

Production, Circulation and Reception of Soviet Nonconformist
Culture in Italy (1957-1991): A Transnational Perspective

OKUDZHAVA AND GALICH IN ITALY BETWEEN DISSENT AND OFFICIAL DISCOURSE

OKUDŽAVA E GALIČ IN ITALIA
FRA DISSENSO E DISCORSO UFFICIALE

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ABSTRACT

This article focuses on the Italian reception of the so-called singing poets or ‘bards’ Bulat Okudzhava and Aleksandr Galich. The two artists, together with Vladimir Vysotskii, are undoubtedly the most prominent representatives of the *bardovskaia pesnia*. Their recordings had a second life outside the boundaries of the Soviet Union, where Russian emigrant circles helped their popularity grow very quickly. In Italy, their song production received some attention in the second half of the twentieth century. Through an analysis of different articles, interviews and other peritextual and paratextual material, I trace back the history of the reception of Okudzhava and Galich, shedding light on how this genre was perceived in Italy. In particular, I show how newspapers put the two bards in the context of the Soviet Union, which was marked by the dichotomy conformism/nonconformism and official art/underground circulation and which image of the two artists predominates in the Italian press of that time.

Keywords: Aleksandr Galich; Bulat Okudzhava; *Magnitizdat*; Paratexts; Soviet Songwriters.

Questo articolo si concentra sulla ricezione in Italia dei cosiddetti cantapoeti o “bardi” Bulat Okudžava e Aleksandr Galič. I due artisti, insieme a Vladimir Vysockij, sono senza dubbio i rappresentanti più importanti della cosiddetta *bardovskaja pesnja*. Le loro registrazioni ebbero una seconda vita al di fuori dei confini dell’Unione Sovietica, dove i circoli degli emigranti russi contribuirono alla rapida crescita della loro popolarità. In Italia, la loro produzione musicale suscitò un certo interesse nella seconda metà del XX secolo. Attraverso l’analisi di articoli, interviste e altro materiale peritextuale e paratestuale, ripercorro la storia della ricezione di Okudžava e Galič, mettendo in luce come questo genere fosse percepito in Italia. In particolare, l’obiettivo è mostrare come i giornali collocassero i due cantautori nel contesto dell’Unione Sovietica, caratterizzato dalla dicotomia conformismo/anticonformismo e arte ufficiale/circolazione clandestina, e quale immagine dei due artisti predominasse nella stampa italiana dell’epoca.

Parole chiave: Aleksandr Galič; Bulat Okudžava; *Magnitizdat*; Paratesti; Cantautori sovietici.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The genre of Soviet ‘sung poetry’ has developed in the late 1950s in the Soviet Union at the juncture of urban folklore, peasant ballads and the ‘criminal’ songs brought by former prisoners returning from Stalinist labour camps (Kulagin). Thanks to the relatively open and free atmosphere promoted by Nikita Khrushchev – called ‘Thaw’ (*otтеpel’*) – this new trend was made popular by such bards as Iuz Aleshkovskii, Iurii Vizbor, Iulii Kim, Aleksander Gorodnitskii, Evgenii Kliachkin and Novella Matveeva, but most of all, the three great names that stand out in the singing context of the 1960s and 1970s are the poet and writer Bulat Okudzhava, the playwright Aleksandr Galich and the actor Vladimir Vysotskii. As Zhitinskii rightly states, for the first time during the Soviet era, these bards “created songs that dealt with intimate human emotions, the complexities of human relationships and issues of social injustice, honestly evoked in a simple vernacular often spiced by regional elements, criminal jargon and, at times, obscenity” (189).

In the present paper, I focus on the reception in Italy of Bulat Okudzhava and Aleksandr Galich, as Vladimir Vysotskii’s reception calls for a separate investigation, being slightly more popular in Italy than his fellow songwriters and already studied from this perspective.¹

Much information about the journeys of the bards in Italy and their literary traces in the shape of interviews, documentaries, translations and so on is still to be found in archives or the memory of those witnesses who are still alive. However, a great number of articles has been collected so far, that together with other paratextual material (prefaces and introduction to books translated in Italian), allow us to make some preliminary observations about the role and status of these peculiar artists in Italy in the second half of the Twentieth century.

Bards’ songs circulated in the Soviet Union thanks to *magnitizdat*, “the practice of making and sharing homemade audio recordings, which became widespread just as samizdat was beginning to become a recognizable system after Stalin” (Komaromi). These recordings then usually had a second life outside the boundaries of the Soviet Union, and manuscripts and books were smuggled out to become part of new literary circuits.

As far as the Italian context is concerned, we cannot say that such circulation has ever been as widespread as it was, for example, in Paris or the USA, where Russian emigrant circles helped the popularity of such songs grow very fast: think of the French recording studio Chante du Monde but also of the leading role of Vladimir Frumkin as a teacher of Russian language at Oberlin College and promoter of the seminars, lectures and general concerts by many bards that allowed American students and the general public to become acquainted with this part of the Russian culture (Frumkin). A thorough investigation of Okudzhava’s, Galich’s and Vysotskii’s reception in Italy during their life and after has still to be carried out. What follows is the first step to fill in the

¹ For example, see Grassi.

gap in reception studies concerning Soviet music of the second half of the XX century and how it was perceived abroad, particularly in Italy.

2. BULAT OKUDZHAVA, ALEKSANDR GALICH AND ITALY

Chronologically, the name Bulat Okudzhava is the first to appear in Italy in the 1960s, whereas Aleksandr Galich is mainly linked to the *Biennale del Dissenso* (Biennale of Dissent), which was held in Venice in 1977. Before that, Okudzhava, Vysotskii and Galich's poems were included in the seminal collection *Canzoni russe di protesta* [Russian songs of protest] that were edited and translated by Pietro Zveteremich and published in 1972, "a printed miracle, an act of courage, a proof of love, a slim gospel, an essential anthology" (Lega 19).²

Bulat Okudzhava's main connection with Italy is because of his performance at the Tenco Festival in 1985, where he was awarded the prestigious Tenco prize. However, Okudzhava's relationship with Italy began to develop long before his visit to Ligurian town. Almost 20 years before this concert, in 1967, Okudzhava's mysterious record, entitled *Un nastro da Mosca. 1960–1967* [A Tape from Moscow. 1960–1967], appeared. On the cover the small print reads: *Canzoni del disgelo cantate da Bulat Okudzava* [sic] [Songs of the Thaw sung by the poet Bulat Okudzhava].

