Olga Gershenson

The PHANTOM HOLOCAUST

Soviet Cinema and Jewish Catastrophe

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Jewish Cultures of the World

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OLGA GERSHENSON

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To the memory of my grandparents

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THE PHANTOM HOLOCAUST

1 Screening the Holocaust in the Soviet Union

Jews without the Holocaust and the Holocaust without the Jews

This book began with a paradox. Half of all Holocaust victims—nearly three million people—were killed on Soviet soil, mostly in swift machine-gun executions.[1] And yet, watching popular Holocaust movies, whether European or American, the impression is that Holocaust victims were mainly Polish and German Jews killed in concentration camps.[2] Two questions arise: Why is the Soviet Union not in the picture? And why are the camps depicted as the sole site of the Holocaust?

It is understandable why on film the camps have become an ultimate representation of the Holocaust. When Soviet and the Allied forces liberated the camps, they made a concerted effort to document Nazi atrocities (Nazis did not film death camps).[3] The resulting footage was the basis for several documentaries depicting the horrific reality of the camps.[4] Although these early documentaries downplayed the victims' Jewish identity, they ultimately came to represent first the Nazi atrocities, and later the Holocaust. In fact, Soviet documentarists helped to shape this image.

These documentaries established a cinematic repertoire of Holocaust imagery: emaciated bodies, striped uniforms, barbed wire, crematorium ovens, and mounds of personal effects. These images conflate evidence of the extermination that took place in the *death* camps, where 2.6 million Jews were murdered, with the realities of the *concentration* camps, where 150,000 Jews perished.[5] As Timothy Snyder points out, "The vast majority of Jews killed in the Holocaust never saw a concentration camp."[6] Historically accurate or not, the cinematic Holocaust repertoire was used and reproduced so often that striped uniforms and crematorium chimneys cause in us a knee-jerk response. They are photogenic, clear, and what we assume to be the unambiguous signs of the Holocaust.

The footage of atrocities on Soviet soil never acquired the same status. The perpetrators almost never filmed their massacres; they just took snapshots. The Soviet cameramen who filmed the atrocity sites after liberation did not focus on Jewish victims, but rather obscured their Jewish identities. This is not very different from the international documentaries about camps. What was different is that the Soviet documentaries depicting Nazi crimes on Soviet soil, even when

shown in the West, were viewed with suspicion and mistrusted as propaganda.[7] Atrocity images in these films never took hold deeply enough to be interpreted as depictions of the Holocaust, and so did not build up the semiotic power of representation in later films.

During the cold war era, when an entire cultural industry of Holocaust memory emerged in the West, the Soviet experience was not in the picture. Soviet sources were unavailable, or deemed untrustworthy. Holocaust discourse in the West was based on the available sources—Western archives and testimonies of the survivors liberated from the camps. This discourse was propagated through memoirs by the survivors, academic research, popular historical writing, museums, memorials, educational programs, travel to camp sites, observances of Holocaust Remembrance Day, and of course cinema. The Holocaust was depicted on screens starting in the late 1940s, at first sparingly, then increasingly more frequently, until in the 1980s and 1990s the entire genre of Holocaust cinema emerged, with its own subgenres, comprising hundreds of films.[8] The trend continues today. Very few of these films reflect Jewish war experiences on Soviet territory.[9] But what about the Soviet culture industry?

Soviet commemorative practices were highly selective: many categories of people were excluded from the memory of the so-called "Great Fatherland War." Foremost among the forgotten were Jews.[10] There was no institution of Holocaust memory within Soviet borders. The word "Holocaust" itself was not used—the particular Jewish loss had no name.[11] There was no clearly formulated, consistent policy regarding the Holocaust; instead, beginning in 1943, the tendency was to silence any discussion of the matter. Although this vague policy and its enforcement fluctuated over time (as will be evident from the discussion of specific time periods), throughout most of the Soviet era the silencing mechanism remained the same: the Holocaust was not denied, it just was not treated as a unique separate phenomenon.[12] The Holocaust was, instead, generally universalized by subsuming it as a part of overall Soviet tragedy, with Jews euphemistically labeled "peaceful Soviet citizens."[13] In addition to universalization, there was another, much less explored mechanism, which I call *externalization*; when crimes against Jews were discussed as such, the Holocaust was likely to be set outside the borders of the Soviet Union.[14] Universalization and externalization were used in conjunction. As a result, Soviet Jews were Jews without the Holocaust.

Historians offer different explanations for this policy. Zvi Gitelman suggests that universalization was perhaps an effective choice in the Soviet Union, plagued by anti-Semitic traditions.[15] Timothy Snyder points out that the Soviets cast Slavs and communists as the main target of Hitler's attack, presenting them as "both the victors and the victims of the Second World War."[16] They did not want to concede this place to Jews: the Jewish story of the war would have unsettled "the ethnonational hierarchy of heroism."[17] As Amir Weiner shows, the war

narrative was becoming a new legitimating myth of Soviet polity. The Soviets did not want to "Judaicize" this myth, so Jews had to be excluded.[18] Moreover, as Ilya Altman writes, acknowledging a particular Jewish fate during the war would mean accepting Soviet responsibility for failing to save Jews.[19] The question of historical responsibility would then apply not only to the few Soviet citizens who collaborated with the Nazis (and were tried), but also to the silent majority, who stood by as Jews were executed, tortured, and herded into ghettos. Finally, the Soviets feared that memorializing the Holocaust would raise Jewish consciousness; they did not realize that silencing it would raise Jewish consciousness even more.[20] In this general context, it was easier to forgo difficult questions of historical responsibility and cover them up with a fig leaf of "internationalism"—to subsume the Jews in the general Soviet war losses—or to locate the Holocaust elsewhere. Moreover, the Soviets silenced other victims as well: the overall scope of human loss during the war—27 million dead—has not been publicized until recently. The number of Soviet prisoners of war killed or starved to death by the Nazis—over 3.5 million—also has not been circulated.[21]

As a result of these policies, there was no official commemoration of the Holocaust in the Soviet Union—no museums, no memorials, no research or popular nonfiction.[22] Survivors had no status, and their stories for the most part remained untold. Most Soviet literature, art, and films about the war did not feature Jews. Not only were Soviet Jews the Jews without the Holocaust, the war narrative also presented, as it were, a Holocaust without the Jews.

And yet, this is not the whole story. Some writers, poets, photographers, and artists broached the subject even in the most inhospitable historical circumstances. Western readers are familiar with the writing of Ilya Ehrenburg, Vasilii Grossman, Anatolii Kuznetsov, and Anatolii Rybakov, but there were many others.[23] Amazingly, some of their creative output was published and widely circulated. Despite Soviet obfuscation and the absence of official recognition, in the arts and literature the memory of the Holocaust was kept alive.

Similarly, I discovered a number of Soviet films about the Holocaust, often based on well-known literary sources. Naturally, the question arises, if these films indeed existed, why do so few people, in Russia and in the West, including Holocaust film scholars, know about them? Even I, born and raised in the Soviet Union (and well versed in local culture), needed to spend a considerable time in libraries and archives to gather a list of such films. It took even more time and effort to actually see them.

This book, then, is about these Soviet Holocaust films. Despite all the political realities, the amazing fact is that Soviets were ahead of the curve in representing what would later be known as the Holocaust. Already in the 1930s, it was Soviet films—the first in history—that exposed Nazi anti-Jewish persecution. Three such films were made in 1938: *Professor Mamlock, Peat Bog Soldiers*, and *The Oppenheim Family*. All three were banned the following year, after the

Molotov-Ribbentrop pact. The first Soviet film that represented a Jewish tragedy on Soviet soil, *The Unvanquished*, was also made very early, in 1945, long before American or European studios dared to touch the subject. But this film was also taken off screens soon after its premiere, following the emergence of Stalin's anti-Semitic policies. Most Holocaust-themed films in the Soviet Union were made in the period of post-Stalin liberalization. Films made in this era, such as *Ordinary Fascism* (1965), *Eastern Corridor* (1966), *Goodbye, Boys* (1964/1966), and *Sons of the Fatherland* (1968) ran a gamut of styles, genres, and points of view. However, even during these relatively liberal times, censors banned one such film, *Commissar* (1967), and rejected several scripts. These scripts, including *Gott mit Uns* (1961), *Stalemate* (1965), and *King Matt and the Old Doctor* (1966) were never made into films. Rather, they became what I call the phantom cinema of the Holocaust. When the liberal era came to an end with Israel's 1967 war and the 1968 Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia, Jewish-themed cultural production was terminated altogether. The Holocaust would not become a subject of Soviet films again until the perestroika era, in the late 1980s. It was then that *Commissar* was finally released, and when several new Holocaust films were made, including *Our Father* (1990), *The Parrot Who Spoke Yiddish* (1990), *Ladies' Tailor* (1990), and *Exile* (1991). In the post-Soviet era, Holocaust movies continue to be made, but not often.

This book is not only about these films but also about why we don't know them. In some ways, all Soviet Holocaust films are phantoms. Of course, they literally exist—on archival shelves, on illegal websites, and in the memory of those who saw them years ago. And yet they don't exist—they have no physical presence, either as widely distributed DVDs or web-streams today, or at festivals and movie theaters at the time of their release. As a result, they are not found in international Holocaust filmographies.[24] This book is an attempt to bring these films to our awareness, thus giving substance and reality to the phantoms.

Not all the phantoms are the same. Some Soviet Holocaust films were completed, and even had a modest circulation. Other were only conceived, but terminated by censors, and ended up as total phantoms—scripts on dusty shelves. This book is therefore also about the production histories of these films: making films under the best of circumstances is a long and arduous process; in the Soviet context it was further impeded by hurdles of censorship. The process was even more difficult for Holocaust films. Specifics are preserved in archival documents that explain why the films were made the way they were, or not made at all. Behind each film—and especially behind each stillborn script—is a story of writers and filmmakers silenced with various degrees of violence.

This book, then, is also about the writers and filmmakers who made these movies—or were not given a chance to make them. Their identities, talent, skill, and motivation vary greatly. Mark Donskoi was a Soviet classic director, whose films never dealt with his Jewish roots. Yet in his 1945 film *The Unvanquished*, he

included a scene of mass execution of Jews filmed in Babi Yar, a place that came to symbolize the Holocaust in the Soviet Union. Mikhail Romm was a filmmaker favored by Stalin and embraced by the regime. Yet throughout his illustrious career he fought for every fellow Jewish filmmaker and took a consistent stance against state-sponsored anti-Semitism. In the 1960s, his film *Ordinary Fascism* shocked millions by drawing parallels between Nazism and Stalinism. Maya Turovskaya, a scriptwriter of *Ordinary Fascism* (and the only woman discussed in this book), made a conscious effort to eliminate Soviet conformism from her writing. She was able to make only a few documentaries. Mikhail Kalik went to film school, as well as to a Gulag labor camp. He went on to make beautiful films, each one of them with a Jewish motif. In the late 1960s, he lost two of his film projects about the Holocaust to Soviet censorship and ultimately emigrated to Israel. Lithuanian-Jewish writers Icchokas Meras and Grigorii Kanovich, whose scripts about the Holocaust were rejected by censors, also left for Israel. Valentin Vinogradov, who was not Jewish, stumbled upon the subject of the Holocaust when doing research for his war film about Belarusian resistance, *Eastern Corridor.* He succeeded in making the film, but his career was destroyed: the establishment never forgave him his preoccupation with Jewish suffering. The career of another non-Jewish filmmaker, Aleksandr Askoldov, for whom Jewish subjects had a personal resonance, was also destroyed. After his *Commissar* was banned in 1967, he never made another film. Others fared better. Politically savvy Latif Faiziev did not pay a high price for his *Sons of the Fatherland* (1968), which went on to become a classic of Uzbek cinema. In his later films, though, he steered clear of themes related to Jews and the Holocaust.

Those are the key figures in my book—they made or attempted to make films dealing directly with the Holocaust. Others touched upon it in their work: art-house cinema auteurs like Larisa Shepitko and Elem Klimov; box-office darlings like Sergei Bondarchuk and Stanislav Rostotskii; and even rank-and-file socialist realists like Sergei Kolosov and Nikolai Figurovskii. Most Soviet filmmakers, however, would not come near the Holocaust. If they made films about the war—and even about the events of the Holocaust—there was no mention of Jews, as if they never existed. In contrast to this silent majority, the audacity of the filmmakers I focus on here is particularly striking.

Even if they were released, most of their films were quietly shelved after a modest premiere in the periphery. They were not sold abroad or sent to festivals, on orders from above. This book, then, is also about the films' circulation and reception. Their silencing explains why today most of them are phantoms, forgotten at home, and entirely unknown in the West. We, the audience, are deprived of the whole corpus of such films, films that depict the Holocaust on Soviet soil, or as seen from a Soviet vantage point. This is our loss.

To redress this loss, I draw a complete picture of fiction films and unrealized scripts dealing with the Holocaust that were produced in the USSR from the

1930s to 1991, when the Soviet state ceased to exist. Although I consider some shorts and documentaries, I focus on feature-length fiction (also called narrative) films. Whether made for theatrical release or for TV, generally these films commanded very large audiences in the Soviet Union. They were more expensive and more involved productions, and hence showed more commitment on the part of funding agencies (in the Soviet case, always the state) than other genres.

Most important, fiction cinema, which is both an art form and a mass culture product, relies on good storytelling, vivid imagery, and emotional appeal, endowing it with a unique ability "to make history come alive."[25] History textbooks will fade from memory, but a striking scene will endure and shape one's understanding of the past. Film, then, becomes a source of historical knowledge and, more important, personal identification with distant events. Given that the Holocaust lies outside the actual experience of most popular audiences today, its cinematic representation becomes a way to live through it vicariously, and in the absence of actual recall, forms "prosthetic memories."[26]

The Holocaust on Soviet Soil

How is the Holocaust represented in Soviet films? To answer this question we should take into account the unique features of the Holocaust on Soviet soil.[27] First, as mentioned, most Soviet victims of the Holocaust were murdered in mass machine-gun executions, in or near their hometowns. Those not killed in these initial mass operations were rounded up in ghettos or labor camps. Only very few were sent to death camps. By 1942, most Jews in the occupied Soviet territories were dead. The rest were killed near their ghettos before the Nazi retreat in 1943–1944.

Another unique feature of Soviet Jewish history was that about half a million Soviet Jews fought in the Red Army against the Nazis. Thousands more fought as partisans, either in general Soviet partisan units or within Jewish groups.[28] Although many Jews identified in general as "Soviet people" and were recruited or volunteered to serve as any other Soviet citizens, individual Jewish soldiers fought as Jews. News of Nazi atrocities against fellow Jews or family members sparked their Jewish identification. They were driven by a desire for revenge, but also motivated to dispel an age-old stereotype of Jews as unfit for military service.[29] Within this context, the story of the Soviet Jewish war effort is closely interconnected with the history of the Holocaust. As Harriet Murav points out, "the two phenomena, the war and the killing of Jews as Jews, overlap: Soviet Jews were Red Army soldiers who fought and died on the front; they were victims of the Nazis, and witnesses."[30]

An important part of Soviet war history was evacuation: between a million and a million and a half Soviet Jews fled eastward from Nazi-occupied territories, either evacuated in an organized Soviet effort or individually as refugees. They were joined by Polish-Jewish refugees uprooted by rumors of anti-Jewish

violence.[31] The stories of their escape and survival are yet another distinguishing feature of the history of the Holocaust on Soviet territory.

Like Holocaust survivors elsewhere, Jews in the Soviet Union faced terrible hardships even after the war was over. Whether they returned to their hometowns from evacuation, fronts, hiding, or camps, they found their houses destroyed or occupied, their possessions appropriated, and more important, their entire communities and families lost. However, what made the situation different in the Soviet Union was that Jewish survivors had no special status, and no recognition. As Amir Weiner puts it, they returned to "political invisibility."[32] There were no displaced persons camps, no resettlement help, and even Western help packages did not always reach them. Material help was provided on an ad hoc basis at best.[33] The hardships of the Soviet Jewish survivors were exacerbated by the resurgence of local anti-Semitism.[34]

An additional distinguishing factor was that the Jewish catastrophe on Soviet soil coincided with Stalin's repressions. Specifically, the Holocaust was bracketed by the terrible purges of the late 1930s (which, although they did not target Jews as such, listed massive numbers of Jews among the victims) and the anti-Semitic campaign of 1948–1953. In Western historiography, the Jewish Holocaust and Stalin's purges are seen as two distinct historical events. But as Timothy Snyder has shown, Stalin's and Hitler's crimes had the same victims: "In Soviet Ukraine, Soviet Belarus, and the Leningrad district, lands where the Stalinist regime had starved and shot some four million people in the previous eight years, German forces managed to starve and shoot even more in half the time. Right after the invasion began, the Wehrmacht began to starve its Soviet prisoners, and special task forces called Einsatzgruppen began to shoot political enemies and Jews."[35] Whatever they didn't finish, Stalin seemed to want to accomplish in his postwar anti-Semitic campaign. The parallels between Stalin's and Hitler's regimes did not escape the attention of Soviet intellectuals, including filmmakers.

We should also take into account dramatic changes in Jewish life in the prewar Soviet Union. To different degrees, Jews were secularized, Russified, and assimilated into the Soviet regime—more so in the old Soviet territories, and less in the newly annexed regions. Traditional Jewish institutions of communal life vanished. Intermarriage was commonplace. As historians rightly note, these transformations had far-reaching consequences for the events of the Holocaust.[36]

Moreover, the very understanding of who was a Jew and what it meant to be Jewish had changed. It was a nationality—as registered in Soviet passports, with a national language and culture, as evidenced by the Yiddish organizations, literature, press, and theater. But most Soviet Jews did not participate in the official Yiddish institutions, nor did they move to the Jewish Autonomous Region of Birobidjan in the Far East or Jewish collective farms in Crimea. Most of them identified as Soviet people. For them, as Harriet Murav argues, their two identities, as Jews and as Soviets, were not a zero-sum game; they crossed

and blurred: "During the war Jews were particularly good Soviets, because they were Jews, because they were doubly the target for annihilation in Hitler's war against 'Judeo-Bolshevism.'"[37]

The final context that we should take into account is a particular Russian history of anti-Jewish violence, as evidenced by a wave of pogroms at the end of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The still images documenting pogroms and its victims, including horrific pillage, violated Torah scrolls, wounded victims, and piles of corpses buried in pits, have been widely publicized in newspapers and postcards since the end of the nineteenth century. The cinematic portrayal of pogroms ranged from documentary footage to several fiction films, Russian and Soviet.[38] As a result, images of pogroms were indelible in Russian Jewish cultural memory. All of these factors contributed to the way the Holocaust was portrayed on Soviet screens.

Soviet Film Censorship

Now that it is clear what this book is about, perhaps I should also say what it is *not* about. Theoretical debates about the limits and possibilities of Holocaust representation, proliferating in Western literature in recent decades, are not treated here. Soviet filmmakers might have contemplated whether and how to represent the Holocaust, but the ultimate answer was given by a censor. Theoretical debate was beside the point. Filmmakers who felt compelled to represent the Holocaust, but who were not given a chance to do so, could not afford such a luxury.

This means that film censorship is crucial for understanding Holocaust representation in the Soviet Union. In general, Soviet censorship was executed on several levels: (1) self-censorship of authors or artists; (2) editorial censorship by editors and various advisory boards; (3) official censorship of Glavlit, a body responsible for screening for military and security information; (4) penalizing censorship by secret police; and finally, (5) ideological censorship by party leadership.[39] In actuality, all these levels provided ideological censorship, with the editorial level serving as the most powerful means of control. This structure was put in place in the early years of the Soviet regime, was fully codified in the 1930–1950s, and was largely the same until 1988, when ideological censorship ended.[40] In the film industry, censorship had its own nuances, which stem in part from the medium itself. Filmmaking is an organizationally complex and expensive endeavor: revisions cannot be done easily, and banning an already made movie results in a big financial loss. Also, film is a part of mass culture: in the USSR successful films were seen by tens of millions of people and even minor films counted their audiences in the millions. The price tag and the tremendous exposure led to a very close scrutiny of the making of a film, from the very early stages of production to a final version.

An average narrative film had to undergo as many as twelve levels of approval by various committees and functionaries, in some cases many more. The costs

and circumstances of film production also meant that, unlike literature, there were no *samizdat* and no dissident films—anything ideologically suspect was weeded out early on, either by the self-censorship of filmmakers themselves or by editorial censorship.

At the very least, Soviet films underwent the following successive stages of approval.

Film Studio

After a script received an informal green light from a film studio (this was a common practice to reduce bureaucracy), it was submitted officially for consideration of an Artistic Council and the studio heads. Members of the Artistic Council were themselves filmmakers and writers whose official mission was to ensure a high level of artistic quality in the production. In actuality, Artistic Councils functioned as peer-censors, foreseeing and alleviating complications with the approval of the screenplay (or film) at higher levels. Occasionally, if the members were particularly stumped, or felt the need for political reassurance, a script (or a film) was sent out to expert reviewers, whose assessment helped the council members make a decision.

Film Industry

From a studio, a script was then sent for approval to the film industry governing body, Goskino. Within this structure, a script first had to be authorized by an editorial board called SRK (*Stsenarno-redaktsionnaia kollegiia*), which despite its artistic agenda also functioned as an ideological watchdog. Then, after the SRK, a script went to the heads of Goskino, high-echelon bureaucrats who had final authority to veto a project. If a film was made in one of the Soviet republics, it first had to jump through the same hoops on the local level. Together, Artistic Councils and SRKs functioned as a form of peer-editorial censorship, which was the major mechanism of ideological control.

Official Censorship

After the Goskino overlords were done with a script, it had to get approval of the official censors at Glavlit—every page had to get a stamp (literally). On the record, the censors had to check the script vis-à-vis lists of classified military and security information. But in reality, they alerted authorities to potential ideological pitfalls.

Party Organs

Should an ideological problem be detected, a script was sent to a Party organ, usually someone at the Propaganda Department or the Culture Department at the Central Committee of the Communist Party. Occasionally it was a local party functionary or a Politburo member, or before 1953, Stalin himself. Which

party organs got involved changed over time. Their role and their relationships with film industry heads also differed from place to place. Usually they were on the same page, especially since they were often the same people.[41] But sometimes, they competed, in which case the party intervention actually benefited a filmmaker.

Government Agency

If the content of a film fell under the jurisdiction of one of the government agencies, another level of censorship was applied on an as-needed basis. Under the guise of a "consultation" with specialists, a script (or a film) underwent further ideological inspection. For instance, all war films had to get the imprimatur of Glavpur—the Political Directorate of the Army.

Department for Control over Cinematic Repertory

Should a script obtain all these approvals, it was eventually launched into production. Once a film was made, it had to be approved once again at *all* the above stages. Finally, a finished film had to be approved by the censors at the Department for Control over Cinematic Repertory. The department staff carefully compared a film, scene by scene, to a so-called *montazhnyi list*, detailed itemization of edited footage (editing script, for short). Only upon passing this final checkup did a film get permission to be reproduced and distributed. Any inconsistencies needed to be addressed.

Distribution

Despite all these levels of control, occasionally a problematic film was still made. Such films were almost never officially banned, that is, shelved on Goskino orders with no distribution. More often, the censorship was enforced unofficially, through distribution channels. There were ways to make an unwanted film invisible—we will see many such examples in this book. Deciding on the number of printed copies, for example, served as a form of censorship. Undesirable films were printed in small numbers. Moreover, the distribution channels worked according to unspoken protocols, and theater managers choosing movies for their theaters were gently "helped" with their decisions. Whether a film went into a wide or a limited release, whether it was shown in major centers or in the periphery, how long it was in circulation, and how well it was publicized, also functioned as forms of distribution censorship.

As to punitive censorship within the film industry, the KGB was rarely involved. More often, penalties consisted of creating conditions that barred a filmmaker from professional work; there are many examples of this. Frustrated filmmakers then were forced to quit, transfer to marginal studios, do semi-professional work (such as dubbing), or emigrate. Emigration or other suspect behavior in turn resulted in pulling films by a filmmaker out of circulation.

In this book, I specifically focus on censorship problems that films encountered as a result of dealing with the Jewish question or with the Holocaust. But these were not the only problems. Almost anything could raise a red flag. Some problems were predictable, such as portrayals of drunkenness, nudity, sex, and religion, all of which were officially unacceptable. But a list of potential pitfalls also included deviation from the tenets of socialist realism, such as sarcasm, naturalism, symbolism, pessimism, any kind of artistic experimentation, ambiguity of meaning, or even an open ending.[42] That is because the editors, who were de facto the main censors, looked not only for direct ideological statements (i.e., criticism of the Soviet regime and its leaders), but also tried to read between the lines. They saw hints and unwanted associations where sometimes there were none. This process caused significant anxiety among Soviet filmmakers.[43] No one was immune; even the most mainstream and celebrated filmmakers were under close scrutiny.

There was an element of chance in this process—why some scripts were approved and some rejected, why some films were released, and others not, might not always have a direct causal explanation. In part, it depended on the time period in which a film was made—some eras were more liberal than others. In part, it depended on the personalities of filmmakers (their fame, their political cachet and know-how), or the personalities of reviewers, editors, and Goskino officials. Approval or rejection could rest on the political preferences, personal integrity, or mere idiosyncrasies of these same individuals. Sometimes, the fate of a film was decided by which desk its file landed on. But even these factors did not have full predictive power: as we will see, even in the worst times, some films slipped through; even in the most liberal times, others were rejected. The results were, to some degree, arbitrary.

Today, it is probably impossible to reconstruct the full picture. That is partly because censorship also extended to the way records were preserved and filed. This presents further challenges for research on Soviet film censorship. As film historian Valerii Fomin explains: "Some very important documents . . . were very thoughtfully not filed for archival storage. Others mysteriously disappeared from the archival files. A significant part of the most important documents and materials ended up in the archives that are out of reach even today. . . . Moreover, some transactions (in the most dramatic cases) were conducted so masterfully that today there is no trace, at least there is no paper trail."[44] Indeed, in my research in the Russian state archives, I encountered all of these challenges: some files were still classified. Some decisions, about which I learned from the filmmakers themselves, left no paper trail whatsoever. But sometimes the opposite was true: because the Soviet bureaucracy was so convoluted and so inefficient, occasionally I found a letter from the KGB or a zealous report from a party hack in a completely unexpected place, simply because it was filed there by mistake. Such fortuitous bureaucratic errors, though helpful, were rare.

I was able, fortunately, to supplement my research at the state archives with private archives and, when possible with interviews with the filmmakers and scriptwriters themselves. Most of the filmmakers have passed away. But I spoke with those who are still available, or with their surviving family and crew members. Their stories, as we will see later in the book, fill in the official archival blanks. Their accounts also give insight into their personal lived experience working on verboten subjects in the Soviet context.

Finally, a note on how I approach all the archival documents, the interviews, and the films themselves. As will be evident from their censorship histories, the films that I am discussing were often too Jewish for Soviet censors. For general audiences, disinclined to read them as Holocaust stories, they were not Jewish at all, and were seen as war films like any others. But Soviet Jews, starved for representation, were keenly aware of every film that dealt with Jewish life, however obliquely. I follow their lead. Relying on interviews with filmmakers and archival documents, I read the films through a Jewish lens. I am considering these films not only in the context of Soviet cinema, as Russian film scholars do, but also in a context of Holocaust cinema, and in the context of Soviet Jewish culture and history. Reinscribing Jewishness onto the Soviet films is an integral part of my project.[45]

2 Soviet Antifascist Films of the 1930s

THE EARLIEST IMAGES OF NAZI ANTI-SEMITISM AND CONCENTRATION CAMPS ON WORLD SCREENS

Following the Kristallnacht pogroms in Germany in November 1938, a wave of anti-Nazi protests swept over the Soviet Union. The protests were government sanctioned, highly orchestrated, and featured celebrity writers, actors, intellectuals, scientists, and other public figures, Jews and non-Jews. A thousand people showed up for a protest in Leningrad, over fifteen hundred in Baku, over a thousand in Kiev.[1] Two thousand gathered at the most central of such protests—the Great Hall of the Moscow Conservatory—to express their indignation with anti-Jewish pogroms. Aleksei Tolstoy, a great Russian writer, said: "To compare fascism to the medieval times is to insult the Middle Ages." Solomon Mikhoels, a famous Yiddish actor and Jewish leader roared: "a brown plague has embarked on a bloody attack on defenseless Jews. The streets of German cities are defiled by fascist cannibals; they turned into an impassable thicket of primordial forests where fascists are hunting their victims. To kill, to plunder, to burn, to rape, to demolish—this is the mission of fascism, its nature."[2]

The meeting passed a resolution, which bluntly stated that "fascists beat, mutilate, rape, kill, and burn alive men and women whose only fault is to belong to the Jewish people." The resolution ended on positive note, expressing both confidence in the German people, who in the Soviet view were somehow entirely uninvolved in "the brutalities of fascist monsters," and the conviction that "the night which fascism brought onto Germany will be over."[3] *Pravda* published reports about similar protests taking place all over the world.[4] Altogether, the Soviet mainstream press published dozens of articles about attacks on Jews in German-controlled territories.[5]

These protests and their publicity were part of the concerted propaganda effort undertaken by the Soviets to rally against the rise of Nazism. As part of this effort, several antifascist films were made throughout the 1930s. Three of these films specifically tackled the question of Nazi anti-Semitism and Jewish persecutions: *Professor Mamlock, Peat Bog Soldiers*, and *The Oppenheim Family.*[6] Their release at home and abroad nearly coincided with the Nazi pogroms, making them

uncannily timely. Reviews of these films appeared on the same pages in newspapers as reports of the Nazi atrocities and the protests against them.

These three Soviet films were among the first on world screens to treat Jewish persecution in Nazi Germany. But the very first film touching on the subject, *Ruddy's Career* (*Kar'era Ruddy*), was made even earlier, in 1934. *Ruddy's Career* was re-released in 1938, along with the other three films. It told a story of a young German college graduate, Ruddy, following him from post-graduation euphoria, to fruitless search of work, and then to complete hopelessness. It is at this low point that Ruddy is invited to play soccer for a "national" club, leading to his membership in the fascist movement. Ultimately, Ruddy understands the wrongdoings of the club members and joins the workers' movement. Along with Ruddy's story, the film tells a story of his Jewish friend, Iosif, presented as a quintessential schlemiel—a brilliant but hapless young man. Already at the graduation ceremony, where the bespectacled, awkward Iosif is granted a gold medal, he is taunted as a Jew, and then beaten up. In the scuffle, he loses his glasses, and becomes completely helpless. No wonder Iosif is the first of the two friends to become concerned with the political changes in Germany—and he tries to alert Ruddy to the dangers of fascism. After a falling out, the two friends are reunited in jail, where they end up as a result of involvement in the workers' strike. In these last scenes, Iosif appears without glasses, strong and confident. "It's nothing," he tells his comrades in response to the brutal treatment by the police, "we will yet teach them politeness." Repeating a trajectory of a typical Jewish character of earlier Soviet literature and film, he is transformed from a Jewish intellectual to a proletarian fighter.

Thus as early as 1934, through the character of Iosif, this film thematized a concern with Nazi anti-Semitism. It is noteworthy that Iosif is typed according to Russian anti-Semitic stereotypes (emasculated, frail, unattractive) rather than German ones (as exemplified, for instance, by the diabolical protagonist of the 1940 *The Jew Suss*). This tendency to "translate" German anti-Semitism into its Russian equivalent, which first appeared in *Ruddy's Career*, would be fully developed in later films. So that even though anti-Semitism on screen is externalized, these "translations" betray the filmmakers' concern with rising anti-Semitism not only in Germany but also at home.

Professor Mamlock

Although *Ruddy's Career* was the first film ever to touch on the issue of Nazi anti-Semitism, the first film to tackle the issue head on, and the one with the most resonance both at home and abroad, was *Professor Mamlock* (1938). This film was made at Lenfilm Studio by two Jewish directors—a Soviet, Adolf Minkin, and an Austrian, Herbert Rapoport, who fled to the Soviet Union to escape Nazism. The film was based on the play of the same name by a famous German playwright (another Jewish exile), Friedrich Wolf. At the time Wolf was

something of a celebrity—trained as a physician and professing what we would term today bodybuilding, he was an author of a controversial play *Cyankali* (1929), which made a case for legalizing abortions. Wolf penned *Mamlock* in 1933, and since then it has been performed all over the world, including Moscow, Tel Aviv, Tokio, Shanghai, and New York.[7] In 1934, Wolf emigrated to the USSR and helped to adapt his play for the screen.

At the center of the plot is Professor Mamlock (Semen Mezhinskii), a gifted and devoted surgeon and a decorated war veteran, who starting in 1933 becomes a subject of Nazi persecutions. At first, he fails to take the situation seriously, and clashes with his communist son, Rolf (Oleg Zhakov), who believes that the political prospects are dire. Over time, the old professor begins to agree with Rolf. A turning point comes as Mamlock's mediocre colleague—and a storm trooper—Dr. Hellpach, actually expels the surgeon from his clinic. At the end of the film, Mamlock gives a passionate speech from his balcony—which becomes his tribune—calling for forces to unite against the fascist plague. He is shot by Nazi troopers, but, in accord with socialist realist convention, his transformation from a removed scientist to a communist fighter is complete.[8]

Several significant changes were made during the transformation of the German play into a Soviet film. An entire obligatory subplot detailing the activities of the communist underground was added—complete with meetings, agitating, imprisonment, and escape. Another significant adjustment was the story of Mamlock's end. In the play, he fatally shoots himself with the very gun he earned by his heroic fighting at Verdun. But suicide was unacceptable on Soviet screens, and hence in the film Mamlock recovers from his own shot, only to die later a more appropriate death—at the hands of the Nazis after his fiery speech.

Several other revisions changed the way the Jewish characters—and the persecution they faced—are represented. In the play, as German as he is, Mamlock also strongly—and proudly—identifies himself "as an old soldier, as a democrat, and as a Jew." He praises his devoted Jewish staff as "the purest Maccabean" and speaks of biblical David and Samson as examples of bravery and heroism.[9] Understandably, this dialogue did not make it into a Soviet film. In the film, Mamlock has absolutely no Jewish characterization—he is depicted as a professional (as shown through his dedicated work at the clinic) and a member of the intelligentsia (with a tasteful, book-lined apartment). He is Jewish in name only. And yet, as the film underplays Mamlock's Jewish identity, it highlights the anti-Jewish persecution. The result is that Mamlock is rendered less Jewish, but the film overall makes a strong case against anti-Semitism.

Even though on screen the action takes place in Germany, one cannot fail to see parallels with the events at home. Two scenes stand out. The first takes place when the Nazi, Dr. Hellpach, storms with his troopers into the operation room where Mamlock is to begin a surgery. Hellpach orders another doctor to operate: Mamlock must leave the hospital. At first, Mamlock is simply confused,

but then he realizes what is happening and confronts Hellpach. Hellpach insists that Mamlock leave.

At this point, Mamlock gets agitated: "Dr. Hellpach—I am the one responsible for this hospital. I want you out, now."

Hellpach fake-laughs into his face: "Itsik is giving orders. Germany—tremble with fear! Itsik wants to kick us out!" His uniformed minions standing behind him laugh as well. Hellpach turns to them with an emphatic question: "Who sold Germany to France? Jews!" The storm troopers behind him echo: "Jews!"

Hellpach: "Who defiles German science? Jews!" "Jews!"—echo the Nazis.

Mamlock, infuriated, removes his surgical mask and shouts: "Get out of here! Out!"

This remarkable scene combines two instances in the play and "translates" them into Russian-Jewish terms. The first instance takes place entirely off-stage: Hellpach's order for all non-Aryan doctors and staff to leave the hospital is reported to Mamlock by another Jewish doctor.[10] We never see it.

The second instance in the play is a dialogue that takes place when Hellpach marches into Mamlock's house to tell him that he was dismissed. This is not just a confrontation between Hellpach and Mamlock, but rather a chance for Mamlock to state his convictions in a well-argued and eloquent speech, blaming the Nazis for "fear of competition": "So, they'll forbid us to study at universities, forbid us to work, to think, to write poetry, to play music in public; they won't recognize our inventions, strike our champion fencers off the list, our runners, athletes, tennis players; but do we get any worse, or you any better through this self-deception!"[11]

This speech was at once too much and too little for the 1930s USSR—on the one hand, the fencers and tennis players did not resonate with images of Jews in Russia; on the other hand, "fear of competition," especially in light of the recent anti-Trotskyite campaign, struck a little too close to home. Therefore, the film "translates" this powerful diatribe into a more familiar idiom: a bunch of uniformed idiots (think Cossacks, cops, or soldiers) taunting a Jew. Characteristically, now a German Jew—Mamlock, whose last name sounds anything but Jewish to the Russian ear, and whose first name we never learn—becomes a shtetl *Itsik*, a Russian-Jewish diminutive of Isaac—little Isaac. Moreover, when Hellpach cries out "Jews!" in response to his own questions (and his crew repeats after him)—they pronounce the Russian word for Jews, *evrei*, with a uvular "r," mocking a Yiddish accent. One of the most salient features of this accent is that it was used to stereotype Jews as being unable to properly pronounce the rolled Russian "r." This mocking performance turns a refined German Jew into an illiterate Yiddish speaker, unable to master the nuances of Russian phonetics. As improbable as it is, this translation of Nazi anti-Semitism into Russian terms, whether it was intended or not, makes the scene more Jewish, and makes it more relevant to events at home.

The second scene that highlights anti-Jewish persecution takes place when Hellpach, incensed by Mamlock's disobedience, arrests him and marches him through the streets. The word "Jude" is written on his white coat in huge letters. As Mamlock marches surrounded by the Nazi convoy, the camera moves in on his coat and his suffering face, and then pans over the "masses"—simple German people who look at the procession with disgust (in Soviet films, Germans are always repelled by fascism). A little boy recognizes his kindly professor and runs to hug him—this particular interaction poses Mamlock as a kindly children's doctor (in the play he is not), invoking an image of Doctor Aibolit, a Russian Dr. Dolittle, a favorite character of a famous children's book. But the naïve boy is pried away, as the Nazi photographer takes pictures of the degrading procession for the press (a reminder of Nazi mass propaganda). This is the pinnacle of

Figure 2.1 *Professor Mamlock*. Mamlock's arrest by storm troopers. Courtesy of the State Film Museum, Moscow.

Mamlock's humiliation, but he succeeds in turning the tables in the next scene, when he is urgently summoned to the hospital because a Nazi boss needs surgery. Jew or not, Mamlock is the best. The doctor hesitates for a moment as he decides whether to remove the defiled coat. He chooses to keep it on as a statement. This is how he shows up to perform surgery—and to shame the Nazis.

This entire sequence is not in the play: Mamlock does come home distraught, with a sign around his neck that says "Jew." But the entire march through the streets was prevented by one of the doctors, who stopped Hellpach in his tracks. By contrast, in the film this anti-Semitic persecution scene is not only fully developed but it is pushed to the extreme: with the cheerful young boy hugging the professor, the photographer who hurries to document the humiliation, and the old doctor returning to operate on a Nazi patient. Of course, looking at this scene from a distance of time, one cannot help but wonder about its prophetic nature, foreseeing in Mamlock's debasement Stalin's own campaign against "the murderers in the white coats." But that was later.

Back in September 1938, *Professor Mamlock* was released in Soviet theaters. After the party outlet *Pravda* pronounced it a big success, other laudatory reviews followed suit.[12] They reported that the film was a hit with audiences, too: the screenings were often interrupted with rounds of applause.[13] Indeed, the film was not only impressively acted but also beautifully shot. Tracking shots follow the movement of characters through austere hallways filmed in deep focus. Instead of a close-up, the mobile camera lets us decide what to pay attention to. Scenes that were shot through doorways and windows create double frames, which both accentuate the audience's involvement in the diegesis and invites voyeurism. This was unusual for a Soviet film of 1938. The artistic achievement of the film was undoubted, but one wonders whether *Professor Mamlock* struck such a chord with local audiences because, through criticizing German National Socialism, the film in fact condemned all kinds of totalitarianism, including its own homegrown variety. In the words of a later commentator: "The very atmosphere of the film—atmosphere of all-encompassing fear, surveillance, betrayal, and horror—combined in the minds of Soviet audiences with the realities of the Soviet life of their era."[14]

As if to illustrate this point, the filmmakers, like other German and Austrian exiles in the Soviet Union, were shadowed by the Soviet secret police. Herbert Rapoport was not given another chance to make a film about intelligentsia and state power, his subject of choice. But otherwise, he survived the treacherous times unharmed, and went on to become an accomplished Soviet director. Friedrich Wolf fared less well. The NKVD, Soviet secret police, reported that he "routinely conducted anti-Soviet conversations, expressed a desire to leave the USSR, and said that in our country there is no freedom, but only repressions." He was nearly deported, and only a Comintern intervention saved him from being delivered to the hands of the Gestapo.[15] In 1945, Wolf and his family

returned to Germany. One of his sons, Markus Wolf, became a spy and later a head of Stasi, the East German state security service. His other son, Konrad Wolf, after a stint as a Soviet *kulturofficer* in the newly liberated Germany, became a celebrated filmmaker and directed a remake of *Professor Mamlock* at DEFA, an East German film studio, in 1961.

As to the original Soviet *Mamlock*, in addition to its success at home, it was also shown abroad. One of the few Soviet films to have a wide release in the United States with the imprimatur of the Production Code Administration itself, *Professor Mamlock* was a genuine artistic hit. Not only did the sympathetic *Daily Worker* hail the film as "the most significant picture of the year" but the National Board of Review named it among the best foreign films of the year.[16]

Peat Bog Soldiers

When *Mamlock* was still in development, a young Soviet filmmaker, Aleksandr Macheret, ethnically Jewish, also wanted to make an antifascist movie. In 1936, Macheret penned a script, "Walter," about a young German's difficult journey from a Nazi sympathizer to an active fighter against fascism. Macheret drew his inspiration from a documentary novel, *The Trial* (*Die Prüfung*) by Willi Bredel, and from Wolfgang Langhoff's memoir, *Peat Bog Soldiers* (*Die Moorsoldaten*), about imprisonment in the Nazi concentration camps.[17] It was an important project for Macheret, but he was unhappy with the result: the exposition was long-winded, and the dialogue lacked precise characterization. He struggled and sulked, until one day he mustered his courage and called a famous writer, Yurii Olesha, whom he barely knew. Olesha met Macheret in the Café National, frequented by writers and filmmakers. There, sitting in front of large windows overlooking the Kremlin, interrupted by endless streams of friends and colleagues, Olesha edited Macheret's script.[18] Details fell into place, and Macheret now liked his script so much he had it published in a popular literary journal.[19]

The main character is Walter, a simple worker, not yet enlightened by class consciousness. Both he and his communist friend Paul are in love with Mari. The action starts when Walter finds himself in the middle of a pogrom on a Jewish pharmacy. He simply tries to calm everyone down: for him the storm troopers are just "the guys." But in a scuffle, he is mistaken for a communist named Shultz and taken by "the guys" to a concentration camp. A Jewish pharmacist is arrested along with him. In the camp, Walter and the pharmacist meet other inmates, a student Franz and a hobo Klaus. Over time, and under the influence of heroic communists, Paul (who commits suicide rather than to become a traitor) and the real Shultz (who was briefly in the camp under an assumed identity), the motley prisoners develop a class consciousness and proletarian solidarity. They are transformed: a timid old Jewish pharmacist refuses to follow Nazi orders and dies a hero. Franz is executed, too. Inspired by his friends' steadfastness, Walter becomes a communist. And even the unprincipled alcoholic Klaus rises to the

occasion and helps Walter escape, risking his own life. At the end, Walter is free again. He joins Shultz in the communist underground, where he is reunited with Mari. The end.

With the script published in a popular (and obviously, closely scrutinized) journal, and with Olesha's name as a first author, the future of the film seemed bright. Indeed, *Walter* (the film was retitled *Peat Bog Soldiers* much later) was launched into production at Mosfilm—a central studio in the country. At first, there seemed no reason to expect trouble. By December 1937, the filming was complete, and the materials were presented to the studio and to the apparatchiks at the Film Industry Administration, the main filmmaking governing body.[20] However, what was fine on the pages of the journal did not pass the film censors. They found fault with what appears at first sight to be a perfectly formulaic socialist-realist script. It was problematic that the communist character, Paul, dies (and by suicide, no less), whereas a Nazi sympathizer, Walter, not only goes on living after an escape from the camp, but also turns out to be a good guy, and, even worse, gets the girl! Perhaps more important, the actor who played Walter, Ivan Koval-Samborsky, was arrested in 1938. He could no longer be cast in a lead role, and certainly not as a positive character. Also, the workers' movement had to be given more screen time.

For the next eight months, Macheret lived through a filmmaker's worst nightmare: he kept revising the script and refilming scenes of the already finished film.[21] Since the goal of the exercise was to satisfy ideological demands, the dramaturgy was discarded. As a result of these incessant—and ruthless—revisions, communist Paul (Oleg Zhakov, Rolf in *Mamlock*) became the main character of the film. He is the one who escapes from the camp, joins the underground, and gets the girl. Moreover, the film now ends with an extended scene of a strike at the factory, which Paul helps organize. The workers see through the lies of the Nazi propagandists, and raise their fists in in unity (again, it is entirely not clear who supported Hitler). If this was not enough, relatively normal dialogue in the camps was substituted with excruciatingly boring debates between communists and social democrats. Walter, meanwhile, was recast as a traitor, and the film pretty much lost interest in him early on.

Accidentally, as a result of these revisions, the character of an old Jewish pharmacist received more development, and became a true hero. Played by Mezhinskii, the same actor who played Mamlock, he is a very different character. First, his demeanor and body language become identifiably Jewish, or more precisely, Jewish according to Russian stereotypes. He is scared and defenseless in the scene of a pogrom; in the camp he is weak and emasculated: he looks out of place in a trench with a shovel, he cannot see without his glasses, he is a target of Nazi taunting and insults, and out of all the prisoners, only he has around his neck a sign, that says "I am a Jew, a communist's friend, and a dog." And yet, despite his frailty, he is a compassionate humanist: exhausted, and on the brink

Figure 2.2 *Peat Bog Soldiers*. A Jewish pharmacist in a concentration camp. Courtesy of Mosfilm Cinema Concern.

of collapse, he nevertheless helps young Franz, who is falling short of his work quota. The old Jew is not just a pharmacist—he is a healer. In the barracks he is shown to care for wounded comrades. All this lets the film historian Miron Chernenko read the old Jewish pharmacist as "a conscience of the community, who helps everyone. . . . He is a kindly rabbi, and not a German one, but somewhere from the Russian Pale of Settlement."[22]

But the pharmacist's highest point comes in the scene of Paul's escape: as a Nazi guard aims his gun to shoot Paul, the old Jew raises his shovel and hits the guard on the head. Then he takes the Nazi's gun and follows Paul, also attempting to escape. Franz is with him. The Nazis run after them, shooting. Franz is killed first, but Paul and the pharmacist keep running. The old man is clearly excited by his own daring. Finally, he is wounded, but undefeated. He dies in Paul's arms, with the words, "How pleasant it is to fight!" (echoing, unwittingly, the famous Zionist dictum by Yosef Trumpeldor, another Russian-Jewish hero).[23]

Peat Bog Soldiers was probably the very first film ever to depict a Jew in a Nazi camp, and one of the first films about concentration camps as such.[24] Although the sets were designed on the basis of photographs from Dachau, this is a far cry from our image of a Nazi camp.[25] The camp in *Peat Bog Soldiers* presents a picture of forced labor and drudgery: numerous men with spades digging trenches under seemingly endless rain. (The cinematographer explained that

they filmed the camp scenes only when it was raining or overcast. If it wasn't dark enough, the crew stretched tulle above the sets to block the light.)[26] Rather than iconic striped suits with Jewish stars or other classifying signs, the men wear simple grey uniforms with no signs on their jackets.[27] This is still a labor camp, exactly like camps at home. Indeed, today, these images conjure images of Stalin's work camps more than the Nazi ones. Luckily, the censors did not notice the parallel—or maybe were wise enough not to bring it up.

Finally, after several rounds of revisions, the film was deemed presentable—and a group of film professionals gathered at the Film Center (*Dom Kino*) in Moscow for a screening and a discussion. Conclusions were mixed. Everyone agreed that this is not the best film that could have resulted from a collaboration of such talents as Olesha and Macheret. But equally, everyone agreed that the authors should not be held responsible. Author and scriptwriter, Oleg Leonidov (nee Shimanskii), was the first to bring it up: "I can only regret that we had to watch this concoction that was forced on Macheret: he was left with a concentration camp, but no dramaturgy. He was able only to use the means that were left to him."[28] Yulii Raizman, a famous filmmaker, ethnically Jewish, openly blamed the authorities for forcing revisions on Macheret. "The film is extraordinarily mutilated," he concluded.[29] Grigorii Roshal, also a Jewish filmmaker, who was working at the time on his own antifascist film, *The Oppenheim Family*, was also sympathetic to the trials of the authors: "I heard that Macheret suffered greatly from all these revisions of the film. And the artists [who worked with him], who had to change everything, also took it badly." "Films should not be revised like that," he concludes.[30] Mikhail Romm, at that time a young filmmaker (also Jewish), whose work and advocacy we will encounter many times in this book, clearly identified with the authors of the film: "We are faced here with a tragedy of two great artists, Olesha and Macheret. . . . What we saw on the screen are just patches over what was there before."[31]

But it is through the words of Macheret himself that the extent of the violence done to his film (and to him) is perceived: "I am in great pain when I see this picture. . . . I will tell you again, not today, not tomorrow, not ever, neither this production, nor anything else should be revised like that!" It is also clear from his words that he was frightened, especially as he pointed out his "political trembling" experienced during the work on the film. He went on to distance himself from the "political mistakes" in his script (he was not even sure how they got there), concluding emphatically, "Comrades, I am no saboteur!"[32]

Of course, by 1938, "saboteur" (*vreditel'*) was perhaps one of the scariest words in the Russian vocabulary. A saboteur meant an "enemy of the people," one who did not belong in a happy Soviet community. Macheret needed to tread lightly. Nearly every day, various members of the filmmaking community were dismissed, arrested, or executed. The great Sergei Eisenstein had just survived the ordeal with *Bezhin Meadow*, which nearly cost him a career.

Boris Shumiatskii, a former film tsar, was demoted and sentenced to death. If Eisenstein could be disgraced and Shumiatskii executed, what about everyone else? Macheret could have easily found himself in the very same camps that he portrayed in his film—the Soviet, not the German ones.

But his kind colleagues Leonidov, Raizman, Roshal, and Romm not only sympathized with his ordeal but found something positive even in the violated film. They praised Macheret's work in several scenes, especially the scene of escape from the camp, and the acting in the film, especially by Zhakov and Mezhinskii. Roshal made an insightful comment about Mezhinskii's pharmacist, pointing out that this is a role that extends and develops his work started in his role as Mamlock.

The review in *Pravda* was not as kind. In those times, film releases were preceded by official reviews, clearly charting a party line. *Professor Mamlock*, as the reviewer correctly argued, set the bar of expectation for new antifascist films pretty high. *Peat Bog Soldiers* fell short of meeting these expectations.[33] This conclusion is supported by a fairly accurate blow-by-blow story of the film's production, from the published screenplay to the "unsatisfactory first version," and the resulting revisions. As the reviewer explains, numerous revisions led to sloppy links between elements of the story, and "lowered the artistic persuasiveness of the film." Apparently, in 1938, there was no need to be shy about forcing changes on an already finished film (later, the reviewers would be more coy).

Peat Bog Soldiers was officially released to theaters in November 1938. After *Pravda* announced its verdict, the film had very limited press. Reviewers did not want to touch it. The only good piece of news about the film was its impact in the United States, where the film was screened under a title *Concentration Camp.* It's not that the US critics extolled it—although they did like it better than *Pravda* did.[34] The point was that the film unnerved Nazi sympathizers: a screening of the film in New York was reported in the Soviet press to have been interrupted by a tear gas bomb explosion in which several people were injured.[35] This terrorist act inadvertently paid a compliment to the film: someone was taking Soviet propaganda seriously.

After *Peat Bog Soldiers*, Macheret made only a few films. In 1948, he left filmmaking altogether. He spent most of his remaining career working as a film historian, an endeavor fraught with ideological mishaps. Even in this capacity, he stayed away from theory. Instead, he painstakingly collected data on every Soviet film ever made, essentially becoming an archivist preserving for history records that otherwise might have been lost.[36] One wonders if the trauma of revising *Peat Bog Soldiers* pushed him away from filmmaking and into safety of the archive.

The Oppenheim Family

Almost simultaneously with *Peat Bog Soldiers*, another film on the subject of Nazi anti-Semitism was released. *The Oppenheim Family* (*Sem'ia Oppengeim*)

directed by Grigorii Roshal at Mosfilm, was based on the famous novel by Lion Feuchtwanger. The Soviets had been interested in dramatizing it for some time; as early as 1936 they had commissioned the writer to turn it into a screenplay.[37] The Soviets courted the writer, trying to turn him into a friend of the Soviet Union. As evidenced by his book, *Moscow 1937*, they were successful.

Grigorii Roshal, a filmmaker charged with the important task of making the film, was not only ethnically Jewish; born in the Pale of Settlement, he had a traditional upbringing and Jewish religious education. One of his earliest formative memories is a survival of a horrific pogrom. Naturally, he was motivated to make an anti-Nazi film.[38] He had been interested in Jewish subjects previously, having made *His Excellency* (1927) and *A Man from the Shtetl* (1930), both set in a Jewish milieu. Roshal was close to GOSET, the State Yiddish Theater, loved its actor and artistic leader Solomon Mikhoels, and worked with Veniamin Zuskin and other Yiddish actors.[39] Roshal had also turned previously to the subject of German fascism in *Salamander*, a 1928 Soviet-German co-production about a scientist persecuted by reactionary forces. Neither of these films was a huge success, but still, by 1938 Roshal was an established and respected filmmaker. He often worked together with his sister, a dramaturge, Serafima Roshal, and his wife, a filmmaker, Vera Stroeva, which was the case with *The Oppenheim Family.*

Serafima Roshal wrote the script, in consultation with Feuchtwanger, who allegedly embraced all the changes to the complex plot of the novel required to dramatize it.[40] Originally written in 1933, Feuchtwanger's novel is an epic story of an enlightened German-Jewish family, three brothers and a sister, with their spouses and grown-up children, set during the Nazis' rise to power.[41] Roshals did away with one of the siblings (the intellectual Gustav) and focused on the rest of the Oppenheims, making adjustments to their characters: Edgar and his daughter Ruth, both doctors, Martin, a businessman, and his son, Berthold, a student. The Oppenheim sister is barely featured, but her husband, Jacques Levendel, a greedy and unprincipled capitalist, is there to contrast with the other Oppenheims. The main plot line is Berthold's ideological conflict with his new fascist teacher. When the conflict escalates and reaches an impasse, Berthold is cornered and commits suicide. Parallel events unfold in Edgar's hospital—he is kicked out of his own operating room as a Jew and thrown into a jail. The script also introduced new characters: Martin's driver, Pahinke, was developed to become a full-fledged character, a working-class mentor to Berthold. An important addition is Pahinke's communist comrade, Weller, whom Edgar meets in jail, and who serves as a role model for all positive characters in the movie—and for audiences. At the end, Berthold's parents leave Germany, as do Edgar and Ruth. Despite Berthold's suicide, the film ends on an optimistic note—an alliance of sorts is made between the intellectuals and the communists,

and the fight will continue. The bright message is conveyed visually in the scene of Edgar's and Ruth's escape from Germany through the Alps. The backdrop of sunlit mountain peaks stretching to the horizons metaphorically reveals a brighter future. But except for this scene, the rest of the film is shot in interior, enclosed spaces, mostly at night. It is dark outside, and usually raining, or at least overcast. The film looks like Soviet *noir*, with the characters shivering in their wet trench coats. The message: night is descending on Germany.

As a Soviet antifascist film targeting Nazi anti-Semitism, *The Oppenheim Family* had a lot in common with both *Professor Mamlock* and *Peat Bog Soldiers*. In all three, main characters are Jewish doctors or medical professionals. The scenes when storm troopers kicked Professor Mamlock and Edgar Oppenheim out of their clinics by are nearly identical. But of the three films, *The Oppenheim Family* offers the most nuanced representation of Jews. On the one hand, unlike the other two films, not all the Jews here are unabashedly positive characters and innocent victims. *The Oppenheim Family* features a character of Levendel—an opportunistic greedy moneybag, really an anti-Semite's dream. In the Soviet Union, it was important to Roshal to show the type of Jew who still served German capital: "I saw such men, and how they bare their teeth," the filmmaker said.[42]

On the other hand, *The Oppenheim Family* features the most Jewish character in all three films. This is Dr. Jacobi, played by the great Solomon Mikhoels, and he is even more Jewish than the old pharmacist. Familiar to Soviet audiences as hapless Menahem-Mendl in the silent film *Jewish Luck* (*Evreiskoe Schast'e*, 1925), but also as King Lear in a celebrated GOSET production, Mikhoels elevates Feuchtwanger's schlemiel character to a level of a tragedy. Unlike Mamlock and the Oppenheims, he has an obviously Jewish face and name. Not accidentally, he is the first to become a target of Nazi persecutions and abuses. Tragically, no one is able to help him.

Officially, the main theme in *The Oppenheim Family* is the destruction of German culture and cultural values. This was the takeaway from the screening and discussion of the film in the Moscow Film Center in 1938. The event went amazingly smoothly. Everyone present—fellow filmmakers, commissars, and a token worker ("a representative of the people")—loved the film and praised the directing, acting, cinematography, and other aspects of the production. Surprisingly, the film was classified as "a psychological drama"—although today we would not agree with that. Only an army representative saw the film for what it was—a propaganda document, "aimed to mobilize for the fight with fascism."[43] He was right.

The press followed in the footsteps of this enthusiastic reception. Both the party *Pravda* and the more literary *Literaturnaia Gazeta* lavished praise on the film, particularly cheering it for its timeliness in light of the pogroms sweeping

Figure 2.3 *The Oppenheim Family*. Storm troopers attack Dr. Jacobi. Courtesy of Mosfilm Cinema Concern.

over Germany.[44] Like *Mamlock* and *Peat Bog Soldiers, The Oppenheim Family* was shown in the United States. Unlike the Soviet critics, the Americans were unimpressed with the film, whose production values they found sub-par by Hollywood standards. But they did appreciate the progressive message of the film.[45]

As seen from the distance of time, these three films tell us not only about the Nazi Germany where they are set but also about Soviet Russia, where they were made. As Evgenii Margolit notes, "the most important thing in these films is not what they are talking about, but what accidentally slips in: the picture of the fascist regime in Germany reflects the realities of Stalin's regime in the prewar years."[46] On screens we see long food lines, arrests and disappearances, slave labor in camps, and other injustices—chief among them, anti-Semitism. All these realities are externalized, shown as existing outside the borders of the Soviet Union (in the same way as later films will externalize the Holocaust). The trope of anti-Semitism is recruited only to show the racism of the Nazis. However, there is no doubt that their plots taking place in Germany were fueled by Jewish anxiety at home. These early antifascist films already have some distinctive features of Holocaust representation in the USSR. Most important, they externalize anti-Jewish violence and, wittingly or unwittingly, draw parallels between Stalin and Hitler's regimes.

Similarly, Jews in these films are sanitized—not unlike the filmmakers themselves, they are Jews in name only, with only minimal Jewish characteristics (unless we count as Jewish their medical profession, education, humanism, and glasses). And yet, despite this externalization and representation of "non-Jewish Jews," the ugly grimace of local anti-Semitism slips through in moments of "translation," such as Hellpach's mocking of the Yiddish accent.

Paradoxically, these three works, like other Soviet antifascist films, create an image of Germany where there is no place for actual fascism.[47] As Thomas Doherty notes, "The party line valorization of the German working class makes the Nazis seem more like an invading army than an expression of popular will. . . . Just where did all those marchers at the Nuremberg rallies come from?"[48] In these and other antifascist Soviet films, German people, especially the working class, appeared to be victims of Nazism, not its perpetrators. In this way, even the Nazi ideology itself is externalized.

Consequently, in all these films, the real heroes are not Jews but communists, and the real conflict is not between Jews and Nazis, but rather between communists and Nazis. The more progressive Jewish characters join communists at factories and in the underground (like Rolf in *Mamlock*) or in prisons and camps (like Edgar in *The Oppenheim Family* or the pharmacist in *Peat Bog Soldiers*). There, characters not only convert to communism but are also enlightened and spiritually nurtured. Political underground, camps, and jails in these films function as a kind of ideological spa—a political retreat for the lost (Jewish) souls. In hindsight, this is not only odd but also an outright sinister interpretation of what real underground, camps, and jails would bring about in just a few short years.

Finally, all these antifascist films, as well as the cycle of Soviet military utopia films, called "defense" movies, were entirely wrong in their assessment of the situation.[49] Just as the "defense" films painted a sure and easy victory in the upcoming war with Germany, the three films offered an optimistic outlook on the future: fascism will be defeated, the working class will rise, and the intelligentsia will join it. Anti-Semitism will be extinguished along with Nazism and capitalism.

As wrong as these predictions were, the three films played an enormously important role in educating Soviet Jews. After the Molotov-Ribentropp pact was signed in August 1939, and Stalin raised a toast in the Kremlin for Hitler's health, the Soviet policy toward Nazi Germany underwent a complete about-face. All Soviet antifascist movies were taken off screens, including *Professor Mamlock, Peat Bog Soldiers*, and *The Oppenheim Family.*[50] But in the short time span between their releases and the Molotov-Ribentropp pact, these films clearly showed how Nazis persecuted Jews. Even after the movies were taken off screen, the message stuck. Immediately after Hitler's invasion of the USSR, when the Soviets did not rush to publicize the news about pogroms and executions of Jews in

the occupied territory, at least some Jews remembered the lessons they had learned from the Mamlocks and Oppenheims: Nazis are not going have any mercy on them.

Several memoirists and interviewees recall that their families owe their lives to these 1938 films.[51] On the basis of these films, they knew not to trust Soviet propaganda, not to trust their neighbors who remembered Germans in World War I as "civilized people," but rather they knew to escape. Those who did, survived. Those who stayed behind did not. If for no other reason, these three mediocre movies deserve to be remembered.

3 The First Phantom

I WILL LIVE! (1942)

A few weeks after the June 1941 German invasion of the Soviet Union, several prominent Soviet Jewish cultural figures initiated a rally intended to rouse Jewish international support for the Soviet war against fascism. The rally, which took place on August 24, was attended by thousands, broadcast on radio nationally and internationally, reported in major Soviet newspapers, and widely circulated as a newsreel.[1] Solomon Mikhoels, Peretz Markish, Ilya Ehrenburg, David Bergelson, and other Soviet Jews of international renown called for Jewish unity the world over. In April 1942, following the success of the initial rally, the Soviets approved the creation of a Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee (JAFC), designed to appeal to the international Jewish community for material aid in the Soviet war effort. The JAFC cause was embraced by the Western public, where various Jewish organizations started fundraising for the Red Army. Over the course of the war JAFC raised 45 million dollars in foreign aid.[2]

Domestically, JAFC also spearheaded several important initiatives, galvanizing Soviet Jews for the war effort and helping them understand and memorialize their experience. In addition to rallies and meetings, JAFC published the Yiddish-language newspaper *Eynikayt*, sponsored radio broadcasts in Yiddish, and in the postwar era compiled *The Black Book*, a collection memorializing the Holocaust on Soviet soil.[3] What is mostly unknown is the fact that the JAFC had also planned to develop a number of films about the Jewish experience in World War II.

