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Narratives of Return:

Babii Iar and Holocaust Literature

in the Soviet Union

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy

in Slavic Languages and Literatures

by

Naya Lekht

2013

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2013

ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Narratives of Return:

Babii Iar and Holocaust Literature

in the Soviet Union

by

Naya Lekht

Doctor of Philosophy in Slavic Languages and Literatures

University of California, Los Angeles, 2013

Professor Roman Koropeckyj, Co-Chair

Professor David MacFadyen, Co-Chair

This dissertation examines Soviet literary texts devoted primarily to Babii Iar and other ravines where thousands of Soviet Jews and non-Jews were murdered by fascist occupiers during the Second World War. The centrality of Babii Iar as a symbol of the Holocaust for Soviet Jews and non-Jews is the point of departure for this dissertation, which redefines the contours of Holocaust literature. The purpose of the dissertation is to identify and analyze the following key problems: the divide between ravine literature and camp literature; the difference between the literature of witness and the belated, post-traumatic response to the Holocaust; the presumed lack of response to the Holocaust by Soviet figures; and the relationship between Yiddish and Soviet contexts. The ultimate goal of this dissertation is to broaden the current conception of the Holocaust and

its literature to include texts written on Soviet territories during WWII. As such, the dissertation does not only unearth and analyze previously unknown works, but also argues for a new sub-genre of Holocaust literature.

The dissertation of Naya Lekht is approved.

Ronald Vroon

Olga Kagan

Marat Grinberg

David MacFadyen, Committee Co-Chair

Roman Koropeckyj, Committee Co-Chair

University of California, Los Angeles

2013

Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my incredible parents and

dear husband who believed and supported me every step of the way.

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Acknowledgments

I could not have written this dissertation without the amazing support I received from my department and advisors at the University of California, Los Angeles. Initially, I wanted to write a dissertation about Soviet Jewish reactions to the Holocaust. I am particularly indebted to Professor Roman Koropeckyj, who sharpened my argument by suggesting that I focus on Babii Iar. Professor David MacFadyen has always supported my ideas, and was critical in advancing my career as a scholar; I am infinitely thankful to him. Professor Marat Grinberg from Reed College offered his expertise in Jewish Studies, which helped me broaden my analysis of Babii Iar in order to contextualize it in Holocaust and Jewish Studies. I am also grateful to professor Olga Kagan for the constant support that I received all throughout graduate school.

I also benefited immensely from the support of UCLA's Department of Slavic Languages and Literatures, the Jewish Studies Center, and the Graduate Division, which funded my research and allowed me to concentrate on my writing throughout 2012-2013.

I reserve special thanks to Professor Peter Kenez of the University of California, Santa Cruz who inspired me to pursue academia. I would also like to thank Boris Dralyuk, who guided and supported me. I also owe a great deal of gratitude to my fellow graduate students, Naomi Beth Caffee and Paula Emory (PJ), who have helped me throughout the process by offering their support.

This dissertation could not have been written without the support of my dear husband, Sasha Keyfes, who has helped me in more ways than can be summarized here. Aside from the incredible support of my family, this dissertation would probably not have been written without

my *zeyde* (my grandfather), who played Yiddish songs to me while I was a little girl, and instilled in me a love for *Yiddishkayt*.

Vita

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2011	Organizer and Chair, "In the Mirror's Reflection: The Encounter between Jewish and Slavic Cultures," (May 10-11, 2011), University of California, Los Angeles
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2010	Paper presented, "The Boy with the Red Flag: Itsik Fefer's Triumphant Vision of the Soviet Jew During World War Two," ASEEES, Los Angeles
2009	Paper presented, "Traversing Genres: Der Nister's *The Family Mashber* in 1930s Soviet Culture," California Graduate Slavic Colloquium, University of California, Berkeley

2006	Paper presented, summer workshop on the Russian-Jewish nexus: '*Spectacles on the nose and autumn in the heart:' Isaac Babel and the creation of the Soviet-Jewish identity*, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign
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2011	"Revealed," *Tablet Magazine*, December 2011
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2008	"Motl in the 20th Century: Jewish-American Stage and Cinema," *Yiddish: a Quarterly Journal Devoted to Yiddish and Yiddish Literature* 15, no. 3 (New York: Queens College)

NOTE ON TRANSLITERATION, NAMES, AND TRANSLATION

The Library of Congress standard of transliteration is used throughout the dissertation, including, – for the sake of consistency – those names well known in other spellings (Tolstoi for Tolstoy, Vasilii for Vasilly, Arkadii for Arkady, etc). In addition, because the dissertation examines the history of Ukraine during the Soviet period, and the texts I discuss were written in either Russian or Yiddish, I give the Russian form of Ukrainian place names (L'vov for L'viv, Berdichev for Berdychiv, etc). If, however, the author/poet was Ukrainian, I give the Ukrainian form of the names; for authors/poets who wrote in Yiddish, the titles of works are transliterated from the original Yiddish. In addition, unless otherwise indicated, all translations from Yiddish and Russian are mine.

Za staruiu evreiskuiu mat'.
Za malen'kikh detei.
Za kievskii Babii Iar.
Za iamy smerti v Vitebske i Minske.

Il'ia Ehrenburg, 1943

I know this too:
for endless generations
you were a haven
for outcasts
from a great gray land…
your shame casts shadow
over its furthest distances,
Ukraine!

from "Ukraine"
Dovid Hofshteyn, 1937

Chapter 1

Looking East: Babii Iar and Holocaust Literature in the Soviet Union

> Old Kiev used to be a city of contradictions, unusually showy but one of the most beautiful cities in Europe, whereas modern Kiev is a monotonous place that has no soul, only a façade. Looking through the window of the train in the twilight, I felt that the spirit of old Kiev now lay at rest amid its sandy hills and at the bottom of its deep ravines.[1]

On September 19, 1941 a fifty-man group of Sonderkommandos 4A of the Einsatzgruppen C entered Kiev with the mission of liquidating the city's Jewish population. Signs were erected in Russian, Ukrainian, and Yiddish informing the local population that all Jews (*zhids*) and communists were to meet in the early hours of September 19 in order to be evacuated. The meeting place was precise: at the intersection between the Jewish and Christian cemeteries. This spot—the crossroads between Jewish and non-Jewish space—became a symbol of the tension between Kievan Jews and non-Jews in literary narratives of the massacre. It took the Einsatzgruppen three days to liquidate 33,771 Jews in a nearby ravine called Babii (Babyn) Iar. As such, the Babii Iar event is considered "the largest single massacre in the history of the Holocaust."[2]

Almost immediately, Babii Iar became a leading metaphor for the Holocaust and the space demarcated as Jewish, as Jews returning to their hometowns sought places where their

[1] Fridrikh Gorenshtein, *Traveling Companions*, trans. Bernard Meares (San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1991), 12.

[2] Wendy Morgan Lower, "From Berlin to Babii Yar. The Nazi War Against the Jews, 1941-1944," *Journal of Religion & Society* 9 (2007): 1-14.

families were shot in order to erect small monuments,[3] thereby evincing a strong desire to commemorate and memorialize the event.

With the liberation of Kiev on November 6, 1943, news about Babii Iar began to spread. In official Soviet discourse, Babii Iar was incorporated into the major war narrative and presented as a Nazi crime against communism.[4] Soviet reporting on Babii Iar did not indicate that Jews were the only ethnic group targeted by the fascists, even though Viacheslav Molotov, the Minister of Foreign Affairs from 1939-1949, wrote a note in 1942 mentioning the fact.[5] Several journalists and writers hinted at the ethnicity of the victims in the years immediately following the incident, but as Stalin's anti-Semitic policies became increasingly repressive, the topic of Jews killed in the Second World War was less welcome.

Jews who could read Yiddish learned about the massacre through the official newspaper of the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee, *Eynikayt*. Generally, coverage of the event in Yiddish provided greater detail about the destruction and murder of the Jewish community. However, even the Yiddish press did not present the massacre at Babii Iar as a unique occurrence; initially, the ravine was presented as one of many places in Ukraine where Jews were murdered. In a 1943 article published by Soviet poet Il'ia Ehrenburg in *Eynikayt*, Babii Iar is included in a catalogue of places of destruction.[6] However, by late August 1944, Soviet Jewish reactions to Babii Iar began to change. Itsik Fefer, a well-known Soviet Yiddish poet and central member of the

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[3] Arkadii Zeltser, "Tema 'Evrei v Bab'em Iaru' v Sovetskom Soiuze v 1941-1945 godakh" (paper presented at the Ukrainian Center for Holocaust Studies, Kiev, Oct. 24-25, 2011), accessed August 22, 2013, http://www.kby.kiev.ua/komitet/ru/conference/art00069.html.

[4] Ibid, 87.

[5] V. M. Molotov, "Nota narodnogo komissara inostrannykh del tov," *Izvestiia*, January 7, 1942, 2.

[6] Il'ia Ehrenburg, "Nemetskie fashisty ne dolzhny zhit'," *Eynikayt*, November 4, 1943, quoted in Zeltser, *"*Tema 'Evrei,'" 87.

Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee (JAFC), wrote an article in the 1944 issue of *Eynikayt*. For Fefer, whose close relatives were killed at Babii Iar, the massacre of virtually the entire Jewish community in Kiev, along with the subsequent fascist attempt to destroy all evidence of the crime by burning the corpses, transformed Babii Iar from one of many sites of murder into a pivotal and symbolic episode in the war:

> Before their retreat from Kiev, the Nazis dug out the bodies and burned the remains of our fathers and mothers, brothers and sisters, and spread their ashes into the wind, thinking that the wind would scatter their evil secret. But the ashes of Babi Iar burns in our hearts, the flames burn in our eyes, the ashes have fallen on our scorched wounds, and does not give us peace.[7]

Jews from Kiev called Babii Iar a "valley of tears" (*dolina slez*).[8] On September 29, 1944, the third anniversary, people of all ages flocked to Babii Iar in order to remember the massacre.[9] By 1945, Babii Iar became the central story of the Holocaust for Soviet Jews. In September 1945, famed Soviet Yiddish theatre actor and chairman of the JAFC, Shimon Mikhoels, visited Kiev in order to speak at the Kiev State Jewish Theatre. The actor entered the stage carrying a crystal vase containing a yellow and black substance. Citing a newspaper account in *De naye presse* (The New Press) by Shimon Kipnis, Joshua Rubenstein and Vladimir P. Naumov relate Mikhoels' opening remarks:

> "Before I came," Mikhoels began, speaking in Yiddish, "some friends from the Moscow theatre and I went to a store to buy a crystal vase. We then went directly to Babi Yar and filled the vase with earth, which held the screams of fathers and mothers, from the young boys and girls who did not live to grow up, screams from all who were sent there by the fascist beasts."[10]

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[7] Itsik Fefer, "Evreiskii narod v bor'be protiv fashizma," *Eynikayt,* May, 1945, 27.

[8] Zeltser, "Tema 'Evrei,'" 96.

[9] A. Kagan, "Kiever 'tal fun trern' dem 29 sentiabr 1944," quoted in ibid., 38.

[10] Joshua Rubenstein and Vladimir P. Naumov, eds., *Stalin's Secret Pogrom: The Postwar Inquisition of the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee* (New Haven: Yale University, 2001), 38.

So central was Babii Iar to the Jewish collective understanding of the war that it remained a chief symbol of the Holocaust in the postwar era. For instance, in 1989-90, a survey of more than 300 recent Soviet Jewish immigrants in Detroit revealed that few knew the total number of Jews who died during the Holocaust. When asked what they knew about the Holocaust, they frequently cited Anatolii Rybakov's *Tiazhelyi pesok* (*Heavy Sand*, 1978), a novel about Jewish death at an unspecified ravine in Soviet Ukraine, Evgenii Evtushenko's "Babii Iar" (1961), and Anatolii Kuznetsov's *Babii Iar: Roman-dokument* (*Babi Yar: A Document in the Form of a Novel*, 1966).[11] The Detroit survey reveals that for Soviet Jews, Babii Iar synechdochically *signified* the Holocaust,[12] encapsulating the tragedy of the war. It also demonstrated that literary works about Babii Iar are representative of the broader Soviet Jewish attitude toward the war.[13] The fact that two-thirds of the authors cited were not Jewish does not matter; it is important to note that there was, and remains, a consensus among Soviet Jews that Babii Iar is a Jewish story.[14] Semen

[11]Zvi Gitelman, "Soviet Reactions to the Holocaust, 1945-1991," in *The Holocaust in the Soviet Union*, eds. Lucjan Dobroszycki and Jeffrey S. Gurock (New York: M.E. Sharpe, 1993), 17.

[12] For modern Israelis, unlike people studying the Holocaust in North America and most of Western Europe, Babii Iar is a central part of the Holocaust narrative. A 2011 article published in the *Jerusalem Post*, "Babi Yar Massacre as Model for Modern Mass-Killings," helps to emphasize the strong connection between Babii Iar and the Holocaust: "'What happened here [in Ukraine] served as a prototype of contemporary genocide,' said Patrick Desbois, a Catholic priest who visited Ukraine this month with a grim exhibition called 'Holocaust by Bullets'…There are no [Auschwitz-style] camps. Here, it is mobile killers, not the victims, who moved–and rapidly,' he told Reuters in an interview." "Roots of the Holocaust," *The Jewish Daily Forward* (September 16, 2005), accessed May 12, 2013, http://forward.com/articles/2793/roots-of-the-holocaust/.

[13] Leo Gruliow, in his introductory comments to Anatolii Kuznetsov's novel, *Babi Yar: a Document in the Form of a Novel,* explains that "Kiev's Babi Yar was most notorious as the scene of a gruesome slaughter of the Jews, and for a quarter of a century the Soviet press ignored the whole matter. No tablet marked the site. It is as if, say, the Polish public had never been told about the Auschwitz death camp." Anatolii Kuznetsov, *Babi Yar: A Document in the Form of a Novel* (London: Cape, 1970), ix.

[14] The Soviet sacrifices of World War Two shaped Soviet collective identity in a manner that often obscured non-Russian minorities. As such, calling an event a "Jewish tragedy" was not only risky, but virtually impermissible.

Gluzman, a former Soviet dissident, recalls how his family reacted to Kuznetsov's novel when he was a little boy:

> Then there was an explosion—Anatolii Kuznetsov's novel. My parents discussed with great emotion some details of the text that were incomprehensible to me; their friends would visit us and also discuss nothing but this book. For a few weeks, the house lived on this alone… No one spoke of this topic on the phone.[15]

Gluzman's account adds anecdotal color to the response of the Detroit sample group, and reveals the historical and literal significance of the Babii Iar event for Soviet Jews. Though there were many incidents similar to Babii Iar in Soviet Ukraine, the fact that this event came to signify the Holocaust for succeeding generations can be attributed to the Soviet Thaw-era poet Evgenii Evtushenko. Although his poem was not the first to be devoted to Babii Iar, it was the first text to address the forbidden topics of the Holocaust as well as internal and external anti-Semitism on a national scale, and to tie these topics to the massacre at the ravine. Despite endless attempts by the Soviet officials to obfuscate and at times eradicate the ethnic and cultural identity of the victims,[16] for Soviet Jews Babii Iar represented what Treblinka, Buchenwald, and Auschwitz represented for Jews in Europe and the United States. Moreoever, the vicious nature of the killings at the ravine prompted Soviet Jewish writers to call for vengeance. In a 1943 article written for *Eynikayt*, famed Soviet Jewish war correspondent, author, and poet Il'ia Ehrenburg decisively calls for revenge: "For the old Jewish mother; for the little children; For Babii Iar; for all the pits of death in Vitebsk and Minsk."[17]

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[15] Semen Gluzman, "Babii Iar," *Komitet*, no. 1 (September 29, 2006), accessed June 12, 2012, *http://www.kby.kiev.ua/komitet/ru/polemics/art00021.html*.

[16] Lukasz Hirszowicz, "The Holocaust in the Soviet Mirror," in Dobroszycki and Gurock *The Holocaust in the Soviet Union*, 30-31.

[17] Il'ia Ehrenburg, "Di daychishe fashistn tor nit lebn blaybn," *Eynikayt*, January 4, 1943, 2.

The centrality of Babii Iar as a symbol of the Holocaust for Soviet Jews and non-Jews is the point of departure for this dissertation, which redefines the contours of the Holocaust and Holocaust literature. The purpose of the dissertation is to identify and analyze the following key problems: the divide between ravine literature and "camp literature"; the difference between the literature of witness and a belated post-traumatic response to the Holocaust; the presumed lack of response to the Holocaust by Soviet figures; and the relationship between Yiddish and Soviet contexts.

My dissertation introduces readers to an array of Soviet texts on Babii Iar and other ravines, and, in doing so, expands the current conception of Holocaust literature. In the West, texts and images of extermination camps have long defined the Holocaust. But as Timothy Snyder asserts, "Auschwitz as symbol of the Holocaust excludes those who were at the center of the historical event;" of the six million Jews killed during the Second World War, half were slaughtered in the East—more specifically, on Soviet territory. [18] These Jews were not gassed or burned in ovens. Instead, they were shot by Nazis and Polizei (local Ukrainian, Lithuanian, Moldavian, or Belorussian collaborators) on the outskirts of their hometowns and cities—in ravines and rivers. In recent historical studies, Jewish death on Soviet soil—more precisely those killed in Soviet Ukraine—is frequently referred to as the "Holocaust of bullets" (*kholokost pul'*).

Readers of Holocaust literature have long explored challenging questions regarding the nature of this literature. A leading scholar of Holocaust literature, Alvin H. Rosenfeld, maintains that: "Holocaust literature must be counted among the most compelling literatures of our day… [It] is needed to express the deaths, the characteristically violent, dehumanized deaths of the

[18] Timothy Snyder, "Holocaust: the Ignored Reality," *The New York Review of Books* (July 16, 2009), accessed July 15, 2013, http://www.nybooks.com/articles/archives/2009/jul/16/holocaust-the-ignored-reality/.

twentieth century."[19] Rosenfeld identifies key features of Holocaust literature in his book, *A Double Dying: Reflections of Holocaust Literature*. Though a useful work for defining the category of Holocaust literature, Rosenfeld's focus on "camp literature"[20] eclipses voices from Soviet Russia.

Recent scholarship repositions the Holocaust by focusing on space. In their book, *Holocaust Literature: a History and Guide*, David Roskies and Naomi Diamant divide Holocaust literature into two categories: wartime writing in the "Free Zone" and in the "Jew Zone." "Free Zone" literature included texts not written under Nazi occupation. Conversely, "Jew Zone" texts were produced in "dire circumstances" (i.e., in Nazi occupied territories). By re-conceptualizing the Holocaust in terms of space ("a division of the globe in the years 1939-1945 into two zones"[21]), Roskies and Diamant offer a new approach to Holocaust literature that includes, however obscurely, Soviet literature on the Holocaust. Roskies and Diamant point out that, "The Soviet Union was … the first place to bear the full brunt of the Nazis' Final Solution… Jewish photojournalists, poets, and professional writers serving in the Red Army were the first to report and record the discovery of the mass graves and systematic murder of Eastern European Jewry." Indeed, poems such as "I Saw It!"[22] by Il'ia Selvinskii in 1942 and Il'ia Ehrenburg's 1945

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[19] Alvin H. Rosenfeld, *A Double Dying: Reflections on Holocaust Literature* (Bloomington and London: Indiana University Press, 1980), 4-5.

[20] Alan Mintz describes two models of Holocaust representation, arguing that: "camp literature heightens our awareness of 'the Holocaust experience.'" Alan Mintz, *Popular Culture and the Sharpening of Holocaust Memory in America* (Washington: University of Washington Press, 2001), 62.

[21] David Roskies and Naomi Diamant, *Holocaust Literature: A History and Guide* (Waltham: Brandeis University Press, 2012), 22.

[22] Il'ia Selvinskii, a Red Army soldier wrote his poem "I Saw It!" on the subject of mass murder in the Crimean city of Kerch. Il'ia Selvinskii, "Ia eto videl!" *Krasnaia zvezda*, February 27, 1943, 3.

untitled poem devoted to Babii Iar were the first to record and memorialize the mass killings at ditches and ravines.

My aim in the dissertation is to identify key features of Soviet Holocaust literature responding directly to the murder of Jews in ravines. I refer to narratives written about Babii Iar and other ravines throughout the dissertation as the "Babii Iar text" and more broadly, "ravine literature."[23]

Scholars of Babii Iar have usually focused on history, historiography, and the politics of commemoration in the Soviet Union and present-day Ukraine. As such, the Babii Iar story has, in many ways, been hijacked by those who use the event to vilify the Soviet Union.[24] I am in no way arguing that the Soviet Union's position of silence on the Holocaust is justified or should not be mentioned. But any focus on latter-day politics obscures the fact that poets, authors, and journalists wrote about the event immediately after it occurred and continued to do so well after

[23] I would like to thank my advisor, Marat Grinberg, for introducing me to the term "ravine literature." While I was working on my dissertation, Annie Epelboin and Assia Kovriguina published an anthology of Soviet texts about the deaths at ravines during the Second World War. Their anthology, *La Littérature du Ravins: Écrire sur en Shoah en URSS* (Paris: Robert Laffont, 2013), re-examines the traditional ways of considering Holocaust literature. Epelboin and Kovriguina state that "the literature of camps has fueled numerous works… and Auschwitz has entered the global paradigm of extermination. The model of the camp served as a representation of the annihilation and left no room for the 'literature of ravines.'" Epelboin's and Kovriguina's approach is historical, unearthing previously unknown and unpublished texts by Soviet authors who responded to the deaths at the ravines. Though I borrow the term "ravine literature" from their work, the current study is concerned primarily with literary analysis insofar as I argue for a new sub-genre of Holocaust literature.

[24] There is a dearth of material on Babii Iar. Victoria Khiterer's article, "Babi Iar, the Tragedy of Kiev Jews," *Brandeis Graduate Journal*, no. 2 (2004), examines how Germans developed "tricks" and used the local population to "entice Jews to leave their homes." People would go to designated areas where they were shot. Khiterer's research reconstructs the events leading up to the shootings at Babii Iar. Other relevant works include George St. George's *The Road to Babi Iar* (London: Neville Spearman, 1967), loosely based on Anatolii Kuznetsov's *Babi Yar: a Document in the Form of a Novel* (1966). William Korey's article, "A Monument over Babi Yar?" in Dobroszycki and Gurock, *The Holocaust in the Soviet Union*, 65, introduces the topic of monuments at Babii Iar in the Soviet Union.

the war[25]; little to no attention has been paid to the literary reflection of the massacre, which can reveal more about public opinion and collective memory analyses of Soviet policy.[26] This dissertation, therefore, explores some of this hitherto ignored material, and aims to correct the historical and literary biases of previous studies.

Reading the Holocaust in the Soviet Union: Current Trends

Recent studies in history and film attempt to refocus attention on the story of the Holocaust in Soviet territories. Historian David Shneer urges us to move beyond "the limits of documentation."[27] In his book *Through Soviet Jewish Eyes: Photography, War, and the Holocaust*, Shneer explores how Jews were instrumental in creating Soviet photojournalism. According to Shneer, stories of war told via photography betray an awareness of the photographers' Jewishness—acknowledged or unacknowledged, accepted or completely rejected—and tell the Jewish story of the 'Great Patriotic War.'

In the field of literary analysis, three major works have explored the Holocaust on Soviet soil. Harriet Murav's *Music from a Speeding Train: Jewish Literature in the Post-Revolutionary Russia* is one of the few studies to engage with Jewish literature—written in Russian and in Yiddish—in the Soviet Union. Murav's attention to Soviet Yiddish writers' reactions to the Holocaust is a fine example of thoughtful literary analysis, exploring how authors navigated

[25] Zeltser argues that much more information about the massacre was published in Russian and Yiddish immediately after Babii Iar than was previously known. Zelter, "Tema 'Evrei,'" 92.

[26] Maxim D. Shrayer, "Jewish-Russian Poets Bearing Witness to the Shoah, 1941-1946: Textual Evidence and Preliminary Conclusions," in *Studies in Slavic Languages and Literatures. ICCEES*, ed. Stefano Garzonio (Bologna: Portal on Central Eastern and Balkan Europe, 2011), 61.

[27] David Shneer, "Probing the Limits of Documentation," *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 10, no. 1 (Winter 2009): 131.

between Jewish and Soviet ideals to create a dynamic Soviet Jewish wartime literature. Marat Grinberg's study of Boris Slutskii's verse in his book *"I Am to Be Read Not from Left to Right, but in Jewish: from Right to Left": The Poetics of Boris Slutsky*, though not devoted strictly to Slutskii's Holocaust verse, introduces readers to an important Soviet Jewish voice on the Holocaust. Likewise, Maxim D. Shrayer's recent book on Soviet Jewish poet Il'ia Selvinskii, *I Saw It: Ilya Selvinsky and the Legacy of Bearing Witness to the Shoah,* demonstrates the Soviet "peoples' awareness and understanding of the Shoah… by probing key Holocaust texts in the Soviet cultural mainstream."[28] Focusing on one Soviet Jewish poet/ soldier during the war, Shrayer explores how Soviet Jews—as witnesses and scribes—reacted to the Holocaust. In dealing with Soviet Jewish reactions to the Holocaust, Murav, Grinberg, and Shrayer continually call attention to how Soviet Jewish writers negotiated their Soviet and Jewish identities.[29]

My work draws on, and contributes to the scholarship of Murav, Grinberg, and Shrayer, examining the literary and historical context. My approach is to read closely both the literary text and the historical context that informs it. Because my dissertation examines both Russian-language and Yiddish-language representations of Babii Iar, language as a socio-cultural category must be addressed. In the Russian context, Babii Iar looms large due to the dearth of texts dealing with the Holocaust as a specifically Jewish catastrophe; in the Yiddish context, it is not singled out as a representative event, but belongs to an entire corpus of texts devoted to the *Khurbn* (destruction). As such, Soviet Yiddish writers and poets describing Babii Iar and the Holocaust were ensconced in a Jewish literary tradition of writing about destruction that

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[28] Shrayer, "Jewish Russian Poets Bearing Witness to the Shoah," 4.

[29] Also important is Frank Ellis' *The Damned and the Dead: the Eastern Front through the Eyes of Soviet and Russian Novelists* (Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 2011). Devoted to Soviet wartime literature (*voennaia proza*), Ellis' study argues that much of that writing constituted a form of resistance to the Soviet state, thereby re-introducing readers to a new kind of narrative.

informed their treatment of Babii Iar. Because Yiddish representations of Babii Iar belong to a Jewish literary tradition of writing about catastrophe, I devote an entire chapter of the dissertation to discussing Soviet Yiddish responses to the tragedy as evidence of collective Jewish "responses to catastrophe"[30] in literature. In the case of writings in Russian and their reception, Babii Iar stands for the destruction of Jews as a whole.

Dissertation Goals

This dissertation aims to address the literature of Babii Iar as a distinct phenomenon and an element of the broader category of Holocaust literature. A central figure of this dissertation is the Soviet Jewish poet and man of letters, Il'ia Ehrenburg (1891-1967). Ehrenburg structures his portrayal of Babii Iar in poetry and prose around the pilgrimage motif, lending his narratives aesthetic, political, and religious significance. Because this dissertation focuses on the recurring subject of pilgrimage, it is important to briefly provide the definition of pilgrimage in secular and religious texts. According to *The Oxford English Dictionary,* a pilgrim is "one who journeys to a sacred place as an act of religious devotion." The *Jewish Encyclopedia* defines a pilgrimage as "a journey, which is made to a shrine or a sacred place in performance of a vow or for the sake of obtaining some form of divine blessing."[31] According to Jewish law, every Jewish male was once required to make a pilgrimage to Jerusalem three times a year. Called *re-iyah*, ("the appearance"), the Bible instructed Jewish males to make appearances (*reiyot*) during Passover, Shavuot, and Sukkot. In Islam, a pilgrimage—known as a *Hajj*—"is a journey obligatory of

[30] For a full discussion on the Jewish literature of catastrophe, see David Roskies, *The Literature of Destruction: Jewish Responses to Catastrophe in Modern Culture* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1988).

[31] *Jewish Encyclopedia Online*, s.v. "Pilgrimage," accessed July 11, 2013, http://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/12149-pilgrimage.

every Muslim, man, or woman, who has reached the age of puberty." Predicated on the notion of performance, pilgrimage in the religious definition is a way in which men of faith show respect to a certain sacred space. In the Christian context, pilgrimages were initially voluntary; following the organization of penitential systems of the church, they become mandatory. Because pilgrimage was required in Islam and in Judaism, it helped to "maintain adequate network of communications between the far-flung Muslim lands; the experience of the pilgrimage gives rise to a rich literature of travel, bringing information about distant places, and a heightened awareness of belonging to a larger whole."[32]

Though pilgrimage in secular literature, as Phillip Edwards has noted, has become a relatively diverse genre,[33] for the purposes of this dissertation, we may define a pilgrimage text as a narrative in which the author chronicles a journey to a place of ruin generated by catastrophic events. As the dissertation will show, the text produced by poets of ravine literature, much like Jerusalem in Judaism and Mecca in Islam, helped to facilitate "adequate networks of communications" among writers and readers of various generations. I will argue that, in his texts, Ehrenburg narrates his own pilgrimage to the site of trauma and facilitates an imaginary pilgrimage for his readers. As such, the text becomes a destination of pilgrimage, a *sacred station* to be visited by readers and generations of writers. The notion of texts as *sacred stations* underscores the significance of poets and authors who wrote about Babii Iar long before Evtushenko and Kuznetsov, as well as those who reference Ehrenburg by erecting their own monuments to Babii Iar via literature. As such, the second chapter is devoted precisely to

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[32] *The Encyclopedia of Islam*, s.v. "Hajj" (Leiden: Brill, 1966).

[33] For a complete discussion of pilgrimage in literature, see Philip Edwards, *Pilgrimage and Literary Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005). Victor Turner's essay, "Pilgrimages and Social Processes," in *Dramas, Fields, and Metaphors: Symbolic Action in Human Society* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1974), 166-231, is a useful source on pilgrimage and related social structures.

Ehrenburg's literary constructions of Babii Iar in prose and poetry. The following chapters then explore how authors after Ehrenburg employ and manipulate the features of the ideal "Babii Iar text," the contours of which he established in his formative treatments.

Chapter 3 focuses exclusively on Soviet Yiddish prose and poetry written during and after the war. Yiddish literature flourished in the early Soviet Union, but during the 1930s, and especially during the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, Yiddish publishing houses, newspapers, and journals faced increasing pressure and were mainly shut down. With the outbreak of war and the collapse of the Pact, Yiddish literature was briefly reborn. Nonetheless, with the rise of anti-Semitism immediately after the war, Yiddish literature was obliterated, along with the leading Soviet Yiddish writers and poets.[34] The Thaw (1953-1965), a period of considerable liberalization in the post-Stalin era, was characterized by a third revival of Yiddish literature that lasted all the way through the succeeding period, the Stagnation (1965-1984). By examining major Soviet Yiddish voices on Babii Iar and the Holocaust, I show how Yiddish writers during the war, immediately after the war, and during the Thaw and Stagnation participated in the well-established Jewish literary tradition of writing about catastrophe. My analysis of Soviet Yiddish narratives of war, influenced by Murav's seminal work, also focuses on how Soviet Jews writing in Yiddish navigated between Soviet and Jewish contexts to address one of the worst destructions in Jewish history.

The motif of pilgrimage and return provides a thematic touchstone throughout the dissertation. Soviet writers employed this idea to carve out their literature of the Holocaust. In chapter 4, I therefore explore works by two major Soviet voices, Evgenii Evtushenko and Anatolii Kuznetsov**,** who also employ the motif of pilgrimage and return. Though quite

[34] For a full account of Yiddish literature and its disappearance from Soviet literary life, see Rubenstein and Naumov, eds., *Stalin's Secret Pogrom*, 38.

different, their reactions to Babii Iar form an essential component of Soviet Holocaust literature at a time when Soviet "leadership [was] not especially concerned with the plight of Jews."[35]

In chapter 5, I continue to examine the "Babii Iar text" during the 1970s by examining two official works on Babii Iar and the Holocaust. The chapter is devoted to Anatolii Rybakov's Russian-language *Tiazhelyi pesok* (*Heavy Sand*) and Yekhiel Falikman's Yiddish-language *Der shvartser vint* (*The Black Wind*), narratives on the Holocaust that reached readers through official channels.