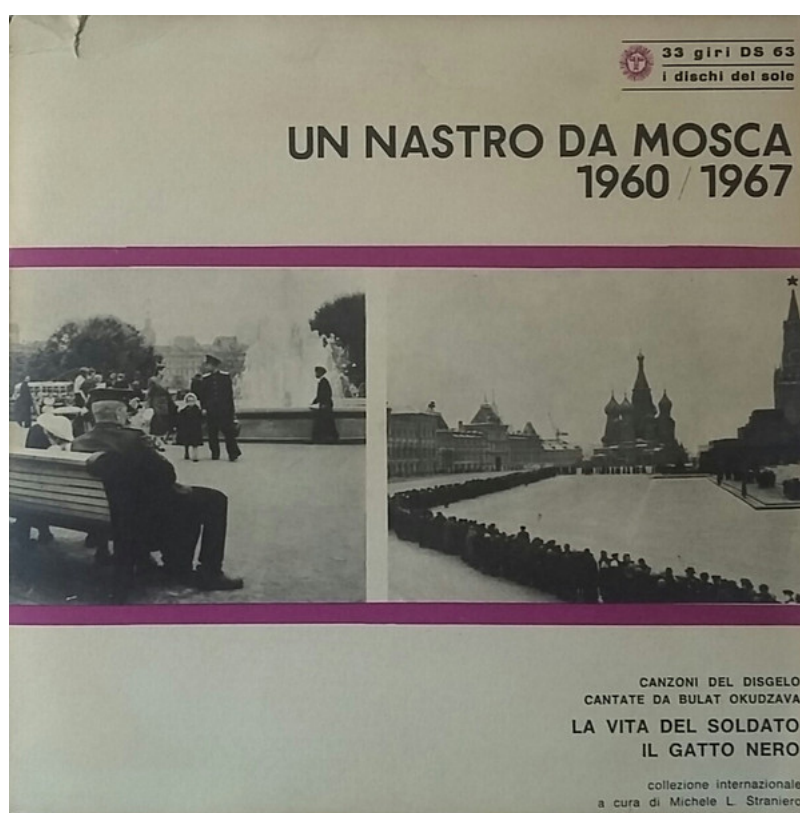


Fig. 1 B. Okudžava, *Un nastro da Mosca 1960/1967*, I dischi del sole, 1967.

² Here and elsewhere, unless otherwise indicated, the translations are mine.

The disc was edited by Clara Strada, wife of the famous scholar Vittorio Strada, and by singer, ethno-musicologist and researcher of folk and art songs Michele Luigi Straniero. This is most likely one of the thousands of *magnitizdat* editions circulating throughout the Soviet Union and beyond in those years. The hypothesis is confirmed by an article of 14 September 1985 written by Michele Straniero, who claims that “[o]ne of these discs came into our hands at the end of the sixties and we immediately included it in a small international series called “Disks of the Sun”” (7) and adds “[t]hat recording by Bulat Okudzhava, entitled simply: “A Tape from Moscow”, has remained as an irreplaceable testament to our hope and – if you like – our utopia” (7). The disc contains recordings of very poor quality (which also confirms the unofficial distribution) of Okudzhava’s songs from 1957 onwards. The selection of songs fixed an important moment in the author’s poetic evolution, including such works as *Canzone dell’Arbat* [The Song about Arbat/Pesenka ob Arbate], *Canzone del palloncino blu* [The Song about a Blue Balloon/Pesenka o golubom sharike], *Il soldatino di carta* [The Paper Soldier/Bumazhnyi soldat], *L’ultimo filobus* [Midnight Trolleybus/Polnochnyi ili poslednii trolleibus], *Sulla strada di Smolensk* [On the Smolensk Road/Po Smolenskoi doroge] and so on, that is, the most famous ‘poems for guitar’ Okudzhava had composed up until then, and which subsequently became his most famous songs. The text of the small booklet included in the album briefly describes the ‘genre’ of bards, gives a brief biography of Okudzhava and includes literary translations of the songs into Italian.

In fact, before this disc, Italians had come to know Bulat Okudzhava not as a songwriter but as a writer, thanks to the translation of his prose works.³

³ The selection occupies quite an important place in the Italian publishing market. Although translations of Soviet literature started to appear in Italy at the end of the fifties (with Pasternak’s *Doctor Zhivago* in 1957) and its publication increased exponentially in the 1960s and 1970s, only a few authors received so much attention. In 1962, Editori Riuniti published Bulat Okudzhava’s novella *Bud zdorov, shkoliar!* [Be Healthy, Schoolboy!] translated by Agostino Villa and released in Italy with the title *In prima linea* [On the first line]. In 1969, *Bednyi Avrosimov* [Poor Avrosimov] was published by the publishing house De Donato, in Mariia Olsuf’eva’s translation, titled *Il povero Avròsimov*. It was followed in 1972 by the Longanesi’s edition of *Pozhozhdeniia Shipova ili starinnyi vodevil* [The adventures of Shipov, or Old Timey Vaudeville], also translated by Olsuf’eva with the title *L’agente di Tula (Antico vaudeville, fatti realmente accaduti)*. Okudzhava popularity in Italy continued into the 1980s: in 1986, a year after his appearance at the Tenco Festival, the novel *Svidanie s Bonapartom* [A Date with Bonaparte] was published, translated by Gian Carlo Giaccone and released with the title *Appuntamento con Bonaparte*; and finally, in 1989, the short story *Iskusstvo kroiki i shitia* [The Art of Cutting and Sewing] came out under the title *L’arte di tagliare, cucire e vivere* by the publishing house Mondadori.