In fact, I would not have known to look into JAFC files at the archives were it not for Ilya Altman, director of the Holocaust Center in Moscow, a historian and an activist of Holocaust education in Russia. Back in 2009, when I first told Altman about my research, he recalled seeing a screenplay by David Bergelson in the JAFC files. The next morning, I was at the GARF—the Russian State Archive where the JAFC archive is held. Atman's tip paid off immediately. There in the founding document of the JAFC, among its "general goals and immediate tasks," two paragraphs detail its plans:

11. to negotiate with film organizations in the USSR and abroad about making of a number of movies representing fascist violence against the Jewish population and also the struggle of the Jewish masses against fascism.

12. to commission from Jewish writers screenplays about a struggle of Jewish masses against fascism and about participation of Jews in the Patriotic War.[4]

This statement is dated February 5, 1942, before the JAFC was established. This means that at a very early date Soviet Jewish cultural leaders understood the importance of cinema for its messages.

This is not the only document mentioning such plans. The same goals—to commission screenplays and to make films—appear repeatedly, for instance in a memo by Shakhno Epstein, a secretary of JAFC, dated May 28, 1942.[5]

Another (unfortunately undated) document lists more specific plans: "(1) to peruse Bergelson's screenplay intended for Kiev Children's Film Studio about Jews—heroes in the Red Army and in the partisan movement, about anti-Semitism, and friendship between the peoples of the USSR."[6] This screenplay was *I Will Live!* (*Kh'vel Lebn* in Yiddish and *Budu Zhit'* in Russian). How did the Yiddish writer David Bergelson come to write a screenplay that could have become the first ever film about the Holocaust?

Bergelson: From Jewish Modernism to Jewish Socialist Realism

By 1941 David (Dovid) Bergelson was the most famous Soviet Yiddish writer. He personally experienced Nazi anti-Semitism during his sojourn in Berlin (1921–1934), and his choice to come back to the Soviet Union was motivated, among other reasons, by Hitler's rise to power.[7] Throughout the war period, Bergelson's journalistic writings for the JAFC newspaper *Eynikayt* presented a picture of Jewish loss—*khurbm*—but also of Jewish pride, vengeance, and heroism. For his Yiddish readers, Bergelson "made this Great Patriotic Soviet war Jewish."[8] In 1942–1944 he also authored a play, *Prince Reuveni*, which is set in medieval Europe but can be read as a call for Jewish political action in response to the Holocaust.[9] At the end of the war, Bergelson wrote a remarkable cycle of stories about Holocaust survivors and their trauma.[10] Significantly, Bergelson was one of the chief creators of a Jewish narrative of the war in the Soviet Union.[11] This position was expressed early, in Bergelson's speech at the 1941 rally: "Hitler's plan to annihilate peoples, first and foremost the Jewish people, is as simple and cruel as the plan of a cannibal. . . . Can it be that this people will give up and perish? A people which, over the course of thousands of years suffered unheard of humiliations, bloodshed, and slaughter at the hands of its enemies, but which never ceased to affirm with all its voice: I will not perish. I want to live, and I will live! [*Lo omus ki ekhye*]."[12] The Hebrew phrase Bergelson cites in his speech (and which he would use to title his screenplay) comes from Psalm 118, part of the traditional *Hallel* service, praising God's power. Already in this speech, as in later writings including *I Will Live!*, Bergelson "specifically deployed Biblical discourse to render the war between Soviets and Germans as a divine war against the adversaries of God's people."[13] But he also walks a thin line between universal and particular, between Soviet and Jewish

stories of the war. Here, as always, "Bergelson tried at one and the same time to be a loyal subject of the new Soviet Union and a good Jewish writer, according to a model that he himself was continuously developing and revising."[14]

Among the works by Bergelson, lauded as one of the great Yiddish modernists, *I Will Live!* does not stand out as a remarkable literary achievement. To the extent that it is known, it is mentioned only in passing by Bergelson scholars as a play.[15] According to Bergelson's biographer Joseph Sherman, Bergelson first wrote *I Will Live!* as a play in late 1941.[16] If this is the case, he turned it into a screenplay sometime in early 1942, following the JAFC plans to make films. However, the text of the play shows much more literary development and more sophisticated dialogue, and it seems more likely that Bergelson wrote the screenplay first, and then, once it became clear that it would not be made into a film, revised it for the stage. This probably took place in late 1942, since around that same time he published an excerpt from a play *I Will Live!* in *Eynikayt*.[17]

If indeed *I Will Live!* was originally intended to be a film (not a play), then it would have had much greater significance. As a title page of the screenplay testifies, it was intended to be made at the Kiev Film Studio, a major Soviet studio. Unlike a play addressing only Yiddish-speaking theatergoers, the Russian-language film was envisioned for the broadest possible mainstream audience.[18] Thus Bergelson's work is a valuable historical document, demonstrating one of the earliest fictional representations of the Holocaust on Soviet soil.

Lev Bergelson, the writer's son, recalls that David Bergelson loved movies, and both in Moscow and in evacuation in Tashkent there were filmmakers in his social circle. But he does not recall Bergelson's interest in writing film scripts.[19] *I Will Live!* is thus Bergelson's first attempt to write for film, motivated probably, as was his JAFC work and his writing for *Eynikayt*, by his desire to galvanize support for the war effort.[20]

Although the screenplay is similar to the play in terms of major plot lines, Bergelson seems to be excited about the visual opportunities that film offers. The opening scene is already cinematic: a bird's-eye view of the village from the vantage point of two pilots, Jewish Misha and Ukranian Pavlo, flying over their homeland on the way to a military assignment.[21] In contrast, the play opened with a scene at the recruitment office.

The war is already raging, but in the village it is business as usual, or even better than usual: in recognition of its remarkable agricultural achievement, Stalin himself sends a congratulatory telegram. The entire population—Jews, Ukrainians, and Russians—are celebrating this milestone. Motley characters are intended to demonstrate friendship between all Soviet peoples, and even internationalist solidarity. Among the residents is Professor Kronblit, a German Jew, who escaped Hitler and fled to the USSR. He is an agricultural researcher, and a keeper of a notebook with priceless experimental data. Other residents include old Avrom-Ber, father of the Red Army commander Benzion Levit, and of the

beautiful Frida, "a girl who read Lenin." There is big-mouthed Khaya, whose son Misha, or Moyshele, as Frida calls him, is a military pilot fighting side by side with Pavlo, whose father is an agronomist at the agricultural station. There is also Borukh, a goofball turned partisan, who was adopted by Ukrainian Nastia after his revolutionary Jewish parents perished in the Russian Civil War.

A key character, expressing the tension between Soviet and Jew (Bergelson's enduring theme) is Avrom-Ber, an Old/New Jew who jokes that he is either 2,000 or 24 years old. As a new Soviet man, Avrom-Ber wants to volunteer for the front, along with other villagers. On the other hand, when he learns that his son Benzion was killed in the war, he mourns him in a traditional Jewish ritual—sitting *shiva*, and tearing his clothes. Benzion died a Soviet death on the battlefield, but his father's grieving renders it Jewish.

Bergelson consistently works to create a link between the Jewish past and the Soviet present. For instance, he gives a proud Hebrew name, Benzion Levit, to a Red Army commander. In this way, Bergelson's efforts run parallel to contemporaneous Zionist rhetoric. As historian Yael Zerubavel explains, the Zionist approach to time emphasized a link between the heroic Jewish past in antiquity and the current rebuilding of Jewish life in the *yishuv* in Palestine.[22] Like early Zionists, Bergelson reached for the heroic past to create models for Jewish heroism in the present.

Another character who serves as a kind of Bergelson mouthpiece is Professor Kronblit, a German Jew. Like Bergelson himself, Kronblit had personal experience with the Nazis, and like Bergelson, he wants to impart his understanding to the locals.[23] As the Germans are nearing, agronomists want to destroy the experimental crops and transfer the valuable notebook to Soviet authorities for safekeeping. Kronblit does not think it will help: "To destroy—then let's destroy everything, along with the notebook, tear it apart, burn it! They will destroy everything anyhow—the station, the plants, and the people. I know them! I personally experienced their all-destroying bloodthirstiness and rage! They spread destruction all over! No one is able to stop them." He continues bitterly: "I feel the death coming. . . . My fate is determined, like that of so many German Jews. . . . I will kill myself!" Bergelson counteracts this defeatist position (which, of course, had no place in Soviet art) with the voice of Avrom-Ber, a voice of millennia-old Jewish wisdom:

> What about us—how do you leave me, my daughter, my grandson? We are Jews too! . . . How can a Jewish Professor Kronblit leave other Jews, his entire people, who resisted all the persecutions and all the initiations through fire and smoke, people who were slaughtered and who went from land to land, and in each new country found old laws! And no one killed themselves! Despite all the miseries, Jews didn't stop believing into itself, and always repeated, *"Lo omis!"* [*sic*]—I will not die—*"Ki echje!"* [*sic*]—I will live!

This is the first time that the powerful call, a biblical Hebrew phrase, echoing Bergelson's rally speech, appears in the screenplay. The fact that Bergelson gives Avrom-Ber his own words signals his identification with the character.[24] Even more important, this entire monologue works to fuse a connection between the larger context of Jewish history and the current war. For Bergelson, this is a typical conception of Jewish time. As Jeffrey Veidlinger notes: "Jewish time is cyclical and circular. . . . The historical details are interchangeable, but the patterns and underlying meaning are consistent and eternal."[25] Seen this way, Nazi Germany is just another iteration of the cycle of historic persecutions against Jews.

As Germans enter the village, new characters are introduced. There is Major Brendeke and Frau Günter (with her ferocious Alsatian), and their interpreter Nezabudko. The three of them are portrayed as sadists: Frau Günter, whose task is to recruit local women for sexual services to German soldiers, brags that her dog ravaged a baby. This portrayal is consistent with the discourse of Nazi bestiality in other Bergelson's war writings.[26]

Through the character of Nezabudko, the screenplay introduces the subject of local collaboration with the Nazis—a touchy issue in Russia even today. Nezabudko, who hails from the village, helps the Germans, but he is not quite local. In a wise move, Bergelson makes this originally local man an emigrant, placing him among the most despised character types in Soviet lore. Nezabudko indeed tells of his misadventures abroad. While his former compatriots were making scientific discoveries at the agricultural lab, he was busy entertaining guests in emigrant restaurants by playing the balalaika. He sold out first when he emigrated from his motherland, then he sold out again to the Nazis. Making Nezabudko a return emigrant allows Bergelson to represent local collaboration with the Nazis without compromising the "friendship of Soviet peoples." (Never mind that he was a return emigrant himself.)

Curiously, the Nazis are not seeking Jews, but rather Kronblit's notebook and its precious agricultural data. Brendeke demands the notebook, but obviously neither Kronblit nor others disclose its location. The Nazi anti-Jewish sentiment is only evident in Brendeke's treatment of Avrom-Ber, whom the Nazi Major taunts as a "stinking Jew" and "an old Maccabee," and who is severely beaten. But even when Brendeke threatens to execute the old man, he promises to hang him along with Ukrainians and to put up a placard with the words, "Here hangs a Soviet friendship of peoples!" In fact, the person whom Brendeke executes is not a Jew but rather a communist, an agronomist named Galina. She is married to a Jew (she is Benzion's widow) and the mother of their son Yashka—who witnesses Galina's execution. Still, her Jewish family is of no interest to the Nazis.

When Jews in the village are rounded up and stood in a long line (one of the few images directly signaling the Holocaust to audiences today), and one in every three is threatened with execution, it is in retaliation for a partisan's

shooting and not for simply being Jewish. And even this execution is prevented by Kronblit's heroic actions.

All in all, *I Will Live!* is an expression of Bergelson's ambivalence. His screenplay vacillates between the Jewish and Soviet stories of the war. By the time Bergelson wrote the screenplay, he was fully aware of the Nazi massacres of Jews. In 1942, he published a series of articles on mass Jewish loss.[27] But in the screenplay he emphasizes the Soviet version of the war, which insists that the Nazis are first and foremost targeting communists. Bergelson seems willing to play by Soviet rules and interpret the German invasion as a war against the Soviet state and its achievements. *I Will Live!* is a work of socialist realism, but with a Jewish twist.

Along with a Soviet story, Bergelson is also telling a Jewish story of the war, especially through Avrom-Ber. When the old man is forced to dig a grave for his daughter-in-law, he quietly sings to himself the Lamentations of the Prophet Jeremiah, a text traditionally recited on Tisha B'Av, a fast day commemorating the destruction of the First and Second Temples.[28] Avrom-Ber responds to the Nazi taunting by referencing Jewish tradition: "I am thinking about . . . one man, Rabbi Akiva, who let his skin be torn from his body with an iron scraper, but he didn't betray." Relying again on the notion of circular Jewish time, in Avrom-Ber's next phrase, Bergelson connects Jewish martyrdom with Soviet heroism: "I am thinking about my son who died for his motherland fighting against you, fascists." In a later scene, Avrom-Ber proudly announces to Brendeke, "I am a Jew, a Soviet Jew—with the best qualities of my people." The old Jew practically conducts a verbal duel with the Nazi—and he is winning, on moral grounds. Bergelson understood what a far cry this was from the brutal reality of Einzatsgruppen actions on Soviet territories, but his goal was to tell a story of heroism and vengeance.

Even with these compromises, some haunting details in the screenplay still echo the real horrors of the Holocaust. When Yashka (Galina's young son), devastated by his mother's execution, escapes to the fields, he meets an old blind Jew, who is the most symbolic and the least socialist-realist figure in the screenplay. This old Jew, whose eyes were taken out after his entire family and community were murdered in front of him, is simultaneously a witness and a victim. Beyond that, he has no name, no social or professional identity, no anchors of time and place. He is a Wandering Jew. This blind witness is a powerful symbol of Jewish suffering.

Another haunting scene takes place when Avrom-Ber and two Jewish tailors, old Reb Yoines and Fishl Brodsky, are sewing yellow stars onto clothes. The rest of the Jews are waiting outside for their clothes to be ready. The tailors keep their spirits afloat with references to the larger context of Jewish history: "Not a big deal! In the same way they thought to scare our forefathers—to turn them away from being Jews, but what is the use of that?" The tailors manage to support each other until Fishl recognizes his son's jacket in one of the pieces.

Crestfallen, Fishl wonders whether he has strength to go on. But Reb Yoines cheers him up even then: "Go on, sew it on! Even patriarch Abraham had to tie up his child for sacrifice with his own hands." Reb Yoines and Avrom-Ber then have a theological argument about Jewish fate, invoking the story of Job—and foreseeing the insights of post-Holocaust Jewish thought.[29] These Jewish biblical and historical references, which are all but unthinkable in a Soviet film script, place Jewish suffering in a much wider context and emphasize again the circular nature of Jewish time.

At some point, even the seemingly upbeat Reb Yoines admits that all he can do is prepare for his death. He is wearing a burial shroud beneath his clothes. In essence, he is a living dead. This is one of the earliest instances when the motif of a "living dead" is employed to represent the Holocaust. Yellow stars and piles of Jewish clothes, also featured in this scene, appear as powerful signifiers of the Holocaust. Later such images will become symbolic and even clichéd, but Bergelson uses them for the first time. These "Jewish" scenes are the strongest scenes in the screenplay, and the only ones that still convey the voice and vision of Bergelson, the great modernist writer. Perhaps, like his nameless character, he is a witness, blinded by grief in the face of the enormity of the loss.

But other parts of the script read as if Bergelson is not acknowledging the loss. Toward the end of the screenplay, the entire village, Jews and non-Jews, join the anti-Nazi resistance. As Pavlo and Misha-Moyshele are repairing their plane that crashed near the village, old Nastia brings them food and news: Borukh became a sniper and joined the partisan unit, and Yashka, along with the blind Jew, are gone in search of a Red Army unit. Even Frida, who is in German captivity, is able to cooperate with outside forces to fool the Germans into being easy targets. She tricks the Germans into entering the school building to set them up for an explosion. As a result, many Germans are killed, as the combined forces of the Red Army and partisans liberate the village.

In the last scene, Frida carries the body of Yashka, who was killed by the Nazis. She uses his small corpse as evidence of Nazi bestiality and as a call for revenge (which is also Bergelson's agenda). She says, "No, not to bury, not to hide it in the ground, but to show to the entire world, here, see what they have done. . . . Destroy them! Destroy!" Frida becomes a final mouthpiece for Bergelson's own call for revenge and retribution.

In the concluding scene, a Red Army commander interrogates a Nazi officer in the presence of the other villagers, foreshadowing the future trials to come. Avrom-Ber has the last word, repeating again Bergelson's own words:

> Since I am a Jew, you've tortured me just for your pleasure, twice as much. I don't want to torture you; I will not enjoy it a single bit. I only want to find out one thing—you are wild beasts, and anyone who is still hoping for your mercy is mad. But still, tell me, where is your mercy to your own German people? We,

> my people, the Jews, we were bad-mouthed for a long time now, they blabber about some secretly spilled innocent blood—all lies and slander! But to this day my people still can't wash it off! And what would become of you, when in every country that your boot stepped in, it is difficult to find even one mother whose child you haven't slaughtered, whose house you haven't defiled? You went to plunder and pillage the entire world, don't you have any fear for the future of your own German people? You planned to destroy everything but yourself; you hoped first and foremost to extinguish me, the Jew, and my people! And now, listen up to what I will tell you on behalf of all people—and on behalf of my Jewish people—*Lo Omus Ki Echje!* No, I will not die! I will live!

This monologue is remarkable for several reasons: it makes clear that Bergelson, like his character, recognizes the special role of Jews in World War II. As in other places, here too Bergelson places Nazi persecution in a broader historic context of other persecutions and libels against Jewish people. He also raises the question of historical responsibility of Germany, even though he is writing this in 1942, with the war still raging and the extermination of Jews is still ongoing.

Bergelson concludes his screenplay with the Hebrew *Lo omus ki echje!* citing both the psalm and his own speech at the antifascist rally. Needless to say, Hebrew was not an obvious choice of language in a Soviet movie circa 1942.[30] Here, Hebrew—not just a national language like Yiddish but also a biblical language—is put in a positive context, and these vital words belong to one of the most important and positive characters in the screenplay.[31] Bergelson was fully aware that Russian-speaking audiences would be unlikely to identify the language as Hebrew, which indicates that he probably had Jewish audiences in mind. For this audience, Hebrew would evoke feelings of national pride and rootedness in the long history of the Jewish people. Given the time in which this screenplay was created, and the culture of the wider Soviet audience, Bergelson's choice of Hebrew for these final words was bold.

But, of course, the subject itself was even bolder. After the German invasion, the Soviet film industry had been shifting gears to make films for mobilizing the war effort. In 1941–1942, fiction films were mainly *boevye kinosborniki* ("combat film-anthology"), quickly made propaganda shorts, exposing the cruelty of the Nazis, and lauding the exceptional heroism and resourcefulness of Soviets and other brotherly East Europeans in combat and at the home front.[32] In that sense, *I Will Live!* would fit right in. However, none of these shorts showed extermination of Jews or even Nazi anti-Semitic policies. The only such propaganda short that might be seen as hinting at the persecution of Jews is *A Priceless Head* (*Bestsennaia Golova*, 1942, dir. Boris Barnet), set in an occupied Polish town. Remarkably, the film features a secondary character, an old nameless Jew in a Hasidic garb (competently played by renowned Yiddish

actor Moisei Goldblat). A camera clearly shows his armband with a Jewish star, and he says that as a Jew his movement around the city is restricted. But this is the only sign of his special status: he is not confined to a ghetto, and is not treated by Nazis differently from other Poles. He is captured not because he is Jewish, but because he was helping the resistance. Although by 1942 Nazi violence against Jews was well known, the film barely hinted at it. This was consistent with the treatment of the subjects of anti-Semitism and anti-Jewish persecution in the Soviet wartime newsreels, documentaries, and fiction films which universalized the Jewish loss or avoided it altogether.[33] Still, even this indirect reference in *A Priceless Head* was remarkable: other films that attempted hinting at the Nazi anti-Semitism at the time were terminated, like *The Murderers Leave for the Road* (*Ubiitsy Vykhodiat na Dorogu*, 1942, dirs. Vsevolod Pudovkin and Yurii Tarych), or banned from release, like *Young Fritz* (*Iunyi Frits*, 1943, dir. Grigorii Kozintsev).

I Will Live! could, then, have become the first-ever representation of the Holocaust on Soviet soil in fiction film. Of course, the way it represented Jews and anti-Jewish violence differs significantly from what we have come to expect from a "Holocaust film." Unlike those in Western films, the Jews in *I Will Live!* are not typical victims—passive, unable to resist, and saved from their sure death only by the intervention of a powerful outside agent. They are active and resourceful heroes, whether they are young fighters like Misha-Moyshele or old tailors like Avrom-Ber. Even the nameless blind Jew, an ultimate victim, has agency and contributes toward the victory. The women are no less heroic, most notably Frida. But Aunt Khaya, with her big mouth, seemingly introduced for comic relief, is also a hero. All of them are both Jewish and Soviet heroes. Paying a tribute to the dictum of internationalism, all of these Jewish characters are fighting hand in hand with their Ukrainian and Russian comrades in a "brotherhood of nations." This depiction is an important feature of the Soviet war narrative in general. As the JAFC memos show, this representation was intentional, and was initiated "from the inside" (by a Jewish institution, the JAFC itself), and realized by Jewish cultural producers. As one of them, Bergelson here takes part in creating and sustaining the universalizing Soviet narrative of the war. But in universalizing the Jewish fate, Bergelson and other writers "maximize the exemplary role of Soviet Jews as the personification of Soviet ideals."[34] Here the Soviet and Jewish identities cross and blur.

Such portrayal of Jews is deeply ambivalent. On one hand, it reflects a Soviet tradition of representing the war through heroism and internationalism. But in many ways—in its emphasis on Jewish characters, Jewish religious and historical references, and Jewish loss—the screenplay contradicts the Soviet denial of the special role of Jews as targets of Nazi violence, and consequently, their special motivation as military and partisan fighters.

The Other Phantoms

I Will Live! is the only complete screenplay in the JAFC files, but other screenplays were left in various states of development. The same document that details a plan to peruse Bergelson's screenplay continues with further plans to commission screenplays from other authors:

1. by Markish about the struggle of the Jewish masses against fascism
2. by Halkin about Jews in the Patriotic War
3. by Kushner [in another version of the same document—Kushnirov] about friendship of peoples in the USSR during the struggle with the fascist invaders.[35]

Importantly, other authors mentioned in the same memo also worked on plays about the Jewish fate during World War II. JAFC files reveal plays with telling titles: *Ghettograd, Warsaw Ghetto Speaking, Jews-Partisans*, and *Ghetto Uprising.*[36] Archives of GOSET, the Yiddish State Theater, offer an even greater number of plays about the Holocaust, only a few of them actually staged.[37] It is likely that the playwrights would have transformed their plays into screenplays, given a chance.

Moreoever, *I Will Live!* was not the only screenplay to have been completed. Another great Soviet Yiddish writer, poet, and JAFC member, Lev (Lieb) Kvitko, also wrote a screenplay about the Holocaust, of which no record at all survived. Kvitko's entire personal archive was confiscated (and probably destroyed) when he was arrested in 1949. But Nikolai Khardzhiev, a Soviet writer and critic, remembers working with Kvitko on the screenplay. He met Kvitko in late 1941 in Alma-Ata, which at that point was a filmmaking center. Kvitko was invited to work for the Screenplay Studio (Scenarnaia studiia), and Khardzhiev was appointed as his editor. Khardzhiev recalls:

> I barely remember the plot of the antifascist screenplay by Lev Moiseevich [Kvitko]—a German massacre of the Jewish population in an occupied town. But I do remember two plotlines: the main one—the *pogrom*, and parallel to it—a kind of Sisyphus torture that the Germans came up with. An old man, who has lost his legs, is told to climb up the stairs to the fifth floor, and then to climb down. And do this until the end—the end of his life. This parallel action was repeated again and again to create an illusion of a length of time. The screenplay was written, but the film was never made. It seems to me that V. Stroeva was supposed to direct it.[38]

Khardzhiev does not mention why the film was never made. For him, the reason was obvious. It was the same reason Bergelson's screenplay was not made into a movie: changing Soviet policies toward anti-Jewish violence prevented it. If in 1941–1942, Soviet policy allowed for "national expression" (telling a particular

Jewish story of the war), by 1943–1944 the climate required a more universal perspective.

Although we do not have records about censorship of Bergelson's screenplay, looking at the archival history of the play is instructive: in early 1943, an initial censor's review praises *I Will Live!* and recommends it to *all* theaters, albeit with several omissions of text. These omissions are predictable—anything to do with biblical references, anti-Semitism, or any parallels with Jewish history. The resolution of GURK, an institution that approved theater plays for production, was "to permit for production at GOSET." And there is an explanation in longhand by a senior official: "I consider it possible to permit this play only on an individual basis to Jewish theaters. In this case—GOSET."[39] Clearly, the play was deemed too Jewish for general audiences.[40] And this was the difference between film and theater. A play could be produced for a small niche audience, whereas film, especially in the Stalinist Soviet Union, was a mass medium with universal appeal. Therefore, at a time when plays about the Jewish fate during the war were still produced, and when *Eynikayt* was still published in Yiddish, Russian-language film was already out of the question. Beginning in 1943, plans to produce films on Jewish topics disappear even from JAFC documents.

In this new climate, "Soviet Jews were themselves drawn into the process of universalizing the Holocaust, in film, photography, and print in both Russian and Yiddish."[41] Indeed, starting in 1944, there was a new priority for JAFC—"to ensure placement of materials on general Soviet topics in the foreign Jewish press." That was because "exposure of the multifaceted Soviet life through the prism of Jewish topics . . . can lead to narrowly nationalistic distortions, which impede demonstration of the Stalinist friendship of peoples."[42] The same ideas were expressed in JAFC documents from 1945.[43] In this new climate, JAFC understood that films about Jewish victims and heroes were no longer possible.

The last time the JAFC discussed film was in 1944, in a very different context. During a meeting of the JAFC literary committee, Ilya Ehrenburg shared his impressions after viewing *None Shall Escape* (dir. André de Toth, 1944), one of the earliest Hollywood films about Nazi war crime trials and about violence against Jews. Ehrenburg reported that although he personally did not like the film, the main crime of the Nazi Reichskanzler in Poland, represented on screen as execution of Jews, "is shot expressively and quite frighteningly."[44] This one brief report effectively put an end to discussions of film at the JAFC.

In just a few short years, all the JAFC projects, chief among them *The Black Book*, would be banned. The JAFC itself would be disbanded, most of its members arrested, and many executed after an unjust trial. Instead of being made into a film, *I Will Live!* would become a phantom—a dusty folder lost in the vast archives of JAFC confiscated documents.

4 How a Soviet Novel Turned into a Jewish Film

THE FIRST DEPICTION OF THE HOLOCAUST ON SOVIET SCREENS, *THE UNVANQUISHED* (1945)

In October 1945, *The Unvanquished* (*Nepokorennye*) premiered in Moscow theaters. This was a noteworthy event for several reasons. Nazi crimes against Jews were at the core of the film. One of the central characters was a Jewish doctor played by the great Yiddish actor Veniamin Zuskin. A key scene in the film was mass execution of Jews by a German firing squad (this scene was filmed on location, in Babi Yar, a place that came to symbolize the Holocaust in the Soviet Union). Remarkably, this film, representing a Nazi massacre of Jews in the Soviet Union, was released in 1945, embraced by Soviet critics, and even sent to represent the USSR at the 1946 Film Festival in Venice.[1] According to the critic Miron Chernenko, *The Unvanquished* was the first film to depict the Holocaust on Soviet screens, and one of the first such films worldwide.[2]

This story contradicts everything we assume about Soviet treatment of the Holocaust: that the Holocaust was silenced and its Jewish victims were subsumed among the universal war suffering. In fact, if we look closely at the film itself, and at the history of its production and reception, we will see deep Soviet ambivalence about the Holocaust and profound confusion about Holocaust representation—characteristic of the time in which the film was made. This history captures the moment of indeterminacy of the Soviet discourse about the Holocaust. *The Unvanquished* gives us an insight into this discourse as it was being formed.

How a Soviet Novel Turned into a Jewish Film

In 1943, *Pravda* serialized Boris Gorbatov's novel *The Unvanquished*, about the fate of a Ukrainian family during the war.[3] The action takes place in an occupied Ukrainian town, where Taras lives with his extended family—his wife, his young daughter, and two daughters-in-law with children. His older son, Stepan, fights in the Red Army, and a younger son, Andrei, in the partisan movement. The novel was published when the war was still raging, but ends on a happy note, with the town's liberation. Among other minor characters, there is an old Jewish man—a lonely doctor, who used to treat Taras's children and grandchildren. In

the novel, he appears only twice: first, when Taras runs into him in the street, and second, when the doctor, along with other Jews, is marched to his death. Another Jewish character mentioned in passing is a little girl, whom various people hide in their houses until the Nazis capture and presumably kill her.

The novel, surprisingly readable for 1943 *Pravda*, was a big hit, and soon after its publication the great Soviet director Mark Donskoi turned it into a film. Donskoi (1901–1981) was a complex and contradictory figure. He came from a modest background—a son to a poor Jewish family from Odessa—but he became the quintessential Soviet image maker. Donskoi's trilogy of films in the 1930s that adapted Maxim Gorky's autobiography with the blessing of the venerated writer earned him the highest Soviet marks of achievement: recognition of the Soviet establishment and Stalin Prizes. Yet, throughout his career, he played a village idiot, possibly as a survival strategy. His pranks, outbursts, and foul language earned him a reputation as a loose cannon, and protected him from the regime. Indeed, Donskoi weathered the anti-cosmopolitan campaign relatively well: he was exiled to a Kiev studio, where he continued making films. Characteristically for his time, Donskoi had uneasy relations with his Jewish roots. He was neither part of the Soviet Yiddish cultural establishment nor did he identify publicly with Jewish people or make Jewish films. And yet his son reminisces that in his private life Donskoi identified as a Jew, especially through his social circle, which was predominantly Jewish. He was fluent in Yiddish, and kept in his library books by Mendele Mocher-Sforim and Sholem Aleichem.[4] At least in private conversations, he supported the idea of immigration of Soviet Jews to the newly founded Israel.[5] In short, Donskoi was Soviet in public and Jewish in private.

During the war, Donskoi, like the rest of the cultural elite, was evacuated to Central Asia, where he first worked on propaganda shorts, *Boevye Kinosborniki*, and where he later made one of the most impressive Soviet war films, *Rainbow* (*Raduga*, 1943).[6] This rousing story of a Ukrainian partisan woman won him not only the Stalin Prize but also recognition by American critics, and it was allegedly understood by Franklin Roosevelt without translation.[7] Neither his propaganda short nor even *Rainbow*, which was set in occupied Ukraine, mentions Jews. *The Unvanquished*, which Donskoi directed next, was a considerable departure from that position.

For 1945 Soviet Union, the film is redolent with Jewish references. It stands out not only in Donskoi's oeuvre but also among all Soviet wartime films. Once the Soviet propaganda machine geared into action, it was remarkably efficient. During the war, about seventy feature films were made, the majority dealing with the war effort: by Red Army fighters, by partisans, or by workers at the home front.[8] As the fighting continued, the war was increasingly presented as a Russian rather than a Soviet war. Few token representatives of other titular nations were depicted along with heroic Russians, and only to reassert the idea of the friendship among all Soviet people.[9] Jews, however, were not among

Figure 4.1 *The Unvanquished*. A production still: Mark Donskoi is in the center. Courtesy of the State Film Museum, Moscow.

them. Jews appeared on Soviet wartime screens only as soldiers, and even then their representation was limited to either marginal characters (as in the melodrama *Wait for Me*) or characters whose Jewishness was only implied (as in a combat comedy, *Two Fighters*).[10] Jews as victims of Nazis had no place on Soviet screens. As Jeremy Hicks comments, "Soviet films are most eloquent about the exceptional fate of Soviet Jews in their silences, in what they do not show and do not say."[11]

The Unvanquished reversed this trend. It was the only Soviet film that represented Jews as victims of Nazi violence. This was a conscious choice: writing about the film shortly after its completion, Donskoi keeps emphasizing its Jewish characters, especially Dr. Fishman, whose story is intertwined with Taras's family story.[12] Donskoi's son recalls that the director was aware that he was making the first film about what would later be called the Holocaust. This was personally important to Donskoi.[13]

Indeed, together with Gorbatov, Donskoi turned the Jewish doctor into a central character. The novel opens with a scene of mass escape from town; in contrast, the film starts with a closeup of Dr. Fishman. As he treats Taras's sick granddaughter, there is the sound of bombing in the background. Dr. Fishman cuts a sympathetic, even endearing, figure. He is portrayed as a member of the intelligentsia—a balding professor, with a beard and white hair, in a suit and a tie. He speaks polite, hyper-correct Russian, in a voice that remains calm even

Figure 4.2 *The Unvanquished*. Dr. Fishman and his young patient. Courtesy of the State Film Museum, Moscow.

at the most dramatic moments. He endures suffering stoically. He doesn't lose his sense of humor—attending to his little patient under the whistling missiles, he playfully recites with her a children's poem about kind Doctor Aibolit (the beloved Russian Doctor Dolittle character). Fishman is Doctor Aibolit himself.

When the doctor leaves Taras's house, the tracking shot follows his lonely figure walking away into the devastated landscape, balancing precariously on the piles of rubble, and disappearing into the smoke. This shot visually echoes the end of the famous Soviet-Yiddish film *Jewish Luck* (1925), when Menachem-Mendel (Solomon Mikhoels) walks away into a distance. This shot hints that, like Menachem-Mendel, Dr. Fishman is a wandering Jew.

After this initial interaction, Taras and Dr. Fishman meet twice more. Each encounter with the doctor constitutes an important step in the transformation and growth of Taras's character. The first such meeting takes place at a street market, where Taras runs into Dr. Fishman, who is offering his meager possessions for sale. Tracing Taras's gaze, the camera zooms in on a Jewish star on the doctor's sleeve. Next to the doctor is his granddaughter—a sad and serious child with big eyes who is clutching a doll to her chest. They both are silent and motionless among the hustle and bustle of the marketplace. The doctor points to the girl: "This is my granddaughter—the most precious of what I have left." Importantly, in the novel, the doctor had no family or relations. In the film, the doctor has a granddaughter, and his line "what I have left" hints at the prior loss of his family. Perhaps he, like Taras, was once a father and grandfather to a larger clan.

As the Germans raid the market, panic ensues, and people run away, among them the doctor. In the next shot, he is hiding in an entryway—looking disheveled, but still clutching his granddaughter and her doll to his body. When Taras finds them, he invites the doctor to his house. Fishman declines, but gives his granddaughter to Taras. The little Jewish girl is adopted by Taras's family, and from that moment on Taras takes the place of her Jewish grandfather.

The most important encounter—and a central scene of the film—occurs when Taras and his factory comrades are burying a friend shot by the Germans for refusal to cooperate. The funeral encounters a wretched procession of Jews with motley luggage, marched by a German convoy with dogs and guns. As the processions draw near, Taras recognizes the doctor among the walking, approaches him, and bows. "Is this to me?" wonders the doctor. "To you and to your suffering," replies Taras (serving probably as a director's mouthpiece). "Thank you, Human Being," says the doctor, echoing Maxim Gorky's glorifying use of the word *chelovek* (human being) so familiar to Soviet audiences. The scene ends when to a klezmer-like melody the procession resumes.

In the novel, Taras had a similar conversation with the doctor during their chance encounter in the street. But Donskoi gave this conversation much more gravitas by having it take place on the doctor's way to death. Donskoi's script also added a reference to Gorky (whose work preoccupied Donskoi throughout his life), envisioning Jewish suffering as the universal human tragedy.

The fact that the procession of Jews is not shown on its own, but rather in the context of a funeral of a resistant Soviet worker, also universalizes the scene. Jewish suffering here is part of the larger Soviet loss and pain. Still, universalized or not, this is the first time that a procession of Jews being led to their deaths (which would become a staple of Holocaust imagery) appears on screen. It is also the first time that the funeral motif is used in this context. In later films, the parallel would be more direct: in the famous scene in *Commissar* (1967/1987), when Jews led to their deaths are carrying a coffin, their procession is literally their own funeral.

In the novel, the mass execution is depicted in a single sentence: "The Jews were shot somewhere outside of the town." In the film, the execution is depicted graphically and emphatically. Although, as Jeremy Hicks notes, the scene does not represent an execution with historical accuracy, it nevertheless pays an important tribute to the death of millions of Jews killed near or around their hometowns in the Soviet Union.[14] Moreover, if in the novel, and in earlier versions of the script, the town is named Kamennyi Brod, in later versions the town is left unnamed. So that even though the scene is filmed in Babi Yar—the most symbolic Holocaust site in the Soviet Union—it can be read as representing any massacre of Jews in any—and hence every—town. This scene is undoubtedly the center of gravity in the film.

Representing mass killing on screen for the first time must have been a challenge for a filmmaker—there were few models to rely on. Donskoi chooses to draw on images of massacres in the classic films by Sergei Eisenstein. In addition to the remarkable synchronization of music and on-screen action characteristic of Eisenstein,[15] the first shots of the scene, when the camera closes in on children, women, and old men huddled in the ravine, is reminiscent of the similar shots in a scene of the Pskov massacre in *Alexander Nevsky* (1938). In another tribute to Eisenstein, the scene when a line of Nazis with machine guns advance toward the Jewish crowd is reminiscent of a similar scene with the Cossacks in *Battleship Potemkin* (*Bronenosets Potemkin*, 1925).[16] It is significant that Sergei Eisenstein, the most influential filmmaker of his time, relied on pogrom imagery when depicting violence in his films. The pogroms of 1905 made an indelible impression on him, as reflected by scenes of mass violence in *Battleship Potemkin* (which originally had a pogrom scene, later edited out), *Strike* (*Stachka*, 1924), and *Alexander Nevsky*.[17] These powerful scenes, drawing on pogrom imagery, influenced the representation of violence in other films, including *The Unvanquished*. The fact that Eisenstein's scenes that drew on pogrom imagery in their turn shaped the representation of the Holocaust in later films means that these images had come full circle.

But if in *Alexander Nevsky* the Germans are killing Russian people, in *The Unvanquished* the victims are typecast to look Jewish. Among others, a bearded old man who looks like a biblical patriarch clutches to himself a young boy with curly hair, about to be murdered (Donskoi cast his own son Alexander in this role).[18] This shot is intercut with a close-up of Dr. Fishman concentrating on his silent *davenning* (praying), rocking his head slightly, as the Nazis cry out orders in the background. When the shooting starts, the camera intercuts between a clouded sky and the scene of a massacre, and the music grows to a crescendo. Then the camera pans over the Nazi bosses who are calmly watching the execution, and then over the ravine, full of white smoke. The Nazi soldiers walk amid piles of corpses visible in the foreground, shooting accidental survivors. These final shots of the scene reproduce the famous Nazi photographs taken after the Babi Yar massacre. Donskoi knew how this massacre was carried out both from these photographs and from his interviews with witnesses and survivors in the newly liberated Kiev.[19] Yet he deliberately sacrificed historical accuracy for cinematic impact.

The scene ends with a shot of a lone dead tree with a scarf caught in its branch. Although the symbolism of the image is universal, it has a particular Jewish resonance. On the stage of GOSET, this image was used as a symbol of Judaism. It appeared first in *Wandering Stars* (1941). Later, in *Tumultuous Forest* (1947), a scarf became a scrap of *tallit* (Jewish prayer shawl).[20] A similar image, a Jewish ritual garment called *tallit katan* (*taleskoten* in Yiddish) was depicted as

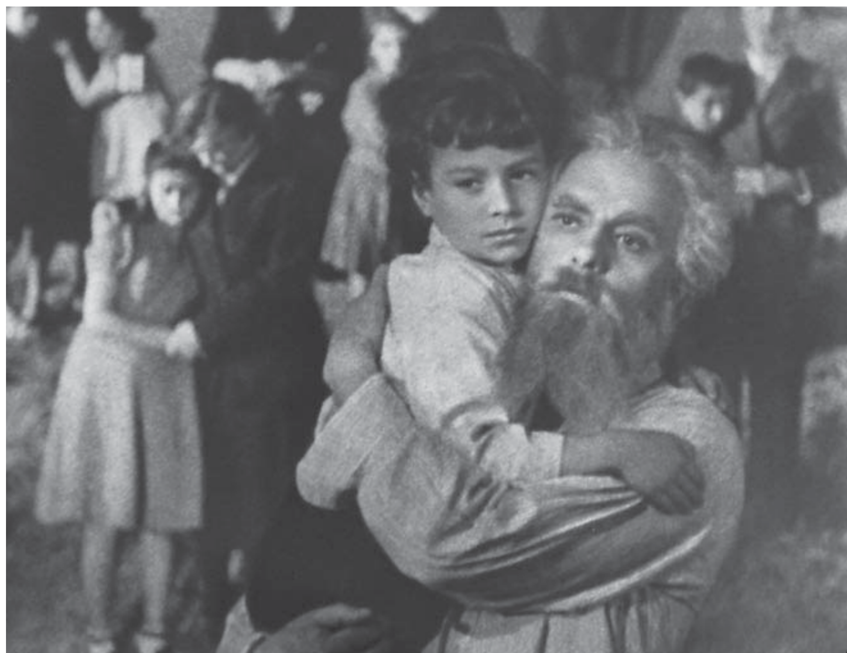

Figure 4.3 *The Unvanquished*. An execution in Babi Yar. Donskoi's son is cast as a young boy. Courtesy of the State Film Museum, Moscow.

blowing in the wind on a concentration camp fence in the painting by Zinovii Tolkachev, *Taleskoten*, made in 1944 during the liberation of the Majdanek Extermination Camp.[21]

The execution is an end of Dr. Fishman's life, but it is not the end of the Jewish people in the film. His granddaughter was saved by Taras. On screen, the girl is happily playing along with Taras's grandchildren, even though she must be hidden in a trunk during a Nazi raid. Eventually, the Nazis find her, still sleeping peacefully in her trunk, clutching the doll to her chest. Her execution is prevented only by an undercover partisan posing as a *politzai* (a Nazi policeman), who whisks her away to safety. Again, this entire subplot has been added by Donskoi. In the novel, an anonymous girl is hidden collectively—every night she is passed on to another family. It is only by chance that she is captured in Taras's house; he is not solely responsible for her. Moreover, in the novel, the girl is probably killed. But for Donskoi it was important that the girl live on. With her doll, she is a little Madonna—a reference to a powerful Christian religious symbol and a promise of the future of the Jewish people. The Madonna-like figure is not uncommon in Donskoi's films. In a key scene in *Rainbow*, a woman protagonist is depicted similarly. She is persecuted and tortured, led under convoy

holding a child in her hands, in the same way in which the little Jewish girl in *The Unvanquished* holds her doll. However, in *The Unvanquished*, the Christian symbolism appears in the Jewish context, side by side with Jewish symbolism, something that we shall see on Soviet screens again and again.

Despite such parallels, Jews and non-Jews are represented in the film with striking differences. In contrast to Taras's sons and comrades, who actively resist the Nazis, Jews passively walk toward their deaths. Taras and his sons are men of action—grounded in their household (in the scenes at Taras's house), in physical labor (in the scenes at a factory), and in their cultural capital (not only does Taras's grandchild keep reading Gogol's *Taras Bulba*, but Taras and his sons are named after the main characters in the novel). And yet, it is Taras, a simple and strong man, a character so clearly inspired by Gogol, who proves the most sympathetic to a weak Jew, Dr. Fishman.

Dr. Fishman is homeless on screen, always with his bag and his cane, unprotected, in need of shelter, a learned but powerless man. In the patriarchal universe of Stalinist film, the power belongs to men, and the women are to be shushed or saved. In that context, it is significant that in *The Unvanquished*, Jews, as represented by an old man and a little girl, are emasculated. *The Unvanquished* is not unique in that regard. According to Judith Doneson and Annette Insdorf, many Western Holocaust films portray Jews as either feminized or as children, in order to express weakness and victimization.[22] But this particular portrayal in *The Unvanquished* creates a dichotomous story of the Great Patriotic War, when all victimhood is relegated to the Jews, and all heroism to the non-Jewish Soviet people (be they Ukrainians, Russians, or other titular nationalities). Obviously, there are no collaborators or traitors among these heroes. Even Taras's son, Andrei, who was captured by the Germans (a sign of weakness in Stalin's universe), escapes and restores his good name by fighting in a partisan unit.

And yet, not all is that simple. Once Jews are gone, others take their place—at least that's what Donskoi's visual language is suggesting. Instead of the wandering Jew—a doctor with his bag—Taras takes to the road. Importantly, in the novel, Taras needs to leave in order to find food, and his epic journey, including his encounters with people from all walks of life, is narratively justified. In the film, it is not entirely clear why he embarks on the journey. Taras says he is going to search for "the unravaged land" (*nerazorennaia zemlia*), an expression which calls to mind "promised land" (*obetovannaia zemlia*), an obvious Jewish reference. His lonely figure trekking through various landscapes is reproduced multiple times, to show the length of his journey. On his way, Taras is joined by an increasing number of other wanderers, until they walk in a procession not dissimilar to a procession of Jews we have seen before. Their identities are muffled, Taras is indistinguishable from others, and it seems that the whole country, depicted by Donskoi as a vast landscape, is homeless. Now the whole people turn into wandering Jews. Their makeshift camps set up amid the devastated

landscape create striking anti-utopian images, especially in contrast to the interior cozy setting of Taras's house. All these changes to the novel—development of the Jewish characters' subplot, addition of the execution scene, and a reconceptualization of Taras's journey—had far-reaching consequences for the film's professional (read censorial) reception.

Professional Reception: Ambivalent Censors

On June 21, 1945, the film was discussed at the meeting of the Artistic Council of the Film Committee. The Artistic Council was at the time a new organ, established in 1944 in order to inspect screenplays and films "to elevate the quality of films" and ensure that films are "wholesome aesthetically and of the highest ideological content."[23] But in reality, the council's mandate was censorship.

The head of the committee, Ivan Bolshakov (the Soviet film tsar), chaired the June meeting. Among the members were such figureheads of Soviet culture as Konstantin Simonov, Ivan Pyr´ev, Sergei Gerasimov, Mikhail Romm, Igor Savchenko, Sergei Eisenstein, Nikolai Okhlopkov, Boris Babochkin, and Dmitrii Shostakovich.[24] Gorbatov and Donskoi were also present. The discussion was far from smooth. *The Unvanquished* dealt at once with two taboo Soviet topics: Jews and prisoners of war, both excluded from "the big family" of the Soviet people.[25] However, it is the Jewish subject that loomed large in the discussion at the meeting.

The important historical context for the film's reception was established by Simonov, a Soviet cult poet and a scriptwriter of the popular wartime melodrama *Wait for Me*, in his introductory remarks: "I went to see it with a certain trepidation. . . . I was afraid to be biased because now one doesn't want to see and read about horrors of the war, and about frightening and difficult wartimes."[26] This is an understandable sentiment, given that the committee saw the film just a month after the victorious end of the war, a time of euphoria and hope. Despite his reservations, Simonov identified *The Unvanquished* as a "historical picture," and talked about its importance for the collective memory of war crimes. He then shared this recollection:

> Once, in the streets of Prague, I saw the Czechs herding a large number of Germans through town. And they were treating them poorly. . . . At first, I felt this sympathy for Germans, and I stopped the car and wanted to do something. . . . But we shouldn't forget what happened in this war. And when I saw this film, the scenes where they march the Jews—I recalled that moment in Prague, and I thought that yes, I did the right thing by first stopping the car, and then by driving on. Let them drag the Germans however they want!

Simonov continued, "We have to keep reminding [ourselves] about this dark history."[27] From the outset Simonov placed the Jewish tragedy and its memory

at the center of the discussion. The debate that followed explicitly dealt with a larger question of the representation of the Holocaust on Soviet screens.

Indeed, the film proved divisive mainly because of its treatment of the Jewish topic: the main controversy was about the execution scene, which some committee members interpreted as privileging the Jewish tragedy above overall Soviet losses. The second point of contention, much more subtly connected to Jewish topics, emerged in the discussion of Taras's character. The committee split over the two issues: Romm and Simonov headed the faction that advocated for the film; Okhlopkov and Babochkin led the opposition. How could cultural officials be anything but confused about how to represent the Holocaust if, indeed, they were dealing with the first cinematic depiction of the mass killings? There were no ready models, and, more important, no clear party line on the matter.

In his remarks, Babochkin (most famous for his lead role in the Soviet cult movie *Chapaev*) argued that *The Unvanquished* was a failure, and among its main problems he listed the execution scene. Paradoxically, Babochkin first admitted that it is a powerful scene, but then completely denounced it: "I am convinced that this scene is unacceptable, because it does not have any elements of art. This is a monstrousness of *guignol* which cannot leave one indifferent, but it is not art. I believe we don't have the right to show to our audiences scenes like that." He continued, "the audiences will not accept this picture." The writer and the professional military cadre, Major-General M. R. Galaktionov, supported Babochkin:

> Comrade Babochkin pointed to the execution scene. The thing is that if this scene is presented then it needs to be done 100%. . . . But here, it is presented "halfway." If it was presented realistically, if it showed how people run in horror, how children cry, women wail, how wounded writhe with pain and so on—then it would have been deeper, more convincing. And one more thing: if it showed some sort of resistance. . . . But here people stand calmly, timidly, and wait for their lot—to be shot. . . . This exactly conveys stereotypical ideas about the Jewish people, who submissively accept their fate.

It might appear that Galaktionov is interested in seeing more realistic representation of the massacre, but in the end he comes to the same conclusion as Babochkin: "This scene of execution should be portrayed better, perhaps just leading up to it but not showing the actual shooting. . . . This scene here is a 100% failure, and since it is so, it should be taken out completely."[28] This reaction, once again, shows a profound confusion about the scene—how can the Jewish massacre be represented? The discussants err on the side of caution: since there is no clear model, it is safer to simply take the scene out.

Film director Savchenko was silent at the meeting, but he wrote a review of *The Unvanquished*, potentially in preparation for its discussion by the Artistic Council. Ironically, Savchenko was one of the forefathers of the Soviet "ethnic"

film and a teacher of such directors as Sergei Parajanov. Still, Savchenko raises similar concerns in his unpublished review: "The facts of the physical extermination of several million Jews are so frightening, so inhumane, and so incomprehensible to a normal person, that this subject shouldn't be discussed superficially. Either it needs to become the subject of a separate picture, or it shouldn't be mentioned at all." Savchenko is equally incensed at the portrayal of Jews as "a submissive suffering herd," which according to him entirely misrepresents active and heroic Soviet Jews. He goes as far as calling the film an "undeserved insult to Jewish people."[29] The execution scene was a problem for him and others because it portrayed the murder of innocent people outside the trope of Soviet-style heroism.

The critics all felt great discomfort about the portrayal of Jewish suffering because, with keen political intuition, they grasped it was counterproductive both to the optimistic postwar Zeitgeist and to the emerging party line. As we have seen, by 1945 Soviet policies regarding the events of the Holocaust already favored silencing, through universalization and externalization.[30] Discussion of the Holocaust in the media, if any, was focused on resistance, not suffering.[31] The scene of an execution of Jews in Soviet territory did not sit well with this trend. And yet, none of these policies was formulated clearly. Discourse on the war and its victims had not yet ossified. In light of these circumstances, it is not surprising that the committee members were conflicted over Donskoi's treatment of Jewish suffering.

The camp of the film's advocates was represented most prominently by Mikhail Romm. (This was neither the first nor the last time Romm would act as an advocate of Jewish cultural producers or films dealing with Jewish subjects).[32] He first called such criticism of the film "undue" and "unjust," then presented his own argument: "I don't agree with Babochkin that the execution scene should not be shown. . . . If during these years 3.5 million Jews in Europe were exterminated and we haven't yet said a word about it, haven't represented it in our films, and if in this picture a mass execution is shown in one scene, I am convinced that this scene needs to stay there." He continued his advocacy: "Despite some shortcomings, this is a necessary film, it has to be released, and people both here and abroad will see this picture."[33] Notably, Romm cited an incorrect number of Jewish victims. Even though the number six million had already been mentioned by Ilya Ehrenburg in 1944, it was not widely circulated in the USSR before 1955, following repeated publication of the Nuremberg Trial documents.[34] Romm also externalized the Holocaust. He talked about an execution of Jews "in Europe," eliding the fact that a great many executions took place on Soviet soil. And yet, Romm made a strong case for a need to represent Jewish suffering and leave the execution scene in.

The execution scene was not the only hurdle. Other committee members criticized the film for its overall development of the Jewish plotline as compared

to the novel. Pyr´ev, a film director who in 1943 made a speech about "a lack of true Russianness in our cinema,"[35] was particularly upset about the great emphasis on the doctor's character, which, he added, "clearly, is done on purpose." To that, Donskoi shouted from his place: "Yes!" Pyr´ev went on, "Comrade Romm here mentioned 3.5 million Jews who perished. It's true. And it is true that this film needed to be made. But when all the peoples of our Motherland are concerned, all of them . . . then why separate [Jews] in contrast to the novel?"[36] Pyr´ev advocated for a particularly Soviet approach: the mass murder of Jews should not be placed into its own category, but should be part of universal Soviet suffering. Indeed, universalization was exactly the party line regarding the Holocaust for years to come. Pyr´ev's words capture a moment when this approach was being formulated.

Another debate focused on the character of Taras. In the film, Taras is an ethnic Ukrainian, but the discussion about his character still revolved around Jews and Jewish representation. The topic was introduced by actor and director Okhlopkov, when he criticized Amvrosii Buchma's performance as Taras, interpreting it as overly emotional. Okhlopkov called Taras "a Spaniard in Africa" with "burning eyes." According to him, Buchma's Taras is "a kind of African, and everything about him is breathing fire." Okhlopkov was not alone in this particular criticism. The choir director V. G. Zakharov complained that Taras is "wild and passionate." Film director Gerasimov noted the character's "African passions." Yes, Buchma's Taras has an expressive face and body language, but why such over-the-top imagery? Okhlopkov's own words provide an answer:

> I saw this once—a car is driving on the road, and is unable to pass two shtetl Jews who are walking right in front of it—with their hands [blocking the road] on the right and [blocking the road] on the left—they are talking. Jews have that kind of body language. I also use gestures, but for Ukrainians it is atypical. They don't use this kind of body language. . . . Ukrainians are in general very calm people; when it is necessary they can heat up, but to burn all the time like Taras—they don't do it. Here he looks like an African, or some sort of Spaniard.[37]

In fact, Okhlopkov doesn't like Taras's body language because it reminds him of shtetl Jews; here all these "Africans" and "Spaniards" are code words, indicating foreignness or otherness usually associated with Jews.[38] Okhlopkov's anxiety regarding Buchma's character did not come out of nowhere. Buchma, in fact, grew up in Galicia, was familiar with Jewish life, and was known for his brilliant performances of several Jewish roles in the earlier Soviet films *On the Eve* (1928, based on *Gambrinus*, by A. I. Kuprin), and *Five Brides* (1929).[39]

If Okhlopkov and others were critical of Taras's character because they saw him as a kind of Jew, then another point of contention can be explained too: nearly all the committee members, both advocates and opponents of the film, were critical of Taras's journey as "incomprehensible." As Okhlopkov correctly

pointed out, in the novel Taras has to take to the road to find food for his starving family. In the film, his journey is seemingly unmotivated. In his criticism of the scene, Gerasimov even called it "the biblical travels of Taras" railing against the "naïve symbolism" of the film.[40] Himself a closeted Jew throughout his career, Gerasimov was the only one who understood that Donskoi took away the perfectly reasonable and mundane justification for the journey in order to give it a symbolic dimension and to elevate it to the level of biblical parable. In the narrative logic of the film, Taras takes the place of a wandering Jew, an ambivalent symbol of persecution and perseverance.

The discussion of the film came to a stalemate, with one camp advocating for its release, and another voicing forceful opposition. A surprising remark by Eisenstein, who had remained quiet during the entire discussion, saved the day. When Okhlopkov suggests that not only the film be rejected but even the script be rewritten and the film made anew, Eisenstein quipped, "But it's only in bad dreams that there can be such a punishment!"[41] Everyone laughed, and somehow this resolved the conflict. Eisenstein's support is not surprising. His solidarity with the Jewish people was evident in his activity with the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee. Moreover, although Eisenstein was not Jewish, according to the widely circulated anecdote he admitted to being "a bit of a Yid" himself (*s prozhid'u*).[42]

After the laughter died out, Bolshakov, who had also been silent up to that moment, simply dismissed the suggestion to remake the film, and then recommended *The Unvanquished* for mass release, with minor revisions. It is hard to know for sure what led to such a dramatic turn, and to Bolshakov's approval. It is likely that Eisenstein's authority was much greater than Babochkin's and Okhlopkov's taken together—at the time, Eisenstein's star was still shining brightly (this was before the 1946 banning of the second part of his *Ivan the Terrible*). Whatever the explanation, Bolshakov aligned himself with the film's advocates, and his choice saved the film.

The meeting concluded with a resolution: "The novel's adaptation to film is paler than the original." The problem was that the authors "got carried away with the development of the secondary characters" (read: Jewish). Still, the resolution praised the mastery of the director in the scene identified as "an execution of peaceful residents" (a Soviet euphemism of choice for Jews). The text also lavished praise on Zuskin and Buchma for their performances as the doctor and Taras (who is described as "a complex character"). The ultimate resolution was to permit mass release.[43]

Critical Reception: Confused Critics

Released in October 1945, *The Unvanquished* was greeted warmly, with reviewers praising especially Zuskin and Buchma. The film's media reception, however

positive, nonetheless reflected the already familiar confusion and ambivalence over representations of the Holocaust. The Jewish topic proved to be most controversial. Controversy arose even over the way of addressing it: some reviewers mention Jews verbatim, others refer to them euphemistically.

Only one review (in *Sovetskoe Iskusstvo*) chose to avoid any Jewish references completely, without even mentioning Zuskin.[44] Not coincidentally, this was the most critical review of the film, pointing out its many shortcomings while giving only lukewarm praise. But most reviewers in one way or another dealt with the Jewish topic, at least indirectly, without using the word "Jew" explicitly. A review in *Moskovskii Bolshevik* described the scene of the last meeting between Taras and the doctor in great detail, noting that it "embodies a lofty idea of national equality and brotherly respect among Soviet people" in contrast to "fascist hatred and racist obscurantism."[45] This hinted at Nazi anti-Semitism without actually spelling it out.

Similarly, the major newspapers *Izvestiia, Vecherniaia Moskva*, and *Trud* praised the doctor's character as one of the most memorable and significant in the film, especially in comparison to the novel.[46] *Izvestiia* commended the powerful scene of mass execution. *Trud* mentioned Babi Yar and Trostianets (a place of mass executions of Jews near Minsk), but carefully called it "a place of mass execution of the populace." Thus, even though these reviews referred to the events of the Holocaust, the reviewers never mentioned anything Jewish directly. Their message might have been coded, but it was still clear. A review in the most authoritative newspaper, *Pravda*, echoed similar themes.[47] The reviewer praised Zuskin but was critical of the doctor's "submissiveness." *Pravda* also did not approve of the execution scene: "On screen, our people go to their death submissively, but from the real life experience we know that in such cases even the timid ones would rip bricks out of pavement and throw them at their murderers." Here the reviewer raised a much debated question about Jewish resistance (or lack thereof), and yet he completely evaded direct Jewish references.

Some reviews did bring up the Jewish topic, at least in passing. Discussing the doctor's character, *Moskovskii Komsomolets* pointed out that he was murdered only for being a Jew (the reviewer scolds his portrayal as "doomed"). *Krasnyi Flot* mentioned the Nazi persecution of the "little Jewish girl."[48]

But two reviewers, I. Sokolov (*Komsomolskaia Pravda*) and I. Kruti (*Literaturnaia Gazeta*), specifically focused on Jewish themes in the film. Sokolov discussed every instance in which the Jewish topic is treated in the film. He pointed out the yellow star on the doctor's sleeve, which marks him as a Jew. With great sympathy, he described both the scene of the little Jewish girl's capture, and Taras's last meeting with the doctor, again not shying away from the Jewish content.[49] Similarly, when Kruti praised the image of the two death processions coming toward one another, he described one of them as a "procession of Jews, herded

toward their execution at Babi Yar." Moreover, unlike some other reviewers, Kruti appreciated the doctor's character and saw in it an alternative model of courage: "V. Zuskin, with his customary precise and unobtrusive artistic mastery, creates an image of a great intellectual and moral power. He is not a victim, but a judge. This man goes toward his death unvanquished, as those who remain alive with weapons in their hands are unvanquished."[50]

This warm reception should have guaranteed the film's wide circulation and long run, especially during a time of cinematic paucity. However, *The Unvanquished* was out of sync with its time: it was made during the war, when death, martyrdom, and graphic depiction of atrocity were still de rigueur. But by the end of the war, and especially after the victory, Soviet films became more optimistic and more upbeat, embracing even the genre of musical comedy. The complicated subject matters of anti-Jewish violence, reintegration of prisoners of war, life under occupation, and, however underplayed, collaboration with the Nazis, were unwelcome.

After its widely publicized premieres, *The Unvanquished* did not stay in the theaters for long.[51] It did not persist at festivals, either. Even as the film was shown at the Venice Film Festival, its screening at the Mariánské Lázně International Film Festival was substituted at the last moment with a Stalinist tableau, *The Vow* (1946).[52] Two factors probably contributed to the gradual silencing of *The Unvanquished*. In 1947, Stalin abolished celebrations of Victory Day. He did not want to memorialize the war and the resulting losses. Any honest depiction of the war was effectively prohibited.[53] The second factor was a solidifying of Stalin's own anti-Semitic policies. In 1948, the typeset of *The Black Book*, a collection memorializing the Holocaust on Soviet soil, was dismantled. The same year, Jewish actor and public figure Solomon Mikhoels was murdered and soon his closest collaborator, Veniamin Zuskin, was arrested. Anything Jewish was rapidly becoming suspicious. It was at this time that *The Unvanquished* disappeared from screens entirely.

Even then, it was not completely scratched from Soviet film history. In 1948, Bolshakov (who had served as chair of the council meeting) published a brochure: *Soviet Cinematic Art during the Years of the Great Fatherland War.* He dedicated a generous two pages to *The Unvanquished*, praising mainly its portrayal of heroism and resistance of the Soviet people in "proletarian Donbass." Zuskin is never mentioned, although, amazingly, Bolshakov praises such scenes as "the execution of peaceful citizens, the raid at the market, and the journey in search of bread" as "well made by the director and actors."[54] Like most newspaper reviewers, Bolshakov here talks about the Jewish scenes in the film without ever identifying them as such. Even in the 1950 edition of the same brochure (reissued mainly to add a few jabs at "rootless cosmopolitans"), a discussion of *The Unvanquished* remained in place, and did not change in tone.[55] The film was never fully ostracized; it just was not endorsed.