This collection of "Babii Iar texts"—addressed in each chapter and in each consecutive Soviet period—allows the discussion of a new genre of Holocaust literature: ravine literature. The ultimate goal of this dissertation is to broaden the ways in which we read and comprehend Holocaust works. As such, the final section of the dissertation examines Holocaust literature as usually defined. To exemplify the phenomenon of ravine literature, I also examine Fridrikh Gorenshtein's 1985 novella, *Poputchiki* (*Traveling Companions*), which exhibits all the vital features of the "Babii Iar text."

Because many of the poems and novels under consideration were inspired by or dramatized personal pilgrimages to a site that remained officially uncommemorated, the "Babi Iar text" usually calls attention to the implicit relationship between text and monument. As Zeltser documents, memorialization of the spaces of destruction (i.e., the ravines and ditches) became a concern almost immediately after the massacres of Soviet Jews. Jews returning from evacuation to their hometowns after the War flocked to mass graves in order to erect small makeshift monuments to those killed. In a concerted effort to eradicate any Jewish acts of

[35] Timothy Snyder, *Bloodlands: Europe between Hitler and Stalin* (New York: Basic Books, 2010), 239.

memorialization, the Soviets destroyed these small monuments.[36] The Soviets also wavered about building a monument at Babii Iar for decades. The first memorial erected at the site in 1976 was dedicated to Soviet citizens and prisoners of war killed during the fascist occupation of Ukraine, without any mention of their ethnicity. It is a large sculpture of men, women, and children falling over a precipice (image below). The bodies hang as if fixed in time and space, creating a transformative experience of Babii Iar in which onlookers can literally stand in the flow of history. The 1976 monument provides an apt metaphor for my approach to the "Babii Iar text." The ravine no longer exists and "the area is now covered by several apartment blocks and a park, where almost a dozen small monuments have been erected in different spots in the past twenty years."[37] What remains are the bodies of texts, waiting to be unearthed and identified.

[36] Zeltser, "Tema 'Evrei,'" 90.

[37] "Babi Yar Massacre for Model for Modern Mass-Killings," *The Jerusalem Post* (October 2, 2011), accessed on May 27, 2013, http://www.jpost.com/Jewish-World/Jewish-Features/Babi-Yar-massacre-model-for-modern-mass-killings.

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A Note on Terminology

The term "holocaust" derives from the Greek word *holókaustos,* which is composed of *hólos* (whole) and *kaustós* (burn), referring to the practice of animal sacrifice. It implies the total destruction of the Jewish community during World War Two; in Hebrew, the Holocaust is known as *Shoah* (catastrophe). The Yiddish word, *Khurbn* (destruction) does not single out the Nazi genocide as a unique phenomenon; it refers to any destruction of Jews and Jewish communities. It was first used to describe the destruction of the Second Temple in 70 AD. In Russian, there is no term to refer specifically to the destruction of the Jewish community during the Second World War. Indeed, in Russia, the Second World War is known as the "Great Patriotic War." The word "Holocaust" (*golokost/kholokost*), almost universally accepted in the

[38] Dgri, photographer, "Monument to Babi Yar victims in Kiev," photograph, June 13, 2007, from Wikipedia, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Kiev_BabiYar_Victims_Monument_070613.jpg.

West immediately after the War,[39] only entered the Russian lexicon after the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991. This glaring lacuna of a fixed term for the death of Jews during the war reflected the official Soviet position of silence on the topic. Russian-speaking Jews often use the word *katastrofa* (catastrophe) to refer to the Holocaust. Though the noun "Holocaust" entered the Russian vocabulary late, I will be using it and "destruction" interchangeably throughout the dissertation.

[39] "Roots of the Holocaust," *The Jewish Daily Forward* (September 16, 2005), accessed May 12, 2013, http://forward.com/articles/2793/roots-of-the-holocaust/.

Chapter 2

Text as Sacred Station: Il'ia Ehrenburg and the "Babii Iar Text"

Babii Iar garnered international attention through the works of Evtushenko and Kuznetsov, which electrified Soviet audiences when they first appeared in the 1960s.[40] Though in popular consciousness it is still believed that these two works were the first to boldly engage with the topic, a vast body of Babii Iar literature was already in place. This chapter explores one of the first literary reactions to Babii Iar and popular receptions of Ehrenburg's Babii Iar texts.

Ehrenburg structures his portrayal of Babii Iar in poetry and prose around the motif of pilgrimage, by which he seeks to lend his narrative political, aesthetic, and religious significance. Ehrenburg narrates his pilgrimage to the physical site of trauma and facilitates an imaginary journey for future readers. As such, the text becomes a destination of pilgrimage, a *sacred station* to be visited by readers and future generations of writers.

In an autobiographical sketch published in the Parisian daily *L'Express,* Evtushenko explained that he had long wanted to write about anti-Semitism before penning "Babii Iar;" a visit to the site prompted him to write the poem, which he said he completed "only in a few hours."[41] Years later, in an interview, Evtushenko said, "I am not the first poet to write about Babii-Yar… Il'ia Ehrenburg, he wrote a poem about it. A famous correspondent with the Red

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[40] Richard Sheldon, "The Transformations of Babi Yar," in *Soviet Society and Culture: Essays in Honor of Vera S. Dunham* (Boulder & London: Westview Press, 1988), 7.

[41] William Korey, "A Monument over Babi Yar?" in Dobroszycki and Gurock, *The Holocaust in the Soviet Union*, 65.

Army in World War II, Ehrenburg (a Jew) was born in Kiev."[42] Evtushenko learned about Babii Iar by reading the verse of both Il'ia Ehrenburg and Lev Ozerov, a Soviet Jewish poet and journalist: "So I discovered the existence of Babii Iar through poems like that—poems which were later never published out of some strange conspiracy of silence." Hence, Evtushenko's first journey to Babii Iar was a literary pilgrimage to the *sacred station* of Ehrenburg's texts. This chapter is devoted to introducing readers to one of the first Babii Iar texts, and offers a prototype for one of the earliest examples of Soviet Holocaust literature.

"'Kiev, Kiev, My Home…'":[43] Il'ia Ehrenburg and the Trauma of Exile

Babii Iar first appeared in Soviet literature in 1944 with the publication of Il'ia Ehrenburg's eponymous poem.[44] Ehrenburg, a frontline correspondent during the Second World War, traveled alongside soldiers in order to describe their daily experiences to the Soviet citizenry at home. In this capacity, Ehrenburg was one of the first journalists to witness the remains at Babii Iar while traveling with the Red Army through Kiev, his native city, during its liberation from the Nazis. Apart from his 1944 poem, the author also wrote about Babii Iar in his novel, *Buria* (*The Storm*, 1947), and in his memoirs *Liudi, gody, zhizn* (*People and Life, 1918-1921)*. Ehrenburg's textual representations of Babii Iar foreground the themes of displacement and exile. For him, the trauma of the event lay not so much in the actual murders, but in his exile from the city of his birth. Ehrenburg repeatedly employs the construct of both pilgrimage and

[42] Evtushenko, in ibid, 78.

[43] Il'ia Ehrenburg, *Liudi, gody, zhizn': vospominaniia v triekh tomakh* (Moscow: Sovetskii pisatel', 1951), 308.

[44] The first poem to broach the subject of Babii Iar, "Kirillovskie iary," was written in 1943 by Ukrainian poet Ol'ga Anstei. Evgenii Evtushenko addresses this in a September 2012 interview. See Evtushenko, "Beseda s Evgeniem Evtushenko," *Svoi Variant*, accessed July 23, 2013, http://mspu.org.ua/pulicistika/4635-beseda-s-evgeniem-evtushenko.html.

return as a means of enshrining the event in sacred time and space. These pilgrimages enact the author's own grappling with loss and ruin, and his sense of identity as a Jew, a Soviet citizen, and Russian writer.

In order to understand how Ehrenburg's sense of identity shapes and is refracted in his literary depictions of Babii Iar, one must first attempt to untangle his complicated and somewhat contradictory relationship to Jewishness, and his role as a Soviet man of letters. Joshua Rubenstein writes that "Ehrenburg was an assimilated Jew in the sense that he felt removed from Orthodox ritual and spoke neither Yiddish nor Hebrew; he identified himself primarily with Russian language and culture, yet his Jewish origins were a constant source of strength to him."[45] Two statements by Ehrenburg about his Jewishness at different points in his career addressed to radically different audiences in different contexts demonstrate the complexity of this issue in his life.

Rubenstein cites a letter written by Ehrenburg from Berlin in 1923 to a woman in Petrograd, in which he advises, "Don't give up being a heretic. Without it, people of our nature (and we have the same nature) could not live through a single day. We are Jews. We drank up Parisian skies. We are poets. We know how to laugh things off. Aren't these four qualities enough to keep going?"[46] At this point in his career, living abroad and socializing with émigrés and European literati, Ehrenburg conceives of his Jewishness as part of a matrix of modernity, wearing it as an emblem of cosmopolitanism; he sees himself as an internationalist, "more European than Russian or Soviet."[47] Yet he is certainly aware of his Jewishness. Indeed, one of

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[45] Joshua Rubenstein, *Tangled Loyalties: the Life and Times of Ilya Ehrenburg* (New York: Basic Books, 1996), 203.

[46] Il'ia Ehrenburg's letter to Liza Polonskaia, quoted in ibid., 203.

[47] Rubenstein, *Tangled Loyalties,* 189.

Ehrenburg's first novels, *The Extraordinary Adventures of Julio Jurenito and His Disciples*, foreshadowed the Holocaust and his disillusion with Europe, his imaginary homeland. Ehrenburg explores the perils of ideology—from Western capitalism, to Soviet communism, to religious faith—and hints at the final destruction of Europe in the Second World War. Years later, however, in his famous 1941 speech at the Moscow Park of Culture, Ehrenburg presents another picture of his self-awareness as a Jew: "the Hitlerites have reminded me of something else: my mother's name was Hannah. I am a Jew."[48]

His assertion that it was only the advance of the Hitlerites that reminded him of his ethnic and/or religious identity is a rather transparent, even propagandistic ploy. Like other members of the JAFC, Ehrenburg marshaled his Jewish heritage to rally the Soviet citizenry against the Germans. This speech does not constitute a genuine confession of re-awakened Jewish self-awareness. Instead, it reveals how Soviet Jewish authors, with the approval of the powers that be, used the trope of re-awakened Jewish national pride to justify Soviet policy toward Germany. To his credit, Ehrenburg did not disavow his Jewishness after the war, when Soviet policy grew increasingly anti-Semitic, and his struggle to negotiate his identity as a Soviet Jew in the late 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s was no less complicated. The topic of Babii Iar in his prose and poetry provides a window into this personal struggle.

Of all the texts dedicated to the Babii Iar event in Ehrenburg's literary oeuvre, his novel *The Storm* perhaps best represents the pilgrimage theme. Inspired by the anti-Semitic campaign waged by Stalin in the immediate post-war years, *The Storm* was intended to depict the sufferings and heroism of Soviet Jews. The Yiddish poet Shmerl Kaczerginski describes his visit

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[48] Il'ia Ehrenburg, "To the Jews," trans. Joshua Rubenstein, quoted in *An Anthology of Jewish-Russian Literature: Two Centuries of Dual Identity in Prose and Poetry*, vol. 1, ed. Maxim D. Shrayer (New York: M.E. Sharpe, 2007), 532.

to Ehrenburg in his Moscow home. He found the author deeply immersed in collecting all available material on the fate of Soviet Jews under the Nazis and, in particular, on the attitude of the local gentile population toward their Jewish neighbors. According to Kaczerginski, Ehrenburg was entirely aware of the fact that "the Soviet population of the occupied regions did not give any support to the Jews, but, on the contrary, a large part, in particular the youth, had helped the German murderers."[49] This project, later known as *The Black Book*, consisted of eyewitness accounts from survivors, as well as journalistic comments on the Holocaust on Soviet soil. Ehrenburg abandoned the project when he was told that he would never be able to publish it. He destroyed the documentary manuscript and instead wrote *The Storm*.[50]

The novel, awarded the Stalin Prize in 1948, features a vast array of characters who are members of a Jewish family in Kiev. The matriarch of the clan, Hannah Alper, symbolizes the unassimilated pre-Revolutionary Russian Jews, while her son, Osip, "represents the Soviet generation of Jews, no different from their Russian and Ukrainian friends except for childhood memories of Petlura's pogroms."[51]

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[49] Shmerl Kaczerginski, *Tsvishn hamer un serp: Tsu der geshikhte fun der likvidatsye fun der yidisher kultur in Sovyetn-Rusland*, quoted in Reuben Ainsztein, "Jewish Tragedy and Heroism in Soviet War Literature," *Jewish Social Studies* 23, no. 2 (April, 1961): 72.

[50] Il'ia Ehrenburg and Vasilii Grossman's joint project to document Jewish people during the Holocaust, *The Black Book*, was completed in late 1944. At that time Ehrenburg published pieces of the book in a two-volume study called "Merder fun Felker" (Murder of Peoples). In early 1945 he gave it to the JAFC, who modified and made additions to the manuscript. In 1946, copies of the revised text were sent to the United States, Romania, and Israel. Parts of the manuscript were published in English in America as *Black Book*, which dealt with the extermination of European Jewry. Additional sections were also published in Romania in 1946. According to Ehrenburg, the book was actually printed in the Soviet Union, but both the manuscript and the entire print run were destroyed in 1948 when the JAFC was dissolved. One copy of the manuscript, sent to Israel (and missing the chapter on Lithuania), was given to Yad Vashem in 1965. The text was only published in Russian in 1980, in English in 1981, in Yiddish in 1984, and in Hebrew in 1991. The Yiddish version included the reconstructed chapter on Lithuania.

[51] Reuben Ainsztein, "Jewish Tragedy and Heroism in Soviet War Literature," *Jewish Social Studies* 23, no. 2 (April 1961): 73.

Babii Iar appears in the novel in parts 3 and 4. The first mention of the event follows a short chapter in which a German soldier visits Vera, a non-Jew. During his brief stay at her home, the soldier expresses his violent rage against her "faith:" communism. After Vera tells the soldier that: "you have your faith, we have ours," she receives a "swinging blow to the face." He then "dashed her head against the steps and pulled her into the courtyard, dead." Vera's death is immediately followed by a scene in which Hannah, a local Jewish woman, goes to the market with her granddaughter. There she finds a notice posted on the wall: "Jews of the City of Kiev and its environs. On Monday, September 29, 7 a.m., you must present yourselves with your belongings, papers and warm clothing in Dorogozhitskaya Street, near the Jewish cemetery. Penalty for non-appearance—death."

The reproduction of a famous placard recalls the ethnic tension between the Jews and non-Jews of Kiev. However, by collocating the non-Jewish Vera's death with Hannah's discovery of the Nazi placard, Ehrenburg attempts to bridge this divide in Soviet society, a bridge that rests on the shared tragedy of the war. Throughout the novel, scenes portraying atrocities against non-Jews are carefully interwoven with scenes dealing with, or simply referring to, the massacre of Jews at Babii Yar. Indeed, the same Soviet critics who attacked Evtushenko for dwelling on the Jewish tragedy at Babii Iar in his eponymous 1961 poem cited Ehrenburg as an admirable example of how to properly write about the event[52] because "he [Ehrenburg] does

[52] During the 1960s, a quarrel on the pages of *Literatura i zhizn'* and *Literaturnaia gazeta* between D. Starikov and Ehrenburg demonstrated just how problematic the word "Jew" became in post-WWII Soviet Russia. When Evtushenko's poem "Babii Iar" appeared on the pages of *Literaturnaia gazeta* in 1961, a scandal erupted. Starikov sternly denounced Evtushenko's verse in a lengthy article, "Concerning a Poem," for *Literatura i zhizn'*. In it, he blames Evtushenko for inadequately condemning the Nazis in his poem and then lauds Ehrenburg, whom he quotes extensively as an example of how to deal properly with the topic of the war.

Pitting Evtushenko against Ehrenburg, Starikov continuously raises the question of why Evtushenko even imagines himself as a Jew, while Ehrenburg, an "actual" Jew, does no such thing. Somewhat uneasy with Starikov's argument, Ehrenburg wrote a letter in response, also published in

not privilege one ethnicity over another."[53] Ehrenburg's blending of Jews with other victims, of course, was also in line with official Soviet policy toward victims of the Second World War.[54]

Ehrenburg avoids a direct depiction of the massacre at Babii Iar. He devotes a single telegraphic and elliptic line to this tragedy, portraying it as literally unspeakable: "They were driven right to the edge of the ravine, and then—a round of tommy-gun bullets." He calls on the reader to fill in the gap left by the dash, and is instead mostly preoccupied with scenes on Lvov Street:

> Lvov Street was jammed. Many aged people, many children. Hannah asked herself: 'Where are the young people?' and remembered, the young are fighting. Two bearded old men were carrying a paralyzed woman on a blanket. A man with an artificial left leg was pushing a baby carriage. Children lost their mothers and cried. The old men prayed; and the mournful strains of Oriental chanting mingled with the wailing of women.[55]

This catalogue represents the diversity of Kiev's Jewish community, and may also reveal the author's relationship to the group. The old bearded men and those chanting represent the traditional religious community; the man with an artificial leg likely fought in the First World War, and the women and children represent the younger generation, the community's future, which will soon be destroyed. The young men who left this last group behind "are fighting" for

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Literaturnaia gazeta. It rebuked Starikov for quoting "arbitrarily from my articles and poem, cutting quotations short to make them correspond to his thoughts and contradict mine." Though Ehrenburg blamed Starikov for misquoting him, Richard Sheldon points out that "even during the war [Ehrenburg] tended to soft-pedal the fact that the Jews were being subjected to particularly cruel treatment by the Nazis. Ehrenburg admitted this in private conversation at the end of the war, saying that he had to restrain himself because of the anti-Semitism prevalent among the Party elite." Sheldon, "The Transformation of Babi Yar," 44-71.

[53] Ibid., 20.

[54] For a detailed account of the Soviet official political attitude toward the Holocaust, see Zvi Gitelman, "Politics and the Historiography of the Holocaust in the Soviet Union," in *Bitter Legacy: Confronting the Holocaust in the USSR,* ed., Zvi Gitelman (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997), 14-43.

[55] Il'ia Ehrenburg, *The Storm*, trans. Eric Hartley and Tatiana Shebunina (London: Hutchinson International Authors, 1949), 167.

the Soviet Union. Again, Ehrenburg depicts the war as a shared plight; the Jews and non-Jews have grown together under Soviet power, and the youngest generation is fully assimilated, defending the new "faith" at the front.

But what about the old men and their "Oriental chanting"? The epithet is certainly charged, yet it is difficult to assert that Ehrenburg would have considered the sound of Hebrew prayers foreign.[56] It is more likely that, as in his speech of 1941, Ehrenburg tailors his narrative with a non-Jewish Soviet audience in mind. His Lvov Street procession charts a history of assimilation and Sovietization, and seeks to justify the traditional Jewish community to non-Jews who may have found it unacceptably foreign. The fact that the old men's prayers sound like Oriental chants suggests their foreignness, their cultural isolation from their non-Jewish Soviet neighbors. Yet these men raised the younger, assimilated Soviet Jews now fighting in defense of the Soviet Union. The successful integration of the sons and their sacrifices at the front justifies the old faith of their fathers, however "Oriental," un-Soviet, and undesirable it may seem to their neighbors.

Thus, it is clear that for Ehrenburg, Babii Iar was equally a Jewish and a Soviet tragedy. It was also a personal tragedy inextricably linked to Kiev. The deaths at Babii Iar signaled the death of his birth city. When the Germans captured the city in June 1941, Ehrenburg wrote, "We will liberate Kiev. The enemy's blood will wash the enemy's footprints. Like the ancient Phoenix, Kiev will rise from the ashes, young and beautiful. Sorrow feeds hatred. Hatred strengthens hope." For Soviet soldiers, his words were as effective as bullets, and spurred them

[56] During his two-year friendship with the Yiddish poet Avram Sutzkever, Ehrenburg often asked Sutzkever to recite verses in Hebrew: "How I love the prophetic sound," he told Sutzkever. Ehrenburg was simultaneously interested in the poetry of Elisha Rodin, the "last Hebrew poet in the Soviet Union…Rodin composed a cycle of Hebrew verse in his son's memory." Rubenstein, *Tangled Loyalties,* 211.

on to liberate Russian towns.[57] They also secured Ehrenburg's position as the most famous and widely read Soviet journalist of the Second World War.

Ehrenburg's subdued, meditative description of Hannah leaving her childhood home contrasts with the loud and overblown rhetoric found in his journalistic pieces: "Where were they? Still in Lvov Street. In that house Hannah's elder sister, Fenya, once lived." And later: "The highroad. She had been here long ago—when she and Nahum went to Rosa's wedding… Now all around them was vacant land, a hill, a ravine, and sand." The silence and emptiness of the landscape is mirrored in Ehrenburg's style. The places that were filled with people, celebrations, and plans for the future were empty.

Ehrenburg picks up the leitmotif of the city and its ruins in the second Babii Iar episode. Osip, Hannah's son who had served at the front alongside other Red Army men, returns to the city of his childhood. Osip is a perfect Soviet soldier who represents the ideals of Soviet war prose: political awareness, duty, and loyalty. The chapter begins with Osip and his fellow soldiers celebrating the October Revolution. His regiment is soon transferred to Zhitomir, and along the way he sees Kiev: "But he was amazed—the Kiev of his memories was not there. Dark ruins loomed through the cold rain. Before him lay not Kiev, but the war…" Again, the author's telegraphic style communicates the horror of the situation; the ellipses are once more to be filled in by the reader. Moreover, the destruction of Kiev is not primarily a material loss—it is a human tragedy: "To his [Osip's] delight he saw that the house he had lived in was still standing." However, he soon learns that his mother and small daughter were sent to Babii Iar:

> He [Osip] went to Babii Iar. His mind was blank, he was not yet fully conscious of the immensity of his bereavement; he breathed with difficulty; he heard nothing; he just walked on and on. He reached Babii Iar. In places it was not longer than a ravine (*iar*), it had been filled in. Sand, ashes,

[57] One soldier described Ehrenburg's war articles as "a literary machine gun." Ibid., 194.

small, charred bones. Osip went down on his knees and pressed his face to the cold, wet sand.[58]

Osip's journey takes on all the qualities of a pilgrimage, a trajectory of "interrelated spiritual and physical development that, when successful, culminates in reaching a destination of spiritual reward as a site of holiness."[59] The objects the narrator enumerates such as ashes and small charred bones comprise holy relics. Osip's prostration before these objects is a spiritual ceremony consecrating Babii Iar as a place of blessed memory: his journey is transformative. Ehrenburg's *The Storm* emerges as a novel of conversion, but unlike the typical Soviet wartime "conversion narrative" (to be explored in greater detail in chapter 5) propelled purely by communist ideology, the story of Osip's transformation is two-fold: first, Ehrenburg depicts his assimilation into Soviet society through experiences at the front, and then he depicts his Jewish reawakening at Babii Iar. Osip truly becomes a Soviet Jew.

The most curious element in Ehrenburg's Babii Iar chapter is Osip's letter to his wife, Raya, in which he writes, "I know everything… I have been to Babii Iar." What Osip may have read in newspapers and heard from former neighbors does not fully communicate the horror; only the physical journey to the site can confirm the reality of the event. Osip ends the letter, declaring: "After what I have lived through in Babii Iar I am not afraid of words, I want to say we two are bound together forever, and that is stronger than death."[60]

The notion of needing to witness the Second World War in order to truly understand it became a central theme in Soviet writing. It finds powerful expression in such works as Il'ia Sel'vinskii's 1942 poem "Ia eto videl!" ("I Saw It!"): "Mozhno ne slushat' narodnykh skazanii,

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[58] Ehrenburg, *The Storm*, 321.

[59] Heidi Oberholtzer, "Pilgrimage in Literature of the Americas: Spiritualized Travel and Sacred Place," *Religion and Literature* 35, no. 2/3 (Summer-Autumn, 2003): 11.

[60] Ehrenburg, *The Storm*, 356.

/ Ne verit' gazetnym stolbtsam, / No ia eto videl. Svoimi glazami. / Ponimaete? Videl. Sam." ("You can ignore the people's talk, / Disbelieve newspaper columns, / But I saw this. With my own eyes. / You understand? I saw it. Myself").[61]

Ehrenburg, having been a witness to tragedy in his wartime journalism, reinterprets this principle in his novel. Osip does *not* witness the massacre at Babii Iar. For him, to visit Babii Iar, even after the tragedy, is to have "lived through" it. Babii Iar is a *sacred station* where the tragedy of the massacre lives on and retains its power to transform. His final statement on Babii Iar reflects this two-fold conversion, his transformation into a Soviet Jew: "I want to say we two are bound together forever, and that is stronger than death."

Ehrenburg also touches upon the trauma of Babii Iar in his memoir, *People, Years and Life*. He addresses the tragedy in a chapter devoted to Kiev, his hometown: "Two cities—Moscow and Paris—have been the scene of my life. But I could never forget that Kiev was where I came from."[62] With one eye on the European literary scene, Ehrenburg constructs a Proustian paean to his native city. "In Kiev," he writes, "I ate cherry dumplings and garlic rolls;" in Kiev, he drinks in the literature of Gogol, Babel, Bagritskii, and Paustovskii; he admires the "sly and tender music of Ukrainian speech." He lays bare his love for a city that, together with Babii Iar, perishes in the wasteland of ash and soot.

Like Osip in *The Storm*, Ehrenburg is transformed by a pilgrimage to Babii Iar, although neither he nor any of his family members was present at the massacre:

> There were no relative of mine among those who lost their lives, but nowhere, I think, have I felt so wretched, so orphaned, as on the sands of Babii Iar. Here and there a pile of ashes and charred

[61] Il'ia Selvinskii, "I Saw It!" trans. Maxim Shrayer, in *I Saw It: Ilya Selvinsky and the Legacy of Bearing Witness to the Shoah* (Boston: Academic Studies Press, 2013).

[62] Il'ia Ehrenburg, "Kiev, Kiev, my home…" trans. Anna Bostock, in *People and Life, 1918-1921* (New York: Pergamon Press, 1962), 303.

> bones made a lack patch. Somehow I had the feeling that my relatives, friends, childhood playmates had perished here, friends whom forty years earlier I had watched at their games in murky streets of Podol and Demievka.[63]

This confession echoes Julian Tuwim's 1944 article, "We—the Polish Jews," in which the poet writes:

> I hear voices: "Very well. But if you are a Pole, why do you write 'We Jews?' I will reply: "Because of blood… There are two kinds of blood: the blood that flows inside the veins and the blood that flows out of them. The first is the sap of the body… The other kind of blood is that which the ringleader of international fascism pumps out of humanity in order to prove the superiority of his blood over mine."[64]

The blood that poured out of his "neighbors and friends" binds Ehrenburg to those who perished.

Babii Iar prompts Ehrenburg to write in the past tense that: "many Jews lived in Kiev."[65] These Jews, or at least the ones that he remembers, conjure a portrait of a man "with glasses and long hair" scurrying along Kreshchatik. In this text, his cousin tells the young Ehrenburg that this man is Sholem Aleichem: "At the time, I had not heard of this writer and I thought him just another learned eccentric who pored over a book, emitting meaningful sighs." Later, he reads Sholem Aleichem's books. Ehrenburg concludes the Babii Iar episode in his memoirs: "Sholem Aleichem called Kiev 'Yegupets,' and its townspeople fill his books. Their children and grandchildren bade farewell to Yegupets on the sands of Babii Iar."[66] Ehrenburg's decision to end his discussion of Babii Iar with Sholem Aleichem, one of the grandfathers of Yiddish

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[63] Ibid, 307.

[64] Julian Tuwim, "We—the Polish Jews," quoted in Rubenstein, *Tangled Loyalties,* 204. Tuwim's article was first published in April 1944 in an American Polish language newspaper. Rubenstein states that during the war, Ehrenburg read Tuwim's article and was so moved that he inserted it into his own memoirs, *People, Years, Life*. Rubenstein also notes that Tuwim's article never appeared in Russian translation, but that Ehrenburg translated it himself and quoted it often.

[65] Il'ia Ehrenburg, *Selection from People, Years, Life*, trans. Anna Bostock in collaboration with Yvonne Kapp (New York: Pergamon Press, 1972), 173.

[66] Ibid.

literature, incorporates the tragedy into a larger history of Jewish loss.

Through Sholem-Aleichem, the death of thousands at the ravine reaches back to the turn of the century, when Jews left behind their small towns in the Pale of Settlements and moved to urban centers in the Russian Empire. The children and grandchildren of Aleichem's fictional Yekhupets perish in the ravine alongside Ehrenburg's neighbors, friends, and relatives. The chain of Yekhupets-Kiev-Babii Iar establishes a trajectory for the Jewish experience in Russian and Soviet Ukraine—a trajectory ending in continued tragedy. "The modern Library of Jewish Catastrophe," writes Roskies, "both grew out of Jewish collective memory and fed back into it."[67]When Ehrenburg writes that "[in] Kiev I saw a pogrom,"[68] we are immediately reminded of Bialik's "In the City of Slaughter," Lamed Shapiro's "The Kiss," and Perets Markish's "The Heap."[69] Ehrenburg's Babii Iar texts both take their place in and transform this canon of Jewish Catastrophe.

Ehrenburg's Cycle of Verse: Text as Monument

Ehrenburg's first literary response to Babii Iar preceded *The Storm* by two years. In January 1945, he published a cycle of six short untitled poems about the Second World War in the Soviet magazine *Novyi mir*, which had a print run of 30,000, ensuring that the cycle would reach a wide and diverse Soviet readership. The first of the six poems was devoted to Babii Iar.

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[67] David Roskies, *The Jewish Search for a Usable Past* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999), 19.

[68] Ehrenburg, *People and Life,* 307.

[69] Bialik's "In the City of Slaughter"; Shapiro's "The Kiss"; and Perets' "The Heap" are all part of the canon of Jewish writings on catastrophe. See David Roskies, *The Literature of Destruction: Jewish Responses to Catastrophe* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 1988).

As L. K. Dolgopolov stated, any cycle of verse must exhibit an "inner oneness."[70]Consequently, I will treat Ehrenburg's untitled Babii Iar poem in the context of the larger cycle; the author's decision to place Babii Iar at the beginning of his sequence underscores the importance of this event in his overall conception of the war.

K chemu slova i chto pero,
Kogda na serdtse etot kamen',
Kogda, kak katorzhnik iadro,
Ia volochu chuzhuiu pamiat'?
Ia zhil kogda-to v gorodakh,
I byli mne zhivye mily,
Teper' mne kazhdyi iar znakom,
I kazhdyi iar teper' moi dom.
Ia etoi zhenshchiny liubimoi
Kogda-to ruki tseloval,
Khotia, kogda ia byl s zhevymi,
Ia etoi zhenshchiny ne znal.
Moe ditia! Moi rumiana!
Moia nesmetnaia rodnia!
Ia slyshu, kak iz kazhdoi iamy
Vy oklikaete menia.
Ia govoriu za mertvykh. Vstanem,
Kostiami zastuchim—tuda,
Gde dyshat khlebom i dukhami
Eshche zhivye goroda.
Zaduite svet. Spustite flagi.
My k vam prishli. Ne my—ovragi.[71]

What use are words and quill pens
When on my heart this rock weighs heavy?
A convict dragging his restrains.
I carry someone else's memory.
I used to live in cities grand
And love the company of the living,
But now I must dig up graves
In fields and valleys of oblivion.

[70] Ronald Vroon, "Liricheskii tsikl," in *Teoriia literatury*, vol. 2, ed. L.K. Golgopolov (Moscow: Imli Ran, 2011), 126-127.

[71] Il'ia Ehrenburg, "Stikhi," *Novyi mir*, January 7, 1945, 16.