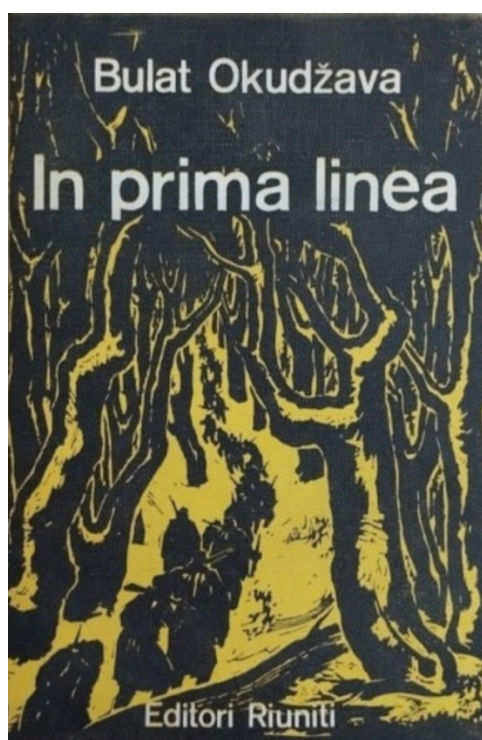


Fig. 2. B. Okudžava, *In prima linea*, trad. A. Villa, Editori Riuniti, 1962.

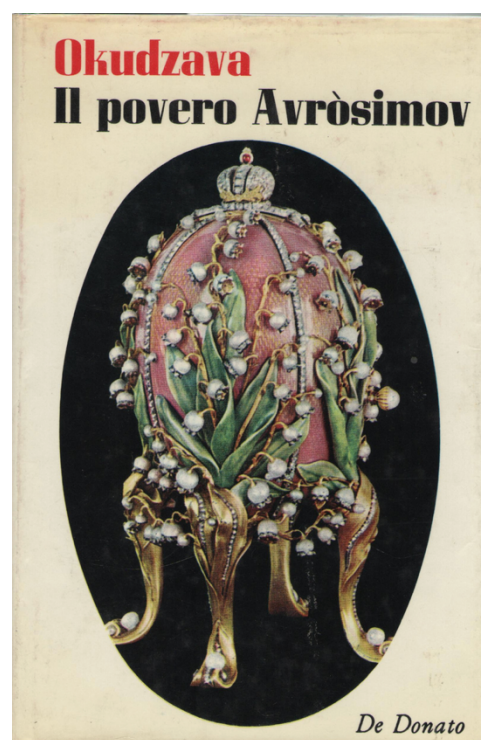


Fig. 3. B. Okudžava, *Il povero Avròsimov*, trad. M. Olsoufieva, De Donato, 1969.

Therefore, in Italy, Okudzhava the novelist enjoyed considerable success, at least in the press, with fairly well-known publishers publishing his books and having them featured in newspapers.

In 1972, a fundamental study appeared in Italy: a book entitled *Canzoni russe di protesta* [Russian Songs of protest] – which included a collection of poems and songs by Vysotskii, Okudzhava and Galich – was translated and edited by Pietro Zveteremich, translator of the world's first publication of Boris Pasternak's novel *Doctor Zhivago* (Pasternak).⁴

The book represents one of the first meaningful attempts at an academic analysis of the phenomenon of Russian 'sung poetry'. In his introduction, Zveteremich points out an important factor in the reception of such artists at home and, consequently, abroad:

Those who only know about Russian literary life today through the official press of that country, they will remember a few good stories of Bulat Okudzhava, which appeared in periodicals and almanacs of limited circulation and which cannot be found today [...] they will know even less of Aleksandr Galich: that he is the author of a popular play and a few poems sporadically published in journals; finally, they will know nothing about Vladimir Vysotskii, because he does not belong to the Soviet Writers' Union but to a syndicate of entertainment workers and therefore cannot be a poet. (7)

Almost 20 years later, following the path indicated by Zveteremich, Gian Piero Piretto published *Arbat, mio Arbat* [Arbat, My Arbat], a collection that included a large number of songs by Okudzhava.

⁴ For a detailed analysis of the editorial microhistory of this *tamizdat*, see Mancosu, "Inside the Zhivago storm"; "Moscow has Ears Everywhere"; "In the KGB's Crosshairs".

Canzoni russe di protesta and *Arbat, mio Arbat* are two major works that have become the basis for other projects and research on Okudzhava, the singing poet. As already mentioned, apart from these appearances in Italy in the form of translations and publications, Okudzhava visited San Remo in 1985, where he was awarded with a special prize as “cultural operator” during the Tenco Festival. He arrived in Ventimiglia, not far from San Remo, by train with Afanasii Veselitskii, a member of the Soviet Writers’ Union who handled Italian–Soviet relations and who acted as ‘supervisor’ for the artist abroad. After his performance in San Remo, Okudzhava extended his stay in Italy for a few days for an unscheduled invitation from the Italy–USSR Association in Turin. The last time Bulat Okudzhava is said to have visited Italy – Rome to be precise – was in 1987, but no reliable information has been found yet.⁵

At the time, the Tenco Festival was the most important event for musicians and critics, a sort of antagonist to the well-known Sanremo Music Festival, the most popular Italian song contest and awards ceremony, which is held annually in the city of Sanremo and is still the longest-running annual TV music competition on a national level. However, the Tenco Festival was perceived as the only venue for making acquaintances with the most interesting national and international music.

I will focus on the media coverage of the event, particularly on the exhibition of Bulat Okudzhava, after being awarded as the best ‘cultural operator’ of the year.⁶ The newspapers that gave the most coverage of the event were Turin-based *La Stampa* and *Stampa Sera*. Articles or brief accounts appeared in numerous other publications, such as *l’Unità*, *Il Messaggero*, *Il Manifesto* and *L’eco di Bergamo*. They were very different in their popularity and scope: *l’Unità* and *Manifesto* were leading left-wing dailies at the time, whereas *L’eco di Bergamo* and *L’arena*, for example, were local papers with small editions and limited readership. Nonetheless, they all devoted one or two articles to the festival, while *La Stampa* announced the event in September and published one article each on all days of the festival from October 10 to 12. Some journalists and critics have written about Okudzhava on several occasions. Among them, I will mention Michele Straniero and Michele Serra, who talk not only about Okudzhava’s work, but also about the sociocultural context in which it originated, thus offering a very specific perspective from abroad on Soviet musical culture.