As the historians Karel Berkhoff and Kiril Feferman show, during the war Soviet attitudes to depictions of the Holocaust vacillated between allowed and forbidden, but despite inconsistency, the tendency was toward silencing, universalization, and externalization.[56] These tendencies intensified over time: if in the early stages of the war, the Holocaust was a permissible topic (mainly because it was a matter of foreign policy), starting with 1943, the Jewish character of the Holocaust was increasingly downplayed.[57] And yet this was just a tendency. Berkhoff emphasizes that "even as late as August 1944 there was no top-level decision, in writing or not to fully omit Jews from media reports about the victims of the Nazis."[58]

Despite the tendency to silence, the Jewish fate during the war was still present in artistic productions as late as 1948, and was directly referenced in legal discourse (mainly in the reportage of Nuremberg Trials).[59] This ambivalence permeates *The Unvanquished*, as well as its professional and critical reception. The film appeared at a time when the topic of the Holocaust was neither completely suppressed nor fully acknowledged, but straddled the grey area between the allowed and the forbidden. Its history—from the publication of the novel in *Pravda*, through its transformation into film and the battle at the Artistic Council meeting, to its inclusion into the official party brochure—gives us an insight into the shifting Soviet cultural politics regarding the Holocaust and its representation.

In the 1960s, Soviet audiences had a chance to see *The Unvanquished* on television.[60] The film was not shown in its entirety, however; it is easy to guess which scenes were excluded. The uncut *Unvanquished* returned to Russian audiences only relatively recently, when it was released on VHS and DVD. And so, decades after it was made, the film was salvaged from obscurity, and today occupies its due place alongside other Soviet cinematic classics. Moreover, the key scene of *The Unvanquished* stands today for the Babi Yar massacre. In a remarkable Russian documentary about Holocaust survivors, *Children from the Abyss* (*Deti iz Bezdny*, dir. Pavel Chukhrai, 2000), the scene from *The Unvanquished* is used as a substitute for missing archival footage of the mass execution in Babi Yar. More disturbingly, in a French documentary *Einsatzgruppen: The Death Brigades* (dir. Michael Prazan, 2010), which supposedly unearthed hitherto unknown visual documents of mass executions, the same scene from *The Unvanquished* is used in lieu of documentary footage. Thus, despite its historical inaccuracy, this scene constitutes a source of visual memory for audiences both in Russia (where Chukhrai's documentary was broadcast on the state TV channel) and worldwide (*Children from the Abyss* was part of the TV miniseries *Broken Silence*, produced by Steven Spielberg and widely circulated). In the same way in which the storming of the Winter Palace in Eisenstein's *October* became an iconic image of the

Russian Revolution, the execution scene in *The Unvanquished* has the potential of becoming an iconic image of the Holocaust in Russia. Although a specific scene may be recognized, the film as a whole remains completely unknown in the West: with no subtitled copies available and no distribution on DVD, *The Unvanquished* is still awaiting its due place among other early representations of the Holocaust in feature films.

5 The Holocaust on the Thawing Screens

FROM *THE FATE OF A MAN* (1959) TO *ORDINARY FASCISM* (1965)

In 1953, Stalin died. Two years later, Khrushchev's speech at the Twentieth Party Congress heralded the so-called Thaw, often understood as a period of relative liberalization in both politics and culture. But a closer look reveals that the process of liberalization was actually rather tentative, and that new signs of thaw were interspersed with plenty of familiar freezing. In that schizophrenic atmosphere, when filmmakers constantly tried to navigate a treacherous terrain of the permissible and the forbidden, scores of significant films were made, and more scripts were in development. Several of them dealt with the Holocaust.

At first, cinema was slow to warm up to the changes: it takes much longer to make a film than to write an article or a poem. More important, as the Russian film scholar Josephine Woll notes, the film industry was decimated by various purges and persecutions during Stalin's reign and was paralyzed by party interference.[1] But eventually the filmmakers do heed the call for truth telling and for a revival of idealism characteristic of the era. By 1956, the first Thaw movies appeared: instead of stodgy monumental epics or varnished *kolkhoz* musicals, the filmmakers cautiously turned to the everyday and the ordinary. The hero was brought off his pedestal, especially in war films. New physical types emerged on screens.[2] One of such new types was a Jewish officer, the first Jew on Soviet screens in over a decade.[3] Several other filmmakers gingerly followed this precedent, gradually chipping away at the pompous, inflated version of the war, and revising it to include "the trench truth" based on actual experiences. But the atmosphere was far from encouraging: the regime provided mixed messages, here permitting innovation and openness, and there demanding unconditional obedience to the party line and socialist-realist orthodoxy. In 1957–1959, in the absence of a clear signal, filmmakers followed a line of "caution and retrenchment."[4]

In the early 1960s, signals remained equally mixed, but liberals felt encouraged. Some controversial literary works were published, and Khrushchev still continued to acknowledge the crimes of Stalin's regime. The publication of Evgenii Evtushenko's 1961 poem "Babi Yar" became a catalyst for a renewed conversation about Holocaust memory.[5] Conservatives launched an attack against

the poet, yet he incurred no official sanctions. Moreover, Shostakovich's Thirteenth Symphony, parts of it set to the poem, premiered soon after. In November 1962, at an officially sponsored conference, Mikhail Romm spoke openly about Jewish filmmakers persecuted during the anti-cosmopolitan campaign, and advocated for accountability and even openness to the West.[6]

But by the end of 1962, there was an about-face. Khrushchev visited an avant-garde art show, and dismissed it with brash and vulgar criticism.[7] This escapade marked a return to a repressive policy of party oversight of the arts, and the rejection of any "corrupting" (read Western or avant-garde) influences. By the spring of 1963, the situation had deteriorated: at a meeting with writers and artists, Khrushchev gave a speech clearly laying out a repressive policy. This speech gave him a chance to finally opine on the controversy surrounding "Babi Yar," which according to him was among the works of art presenting "a distorted view of the Jewish situation in our country." Here is what he found so distorted: "The poem implies that only Jews were victims of fascist crimes, whereas many Russian, Ukrainian, and Soviet people of other ethnicities fell at the hands of Hitlerite henchmen." This was the closest the Soviets ever came to stating an official policy regarding the Holocaust (familiar to us as universalization). Khrushchev concludes, "The 'Jewish Question' does not exist here."[8]

But, of course, the Jewish question very much existed in the Soviet Union. Starting in the late 1950s, the Zionist movement was reemerging, Jewish samizdat was spreading both literary fiction and legal materials, and a handful of enthusiasts were teaching Hebrew. This nascent movement was interconnected with attempts to memorialize the sites of mass executions in Riga, Kiev, Vilnius, Minsk, and other places. Informal ceremonies at these sites became gathering points for young Jews. The suppression by the regime only reinforced their growing national and religious identification.[9]

Late 1963 and early 1964 continued to be tense times for artists and filmmakers: on one hand, significant films were still made and groundbreaking works of literature were published. On the other hand, some films, severely criticized, remained shelved.[10] Performances of nonconformist poets and songwriters such as Aleksandr Galich (whose name we will encounter later) were curtailed. The poet Joseph Brodsky was arrested, charged with parasitism, and sent into exile. Transcripts of his trial and related documents circulated in samizdat.

In 1964, Khrushchev was removed from power, and a period of uncertainty about the new party line opened a window of opportunity for filmmakers. Within that small window, several works of literature dealing with the Holocaust were published, several films were made, and several more screenplays were in development.[11] But liberal hopes quickly dissipated. By the end of 1965, Brezhnevite patterns were formed. Any sign of disobedience to the regime was squashed, progressive editors were fired, and an atmosphere of increasing repression set in. Arrests of writers Andrei Siniavskii and Yulii Daniel, and the

campaign against Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, sent a strong message to authors and filmmakers.

Censorship intensified, and projects about World War II were scrutinized especially closely. In 1965, Brezhnev reinstituted celebrations of Victory Day, and used the official pomp to return to the Stalinist canon of a monumental memory of the war, where individual suffering and trauma had no place. Projects about the Holocaust, in one way or another, hit a wall. Films were not released at all, or only with limited distribution; screenplays were rejected. Of course, the Holocaust was not the only theme targeted for censure. Criticizing the Stalinist regime or rethinking revolutionary history was increasingly off limits as well: projects on these and other topics were rejected or shelved.[12] By late 1966, it was patently clear that the era of "administrative persecution of cinema" had started.[13]

Yet even in 1966–1967, studios were still making significant films; in fact, several films discussed here were released or developed during that time. It is not until 1968 that the Thaw died an unnatural death—strangled by the party grip. Israel's 1967 war put an end to any Jewish themes in Soviet culture—and unleashed a strong emigration movement. The invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968 finished off any traces of liberal hopes. Here is where the era of stagnation officially starts. For nearly twenty years, until Gorbachev's perestroika, no criticism of any Soviet regime, past or present, was permitted. No Jews were allowed on screens either, whether in war or in any other kind of film.

Harbinger of Changes: *The Fate of a Man*

After *The Unvanquished*, images of the Holocaust reappeared on Soviet screens only in the late 1950s, with the onset of the Thaw. The presence of Jews in these films was minor, of course, and the Jewish fate was never their focus. Nevertheless they breached the silence that had shrouded this subject since the end of the war. The first to do it was *The Fate of a Man* (*Sud'ba Cheloveka*, dir. Sergei Bondarchuk, 1959), based on the 1946 story by a famous Soviet writer, Mikhail Sholokhov, which had been unpublishable for ten years. One of the most important war films of the Thaw, acclaimed nationally and internationally, *The Fate of a Man* is an epic story of Andrei Sokolov (played by the film director Bondarchuk), a Russian everyman, and his trials and tribulations before and during the war.[14] On the front, he is captured by the Germans, sent to POW camps, and later to a concentration camp. He escapes, but upon returning home he learns that his entire family perished in the occupation. The redemption comes at the very end of the film, when Sokolov adopts a young boy, a war orphan like himself. The film was remarkable for its time, with a deeply sympathetic portrayal of a Soviet prisoner of war, as well as an open display of the overwhelming loss and trauma of the characters (rather than formulaic heroism). It was also the first war film deeply steeped in Christian allusions.

Within this context, there are two brief scenes in the film alluding to the fate of Jews during the war, one set in the Soviet Union, the other outside its borders. In the first scene, Germans execute a young Jewish doctor (Victor Markin), typecast to look Jewish, with dark wavy hair and glasses. The scene is beautifully shot: the young doctor is in the foreground, with a church behind him. He is awash in rays of light, giving him the halo of a martyr. Even though there are a few other prisoners of war (communists and officers) who are being executed, the camera zooms in only on the doctor—it is his singular execution. The scene lasts only a few seconds, but makes an indelible impression, especially since it was shot just a few years after an infamous doctors' plot, Stalin's anti-Semitic campaign targeting Jewish medical professionals.

In the second scene, later in the film, Sokolov arrives in a concentration camp along with other POWs. Contrapuntal diegetic music—an orchestra playing a charming cabaret-style tune—greets the new arrivals. A slow tracking shot shows civilians being forced off the other trains. They do not wear Jewish stars, but there can be no confusion about their identity, as an announcement coming from a loudspeaker orders the POWs to go to one side and all Jews to the other. The cheerful music is interrupted with screams of children as they are pried away from their parents on screen. A close-up on Sokolov's face reveals him watching the brutal scene in shock. And then the civilians are shown lined up behind the barbed wire fence, in the direction of a huge sign that reads, "The bath." A crematorium chimney is towering in the background. In the next long panoramic shot, the crematorium is in the center of the frame, with black smoke billowing from its enormous chimney, and several lines of people slowly moving toward it. Then the camera closes up on the chimney itself. Finally, only black smoke is filling the screen. Presumably, this is all that remained from the gassed people.

Characteristically, a Soviet Jew in this film dies as a hero and a soldier, whereas the Holocaust, as a mass murdering of Jewish people, is externalized—represented as having taken place outside the Soviet Union. The mass killing of Soviet Jews, showing them as victims, is virtually unrepresentable at the time. But even a partial portrayal of the Holocaust was too much for Soviet censors. At the meeting of the Artistic Council, discussants had been asked to downplay the "concentration camp horrors," claiming them to be unnecessary and familiar images.[15] Who knows how this film would have represented the Holocaust had it been not for censorship pressure.

However, not every film dealing with the Holocaust faced the opposition of the censors—it all depended on specific circumstances. A good example here is an Uzbek war drama, *You Are Not an Orphan* (*Ty ne Sirota*, dir. Shukhrat Abbasov, 1962), once a major film, but largely forgotten today. Behind Abbasov's inspiration to make the film is a real-life story of an Uzbek couple who adopted fourteen wartime orphans, a feat of courage memorialized in an eponymous poem by a famous local author, Ghafur Ghulom. The filmmaker also drew on his own

Figure 5.1 *The Fate of a Man.* A crematorium at work. Courtesy of Mosfilm Cinema Concern.

memories of his hungry childhood during the war, spent in an Uzbek village among refugees from all over the Soviet Union.[16] Abbasov recalls that there were many Jews among them.

Indeed, there was a Jewish boy among the adopted children in the film. Of course, an internationalist message is conveyed throughout, and he is only one of the adopted children of various Soviet ethnicities. There is even a German boy. But it is young Abram (Fima Kaminer) who is particularly haunted by traumatic memories. In the most dramatic scene of the film, children play war—Abram is dressed as a Nazi, in a uniform and with a Hitler-style mustache. He holds another child, cast as a Soviet partisan, at gunpoint, and screams, "Speak, you dirty partisan!" As he mouths the words, Abram experiences a flashback, hearing those same words spoken by a Nazi, followed by shooting. Abram faints. Clearly, this game was a reenactment of his trauma—he witnessed his parents being executed by the Nazis. Importantly, they were killed as partisans, not as Jews. Yet, there are hints in the film of the unique place of Jews. Thus, one of the kids says to his adoptive Uzbek father, "If Germans come here, they'll execute you because you adopted Abram. The fascists hate the Jews."

Abbasov recalls that the film encountered absolutely no opposition from the film apparatchiks. Just the opposite: when Ekaterina Furtseva, then minister of culture, watched the film as a part of its authorization process, she was moved

to tears. She came out of the screening room sobbing, hugged Abbasov, and said: "You've made us feel their suffering! I will promote your film everywhere!" And she was true to her word—Abbasov showed his film in thirty-three countries and was enthusiastically received by Soviet critics.[17] Why was this film so unproblematic? Even though it featured the Jewish child and his tragic story, Abram was one of the many war orphans, each one with his or her own tragedy. In that way, the film was not about the uniqueness of the Jewish Holocaust, but about internationalism—about celebrating "the big family of Soviet people." And this was completely in agreement with the still-liberal party line of 1962.

Similarly unproblematic was the first Soviet TV miniseries *Drawing Fire upon Ourselves* (*Vyzyvaem Ogon' na Sebia*, dir. Sergei Kolosov, 1964), featuring a marginal character of Jenia (Nina Krachkovskaia), a Jewish girl who escapes from the Smolensk ghetto and is hidden by heroic Russians who risk their lives to save her under the occupation. When the suspicions about Jenia's whereabouts escalate, she is smuggled into the forests to the partisans, and becomes a fighter herself. Like *The Fate of a Man, Drawing Fire* deals with the previously taboo subject of, in this case, local collaboration with the Nazis. A local *politzai* (Rolan Bykov) even speaks directly about executing Jews. Yet again, Jenia's story is just one of the horrible war tragedies. Although it is present in the plot, it is not represented as dominant or unique. In accordance with the prevailing Soviet discourse, Jewish Jenia suffered along with, and only as much as other Soviet citizens.

When the Jewish fate is represented as distinct from that of other people, this usually appears in very brief and understated scenes. In a Belarus war drama, *All These Years* (*Skol'ko let skol'ko zim*, dir. Nikolai Figurovskii, 1965), a scene of an execution of a Jewish family lasts just a few seconds. Their Jewishness is not signified directly, but when the family is led to the ravine, the soundtrack is a Yiddish song. Indirect references to the victims of the Holocaust may be also found in later films: *Chronicle of a Dive-Bomber* (1967), *No Way Back* (1970), and *And the Dawns Are Quiet Here* (1972).[18]

In all these movies, Jews are represented in a similar way: they are mostly women and children—victims in need of protection and defense. They are helpless without their protectors of titular nationalities (Russian, Uzbek, etc.). As if following the Nazi inscription, these cinematic Jews are racialized. Their characters are typecast to look stereotypically "Jewish"—with dark wavy hair and non-Slavic facial features, sometimes directly referred to in dialogue. In the absence of any kind of references to religion and culture, what makes these characters Jewish is their blood—and Nazi violence. And of course, all these Jewish characters are relegated to the margins of the plot. We never see events from their vantage point, they have almost no dialogue, and often their role is instrumental—to help along the development of other characters. Also, aside from *The Fate of a Man*, and to a lesser degree, *Drawing Fire*, Jews appeared in

minor films made at provincial studios, which did not become landmark events in the Soviet film process.

The Extraordinary *Ordinary Fascism*

The real breakthrough in the representation of the Holocaust took place in a remarkable film, *Ordinary Fascism* (*Obyknovennyi Fashizm*, dir. Mikhail Romm, 1965). Today, the film is defined as a documentary, and it originally came out as a "journalistic feature" (*khudozhestvenno-publitsisticheskii fil'm*), although the better description is, in the authors' words, "a film-contemplation, a film-reflection."[19] The three-hour documentary consists of fifteen distinct "chapters." Weaving together excerpts from Nazi newsreels and propaganda films, contemporary documentary footage, photography, and art, the film is an investigation of the psychology and culture of German Nazism, and of totalitarian ideology in general. In terms of genre, it is a compilation film edited according to the principles of silent cinema, inspired by Eisenstein's montage, splicing together contrapuntal images and sounds. Although the film is patently original, it does draw on earlier Soviet documentaries, especially Roman Karmen's film about the Nuremberg trials, *The Judgment of the Peoples* (*Sud Narodov*, 1946). Karmen also used Soviet avant-garde montage and accompanied the visual, not with the usual voiceover but with a passionate direct speech by a writer, Boris Gorbatov.[20]

Similarly, the visuals in *Ordinary Fascism* are accompanied by insightful commentary in Mikhail Romm's voice, completely devoid of Soviet puffed-up officialdom.[21] The accumulation of visual evidence is subject to Romm's witty observations: as in the case of dozens of images of the Fuhrer with his hands folded on his . . . groin. Further footage reveals that Hitler's gesture starts being blindly reproduced by his minions, and then photos of rows and rows of Nazis with their hands uniformly arranged on their privates complete the picture. But in other instances the effect of the montage is heartbreaking, especially when freeze frames are used for emphasis: the camera shows contemporary documentary footage of young mothers with their children. One woman in a habitual gesture scoops up her toddler before crossing the street. Freeze frame. Then the camera cuts to a still image of a mother pressing a child to her as a Nazi soldier is about to shoot her. The two mothers pressing their children to their chests look almost identical, except that one of them is about to be killed. A gun shot is heard on a soundtrack. And then, in complete silence, still images of dead children and piles of naked bodies appear on screen. This is how the film introduces the subject of fascism.

The overall effect of the film is stunning even today. But in the Soviet 1960s, the film was nothing short of an explosion—the first exploration of fascism on Soviet screens. (There were several international documentaries, such as *Life of Adolf Hitler* [1961] or *Mein Kampf* [1960], but they were shown only in festivals

and were unknown to the broad Soviet audience.) *Ordinary Fascism* became a box-office hit in the Soviet Union, and received national and international critical acclaim. Arguably, this was the first film that truly made Soviet people, as its screenwriter, Maya Turovskaya, points out, "reflect critically about their recent past on collective and individual levels."[22]

Of course, a film about Nazism could not have avoided a Jewish question. But it was 1965, and a direct engagement with the Final Solution was not an option. The film could not have dealt with an analysis of Nazi anti-Semitism, or relations between Stalin and Hitler, and certainly not with the rise of anti-Semitism in the USSR. It is easy to see these limitations from a distance of time and a privilege of historical knowledge. But in its own era, *Ordinary Fascism* started as honest a conversation as it could without being shelved. Nazi anti-Semitism and the horrors of the Holocaust, although represented indirectly and not on a center stage, were nevertheless recurring motifs in the film.

In its treatment of the Holocaust, the film uses a number of strategies, with different levels of directness. The most common one, which also corresponded to the prevailing Soviet approach, was universalization: subsuming Jews among other targets of Nazism. Thus when the archival footage of Nazi torch parades and book burnings appear on screen, the voiceover explains: "They burnt books by scientists of non-Aryan origin." Among the writers whose books are burned were Leo Tolstoy and Vladimir Mayakovsky, Heinrich Heine, Lion Feuchtwanger, Bertolt Brecht, Erich Maria Remarque, and obviously Karl Marks, Friedrich Engels, and Vladimir Lenin. Translation: Jews are only one category of the persecuted, along with Russians and communists. In addition to universalization, *Ordinary Fascism* had to live up to the Soviet rhetoric of the war, designating the Russian people as its main victim. Thus the voiceover explains the Nazi plot: "Himmler planned to build gigantic extermination camps over the Urals, and to kill there 60 million Russians alone, not counting other peoples."

Even in the Auschwitz sequence, the emotional apex of the film, victims are universalized. When the camera displays successive headshots of camp inmates, photographed by the Nazis for their records, the camera scrolls up to their faces and then zooms in on their eyes, creating an intense emotional encounter with each one. These eyes looking at us, some with anger, some with despair, and some with hope, appear also in the final frames of the film. Their gazes are haunting. But we don't know national, ethnic, religious or any other identities of these people. They are universal victims.

Another way of dealing with the Jewish question was to use the term "Nazi racism" as a code for anti-Semitism. In a genuinely funny sequence that scorns Nazi racist theories, the camera shows "people with incorrect skulls." After portraits of Alexander Pushkin, Anton Chekhov, and other great Russian writers, the camera dwells on a photo of Albert Einstein. "This one," says Romm, "definitely has a wrong skull. It just stands out." This is not a very subtle reference.

The sequence continues with a demonstration of people with "correct skulls"—various Nazi bosses, with truly degenerate faces. One of them, Streicher, is described as "the main propagandist of obscurantism, racism, and judeophobia." "People with incorrect skulls who had the good sense to go away, were saved," comments Romm. But on screen we see Jews in traditional attire, with side locks, so it's very clear who these "people with incorrect skulls" are. "But," he continues, "those who didn't leave were much worse off." Scenes of deportations, and desecration of Jewish businesses, appear on screen; the word "Jude," and a huge Jewish star, are drawn on the windows. Again, the message is only barely coded.

In other scenes, familiar Holocaust imagery appears, but without an explicit reference to the Jewish Holocaust. Horrible sites of corpses in the pits, piles of naked bodies, and execution scenes appear on screen. The contemporary footage of camp sites turned into museums depict chimneys, crematoriums, and ghastly exhibits of piles of human hair, prostheses, and other objects. Jews are not invoked directly, although this is unmistakably Holocaust imagery, and the identities of the victims—mainly women and children, often naked—can be inferred.

In other scenes, the filmmakers are much more direct. In the sequence about the Lvov pogrom, the camera shows still photos of beaten up, half-dressed women, their faces distorted with suffering. Romm's voice does not say that the victims are Jews, but the word pogrom speaks for itself. The same principle is applied to the live footage of the Warsaw ghetto. Again, Jews are not mentioned, but the word ghetto is. In the footage of deportations from the ghetto, armbands with Jewish stars are clearly visible. Similarly, when Romm's voiceover explains the selection process in Auschwitz, the horrific stills reappear on screen, with the Jewish stars clearly visible on people's clothes.

Finally, in several sequences, when the film addresses the anti-Jewish violence in the most direct way, the Holocaust is externalized. The tendency toward externalizing the Holocaust can already be seen in earlier Soviet documentaries (*Majdanek*, 1944; *Auschwitz* [*Osvencim*], 1946; and *The Judgment of the Peoples*, 1946), where the events of the Holocaust are located in ghettos and camps in Poland and Germany. In the 1960s, the Holocaust is increasingly externalized in most Soviet films. Examples of this in *Ordinary Fascism* are numerous: when a tightly typed document appears on screen, Romm's voiceover explains it this way: "Here is a report about liquidation of the entire Jewish population of Warsaw." After that, iconic photos from the Warsaw ghetto appear on screen (the most famous is of a young boy with raised hands). Here not only do the visuals and text speak directly about the murder of Jews but the soundtrack switches to a klezmer melody.

The policy of externalization allowed Romm to represent neo-Nazism as a part of the obligatory criticism of the West. The camera zooms in on a desecrated Jewish cemetery, with swastikas, and words "Jews out" or "Not enough of you died" written on monuments. Representing this "symptom of decaying

capitalism" gave the filmmakers an opportunity to discuss the contemporary revival of anti-Semitism; it was up to audiences to draw parallels.[23]

It is important to understand that in the 1960s *Ordinary Fascism* was subversive not only because of its hidden (or direct) Jewish references but mainly because the film established striking parallels between Hitler's Germany and Stalin's Russia—its collectivistic rhetoric, its endless propaganda, military parades, and most important, its blind submission to a totalitarian leader and a complete disregard for human life. Like Vasilii Grossman's novel *Life and Fate, Ordinary Fascism* made connections between Stalin and Hitler, between Soviet communism and Nazi socialism. *Ordinary Fascism* also discussed Stalinist crimes and the Jewish Holocaust together. In the Soviet Union, these two subversive subjects were linked.

The question arises, how was it possible that this film was made, released, and turned into a blockbuster in the mid-1960s, when the liberal tendencies of the Thaw were petering out? When I went into the archives, I expected to find piles of documents, as is the case with other "problematic" movies. But no—the film's file had few documents and promised no answers. Luckily, Maya Turovskaya, one of the scriptwriters of the *Ordinary Fascism*, agreed to speak with me, and I flew to Munich, where she now lives. We met in a tiny doughnut shop, featuring her favorite—a Bavarian specialty called *Krapfen*. There, amid waitresses in Bavarian costumes and old ladies dunking their *Krapfen* into milky coffee, Turovskaya set me straight. At the time of our meeting she was eighty-four, a tiny bird-like woman, who did not look conspicuous among her German contemporaries in the shop. But belying this appearance, Turovskaya is the iron lady of Soviet cinematography, who lived through the war, through Stalin's purges, and Khrushchev's promises, who weathered Brezhnev's inane era, all the while writing and speaking in her own voice. To me, her entire life and work seem like a feat of courage.

Turovskaya explained what allowed an unlikely appearance of *Ordinary Fascism* in the Soviet Union.[24] The story starts early in the 1960s, when Turovskaya, then a young film and theater critic, received a gift of Siegfried Kracauer's book *From Caligari to Hitler: A Psychological History of German Film*. The book made a great impression on her. She started going to Gosfilmofond, the Russian Film Archive, to watch old German films, which, as Kracauer argued, intuited the emergence of fascism. Simultaneously, her friend Yurii Khaniutin was going to the same archives to watch Soviet war movies for his dissertation on the subject. The two often watched their respective movies in adjacent rooms, and talked about them during breaks. Soon, they came up with an idea—to make a film investigating the emergence of fascism, using excerpts from the early German films as illustrations of the collective unconscious. They wrote a treatment, and called it "Ordinary Fascism"—their take on the "banality of evil" thesis. The question now was, who will direct it?[25] With their experimental cutting-edge

idea they did not want to go to a seasoned documentarist who would turn their brainchild into a didactic Soviet potboiler. Instead, they went to Romm. This was a smart and unconventional choice. On the one hand, Mikhail Romm was a living classic, director of such fundamental Soviet films as *Lenin in October* (1937) and *Lenin in 1918* (1939). Stalin himself loved Romm's films. On the other hand, Romm was a man of integrity, one of the few who stood up against Stalin's anti-Semitism.[26] He welcomed the liberalization of the post-Stalin time and supported young filmmakers of the new generation. Romm's own 1961 film, *Nine Days of One Year* (*Deviat' Dnei Odnogo Goda*), became a beacon of the Thaw. Most important, in 1962, Romm made yet another public speech denouncing the return of Stalinist policies in culture, and especially against the revival of Stalin-era anti-Semitism. After that, he fell out of favor.[27] Predictably, Romm became interested in the project. Like Turovskaya and Khaniutin, he was ethnically Jewish (raised in an entirely Russian milieu yet proud of his Jewish roots). He intuited a promise of a truly mind-changing film. Yet he was honest with the first-time scriptwriters; he warned them: "If this film is successful, then it will be a Romm film, but if it fails, it will be your fault."[28] At the time, the Soviets were under pressure: a US studio wanted to invite Romm. It became crucial that Romm start working on a new project—any project—so that the Soviets could refuse an American invitation on the grounds of the director's busy schedule.[29]

And so, when Romm, Turovskaya, and Khaniutin came to Mosfilm in October 1963, their proposal was approved without a hitch, although some members of an Artistic Council wondered why they would want to work on such a film.[30]

Turovskaya and Khaniutin developed the script, and the following year it was considered by Goskino. Predictably, in accordance with prevailing Soviet policy, editors advised the authors "to show that the Soviet people suffered from fascism more than any others" and recommended including in the film more materials on Soviet heroism and Soviet losses.[31] But overall, the script passed this level with ease, supported mainly by Aleksandr Dymshits, the chief Goskino editor. On first glance, Dymshits appears to be an unlikely advocate. By the mid-sixties, he had a reputation as a conservative and careful bureaucrat, a vestige of the Stalinist era. Why, then, would he rally to support such a radical film? The subject of the film probably resonated with him on multiple, deeper levels. At the end of World War II, Dymshits served as a Soviet *kulturofficer* in the new socialist Germany, and in that capacity oversaw early East German filmmaking. A Germanist by education, he loved the German language and culture, and for him exploration of German fascism was a natural and endlessly fascinating subject.[32] He was also an ethnic Jew, persecuted during the anti-cosmopolitan campaign.

The script was approved with only one stipulation, conveyed to the filmmakers entirely off the record: not to emphasize Jews.[33] Romm promised, and Turovskaya and Khaniutin went to work compiling visual materials for the film. Romm rejected their idea of including excerpts from German expressionist films

as too elitist. Instead, they watched archival footage, official Nazi *kulturfilme* (propaganda movies) and newsreels, some of them from the personal video archive of Goebbels (held at Gosfilmofond). Other documents and photographs came from the personal archive of Hitler, children's drawings from Theresienstadt, photographs from the Auschwitz museum, amateur shots taken by Nazi troops, and many other sources. Simultaneously, other crew members filmed camp sites in Germany and Poland, and used hidden cameras to capture images of contemporary young people and children. This footage would allow the filmmakers to introduce a motif of childhood into the film that effectively offsets the horrors of fascism.

It took the film crew over a year to select all the visual materials for the film; Turovskaya and Khaniutin watched two million meters of film and selected 60,000 meters for Romm to work on. Their tedious work with such brutal materials earned them the nickname "the ordinary fascists" in Mosfilm hallways. Romm edited the film like a silent movie—following the principles of Eisenstein's "montage of attractions," bringing together contrapuntal sights and sounds.[34] It was important for Romm not to be guided by chronological principle or intellectual abstraction. Instead, he was free associating, working, as Turovskaya puts it, "from the gut" to reach the most penetrating emotional impact.[35]

Once the film was edited, the question of narration arose. The crew floated various ideas: perhaps the story should be told by a concentration camp survivor, or maybe it should be Yurii Levitan, the official voice of Soviet radio during the war, or even Ernst Busch, the famous German communist singer. They also considered Ernst Genry—a fascinating character himself—a Comintern member, a former Soviet spy turned writer and journalist, who served as a consultant for the film.[36] The film remained silent. When they needed to show it, Romm, who was famous for his gift of storytelling, commented improvisationally. At some point it dawned on Turovskaya and Khaniutin that they would never find a better narrator. They talked Romm into recording his running commentary on the film, and this was its voiceover—passionate, personal, funny, and at times heartbreaking. The casual tone and genuine emotion shocked Soviet people, who were used to deadly formulaic newspeak. This was a breath of fresh air.

The film was born. Now what? It was clear to everyone who saw it that it would be very difficult for *Ordinary Fascism* to receive Goskino authorization—not only because it spoke relatively openly about the Holocaust, but more important, because it investigated the very basis of totalitarianism, and some parts of the film made parallels between Nazi and Soviet regimes painfully clear. The story of this film's authorization is worth telling in detail. It illustrates not only the complexity of the Soviet censorship system but also the ability of cultural producers to play some elements of the system against each other, and to negotiate successfully that system with the use of local political know-how.

Ernst Genry (who used to be a spy, after all) had an idea about getting the film officially approved. He said, "We have to start from the top." And on Genry's advice, Romm went to the Central Committee, to the Department for Liaisons with Socialist Countries, headed then by Yurii Andropov. The Soviets understood then that their touch-and-go foreign and internal policy left intellectuals disillusioned, that they had to build relationships with their own cultural elites. Therefore, Andropov staffed his department with a cadre of young and well-educated professionals, and gave orders to befriend the "intelligentsia." Romm invited this group for a screening of *Ordinary Fascism*.

The film impressed Andropov's crew. They helped the filmmakers devise a strategy for obtaining its endorsement. The idea was to have the brotherly German Democratic Republic approve it first, then have the Soviets endorse it simply "by precedent." To engineer this intrigue, the filmmakers turned to Konrad Wolf, who once studied at VGIK, a film school in Moscow, and loved Romm. Wolf, a distinguished German director and a brother to Markus Wolf (a head of the Stasi), had access to Walter Ulbricht, then the head of the East German socialist party. Wolf asked Ulbricht to invite the film to the Leipzig Film Festival. Ulbricht obliged. After a triumphant show in Leipzig, where it won a Special Jury Prize, *Ordinary Fascism* was approved in Moscow without a hitch.[37] The ploy devised by an old spy worked.

Finally, in 1966, *Ordinary Fascism* opened in wide release, and the lines circled the movie theaters. Twenty million people saw the film—not a trivial number for a black-and-white documentary. The film had a huge and largely laudatory press: reviews praised the film for its "great denouncing power," "precision of the analysis," for its "angry and ruthless exposure of fascism."[38] No one wrote about the parallels between Stalinism and Nazism, nor about the Holocaust, but reviewers clearly felt the subversive nature of the film. Therefore, some of them wished that the film were more Marxist, with more "proletarian-class analysis" (in other words, that it were versed in familiar Soviet terms).[39] Nevertheless, all told, the national and international acclaim that this film received was without precedent.[40]

After a triumphant run in theaters and international festivals, a Moscow publisher, Iskusstvo, commissioned the filmmakers to write a book about *Ordinary Fascism* for the prestigious series "Masterpieces of Cinema." Turovskaya and Khaniutin put together the manuscript, including a chapter by Romm, their own essays, and screenshots accompanied by Romm's commentary. The book was ready to go to the printer when they got the news that the typeset of the book was disassembled. It was 1968, but the censorship decision didn't make sense to Romm—the film, after all, did come out, why would the book be a problem? He tried to resuscitate the project, made phone calls, went to the party brass. He was told, "They will see a film once and forget about it. But they can read the

book and start thinking."[41] Of course, the film had already made people think. This was frightening, and the regime retaliated.

In 1968, a Lenin Prize Committee (at that time, the highest award) refused to consider Romm's candidacy for his *Ordinary Fascism* on a technicality. Sergei Gerasimov, Lev Kulidzhanov, and Dmitrii Shostakovich, three luminaries of Soviet culture, wrote to Brezhnev with a request to change the biased attitude toward the film, to no avail.[42]

By that time, *Ordinary Fascism* was no longer playing in theaters, either (it lasted only eleven months).[43] Still, *Ordinary Fascism* remained an electrifying memory for all who saw the film in 1966. It made an indelible impression on filmmakers, creating both a visual vocabulary and an aesthetic style for representing the Holocaust. For instance, echoing *Ordinary Fascism* in his *It Was a Month of May* (1970), Marlen Khutsiev intercuts the observational documentary-style shots of contemporary Western life with still images of the Holocaust, including that of the Jewish boy in a Warsaw ghetto with raised hands, which Romm's film made iconic.

Ordinary Fascism returned to Soviet audiences almost twenty years after its original release, when it was shown on Russian TV and later released on DVD. Today it is widely known in Russia, but remains largely forgotten in the West.[44] The book about the film did not disappear, either—a brave Iskusstvo editor salvaged the original layout and secretly gave it to Turovskaya.[45] In 2006, thirty-eight years after its intended release, the book about *Ordinary Fascism*, restored from the 1969 original layout, was finally published in Russian, closely followed by a German translation.[46]

6 The Holocaust at the Lithuanian Film Studio

GOTT MIT UNS (1961)

"Manuscripts don't burn," wrote the Russian writer Mikhail Bulgakov. This phrase proved to be prophetic many times in Soviet history, when books, films, and other works of art that were seized, banned, rejected, or simply lost in archives came back to life in more liberal times. This chapter tells one of those stories—a banned screenplay that came back from the dead of the archives.

The story starts at the Russian State Archive of Literature and Art (RGALI), a depository of, among other materials, lost or forgotten screenplays. I was there in early 2009, going through lists of rejected screenplays, when I came across an unusual title for a Soviet screenplay—*Gott mit Uns*, German for "God is with us," a slogan that was imprinted on the belt buckles of Nazi uniforms. The screenplay was written by Vytautas Žalakevičiaus and Grigorii Kanovichus.[1] I recognized their names: Žalakevičiaus, probably the greatest Lithuanian director, apparently wanted to make a film about the Holocaust.[2] Kanovichus (better known by his Russified name, Kanovich), was a famous Jewish Lithuanian writer who, throughout his life, wrote about the Holocaust of Lithuanian Jewry.

I felt compelled to read this screenplay. After requesting the file, with bated breath I waited three days for its delivery—how long it takes to retrieve a file from storage in RGALI. Once I had it, I read the screenplay in a stuffy, crowded reading room, completely transported by the text. From the first lines, it was clear that this was the rare find that I would never have dared to hope for. The screenplay was dated 1961. Files in RGALI come with a sign-up sheet on the first page, and everyone who takes it out must record his or her name and date there. The sign-up sheet for *Gott mit Uns* had no names. I was the first person in nearly fifty years to read the screenplay.

Gott mit Uns: Local Setting—Universal Tragedy

The main character is Feliksas, a Catholic priest and self-doubting intellectual, who once was a promising scholar in an academy in Rome and a student of art, stuck now in a dead-end position in a godforsaken Lithuanian village. He is a Dostoevskian character in his agonizing questioning of his every act and motive and in his constant preoccupation with doing the right thing. Under the Nazi occupation, he faces impossible choices in a situation where he has little control,

where saving one life inevitably means sacrificing another. Feliksas is a tragic character of great magnitude, and the fact that this character was never realized on screen constitutes perhaps one of the biggest cultural losses in Soviet film.

Feliksas is torn between saving a Jewish boy (whom he named Thomas after rescuing him from a death march) and Monica (a young doctor sent by the Soviets to assist the Lithuanian partisans). Feliksas had not consciously chosen to save either one of them—he rescued Thomas (whose real name is Abraham), on a whim, when he happened upon the column of Jews being marched to their deaths. Monica appeared at Feliksas's door at night when an unfortunate parachute landing left her immobilized and helpless with a broken leg. Feliksas's conscience did not allow him to turn her away. His kindness (or weakness of will?) is a disaster for the village. Aware of the landing, Germans take ten hostages whom they will execute if the Soviet parachutist is not given away. This is the main dramatic conflict.

The screenplay opens with a scene of Felikas's escape with Thomas (at that point the screenplay refers to them as a boy and a man). They are stopped by the Nazis, who shoot the boy. Fade out, title roll. Now we know how the story ends. From there, events unfold as a flashback, starting five days earlier. Feliksas is finishing services at his church. After the usual announcements, he reads this to his parish: "The German military command issues a warning: if within a week a Red parachutist hiding in the area is not transferred to the authorities, then the ten hostages will be executed. Captain Rosenberg. 1942. . . ." He quietly continues: "There are four days left."

Meanwhile, the very cause for the hostage crisis—wounded Monica—is staying in the priest's house. Her wound is badly inflamed and she is in need of surgery before she can be transferred to the partisans. Feliksas feels it is his duty to assist her if she is to operate on herself, but he is not sure he has strength to do it: "I am quite a coward. And she understands it," Feliksas notices himself thinking. "She is here only because I was too scared not to let her in that night."

Ultimately, tortured by constant self-criticism, Feliksas decides to go to the Nazi commander, Captain Rosenberg, to ask for a temporary release of a village doctor, Givenis, one of the hostages. Rosenberg (probably named after one of the Nazi leaders, Alfred Rosenberg) is depicted in an ambivalent way: Feliksas finds him exercising at the school gymnasium, flexing his torso muscles at a set of rings. Feliksas notices a golden cross on Rosenberg's healthy, hairy chest. And yet, looking at the captain's face, Feliksas thinks, "God, he looks so much like a Jew!" As if hearing the priest's thoughts, the Nazi explains, "I am a Catholic—my mother is Italian, I was born in Sicily, but I feel right at home in Lithuania."

Emboldened by the friendly tone, Feliksas asks for the doctor's release—to treat his sick Thomas. In what appears to be an act of kindness, Rosenberg immediately sends for the doctor. But just as Feliksas thinks, "God, he is a decent human being," Rosenberg reminds him of some simple arithmetic, 1:10. If the

doctor doesn't come back, ten more hostages will be taken. Feliksas understands that "Rosenberg, obviously, is not joking. He will kill the hostages . . . this student-Catholic with the Jewish eyes."

Afraid of everyone—of Rosenberg, of Givenis, of Monica, and of his own weakness—Feliksas brings the doctor home to operate on the Russian parachutist. As the old Givenis operates on Monica, Feliksas is still tortured by doubt about his impossible situation: "How can I tell that woman that because of her ten people are waiting for their death. . . . How can I tell the doctor that the very person who brought this threat on them is upstairs, under his operating knife." Referring to Thomas, he asks, "And can I tell people from my pulpit who you are?"

After the surgery, the two men, Feliksas and Givenis, talk over supper, feeling out how much they can trust each other. They realize that each of them is fully aware of the precarious situation, and they establish a kind of trust. "Now that you know everything, what would you advise me to do?" asks Feliksas, "One and ten . . . what a vile math."

But Givenis, of course, doesn't have an answer. He can only dream of escape. "Why don't I take a bike and run away from my destiny?" he says.

"They will take ten more people for you," Feliksas answers. "And then ten more. And then more."

"Then let those ten also ride bikes," Givenis offers. "And ten others too. Can you imagine a whole army of bicyclists roaming the roads?"

But this fantasy of mass escape only underscores their harsh reality.

The next day, Feliksas again reads from his pulpit the same gory announcement: "The German military command issues a warning: if within a week . . ."

When there are only two days left before the execution, Feliksas starts to visit the families of the hostages. Even here, he is uneasy about his role and his ability to console the grieving families. "Everything is God's will," he says to someone's crying wife. But he thinks, "One consoler! A liar! Tell her a simple real word."

When visiting another household, and speaking again of "God's will," he experiences a crisis of faith: "If we don't have a free will . . . then what are we responsible for? For someone else's whim? And where am I there? I?"

And yet, at another house, moved by the prayer of peasant women, Feliksas repents, "God, be merciful to them. . . . Forgive me, God, for all my doubts. . . . You allow me, your servant, and not your bravest one, not your firmest, to execute your will."

As all of this occurs, Monica, recovering in Feliksas's house, has befriended Thomas. She tells him fairy tales and plays with him, and gradually the boy warms up to her and tells her his real name, Abraham. The two laugh and play in the hidden room in the priest's house. After Feliksas reads Rosenberg's warning one last time from the pulpit—just a day left before hostages are to be executed—he comes home and happens to see Monica and Thomas happily chatting. He

strikes Thomas, then explains to Monica, "If he wants to live, he needs to be mute. His Lithuanian is poor. He is a Polish Jew. He needs to be silent."

"This is cruel," responds Monica.

Feliksas breaks down and tells Monica about the ten hostages, who will be shot the next morning. "I shouldn't have told you," he says, immediately torn by self-doubt and regrets.

Indeed, his act constitutes a death sentence for Monica—she fatally shoots herself after Feliksas leaves. He hears the shot from downstairs and thinks, "It is I who killed her."

But Feliksas has no opportunity to show his shame and horror. Instead, he must immediately make an excuse for the loud sound and conceal his reaction, because an old seminary buddy, canon Pantalauskas, pays him a sudden visit. Feliksas doesn't know if he can trust this old friend.

In the morning, Monica's corpse is delivered to Rosenberg, anonymously. Despite Feliksas's hopes, Rosenberg still executes all ten hostages. Before Feliksas can grieve, he must deal with another situation. Thomas got into a fight with local boys, who threw him in the river. Drowning, Thomas began screaming in Yiddish: "Ich schwim nit! Mame! Ich ken nit!! Ich . . . vil nit tronken!" He was saved, but his identity is uncovered. Now the question is, what to do with the boy? As Feliksas contemplates the situation, he has a flashback to the moment when he first saved Thomas: he recalls the column of Jewish children under the Nazi convoy, and how, on a whim, he offered all his money to a Lithuanian guard for one of them. He pulled that light-haired boy from a procession. The rest of them were led to their deaths. As the flashback ends, Feliksas explains to Pantalauskas that he baptized the boy, christened him Thomas, and ordered him to play mute. The canon offers to take the boy to the monastery, but Feliksas resists the offer. "I will not give him to you. Do you know what a monastery is? Enough damage has been done already."

The key scene follows when Rosenberg enters upon the conversation between Feliksas and Pantalauskas, demanding "the Jew." Emboldened by the situation, Feliksas lies to Rosenberg, telling him that the boy has already been taken to the Trappist monastery, and that this was the real purpose of the canon's visit.

But the canon retorts, "The priest is joking. Let's not put others under suspicion. There is no Trappist order in Lithuania. And hence no monastery. The boy is in the kitchen, drying out after an unfortunate swim."

"Traitor," thinks Feliksas.

But the canon continues: "Everything is much more complicated, and the captain, I am sure, will agree with this as well. The boy is baptized. Like you. Like the captain. Like me. It cannot be ignored—"

Abruptly interrupting Pantalauskas, Rosenberg says, "A law about 'racial purity' does not make considerations for religious affiliation. Give the Jew to the authorities."

As Feliksas observes this negotiation, the scene turns into a silent reel. He suddenly envisions Pantalauskas in a German uniform, with an Iron Cross, in boots, and a buckled belt (this is presumably where the camera would have zoomed in on the words "*Gott mit Uns*," on a buckle). Feliksas tries to shake off the disturbing vision, but it persists. Pantalauskas and Rosenberg take turns speaking, patting each other on the shoulders, their officers' crosses clinging.

"The trade is over," understands Feliksas, and when the canon approaches him with a hug, he cries out "Judas!" pushing the canon away.

"Dear Feliksas gives a rather simplistic interpretation of *sacre teologie*. I will try and defend him," says the canon in a sugary voice.

At that, Feliksas envisions Rosenberg in dark long vestments with a cross on a silver chain, saying, "It depends only on Mother Church whether it can direct its servant toward the right path."

Pantalauskas agrees with the officer, but Feliksas sees both again as Nazi officers.

"Where is the boy?" asks the officer-canon.

"In the kitchen. He has dried out, and is probably asleep," says Feliksas.

Shooting and screaming heard from afar interrupt the scene. Partisans enter the village in retaliation for the execution of the hostages. The canon becomes a canon and Rosenberg remains Rosenberg. Feliksas thinks: "An eye for an eye."

End of scene.

The last scene returns to the same setting of the opening—Feliksas and Thomas escaping in a carriage. This time, however, the priest does not turn off, but follows a partisan detachment. His horse "rushes forward, following the carts, riding away into the blinding rays of the rising sun."

"This is how it could have ended," concludes the screenplay.

This circular composition is a genius device—although it pays tribute to the Soviet expectations of the happy ending (Feliksas saves the boy when he follows the partisans), the last phrase in a conditional tense clearly indicates that it is not how the story actually ended. In fact, from the start, we know that Thomas will be (has been) executed by the Nazis. And yet, reliving the same scene on screen provides an enigmatic, open-ended plot. With its postmodern indeterminacy, it looks remarkably contemporary for something written in the Soviet Union in 1961. The boy both dies and doesn't die; the escape is both a failure and a success.

I finished reading the screenplay, closed the file, and reluctantly returned it to the archivist. My work here was done.

How Did *Gott mit Uns* Become a Phantom?

That same night I was having dinner with Oleg Gaze. He and I had been friends since 1990, when we both were students, I at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem and Oleg at the Film and TV department at Tel Aviv University. In those days, we were starving immigrants, and studying film was expensive. Gaze got sick

of it, dropped out, returned to Russia, and made a fortune there in the roaring 1990s. In the respectful 2000s, he went back to school and became a filmmaker.

When we met for dinner, Gaze had just released another TV series, and was driving himself (and me) crazy with complaints about the lack of interesting material, low TV standards, and general Russian despair. Tired of his complaints, I said, "Today, I found this amazing screenplay." I told him about *Gott mit Uns*. He perked up, asking, "Can you get me a copy to read?"

Remembering the intricate photocopy procedures at RGALI, I made a cautious promise. The procedures turned out to be even more complicated than I expected, but after endless bureaucratic trouble and a week of waiting, I had the screenplay. (During the entire week, Gaze called me every day and asked, "Is it there yet?") Two hours after I gave him the copy, he showed up at my door.

"*Nu*," I asked, "What do you think?"

"I want the rights," he said.

It was time to find Kanovich.

Žalakevičiaus had passed away in 1996, but Kanovich was still alive and probably living in Israel. (In 1991, he wrote a legendary essay, "A Jewish Daisy," which made a convincing case for Soviet Jews to go to Israel.)

I called my mother (who lives in Tel Aviv) and recruited her help. Israel is a small place, and in two days I had Kanovich's phone number. With shaking hand, I dialed. "Can I speak with Grigorii Semenovich?" I said in Russian. Kanovich was summoned and I explained to him that I had found *Gott mit Uns* and wanted to talk to him about it.

He gasped. "Olia," he called to his wife, "can you believe it, she found our screenplay!" Returning to me, he said, "I thought it was lost. You are bringing me back to 1961, when Žalakevičiaus and I were working on the screenplay in Yalta. And then we got a call that the screenplay was slaughtered. We were crushed."

"Well," I said, "that brings me to the second point. There is this filmmaker, and he really wants to make a movie based on *Gott mit Uns*."

Clearly, we had a lot to talk about. We made a date: Kanovich and his wife travel every year to Nida, a seaside resort in Lithuania, to see friends and family. I worked out a way to join them in Nida for a few days.

In early August 2009, Gaze, his wife, and I landed in Vilnius, rented a car, and drove to Nida, about two hundred miles from Vilnius. On the way, we stopped at Ponary forest, near Vilnius, where Nazis murdered 100,000 people, 70,000 of them Jews. This was a terrible place—former Soviet fuel pits, into which Nazis threw dead Jewish bodies, then, in an attempt to cover up traces of the massacre, exhumed the bodies, burned them, and threw them back into the pits. Among the memorials, at the edge of a pit, Lithuanian teenagers were drinking beer.

We came to Nida, a picturesque resort town on the tip of a peninsula, with the Baltic Sea on one side and Kurskii Bay on the other. We checked into our hotel, the same place where the Kanoviches were staying. This turned out to be not just any hotel—it was a Soviet-style writers' resort, *dom tvorchestva pisatelei*, once reserved for elite members of the Soviet writers' union. Today, anyone can check in, but the hotel preserved its Soviet décor, and its devoted clientele, like the Kanoviches. The rooms, in tiny cottages scattered over the hill, had antiquated plumbing—rusty bathtubs, leaky faucets, toilets that either didn't flush at all or never stopped flushing, and carpeting that bore signs of generations of Soviet writers having had a good time. I hadn't seen anything like this since my Soviet childhood.

The hotel stood on a hill, and the main building had a rooftop café with good coffee and Wi-Fi. The view offered dunes and the sea to one side, and a lighthouse and woods on the other. We could have done worse. The staff members were Lithuanian youths who looked like Californian surfers—tall, tan, barefoot, with blond dreads. The faux Californians spoke English and German. Their Russian was either elementary or nonexistent. (With anyone older, Russian was still the lingua franca.)

The Kanoviches came to meet us at the picnic table near their cottage—Grigorii Semenovich, small, serious, focused; and elfin Olga Makarovna, still beautiful at eighty. We spent the next five days together, talking at the picnic table and at various other tables at their favorite local restaurants. Gaze was grilling Kanovich about the rights (which proved to be not a trivial matter, as the rights were split between Kanovich and Žalakevičiaus's heirs—a number of ex-wives, their husbands, and his children, mostly not on speaking terms with each other). All the while, Kanovich was telling me how *Gott mit Uns* came about.

It seems as though Kanovich was destined to write *Gott mit Uns*. He was born in 1929, in a shtetl Yonave, near Kaunas, to an old Lithuanian Jewish family. Kanovich and his parents survived the war, but Lithuanian Jewry was decimated—90 percent of 240,000 were killed.[3] This history defined him as a writer, inspiring him to become a chronicler and a poet of his people. His novels tell an epic story of his shtetl, from the nineteenth century to the Holocaust. The place is always the same—Mishkine, the shtetl's fictional name. His plots are based not only on Kanovich's own memories; in the postwar era, Kanovich spent a lot of time listening to survivors, and was saturated with their stories.

In 1959, Kanovich, then a young and barely published author, started talking with Žalakevičiaus about an idea for a screenplay. Žalakevičiaus would later become an icon of Lithuanian cinema, but he was just twenty-seven then, fresh from his directorial debut and searching for a new project. The idea Kanovich shared was based on a true story that he had heard from a survivor.

Kanovich recalls it this way: "An old Jewish man told me how a Catholic priest saved his son. The Jews were marched in a column, adults and children together, when a man in cassock appeared in front of them and told one of the guards, 'Do you want to make a little money? Do you want to do a good deed that will please God? Sell me one boy—I will choose him myself.' And he chose a boy—with light hair and blue eyes, and he took him away. That was this man's son. And the father understood that the priest was saving his boy."[4]

The man never learned what happened to his son, but the story struck Kanovich, and he began developing it further. He imagined that the priest took the boy to his village. In Kanovich's words: "The priest sat him down and asked him, 'Do you speak Lithuanian?' and the boy answered in Yiddish—'no.' Then the priest said, 'I will teach you, every night. You will have to speak Lithuanian—a plate, a chair, a table, etc. If you make a mistake, you won't get your dinner.' And that is how the priest taught him. . . . Meanwhile, the priest tells the peasants that the boy is mute. When the peasants find out that the boy can speak, the priest has to find an explanation, and he pronounces the boy's speech a miracle. Then the priest makes him his altar boy. . . . And then I kept thinking how this situation might develop."

Žalakevičiaus loved this idea, drawn by the contrast between a Catholic priest and a Jewish boy. Kanovich described it as "a juxtaposition of their positions, when one is absolutely safe and another is absolutely helpless. It interested Žalakevičiaus both politically and psychologically." But for Kanovich, the screenplay was "about a choice in the situation when choice is impossible—no matter which choice one makes, all roads lead to death."

Kanovich and Žalakevičiaus started writing the screenplay. Around that time they saw *Stars* (1959), an East German–Bulgarian co-production by Konrad Wolf, which was one of the first Holocaust films ever shown in the Soviet Union (in very limited release). Žalakevičiaus, who was friendly with Wolf from their studies at VGIK, probably took notice. But that was a foreign film, whereas in the post-Stalin Soviet Union, Kanovich and Žalakevičiaus were among the first to attempt a film project about the Holocaust. They penned *Gott mit Uns* even before the publication of Evtushenko's poem "Babi Yar" and Kuznetsov's novel by the same title, and before most of the films discussed here were conceived. Their script could have become the first Soviet Holocaust film since *The Unvanquished*.

It is not by chance that Kanovich and Žalakevičiaus were writing in Lithuania. Although Baltic republics were part of the Soviet Union, they had a more Western orientation, politically and culturally, so they could discuss the Holocaust there before it was possible in Moscow. For instance, in Lithuania, the press gave more coverage to the Adolf Eichmann trial.[5] Even if the local authorities were sensitive to the Moscow line, on the periphery there was still a greater

level of freedom for artists and filmmakers. Therefore, as we shall see, several screenplays about the Holocaust were at least initiated and discussed (although not necessarily produced) in Lithuania and other republics.

But even in Lithuania, *Gott mit Uns* was a hard sell. The challenge was to adjust the story to Soviet censorship expectations, which meant endless revisions. Kanovich compares the birth of this screenplay to "a difficult Cesarean section," because of the repeated interference of censors. "As a result," he continues, "the character of a little Jewish boy turned out to be the least developed, whereas the storyline about the partisans, which pleased the censors, became central. And when the priest goes to visit the ten hostages, it is because we had to show to Moscow—here, ten people for one communist." There were other changes. Kanovich sighs: "It is difficult to say today what this screenplay would have looked like if things were different."

Flash back to 1961. It is January, but hot in the meeting room of the Lithuanian Film Studio, where the SRK is discussing the second version of *Gott mit Uns*.[6] Surprisingly, they are not bothered at the moment by a Jewish topic. Instead, the main critique raised by several committee members, and by the studio director at the time, Julius Lozoraitis, is that the plot gives too much attention to the church by focusing on Feliksas, whereas the characters of Monica and the partisans, who ought to offset his "abstract humanism," are not significantly developed. According to the committee, the screenplay is lacking a clear explication of the moral bankruptcy of the church, and does not claim superiority of "party morals" over the priest's choice.

How was it that a Jewish topic was not a stumbling block of this discussion? It didn't come up because, as Kanovich explained, "Jewish themes were unspoken, not to be discussed." At the time, even the very word "Jew" was "somewhere between a dirty word and a state secret" in the Soviet Union.[7] Moreover, this policy of silencing things Jewish was itself unmentionable, and as such was communicated strictly off the record: there were no official directives instructing film studios to avoid the subject of the Holocaust. Officially, Soviets fashioned themselves as staunch internationalists who opposed anti-Semitism, a bias which was, of course, a "vestige of the bourgeoisie." In Lithuania, where the local population took an active part in identifying and murdering Jews, there was special sensitivity to the subject. In fact, saying out loud that the screenplay's problem lies with its representation of Jews would itself be anti-Semitic. This is why SRK was hard pressed to avoid any on-the-record discussion of Jewish topics, while effectively trying to suppress it.

At the meeting of the SRK, Žalakevičiaus and Kanovich had only one advocate, Yonas Gritsus, a cinematographer, and, according to Kanovich, a man of remarkable integrity.[8] From the outset, Gritsus called *Gott mit Uns* "an excellent, professionally written screenplay." Despite the objections of other members,

he insisted that the committee approve it for production. His voice was heard, and the screenplay was given a stamp of approval, with the understanding that Žalakevičiaus would strengthen "the party truth" in his treatment.

Next, the screenplay was sent to Moscow for approval by the Ministry of Culture, which managed the film industry at that time. This is where *Gott mit Uns* was ultimately rejected. Kanovich and Žalakevičiaus learned about it when they were working on the treatment in Yalta, hoping for good news from Moscow.

When the rejection came, Žalakevičiaus was heartbroken. He wrote to his friend, the great actor Donatas Banionis: "The screenplay is maimed, damaged, its limbs are cut off." In its current shape, continued Žalakevičiaus, it is nothing but "God, priest, and melodrama."

Žalakevičiaus still believed in the screenplay. "One day," he wrote, "sooner or later it will resurface."[9] Indeed, scholars of Žalakevičiaus believe that if *Gott mit Uns* had been made, it would have become a masterpiece, and might have received a Vatican prize.[10] But that did not happen. The film was not made. The most Kanovich and Žalakevičiaus could do to prevent *Gott mit Uns* from disappearing without a trace was to publish it as a screenplay. It appeared in a local literary journal, *Pergalė*. Translated and published only in Lithuanian, it was essentially buried, made inaccessible to a wide readership.

Yet, years later, *Gott mit Uns* was partially turned into film by a Russian-Jewish émigré director, Efraim Sevela. Žalakevičiaus had met Sevela in 1957, when he directed a Lithuanian film, *Till It's Not Too Late* (*Kol Nevelu*), which Sevela co-wrote. The two stayed in touch, and at a later date Žalakevičiaus showed him *Gott mit Uns*. Sevela became a famous dissident and refusenik, participated in a brave action of protest at the Supreme Soviet demanding emigration rights, and ultimately left the Soviet Union in 1971. After Sevela left, he lived all over the world, and developed a successful career as a writer. He wrote bittersweet, poignant stories of Soviet Jews, often as emigrés. In 1986, he returned to filmmaking and directed a Swiss-Polish co-production, *Lullaby* (*Kolysanka* in Polish). Unlike his humorous playful writing, this was a highly melodramatic film: three novellas set during the Holocaust. One of them is a story of a young Jewish boy saved by a Catholic priest. The priest orders the boy to pretend to be mute, and turns him into an altar boy. Things go well, until one day, a boy falls into the river and cries for help. The peasants save him, and when his body gets exposed, they see that he is circumcised. The novella ends with a silent scene, as the priest holds a boy in his arms, and the German troops pass by.

The novella bears a clear resemblance to *Gott mit Uns*, but its authors are not mentioned anywhere in the credits. Kanovich is positive that Sevela, enterprising but unscrupulous, simply lifted the plot from his and Žalakevičiaus's script.[11] In 1991, Sevela returned to Russia and toured extensively, showing, among others, *Lullaby*. Excerpts were also shown on Russian TV, but the film never got any real publicity or distribution, and disappeared without a trace. Even though *Gott mit*

Uns was at least partially turned into a film, it was little consolation: the authors were uncredited and the film was unsuccessful.

But times changed. Oleg Gaze secured the rights to *Gott mit Uns*, wrote a treatment, and got initial support from public Lithuanian and private Russian funds. In 2010, his treatment was awarded a second prize (300,000 rubles) in the category of "the best joint project" at the Kinoshock film festival.[12] As of this writing, Gaze is scouting EU foundations and festivals to raise necessary funds to produce the 1961 screenplay into a film at long last.

7 The Holocaust without the Jews

Steps in the Night (1962) and Other Films

The rejection of *Gott mit Uns* had profound consequences for Lithuanian filmmakers. Film tsars in Moscow not only rejected it but also made it clear that even considering such submissions was completely out of line. This frightened Julius Lozoraitis, a head of the Lithuanian Film Studio.[1] The result was increased self-censorship in Lithuania, so that some screenplays never even reached the level of an official discussion at the local Artistic Council. They were simply rejected informally, not only because they were sure to be rejected at the next level but also because the reputation of Lithuanian culture bureaucrats was now on the line. As Kanovich put it, speaking more than forty-five years after this repressive time, "They didn't want to take a chance: neither an artistic chance, nor a political chance."[2]

But not all screenplays were as unfortunate as *Gott mit Uns*. And not all filmmakers were as obstinate as Kanovich and Žalakevičiaus. Some artists were more open to modifications, as suggested by formal or informal censorship. On censors' orders, screenplays were changed and entire plot lines disappeared. Jews were written out of Soviet films. Nonetheless, as I will show in this chapter, these films remained obsessed with Nazi genocide and retained a measure of "residual Jewishness."