Now every *yar* is known to me
And every *yar* is home to me.
The hands of this beloved woman
I used to kiss, a long time ago,
Even though when I was with the living
I didn't even know her.
My darling sweetheart! My red blushes!
I hear you calling me from the pits.
I speak for the dead. We shall rise,
Rattling our bones we'll go—there,
Where cities, battered but still alive,
Mix bread and perfumes in the air.
Blow out the candles. Drop the flags.
We've come to you, now we—but graves.[72]

The cycle opens with a meditation on the relationship between the written word and the weight of lived experience: "What use are works and quill pens/ When on my heart this rock weighs heavy?" The lightness of the "quill pen"—literally a feather (*pero*) in Russian—contrasts with the "rock" upon the speaker's heart. "*Pero"* in Russian is often a symbol of nineteenth-century Russian poetry (even of Pushkin's ethos in particular). "*Pero*," therefore, suggests not merely writing, but writing poetry with a capital "P" about "substantial" topics. Indeed, the motif of mass and weight governs Ehrenburg's cycle. In the following lines, he likens himself to a convict who drags about his "restraints," which turn out to be "*chuzhaia pamiat'* "—"the memory of someone else" or "someone else's memory." Who is this "I"? Is it Osip from *The Storm*? Maybe Ehrenburg the famed war journalist? Ehrenburg the Soviet citizen? Perhaps Ehrenburg the Jew? Ehrenburg the Russian? Ehrenburg the pan-European man of letters? We must regard the speaker as a combination of these identities, which separate and unite at various moments in the text. For instance, the repeated juxtaposition between "then" (*kogda-to*) and "now" (*teper'*) immediately

[72] Idem, "Untitled I," trans. Maxim D. Shrayer, "Ilya Ehrenburg's January 1945 *Novyi mir* cycle and Soviet Memory of the Shoah," in *Eastern European Jewish Literature of the 20th and 21st Centuries: Identity and Poetics*, ed. Klavdia Smola (Munich-Berlin: Welt der Slaven Sammelbände, Verlag Otto Sagner, forthcoming 2013).

suggests some kind of development, if not internal fracturing. Yet the "I" of the past and the "I" of the present remain consistent; no tonal shifts separate one from the other. They are, instead, separated by a traumatic event—a loss, a chasm, a *iar*.

In this cycle, Ehrenburg broaches the pilgrimage theme he would later develop in his novel. The poet's journey to the site of catastrophe fosters a sacred bond, an atonement: "Now each *iar* (ravine) is familiar to me." The speaker, who had until now employed a first-person, singular perspective, shifts to the plural pronoun "we:" "We shall rise, / rattling our bones we'll go—there." The apocalyptic imagery and language mark a drastic change in tone. The poet's pilgrimage engenders a longing prompted by loss and uniting with the fallen.

The last six lines of the text assume the rhetoric of Ehrenburg's journalistic pieces. The key sentiment is "I speak for the dead." The poet has become the murdered victims; he accepts the responsibility not only of bearing witness, but also of uniting with the dead and *doing* something with this knowledge. The emphatic "We shall rise" does not refer to the actual victims lying in the ravine, but to those, like Ehrenburg, who avenge and revive them in memory, specifically by writing and reporting on their plight. The apocalyptic imagery and language, normally reserved for a religious experience (i.e., "we shall rise," "rattling our bones"), consecrate the sacred space of Babii Iar and provide a call to arms; the rattling of bones must be read, in part, as the rattling of quills—a defiant call for the witness to pick up his pen and write.

Ehrenburg introduces another startling image in the poem by presenting himself not only as a pilgrim to the site of catastrophe, but also as one whose duty is to "dig up graves." It is not enough to journey to the site of destruction; one must actively engage with it. Ehrenburg plays with the Slavic and Turkic roots of the homonyms "*iar*." The Turkic borrowing means a ravine;

the Slavic root "*iar*" means "bright," "hot," and "spring-like"—a phenomenon associated with the onset of the growing season. The poet taps into the association of "*iar*" with spring, linking the act of digging to planting. Digging, therefore, is not merely a morbid excavation of bodies, but also a resurrection and revivification, a return to "cities, battered but still alive,/ [which] mix bread and perfumes in the air." It is the creation of another body—a body of writing.

One may, likewise, discern another rich and mystical subtext for the imagery of digging: the figure of the golem in Jewish folklore. In Jewish mysticism, the golem—an inanimate figure made from earth—is brought to life in order to defend the Jewish population in the Diaspora from their gentile neighbors. In some tales, for example, those of the Golem of Chelm and the Golem of Prague, a golem is inscribed with Hebrew words that keep it animated. The word *emet* ("truth" in the Hebrew language) written on a golem's forehead is one such example. Removing the letter "aleph" in emet could then deactivate the golem, changing the inscription from 'truth' to 'death' (*met* and "dead"). Legend and folklore suggest that golems could be vivified by writing a specific series of letters on parchment - and placing the paper in their mouth. In these examples, the act of writing stirs the golem. The poet in Ehrenburg's Babii Iar text, via the act of digging, creates a golem-like creature whose writing is both a conduit for vengeance and a concrete monument. This reading reinforces the overarching theme found in the entire cycle: writing as a source of retribution and a concrete embodiment of memory. Digging, therefore, is not merely an act of exhuming a grave, but more importantly, of creating a new body of texts.

The third untitled poem in the cycle picks up the leitmotif of a stranger's experiences:

Chuzhoe gore, ono, kak ovod,
Ty otmakhnesh'sia—i siadit snova,
Zakhochesh' vyiti, a vyiti pozdno,
Ono—goriachii i mokryi vozdukh;
I kak ni dyshish', vse tak zhe dushno.
Ono ne slyshit, ono—klikusha,

Ono prikhodit i noch'iu noet,
A chto s nim delat'—ono chuzhoe. [73]

Someone else's woe—like a gadfly;
You wave it off, but it gets right back at you,
You'd like to go out but it's late already,
The woe's hot and muggy air,
No matter how you breathe, suffocating.
The woe doesn't hear, a nagging hysteric,
It comes at night, moaning, aching,
And what to do with it—someone else's.[74]

In the first poem, the poet describes his estrangement from his surroundings. He asks what use words and quills are when he walks around with someone else's memory, thereby demonstrating a personal relationship with Babii Iar. The poet begins the third poem by comparing a stranger's suffering to a gadfly. This comparison reveals an ongoing tension in the six texts between *somebody else's* grief and *one's own*.[75]

The third poem in particular reveals a curious turn in the poet's relationship to grief. If, in the first poem, this relationship was personal—that is, the poet drags around someone else's woe—here grief belongs to an unidentified "you:" "*You* wave it off, but it gets right back at you." The faceless "you" is both the speaker and the audience; it is the Soviet Russian citizen coming to terms with the massacre of Jews at Babii Iar. The perennial return of this gadfly—this stranger's sufferings—gnaws at the flesh day and night. As Maxim Shrayer points out, "Ehrenburg understood perfectly well that to the Soviet state the Holocaust was someone else's

[73] Idem, *Derevo: Stikhi 1938-1945 gg*. (Moscow: Sovetskii pisatel', 1946), 81.

[74] Idem, "Untitled III," trans. Maxim D. Shrayer.

[75] The Russian word, "chuzhoe" does not have an English equivalent. It can be translated as "foreign," "alien," or "someone else's."

grief."[76] Finally, the poet asks, "what to do with it—someone else's [sadness]?" We may read this third poem as the poet's grappling with ownership and grief within a non-Jewish context. He senses that the pain of massacred Jews is a foreign, marginal presence in the lives of Soviet citizens, but it is a presence nonetheless—one with which they must come to terms.

As early as 1941, Ehrenburg began to feel and fear the growing anti-Semitic climate in the Soviet Union. Though an active member of the thriving JAFC, Ehrenburg was concerned about the growing slander against Jewish citizens. The famous Soviet writer Mikhail Sholokhov's scathing words, "You are fighting… but Abram is doing business in Tashkent," angered Ehrenburg and fellow journalist and Soviet writer Vasilii Grossman. Though Jews "earned the most disproportionate number of military awards of any Soviet nationality during the war, distinguishing themselves in every branch of the Soviet military,"[77] it became a staple of anti-Semitic rhetoric to insinuate that Jews were hiding in Tashkent instead of fighting the war against the Nazis.[78] Vilifying the Soviet Jewish population by accusing them thusly was such a powerful and widespread slur that Soviet Jewish poet, Boris Slutskii, appropriated it into his famous wartime 1943 poem, "Pro evreev" ("Of the Jews") in which he voices the same Russian anti-Semitic slur:

> Evrei—liudi likhie.
> Oni soldaty plokhie:
> Ivan voiuet v okope,
> Abram torguet v rabkope.
>
> Ia vse eto slyshal s deststva,

[76] Shrayer, "Jewish-Russian Poets Bearing Witness to the Shoah," 61.

[77] Rubenstein, *Tangled Loyalties*, 205-206.

[78] For a detailed account of the evacuation of famous Soviet figures to Tashkent, see Rebecca Manley, *To the Tashkent Station: Evacuation and Survival in the Soviet Union at War* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2009).

Skoro sovsem postareiu…[79]

Jews are an evil people,
They make bad soldiers:
Ivan battles in the trenches,
While Abram trades at the marker.

I have heard this all from my childhood,
I will soon grow old…[80]

Slutskii's internalized anti-Semitic discourse mirrored Ehrenburg's attitude toward the rise of anti-Semitism in print journalism. In a November 1942 article in *Krasnaia zvezda*, Ehrenburg writes: "Hitler wanted to turn the Jews into a target. The Jews of Russia showed him that a target shoots… Once upon a time, the Jews dreamed of a promised land. Now a Jew has a promised land: the main line of defense. There he can take revenge against the Germans for wives, for the elderly, for children."[81] Ehrenburg's meditations on what it means to feel another's sorrow reflect powerfully the lack of a language in the Soviet context to deal with the massacre at Babii Iar. The final line of the poem, "And what to do with it—someone else's [grief]," displays the inertia and unwillingness of the Soviets to address such matters.

The last poem in the cycle returns to the first-person singular perspective. Emotions abound, the poet begs the reader to properly mourn those who "lived in blood, whose mirrors froze, / Who hadn't heard love's violins, / For the longest, who forgot the smell/ of roses and lilt of sleep":

Proshu ne dlia sebia, dlia tekh
Kto zhil v krovi, kto dol'she vsekh

[79] Boris Slutskii, "Pro evreev," in *Sobranie sochinenii* vol. 1 (Moscow: Khudozhestvennaia literatura, 1991), 165.

[80] Idem, "Of the Jews," trans. Sergey Levchin and Maxim D. Shrayer, in *An Anthology of Jewish-Russian Literature: Two Centuries of Dual Identity in Prose and Poetry* vol. 2, ed. Maxim D. Shrayer (New York: M.E. Sharpe, 2007), 644.

[81] Il'ia Ehrenburg, *Krasnaia zvezda*, November 1, 1942, 3.

Ne slyshal ni liubvi, ni zerkal,
Pod kem i pol v senikha ne skripnul,
Kogo i son ne oklikal.
Proshu dlia tekh: i tsvet, i shchebet.
Chtob bylo zvonko i pestro,
Chtob, umiraia, den', kak lebed'.
Ronial ikh gorla serebro.
Proshu do slez, do bezrassudstva,
Doidia, voidia i pereidia,
Nemnogo smutnogo iskusstva
Za legkim pologom dozhdia.

I beg you not for me, but for those
Who lived in blood, whose mirrors froze,
Who hadn't heard love's violins,
For the longest, who forgot the smell
Of roses and lilt of sleep—
Beneath them no floor with tilt.
I beg for them: both color and singing
Please give them ringing, motley sounds,
So that the dying day, like a cygnet,
Will drop tongue-trilling silver sighs.
I beg you senselessly, my heart
Approaching, stopping, crossing again,
For just a bit of tremulous art
Behind a dainty curtain of rain.[82]

Maxim Shrayer writes, "it is remarkable that as early as January 1945, on the eve of the liberation of Auschwitz-Birkenau by the Soviet troops, Ehrenburg was asking in print that both the poet and the victims of the Shoah be granted a modicum of remembrance and salvation through art and in art, however muted or vague the art's expression of Jewish loss."[83] Begging the reader and artist to create an aesthetic monument for the Jewish victims, the poem becomes a kind of *matzevah,* a Jewish tombstone to be erected by future writers. Rubenstein concludes that, "in Kiev he [Ehrenburg] saw how badly his hometown community had been decimated and so he offered a poem ('Babii Iar') in place of a prayer for the dead, the *Kaddish*, whose words

[82] Idem, "Untitled VI," trans. Maxim D. Shrayer.

[83] Shrayer, "Jewish-Russian Poets Bearing Witness to the Shoah," 80.

he no longer remembered."[84] This closing poem serves as a destination of pilgrimage; it is a holy site, a monument commemorating the massacre of Babii Iar. Creating a body of texts envisioned in six poems, the writer established sacred stations for readers and future writers to re-discover.

To this day, little scholarly attention has been paid to Ehrenburg's Babii Iar texts. From the extant reviews and critical writings, we can assume that his works were deemed unimportant for either aesthetic or ideological reasons. His Babii Iar poem generally received poor reviews:

> Although deeply moved by the massacre at Babi Yar, Ehrenburg lacked the command of poetic diction needed to produce a first-rate poem. After expressing his horror in conventional terms—the inadequacy of words, the rock on the heart, the convict's ball and chain—he attempts to restore the victims to life in his imagination… Although Ehrenburg was unable to create a poem that could do justice to the theme of Babi Yar, there can be no doubt that the discovery of these mass graves had a major impact on him.[85]

In the Yiddish press, however, the connection between Babii Iar and Ehrenburg was immediately recognized. A 1947 review of Ehrenburg's *The Storm* by I. Borukhovits for the Yiddish newspaper *Eynikayt* hails the "novel to be an important work first and foremost for its portrayal of the war."[86] Tellingly, the review focuses on the novel's Babii Iar episodes. For Borukhovits and likely for his readers, this would have been the most significant part of the work. Although Babii Iar occupies very little space in Ehrenburg's novel, it proved to be central for the Jewish reader.

In an article written by and for Jews, the author takes a curious turn in the final remarks of the review, concluding that Ehrenburg's novel will "prove to be most edifying for Soviets,

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[84] Rubenstein, *Tangled Loyalties*, 210.

[85] Sheldon, "The Transformations of Babi Yar," 18.

[86] I. Borukhovits, "A nayer roman fun Il'ia Ehrenburg," *Eynikayt*, April 17, 1947, 19.

Frenchmen, and Americans."[87] The omission of "Jews," likely the *only* people who would read this review, raises several questions. Does Borukhovits offer the significance of Babii Iar as an ethical lesson from which gentiles should learn? Is Borukhovits' focus on the non-Jewish reader a prescient comment on the Soviet dismissal and refusal to publicly commemorate the deaths of Jews?[88] The stifling political climate of the time may best explain the author's choice not to include Jews as another ethnic group equally interested in Ehrenburg's novel. Also important is his desperate plea for understanding and acknowledgment of the tragedy from "Soviets, Frenchmen, and Americans."

Borukhovits' Yiddish review of Ehrenburg's novel segues to the next chapter, which explores Yiddish responses to Babii Iar in the Jewish canon. A key question emerges: does writing in Yiddish change, in and of itself, the depiction of events? Employing the motif of pilgrimage and return, Soviet Yiddish narratives on Babii Iar and the Holocaust form an essential addition to Soviet literature on the Holocaust. They likewise reflect Jewish writings about destruction throughout history.

[87] Ibid.

[88] By 1947, Soviet officials found little reason to continue the support for the JAFC and its newspaper, *Eynikayt*. Likewise, the event at Babii Iar was virtually eliminated from public discourse; any mention of Jews as the ethnic group singled out for annihilation was prohibited.

Chapter 3

Writing from Right to Left: Soviet Yiddish Responses to Babii Iar in the Context of Jewish Writing on Destruction

In 1944 an article by Itsik Fefer, the Soviet Yiddish poet and central member of the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee, appeared in the official JAFC newspaper, *Eynikayt*. Fefer's article is one of the first to broach the topic of Babii Iar in Yiddish. In it, Fefer exposes the crime of murder and deliberate attempt to erase any evidence of the massacre by the Nazis. For him, the subsequent act of expunging all evidence of the murder was unbearable. Calling our attention to the pressing need to bear witness, Fefer's article exemplifies what David Roskies and Naomi Diamant call writing produced in the "Jew-Zone":[89] "Before their retreat from Kiev, the Nazis dug out the bodies and burned the remains of our fathers and mothers, brothers and sisters, and spread their ashes into the wind, thinking that the wind would scatter their evil secret."[90] Like Ehrenburg, whose traumatic experience of the war was linked to Babii Iar and his birth-city Kiev, Fefer, who was also born there, found the massacre to be intimately painful. Fefer wrote, "The ashes of Babi Iar burn in our hearts, the flames burn in our eyes, the ashes have fallen on our scorched wounds and *do not give us peace*."[91] Fefer's article initiates a

[89] In *Holocaust Literature: A History and Guide*, Roskies and Diamant use the term, "Jew-Zone" to address texts by writers in "desperate spaces" (i.e., areas controlled by the Nazis). A salient feature of "Jew-Zone" writings—whether in song, poetry, reportage, prose, or memoirs—is a persistent reminder of the need to bear witness.

[90] Fefer, "Evreiskii narod," 27.

[91] Ibid., italics mine.

discussion on Soviet Yiddish responses to the tragedy, which was reported and memorialized in journalism, poetry, and prose. Like Ehrenburg and Fefer, whose literary and journalistic writings about the ravine were spurred by a personal attachment to a specific place (i.e., Kiev), Soviet Yiddish writers who wrote about Babii Iar also had a personal connection to the city, having been born in Kiev or simply from spending a large amount of time there.

This chapter examines and situates Soviet Yiddish responses to Babii Iar and other Ukrainian ravine massacres in the context of Jewish writings about catastrophe. The central figure here is Perets Markish and his Babii Iar text, "Dry Bones," which appeared within his narrative poem, *Milkhome* (*War*). Also important is Der Nister's literary representation of Babii Iar in his short story, "Vidervuks" ("Regrowth"). Though Markish and Der Nister were not born in Kiev like Ehrenburg and Fefer, they did spend a considerable amount of time there when it was a center for Soviet Yiddish literature in the 1920s.[92]

This chapter also explores another vital Babii Iar text by the Soviet Yiddish author, Itsik Kipnis. His "Ven-nit-ven" ("No Matter Where," 1969) portrays a postwar journey to the ravine by two friends. As in Ehrenburg's works, the site of Kipnis' catastrophe is enshrined in holy time, lending itself to interpretation as a pilgrimage narrative. But unlike Markish and other leading Soviet Yiddish writers who wrote about the Jewish murders *during* the war, Kipnis' narrative describes postwar Jewish life. According to Kipnis, Babii Iar is equally tied to survival and continuing existence of the Jewish people.

Because this chapter places Soviet Yiddish poetic and literary representations of Babii Iar in the context of the canon of Jewish writings on catastrophe, I will argue that in contrast to the depiction of the tragedy in Russian, Yiddish writings devoted to destruction did not

[92] Markish and Der Nister were part of the Kiev Group of writers in the 1920s when Kiev became the center of Yiddish cultural and literary life. It was also home to the largest Yiddish publishing house.

depict Babii Iar as something unique event, but rather within an entire Jewish literary tradition of writing about annihilation. Relying on the work of David Roskies, I will assert that Yiddish-language evocations of Babii Iar fit into the Jewish master narrative of destruction.[93]

Perets Markish's "Dry Bones:" A Soviet Yiddish Response to the War

In 1944, Soviet Yiddish poet Perets Markish wrote a revealing letter to his friend Joseph Opatoshu, the Polish Jewish writer, in which he dramatically reconceives the figure of the suffering wandering Jew:

> Now there must be a word about our literature, but not a descriptive one. Most importantly, it has to interpret and, as a result, to test the spirit of our wretched people. The blood of six million victims has to shout not through the mouth of Julian Tuwim[94], who fed himself on anecdotes about Jews until the graves reminded him that he was associated with the Jewish people. His Jewish-Catholic mysticism indicates a belated acceptance of the notion of the Jews as a Chosen People rather than an understanding [of what happened].
>
> Our literature now will have to sum up and re-evaluate the notion of *kidesh-hashem*, death for being a Jew, as an eternal national category, which, in fact, helped fascism annihilate our people.
>
> In this war were born the Jewish soldier and the Jewish partisan, who through shedding their blood became entitled to re-evaluate Peretz's 'gifts.[95]

In this letter, Markish refers to Yiddish author I. L. Peretz's story "Dray matones" ("Three Gifts," 1909), which presents three anonymous Jewish figures throughout history, demonstrating the typical features of the suffering Diasporic Jew. The trope of *kidesh-hashem*, loosely understood as someone who sacrifices himself for G-d, was no longer a viable representative of

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[93] See David Roskies, ed., *The Literature of Destruction: Jewish Responses to Catastrophe* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 1988).

[94] A reference to Tuwim's 1944 article "We—the Polish Jews."

[95] Perets Markish, letter to Opatoshu, quoted in *Briv fun Yidishe Sovetishe Shraybers*, ed., Mordechai Altshuler (Jerusalem: The Hebrew University, 1979), 331.

the type of Jew Markish envisioned in Soviet Russia. Witnessing the destruction of the Jewish people, Markish saw "something new that made this current wave of destruction different from other *khurbns* (destructions)… If Jewish history was peppered with Jewish self-sacrifice in the form of *kidesh-hashem*, sacrificing oneself in the name of G-d, then Markish shows that Jews in 1941 were responding differently."[96] Markish envisioned Jewish self-sacrifice in the shape of Jewish-Soviet heroism:

> The best sons and daughters of our people, weapons in their hands, are giving their lives on the fields of battle in the fierce struggle against fascist vandals… Fellow Jews! The time of submissive non-resistance to the butchers is the most shameful page in the tragic history of our ancient people![97]

In both his writing and public oration, Markish shifted "from a literature of destruction to a literature of Jewish heroism."[98] On August 24, 1941, he joined a group of Soviet Jewish intellectuals who gathered in Gorky Park in central Moscow for a rally and appeal to world Jewry to support the Soviet war effort. Markish addressed the Jewish population in Yiddish, stressing the image of blood:

> The blood of our people is flowing over cities and on the roads that connect one country to the next. It is everywhere that the butcher Hitler's fascist hordes have stepped. The blood, spilled during the horrible murders in Germany, had not yet dried up; the cry of tens of thousands of plundered and degraded refuges had not yet abated, when a new bloody carnage broke out in Austria, into which the frenzied butcher threw the strangling noose of the dark swastika.[99]

Though the word "Jew" is never mentioned, the motif of blood in relation to "our people" recalls the persistent trope of Jewish sacrifice—*kidesh-hashem*—in the Diaspora. Markish's mounting

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[96] David Shneer, "Rivers of Blood: Perets Markish, the Holocaust, and Jewish vengeance," in *A Captive of the Dawn: the Life and Work of Peretz Markish*, ed. Joseph Sherman (Leeds: Legenda, 2011), 144-145.

[97] Perets Markish, "Der baleidikter koved fun undzer folk fodert an entfer," in *Brider yidn fun der gantser velt* (Moscow: Melukhe-farlag "Der emes", 1941), 11-13.

[98] Shneer, "Rivers of Blood,"147.

[99] Markish, "Der baleidikter koved fun undzer folk fodert an entfer," 11.

interest in cultivating a radically new image of Soviet Jewishness is reflected in his wartime speeches and private letters, as well as his magnum opus, *War*, a cycle of verse describing the Soviet Jewish experience of the Second World War. Indeed, Markish's letter to Opatoshu offers a window into the poet's changing perspective on Jewish literature, and reflects a consensus among Soviet Yiddish authors and poets spurred by the hostilities.

In the 1920s, Markish was among the most respected Soviet writers working in Yiddish. He was the head of the Yiddish section of the Soviet Writers Union from 1939-1943, and served on the editorial board of *Eynikayt*. During the Soviet-Nazi Non-Aggression Pact, Markish, like most Soviet writers, exercised restraint in addressing the situation in Europe, but when the Nazis launched their attack on the Soviet Union, he broke his silence with the 1941 poem "Tsu a yidisher tantserin" ("To a Yiddish Dancer"). In this text, Markish celebrates collective Jewish history, indicating a newfound interest in Jewish themes that he rarely addressed prior to the war. His two best-known works about the hostilities are the epic poem *War*, which appeared just before the liquidation of Jewish culture in the Soviet Union, and the novel *Trot fun doyres* (*The March of the Generations*), which was rescued by his family at the time of his arrest and published in 1966. In 1949, Markish was arrested along with fellow Yiddish writers and poets. Charged with overt Jewish nationalism, he was sentenced to death with most of the accused. In 1952, he was executed on the infamous Night of the Murdered Poets. Following a renewed interest in his work, Markish's verse appeared in several Russian translations in 1955.

Markish's *War* was first published as a book in Moscow in 1948. Parts of this long poem appeared in a number of Yiddish periodicals in Moscow after the war. It is divided into four sections: "In onheyb" ("In the Beginning"), consisting of 43 chapters; "Moskve" ("Moscow"), 42 chapters; "Stalingrad," 36 chapters; and "Tsum marev" ("To the West/Westward"), 41

chapters. The collection features an array of Jewish and non-Jewish figures, together offering a panorama of the Soviet experience during the conflicts. Indeed, Markish makes a concerted effort to compare the fates of Jews and non-Jews during global conflict.

"Etsemes khayaveshes" ("Dry Bones") is the only poem exclusively devoted to the Babii Iar tragedy in *War*. Until this point in the cycle, the reader had followed the life of Aleksei Sadovskii, a non-Jewish commander of the Red Army; now the reader is led by Gurarii, a Jew, to the ruins of Babii Iar. The shift in perspective must be read within the context of the entire collection. "Dry Bones" is a poem about the fate of Soviet Jews as seen through the eyes of a Soviet Jewish figure. The text begins with Gurarii leading Sadovskii to the ravine where the Jewish tragedy during is revealed at Babii Iar. The poem introduces the massacre by describing the famous scene of Jews walking along the "dolina slez" (the trail of tears) to the ravine. Like *The Storm* in which Ehrenburg describes the path taken by Jews to Babii Iar, Markish also focuses on the "trail of tears." And as in Ehrenburg's novel, the actual shooting of the Jews is not portrayed by Markish.

Markish commences with an invitation by Gurarii to Sadovskii and the reader to go "there." Markish sanctifies the place of destination by calling the journey an *aliyah.* The word "aliyah" literally means ascension. In Judaism, it is used to describe the honor of being called upon to read the Torah in front of the congregation; it also means immigrating to Israel. Markish could have called the trip a journey, but by using the religiously charged term, he clearly establishes a holy setting. We know that he is inviting the reader to survey a ravine, yet the destination is not initially specified:

> —Kumpt, khaver komandeer,—
> khot tsu Sadovskin zikh gevendt

Gurarii, vi epes volt er im dermonen…[100]

—Let us go, comrade commandeer, there…—
Gurarii hastily turned to Sadovskii
On that same day, when…

Gurarii continues his plea to Sadovskii, though with more urgency: "I need to show / You that place, where the earth/ trembled for seven days." Again, Gurarii does not disclose where he is taking Sadovskii. Nonetheless, the use of apocalyptic imagery (e.g., seven days, trembling, etc.) sanctifies this locus. Gurarii's urgent call to Sadovskii intensifies: "Let us go…/ One thousand people… No, there were more/ killed by the Nazis in that place…/ It [the grave] still trembles…" The process of sanctification begins as the poet removes the ravine from historical time and space. In other words, "that place" is where the "earth shook for seven days" – no mere spot on a map. Gurarii's exclamation "it shakes and will never remain still" further unmoors the place from the limitations of history and demonstrates Markish's penchant for prophetic verse.[101]

Gurarii's subsequent tour through relics and ruins is envisioned through Jewish eyes as a landscape strewn with Jewish objects. As Gurarii and Sadovskii scan the sanctified surroundings, they visualize Jewish mothers, fathers, children, and grandparents walking to their deaths. The narrator interjects: "Here, time stops and… a valley is covered with ash."

The poet's vision of the ravine reaches a climax in the narrator's prophetic rhetoric: "Clad in their *tales* (a Jewish prayer shawl), the dead will rise." Later, Gurarii affirms: "Yes, he just now resurrected himself from the tomb… Yes, he has risen, here, right here, where you stand, a lively warrior—a Soviet soldier." Later yet, "bones crawl out, crying: 'Let us return to the body and skin of man.'" Hearing the noise of rattling bones, the poet's visions multiply as he

[100] Perets Markish, "Etsemes khayaveshes," in *Milkhome*, vol. 2 (New York: YKUF Farlag, 1956), 589.

[101] Shneer, "Rivers of Blood," 139-157.

declares: "Yes, they (the people) will rise [again]!"[102] This is a clear allusion to Ezekiel's "Valley of Dry Bones" (Ezekiel 37: 1-3):

> The hand of the Lord was on me, and he brought me out by the Spirit of the Lord and set me in the middle of a valley; it was full of bones. He led me back and forth among them, and I saw a great many bones on the floor of the valley, bones that were very dry. He asked me, 'Son of man, can these bones live?'

Markish revels in apocalyptic images and sounds, and although the poetic lines echo Jewish biblical images from Ezekiel, one cannot deny the equally strong Soviet context. The lines, "he has risen himself, here, right here, where you stand, a lively warrior—a Soviet soldier" show the poet's ability to wed biblical prophecy with Soviet ideology.[103] In the original verse from Ezekiel, many men assembled from bones rise before the prophet's eyes: "So I prophesied as he commanded me, and breath entered them; they came to life and stood up on their feet—a vast army" (Ezekiel: 37: 10).

We see a clearer and stronger example of the poet's appropriation of Jewish texts elsewhere. Gurarii envisions the bones rise as if straight from Ezekiel:

> Un ongefangt khot zikh a resh in ale ekn:
> mit adern in flaysh fun oibn khot aleyn
> ayeder beyn genumen zikh badekn,
> un s'iz in zey areyn der geyst,
> un gvure iz in zey arayn mit fayer—
> zey khobn oyf di fis geshtelt zikh drayst
> un zikh ovekgelozt—a groys, an umgekheyer khayel.[104]
>
> Noisily, they started to conjoin.
> And veins began to grow on them, and flesh,
> And skin appeared upon the bones.

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[102] Markish, *Milkhome*, 594.

[103] Yiddish scholar Avram Novershtern also points out that entire sections of *Milkhome* "bear the stamp of Soviet poetic style." *The YIVO Encyclopedia of Eastern Europe*, s.v. "Peretz Markish," accessed August 6, 2013, http://www.yivoencyclopedia.org/article.aspx/Markish_Perets.

[104] Markish, *Milkhome*, 598.

And spirit entered the soulless bodies,
Entered, and bestowed upon them souls.
Revived, they stood on their own feet
And they set out—a big and enormous army.

Markish's poetic vision also recalls the golem of Jewish folklore, but here, the poet reworks this figure into a modern army of Soviet soldiers. Again, Jewish texts and contexts buttress a unique vision of the Soviet Jewish war hero.

"Dry Bones" concludes with a promise made by Sadovskii that the Germans shall repay for this injustice. Though the entire narrative is relayed via Gurarii, Sadovskii is given the last words for another interesting shift in perspective. Sadovskii regains consciousness after the initial shock of witnessing the horrors at Babii Iar, and urges Gurarii to leave. Sadovskii's promise to make things "right" reflects Markish's faith in the Soviet cause—his belief that the Jew has finally found a home. For Gurarii, the savior is seen in the figure of a Soviet soldier.

Many scholars are wary in their reading of such pro-Soviet passages, claiming that Jewish authors and poets often praised Soviet characters due to their fear of censorship. This explanation surely has merit, but it also may be somewhat misleading; there is clear evidence of genuine enthusiasm for the Soviet cause among Jewish writers of this period, especially in the ideologically forgiving atmosphere of the war, when Jewish authors had more freedom to explore Jewish themes in their prose and poetry.[105] However, even if fear of censorship provided motivation for some, Markish's romance with the Soviet Union before and during the war must not be overlooked. For Markish and many of his fellow Yiddish writers and poets, there was no conflict between Jewish and Soviet ideals; one reinforced the other. To be Jewish was to be Soviet. In his 1929 novel, *Dor oys, dor ayn* (*A Generation Goes, a Generation Comes*), Markish

[105] During the war, Soviet Jewish writers were permitted and even encouraged to celebrate their Jewish identities. As Roskies and Diamant write, "the war, paradoxically, opened the floodgate" for Soviet Jewish writers. Roskies and Diamant, *Holocaust Literature*, 34.

traces the lives of Jews in a shtetl before and after the Revolution. Before the Bolsheviks come to power, the shtetl is cordoned off from modernity and its residents are myopic. The Revolution saves the town and its inhabitants from their own parochial existence; acting as the main vehicle for upward mobility, modernity, and acculturation, the Revolution was central to Markish's pre-war literary oeuvre. This novel's teleological trajectory, set in motion by the Revolution, points both to Markish's apocalyptic mode of thinking and deep faith in the role of the Soviet Union for Jews' common fate.