As previously mentioned, Michele Straniero played a crucial role in Okudzhava’s participation in the Tenco Festival. He was a member of the Cantacronache movement in Turin.⁷ In the 1960s, he organised the masterclass *Opposition Is Always Resistance* at the international Folk Festival 2,

⁵ For more detailed information about Okudzhava’s visit to Italy, see De Florio, “Pesni Bulata Okudžavy na ital’janskom jazyke” 27–29.

⁶ For a detailed account of the prize-awarding, see Sacchi 7–13.

⁷ Cantacronache was a collective of musicians, writers and poets formed in Turin in 1957 with the aim of enhancing the world of song through social commitment. It was formed by Sergio Liberovici and Michele L. Straniero, founders, who were joined by Fausto Amodei and Margot. They are considered among the precursors of Italian singer-songwriting. Intellectuals of the time such as Gianni Rodari, Giorgio De Maria, Emilio Jona, Italo Calvino and Umberto Eco also participated in the musical project as lyricists (Ferrari).

which was dedicated to folk song and the world song.⁸ In the 1980s, he became a music critic of *L'Avvenire* and wrote several articles about the Tenco Festival. A specialist in ethnographic and folk music, he found common roots in Okudzhava's work on the European musical tradition.

Journalist and writer Michele Serra picked up on this comparison and called Okudzhava the 'Eastern Brel', adding that it is very difficult to define the phenomenon of the bard's song, particularly whether Okudzhava belongs to the category of either dissident or conformist. In an article in *l'Unità* of 12 October 1985, Michele Serra reports Okudzhava's words about this question: "Bulat Okudzhava confirmed how difficult and pretentious it is in the West to label an Eastern intellectual on the basis of the limited and crude dualism of dissent and conformism" (17).

The articles that deal with Okudzhava touched on two main discourses: on the one hand, the topics are the music, the main features of Okudzhava's artistic personality and his style and poetics; on the other hand, journalists focus on the ideological discourse, how the political significance of Okudzhava's activities in the USSR and his presence in Italy was interpreted in the framework of Italian-Russian relations of the second half of the 1980s.

Based on this, it is possible to divide the newspapers into two groups: *La Stampa* and *Stampa Sera* predominantly paid attention to Okudzhava's creative biography and focused on his artistic talent.⁹ The other newspapers, on the other hand, highlighted the role of the nonconformist writer in his homeland and abroad.

Some critics have focused on the difference that traditionally characterises the relationship between poetry and songs in Italy and Russia. Emblematic on this subject is the observation made by the writer and poet Giuseppe Conte in an article on 20 May 1985 in *Stampa Sera*. He believes that the problem lies in the different conditions and functions of poetry and songs in the contemporary world. If, in Italy, where mass culture reigns supreme, poetry is in a marginal state, then in Russia, poetry is very successful and is read and listened to by most of the population. This difference is highlighted in many articles about Okudzhava in the 1980s, as well as in interviews in which the poet talks in first person about the situation of poetry in the USSR and difference between his work and mass song and, consequently, about his rejection of Italian pop music, which was hugely popular in the Soviet Union at that time. In an interview with Emanuele Novazio on 12 December 1986, Okudzhava explains that "songwriting is a serious thing, it's a counterbalance to mass culture. If there were no songs, mass culture would suffocate us. God and time will show who was right" (Novazio 3). By mass culture, Okudzhava means "art without thought, which does nothing but entertain". Songwriting, on the other hand, is "the creativity of people who think for those who think" (3).

⁸ See *Stampa sera* 8 September 1966.

⁹ "From 10 to 12 October [...], you will meet some very interesting artists surrounded by a legendary aura, above all the Soviet writer Bulat Okudzhava, a versatile intellectual capable of moving in his long career from poetry to novel, from film scripts to song" (c.g., 23); "the founding father of Soviet singing authors" (s. sp., 21); "Representative of a popular music culture that is completely unknown in Italy" (c.d., 19).

In Italy, therefore, the convergence and promotion of the two genres is perceived as a peculiar element of the Russian tradition, particularly of Okudzhava's work and, later on, of Vysotskii's as well. Thus, we can assume that the different interactions between such phenomena as mass culture, poetry and song lies in the special perception of bards' songs by Italian music critics, which ultimately led to an interest in the work of the Russian poets and bards.

Despite the fact that the ideological discourse is brought to the fore in other journals and newspapers, in the 1960s and 1970s *La Stampa* gave some space to the conformist-dissent dichotomy: in 1967, in an article about the music listened to in the USSR, Ennio Caretto talks about a ban on broadcasting Anglo-American songs and "songs by songwriters such as Okudzhava, full of pity and regret or causing protest" (3).

Undoubtedly, the publication of the collection by Zveteremich *Canzoni russe di protesta* and the conflicts generated by the *Biennale del Dissenso* in 1977 – which I will talk about later – oriented Italian journalists, who were at ease placing emphasis on the ideological background and positioning of the writer in the Soviet cultural space.

However, it is at the Tenco Festival that the sociocultural issue was predominant in the Italian press: almost all Italian issues focused more Soviet singer than to the other winners, that is, Dave Van Ronk and Silvio Rodriguez, tending to place his participation in a political framework:

Adaptation or dissent? Labels, especially when it comes to poorly understood cultural realities, are very untrue and often useless. The only thing that can be said for certain is that the good Bulat came to Sanremo with the blessing of the Moscow Writers' Union, together with (at Rambaldi's own insistence) an *attaché* for cultural relations between Italy and the USSR. (Serra 12)

Mario Baudino defined Okudzhava as a "nonconformist writer" but definitely not a "dissident writer", and in his eyes he looked "like a great loner, a voice outside the chorus" (15).

A more direct and polarised narrative prevails in almost all the other newspapers, apart from *La Stampa* and *Stampa Sera*, that reported on Okudzhava's performance at San Remo. Looking at the headlines of the articles, the bard is presented as an oppositionist, a dissident or a 'poet against'. Another element in common in almost all the texts is the exceptionality of the event, with Soviet, American and Cuban artists performing on the same stage: "Cuban, Soviet, North American: a real inverted historical compromise, given that songwriting is a song of protest, conflict, never compromise. But Club Tenco knows how to do this and much more..." (Martelli), "Sanremo: in the name of Tenco, USSR and USA sing together" (Romana), "Russia and States make peace with music" (Maccario) to name just a few examples.