The story of another Lithuanian film, *Steps in the Night* (*Shagi v Nochi*, 1962), is a good example. The plot is based on true events—the escape of sixty-four prisoners from the Nazi prison of Fort IX in Kaunas, Lithuania. Historically, sixty out of sixty-four prisoners were Jews, either Soviet prisoners of war, resistance fighters from the Kaunas ghetto, or other ghetto Jews. Their story is told in detail in the memoir of Aleks (Alter) Faitelson, who was one of the organizers of the escape.[3] The prisoners were originally brought to the fort to work on covering up traces of Nazi crimes. Their task was harrowing—they had to dig up mass Jewish graves, exhume the bodies (or "dolls" as the Nazis euphemistically called the corpses), pile them up in batches of three hundred, burn them, crush the remains, and then place them back into the pits. Some prisoners recognized their family members among the corpses. They understood that after their task was

done, they, too, would be executed. Clearly, they were motivated to escape. A core group consisting of ghetto fighters and Red Army prisoners of war meticulously prepared and executed a spectacular escape on December 25, 1943. All sixty-four escaped.

Director Rajmondas Vabalas recognized this story as a winning plot, with, as Kanovich called it, "Hollywood-like potential." Vabalas knew the historical events of the Fort IX escape, but he understood from the outset that there was no chance that the story of Jewish escapees would be allowed in this film. It was 1961, the *Gott mit Uns* fiasco had just taken place, and Lithuanian studio officials were particularly vigilant. According to Kanovich, Vabalas regretted not being able to truthfully portray his characters, but he felt that he had no choice. He was a young, talented director, waiting for his big break. He recognized *Steps in the Night* as his chance for success as a director. But his original idea had to undergo dramatic—and cruel—changes.

Indeed, there are four versions of the screenplay in the RGALI archives. This means the screenplay was closely scrutinized and repeatedly revised. Vabalas "cleaned up" his screenplay, proactively turning his main Jewish character, the escape organizer, into a Russian communist. But it still was not enough. The Nazi prison, which is what Fort IX really was, became a camp in the screenplay (presumably for POWs) and the Jewish inmates were transformed into an international team including Lithuanians, Russians, French, and—in an earlier version of a screenplay—a token Jew. Clearly, Vabalas didn't clean out all the Jews at once. The "residual Jewishness" of the screenplay, and also the gory details of the inmates' work, constituted a problem for Soviet film authorities.

The history of how *Steps in the Night* was censored is worth looking into for several reasons. For one, famous figures were involved. The film's file opens with a letter from Aleksandr Askoldov, himself destined to become the legendary director of the banned film *Commissar*, but at this time still appearing in his previous role as a midlevel functionary in the Ministry of Culture—an editor in the department of film production.[4] Askoldov's letter is directed to the highest echelon of power—the Lithuanian Minister of Culture, U. A. Banajtis. Following up on the minister's request, Askoldov solicited an opinion from Mikhail Bleiman, and recommended revisions according to Bleiman's comments.

Mikhail Bleiman is another fascinating historical figure. A screenwriter and film editor, he was one of the most influential critics in the late 1950s and into the 1960s. Ethnically Jewish, he personally suffered in the anti-cosmopolitan campaign. Despite that, Bleiman remained a hard-core believer in the communist ideology that shaped him in the 1920s. At the same time, he was a perceptive critic, one of the most educated, intelligent, and precise readers of screenplays. He was also decisive and picky, and on his word films were rejected, and careers ruined. In short, Bleiman was very influential.[5] As I read his many reviews, I found myself becoming a fan of Bleiman. With each review, I anticipated his

dead-on analysis of the screenplay, even as I simultaneously dreaded reading his verdicts, which often forced radical revisions.

With *Steps in the Night*, as with other screenplays, Bleiman offered a superbly detailed but damning verdict. In its current shape, he concluded, Vabalas's screenplay could not be put into production. In his nine-page analysis that followed (far beyond the normal length), he insisted on greater character development, deeper understanding of relationships between the characters, and a clearer definition of goals.

A number of Bleiman's critical comments deal with minor Jewish characters, especially when they are represented as religious Jews. In one scene, it is a character simply labeled "a praying Jew." In another scene, it is a Jew who is quoting from Ecclesiastes. In yet another scene, it is a realistic assessment by a Jewish character: "The dead are better off. Soon we will die too, the sooner the better." All these "residual" Jewish references incensed Bleiman.

However, Bleiman's main problem and discomfort was with the representation of violence. He did not like the fact that the inmates "were burning corpses, frivolously calling them 'dolls.'" Bleiman calls the scene of exhumation and burning of the corpses "scandalous in its naturalism and an escalation (*nagnetanie*) of horror." He continues, "Do the filmmakers realize what they have written? And how are they going to film this? How can one make out of this scene a background of [characters'] chatting?"

In a way, Bleiman's indignation is understandable. The scenes at Fort IX are horrific. But didn't Bleiman know that these seemingly unrepresentable scenes arose from real historical events? It is a fact that 80,000 people (30,000 of them Jews) were murdered in the fort, and that other inmates were brought in to cover up the crime. Indeed, Faitelson describes the mundane daily life by the pyres of burning corpses, with the prisoners not only talking to each other but also snacking during breaks. True, "dolls" is a shocking way to refer to exhumed corpses, but that is, in fact, the historically correct term the prisoners used.[6] Bleiman surely understood that the violence depicted in the screenplay was not gratuitous. It seems he was so uncomfortable with such depiction that it was easier for him to blame the screenplay for being grotesque and force Vabalas to sanitize it than to engage with its subject. Bleiman's recommendation is "to shorten the camp part as much as possible." He adds, "This is known material, and to a certain degree it has been done before and has become a cliché."

What is going on here? To understand such a strong reaction, we must look at the history of the representation of violence in Soviet war films. Early Soviet film did not shy away from pictures of extreme violence. But in the 1930s, influenced by socialist-realist standards, such depictions were toned down. World War II posed new challenges for filmmakers: how to "select images that were graphic enough to outrage but not so graphic as to terrify."[7] The standards that were established during the war allowed for graphic images (such as mutilated

corpses), especially compared to Western standards. But by the 1960s, this had changed: with the rise of new humanistic movies of the Thaw period (such as *The Cranes are Flying* and *The Ballad of a Soldier*), the emphasis shifted from national atrocities portrayed with broad strokes to stories of individual suffering and even a de-heroization of the war. Cultural bureaucrats became concerned with censoring violence, which by then was perceived as gratuitous. It is not by chance that Andrei Tarkovsky's *Ivan's Childhood* (in Denise Youngblood's words, "the most disturbing of the Thaw war films"), which also featured graphic images of the war, was at the time of its release in 1962 blamed for "negativism."[8] Similarly, *The Living and the Dead* (dir. Aleksandr Stolper, 1963) was criticized for its "horror" of war depictions.[9] This is the context for Bleiman's critique, which might explain why he believed that the time for depicting war horrors had passed, and why he found them so objectionable.

Another context is the constant preoccupation of Soviet critics, Bleiman first among them, with so-called "naturalism." In art history, naturalism is simply an artistic movement defined as the depiction of realistic objects in a natural setting, but in Soviet newspeak it meant unhealthy fixation on the most basic physiological aspects of human nature, something that is entirely incompatible with socialist realism. In this view, any representation of death, dying, decay, or the human body is guilty of "naturalism." Shots of rotten meat and of a pierced eye in *Battleship Potemkin* are "naturalism." So are scenes of dying animals and naked peasants in films like *Andrei Roublev.* Bleiman saw what, to him, were repugnant elements of "naturalism" in *Steps in the Night.*[10]

Importantly, Bleiman did not consider his review to be censorship, and in fact wrote that the screenplay needed to be *saved* (his emphasis). What happened with this film is emblematic of the entire process of Soviet censorship of Holocaust representations: first, in an act of self-censorship, the director (in this case, Vabalas) erased most Jews from the plot. The precedent for his action was the rejection of *Gott mit Uns* and the considerable fear of Moscow among the Lithuanian studio leadership. Second, a Moscow reviewer (here, ironically, a screenwriter and Jew himself) insisted on deeper changes that would render the film even more distant from true events, and in doing so, eliminate the last traces of anything Jewish. In both cases, the changes to the screenplay were undertaken from "within" the industry, by (or on the recommendation of) cultural producers themselves. There is no external body (such as a KGB officer) monitoring the process. The system self-regulates. This is how a real-life Holocaust story becomes, on screen, "the Holocaust without the Jews."

Bleiman's recommendations were carried out, and on November 1, 1962, the film was accepted at the Artistic Council meeting of the Lithuanian Film Studio (incidentally, Vytautas Žalakevičiaus was an artistic supervisor of the film).[11] *Steps in the Night* turned out to be a serious, thoughtful film, beautifully shot in black and white. The main characters—the organizers of the escape—are

completely devoid of any sort of Jewish characterization, instead presented as generic Soviets led by blond, heroic, square-jawed communists. Only one prisoner—an older bearded man in glasses—retains a measure of "residual Jewishness." This is universalization of the Holocaust at its best (or worst).

And yet, even after all of this, the film was still viewed with suspicion. To request an all-Soviet film release, a Lithuanian minister of culture had to write a letter to the Ministry of Culture in Moscow that was couched in the most loyal Soviet terms.[12] The film finally went into wide release in 1963.

Steps in the Night did not become a big cinematic event, but it was received very positively by Soviet critics: *Sovetskaia Kul'tura* praised the film.[13] *Moskovskii Komsomolets* emphasized the commemoration of previously unsung heroes: "This film presents youth-like open romanticism of the fight of those who weren't broken; but it also presents the bitter wisdom of realization that millions did die. During the war, and immediately after it, we couldn't yet grasp all the human loss in its full scale. It is precisely for this reason that films about topics such as death camps have appeared and are still appearing now, when the war is long over."[14]

But among Lithuanian Jews, the film was received very differently. Kanovich says, "When the film came out, the survivors of Fort IX and the families of those who died there were still alive. And they were very unhappy with the film—they thought that it was a falsification." According to Kanovich, Vabalas himself was sympathetic toward Jews, and he did what he could. "In the film," Kanovich explains, "the inmates are burning the corpses of their own people. Lithuanian Jewish audiences understood what was going on there."[15]

When I was in Lithuania, I went to Fort IX, which today is a park and a museum under an open sky, full of memorial plaques and an enormous sculpture commemorating the victims. It was a bright sunny day, and people were meandering along the paths, many with baby strollers. Although the site now looks different, I immediately recognized the fort from the film—here is the wall where inmates were executed, there are the pits where prisoners worked. It was possible for me, while watching *Steps in the Night*, to translate the Soviet idiom into history and restore the heroes' real identities.

Several years later, another Lithuanian film written by Kanovich and Žalakevičiaus, *Ave Vita* (1969, dir. Almantas Grikiavichus), also presented a picture of "the Holocaust without the Jews." The story of how it was written is very similar to that of *Gott mit Uns*. It starts again with Kanovich, who spent a lot of time in the postwar period among the survivors. He heard their stories, and told one such story to Žalakevičiaus, who was always "thirsty for a good plot." This story is about a Jewish man who survived the execution in Ponary, and now lives somewhere abroad. But every year, on the anniversary of his death march,

he comes to Vilnius, puts on clothes of that time period, including a yellow star, and walks the entire nine miles from Rudnitskaia Street in the ghetto to the pits in Ponary. Žalakevičiaus was taken with the story, and together with Kanovich wrote a screenplay in which one of the subplots is based on the story of the Jewish survivor. This time, it was clear to both Kanovich and Žalakevičiaus that the Jewish identity of the character needed to be removed. They changed his Jewish name, took off the yellow star, and made him Lithuanian. But they still succeeded in hinting at his Jewishness: they gave the character a bizarre non-Lithuanian name, Cezaris, and they cast Vitautas Paukshte in this role—an actor, who, according to Kanovich, "looked Jewish."

Precautionary self-censorship was not enough. The film was still, in the words of Kanovich, "anatomized," and had entire plot elements taken out.[16] In the final cut, Cezaris is haunted by wartime memories upon his return to Lithuania. As he and his survivor friends walk a contemporary cobblestone street, he keeps hearing German orders, until his flashback takes over, and the screen is filled with images of people marched by the Germans through the same streets. There are no Jewish references. It is entirely unclear why the Nazis have arrested all these Lithuanians, and, in a later scene, why the Lithuanians are killed in a mass machine-gun operation. The plot makes sense only if the characters are Jewish.

Despite the accommodations Lithuanian filmmakers agreed to, they had their limits. Kanovich explained to me that there were things he refused to do. Sometime in the early 1970s, Otar Ioseliani, a Soviet Georgian director (who later became famous for his cult film, *Favorites of the Moon*, 1984) read Kanovich's novel *Birds in the Cemetery*, and wanted to make it into a film. He got the word out to Kanovich, but made it clear to him that the novel would only be used as a basis, and all the characters would be changed from Jewish into Georgian. Kanovich said no. Had he agreed, there would have been another film about the Holocaust without the Jews.

Of course, the strategy of de-judaizing historical plots was not isolated to Lithuanian studios. A Lenfilm movie, *Skylark* (*Zhavoronok*, dir. Nikita Kurikhin and Leonid Menaker, 1964), takes place in the Nazi camps, where Soviet prisoners of war unite with foreign inmates in efforts to escape. Despite the visual imagery of the Holocaust (striped uniforms of the emaciated inmates and barbed wire of the camp) there are absolutely no references to Jews in the film. *Arena* (dir. Samson Samsonov, 1967), made at the central Mosfilm, is set in a circus which the Nazis create for their entertainment by bringing in performers from various concentration camps all over Europe. No Jews are mentioned. A spy war drama, *The Dead Season* (*Mertvyi Sezon*, dir. Savva Kulish, 1968), deals with Nazi medical experiments in the camps, and features a camp survivor—a nice Russian guy. In a Soviet-East German-Polish co-production, *Shield and Sword* (*Schit i Mech*, dir.

Vladimir Basov, 1968), the protagonist is a Soviet spy making a successful career as an SS officer. Remarkably, in his line of work he never comes across any references to the Jewish question. In a beautifully shot television drama, *It Was a Month of May* (*Byl Mesiats Mai*, dir. Marlen Hutsiev, 1970), Soviet liberators come across a former Nazi concentration camp. Jews are not figured into the narrative until the very end of the film, when the observational-documentary-style shots of contemporary German street are intercut with still images portraying the Holocaust, including iconic ones such as a Jewish boy in a Warsaw ghetto with raised hands and naked women and children lined up for execution. These images speak for themselves, but the word "Jew" is never pronounced. There are no Jews in the episode of a television series, *The Eternal Call* (*Vechnyi Zov*, Mosfilm, dir. Vladimir Krasnopolskii and Valerii Uskov, 1982–1983), which takes place in Buchenwald. No Jews appear in another Mosfilm production, *Mother Maria* (*Mat' Maria*, dir. Sergei Kolosov, 1982), based on the real-life story of a Russian nun who saved dozens of Jews in occupied France. In the film, the nun saves Soviet prisoners of war.

A slightly different case is Yakov Segel's film, *I'll Be Waiting for You* (*Ia Vas Dozhdus'*, Gorky Film Studio, 1982), which features a secondary character of an old man who miraculously survived a mass execution in which his entire family was killed. This particular story hints at the executions of Jews by Einzatsgruppen. And yet nothing in the film directly points to it, except for a man's Jewish-sounding patronymic (Arkadii Lazarevich), and the casting choice—this survivor is played by Zinovii Gerdt, a recognizably Jewish face on Soviet screens. Under different circumstances, *I'll Be Waiting for You* could have told a Holocaust story, but in its sanitized version it can be read that way only through careful decoding and guesswork. Still, this is more than some other films were permitted at the peak of the stagnation era.

Strangely, some of the filmmakers discussed above were Jewish themselves, like Kulish, Segel, and Samsonov (whose real name was Edelstein). They were certainly aware of recent Jewish history. Kulish even worked with Mikhail Romm's crew on *Ordinary Fascism*. The non-Jewish filmmakers knew the history equally well, but all of them, for various reasons, could not or would not represent the Holocaust directly. Today, it is difficult to say what happened in each specific case, especially with most filmmakers gone and the paucity of paper records in the archives. I know, for instance, that the KGB itself sanctioned *The Dead Season*, and that SRK recommended "certain omissions" from the film—but no one knows precisely what kind.[17] I also discovered that an Artistic Council omitted "a long scene of liberation of children from a concentration camp" from the screenplay of *Shield and Sword*.[18] But there is no way of knowing what kind of scene it was. *Arena* had a difficult production history, with many revisions recommended at every step. Some of these recommendations were communicated

in a "friendly conversation" (I can only imagine that friendliness) between Samsonov and the head of SRK.[19]

I wanted to try and understand how it happened, how scripts were "cleaned up," and to look closely into at least one more case, in addition to *Steps in the Night*. Of all the filmmakers mentioned above, I succeeded in tracking down Kolosov, the director of *Mother Maria*, who was eighty-eight at the time we spoke. Kolosov was a rank-and-file Soviet director, churning out socialist-realist potboilers, often based on real historical events, which inevitably starred his wife, Ludmila Kasatkina. The couple was mostly known for the first Soviet television miniseries about a partisan cell in an occupied Soviet town, *Drawing Fire upon Ourselves* (1964), and a Soviet-Polish co-production about a Russian woman taken to a Nazi concentration camp, *Remember Your Name* (*Pomni Imia Svoio*, 1974). Remarkably, both touch on the Holocaust. In the miniseries, partisans help a Jewish girl who escaped from a ghetto deportation.[20] In *Remember Your Name*, the main character encounters some Jewish inmates in the camp. Although their characters are not developed and their presence is deemphasized, at least they are mentioned.

Despite my best attempts, Kolosov seemed very uncomfortable with the subject of my research and never agreed to meet with me. We spoke only on the phone. According to Kolosov, he wrote a screenplay of *Mother Maria* based strictly on accurate research about a real historical figure, a nun, born Elizaveta Yurievna Skobtsova.[21] Kolosov explained to me that during his work on the screenplay and the film, he met with people who lived in occupied France, visited the camp Ravensbrück, where Mother Maria died, and went to archives in France.[22]

I asked about the representation of the Holocaust in this film. "The subject of the Holocaust was not our top priority for this picture," Kolosov explained, "although we certainly were familiar with its history from working on *Remember Your Name*." "I understand," I said, "that this was not a priority, but you are telling me that the film is based on accurate historical research. However, in your film Mother Maria saves a couple of Soviet prisoners of war, whereas in real life she hid and smuggled many Jews and worked with the Jewish Resistance in Paris." Kolosov was nonplussed: "The film is based on accurate historical materials," he reiterated.

After that, we seemed to just go in circles—I would bring up again a historical detail about Mother Maria, and Kolosov would calmly restate how everything that they portrayed in the movie is entirely accurate. At some point, Kolosov mentioned that the film reflects the subject of the Holocaust, "as it was acceptable within the context of our national cinema."

Growing weary of our conversation, I asked what that means. Did he feel any direct or indirect pressure to portray Mother Maria in a certain way? "No,

no," said Kolosov, now clearly annoyed with me. "No one bugged us with that topic of the Holocaust, and no one told us to include or exclude it." "But evidently," I said, "you chose to portray Mother Maria as a savior of Soviet prisoners of war, and not of Jews." "We filmed it in the way in which the events took place," insisted Kolosov. After several more rounds of the same conversation, I thanked Kolosov and hung up.

Did he convince himself of what he was saying? Did he internalize the party line to such an extent that it became his own? It is tempting to judge him—coward, conformist, liar. But simply put, he was a Soviet director, a good citizen, and he did what he could. When it was permitted to show Jewish suffering during the war, he did so in his miniseries made in the early 1960s. He made references, however partial, to the fate of Jews even in his 1970s picture. Both represented the Holocaust, in his words, "as it was acceptable within the context of our national cinema." Why not in his 1982 film? Perhaps by that time what was acceptable had changed. Perhaps one subversive subject per film was enough. After all, *Mother Maria* dealt sympathetically with the subject of White émigrés, and with the Russian church abroad, which were themselves untouchable subjects.

With Kolosov remaining a staunch Soviet citizen even in 2009, we shall never know the answers to these questions. But my conversation with Kolosov taught me an important lesson: not everyone wants to part with the Soviet past. This lends even greater credit to artists like Grigorii Kanovich, a hero of the previous chapter, and Icchokas Meras and Mikhail Kalik, the main characters in the next chapters, who refused to play by the Soviet rules.

8 Kalik versus Goskino

GOODBYE, BOYS! (1964/1966)

The biography of film director Mikhail Kalik seems to encompass the entire Soviet Jewish experience of the twentieth century—hopes for communism, World War II, Stalin's purges, the gulag, opposition to the regime, and finally emigration to Israel. Today, Kalik is in his eighties; he lives in Jerusalem, seemingly out of sync with his present environment. His apartment, full of mementos and memories, is like an island, floating in the sea of the ultra-orthodox life of contemporary Jerusalem. Like other great filmmakers, Kalik is a wonderful storyteller, with a keen sense of dramatic tension, and a talent for enacting various characters and voices. As I was listening to him, his past came alive as if on screen.

Born in 1927 and named Moisei (Moses, in Russian), he grew up in the heart of Moscow, in a neighborhood where Pushkin once lived, in the Russified artistic milieu of his parent-actors and their friends. But Kalik was also a descendant of a prominent Kiev Jewish family. (His great-aunt Rachel used to book an entire hotel in Kiev during pogroms, gather her family and friends there, hire police to guard it, and oversee the battle from her command post on a balcony.) These two legacies—Russian culture and Jewish history—would later define Kalik's life and work. As a teenager, he spent the war in the evacuation in Central Asia, where he encountered the best of Soviet arts and culture, even watching Eisenstein film his *Ivan the Terrible* in Alma-Ata.

In 1949, at the height of the anti-cosmopolitan campaign, Kalik was accepted into a prestigious film school, VGIK. What made this possible was the forceful advocacy of Mikhail Romm, who became Kalik's lifelong mentor. His film studies, though, did not last long. Soon Kalik was arrested and sent to the gulag. He survived the camps by playing a game with himself: he pretended he was sent there on a mission—to learn about life and become a better artist and filmmaker. In the camps, he was exposed not only to ruthless brutality but also to Jewish culture. His best friend there was a Romanian Yiddish actor, Leva Levin, who taught him the basics of Judaism and some Hebrew. Kalik's defining memory is Purim in 1953, on the day Stalin died: "In our camp, Jews hugged and congratulated each other 'Haman dropped dead!' This was a true Purim."[1] Stalin's death freed Kalik, and he came back to VGIK to be a student of the legendary Soviet director Sergei Yutkevich, who helped him through the many obstacles Kalik faced with

each of his films. Kalik was an uncomfortable filmmaker for the Soviet system: too innovative, too principled, and, yes, too Jewish.

Every one of Kalik's films had a Jewish motif, and at least a minor Jewish character. In his first movie *The Youth of Our Fathers* (*Yunost' Nashikh Ottsov,* 1958), it was Commissar Levinson. In *Lullaby* (*Kolybel'naia,* 1959), it was a Jewish pharmacist. There was a handicapped Jewish war veteran in his most famous film, *Man Follows the Sun* (*Chelovek Idet za Solntsem,* 1961). Finally, there was an old furniture dealer, Solomon, in his last Soviet production, *The Price* (*Tsena,* 1969).[2] For Kalik, it was not an ideology or an act of subversion. This was simply a result of who he was and how he thought; his deep identification with his people came through in his art.[3] This is especially true for his *Goodbye, Boys!,* a stunning work of the Soviet poetic cinema of the 1960s, and, arguably, Kalik's best film.

Goodbye, Boys! is important to consider here for several reasons: first, Kalik's cinematic innovation in depicting the war and the Holocaust through weaving together documentary and fiction. Further, in this film we see the unique features of the Soviet representations of the Holocaust: externalization through depiction of ghettos and camps, and parallels between Stalinist and Nazi crimes. In that, *Goodbye, Boys!* shares common ground with Western Holocaust films, as well as staking out its own territory.

Goodbye, Boys! is a nostalgic story of three teenage boys in a resort town on the shores of the Black Sea: one Jewish, Sashka (Nikolai Dostal'), and two Russian, Vitka (Mikhail Kononov) and Volodia (Evgenii Steblov), from whose point of view the story is told. It is the late 1930s, and three friends, being the best of their crop, are recruited for the military academy. The boys enthusiastically accept, but their different families struggle with this lucrative offer, especially Sashka's Jewish parents. As the boys are preparing to leave their native town, they go through rites of passage: the first cigarette, the first kiss, the first shave, and the first glass of wine. At the end, the boys are on the train leaving for military school—from which in a few short years they will be sent to the war. The train is shown at a dramatic low angle: it is the train of history, and it will crush the boys.

In *Goodbye, Boys!,* Kalik uses the full toolbox of cinematic poetry. The cinematography is exquisite: in the scenes when the boys are swimming, patches of sunlight make the water palpable, nearly spilling off the screen. The film is shot in black and white, but the sun and the sea water are luminous. The sea is so dominant on screen that it appears to be another lyrical character—its still or stormy waters reflecting the emotional world of the boys. Levan Paatashvili's camera captures extreme close-ups and long shots, which are carefully edited together to create a seamless open space filled with air and sunlight—a space of freedom and movement. This is also the space of nostalgia for the times when life was whole, the world was in order, and everyone was alive and well. At key emotional moments, Kalik freezes the frames, sometimes superimposing an intertitle over them.

Figure 8.1 *Goodbye, Boys!* Three friends (left to right): Sashka, Vitka, and Volodia. Courtesy of Mosfilm Cinema Concern.

The film combines diegetic period music (popular Soviet songs performed on screen) and natural sounds (waves, snippets of conversations), and extradiegetic atmospheric music: a bittersweet piano melody by Mikael Tariverdiev, a famous composer who worked on most of Kalik's films. The visual imagery and the rich multilayered soundtrack create the atmosphere of the time. The overall effect is what Kalik himself calls "a cinematic impressionism."[4]

But the most remarkable cinematic trope that Kalik uses in this film is excerpts from other films, fictional and documentary, which function as flashbacks and flash-forwards. Already in one of the opening scenes, Kalik uses this trope: Volodia, Sashka, and Vitka watch a movie in a theater about three friends set during the Revolution (a Soviet 1934 classic, *Maxim's Youth*), only one of whom would survive. This film-within-a-film foreshadows the tragic future of Kalik's characters, and functions as a kind of a flash-forward.

But the most dramatic effect is reached in the film through documentary footage. The first such instance occurs when Volodia's mother is faced with the prospect of his military career. On screen, her thoughtful face gives space to footage of a Nazi military parade, complete with the marches, flags, insignia, and Hitler's speech. The parade transforms into iconic scenes of book burning (highly recognizable for Soviet viewers).[5] Soon after this, Kalik inserts

documentary footage of a Soviet parade—iconic images of celebration of Valerii Chkalov's record-setting flight of 1937.[6] This footage functions as a flashback to the recent past, not an unusual device for Soviet cinema in 1960s. Much more unusual was Kalik's editing together the two parades—the Nazi and the Soviet—suggesting obvious parallels between the two regimes. These bold parallels appeared simultaneously in Romm's *Ordinary Fascism* and in Kalik's *Goodbye, Boys!*—the two were made at the same time. The dialogue between Romm's and Kalik's films is particularly striking because the two filmmakers rely on similar techniques: contrapuntal montage, emphatic freeze frames, and still photography incorporated into the moving footage.

The use of contrapuntal montage is especially effective when documentary footage functions as a flash-forward to the future war. The images of destruction, used as the first such flash-forward to the war, rupture a romantic scene. Volodia and his girlfriend, Inka, are sitting at night on the seashore. Right before their first kiss, battle scenes and devastated towns appear on screen. Among those are scenes that we would identify as Holocaust imagery: freight cars loaded with people, men and women with Jewish stars on their jackets pushing carts and lugging suitcases. These are ghetto Jews, whom the Nazis deport to camps. The flash-forward continues with the images of atrocities on Soviet soil: wounded civilians, crying old women, and a young woman in a torn dress, led away by Red Army female soldiers from the site of her rape.

The second war flash-forward is intercut with a scene of the boys on a boat on a stormy sea; the violence of the war footage is matched by the grave danger of the storm. Images on screen are made even more powerful by the contrapuntal, lyrical melody on the soundtrack. The flash-forward captures the end of the war: ruins of German cities, white flags of surrender, then concentration camp inmates behind barbed wire, mass graves, and a whole procession of inmates in striped uniforms walking through a barbed wire passage.[7] The footage of camp liberations gives way to another iconic image—a photo of a soldier putting a Soviet flag over the Reichstag (a version of a famous shot by a Soviet Jewish photojournalist, Evgenii Khaldei). The flash-forward then ends on a happy note, with the iconic scenes of victory and return from the fronts, soldiers and civilians hugging and crying.

Significantly, both flash-forwards to the Holocaust rely on ghetto and camp images, rather than on local events of the Holocaust on Soviet soil. This means that the Holocaust is represented through an iconic, universally known cinematic repertoire, the same as that in Western films. However, it also means that the events of the Holocaust are externalized, according to Soviet convention.

Kalik's use of flash-forward is not limited to documentary. Even his intertitles foretell future events. These intertitles, which appear in lieu of the narrator's voiceover, disrupt the normal chronological sequence of events, and create an alienation effect. By removing the fourth wall (in Brechtian terms), they remind

us that the events on screen are a deeply subjective memory of just one surviving character, Volodia. The most dramatic of these intertitles reads, "Vitka was killed in 1941 in Novo-Rzhev, and Sashka was in 1956 acquitted posthumously." In one short phrase one can intuit not only a heroic fall in battle but also an untimely death in the gulag.

The flash-forwards disturb the natural flow of time in the film, and create displaced temporal relations, presenting, in the words of Thomas Elsaesser, "a glance from the future into the irretrievable past."[8] The film presents to us the past from the position of already knowing the future, "always already and not yet"—and never in the present. Although the disrupted temporal relations, especially through flashbacks, are common in Western Holocaust films for depicting trauma, flash-forward was Kalik's innovation. Similarly, by the mid-1960s, use of documentary footage in war films as flashbacks became almost cliché, but no one had used it for a vision of the future. These remarkable flash-forwards, predicting in a few short minutes the enormous tragedy of the war and the horrors of the Holocaust, were Kalik's unique contribution.

As a kind of flash-forward, I should add here that when Aleksandr Askoldov saw *Goodbye, Boys!,* the flash-forwards made such an impression on him that he used the technique in his *Commissar,* to great effect.[9] In the late 1980s, when audience worldwide finally saw *Commissar,* this ominous flash-forward became famous. No one recalled that it was a tribute to Kalik's beautiful film.

It all started with a moment of intense identification that Kalik felt when he first read Boris Balter's novel, *Goodbye, Boys!,* in 1962, when it had just been published.[10] The novel was set in an unnamed southern town on the Black Sea, but Kalik instantly recognized Evpatoriia, a famous resort town, where his beloved wife Susanna had grown up, and where his parents took him on summer vacations. More important, he recognized Balter's boys: "I read it, and everything was so close to me—these boys, they were uncles of my Susanna. I knew them—or rather I knew only one of them, Uncle Isaac, the rest of them were killed in the war."[11] Susanna's uncles were all Jews; only one of their friends was ethnic Russian. (In the novel, and, later, in the film, only one boy is Jewish.) The feelings of nostalgia and loss that the novel evoked in Kalik made him realize that this was his material: "I can only make a film if it's close to me, if there are graves there. Graves of people I love, not necessarily in a literal sense, but also metaphorically—everything that is dear to me." Kalik reached out to Balter, and together they wrote a beautiful, bittersweet screenplay. But their text was full of graves.

Consider an original intertitle about the boys' fate, which appeared at the end of the script: "Vitka was killed near Novo-Rzhev in 1941. His battalion came out of the counter-attack without its commander. Sashka was arrested in 1952. It took place after an arrest of many prominent doctors in Moscow. Sashka was

also a very good surgeon. He died in prison—his heart gave out."[12] Another intertitle tells us that the narrator himself is on a brink of death, at the age of forty, from heart disease. These intertitles, as well as the rest of the script, were closely based on the novel. Aside from cutting subplots about the boys' girlfriends, the main change between novel and screenplay was the addition of the documentary flashbacks and flash-forwards.

Kalik brought the script to Mosfilm in 1963. This was still a liberal time, when the fresh winds of the Thaw were blowing. Khrushchev was still in power, and although he had pronounced that "there is no Jewish question," this was nothing new, and had not yet changed a fickle official line.[13] It was still possible to propose a film that spoke in the same breath about the Great Patriotic War and the Holocaust. It was still possible, at least subtly, to critique Stalinism. But Kalik's script was too much.

The story of the production and reception of *Goodbye, Boys!* not only captures the Zeitgeist but also exposes the work of censorship on different levels—from the peer pressure within the studio itself to the involvement of the highest echelons of power, which determined the film's sad fate. From the outset, consideration of the script was marred by controversy. The minutes of the meeting of the Mosfilm Artistic Council reveals that the problems lay in the script's critique of Stalinism, especially the Stalin's anti-Semitic persecutions. Indeed, the most controversial part for members of the Artistic Council was a direct reference to the doctors' plot in the intertitle. Prominent Soviet writer Baklanov (himself Jewish) explains why: "As for Sashka Kriger's death in 1952 under very certain circumstances—we can't have that. Why not? Because we have to clean it up ourselves, and not to take the position, 'they will cross it out later anyway.'"[14] Enacted, most likely, for self-preservation, this is anticipatory censorship, pressing a filmmaker to make changes by foreseeing objections from above. Baklanov was not an exception—this was a common strategy. Even Tarkovsky, who was familiar with censorship firsthand, objected both to the reference to Sashka's death in 1952 and to mentioning the narrator's disease.[15]

Another controversial point was Kalik's use of documentary footage. Some members of the council would have preferred a war scene that clearly showed the heroism of the film's characters. Others, Tarkovsky among them, liked the idea of archival footage but objected to the idea of flash-forward. Kalik's flash-forwards were so innovative that other filmmakers did not know how to take them.

In a month, the Artistic Council gathered again, but the problems remained very similar. Reference to the doctors' plot was still a bone of contention.[16] Aleksandr Alov and Vladimir Naumov, two experienced filmmakers (and Kalik's friends), saved the day by suggesting an acceptable compromise: instead of Sashka's execution in 1952, the intertitle should read "posthumously acquitted." That way, the message is positive enough, and still communicates in a coded way that Sashka was either executed or died in the camps.[17] With these adjustments,

the script was promptly shipped to Goskino, where the editors rubber-stamped it with only a few suggestions: one, to minimize further an allusion to the doctors' plot and to make a non-Jewish boy a doctor (this was never done); another, to shorten the documentary footage (one can easily guess which scenes should be cut).[18] A few short months later, the same battles were fought again at the discussion of the director's treatment.[19] But what is important is that the script was launched into production.

In the early 1964, Kalik traveled with a crew to Evpatoriia. Most of the film was shot on location. Kalik recalls the filming there with pleasure: "We arrived in

Figure 8.2 *Goodbye, Boys!* A production still: Mikhail Kalik (center) is directing the cinematographer. Courtesy of Mosfilm Cinema Concern.

the early spring, when it was still cold. . . . Evpatoriia is sad in the winter, but also very romantic and beautiful: sea smell, big tides." The filming went smoothly, and Kalik was pleased with the results. Once he was back in Moscow, he started going to the Soviet Documentary Archives in Krasnogorsk to select documentary footage for flashbacks and flash-forwards. He was not given access to all materials: his biography, tainted by imprisonment in a gulag, made it particularly difficult. The process was very controlled: Kalik described to archivists what he was looking for and they prepared for him what they deemed appropriate. He had to choose only from these available materials.[20] Nevertheless, he was able to draw from a large and diverse pool. He was trying to find both Soviet and Nazi documentary footage: iconic, instantly familiar images, as well as entirely unknown ones. Kalik included footage that represented the Holocaust, and footage that drew parallels between Nazism and the Soviet regime. This was his deliberate and conscious choice.

If Kalik was not afraid to be so subversive, why would he externalize the Holocaust? Why didn't he include depictions of the Holocaust on Soviet soil? "Actually," Kalik told me, "I did. There is a scene taken from the early Soviet liberation footage when Red Army women lead a young undressed girl who was raped. To me she looked Jewish, and I knew that this footage was given to me in the archive in response to my request for Holocaust documents. Obviously, there wasn't a term 'Holocaust' then, but I explained to them what I needed." Unfortunately, without Kalik's explanation, the Jewish content of this scene is not evident. The Holocaust is represented most explicitly in the footage of the ghetto and the camps.

Again, Kalik: "The problem is not that I didn't include footage of mass executions [of Jews in the Soviet Union]. The problem was that no such documentary footage exists. Unlike ghettos, Germans didn't film those. We have only photos of after the fact—like the ones from Babi Yar."[21] This is an important moment: in some ways Kalik is right—indeed, no German footage of executions exists. But neither does German footage from the camps. Both the camps and the sites of mass executions were filmed after liberation, probably by the very same Soviet cameramen. Yet the camp footage formed the backbone of what we today imagine as "the Holocaust," whereas the footage of execution sites was interpreted as a general Soviet war loss, with the Jewish identities of the victims universalized. Years later, including the archival footage in his film, Kalik reproduces this situation. As a result, the references to the Holocaust on Soviet soil are all but invisible; whereas in the recognizable depictions, the Holocaust is externalized. Kalik was not trying to abide by Soviet rules, but that did not matter. The Soviet approach to the Holocaust—universalization and externalization—was already entrenched in the archival footage. When this footage was used, the Soviet discourse of the Holocaust reproduced itself despite Kalik's best efforts.

But to return to the film production: once he had all the archival materials, Kalik edited them together with his own footage filmed in Evpatoriia. By September 1964, he was ready to show the rough cut to the Artistic Council at Mosfilm. The council members liked the film and approved it with just a few revisions. Predictably, the peer-censors paid heightened attention to the depictions of the Holocaust and to anti-Stalinist rhetoric. The editors suggested that he shorten the scenes at Auschwitz, as well the scene of labor at the dock, where workers are running with wheelbarrows.[22] The editors correctly interpreted it as a ridicule of the glorified Soviet rhetoric of labor. (They were right; indeed, this scene at the dock was inspired by Kalik's experience of slave labor in gulag.)[23] In just a few days, Kalik reached a compromise with a studio, cut a few seconds here and there, and the film was sent for approval to Goskino.[24] And this is where the real troubles began, for reasons, as we will see, entirely unrelated to Kalik or his film.

Again, Kalik:

> Right after the film was sent to Goskino, I get a sudden phone call asking me to come to Goskino right away. I went, of course. I enter the famous building in Gnezdikovskii Alley [Goskino's address in Moscow] and I see a bizarre scene: everyone is running around, like in a movie, when "the Reds" come into town and "the Whites" burn all their documents. Just like that, everyone is running, some with boxes, others with piles of paper, and fast. I saw that something was up. I go to Baskakov's office—he was the one who summoned me. The secretary asks me to wait because something important is going on. So, I wait. Finally, I am called in, and Baskakov tells me, "In your new picture, in a scene with Chkalov, there is a close-up of Khrushchev. This close-up needs to be cut." Of course, I promise to cut it. Khrushchev was of no consequence to me in this scene, so it was fine with me. Who would have guessed that this entire muddle was because Khrushchev was ousted. This was literally the day after, the news was still not in the papers, and Goskino heads didn't know yet how to treat it.[25]

With Kalik's luck, *Goodbye, Boys!* was sent for Goskino approval on October 8. On October 14, 1964, Khrushchev was demoted, and Leonid Brezhnev assumed power.

With Khrushchev's face edited out, the film was approved. But with a regime change, the new party line was not yet clear . . . Was it still permitted to criticize Stalin? Careful Goskino officials did not want to take any chances. And so, Romanov ordered that the scene with the wheelbarrows be cut, a scene that Goskino correctly read as a comment on slave labor in the gulag camps. This was communicated, by necessity, off the record, since the film was already officially approved. Still, Kalik was supposed to oblige. Kalik refused—from his point of view, the film was approved as is, and there was nothing anyone could do. Kalik

was very principled about it: he even dug up an old decree by Lenin, asserting the author's legal rights.[26]

This effectively put the film on a shelf. The studio was devastated. After an impasse lasting several months, the studio held a meeting to discuss the desperate situation with the film. Opinions at the meeting were divided—some were incensed by Goskino's demands, but others were angry with Kalik because he refused to cut a mere seventeen meters of the scene with the wheelbarrows and release the film. At this meeting, participants openly discussed the question of censorship: if the request made by Goskino was one of censorship, they said, then there is nothing to discuss, and the scene must be cut "on the orders of the management."[27] But Kalik didn't show up at the meeting, and nothing could be done.

In an attempt to put pressure on Kalik, film authorities organized a so-called public meeting—a screening of the film to the public followed by a discussion. Usually, the "public" was well selected, or at least instructed about its tastes (whether on or off the record). This was another means of censorship. On June 17, 1965, workers of the car factory in Moscow gathered to see *Goodbye, Boys!* and weigh in with their solid proletarian judgment. From a distance of time, it's hard to imagine how Kalik survived this execution of his work: after the screening, a speaker after speaker arose and condemned the film. According to the Moscow carmakers, the film was a failure. One of them even suggested simply throwing it out and making another one. As if orchestrated, they zoomed in on all the pernicious moments: the slave labor in the wheelbarrow scene, the intertitle about Sashka's acquittal in 1956, the general de-heroization of the war generation. A sole librarian seemed to advocate for the film, but was quickly silenced. At some point, the discussants were so unanimous in their indignation that a Mosfilm representative asked how these people ended up at the screening—were they recruited by their party leadership? But Kalik kept his cool, and at the conclusion of the discussion simply thanked everyone and left.[28] Decades later, he remembered the humiliation and absurdity of the situation: "I decided to be silent, simply not to get down to their level," he explained.

The meeting accomplished nothing. The impasse remained. Finally, in September 1965, Glavkinoprokat (the main film distribution body in the USSR) brought an action against Mosfilm, charging it with losses of hundreds of thousands of rubles because they were not able to release the film to wide circulation. Glavkinoprokat demanded that Kalik make the cuts, or else it would be done without his consent.[29]

Once again, Naumov, Kalik's friend at Mosfilm, engineered a compromise: he found seven meters (forty-four frames in total) that he could cut in such a way that it would satisfy Goskino, and still be agreeable to Kalik.[30] The issue was resolved, but it was too late. The controversy over the film went to the very top. After two years of stalling, the chief party ideologue, Mikhail Suslov, allowed the film to be released only in the USSR. It did very well in the box

office, given the lack of publicity (13.1 million viewers). Suslov forbade *Goodbye, Boys!* from being screened outside the country.[31] The film was not sent to a single international festival.[32]

The authorities never forgave Kalik for his subversive film, and for his difficult behavior. After *Goodbye, Boys!,* Kalik was able to make two more films in the Soviet Union, but they were not released. His other projects, as will become evident in following chapters, were simply killed. In a few short years, dispirited by constant struggle with the regime, Kalik emigrated to Israel. His emigration effectively banned his films. *Goodbye, Boys!* finally traveled to international film festivals, only after the liberalization of perestroika. It was shown in Pesaro, Italy (1989), Rotterdam (1991), and New York (1995) to rave reviews. But it was too little too late. In Russia, the film has never been released on DVD. Outside Russia, copies of the film with English subtitles are extremely rare. *Goodbye, Boys!* might as well still be on the Goskino shelf.

Curiously, for Soviet censors this film was too Jewish. Today, especially for Western audiences, it probably would not be Jewish enough. If it were up to Kalik, *Goodbye, Boys!* would have been a much more Jewish film. As mentioned earlier, the boys on whom he modeled his characters (his wife's uncles) were Jewish. But in the 1963 Soviet Union, even Kalik could not pitch a film with all-Jewish main characters. He had to stick to the novel, where only one boy is Jewish. In an alternate reality, in which he had not been constrained by Soviet policies and restrictions, Kalik would have included images representing the Holocaust on Soviet soil. Unfortunately, we do not have such an alternate reality. In the only reality we have, *Goodbye, Boys!* was made and even distributed, but in some ways it remained a phantom, a phantom of a film that could have been.

9 *Stalemate* (1965) between the Filmmaker and the Censors

Mikhail Kalik's film *Goodbye, Boys!* was reluctantly released after a prolonged delay, but his next project, a screenplay set in a Vilnius ghetto, was never even given a chance to become a film. The screenplay was based on a novel entitled *Stalemate* (*Vechnyi Shakh*) by Icchokas Meras, which was itself such an extraordinary text that it merits discussion.

The novel was first published in 1965, in a popular Soviet literary magazine *Druzhba Narodov* (Friendship of the Nations), translated from the Lithuanian.[1] This was not unusual: the magazine specialized in literature of the Soviet republics, and routinely published translations of ethnic authors. What was unusual was that the novel was written by a Jewish writer and set in a ghetto during the Holocaust. The prominent Russian cultural critic Lev Anninskii recalls the startling effect of Meras's novel: "When Meras's star emerged on the Soviet literary horizon of the mid-1960s, there was a sense of something incomprehensible: of stripped skin, bare nerves, above-literary (or super-literary?) level of candor. His writing fit neither stylistic nor ideological canons [of the time]. It invoked an unknown-to-us spiritual form that had not had language yet."[2] This effect is understandable—*Stalemate* was one of the first novels published in the Soviet Union to speak openly about the Holocaust.

It seems that Meras (like Kanovich) was destined to write about the destruction of Lithuanian Jewry. Born in 1934 in a town of Kelme, he was a child survivor, having lost his parents in mass executions of 1941. He was saved by ethnic Lithuanians, and for years lived under an assumed Lithuanian name, speaking only Lithuanian. Not until after the war was Meras able to go back to his Jewish name, identity, and Yiddish language. The story of his survival became an inspiration for his first book, *Yellow Patch*, a cycle of stories.[3] *Stalemate* was his first novel, loosely based on the events that took place in the Vilnius ghetto.[4]

Stalemate's main character, Isaac Lipman, is a young chess player in an unnamed ghetto, the youngest son of Avraham Lipman, "a tailor with his fingers covered with pinpricks as a sky is covered with stars." Isaac is a target of the ambivalent attentions of Shoger, a sadistic ghetto commandant and ardent chess player, who harbors both awe and loathing of the boy's talent. When the children of the ghetto are threatened with deportation, Isaac is faced with an

unusual challenge: Shoger wants him to play a game of chess in front of the entire ghetto; if Isaac wins, the children will remain in the ghetto. But Shoger will kill Isaac. If Isaac loses, he will be spared but the children will be deported. Everyone will be saved only if the game results in a draw. Isaac has a tall order—to bring a game to a draw, which is more difficult than winning.

The novel's chapters follow Isaac's moves, as the entire ghetto is watching. With each move come his memories, and the novel is structured as a series of flashbacks that tell the story of Isaac's siblings and friends. Each subchapter about his siblings opens with Avraham's biblical-sounding words: "I begat a daughter Ina," "I begat a daughter Rakhil," "I begat a daughter Basya," "I begat a son Kasriel," "I begat a daughter Riva," and "I begat a daughter Taibele." Each story gives further insight into yet another aspect of ghetto life: Ina used to be an opera diva famous throughout Europe. Now she is involved in an underground theater production in the ghetto. When she smuggles the notes of Fromental Halevy's opera, *The Jewess*, into the ghetto, to be produced as an act of defiance of the Nazi prohibitions, she is caught and shot on the spot. Kasriel is a philosophy student, tempted and threatened by Shoger to spy on the ghetto resistance, but who commits suicide instead of becoming a traitor. Rakhil is a young widow whose beloved husband has just been executed at the killing site in Ponary and who has become an object of Nazi medical experiments. When Rakhil understands that her new baby is the result of such an experiment, she strangles it.

There is Isaac's girlfriend, Ester, for whom Isaac brings flowers to the ghetto, risking his life. There is also their friend, Yanek, a Pole who moved into the ghetto because his best friend, Meika, Ester's brother, was killed by a Nazi, and Yanek did not want to leave Ester alone. But Yanek is motivated not only by his friendship. He explains to Isaac his broader understanding of the situation: "You think that the ghetto is only in the ghetto, but that's not the case. Over there is also a ghetto. The only difference is that our ghetto is fenced, and over there, it's not."

Flashbacks end. We return to the chess game, at the fifty-second move. Isaac needs to make a decision—should he end the game with a draw and "make everyone happy," or win the game despite the threat of an execution and at least briefly defeat the commandant. Isaac chooses to defeat Shoger in his last move. But when the commandant reaches for his gun, the ghetto people begin to come closer. Then, this ring of people contracts around the commandant: "Shoger barely managed to grasp his neck with his hands. . . . A live wall has closed up. The ring disappeared." Meras leaves it open-ended: did Shoger kill Isaac? Was Shoger himself strangled by the human ring?

The novel ends on a lyrical note, repeating a reference to Sholem Aleichem's "Song of Songs," a tender tale of the forbidden love of young Shimek for Buzie,

the daughter of his deceased brother (references to this novel are scattered throughout *Stalemate*):

> "The end—a sad chord?
>
> A beginning, a most sad beginning is better than the most joyful ending? Sometimes a beginning could be an end, and sometimes an end—only a beginning. . . . Do you know how the spring sun shines? I doubt it. You haven't seen how Ester smiles. A spring sun shines like Ester's smile, and her smile is as bright as a spring sun."

Besides its literary accomplishments, the novel is remarkable for its deep engagement with Jewish life and culture, especially considering that it was published in the Soviet Union in 1963. Along with the Jewish main characters, the novel features various non-Jews. Besides the Pole Yanek, who wears a yellow star in the ghetto like all the Jews, there is also a beautiful Polish singer who helps Ina procure the opera notes; there is a Lithuanian partisan, killing Germans alongside Jewish Riva; and there is a Czech guard turning a blind eye to Jewish smugglers. There is even a German soldier who helps the ghetto underground.

Portrayal of the ghetto, and especially of its underground resistance, happened to be in line with a common Soviet trope of war heroism. For Meras, it was important not to show ghetto Jews as passive victims. In his writing, even in the inhumane conditions of the ghetto, Jews struggle to maintain their human dignity. Along with armed struggle, small acts of defiance determine their daily life. The Jews in *Stalemate* remain undefeated. Historically, few people managed to survive in Lithuanian ghettos, even in the Vilnius ghetto with its developed resistance organization.[5] But in the last scene of the novel, the ghetto Jews triumph over the Nazi commandant. Of course, this is only a victory on moral grounds, rather than an actual defeat of the Nazi. Yet it is a triumph of human dignity.

Although the internationalism and heroism in the novel aligned well with Soviet policies and tropes, Meras developed it on the basis of actual history of the Vilnius ghetto. The depictions of the Holocaust in the novel are also grounded in the local reality. The only plot line externalizing the Holocaust was the story of Rakhil, who was subject to Nazi medical experiments (which historically did not take place on Soviet territory).

Stalemate is a remarkable work of literature. It calls to mind the great modernist writings of the twentieth century, experimenting with point of view, narrative structure, and dialogue. It is amazing that this kind of novel—not only focusing on the Holocaust but also written in an extraordinary prose far removed from the tenets of the socialist realism—appeared at all in the USSR. It helped that it was first published in Lithuania, where, as in other Soviet provinces, the ideological leash was much longer, and in Lithuanian, a language that

conveniently prevented broad Soviet readership.[6] Still, how did it happen that the novel appeared in a mainstream Soviet publication, in Russian?

Today, Meras lives in Israel (he immigrated there in 1972). Failing health turned him into a recluse, and he rarely meets with people, limiting his social interactions to e-mail and phone. But I was lucky: when I got to Israel, in the winter of 2009, Meras agreed to meet with me. On a bright Friday morning, when the entire country was going shopping in preparation for the Sabbath, I took a bus to a quiet neighborhood in Holon, a suburb of Tel Aviv, where Meras lives with his wife Frida, an artist. He told me to call him Icchokas, his Lithuanian name (in Israel he goes by Itzhak). Meras is short, with a heavy-set head and piercing blue eyes. He moved slowly and deliberately, leaning on a sturdy cane. He spoke to me in accented but precise Russian.

"How did *Stalemate* get published in the Soviet Union?" I asked him. "Even though it came out in 1963 in Lithuanian," said Meras, "it was harder to publish it in Russian. Felix Dektor translated it and started going to publishers and journals, but no one wanted it, because it was a Jewish topic. The editor-in-chief of the *Druzhba Narodov* journal, [Vasilii Aleksandrovich] Smirnov, got excited about it. 'It's good prose,' he said. He gathered an editorial meeting to discuss it, but it accomplished nothing—*gornischt*."[7]

Actually, the meeting accomplished quite a bit. Reading the minutes today clearly explains the major problems the novel posed for the Soviet editors. Since those are probably the same problems that later led to rejection of the screenplay, the minutes are worth reading closely.[8] First, the editors wanted to strengthen the Soviet-Communist presence in the novel: to link the characters with the Communist underground, and to show them as supporters of the Soviet regime. Second, they insisted on downplaying the Jewishness of the novel: they were against all the Jewish references (whether the source was the Bible or Sholem Aleichem). Instead, the members needed the novel to emphasize universal suffering during the war. As one of the discussants put it, "It is necessary to broaden an international outlook of the characters. . . . No need to present the conflict as racial. Everyone fought with fascism, not only Jews." Another discussant worried that the novel is talking to Jewish readers, when instead it ought to appeal to Soviet readers as "an antiwar humanist tale." Third, it was important for the editors that the ghetto inmates be shown as active fighters. They could not accept the plot line about Kasriel, who chooses to commit suicide, which for the editors was a defeatist position.

Along with such ideological red flags, there were also aesthetic concerns. For one, according to the censors, the novel lacked a socialist-realist approach. Also, the discussants criticized the novel for its treatment of women and bodies

with what they called "naturalism"—an author's unhealthy fixation on the basest physiological aspects of human nature. Hence, the entire plot line of Rakhil for them was "pathological . . . a part of a medical textbook or a bill of indictment," and as such was "unacceptable in literature."[9]

As a result of the meeting, the text was revised, then appeared in the August 1965 edition of *Druzhba Narodov.* In that version, as expected, the Soviet line is strengthened, the entire chapter about Kasriel is missing, and the plot line of Rakhil is changed: she is now trying to save (rather than kill) the babies who were produced by the Nazi experiments, and is shot in an attempt to escape. Beyond these changes, the novel is unscathed—Jewish characters are still at the core of the plot, and even biblical allusions remain intact.

This publication was significant not only for Meras. Although *Stalemate* had previously been published in Lithuanian and Yiddish, these languages limited the novel's exposure and marked it as a niche publication (presumably of interest only to Lithuanians and Jews). This guaranteed the novel's marginal position and made it unthreatening to the censors. But now the situation was quite different. Publication of *Stalemate* in a major Soviet literary journal sent a powerful signal to other editors and their boards (read censors) that Jewish subjects and the subject of the Holocaust were now allowed. In 1966, another Meras novel dealing with the Holocaust, *On What the World Stands*, was published in a hugely popular Soviet literary journal, *Yunost'*, which had a circulation in the millions.[10] That same year, both novels came out as a book, published by a prestigious Soviet press *Khudozhestvennaia Literatura* (Artistic Literature) with a print run of 100,000. This edition was illustrated by Vadim Sidur, a Jewish artist in opposition to the regime. Another major publisher included *Stalemate* in an anthology of Soviet war writing.[11] Amazingly, in these publications, Meras succeeded in restoring his text to its original version, including the stories of Kasriel and Rakhil.

From Novel to Screenplay

It is in this context of newfound freedom that an idea to make *Stalemate* into a film emerged. This idea originated with the great Soviet director Mikhail Kalik. In 1965, Kalik was at the peak of his fame—and at the same time in opposition to the regime. After the spectacular success of *Man Follows the Sun* (1961), his *Goodbye, Boys!* (1962) was only released in 1964. Fed up with censorship, Kalik left Mosfilm studio.

"When I just left," he told me, "a couple of people traveled to Moscow from the Lithuanian Film Studio to see me and offered to make a film in Lithuania. And I had recently read *Stalemate* by Meras in *Druzhba Narodov* and fell in love with the novel. So, I said that I had an idea, but it would not be allowed—it's about Jews. But the Lithuanians were so interested that they said, 'Why not, let's try.'" He adds, "I think one of them was Jewish too."

Kalik wrote the screenplay, in informal consultation with Meras. "Then the Artistic Council of the Lithuanian Studio read the screenplay," Kalik explained. "Even though they liked it, it didn't go any further, as it was clear to all that there was no hope."

"Do you have the screenplay?" I asked.

"No," said Kalik, "by now, I think it is lost."[12]

I came back to the United States, but I couldn't stop thinking about *Stalemate.* I wanted to read it and to find out what happened to it.

Maybe I should go to the Lithuanian version of RGALI and spend some time searching in their dusty archives? At least Vilnius was a nice place to visit. I went online, found the Lithuanian archives' website, and on a whim sent an e-mail to a nondescript address. To my enormous surprise (in my experience, people in the former Soviet Union don't bother with e-mail, especially requests from strangers), I received a very nice reply from Vida Šimėnaitė, director of the Lithuanian Archive of Arts and Literature. "In response to your inquiry," she wrote, "we are confirming that we have two files for *Stalemate*, one by Kalik and one by Sverdlov. Would you like copies?"

Would I like copies? I nearly cried. It was such an ordeal obtaining copies from the Russian archives, even when I was physically there, that I could not believe my luck. I wired a fee to the archives, and the next day they uploaded two entire files, scanned page by page, onto my server. It was enough to make me want to study only Lithuanian materials from then on.

Sifting through the disparate pages of the files (Soviet archival records are notoriously disorderly), I began to reconstruct the events. It appears that after the meeting of the Lithuanian studio representatives with Kalik, events moved swiftly. Emboldened by the publication of *Stalemate* in *Druzhba Narodov*, the Lithuanian Film Studio had secured the rights to Meras's novel as early as August 1965. In October that same year, Meras signed a contract with a studio, and soon afterward Kalik submitted the screenplay.[13] His screenplay was based on the original novel, not the censored version in *Druzhba Narodov.*

The main plot development remains the same as the novel, as does the sequence of events: the screenplay opens with Isaac's game with Shoger, then proceeds in a series of flashbacks intercut with scenes of the ongoing game. By necessity, the screenplay had to be shorter than a novel, so several subplots had to be omitted. But unlike the *Druzhba Narodov* censors, Kalik omitted what were arguably the most Soviet and internationalist of the plotlines: that of Riva, an underground fighter cooperating with the Lithuanian and Russian partisans, and the plotline of Taibele, a little Jewish girl adopted by the Lithuanian couple. Kalik also omitted the entire story about Yanek's escape from Ponary, a subplot where Jewish resistance and Lithuanian solidarity with the Jews are most represented. The only true concession to Soviet rhetoric is the very end of the screenplay, in a few lines foretelling an uprising in the ghetto:

We rose then. And we all died.
No one was spared.
We perished with the weapons in our arms.
Freedom was our burial shroud.[14]

Kalik, of course, introduced a number of stylistic changes, such as his signature blend of archival footage and still photography with the fictional narrative (which he first used in *Goodbye, Boys!*). The first scene in the ghetto is intercut with archival footage showing the walls and the guards. At the end of the screenplay, there are images of the Warsaw ghetto memorial (Kalik probably chose Warsaw because there were no Holocaust memorials in the Soviet Union in 1965).

In another characteristic move, Kalik's screenplay makes use of voiceover—Isaac's, Ina's, and Avraham's voices. This uniquely suits Meras's novel, with its multiple vantage points. Finally, Kalik takes some key quotes in the novel and turns them into recurring intertitles (again, as he did in *Goodbye, Boys!*). A quote reminiscent of the "Song of Songs" poetry is spelled out as an intertitle both at the beginning and at the end of the screenplay:

Her lips are sweet as honey
Her cheeks are gentle as velvet
Her eyes are like blue mountain lakes.

Similarly, Abraham's refrain, "I begat a daughter . . ." or "I begat a son . . ." is also spelled out in the intertitles.

Despite the concession to the Soviet rhetoric at the end, the screenplay is tight, and generally reads like a promise of a great film. However, the Lithuanian Film Studio thought differently. An editor at the studio, Zakarias Grigoraitis, wrote an official letter to Kalik, rejecting his screenplay, while expressing satisfaction that Kalik agreed with many of the studio's recommendations (probably listed in another document, missing from the archival file) and asked for "developments and revisions."[15]

In just a few days, Grigoraitis followed up with the full review of the screenplay by SRK. It opened with an ambiguous formula, which would later have important consequences for the fate of the screenplay: "SRK of the Lithuanian Film Studio . . . holds that the screenplay cannot be accepted as a first version."[16] The document then delineated the reasons, all too predictable, for rejection. The first problem was insufficient emphasis on the "solidarity of people of different ethnicities in the struggle against fascism," especially since, instead of internationalist solidarity, the screenplay puts forth "the idea of the tragic fate of the Jewish people." More specifically, SRK was unhappy about biblical references, and references to Sholem Aleichem.

The SRK also complained that the preparation for the uprising did not constitute the main plot line. The editors pushed Kalik to leave behind the plot of

the novel, and instead "go beyond the original material." They would rather see a movie about an armed resistance in the ghetto than about Jewish suffering. SRK also took issue with the way Jews were represented in the screenplay: "It is well known that in many ghettos there was a huge social hierarchy among the inmates. Often times, people on the top were simply willing to do anything to survive, went to work for the fascists, became camp [*sic*] higher-ups, and camp police. It's true that this is not a part of Meras's novel, but the screenplay on the subject should reflect the complex social relationships that existed in the ghettos." This shows that SRK was concerned that the Jews might come out looking too good, and that it would help if traitors and collaborators among them were also represented.

And of course, as at the *Druzhba Narodov* editorial meeting, there were concerns about aesthetics—SRK disapproved of voiceover narration, intertitles, and the use of archival footage or stills, all of which were Kalik's signature stylistic devices. According to SRK's artistic intuitions, these devices would compromise the normative socialist-realist aesthetic.

But some of the SRK's comments were reasonable: "The screenplay mentions Ponary, where Rakhil's husband died, only once. The end of the screenplay, where Kalik wants to use photos from the Warsaw ghetto, further creates the impression that all this has nothing to do with our republic—with Lithuania." SRK insisted, justifiably, that the screenplay be more grounded in Lithuanian events.

Despite extensive criticism of the screenplay, it was not a damning review. The SRK clearly stated its support for the screenplay, and all but begged Kalik to cooperate and to make it possible for them to accept it. But Kalik was angered by the review, and made it clear to Grigoraitis that he did not want to make changes.[17] The studio became concerned, and Grigoraitis sent Kalik another letter, personal and warm, encouraging Kalik to make the necessary revisions. Taking an insider, off-the-record tone, Grigoraitis prioritized SRK's concerns: "Dear Misha," he wrote, "you, naturally, understand very well that the main point of SRK's review has to do with the development of a plot about antifascist resistance in the ghetto."[18] Translation: SRK's only real demand was to focus on the antifascist uprising instead of Jewish suffering. The comments about Kalik's style were only intended as suggestions. Grigoraitis reassured Kalik that the studio was committed to the screenplay. The letter ends with some flattery—"I am sure that for such an experienced person as yourself, it will be very easy [to revise the screenplay]."

