-marketer beats up my mother.