A reference to politics is also made in a statement by Amilcare Rambaldi, which can be interpreted as a call upon humanitarian values rather than as a political claim: "Song cannot make peace, but a little music is enough to promote acquaintance and mutual understanding between peoples" (Monticone 21).

By and large, Italian criticism singled out the Russian songwriter's singular existential stance and rightly interpreted the significance of his work as far from being purely political, but rather ethical. Okudzhava was not a dissident, although he related to dissidents, knew them and was friends with some. Nevertheless, he set himself a different task: not a direct confrontation with the authorities but an expression of his soul that can overcome geopolitical issues.

The same position was shared by Aleksandr Galich (1918–1977), whose connection to Italy, in a sense, was very similar to Bulat Okudzhava's reception, yet some differences should be noted when approaching paratextual material not strictly connected to his works, especially newspaper articles, the majority of whom were written during or right after Galich's visit to Venice for the *Biennale del Dissenso* in 1977. The event took on even greater significance because it was the writer's last public appearance before his death one month later in Paris.

Little information about Galich can be recovered at the beginning of the 1970s. On 1 December 1970 in *La Stampa* Moscow correspondent Paolo Garimberti talked about the phenomenon of *mag-nitizdat*, naming the best representatives of this new 'genre' – Vysotskii, Ancharov and Galich – comparing them with Western songwriters such as Bob Dylan, Joan Baez and De André. The journalist distinguished their finest satire from open and sharp dissent. However, he gave misleading information about Galich's biography by mentioning the long years he allegedly spent in the prison camps:

Aleksandr Galich, who spent long years in 'labour camps' is the best known and least 'liked' of these 'minstrels of anti-Stalinism' (his friends have called him the 'Solzhenitsyn of music'). The rhythm of his ballads is slow and monotonous, very sad; his voice is low, deep, somewhat ghostly. But the words are harsh, cutting when they denounce the accomplices of the Stalinist crimes, who kept silent 'out of fear or interest'. (3)

Three years later, the journalist described the repressive campaign against many intellectuals and Soviet elites who were bound to be exiled or imprisoned. Many newspapers were forced to shut down, human rights were more and more violated, and freedom of speech was almost reduced to zero. The expulsion of Galich from the Soviet Writers' Union on 29 December 1971 was one of the many examples mentioned by Garimberti to prove the Soviet government's crack-down on those who did not align with official ideology (8).

Meanwhile, in Italy, Lia Wainstein¹⁰ reviewed *Canzoni russe di protesta* and confirmed that, at that time, only Bulat Okudzhava was known among Italian readers (14). Some share of this popularity came for Galich only in 1977, after his participation at the *Biennale* of Venice – one of the most prestigious expositions of the international art world – that "brought the unofficial contemporary cultures of Soviet bloc countries into sharp focus" (Sasvári 12).

¹⁰ Lia Wainstein was a European intellectual, active in Italy from the 1950s until the turn of the millennium. She was a Slavist translator and writer who published more than 1.200 writings including volumes, essays and press articles. Her constant focus, both intellectual and human, was on the Russian and Soviet worlds and the important part that Jewish culture and tradition played in them.

The debates and controversies that accompanied the planning and realisation of the initiative made it a point of no return in relations between the USSR and Italy, a pivotal element in any analysis of the cultural and political dynamics between the two countries and, more generally, between the communist parties of Europe and the Eastern bloc. According to Simone Guagnelli, the *Biennale del Dissenso* can be considered “as much the fruit of an authentic path of support for the emerging forms of protest by Eastern European intellectuals, as an instrument of hegemonic politics concerning the left in our country” (319). The political message inside the very idea of a cultural exhibition dedicated to oppressed voices in Poland, Russia, Hungary, Czechoslovakia and other countries triggered a series of countermeasures by the Soviet government, including fierce accusations of anti-Soviet propaganda (Caccamo 123-29). However, “the Biennale was not only an instrument of Italian domestic political manipulation, but also represented an encouragement for those inside the USSR who dissented. In fact, the cause of dissent received great space and voice” (131).

Information about Galich’s presence in the last part of the exhibition was confirmed by a number of newspapers that covered the event and by the publication of the 1977 Yearbook edited by the Historical Archive of Contemporary Arts in 1979, where details about the various concerts are given as follows:

Music events. Among the cultural dissent events, those dedicated to music were divided into three different sets: two series of concerts by singer-songwriters and musicians from eastern countries, and a third consisting of seminars and round tables. The meetings under the title ‘Songwriters of Dissent’ with four ‘dissent’ songwriters and poets Wolf Biermann, Karel Kryl, Aleksandr Galich, and Aleksei Khvostenko were in some ways the most unexpected, unusual, and aroused as much if not more interest and audience participation than the ‘Sovetskaja Muzyka’ concerts. (Annuario 593)

For some reason, two pages later, it is said that the cycle of songwriters “ended, somewhat quietly”, but nonetheless, the meetings were successful:

Four personalities differing in age, temperament, inspiration and style, but illustrated in a variety of production in the field of song and poetry that the acronym ‘dissent’ perhaps tended to schematise in a reductive manner, but even from this nominalistic cage they all escaped with the naturalness of freedom. Some general considerations were valid for all: the exclusion of any indulgence in any political exploitation of these performances (so much so that the presence of police squads outside the venues of such harmless performances was completely unjustified and anachronistic), the passionate participation of a predominantly international and cultured audience (one heard around them speaking more in Slavic and Russian languages than in Italian) of students, journalists, critics, artists and militants. All the *récitals* (songs and poems) were in the original language, but oral and sometimes even written translations of the texts were provided. (595)

Interestingly enough, almost all the daily newspapers that commented on the exhibition defined Galich as ‘a songwriter’ and ‘a dissident’, two words that were highly despised by him and

his fellow writers.¹¹ This is more relevant if we read the interview that Galich gave on 14 May 1977 for *Il Gazzettino di Venezia* to Augusto Dell'Angelo, where the poet openly stated that he did not want to be called 'dissident', "a word that does not exist in our language. I prefer to be called resistant, like millions of my compatriots" (Dell'Angelo 1).