But Kalik would not be placated. Despite a friendly letter, Kalik's response to Grigoraitis was angry. He argued against Grigoraitis's formula: "The screenplay is not accepted as a first version." According to Kalik, this violated the conditions of the contract between himself and the studio. In his view, if the screenplay was rejected, the studio ought to cancel the contract. Alternatively, if his screenplay

needed revisions, the studio ought to act according to §8 of the contract (pay the author 10 percent of the agreed-upon final payment). Kalik reassured the studio that he was prepared to work on the revisions, but insisted that his screenplay remain loyal to Meras's novel (an uprising would not be the main plot line, and there would be no new plot lines about collaborators in the ghetto).[19]

Kalik's seemingly tedious legalistic nitpicking was actually an important resistance strategy at the time. Two important Soviet dissidents, Vladimir Albrecht and Vladimir Bukovskii, each in his own way, promoted a strategy of making the Soviet authorities play by their own rules.[20] Kalik was influenced by their ideas and implemented them in his dealings with the studio.

As a result, the conflict escalated, and Julius Lozoraitis, a head of the Lithuanian Film Studio, intervened. Apart from scolding Kalik for what appeared to Lozoraitis as a battle of egos, he restated that due to Kalik's selection of story lines, the screenplay's "ideological meaning" was "considerably narrower than that of the novel."[21] Insufficient "ideological meaning" (vague Soviet lingo for adherence to the party line) was the reason the screenplay needed work and was not accepted "as a first version." But, Lozoraitis concluded, the studio didn't want to cancel the contract because they were confident that Kalik could deliver. What would be his deadline?

As time passed, the conflict remained unresolved. In February 1966, Grigoraitis traveled to Moscow to meet with Kalik in person, but their meeting accomplished nothing.[22] In September 1966, Kalik fired another angry letter to the studio, demanding that they "play by the rules." His legalistic letter ended on a sad personal note: "In connection to our correspondence, I keep thinking about a simple truth: foul play is not the best way to deal with people."[23]

At that point, the sides truly found themselves at a stalemate (no pun intended). In October 1966, for a resolution they turned to a lawyer, E. Maltsas. In his letter, the famous lawyer decisively pronounced Kalik's interpretation of the events correct, and his demands for an appropriate procedure well founded.[24] There are no other documents in the file, but it is fairly clear what happened. The studio never followed the legal advice it received, but rather used a conflict with Kalik to put an end to the project. This was not surprising, given that the events occurred at the end of 1966, when the liberal times were coming to an end. Several other Jewish-themed projects were terminated, as we will see in the next chapter. *Stalemate* at least was developed into a screenplay (even two), and for some time in 1965 its prospects for becoming a film actually looked promising.

The history of *Stalemate*, as of many other screenplays of this period, presents a complex picture of inconsistency and ambivalence of the Soviet approach to censorship of the Holocaust. First, the project was initiated by a filmmaker, already in opposition to the regime. Then it was initially supported by a studio in the Soviet periphery—and in some ways its Western frontier (Lithuania). Only

when the screenplay started going up the bureaucratic channels did it encounter snags. Even then, there was no outright, official act of banning, no anti-Semitic, Holocaust-denying verdict that would stun contemporary readers. There was not even direct acknowledgment of institutional censorship. The studio simply let the project quietly die.

An Alternative *Stalemate*

The Lithuanian Archives of Literature and Arts sent me two screenplays based on Meras's novel. The second screenplay was written by S. Sverdlov, whose identity remains a mystery to me despite all my efforts. It is entitled *Stalemate Lasts a Moment*, and is subtitled, "A cinematic novella in 10 episodes." Unfortunately, only the first two episodes, and a beginning of the third, are in the file (the story of Avraham Lipman's agreement with Shoger about the chess game, a story about the meeting between Isaac and Ester, and a beginning of Ina's story). The rest is lost. However, a comparison between the two screenplays is instructive: first, Sverdlov removed the biblical references and shortened references to Sholem Aleichem. Second, he got rid of the voiceover, and streamlined the narrative in such a way that the events take place in chronological order, which dramatically reduces the complexity of the story. Finally, judging by the titles of the missing episodes (preserved on a title page), Sverdlov placed greater emphasis on the resistance in the ghetto (episode 6, "The Fighters' Unit" and episode 8, "They Became Fighters") and on internationalism (episode 7, "The Family of the Lawyer Klimas," about a Jewish girl, Taibele, adopted by a Lithuanian family).

It is difficult to determine whether Sverdlov included story lines about Kasriel and Rakhil in his screenplay, and if he did, in what version. However, what this incomplete comparison makes clear is that Sverdlov meant to accomplish what Kalik refused to do—meet all the recommendations of the SRK. He downplayed the Jewish topics and amplified the Soviet content.

Predictably, Sverdlov's screenplay compares unfavorably both to Meras's original and to Kalik's version. The screenplay's further fate is not known. But since the file does not have an official SRK review, it is possible that it was rejected in the informal procedure described to me by Kanovich. If the rejection of Kalik's screenplay constitutes a cultural tragedy that creates a gaping lack in the history and memory of the Holocaust in the USSR, the fact that Sverdlov's compromised screenplay was also rejected is small consolation. Had it been realized, it probably would have resulted in a sanitized version of the events, creating a picture of the Holocaust that was, if not "without Jews," then at least not "about Jews."

But a part of Meras's novel was nevertheless turned into a film (without his consent or even acknowledgment of his authorship). The opening novella of Efraim Sevela's 1986 film *Lullaby* (also mentioned in Chapter 6) is clearly based on Meras's novel. This novella is set in the abysmal conditions of a ghetto, where

a girl (modeled on Ester) and a boy (modeled on Isaac) develop friendship. The girl asks him to bring her daisies. She wants a flower to test his love—to play a game of "he loves me—loves me not." The rest of the plot closely follows Meras's novel: the boy repeatedly tries to smuggle flowers into the ghetto and gets beaten by the guards every time, until one day when all the men smuggle a flower each and give them to him. Here the "borrowing" from Meras is even clearer than in the case of *Gott Mit Uns*, and yet, Meras is uncredited in the film.

Epilogue: *Stalemate* Today

My work on *Stalemate* had unforeseen consequences. Soon after reading the novel, I met Mindaugas Karbauskis, one of the most brilliant theater directors in Russia. Every one of his productions won prestigious prizes and became the talk of the town. By the time I met him, he was on a self-imposed two-year sabbatical, complaining about "nothing to stage." About forty years old, he was handsome in a typical Baltic way—blue eyes, blond straight hair, sculpted and elongated face, and a strong build. Karbauskis is Lithuanian, from an established local family, and he obviously knows and understands Lithuanian culture. He became my informal consultant and translator for all things Lithuanian—an invaluable help.

One day we had coffee at the Art-Garbage on Starosadskii Lane, a Moscow cafe reminding Karbauskis of Vilnius courtyards. I lent him my copy of *Gott mit Uns*, and he loved it. "Would you recommend something else to read, with your lucky touch?" he asked. I was flattered, and told Karbauskis about *Stalemate*. The next day, I got an e-mail from him: "I want to stage *Stalemate*. How do I get in touch with Meras?"

All of a sudden I was reminded of a research methods seminar back in graduate school, where we learned that there is no such thing as "data collection" in the social world, that all research is an intervention. Now this was playing out before my eyes. Gaze was already planning to make *Gott mit Uns* into a film. And now Karbauskis had decided to put *Stalemate* on stage.

On February 9, 2010, *Stalemate*, titled in Russian, *Stalemate Lasts a Moment* (*Nichia Dlitsia Mgnovenie*), premiered at RAMT Theater, one of the most prestigious stages in the country. In his preview, a premier Russian critic, Roman Dolzhanskii, wrote that expectations were high, and not only because it was Karbauskis's first major production after a two-year hiatus but also because of the play's content: "On the one hand, it is surprising that no one thought of staging *Stalemate* before, as it is so obviously theatrical material. On the other hand, one's got to admire RAMT for staging Meras's novel today, as it poses a challenge to the general orientation of contemporary theaters, even repertoire and public theaters, geared towards levity and entertainment."[25] The stakes, Dolzhanskii concluded, were high.

Karbauskis not only directed but also wrote the play based on the novel. He focused the action only on the events set inside the ghetto walls. He also "de-Sovietized" the plot, and got rid of acts of heroism. There are no partisans who fall in the battle, no attacks on German soldiers, and no strangling of Shoger. But the scene of Shoger's moral defeat by Isaac is powerful. The entire Lipman family joins Isaac at the chessboard, repeating in a ballet-like sequence his last move beating Shoger.

For Karbauskis, the ghetto is "a universal symbol of control, violence, and victimhood," as he writes in the playbill. But it is also a place where people experience love and friendship, the birth and death of their children, complex feelings of pride and grace, loyalty and treason to the fullest. "They are at the apex of their life," he concludes. But that full life is conducted within the stifling limits of the ghetto.

To reflect this, the stage design is minimalistic, even sterile. Black, brown, and gray are the dominant colors. The stage is almost bare: seven large demonstration chessboards are set on the black backdrop—as the play progresses, chessboards are removed, until only one remains. Like the novel, the production is structured as a series of moves in a chess game between Shoger and Isaac Lipman, the match that will decide the fate of the ghetto. The game takes place at a simple black table. Only a few actors carry out the entire production, most of them cast in multiple roles. The costumes are similarly minimalistic, signifying the characters' identities rather than indulging in rich historical detail. Instead of a Nazi uniform, Shoger wears a leather jacket and a turtleneck. Only a swastika on his arm band marks his status. Similarly, only yellow stars on their jackets mark Isaac Lipman and his family and friends as ghetto inhabitants.

The characters are not typecast; there is no excessive Jewish "ethnic flavor"—in Karbauskis version, the suffering of ghetto Jews is universal human suffering. And Karbauskis's main theme is not a Jewish Holocaust, but human dignity in the face of death—the choice to pay a high price for preserving that dignity. In the words of a reviewer, "His characters pay with their life for the right to remain human, for maintaining their self-respect."[26]

Karbauskis's *Stalemate* is equally minimalist in its emotional expression—it is intentionally dry and devoid of sentimentality; there is no blood and no tears on stage. The juxtaposition of the minimalist production and the immensity of the ghetto tragedy is an organizing principle of Karbauskis's vision. Although most critics praised the production exactly for this minimalism, which allowed Karbauskis to avoid clichés in the representation of the Holocaust,[27] the ascetic nature of the production, according to other critics, prevented the audience from fully identifying with the characters, and stood in the way of our empathy.[28] The majority of reviewers, however, found that the contrast between the ostensible lack of pathos on stage and the intense inner life of the characters

allows the audience to empathize with the characters. One reviewer even noted that the audience cried from the first moment to the last.[29]

After receiving critical acclaim, Karbauskis's *Stalemate* was nominated for a Golden Mask, the premier Russian theater prize. For this production, the Russian Federation of Jewish Communities awarded Karabauskis its annual prize in the Theater category. Forty-five years after its original, unfulfilled dramatization, *Stalemate* found its audience in Russia.

10 Kalik's Last Phantom

KING MATT AND THE OLD DOCTOR (1966)

In the mid-1960s, around the time of his ordeals with *Goodbye, Boys!* and *Stalemate*, Mikhail Kalik, along with many other filmmakers and writers, moved to the "Metro Aeroport" area of Moscow. It was a new neighborhood, made up of tall Soviet-style block buildings of a ghastly pinkish hue. New residents aptly named it "a pink ghetto" because so many of its residents were Jews, and because it contrasted so much with its "Red" working-class surroundings. Despite its remote location, Kalik liked Metro Aeroport because writers and filmmakers would run into each other in the street, and visit each other. Among Kalik's neighbors was Aleksandr Sharov, a beloved Soviet children's writer. Sharov's real name was Sher Israelivech Nurenberg (too Jewish for a Soviet writer), and friends called him Shera. One night, Kalik was invited to Shera's house for a reading of "Kaddish" by friend and fellow author Aleksandr Galich (who had also traded his too-Jewish name, Ginzburg, for a palatable penname). Galich was a legendary performer and singer/songwriter who increasingly opposed the regime. He had written a long poem dedicated to Janusz Korczak, a Polish pediatrician, writer, educator, and children's rights activist (his birth name, Henryk Goldszmit, was also too Jewish).

Korczak is remembered not only as an outstanding educator but also as a Jewish martyr who refused to abandon the orphans in his care in the Warsaw ghetto—even to save his own life. Along with the children, he was deported and killed at Treblinka. In the ghetto, he wrote a diary that was miraculously saved and published in Polish after the liberalization of 1956.[1] Following this, Korczak's writing appeared in the USSR.

At the time, Korzcak's diary was one of the few Holocaust-related stories allowed to be discussed in the Soviet Union. That is because the events described by Korzcak took place outside the USSR: in Warsaw ghetto and in Treblinka, one of the camps in Poland that the Soviets liberated. Most important, in the Soviet memorialization of Korczak, the Jewish side of the story was underplayed, making Korczak a universal humanist hero.[2] The Holocaust in this case was both externalized and universalized.

At the time of Galich's reading, Sharov was also writing about Korzcak. He was preparing an extensive essay about a recent collection of Korczak's works

published by a major Soviet press.[3] Sharov's "Janusz Korczak and Our Children" appeared in the literary journal *Novyi Mir* in October 1966.[4] These two texts—Sharov's essay and Galich's poem, the former published in a leading Soviet publication, the latter distributed in samizdat—were among the most important Soviet texts about the Holocaust and its memory, read and known nearly universally by Soviet intelligentsia. What was remarkable in both Galich's poem and Sharov's essay is that both writers re-inscribed the Jewishness of Korczak and his orphans.

But in the Soviet context, Korczak's story had meaning beyond Jewish martyrdom. It was also a story about nonconformism, about personal integrity, and standing up for one's beliefs and values. Those were all themes deeply resonant for Soviet cultural producers of the era. For Kalik, for instance, the figure of Korczak was so significant that he kept Korczak's portrait on his bookshelf.[5]

After Galich's reading, Sharov and Kalik discussed Korczak, and realized that they wanted to make a movie about him. They understood that making a film about a Jewish educator and writer in the Warsaw ghetto was a hazardous idea, but they decided to take a chance. The result was a screenplay, *King Matt and the Old Doctor* (*Korol' Mateush i Staryi Doktor*).

The screenplay is structured as a story within a story, the two plots converging in a tragic ending. The first plotline was a story of Korczak and his orphanage based on real-life events in the ghetto. The second was a fairy tale loosely based on Korczak's 1923 children's novel, *King Matt the First*.

For the ghetto part, the authors wove together quotes from Korczak's *Ghetto Diary* and from his famous pedagogical essays, "How to Love a Child," "When I Am Little Again," and "Rules of Life." Kalik and Sharov also relied on memoirs about Korczak by Igor Newerly (Korczak's former student) included in the 1966 Soviet collection.[6] (Sharov was simultaneously working on his essay for *Novyi Mir*, and many quotes appear both in the essay and the screenplay.) The screenplay, subtitled "A Fairytale—Requiem," opened with a harrowing scene at the camp:

> Flat field, flooded with an even bleak light. Everything seems dead—tall grass, identical barrack blocks in the distance . . .
>
> On the road to the barracks, from which black smoke is rising, children march in an endless column. Two to a row, holding hands. Not a sound is heard. It all is floating by as a memory that cannot be forgotten.
>
> Muffled, slightly stumbling voice of Korczak is heard:
>
> —what unbearable dreams. A night at a camp—always, every night. This is a camp for only little children. At night, I myself turn into such a child—desiccated, shriveled, ageless.
>
> The children are walking on and on: towards the black smoke rising over the edge of the field, flooded with bleak light.

Korczak's voice:

—I remember in my dream that I am seven, and that I had to go to school when all this happened. I remember that a primer, notebooks, satchel, and pencil-box were bought for me. And I know that I'll never get to school, and that there will be nothing at all . . .

A column of children. A little boy saw a wilted flower on the side of the road. He bent over and . . .

The frame freezes. A child's hand is outstretched toward the flower. Korczak's voice:

> Our Father who art in Heaven . . .
> This prayer was carved out of hunger and misery
> Our daily bread! Bread!

But it all happened! Happened! And we did live!

Music of requiem sounds.

At the image of the child's hand outstretched towards the flower, the credits roll.

KING MATT AND THE OLD DOCTOR.[7]

After the credits, Korczak's face appears on screen. He is the Old Doctor, with his "sad and anxious smile . . . with the eyes of the storyteller and a high forehead of a sage."

Then the camera is supposed to zoom in on children's drawings, which are followed on screen by images of nature, and then children's play—everyday scenes of children's lives. Korczak's voiceover continues—he marvels at children's understanding, at their curiosity of the world (all based on various pedagogical writings by Korczak).

Then a close-up on a child's drawing—a butterfly and flowers, entitled "Not in a ghetto," signed, "Marysia from Chenstohova." As a counterpoint, the word "Gassed" is superimposed on the drawing.

This opening sequence is characteristic of the entire screenplay, almost entirely based on Korczak's writing. The ghastly dream is inspired by an image from the *Ghetto Diary*.[8] The "Our Father . . ." prayer is taken verbatim from the diary entry on August 4, 1942, right before the deportation.[9] And Korczak's narration of his dream echoes his essay, "When I Am Little Again," in which the author imagines himself turning into a child.[10]

This initial scene also gives us a sense of Kalik's envisioned cinematography: stark, bare images, filmed in black and white; freeze frames and photographic stills, capturing key images and marking key moments on screen. In *King Matt and the Old Doctor*, in addition to the stills, Kalik also planned to use children's drawings and intertitles to the same effect—to freeze a moment in time and put emotional emphasis on the scene. For a soundtrack, Kalik planned to combine

voiceover, letting the characters speak to an audience as if in private, and music, which, as in his other films, would both parallel and contrast with the emotional tenor of a scene. In *King Matt and the Old Doctor*, a requiem is meant to reinforce the tragic tenor; a joyous Jewish wedding melody, another motif of the film, serves as a counterpoint. But even this wedding tune, which Kalik keeps inserting throughout the screenplay, is both joyous and sad.

Kalik also planned to use his signature device: a blend of documentary and fiction. This time, he fused the real-life story of the orphanage with the imaginary world of the fairy tale. Kalik envisioned the two stories being filmed differently: "The fairy tale had to be bright and colored, and life in the ghetto had to be filmed in a documentary style, using footage of the Warsaw ghetto filmed by the Germans. And even the parts that we would film would have been shot in a documentary aesthetic—black and white, natural lighting, with a shaky [handheld] camera, so that the frame is not fixed . . . sometimes something is in, and something else is cut out."[11] Kalik wrote, "I saw this film in my dreams, from the first to the last shot."[12]

The screenplay opens with a description of the Warsaw ghetto, which in his diary Korczak calls "the district of the damned": "Jagged brick wall, separating this area from the rest of the world. Women, elderly, children offer rags and old shoes to passers-by. But there are no takers. In front of a boy—books in a stroller. A man drives a coffin in a cart. Behind the coffin—several people; death is still an event. . . . On the walls, slogans are sneering at them: 'Dirt breeds lice; lice, typhus.'"

Within these walls, Korczak, together with Pani Stefa (based on real-life Stefania Wilczynska, Korczak's colleague) and a janitor Pan Zigmund (based on Piotr Zalewski) try to keep the orphanage alive. Korczak treats a sick child, calms a boisterous one, and teaches a lesson. The lesson becomes a game: who do you want to be when you grow up? All the while, he is struggling to procure enough food for the kids. His thoughts are in voiceover: "And I wish I could be little again . . . And I wish for a long, long fairy tale, the tale that never ends."

Indeed, at that point the grim reality of ghetto life turns into the fairy tale on screen. In this alternative fantastical world, Korczak is an Old Professor, one of the boys from the orphanage is young King Matt, and the rest of the children are his various friends and other characters. The plot of the fairy tale in the screenplay is loosely based on Korczak's novel *King Matt the First*, about the fanciful adventures of a young king. In the screenplay, the plot is streamlined and more carnivalesque. Although several subplots are omitted, the basic elements remain: Matt's father, the old king, dies. A little boy is crowned, but he struggles with having the power of a throne while being powerless against the corrupt ministers. A visit to the Sad King makes Matt think seriously about power and social justice, but more important, the Sad King tells Matt about his

African friend, King Bum-Drum. With his wonderful mentor, the Old Professor, and a friend, Felek, Matt runs away to the amazing homeland of Bum-Drum and his beautiful daughter, Klu-Klu. Meanwhile, the ministers conspire to usurp Matt's power. They create a doll that poses as a king and is entirely in their control. When Matt comes back, with Klu-Klu and many fabulous gifts from Bum-Drum, he decides to institute a children's parliament, with its own green flag. But the ministers conspire again to undermine Matt's initiative. They arrest him, stage an unjust court, and condemn him to death. Even the fairy tale ends in tragedy.

King Matt's tale is interspersed with scenes from the orphanage, all based on real-life events. In the screenplay, bright, colorful fairy-tale images contrast with the grim realities of hunger and devastation in the ghetto. The scene depicting Matt's return from the wise Sad King is intercut with a scene in the orphanage, when a former student (based on real-life Igor Newerly) visits Korczak to offer him fake documents and an escape from the ghetto. Korczak declines to leave his two hundred children behind. A fairy-tale scene, when Matt distributes chocolate to all the children in his kingdom, is juxtaposed with a ghetto scene, when a janitor, Pan Zigmund, is beaten up by the Nazis (also based on historical events). The scene of Matt's return from Africa is intercut with a scene of Korczak's quiet writing in his diary: "It is a difficult thing to be born and to learn to live. Ahead of me is a much easier task: to die."[13] Shots are heard outside. Korczak interrupts his writing to calm a frightened child.

As the tragic events unfold in both the fairy tale and the ghetto, the two stories begin to converge. Before the deportation, Korczak is gathering his staff and pupils in the orphanage courtyard.

"Pan Doctor, where are we going?" asks one of the boys, "to a summer house?"

As Korczak is looking over the column of children under their green flag, a Nazi officer enters the courtyard. Korczak's voiceover (again, based on his diary) says, "If one could say to the sun: stop, probably it should be at this time."[14]

The column sets off: "All the children are clean, dressed up, girls have ribbons in their braids. The green flag is waving in the wind." (Historically, the orphanage flag was green on one side, and white, with a blue Star of David, on the other, but that detail could not have been mentioned in the 1965 screenplay.[15])

The events in the ghetto continue to unfold: "The column moves. Silence. And in this silence appears a dance tune already familiar to us. It's an orchestra on Umschlagplatz [a site of deportation]. . . . Children walk up into the freight cars, with windows blocked by barbed wire. . . . The orchestra keeps playing."

As the SS troops are marching a procession of people toward Umshlagplatz, the evil ministers are capturing King Matt and condemning him in court. The doll-king declares the verdict—"Execute!"

The screenplay equates the inhumanity of the doll with the inhumanity of the Nazis: "What a strange inhuman smile is planted on the faces of the SS: identical to all, as if it's been mechanically reproduced. The smile of a mannequin."

Right before the deportation, a Nazi officer approaches the full cars and asks, "Are you Janusz Korczak?" A lover of his books, the officer offers Korczak a chance to stay.

"And the children?" asks the doctor.

The Nazi asks in response, "Do you realize where this train is going?"

Korczak is silent.

"Think about it!" says the officer.

"Can I go now?" asks Korczak and returns to his children.[16]

The action shifts again to the fairy tale, where soldiers are marching Matt toward his death, and the two worlds, that of the ghetto and that of the fanciful tale, finally come together: "Behind the convoy, behind the crowds—a green flag. It is Janusz Korczak and his orphanage. They came into the world of fairy tale, where the Old Doctor tried to lead them again and again, to lead his children, and where along with him came the tragic events of real life."

Now that the two worlds have collided, Korczak is continuing to tell his tale to the children on the train, quietly, slowly, pausing often: "They stood next to the wall, under the soldiers' guns, Matt and Klu-Klu . . . and the Old Professor."

"And they . . . they were killed?" ask the children.

Korczak's novel has a tragic end. Matt dies. But not so in Kalik and Sharov's screenplay. In their version, the soldiers refuse to fire:

> "And he . . . he wasn't killed?"
>
> "No," replies Korczak.
>
> "Hurray!" several kids at once.
>
> "I knew it, I knew it, he will not be killed," said a girl.
>
> "And me," said a boy.
>
> Train wheels clang.
>
> A car is dark, and one can barely make out silhouettes of children, huddled around Korczak.
>
> And suddenly—blindingly bright green of leaves and grass appear in the car window. This live green spot is rushing by, blinks, lights up.
>
> The wheels' clanging is louder and more insistent.
>
> Music of a requiem appears . . .

The screenplay ends with a poetic scene, with a little boy running in the meadow, and Korczak talking to him about the wonder of this world—"wonderful is everything that one remembers and one forgets, and how a man falls asleep, and what is he dreaming about, and how he wakes up, and what already happened and cannot come back . . . and what will only happen in the future."[17]

Although far from a happy ending, the tragic story closes on a lyrical note, and the reference to the future even gives it a ray of hope. What happened to the screenplay itself, however, leaves no hope at all.

Another Lost Battle

In the fall of 1966, Kalik and Sharov submitted the screenplay to Lenfilm, a studio in Leningrad that then had a reputation for being liberal. Later, Kalik admitted, "We, of course, realized how difficult it would be to make the screenplay pass through all the censorial hurdles, and therefore tried to smooth things out: we changed children's Jewish names to neutral ones, made some other cosmetic adjustments, but, obviously, a ghetto is a ghetto."[18]

Kalik and Sharov's efforts "to smooth things out" at first paid off. Lenfilm was initially very supportive. When the Artistic Council of the Lenfilm studio met to discuss the screenplay in October 1966, the resolution was unambiguously positive. While the council was critical of some specifics, and advised the authors "to use intellectual motifs of the literary-pedagogical legacy of Korczak in a more poignant and liberal way," the screenplay passed the main test—ideological screening.

The council not only approved of the screenplay but also expressed high regard for the project, declaring that the screenplay demonstrates how "the inhumane reality is overcome, how conditions for an act of heroism are created, and how spiritual complexity of character is formed." Most important, the council concluded, "This film, which reflects the world of children's life and imagination, is antifascist in its idea and its pathos."[19]

With such a strong evaluation, Lenfilm did not hesitate to send the screenplay to Goskino for an approval.[20] From there, the screenplay was sent for review to Mikhail Bleiman, both a bogey-man of Soviet scriptwriters and the most perceptive critic and editor of their work. Even Bleiman was enthusiastic. He approved of Sharov's essay as an excellent basis for the screenplay. He noted that Kalik, a director with a penchant for fairy tale and lyricism, was a perfect match for the material. In Bleiman's own words, "This material fits Kalik's artistic sensibility like a glove."

But being Bleiman, he also criticized the screenplay: "Scenes from Matt's tale are picked somewhat at random. They are not well integrated with the real history of Korczak's life and the life of his pupils in the Warsaw ghetto. And finally, the ghetto itself, scenes of the orphanage destruction, so well captured in Sharov's essay, here, in the screenplay, are not dramatic enough, and are even trivial." But his verdict remained positive. Moreover, Bleiman reported that in their conversation, Kalik apparently was even more critical of the screenplay than Bleiman himself (if this was possible). According to Bleiman, the only thing stopping Kalik from further work on the screenplay was the filmmaker's uncertainly about whether it would be approved for production. Indeed,

Bleiman confirmed that "there are some doubts as to whether to make a film about a Polish hero, when the Poles themselves are not doing it." As Kalik explained to me years later, the real concern was whether to make a film about a Jewish hero.[21]

Nevertheless, Bleiman's support was unequivocal: "Regardless of all these concerns . . . in my opinion it is necessary to make a film about Korczak, whether with Poles or without them. He is an amazing figure of international scale, of world humanistic heroism, and he deserves a film. And this film needs to be made by Kalik, and no one else. It is his cause, corresponding to his artistic inclinations and talent."[22]

Unfortunately, Bleiman's letter did not help. The project stalled once it reached the very top—the Department of Culture at the Central Committee of the Communist Party. Kalik was summoned to Goskino, where he had an unpleasant conversation with Baskakov, its deputy head, who told him bluntly that the film is not going to be made. "And the reason?" asked Kalik. Baskakov pointed his finger to the ceiling, and uttered, "There is an opinion."[23]

This conversation effectively put an end to the film, but it took place entirely off the record, and Lenfilm (or rather Kalik's friends at Lenfilm) tried to play by the rules and demand an official answer. They used the same legal strategy as Kalik in his struggle over *Stalemate.* The answer from Goskino came only in February 1967, in a letter, which stated: "Regarding a screenplay 'King Tadeush' [*sic*] (suggested director M. Kalik), the studio's heads and its editors were informed, and not once, about inexpediency of including this screenplay into the studio's plan, due to the narrowly national tone of this work belonging to Polish literature . . . which was made perfectly clear to Lenfilm directors at the conference with Baskakov in January."[24] The tone of the letter, as well as an error in the title of the screenplay, indicates that it is a dismissal, that the problem had nothing to do with artistic qualities of the screenplay. Once again, "Polish" needs to be read as "Jewish" here.

The timing of *King Matt and the Old Doctor* was unfortunate. If in 1966 Lenfilm still entertained high hopes about the screenplay, increasing political tensions made the project ever more tenuous as time passed. As Kalik says, "We were too late."[25]

In 1966–1967, several events in both domestic and foreign political arenas marked the end of the liberal era. Two writers were arrested and put on trial: Yulii Daniel (who was Jewish) and Andrei Siniavskii (who adopted a Jewish-sounding pen name, Abram Terz). Their February 1966 trial, in the words of Zvi Gitelman, "marked out the limits of official tolerance of heterodox ideas in literature and, by implication, in other fields as well. Jews and others . . . correctly interpreted the Siniavskii-Daniel trial as a strong signal that the reins were being tightened."[26] This trial also indicated the emergence of a dissident movement

with a high proportion of Jews. Concurrently, an emigration movement started in 1965 with an increasing number of Soviet Jews applying for visas to Israel.[27] This unnerved the Soviets.

At the same time, in the foreign arena, relationships with Israel were becoming tense. Already in January 1967, Israeli diplomats in Moscow received hints about an impending severance of diplomatic relations because of the "Jewish question."[28] As the 1967 War in Israel drew nearer, Soviet-Israeli relations deteriorated, and in June of that year the threatened severance of diplomatic relations with Israel became a reality. There was then a dramatic surge of virulent anti-Israel propaganda in Soviet media, often bordering on anti-Semitism.[29] Any further treatment of Jewish subjects effectively became impossible.

In addition to *Stalemate* and *King Matt and the Old Doctor*, two more prospective screenplays became victims of the Soviet vigilance regarding Jewish subjects in 1967. The first was *Babi Yar*, an adaptation of a novel of the same name by Anatolii Kuznetsov, proposed by Lenfilm. In their letter to Goskino, Irina Golovan' and Iosif Heifets, the creative cadre at Lenfilm, praised the novel and expressed high hopes for the future film. They phrased their request in the most innocuous Soviet language, without ever referencing Jews or the Holocaust: "Turning to the grim period of Kiev's occupation by Hitlerites, the author shows the fascist invasion as a national disaster, which leads to the rage and hatred of people toward the invaders. The accomplishments of the novel give us reasons to hope that it will become a basis for a significant film with great educational value."[30]

Given the significance of the project, Golovan' and Heifets suggested that Sergei Mikaelian, highly regarded at the time, direct the production.[31] *Stalemate* and *The King Matt* were slowly suffocated in 1966. But in 1967, the idea of making a film about *Babi Yar* was killed instantly, with only a couple of letters from Goskino editors. Their reasoning: since the plot is set in Kiev, let the Ukrainians deal with this subject.[32] At that point, Goskino did not want even to entertain the possibility of making *Babi Yar* into a film.

Another screenplay that was terminated was *Nuremberg Diaries* (*Nurembergskie Dnevniki*), submitted by N. Khrabrovitskii to Mosfilm in 1967. The idea was to present in a fictionalized form a history of the Nuremberg trials, incorporating documentary footage of the Nazi crimes. Initially, Mosfilm supported the idea and even sent the script to Goskino for approval. As with other sensitive materials, Goskino turned to Bleiman. Unsurprisingly, given his record, Bleiman did not like the script. Ostensibly, his problem was that the documentary nature of the script left no place for "artistic imagery." But as we have seen, this kind of purely aesthetic concern often masked political or ideological unease, in this case, over the troubling nature of the subject itself. Bleiman hints at it when he writes about the script: "the facts are well known."[33] Translation: let

sleeping dogs lie. There is no point in rekindling the discussion of the painful subject of the Nazi crimes and their retribution.

This discussion was fraught with other undesirable subjects, such as the particular fate of the Jewish people. Despite Bleiman's admonition, SRK encouraged further work on the script—as long as Khrabrovitskii revised it to emphasize the Soviet role in the trial. Khrabrovitskii took this to mean a serious rethinking of the script, and his letter to Baskakov of Goskino suggests developing the script into a thriller focusing on Martin Bormann's story.[34] It might have worked, had he not written his letter in June 1967; with an Arab-Israeli war this was not the right time to drag out the Nazi crimes. Even though SRK had no objections to his ideas, discussion of the screenplay stopped without any explanation.[35] This meant that there was a so-called "signal from above"—an orally and privately communicated message about the undesirability of the project in the current political climate. End of story.

We can only speculate whether the film could have been another *Ordinary Fascism* or another *The Dead Season*—an honest exploration of fascism or another sanitized version of "the Holocaust without the Jews." We'll never know. The fact is, following the War of 1967 and Siniavskii-Daniel trial, Jewish-themed cultural production was terminated, and liberal illusions were shattered.

***King Matt* in Israel**

After *King Matt and the Old Doctor* was rejected, Kalik was able to make two more films in the Soviet Union, an art-house film, *To Love* (*Liubit'*, 1968), and a TV drama, *The Price* (*Tsena*, 1969), based on Arthur Miller's play. But *To Love* was radically cut without Kalik's permission, and *The Price* has never been broadcast. By that point, Kalik had become increasingly disillusioned with the regime, and began to seriously consider emigration. When he was sued by the state on trumped-up charges, and all his films and his money confiscated, he effectively became a dissident. On December 10, 1970, shortly following his request for an exit visa, he was kicked out of the Filmmakers Union. Now he was completely outside the system. Before his emigration in May 1971, Kalik sent an incredibly brave public letter to *Izvestiia, Sovetskaia Kul'tura*, and *Literaturnaia Gazeta*, three major Soviet newspapers, openly condemning state-run anti-Semitism:

> In a big and multinational country there has been no place for Jewish culture in the last decades. Entire generations of Jews grew up without knowing their language, their history, and the ancient history of their own people. This is sad and immoral. It always bothered me and limited my opportunities. Now it led me to a creative dead end, because I cannot express what lives inside me.
>
> My modest plans to express national character in cinema (based on the books by Sholem Aleichem, I. Babel, I. Meras) did not come to fruition. Even the film

> script that was approved at Lenfilm (written by Sharov and me) about the fate of the great humanist of the 20th century, Janusz Korczak, was not allowed to be produced. "There is an opinion," I was told, as they pointed to the ceiling.[36]

Then he recounts details of the persecution campaign that was mounted against him and against other Jewish writers and scientists. He concludes that he has no choice but to emigrate to Israel—"a state of my people, reestablished after thousands of years of torture and wandering." Israel is where he sees his place.

In 1971, Kalik emigrated. Years later, Kalik dramatized these experiences in his remarkable cinematic autobiography, *And the Wind Returns* (*I Vozvraschaetsia Veter*, 1991), which he made in Russia as an invited Israeli director.

After his emigration, Kalik's films became unmentionable. His name was seemingly erased from the history of Soviet film, and an entire generation of Russians grew up without having heard of him. Even in contemporary Russia, Kalik remains largely ignored, whereas piles of books and articles are published about lesser directors.[37]

In Israel, Kalik fared only slightly better. At first, he was enthusiastically greeted by the local cultural establishment as a world-class director who would change the face of Israeli cinema. Kalik truly became a center of media attention when Otto Preminger (director of the famous *Exodus*) came to Israel, and the first person he wanted to see was Kalik. That encounter sealed Kalik's status as the sole hope of Israeli cinema, and Zeev Birger, a local film authority, took Kalik under his wing. Everything seemed possible. And yet, very soon Kalik discovered that all was not perfect in his new cultural milieu. The first unpleasant realization came during one of his media interviews. As the crew was setting up the equipment to film, Kalik showed a cameraman a portrait of Korczak, the very portrait that he had on his bookshelf in Moscow. Kalik asked a cameraman, a young Israeli, "Do you know who this is?" The guy looked at Kalik, and said, with hope, "Dostoevsky?" "And this," said Kalik to me, "made me very nervous. No one here needs this stuff either." [38]

This was just the beginning. Kalik's worst fears were confirmed later, when he failed to raise money for the film, this time not because of censorship but simply because it was not seen as a commercially viable project. "Over there, this screenplay didn't fit ideologically, and over here—financially. And I am thinking, what's better?" wondered Kalik.[39]

Ultimately, unable to realize a film, he opted to at least have the screenplay published. A version of *King Matt and the Old Doctor* appeared in an obscure Russian-language Israeli magazine, *Narod i Zemlia*.[40] In Hebrew, Kalik self-published it, along with his two other unrealized scripts written in Israel.[41] In all likelihood, both publications had very few readers, especially outside of Israel. In Russia, short excerpts from the screenplay appeared in a 1996 issue of the niche Russian weekly *Ekran i Scena*, which also does not boast a large circulation.[42]

Following this publication, Miron Chernenko included a brief discussion of the screenplays in his book on Russian Jewish cinema.[43]

Finally, in 2005, a Russian-Jewish literary magazine, *Lechaim*, serialized an abridged version of the screenplay.[44] Since this publication is available online, it probably made the text accessible to a much wider audience than the previous two.

The ordeal of *King Matt and the Old Doctor* did not leave much hope for Kalik and other Soviet filmmakers from that period. How ironic that this screenplay, because of its later publications, has become one of the better known Soviet Holocaust films that were never made.

11 The Film That Cost a Career

EASTERN CORRIDOR (1966)

Wartime Belarus was a site of the most horrific, unprecedented violence. Not only soldiers were killed in military combat between the German and Soviet armies but also civilians, Jews, and partisans—or people loosely affiliated with them. Killing of Jews, and retaliation against the partisans, took genocidal proportions: the population of whole villages was burned alive. Entire communities were razed.[1] A film by Valentin Vinogradov, *Eastern Corridor* (*Vostochnyi Koridor*), captures the all-encompassing horror of that war. *Eastern Corridor* is not just a phenomenal war film, remarkable for its honest depiction of the complex and contradictory reality of occupied Belarus. It is also the only 1960s Soviet film that makes the events of the Holocaust integral to the plot. In that, the film violates the Soviet rules of universalization and externalization of the Holocaust: in the film, Jews are portrayed as Jews (and not just as "peaceful Soviet citizens"), and the action is set locally, bringing in all the complexity of life under occupation. With its Holocaust scenes shot with unparalleled force and artistic vision, *Eastern Corridor* should have occupied a major place in the international Holocaust filmography. Instead, it was silenced upon its release, and became another cinematic phantom. This chapter is about *Eastern Corridor*, and its difficult production and reception history in the Soviet Union. It is also an attempt to save the film from the oblivion and return this remarkable tour de force to the cinematic history of the Holocaust.

Eastern Corridor opens with the German order instructing the forces to "use any means, including those against women and children" in their fight with the local resistance. As the order is read in voiceover, the camera descends through the lines of barbed wire stretched across the top of the prison cell to reveal inmates, including several local underground fighters, and Professor Grommer, a deported German Jewish scientist, holding in his mind a secret to powerful weapons. Another inmate is let in—Ivan Lobach (brilliantly played by Regimantas Adomaitis). Disheveled, beaten up, he is wearing an undone Nazi uniform, and the camera pans slowly over the other inmates, who examine him with suspicion. Although all suspect each other of treason, Lobach is their prime suspect. They demand to know his story.

The rest of the film is built as a series of flashbacks telling what happened to Lobach. The narrative is disjointed, jumping from past to present, from one

vantage point to another without warning. The film does not use a traditional establishing shot when introducing a scene in the film. A cut is often to a disorienting close up; there are no cues as to where we are or how much time has passed.

Many scenes are shot through doorframes or windows, constantly framing and reframing the story. Dramatic, oblique angles and expressionistic lighting add to the unabashed subjectivity of the narrative, intensifying the technique of moving between different, often conflicting, points of view. The soundtrack reinforces the polyphonic subjectivity of the film: its main motif in a minor key (by a popular Soviet film composer Mikael Tariverdiev) haunts the film. But more often than not, the music is contrapuntal, offsetting rather than illustrating on-screen action. Woven into the music are natural and other sounds, adding to the complex narrative. Besides music, the film draws inferences from other art forms—painting, sculpture, dance, and literature.[2]

With the film's elliptical narrative, considerable cognitive labor is required from the audience to piece it all together. By being asked to struggle with the narrative confusion, the atmosphere of the Belarus underground is conveyed to audiences on a visceral level. This narrative structure forces the viewer to rely on retrospective understanding (which makes the film clearer only on second viewing).

Eastern Corridor is a very unusual film, to say the least: in addition to a complex narrative structure, it does not clearly designate its characters as positive or negative. Unlike other Soviet films dedicated to partisan warfare, *Eastern Corridor* is a film without a clear positive hero, as expected from a socialist-realist production of the time. Rather, *Eastern Corridor* establishes the atmosphere of almost mystical horror and distrust penetrating the war-torn town. The deeply humanistic message of the film is the absurdity, senseless cruelty, and corrupting influence of any violence, regardless of what side you are on. In that, *Eastern Corridor* belongs to a larger trend in Soviet war films of the Thaw, when the plots no longer involved large-scale epics, but rather poignant stories about orphans of the war (like *Ivan's Childhood*), or the human cost of the war (like *The Ballad of a Soldier*), and huge losses to individuals (like *The Cranes Are Flying*). Among all war films of the 1960s, *Eastern Corridor* is most indebted to Andrei Tarkovsky, whose visual style created an aesthetic world upon which Vinogradov drew.

And yet *Eastern Corridor* pushes the envelope further than other Thaw films. Even Tarkovsky's *Ivan's Childhood* still features elements of socialist realism. For instance, the Germans are not humanized; they retain a scary, off-screen presence. There is clarity of moral purpose—good guys fight against bad guys, with very few gray shades. In *Eastern Corridor*, it is not clear who is a traitor and who is a victim. Germans are humans, and their characters are developed on screen with nuance, while some of the supposedly positive characters—partisans and underground fighters—remain questionable, and their roles are unresolved right

to the end of the film. The main character, Lobach, is a case in point. In Lobach's flashbacks, he emerges as a brave fighter. Working undercover and posing as a Nazi collaborator, *politzai*, he volunteers for dangerous missions. His Nazi uniform lets him have access to actual collaborators, who are implicated in arrests, torture, and executions of partisans.

However, in others' flashbacks, his part is much more questionable. Lobach's role in trying to save the ghetto Jews is particularly ambivalent: perhaps his involvement brings more harm than good. This subplot, which makes *Eastern Corridor* an extraordinary film for its time and place, starts developing when the underground sends a liaison to the ghetto, where local Jews are kept side by side with deported German Jews.[3] A liaison says this to Goldberg, a ghetto contact: "The pogrom is planned for Wednesday, the Hamburg Jews will be killed. Warn the ghetto. Also, we'll send you our man, help him to get this scientist, Grommer, out of the ghetto."

In the next scene, the camera pans over the desolate landscape—an old Jewish cemetery, where, among the worn gravestones overgrown with grass, swiftly, like a lizard, moves Freda (Elena Rysina), Professor Grommer's beautiful daughter. She is in a black dress, on which the bright round patch marking her as a Jew especially stands out.[4]

Goldberg convinces Freda to lead Nazi-uniform-clad Lobach to Grommer. Their dialogue reveals important ideological and philosophical differences between Grommer, the scientist, and Lobach, the fighter. The old scientist says, pointing to his head: "I have so many explosives in here, I could have blown up the entire world." Yet he is powerless against a local *politzai* who tortured him. Lobach offers him a gun. "Take it away," says Grommer, "I don't want my explosives to kill anyone. This is why I didn't give them to the German Army. I won't give them to you either." Lobach confronts him: "You want him [Goldberg] to fight for you? You want me to fight for you?"

GROMMER: I don't want to be responsible for any wrongdoings.
LOBACH: You do know that they brought you here to kill you, right?
GROMMER: Young man, have you asked yourself why they should want to kill such professionals? You don't know Germans—this is not economically profitable. They will keep us here, in the ghetto, until the very end of the war.

This dialogue is remarkable because it reflects an actual historical rift between the two parts of ghetto: local Jews were actively involved in the underground and supported the partisan movement, whereas German Jews stayed away from it. Regardless of their national origins, all Jews were killed in Minsk by October 1943.[5] And this is exactly the nature of Lobach's last warning to Grommer: "You are blind. Today there will be a pogrom and you all will be killed. This is a fact. There will be soldiers here within an hour." Lobach offers him to lead him away

Figure 11.1 *Eastern Corridor.* Professor Grommer. Courtesy of Valentin Vinogradov.

from the ghetto. But the professor is reluctant to leave. Ultimately, looking at his daughter, he yields to Lobach and follows him.

Their escape goes wrong, and Lobach must defend Grommer and his daughter by himself, as they are hiding in an abandoned hut in the marches. The Germans approach and throw smoke bombs into the hut. In the visually harrowing scene, Lobach's figure is barely visible in the clouds of smoke. Finally, when

Germans enter the hut, the camera first reveals only their boots moving across the smoke, then the camera tilts up to their faceless heads in the gas masks. The Germans are looking at the defeated Lobach lying face down by their feet. Although this scene takes place in Belarus marches, the clouds of smoke create an inevitable association with the gas chambers, as if priming us for what is to come—a scene of mass murder of Jews by shooting them in the river. This scene is clearly the apex of the film, and is one of the most remarkable scenes of the Holocaust cinema in general.

First the camera pans over roaring water from above, to reveal slowly that the river is full of people, struggling against the current in the dark. (The cinematographer, Yurii Marukhin, filmed this scene from a cable stretched over the fast-moving river, risking his life.)[6] The sound track is multilayered, combining the rush of the water, children screaming, and a cantor's voice singing in Hebrew the prayer "The Rock of Israel" (*Tsur Yisroel*). Then camera slowly moves to the right, showing the glow of the burning torches, and finally closing in on people trying to climb out of the rushing water. Then, with a fast movement, the camera pans over the figures in *tallitot*, the Jewish prayer shawls, praying and bowing in unison as they are standing knee-high in water. The camera moves even faster, as if gliding over the water, where people are drowning. Now in addition to the prayer and screams, there is a sound of automatic rifles shooting. The gunshots serve as a counterpoint to the beatific cantorial singing. The choice of prayer

Figure 11.2 *Eastern Corridor.* A drowning scene (a fragment). Courtesy of Valentin Vinogradov.

Figure 11.3 *Eastern Corridor.* A production still: filming of a drowning scene. Courtesy of Valentin Vinogradov.

is particularly poignant here: *Tsur Yisroel*, which is recited daily after the *Sh'ma* prayer, is a plea for deliverance and redemption. With this prayer on their lips, the Jews are dying on screen.

The camera now slows down its frantic movement, giving an eye-level shot of a large group of Jews in prayer shawls. Out of their midst comes out a naked, strikingly beautiful woman, knee-high in water, and the camera tracks her progress as she walks across the water, with a waterfall in the background, the high-contrast light and deep shadows emphasizing the emotional tenor of the scene. Her appearance is accompanied by a new musical theme—somber church music played on an organ. As the naked woman stops, she faces the camera, and with raised hands implores God in Yiddish: "God, God, you see our pain. Master of the universe, you see our pain, here stands in front of you Israel, your daughter, Rachel, take her and make her fertile!"

The drowning scene is shot from Grommer's point of view—along with the injured Lobach and Freda, he was captured by the Germans, who are driving them to a prison in a horse-driven cart. Grommer is peering intently at the scene of execution. Machine-gun fire is heard.

As much as Lobach tried to save the old scientist and his daughter, his efforts only brought them to the Nazi prison. When Freda has a chance to see Lobach again in prison, she confronts him and blames him for her father's impending death. Yet Lobach convinces her to help him organize the escape, which will also save Grommer. Freda has become a servant in the prison, and she is helping the enlightened prison commandant Baum learn Russian (she knows Russian

because her mother was a Russian Jew). Lizard-like Freda moves around the hallway of the prison, and brings keys to the beaten-up Lobach, an organizer of the escape.

But it is too late: these prison scenes are intercut with the scene of ghetto liquidation. In the empty courtyard of the castle (which houses the prison and the ghetto), people are loaded into trucks with red crosses on them. It is clear from the dialogue that these trucks will take people to their death. Among the people waiting in line to be sorted is the old Grommer and Egor, the artist (who is imprisoned as a resister). Grommer ask him, "What should I say?" Egor: "Say you are healthy. They kill the sick ones." Despite the fact that he witnessed a horrible execution at the river, Grommer says, "It can't be. I heard that they send the healthy ones to Germany and the sick ones are allowed to remain here. I have

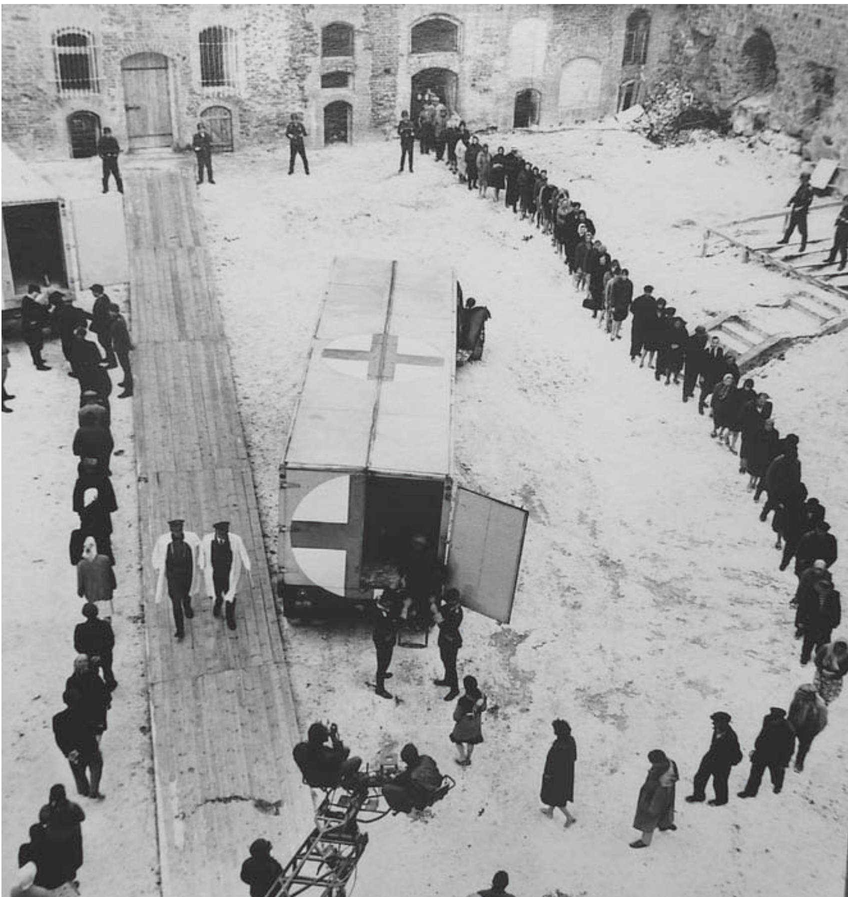

Figure 11.4 *Eastern Corridor.* A production still: filming of a scene in the prison's courtyard. Courtesy of Valentin Vinogradov.

diabetes." Indeed, when it's his turn, Grommer says, "Diabetes," and is directed to get into the truck. Next in line, Egor hesitates a moment, and then says, "I am sick," and follows him.

Back in the cell, the inmates are preparing to escape. But until the last moment they are all suspicious of one another—anyone can be a traitor. Finally, partisans succeed in blowing up the outside wall, and the inmates escape down the narrow confusing hallways of the castle, with shooting and sirens as the soundtrack. And then—absolute silence. Lobach was shot to death—and following his gaze the camera tilts up to reveal the sunlit shaft of the castle. Perhaps, after all, he redeemed himself in death.

This film staked out new artistic territory. Nowhere is this more apparent than in the drowning scene. In that scene, for the first time since *The Unvanquished*, the director depicted mass execution of Jews on Soviet soil. Vinogradov needed to find an authentic language for representing the atrocious violence. Like Donskoi before him, Vinogradov reached for an existing cinematic palette and sacrificed historical accuracy for the great emotional power of the scene. But if Donskoi modeled his Babi Yar massacre on Eisenstein, Vinogradov drew on the tropes of contemporary poetic cinema, especially that of Andrei Tarkovsky and Sergei Parajanov (both of whom he knew well). Like Donskoi, Vinogradov used these potent cinematic references to create a unique, authentic image of the Holocaust.

The drowning scene in *Eastern Corridor* is composed of the same visual elements as the famous scene of a pagan celebration night in Tarkovsky's *Andrei Roublev* (1966): filmed at night, it also features a crowd of naked people in the water illuminated by torches. The scene with a naked woman pleading with god is reminiscent of a scene in Parajanov's *Shadows of Forgotten Ancestors* (1964), when a naked woman is praying for fertility. Of course, the emotional tenor of the drowning scene is entirely different. However, all three scenes deal with religious rituals and meanings, as well as the larger symbolism of water, light, and darkness. The pagan, erotic nature of Tarkovsky's and Parajanov's films is echoed in the last words of the beautiful, naked woman, when she asks God to "take her" as she is standing in the water.

This striking but ambiguous moment is both deeply Jewish and Christian. The young woman can be read as symbolizing the entirety of Jewish people who, naked and vulnerable, face their death. Her plea in the moment before death to make her fertile (*frukhtik* in Yiddish, literally fruitful, echoing the biblical commandment to be fruitful and multiply), can be understood as a plea to let Jewish life continue. However, church music accompanying the woman's plea also conjures up Christian allusions.

In the absence of subtitles, the precise meanings of the Yiddish monolog and of the Hebrew prayer would be inaccessible to most Soviet audiences. But "yisroel," repeated several times, is clearly heard, a word that would be powerful in the 1966 Soviet Union. And yet, even in this very Jewish scene, there

are Christian references, making it more universal—and less Jewish—for its intended audience.

Christian references abound in other scenes in the film as well, often communicated through artistic images. In a visually stunning scene, a statue of Jesus is buried in the mounds of grain in an abandoned church. In another, the camera zooms in on a figure of a sinner at the reproduction of *The Last Judgment* by Michelangelo, to show a character's identification with him. The composition of other frames echoes Renaissance paintings as well as traditional Christian iconography. In its Christian symbolism and broader artistic and philosophical references, *Eastern Corridor* echoes not only Tarkovsky's films but also 1960s films of other influential European directors, such as Ingmar Bergman's *Persona* and Andrzej Wajda's *Ashes and Diamonds*.

Eastern Corridor is also remarkable for its subversive, erotic charge, especially in violent scenes, including those of rape and torture. The naked, vulnerable beauty of women in *Eastern Corridor* offsets the violence of the situations in which they find themselves.

Taken together, the complex narrative structure, sophisticated poetic cinematography, moral ambiguity, religious symbolism, and the theme of the Holocaust make *Eastern Corridor* stand out within the context of Soviet cinema, and place it within a broader context of international cinematic masterpieces. Unlike other famous directors—Tarkovsky, Parajanov, and Bergman—however, Vinogradov is almost completely unknown. Who is he, and how did he come to make the *Eastern Corridor*?

The Unknown Valentin Vinogradov

Ever since 2009, when I saw *Eastern Corridor* for the first time, I have wanted to find out more about Vinogradov. The problem is, there seems to be no literature about him. Despite a modest revival of interest in his film, not a single Russian film critic I talked to knew Vinogradov's whereabouts.[7] Only in 2011, after I read an article by the Russian media scholar Aleksandr Fedorov, did I make any progress in my task of finding the elusive director.[8] I learned from Fedorov that Vinogradov is still alive, and is based in Moscow. I found his number in the phone book online, and in just two days I was sitting in front of Vinogradov in his tiny apartment near the VDNKh Park—once a glorious showcase of Soviet economic achievements.

I am not sure what I expected from this forgotten filmmaker: Was he a dissident? A crazy artist? A bitter old man? Whatever it was, Vinogradov defied my expectations. I met a cheerful, amicable character, who, with his shorts, sandals, and tan earned during long walks in the park, looked more like a Florida retiree than an embattled Soviet filmmaker.

Once he started talking, I could see through the façade. The early career of Valentin Vinogradov looked promising: born in 1933, a descendant of a Cossack

family (his parents were professional military cadres) he was accepted by the prestigious Soviet film school, VGIK. He was a cohort of Andrei Tarkovsky and Vasilii Shukshin, two directors who defined in many ways Soviet cinema of the 1960s–1980s. Vinogradov became close with Shukshin, but had a more complicated relationship with Tarkovsky—they were in love with the same woman, Irma Raush, who later became Tarkovsky's first wife.[9] Their mentor was Mikhail Romm, who by that time was already a legendary director. Romm told his students that he could not teach them how to become filmmakers; they would need to discover it themselves, and he gave them the freedom to explore. Being VGIK students during the liberal years of the early Thaw gave them access to the best of world cinematography: they watched and absorbed Bergman, Akira Kurosawa, Robert Bresson, Italian neo-realism, German expressionism, Russian avant-garde—everything that would later deeply influence their films.[10] Romm remained for the rest of his life Vinogradov's mentor and advocate.

Upon graduation, Vinogradov was assigned to the studio Belarusfilm, in Minsk. His first feature, *Day When I Am 30* (*Den' Kogda Ispolniaetsia 30 Let*, 1961) was a box-office hit, and Vinogradov became a promising young director. But with his second film, *Letters to the Living* (*Pis'ma k Zhivym*, 1964), Vinogradov ran into problems with the authorities. Since the film was based on the biography of Vera Khoruzhaia, a revolutionary and a partisan, it was automatically considered a political film, and hence had to be examined particularly carefully. Vinogradov was just finding his style in this film: with visual metaphors and unusual camera angles, it did not fit the prevailing socialist-realist approach. *Letters to the Living* was censored, and production was stopped. Only Romm's involvement saved the day, and Vinogradov received approval to move ahead with the film. In the end, it was well received, and Vinogradov's star went on shining brightly.

Then, the Belarus leadership decided that Vinogradov should make a film about the local resistance during the war. Pyotr Masherov, the secretary of the Belarus Communist Party (the republic's president, for all intents and purposes), called a meeting with Vinogradov and Ales' Kuchar, a scriptwriter of *Letters to the Living*, and gave them the assignment—to make a film "about the heroic struggle" of the partisans.

Kuchar was older (b. 1910), had survived Stalinism, and knew how to talk to Party bosses. Vinogradov recalls that he was silent during that meeting, and let Kuchar speak for both of them: "Kuchar was the most interesting person, but very complicated. He told me a lot about Stalin's era, about a time when people betrayed one another. He was the only significant Belarus writer who didn't find himself in a gulag, so there were rumors that he ratted on someone. But he really wanted to change. . . . We became very close."

Both Vinogradov and Kuchar were excited about making a film about local resistance. They decided to do their own research, and they found and interviewed survivors and witnesses. They wrote their notes down in simple

lined notebooks—Vinogradov showed me one (dated May 1965). From these interviews, Vinogradov and Kuchar learned the tragic history of the Belarus underground, where suspicion and distrust ruled:

> There were partisan units [in the woods] that were not connected to the underground in the city. They did not trust each other. They trusted no one, period. For treason, for collaboration with the Germans, the partisans punished severely: by skinning, by impaling. People in the underground didn't trust anyone, to such an extent that they even sometimes killed the Soviet agents who were sent from Moscow to establish communication with them. And everyone was afraid of Stalin. One man, an underground leader, used to carry on him a list of underground fighters' names, so that he could justify himself to the Soviets, to Stalin—show that he didn't simply collaborate with the Germans, but did so to carry out underground activity. But when Germans arrested him and found this list of names, he became a traitor despite of himself. He did not want to betray anyone, he wanted a proof of his loyalty to the Soviets, but as a result all his comrades were arrested. . . . So, how could I tell an "objective" story about the "patriotic war"? A war is a war, and there is no just side in it.

Inspired by the stories, Vinogradov and Kuchar wrote a screenplay where everything was ambiguous, where "it is not clear who the hero is. Rather, there were no heroes at all." This lack of positive heroes, normative in socialist-realist movies, was to be detrimental for the film's approval by the industry bureaucrats.

What made it worse was that Vinogradov and Kuchar introduced a Jewish theme into the narrative, an unfavorable subject in 1966 Soviet Union. This, according to Vinogradov, was Kuchar's initiative. Ales' Kuchar, whose real first name was Isaac, and who was born in a shtetl near Minsk, lost family members in the Holocaust, and fought on the fronts himself. The Jewish theme was important to him.

From the witnesses they interviewed, Vinogradov and Kuchar learned the complicated history of the ghetto: "There were a lot of German Jews in Minsk ghetto; they were deported there. People who guarded the ghetto and who policed it were Jewish, too, and at times they were even crueler than the Germans. . . . We couldn't deal with this subject—it was too painful." They also learned about the abuse and torture Jews were subjected to in the ghetto. Vinogradov and Kuchar felt that the accurate reenactment of the heinous acts on screen would be a desecration of the memory of the dead. This is why they decided to create a highly metaphorical scene—the drowning of the Jews—to convey the torture and mass executions.[11] Kuchar chose the prayer for the scene and brought in a cantor from Leningrad to perform it.[12] Kuchar also wrote a text in Yiddish. Somewhat symbolically, the scene was shot on a river near Vilnius, another site of mass execution of Jews during the war.

From the outset, the drowning scene became the biggest hurdle of the film's approval process. Other scenes, especially the ones representing Jews, as well as scenes with nudity and violence, were also problematic. Everything about Vinogradov's approach was at odds with Soviet film conventions. The very first memo about the screenplay (by Belarus Goskino) recommends paying closer attention to the scenes that "harbor a danger of naturalistic representation," a scene of drowning among them.[13] Any accusation of "naturalism," one of the flashing daggers of Soviet criticism, was not to be taken lightly. The recurring concern over the film's "naturalism" would make *Eastern Corridor* unacceptable for Soviet censorship.

As the script was moving up the bureaucratic ladder, other similar issues arose, mostly dealing with aesthetic concerns and Jewish themes. On February 11, 1966, a meeting was called at Goskino in Moscow to discuss the *Eastern Corridor* script. As is evident from the meeting's minutes, in the original script, the portrayal of Jews and the Holocaust was more controversial than in the resulting film: Professor Grommer was presented as a fervent patriot, loyal to Germany even after Hitler came to power and after he himself has been deported to the Minsk ghetto. Unanimously, several editors, Mikhail Bleiman among them, objected to this position as unreasonable and ahistorical.