In "Dry Bones," Markish allows his speaker and characters to transcend historical time. Throughout the poem, Gurarii is able to dwell in the past, present, and future in the same instant. In one poignant episode, Gurarii inhabits various spheres of space and time; walking through the scene of present destruction, he mentally returns to his "forlorn" childhood, but is also able to envision an indefinite future wherein bones shall rise. Markish uses this complex situation to turn a 20th century ravine near Kiev into a vision straight out of Ezekiel, ushering in an apocalyptic vision of war.

Though saturated with Jewish images and taking inspiration from the Book of Ezekiel, Markish's "Dry Bones" celebrates Soviet themes. This ensured its place in the canon of Soviet literature, despite relating a forbidden subject. "Dry Bones" was never left out of any Soviet publications of *War.* In a 1957 edition of Markish's collection of verse, "Dry Bones" is translated and re-titled "Babii Iar." In addition, the editor's introduction to the collection depicts Markish's literary input in terms agreeable to a post-Stalinist Soviet Union:

> A poet, who unlocked new horizons of Jewish poetics, and raising it (Jewish poetics) to new heights, was a Jew by blood and spirit, who at the same time remained a deeply international artist; His literary creations are comprehensible to readers of all nations.[106]

[106] Boris Lavrenev, ed., *Izbrannoe. Stikhotvoreniia i poemy* (Moscow: Sovetskii pisatel', 1957), 4.

Restoration after Destruction: Der Nister's "Regrowth" and Jewish National Revival During the War

Markish was not the only poet to resort to a messianic tone during the hostilities, and he was not the only Soviet Yiddish writer to manipulate the *kedush-hashem* trope. In fact, most Yiddish writings that focused on destruction employed apocalyptic images. In this way, Markish's apocalyptic reconstruction of the Babii Iar ravine joins an entire Jewish literary tradition of writing about catastrophe.[107] Soviet Yiddish prose writer Der Nister wrote short stories during the war about Babii Iar and the destruction of the Jewish community in the Ukraine.

Der Nister is an especially difficult author to study; very little is known about his life, as the author was careful not to reveal too much about himself.[108] Indeed, his pen name, Der Nister, "the Hidden One," highlights the author's sense of mystery and desire to remain secluded. Furthermore, although he published extensively and was read widely by his literary cohort, few contemporary scholars have examined his work.[109]

[107] For a detailed analysis of the Jewish literature of catastrophe, see Roskies, *The Literature of Destruction.* Roskies argues that destruction became a unifying moment for Jewish writing. "Jews perceive the cyclical nature of violence and find some measure of comfort in the repeatability of the unprecedented." These narratives employ staple archetypes—exile, destruction, martyrdom, and redemption—in order to ensure authorial and generational unity with any predecessors.

[108] See Mikhail Krutikov, "Skrytyi klassik evreiskoi literatury," *L'chaim* (October 2009), accessed August 23, 2013, http://www.lechaim.ru/ARHIV/210/krutikov.htm.

[109] Most scholars writing on Der Nister focus on his early career or his entrance into the Yiddish modern literary scene with stories such as "Under the Fence" (1929). Paying particular attention to the writer's early symbolist leanings, Daphne Bechtel's *Der Nister's Work, 1907-1929: a Study of a Yiddish Symbolist* (Berne: P. Lang, 1990) is an important scholarly work on Der Nister's unique literary voice.

In 1943, Der Nister published a small collection of short stories on the war entitled *Korbones* (*Victims*).[110] Most of his wartime stories, however, were collected in book form after his death, including *Dertseylungen un eseyen* (*Stories and Essays*, 1957) and *Vidervuks* (*Regeneratio*n, 1969). Like Markish, he was arrested in 1949 for overt nationalism and died in a labor camp on June 4, 1950.

During the war, Der Nister often explored themes of loss, vengeance, and rebirth through the figure of an orphan.[111] His heroes were either children orphaned by the loss of their parents or parents orphaned by their children - who went off to fight with the partisans. For these characters and Der Nister, loss and destruction fueled a combined sense of nationalism, messianism, and a re-awakening of Jewish allegiance. His short story, "Vidervuks" ("Regrowth," 1945) best exemplifies the reconstruction of Jewish heroism during the Second World War.

Like Markish's "Dry Bones," which creates both an apocalyptic setting and a feeling of Jewish revival, Der Nister's "Regrowth" explores the theme of rebirth, facilitating a discussion on Jewish national renaissance and revenge. As the title suggests, the central motif for this story is a sense of re-awakened nationalism engendered by loss and even death.

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[110] In Yiddish, *korbones* carries an additional meaning of sacrifice. *Korbones*, therefore, is not merely a victim, but one who is offered as a form of sacrifice. Interestingly, this meaning comes closest to the Hebrew word for the Holocaust, "Shoah."

[111] In her work on Soviet novels written during the Second World War, Katerina Clark describes the figure of the orphan who gains a Soviet family as a common literary trope. See Katerina Clark, *The Soviet Novel: History as Ritual* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000), 189-194. Roskies and Diamant also claim that during the war, "the parent-child relationship became a universal trope;" furthermore, "ghetto songs focused on the child: orphaned, abandoned, peddling in the streets." Roskies and Diamant, *Holocaust Literature*, 48-49.

Der Nister uses biblical language in the story, perhaps most tellingly in the title of the text, "Vidervuks."[112] In Yiddish, *vidervuks* is derived from the Hebrew *safiach,* which in English means "after-growth," or a second spontaneous growth after a harvest. In Leviticus 25:5, God tells the Jews to let the land rest on the seventh year by not harvesting the "after-growth." After-growth emerged from an already-harvested stalk as something new and spontaneous. By drawing explicitly on such biblical themes, Der Nister was able to call for national renewal in religious terms.

The story is a complex narrative, both structurally and thematically. Though told with language redolent of a folktale, Der Nister's "Regrowth" also utilizes more modern techniques such as *skaz*, narrative doubling, or the metaphor of waking in order to explore themes of loss, rebirth, and vengeance.

This is the story of "a man on a vayb un a vayb on a man" ("man without a wife, and a wife without a man").[113] We soon learn that these two characters, Dr. Zemelman and Mrs. Zayets, "have grown estranged from their Jewish origins and all that occurred in the thicket of their people." From the beginning, the fates of Dr. Zemelman and Mrs. Zayets are intertwined: they live "a tir kegn a tir, of eyn etazh, in eyner a sovetisher khoipshtot" ("with facing doors, on the same floor of the same building, in a Soviet capital city") and they both lose their children who have joined the Soviet army in the war. Indeed, a shared fate is the backdrop for the story.

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[112] The Yiddish publishing house, *Lyric*, founded during the 1920s while Der Nister was part of the Kiev Group, established a literary imprint for young writers called *Vidervuks*. For additional information on the Kiev Group, see David Shneer*, Yiddish and the Creation of Soviet Yiddish Culture, 1918-1930* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 150-153.

[113] Der Nister, "Vidervuks," in *Vidervuks: dertseylungen, noveln (fun) Der Nister* (Moscow: Sovetskii pisatel', 1969), 160.

The first lines of the narrative foreshadow a union between this man and woman. Orphaned by their children after hearing that Dr. Zemelman's brother has died in an unspecified ravine, the two are led to "what they shared on a higher level, which now brought them together and united them":

> Yes, although Dr. Zemelman had grown distant from his community for many years from not having had any interaction with it, now—when such a cloud had moved in to destroy the community—he began to feel more and more that he belonged, that he had a close connection with its devastation.[114]

"Regrowth*"* is full of Socialist Realist tropes. Employing standard figures drawn from Soviet discourse, Der Nister positions them within a Jewish context. A strong example of this technique is found in Dr. Zemelman's "project" to construct a new family for himself: Dr. Zemelman "was eager to see something built anew, newly paired for a new life—recently he had been more strongly inclined to participate in the new construction [of his life]."[115] In her study of Soviet landscapes, scholar Emma Widdis argues that a related drive to establish a "single, unified national space" was always the "key Soviet project."[116] Widdis' concept of private space and public, national identity helps to illuminate the approach of Der Nister's literary project during the war, carving out a new space for Jewish identity.

Despite its markers of Socialist Realism, "Regrowth" exposes a uniquely Jewish response to armed conflict. The union between Dr. Zemelman and Mrs. Zayets, and between their two adopted children, brings the characters closer to their Jewish heritage. The short story ends with Dr. Zemelman's striking dream, in which he hopes to perish beside his brother in the

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[114] Der Nister, "Regrowth," trans. Erik Butler, in *Regrowth: Seven Tales of Jewish Life Before, During, and After the Nazi Occupation* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2011), 163.

[115] Ibid.

[116] Emma Widdis, "Viewed from Below: Subverting the Myths of the Soviet Landscape," in *Russia on Reels: The Russian Idea in Post-Soviet Cinema*, ed. Birgit Buemers (London: Tauris, 1999), 69.

ravine. His desire for self-effacement can be interpreted as a dual aspiration for some ultimate form of "unity" and a re-awakened sense of nationalism. "Regrowth" ends with Dr. Zemelman literally awakening from a dream. In that liminal moment between sleep and waking, Dr. Zemelman hears a voice calling to him: "Aynem tsum fargedenken: dem gebot fun vaksn un vider vaksn, nisht gekukt af alts, vos khot getrofn Alemen, un bazunders—undz" ("There is one thing to be mindful of: the commandment to grow and regrow, despite all that has struck everyone—and especially, us"). One cannot help but recall God's commandment to "(B)e fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth" (Genesis 1:28-30). Echoing God's voice, the narrator not only implies a need to physically refill such a void, but more importantly, to revive the Jewish national spirit. In Der Nister's work, the process of "waking" either from the nightmare of Babii Iar or from any such tragic event signals a future ability to recover Jewish identity.

Similarly, Markish's "Dry Bones" concludes with a return to apocalyptic imagery and, like Der Nister, employs the experience of waking as a symbol for Jewish renewal: "How does one wake from a primeval night,/ How does one wake from a deluge of blood?"[117] Just like Der Nister and other Soviet Yiddish writers, Markish combined and reworked two social and literary contexts in order to promote a new image of the Soviet Jew. In doing so, and in order to subvert the trope of *kidesh-hashem*, Soviet Yiddish writers needed to create an environment conducive to what has been called the "prophetic chronotope."[118] Markish successfully transformed the setting of destruction and ruin at Babii Iar by infusing his own narrative with apocalyptic rhetoric. In

[117] Markish, *Milkhome*, 597.

[118] Harriet Murav, "Violating the Canon: Reading Der Nister with Vasily Grossman," *Slavic Review* 67, no. 3 (Fall 2008): 642-661.

"Regrowth" and numerous other stories[119] devoted to the Holocaust, Der Nister established an apocalyptic setting that facilitated discussions of Jewish national restoration and retaliation.

The tendency toward an apocalyptic mode permitted Markish and other Yiddish writers to tap into an Urtext. By alluding to the books of the prophets, the thematic emphases established by Yiddish writers during the war often featured a strong component of Jewish vengeance. They did this, of course, well within the framework of Socialist Realism, as their "risen warriors" were invariably Soviet soldiers or partisans, or in the case of Markish's Gurarii, soldiers loyal to the Red Army. In the final line of Markish's poem, Gurarii exclaims, "(W)e will spill their blood… Yes! / *We* will remind the Nazis of Babii Iar."[120]

In as much as other times of destruction in Jewish history fueled an apocalyptic mode of writing, so too did Babii Iar spur writers to react similarly.[121] We may best see how Soviet Yiddish writers confronted the *kedush-hashem* trope in Der Nister's short story "A zeyde un an aynekl" ("Grandfather and Grandson") written in Tashkent in 1942.[122] In this story, an elderly rabbi, a "most pious of Jews," ponders his role in the long linage of great rabbis:

> Whenever he paused from study and meditation, he invariably held before his mind's eye images of rabbis from various times past… He also saw the way this great rabbi, with the words of

[119] For a prime example of how Der Nister created a "prophetic chronotope," called for national Jewish revival, or revenge, and subverted the *kedush-hashem* trope, see his short story, "Khas" ("Hate") which appeared in *Eynikayt* in January 4,1943.

[120] Markish, *Milkhome*, 595.

[121] Roskies argues that the normative way in which Jews reacted to catastrophe in writing was by conjuring up the apocalypse. Roskies, *The Literature of Destruction*.

[122] The Yiddish text of "Grandfather and grandson" was first published in Der Nister, *Dertseylungen un eseyen* (New York: YFUK, 1957), 48-79.

> confession before death on his lips, wore a shroud beneath his Holy Day… These were the rabbis of old. And nowadays, what was he, Reb Aaron? What?...[123]

Confronted with the fascist occupation of Poland, Reb Aaron Moneses poses the following question about issues of martyrdom during the Holocaust:

> What would Jews think if, God forbid, even now a time of evil decree and persecution were to come and martyrdom might be demanded—would there be found those who would willingly offer their necks to the slaughtering knife as in the days of Chmielnicki…[124]

This rhetorical question becomes a reality as Reb Aaron, with his communist grandson and his entire congregation, is led by the Nazis to be hanged on Yom Kippur, the holiest of holy days. Reb Aaron's identity crisis is arguably (and tragically) solved as he joins the linage of great rabbis who died for "something higher." Facing each other on the platform where they are to be hanged, the Nazis order the grandson to spit on the Torah. Despite being an ardent Marxist and atheist, long estranged from his grandfather, the grandson refuses to obey the command. Likewise, the Nazis order the rabbi to spit on a photograph of Lenin that the grandson carries around his neck. Just like his grandson, the rabbi disobeys, but ultimately both acquiesce to their fate. By depicting the rabbi's passive acceptance of fate, Der Nister is perhaps not utilizing the *kedush-hashem* trope in new ways. However, on closer examination, the rabbi's refusal to obey Nazis orders in his final hours is actually a genuine reenactment of *kedush-hashem*.

Babii Iar and Postwar Jewish Life in Itsik Kipnis' "No Matter When"

Itsik Kipnis (1896-1974), a contemporary of Markish, Der Nister, and Fefer, was also arrested and imprisoned for "anti-Soviet nationalist agitation" in 1949, but unlike his contemporaries he miraculously survived. Though his Babii Iar narrative appeared well after the

[123] Der Nister, "Grandfather and Grandson (An incident from currently occupied Poland)," trans. Joseph Sherman, in *From Revolution to Repression: Soviet Yiddish Writing, 1917-1952*, ed. Joseph Sherman (Nottingham: Five Leaves Publications, 2012), 201.

[124] Ibid., 203.

war, Kipnis belongs to the generation of Soviet Yiddish poets and writers who perished in the immediate postwar years. Unlike most of the Soviet Yiddish authors (except perhaps Der Nister) accused of anti-Soviet nationalist tendencies, Kipnis displayed a nostalgic attitude toward pre-Revolutionary Jewish life in his oeuvre. In 1967, the editors of *Sovetish heymland* sent Kipnis greetings on his 70th birthday, praising him for "remaining true to the theme of the shtetl, into which [he] had brought so many remarkable changes."[125] His suggestive postwar essay, "On khokhmes, on kheshboynes" ("Without Thinking, Without Calculation") asked Jews to celebrate the Jewish star as a symbol of pride: "I want all of the Jews who are now walking the streets of Berlin with firm and victorious steps to wear on their chest, next to medals and decorations, a small and lovely star of David."[126] Kipnis' portrait of a postwar Jew recalls Markish's wartime hero, Gurarii. Kipnis' core message was not well received by Soviet officials; his manuscript *Nostalgia for Childhood, for Home* (1946-1947) was confiscated due to an idealization of pre-Revolutionary Jewish life in the Pale.

After his return from prison, Kipnis began to work on his autobiography. *Mayn shtetele Sloveshne* (*My shtetele Sloveshno*), which appeared in its entirety in 1971 in Tel Aviv. Like Ehrenburg, for whom the trauma of Babii Iar lay in the destruction of his native city, Kipnis also concentrates his love for a "city that is no more." And just like Ehrenburg, for whom his text served as the only *matzevah* (gravestone) for Kiev and Babii Iar, so Kipnis explains in the introduction to his book that: "it [the book] is a gravestone, or, a sign for a gravestone for the city of my birth."[127] In this light, it is worth recalling Harriet Murav's observation that many postwar

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[125] Harriet Murav, "Jewish Spaces and Retro-Shtetls," in *Music from a Speeding Train: Jewish Literature in Pre-Revolution Russia* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011), 253.

[126] Quoted in ibid., 254.

[127] Itsik Kipnis, *Mayn shtetele Sloveshne* (Tel Aviv: Farlag, 1971), 41.

Jewish narratives written in Yiddish exhibited a longing for the Jewish home in the former Pale of Settlements. If, before the Revolution, Soviet Yiddish writers complained about their homes in the shtetls, then postwar narratives described such places as "neither a wasteland nor a site of full plenitude and unbroken tradition, but rather something in between."[128]

In 1969, Kipnis' short story "Ven-nit-ven" ("No Matter When") appeared in the collection *Tsum lebn*. It describes the return of a Jewish man to Kiev after the war; like many works in the postwar Soviet Jewish canon, "No Matter Where" is constructed around the theme of return. Mordecai Altshuler points out, "a large majority of Jews who survived the war returned to their previous areas of residence after the war." According to Altushuler, Kiev became one of the most reentered cities after 1945.[129] And, in the larger Soviet (Jewish and non-Jewish) postwar texts, the act of returning home provided a psychological structure to deal with issues of memory, trauma, and survival.

Kipnis' tale begins with the narrator's return to postwar Kiev and a sentimental stroll along Kreshchatik, the same street where Jews marched to their deaths in 1941. s"No Matter When" gradually recalls Dovid Bergelson's postwar depiction of return and survival, "An eydes" ("A Witness,"1946). In Bergelson's story, a man also returns to his hometown in Ukraine only to find traces of a local Jewish population. Though Bergelson's narrative depicts life after the war, its major focus is on writing as a form of vengeance.[130] Kipnis, on the other hand, is solely

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[128] Murav, *Music from a Speeding Train*, 248.

[129] Mordecai Altshuler, *Soviet Jewry Since the Second World War: Population and Social Structure* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1987), 93.

[130] David Shneer, "From Mourning to Vengeance: Bergelson's Holocaust Journalism, 1941–1945," in *From Modernism to Socialist Realism*, eds. Joseph Sherman and Gennady Estraikh (Oxford: Legenda, 2007), 253.

concerned with moving on, a theme reflected in his opening query: "Iz tsi velen mir im derlebn?" ("How shall we continue to live?"). [131]

After Kiev was liberated from the fascists, and local Jews returned from evacuation, it was important to show that the capital remained their central cultural locus. In Kipnis' related essay, "Tsvishn yidn"[132] ("Amongst Jews"), the author wrote, "my enemies will not be able to say: Babii Iar—the last refuge of the Jewish people. The last moment of Jewish existence. The last word on the history of the Jewish people." Instead, he offered the following Hebrew phrase as respite: "Am Yisreol Chai" ("the Jewish people live"). [133]

Walking into a local grocery store, the narrator encounters Deborah Lezebnik, an old acquaintance, who invites him to travel to a "holy place" (*heylkin ort*). [134] We later learn that the sanctified location is a cemetery and mass grave outside the city. The two characters agree to meet at the tram station in order to travel to this unidentified, but already significant spot. The tram breaks down en route, and the pair is forced to journey to the site on foot. Their pilgrimage to a site of ruin does not spur an apocalyptic vision of the Babii Iar massacre as it had in Markish's text. Unlike the other Babii Iar narratives under discussion, Kipnis does not focus on carnage and ruin. Though destruction is the primary backdrop of this story, the main focus is on postwar survival.

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[131] Itsik Kipnis, "Ven-nit-ven," in *Tsum Lebn* (Moscow: Sovetskii pisatel', 1969), 211.

[132] Kipnis' "Tsvishn yidn" also appeared under the title, "Babii Iar" in the collection, *Babii Iar* that came out in Israel in 1981. Zeltser, "Tema 'Evrei,'" 84.

[133] Idem, "Tsvishn yidn," quoted in Zeltser, "Tema 'Evrei,'" 91.

[134] When speaking to the narrator, the woman first talks in Russian and then repeats the same phrase in Yiddish. On the other hand, he speaks only Yiddish. As in Bergelson's "A Witness," the narrator is an old man who clings to the Yiddish tongue. Likewise, the woman shows more confidence Russian, suggesting a difference in age or a generation gap.

Kipnis' commentary on postwar endurance is constructed around the image of the tram. As the two pilgrims make their way back to the city, the tram is running again; its return to activity mirrors the major theme of the text: a return to normal life in postwar Ukraine. To underscore this motif further, the narrator explains that as the tram starts up again, its movements are "lively" (*balebtn*) and "full of life" (*fil mit lebn*). Kipnis' tram is not only a commentary on postwar survival and the need to move on; it also symbolizes the Jewish people in Ukraine after 1945. Indeed, the story concludes with the following line: "The half-empty tram took off" (*der khalb-leydiker tramvay khot gerirt fun ort*). In other words, the narrator's adjective refers to the loss of life during the Holocaust. The image is both realistic and optimistic; though it is half-empty, the tram still moves onward. Kipnis' Babii Iar text transforms the site of catastrophe and destruction into a point of departure from which the people depart or continue their passage; therefore, his text celebrates continuity.

Kipnis' Yiddish Babii Iar text is unique in part because his biography differs from that of his peers; he was one of the few Soviet Yiddish writers to survive both the Holocaust and Stalin's postwar anti-Semitic campaign. As a result, Kipnis received a rare opportunity to explore such postwar motifs as survival and return. It is unclear how Markish, Der Nister, and Fefer would have dealt with similar issues if they had been actively writing in the 1960s and 1970s.

But there is another text: a poem titled "Babii Iar" written between 1953-1954 by Shike Driz (1908-1971), a Yiddish poet from the Ukraine.[135] Driz's poem depicts a mother's longing

[135] For more detailed information on the life and literature of Shike Driz, see "Driz, Shike" Dov-Ber Kerler, in *YIVO Encyclopedia of Jews in Eastern Europe*, http://www.yivoencyclopedia.org/article.aspx/Driz_Shike, and Galina Petrova, "An eygnartiker dikhter," *Sovetish Heymland*, no. 5, 1978, 167–172.

to rock to sleep her two sons… who perished at Babii Iar. Unable to find her children's bones, the mother calls out: "Help me, mothers, help me/ rock Babii Iar to rest!"[136] Driz plays on the literal meaning of Babii Iar, the "women's ravine" to express the loss suffered by all Jewish mothers at the site.[137] Driz's "Babii Iar," later made into a popular song, titled "Viglig" ("Cradle Song"), is the only extant postwar Babii Iar poem written in Yiddish. Just like Kipnis' text, it demonstrates a desire to heal eternal wounds and lay a tragedy to rest; nonetheless, Kipnis' "No Matter Where" remains unique as it focuses wholly on the continuation of life after the war.

Other Soviet Jewish writers reacting to a postwar Ukrainian landscape devoid of Jews were not as hopeful. For example, Soviet Jewish poet Boris Slutskii, in his poem "Sozhzheny" ("Burnt") published in 1961 and written in 1952, describes a radically different reaction to the obliteration of Jewish life:

> Vse sozhzheno: poroki s dobrodeteliami
> I deti s prestarelymi roditeliami,
> A ia stoiu pred tikhimi svideteliami
> I tikho povtoriaiu: sozhzheny.[138]
>
> All is burnt: vice and virtue
> And children with their elderly parents,

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[136] Shike Driz, "Babi-Yar," trans. Aaron Kramer, in *The Last Lullaby: Poetry from the Holocaust*, ed. Aaron Kramer (Ithaca: Syracuse University Press, 1998), 60.

[137] Driz's "Babii Iar" echoes another undated Babii Iar poem written by a Ukrainian Jew. Leonid Pervomais'kyi's (born Il'ia Shlomovich Kharevich) "V babynim iaru" ("In Babii Iar") also features a mother speaking to her son, seemingly just prior to their execution. In Pervomais'kyi's poem, the mother and son are in the ravine, looking up at their killers: "Stand next to me, my son/ I will shield your eyes with my palm/ so you will not see your own death." Pervomais'kyi and Driz use the feminine voice in order to personalize the loss at Babii Iar. Yet the same voice also allows Pervomais'kyi and Driz to transform the ravine, a place of destruction, into a site of birth, even a womb. The mothers and sons who perished in Babii Iar are reborn in verse.

[138] Boris Slutskii, "Vse sozhzheno…" in *Rabota* (Moscow: Sovetskii pisatel', 1964).

And I stand before the silent witnesses
And silently repeat: burnt.[139]

Slutskii's desolate portrait of postwar life contrasts with Kipnis' Yiddish-language representation of Jewish life after the Holocaust. In Slutskii's poem, the speaker experiences the Holocaust as those Soviet Yiddish writers who wrote prophetically. In other words, the term "sozhzheny," steeped in biblical reference, means "burnt" and also refers to funeral pyres. It appears several times in the Old Testament: during the Jewish exile from Egypt, during the reign of King Solomon, and finally as a sacrificial offering to be brought to an angel. Slutskii uses this final connotation[140] in his poem to highlight the sacred nature of those killed. In this way, Slutskii's verse joins the canon of Soviet Yiddish wartime literature.[141]

Soviet Yiddish Responses to Babii Iar: Toward a Conclusion

Most contemporary Holocaust literature was written by survivors telling their tales of horror retrospectively. There are few examples of texts written *during* the Holocaust. The Babii Iar texts of Soviet Yiddish writers like Markish and Der Nister offer a rare glimpse into how Jewish writers reacted to the destruction of their people *at the time* of the events. Although each author had their own aesthetic vision, definitive conclusions can be made about how Soviet Yiddish writers treated the topic of Jewish death and survival during the war.

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[139] Idem, "Burnt," trans. Daniel Weissbort, in *Truth and Lamentation: Stories and Poems on the Holocaust*, ed. Milton Teichman and Sharon Leder (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1994), 454.

[140] Grinberg maintains that "Slutsky's idiosyncratic tragedies are the transplanted biblical narratives." Grinberg, *The Poetics of Boris Slutsky*, 285.

[141] Grinberg further argues that Slutskii's Holocaust verse is "strongly anti-apocalyptic." Ibid.

Perets Markish was the flag-bearer for an entire generation of poets,[142] and as such, his Babii Iar text, "Dry Bones," is the most illustrative. Markish undoubtedly knew that many Jews were willfully marching to their deaths in concentration camps and to ravines such as Babii Iar; nevertheless, he chose to focus on the Jewish warrior. Subverting the trope of *kidesh-hashem*, Markish cultivated a radical image of the Jewish hero who avenges the deaths of his people alongside the Soviet army in an apocalyptic setting. For Der Nister, war and destruction fueled a national Jewish rebirth and a call for vengeance, which was also couched—if only pragmatically—in Socialist Realist discourse.

In the Yiddish context of writings devoted to destruction, Babii Iar does not stand out as a unique event, but instead belongs to an entire Jewish literary tradition of writing about destruction. Therefore, inasmuch as Babii Iar generated a mode of apocalyptic thought, so did the Kishinev pogrom in 1903, as well as Bohdan Khmelnytsky's campaign to destroy the Jewish population in Ukraine in the seventeenth century.[143] The literary representation of Babii Iar and other ravines by Markish and Der Nister determines a paradigm of Jewish literature of destruction written in Yiddish.

While destruction became a prerequisite for apocalyptic thinking and writing *during* the war, in the postwar years destruction itself did not generate similar literary results, as shown in Itsik Kipnis' "No Matter Where." Indeed, the "prophetic chronotope," vengeance, and Jewish national revival—central to Markish and Der Nister—are entirely missing in Kipnis' narrative.

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[142] Roskies and Diamant, *Holocaust Literature*, 34.

[143] In 1968, Executive Director of the Maine Jewish Council Alexander S. Kohanski published a thin book entitled *From Kishinev to… Babi Yar* (New Jersey: Asko Press, 1968). Kohanski argues that in Jewish collective history and imagination, Babii Iar was of historical significance because it pointed to the "Jewish conditions in the old and new Russia which saturated the pale of Jewish settlement with hatred and persecution of the Jewish people," 9. Kohanski's depiction of Babii Iar tends to view the tragedy as one of *many* moments of destruction in Jewish history.

Writing about Babii Iar twenty-five years *after* the destruction, his prose stresses the need to continue.

The act of writing about Babii Iar in Russian as opposed to Yiddish became a way of presenting it as an exclusive event in Jewish history; that is, it was portrayed as a wholly Jewish catastrophe, whereas in the Yiddish context it is part of a longstanding, Diasporic experience of anti-Semitism and demolition. The following chapter, therefore, is devoted to two leading Soviet Russian-language texts dealing with Babii Iar during the Thaw.

Chapter 4

Babii Iar and the Thaw: Evgenii Evtushenko and Anatolii Kuznetsov React to Babii Iar

"On March 5, 1953, an event took place that shook the country—Stalin died. It was almost impossible to imagine him dead, for he seemed such an integral part of life to me. Everyone was stunned. People had been taught that Stalin thought about all of them, and they were lost without him. All of Russia wept, and I did too. They were sincere tears of sorrow and, perhaps, tears of fear for the future… that day was a watershed in my life, and therefore, in my poetry."[144] It is difficult to imagine that the author of these lines, Evgenii Evtushenko, would go on to become an electrifying figurehead of the Thaw,[145] (1953-1965) a period of political and cultural liberalization that followed Nikita Khrushchev's famous "secret speech" on Stalin's cult of personality at the Twentieth Party Congress in 1956. In fiction, Il'ia Ehrenburg's novel *Ottepel'* (*The Thaw*, 1954) marks the beginning of this new era of relative freedom; in poetry, it is Evgenii Evtushenko's "Babii Iar" (1961).[146]

Evtushenko claims to have written his impassioned denunciation of anti-Semitism "in only a few hours," but admits to thinking about the subject and Babii Iar for some time. In a

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[144] Evgenii Evtushenko, *A Precocious Autobiography*, trans. Andrew MacAndrew (London: Collins and Harvill, 1963). Evtushenko's memoir was first serialized in Germany's *Stern* magazine in 1962. It was published in the USSR in 1989 in *Nedelia*, the weekly supplement of *Izvestiia*.

[145] For a more recent exploration of the Thaw and its relation to the Second World War, see Juliane Furst, Polly Jones, and Susan Morrissey, "The Relaunch of the Soviet Project, 1954-1964," *The Slavonic and East European Review* 86, no. 2 (April 2008): 201-207.

[146]Evgenii Dobrenko, "Literary Criticism During the Thaw," in *A History of Russian Literary Theory and Criticism*, eds., Evgenii Dobrenko and Galin Tikhanov (Pittsburg: University of Pittsburg Press, 2011), 186.

2011 interview, Evtushenko said, "I am not the first poet to write about Babii Iar… Il'ia Ehrenburg, he wrote a poem about it. A famous correspondent with the Red Army in World War II, Ehrenburg (a Jew) was born in Kiev."[147] Evtushenko learned of Babii-Iar by reading the poetry of Il'ia Ehrenburg and Lev Ozerov, a Soviet Jewish poet and journalist who also wrote about the massacre: "So I discovered the existence of Babii Iar through poems like that—poems which were later never published out of some strange conspiracy of silence."

