"Not by Thought nor by Action Will I Lie": The Emergence of the Public Voice in the Poetry of Olga Berrgoltts

Kristen Bleakley
Illinois Wesleyan University

Dr. Marina Balina, Faculty Advisor
Illinois Wesleyan University

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.iwu.edu/jwprc

Bleakley, Kristen and Balina, Faculty Advisor, Dr. Marina, ""Not by Thought nor by Action Will I Lie": The Emergence of the Public Voice in the Poetry of Olga Berrgoltts" (1995). John Wesley Powell Student Research Conference. 40.
https://digitalcommons.iwu.edu/jwprc/1995/posters/40

This is protected by copyright and/or related rights. It has been brought to you by Digital Commons @ IWU with permission from the rights-holder(s). You are free to use this material in any way that is permitted by the copyright and related rights legislation that applies to your use. For other uses you need to obtain permission from the rights-holder(s) directly, unless additional rights are indicated by a Creative Commons license in the record and/or on the work itself. This material has been accepted for inclusion by faculty at Illinois Wesleyan University. For more information, please contact digitalcommons@iwu.edu.
©Copyright is owned by the author of this document.
"NOT BY THOUGHT NOR BY ACTION WILL I LIE": THE EMERGENCE OF THE PUBLIC VOICE IN THE POETRY OF OLGA BERRGOLTTS

Kristen Bleakley and Dr. Marina Balina*,
Department of Foreign Languages, IWU

Using Mikhail Bakhtin's theory of public and private identity, this study analyzes the poetry of Olga Berrgoltts and traces the development of her poetic voice from private to public during World War II.

Olga Berrgoltts was among the first women in the early decades of Soviet Literature to achieve fame. She started her career in journalism, working as a travelling correspondent in Kazakhstan and then as a writer/editor in her home city of Leningrad during the 1930s. She was extremely active in the communist youth group Komsomol, and, like many others of her generation, followed closely and with great enthusiasm the political developments of the Soviet Union. Yet the Soviet dogma which dictated the social and cultural life of the nation was not the focus of Berrgoltts' poetry. Her verses were very lyrical and centered on personal thought and experience. This type of artistic expression was considered superfluous to a society which was not concerned with the individual, but rather with the large-scale identity of a nation and its development. Thus, it was not in that pre-war, public-oriented sphere that Berrgoltts achieved her notoriety.

It was not until the beginning of World War II and the 900-day blockade of Leningrad that Berrgoltts' individuality coincided with the experiences of millions and her private voice became public. As a native of Leningrad, Berrgoltts shared in the suffering and losses of others and was able to express these very intense, very private emotions in her verse. However, she was no longer expressing her experience alone, but the experience of many. This "life entering" (ВЖИВАНИЕ), or sympathy of mutual experience, brought Berrgoltts' poetry and the needs of a nation together on one level. For the first time in her life, Berrgoltts' private identity merged with the public identity and her voice was adopted as the voice of a nation.