However, it must be noted that the descriptions of the concert Galich gave on 3 December 1977 focused more on his artistic quality than on the political aspect:

What was most striking about Galic, however, was not only his subtle irony in recounting certain episodes that acted as 'breaks' in the songs, but above all his delicate poetry, 'sung' by a raspy but extremely penetrating and confidential voice to which the sound of the guitar, which the artist most lightly plays, played in the background. (Pugnaletto 3)

Cesare Marchi shared the same opinion in his article for Milan-based *Il Giornale nuovo*: "They are compositions that, using the language of the street and the underground, represent a humanity now frustrated now overwhelmed, the defeated and the overbearing, from the retired ex-convict who gets drunk in the dive bar to the obtuse party official" (5).

Such brief comments resonate also in the book *Songs/Poems of dissent (Canzoni/poesie del dissenso)*, edited by Mario Corti e Gianlorenzo Pacini and published by Marsilio Editori,¹² and it is likely that journalists drew inspiration from the preface of the volume, which came out in November 1977. In his text, Mario Corti gives a brief but exhaustive biography of Galich as a Soviet man and artist. Together with the analysis of Zveteremich, it is the only text in which Galich's multifaceted mastery is thoroughly explained to the Italian reader/listener.

It is peculiar that, in their articles, the journalists never mentioned the complexity of Galich's songs: the literary references – mainly Pasternak, Maiakovskii and Brodskii, as Corti states (53-58) – and hints to everyday life often make them enigmatic (even to the post-1991 generation of Russian listeners), when not downright incomprehensible. Galich is certainly the least 'accessible' of the bards, the most cultured and tied to the literary tradition of his country. On the other hand, at the concert, the public was mostly of Russian-speaking people, and on the stage, Gianlorenzo Pacini translated the lyrics and Galich's comments and remarks about his songs.

The Italian press emphasised his ability to reach the listener, if only through his raspy voice or the expressiveness of his performance, as noted by Lucio Lami in his article written after the sudden death of poet on 15 December 1977 in his flat in Paris (Lami 5).

The tragic accident was reported by a large number of newspapers; some of them did not pay attention to Galich during the *Biennale*, such as the Catholic-inspired daily founded in 1968

¹¹ Okudzhava, Vysotskii and Galich generally disliked self-description, but when forced to, they considered themselves to be poets. Note that Okudzhava was also a prose writer, Vysotsky an actor and Galich a playwright. For the terminological debate around 'avtorskaia', 'bardovskaia' and 'samodeiatel'naia pesnia' see De Florio, *Il dissenso cantato in Unione Sovietica* 109-13; Kulagin; Platonov; Bogomolov.

¹² The volume was part of a series of 10 books that included material taken from the Biennale. See Bevilacqua 2.

L'Avvenire. The newspaper did not cover Galich's performance in Venice¹³ but after his death was interested in the Christian aspect of "one of Russia's most prolific and generous intellectuals in exile" (3). By including an excerpt from the poem *Stalin* – in Italian *Ave Maria* – and a translation of *Ascoltando Bach Listening to Bach*, the anonymous journalist underlined how "Galic's Christian discourse is also civically engaged, as the glimpses of Soviet reality alternating with stanzas of a religious stamp show" (18).¹⁴ Also *La Gazzetta del Sud*, a Messina-based newspaper, hosted Paolo Romani's article about Galich's tragic end (1977), where the journalist recalled an album recorded in 1974 by Galich in Oslo.¹⁵

Finally, both *La Stampa* and *Tuttolibri* highlighted the difficulties of emigrant life for the artist, giving a more human portrait of the artist, though it is difficult to estimate whether the statement corresponded to the truth: "In Paris, Galic [*sic*] did not live well; he appeared sad, lonely, sick with nostalgia like other Soviet 'dissidents', strangers in an environment they do not understand, who often refuse to understand, jealous of their own language, guarded as a personal as well as a cultural identity" (Patrino 26).

In 1978, the name of Aleksandr Galich appeared, this time postmortem, in the Italian press: 29 July 1978 *Tuttolibri* mentioned some poems by Galich included in the fourth issue of Giancarlo Vigorelli's journal *La Nuova Europa*¹⁶ (Guaraldo 11), but the last relevant mention was related to the publication of his novel *Prova generale* [Dress Rehearsal], which was published by Città Armoniosa in 1978.¹⁷

In 1979, two reviews of the book came out, respectively, in April and May 1979. The first was published by *Tuttolibri* and signed by Giorgio Martellini, who significantly entitled the text *Un menestrello contro i burocrati* [A minstrel against the bureaucrats] and stressed Galich's song production while talking about his novel: "He put his message of protest in ballads full of rage and hope that he sang with the guitar: the ancient tradition of minstrels was renewed and his verses hit the mark much faster than essays and novels and being an oral performance, could avoid more easily the Soviet censorship" (14).

Lia Wainstein gave some details about Galich's biography and made some general remarks on the book, but more importantly, for the first time, touched on the topic of his Jewish origin and the persecution of Soviet Jews in Soviet history. She briefly mentioned some concerts in Rome in 1977, but it was not possible to retrieve any information about them.

¹³ This assumption is based on the research carried out so far in the newspaper's archive.

¹⁴ Another article appeared in the daily on 17 December 1977 which quite emphatically reported the death of the dissent artist and exposé of truths. See *L'Avvenire* 17 December 1977, 3.

¹⁵ *Un cri chuchoté*. Chanté en russe par Alexander Galitch. Enregistré en 1974 aux studios Arne Bendiksen, Oslo, Norvège 1974.

¹⁶ Giancarlo Vigorelli (1913–2005) was a writer, journalist and literary critic. He played a fundamental role in building diplomatic bridges among Europe's writers and artists.