In a recent interview with the online journal, *Svoi variant* (*My Version*), Evtushenko admits that Ozerov's verse resounded more with him at the time than Ehrenburg's. "Who can forget the wonderful beginning of Ozerov's poem?"[148] That first line is indeed powerful, immediately locating the speaker and the reader on the precipice of the ravine, tapping into the tradition of pilgrimage literature: "I have come to you, Babii Iar" (*Ia prishel k tebe, Babii Iar*).[149] Hence, Evtushenko made his first acquaintance with Babii Iar via a literary pilgrimage, which in turn, inspired an actual pilgrimage. His reading of Ozerov and Ehrenburg, followed by his journey to the site, sparked an irrepressible desire to write about the crime committed by the Nazis in 1941, together with the crime of willful omission and obfuscation committed by the Soviets in the postwar years.

This chapter explores texts by two authors most commonly associated with Babii Iar: Evgenii Evtushenko and Anatolii Kuznetsov. Shocked by the lack of a memorial at the site Evtushenko and Kuznetsov produced two different but equally notable literary monuments to Babii Iar in the post-Stalinist period that, in turn, exposed the centrality of the Jewish experience

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[147]Evgenii Evtushenko, "Evgenii Evtushenko o 'Bab'em Iaru.' Interv'iu," interview by Mikhail Buzukashvili, *Chaika* (January 16, 2011), accessed July 23, 2013, http://www.chayka.org/node/3104.

[148] Idem, "Beseda s Evgeniem Evtushenko," *Svoi variant*, accessed July 23, 2013, http://mspu.org.ua/pulicistika/4635-beseda-s-evgeniem-evtushenko.html.

[149] Lev Ozerov, "Babii Iar," trans. Richard Sheldon, in *An Anthology of Jewish-Russian Literature*, 575.

during the Second World War. In the case of Evtushenko's poem "Babii Iar," the "multiplicity" of voices and experiences at the ravine find expression in the alternating "civic-lyric" poetic approach he adopted during the Thaw.[150] Evtushenko struggles to bridge the gap between the voices of many and that of one, deliberately shifting between the civic and lyric modes. Though Evtushenko's "Babii Iar" is rarely celebrated for its aesthetic qualities, I will show how the poet successfully employed poetic devices and figures to produce his own literary monument. In addition, I will examine how the text was received. The poem's appearance in print and Evtushenko's public readings generated much controversy in political and literary spheres. The text not only redirected readers' and critics' attention to an obscured historical event, but also became a literary event of the Thaw in itself.[151]

Though Evtushenko's poem forced Soviet public officials to deal with state-sponsored anti-Semitism and the reality of Jewish death during the "Great Patriotic War," no corporeal monument was erected after the appearance of "Babii Iar" in print. Instead, another literary work emerged, which promised to tell the entire story. Kuznetsov's *Babi Yar: A Novel in the Form of a Document* (1966) is not concerned with monuments and shrines. Instead, the novel is a bold declaration by a Soviet non-Jewish author that Babii Iar is a manifestation of the Holocaust on Soviet soil.

Kuznetsov's portrayal of Babii Iar as a Nazi death camp is the first such interpretation to appear in Soviet prose, and is therefore an important and largely unacknowledged addition to the body of Soviet texts on the Holocaust, not to mention the entire canon of Holocaust literature. We must recall that for literature written in Russian (especially by non-Jews), as opposed to in

[150] Boris Dralyuk, "Evgenii Evtushenko's Civic-Minded Lyricism in 'Babii Iar'," *Toronto Slavic Quarterly*, no. 43 (Winter 2013), 24-39.

[151] Dobrenko and Kalinin, "Literary Criticism," 185.

Yiddish, Babii Iar was singled out as a Jewish event. By presenting Babii Iar as a Jewish tragedy, Soviet writers were able to call attention to the pressing need to acknowledge the Holocaust as a whole.

Evtushenko and the "Jewish Question" During the Thaw

Anti-Semitism was an ongoing concern for Evtushenko.[152] In Babii Iar, he found a venue to address the roots of Russian and Soviet anti-Semitism. Writing from outside the Jewish experience, Evtushenko's deterministic, teleological vision of Jewish history as beginning in Egypt and ending in Eastern Europe rehearses the perennial model of Jewish life in the Diaspora. To underscore this model, the characters that Evtushenko selects as representative of the Jewish experience are either wanderers or persecuted individuals as seen in the second stanza of the poem:

> Mne kazhetsia seichas—
> ia iudei.
> Vot ia bredu po drevnemu Egiptu.
> A vot ia, na kreste raspriatyi, gibnu,
> i do sikh por na mne—sledy vozdei.
> Mne kazhetsia, chto Dreifus—
> Eto ia.[153]

> I see myself an ancient Israelite. I wander o'er the roads of ancient Egypt
> And here, upon the cross, I perish, tortured
> And even now, I bear the marks of nails.
> It seems that Dreyfus is myself.[154]

[152] Evtushenko, "Beseda s Evgeniem Evtushenko."

[153] Idem, "Babii Iar," in *Stikhotvoreniia i poemy*, vol. 1 (Moscow: Sovetskaia rossiia, 1987), 309.

[154] Idem, "Babii Iar," trans. George Reavey, in *The Poetry of Yevgeny Yevtushenko* (New York: October House, 1965), 152.

Cognizant of the fact that his poem would serve as a monument to those murdered at the ravine, Evtushenko oversteps the boundary of permissible speech and focuses on the Jewish victims of Babii Iar. Raising the "Jewish Question" in postwar Soviet Russia, Evtushenko unearths the crime committed not only by the Germans, but also by the Soviets – namely, their unwillingness to pay tribute to or acknowledge the historical reality at Babii Iar. Though Evtushenko's poem captivated and emboldened the Soviet Jewish readership, its reception in the Kremlin was less than positive.

Initially, the Thaw and Khrushchev's relatively liberal policies seemed to hold the promise of better relations between the Soviet regime and the nation's Jewish population. Jewish cultural life appeared to flourish after Khrushchev inaugurated his campaign of de-Stalinization. Previously suppressed writers, including Yiddish writers murdered by Stalin, were officially rehabilitated and republished. In 1955 a volume of Isaac Babel's work was published – together with an introduction by Ehrenburg. The monthly Yiddish journal, *Sovetish heymland*, began publication in 1961. Yiddish writers who survived the Holocaust and Stalin's anti-Semitic campaign, like Itsik Kipnis and Shmuel Halkin, continued to be published in the 1960s and 1970s. In addition, in 1965 the Soviet journal *Zvezda* published a Russian translation of Mariia Rol'nikaite's *Ia dolzhna rasskazat'* (*I Must Tell*…), a diary by a Jewish girl who survived the Vilna ghetto. And poets such as the Soviet Jewish poet Boris Slutskii were, however infrequently, allowed in print to mourn the loss of Jewish lives and ways of life in the Soviet Union.[155]

But Khrushchev, who took credit for de-Stalinization and the beginning of the Thaw, was not eager to revisit the topic of Babii Iar. His fame as the architect of liberalism eclipses

[155] See Boris Slutskii, "Ia osvobozhdal Ukrainu," trans. Marat Grinberg, in Grinberg, *The Poetics of Boris Slutsky*, 173.

his political past with Stalin. Shimon Redlich explains, "During the purges of the late thirties he [Khrushchev] not only adapted to the new situation, but also succeeded in strengthening his own position. In a sense, the purges tested the Soviet leaders' abilities to become Stalin's men, and Khrushchev excelled."[156] In addition, Stalin entrusted Khrushchev with one of the most important positions in Ukraine (1939-41), as well as in the aftermath of World War II, indicating that he trusted him.[157] Khrushchev's attitude toward the Jews did not differ from Stalin's.[158] Though not waging overt anti-Semitic campaigns against the Jews, his anti-Jewish prejudice was clearly revealed in private and public statements.[159]

Khrushchev responded to the tragedy of Jews killed during World War II with silence and avoidance, implicitly continuing Stalin's postwar policy. He loathed Ehrenburg and forbade him from publishing *The Black Book*, a collection of testimonials and eyewitness accounts of the Holocaust. Kuznetsov, who conducted research on Babii Iar, testified that it was Ehrenburg who initially demanded a memorial to Jewish victims at the ravine. When news reached Ehrenburg that there were plans underway to build a market on the site, he wrote to Khrushchev, who refused the author's demand for a memorial and advised him to limit himself to literary activities.

Though Khrushchev admired Evtushenko's civic verse and used him for his campaign of de-Stalinization, he was equally furious with the poet for his stance on the Jewish question in

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[156] Shimon Redlich, "Khrushchev and the Jews," *Jewish Social Studies* 34, no. 4 (Oct., 1972): 345.

[157] Ibid., 343-44.

[158] Joel Cang, *The Silent Millions: A History of the Jews in the Soviet Union* (New York: Taplinger Publishing Company, 1969), 147.

[159] Much like Stalin, Khrushchev thought the Jews prone to treason. Viewing them as careerists, Khrushchev bemoaned the large number of Jews in the early Bolshevik party.

"Babii Iar." He declared that: "Evtushenko did not manifest political maturity and disclosed ignorance of historical facts."[160] Accusing him of "a lack of patriotism and a one-sided treatment of the theme," Khrushchev demanded that Evtushenko add new lines to the end of the poem.[161] The additional lines reflect the regime's steadfast demand that the discourse on Babii Iar include all ethnicities:

> I stand here, as if by a well, that gives me faith in our brotherhood.
> Here Ukrainians and Russians lie with Jews in one earth.[162]

In fact, Khrushchev and the Soviet apparatus waged a campaign against Judaism in a series of books, pamphlets, and articles.[163] Among these publications was a volume entitled *Judaism Unembellished* by Professor M. K. Kitchko of Kiev University. In it, he played upon age-old anti-Semitic tropes reminiscent of the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*. Kitschko's book was a turning point in Soviet anti-Semitism. The author rehashed pre-Revolutionary libels, and depicted Zionism and the state of Israel as enemies of the Soviet Union. This linkage of anti-Semitism with anti-Zionist rhetoric (to be explored in greater detail in chapter 5) reflected official Soviet policy after the Six-Day War in 1967. The official anti-Israel campaign was matched by a clear surge in pro-Israel feeling among Jews. For many Soviet Jews, Evtushenko's "Babii Iar" reawakened Jewish national feelings, and by extension, pro-Israeli attitudes.[164] For

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[160] Redlich, "Khrushchev and the Jews," 350.

[161] In his own private letters and collections of verse, Evtushenko did not add these lines.

[162] Evgenii Evtushenko, "Babii Iar," quoted in Arkadii Belkin, "Vokrug stikhotvoreniia 'Babii Iar,'" (October 11, 2010), Proza.ru, accessed July 25, 2013, http://www.proza.ru/2010/10/11/1615.

[163] In addition, during Khrushchev's rule the number of synagogues in Russia was reduced from 500 to 97. That rapid decline, however, also reflected the lessening number of religious Jews, itself a consequence of war and ideological pressure.

[164] Cang, *The Silent Millions*, 154.

these reasons, Evtushenko's poem was perceived as subversive because it challenged the official Soviet stance toward Jews during the Holocaust, and stirred nationalistic fervor.

Evtushenko's "Babii Iar:" An Analysis

Evtushenko's "Babii Iar," which appeared in *Literaturnaia gazeta* on September 19, 1962, became symbolic of the Thaw. For the first time, Evtushenko publicly explores the forbidden topic of Jewish deaths at the ravine and raises the so-called "Jewish Question." Recalling the tumultuous events leading up to a publication date, Evtushenko said that at the "time I did not know that it [the poem] would be published. So I used my voice to publish 'Babii Iar.'" In a 2011 interview, Evtushenko documents the text's genesis. Aside from taking a literary pilgrimage to the ravine via Ehrenburg and Ozerov, he recollects that he was first taken to the site in person by Anatolii Kuznetsov, a fellow Soviet writer. He also recalls the most shocking element of the visit; neither a monument nor any vestige of the disaster remained, to remind people of the many victims:

> When we came to Babii Iar, I was shocked at what I saw. I knew that there was no monument there, but I expected to see some sign of remembrance or some place well taken care of… And suddenly I saw the most ordinary dump… And it was on that place, where thousands of innocent victims lay: children, women, and elderly. Before our very eyes, trucks would dump on this very place—where these victims lay—loads of trash. I was so ashamed of what I saw, that that very night I wrote the poem.[165]

Even before the poem appeared in print, Evtushenko knew it would spark controversy. He remembers going to the head editor at *Literaturnaia gazeta*:

> And so then I set out to Kosolopov to *Literaturnaia gazeta*… He read the poem in front of me and said after a pause: "This is a very strong poem. But what shall we do with it?" I replied: "What do you mean, what? Print it!" He thought a while and said: "Well, you will have to wait. Please sit in the hallway. I have to call my wife." I wondered, why call his wife? And he

[165] Evtushenko, "Evgenii Evtushenko o 'Bab'em Iare'. Interv'iu."

explained, "What do you mean, why? I will be fired when this is published. I have to talk to her about it first. This has to be a family decision. Go and wait."[166]

Evtushenko's verse created a stir not only on the pages of the *Literaturnaia gazeta* and other journals, but also among masses of people at sports stadiums, where the poet dramatically recited his work in a conscious attempt to replicate the theatrical performances of his idol Vladimir Maiakovskii and thus become the "national poet."

Tapping into the long-standing Nekrasovian tradition of "poet as civic consciousness" in Russian culture, Evtushenko likened the role of the *nastoiashchii* (genuine) poet to a "surgeon who is given the moral license to open up the body of an era by fearlessly opening up himself."[167] In Babii Iar, an obscured tragedy of national scope, Evtushenko found a fitting subject to realize his vision as a bard carrying moral responsibility for an entire people. The narrative's iconic opening lines situate the speaker and the reader in the present at the site (1961):

Nad Bab'em Iarom pamiatnikov net,
Krutoi obryv, kak gruboe nadrob'e.
Mne strashno.
Mne segodnia stol'ko let,
Kak samomu evreiskomu narodu.[168]

No monument stands over Babi Yar.
A steep cliff only, like the rudest headstone.
I am afraid.
Today, I am as old.
As the entire Jewish race.[169]

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[166] Ibid.

[167] Idem, *Half Fatal: The Culture of Democracy in the Soviet Union*, ed. and trans. Antonina W. Bouis (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1991), 202.

[168] Idem, *Stikhotvoreniia i poemy*, 309.

[169] Idem, "Babi Yar," trans. Benjamin Okopnik, Remember.org, accessed August 4, 2013, http://remember.org/witness/babiyar.html.

Having been led to the "dump" by Kuznetsov, who Evtushenko explains, was "a witness of the event," the poet posits a relationship between bearing witness and writing. The first line of the work concerns itself with official national markers (i.e., monuments) in austere and declaratory language. As such, the opening mode is civic. Abruptly, however, the poetic voice shifts from civic to lyric by focusing on the speaker and alluding to Romantic imagery. The figure of the poet at the edge of a precipice recalls, for example, Caspar David Friedrich's 1818 iconic portrait of a man observing a sublime landscape from above.

In the subsequent stanzas, the lyric voice alternates and blends with the civic. Evtushenko invokes a catalogue of historical Jewish figures. They range from the "ancient Israelite" who wanders the endless roads of Egypt, to Jesus tormented "upon the cross." The author adds Dreyfus, betrayed by the French government which he had served so honorably and bravely, and a simple boy from Belostok (Białystok), running from the "rabble of pogrom,/ to jeers of 'Kill the Jews, and save our Russia!' " Evtushenko not only writes about these figures from a civic standpoint, but also identifies with them lyrically, repeating the formulaic line: "It seems to me that I am…" ("*Mne kazhetsia, chto ia…"*) before each figure is introduced. He concludes these parallels by likening himself to Anne Frank, the young Dutch girl of Jewish origin who perished with her parents at the hands of the Nazis, then left a diary that has come to symbolize the tragedy of the Holocaust. Evtushenko, in fact, devotes the greatest number of lines in the poem to the episode of Anne Frank:

Mne kazhetsia—
        ia—eto Anna Frank,
prozrachnaia,
        kak vetochka v aprele.
I ia liubliu,
        I mne ne nado fraz,
Mne nado,
        Chtob drug v druga my smotreli,

Kak malo mozhno videt',
obniat'!
Nel'zia nam list'ev
i nel'zia nam nebo.
No mozhno ochen' mnogo—
eto nezhno
drug druga v temnoi komnate obniat'.
Siuda idut? [170]

It seems to me that I am Anna Frank,
Transparent, as the thinnest branch in April,
And I'm in love, and have no need of phrases,
But only that we gaze into each other's eyes.
How little one can see, or even sense!
Leaves are forbidden, so is sky, But much is still allowed—very gently
In darkened rooms each other to embrace.[171]

In the Soviet Union, as opposed to the United States, Anne Frank never became the figure most strongly associated with the Holocaust.[172] Nevertheless, her appearance in the poem indicates that Evtushenko assumed readers would have known her identity and writing. Initially published in the Netherlands (1947) and the U.S.and U.K. (1952), the diary did not reach Soviet readers until 1960. The Russian translation, issued by *Inostrannaia literatura*, included an introduction by Ehrenburg. He wrote: "One voice speaks for all the six million—not the voice of a wise man (*mudrets*), not that of a poet—but that of a simple little girl…."[173] Ehrenburg's declaration that a single voice can speak for a staggering number of victims resonated with Evtushenko's vision

[170] Idem, *Stikhotvoreniia i poemy*, 310.

[171] Idem, "Babii Iar."

[172] In the Soviet Union, it was, however, the diary of a Jewish girl who survived the Vilnius ghetto that was most widely read in the Soviet Union. Mariia Rol'nikaite's *Ia dolzhna rasskazat'* (*I Must Tell…)* was initially published in Lithuanian in 1963. It was then translated into Yiddish and finally into Russian, specifically in 1965 for the journal *Zvezda*.

[173] Il'ia Ehrenburg, introduction to *Dnevnik Anny Frank* (Moscow: Inostrannaia literatura, 1960), 9-10.

of the poet's role; as he writes in his epic "Bratskaia GES" (1964-65), "In Russia a poet is more than a poet (*Poet v Rossii—bol'she, chem poet*)."[174] For Evtushenko, a poet was not only a skilled versifier, but also a moral guide. Rendered by him as "transparent" and the "thinnest branch in April," Anne Frank is presented in a forbidden love affair, accompanying a shift back to the lyric mode. This depiction of a fragile, passionate girl is meant to appeal personally to the reader and/or listener in order to foster empathy for a single, representative victim, rather than for some faceless statistic. But this portrayal of Anne Frank with which Evtushenko identifies himself also reflects his self-image.

Marked during the Thaw and later as a "poet of the youth,"[175] Evtushenko carefully sculpted an image of himself as a keenly sensitive, fervent representative of the new generation—characteristics easily discernible in his portrait of Anne Frank.[176] Chief among Evtushenko's rhetorical devices in "Babii Iar" is what Bakhtin called heteroglossia—a mix between the lyric and civic voice. The lyric voice is acutely intimate and subjective; the civic voice, in contrast, is communal, and as such, potentially national in scope. The constant shift between registers is motivated by a desire to capture the full significance of the Babii Iar event,

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[174] Evgenii Evtushenko, "Bratskaia GES," in *Bratskaia GES, stikhi i poemy* (Moscow: Sovetskii pisatel', 1967), 179.

[175] At the 1957 World Festival of Youths and Students in Moscow, youth itself as a symbol of regeneration was celebrated. Capturing this same mood of regeneration, Evtushenko's depiction of Anne Frank served as a reflection of himself and Soviet culture after Stalin. Years later, at the Sixth Writers' Union Congress, Evtushenko delivered the following speech: "Youth and courage are sisters. 'Craven old age' does not sound very nice, but how terrible are two other words, set side by side, cringing and fighting the forced, unnatural combination – 'craven youth.'" Evtushenko, *Half Fatal,* 272.

[176] In several interviews, Evtushenko repeats the same memory of writing "Babii Iar," wherein he would bolt into a nearby room to scribble the poem quickly on a piece of paper. See Mikhail Buzukashvili, "Evgenii Evtushenko o 'Bab'em Iare.' Interv'iu," *Seagull Magazine* (January 16, 2011), accessed August 28, 2013, http://www.chayka.org/node/3104; "Evgenii Evtushenko: 'V ustakh politikov ukrainskii zvuchit grubo,'" January 24, 2013, Chayka.org, accessed August 28, 2013, http://www.segodnya.ua/life/interview/Evgeniy-Evtushenko-V-ustah-vashih-politikov-ukrainskiy-zvuchit-tak-grubo.html.

both as an individual and communal tragedy. Evtushenko attempts to bridge the gap between the one and the many, as well as between Russians and Jews.

"Babii Iar:" The Literary Event and Soviet Reactions to the Holocaust

Aside from provoking the ire of the Kremlin, Evtushenko's "Babii Iar" produced one of the most emotionally and ideologically charged literary debates of the Thaw that unfolded on the pages of popular Soviet journals. Evtushenko recalls that the day following the poem's appearance in *Literaturnaia gazeta*, "the head of the Central Committee arrived and demanded to know 'how it was that this [the poem] was printed?' But it was too late. It was already being sold and nothing could be done."[177] The text divided the Soviets into two camps: liberals and staunch conservatives. Within a week of the poem's publication, it was translated into 72 languages while thousands of letters and telegrams arrived at Evtushenko's door:

> The poem reached everyone at lightning speed. It was even read aloud on telephones. They did not have fax machines then. And these were mostly Russian people! I even received a phone call from [distant] Kamchatka. I inquired, "How did this reach you? The paper has not even reached you yet!" "No," they said, "we heard it on the telephone and we wrote down what we heard." There were many incorrect versions. And naturally what followed were official accusations. Aside from everything else, they [the government] chastised me for writing nothing about the Russian people. They accused the same 'me' who wrote the words to the song, 'Do the Russians Really Want War?' which everyone sung, including Nikita Sergeevich Khrushchev. This was the same Khrushchev who lambasted me for 'Babii Iar.'[178]

The poem sparked a bitter dispute that involved many leading Soviet literary figures of the Thaw. On September 24, 1961, a response to Evtushenko appeared in the popular Soviet journal *Literatura i zhizn'*. Aleksei Markov, a Soviet Russian poet and nationalist, publicly

[177] Evtushenko, "Evgenii Evtushenko o 'Bab'em Iare.' Interv'iu."

[178] Ibid.

accused Evtushenko of being disloyal to his Russian roots. The first line of his poem, "What kind of Russian are you, / When you have forgotten your own folk," points an accusatory finger. As Evtushenko describes it, Markov's poem depicted him as a "[mere] pigmy." Three days after Evtushenko's poem appeared, *Literatura i zhizn'* also printed a large article condemning the poet for "violating international Leninist policy and exciting enmity between nationalities."[179]

However, Markov's text failed to attract Soviet literary figures to his side; instead, it inspired them to rally around both Evtushenko and the Jewish cause. One example of that growing support is a poem titled "My Response to Markov" ("Moi otvet Markovu") by the beloved Soviet Jewish children's author Samuil Marshak. He cleverly exposes Markov's anti-Semitism by alluding to his predecessor and namesake, Nikolai Evgen'evich Markov, "The Second (*Vtoroi*)," an infamous pre-Revolutionary right-wing politician and inciter of pogroms. Samuil Marshak couches his "response" in the style of a children's tale:

> Byl v tsarstve vremia izvestnyj geroi
> Po imeni Markov, po klichke "votoroi."
> On v Dume skandalil, v gazete pisal.
> Vsiu zhizn' ot evreev Rossiiu spasal…
> I vot vystupaet segodnia v gazete
> Eshche odin Markov, teper' uzhe tretii.[180]
>
> There once lived a hero in the time of the tsars,
> Markov by name, and nicknamed "The Second."
> He raised Cain in the Duma, wrote in the papers,
> Spent all his life saving Russia from Jews.
> And today in our newspapers there has appeared
> Another Markov, this time the third.…[181]

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[179] Belkin, "Vokrug stikhotvoreniia 'Babii Iar.'"

[180] Samuil Marshak, "Moi otvet Markovu," quoted in Belkin "Vokrug stikhotvoreniia 'Babii Iar.'"

[181] Trans. Boris Dralyuk and Naya Lekht.

Soon after Marshak's pointed reply, Konstantin Simonov, the celebrated war poet published his text: "Over Babii Iar, the horrible grave / Stood a poet, bowing his head" ("Nad Bab'em Iarom, strashnoiu mogiloi, / Stoial poet, on golovoi ponik"). In this poem, Simonov asks**,** "Chto vas vzbesilo? To, chto Evtushenko/ Tak uzhasnul krovavyj Babii Iar?" ("What has infuriated you so?/ Is it that bloody Babii Iar/ so horrified Evtushenko?") He explores two writers' reactions to one event. In other words, Evtushenko stands over Babii Iar and - terrified by what he sees - produces his monumental transcript. Markov, on the other hand, fails to produce anything of worth when faced with "the horrible grave;" though his verse is full of "zeal, passion, and strength," he remains silent over Babii Iar. Perhaps the most enraged response to Markov came from the popular Soviet Jewish singer and jazz conductor, Leonid Utesov. His pithy verse depicts Markov's anti-Semitic rhetoric as a "Socialism of the idiots:"

> Otbrosiv sovest', styd i chest'.
> Ne znaet v mysliakh povorotov.
> Emu davno pora uchest'.
> Chto antisemitizm—est'
> Sotsializm idiotov.
>
> Casting away his conscience, shame, and honor,
> He doesn't know how the mind turns.
> It's high time that he recognizes
> That anti-Semitism is
> A Socialism of the idiots.[182]

Among this growing collection of literary responses, the best-known *musical* reaction to Babii Iar of the time came from Dmitri Shostakovich. Just as Evtushenko first encountered Babii Iar through a literary pilgrimage, so did Shostakovich; for the composer, it was Evtushenko's own poem that became a sacred station, inspiring the composer's Thirteenth Symphony. Set to

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[182] Trans. Boris Dralyuk.

Evtushenko's words, the symphony instantly became a bona fide musical occasion. Evtushenko could hardly believe that his poem had reached and inspired such a figure. He describes his phone conversation with the composer as "unreal": "My wife and I did not believe it. We thought it a nasty joke played by someone. He asked my permission to write music to my words. I said, 'Of course!' He added: 'The music has already been written.'"[183] Days after his symphony, Shostakovich was lambasted as viciously as Evtushenko, yet his own musical monument would continue to stand.

Why did Babii Iar trigger such heated debate? It is not as if Soviet officials refused to formally acknowledge the ethnicity of the victims. Indeed, if we look at the 1970 third edition of the *Sovetskaia bol'shaia entsiklopediia* (*The Great Soviet Encyclopedia*), under "Babii Iar," we find the following description: "Babii Iar is a big ravine in the northern part of Kiev… At the end of September 1941, the German fascist occupiers shot approximately 50-70 thousand people at Babii Iar, chief among them Jews."[184]

To help explain why Babii Iar generated such impassioned debate, I return to Markov's inciting question at the beginning of his poem, "What kind of Russian are you, / When you have forgotten your own folk?" It was not merely that Evtushenko spoke publicly about Babii Iar, for information was readily available to the public, but that he chose to focus exclusively on the Jewish victims. Indeed, by highlighting the ethnic identity of the sufferers, he was able to call attention to the sensitive issue of Russian anti-Semitism. As famed Soviet writer, Viktor

[183] Evtushenko, "Evgenii Evtushenko o 'Bab'em Iare'. Interv'iu."

[184] "Babi Yar," in *The Great Soviet Encyclopedia*, 3rd ed. (New York: Macmillan Inc., 1973), 521. See also, "Babii Iar," in *Bol'shaia Sovetskaia entsiklopediia*, 3rd ed. (Moscow: Sovetskaia entsiklopediia, 1970), 503.

Nekrasov, pithily reminds us: "Yes, at Babii Iar not only Jews were shot. Nonetheless, only the Jewish victims were shot *because* they were Jewish."[185]

In 1995, Evtushenko published an enormously well received collection of twentieth-century Russian verse, *A Century's Verse: An Anthology of Russian Twentieth-Century Poetry* containing the work of 875 Russian authors.[186] In that enormous collection, Evtushenko explains that he began putting the material together "already in the sixties… The chances of printing this anthology in the USSR were zero, and I was willing to publish the book abroad."[187] Here Evtushenko collects all the known poems addressing Babii Iar—texts by Ehrenburg, Ozerov, and Ol'ga Anstei, a Russian-Ukrainian émigré poet. Evtushenko's emphasis upon this theme reflects his personal commitment to memorializing this Jewish tragedy on Russian soil. It also testifies to the growing centrality of the Jewish experience in twentieth-century Russian history and culture.

Babii Iar as Buchenwald: Anatolii Kuznetsov's *Babii Iar: A Novel in the Form of a Document*

Evtushenko's "Babii Iar" forced the Soviet government to deal with the lack of a monument at the site of the massacre. On November 30, 1965, *Literaturnaia gazeta* announced that the Ukrainian government had decided to build two monuments: one to commemorate the 68,000 people who died in the Nazi prison camp at Darnitza, adjacent to Babii Iar, and another to commemorate the thousands who died at Babii Iar itself. This decision came exactly six years after construction plans had been blocked by the Kremlin in December 1959. The *Literaturnaia*

[185] Viktor Nekrasov, "Tragediia Ba'ego Iara: Prestuplenie i ravnodushie," *BBC Russia*, accessed July 25, 2013, http://www.bbc.co.uk/russian/russia/2011/09/110927_Babiiy_yar_70anno.shtml.

[186] Unfortunately, none of the Yiddish poets' verse on Babii Iar found its way into Evtushenko's anthology.

[187] Evgenii Evtushenko, "Poet v Rossii bol'she, chem poet," *Novye izvestiia* (September 16, 2005), accessed July 25, 2013, http://www.newizv.ru/culture/2005-09-16/31782-tolko-v-ni.html.

gazeta article referred to the victims as peaceful "Soviet citizens, prisoners of war, and officers of the Soviet army," carefully circumventing mention of any ethnic group. It announced a contest in which several groups of architects would submit plans for the memorials. The competition was to close on December 10, when various plans would be displayed to elicit comments and suggestions from the public. As of 1959, however, no structure was erected. Instead, another work of art emerged that promised to tell the story of Babii Iar in its entirety: Anatolii Kuznetsov's *Babi Yar: A Novel in the Form of a Document* (1966). It was serialized in the literary journal *Iunost'*, where Evtushenko sat on the editorial board; it was Kuznetsov, after all, who had first taken Evtushenko to the ravine. The novel was published with illustrations by Soviet artist and illustrator Savva Brodskii.

There are two major versions of the novel: one which the Soviets censored and one that Kuznetsov smuggled to England when he defected in 1970. Even the "abridged" version of the narrative was full of heretical material. When told that he would have to make cuts, he demanded the manuscript be given back. After Boris Polevoi, the editor of *Iunost'*, refused to hand it over,

Kuznetsov grabbed the manuscript, ran down the street and tore it to shreds. The editors, however, had another copy at hand, which they both censored and published without the author's permission.[188]

Kuznetsov, who was twelve years old when the Germans invaded Ukraine, later explained that because he had lived very near the Babii Iar ravine, he was forced to write about it. He vowed that if he ever survived the occupation, he would dedicate himself to documenting the story of the massacre. Though he began writing about Babii Iar as a young boy in daily diary entries, he only sat down to compose the novel twenty-five years later. His painstaking study of

[188] Sheldon, "The Transformations of Babi Yar," 30.

the leaflets, posters, and newspapers of the period, as well as interviews with survivors, helped to buttress his own recollections of the event. In many ways, Kuznetsov's novel builds on themes of the canonical Babii Iar text established by previous authors, including Ehrenburg, Markish, and Evtushenko. Even though Kuznetsov led Evtushenko on a pilgrimage to the "sacred station" of the ravine, Evtushenko's poem clearly became a "sacred station" on Kuznetsov's own literary journey.