In general, the discussion indicates that the editors were acutely aware of the sensitive subject of the film: "If we, for the first time in a Belarus film, show a ghetto, we need to approach the subject with political and historical accuracy," emphasized an editor, Zoya Kutorga.[14] Another Goskino official, Evgenii Surkov, took a different line, pointing out that life in the ghetto is a "subject for Markish." What he was trying to say was that the Holocaust is permissible subject only for Yiddish writers, such as Perets Markish, and that Kuchar and Vinogradov should not concern themselves with this particular issue. (Indeed, Vinogradov was one of the very few non-Jewish Soviet filmmakers dealing with the uncomfortable Jewish subject.) A senior editor, Irina Kokoreva, noting too much emphasis on "the Jewish question," actually worried about anti-Semitism: "Currently, Jews are represented in such a way that it might be taken as a slander against Jewish people."

Kuchar, who was in attendance, explained his position: "There are many approaches to the Jewish question. Ours is harsh, but fair. There were different Jews, and there is no need in sugarcoat it." Besides, he adds, going on record about Tarkovsky's influence, "We wanted to write a contemporary cutting-edge script, like *Ivan's Childhood*." But he does promise to think "the Jewish question" over. Ultimately, the script was approved, and the film was launched into production. However, after such an inauspicious discussion, the authorities were on high alert, and monitored the production very closely. In early June 1966, Vinogradov and his crew arrived in Mirskii Castle, the location of an actual ghetto in a town called Mir in Belarus, where most of the film was shot. From the outset,

the production process was difficult: on censors' orders, the filming was stalled several times. Vinogradov documented his film's trials and tribulations in his diary. By mid-June, the first overseers showed up:

> 16 June:
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> . . . Today Ivanovskii [a high-up Belarus official] and Poritskii [a Belarusfilm studio executive] came to visit. Ivanovskii brought a message from above. He frightened us, begged, and at the end, admitted that he and Pavlenok [a head of Belarus Goskino] were told that their fate depends on the fate of our film. The conversation was childish, pathetic, it left me feeling heavy and dirty . . .

In a few days:

> This is our official first day of shooting. We broke a bottle of semi-dry [a Russian tradition of breaking a bottle of champagne against the camera for good luck]. Marukhin and I cut ourselves, got drenched in champagne and blood. We finished shooting, as promised 3 hours earlier. A night with vodka. The entire group gathered in the lobby. Got drunk and went back to our village.
>
> 30 June:
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> Pavlenok sent back the screenplay. On every page, in small handwriting, his willful directions. In the "torture" part, there is a comment: "Fie!" I should keep it as a memento. We watched the materials. The bath-house scene came out great. I think that here we got beyond all-Soviet conventionalism, and truly pushed ahead.[15]

But what seemed like an accomplishment to Vinogradov was extremely alarming to the culture authorities, and clouds started gathering over his head. Aleksei Kapler, a highly regarded Soviet scriptwriter, wrote a scathing critique of *Eastern Corridor* in the influential *Literaturnaia Gazeta*. Citing the drowning scene with a naked woman appealing to God, Kapler scolded the script for "vulgarization of the real-life issues" as well as for "predilection for pseudo-psychologizing and for alleged poetry of lewdness."[16]

Simultaneously, writers A. Kuleshov and V. Guzanov were recruited to write a letter, or rather an ultimatum, to Vinogradov and Kuchar, advising them to make changes to the film by August 22 at the latest, otherwise filming would be terminated. Many of the suggested revisions dealt with the Jewish characters and the Holocaust, particularly with the drowning scene, which posed the danger "of emphasizing doom and victimhood, as well as naturalism." Instead, insisted the letter writers, the film should focus on heroism.[17] The recommendations of Belarus Goskino were virtually identical.

On August 31, 1966, the Artistic Council of Belarusfilm studio gathered to watch the filmed materials. Their resolution was nothing new: "over-the-top visual effects and the decorative nature (*krasivost'*) of the shots, as well as false

meaningfulness of some scenes, such as a girl on mounds of grain with Jesus, the naked woman in the drowning scene, and the icon-like beauty of Freda" were all reasons for concern. Clearly, the council communicated these concerns to the higher-ups, because following the local screening, Moscow sent in a special mission to the sets. Again, from Vinogradov's diary:

> 6 September:
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> Tomorrow an entire commission headed by Kokoreva is coming. Pavlenok is angry with me for both my material and for my "behavior."
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> 7 September:
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> I am working very seriously. Even in my dreams, the film is not letting me alone. In cinema, in directing a film, there is no logic. Often things that seem obvious at the set come out backwards on screen. Kokoreva reprimanded me that a cinematographer in me is taking over the director. She also scolded me for the actors (Adomaitis, Rysina). We'll have to film again a scene "Ivan comes to Jenia." I am scared, angry, but not tired.

Vinogradov recalls that the drowning scene was a bone of contention at many of the discussions with Goskino officials. He remembers being questioned about nudity in the scene: "Why is the woman in the scene naked?" Vinogradov played the fool: "It's a mystery, I don't know. . . . You should ask *her* why she is naked." Vinogradov did not make it easy for the cultural bureaucrats to wave him through. Again, from the diary:

> 21 October:
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> A few days ago, they showed our material in Moscow. Urenevs, Bleimans, Kutorgas, and others [all names of Goskino editors in the plural] demolished it, turned it into shit. Isaev [a famous screenwriter] left the screening without a word. Back in Minsk, Pavlenok responded to it very calmly. I'll keep filming. They criticized me for:
>
> 1. style (cardboard style)
> 2. symbolism
> 3. beautiful frames
> 4. coldness[18]

Vinogradov's summary is remarkably accurate. Although he would have seen the official letter only a few days later, this is exactly what Goskino editors and functionaries Surkov and Ureneva complained about in their report to Boris Pavlenok.[19] Simultaneously, Kokoreva (their boss) followed up on their report with a telegram to Pavlenok obliging him not only to send the filmed materials of the *Eastern Corridor* for a screening in Moscow but also to be personally present for it.[20]

The same day, Goskino officials sent an urgent memo to Stanislav Pilatovich (a member of Central Committee of the Communist Party in Belarus responsible for culture), warning him that Vinogradov's style "may lead to the serious distortion of ideological-artistic concepts of a film about the struggle of Belarus people with the fascist invaders." Those are severe accusations by Soviet standards. They request that Pilatovich "help the Minsk film studio in their understanding and creative representation of the heroic struggle."[21] Translation: Moscow requires immediate and serious intervention from the local party leadership. Now Vinogradov and his film are in the eye of the storm, but he seems to be almost autistic in his obliviousness of his film's troubles. In his diary in these days, he is focused only on his creative process:

> 23 October:
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> I can't believe it. . . . I've never worked with such complete devotion. I love my film. I learned a lot. I understood how to express ideas through associative symbolic images . . .[22]

Why did Vinogradov not try to play by the rules and meet the expectations of the officials at least partially? He explained his position to me this way: "I didn't think about it. It was important to me to make a film, to create art. And as to how those in power would look at it—it didn't even occur to me to think about it." Vinogradov would come to pay dearly for his idealism. In a few days, once he read the report from Moscow, even Vinogradov started to realize a censorship crisis:

> 25 October:
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> They sent a memo from Moscow re our material. Signed by Ureneva and Surkov (although Surkov hasn't seen it). Many "isms"—melodramatism, symbolism, naturalism . . . and aesthetisation. Ureneva—a cowardly bitch—writes every other word, "I warned," "we warned." Rotten whores![23]

Curiously, alerting local party leadership had the opposite effect. As noted before, the party organs were sometimes in competitive relationships with the film industry tsars, and their involvement could be positive as well as negative. In this particular case, Vinogradov was lucky and Stanislav Pilatovich became his advocate. Vinogradov remarked, "Even back when the studio made it difficult for me to work on the film, he told them that they were idiots, and if they didn't understand this film—their thinking was simply outdated. He himself was a partisan during the war, and that is why he liked our movie so much."

Pilatovich's advocacy probably helped push the film through the Belarus Goskino, which issued a very formulaic loyalist letter of approval verifying that the film was distinguished by "patriotism and the great loyalty to ideas of the Communist Party."[24] And when the film was sent to Moscow for the central

Goskino approval, Vladimir Baskakov, then a deputy head of the Goskino, decided that he liked the film, and put a stamp of approval on it. Vinogradov recalls that Baskakov said, "*Nu*, well done—the movie is very good" and slapping him on the shoulder, complemented his performance as a Nazi boss (Vinogradov cast himself in a small role). And then Goskino editors had no other choice but to agree with Baskakov's verdict. According to Vinogradov, only one scene out of the entire film was cut: a scene of a Jewish woman slaughtering a chicken. Most likely, it was both too Jewish and too "naturalistic" for the cadre of Goskino editors. This was the one scene that Vinogradov agreed to cut.

The film was approved by Goskino, but Masherov—the party boss who had commissioned the film in the first place—was livid. Vinogradov recalls that at the special screening of the film, Masherov stamped his feet, and left without watching it to the end. Vinogradov was horrified and started preparing for the worst.[25]

Masherov and the other local cadres were determined to punish Vinogradov. There was not much they could do about *Eastern Corridor* after it was approved by Moscow, but they did make Vinogradov's life very difficult with his next film, *Wait for Me, Anna* (*Zhdi Menia, Anna*, 1969). It was censored—cut and recut without his permission—to such a degree that Vinogradov felt he had no choice but to leave Belarusfilm. Vinogradov was not the only one to be punished for *Eastern Corridor.* Pilatovich was demoted and sent to work in Poland. Kuchar was fired from the studio, and was never given another chance to work in film.

At this difficult time, Vinogradov met again with Tarkovsky, who was going through similar hurdles with his *Andrei Roublev*, which authorities also demanded be cut, and which was not released for a long time. The two classmates exchanged stories and commiserated about the difficult fate of their movies.

Everything that Vinogradov made (or attempted to make) after *Eastern Corridor* was closely scrutinized by the authorities, and at least in one case, his TV miniseries *Blue Desert* (*Siniaia Pustosh*), half-filmed, was simply washed off the film stock. Paradoxically, *Eastern Corridor* turned out to be the least censored of Vinogradov's films, and today this is the film that most fully represents Vinogradov the director.

Vinogradov died in August 2011, less than a month after our conversation. When I went to meet him for the first time, I expected to find a dissident, or at least an angry man, bitter about the system that had undermined him as an artist. Surprisingly, despite his compromised career as a director, he did not harbor a grudge against the Soviet regime. Moreover, by 2011, as an aged man, he idealized the good old Soviet Union, and spoke of the immense opportunities that his country gave him—free education, an opportunity to work in his vocation. For Vinogradov, the Soviet power was still the best and the only. All these bureaucrats that he encountered—the Masherovs, Urenevs, Romanovs—were

aberrations, and in his mind did not represent the regime but rather betrayed it. He, Vinogradov, remained loyal to it until the end.

From a Film to a Phantom

Eastern Corridor has never been shown to a wide audience. Although it had not been banned officially, it was only released for a very limited time and shown only on the periphery, so that there was no exposure and absolutely no impact. The limited press coverage, to the extent that it appeared at all, was mobilized to dismiss the film. It is not entirely clear where these reviewers saw the film, as even Vinogradov himself does not recall its release in the capitals. Most likely, reviewers saw it at the so-called closed screenings, where the opinion from above was dictated to them.

Mikhail Bleiman, who was highly critical of the film from the start, set the tone. His article in *Literaturnaia Gazeta* not only launched an all-out attack against the film's style but also blamed it for the lack of ethical approach and tact in representing the atrocities. He compared *Eastern Corridor* with *Kapo*, a controversial Italian Holocaust film (dir. Gillo Pontecorvo, 1959).[26] This bald comparison put a first nail in *Eastern Corridor*'s coffin.

Several critics followed suit. A review in *Sovetskoe Kino* dismissed the film for its "aesthetization of cruelty." And yet, almost despite herself, the reviewer admired the cinematography of several scenes, especially the drowning scene (which she directly identified as "extermination of the Jewish ghetto"). In the end, she argued that it was all for naught, since the "pretentious stylization" of the film contradicted the importance and the dramatic nature of the war itself.[27]

Sovetskii Ekran was even more negative, pointing to the *Eastern Corridor* as a sign of "alarming tendencies" in Soviet cinema (this is strong language). In addition to a critique of the complex narrative structure, the author particularly disparaged the "superficial pretentiousness" of the film, arguing that it did not have any ideas or artistic statements behind it. Like other reviewers, she was particularly adamant about the most visually provocative scenes in the film: the Jesus scene and the drowning scene, which this reviewer called "an execution of the camp inmates," thus avoiding mentioning Jews completely.[28] Influential *Iskusstvo Kino* also published a scathing critique, attacking mainly the confusing narrative and intellectual pretentiousness of the film.[29]

But glimpses of the reception of actual audiences can be gleaned from a review published by an amateur critic—a film-buff college student—in a peripheral newspaper. She mentioned the long lines to the box office, and how hard it was to get a ticket. In some ways, this is more important information about the film's reception (the same long lines in the complete absence of advertisement characterized other semi-forbidden films). The young audience was tired of the predictable socialist-realist cud, and ready for challenging ideas and new cinematic language. Indeed, this one reviewer actually understood and loved the

film. Although she made a few obligatory critical comments about the film's symbolism and confusing narrative, her overall assessment was unabashedly positive. She even pointed out the drowning scene as an emotional apex of the film. It is especially remarkable that this young reviewer noticed that the Jewish victims in film "receive death with human dignity." She even praised the religious symbolism of the scene, which is extremely unusual: "Even in its last moment, the crowd has the courage to throw into the cold faces of its enemies a Jewish religious psalm."[30]

It is not surprising that at the only festival where this film was shown in 1967—the VII Film Festival of Baltic Republics, Belarus, and Moldavia—*Eastern Corridor* was declared to be an "anti-artistic phenomenon." The jury unanimously voted it out of competition.[31] Vinogradov and his film were disinvited from other 1967 festivals.[32] Writing years later, a Russian film scholar noticed, "Should this film have been shown at any Western festival in the late '60s, it would most likely be as triumphant as *The Cranes Are Flying* or *Ivan's Childhood*. Alas, that was not the case."[33]

Officially, the film was released, but in reality almost no one has seen it. This film should have placed Vinogradov among the greatest filmmakers of the Soviet 1960s. Instead, his film became a phantom, and its director remained unknown. Up to this day Vinogradov is one of the most important Soviet filmmakers that no one has ever heard of.

12 Muslims Instead of *Musslmans*

SONS OF THE FATHERLAND (1968)

Simultaneously with the release of *Eastern Corridor*, another film was in the works in the distant land of Uzbekistan. This was *Sons of the Fatherland* (*Syny Otechestva*, 1968), directed by Latif Faiziev. Although it might not be immediately apparent, this film has much in common with *Eastern Corridor*. Both deal with the theme of the Holocaust, both are filmed in the tradition of the 1960s poetic cinema, both present suffering and violence graphically, both rely on eclectic religious (though mainly Christian) symbolism, and both are made in republican studios, far away from the metropolis of Moscow. To an uninitiated viewer, *Sons of the Fatherland* might appear entirely surreal: from the scene of a crucifixion of a Jew in a concentration camp to a scene of inmates in the iconic striped uniforms kneeling in fervent Muslim prayer. But behind this stunning imagery (and the frankly improbable plot) is an intriguing story.

The film was loosely based on the real-life history of the Muslim Legions—SS units recruited from among Soviet Muslims at POW camps. One of them, the Turkistan Legion, was composed of Uzbeks and other Central Asians. They were lured to the legion not only by the drive to avoid starvation and sure death in the camps but also by the prospect of liberation from Bolshevism, national independence after the war, and a chance to practice Islam right away, a practice forbidden to them anywhere in the Soviet Union, and certainly in the Red Army. During the war, their national and religious hopes were so high that they established a Turkestan government-in-exile, with an army of over two hundred thousand.[1] Their hopes did not materialize, obviously, but the subject of collaboration with the Nazis and aspiration for national independence remained a highly sensitive subject for years to come in Soviet Uzbekistan. Unlike Crimean Tatars, after the war Uzbeks avoided collective punishment, but the stigma of being Nazi collaborators still stuck to them.[2] So it is not surprising that an Uzbek director would want to make a film revealing Uzbek heroism in an attempt to repair the compromised image. Here I read this film as an apologia of the Uzbeks' collaboration with the Nazis. It is to that end that the subject of the Holocaust is brought up.

Sons of the Fatherland is set in a Nazi camp, drawing on a story of resistance in Buchenwald, as told by participants in the events—one of them, a survivor of the Dora-Mittelbau concentration camp (a satellite of Buchenwald), was invited

to serve as a consultant. The film also draws on the biography of Mussa Jalil, a Tatar national poet who was recruited to serve in one of the Muslim legions. Jalil led an underground organization in the legion and was subsequently arrested and executed in a Nazi prison. For a long time he was considered a traitor in the Soviet Union, until the evidence of his resistance was uncovered. Jalil's story was made into a film, *Moabit Notebook* (*Moabitskaia Tetrad'*, dir. Leonid Kvinikhidze), also released in 1968. However, *Moabit Notebook* was really more of a heroic biopic about Mussa Jalil, and did not feature Jewish characters, or any other Holocaust references (it is also a less interesting film cinematically).

Jewish fate during the war is invoked in the very first sequence of *Sons of the Fatherland*; documentary footage of the Soviet poet, Konstantin Simonov (the author of the cult poem and a film based on it, *Wait for Me*), speaks about a fellow poet, Ghafur Ghulom, an accomplished Uzbek author, to whom the film is dedicated.[3] As Simonov is reciting Ghulom's poem "I Am a Jew" in voiceover (using his own Russian translation), the camera turns to various Soviet monuments dedicated to the Great Patriotic War—to emphasize the internationalist message of a poem. To offset its subversive title, Simonov recites the poem's most "Soviet"—and least Jewish—part. This opening marks an ambivalent tension of the film. It attempts to speak to the Jewish question, but cannot. This tension surfaces repeatedly in the fictional part of the film.

The action starts in contemporary Uzbekistan, at the opening of an art show on tour from West Germany. The portraits created in Schpilhausen, the German concentration camp, are displayed on the ancient, vaulted walls of a museum. The identity of one of the artists is unknown, but some of the people in the paintings have been identified as Central Asians, and hence, the German curator, Johann Kultscher, brings the show to Uzbekistan in hopes of finding more clues to the camp paintings. A local teacher, Elena Salimova (Ludmila Khitiaeva), recognizes her late husband, an Uzbek, Iskander Salimov (Nodar Shashik-Ogly), in one of the faces painted on the back of a striped camp jacket. She is certain about the identification—and there is a lot at stake here for her. To the best of everyone's knowledge, Salimov was a Nazi collaborator. Here is Elena's chance to clear his name and to have it imprinted on the city's memorial, among the names of other heroes. But the curator assures her that this is a portrait of an entirely different person, a Jew from Hamburg, Mark Geltz. He even points to the identifying sign, "Jude" on the painting. So, whose face is this in the mysterious portrait?

The film goes on to present (somewhat like *Eastern Corridor*) a few versions of the same events that took place in the camp, each version told from a different point of view. At the art show, the camera zooms in on other paintings, presenting graphic imagery that in the West is most often associated with the Holocaust: barbed wire, emaciated, overworked inmates in striped uniforms with eyes glowing from their deep eye sockets, pictures of torture and execution painted in an exaggerated tradition of German expressionism. (These

paintings were produced especially for this film, by two artists, V. Galatskii and E. Shmit.)

As the curator tells a sad story of the camp, formed to supply a work force to the secret German plant, the paintings come alive, and camp inmates appear on screen. This is the story of an execution of an inmate, who is known to be Mark Geltz, a Jew. The camera pans over inmates marching in an oddly celebratory procession, headed by camp musicians with violins. A melody in minor key, sung by a barely audible female voice in Yiddish, hovers above the column: the song "Watchman" (*Der Vekhter*), performed by the Yiddish singer Nekhama Lifshitz.[4] Behind the musicians, other inmates are dragging a decorated cart, where Geltz is placed with a placard that reads *Konig der Juden* (King of the Jews), an obvious Christian reference.

The voiceover explains, "Our commandant liked to execute the inmates on their own holidays: Muslims on Fridays, Christians on Sundays, and Jews on Saturdays." (Clearly, this is a tribute to the Soviet policy of the universalization of the Holocaust: Jews here are not singled out as Nazi victims, but are rather presented as just one category of victim.) The voiceover continues: "*Jedem das Seine*—'to each his own'—this is how he understood Nietzsche's words."[5] Then camera pans over the uniformed Nazis watching the procession, some of them in turbans decorated with Islam's star and crescent symbols.

The procession continues to walk in between the barbed wired fences. It arrives at the huge cross (shown from above)—and the voiceover continues: "For an attempted escape from the camp, an inmate Mark Geltz, #12128, is condemned to death." To the same off-screen Yiddish song and dog barking, the Nazis take the inmate out of the decorated cart, beat him, and nail him to the cross. Except for the nailing and barking, not a sound is heard from hundreds of inmates gathered for the occasion. Then, with a wave of a Nazi hand, the inmate orchestra starts up, "Oh, you dear Augustine," and with the creaking of a rotating mechanism, the cross is lifted up. The music is played without words, but the lyrics of the chorus are familiar enough ("All is lost!") for the song to be understood. The camera pans over the frozen faces of the inmates, pausing on two people, holding hands in pained solidarity.

The crucified figure in the night sky, together with the soundtrack, creates a surreal effect.[6] Crosses on a site of a concentration camp had appeared previously in a 1944 Hollywood film, *The Seventh Cross* (although in this film crosses were used for torture rather than crucifixion). The scene of a crucifixion, and especially close-ups on nailed hands, references a whole world of artistic imagery—from Renaissance paintings to scenes in Bergman's *Persona* (which was very influential for Soviet filmmakers in the 1960s).

But the curator's story did not convince Elena. In the second part of the film, conveniently titled "A lie," she travels to West Germany to find the truth. Of course, the first thing that Elena encounters in a small German town is a

Figure 12.1 Publicity still: *Sons of the Fatherland*. Iskander Salimov in Schpilhausen camp. Courtesy of the State Film Museum, Moscow.

neo-Nazi parade, with a crowd of people with swastikas on hand bands screaming, "Germany for pure Germans!" (a necessary part of any depiction of capitalism). Elena also visits a former Schpilhausen camp (which is now a museum) where, mysteriously, a cross is still standing. There, together with other museum visitors, she watches a documentary film. This film-within-a-film is a montage of documentary footage of Nazi crimes (taken from the famous US documentary *Nazi Concentration Camps*) and the fictional reenactment of the trial of Schpilhausen's commandant.[7] (On screen, the defendant says, "I am innocent! I just fulfilled my orders!" echoing the Adolf Eichmann trial.)

Elena also meets Hilda Heinz, who used to work as a photographer at the camp and knew Iskander. (Her photographs of life in the camp appear in the film.) Hilda tries to tell Elena about her love affair with Iskander. Ultimately, it turns out to be a lie. Hilda commits suicide.

But as Hilda's recollections come alive on screen, we see scenes of camp life: a sweet-talking mullah in a Nazi uniform recruiting inmates lined up in front of him to agree to serve as camp guards—"in the name of Allah." Then the Nazis find a drawing of the camp in a prisoners' barrack, and want to find the artist. At first, they decide to bribe the Muslims and allow them to pray. On screen, the inmates in striped uniforms kneel in the namaz to the sound of the traditional prayer. But when no artist is revealed following this act of charity, the Nazis decide on a different tactic, and the prayer is transformed into torture. Shooting the gun into the air, a Nazi keeps barking at the inmates: "Sit! Stand!" Instead of namaz, the exhausted inmates are forced to quickly get down and rise up as the heavy rain beats down on them. Filmed in expressionistic lighting, with a

camera tilted in oblique angles, this is visually one of the more striking scenes in the film.[8] This scene of torture also explains the collaboration of the Muslim inmates: they were tortured. This is the apologia of their collaboration.

Hilda's memories didn't explain much, and Elena comes back to Uzbekistan without understanding her husband's fate. There she finally learns the truth from Batyrov, whom we recognize as a former mullah in Schpilhausen. He explains that he and Iskander were sent to Schpilhausen on Red Army orders to head the resistance. Batyrov, a scholar of Islam, had to pose as a mullah, and Iskander as a regular inmate. Once in Schpilhausen, they decide to start with exposure of Nazi crimes in the camp. For that purpose, Iskander tries to recruit an artist, Mark Geltz, to depict the horrific camp conditions, so that the drawings can be smuggled out of the camp and publicized. At first, Geltz does not want to help. Then Iskander points out to him that his position as a Jew in camp is precarious—there is a close-up of a Jewish star on his striped jacked, with the letter "J," for "Jude." At first, Geltz denies his Jewish origins, "I am a German! It's a mistake," he says.

But in the next scene Geltz changes his mind: the two men witness the arrival and execution of other Jews at the camp, a scene that could be easily identified as the Holocaust by Western audience. This is a particularly heartbreaking scene, especially since in contrast to the rest of the film, there is nothing fanciful about it. In fact, it is filmed with the realism of a documentary: a train arrives, the doors of a cattle car are pulled open, revealing a huddled crowd of people with Jewish stars on their coats. They are forcefully unloaded from the train, to the soundtrack of screaming, dogs barking, and a sorrowful Jewish melody. A sad procession of these Jews, the camera zooming in on old people, is led

Figure 12.2 *Sons of the Fatherland*. Mark Geltz (in the center, with a Jewish star) and other inmates in Schpilhausen. Courtesy of the State Film Museum, Moscow.

through the narrow passage fenced with barbed wire. The lighting is gray—the time of day is unclear. They are marched to the barracks to the sound of a Yiddish vocal (the same song we heard earlier by Nekhama Lifshitz). The next shot foregrounds young women who undress, as the enormous chimney billowing smoke is visible in the background. Their future is clear. Geltz and Iskander pick up and process the clothing—all that is left from a train full of Jews.[9]

Witnessing this mass murder convinces Geltz to cooperate with Iskander. Geltz makes the drawings, hides them in his uniform, and then exchanges jackets with Iskander. With the exchange of the uniforms comes an exchange of identities. Now Geltz will pretend to be Iskander, and in order to conceal his true origin, he will pretend to be mute. Iskander, assuming the identity of Jewish Geltz, will try to escape from the camp carrying the drawings.

Meanwhile, Batyrov, using his position as a Nazi mullah, assists Iskander from the inside. Iskander (posing as Geltz) and two other inmates escape. The Nazi guards chase after them. Iskander-Geltz must surrender is order to let his comrade escape with the drawings. Consequently, he is captured and executed. Now we understand that in the crucifixion scene, Iskander was the one who was executed.

Batyrov also tells Elena a story of the real Mark Geltz, who remained at the camp. By assuming Iskander's identity, he also became a hero. As the Red Army forces draw near, and the Nazis plan to liquidate the camp, the inmates, led by communists, organize an uprising. Armed battle takes place, and Geltz dies fighting.

Now Iskander's name is clean of the shame of collaboration. The film ends with both names, that of Iskander and that of Geltz, inscribed at the memorial in Uzbekistan.

Sons of the Fatherland: A Product of Its Time

Sons of the Fatherland is part of the tradition of Soviet poetic cinema of the 1960s. The film's cinematic style is characterized by oblique expressionistic angles, poetic atmospheric images (such as images of cranes flying to their nest, which appear on screen every time the action moves to Uzbekistan), as well as the use of documentary footage, art, and still photography on screen. Like other directors at the time, Faiziev combined different genres of music, often in contrapuntal relation to visual image (at times bordering on bad taste). In the 1960s, this poetic style became a new convention in Soviet war movies. The result was "Fellini à la Faiziev," as the scriptwriter of the film, Nikolai Rozhkov, joked.[10]

The use of religious symbolism is also characteristic of the 1960s cinema (reflecting a broader trend in Soviet society—a revival of interest in religion). Curiously, this Uzbek film, which focuses on the plight of Jews and Muslims in a concentration camp, nevertheless features Christian motifs. Besides the obvious crucifixion scene, Christian allusions appear in the images of Mark Geltz's

art, which he creates in the camp. One of his paintings is *The Last Supper*, where inmates are portrayed as New Testament characters. The portrait of Iskander painted on the striped camp jacket visually recalls the iconography of the Christian relic, the Veil of Veronica (the cloth on which the image of Jesus appeared after he used it to wipe sweat from his face).

Sons of the Fatherland also uses images of art (like both Tarkovsky and Vinogradov) and freeze frames (like Kalik). Curiously, Faiziev's film juxtaposes art (created by a Jewish camp inmate) and photographs (taken by Hilda on Nazi orders). Moreover, art—which is authentic, humanistic, and subjective—gains a victory over photography, which, although it is an objective medium, fails to capture the essence of the events or the truth of the situation.

The film constantly asks, what is the truth? In fact, things are not what they appear at first sight: a mullah is not a religious leader but a scholar and a communist; a Jew is not a Jew but an Uzbek; and a traitor is not a traitor but a hero. Although, unlike *Eastern Corridor, Sons of the Fatherland* has clear moral beacons, there is also a measure of ambiguity in the film's assessment of the characters. But by the end of the film, the facts are firmly established and justice is restored. What is the message?

Sons of the Fatherland is an interesting case of using the Holocaust to its own political purpose—of justifying Muslim collaboration with the Nazis. The film puts this historical fact on its head: Muslims collaborate with the Germans on Red Army orders—with the singular goal of leading an uprising in the camp. They are the true patriots and internationalists. Also, true martyrs—an Uzbek, Iskander, after having assumed the identity of a Jew, is crucified. He sacrifices his life and freedom so that the world can learn about the Nazi crimes.

This film is redolent with Holocaust imagery, from the Jewish stars to the crematorium chimneys. And yet, there are no individualized Jewish characters. Jews brought to the camp on a transport are mute and barely seen. A Jew executed in the first part of the film, allegedly Mark Geltz, is not a Jew at all, but an Uzbek, Iskander Salimov. And even Mark Geltz himself might not be Jewish.

In this film, an Uzbek Muslim takes the place of a Jew. From many camp memoirs, and later films and literature, we know the character of a *musslman*, a barely living inmate who has given up on life, a living dead. The origin of the term is ambiguous, but it probably has nothing to do with actual Muslims. In Faiziev's film, however, actual Muslims, not *musslmans*, populate the camp.

From *I am a Jew* to *Sons of the Fatherland*

Latif Faiziev (1929–1994), a director of *Sons of the Fatherland*, was one of the most prominent Uzbek filmmakers. He was born into the party, and into the cultural elite of the new Republic of Uzbekistan. His father, Abid, was a major figure in the local cultural administration, and over the course of his career headed various unions and organizations. Young Latif grew up with both artistic and

political sensibility. When he was still a child, he met important Uzbek writers and actors, and made his own debut as a poet. With the start of the war, his father left to fight at the front, and Latif, then a teenager, became a breadwinner. Who knows if he would have survived had it not been for Ghafur Ghulom, who then was a famous poet. Ghulom took Latif under his wing, helped him find a job at a local theater, and in general became his mentor. But Ghulom was more than a mentor for young Faiziev—he was his substitute father, after Abid fell in battle. Faiziev remained indebted to Ghulom for the rest of his life, and cherished the old poet's legacy.[11]

During the war, Uzbekistan was a destination for hundreds of thousands of evacuees, many of them Jews. Some of them were members of Soviet cultural elites evacuated in an organized effort, others were refugees who escaped from the occupation on their own. In the course of their work, both Faiziev and Ghulom met and became friendly with Jewish actors, writers, and filmmakers. But they also encountered Jewish refugees, whose plight made such an impression on Ghulom that as early as 1941 he wrote "I Am a Jew," a remarkable poem, deeply sympathetic to the Jewish people. Like the Yiddish writer David Bergelson, writing at the same time, Ghulom presented Nazi atrocities in the long line of other historical persecutions Jews faced. Faiziev was taken by the poem, and years later opened his film with Ghulom's poem as a tribute to his old mentor.

Faiziev had a successful career as a filmmaker. He graduated from the prestigious VGIK film school in Moscow, where he studied together with such future luminaries as Sergei Parajanov, Marlen Hutsiev, Aleksandr Alov, and Vladimir Naumov. Their teacher was Igor Savchenko, a Soviet giant of "ethnic cinema." In 1958, Faiziev staged a revolt against the old guard at the Uzbek Filmmakers' Union, and became its head himself. This position, which he occupied for over fifteen years, gave him great political power, which Faiziev very much enjoyed. Flaunting it in a local style, Faiziev's car was carpeted with Oriental rugs.

By the time he began working on *Sons of the Fatherland*, Faiziev has already made a number of documentary and feature films, often dealing with Uzbek national history, presented from a loyal Soviet vantage point. From the outset, his new film was intended as a major production, a two-part (three-hour-long) epic, bringing together local Uzbek actors and invited on- and off-screen talent. The script was by the Uzbek writer Sarvar Azimov, a high-ranking Uzbek cultural apparatchik, and the senior Moscow scriptwriter Nikolai Rozhkov. The cast included popular Uzbek actors and the beautiful Ludmila Khitiaeva, then a major Russian star. Several accomplished professionals from Gorky Film Studio joined the impressive local team.

The initial script, written in 1966, had a much more Jewish character than the resulting film. It was entitled *I Am a Jew* (after Ghafur Ghulom's poem). The name of the Jewish inmate initially was Falkovich, an unequivocally Eastern European Jewish name (later the name was changed to Geltz, which allowed the

character to claim a German identity). The nature of the relationship between Falkovich and Salimov was very different from that of Geltz and Salimov. In the original script, Salimov exchanges identities with Falkovich in order to save him—because Falkovich is a talented artist facing a sure death. Neither he nor his art is implicated in the underground work, as in the final film. In fact, the camp's commandant collects Falkovich's art in order to sell it after the war and get rich. Salimov's act, then, is purely altruistic. And Falkovich is endangered purely as a Jew.

In 1966, of course, no one in Moscow would have considered calling their film *I Am a Jew* or singling out Jews as the main targets of Nazism. But remote Uzbekistan had its own rules. The name of Sarvar Azimov, gracing the first page of the script, was sufficient to have anything approved. In fact, it was a common practice at Uzbekfilm to put a name like his on a script to guarantee unproblematic approval. This arrangement was mutually beneficial, as in exchange for the use of his name Azimov (or some other party boss) received an honorarium as a scriptwriter.

No wonder then that by early 1967 the script passed all internal review levels of the Uzbek film bureaucracy. Uzbek officials praised the script for its "political-social relevance" and enthusiastically recommended it for production.[12] Goskino in Moscow, where the script was sent next, was a different story, however.[13]

The title certainly ought to have attracted attention. If this was not enough, it dealt with sensitive subjects—the Holocaust, Soviet POWs, and collaboration with Germans. Consequently, it was scrutinized very closely, and was sent for review to the archeditor, Bleiman. To say that Bleiman detested the script would be an understatement. He wrote, "The script is written so fancifully, in such a bad taste, that the entire story seems totally improbable. . . . This is an artistically inadequate text. . . . I categorically object to its production."[14]

Granted, the script is not a work of genius. Still, why such indignation? Reading further reveals that Bleiman's concern was not just with this particular script but with a broader phenomenon: "We are already regretting launching such scripts into production. It's enough that we've allowed *Eastern Corridor*, which has the same style. It doesn't matter that in one case it was written by Kuchar in Belarus and in the second [by other authors] in Uzbekistan. The result is the same."[15] Bleiman, with his discerning perception, intuited the implicit connection between the two seemingly unrelated films: both dealt with politically questionable subjects, both broke taboos about the Holocaust, both professed a kind of new poetic cinematic approach that was deeply repugnant to the socialist-realist critic.

Bleiman's analysis not only reveals his vehement objection but also draws connections between the script and other stories, such as that of Mother Maria, who exchanged identities with a Jewish woman in a camp, in order to save her.[16] He also noticed a similarity to the story of Mussa Jalil, which provided another

argument against the script: "Currently, Lenfilm is producing a film, *Mussa Jalil*—this is also a history of a Muslim legion, but based on the facts rather than on a complete fabrication. Is it worth it to make two films on the same subject at the same time?"[17] Finally, Bleiman noted that one of the plotlines was critical of Stalinism, as was fairly common in Thaw films. That he simply dismissed as fashionable.

The second reviewer of the script, a writer B. Andronikashvili, went on record with a more detailed critique: "I think that the script is in need of serious revisions and even reconceptualization. This is because the Jewish question today is irrelevant everywhere, and even the neo-Nazis who are mentioned in the script fell away from anti-Semitism. Besides that, to speak about 6 million Jews killed in World War II, whereas at the same time 30 million Russians, Ukrainians, and Belarusians were executed and killed, is simply not tactful in relation to the latter ones."[18]

Andronikashvili exaggerated the number of Soviet victims, but this is beside the point.[19] What is important is that his response reaffirms Soviet rhetoric, according to which the Slavs bore the greatest brunt of the war. In that worldview, Jewish victims had to take a secondary place, if any. At stake here for the Soviet regime was a construction of its own historic role and justification of its postwar crimes and persecutions during the cold war.[20] It was important, then, for a Soviet editor-censor to claim that the Jewish question should no longer be asked.

Faiziev heard his critics. He promptly renamed his script *The Truth*, made other revisions, and resubmitted it to Goskino. The response was more encouraging: the editors commended the script for its potential to become a film about the heroic struggle of the Soviet people in Nazi imprisonment, but still noted that this potential is not realized. That was because "the main emphasis is on the story with identity exchange. . . . In essence, the patriotic subject of the script (antifascist fight and its heroes) is no more than a background for Falkovich's story."[21] Translation—still too Jewish. However, after suggesting revisions and significant cuts (reducing a three-hour film to the standard ninety minutes), they recommend that the script advance to the next stage of production.

But Bleiman became even more critical, if that was possible. His review now reads as a manifesto—a statement asserting a Soviet view on the representation of war and the Holocaust: "The subject of [Nazi] camps is artistically treacherous. The danger is aestheticization of crimes. We have already got into the mess with the film *Eastern Corridor*. The entire authors' worldview and their imagery lead to grotesquely immoral aesthetics—that of savoring horrors and crimes." This approach, according to Bleiman, defeats the purpose of making a film about fascism as a political and social phenomenon: "Paradoxically, the more horrors [on screen], the less is political impact. So it is in this script." Moreover, the script's portrayal of German characters as pathological and exceptional not

only lessens the political significance of the film but also cheapens it, makes it simply sensationalist. This kind of bad taste, he repeats, was already an issue in *Eastern Corridor* and *Arena*.[22] Bleiman was so indignant about *Sons of the Fatherland* because he was still reeling from *Eastern Corridor*, which he saw as a terrible mistake.[23] Bleiman here is expressly concerned with "aesthetic" or stylistic questions, and does not go on record with his real political-ideological concerns.

Another reviewer, one Balikhin, does:

> It seems to me that the authors are artificially narrowing their scope, by insisting on the subject of the struggle against fascist anti-Semitism. It is unreasonable to divide the inmates in fascist prisons based on that. The heroic deed of an inmate is not going to be any less if he saves, say, a Ukrainian or an Uzbek. Therefore, to artificially emphasize the fact that Falkovich is Jewish seems to run counter to the main idea of the script, which ought to affirm the heroism of a Soviet people regardless of their ethnicity (*natsional'naia prinadlezhnost'*). We know about the anti-Semitic bestialities of the fascists, but now, in the current conditions, it is wrong to artificially emphasize this subject and to divide the inmates according to their ethnicity. It will weaken the overall heroic meaning of the film. This is why I think that the poem by a fine poet, Ghafur Ghulom, is superfluous in this script. I don't think that we need to prove with such a passion that there is no anti-Semitism in the USSR. It is self-obvious.[24]

Balikhin's concerns are very different: it is not simply that the script is too Jewish, it is that in the current political situation—late spring of 1967—the subject of anti-Semitism is very unwelcome. The situation in the Middle East was tense (ultimately resulting in the 1967 War), and a Soviet propaganda machine was oiling its gears. In the Soviet Union, attacks on Israel were drawing on anti-Semitic tropes and, if anything, equated Zionism with fascism.[25] That is why, at this particular time and place, it was very awkward to remind audiences about Nazi anti-Semitism, and about the fact that Jews were treated by the Nazis very differently from other groups of prisoners in concentration camps.

As we see now, if it was up to him, Faiziev would have made a very different film, but that was not the case. And Faiziev did not have the conviction and integrity of Kalik, or even the naïve obstinacy of Vinogradov. He was a political player; he understood the rules and played by them. Together with his co-author, Rozhkov, Faiziev responded with a list of suggested revisions to the script. Among the changes: omit the text of Ghulom's poem (now we understand why only the most innocuous part of the text is read on screen); omit dialogue emphasizing Falkovich's Jewishness; and lessen anti-Stalinist elements in the plot (a negative character, Vakhabov, is no longer an NKVD agent, but a rank-and-file party functionary).

Despite these revisions, and Uzbekfilm's plea to launch the film into production, the script was still not approved by Goskino.[26] The official letter of response

repeats almost verbatim Balikhin's words: "The filmmakers reduce the idea of the film by focusing on the subject of fascist anti-Semitism as the defining feature of the fascist ideology as such. Hitler's racism related to many other ethnicities and, moreover, had a class element. Therefore, emphasis on the Jewish identity of the main character, Falkovich, in our view, makes the script inaccurate. . . . To highlight the exceptional victimhood of the Jewish people in the past war is not very tactful in relation to other peoples of our country who also suffered great losses."[27]

This is a direct articulation of the Soviet policy regarding the Holocaust. Such direct political statements are rare in the archival files, and are particularly valuable because they reveal not only the policies themselves but also their hierarchy. It is clear from this Goskino letter that universalization of the Holocaust is much more important than its externalization. The script of Faiziev's film fully externalizes the Holocaust. It is set in German concentration camp, and absolutely nothing in the film alludes to Soviet Jews, or to the events of the Holocaust in the Soviet Union. But this alone is not enough. The fact that Jews are singled out as victims is a much bigger problem.

The scriptwriters went through another round of revisions and resubmitted the script. It went directly to Bleiman, who at that point was Romanov's consultant, and hence his words are very powerful. Bleiman was undeterred: "I cannot honestly agree with the production of such a script. It is for me anti-aesthetic, and more important, an immoral phenomenon."[28]

Finally, after more revisions and negotiations, and significant pressure that the Uzbek leadership exerted upon Goskino, the film was launched into production in late November 1967. But, as in the case of *Eastern Corridor*, the Goskino editors were on high alert, and kept writing letters warning the Uzbek Goskino about ideological pitfalls of the film in the making. They were especially worried about the graphic violence on screen (what they call "aestheticization of suffering") and about religious symbolism (leading to "incorrect associations").[29]

The strong advocacy of the Uzbek local authorities protected the film, and the production continued. In August 1968, filming was complete. The Artistic Council of Uzbekfilm wrote a purposefully formulaic recommendation, swaddling a reference to collaboration in the cotton wool of Soviet rhetoric: "Thematizing the courageous and brutal struggle of a group of soldiers—members of the Muslim Legion—who died as heroes, the authors emphasized the internationalist character of this struggle, as well as the moral and ideological steadfastness of the Soviet people."[30] The emphasis on internationalism is meant to indicate that the film is not about Jews and Uzbeks, but about greater Soviet values.

In October 1968, the film was approved by Goskino, but not until some further revisions—Falkovich was renamed Geltz and his Jewish identity was made ambiguous. (Now the exchange of identities was poorly motivated, and looked

like a badly edited leftover from a previous plot). Still, several scenes involving Geltz had to be cut.[31] Finally, after all the revisions were carried out, the film was released in November 1968.[32]

It might as well have been simply shelved. *Sovetskaia Kul'tura* was the only central newspaper that covered *Sons of the Fatherland.* The review was formulaically positive, commending the film for its demonstration of "the moral steadfastness of a [Soviet] person." The anonymous reviewer explains that the film is based on real historical events featuring "people of different nationalities," who are "anti-fascists and internationalists."[33] After that, the film was engulfed in silence. It is doubtful that *Sons of the Fatherland* will have a comeback, as did *Eastern Corridor* (which has been slowly achieving cult status with film aficionados), since it is simply not a good enough film. It remains today as a testimony not so much to Holocaust memory as to the ways of using it.

13 *Commissar* (1967/1988)

THE END OF THE THAW

In 1937, Sasha Askoldov was five. He was growing up a happy child until the day his father was arrested. One night soon after, the secret police also came for his beautiful mother. Little Sasha overheard that in a couple of hours they would return for him. He pulled himself together, figured out how to unlock the door, and escaped. He walked for hours in the streets of nighttime Kiev. It was spring, and the air was full of the aroma of blooming chestnut trees, a smell that Askoldov could not stand for the rest of his life. Finally, he reached the doorstep of some family friends—a large Jewish family. When they saw him, they understood everything without a word, took him in, and hid him. This Jewish family took care of little Sasha until his grandmother was able to take him into her care. Although Askoldov lost track of his rescuers, he never stopped thinking about them. After the war, he tried to locate them. Their traces disappeared in Babi Yar, but his memory of this Jewish family consciously or unconsciously became an impetus for the future film *Commissar.*[1]

Little Sasha grew up, got an education, and became a promising young functionary at Goskino. He was a principled and devoted communist, on his way to making a brilliant career—until he decided that he did not want to manage other filmmakers, but rather to be one. He successfully graduated from the prestigious Film Directing Course (*Vysshie Rezhisserskie Kursy*), and started working on his diploma film, *Commissar*, based on Vasilii Grossman's story, "In the Town of Berdichev" (1934). Thus Askoldov, a fervent communist and an ethnic Russian, made a film that would become one of the most famous and celebrated Soviet films about Jews and the Holocaust. The history of its production and reception—especially its ban—would serve as the iconic example for a conversation about Soviet censorship and repressive Soviet policies toward anything Jewish. Although it is not strictly speaking a Holocaust film, *Commissar* is one of the very few Soviet films that were added to the Western canon of the Holocaust cinema.[2] As in other Soviet films discussed here, the brief moments representing the Holocaust become focal points: a Holocaust scene remains imprinted in our memory. It is not by chance, then, that it got a disproportionate amount of attention from censors.

The story line is well known: the film tells about a Red Army commissar (outstanding Nonna Mordukova), who gets pregnant during the Russian Civil War.

For the delivery of her baby, she is stationed with the large and unwieldy family of a poor Jew, Efim Magazannik (Rolan Bykov). She gives birth to a son, and marches away with her regiment, leaving the baby with the Magazanniks. The characters in the film are often read symbolically. The female commissar signifies the revolution, committing cruel acts in the name of the people and humanity; Efim and his family, this very people and humanity, with their imperfect, messy lives, become cannon fodder for the revolutions.

The film was made in 1967, banned, and sat on a shelf for twenty years. In 1987, an outburst by Askoldov at the Moscow International Film Festival led to involvement of the highest authorities, who finally released the film. Since then, *Commissar* has made a spectacular comeback, gathering prizes at international (but not Russian) festivals and critical accolades from media and scholars. *Commissar* is a unique case, where a phantom film is transformed into an international success. So far, none of the Soviet films or screenplays about the Holocaust came close to repeating this triumphant history.

The film has been analyzed at length by both scholars and reviewers.[3] Here, I focus on two scenes that are of particular importance to this book. The first takes place when the town is preparing for yet another attack from the Whites, boarding up its churches, synagogues, and private houses. In an anticipation of a pogrom, children play out their own version of violence. Three Magazannik children dressed as Cossacks, with painted mustaches and toy sabers, chase their older sister, crying out: "We are now going to kill you, Jewess (*zhidovka*)!" They even pierce a featherbed, letting the feathers fly out, thus reproducing classic pogrom imagery. The camera closes up on a horrified girl, as her siblings tear up her dress, breathing heavily, emulating rape. The scene ends with slow-motion shots of a girl, whom the boys push on a swing, her eyes full of horror, her arms open wide like wings. She is a defenseless half-child, half-bird, crucified on a swing. The scene cuts to the children weeping as Efim yells at them: "Pogromists, bandits, murderers! And those are my children!"

As I have mentioned, in Russian (and especially Russian Jewish) popular imagination, pogrom and the Holocaust are metonymically connected. Pogrom is a kind of pre-Holocaust, and pogrom imagery in many ways foreshadowed the Holocaust imagery. Already this pogrom (and it is a real pogrom, even if Askoldov presents it through children's play) augurs the prophetic vision of the Holocaust that will appear in the famous ghetto scene.

There is also another moment in the film that foreshadows the Holocaust: an old woman, Efim's mother, whom we heard earlier quietly dispense a Yiddish blessing on her grandchildren ("May they grow and become honest people, Lord of the Universe, bless the children with good fortune and blessing"), is shown saying something very different. Instead of a benevolent blessing, she turns to God with a question about the Jewish fate and a plea for protection: "Lord of the Universe," she asks, "Why are you punishing us? What are our sins before you

that we should die in fear and in angst? Have pity on us, Lord of the Universe, do not let the evil ones kill innocent children." This is a theological question, which has been haunting religious Jews ever since the Holocaust. However, her words are not translated into Russian, making it a hidden message, accessible only to Yiddish speakers.

But the key scene begins when the entire Magazannik family and the Commissar Vavilova with the baby hide in the basement, as the artillery shells are heard in the background. To cheer up the scared children, Efim starts dancing to an ex-diegetic klezmer melody. He moves at first tentatively, but then the children follow him, and dance round and round with their arms lifted, their hands making small circular motions in sync with the music. In the pitch-black darkness of a cellar, the light shines only on the faces and the hands of the dancers, as if they are dancing in the middle of emptiness, as if the world was destroyed and only their figures, slight as ghosts, remained. The camera zooms on their faces, then tilts up until only their hands are visible.

This haunting dance, literally in the face of death, gives rise to Vavilova's prophetic vision: the frame is filled with a slow procession of people with Jewish stars on their clothes (Askoldov called this scene "the march of the doomed"). Efim, dancing to the same klezmer tune (which provides continuity between the scenes) is among them. Among the people in this procession is an old man dragging a coffin behind him—even the coffin is marked with a Jewish star. As the procession enters a tunnel passage, klezmer transforms into somber church music. The camera reveals a crowded courtyard—all around it, on different levels, on the ground and on porches are people in striped camp uniforms, motionless, awaiting their lot. Then the camera turns back to the tunnel to reveal Vavilova gingerly following in the footsteps of the procession. The camera follows her gaze: the courtyard is full of people. As in an earlier dancing scene, their arms are up, waving like blades of grass in the wind. They are the grass, about to be cut. To remind us about their fate, there is a chimney in the corner of the frame billowing black smoke. Baby in hands, Vavilova enters the gates, stops in her tracks, then turns around to face the camera—looking directly at us.

The soundtrack shifts to Hebrew prayer, mumbled indistinctly by an old woman's voice, returning us again into the reality of Magazannik's cellar. The Russian translation in the voiceover begins, "God, don't conceal your face from us in the day of our tragedy, hurry to hear us, God."[4]

Commissar is neither a Holocaust film nor even a World War II film. The action takes place during the Russian Civil War; aesthetically, its cinematography belongs to the poetic school of Thaw cinema, and its style draws on early Soviet experimental cinema: Sergei Eisenstein's metaphorical montage, Vsevolod Pudovkin's revolutionary narratives, Alexander Dovzhenko's poetic imagery and long, fluid shots.

In this context, the use of Holocaust imagery in *Commissar* is paradoxical: on the one hand, "the march of the doomed" scene is crucial to the film itself, and to its subsequent ban. On the other hand, despite the pivotal role the scene plays, the film is not about the Jewish Holocaust. Similar to *Sons of the Fatherland*, the Holocaust in this film is used instrumentally, as a nearly universal symbol of suffering and persecution. In fact, Askoldov acknowledges this himself: "My film is against the Holocaust, and by that I mean not just the Jewish Holocaust, but the Holocaust in general."[5] If war for Askoldov is "a limit of morality," the Holocaust is beyond the limit, the ultimate form of violence.

It is interesting that in this scene, Askoldov, in his own words, was very well aware of the history of the Holocaust on Soviet soil, used an image characteristic of the Western trope of the Holocaust—a death camp. Askoldov knew that most Soviet Jews were killed not in the camps but mainly in or near their hometowns. Moreover, the very process of filming on location, in Ukraine, in a centuries-old Jewish town of Kamenets-Podolsky, gave rise to an unexpected moment of memorialization. Askoldov recalls that when the crew was filming "the march of the doomed," locals who had gathered at the site were crying. "It turned out that this was the very spot where during World War II there was a mass shooting of Jews."[6] If Askoldov knew exactly how Jews were killed on Soviet soil, why did he add camp imagery: striped uniforms with Jewish stars and a crematorium chimney?[7]

The Holocaust in *Commissar* appears as a subjective vision—an impressionistic flash-forward, a symbol, rather than a historical document. Still, it is useful to try and understand how this symbol is constructed. The scene opens with the image grounded in local events and local representational tradition: the procession of Jews led to their death, as in an earlier film, *The Unvanquished*. The elements of camp imagery, which conclude the scene, do not externalize the Holocaust: it is still clear that the film reflects the local reality. Rather, the images of striped uniforms and a crematorium chimney tap into the cinematic Holocaust repertoire familiar the world over in both documentary and fiction films. The camp imagery, by virtue of being a clear, unambiguous sign of the Holocaust, amplifies the effects of the scene. Here, Askoldov creates a hybrid or composite picture of the Holocaust, bringing together local and universal representational traditions.

Even if *Commissar* is not necessarily a Holocaust film, "the march of the doomed" is one the most powerful cinematic images of the Holocaust. Similarly, it is not strictly speaking a Jewish film, yet in the Soviet context, it emerges as one of the most Jewish films. Its main collective character is a Jewish family, and its portrayal is steeped in Russian Jewish culture. The character of Efim is played by Rolan Bykov in the best tradition of Mikhoels's *luftmenchen* from the early Soviet Jewish films, *Jewish Luck* (1925) and *Through Tears* (1927), both based

on Sholem Aleichem's stories, thus establishing almost direct bridge to the classic of Yiddish literature.

Even more profound is Isaac Babel's influence. Askoldov's film is based as much on on Babel's *Red Cavalry* cycle, especially the stories, "Gedali" and "The Son of a Rabbi," as it is on Grossman's text, as we see in the juxtaposition of the new world of the Red Army fighters and revolutionaries with the old dying world of the shtetl Jews. The dialogue in *Commissar*, especially that of Efim and his wife Maria, is reminiscent of the rich metaphoric language of Babel's *Odessa Stories.* Moreover, it is one of the few Soviet films (along with *Eastern Corridor*) where Yiddish and Hebrew are heard, and whose soundtrack draws on Jewish (klezmer) folk tunes.[8] And most significant, in *Commissar*, Jewish characters, along with Judaism, are subtly but sympathetically represented. In Efim's house, there is a mezuzah in a doorway and the portrait of a rabbi on the wall, which the camera points out several times. In outside scenes, a synagogue is shown along with a church. Moreover, in a scene that was later significantly cut, Vavilova takes her baby to a rabbi. In a final version of the film, after taking the baby to a church, she is shown entering the ruins of a synagogue and encountering a rabbi for only a moment.[9]

Why would Vavilova take her son to a synagogue? It is easier to understand why she was taking him to a church—after childbirth, even this fervent commissar is visibly transformed from an androgynous fighter into a traditional woman who wants to baptize her baby. The figure of Kiril, Vavilova's lover and a father of the baby, hints at some answers about the synagogue. He is portrayed as Vavilova's male counterpart—in her flashback they are even dressed in the same leather coats—except that he wears wire-rim glasses (not mentioned in Grossman's story), which are identical to the ones we see in most familiar portraits of Babel. Moreover, Babel's protagonist in *Red Cavalry*, a Jewish commissar, is also called Kiril. Given the profound influence of Babel on *Commissar*, it is not far-fetched to read Askoldov's Kiril as an incarnation of Babel's Kiril, a Jewish intellectual and revolutionary.[10]

Vavilova takes her baby to a church, and then to a synagogue, because he is half Russian and half Jewish. Although we never see an actual religious ceremony, Vavilova's walk, which takes her through an Orthodox church, then a Catholic church, and finally to a synagogue on the hilltop, constitutes both a symbolic baptism and a symbolic *bris* (Jewish circumcision), both signs of a covenant with god. This reading also helps explain Vavilova's prophetic vision of the Holocaust. If her son is half Jewish, it is about him she is concerned, and about his future. This is why she enters the gates of the ghetto with her son in her arms—his Jewish blood seals his fate.

The baby then is a child of intermarriage, a product of Russian-Jewish cultural fusion. This idea of fusion—Efim calls it, "the International of kindness"—is

conveyed in a later scene in the film through soundtrack. Vavilova puts her baby to sleep and sings him a sorrowful Russian folk song. Then her lullaby is phased out, and Maria's voice starts with a wordless *nigun*, Jewish vocal music. Slowly, Vavilova's voice becomes audible again, and the voices of two mothers—one Russian and another Jewish—are interwoven, forming a calming soundtrack for sleeping children. This is also a powerful metaphor of coexistence. Similarly, in a ghetto scene, boisterous instrumental klezmer music transforms into a somber church organ with vocalization, again bringing together Jewish and Christian tradition, but this time in the context of death.[11]

This Judeo-Christian (or Russian-Jewish) fusion is also conveyed through names. Askoldov changed the names of his main characters: instead of Khaim-Abram, Magazannik becomes Efim; his wife turns from Beila to Maria; Vavilova's son, named after his father, changes from Aliosha into Kiril. Efim is a Russified version of Khaim, with the second name, Abram, simply omitted as too Jewish. But Maria (Saint Mary) and Kiril (Saint Cyril, the so-called "apostle to the Slavs") are names with unavoidable Christian associations.[12] It is significant that these two characters, a Jewish woman (and a paradigmatic mother) and Vavilova's lover and his son, arguably Jewish, have such loaded names. Moreover, in some of the imagery, Judaism and Christianity are literally fused: in a synagogue scene, a camera first zooms in on Vavilova standing with her baby in one of the arches of a destroyed building, echoing the composition of Renaissance paintings of the Madonna. Then the camera turns to a rabbi framed by an arch, which once probably housed a Torah scroll but is empty now. The rabbi is facing out, looking into a landscape, his arms spread open—replicating crucifixion iconography. He is a rabbi and Jesus at the same time. As one of the scholars noticed, in this scene, Askoldov's ecumenical ideas are also expressed through the soundtrack: "Shnitke's non-diegetic music accompanying the heroine on her walk introduces special leitmotifs for each of the religions, and they all intertwine harmoniously with the central musical theme of motherhood."[13]

Such honest portrayal of Jewish characters was exceptional, and actors approached it very seriously. Rolan Bykov (ethnically Jewish) at first even refused to play Efim because he was wary of creating a stereotypically schmaltzy Jewish character, as he puts it, "a socialist realism for Jewish people, a syrupy realism." But then, he found his inspiration in the character of Mikhail Svetlov, an ethnically Jewish Soviet poet famous for his drinking and his wit. Bykov recalls: "I thought, what if I played Efim as this kind of Jew: . . . someone who likes to have a drink, who admires women, a lover of life, who lives passionately, a charming man, and at the same time, very down to earth." With that concept, Bykov started working on the role. He recalls that he wanted to celebrate his character—to play a seemingly unlikable Jew, in such a way that people will

come to love him. For Bykov, this role was his comment on anti-Semitism, which he called "a barbaric, medieval antagonism."[14]

How *Commissar* Became a Phantom

The overall story of *Commissar*'s censorship is well known and has been told multiple times in Russia and in the West. Here I focus mainly on the treatment of the "Jewish question."[15]

Askoldov initiated the film when he first submitted his adaptation of Grossman's story to the Gorky Film Studio in 1965. This was a time of change in political leadership, from Khrushchev to Brezhnev, when the liberal culture of the Thaw was beginning to be gradually replaced by a period of stagnation, with a resurgence of the Stalinist canon. In that climate, the very literary source of Askoldov's script was subject to suspicion: Grossman's story was set in a Jewish milieu, and his novel *Life and Fate* (*Zhizn' i Sud'ba*, 1960), had recently been seized by the KGB for making dangerous parallels between Nazism and Stalinism. In short, a Jewish story by an ideologically disgraced author was a poor choice of material for a film intended to celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of the Revolution (which is how it was pitched).

Predictably, Jewish topics became a problem from the start. During the initial discussion of the screenplay in September 1965, editors objected to the prominent role Jews played in the script: "The Magazannik family occupies too much place." They would prefer to have the family in the background. The pogrom, represented as children's play, was also highly objectionable. But Askoldov was firm in defending both the pogrom scene and the Magazanniks' prominence. In his response to the editors, he appealed to the Soviet internationalist rhetoric: "We all grew up in the same cradle, we are all brothers, we are inspired by Lenin's ideas—this is the gist of my screenplay."[16] Askoldov here was not cynical—he was, and remained, a true believer in the ideals of the revolution.

Despite concerns, the screenplay was approved, and passed on to Goskino officials, who wanted revisions. Askoldov went to work on the script, and in July 1966 sent Goskino a letter detailing all the revisions.[17] But that was not enough, and Goskino responded with a stern document entitled, "On the shortcomings of the screenplay *Commissar*."[18] Although on the record these shortcomings consist of the potential misrepresentation of the "humanistic nature of the proletarian revolution," the real nature of Goskino's concerns was communicated to Askoldov off the record, in a cozy chat with Romanov, Goskino head. As usual, this chat did not leave a paper trail, but Askoldov later recalled, "He patted my knee and said, 'I have two suggestions by which you could save your creative career. Suggestion number one: Cut that section where the Jews are herded into the gas chamber. Number two: Let's think how we could change this Jewish family into a family of some other nationality.'"[19]

Askoldov was under pressure not only from Goskino but also from the local Jewish community. The concern was that the characters were "too Jewish." Bykov recalls that a rabbi from the Moscow synagogue who worked as a consultant on the film asked him, "Why are you portraying such a dirty Jew?"[20] But idealistic and obstinate Askoldov yielded neither to Jewish community pressure nor to the Soviet officials. He would come to pay dearly for his steadfastedness.

With Romanov's involvement, the film came under ever closer scrutiny, and the concern with Jewish subjects went on record. After the screening of film materials at the Gorky Studio, the discussion specifically focused on the ghetto scene.[21] One of the discussants wondered whether it belonged in the movie at all. Askoldov gave a powerful response: "I don't know yet where exactly the scene which we call a march of the doomed will fit. You've mentioned that this is Vavilova's prophetic vision of 1941, but I would say it's 1951 and further. You may denounce me, but I'll still do it. I consider it to be a gift for the fiftieth anniversary [of the Communist Revolution]. Shouldn't we be speaking about communism bringing equality to people? Shouldn't we acknowledge that the ghost of Auschwitz is still around in the world?" It is clear from his words that, not unlike Mikhail Kalik in *Goodbye, Boys!*, Askoldov was talking not only about Holocaust memory but also about the era of Stalin's anti-Semitism.