¹⁷ *Dress Rehearsal* was written by Aleksandr Galich in 1973, only a year before his forced emigration from the Soviet Union and four years before his tragic death. The novel has many autobiographical elements, but it reflects also on the psyche of Galich's contemporaries and offers an insight into Soviet mentality.

Finally, we find two little articles in *La Stampa* in the late 1980s, during the *perestroika*, when the circulation of the books censored up to that time became official again. The first text (1988) announces Galich's rehabilitation by the Filmmakers' Union: "Soviet screenwriter Aleksander Galich, who died in exile in France in 1977, was rehabilitated in the USSR by the Union of Filmmakers. A highly regarded screenwriter, Galich nevertheless owes his fame to his verses and songs in which he spoke bluntly about the crimes of Stalinism and betrayed hopes" (*La Stampa*, "Che fanno" 21). In the second article (1989), the journalist talks about the return of forbidden books to the USSR, starting from 15 August 1989, and it is curious that the columnist mentions Galich, together with Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn and Vasilii Grossman, whose popularity and relevance to the literary canon were decidedly greater than that of the singer-songwriter: "From 15 August next many of the books of forbidden will be able to be freely introduced into the USSR. This authors [including Solzenitsyn, Grossman and Galic] was announced by Soviet customs officials claiming to have received a ten-page long list of no longer taboo authors" (*La Stampa*, "Torneranno in Urss i libri proibiti" 4).

The figure of Galich that emerged from the vast array of press articles is, on the one hand, rather incomplete, linked only to musical production and missing his prose and theatrical texts. On the other hand, it should be noted that more space was given to the artist rather than to the dissident (who often remained confined to the title of the article). Despite the highly polemical and ideologised context in which the author came to be known to the Italian public, the critical and aesthetic aspects were almost never overlooked.

La Stampa confirmed itself as the newspaper being the most attentive to the singer-songwriter phenomenon, with many articles dedicated to Galich and Okudzhava framed from an artistic and biographical point of view. The journalists involved in the building of the reception of the Soviet bards were different: for Galich, they were not experts in music studies, yet some of them were keen on Soviet and Russian culture, such as Lia Wainstein. Thanks to his performance in Sanremo, Okudzhava gained some popularity in the field of music, so experts like Michele Straniero paid more attention to him and his works. As can be seen from the collected material, journalists were actively involved in the few visits of Okudzhava and Galich in Italy. Their media coverage helped raise awareness of the singer-songwriter tradition. However, bards' immense popularity at home cannot be replicated in Italy, where there was no strong Russian diaspora and the translation of songs was very limited. Therefore, the importance of such cultural phenomenon could not be emphasised in Italy and remained the prerogative of a narrow circle of enthusiasts. The most significant research devoted to the two bards was carried out by experts in Slavic studies, such as Pietro Zveteremich or Mario Corti, or by the translators of their novels and short stories, but the majority of the Italian intellectual public remains unaware of this important literary-musical phenomenon.

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4. ANNEX 1. CRONOLOGY OF THE RECEPTION OF B. OKUDZHAVA IN ITALIAN NEWSPAPERS AND MAGAZINES (1966-1989)¹⁸

1966

S.n. "Cantanti di tutto il mondo riuniti per il "Folk festival." *Stampa sera*, 8 Sep. 1966, p. 9.

¹⁸ The articles in the two following sections are listed in chronological order.

1967

Caretto, Ennio. "Venduti quest'anno in URSS centottanta milioni di dischi." *Stampa sera*, 15-16 Nov. 1967, p. 3.

1969

M.B. "Qualche titolo in vetrina." *La Stampa*, 12 Oct. 1969, p. 13.

1971

Wainstein, Lia. "In antologia i dieci massimi autori degli Anni 60. Si fa molta poesia in Russia." *La Stampa*, 30 July 1971, p. 12.

1972

Wainstein, Lia. "Il 'samizdat' musicale-poetico nell'Urss. Clandestini della canzone." *La Stampa*, 25 Feb. 1972, p. 14.

Riccio, Carlo. "La Russia protesta cantando." *il Messaggero*, 10 marzo 1972, p. 3.

Ronchey, Alberto. "A Mosca, a Mosca!." *Stampa sera*, 17-18 May 1972, p. 3.

P.G. "Bulat Okudzhava come Solzenicyn, come Yakir. Il più noto 'cantautore' dell'Urss fuori dal PCUS e costretto a tacere." *La Stampa*, 30 June 1972, p. 11.

Garimberti, Paolo. "I personaggi. Okudzhava, poeta-beat sconfitto dai burocrati." *La Stampa*, 30 June 1972, p. 11.

Okudjava [sic], Bulat. "Autopregiera (e il resto per giunta)." *Carte segrete*, year VI, no. 19, pp. 187-88.

Wainstein, Lia. "La satira spiritosa del russo Okudzava. Complotto a casa Tolstoj." *La Stampa*, 17 Nov. 1972, p. 16.

1985

Conte, Giuseppe. "Canzoni e poeti: amici o nemici?" *Stampa sera*, 20 May 1985, p. 3.

Sinatti, Piero. "In Russia divennero romanze zigane i versi di Puškin e di Turgenev." *Stampa sera*, 20 May 1985, p. 3.

Straniero, Michele L. "Okudzava, il Brassens dei 'samizdat' esce dal suo confino." *Tuttolibri*, 14 Sep. 1985, p. 7.

C.G. "Okudzava, Rodriguez e altri eccellenti. Al Tenco '85 programma di gran classe." *La Stampa*, 22 Sep. 1985, p. 23.

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- R.B. "'Premio Tenco' troppo serio per Baudo?" *La Stampa*, 6 Oct. 1985, p. 25.
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- S.P. "I russi e gli americani al 'Tenco '85' di Sanremo." *L'arena*, 8 Oct. 1985, p. 3.
- B.M. "Tenco 85 a puntate su Raidue e Raitre." *La Stampa*, 9 Oct. 1985, p. 21.
- M.G. "Usa e Urss s'incontrano con la canzone d'autore." *Il secolo XIX*, 9 Oct. 1985.
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- Serra, Michele. "Benvenuto Okudzhava, sei il Brel dell'Est." *l'Unità*, 9 Oct. 1985, p. 12.
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M. "Anche in Russia si è parlato della rassegna di Sanremo." *L'eco della Riviera*, 17 Oct. 1985.