In the introduction to the novel, we are told that Kuznetsov would often travel out to the Babii Iar ravine as a child. Based on numerous visits to the site, the author's prose singles out a chilling episode:

> I bent over and picked up a pebble. It was a burned piece of a bone, the size of a fingernail, white on top, black on the bottom. The stream had washed these pebbles down and was carrying them along. From this we concluded that they had shot the Jews, Russians, and Ukrainians and other nationalities higher upstream. So we walked for a long time over these bones until we came to the very mouth of the ravine, and the stream disappeared; it flowed from many sandy layers. The bones were being washed out from these layers.[189]

Walking further along the ravine, Kuznetsov spots three boys hammering and crushing the earth. When he asks what they are doing, the young boys point to a "half-melted gold ring and some other bits of metal." The narrator concludes: "They were mining." And indeed, the further upstream he went, the more "complete and fresh" bones were found with "damp skulls" and "dark ash in the sand." Though Kuznetsov's description is not as rich in apocalyptic language as Markish's "Dry Bones," the setting nevertheless recalls Ezekiel's "Valley of Dry Bones." This transformative experience of walking over dry skeletons forces the narrator to declare that "even then the thought came to me that someone should tell about this as it really happened, from the very beginning, omitting nothing and inventing nothing. This is what I am

[189] Anatolii Kuznetsov, *Babi Yar: a Document in the Form of a Novel*, trans. Jacob Guralsky (New York: The Dial Press, 1967), xiv.

doing, because I feel it my duty." Despite any religious symbolism, Kuznetsov's portrayal of children playing with bones and hammering gold is frighteningly banal.

In notes that precede the novel, Kuznetsov states: "everything in this book is the truth." Its subtitle—*a Novel in the Form of a Document*—is an oxymoron and presents us with a dilemma regarding how to read the work: as fiction, testament, history, or a mixture of fiction and non-fiction? Kuznetsov underscores the reality of the novel by calling attention to its title. As the author himself declared: "The word 'document' here means that 'I am presenting only authenticated facts and documents; here you will find not the slightest literary invention—this is not 'how it might have been' or 'how it should have been.'"[190]

Holocaust literature is often preoccupied with testimony. As the noted Holocaust writer Elie Wiesel once wrote, "If the Greeks invented tragedy, the Romans the epistle, and the Renaissance the sonnet, our generation invented a new literature, that of testimony."[191] Or as Warsaw historian Dr. Ignacy Schipper reportedly told Alexander Donat, a Warsaw Ghetto survivor and writer: "Everything depends on who transmits our testament to future generations, on who writes the history of this period. History is usually written by the victor. What we know about murdered peoples is [in most cases] only what their murderers vaingloriously care to say about them."[192] In their description of "Jew Zone" writing, Roskies and Diamant maintain: "The daily assignment was to write about a whole people in extremis, through the prism of the unique

[190] Interestingly, at the same time in the United States, a new literary genre was being developed. New Journalism (also known as the "literary-journalistic genre") evolved right after the Second World War and sought to bridge fiction and non-fiction. Some authors of conventional fiction switched to writing in this style, such as Truman Capote for his *In Cold Blood*, and Norman Mailer in *Armies of the Night.* Kuznetsov's *Babii Iar*, a self-proclaimed "documentary novel," mirrors similar generic qualities.

[191] Elie Wiesel, *Elie Wiesel and the Art of Storytelling*, ed. Rosemary Horowitz (Jefferson: McFarland and Company, Inc. Publishers, 2006), 172.

[192] Alexander Donat, *The Holocaust Kingdom* (New York: Hold, Rinehart and Winston, 1961), 211.

social organism that was the ghetto, as if for a deadline sometimes in the future, when the war was over, and these writings would see the light of day."[193]

Although Kuznetsov is obsessively concerned with historical veracity, the questions and problems he raises go far beyond the historical. Appearing four years after Evtushenko's groundbreaking poem, Kuznetsov's monograph rehearses the politics of speaking publicly about Babii Iar, while chronicling the daily life of Kievans under German occupation. The narrative of occupation allowed Kuznetsov to explore the tension between different ethnicities. In order to emphasize the theme of ethnic concern and the politics of talking about Babii Iar in the postwar period, Kuznetsov's narrates his youthful encounter with an unnamed man at the ravine:

> "Hey, uncle!" I shouted. "Was it here that they shot the Jews, or farther on?"
> The old man stopped, looked me over from head to foot and said:
> "And how many Russian were killed here, and Ukrainians and other nationalities?"
> And he went his way.[194]

Whether Kuznetsov really met such a man is irrelevant. What is important is how the author invites readers to relate the story of Babii Iar "morally." Indeed, the broadminded journal *Literaturnaia gazeta* lauded the novel for its "honest" and moral treatment of the topic:

> It [the novel] combines the honest, morally incorruptible thought of an artist, the powerful force of a document, and important historical information. Caught up in the documentary nature of the novel, some readers may not immediately appreciate its artistic power, may not perceive what a marvel of art is behind the realistic facts. With the passage of time, it will become clear that Soviet literature has gained a passionate and talented work.[195]

Soviet literature gained a "passionate and talented work," and more importantly, its original contributions bolstered the symbolic link between Babii Iar and the Holocaust, a connection to

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[193] Roskies and Diamant, *Holocaust Literature*, 53.

[194] Kuznetsov, *Babi Yar*, xiii.

[195] Sheldon, "The Transformations of Babi Yar," 43.

which Evtushenko's Anne Frank only alludes. Significantly, early Soviet reviews actually compared this novel with *The Diary of Anne Frank*.[196]

In an introduction to the first English-language translation of the book in 1967, Leo Gruliow, the editor of the *Current Digest of the Soviet Press*, writes, "It is as if, say, the Polish public had never been told about the Auschwitz death camp. Ironically (in Soviet literature of the Second World War) the Auschwitz and Buchenwald camps became far better known to the Soviet reader than Babii Iar on their own soil."[197] Gruliow's observation underscores the impact of the novel on Soviet readers, and also establishes—perhaps for the first time in the West—Babii Iar as a symbol of the Holocaust on Soviet land. Indeed, Kuznetsov was the first Soviet writer who compared Babii Iar to a Nazi death camp. In a recently published letter to the Israeli journalist, writer, and translator Shlomo Even-Shoshan dated May 17 1968, Kuznetsov states that long before Treblinka and Auschwitz, there was Babii Iar:

> Before September 29, 1941, Jews were slowly being murdered in camps behind a veneer of legitimacy. Treblinka, Auschwitz, etc. came later. After Babii Iar, murder became commonplace. I trust you know how they did this. They published an order for all the Jews in the city to gather in the vicinity of the freight yard with their belongings and valuables. Then they surrounded them and began shooting them.[198]

Occupation and Murder in Kuznetsov's *Babii Iar*: An Analysis

The novel begins with a chapter entitled "The Germans Come." Kuznetsov's grandparents figure heavily in his initial portrayal of the German occupation of Kiev and Eastern

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[196] Leo Gruliow, introduction to *Babi Yar*, v.

[197] Ibid.

[198] Anatolii Kuznetsov, quoted in Yury Shapoval, "The Defection of Anatoly Kuznetsov," *Den'*, trans. Yury Shapoval, January 18, 2005, accessed July 27, 2013, http://www.day.kiev.ua/en/article/history-and-i/defection-Anatolii-kuznetsov.

Ukraine, as they were the only adult figures to serve as a young boy's window to the outer world. In particular, his grandfather's attitudes toward the Soviet regime and the Nazis reflect a large segment of the Ukrainian population; people who welcomed the Germans as liberators from the Soviets.[199] Conversely, his grandmother is described as a simple woman who was "completely illiterate, unable to even read numbers. She could tell paper money by the patterns and colors of the bills, and coins by their sizes." Kuznetsov spent his entire childhood with her. His grandfather's outspoken political opinions and his grandmother's simple worldview shaped the author's early experience of the war and the Babii Iar event.

Babii Iar itself is presented against the backdrop of the occupation. It involves such painful realities as the locals' collaboration with the Nazis, and worsening tensions between Ukrainians and Jews.[200] Aware of the existing tension between different ethnic and political groups, the Germans encouraged infighting by hanging signs such as "*Zhidy*, *liakhy* and *moscali* are the worst enemies of the Ukraine!" These are derogatory terms for Jews, Poles, and Russians, respectively. The racist placard forced the young Kuznetsov to think of "my origin for the first time in my life. My mother was a Ukrainian, my father a full Russian, which meant I was half Ukrainian and half *moscal*… or an enemy to myself."[201] Like Ehrenburg in *The Storm*, Kuznetsov addresses the issue of ethnic tension by reproducing the full text of the placard addressed to the Jews of Kiev:

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[199] Timothy Snyder, "Shades of Grey: Reflections on Jewish-Ukrainian and German-Ukrainian Relations in Galicia," in *The Shoah in Ukraine: History, Testimony, Memorialization*, ed. Ray Brandon and Wendy Lower (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008), 77-114.

[200] Rebecca Golbert, "The Ukrainian Jewish Experience of the Holocaust," in *Lessons and Legacies*: *The Holocaust in International Perspective*, vol.7, ed., Dagmar Herzog (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2006), 236.

[201] Kuznetsov, *Babi Yar*, 38.

> All zhids of the city of Kiev and its environs must appear on the corner of Melnikov and Dokhturov Streets (beside the cemetery) at 8 a.m. on September 29, 1941. They must bring their documents, money, valuables, warm clothing, etc.
> Zhids who fail to obey this order and are found elsewhere will be shot.
> All who enter the apartment left by zhids and take their property will be shot.[202]

This is the beginning of Babii Iar for Kuznetsov. From this point on, the author begins to detail the lives of the Jews that lead up to their deaths. The carnage is depicted three times in the narrative: first, via the account of a survivor, Dina Pronicheva[203]; then, through Kuznetsov's acquaintance who is detained by a Ukrainian Polizei; and finally, at the massacre itself, shown as though it were a Nazi death camp execution.

The first account is detailed in chapter 7, titled "Babii Iar" and is purely documentary. The second account dramatizes the tensions between various ethnicities, as well as the motivations of collaborators.[204] More specifically, it is the story of Volodia Davydov, a Jewish man detained and taken away by a Ukrainian Polizei named Zhora Puzenko. Startled by Puzenko's decision to hold him, Davydov asks if he is ashamed of his actions. Pozenko replies he is not, since he is being paid for such work. Puzenko takes Davydov to the Gestapo.

The narrator relates that the Gestapo headquarters are near Bohdan Khmelnytsky Square. A hetman of the Zaporozhian Cossacks, Khmelnytsky waged an anti-Jewish campaign in 1648-56 that is remembered as one of the worst moments for Jews in Ukraine. Kuznetsov's pointed reference to the fact that the Gestapo building stood near the square named after Khmelnytsky

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[202] Ibid., 58.

[203] Dina Pronicheva, a survivor from Babii Iar, lived to tell her story to various Ukrainian, Russian, German, and Yiddish press outlets. Interestingly, her version would sometimes change, based on the language she used when giving interviews. For a detailed report on Dina Pronicheva, see Alexander Kruglov, "Dina Pronicheva's Story of Surviving the Babi Yar Massacre: German, Jewish, Soviet, Russian, and Ukrainian Record(s)," in *The Shoah in Ukraine: History, Testimony, Memorialization*, ed. Ray Brandon and Wendy Lower (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008), 291-318.

[204] Golbert, "The Ukrainian Jewish Experience," 236.

draws our attention to the topic of lingering Ukrainian anti-Semitism as one of the root causes of the massacre.

The third and final episode in the novel, appropriately titled "Babii Iar, Finale," describes the ravine as if it is located in a Nazi death camp. By 1943, the Soviet army turned the tide against the Germans. In the final days of their occupation of Kiev, the Germans hoped to murder as many Jews as possible, while simultaneously "erasing [Babii Iar] from history." This mission to eliminate any evidence required the mobilization of special groups: diggers, the gold-seekers, so-called "builders," stokers, bone-crushers, and gardeners. The diggers managed pits of exposed decomposing bodies that they filled with earth; others ripped apart the corpses with axes—making identification harder. The gold-seekers used tongs to tear gold teeth from the mouths of the dead; the "builders" constructed furnaces. The stokers started enormous fires, applying torches to any protruding heads. The bone-crushers handled the ashes and ground large bones into smaller pieces; the gardeners shoveled ashes into large piles in order to spread them on local vegetable gardens.

This attempt to erase the massacre from history, to remove all signs of destruction, later became typical of Nazi practice in Auschwitz and other death camps.[205] Kuznetsov's portrayal of Babii Iar as a centralized system of annihilation and erasure details the "machinery of extermination:"[206] Babii Iar emerges as an extension of the "Final Solution" on Soviet land. Indeed, Kuznetsov's depiction of what he calls the "Babii Iar system" recalls descriptions of the

[205] Annie Epelboin, "Babii Iar, Ukraine, un lieu de mémoire disloquée, " *Libération* (November 1, 2011), accessed July 23, 2013, http://www.liberation.fr/monde/01012368876-Babii-yar-ukraine-un-lieu-de-memoire-disloquee.

[206] I borrow from Raul Hilberg the term, "machinery of extermination." Raul Hilberg, *The Destruction of European Jews* (New York: Octagon Books, 1961).

methodical nature of death camps in other classics of Holocaust literature, such as Primo Levi's *Survival in Auschwitz*.

Kuznetsov concludes his novel with a "contemporary chapter." As an older man, he returns to Kiev on what could be described as a pilgrimage, but unlike Ehrenburg and Markish for whom pilgrimage is a way to rebuild their lives, Kuznetsov writes that: "Babii Iar is gone." In postwar Soviet narratives, "fictions of return" often addressed topics of postwar trauma. For example, Viktor Nekrasov's novella *V rodnom gorode* (*In My Hometown*) opens with "images of destroyed Kiev."[207] Upon returning to his native town, the hero begins to recollect a now-absent, prewar Kiev in contrast to the landscape before him. For Kuznetsov, the return to Babii Iar is a reckoning with wartime trauma or loss and an attempt to construct an historical document. He writes:

> …construction is under way on both sides of the road. But people working on the foundation still turn up human bones and clumps of barbed wire. The ashes have long since drifted away, though some lie deeply buried. Nothing remains of those who perished here except statistics and recollections.[208]

Ultimately, the memory of Babii Iar can only be regained through the author's text.

Kuznetsov's work as an example of the Holocaust on Soviet soil was daring and dangerous. Recalling the difficulty of writing, Kuznetsov stated that "for a whole month in Kiev I had nightmares, which wore me out so much that I had to leave without finishing my work and temporarily switch to other tasks in order to regain my senses." Kuznetsov angered the Soviet censors and troubled the editors of *Iunost'* with his implicit comparison between German

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[207] Murav, *Music from a Speeding Train*, 216.

[208] Kuznetsov, *Babi Yar*, 389.

attempts to eradicate the evidence and Soviet silence over the event.[209] The Soviets may not have been responsible for the massacre, but they were just as guilty as the Nazis of historical suppression.

How, then, was this novel allowed to be published? While bravely focusing on Jewish victims, Kuznetsov was careful to universalize the event:

> We dare not forget those cries, both because such things are unforgettable and because the problems of the Babii Iars hang over mankind like a black cloud. Nobody knows what technical forms they will assume in the future, or what names will be given to the new Buchenwalds, Hiroshimas and other horrors, still hidden from us but awaiting their hour.[210]

He presented Babii Iar as an example of a world tragedy, and paid lip-service to the Soviet authorities by equating the actions of the Nazis at Buchenwald with those of the United States in Hiroshima.

Kuznetsov recalls that he received attacks from two extreme camps after writing the novel. On one hand, some people accused him of being a secret Jew: "You glorify Jews; you are a secret Jew yourself!" Others saw Kuznetsov's universalization of Babii Iar as a way to *marginalize* the Jewish experience. He recalled speaking with one Jewish citizen who considered Babii Iar "an essentially Jewish national grave. More Jews are buried there than anybody else, even in purely mathematical terms." To this, Kuznetsov replied:

> If we are to speak about arithmetic—which I don't like, but let us do so—50,000 Jews were murdered in Babii Iar compared to 150,000 people of other nationalities, more of them Ukrainians and Russians. I'm not dividing or deciding anything. In my book I'm simply telling the actual facts, the historical truth that is more important to me than any established opinion. I am simply recounting how it happened. My book is a document, and I'm prepared to vouch for every word under oath in the strictest legal sense.[211]

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[209] Sheldon, "The Transformations of Babi Yar," 30.

[210] Kuznetsov, *Babi Yar*, 391.

[211] Kuznetsov, quoted in Shapoval, "The Defection of Anatolii Kuznetsov."

This universalization recalls Ehrenburg's *The Storm,* which depicts the fascist occupation of Kiev as a tragedy affecting all Soviet nationalities. Kuznetsov pays homage to the Jews lost at the ravine, and even focuses on them as primary victims, yet manages to limit any political fallout by stressing the deaths of other ethnicities at key points. Thus, he presents Babii Iar as a truly Soviet tragedy. In fact, Kuznetsov learned how to couch his "Babii Iar text" in permissible terms from Ehrenburg and Evtushenko.

The Legacy of the Thaw

Prior to the writings of Evtushenko and Kuznetsov, few Soviet citizens were familiar with the story of Babii Iar. Ehrenburg's novel and poems were not well known; the Yiddish texts of Markish and Kipnis were unavailable in Russian. Thus, Evtushenko and Kuznetsov were the first to bring the topic into the national spotlight; however, their work failed to move the Soviet authorities.

On September 29, 1966, the year that Kuznetsov's novel appeared in print, thousands of people gathered to mark the twenty-fifth anniversary of the massacre. Many people gave speeches, including Viktor Nekrasov and Ivan Dziuba, the Ukrainian dissident and literary scholar who denounced official and popular anti-Semitism in Soviet Ukraine.[212] The gathering was not endorsed by the state, and the police arrived to disperse the crowd. Cameramen from the Kiev News Film Studio were forced to surrender their footage to the police; the director of the studio lost his job. Nekrasov was detained and endured several interrogations over the events of that day.[213]

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[212] A transcript of Dziuba's speech may be found in *The Chernovil Papers*, comp. Viacheslav Chornovil (New York, 1968).

[213] See Viktor Nekrasov*, Zapiski zevaki* (Frankfurt/ Main: Posev, 1976).

Although Soviet Jews were somewhat hopeful that a monument would be placed at Babii Iar, the Six-Day War in June 1967 halted all efforts and drastically changed attitudes toward Jews in the Soviet Union. The anti-Zionist campaign continued well into the late Soviet period. A vivid illustration of this is evident in the 1983 publication of Evtushenko's poem without the changes previously required in 1961: it contained footnotes equating Israel with Nazi Germany.

These writers and social figures of the 1960s (known as *shestidesiatniki*) used the opportunity afforded by Khrushchev's de-Stalinization to tell the story of Babii Iar to a wider Soviet audience. Evtushenko's physical and literary pilgrimages to Babii Iar inspired one of the decade's iconic poems, a literary monument to an event that was officially unrecognized. Kuznetsov, who led Evtushenko to the ravine, developed some implications of Evtushenko's poem and presented Babii Iar as an example of the Holocaust on Soviet soil. These daring steps on the literary front were met with official disdain and ignorance. Although men such as Evtushenko, Kuznetsov, Nekrasov, and Dziuba all sought to recover the memory of Jewish victims at Babii Iar from Soviet suppression, their attempts produced mixed results. The first memorial was built only in 1976, in the middle of what is commonly known as the social tedium of Brezhnev's "Stagnation." That same ceremony failed to mention the Jews, and was instead dedicated to "citizens of Kiev and prisoners of war." The following chapter will explore "Babii Iar texts" produced during these subsequent years.

Chapter 5

Reading Ravine Literature in the 1970s: Anatolii Rybakov's *Heavy Sand* and Yekhiel Falikman's *The Black Wind*

The dynamic period of the "Khrushchev Thaw" settled into a slower, less romantic era known as the Stagnation (*zastoi*). That term refers primarily to the sluggish economic conditions during Leonid Brezhnev's administration in the 1970s; in terms of cultural and literary production, however, the period was anything but immobile. Publishing in *samizdat* and *tamizdat*, Soviet writers associated with the dissident movement continued to exert pressure on the regime and foster a burgeoning underground literary scene. Even officially published work sometimes pushed the boundaries of authorized discourse. Several sanctioned authors persisted in raising the "Jewish question" in general, with queries about the Holocaust and Babii Iar. The Holocaust, therefore, precipitated a major shift in Soviet Jewish self-awareness. The creation of the State of Israel in 1948, as well as Golda Meir's simultaneous visit to the Moscow Synagogue as the state's first ambassador to the Soviet Union had been met with great enthusiasm and Jewish pride. [214]

Indeed, Soviet Jewish self-awareness manifested itself in the substantial waves of emigration to Israel (known as *Aliyah*), a phenomenon closely associated with the period of

[214] Yossi Goldstein, "The Jewish National Movement in the Soviet Union: A Profile," in *Jewish Culture and Identity in the Soviet Union*, eds. Yaacov Roi and Avi Beker (New York: New York University Press, 1991), 31-33.

Stagnation.[215] This chapter situates two official texts on the Second World War and the Holocaust in the context of that emigration; it also investigates the increasingly central role that Israel played for Soviet Jews who were unable to leave.[216]

It should be noted that there was no strict ban on the topic of the Holocaust in Soviet literature, but any mention of the massacre of Jews during the Second World War had to be carefully couched in a broader context. Stories, poems, memoirs, essays, and articles on the Holocaust were present in almost every issue of the only Yiddish state-sponsored journal, *Sovetish heymland*, which began publication in 1961. This Holocaust literature dutifully reflected the official Soviet position on the Second World War. In order to propagate the message of *druzhba narodov* (friendship of peoples), the authors of *Sovetish heymland* took pains to: (1) describe Gentiles who frequently saved Jews in occupied territories; (2) show cooperation among all Soviet nationalities against the Nazis; (3) depict collaborators with the Nazis as fascists who lived in the West; and (4) portray Jewish resistance as a form of universal, not "parochial" struggle with the fascists.[217] Authors who were able to successfully publish on the Holocaust did so by combining it with "writing about resistance."

One such author was Hirsh Dobin, whose short stories mostly deal with Jews in partisan movements in Belarus. His major prose about the Holocaust, *Rasskazy* (otherwise known as *In*

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[215] Mikhail Krutikov, "Constructing Jewish Identity in Contemporary Russian Fiction," in *Jewish Life after the USSR*, eds. Zvi Gitelman, Musya Glants, and Marshall L. Goldman (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2003), 253.

[216] As Krutikov reminds us, during "the course of the 1970s, the possibility of emigration became a fact of life for many Soviet Jews and eventually developed into an important and distinct feature of Soviet Jewish identity." Ibid., 254.

[217] Gitelman, "Soviet Reactions to the Holocaust, 1945-1991," 13-14.

the Workshop, 1973), depicts a group of Jewish partisans.[218] Another accepted way of invoking the Holocaust was to examine it in the greater context of Russian Jewish history; in this approach, definitive moments such as the Russian Revolution and the Civil War were followed by a depiction of the Second World War, in which authors focused on the destruction of Jewish communities by fascists in Soviet annexed territories. For example, Iosif Rabin's novel on the Holocaust, *Ia vizhu tebia, Vilnius* (*I See You, Vilnius*, 1975), describes Jewish life in Lithuania and Belarus in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, with the Holocaust serving as a central moment in Russian Jewish history.

This chapter explores two iconic Soviet Jewish texts on the Holocaust that reached readers through official channels. Because they were deemed "appropriate" by the state, their appearance in official literary magazines and publishing houses allows us to study information on the Holocaust that was permissible. These works also demonstrate how their authors—employing the time-tested Russian and Soviet devices of Aesopian language—could conform to the rules of official discourse and break them, sending unauthorized signals to their readers.

Anatolii Rybakov's Russian-language novel, *Tiazhelyi pesok* (*Heavy Sand*, 1978) and Yekhiel Falikman's Yiddish-language text *Der shvartser vint* (*The Black Wind*, 1968) deal with Jewish deaths at ravines in Ukraine during the Second World War. Though vastly different in their treatment of the topic, the novels depict important ways in which Soviet Jews chose to remember and write about the Holocaust on Soviet soil. In addition, both works were printed in *Sovetish heymland*. For Rybakov and Falikman, Soviet politics toward the State of Israel during the late 1960s and throughout the 1970s form an essential backdrop for the genesis of the texts,

[218] Hirszowicz, "The Holocaust in the Soviet Mirror," 52.

as well as for the framing of the "Jewish Question" during the Stagnation. Thus, Soviet official and unofficial attitudes toward Israel will be explored throughout this chapter.

Because Rybakov's text deals directly with the murder of Jews in Ukrainian ravines, I will show how he manipulates the pilgrimage motif in his *Heavy Sand* in order to establish new directions for the discussion of Soviet Jewry. In contrast to Rybakov, Falikman's novel becomes a complete deviation from the Babii Iar model, and thus warrants further examination. Binding these two novels are not the literary techniques their authors used, but the political and literary contexts within which they were written. These contexts are the roles played by Israel in forming Soviet attitudes toward Jews, and in turn, Soviet Jewish emigration.

Breaking New Pathways: Anatolii Rybakov's *Heavy Sand* and Soviet Jewry in the 1970s

Heavy Sand is about another, unspecified ravine in the Chernigov region of Ukraine; like most ravine literature, it features the motifs of return and pilgrimage. These tropes, however, have an entirely different meaning than those in the works of Ehrenburg, Markish, Kipnis, Evtushenko, and Kuznetsov. This difference comes primarily from the novel's emergence under Brezhnev, when the "Jewish Question" took on new dimensions.[219] Matters were now linked more closely to Israel and a new form of government-sponsored anti-Semitism, equating Zionism with fascism. The Soviets argued that Zionism went against the principles of

[219] In addition to mounting a massive anti-Zionist campaign, the Soviets also cracked down in the wake of the Dymshits-Kuznetsov hijacking affair of June 15, 1970. Sixteen Soviet Jews who had been denied the right to emigrate attempted to steal a civilian aircraft - in order to fly to the West. As a consequence, various unrelated Jewish activists were arrested and makeshift centers for studying Hebrew and Torah were shut down.

communism.[220] Citing Lenin's dismissal of Zionism, the Kremlin saw Israel as an enemy state and an instrument of imperialism.

Just as the word "cosmopolitan" provided a substitute for "Jew" under Stalin, "Zionist" became a code word for Jew under Khrushchev, and to a greater extent, Brezhnev. One must read Rybakov's *Heavy Sand* against the background of this historical situation. In a 1997 interview with the New York daily's *Novoe russkoe slovo,* Rybakov stresses that his novel was born at a time of intense vitriol directed toward the State of Israel:

> And when, in the 1970s, anti-Semitism was spreading and all these books appeared about Zionism in relation to Israel, I set out to write the novel. But I was proud of Israel, and I was proud of my people. I traveled to Belorussia, to Ukraine. At first this was a novel about love. I wrote a novel about love that withstood all hardships, allowing people to preserve their ethnic identities and remain human beings. I thought it my duty to write this book, even though it was hard for me and some people even criticized my incorrect translations from Hebrew.

Here, Rybakov exposed Israel's central role in shaping his attitude toward the novel. Indeed, geographical space is central in the novel and to Rybakov, who traveled back to Ukraine in order to write *Heavy Sand*.

Though Rybakov was born in Ukraine, he spent most of his life in Moscow. In order to write about the Jewish experience during the war, he, like Yakob, the central character of his novel, made a pilgrimage home. The "smells and details" of Jewish life there were necessary to write a novel of such magnitude. For his characters, Ukraine is a "promised land." Yakob's journey to Ukraine and his unwillingness to leave it, as well as Rachel's refusal to abandon her town as Germans troops enter, together signal the cultural importance of that nation for Jews. Paradoxically, while Rybakov describes characters returning to Ukraine, the Soviet Jewish population—i.e., the novel's intended readership— was leaving the USSR or expressing the

[220] Jonathan Frankel, "The Soviet Regime and Anti-Zionism: an Analysis," in *Jewish Culture and Identity in the Soviet Union*, 310.

desire to emigrate. Maxim Shrayer observes, "The concept of his novel and the timing of its creation and publication suggest a connection with the exodus of Soviet Jewry."[221]

Rybakov uses this contradiction to expose the flawed myths of Diaspora nationalism and the Soviet Union as a Jewish "promised land." His heroes and - by extension - Jews who *dreamt* about a Ukrainian homeland, are driven into ravines or shot in their homes, while their bodies are then moved to mass graves in the forest.

Rybakov's novel, written during a sharp rise in state-sponsored anti-Semitism directed against Zionism and Israel, was published in the somewhat conservative Soviet journal *Oktiabr'* in 1978 (no. 7, 8, and 9). Though writing on Jewish topics appeared during the Thaw, many viewed the novel's core theme as unprecedented and somewhat risky.[222] For these reasons, top-rated Soviet literary periodicals such as *Novyi mir* and *Druzhba narodov* rejected the manuscript. Though *Oktiabr'* agreed to publish the text, the author was forced to make changes. For example, the word "Jew" was often changed to "people." In addition, Rybakov intended to call his novel "Rachel," after the matriarch of the Rakhlenko clan, but this title, which was simply too suggestive of Jewishness, was rejected in favor of *Heavy Sand*. The final title alludes to a passage from Proverb 27:3-13: "Stone is heavy and sand a burden, but provocation by a fool is heavier than both." This biblical quotation may be read as a sarcastic poke at censorship.

The uncensored novel appeared after the fall of the Soviet Union in 1995. In 2008, a full-length television serial based on the uncensored novel was produced in Russia. According to Il'ia Al'tman's Center for the Studies of the Holocaust, the television film is currently being used in some Russian and Ukrainian schools to educate students about the Holocaust. Consequently,

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[221] Maxim D. Shrayer, "The Russian Word in the Land of Israel, and the Jewish Word in Russia," *Jews and Slavs* (2006): 342.

[222] Buzukashvili, "Poslednee interv'iu s Anatoliem Rybakovym."

Heavy Sand recently has become widely acknowledged as a novel about Jewish life; Soviet Jews, however, immediately recognized the novel's core themes upon publication, even in its censored version.[223]

Return and Exodus in Rybakov's *Heavy Sand*: An Analysis

Heavy Sand begins with the return of grandfather Ivanovskii and his son Yakob to the Chernigov province in Ukraine. As Yakob's son, the narrator, explains, Ivanovskii came from a *shtetl* in the Pale of Settlements, but moved as a young man to Basel, Switzerland. Wanting to show his son his native city, Ivanovskii took him to Chernigov in search of his ancestral roots. Yakob's journey to Russia ends with a love affair. Having fallen in love with Rachel Rakhlenko, Yakob refuses to return to Switzerland without his beloved. An unlikely match, the two lovers are modeled on the biblical Jacob and Rachel, and face a dramatic future together.

Rybakov proclaimed that *Heavy Sand* was initially intended to be a love story. When asked what led him to depict a twentieth-century Jewish tragedy, Rybakov explained:

> I write about people with whom I lived my life. I write of my grandfather, Abraham Isaakovich Rybakov, whom I loved dearly; I write about my parents, and about those with whom I lived. People I befriended and fought. (Our family) was entirely Russified. I did not know Yiddish, we were atheists… But I am a Jew. In me runs the blood that for centuries poured out of my people. I felt and feel myself to be a Jew. And I will die a Jew.[224]

Rybakov's odd confession of a Jewish heritage recalls Perets Markish's image of blood during the war. As was shown in chapter 2, Markish's invocation of the "blood of our people flowing over cities and roads,"[225] reveals a relationship with Jewishness that was problematic for the

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[223] Ibid.

[224] Ibid.

[225] Markish, "Der baleidikter koved fun undzer folk fodert an entfer," 11.

kidesh-hashem trope. Unlike Markish, Rybakov internalizes and identifies with the image of spilled blood. Soviet Jewish poet Margarita Aliger echoes the same sentiment in her 1946 epic poem, "My Victory":

> My—evrei
> Skol'ko v etom slove
> Gorechi i beskonechnykh let…
> Ia ne znaiu, est' li golos u krovi,
> No ia znaiu—est' u krovi tsvet.[226]
>
> We are Jews
> How much sorrow and endless years
> Are in this one word…
> I do not know whether blood has a voice.
> But I know that blood—has a color.[227]

The preoccupation with blood as a marker of ethnic identity (in this case extending to a symbol of death and victimhood) evinces a strong visceral and biological response to collective group identity.[228]

Though *Heavy Sand* is a novel of historical sweep, for the purposes of our discussion I will focus primarily on its later sections that develop against the dual backdrop of Nazi occupation and the extermination of the Jewish people. We begin with the pages in which Yakob and Rachel Ivanovskii's surviving son starts "putting together the circumstances of my parents' death":

> A black night had fallen on the town. Many years I have wandered in that gloom, along the same streets, there and back and there again. And the ghosts of the tormented wander with me from

[226] Margarita Aliger, excerpt from "Tvoia pobeda," in *Iz zapisnoi knizhki, 1946-1956* (Moscow: Sovetskii pisatel', 1957), 143.