Askoldov continued to make an argument for the scene, in one breath speaking of the Holocaust legacy and communist liberation—not an obvious connection: "In terms of ideas, this scene is crucial. The fact that Vavilova identified with people from a ghetto—this is what caused her to go and die for the Revolution . . . this is necessary in the same way in which it is necessary to reprint 'Babi Yar' by Evtushenko. This is my position, and I want this position to be universally accepted." Askoldov made a similar argument regarding representation of a pogrom—for him, anti-Semitism is anti-Revolution: "We want to film a model of a children's pogrom on Jews. I'm positive this is necessary. This is KKK, this latent feeling that is still inside many people. And we need to expose it because this is *for* the Revolution and not against it."[22] For him, this was a natural connection, but not so for the studio and Goskino officials. Askoldov's response shows not only his idealism, but also his hopeless political naiveté. Obviously, more demands for revisions followed.

The changes in historical context only exacerbated the situation. The leadership of the relatively liberal 1960s was departing and the new cadre that would soon implement much stricter cultural policies was entering. Suppression of the nascent dissident movement heralded the new era. Daniel—Siniavskii's trial, marked by anti-Semitic overtones, sent a strong warning to those who did not want to walk the party line. As if this was not enough, the Israeli-Arab war broke out in June 1967, and reference to anything Jewish became misinterpreted as Zionist nationalism. In that climate, Jewish subjects became particularly

dangerous, especially for Jewish artists, who felt pressure to repudiate their affiliation with anything Jewish.

At the Artistic Council meeting at the Gorky Film Studio in August 1967, this position was made evident by Askoldov's mentor, Leonid Trauberg: "The moment we see this ghetto in the film, instead of a film about a commissar, I see a film about the sorrowful fate of the Jewish people. I don't want to see a film about the sorrowful fate of the Jewish people, even though I am Jewish myself." Trauberg's position is understandable—he lived through and suffered from the anti-cosmopolitan campaign, and his own story is a part of "the sorrowful fate of the Jewish people." For him, even years after this experience it was important to distance himself from it. And so he went out of his way to show his allegiance to the regime: "In general, I really like the movie. Moreover, I'm really happy for it to appear today, so that it can say as soon as possible to the entire world that we are indignant over what's happening now in the Middle East. And this is not because of the national question, but rather the class question, because our country was the first to declare that all nations are equal, and this film proves it."[23] It is noteworthy that Trauberg said all this at the essentially internal discussion at the studio, in front of his colleagues, not at a party meeting. Such was the power of his fear.

He was not alone. Most members of the council were unhappy with the scenes of pogrom and the ghetto, in different ways. Some discussants came up with aesthetic criticism of these scenes, speaking of montage and editing. This, as we have seen with other films, was a common strategy for dealing with ideologically unacceptable content. Others actually praised the scenes as powerful, but then insisted that they needed to be cut. Similarly, Sergei Gerasimov understood the ghetto scene's idea of "emotional prophecy," and yet he said that it leaves him "perplexed"—a nice way of saying that this scene should not be in the film. Most of this meeting was spent arguing about the ghetto scenes, and the children's enactment of a pogrom. At this point, it is clear that "the Jewish question" was the main hurdle. But not everyone attacked the Jewish scenes—there were also advocates: a Russian writer, Vasilii Rosliakov, argued with Trauberg: "I am not scared by the theme of a ghetto or by the theme of the suffering of Jewish people." Rolan Bykov objected to the very framing of the question discussed at the meeting: is it a film about a commissar or about Jewish suffering? He argued, "We are used to it—if Jews are shown then it's about a Jewish question. . . . But here the subject of a commissar is thematized through the problems of a Jewish family."[24]

But the most passionate advocacy came from Eli Traktovenko, a former GOSET actor. According to him, Askoldov succeeded in capturing the essence of Grossman's story: "Here we see the fine mind of Vasilii Grossman, a writer who hasn't seen Mikhoels in his life, but who literally has Mikhoels's signature style. I am from Mikhoels's theater." At that point he turned to Askoldov: "Have

you seen any of our productions?" Askoldov had not seen any. Traktovenko continued: "But there is an imprint of Mikhoels [in the film]. Grossman was one of Mikhoels's favorite writers and he hoped to adapt his [story] 'Old Teacher' for stage. . . . Bravo to comrade Askoldov, this is a marvelous film. This is all I have to say." [25] Traktovenko's contribution was important, not only because he provided a useful contrast to Trauberg's position but also because he placed *Commissar* within the broader context of Soviet Jewish culture, as exemplified by Mikhoels and his theater. Unfortunately, pointing out this cultural pedigree was not going to make it easier for *Commissar* to gain official approval.

Askoldov had a final word at this meeting, and he remained adamant about his use of the trope of the Holocaust for his own purposes—for him the scene was there to advocate for communist internationalism:

> I recently read a collection of Grossman's stories with a foreword by N. S. Atarov. This foreword starts with the words: "On September 15, 1941, in a field near Berdichev, Grossman's mother was brutally murdered, along with hundreds of others. Grossman never talked about it to anyone." I didn't know that. But the entire spirit of Grossman's writing is a spirit of antifascism. And so to advise me to smooth things over is impossible. We shouldn't give away the subject of the Jewish people to Israeli nationalists . . . This question can be resolved only under a red flag, only in internationalism.

He concluded, "It is important to me that this is an antifascist film, in the spirit of Grossman."[26]

Once again, even though on the surface *Commissar* is not a Holocaust film (and not even a World War II film), Askoldov himself sees the subject of the Holocaust as one of its central themes. His focus is not the Jewish loss per se, however, but rather his own political argument. This creates a paradoxical situation—the film focuses on the Jewish fate, and simultaneously pushes it aside to make a bigger point. As Elena Monastireva-Ansdell wrote, "Efim's evocation of the Jewish nation as a symbol of suffering humanity oppressed by ideological systems, and the film's subsequent flash-forward to the Holocaust, make a powerful argument in favor of his philosophy. The film draws parallels between three major autocratic/totalitarian empires—tsarist, Nazi, and Soviet—that used anti-Semitism and nationalism as a means of impressing ideological conformity and unifying the communal 'us' against the deviating/deviant 'them.'"[27]

In all these discussions, Askoldov, unlike his cynical fellow filmmakers, emerged, in the words of a later reviewer, "as a faithful, even evangelical believer in the morality of the Russian Revolution."[28] But that did not help him. Following the studio meeting, Goskino issued another letter clearly demanding that both the pogrom and the ghetto scenes be cut (in addition to other changes aimed at whitewashing Vavilova and Magazannik's characters).[29] The studio

tried to withstand the pressure, and even signed the document of the film's approval, but the film's fate was already foretold.

In fall 1967, Goskino led an all-out campaign against *Commissar.* At least nine editors were mobilized to write reviews (even in the most controversial cases, I have not seen more than three reviews). All nine letters were remarkably unanimous and left no hope either for the film or its director.[30]

The final act in the *Commissar* drama came on December 29, 1967, when Goskino gathered for the final meeting about the film. Once again, "the Jewish question" was at its crux. Romanov, Baskakov, and others simultaneously accused the film of being critical of Soviet anti-Semitism (which, according to them, did not exist) and in being anti-Semitic, describing the film as nothing but an "evil caricature" with no license to exist.[31] This meeting put a decisive end to the film. The studio still tried to save it by writing with suggestions for revisions, but to no avail. The film was shelved. For a long time Askoldov refused to come to terms with this outcome—he advocated for his film at the party meetings of the Goskino, wrote letters to Romanov, to the Central Committee, and to Suslov, the party ideologist. To his appeals, the party leadership of Goskino responded in the best traditions of Stalinist rhetoric: "Askoldov cunningly hid his true goals and realized his private plan the nature of which only became clear after the film was completed. . . . The film sought to make a point about anti-Semitism and to emphasize the extraordinary burden and fateful suffering of the Jewish people."[32]

Indeed, "the march of the doomed" scene was specifically a target of such ideological criticism. Askoldov understood that should his film be destroyed, this scene would be the first to go. He had a copy of the reel with this scene made, and then succeeded in smuggling it from the studio. His brave editor, Valentina Isaeva, carried it out at night, hidden underneath her clothes. The reel remained hidden in Askoldov's closet for twenty years, until he finally had a chance to restore his film.[33] The main crime of the *Commissar* was to demonstrate the particular Jewish fate. The Soviet policy of universalizing the Holocaust was behind the banning of the film.

In March 1969, after rounds of harassment and persecution, Askoldov was fired from the studio "for professional ineptness."[34] This put an effective end to Askoldov's promising career. He would never make another film, nor even assist in making one. The director was banned along with his film. If many Soviet directors had, in the words of Herbert Marshall, "crippled creative biographies," the case of Askoldov is in its own category.[35] Even though young Sasha Askoldov fled arrest, the regime eventually caught up with him. *Commissar* was seized and just barely escaped destruction. But its director was destroyed. In the perestroika era, his film was recovered; Askoldov was not. Until today he has not had a chance to make another film. His dream—to make a film based

on his novel *The Return to Jerusalem*, a tribute to the life and work of Solomon Mikhoels—remains unfulfilled.[36]

The Holocaust on Soviet Screens in the Era of Stagnation

The banning of *Commissar* marked an end of the cinematic Thaw. In the new cultural climate, Jews were not welcome on screens. The era of stagnation gave rise to a slew of allegedly anti-Zionist documentaries, which actually verged on being anti-Semitic. The most notorious of these was *The Revealed and the Concealed* (*Tainoe i Iavnoe*, 1973). Very few Jews still appeared in narrative cinema, and even those were marginal characters, often presented only for comic relief. In the entire decade of the 1970s, there was only one film that touched upon the events of the Holocaust.[37]

Based on Vasil' Bykov's novel, *The Ascent* (*Voskhozhdenie*, Mosfilm, 1976) was a beautifully acted and shot film by an outstanding female director, Larisa Shepitko. In the increasingly conservative 1970s, *The Assent*'s aesthetics hark back to the cinematic poetry of 1960s: it was shot in black and white with intense close-ups exposing the complex psychological moves of the characters. The film is steeped in Christian allusions. At the center of the plot is Sotnikov (Boris Plotnikov), a former teacher turned partisan, who is captured by the Germans and thrown into a makeshift jail along with other characters: a partisan, Rybak; an alderman, Petr; a widow, Demchikha; and a young Jewish girl, Basia. The different ways in which they deal with the dilemma of betrayal versus survival constitutes the dramatic tension of the film. Christlike Sotnikov withstands all his trials, despite the torture, and at the end "ascends" to a higher moral level as he is executed. Alternatively, Rybak becomes a traitor and, like Judas, tries to hang himself.

Along with Sotnikov, Petr, Demchikha, and Basia are executed. Basia (Victoria Gol'dentul), cast to be Jewish-looking, with dark hair and large, sad black eyes, is painfully thin and pale, and her clothes are torn, hinting at beating or worse. Basia's story can be easily grasped from what little she tells the other prisoners in her calm, sweet voice: she was hiding in the woods alone, facing starvation. When she was already unable to move, she opened her eyes to see Praskovya, a local woman. But Basia's story is interrupted by an argument between the other prisoners, distrustful of each other. This is all we find out about her. That, and the fact that she does not betray Praskovya—she never gives her name to the Germans. Basia is a female version of Sotnikov—frail-looking but firm in her beliefs.

In the scene of the execution, although the most screen time is given to Sotnikov, Basia is singled out, not as a Jew but as a young, innocent child. To the bravura sounds of contrapuntal music, locals and Germans gather around the gallows as a small group of prisoners is led to their Golgotha. As the camera faces the prisoners, each standing under a noose, it becomes clear that Basia is too short to be hanged. Special arrangements need to be made, and a box is

brought in to put under her feet. The camera dwells on close-ups of each character, as they are about to part from life (Basia's wide-open eyes are incredulous), zooms out to a long shot of the snow-covered landscape that stretches in front of them, then pans over the villagers who stand around motionless. To the church-sounding somber music, the bench is finally kicked out from beneath the executed. Sotnikov accepts his death with an undefeated smile and the camera shifts to a close-up of a boy, Basia's age, in a Budyonnyi hat (a symbol of Civil War–era heroism), crying silently over the martyred heroes.

In this key scene, Basia, although she is Jewish, is executed along with the others—non-Jewish civilians and partisans—making her, in accordance with accepted Soviet rhetoric, just one of the victims of fascism.

Although this is all we see in the final version of the film, the previous version of the screenplay by Vasil' Bykov, submitted to Goskino in 1972, reveals that Basia's character was originally given much greater prominence and development. In this text, more closely based on the novel, old Petr, one of the prisoners, asks her how she survived when all the other Jews were executed. The girl is silent at first, but in the later scene she slowly reveals her story:

> "At first I wanted to run after them, when they were all led away. I ran out of the front yard, but aunt Praskovya was waving her hand. . . ."

As she speaks, her story comes alive on screen:

> "Praskovya waves her hand—'Don't go there, hide!' Basia runs back, further away from the street, through the gardens, gets inside the bush, and waits, her whole body shaking. Shots are heard from far away—Germans marching the entire Jewish population from their village . . .
>
> Sunset, sunrise.
>
> Basia is still sitting in the bush. Someone is passing by. Basia is quietly crying. Once she hears a whisper near her, 'Basia, Basia . . .' It's aunt Praskovya bending over to give her a slice of bread with lard. Basia eats greedily.
>
> More time passes: sunrises, days, nights . . .
>
> Once in the morning, it seems to Basia that there is a wild animal coming across to her. It turns out to be a cat. He approaches the girl and settles down near her. Basia pets him and falls asleep.
>
> Praskovya keeps bringing her bread.
>
> Seasons change. Fall begins, and the trees are losing leaves. Once, someone passing by the bush saw Basia, but didn't say anything. It starts raining.
>
> Basia gets out of the bush and hides in a barn, in a cowshed. . . . Already snow is falling. She is sleeping in an empty house. But one morning, she is running across the street, and the police patrol notices her . . ."[38]

At that, the action shifts back to the cellar where Basia is continuing her story: she tried to run away from the *politzai*, to no avail. Once again, Basia's words

come alive on screen: "Basia barefoot is running through the snow, policemen-collaborators are after her. They catch up to her, and beat her. They interrogate her, asking who was hiding her. Basia is silent." Back in the cellar-jail, she is finishing her story: "They beat me a lot. Especially this one, Budila. He kept twisting my arms."

Basia's story is told at greater length in this script, and through her a story of her community. In a scene of the execution, Basia dies as a Jew. As prisoners are led out of the jail and towards the gallows, one of the policemen-collaborators yells at her: "And what are you waiting for, dirty Jewess (*zhidovka*)? Get out! You didn't want to talk; now you'll be hanging from a rope! Out, lousy Jude!"[39] It should come as no surprise that this screenplay was rejected.

When the screenplay was resubmitted in 1975, in a significantly sanitized form (rewritten by Yurii Klepikov and Larisa Shepitko), Basia's story was not there. Shepitko might have omitted it for her own artistic reasons, of course—in fact, she told an interviewer that she decided to give up retrospections into characters' pasts as a part of her directorial approach—but it also helped push the script through the editors.[40]

Goskino approved the script without delay.[41] Filming was completed by the end of summer 1976 and submitted for further approval in September. It took nearly a month for Goskino to approve the film. Finally, after the revisions (unspecified in the archival files) were made, Goskino put its stamp of approval on *The Ascent*. Although it was released with only limited distribution, 10.7 million people saw it.

The Ascent proved to be a significant film—along with Aleksei Gherman's *Twenty Days without War* (1976), it came to represent the best of the Soviet war films of the 1970s. It won multiple prizes at the 1977 Berlin Film Festival and was widely discussed in the influential journal *Iskusstvo Kino*.[42] Its canonization was complete with rave reviews in the authoritative publications, *Pravda* and *Literaturnaia Gazeta*.[43] Nowhere was the Holocaust mentioned, but a reviewer in *Iskusstvo Kino*, which had greater artistic freedom, actually spoke admiringly about "a Jewish girl Basia who did not betray her savior."[44] This means that even a truncated story of Basia in the final version of the film was noteworthy at the time.

During the entire pre-perestroika 1980s, only one film, *Come and See* (*Idi i Smotri*, 1985) by Elem Klimov, marginally touched upon the Jewish Holocaust.[45] A coming-of-age story, this film is based on the genocidal history of Khatyn, a Belarusian village under Nazi occupation. The camera follows a teenage boy, Flyora (Aleksei Kravchenko), through a range of harrowing experiences, depicted with maximal brutality. Flyora loses his family, witnesses the murder of numerous people, and barely escapes being burned alive.

The Jewish Holocaust is not a focal point of *Come and See*, but the film does reference this particular history. The first reference appears in a scene where Flyora is looking for food with other partisans while the Nazis are throwing

propaganda leaflets with anti-Semitic texts: "Attack Jude-Bolsheviks!" A partisan casually picks up the paper to use later for rolling cigarettes. He reads the text: "That's it?"—he comments—"Not much."

In a brutal scene of a Nazi invasion of a village, when the Germans round up the locals, and force them into a barn, *politzai*-collaborators drag in a Jewish man, shouting proudly, "Here, we've got Yankel! . . . What a kike!" After beating him, they throw him into the barn, along with everyone else, to be burned alive. This is the extent of the film's depiction of the Holocaust on Soviet soil: although a Jewish man appears on screen, his fate is not much different from that of anyone else in the village.

But actual Holocaust imagery, taken from documentary footage, appears in the film in the form of Flyora's visions. Following a brutal scene in which partisans execute the captured Nazis, which Flyora witnesses, images of emaciated dead bodies and barely alive emaciated *musslman* appear before his eyes. These images are taken from documentary footage from Nazi camps.

After this terrible vision, the camera closes up on Flyora's distorted, tortured face. He picks up his gun and shoots the portrait of Hitler, lying on the ground. The glass shutters. The partisans call Flyora, but he keeps his gun cocked. More visions pass before his eyes: iconic footage of Hitler greeting youth, Nazi pageants, concentration camps, air raids. . . . Flyora keeps shooting, and with every shot, the damage is undone by showing the archival footage backwards—buildings rise up from the ruins, bombs are sucked back into the airplanes, burned books jump out of the fire, the word "Jude" is unwritten by a Nazi, and a Jewish star disappears from a window. Flyora keeps shooting as images of Hitler appear on screen: as the film reels backward, so does time, and Hitler appears younger and younger in the footage. Flyora only stops shooting at the picture of Hitler as a baby, sitting in his mother's lap. This he cannot do. To the sound of Mozart's *Requiem*, the camera closes up on Flyora's face, visibly transformed from that of a young boy into an old man. . . . Like Sotnikov in *The Ascent*, Flyora transcends his physical and moral torment and succeeds in preserving his humanity and spirituality.

Come and See had a very difficult production history, similar to that of *The Ascent* (coincidentally, Klimov was Shepitko's husband). Titled initially *Kill Hitler* (*Ubei Gitlera*), the project was terminated in the mid-1970s, and only with the change of leadership in the early 1980s was Klimov given a chance to finish it.[46]

This use of the war and Holocaust footage echoes earlier Soviet films. As in *Goodbye, Boys!*, the archival footage is used to depict history in both flashback and flash-forward. As in *Commissar*, a private vision is used to intuit the larger historical picture. And, of course, footage used in *Come and See* was familiar to audiences from the rich documentary display in *Ordinary Fascism*. It is significant that in *Come and See*, as in earlier Soviet films, the filmmaker used imagery from the camps as a touchstone of ultimate evil. In this way, the Holocaust is, to a large degree, externalized.

14 An Alternative Track

JEWISH SOLDIERS FIGHTING ON SOVIET SCREENS

In 1941, the famous author and journalist Ilya Ehrenburg wrote, "I grew up in a Russian city. My native language is Russian. I am a Russian writer. Now, like all Russians, I am defending my homeland. But the Nazis have reminded me of something else: my mother's name was Hannah. I am a Jew. I say this with pride. Hitler hates us more than anyone else."[1] Soviet Jews had a personal score to settle with the German forces. As one Jewish officer wrote, "The German thugs massacred my relatives who were living in Odessa and destroyed our happy quiet life. And I want to take revenge for it. Revenge, revenge, and more revenge, in every place and at every moment."[2] The Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee seriously discussed the establishment of Jewish fighting divisions, where Jews would fight as Jews.[3]

Jewish divisions were not formed, but disproportionate numbers of Soviet Jews fought in the war: about half a million put on a Red Army uniform, and thousands more were in the partisan movement.[4] According to all evidence, Jews fought heroically, overrepresented both among the fallen (200,000) and among the decorated. In fact, Jews were the fourth most decorated ethnicity in the Soviet Union.[5] Yet they also had to face age-long stereotypes of Jews as unfit for military service, and withstand the state anti-Semitism that emerged after 1943.[6]

In the Soviet context, the Holocaust and Jewish participation in the Soviet war effort are connected: even if Jews identified as "Soviet people" and went into army service like any other Soviet citizens, they fought as Jews. Jewish soldiers were particularly motivated to fight: first, the news of Nazi atrocities against their fellow Jews or family members drove them to revenge the dead; second, surrender for them was not an option: they knew that the Nazis would kill them as Jews; finally, they did not want to be seen as cowards and reinforce anti-Semitic stereotypes.[7] Therefore, even though a figure of a Jewish soldier on screen might not evoke the Holocaust to the Western audience, it is a way of directly or indirectly relating to the Holocaust, and to the fate of Jews during the war in general.

Filmmakers, especially those who were Jews themselves, became sensitive to the distinct position of the Jewish soldier—both fighting for his (and her) people, and combating stereotypes. The first cinematic Jewish fighters appeared on

screen during the war. Almost simultaneously, in 1943, two films featuring such characters were released, *Two Fighters* (*Dva Boitsa*) by Leonid Lukov and *Wait for Me* (*Zhdi Menia*) by Aleksandr Stolper.

Two Fighters, made in 1942 at the film studio evacuated to Tashkent, is a story of deep and passionate friendship that develops between two soldiers during the harsh battles over Leningrad. One of them, Sasha from the Urals (played by the famous Boris Andreev), is the epitome of Russian spirit—a bear-like giant with a heart of gold—and the second is quick-witted, charismatic, musical Arkadii from Odessa (Mark Bernes, a tremendously popular singer and actor, played the part). Although it is a war film, *Two Fighters* is a comedy featuring songs that later became so popular that they practically turned into folklore ("Dark Night" and "Shalandas/The Fishing Boats"). The two characters fight side by side, watching each other's back, fall for the same girl, come to blows, and, by the end of the film, reconcile. In the final scene of the film, Sasha carries out of the battlefield wounded but irrepressible Arkadii. He can barely stand, but he cries out victoriously, "They will have to wait a while longer (*ne dozhdut'sia*) for Arkadii Dzubin to die!"

The film never spells out that Arkadii is Jewish. His Jewishness might be described as contextual or situational—open to both Jewish and non-Jewish reading. But even if we read Arkadii as a non-Jewish, generic, funny "Odessan," traces of Jewishness are undeniably there. Odessa was such a Jewish city that in the Soviet Union its unique humor and style were associated with Jews.[8]

Miron Chernenko is right in pointing out that Arkadii's character underwent "visual de-ethnization" and does not look stereotypically Jewish: he is blond, athletic, and daringly brave.[9] And yet he is marked as Jewish by many other characteristics, especially his distinct speech. In the screenplay, Arkadii "speaks loudly, confidently, and brusquely. With softened sibilants and guttural sounds, and complete contempt for the 'y' sound. That chic 'gangster' drawl—only in Odessa do they speak this way."[10] This is undeniably a description of a Jewish-Russian ethnolect, and it is exactly what Arkadii sounds like on screen. In fact, Bernes (who was Jewish, but not Odessan) remembers how he sought out the real Odessans in Tashkent in order to learn how to sound authentic.[11] Moreover, Arkadii's name hints at his Jewish origin: Lev Slavin, on whose novella the film is based, named his character after the famous Soviet-Jewish poet (and the author's friend), Eduard Bagritskii, whose real name was Arkadii Dzubin. Bernes, as well as practically the entire crew of the film, was Jewish, including Lukov, who—despite the Russian name and lack of expressed preoccupation with Jewish subjects in his films—was connected to his roots.[12]

The original screenplay (closely based on the novella) featured a couple of other minor Jewish characters, soldiers Shapiro and Zilberman, both portrayed as heroes: Shapiro is wounded in the battle and Zilberman is killed by enemy fire. (Later, Zilberman was edited out, but Shapiro's name is mentioned in the

Figure 14.1 *Two Fighters*. Arkadii Dzubin with a wounded comrade. Courtesy of the State Film Museum, Moscow.

film.)[13] Clearly, the filmmakers made a conscious choice to represent the Jewish war effort, and to make Arkadii its poster child. In his character they created a portrait of a smart, charming, and extraordinarily brave Jewish soldier with a winning personality. Indeed, Arkadii became one of the most beloved characters of the Soviet screen, and his lines entered everyday Russian parlance. The friendship between Russian Sasha and "Odessan" (Jewish) Arkadii became a model not just for male camaraderie but also for interethnic relations, where differences were celebrated. Given the rise of Soviet anti-Semitism that began in 1943, this film was a remarkable achievement.

It is noteworthy that despite its universal popularity and warm critical reception, *Two Fighters* never received a Stalin's Prize, which was awarded to much weaker and less popular films.[14] The authorities, or rather Stalin himself, felt that *Two Fighters* did not align with the Soviet rhetoric, which by that time tended to emphasize Russian people as big brothers in a tight family of Soviet people. In *Two Fighters*, both Sasha and Arkadii are winning characters, but Sasha is "a big brother" only in his size. Otherwise, it is Arkadii who takes the leading role. Stalin never forgave Lukov his transgression with *Two Fighters*: the regime took full revenge on Lukov with his postwar film, *The Big Life* (*Bol'shaia Zhizn'*), which was banned and denounced in a special resolution of the Party Central Committee.[15]

A similarly sympathetic character of a Jewish soldier appears in the melodrama *Wait for Me*, also made in evacuation, in Alma-Ata. The plot, the story of a couple torn apart by the war, was inspired by a poem with the same title by Konstantin Simonov, which was tremendously popular at the time. Misha Weinstein, a young war photo-journalist, plays a secondary, mainly instrumental role of a messenger in the film. He passes a note with the fateful words "Wait for me" from his comrade-in-arms to his faithful wife. Later, when Misha is under an impression that his friend perished in the battle, he brings the tragic news to her. However, at the end of the film, it is Misha who dies heroically trying to get important photographs he took on a reconnaissance mission to the army staff, whereas his friend comes home unscathed. Unlike de-ethnicized Arkadii, Misha—as played by the future star Lev Sverdlin (it was his first role on the big screen)—not only has an explicitly Jewish name but was also typecast to look Jewish—with black, wavy hair and dark, expressive eyes. Like Arkadii, he has an attractive personality—warm, humorous, charming, he easily stands out next to the other more static and reserved male characters. Misha is a supporting role—but the filmmakers and the actor make him one of the most memorable and alive characters in the film.[16] This was evident in the critical reception of the film—reviewers could not help but note that Sverdlin had created a truly remarkable character.[17]

It is interesting that Misha is given a perfectly civilian, and very Jewish, profession—as a photographer, his task is to witness and document the war. Yet, as Chernenko points out, his character brings a heroic ethos to this unheroic profession.[18] In the culminating scene of an aircraft battle, when a gunner of the military airplane is killed, Misha is depicted as a hero. But this depiction also creates a link between his skill as a photographer and his courage as a fighter: "Machine gun goes silent. Weinstein looks around. Moving aside the killed gunner, he gets behind the machine gun. He does it as calmly as if he is taking a picture."[19] In his book on Soviet Jewish photographers, David Shneer reads *Wait for Me* as a celebration of "Jewish heroism and the contribution of Jews to the war effort, as documentors, vizualizers, and communicators of the war—and even as fighters."[20]

As with *Two Fighters*, the introduction of a Jewish character (who certainly was not featured in the lyrical poem), was a deliberate choice of the filmmakers and authors who were Jewish themselves (like Stolper) or were deeply sympathetic to the plight of the Jewish people (like Simonov, whose wife at the time was Jewish). By 1943, when "Jews' specific ethnic heroism and victimization became muted," it was a courageous choice.[21]

Following the films' popularity with audiences, in his official report, Bolshakov, the film tsar, praised both *Two Fighters* and *Wait for Me.*[22] Behind the formulaic praise is the fact that both films occupied an important niche in Soviet cinema. Jewish characters in these movies came to represent the token national

Figure 14.2 *Wait for Me*. Misha Weinstein (left) before the mission. Courtesy of the State Film Museum, Moscow.

minorities in the Soviet war film. Of course, in Stalin's universe it was the Russian soldier who won the war. But along with him, there were a number of obligatory minority sidekicks—Ukrainians, Uzbeks, Georgians, and others, who helped drive home the idea about the happy family of Soviet peoples, and the internationalist message of friendship among them. In this context, Arkadii and Misha emerge as the token Jews of the Soviet war film. Curiously, this was not significantly different from the Hollywood movies of the same era, featuring Black or Jewish servicemen next to an all-American protagonist.[23]

Soldiers: The First Thaw Jew

The most significant Soviet film featuring a Jewish soldier—or rather an officer—was made years after the war, in 1956, heralding the new era of cinematic Thaw. *Soldiers* (*Soldaty*) was made by Aleksandr Ivanov at Lenfilm, a studio that was becoming one of the most liberal and progressive during the time of de-Stalinization. Underappreciated and largely forgotten today, *Soldiers* was truly the first Thaw film, followed by several classics, such as *The Fate of a Man, The Cranes Are Flying, The Ballad of a Soldier*, and *Ivan's Childhood*. *Soldiers* was also

the first film starring Innokentii Smoktunovskii, one of the most intellectual and talented Soviet actors, who was most famous for his later roles of Hamlet and Prince Myshkin.[24]

The film was based on Viktor Nekrasov's *In the Trenches of Stalingrad*, a tremendously popular novel, which was serialized for the first time in 1946, and which sold millions when published as a book.[25] This was one of the first literary works that represented the war authentically, as realistically as was possible during that period. Especially groundbreaking was Nekrasov's message that the soldiers and not the generals won the war. Avoiding bombastic official discourse of glorious victories, Nekrasov was writing from the perspective of a little man and the routine of the war. Amazingly, Stalin liked the novel and gave it a Stalin's Prize, the highest honor. Still, its adaptation into a film, as we will see, was less smooth.

Several filmmakers wanted to dramatize the novel but could not get official approval.[26] Finally, in 1955, Aleksandr Ivanov started working on Nekrasov's screenplay at Lenfilm.[27] Ivanov was a great fit for the film: like Nekrasov, he also fought (in World War I), and reflected his personal experiences and traumas in his films. Like Nekrasov's novel, Ivanov's films represented the war as honestly and authentically as possible at his time. He also paid for his integrity. Even though he was a communist loyal to the party line, his 1949 war film *The Star* (*Zvezda*) was banned, and released to screens only in 1953, after Stalin's death. In short, Ivanov instantly recognized *In the Trenches of Stalingrad* as his material.

The resulting film follows several servicemen participating in the battle of Stalingrad, and their daily life in the trenches. These soldiers and officers form a collective hero of this almost eventless, heroless film: Lieutenant Kerzhentsev, with his loyal men Valega and Sedykh; fearless Chumak, with his reconnaissance unit; Lieutenant Farber (Smoktunovskii), a mathematician with a clear lack of predisposition to military service. The film is shot in black and white, and the characters' heroism is understated, depicted as daily routine rather than feats of courage. This collective hero is conveyed cinematically through long shots with multiple people in the frame, some of whom are not even introduced.

To the extent that there is dramatic tension in the film, it hinges on the cruel and pointless order of the higher-up officers. After Kerzhentsev's battalion conquered a strategically positioned hilltop, Captain Abrosimov orders them to continue with an attack, despite the unfavorable conditions (an allegory of the Stalinist leadership). The mission is clearly suicidal, but Kerzhentsev has no choice but to lead his men forward. The battalion is decimated by the German sniper fire, and following this military disaster—and human tragedy—Abrosimov, who conveniently stayed behind, is sent to a tribunal, where he is demoted. At the end of the film, Kerzhentsev takes a picture of his comrades-in-arms—and the freeze frame of his snapshot becomes a framed photograph on his wall year later, creating a distance of time between the events in the film and contemporary life, but also aiming to memorialize the war.

Throughout the film, the portrayal of Farber—a Jewish fighter—echoes Babel's story "The First Goose," in which the Red Cossacks first challenge the masculinity and authority of a Jewish commissar, but slowly come to accept him. When Farber first appears on screen, he is a quintessential "Jewish sissy"—a far cry from the easy masculinity and bravado of other soldiers around him. Farber is shown in an ill-fitted overcoat, squinting behind his glasses, with awkward moves and hyperpolite speech, all inappropriate for the elemental conditions in the trenches. In some shots, he is shown at a high angle, as if a camera is looking down at him. He appears small, insecure, and out of place, especially next to the broad frame and easy confidence of Chumak, who serves as his main counterpoint. In a remarkable dialogue, Chumak directly challenges Farber's masculinity:

> CHUMAK: You don't drink, you don't know how to swear. What do you like? Do you like chicks? Don't be offended, but I am just looking at you, and I don't get it, really, you are a company commander, an officer. . . . But what can you do? Can you swim?
>
> FARBER: No, I can't.
>
> CHUMAK: Can you ride a bicycle?
>
> FARBER: Can't do that either.
>
> CHUMAK: Have you at least punched someone in the face?

This is the first question that Farber answers in the affirmative, and with force. In a Russian context, there is only one reason for him to punch someone—if he was called an anti-Semitic slur (*zhid*). But Chumak doesn't ease up—"Who did you punch?" At that Farber loses his nerve again, mumbles something in his characteristic manner, and leaves. Farber later admits to Kerzhentsev that he never actually punched anyone.

College-educated Kerzhentsev is the only character with whom Farber has something in common. In a dialogue with Kerzhentsev, Farber reveals himself as a bit of a poet—he is the only character in the film who appreciates natural beauty even in the short breaks between horrific battles. Farber is also a music lover (he recognizes the *Andante cantabile* from Tchaikovsky's Fifth Symphony when it is played on the radio). Farber opens up to Kerzhentsev, and even admits feeling inferior next to people like Chumak. And, indeed, Kerzhentsev is the first one to accept Farber.

But Farber's real moment of growth comes at the tribunal, when Abrosimov defends himself by blaming others of cowardice. Farber directly confronts him: "You are the coward! You didn't go into the battle but sent others. I am convinced that such people cannot be commanders." After this fiery speech, Chumak comes to Farber together with Kerzhentsev, and in a gesture of male solidarity offers him a cigarette and a compliment: "You spoke well, Farber." This is a moment of complete acceptance. After Kerzhentsev is injured, Farber

Figure 14.3 *Soldiers*. Lieutenant Farber (left) confronts a senior officer. Courtesy of the State Film Museum, Moscow.

assumes command of the battalion, and becomes not just its commander but, in the words of one of the fighters, "a pretty good one." The Jewish sissy prevails.

Miron Chernenko, admiring both Farber's character and Smoktunovskii's acting, calls him "the first free Jew of the Soviet screen," although, he notes, it is not entirely clear how he succeeded in maintaining such a freedom and such independence in the decades of Stalin's rule.[28] This incredible freedom and individualization make Farber, according to Chernenko, the central character of the film, a main axis of plot development. Smoktunovskii's acting made the film "a paean to a Jewish character, not concealed by any kind of ideological veils."[29]

Featuring such a Jewish hero, however antiheroic, was a conscious and meaningful choice, of course, especially so soon after the anti-Jewish purges of the late Stalinist era. Turning the novel into a relatively short script demanded significant reductions, and a lot of characters had to be omitted or fused into one. But Farber not only remained in the script but he was rendered even more Jewish than in the novel, and also more memorable. Thus in the novel, Farber is depicted as inscrutable, reserved, with no affect and little emotion. In the novel, his feelings of inferiority vis-à-vis his Russian working-class comrades can be read as the experience of a removed intellectual, rather than a quintessentially Jewish condition. In the film, Farber's body language and his entire demeanor are markedly Jewish. Moreover, his character is actually more developed than in

the novel—in the film, he has the sensibility of a poet (he speaks of and writes a letter about natural beauty) and the bravery of a soldier (in the novel, Farber does not participate in the deadly attack, but in the film he stumbles forward through enemy fire along with the other fighters). Significantly, the most dramatic monolog in the film—Farber's diatribe against the authoritarian, hypocritical Abrosimov, which could be read as an anti-Stalinist gesture, comes from a Jewish character.

All these developments turn Farber into an undeniably positive character, as if created specifically to reassert this alternative Jewish masculinity. Perhaps this was Nekrasov's motivation behind developing this character. It was probably important for Nekrasov to combat the stereotypes against Jews, who were perceived, despite the facts, as "the fighters at the Tashkent front"—that is, as cowards hiding in the evacuation. Nekrasov was sympathetic to the plight of the Jewish people throughout his life, and the character of Farber is his tribute to the Jewish fate in the war.[30]

With its anti-Stalinist impulse and its Jewish character, it should come then as no surprise that the film had a difficult approval history, and was discussed at the highest levels. The fact that the film dealt with the military did not help—this meant that in addition to the usual rounds of censorship, the screenplay and the film also needed to be approved by the military authorities.

Problems began with the screenplay. In November 1955, a head of the Propaganda Department at Glavpur (Political Directorate of the Army), wrote to the Ministry of Culture that the screenplay was found to be "unsuitable." The reasons: the screenplay depicts a lack of military discipline, a lack of leadership, and a lack of heroism.[31] Basically, the script ran counter to all expectations of how the war ought to be depicted on Soviet screens.

Despite the Glavpur admonitions, the film went into production, and the military brass pressed on. A marshal, no less, wrote an excruciatingly detailed letter, seven pages long, disparaging the screenplay, and sent it to both the Ministry of Culture and the Ministry of Defense. Among the main problems he highlighted was the depiction of junior officers, especially Kerzhentsev and Farber. The marshal did not like it that Farber, this "clumsy awkward guy, reminiscent of a prerevolutionary intelligentsia-weakling, turns out to be a more masterful commander than a cadre officer." The marshal also did not like Farber's "self-deprecation" and his sense of inferiority next to Chumak—because, as he rightly noted, it might appear comical.[32] This film critic in a military uniform zoomed in on all the right moments—indeed, Farber, with his distinct mannerisms, is depicted as nearly absurd at the beginning, which is why his rise to be a battalion commander is so powerful. Of course, such a military hero—an intellectual and a Jew—is completely unacceptable for a Soviet Army rank. This letter was forwarded to Lenfilm with an endorsement of Glavpur, confirming that in the current form the screenplay could not be used.[33]

In a few short months, a group of Soviet generals and officers gathered at Glavpur to watch the entire movie. The screening was such a disaster that two high-ranking servicemen wrote a report to the Party Central Committee. The letter considers the film "inadequate" because it does not show the "historic significance of the Stalingrad battle," demonstrating instead a lack of leadership and discipline. But the main problem is a depiction of the cadre officers, who the reviewers believe are shown "farcically" (remember that the previous "review" found Farber's portrayal "comical"). The letter writers summarize that the participants at the screening were unanimous in considering the film "fallacious" and recommending against its release.[34]

Following this report, the Culture Department of the Party Central Committee (essentially, an organ of ideological censorship) gathered a meeting between representatives of the Ministry of Defense, Ministry of Culture, the filmmakers, and Lenfilm Studio representatives. The conclusion: to ban the film in its current form. But the Culture Department was willing to let the filmmakers revise the film, and then reconsider the question of its release.[35] Indeed, almost immediately, Ivanov made changes to the film and resubmitted it. Finally, in January 1957, the film was approved by the Culture Department, "with limited release."[36] However partial, it was a victory. *Soldiers* premiered in March 1957, but the regime was still unhappy, and Lenfilm would pay a price for its liberalism. The official army outlet, *Krasnaia Zvezda*, lambasted the film for its complete disregard for party and military leadership responsible for winning the war.[37] The Culture Department followed up with a scathing letter to the Politburo about "serious mistakes and shortcomings in the work of Lenfilm Studio." Among these mistakes was approval of such "ideologically fallacious" films as *Soldiers*.[38]

What happened? Why did a modest black-and-white film about the Stalingrad battle, based on the Stalin Prize–winning novel and directed by a communist filmmaker, run into such trouble? A parallel story about Aleksandr Galich's play *Sailors' Rest* (*Matrosskaia Tishina*) hints at some answers. Like Nekrasov, Galich started writing his play soon after the war (although he was able to finish it only in 1956). Galich's play also features a heroic Jewish soldier (as well as his old father, who was killed by the Nazis along with the other Jews in his town). This means that the entire play essentially focuses on a Jewish story of the war, including both victimhood and heroism. Around the time when *Soldiers* was having difficulties with the approval process, an innovative theater studio in Moscow staged *Sailors' Rest*. Like everything else, the production needed to be approved by censors—the overseeing party organs. The censors' visit with the theater did not go well, and after just one performance the production was banned. Hopeful for a different outcome, Galich went to talk to the party censor. In his recollection, he was told: "What's this you're trying to do here, Comrade Galich? Are you really trying to get a youth theater in the center of the country's capital to stage a play about how Jews won the war?! The Jews, of all people?!"[39] As with

other real concerns of censorship, this one did not leave a paper trail. Officially, the production was banned for purely aesthetic reasons, but Galich's testimony makes the true motivation behind the ban clear. Given that the same body—the Culture Department of the Party Central Committee—was overseeing all cultural productions, whether film or theater, it is likely that *Soldiers* was first banned, and then approved with limited release for exactly the same reasons—because it was telling a strong and positive story of Jewish participation in the war. Like Galich's play, *Soldiers* was a little ahead of its time.

The film's further fate was marred by Nekrasov's troubles with the regime. In the 1960s, the writer was accused of "adulation of the West," and in 1974 was pressed into exile. As Nekrasov became persona non grata, his books, and any films based on them, were taken out of circulation. Only in the post-perestroika era did Nekrasov's oeuvre, including *Soldiers*, finally return to Russian audiences. Similarly, Galich's play remained banned for over thirty years. It was finally produced in 1990, and turned into a film in 2004.

Other Jewish Soldiers Fighting on Soviet Screens

Except for the brief scene with an executed military doctor in 1959 in *The Fate of a Man*, no Jewish heroes were featured in Soviet movies after *Soldiers* until 1967. The next Jewish soldier appeared on the Soviet screen in *Chronicle of the Dive Bomber* (*Khronika Pikiruiuschego Bombardirovschika*), directed by Naum Birman at Lenfilm. The plot, based on a first novel of the young writer Vladimir Kunin, centers on three young friends—the crew of a bomber—who ultimately die in a heroic feat, torpedoing a German airfield full of military planes. The three friends—a pilot Sergei (Gennadii Saifulin), a sniper Jenia (Oleg Dal), and a navigator Venia Gurevich (Lev Weinstein)—are clearly descendants of Kerzhentsev and Farber: they are also affable, intelligent, and educated young men. Sergei is a teacher, Jenia is an artist, and Venia is a violinist. Like Farber, Venia is reserved and shy, slow to open up. There are other similarities with *Soldiers*: in both films, the characters' heroism is understated, made to seem natural in their seemingly ordinary lives. Both films are shot in black and white, relying on the aesthetic of documentary.

The three characters of the *Chronicle* are not only descendants of *Soldiers*—they are also reminiscent of the three friends from Kalik's *Goodbye, Boys!* In fact, the *Chronicle* may be seen as a sequel to Kalik's film. As in *Goodbye, Boys!* there is a lot of gentle humor in the dialogue, as the three engage in friendly banter, to effectively offset the military lingo. Similarly, the narrative of the *Chronicle* is intercut with documentary footage of the war and excerpts from earlier Soviet comedy (which pilots watch off duty). Period songs included in the soundtrack create the ambience of the era.

As in Kalik's film, the three characters of the *Chronicle* often appear in close-ups, emphasizing their individuality and developing each one's unique

psychological portrait. Each man's story is told through flashbacks. In a rare quiet moment, Gurevich plays a klezmer tune on his violin—he holds it as a guitar, clasping it close to his body, and as his introspective gaze turns inward, the string melody transforms into a vocal *nigun*, a Jewish tune sung by Gurevich's grandfather, an old shoemaker, who appears on screen. In a tableau visually echoing earlier Yiddish films, the grandfather is shown sitting in his tiny shop, under the stairs, surrounded by piles of shoes. He is singing to himself, like Mikhoels's character in *The Return of Natan Beker* (1932), as he is fixing shoes. When the old man starts speaking, lecturing Venia on the importance of violin lessons and sending him off to one, the camera intercuts between the past and present—closing up on Venia's bittersweet smile as he is reminiscing about his beloved grandpa. The film never refers to what happened with the grandfather in the war, but that is not hard to imagine, especially for audiences in the 1960s.

Gurevich, as we see, is a grandson of an "old Jew"—but he is "a new Jew" himself. In that sense, Gurevich is contrasted with Farber. Gurevich punches another pilot in the face when that pilot mockingly calls him "Oistrakh" and insults a girl he likes. Although Gurevich is a violinist—and his comparison to David Oistrakh points to this being a quintessential Jewish occupation—he is also a manly man who can defend his honor and that of his girlfriend in a physical confrontation.

Despite these potentially treacherous motifs, especially given that it was made in 1967, its approval progressed smoothly. The SRK editors particularly praised the main characters: "All three . . . are members of the intelligentsia. But all of them are completely devoid of intellectualizing introspection that became fashionable in some of the movies about young people at war, preoccupation with one's own petty feelings and experiences, and a doomed perception of oneself as a helpless pawn, drawn into a game by a slew of blind monstrous forces. . . . Instead, we have intelligent, witty guys . . . both ironic and romantic."[40]

It is hard to tell now which movies these jabs were directed at—Kalik's? Tarkovsky's? Somehow, the *Chronicle*, wittingly or unwittingly, avoided all the censorial pitfalls that a war film featuring a Jewish hero in 1967 could have fallen into. This is a good example of the inconsistency and unpredictability of the Soviet censorship apparatus.

After such easy approval, the film was greeted by a warm critical reception, including a positive review in the influential *Pravda*.[41] Moreover, in the *judenfrei* climate of the Soviet late 1960s, the film was read in a Jewish context. A rave review appeared in a *Birobidzhanskaia Pravda*, an official newspaper of the Jewish autonomous region (although no direct Jewish references were made in the review).[42]

Despite this warm reception and audience popularity (nearly 25 million people saw it), the film quickly disappeared from screens. Birman's and Dal's careers took off, but a charming Venia Gurevich remained one of the very few

roles played by Weinstein. According to Chernenko, due to his explicitly Jewish looks, Weinstein had a difficult time being cast in Soviet films in the 1970s.[43] In the 1980s, he emigrated to the United States, putting an effective end to his acting career. He died in 1990, before he had a chance to play in post-Soviet films.

A very different kind of Jewish fighter—not a member of the intelligentsia, and not an educated officer, but a simple partisan—appeared in the 1970 TV film *No Way Back* (*Obratnoi Dorogi Net*) by Grigorii Lipshits, a director who was once Eisenstein's student. This film, made at the provincial Dovzhenko Studio in Kiev, tells the story of a partisan unit in Belarus, headed by Major Toporkov, who ran away from a Nazi POW camp and tries to deliver weapons to the camp that will enable his comrades there to lead an uprising. One of the partisans is Solomon Berkovich (Lev Lemke). Solomon is clearly Jewish—not only in his name but also his speech and body language. His looks are a far cry from the chiseled Arian features of Toporkov; Solomon is a short, middle-aged family man with a very civilian, and very Jewish, profession—he is a barber.

No Way Back is the first film that makes a direct link between the Holocaust and the participation of Jews in the war. In fact, Solomon originally joined the partisans because he is looking for his wife Manya and their five children. He hopes to find them in a shtetl where his in-laws lived. A scene of Solomon's arrival at the place becomes a powerful moment. When Solomon enters the shtetl, together with another partisan on a reconnaissance mission, it is unusually quiet. The camera pans over the empty village, with dried-up trees in the foreground, symbolizing the interrupted life of the place. The silence is deafening. When finally Solomon and his comrade reach the in-laws' house, they see through the broken windows that it is empty. The camera dwells on Solomon's fallen face, and then follows his gaze to reveal the devastated household—broken glass and feathers flying everywhere (a recognizable symbol of pogrom). Solomon sits on the doorstep of the violated house and says to himself slowly, as if coming to a realization, "Then this is the truth that they don't leave anyone alive."

It is easy to read "anyone" as "any Jews." But in the continuation of his monologue, hints of the Holocaust are diluted and the Soviet message of internationalism is reinforced: "So many people lived here, Germans, Russians, Ukrainians, Poles, Belarusians, and there was enough place for everyone. . . . What markets did they have here! You could buy thick German beer or Ukrainian pottery, or a nice zinc tub for your baby from an old Jew." Jews are only mentioned along with other ethnics. The scene ends with Solomon sitting alone at the doorstep trying to take in the incomprehensible tragedy, when the camera closes up on his still shocked face.

In the next scene, Solomon, along with his comrades, participates in the uneven battle against the much bigger and much better equipped German contingent. As he is shooting in the direction of Germans with an automatic rifle, he

is shot and killed, but his comrade escapes. Ultimately, the modest barber dies as a hero. At the end of the film, partisans successfully deliver the weapons to the POW camp, and the last words of the film, which relate to Solomon's death as well, are, "It was not for nothing."

No Way Back was a modest TV film from an unimportant studio, and it disappeared without a trace. Following this, Lipshits made two more ordinary Soviet movies, which were equally forgotten. But Lemke's character remained one of the few memorable and warm appearances in the film, which otherwise was a formulaic, tedious Soviet war drama. Lemke, a Jewish actor, was one of the "official" Jews of the Soviet Union, playing a number of minor Jewish characters in Soviet movies, comical but sympathetic.[44] One such film, which was otherwise very unremarkable, is *Leningraders—My Children* (*Leningradtsy—Deti Moi*, Uzbekfilm, dir. Damir Salimov, 1980). It tells the story of an orphanage in wartime Uzbekistan. Lemke plays Naum Markovich, a character very similar to Solomon, a modest tailor working at the orphanage. When a criminal attacks the orphanage, Naum rises to the occasion and attacks the crook. Thus, a little Jewish tailor staying behind the frontlines in the safe Uzbek rear turns out to be a hero, as well.

If *No Way Back* was hardly noticed, another Jewish soldier, and female to boot, appeared in one of the biggest Soviet blockbusters of the era, *And the Dawns Are Quiet Here* (*A Zori Zdes' Tikhie*, 1972), made by Stanislav Rostotskii at the Gorky Film Studio. In the Soviet Union alone, 66 million people saw the film. It is a beautifully shot and acted story about a group of young women serving in an antiaircraft gun unit. They are seemingly ordinary girls—they dream of love, miss their homes, and fantasize about their future. The girls' flashbacks and fantasies are filmed in color, in a stylized theatrical form, contrasting with their gray everyday. The black-and-white, documentary-like look of the rest of the film and the structure of the war routine, interspersed with the flashbacks to prewar life, echo the *Chronicle of a Dive Bomber*, with a feminine spin.

Like the characters in the *Chronicle*, the girls also rise to the challenge, fighting heroically and dying one by one. Among the girls is Sonia Gurvich (Irina Dolganova), an educated and reserved Jewish girl. Her looks make Sonia a dead ringer for Jenia in *Drawing Fire upon Ourselves*—black wavy hair and dark eyes—though both were played by non-Jewish actresses. But in terms of her character, Sonia is Farber in a skirt—she reads poetry, is completely disconnected from anything physical, and looks entirely out of place in the military context. Sonia is a quintessential civilian, afraid of any confrontation; even when the girls fight with each other, she interjects with a plea for peace, offering to read poetry to them. She recites to the girls a famous love song by Pushkin. Even her romantic flashback is bookish—she is shown falling for her bespectacled boyfriend as they are both reading books. When he leaves for the front, he gives her a book of poems by Alexander Blok, which she proceeds to read at the front. And yet, it

is her education (she knows German) that makes her volunteer for a dangerous scouting mission. Her weapon is language.

Like *No Way Back, The Dawns* also references, at least indirectly, the tragic Jewish fate during the war. As Sonia marches along with her sergeant (the only male character), she admits to him that she has probably lost everyone in her family. She explains, "My parents were in Minsk. I studied in Moscow, prepared for the test, when . . ." her voice trails off.

The sergeant asks, "Your parents are of Jewish nationality?"

"Naturally," confirms Sonia, and looks at him questioningly.

The sergeant sighs and explains, "If they were in Moscow, I wouldn't have asked."

Then Sonia turns to him, and says, with desperate hope in her voice, "Maybe they succeeded in fleeing?"

More realistic than she is, the sergeant just curses and marches on.

Sonia's own death is portrayed as a tragic and unjustified loss. Unlike Farber (or Gurevich), she dies for nothing; even before she had a chance to fulfill her mission, she is shot by a sniper's bullet. When the sergeant looks at Sonia's blood-drenched Komsomol identity card, he says, "She used to read poetry, but mainly she could have given birth to children, and they would have given birth to her grand- and great-grandchildren, and the thread wouldn't be cut." This eulogy indirectly references the Holocaust—the fact that Sonia was the only remnant of her family, and now she is gone as well. This depiction of her death portrays Sonia more as a martyr or a victim than a hero, like her male counterparts who either die fighting (like Solomon Berkovich or Venia Gurevich) or become victorious commanders (like Farber). Sonia's representation here is gendered, but it is no different from other girls, whose deaths are also individualized on screen as tragic and largely unjustified sacrifices. Although the girls die in military uniforms, they are first and foremost unfulfilled lovers and mothers to unborn children.

The Dawns was not only enormously popular with audiences but it was also a darling of critics and festivals.[45] Although the fact that one of the lead characters was Jewish usually was not even mentioned, it clearly was significant at least for some audiences and critics. Like *Chronicle, The Dawns* was reviewed in a newspaper in Birobidjan. Behind formulaic praise, there was a true identification, especially as the reviewer quotes opinions of various audience members with explicitly Jewish names which were unlikely to be cited in any other Soviet newspaper.[46]

Except for *Soldiers*, all of the films featuring Jewish fighters, including *The Chronicle, No Way Back*, and *The Dawns*, reproduce the same paradigm: the old generation dies at the hands of the Nazis, the young generation fights on the fronts—and dies in battle. Either way, they are dead, the difference is that the old

generation of Jews is presumed to be victims and their deaths (only alluded to in these films) are passive. The young generation consists of fighters rather than victims, and they die as heroes, along with their non-Jewish comrades. Their story is less Jewish and more universal. In fact, that is the point of this universalization—to emphasize that the Jews fought like everyone else, and to downplay the particular Jewish suffering in the war.

There were a few other films that feature Jewish soldiers on the very margins of the plot. In the early Kalik masterpiece, *Man Follows the Sun* (*Chelovek Idet za Solntsem*, 1961), there is a scene with a Jewish war veteran, Leva (Maksim Grekov), a kind and humorous man who lost both legs in the war but came home alive and is happily shining other people's shoes, giving them a piece of his mind. In other war movies there are soldiers with Jewish last names, such as Schraibman in *Wild Honey* (*Dikii Med*, 1966) or Rubin in *Burning Snow* (*Goriachii Sneg*, 1972). However, aside from Jewish-sounding names, these barely seen and heard characters have no Jewish characterization. So for all intents and purposes, after *The Dawns* the figure of a Jewish soldier disappeared from Soviet screens for nearly two decades, returning only in the late perestroika era.

The most significant of these later films, a Soviet-German co-production, *The Parrot Who Spoke Yiddish* (*Popugai Kotoryi Govoril na Idish*, 1990) was written and directed by Efraim Sevela. It was not Sevela's first time dealing with the events of the Holocaust—all his life he was preoccupied with Jewish culture and identity.[47] Sevela was exiled from the USSR in 1971 for Zionist activism. In 1990 he returned to the Soviet Union to make *The Parrot*. Sevela's epic comedy features Yankel Lapidus (Ramaz Ioseliani), a Jewish "soldier Shweik," a *schlemiel* and *schlimazel* who finds himself first in the Polish, then in the Allied forces, then with the French in Vietnam, before he finally ends up felling trees in a Soviet gulag. All he is ever trying to do is to get out of the line of fire, and not kill anyone. As he says, "You can't shoot a live person!" Despite himself, he keeps committing incredible feats of courage, saving the day time and again. Yet, when he finally comes back to his native Vilnius hoping to find his beloved mama, all he finds is a city emptied of its Jews. His mother was murdered along with most of them. The film ends with a flashback to the Holocaust, when the local Jews, with the yellow stars on their coats, are marched through the narrow streets of the old city.

In 2004, Vladimir Mashkov, a Russian film star, made *Daddy* (*Papa*), based on Aleksandr Galich's play *Sailors' Rest*, mentioned above.[48] It is a story of the father-son relationship between old Abram Schwarz (Mashkov), a shtetl Jew, and his son David (Egor Beroev), an accomplished violinist in Moscow. With the start of the war, David volunteers to fight in the Red Army, and in the battle over his town is lethally wounded. In a hospital, David has a vision of Abram, who tells David the story of his execution in the town ghetto. Abram is a stereotypical "old Jew"; David is a battle hero as well as an educated, cultured, and Russified "new Jew" (he is typed as both Jewish looking and conventionally attractive).[49]

Both films, *The Parrot* and *Daddy*, reproduce the familiar paradigm: the old Jews die passively and the young Jews die fighting; however, unlike in earlier films, here the older generation is given more space in the narrative, and hence the tragedy of the Holocaust is addressed directly.

Another Jewish officer appears in the excellent war thriller by Dmitrii Meskhiev, *Our Own* (*Svoi*, 2004). Three Russian prisoners of war escape from German captivity in 1941. One of them is commissar Lifshits, played by Russian star Konstantin Khabenskii. The three have to negotiate their precarious position with the local villagers, who may betray them at any moment. Lifshits, as a Jew and a commissar, faces a double jeopardy from the start. His lack of survival skills makes it worse: like Farber, he is physically unequipped for the extreme conditions of the escape, and falls ill. He is also bookish, like Sonia Gurvich, asking a peasant who is hiding them for something to read. At the end, when the Germans discover them, the escaped prisoners must run away again. Lifshits is the first to be wounded. He stays behind, holding fire against the Germans, which allows the others to escape. He dies, but not before he puts up a good fight. In fact, Lifshits is portrayed as a martyr: vulnerable from the start because of his physical weakness, he dies in order to let others survive. In this character, the motifs of Jew as victim and as fighter finally come together.

Images of valiant and sexy Jewish fighters on screen today are a far cry from Farber. In the 2008 Hollywood thriller, *Defiance*, a Belarusian Jewish partisan is played by Daniel Craig—aka James Bond. Quentin Tarantino's *Inglourious Basterds* (2009), an over-the-top alternative history pastiche, unleashes on screen a whole platoon of Jews bringing terror to the Third Reich. And yet, despite the obvious differences, as in 1960s Soviet films (surely entirely unknown to the Hollywood filmmakers), the stories of Jewish fighters in these newer movies are closely connected to the history of the Holocaust. On both Soviet and American screens, Jewish heroes rise to avenge the Jewish victims.

15 The Last Phantom—the First Film

Our Father (1966/1990)

By all accounts, Boris Ermolaev was an unusual person. After being trained as a medical doctor, he developed an interest in supernatural powers and practiced hypnosis and teleportation. Perfectly reasonable and sane people in Moscow recall that he was able to keep a handkerchief floating in the air. One day, however, Ermolaev got tired of his psychic career and decided to study filmmaking. He went to the prestigious VGIK, where his first student film, *Sunshower* (*Slepoi Dozhd'*), ended up on a censorship shelf and was destroyed. But his real trouble started when he decided to dramatize "Our Father Who Art in Heaven," a short story by the famous Soviet writer Valentin Kataev, for his diploma film.[1]

Kataev's story, based on real-life events, originally appeared in 1946 in a popular illustrated magazine. The action took place in occupied Odessa and featured a young Jewish woman and her child trying to escape deportation.[2] As she leaves her apartment in the morning, she sees Jews marching into a ghetto. Kataev offers a poignant description of the Jewish predicament in the occupied Soviet city:

> From all ends of the city, on this morning, people with heavy loads trudged slowly in one direction, like ants. These were Jews on their way to the ghetto. The ghetto was set up in the Peresip district, in that dull, depressed part of the city where scorched oil tanks stood at sea level, looking like traveling circus tents. The fascists had surrounded a few dirty blocks with two rows of rusty barbed wire and left only one entrance, as in a mousetrap. The Jews made their way under the railroad bridges. They slipped on the icy sidewalks. There were old people among them who couldn't walk and some people sick with typhus. These were carried on stretchers. Some would fall down and remain lying there, leaning back against a lamp post or hugging an iron hitching post. Nobody was escorting them to the ghetto. They were going there by themselves, without any convoy. They knew that whoever stayed home would be shot, without exception. From all parts of the city, along steep slopes, under railroad bridges, the Jews made their way to the ghetto pushing their wheelbarrows before them, leading their bundled children by the hand. They walked one behind the other, like ants, passing houses and frost-covered trees. . . . It was horribly cold. It was unusually

> cold even for a northern city. But for Odessa it was simply monstrous. Such cold hits Odessa once in thirty years. . . . Hardened sparrows lay on the highways, killed in mid-flight, by the cold. The sea was frozen to the very horizon.[3]

Not much happens in the story: a nameless woman, avoiding the ghetto, keeps wandering the streets hoping to hold out until the deportation ends. She stops by a cafeteria to feed her boy, attempts, unsuccessfully, to find shelter with a friend, sits in a movie theater for a few hours to avoid the brutal cold, and finally, exhausted, rests on a park bench. This is where the soldiers find her body and that of the boy in the morning: wood-hard and frost-covered. They die like the sparrows in the story, frozen mid-flight. They are thrown into a truck, where their bodies bang against other, also frozen, corpses. A cheerful prayer is heard on the loudspeakers: "Our Father who art in heaven . . ."

Choosing Kataev's story as a basis for a screenplay was an unusual move in 1964. Ermolaev then was married to Kataev's niece. Through her he got to meet the famous writer, who told him about his 1946 story. The subject matter was close to Ermolaev's heart—his mother was Jewish, and already in his first student film destroyed by censors, he had attempted to deal with anti-Semitism.[4] With Kataev's encouragement, Ermolaev started thinking of dramatizing the short story.

Together with another young filmmaker, Mikhail Suslov, Ermolaev wrote the screenplay and took it to Mosfilm.[5] The script breathed life into barely sketched characters in the short story. In some ways, it went in the opposite direction from most dramatizations considered here, which were based on longer novels and involved reducing rather than expanding the original. Ermolaev stayed close to Kataev's story, and the action in the script takes place within twenty-four hours on a winter day in 1941. The main characters are the same—a Jewish woman, who would remain nameless, wife to a Russian husband fighting on the front, and mother to a half-Jewish child. Both, according to Kataev's description, look Russian.