Piretto, Gian Piero. "È il cantautore dell'anno: Okudzava parla della Russia." *Il Manifesto*, 23 Oct. 1985.

Serra, Michele. "Né con Gorbaciov né con Reagan." *Epoca*, 25 Oct. 1985, p. 20.

Serra, Michele. "Canto felice di un uomo triste." *Rinascita*, 26 Oct. 1985, p. 20.

Inwinid, Fabio. "Sport, solidarietà e anche buona cucina." *l'Unità*, 27 Nov. 1985, p. 4.

1986

Colomba G., "Raccomandati e mediocri." *Il Messaggero*, 4 Nov. 1986, p. 10.

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F.C. "Cantautori dell'Urss insegnano la lingua." *La Stampa*, 4 Dec. 1986, p. 21.

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1987

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L.C. "Ritorna il poeta che canta la Russia." *Torino Sette*, 18 Dec. 1987, p. 20.

"Tra clowns e poeti dell'era Gorbaciov." *La Stampa*, 19 Dec. 1987, p. 17.

Menicucci, Maurizio. "Vodka e caviale per un pranzo natalizio speciale. Ecco la Russia in vetrina. Le preziose icone, i tappeti, le balalaïke." *Stampa Sera*, 19 Dec. 1987, p. 7.

1988

Cioni A., "Il menestrello dell'Arbat. Le canzoni di Bulat Okudzava", *Note dall'est*, Apr. 1988, pp. 24-26.

1989

Wainstein, Lia. "Anti-perestrojka e antisemiti. Urss, accuse di fuoco tra due riviste." *La Stampa*, 29 Nov. 1989, p. 2.

5. ANNEX 2. CHRONOLOGY OF THE RECEPTION OF A. GALICH IN ITALIAN NEWSPAPERS AND MAGAZINES (1970-1989)

1970

Garimberti, Paolo. "Anche nell'Urss proteste con la chitarra. Chi sono i giovani protagonisti del 'magnitizdat'." *La Stampa*, 1 Dec. 1970, p. 3.

1972

Wainstein, Lia. "Clandestini della canzone. Il 'samizdat' musicale-poetico nell'Urss." *La Stampa*, 25 Feb. 1972, p. 14.

Ronchey, Alberto. "Quei giorni a maggio." *Stampa Sera*, 4-5 May 1972, p. 3.

1973

Garimberti, Paolo. La Russia del dissenso. S'inasprisce la guerra agli avversari del regime, *Stampa Sera*, 19 Feb. 1973, p. 8.

1974

Garimberti, Paolo. "Il fisico Sacharov insorge per difendere Solgenitsin." *Stampa Sera*, 7 Jan. 1974, p. 13.

1977

Dell'Angelo, Augusto. "Nostra intervista a Galič. Il cantautore del dissenso." *Il Gazzettino* [Venezia], 14 May 1977, p. 1.

S.R. "Biennale: il programma e i nomi del 'dissenso'." *La Stampa*, 26 June 1977, p. 9.

Bevilacqua, Gigi. "Le voci del dissenso. Attesa a Venezia." *Tuttolibri*, 12 Nov. 1977, p. 2.

Reggiani, Stefano. "Così, il dissenso a Venezia. Tra vecchie idee e nuova filosofia." *La Stampa*, 20 Nov. 1977, p. 5.

"Domani le canzoni di Aleksandr Galič." *Il Giorno*, 2 Dec. 1977, p. 3.

"Canzoni del dissenso alla Biennale." *La Nazione*, 3 Dec. 1977, p. 11.

Scabello, Sandro. "Al Convegno della «Biennale sul dissenso» nell'est / Il cantautore sovietico Galič polemizza con Alberto Moravia, *Corriere della Sera*, 3 Dec. 1977, p. 9.

Marchi, Cesare. "Ha contestato Moravia alla 'Biennale del dissenso'. Galič canta la rabbia e la nostalgia." *Il Giornale nuovo*, 4 Dec. 1977, p. 5.

Pugnaletto, Enrico. "Un cantautore russo a Venezia. Galič tra dissenso e nostalgia." *Il Gazzettino* [Venezia], 5 Dec. 1977, p. 3.

Wainstein, Lia. "Parlano gli scrittori del dissenso." *La Stampa*, 10 Dec. 1977, p. 3.

"Una luce nella cecità del mondo. Aleksandr Galič." *L'Avvenire*, 17 Dec. 1977, p. 3.

Lami, Lucio. "L'improvvisa morte di Aleksandr Galic. Un poeta per gli oppressi." *Il Giornale nuovo*, 17 Dec. 1977, p. 5.

Patrino, Paolo. "È morto a Parigi Galic poeta russo dissidente. Folgorato da un apparecchio radio." *La Stampa*, 17 Dec. 1977, p. 26.

Romani, Paolo. "Un dissidente russo. Muore folgorato il poeta Galič." *Gazzetta del Sud* [Messina], 17 Dec. 1977, p. 12.

"Galic, morte di un esule." *Tuttolibri*, 24 Dec. 1977, p. 7.

"Una luce nella cecità del mondo. Aleksandr Galič." *L'Avvenire*, 24 Dec. 1977, p. 18.

1978

Galich, Aleksandr. "Quando tornerò e altre poesie. Con una nota di Pietro Zveteremich." *Nuova Rivista Europa*, II, 4 (March/April), 1978, pp. 60-65.

Guaraldo, Enrico. "Cerca voci libere da Gide a Esenin." *Tuttolibri*, 29 July 1978, p. 11.

Wainstein, Lia. "'Novyj Mir', l'Occidente e il dissenso nell'Urss." *La Stampa*, 3 Nov. 1978, p. 3.

1979

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1981

Kopelev, Lev. "Ricordo di Aleksandr Galič." *Continente*, no. 1, I (Apr.), 1981, pp. 168-71.

1988

"Che fanno." *La Stampa*, 17 May 1988, p. 21.

1989

"Torneranno in Urss i libri proibiti." *La Stampa*, 2 Aug. 1989, p. 4.