[228] Nadezhda Mandel'shtam wrote in her memoir of the poet Osip Mandel'shtam, "He never forgot that he was a Jew, but his 'blood memory' was of a particular kind." Nadezhda Mandel'shtam, *Hope Abandoned*, trans. Max Hayward (New York: Atheneum, 1974), 371.

house to house…[229]

Finding himself amid the gloom and "wasteland" of his mother's birth city, the narrator slowly transforms the novel into a pilgrimage narrative. Return and pilgrimage are again evoked when the speaker declares: "You don't send agents and special messengers to find the pit where you mother and father were shot, or the ground which has been stained with the blood of your family, for that you go yourself." Like Gurarii in Markish's "Dry Bones," who takes Sadovskii, a non-Jewish Red Army soldier with him to "that place," the narrator of *Heavy Sand* journeys to the mass grave with Sidorov, a fellow Red Army soldier:

> The last time I was there was 1972, September, the thirteenth anniversary of the uprising and destruction of the ghetto. Sidorov came with me to the cemetery. The fields all round were turning into autumn gold, we went by the path, along which they used to carry the dead from the ghetto… Sidorov and I stood for a while in silence, then we went to the communal grave…[230]

In Ehrenburg's novel, *The Storm*, Osip's return from military service ends with a pilgrimage to Babii Iar; here, the narrator and Sidorov journey to a communal grave along the path used for dumping dead bodies. But unlike Markish and Ehrenburg for whom the journey to demise and ruin sparks an apocalyptic and vengeful vision, here the focus is on postwar survival and continuity: "Before the war, there were several thousand Jews living in our town, now there are no more than two hundred. You already know what happened to those who remained under the Germans, and those who didn't either die in other battles or left with the evacuation and settled down in new places."[231] The conclusion of Rybakov's novel, though involving a pilgrimage,

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[229] Anatolii Rybakov, *Heavy Sand*, trans. Harold Shukman (New York: The Viking Press, 1981), 252.

[230] Ibid., 380.

[231] Ibid., 378.

takes the reader geographically and ideologically in an entirely new direction. We learn that the narrator's perennial returns are spurred by the desire to find his father's and mother's remains:

> We didn't find the remains of my father, Yakov Ivanovsky, though the neighbor pointed out exactly where he had been buried, a wasteland not far from our street… We dug over the whole wasteland, and found nothing but sand, clean, dry, heavy sand. My father's remains had vanished without a trace. Strange isn't it?[232]

The act of digging, familiarized in Ehrenburg's 1945 poem, is not merely a morbid excavation of bodies, but a resurrection and revivification, a return to "cities battered but still alive, / [which] mix bread and perfumes in the air."[233] It is also inextricably linked with the unique responsibility of the pilgrim to become a poet, chronicler, and witness. His role is to create an aesthetic memorial to Babii Iar. Unable to find a physical trace of his father's remains, the narrator calls attention to an absence of bodies, and objects to memorialize the dead. A tension over this lack of monuments is resolved at the end of the novel, when the speaker explains that his final journey to the grave in 1972 led him and Sidorov to a "large black granite [that] had been erected."[234]

As noted earlier, the first official shrine at Babii Iar was erected in July 1976, two years before Rybakov's novel appeared in print. Dedicated to all Soviet citizens and POWs shot by the Nazis during the occupation, it obfuscated the victims' ethnic identity. In Rybakov's novel, however, the narrator describes an entirely different monument written in Russian and Hebrew. In the Russian, Rybakov's monument is dedicated to "the eternal memory of the victims of the German Fascist invaders," reproducing the text of the actual 1976 Soviet memorial. The reader

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[232] Ibid., 379.

[233] Ehrenburg, "Untitled I."

[234] Rybakov, *Heavy Sand*, 380.

encounters the second, Hebrew inscription through the eyes of Sidorov, a non-Jew who asks the narrator to decipher the message:

> As a child, probably until I was eight or nine, I had gone to *kheder*, then I transferred to a Russian school and I'd long ago forgotten the Hebrew characters. Yet, nearly sixty years later, those letters and those words came back to me from the unknown and eternal depths of my memory. I remembered them, and I read: "Venikoisi domom loi nikoisi." The meaning of those words is "Everything is forgiven, but those who have spilled innocent blood shall never be forgiven."[235]

Although like the Russian inscription, the Hebrew does not mention the word "Jew," the mere presence of that language marks it as a memorial dedicated specifically to the Jews. Although no such monument was ever erected to Jewish victims of the Shoah in Ukraine, Rybakov did not entirely invent the episode. In his memoir, *Roman—vospominanii* (*A Novel of Recollections*), written in 1995 and published in 1997, Rybakov describes a journey to his ancestral city Snovsk, where he stumbled upon a small dilapidated monument at the Jewish cemetery. The shrine (pictured below) bears inscriptions in Russian and Hebrew, and is dedicated to the "eternal memory of those killed at the hands of the German occupiers."

Interestingly, the local authorities failed to notice that the inscription was in Hebrew, thinking it was in Yiddish (*evreiskii*) instead. Though memorials like the one in Snovsk were not rare,[236] the fact that Yiddish was permissible and Hebrew was not, speaks volumes about the state's attitude towards any Jewish national revival.

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[235] Ibid., 381.

[236] Mordechai Altshuler, "Jewish Holocaust Commemoration Activity in the USSR Under Stalin," *Yad Vashem Studies* 30 (2002): 271-296.



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The small monument in Snovsk is transformed in Rybakov's text into a "large massive black granite stone."[238] The Hebrew does not mimic the Russian, as is the case with the real monument at Shchors; rather, it is taken from Yoel 4:21: "For I will avenge them of the blood which I have not yet avenged." Like Markish and Der Nister who turned to the books of the prophets for an apocalyptic vision, Rybakov also turned to the prophets.

Although Rybakov's knowledge of biblical texts—unlike that of the Yiddish writers—was rather poor, he demonstrates the broad Soviet Jewish proclivity for a "prophetic chronotope" when speaking of the war, and the Holocaust in particular. For Soviet Jews and Jews in general, the prophets remained the voice of authority regarding war and destruction.

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[237] Frenkel, photographer, "Pamiatnik na evreiskom kladbishche goroda Shchorsa," photograph, February 19, 1999, from *Narod knigi v mire*, no. 19, accessed July 26, 2013, http://narodknigi.ru/journals/19/pamyati_anatoliya_rybakova/.

[238] One of the first ways in which Jewish survivors commemorated the death of thousands was to construct small memorial-stones or monuments. One of the first such ideas regarding those killed in the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising was conceived prior to the end of the war, in 1943. By 1945, Jews in Berdichev, Chernevtsy Oblasti, and Kamenets-Podol'skiy were all engaged in establishing monuments to the victims of the Holocaust.

Yet of all the Soviet Jewish authors listed above, Rybakov seemed the least likely to appeal to the prophets. He was hardly an authoritative figure on Jewish exegesis. In addition, until *Heavy Sand*, Jewish themes were not central to Rybakov's literature.[239] Admitting that he knew neither Yiddish nor Hebrew and that he was an atheist, the writer's interest in his ancestral roots was sparked by a postwar Soviet Jewish national awakening.[240] How then, did he come to encounter the quote from Yoel? Was it made available to him through the Russian Orthodox tradition—i.e., from non-Jewish Orthodox versions of the Bible? How did he know the Hebrew he transliterated into his text? Did he seek help from Hebrew-speaking and religiously educated Jews? These questions are even more intriguing since the Hebrew quote is misinterpreted and incorrectly translated.

The quote in Yoel appears at the very end of the prophet's song. The Hebrew, "nikiti lo domem venikiti" ("And I shall avenge their blood, blood that I have not avenged"), has been traditionally translated into Russian as, "Ia smoiu krov' ikh, kotoruiu ne smyl eshche" ("I will cleanse their blood, that I have not cleansed," Yoel 3: 21 from the Russian Orthodox Bible). In addition, the Hebrew transliteration of the text in Rybakov's novel evinces an Eastern European (mainly Chasidic) pronunciation of the Hebrew. Many Russian readers of the novel have called attention to Rybakov's incorrect translation of the Hebrew verse.[241] In this novel, the narrator translates the inscription as follows: "Everything is *forgiven*, but those who have spilled

[239] Shrayer, "The Russian Word in the Land of Israel," 340.

[240] Though few scholarly works have been written on Rybakov's *Heavy Sand*, Gary Rosenshield's article, "Socialist Realism and the Holocaust: Jewish Life and Death in Anatolii Rybakov's *Heavy Sand*," *PMLA* 111, no. 2 (March 1996): 240-255, briefly explores his Jewish identity in the text.

[241] See Aleksandr Frenkel, "Pamiati Anatoliia Rybakova," *Narod Knigi v mire* (February 19, 1999), accessed August 28, 2013, http://narodknigi.ru/journals/19/pamyati_anatoliya_rybakova/.

innocent blood shall never be *forgiven.*"[242] Replacing the clearly charged word "avenged" with "forgiven," Rybakov's translation of the text demonstrates a misinterpretation—perhaps an intentional softening—of the original biblical phrase.

Why did Rybakov choose Hebrew – since the language spoken by Ukrainian Jews killed by the Nazis was Yiddish, and not Hebrew? Given that Rybakov is quoting the Bible, Hebrew is a fitting option, but read against the political climate of the 1970s and the Soviet party line towards Jews and Israel, this Hebrew inscription on an imaginary tombstone seems especially provocative. It points away from the imaginary "Promised Land" of the Soviet Union. The narrator's declaration that "we dug over the whole wasteland, and found nothing but sand, clean, dry, heavy sand" becomes a stark realization that nothing awaits him here; because nothing remains to be found, nothing can be regained. Unlike earlier ravine texts that offer the reward of catharsis at the end of a pilgrimage to the site or ruin, this narrator's quest to find a trace of his parents in the small Ukrainian town only brings disillusionment. Only Hebrew, the language spoken in Israel, provides a new geographical and ideological horizon.

Rybakov was certainly not the first writer to address Jewish absence from postwar Ukraine. In 1943, Vasilii Grossman wrote a provocative essay titled "Ukraine without Jews" ("Ukraina bez evreev"). Rejected by all Soviet Russian newspapers and journals, Grossman's manuscript first appeared in 1990 in the short-lived journal, *VEK*. It was, however, translated into Yiddish and appeared in *Eynikayt* twice in 1943, on November25 and December 23. In one of the first commentaries to address the Holocaust in any language, Grossman writes:

> And it occurred to me that just as Kozary is silent, so too are the Jews in Ukraine silent. In Ukraine there are no Jews. Nowhere—not in Poltava, Kharkov, Kremenchug, Borispol, not in Iagotin. You will not see the black, tear-filled eyes of a little girl, you will not hear the sorrowful drawling voice of an old woman, you will not glimpse the swarthy face of a hungry child in a

[242] Rybakov, *Heavy Sand*, 331, italics mine.

> single city or a single one of hundreds of thousands of shtetls… Stillness. Silence. A people has been murdered… This is the death of a people who had lived beside Ukrainian people for centuries, laboring, sinning, performing acts of kindness, and dying alongside them on one and the same earth.[243]

For Grossman and Rybakov, this is the death of a people "who had *once* lived beside Ukrainian people for centuries," who felt they had a rightful claim on the land. Indeed, Manes Sperber (1905-1984), a Jewish novelist and essayist born in Austrian Galicia, insisted that the Jews of Eastern Europe, in contrast to Jews from Western Europe, never lived in ghettos. They resided in their own towns and were "not homeless, but rooted in an authentic autonomous culture of their own."[244] This is why Diaspora nationalism flourished in Eastern Europe.

Grossman answers his own question about the Jews' location with a devastating catalogue undercutting the Diaspora dream: "In gullies and deep ravines, in anti-tank ditches of sand and clay, under heavy black soil, and in swamps and pits, there lie hastily flung bodies of professors and workers, doctors and students, old people and children." Grossman concludes his essay with a powerful message. Unable to find murdered people, the author calls for their revival:

> Oh, if the murdered people could be revived for an instant, if the ground above Babii Iar in Kiev or Ostraia Mogila in Voroshilovgrad could be lifted, if a penetrating cry came forth from hundreds and thousands of lips covered in soil, then the Universe would shudder.[245]

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[243] The complete Russian version of "Ukraina bez evreev," on which the present translation is based, may be found in *VEK: Vestnik Evreiskoi Kultury*, no. 4 (1990): 1-8, trans. Polly Zavadivker, quoted in *Jewish Quarterly* (October 2011), accessed August 28, 2013, http://jewishquarterly.org/2011/10/ukraine-without-jews/.

[244] Tony Judt, "The Jewish Europe of Manes Sperber," in *Reappraisals: Reflections on the Forgotten Twentieth Century* (New York: Penguin Press, 2008), 71.

[245] Grossman, "Ukraine Without Jews," *Jewish Quarterly*, http://jewishquarterly.org/2011/10/ukraine-without-jews/.

Soviet Jewish poet Boris Slutskii echoes Grossman's ghostly landscape of postwar Ukraine in his 1948 poem, "I Was a Liberator of Ukraine…" ("Ia osvobozhdal Ukrainu…"). The speaker in the poem is a Red Army soldier who, like Grossman, returns to a postwar Ukraine:

> Ia osvobozhdal Ukrainu,
> Shel cherez evreiskii derevni.
> Idish, ikh iazyk,--davno ruina.
> Vymer on goda tri kak drevnii.
>
> Net, ne vymer—vurezan i vyzhzhen.
> Slishkom byli, vidno, iazykaty.
> Vse pogibli, i nikto ne vyzhil.[246]
>
> I was a liberator of Ukraine,
> And passed through her Jewish villages.
> Yiddish, their language, has become a ruin long ago.
> It died out and has been ancient for about three years.
> No, didn't die out—it was slaughtered and burned.
> Its folk must have been too garrulous.
> Everyone perished and none survived.[247]

Focusing on the destruction of the Jewish language, Slutskii, like Grossman, offers readers a dire portrait of a Ukraine that will forever remain without Jews. For Grossman, Slutskii, and Rybakov—all born in Ukraine—the war and its aftermath served as a joint impetus to embrace their Jewish identity, and to confirm that the dream of a Soviet "Promised Land" was lost. If a new land were to be found, its language would not be Yiddish, which had vanished along with the murdered Jews.

The publication of Rybakov's *Heavy Sand* in 1978 coincided with a second wave of Soviet Jewish emigration. Undoubtedly, the novel was written at a time when Soviet Jews were feeling increasingly unwelcome in the USSR, and Rybakov thematized this trend in his narrative.

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[246] Boris Slutskii, "Ia osvobozhdal Ukrainu," in *Menorah: evreiskie motivy v russkoe poezii*, ed. Ada Golganova (Moscow: Jewish University in Moscow, 1993), 123.

[247] Idem, "I was a Liberator of Ukraine," trans. Marat Grinberg, in Grinberg, *The Poetics of Slutsky*, 173.

How, then, was *Heavy Sand,* a novel about Jews and their suffering on Soviet soil, allowed to be published at a time of growing anti-Semitic feeling and anti-Zionist propaganda?

Much like Ehrenburg, who took on the role of semi-official spokesperson for Soviet Jewry during the 1930s and to a larger extent, in the 1940s, Rybakov - perhaps unintentionally - became the spokesman for Russian Jewry in the 1970s. Working in the spirit of Ehrenburg's *Years, People, Life*, a virtual three-volume encyclopedia of Soviet life from the 1920s to the Thaw, *Heavy Sand* became the most widely read text on the Jewish experience during the Second World War. It was also one of the few works officially selected by officials to be printed in *Oktiabr'*, which adopted a more liberal tone in the 1960s and 1970s, publishing authors such as Anna Akhmatova, Mikhail Bulgakov, and Vasilii Grossman.

In short, there are several reasons why the Soviets chose *Heavy Sand* to become the representative text on and for Soviet Jews. First, Rybakov declares in the novel that: "anti-Semitism does not exist among the Russians." His portrayal of Jewish life in the pre-Revolutionary shtetl also follows the Party line: The Jews are saved by the Revolution and their lives are fundamentally transformed, and no longer confined to the mercantile world. Jews become dedicated revolutionaries, Red Army soldiers, and productive workers during Stalin's first Five-Year Plan. This representation mirrors those of earlier Soviet Jewish writers, and depicts a general strategy of integrating Jews into the Soviet grand narrative. As Gary Rosenshield maintains, "To undermine the image of Jews as hostile aliens, Rybakov casts them as common, ordinary, well-integrated, and fully assimilated Soviet citizens… [T]he novel argues that Soviet Jews have overcome their Jewishness so successfully that the negative stereotype is no longer applicable."[248]

[248] Rosenshield, "Socialist Realism and the Holocaust," 248.

On the surface, Rybakov seems to echo both the official Soviet position and earlier generations of Soviet Jewish authors. But his representation of Jews as exemplary Soviet citizens must be read through the prism of the aforementioned imaginary monument with its Hebrew inscription. Rybakov later revealed that when he visited Snovsk and saw the Russian and Hebrew engravings side-by-side on the small makeshift shrine, he rushed back home to Moscow and told his wife: "Now I finally know how to finish my novel."[249] Rosenshield argues correctly that the "enigmatic" Hebrew inscription "seems to mark the narrator's return to the communal grave of his Jews ancestors, to the Hebrew school of his childhood, his cheder, to a time, place, and life before the revolution… The Hebrew signals the return of the repressed, the Jewishness that Rybakov denies throughout the text."[250]

But the Hebrew inscription signals not only the return of the repressed Jewish past; it also indicates a path forward. Unlike Yiddish, Hebrew was no longer a dead language—it was a language revitalized in the traditional "Promised Land." The Hebrew script from Yoel 3:21 reinforces our reading of *Heavy Sand* as a novel that positions Israel, not the Soviet Union, as the destination of the Soviet Jewish journey. The Hebrew lines chosen by Rybakov are preceded by the following verses (Yoel 3.12-20):

> So shall ye know that I am the Lord your G-d dwelling in Zion, my holy mountain: then shall Jerusalem be holy, and there shall no strangers pass through her any more… Egypt shall be a desolation, and Edom shall be a desolate wilderness, for the violence against the children of Judah, because they have shed innocent blood in their land. But Judah shall dwell for ever, and Jerusalem from generation to generation.

The omitted context of Rybakov's fictional inscription is telling; the view that the Soviet Union was a new Egypt for Soviet Jews was common among *refusniks*. Rybakov's statements confirm

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[249] Anatolii Rybakov*, Roman—vospominanii* (Moscow: Vagrius, 1997), 321.

[250] Rosenshield, "Socialist Realism and the Holocaust," 250.

that Israel was not far from his mind.

On February 26, 1998, the day before Rybakov left Russia for America, he sat down with journalist Irina Rishina from *Druzhba narodov* to discuss both his literary careers and his changing attitudes towards Russia. In this conversation titled "Zarubki na serdtse, poslednee moskovskoe interv'iu" ("Incisions upon the Heart: the Final Moscow Interview"), Rishina asked the author to explain the verse from Yoel in his novel. Rybakov does not address this issue, but immediately brings up the issue of Israel:

> The Jewish theme sits deep within me. And this is one of the many reasons that I wrote *Heavy Sand*. My relationship to Israel is a relatively nervous one. I have been there twice and in my *Novel-Memoi*r I describe these encounters. I fully understand that many things over there are difficult, problematic, and remains unsettled.[251]

The link between the novel and the question of Israel is further clarified: "When, in the 1970s, anti-Semitism was spreading and all these books appeared about Zionism in relation to Israel, I set out to write the novel… I was proud of Israel, and I was proud of my people…"[252] For Rybakov, whose ravine text was written in the 1970s, the pilgrimage leads not to the site of destruction and the promise of apocalyptic resurrection and vengeance, but *through* a place of annihilation to another "Promised Land." Rybakov expressed his view toward the novel and Israel some thirty years after the novel's publication.

Rybakov's popularity—much like that of other famous Soviet writers— began to wane after the fall of the Soviet Union. As such, his implicit assertion over the link between the novel and Israel must be taken with a grain of salt, as many writers often used or invented a negative attitude toward the Soviet Union in order to regain favor in the post-Soviet world. Israel and the

[251] Anatolii Rybakov, "Zarubki na serdtse, poslednee moskovskoe interv'iu," interview by Irina Rishina, *Druzhba narodov*, no. 3, 1999, accessed July 26, 2013, http://magazines.russ.ru/druzhba/1999/3/rybak.html.

[252] Ibid.

topic of Soviet anti-Semitism, therefore, seemed a fitting subject to revisit for Rybakov in discussing the novel in the post-Soviet period.

Heavy Sand became the central book on the Holocaust and the Soviet Jewish experience in the final decades of the USSR.[253] Soviet Jewish émigré Semen Baraz recalls that, "alongside Sholem Aleichem, Shimon Dubnow, and Isaac Babel, there always stood [on our bookshelf] Rybakov's *Heavy Sand*."[254] Rybakov's novel firmly represented the Holocaust among Russian readers. The story was also translated and appeared in the fourth, fifth, and sixth issues of *Sovetish heymland* in 1979. Although a major part of the novel represents pre-Revolutionary Russian Jewish life—an undesirable topic—the Yiddish translation was approved for publication because Rybakov's depictions of pre-Revolutionary shtetls as moribund, backwards communities were ideologically harmless. The novel's subversive suggestions regarding the whereabouts of a true "heymland," may have been overlooked by the editors of a Yiddish publication. It was all noted, however vaguely, by the Russian Jewish reader, eager to hear the language spoken in Israel sounded out in Russian.

Writing Babii Iar in Yiddish: Yekhiel Falikman and Soviet-Yiddish Literature in the Postwar Period

Yekhiel Falikman's *Der shvartser vint* (*The Black Wind*), an epic novel on the Second World War, appeared initially in *Sovetish heymland* in 1968, the same journal that published the Yiddish translation of Rybakov's novel in 1979. Falikman was one of the journal's stars from its inception. He was frequently hailed by Aaron Vergelis, editor-in-chief of the first postwar Soviet Yiddish literary and political newspaper *Sovetish heymland*, as a "true writer." Falikman's short

[253] Frenkel, "Pamiati Anatoliia Rybakova."

[254] Semen Baraz, interview with Naya Lekht, April 9, 2013.

stories, essays, and novel all appear on *Sovetish heymland*'s pages: he was also employed as one of the paper's chief editors. Both the Holocaust and the Babii Iar event would be central to the Falikman's primary narrative. For him and Ehrenburg, the tragedy of Babii Iar was linked to the demise of Kiev; Falikman's literary reconstruction of the Holocaust and in particular, of Babii Iar, bears a similar wound.

The Black Wind recalls both Konstantin Simonov's *Dni i nochi* (*Days and Nights*, 1944) and Viktor Nekrasov's *V okopakh Stalingrada* (*In the Trenches of Stalingrad*, 1947),[255] two prominent novels that set the standard for future Soviet writers seeking to describe the patriotic efforts of soldiers on the front. Falikman's Yiddish language novel also drew inspiration from Yiddish literature itself.[256] His text therefore straddles Jewish and Soviet models of the literature of catastrophe. Consequently, before delving into the author's representation of war and Babii Iar, I will outline both of those literary models.

In his study of Jewish fictional reactions to catastrophe or destruction, David Roskies has cultivated a working archetype for this evolving theme. Roskies explains that the destruction of the Second Temple gave rise to a literature that builds on a catastrophic event and is thereby propelled by it. Destruction becomes a unifying moment for Jewish literature, which is envisioned as a continuous narrative, an enormous chronicle of the Jewish people's history in the

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[255] Simonov and Nekrasov served on the front and were journalists for *Krasnaia zvezda*, the newspaper of the Red Army during the war.

[256] He was also one of the first—before Evtushenko—to publicly voice disdain at Kiev Town Council's plans to flood Babii Iar in 1959 – in order to build a football stadium on the site. In a long letter sent to *Literaturnaia gazeta* he writes: "Is this possible? Who could have thought of such a thing? To fill a … deep ravine and on the site of such a colossal tragedy to make merry and play football? No! This must not be allowed!" Viktor Nekrasov, "Pochemu eto ne sdelano?" quoted in Dobroszycki and Gurock, *The Holocaust in the Soviet Union*, 65. Nekrasov's last article on Babii Iar appeared in 1986 in the New York émigré journal *Novoe russkoe slovo*, under the title, "Babii Iar, 45 let." See Viktor Nekrasov, "Babii Iar, 45 let," *Novoe russkoe slovo* (September 1986), accessed August 28, 2013, http://jennyferd.livejournal.com/1359870.html.

modern world. Through a literature of catastrophe, "Jews perceive the cyclical nature of violence and find some measure of comfort in the repeatability of the unprecedented." These narratives employ staple archetypes such as exile, destruction, martyrdom, and redemption in order to ensure each author's and generation's unity with their historical predecessors.[257]

Much like the destruction of the Second Temple, which ushered in Jewish literature of unification through ruin, the "Great Patriotic War" created a literary model for Soviet texts that depicted a national revival and unification in the wake of the 1940s. The overarching narrative of Soviet war prose is the "conversion narrative," focusing on themes of awakened heroism, call to duty, transfiguration, and vengeance.

By naming the Second World War the "Great Patriotic War," official Soviet policymakers established a parallel to the first "Great Patriotic War" of 1812, in which the Russians defeated Napoleon.[258] This testified to a kind of orchestrated national awakening and a cyclical view of history, similar to the one found in the Jewish literature of destruction. But there was also a strong teleological trajectory. Sopposedly "progressive" Soviet attitudes about the war were reflected to a large degree in a key lecture delivered in 1946 by the Chairman of the Supreme Soviet, Andrei Zhdanov: "With each day our people attain an even higher level. Today we are not the people we were yesterday, and tomorrow we will not be as we are today. We are already not the same Russians we were before 1917. Russia is not the same, and our character has changed too."[259] Here, the transformative capacity of the Russian Revolution is transferred to

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[258] It is no coincidence that the most widely read novel during the Second World War was Tolstoi's *War and Peace*.

[259] "Doklad Zhdanova o zhurnalakh 'Zvezda' i 'Leningrad'," *Literaturnaia gazeta*, no. 39 (September 21, 1946), 2, quoted in Katerina Clark, *The Soviet Novel* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000), 198.

the "Great Patriotic War," cementing its dual significance as a singular historical event and an extension of the Soviet state.

The goal-driven "conversion narrative" precipitated by the Battle of Stalingrad and the Leningrad Blockade—two wartime events that inspired the greatest number of literary responses—is found in texts dealing with partisans, young soldiers, and children. Typically the protagonist must go through a political transformation in order to become self-aware as an individual. He or she must take their place in the Soviet collective family, with Stalin usually involved as a father figure to the tale's hero. This kind of narrative also developed the tropes of classic socialist realism, with characters overcoming devastating challenges and overpowering nature. The typical format stressed party loyalty and military heroism, while offering the promise of retribution or renovation.

The Soviet Jewish model of catastrophic literature shared many themes with the general Soviet conversion narrative, such as vengeance, heroism, loyalty, duty, and transformation, but unlike its Soviet counterpart, it had a different aim. Chapter 3 of this dissertation demonstrated that Soviet Yiddish writers such as Perets Markish, Der Nister, and Itsik Fefer, all of whom employed the tropes of retaliation, heroism, and change, did so with the unique goal of inspiring a Jewish, not Soviet, national revival. Falikman's 1967 wartime novel straddles these two models.

The Black Wind is divided into three parts: "Chertoroi," "Babii Iar," and "Nadezhda" ("Hope"). Though Falikman titles the second part of the novel "Babii Iar," it largely depicts Daniil Kremez's journeys through war-torn Ukraine, together with the actions of partisans led by Kremez's son, Lionia. Falikman does, however, detail the massacre of Jews at Babii Iar; his

depiction gains particular significance as he calls Babii Iar a "Final Solution"[260] on Ukrainian soil, firmly establishing a link with the Holocaust.

Falikman reimagines history by featuring a private conversation between Adolf Eichmann and Heinrich Himmler in Kiev, carefully planning and designing the Babii Iar tragedy. This is a fictional analog of the infamous 1942 Wannsee Conference in Berlin, where high-ranking Nazi officials (including Himmler and Eichmann) gathered to discuss and devise a "Final Solution" for Jews in Germany. Falikman extends the boundaries of this "Solution" to Babii Iar. Falikman's fabricated conversation between Eichmann and Himmler followed Soviet reporting on the Eichmann trial. Although the Soviet Union maintained a position of silence toward Jewish suffering during the Second World War, the Eichmann trial in Jerusalem in 1961 received international attention[261] and was covered, if unwillingly, by Soviet media. However limited and conflicted, the coverage had a positive impact, as it "exposed Soviet Jews to the history of their own people."[262]

At the Wannsee Conference of 1942, Nazi officials discussed the use of Jews on road-building projects, during which they would eventually die. Though perhaps not as familiar to Soviet Jews as the Eichmann Trial, information on the Wannsee Conference was made available to Soviet readers via the appearance of a book by Vaclav Kral in 1968, the same year that Falikman's novel was printed. In his text, *Prestuplenie protiv Evropy* (*Crimes against Europe*),

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[260] It is important to remember that Babii Iar (and the murder of Soviet Jews in other Ukrainian ravines) preceded Auschwitz and Treblinka: "The Soviet Union was the first place to bear the full brunt of the Nazis' Final Solution." Roskies and Diamant, *Holocaust Literature*, 33.

[261] Nati Cantorovich, "Soviet Reactions to the Eichmann Trial: A Preliminary Investigation," trans. Ruth Morris, *Yad Vashem Studies*, no. 2 (2007): 103-108.

[262] Ibid., 104.

Kral discussed the clandestine meeting among high Nazi officials.[263] It is impossible to know if Falikman either read or was aware of Kral's book. Nonetheless, by transplanting the secret conversations between high-ranking Nazi officials that would lead to the "Final Solution" onto Ukrainian soil, Falikman proposes that Babii Iar—which, it should be stressed, predated Auschwitz and Buchenwald—is indeed part of the Holocaust. Falikman's writing echoes Kuznetsov's depiction of the site as an extermination camp. Similarly, Soviet Jewish readers in 1968, increasingly in touch with the "history of their own people," would also have intuited a connection to the Eichmann trial in Israel due to the events of Wannsee that were first aired publicly through Soviet media. Falikman's imagined conversation universalizes the plight of Soviet Jews, linking it to the German planners of the Holocaust, and, obliquely, to the Israeli court that brought the worst perpetrator to justice.

Perhaps relying on Lev Ozerov's Babii Iar essay in Ehrenburg's *The Black Book*[264] as a source and inspiration, Falikman describes the long and arduous journey taken by Kievan Jews to the ravine:

> He walked in the midst of the crowd, and saw before him backs, tattered collars, shawls wrapped around the head and carefully tied below the chin, caps, naked heads, the faces of children carried by adults, bales of items, knots, and valises.[265]

This attention to detail and the cataloguing of single items is a familiar trope in Holocaust literature; these minutiae and specific items metonymically relate to staggering losses.[266] The

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[263] Vaclav Kral, *Prestuplenie protiv Evropy* (Moscow: "Mysl'," 1968), 98.

[264] *The Black Book* opens with Lev Ozerov's article on Babii Iar, wherein the poet meticulously retells events leading to the shooting at the ravine. Il'ia Ehrenburg and Vasilii Grossman, eds., *The Black Book* (New York: Schocken Books, 1981), 3-12.

[265] Yekhiel Falikman, *Chernyi veter* (Moscow: Sovetskii pisatel', 1968), 603.

[266] Rosenfeld, *A Double Dying*, 18.

Babii Iar episode ends with a Jew, Gurarii, answering his bride Bella Moiseevna's question as they are both led to their deaths:

> "Tell me, is it true that there, at the ravine, the road cuts off? They say that you know." Gurarii did not answer at once. He took off his spectacles, gazing at the woman with one squinted eye, and grimaced at the thought: Now she will scream. This one will scream. Let her scream, already—it is, after all, time… He even lost focus of her and that she had not yet left, that she is right here, next to him, and he firmly replied: "Yes, the road cuts off at Babii Iar." "Where are they taking us?" she asked not only of Gurarii, but of all who surrounded her.[267]

Unwilling to accept Gurarii's curt reply, Bella begins to yell, inciting the crowd to attack the Nazis. When the fascists open fire, the narrator asserts: "And in such a way, it all began." The "it" in Falikman's reconstruction of the massacres in Kiev not only refers to Babii Iar, but more importantly – to the beginning of the "Great Patriotic War." The episode is not only the story of the massacre of Jews, but also part of the larger story of the fascist occupation of Ukraine. Furthermore, by labeling the second part of his novel, "Babi Iar," Falikman calls attention to a redefinition of this event. In other words, it is not only the story of massacred Jews, but also a key episode within the fascist occupation of Ukraine during World War II. In short, Falikman radically redefines the Soviet historiography of the "Great Patriotic War."

The third and final section of the novel, "Hope," describes the Red Army and partisans in their fight against the Nazis. Falikman's narrative echoes Perets Markish's two-volume epic poem, *War*, although his use of the name Gurarii may also allude to Markish's cycle (see chapter 3, above). As will be shown, Soviet Jewish critics were quick to suggest parallels between Markish and Falikman. The Red Army's role is to avenge the deaths of those killed in Babii Iar and Chertoroi, a swamp that was also the site of a massacre. Falikman's description of fighting in Rostov shows his central hero, Daniil Kremez, and his regiment bravely combatting the Nazis. At one point, a non-Jewish friend and fellow sodier called, Karatai is found wandering on dirt

[267] Falikman, *Chernyi veter*, 605.

roads. A sergeant from another regiment sees that he is carrying a tattered notebook containing a reference to "millions of people" he has encountered during the war. The notebook will one day "lie under glass… in a museum."[268] Any such writing in the context of the "Babii Iar text" reflects the need for the author and/or poet to become a witness. Like Ehrenburg, Kipnis, and Kuznetsov, Falikman sees writing as a means for commemorating the loss of life, which is an established theme of the "Babii Iar text." Though Karatai is not Jewish, his testimony will serve as confirmation regarding the years of destruction and mass extermination.

In Falikman's novel, any Soviet Georgian, Ukrainian, Russian, or Jew is equally qualified to speak of the Holocaust. Characters of many nationalities populate the narrative. This mirrors the bond between Jewish and non-Jewish brothers-in-arms in many previous Babii Iar texts—like the connection between Gurarii and Sadovskii in Markish's *War*—and, in the context of the 1960s, also illustrates the effective implementation of the *druzhba narodov* campaign in Soviet literature. For this reason, it is not remarkable that the notebook of Karatai, a non-Jew, would testify to the events of the war and the Holocaust.

According to the postwar Soviet Yiddish literary establishment personified by Vergelis, Falikman's *The Black Wind* was in many respects a perfect novel on the war and the Holocaust. It featured Jews in the role of Red Army soldiers (described as charismatic characters who were Jewish and non-Jewish), avoided a nostalgic attitude toward the Jewish past, and most of all, showed the Soviet Union as a multicultural realm where all nationalities were united in the fight against Nazi Germany. It likewise "properly" reflected a changing attitude toward the war in the post-Stalinist era, wherein the suffering of the Jews was generalized to the entire Soviet

[268] Ibid., 818.

population.[269] Unlike Kuznetsov's novel in which some ethnic Ukrainians are portrayed as Nazi sympathizers, Falikman's Ukrainians and Russians are shown exclusively in a positive light; they are either fighting alongside Lionia, Kremez's son, in the partisan movement, or with Kremez in his regiment. Vergelis' call to portray Jews in their "contemporary multi-cultural surrounding"[270] found perfect expression in Falikman's tale.

Hersh Remenik, a leading literary critic of *Sovetish heymland*, wrote about Falikman's legacy in his book *Shtaplen: portretn fun yidishe shrayver* (*Steps: Portraits of Yiddish Writers*). In his article "Ikhil Falikman un zayn trilogiye" ("Ikhil Falikman and His Trilogy"), Remenik declares Falikman to be an important Soviet Yiddish writer of the Brezhnev era. Focusing on *The Black Wind*, Remenik explains that because of his portrayal of Babii Iar, Falikman moved from the margins to the center of the Soviet Jewish literary scene.[271] Calling Falikman's trilogy a "monument" to those killed at Babii Iar, Remenik then compares the novel to Perets Markish's two major wartime texts, *War* and *Der ufshtang in geto* (*The Ghetto Uprising*), both of which he claims are "central texts on the Holocaust." Just as the Yiddish reviewer of Ehrenburg's *The Storm*[272] focused on the Babii Iar episode in praising Ehrenburg's contribution to Soviet Jewish literature on the Holocaust, so Remenik singles out Falikman's rendering of Babii Iar.

Despite the fact that his depiction of the massacre is similar to other Babii Iar texts, Falikman's treatment complicates the model of the "Babii Iar text." Like Gurarii, Markish's hero in "Dry Bones," so Kremez is both a Soviet Jew and a Red Army soldier. But unlike the former,

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[269] Piotr Vail, *60-e. Mir sovetskogo cheloveka* (Moscow: NLO, 2001), 88-89.

[270] Gennady Estraikh, *Yiddish in the Cold War* (London: Legenda Press, 2008), 91.

[271] Hersh Remenik, "Ikhil Falikman un zany trilogiye," in his *Shtaplen: portretn fun yidishe shrayber* (Moscow: Sovetskii pisatel', 1982), 251.

[272] Borukhovits, "A nayer roman fun Il'ia Ehrenburg," 19.

whose encounter with Babii Iar sparks an apocalyptic vision, Falikman's Babii Iar text is devoid of any religious or spiritual dimension. There is also no description of a later pilgrimage to the site of destruction. In order to explain this deviation from the "Babii Iar text" model, we must return to two major literary models that shaped Falikman's narrative.

Written in Yiddish and appearing in the only Yiddish journal in the Soviet Union, Falikman's novel is obviously marked as a "Jewish" text, but first and foremost, it is Soviet. Published only one year after the Six-Day War, Falikman was careful to avoid inciting Jewish nationalism.[273] In fact, works appearing in *Sovetish heymland* in the late 1960s were chiefly devoid of references to Zion, Jewish nationalism, or religious sentiments. A cursory look at titles of prose, poetry, articles, and translations appearing in the 1968 issues shows an interest in depicting Soviet Jewish life positively, as well as bringing to Soviet Yiddish readers translations of non-Russian writers in the USSR. Though the number of Yiddish readers was decreasing, Vergelis aimed to demonstrate to the outside world that Yiddish was still alive in the Soviet Union. In a letter entitled "A Soviet Reply on Jews" published on the op-ed page of *The New York Times* on May 21, 1971, Vergelis explained that while Yiddish culture was declining in America, it was flourishing in the Soviet Union, and he cited the boom in Soviet Yiddish theatre.[274]

As a consequence of de-Stalinization and the general liberalization of literary discourse during the Thaw, authors of wartime prose in the late 1960s and 1970s were under less pressure to portray the political transformation of characters in ways reminiscent of the "conversion narrative" prevalent in earlier works. Ironically, this liberalization of literary discourse about the Party and the War coincided with a ratcheting of anti-Zionist propaganda, placing new pressure

[273] Hirszowicz, "The Holocaust in the Soviet Mirror," 51.

[274] Estraikh, *Yiddish in the Cold War*, 117.

on authors examining the "Jewish Question." Consequently, unlike Soviet Yiddish writers who were permitted, and even encouraged to celebrate their ethnic identities during the war,[275] Soviet Yiddish writers in the 1960s and 1970s were not allowed to call for a reawakened sense of Jewish nationalism. As such they often censored themselves for politically and professionally exigent reasons. This is the context for reading Falikman's *The Black Wind*, in which the traditional elements of Soviet wartime prose (i.e., political conversion) and the "Babii iar text" (i.e., pilgrimage to the site of destruction and a reawakening of Jewish national consciousness) are thoroughly muted.

Although Falikman strays from the template of the traditional "Babii Iar text," he does call attention to the potential of writing to commemorate, if not compensate for, the loss at Babii Iar. Karatai's tattered notebook, which belongs "under glass… in a museum," is another in an extensive list of fictionalized aesthetic monuments — testimonials that long functioned as the only commemoration of Ukraine's massacred Jews. By erecting this outwardly humble but unspeakably powerful shrine in his novel, Falikman joins the ranks of Ehrenburg, Ozerov, Markish, Kuznetsov, Evtushenko, and Rybakov in both contributing to and shaping the contours of the "Babii Iar text."

[275] See chapter 2, above.

Conclusion

Ravine Literature: Reflecting on Holocaust Literature in the Soviet Union

> The bones began to approach one another, and every bone, though it was thrown far away, found its pair, and the noise began, and here sinews and flesh grew on them, and skin began to cover them on top…[276]

The epigraph above comes from Fridrikh Gorenshtein's magisterial novel, *Psolem* (*The Psalm*), written in 1975 but only published in Russia in 1991-92. In it, a Jewish antichrist, cast as Jesus' blood brother and God's messenger, comes to destroy Russia. The antichrist, in fulfilling Ezekiel's prophecy, returns to life the bones of those who were shot by the Germans. Gorenshtein's prophecy helps to locate the subject of Jewish literary responses to the Holocaust in the Soviet Union. For him, the Jewish theme both during and after the Soviet period was an *idee fixe*. The image of Russia's Jew in the post-Holocaust world, "even when disposed of his defenselessness," was the perpetual focus of hatred: the Jew existed merely "as a reminder… of the true Covenant and of Jesus."[277]

The text that best demonstrates Soviet Jewish literary reactions to the Holocaust and, more specifically, the genre of ravine literature is Gorenshtein's 1985 novella, *Poputchiki* (*Traveling Companions*). Here he details a chance meeting between two strangers on a train going from Kiev to Zdolbuniv. The hero and narrator, Feliks Zabrodskii, is a Soviet Jewish writer and satirist who meets Aleksandr Chubinets, a disabled Ukrainian peasant. The latter's

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[276] Fridrikh Gorenshtein, *Psalom: roman-razmyshlenie o chetyrekh kazniakh Gospodnikh*, trans. Marat Grinberg (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo 'Slovo', 1993).

[277] Marat Grinberg, "Hesped," *Slovo* 34 (2002): 3.

provincial worldview allows the author to comment on the perils of ideology, Ukrainian anti-Semitism, and even a disdain for Russian nationalism. This somewhat digressive narrative is made from a lengthy conversation between the two chance travelers; it slowly reveals the wounds of two men, bound by their experiences in 1941. Indeed, the only reason Zabrodskii even lifts his head to look at his fellow traveler is because Chubinets happens to say: "June 22, 1941 was the blackest day of my life." For Chubinets, 1941 is linked to the rejection of his play by the Soviets on grounds of "overt Ukrainian nationalism"; for Zabrodskii, meanwhile, the same year is inseparable from the destruction and massacre of Jews in Soviet Ukraine.

Traveling Companions encompasses all the significant features of the "Babii Iar text" by employing the dual motif of pilgrimage and return, exploring ethnic tensions, creating sacred spaces, and pointing to the potential link between text and monument.[278] Thus, the novella is an apotheosis of ravine literature. Gorenshtein revisits the theme of pilgrimage and return by setting his novella on a train. As Zabrodskii explains:

> I love trains… For me, they have always symbolized change, hope. An airplane, for all its devilish speed, proves only the externals of change… But on a journey by rail, the small gardens and towns and the smells of coal and diesel blend with the gleaming tracks that stretch away in *endless space and time*… That world, once sweet in our imagination, is now a lost paradise… When I dream it is usually of stations, whistles, hooting locomotives, of changing trains at night and sitting with people I either know very well or do not know at all[279]

[278] The motif of pilgrimage and return is not only central to the "Babii Iar text" in prose and poetry; it has also been remediated as film. In 2002, Ukrainian director Mykola Zaseev-Rudenko directed a feature-length movie *Babii Iar*, which begins with the return of a heroine, Leonore, to her birth city, Kiev. Played by famous Soviet-era actress Elina Bystritskaia (1928-), Leonore's return to Kiev and the ravine reiterates themes germane to the "Babii Iar text:" vengeance, memory and commemoration, and ethnic tensions.

[279] Gorenshtein, *Traveling Companions*, 213.

Zabrodskii's journey allows the heroes of the tale to inhabit various times and spaces at once, revisiting their pasts that share a common chronology but look vastly different. Though ostensibly heading in one direction, he travels forward and backward, thereby inhabiting several spaces and times at once. Zabrodskii himself admits that "according to Einstein, a man who travels by train becomes infinitesimally heavier, and he also gets out of phase with his expected time of arrival… and cannot remember whether he's ahead or behind."[280] We have seen this kind of manipulation of time before, most notably with the Yiddish authors, who - in alluding to the prophets - transformed their subject matter and gave it an apocalyptic dimension. Although Gorenshtein's tale has neither prophets nor apocalyptic visions, it achieves similar results as we become increasingly aware of a sacred landscape, one filled with ditches and ravines that haunt both Zabrodskii and the author himself.

Though Gorenshtein's *Traveling Companions* is not exclusively devoted to the Holocaust, the destruction of the Jewish people in Ukraine by the Nazis and "willing Ukrainians" becomes increasingly central to the narrative. Zabrodskii reveals his conflicted attitudes both toward his homeland and the ethnic tensions that continue to plague it:

> I love Ukrainian songs, I love the features of old Ukrainian women, and I love the early-melting spring in the southwest, the long hot summer cooled by the west winds, and the warm dry fall. But the Ukrainian themselves I do not love, though that is another matter.[281]

Unable to separate the murder of the Jews from Ukraine's past, Zabrodskii, much like Rybakov's narrator in *Heavy Sand*, sees Ukraine as a massive gravesite where there is no place for his kind. For Zabrodskii, Jewishness is a stigma that will always make him a stranger or outsider. He repeatedly asks if this realm can really be his historical homeland. Citing the tense year of 1967, the author, like Rybakov, alludes to the failed promise of the Soviet Union as the Jews'

[280] Ibid.,163.

[281] Ibid., 15.

historical, ethnic, or religious homeland, while invoking srael's potential to be his rightful home.[282]

As in Falikman's *The Black Wind*, so in *Traveling Companions*, a non-Jew relates the story of the Holocaust. Recalling his love for a Jewish beauty whose unforgiving stare still burns into his heart, Chubinets offers a particularly poignant description of the death of the Jews across the L'vov region and around Rovno. Frantically looking for this woman, Chubinets realizes that her physical remains, along with those of the entire Jewish population, lie in a ravine: "So Popov Yar is the place where my gray-eyed beauty lies among the flock of crows shot down that night. Where I come from, we have plenty of good burial places. Its country broken by a multitude of ravine and gullies…"[283] This bold confession affirms for Chubinets' fellow traveler that all Ukrainian roads do, indeed, lead to ditches, sand quarries, and ravines. It also recalls the poet's longing to reunite with an estranged love in Ehrenburg's poem devoted to Babii Iar:

> The hands of this beloved woman
> I used to kiss, a long time ago,
> Even though when I was with the living
> I didn't even know her.
> My darling sweetheart! My red blushes!
> I hear you calling me from the pits…[284]

Gorenshtein intentionally punctuates the Ukrainian countryside with signposts that provide continuity with the Ukrainian Jewish past, while reinforcing the tragic absence of Jews today. Thus the novella joins canonical Jewish literature of destruction as detailed in chapters 3 and 5. Before the train's final stop in Zdolbuniv, both Zabrodskii and Chubinets find themselves in

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[282] In the 1970s and 1980s, the Holocaust theme led writers to explore the increasingly central role of Israel for Soviet Jews.

[283] Gorenshtein, *Traveling Companions*, 87, italics mine.

[284] Ehrenburg, "Untitled I."

Berdichev. Zabrodskii says: "Berdychiv is less a place than a state of mind… [it] is both a ghost and living thing."[285] He recasts the Ukrainian Jewish city as an imagined homeland that resides not on a map, but in Jewish collective memory.[286] We soon learn that he used to live in Berdichev, and that the train's route through the city is also a return for him. It spurs him to explore his ethnic and historical roots in what once was a "Jewish Paris."[287] Just as Berdichev is established in Gorenshtein's universe as a Jewish city, so Kiev is presented as a Jewish homeland. Zabrodskii points out that Jews who settled in Kiev "called it Tsiev or Kiun," linking the city's name to Jewish residents hundreds of years ago.

At the same time, Zabrodskii claims that the "Jewish seed has always felt cramped in the Russian forest" and that by murdering more than 600,000 Jews, Bohdan Khmelnytsky "cemented the friendship between Russians and Ukrainians in Jewish blood." Recalling the trope of *kedush-hashem*, Gorenshtein, much like Rybakov, Grossman, and Slutskii, rejects Ukraine as a Jewish national homeland. Walking through Berdichev, Zabrodskii finds himself captivated by its sights and smells, and yet, "there's an atmosphere of pogrom about [the town]."[288] Indeed, as Marat Grinberg writes, "in Gorenshtein's universe, anti-Semitism is indestructible."[289] Pessimism informs his view of Russian-Jewish relations.

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[285] Gorenshtein, *Traveling Companions*, 173.

[286] For a detailed analysis of Berdichev in Jewish collective memory, see Mikhail Krutikov, "Berdichev in Russian-Jewish Literacy Imagination: from Israel Aksenfeld to Friedrich Gorenshtein" in *The Shtetl Image and Reality Papers of the Second Mendel Friedman International Conference on Yiddish,* ed. Gennady Estraikh and et al. (Oxford: Legenda, 2000), 91-114.

[287] Sholem Aleichem's letter to Simon Dubnow, quoted in ibid., 99.

[288] Gorenshtein, *Traveling Companions*, 176.

[289] Grinberg, "Hesped," 5.

Zabrodskii's visit to Berdichev and his inability to see beyond the town's "atmosphere of pogrom" together reflect the combined influence of generations of Russian and Soviet Jewish writers. Together they form the contours of what might be called "the Berdychiv text."[290] Indeed, long before Gorenshtein exposed his bitter, conflicted relationship to Ukraine, Soviet Yiddish poet Dovid Hofshteyn (1889-1952), whose parents and loved ones perished in Babii Iar, wrote a kindred work. His 1937 poem, "Ukraine," dedicated to the Ukrainian poet Iakiv Savchenko,[291] offers readers a rare glimpse into the Jewish experience there:

In a shlekht markh,
  vi a kheys pekh
  nemen gisn in
fun vistad shtet
un bludike fremdeh…
  Fastov!
 Vasilkov!
  un mer,
un mer…

In a diseased brain,
   like a hot pitch,
  names pour in
from wasted towns
blood-soaked neighbors
and bloodied strangers…
       Fastov!
      Vasilkov!
   and more,
  and more…[292]

[290] As Krutikov maintains, Berdichev, which "never failed to fascinate Jewish imagination," became, along with Kishinev, the prototypical capital of pogroms for writers such as Israel Aksenfeld, Mendele Mokher Sforim, Sholem Aleichem, Sholem Asch, Vasily Grossman, and Der Nister. Krutikov, "Constructing Jewish Identity in Contemporary Russian Fiction," 253.

[291] Iakiv Savchenko, to whom this poem is dedicated, was one of the founders of symbolism in Ukrainian poetry. In 1937, Savchenko was accused of nationalism, arrested, and executed.

[292] David Hofshteyn, "Ukraine," trans. Seth L. Wolitz, in *From Revolution to Repression: Soviet Yiddish Writing, 1917-1952*, ed. Joseph Sherman (Nottingham: Five Leaves Publications, 2012), 69.

Calling out the names of Ukrainian towns decimated by pogroms, the poet reveals the deep wounds of the Jewish-Ukrainian experience and therefore unifies Jewish literary responses to destruction in Ukraine and Russia.

Gorenshtein's *Traveling Companions* brings together not only all significant features of the "Babii Iar text," but also engages with a broader "literature of destruction" on Russian, Ukrainian, and Soviet territory. Gorenshtein's novella becomes a prime example of ravine literature, and as such, a necessary addition to the canon of Holocaust writing. The status of Holocaust literature has been well described, yet its borders are constantly redefined**.** Although it would be impossible to consider all scholarly writings on the topic in these final pages, it serves to discuss a few of the more important works.

Alvin Rosenfeld's *A Double Dying: Reflections on Holocaust Literature* presents it as a literary genre without precedent. Maintaining that: "the Holocaust was something new in the world, without likeness or kind,"[293] Rosenfeld defines Holocaust literature as "an attempt to express a new order of consciousness, a recognizable shift in being."[294] It is dominated by the survivor's voice: "Is it not the case," he asks, "that the most lacerating writings often belong to those who survived, not perished, in the Holocaust?" Because these works examine events in hindsight, they "might be described more accurately as "*post*-Holocaust literature." The "post" in Rosenfeld's paradigm has come to dominate Holocaust studies.

[293] Rosenfeld, *A Double Dying*, 21.

[294] Ibid., 13.

A cursory look at the titles of scholarly works devoted to this issue in the last twenty years reveals such a tendency.[295] They undoubtedly reveal important aspects of the Holocaust during the hostilities, yet any focus on the *post* in "post-Holocaust literature" will allow little room for material written *during* the war and/or in the Soviet Union. This dissertation, therefore, aims to move the spotlight back to the Holocaust itself, insofar as the writers of ravine literature were not survivors, but contemporary *witnesses* and victims.

In all fairness, Rosenfeld does shed light on the features that Western Holocaust literature shares with Soviet Jewish and non-Jewish literary representations. Influenced by Adorno's famous axiom that after the Holocaust there can (or should) be no poetry, Rosenfeld shows that when confronted with the Holocaust *and* its aftermath, language breaks down to reflect the utterable limits of human experience. Calling Holocaust poetry the "poetry of *expiration*," Rosenfeld refers to Paul Celan's notion of language and destruction: "the word is no longer a word… it is a terrible falling silent; it takes away [the poet's] breath and word."[296] We have seen this before, most notably in the case of Il'ia Ehrenburg and his cycle of poems devoted to Babii Iar, which open with the lines: "What use are words and quill pen/ When on my heart this rock weighs heavy?"

Soviet Jewish writers were no less attuned to the breakdown of speech and syntax in the face of such unprecedented atrocities.[297] Boris Slutskii, Ehrenburg's contemporary and friend,

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[295] See Elie Wiesel, *After the Darkness: Reflections on the Holocaust* (New York: Schocken Books, 2002); Michael Brenner, *After the Holocaust* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997); Marianne Hirsch, *The Generation of Postmemory: Writing and Visual Culture After the Holocaust* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012); and Alvin Rosenfeld, *Thinking About the Holocaust: After Half a Century* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997).

[296] Paul Celan, *Der Meridian* (Frankfurt am Main: S. Fisher Verlag, 1961), 15, trans. Erna Baber Rosenfeld, quoted in Rosenfeld, *A Double Dying*, 85.

echoes Celan's apprehension regarding language and destruction in a fragment from an autobiographical sketch written during the war:

> The life that I lived for four years (during the war) was brutal and tragic and it seemed that one needed to write tragedies about it, but since I was unable to write true tragedies, I wrote ballads—shortened, crumpled, and concise tragedies.
>
> Later I realized that not only tragedies can be brutal, but also romances (lyrical poetry). Even later—that one can write about brutal things with a non-brutal pen.[298]

We can also see another common feature among the survivor's narrative and Soviet reactions to the Holocaust. The dual act of both writing and writing *about* writing, either to "register and record the enormity of human loss" or to unleash a call for vengeance, became a leading trope for Holocaust texts. For example, the poem "Sing into the Valley of Bony Words" by the major Yiddish modernist Jacob Glatshteyn contains the following:

> Zingen in der tol fun boni verter
> Khekherung arop, os durkh os,
> Ikh libe ir, toyt velt fun mayn yugnt,
> Ikh bafel ir, khekherung arop, lozn dayn freyd flebn,
> Kumen noent, os durkh os, varem, palsing,
> Taytshch garnish,
> Ober dancing tsu der velt,
> Blotting oys di valkns vi a kheliker foygl…[299]
>
> Sing into the valley of bony words
> Rise up, letter by letter,
> I love you, dead world of my youth,
> I command you, rise up, let your joy revive,
> Come close, letter by letter, warm, pulsing,
> Meaning nothing,
> But dancing towards the world,
> Blotting out the clouds like bright bird…[300]

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[298] Boris Slutskii, *O drugikh i o sebe*, quoted in Grinberg, *The Poetics of Boris Slutsky,* 154.

[299] Jacob Glatsheyn, "Zingen in der tol fun boni verter," in *Gedenklieder* (New York: Iidisher kempfer, 1943), 77.

[300] Idem, "Sing into the valley of bony words," trans. Barnett Zumoff, in *I Keep Recalling: The Holocaust Poems of Jacob Glatshteyn* (New York: Ktav Publishing House, 1993).

This cannot help but recall Ehrenburg's cycle of verse devoted to Babii Iar and the Holocaust. Like Glatshteyn, Ehrenburg employs apocalyptic imagery and related phrasing: "We shall rise, / rattling our bones we'll go—there." The rattling of bones must be read partially as the rattling of *quills*—a defiant call for the witness to pick up his pen and write. Glatshteyn's call for each letter to "rise up" and "sing into the valley of bones," echoes Ehrenburg's vision of poetry as a *matzeva* (a tombstone) simultaneously recording and avenging.

Likewise, Glatshteyn's 1946 poem "Without Jews" begins with a directly self-referential turn of phrase: "Without Jews, there is no Jewish G-d / If we leave this world / The light will go out in your tent…" This echoes a range of other texts: Boris Slutskii's poem "Ia osvobozhdal Ukrainu" ("I was a Liberator of Ukraine"); Vasilii Grossman's essay "Ukraina bez evreev" ("Ukraine Without Jews"); Anatolii Rybakov's contemplation of a Russian Jewish homeland in *Heavy Sand*; and Fridrikh Gorenshtein's stain of Jewish blood on Ukrainian soil in *Fellow Travelers*.[301]

Glatshteyn, Slutskii, Grossman, Rybakov, and Gorenshtein share similar concerns reflected in their poetry and prose, yet their reactions to the Holocaust are vastly different. Glatshteyn's "Without Jews" is a deeply religious, if blasphemous reading of the Holocaust.[302] In his chapter "Contending with a Silent G-d," Rosenfeld shows how poets of the Holocaust struggled to reconcile their religious upbringing—steeped in exegeses of the Torah—with the

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[301] Grinberg comments: "Slutsky and Glatstein beautifully echo each other. Slutsky's Jewish God, using the burring Jewish speech, creates a Jew in His image in Glatstein's verse, the Jew shaped God in his likeness." Grinberg, *The Poetics of Boris Slutsky*, 278.

[302] Edward Alexander observes that Glatshteyn's "lines are not only an expression of the peculiarly intimate relation between Jews and their God, or a skeptic's suggestions that God's existence is merely subjective, but a recognition that God had made the Jews the special instrument for the achievement of His purposes and their life His chief interest." Edward Alexander, *The Holocaust and the War of Ideas* (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 1994), 27.

notion of a G-d willing to allow the murder of his people. This was not the case for Soviet Jewish writers grappling with similar questions. The Soviet context that informed Slutskii, Grossman, Rybakov, and Gorenshtein yielded a different response; they were not bewildered by a G-d who turned His back on His people, but by their country which had, in part, collaborated with the enemy.

In contrast to Rosenfeld's reading, David Roskies' and Naomi Diamant's recent study does not present the Holocaust as an event without precedent. As we have seen, Roskies' paradigm of Jewish literature of destruction goes back to the destruction of the Second Temple in 70 A.D. In that case, Jewish reactions to the Holocaust are part of a continuous narrative that "unfolds both backward and forward" in time. [303] Roskies and Diamant dismiss Rosenfeld's claim that a new language had to be invented in order to appropriately reflect the daily life of Jews in both concentration and death camps:

> To the Jews of Eastern Europe, schooled in collective memory, the search for ancient analogies always began with the Tanakh, the Hebrew Bible. Faced with the catastrophe of unprecedented scope, both ubiquitous and inescapable, Jewish writers and chroniclers reaching into the fund of Jewish collective memory of historical" and religious archetypes.[304]

If we recall Soviet Yiddish writers reacting to Babii Iar and the Holocaust, we see that Jewish writers tapped into their collective Urtext of Jewish destruction. Nonetheless, in alluding to the books of the prophets, they almost always called for Jewish vengeance. In addition, they recast the *kedush-hashem* motif in ways that appropriately reflected their Jewish and Soviet identities. This was not the same for Jews who wrote about the ghettos and extermination camps. For them—most notably in Yitzhak Katzenelson's epic poem *Song of the Murdered Jewish People*

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[303] Roskies and Diamant, *Holocaust Literature*, 3.

[304] Ibid., 57-58.

(1943) and in Andre Schwartz-Bart's novel, *The Last of the Just* (1959)—*kedush-hashem* is not scrutinized and subverted: it is fully internalized. Perets Markish and Der Nister radically reconstructed the image of the Jew by manipulating the trope of *kedush-hashem*, thereby offering readers a new image of the Jewish hero informed by the Soviet context. Who can forget the central question posed throughout Der Nister's short story, "Grandfather and Grandson:" "What would Jews think if, God forbid, even now a time of evil decree and persecution were to come and martyrdom might be demanded—would there be found those who would willingly offer their necks to the slaughtering knife as in the days of [Khmelnytsky] Chmielnicki…?"[305] This calls our attention to martyrdom (*kedush-hashem*) during the Holocaust.

Roskies' and Diamant's ambitious book offers very few examples of Holocaust narratives from the Soviet Union. Indeed, within their guide to the "first one-hundred books on the Holocaust," only three works come from Soviet Russia. Among all of the Soviet writers to address the Holocaust, Roskies and Diamant choose Der Nister, Vasilii Grossman, and Anatolii Kuznetsov. Moreover, their explanation for including Kuznetsov's novel reflects the traditional attitude toward Holocaust literature from the Soviet Union: "*Babi Yar* [the novel] honors the ancillary victims alongside the main victims of Hitler's war against the Jews."[306] By making the Jewish victims at Babii Iar secondary to Hitler's "main victims," Roskies and Diamant continue to marginalize the Holocaust experience and Holocaust literature within the Soviet Union.

What unites Rosenfeld's and Roskies' analyses of Holocaust fiction, however, is an emphasis on writing produced in ghettos and extermination camps. Rosenfeld asserts that "hell [was] a prototype of the ghettos and death camps." In the "Art of Ghetto Reportage," Roskies

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[305] Der Nister, "Grandfather and Grandson," 203.

[306] Roskies and Diamant, *Holocaust Literature*, 263.

maintains that "the daily assignment was to write about a whole people in extremis, through the prism of the unique social organism that was the ghetto, as if for a deadline sometime in the future, when the war was over, and these writings would see the light of day."[307]

But there was another hell, and it was located in ravines and mass ditches. For Holocaust literature to appropriately reflect the totality of that experience, we must make room for ravine literature. Bound to the depiction of Babii Iar as a sanctified place, the trope of return and pilgrimage allowed Jewish and non-Jewish writers to construct an apocalyptic vision of war and destruction. This same device also called attention to such pressing themes as vengeance, national Jewish revival, text as monument, and the future of the Jewish homeland. Based on the personal odysseys undergone by writers and poets of ravine literature, we have before us bodies of texts devoted to the "Holocaust of bullets."

Zabrodskii's personal odyssey in Gorenshtein's *Traveling Companions* concludes with a related return. In this final section of the novella, he reinforces the association between text and monument, a relationship predicated upon journey and return. As Zabrodskii looks out of the train into the distant countryside "filled with ravines," he contemplates death and an after-life: "A man leaves his nation behind," Zabrodskii writes, "along with his rotting cadaver. Everything is consumed, and what remains of each of us is a small heap that would resemble ashes if it took material form."[308] This heap, he explains, is the "most valuable essence." Facing the reality that he will also die one day, he asks the reader to "carefully gather his ash" and place it in an urn. This humble hope for a monument does justice to the "most valuable essence"; it is the ultimate

[307] Ibid., 51.

[308] Gorenshtein, *Traveling Companions*, 214.

design and destination of all Babii Iar texts, which have collectively come to serve as monuments for all those lost in ravines.

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