But Ermolaev also made significant revisions to the story. First, in the story the woman makes only three stops on her way to the park bench: at the cafeteria, at the building where her friend lives (but which she cannot even enter), and at a movie theater. In the script, the woman's simple path toward her death becomes an epic journey, her road to Calvary, with multiple stops, each one bringing a different kind of suffering, despair, or humiliation. In Kataev's story, the prayer broadcast on the radio is obviously there only to highlight the hypocrisy and inhumane nature of the fascist occupation. Ermolaev's script makes the Christian allusions, only hinted at in the original story, much more pronounced.

The second important revision is an addition of another Jewish family who, like the woman and her child, have fled the line to the ghetto and are now trying to find shelter. Similar to the main characters, they are running around like

spooked animals. Even if they keep coming to the same places, they can't help each other—in fact, every time they spot one another, they run away, afraid of recognition and endangering each other. In Kataev's story the woman and her child are alone. In Ermolaev's script, the woman shares the fate of other Jews like her—miserable, ineffectual, desperate people, cornered by inhumane circumstances.

Ermolaev maintains the story's circular composition. But now, instead of the prayer, it opens with a scene of a truck moving slowly through the streets—although we don't know yet that this is a truck that picks up corpses. This becomes clear at the end of the script, when it picks up the bodies of the woman and her child. The truck functions as a mediator of death (like Charon or the Grim Reaper), its appearance hinting that the woman was doomed from the start.

Then the action moves to interior spaces, where a woman in her cozy little apartment is waking up her young son. An important detail explains why she can't wait out a deportation at home: she is kicked out by a janitor, who, enacting the Nazi orders, comes to lock up a door behind her.

At first she joins the sad procession of other Jews heading for the ghetto gates. But now, instead of Kataev's brief description painted in broad strokes, Ermolaev personalizes the victims. In the extended scenes that follow, human diversity springs alive from his script: there are the young and the old, kids arguing or playing or dropping dishes, two women carrying their disabled relatives on a stretcher, an old women berating her grandson and his worried mother. Over them, from a loudspeaker on a truck, a pleasant voice recites orders to all Jews to arrive at a particular spot for "permanent residence." "For disobedience—execution; for being late—execution; for hiding a Jew—all inhabitants of an apartment will be executed without exception." In a little while, contrasting with this announcement, the same prayer that concluded Kataev's story is broadcast from the same loudspeakers.

But once people form a line, the scene becomes almost mundane—people are trying to keep pace, worried about losing their place in line, and engage in small talk with their neighbors. Only closer to the gates does the scene turn more sinister. As the people are shoved in, a man writes numbers in chalk on their backs. As they become numbers, they lose their humanity. It is a beginning of an end. A man in a leather coat must give up his dog—no dogs are allowed in the ghetto. Separated from its owner, the dog barks and squeals, until silenced by a guard, signaling what is in store for its former owner.

The woman runs away from the line without much thinking—she simply takes her son by his hand and walks away. Hurrying along a long wall, they come across an enormous pile of green bottles. Disturbed by the movement of the woman and the child, the bottles come crashing down—visually foreshadowing the coming catastrophe. Their lives are coming undone just like the pile of bottles.

Once the woman and the child reach a street, they try to enter a cafeteria—but there they spot another Jewish family, and have to turn around. In another cafeteria, they can finally rest. But as the woman and the child are drinking tea, a radio announcement comes on: "Today at 9, evacuation of the Jewish population of the town was concluded." The woman fakes indifference, as the announcement continues: "Persons of Jewish nationality who hid from the evacuation will be executed. All attempting to leave the city are intercepted by special patrols. The apprehended are executed." This is followed by a weather forecast: minus 31°C. The cafeteria clerk is amazed: "My God, what is going on? It's like in a biblical prophecy."

"What's the biblical prophecy?" asks the woman.

"The end of the world. Birds drop dead in their flight."

At this, yet another catastrophic prediction, the woman flees the cafeteria.

The next stop is the home of her friend—the one person whom she remembers from better times. She drags the boy to the friend's address and waits for her outside. At first, when they meet, it looks like there is a ray of hope—a plump friend recognizes the woman and is happy to see her and her little son. But then, the friend darts a quick look at the woman and it dawns on her: "You are a . . ."

"Yes," answers the woman.

"But your husband is Russian," says the plump friend.

"It doesn't matter, he is on the front. And yours?"

The plump friend's husband is working for the Germans now. When the woman attempts to follow her friend to the safety of her building, a patrol asks for their documents. The plump friend enters the building without as much as looking back, and the woman and her son have to flee again.

Running away, the woman walks through a whole platoon of leering German soldiers. She now takes her son to a beach, to a tiny hut of a fisherman, who in happier times sold her some fish. The hut now appears to be their last resort. But the hut turns out to be a mirage: once they reach it, they find it empty, frozen, and vandalized. Still, the exhausted woman tells her little son that they will settle here. She picks up the mess, and starts a fire. As things are looking up, the woman hears noise outside—right near the hut an entire German antiaircraft unit is being set up. Staying there is out of the question.

Wandering the streets again, trying out locked doors of apartment buildings, the woman comes across an unusual shelter—a barber shop. For as long as an old hairdresser works on her hair, she and her boy can be warm and safe. But no matter how many times the woman wants another adjustment, at some point the visit must come to an end. Besides, another Jewish family is peeking into the shop, and the woman needs to leave.

Back in the street, the woman and her boy run into a group of people led under convoy—clearly, they are "the apprehended" in the words of the radio announcement. Trying to run away from a horrid procession, the woman ducks

into an alley, runs through a courtyard, and finally pops out onto a street. Here, she encounters an odd sight: rows and rows of clothes racks full of jackets and coats.[6] She does not know the source of these clothes (although it is clear to us that they were confiscated from the ghetto Jews), but she understands that something sinister is going on. Indeed, she witnesses a man led to one of the racks, told to leave his coat there, and then taken to a courtyard nearby. Gunfire sounds, followed by a scream. The woman cannot see the act of an execution, but she can hear the shots. In horror, she starts running again without as much as looking where she is going. A tall staircase happens to be in front of her. To the sound of gunshots she runs up the stairs. But the staircase is icy, and when she is near the top, she slips and slides down on her suitcase, clutching her son to her. This is a reference to a famous scene in Eisenstein's *Battleship Potemkin*, which became the most iconic image of violence against the innocent. In Ermolaev's notes, even the planned montage of long shots and close ups to the woman's horrified face are similar to the famous staircase scene. As in *The Unvanquished*, a director reaches out for an established cinematic tradition of representing violence.

The scene of the fall cuts to an image of a beach, which functions as a flashback, but diegetically stands for a scene in a film that the woman and her son are watching in a movie theater. This is another temporary shelter she finds from the cold, sitting among drunk German soldiers and giggling girls. The pictures of the beach turn to clips from German flicks, and then to Nazi newsreels of Hitler's speeches. But even this pathetic show comes to an end—with the curfew approaching, the theater closes.

The woman is in the street again. In her desperation, she sneaks into a cathedral, where a young regent rehearses with a choir of bored boys. Once she is discovered there, she pleads with the regent. But he kicks her out, explaining to her with a smile: "You are a kike (*zhidovka*), I mean a Jewess. A Jew cannot be in a temple of Lord." The woman shields her face like from a blow, and mumbles, "What are you talking about, I don't even look like one." But the regent is not dissuaded: "A Jewess, a Jewess, one can see it right away," he says, as he is polishing a glass on an icon. At that point, the script directs the camera to show the woman's reflection in an icon's glass, her features superimposed on the Madonna's face. She is the persecuted Madonna.

In the next scene, "the apprehended" are led through a vacant lot. Among them are men, women, and children familiar to us from the ghetto line. The woman and her child are among them. A sudden shot is heard, and one of the convoys falls dead. More shooting ensues—and the rounded-up Jews dart away. But even this surprise attack, probably by the underground, does not save her. Fleeing the scene, she finds herself in a dead-end street, under floodlights, where she is dashing around like a wild animal. German soldiers spill out from a bar, rolling out a piano with them. They keep drunkenly playing and singing. Freeze frame. Silence. Cut.

In the final scenes, the woman and her child find their way to the snow-covered park. They sit down, and, embracing her boy, the woman pleads with God: "O, Lord, save us!" As she closes her eyes, the prayer is heard in the extradiegetic angelic voice: "Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be your name . . . Your kingdom come, your will be done . . . Give us this day our daily bread, for the sake . . . for the sake . . . for the sake . . ." The woman and the boy are sitting together trying not to fall asleep.

The script ends exactly like the short story: in the morning, the truck comes to pick up corpses: "First soldiers carried a woman with bent legs to the truck. They swung the body. The woman banged against other corpses like a piece of wood. Then soldiers brought the boy, swung him and easily threw him into the truck. He banged on the woman like wood, and even bounced back. The truck drove away. Only a bench with a dark trace of those who sat on it was left behind."

The woman and her child die completely alone. No one comes to their rescue—no friend, no partisan, not a church, and not the Party. Even the underground's attack is ineffectual, only postponing her death. In the script, much more than in the story, people who understand the Jewish plight simply turn away. This is, of course, a remarkable departure from the message of internationalist solidarity of Soviet people, and a case for unique fate of Jewish people during the war—both all but inconceivable in a conventional Soviet movie. The message about the unique fate of the Jews is made even more poignant because in the script (as in the original story), the woman is a Jew in name only. She does not look Jewish, she is married to a Russian man, and has no apparent cultural, ethnic, or religious identity as a Jew. What makes her Jewish is the Nazi persecution.

Trials and Tribulations of *Our Father*

The first two drafts of the script were considered informally (a practice at that time to simplify the bureaucratic procedure). But the third revision—and Ermolaev was obliged to make significant revisions even at this early stage—was deemed worthy of official consideration. On July 23, 1964, filmmakers and scriptwriters, members of Mosfilm SRK, gathered to discuss the script of *Our Father*. Minutes of the discussion give us a glimpse into how Ermolaev's colleagues—in this case a remarkable group of prominent writers and filmmakers—saw it then. Amazingly, they give it very honest and very close consideration, without any apparent cautionary checking up on the current party line—it is still the Thaw. As we will see, each of the discussants had a personal or professional motivation to help the script along.

Author and scriptwriter Grigorii Baklanov (who was Jewish; his birth name was Friedman), opened the meeting with suggestions that show not only his sympathy to the script but also considerable familiarity with cinematic and literary representations of the Holocaust: citing a French film *L'Enclose* (1960), Vasilii

Grossman's essay "The Treblinka's Hell" (1944), and a memoir by non-Jewish Polish woman, Krystyna Zywulska, *I Survived Auschwitz*,[7] he made an argument for close attention to authentic everyday detail. For instance, Baklanov noted: "Conversations in the line to the ghetto are too deliberate. But people, even going to death, are sticking with their everyday routine. In the film *L'Enclose*, on the line to crematorium, a man is letting a woman pass first, out of habit. This is one detail that speaks volumes." (Ermolaev implemented this useful advice, and the scene in the ghetto lines, indeed, became more powerful). Baklanov concluded very strongly: "All this is truly talented. . . . It can turn into a very big film—a tragedy—and in my opinion you are capable of doing it. . . . We should launch it into production right away."[8]

Yurii Trifonov, another famous Soviet writer (married then to Nina Nelina, a scion of a famous Russian-Jewish artistic family) also strongly supported *Our Father.* He even encouraged Ermolaev to push the envelope further and to deal with a controversial subject of collaboration during the war: "Inhuman, anti-humane nature of fascism is clear. But I think that here there is another subject, more poignant—a subject of people who were complicit to fascism. . . . A great many people did totally fine during fascism, they helped to create ghettos, etc." Recalling the recent trial of local Zondercommando workers in Taganrog, Trifonov even argued for introducing a Nazi collaborator character.

A popular war writer, Yurii Bondarev, was also very supportive, praising particularly the scene where the suitcase is falling down the staircase, which reminded him of the famous scene in *Battleship Potemkin*. Other discussants, writers and filmmakers, also give comments that were productive and to the point. An important filmmaker, Vladimir Naumov, cautioned Ermolaev against the monotone—the same note of suffering in the entire film, worrying that this would diminish the impact of the tragedy. Others (including critic Nora Rudakova) called on him to keep the narrative laconic and simple, devoid of the unnecessary flourishes that would distract the viewer from the sheer desperation of the story. The bottom line: this was one of the most positive, supportive discussions that I have read. All of the discussants, however critical, demonstrated a deep engagement with the subject.

But the most poignant contribution came from Andrei Tarkovsky, a young filmmaker in 1964 but already thinking seriously about representing war and suffering (his *Ivan's Childhood* came out in 1962). His insights are worth citing at length:

> Suffering, a simple story of suffering, of exorbitant suffering cannot be symbolic. . . . And since you [he is addressing Ermolaev] are telling a story about a tragic history from a life of a Jewish family—a mother and a child—symbolism is impossible here. Do you understand what I am trying to say? This story does not have a right to be told symbolically. Because what is it a symbol of? A

> symbol of suffering itself? . . . In your script you don't have yet a philosophical abstraction. . . . Kataev's story is a story of a tragedy of humanity; it becomes philosophical because it is so authentic in its nature. But the moment you start aestheticizing suffering, it becomes importunate and in bad taste.

Then Tarkovsky made an argument for "show not tell"—he wanted Ermolaev to leave the audience with a feeling of deep horror, but not to explain to them that the emotional state of his characters is terrible. To address the problem, Tarkovsky told Ermolaev to focus his camera only on the two people—the mother and the child, and to ignore others. This, according to him, would bring remarkable results. Ermolaev agreed. Tarkovsky concluded: "I deeply believe in these people [Ermolaev and his co-author] and I am ready to say, it will be a very good film. This is a Jewish woman and a Jewish child we are talking about—this is very special."

At that point, Naumov, as a head of the Mosfilm unit where the film was slated to be shot, a man of political intuition, chimed in: "God forbid to make this film with a national character and genre features. This is unacceptable here."

> TARKOVSKY: I am not sure.
> RUDAKOVA: This will make it more difficult.
> NAUMOV: In Kataev's story, the woman does not even look Jewish.

Clearly, there are two concerns here: first, an artistic one, about the "ethnic" character representation that will compromise the script (indeed, the woman in both Kataev's story and Ermolaev's script is Jewish in name only). The second concern is more to the point—the political ramifications of such representation for the film's approval. Nevertheless, the discussion concluded on a strong note—the SRK approved the script, and Naumov expressed hope that the production would start in the next month. Little did he know . . .

The editor at the studio detected sensitive material in the script. Sending it to Aleksandr Dymshits (familiar to us as a chief editor of Goskino) for an approval, he included a note asking for Dymshits's feedback, "so that the authors can incorporate your comments." He also quite reasonably suggested that the script be run by Kataev.[9]

Dymshits obliged. He ran the script by the higher-ups and summarized the input of "the comrades": indeed, they agreed that Kataev's imprimatur was important, as was keeping his realistic style, devoid of all flourishes. Even more important was to present "an occupied city as a Soviet city, where the spirit of resistance and hatred toward fascism is clearly felt."[10] Translation: please make sure that this is a socialist-realist script about the heroism of the Soviet people and not some sort of paean to the suffering of Jews.

In response to this feedback, Ermolaev further developed a brief scene depicting an underground attack on the German convoy leading a group of

captured Jews. Now a partisan not only shoots a soldier but also hides a woman with her child in an arch. The revised script now had Kataev's name as the first author, even though all he did was add his signature under the words: "Read it. Agreed with it."[11] Kataev's name eased further approval, and in early 1965, Mosfilm recommended that the screenplay advance to the next stage—writing a director's treatment. The letter emphasized Kataev's contribution to the script's development, resulting in the addition of a number of scenes, which made the script into "an exciting, deep, and dazzling cinematic work." Importantly, the letter also made a case for the relevance of the subject. To wit: "This story, written twenty years ago . . . did not become outdated. Just the opposite, today, when West Germany is trying to give amnesty to war criminals because its statute of limitation expired, the story 'Our Father Who Art in Heaven' raises pressing issues."[12]

Despite such a well-put argument, the approval process stalled. Later in the year, Mosfilm wrote to Goskino again, asking to include the film in a studio portfolio for 1966.[13] This request means that somewhere along the line the script hit an obstacle, and clever Alov and Naumov (the heads of the Mosfilm unit where the film was supposed to be made, whom we encountered before), decided to go through the back door: scripts that were preapproved for inclusion in the yearly studio portfolio had a somewhat easier time being approved.

The real clincher came in a few days, in a letter written in longhand, with an illegible signature. The author could have been one of the Goskino reviewers, recruited to consider special cases. Or it could have been an apparatchik from a Culture Department, overseeing a controversial issue. This clearly influential letter writer suggested that it was not worthwhile to make a full film out of this script, whose plot lacked psychological characterization and complexity. It was better to make a short film. The letter concludes with a recommendation to rethink the matter (*nado podumat'*).[14] A suggestion to "rethink" was usually bad news.

Following this informal advice, Goskino kept stalling, and the question about inclusion of the film into the studio's portfolio remained open. In this uncertainty, the SRK of Goskino sent Mosfilm a letter with further comments on the script, which was still not approved. The problems were largely the same as before: the SRK recommended sticking with a strictly realistic style in order to avoid the "interpretation of the tragic events represented in the film as trumping up an endless chain of 'horrors,' which would result in the ideological-artistic deficiency of the film."

The tragic and doomed situation of a female protagonist did not sit well with the socialist-realist norm. There was no moral reward, no hope, and no redemption in her death. Next to *Our Father*, other Soviet war tragedies look almost life-affirming. Even in *The Ascent* (made much later), the most openly tragic of them all, a character wins a moral victory over the enemy as he dies with a smile

on his lips. At the end of *Our Father*, frozen corpses are thrown into a truck. It is hard to put a positive spin on that.

The second recommendation of SRK went hand in hand with the first one: "to present the occupied city . . . as a truly Soviet city, opposing the occupiers, breathing hatred toward fascism and its cronies, a city, where people even in the unbearable conditions of terror did not lose their striving to fight, their spirit of resistance and Soviet patriotism."[15] This inevitably meant that the scenes with the local collaborators or complicit onlookers passively implicated in crimes had to go.

This is the last document in the script's file—we will never find out what exactly happened to the script, how and when it was put on the shelf. The subject of the Holocaust was not the explicit reason for its rejection. It is rather that the entire script—the way it zoomed on one particular Jewish story, the way it presented that story as a human tragedy without any attempt to soften it, the fact that Soviet heroism (in the form of Red Army, or partisans, or Party leadership, or simply sympathetic locals) is not apparent anywhere in the script—runs counter to everything that the Soviet cultural leadership considered appropriate for a war film.

With whatever little promise the SRK letter held for Ermolaev, he went on to revise the script again. But the Thaw was petering out, the nascent dissident movement was being strangled, and Jewish topics were becoming increasingly unwelcome. Quixotic Ermolaev did not seem to take notice. All in all, according to his later testimony, *Our Father* was rewritten an amazing twenty-one times.[16]

The last version of the script found in the Goskino files dates to August 1966. But there is no response to it—no reviews, no minutes of discussion, and no resolutions. This means that the script was rejected in an informal procedure, probably upon a consultation with the overseeing party organs. The timing is not surprising—simultaneously with *Our Father, Stalemate* and *King Matt and the Old Doctor* were rejected and shelved, as well. *Commissar* was shot, but brusquely banned. *Eastern Corridor* was released, but in such a way that no one would see it. Like other controversial scripts, *Our Father* became a phantom film—a file gathering dust in the Goskino archives, and even Kataev's imprimatur did not help.

Our Father as a Perestroika Film

This should have been the end of the story. And it would have been, if not for perestroika, which blew a fresh wind into Soviet cultural production. With censorship abolished, films on Jewish topics, including the Holocaust, poured onto screens.[17]

Twenty-five years after its original inception, Ermolaev was able to make *Our Father* at Mosfilm studio. It became the first Soviet Holocaust film.[18] It was a different era, of course, and the 1989 *Our Father* reflects the perestroika Zeitgeist more than it adheres to the original script. Now, instead of the historically

situated Holocaust story (based on real-life events), the film is a dystopian parable, set nowhere in particular, and deeply steeped in Christian allusions and symbolism. The persecution of Jews is but a metaphor for any catastrophic event. The film still loosely adheres to Kataev's story, but the new revisions that Ermolaev made to his 1960s script completely transform the narrative.

First, the film has significantly Christianized the story. As we have seen, in Kataev's original the prayer heard at the beginning and at the end of the story is mainly used to show the hypocrisy of the occupiers: sung by an angelic child's voice it offsets the inhumane, immoral nature of the regime. In Ermolaev's script written in the 1960s, the Christian references are expanded but their function is largely the same. When the woman, who at that point is elevated to the status of Madonna, is kicked out of the cathedral, the depiction of religion is in line with the old-school Soviet approach, emphasizing the hypocrisy of the church.

Not so in the 1989 film. Now the entire narrative is saturated with both visual and textual Christian allusions. In fact, the film opens with the biblical prophecy, read by an off-screen voice, as the image of an icon appears on screen: "and the third angel sounded, and there fell from heaven a great star, burning as a torch, and it fell upon the third part of the rivers, and upon the fountains of the waters; and the name of the star is called Wormwood: and the third part of the waters became wormwood; and many men died of the waters, because they were made bitter." The text is from the Book of Revelation (8:10–11), the last book of the New Testament. This apocalyptic description, opening a Holocaust story, presents one particular human tragedy, told in the film, as a part of a larger worldwide catastrophe. At the same time, it creates a Christian framing for the Jewish story. Throughout the film, Ermolaev inserts New Testament texts and images of icons, keeping this Christian framing.

Consistent with the apocalyptical language of the Book of Revelation, the film is shot in a dark palette, with gray, brown, and black colors dominating the screen. This darkness and apocalyptic imagery were characteristic of the perestroika-era sensibility, which for Soviet cultural producers was also associated with rapture, a dramatic end-of-time, when life as they knew it was over. The wind of reform blew in not only new freedoms but also a sense of uncertainly and foreboding. The discomfiting tone of *Our Father* is also typical of perestroika films. The Holocaust emerges here as a symbol of dark times, a universal parable more than a historical narrative.

Like other perestroika films, *Our Father* makes use of surreal and sexual imagery, verboten during Soviet times. The interior spaces, cafeteria and barbershop, look like bordellos. Both are dark, cavernous places full of strange ominous objects: a skeleton, enemas, and sinister-looking glass vessels. Both spaces are populated by prostitutes, who live their own surreal life: showing magic tricks, fighting, drinking. In the barbershop, prostitutes hit one another as

ballet dancers practice in the background. This preoccupation with surreal and sexual, contrasting so wildly with the Christian text and imagery, is also a tribute to the perestroika-era cinematic fashion.[19] Pavel Ilyshev, an art director of the film, recalls that Ermolaev was deliberately looking to create dreamlike bizarre imagery, defamiliarizing the mundane and the obvious.[20] This imagery was a departure not only from Kataev's laconic terse prose but also from the 1960s script. This imagery largely turned the Holocaust story into a perestroika story.

Finally, non-Jews, and even collaborators, are depicted in the film in a more positive light. If in Kataev's story, and in the 1960s script, no one is trying to help the woman and her child, in the 1989 film, they encounter much more sympathetic people. Some try to help.

In the scene of departure from her apartment, the woman (Margarita Terekhova, familiar to Western audiences from Tarkovsky's *Mirror*) encounters a sympathetic old couple, instead of an impersonal janitor who locks the door behind her, as in the script. Although they cannot save her, the couple asks her for forgiveness, then they give her a fur coat. In the script, a plump friend never so much as makes an effort to help the woman. But in the film, this friend is pregnant and deeply sympathetic to the woman. She brings the woman and her child home, and refuses to let her go, even as she knows that she is putting her own family in peril. It is the friend's husband who makes the woman and the child leave.

Throughout the film, a music teacher, a new character who was not in the original script, keeps following the woman, trying to save her. It is he who ultimately brings her to the church—in the film a Russian Orthodox church, not a Catholic cathedral. Now a priest actually allows the woman to stay until the morning, and hides her at a place where someone else is already hidden. Only when police raid the church, the woman and the child must run away. They are in the street all the same, but importantly, not because of cruelty and indifference of everyone they meet but because of the police raid. Exhausted, the woman tries to return to her former apartment. She finds the apartment vandalized by the police who came to look for her. Her elderly landlord has been killed, added to the list of victims.

And even a man who should clearly be a negative character, a local collaborator (Vladimir Men'shov) charged with a task of writing the numbers on Jewish backs as they enter the ghetto, is individualized as a complex character. He also keeps following the woman and even offers a place to hide her. He is crying to her about his own broken life: "I am also homeless, exactly like you." Even he is, in some ways, a victim. To drive home this message of everybody's victimhood, at the end of the film the truck first picks up frozen corpses of the music teacher, then of the local collaborator, and only then of the woman and her child. With everyone dead, it is not clear who is a perpetrator and who is responsible for the crimes.

Figure 15.1 *Our Father*. A Jewish woman and her young son. Courtesy of Mosfilm Cinema Concern.

Figure 15.2 *Our Father*. An execution in a courtyard. Courtesy of Mosfilm Cinema Concern.

As a result of these changes, *Our Father* is transformed from a minimalist, chamber Holocaust story, individualizing one particular tragedy, to a swooping narrative of mass destruction. The world is coming apart—as predicted by biblical prophecy—and no one is safe. The Jews are not the only victims; rather, nearly everyone whom we encounter is in one way or another victimized, including even a collaborator. This is a typical perestroika narrative, not a tragic story of Jewish fate. Moreover, the references to the Jewish identity of the victims are scant at best. To the degree that *Our Father* can be read as a Holocaust film, the Holocaust is a trope used to speak about the unraveling of the world. In fact, this was exactly Ermolaev's idea in 1989. Reporting on an interview with the filmmaker, a journalist explains: "Taking as a basis the plot of the story [by Kataev], the authors are not trying to transfer it to screen exactly as it is. For the filmmaker, this is just an occasion to speak about today's life. Purposefully, there is no precise indication of time and place in the film. 'Our picture—emphasized Ermolaev—is about spiritual emptiness, about disconnect between people, which may lead to a loss of basic moral values, about the fact that belonging to any kind of nationality does not give any grounds for prejudice or supremacy.'"[21] Indeed, this is exactly how the contemporary reviewers understood the film, as a perestroika product commenting on the existential crisis of the moment: "In their anti-utopias,

Orwell, Zamiatin, Platonov, and Zinov'ev attempted to foresee the features of the future, based on their sense of the present. We survived 1984, we each dug out our own foundation pit [a reference to Platonov's novel], and stopped in front of the hiatal heights of what we have done. . . . The film *Our Father* foretells the future based on our all-too-real recent monstrous past. Unbearable, hellish cold emanates from the screen."[22] This is a characteristic understanding of the film—as a parable and dystopia, a prophecy rather than history.

Clearly, waiting twenty-five years to make a film is not a recipe for success—the director changed, the world around him changed, and the resulting film is out of sync with itself: the constant New Testament quoting is overbearing, the slow motion emphasizing the key moments is heavy-handed, and the dark symbolism is simply tedious. In 1989, Ermolaev has done everything that his colleagues back in 1966 warned him against. The emotional tenor in the film is, indeed, monotone, something that Naumov tried to prevent. Authentic everyday detail, which Baklanov insisted on, is sacrificed for the bizarre and the surreal. The flourishes detract from the powerful message, as Rudakova was worried it would. And most important, aestheticizing suffering and turning it into symbolism is, indeed, "importunate and in bad taste," as Tarkovsky warned. What could have been a phenomenal—and honest—drama in 1966 became another gloom-and-doom perestroika movie, firmly belonging to what a contemporary critic called "a genre of decay."[23]

These ideas resonate in a review by one of the most insightful Russian critics, Lev Anninskii. He did not approve of Ermolaev's dramatic departure from Kataev's story, and disliked the resulting "apocalyptic style" of *Our Father.* Although Anninskii appreciated the competent filmmaking, he rebuked Ermolaev for his eclectic, over-the-top imagery, which caused the film to lose any social or historical specificity. The film is no longer about the destruction of Odessa Jews in 1942, but about the end of the world in general. Anninskii was especially disdainful of the unbridled Russian Orthodox Christianity of the film, which he read as a tribute to fashion: "Soon it will be impossible to make a film without a priest in it, in the same way in which once it was impossible to make a film featuring one." For Anninskii, this is a case of "deep spiritual profanation."[24]

The mixed reviews were not promising for *Our Father.* The fact that its premiere occurred in 1990 did not help, either. At that time a vast number of movies were being churned out, mostly quick and cheap productions. Most of these movies did not find audiences. The economy was in ruins, the film distribution system collapsed, and film attendance, in steady decline since 1970s, was plummeting further. Only popular foreign films, usually American B movies, had some chance in the dilapidated theaters. Mostly, people preferred to stay home and watch reruns of detective TV series and saccharine telenovellas. Emerging video technology, with its cheap pirated offerings, allowed for more private film watching, further decreasing theater attendance.[25] In this cultural climate, *Our*

Father had a very limited run in the theaters, and then disappeared without a trace. Unlike other films I discuss here that had a second birth through art film festivals, reruns on TV, releases on DVD, or at least online pirating, *Our Father* is still awaiting its revival. The film—on 35 mm reels—is available only at Gosfilmofond film archive, where anyone who is so inclined may watch it after paying a steep fee, taking a train from Moscow to the remote station of Belye Stolby, and learning to operate a montage table. Boris Ermolaev is equally forgotten. Soon after he made *Our Father* he emigrated to the United States, where he did not succeed in continuing his career as a filmmaker. Today, he lives in Montreal, where his failing health keeps him in a nursing home, lonely and cut off from the world.[26] The sad irony is that this is a Jewish nursing home, but no one around him is aware of what an amazing film about the Holocaust he attempted to make and what kind of audacity it required back in 1960s Soviet Union.

16 Perestroika and Beyond

OLD WINE IN NEW BOTTLES?

The year 1986 was a game-changing one for Soviet cinema. The Filmmakers' Union Congress demoted the old leadership, and Goskino lost its tight grip on the film industry.[1] Soon small production companies, called *kooperativ*, sprouted like mushrooms. By 1988, Soviet censorship ended, and films on previously untouchable subjects, many of them made by *kooperativ*s, flooded screens.[2] These films were rarely masterpieces—more often than not they had low production values and sensationalist plots, which exploited their subjects for commercial purposes. Nothing was off limits: Stalin's purges, Khrushchev's voluntarism, rock 'n' roll, prostitution, youth counterculture, and anything Jewish. Together, they formed a cycle of perestroika films, allowing a contemporary to summarize their plots in a quip: "A naked woman sits before the portrait of Stalin and smokes marijuana."[3] To this I could add—with an enormous Star of David pendant around her neck. According to Miron Chernenko, in the short time span of 1990–1991, sixty-two films on Jewish subjects were made, swiftly filling up the gap left by Soviet policies.[4] Even though audience numbers at the time were dismal, this sudden phenomenon of Jewish cinema was so noteworthy that the definitive Soviet film journal *Iskusstvo Kino* published a special issue on the subject.[5] Inevitably, some of these new Jewish films dealt with the Holocaust—the most charged of Jewish subjects.

Our Father was still made at Mosfilm, with the usual public funding and bureaucratic production process. But the next two major Soviet films that turned to the Holocaust represented the new world of late perestroika. *Ladies' Tailor* (*Damskii Portnoi*, dir. Leonid Gorovets, 1990) and *Exile* (*Izgoi*, dir. Vladimir Savel'ev, 1991) were made with a combination of private and public funding, and were characteristic of the production, reception, and circulation histories of their era.

Ladies' Tailor originated as a play by Aleksandr Borschagovskii, a Soviet Jewish playwright persecuted during the anti-cosmopolitan campaign. The action is set in Kiev, on the night of September 28, 1941, before "the deportation" to Babi Yar. A misleadingly simple, almost uneventful plot follows Isaac, the old Jewish tailor, who joins his family—daughter Sonia, daughter-in-law Irina, and his grandchildren—for that last night in their home. All night long they prepare for the road, pack, bake cookies, deliberate their future, and welcome to

their soon-to-be vacant apartment a Russian family sent to move in after them. The narrative is interrupted with two brief but dramatic flash-forwards. In the first, Isaac's granddaughter, who survived Babi Yar and crawled from under the corpses, returns home. In the second, this girl, along with the Russians hiding her, are captured and led to their execution. Amazingly, the play was published in a major theater journal in 1980, at the height of stagnation under Brezhnev, when things Jewish were, as a rule, silenced.[6]

A few years later, a young Jewish director from Kiev, Leonid Gorovets, was looking for new material. A friend showed him Borschagovskii's play—and Gorovets was hooked: "I am myself from Kiev, my family is from Kiev. In every Jewish family someone died in Babi Yar." Moreover, Gorovets explains: "Back then there was a particular atmosphere in Kiev—outbursts of anti-Semitism, vandalism at the [Jewish] cemeteries, *Pamyat'* Society [an anti-Semitic nationalist organization], leaflets telling the Jews to get out."[7]

Clearly, the subject resonated with Gorovets, but he wasn't sure how to take such a chamber play—set within the same space over one night—and make it into a film. For two years he kept thinking about the play, before finally getting in touch with Borschagovskii, and then going to meet the playwright in Moscow. Borschagovskii agreed to help turn the play into a script, but he didn't change much. Aside from bringing off-stage action that took place outside the apartment onto the screen, the major change was the transformation of specific and realistic flash-forwards into more symbolic sequences (more on that later).

Meanwhile, Gorovets secured funding from a *kooperativ* "Progress," and went with it to Kiev Studio. But there, he was told, "We don't need your kike (*zhidovskii*) subjects." Gorovets quickly took his business to a new private Moscow studio, Fora-Film, and in 1989 the film was launched into production. With no censors and Goskino hurdles to get through, the process was very efficient: two months of preproduction, a month of shooting, and a month of editing. The film's budget was 500,000 rubles, an amount that would be a joke today, but at that time was an average cost to produce a film.

Gorovets was lucky with the casting. At first, he planned to use another actor for the lead role, but the plans fell through and the part of Isaac was offered to Innokentii Smoktunovskii, one of the greatest Russian actors (who played Farber in *Soldiers*). A similar thing happened with Tatyana Vasil'eva (née Itsikovich), a talented actress with a track record of playing Jewish roles. She was cast as Sonia, Isaac's daughter. Both identified with their parts.

Gorovets recalls that when a suit for Smoktunovskii was ready in Kiev (a black three-piece, with a bowler hat and an umbrella—a cross between Charlie Chaplin and a Sholem Aleichem character), the actor put it on, and went to Moscow. He came back in a week, already transformed—he had needed to live in this suit in order to get into his role. Gorovets recalls: "He treated this role very

seriously—it touched him deeply, there was something personal in it for him." Indeed, Smoktunovskii was quoted in the film publicity materials:

> I fought in the war. I was a POW. I survived. But already there, at the front, when I was a very young man—I was 17—I started thinking, how was it possible that a German nation that gave humankind such geniuses—writers, composers, philosophers—would arrive at the idea of extermination of an entire people. I've lived with that pain, with that perplexity for a very long time. And so, when I was offered the role of an old Isaac, I felt that despite my extremely busy schedule at the theater, I had to make that film. Our entire crew was united in this aspiration—to pay tribute to the memory of the wretched people who died in the fall of 1941 in Babi Yar. We created this film with a sense of repentance. Forgive us, brothers and sisters! Forgive us that we have remained alive and could not save you![8]

The rest of the crew was also highly motivated. When searching for the location, they walked around, trying to find an emotional connection with the place. When they found a dilapidated house in Kiev where the future film would be shot, the crew stayed there overnight—"to inhabit it, to make our own," explained Gorovets. For Gorovets, a native of Kiev, the location scouting had an additional meaning. By that time, he was planning his emigration to Israel, and the film became his farewell to the beloved city. He included in the film sweeping panoramic views and shots of quiet cozy courtyards, including a street where he lived at the time. Among the vistas was a giant statue of Vladimir, a prince who brought Christianity to Russia, and a symbol of the city. This statue, with an enormous cross, is one of the few Christian references in the film (without which a perestroika film was virtually impossible).

The shooting of *Ladies' Tailor* became a site of strange intersections between past and present. Gorovets: "There were many stories with this shooting. When we plastered the notices ordering all Jews to report to a particular location with all their documents and valuables [this famous text appeared at the opening shots of the film], some local scum took it to be real. They sneered, 'Sure, it's about time!'"

Another story is connected with the scene of "deportation," when Jews are marched to Babi Yar under a Nazi convoy. Men, women, and children are trudging along the beautiful Kiev streets: they drag luggage, the stronger ones push loaded carts and wheelchairs with the elderly. The camera intercuts between long shots of the seemingly endless procession of Jews and close-ups of particular people, including the main characters. This is by far the most tragic scene in the film. However, its shooting on location was turned into a dark comedy.

Gorovets recalls, "The producer didn't have money for buses to get the extras from the studio to location. So, the extras just went on the subway, fully dressed up, including those in Nazi uniforms with machine guns. My cousin saw them and called his mother: 'Mom, the Germans are in the city again!'" But perhaps

the cousin was not too far off: as the crew was shooting this scene, in a next street over, Ukrainian nationalists held a demonstration with an anti-Semitic agenda, recalls Gorovets. But besides the bitter irony of this situation, Gorovets also remembers deeply moving moments: "One old woman who saw us shooting the scene came up to me: 'I've survived this as a young girl, can I join them now?' How could I refuse her? And so this old woman walked through the same streets again, nearly fifty years later, but now in order to commemorate the dead."

Not only the circumstances of its production but also the film itself brings together past and present—drawing parallels between the tragic march to Babi Yar in 1941 and a massive exodus of Soviet Jews in 1990. In one such moment, Sonia, Isaac's daughter, interrupts the packing and says, looking directly into the camera, "If you want us to leave, why throw stones into our backs?" And indeed, in the film, both Jews and non-Jews interpret the "deportation" as a kind of emigration—a resettlement in Germany, perhaps. The locals even envy the Jews! A janitor says to Sonia accusingly: "You'll be all set over there, but we'll have a hard time here!" This is an obvious commentary on contemporary mass Jewish emigration.

The most evocative intersection of past and present comes at the end of the film, in the scene when the Jews are marched through downtown Kiev toward Babi Yar. In the final shots of the scene, the camera cuts to a contemporary street, with present-day cars seen below a hill. From behind that hill the procession of Jews gradually appears—or perhaps rise from the dead. Isaac and his family, filmed frontally, are in the first row. The procession continues to march toward the camera, gradually filling up the screen then slowly dissolving into extreme close-up. Isaac is a contemporary Moses, leading his unfortunate family toward their fate.

It is hard not to interpret this scene as a reference to an exodus of Soviet Jews of the 1990s. Judith Kornblatt, in her reading of the film, even locates the street in Jerusalem.[9] The scene was shot in Kiev, but Gorovets agreed with this interpretation—he recalled that during editing he hesitated whether to cut the shot with the cars out or to leave it in. Ultimately he included it, thus making his film speak both about the Holocaust and about emigration, drawing parallels between the Nazi anti-Semitism driving the Jews to their deaths and contemporary anti-Semitism pushing Jews out of the country. This scene is a reminder of the relevance of the past to the present: Aleksandr Galich expressed it in the words of his famous song, "Our train to Auschwitz leaves today and daily."[10] As in Galich's song, in this film images of the Holocaust are associated with the camps.

The film is deeply grounded in Kiev, and in the reality of the Holocaust on Soviet soil. The scene opens with a long procession of Jews marching under German guns—a clear local image of the Holocaust, which had appeared for the first time in *The Unvanquished*. This scene is intercut with images of burning leaves, superimposed with black-and-white still shots of piles of hair, glasses, shoes, and

dolls familiar to audiences from documentary footage of the extermination camps. These images, inserted into a narrative about the events of the Holocaust in 1941, serve as flash-forwards to the horrors to come. In the play the flash-forwards depicted specific and realistic events—an escape of a young girl from Babi Yar and her subsequent capture—so why does the film use camp images instead?

This substitution can be read as a residual externalization of the Holocaust, characteristic of earlier Soviet documentary and fiction films. But aside from a Soviet convention, it is also a sign of the iconic and symbolic power of the camp imagery: even as Gorovets is making a film commemorating the Babi Yar massacre, he is compelled to include the iconography universally associated with the Holocaust for symbolic reinforcement. Therefore, *Ladies' Tailor* brings together local and externalized Holocaust images, creating, like the earlier *Commissar*, a hybrid or composite representation of the Holocaust.

If this is the picture of the Holocaust, how are Jews represented in this film? At the center of the film is Isaac, an eternal Jew, portrayed as if outside historical time. When we first see him, he is sitting in the middle of an empty room that could be anywhere, anyplace, any time. He is swaying slightly, quietly saying the millennia-old words of a traditional funeral prayer, *El Male Rachamim*. Whom or what is he mourning? The past suffering? The future catastrophe? His internal clock is set, so to speak, to a standard Jewish time, from Babylonian exile to eternity.

Isaac is portrayed with the director's deepest love and sympathy, but not without a touch of ambivalence. On one hand, Isaac is a spiritual character—an artist and a humanist. When a wretched Russian family, an old woman with her daughter and grandson, are sent to take over Isaac's home, the local janitor leaves them out in the rain. But Isaac welcomes them in. As a final gift, he wants to cut for the elderly Russian woman a "proper English suit" that he never had a chance to make for his late wife. Referencing a scene in *Commissar*, Isaac is circling around the Russian woman with his measuring tape in a kind of a dance. She is mesmerized by this process, following his every gesture with eyes full of wonder. Here, he is not a tailor, but an artist. But this suit is not only his gift but also his proclamation of hope—"I will cut the suit and someone else will sew it for you, they cannot possibly kill all the tailors in Kiev," he says.

In another scene, he helps bury a son of his Jewish neighbors, shot by the Nazis. Lit by a candle, he says *Kadish*, a memorial prayer, on the gravesite, mediating between life and death. Then, still lit only by a candle, Isaac is silently looking at the portrait of his late wife, when the camera cuts to his vision, depicting legions of ghostly white silhouettes marching into the emptiness to the sounds of shuffling feet and whispers. This is his premonition of future deaths. Here Isaac is a spiritual superman, with an ability to face death, and with a gift of prophetic vision.

Yet, Isaac is also a shtetl Jew, a folksy character imagined by Sholem Aleichem, and then reimagined by Solomon Mikhoels. He is talking with his

hands, makes self-deprecating jokes, and speaks to his daughter in a mixture of Russian and Yiddish. He is charming and funny, but also emasculated, unable or unwilling to fight. Isaac says of himself, "I forgot how to resist, I never even knew how to fight."

But there are no strong masculine Russians, either. *Ladies' Tailor* is a perestroika-era movie, with its aesthetics of bitter revelations and its atmosphere of gloom and doom. The entire film is shot in a dark palette, with gray, black, and brown dominating the screen. And when there is light, it is overexposed, creating a dualistic black/white picture of the world, also characteristic of perestroika-era films. Isaac is the only character who always appears in light, whether by candle glow or in rays of sunshine.

In this millennial vision, the entire country, the entire people, are emasculated, traumatized, and broken. The only Russian male character that we get to know is a scrawny janitor—impotent, unable to produce offspring and incapable of compassion. His character gains some depth after he tells of his experiences as a repressed kulak, and as a gulag guard, forced to commit despicable acts. He is both a perpetrator and a victim. The janitor, with his own tragedy and broken life, is important here. It is through this character that the film, as Judith Kornblatt argues, "shows the Nazi horrors to be only one of the destructive forces to overrun Kiev in the past 70 years. Like Vasilii Grossman's . . . *Life and Fate, Ladies' Tailor* places equal blame for the horrors of this century on Stalin as on Hitler."[11] Kornblatt thinks that this is a distinctly perestroika-era perspective. However, as I have shown, this is a much older idea. Ever since the 1960s, anti-Stalinist rhetoric had been characteristic of Soviet films with a Holocaust theme. In *Ladies' Tailor*, this tendency comes to the fore, showing Stalinism and Nazism as the twin faces of evil.

Ladies' Tailor became Gorovetz's swan song before his emigration. The film premiered in Moscow a week after Gorovets left for Israel. In 1991, when he showed his film in the United States, he went there as an Israeli director. In the USSR, the film had garnered a lot of critical attention. Although critics varied in their evaluation of the film, reviews in *Iskusstvo Kino, Sovetskii Ekran, Sovetskaia Kul'tura*, and other prestigious publications unanimously cheered its introduction of the Holocaust to Soviet screens, and an honest look at Russian-Jewish relations.[12] All of them admired the performance of Smoktunovskii, who, in the words of one reviewer, "elevates the entire cast to a Shakespearean level."[13] Smoktunovskii's Isaac earned *Ladies' Tailor* a Nika prize, a Russian Oscar. The film also won an award at the Cottbus Festival of the East European Film.

Despite the high media profile and Smoktunovskii's stardom, the film had no distribution beyond several screenings in Moscow and at the festivals. According to Gorovets, only two copies of the film were ever printed.[14] Given that in Soviet times, even for the most modest circulation five hundred copies were produced, this was really nothing. However, the film did not disappear

into oblivion like *Our Father* or other perestroika films. TV reruns saved it. Even today, *Ladies' Tailor* is still shown on Russian TV channels, usually around an anniversary of the Babi Yar massacre or around May 9, to commemorate the Soviet victory in World War II. It is the only Soviet Holocaust film distributed in the United States.[15] All of this makes it by far the best known Russian Holocaust film, even today.

Exile

Film director Vladimir Savel'ev is not Jewish. He grew up in Odessa, however, in a communal apartment, where his Jewish neighbors introduced him to their culture and even language. Savel'ev, now in his seventies, can still easily sing in Yiddish, and feels a deep affinity with Jewish people.[16] When he read the novella "Simon-Reznik" by Ukrainian writer Anatolii Dimarov, a tragic story of a Jewish man in Nazi-occupied Kiev, he immediately knew that he must make it into a film.[17] Savel'ev adapted the novella into a screenplay, raised funds, and directed the film. And so, in the fall of 1991, during the commemoration of the fiftieth anniversary of the Babi Yar massacre, a new Holocaust film, a German-Ukrainian co-production, premiered in Kiev. Savel'ev called it *Exile* (*Izgoi*).

The film is set in Ukraine, on the brink of the German occupation. A Polish-Jewish family is fleeing the Nazis: Shimon (Israeli actor Yossi Pollak), his wife, Basia (Margarita Vishniakova), and their six children. The film opens as they are traveling through the fields. Shimon and Basia are two strong, beautiful people, clearly in love with each other. When the kids are asleep, they make passionate love in the tall grass.

The family arrives in a village and settles in an abandoned hut, greeted by the initial prejudice of the neighbors. Shimon and his family are traditional Jews—in several scenes they speak Yiddish, celebrate the Sabbath, and are shown to keep kosher. But they are also respectful of their neighbors' Christianity. Gradually, Shimon earns acceptance in the village. He gets drunk with the locals; he saves an injured calf, he even helps slaughter a pig (he is a *shoykhet* by profession, a ritual slaughterer). Soon enough, the neighbors come to rely on him. But the moment of complete embrace of the Jewish family by the local community comes at a colorful Ukrainian wedding. Shimon and Basia are among the guests, and their red-headed youngster is playing violin with the local musicians. When a neighbor respectfully asks Shimon to come out for a Jewish dance, Shimon obliges. The guests form a circle, at the center of which Shimon starts a kind of Hassidic dance to his son's violin. His arms are spread open as if he is flying, a white kerchief in his hand. Unable to stand still, his Basia joins him, and as the couple relishes their dance, the camera moves away to a bird's-eye view, showing first a whirling couple surrounded by guests, then the lush green landscape, then tilting to the sky. This beatific moment is interrupted by the sound of explosions. The war has started.

At first, Shimon, like every other man in the village, is recruited to dig trenches for the Red Army. But the Germans are advancing so fast that soon the trenches become a battleground, and the surviving villagers, along with the defeated troops, find themselves in an improvised POW camp. Most of the inmates are executed on the spot. As for Shimon—his physical stature gives a Nazi commandant an idea; his superior, Kluger (Valentinas Masalskis), just lost a horse. Why not to harness a Jew instead? The Nazis get carried away with a joke, and make a bet that Shimon will pull a cart faster than a real horse. They promise Shimon they will let him go free to his family if he wins.

In the culminating scene of the film, the Nazis put a real harness on Shimon's face. And then the man runs for his life, dragging a cart behind him. At first Kluger is in on a joke, even cheering his "horse" with "Bravo, Jude!" But then as his competitor is whipping his horse, Kluger is whipping Shimon, screaming "Schneller, schneller!" For a while it looks hopeless, but at the end of the run, Shimon makes a superhuman effort and wins the competition. Immediately, he overturns the cart to throw out Kluger, takes off the dehumanizing harness and runs to his house. But it's too late—the vandalized house is empty. The elderly neighbor runs toward him to give him the bad news: the Nazis threw Basia and the children into the well, and then killed them with a bomb. But before her capture, Basia succeeded in smuggling their baby boy to the neighbors, and now the old woman joins her husband with Shimon's last surviving child in her arms. Shimon barely has a chance to hold him before he has to start running again—the Germans are coming for him with a tank. The old woman takes the baby again—to save him.

In the last moments of the film, the tank is coming at Shimon, and ultimately overcomes him, driving over him in circles, echoing a famous scene from a Soviet war film, *The Ballad of a Soldier.* The tank whirling over Shimon's body is shown from above at a higher and higher angle, until the camera cuts to a bird-eye view of Shimon and Basia's last dance at the wedding. Despite the terrible tragedy, this is a life-affirming end—Shimon has been killed, but his spirit was undefeated. And his youngest son will live.

Savel'ev made several changes to the plot of the original novella, the most significant of them to the character of Shimon. In some ways, Savel'ev renders him much more Jewish; in the novella the man is called Simon, but Savel'ev gives him a biblical-sounding Hebrew name. In the novella, he is more assimilated—although a traditional and spiritual man, he never goes to a synagogue. Savel'ev's film emphasizes his religious observance and portrays it in an idealized way. What is the explanation for these changes?

Savel'ev's casting choices hint at an answer. When he was casting for Shimon's role, he auditioned wonderful Soviet Jewish actors, such as Sergei Yurskii and Mikhail Kazakov. "The problem was," Savel'ev explained to me, "they came out not-proud—like Soviet Jews. And I wanted a proud Jew."[18] At that time, he saw

Yossi Pollak on the stage of Habima, Israeli National Theater, on a Soviet tour, and he recognized his Shimon in a young Israeli actor. Indeed, Pollak played a character who is simultaneously an "old Jew"—traditional and religious, and a "new Jew"—physical, strong, and defiant. Both sets of characteristics are a far cry from the Soviet-Jewish stereotype. This means that Savel'ev made his character more Jewish in order to make him less Soviet. This is, of course, a part of the perestroika Zeitgeist, but Savel'ev's choice had at least one important consequence.

In order to accommodate this non-Soviet Jewish character, Savel'ev made Shimon a Polish Jew. (In the novella, Simon is a local—he has come to the neighborhood from somewhere not too far away, perhaps from Odessa, years ago.) Curiously, this meant that *Exile* became the only Soviet (or post-Soviet) film about the plight of Polish-Jewish refugees. Hundreds of thousands Polish Jews found themselves in the USSR during the war, but their experiences have not been reflected on screen.

Once Savel'ev found his Shimon, he quickly discovered that proud Israeli actors cost more than less proud Soviet Jews. To fund Pollak's salary, Savel'ev turned to a German producer, Artur Brauner, for whom the subject of the Holocaust had an immediate personal relevance. The son of a large Jewish family in Lodz, Brauner, like Shimon, escaped to the former Soviet Union, and thus was able to survive the war. But he lost forty-nine of his family members in the Holocaust. After the war, Brauner went to Germany and started a film production company. As early as 1948 he made his first movie, *Morituri*, one of the earliest films dealing with the difficult legacy of the Holocaust in Germany. Brauner went on to become an extremely successful producer and made hundreds of movies. But along with his commercial projects, he continued to make Holocaust films; for him it was his vocation and a tribute to the dead.[19] In the West, he is most recognized for the Oscar-winning *The Garden of the Finzi-Continis* (1970) and Golden Globe winner *Europa, Europa* (1990).[20]

In the perestroika era, after the borders were finally opened, Brauner started working with Soviet filmmakers. (Brauner speaks Russian, from his wartime sojourn in the USSR.) He first met the young and ambitious Jewish director Dmitrii Astrakhan, and produced a powerful film, *Get Thee Out* (*Izydi*, 1991), about a Jewish family facing a pogrom in tsarist Russia. Astrakhan learned a lot from Brauner, and went on to become one of the most successful Russian commercial filmmakers. The two continued collaborating on several other films, even though they did not always agree.

Although in his first Russian film, Brauner exerted his influence as a producer to form a style I would call "Jewish socialist realism," a hallmark of Brauner's other Jewish films, produced in the former Soviet Union. In all these films, reality is dualistic, depicted without shades of gray. The Jews are always beyond reproach—intelligent, attractive, virile, and morally superior people. The non-Jews, whether positive characters or not, are largely inferior to the Jews. And of

course, anti-Semites and Nazis are just pure evil, devoid of humanity—never mind character development.

If *Get Thee Out* originated this Jewish socialist realism, *Exile* brings it to the fullest expression. In this film, Shimon is an uber-Jew—he is not simply a positive character, he is also visibly a foot taller than any of the non-Jews on screen. He is hyper-masculine; an attractive man, he is a passionate and virile lover (Basia says that she gets pregnant even if he just looks at her), he has immense physical power (he can outrun a horse), he can drink a gentile under the table; yet he also has a spiritual soul (as witnessed in several scenes of his prayer or Jewish rituals) and even an artistic side (best expressed in the dance scene). Basia is equally flawless—she is a beautiful, kind woman, a loving wife, and a wonderful mother. Their children are just as good. This entire family seems to be as wholesome as socialist realist characters of Stalin-era potboilers.

Next to the Jews, the Ukrainians appear as hapless, inadequate people, pointlessly running around with huge bottles of *horilka*, Ukranian vodka. Even if they are mostly sympathetic characters, it is not clear how they managed on their own before Shimon arrived in the village. As to the Nazis, they are simply monsters, with nothing human in them.

In a way, this Jewish socialist realism was perhaps a good match for a Soviet director. One only needed to substitute Jewish for Soviet—and fait accompli! Unfortunately, because of this simplistic outlook, *Exile* fails to be a great movie, but it has its beautiful moments. Savel'ev, a director deeply influenced by the tradition of Ukrainian poetic cinema, filmed *Exile* with remarkable visual poetry. The long shots of the lush landscape and the almost ethnographic portrayal of colorful village life in the film pay tribute to Mark Donskoi's classic, *The Crying Horse* (1957), and even more to Sergei Parajanov's *The Shadows of Forgotten Ancestors* (1964) and Yurii Il'enko's *On the Eve of Ivan Kupala* (1968).

Exile first premiered in Kiev, and later, in February 1992, in Moscow. A local Moscow paper gave it thumbs up, but the highbrow *Iskusstvo Kino* was more critical: as much as it appreciated the story and the emotional tenor of the film, the review was unforgiving of Savel'ev's simplistic directorial choices.[21] Unsurprisingly, *Exile* had almost no theatrical release in the disintegrating Soviet Union—at that time, the local film market had all but collapsed.

The film appeared at a few festivals, but Brauner also had a hard time finding a distributor (under its German title, *Der Gehetze*). Amazingly, he didn't like Savel'ev's directorial choices, and before placing it finally with the prestigious TV channel, Arte, he had the film reedited. Arte screened the film only once or twice, and then it faded into oblivion. After many years, the film experienced a modest revival—in 2007 it was included in the retrospective program of the International Moscow Film Festival, and in 2010 was shown on Israeli TV. For these screenings, Savel'ev recut the film, and renamed it *Pomni* (*Remember*).[22] At that point, he also eliminated Brauner's name from the credits—there was a

falling out between the two about money.[23] A kind soul placed a pirated version of *Exile* on a Russian torrent site, so this is how this rare film can find its audience today.

Chopin's Nocturne

On December 26, 1991, the Soviet Union was dissolved. Along with the state, the entire Soviet film industry was finally dissolved too, after undergoing significant changes since perestroika. Every year, fewer films had been made, but now film production truly came to a halt. Distribution was completely privatized, and the market was flooded with foreign B movies.[24] The Jewish film market seemed to have been saturated too: neither emigration nor the Holocaust were any longer hot or interesting. The last film on the subject, the parting shot of the perestroika era, was *Chopin's Nocturne* (*Nocturn Shopena*), which premiered in Moscow in February 1992.[25] It was made by Efraim Sevela, an émigré writer and director who returned to Russia after a nearly twenty-year-long sojourn abroad. *Chopin's Nocturne* was the second movie he made upon his return, after *The Parrot Who Spoke Yiddish* (which also explored the Holocaust).[26] A Russian-US-Latvian co-production, *Chopin's Nocturne* is a very strange film. To start with, it is filmed like a silent movie: its soundtrack does not feature dialogue. Although in later interviews Sevela speaks of the film as "experimental," more likely he was just aiming for international distribution—a silent film does not require subtitles. His plans did not pan out: the film was not picked up for distribution either in Russia or abroad.

The film's frankly melodramatic plot is based on Sevela's own short story. The action takes place at a Baltic Sea resort on the brink of World War II, where a love story develops between a young Jewish pianist and his family's Latvian maid. Their budding romance is interrupted by first Soviet, and then Nazi, occupations. The town Jews are rounded up. Some are sent to a ghetto—camera pans over the miserable figures sitting motionlessly behind the barbed wire, with enormous yellow stars on their jackets. Others are loaded up on trucks and driven to the execution site in the woods, our pianist among them. As the rows of naked Jews stand under the Nazi guns, the maid succeeds in bribing the local Nazi guard, who gets her boyfriend out of the killing field.

The couple escapes by boat to neutral Sweden, and then the camera shows a montage of their new life there—his concerts, their wedding, their happiness together. After the end of the war, the couple returns to the now Soviet Latvia. This is a mistake. He is arrested on the spot, and she is driven mad by going from one Soviet office to another, trying to find justice. In despair, she drowns herself in the sea. Years later, he returns from the gulag. But without her, there is nothing left for him to live for. He hangs himself.

The only reason to be discussing this strange, heavy-handed plot is to show how even though it was made in the post-Soviet times, by an émigré director, it

still continued a Soviet legacy of representing the Holocaust and Stalinist crimes side by side. In the scenes of Soviet and Nazi occupation, the two regimes' respective crimes are equated: first the Soviets round up the Latvians and drive them off on a truck, and then Nazis do the same with the Jews. In some ways, in the film Stalin is even worse than Hitler. The Jewish protagonist finds himself in the gulag, not in a Nazi concentration camp (like Sashka in Kalik's *Goodbye, Boys!*). If the character's non-Jewish wife is able to save him from the Nazis, she is helpless in the face of Stalin's repression machine. Ultimately, both die, the Jew and the non-Jew. This is, of course, a characteristically Soviet outlook on the Holocaust. In the West, the Holocaust is an ultimate evil. In Russia, there is Stalin.

Schindler's List and the Holocaust Memory in Russia

None of the Holocaust films made during perestroika rose to become an iconic representation of the Holocaust in Russia, like *Schindler's List* in the West.[27] But neither did *Schindler's List* itself. The Oscar-winning international blockbuster failed in Russia—in a country of nearly 150 million people, its audience reached 230,000.[28] Following this remarkable occurrence, the film journal *Iskusstvo Kino* published a special issue on the subject of antifascism. The editorial foreword cited Egor Gaidar, a liberal Russian politician (and a grandson of a legendary Soviet writer, Arkadii Gaidar) who mused that "apparently, an antifascist vaccine is good for only fifty years."[29] The special issue included a number of commentaries on *Schindler's List* by critics invested in both the Jewish subject and the subject of fascism, such as Maya Turovskaya and Miron Chernenko. The critics did not directly address the indifference of Russian audiences to Spielberg's hit, but in a private conversation Turovskaya explained, "It was very clear to me, from the get-go, that to show *Schindler's List* in Russia is an absolute stupidity. No one will watch it there, no one will be interested. . . . My God, who'd be interested to see how some idiot is saving Jews? No one." However, she does not think that this callousness is a result of anti-Semitic attitudes or general xenophobia, as it might appear. Rather, according to Turovskaya, the failure of *Schindler's List* was due to Russia's own massive wounds that are still not healed, traumas that are not worked through: "It's not like in the US, where they watched the film and got horrified—how was it possible? In Russia no one gets horrified. There, over 20 million of their own people got killed, so what if some Jews were killed as well?"[30] In Turovskaya's reading, it is Russians' own enormous losses that render them unempathetic to the Jewish catastrophe.

It is true that memory work is still not done in Russia—despite the bombastic war memorials and official rhetoric of glorious victory, the country lives in a state of amnesia. With the participants and witnesses of the dramatic and tragic events of the twentieth century almost all gone, there is no continuity. Unlike the West, there is no concept in Russia of a "second generation" of either Great

Patriotic War fighters, or a gulag survivor, and certainly not of a Holocaust survivor. The crimes of Stalin's regime are not atoned for and not memorialized. In this context, indeed, why should anyone care for a thousand Jews?

But this numbing indifference also stems from decades of Soviet universalization of the Holocaust under the pretense of internationalism. It is the inertia of this discourse that explains a reluctance to engage with the subject of the Jewish Holocaust in today's Russia. In the words of a contemporary commentator: "The Holocaust remains an uncomfortable subject in Russia: honest people are shamed by it, and the rest just don't want to be bothered."[31] The unpopularity of *Schindler's List* is just one indication of these enduring attitudes.

Holocaust Films in the Post-Soviet Era

In the mid-1990s, Russian film production was minimal, but starting with the late 1990s and into the 2000s, the film industry bounced back. After that, only a few narrative Holocaust films were made, with none of them becoming significant landmarks. Whether made in the 1990s or the 2000s, most of these movies are characterized by low production values and an unsophisticated treatment of the Holocaust. None of these films became a critical or box-office success.

The best of these is a war drama, *I'm a Russian Soldier* (*Ia—Russkii Soldat*, dir. Andrei Maliukov, 1995), based on a famous novella by Boris Vasil'ev. The action takes place in the city of Brest, in the first days of the war, where a young officer, Nikolai, and a few other troops are cut off from his forces, and left behind in the ruins of the fortress. By accident, a local Jewish girl, Mirra, gets stuck with them. She is a winning character—homely and disabled, she is portrayed as warm, humorous, and endlessly kind. An untimely love develops between Nikolai and Mirra, and she even gets pregnant. At the end, both Nikolai and Mirra die—Mirra is beaten to death by a local Nazi collaborator and Nikolai is executed by the Nazis. In this film, Mirra is portrayed as an ultimate victim, even a martyr: a young disabled woman, pregnant and in love, she dies simply because she is a Jew. Although *I'm a Russian Soldier* is not strictly a Holocaust film, Mirra's story is symbolic of the broader Jewish fate during the war.

A year later, the famous commercial director Dmitrii Astrakhan made *From Hell to Hell* (*Iz Ada v Ad*, 1996), based on historical events of the 1946 pogrom in Poland. Markedly, this is the only post-Soviet film that treats anti-Semitism in the post-Holocaust era, but even in that film anti-Semitism is externalized, as if still following the old party line. The events occur outside the Soviet Union, even though there was no lack of instances of anti-Semitism in postwar USSR.[32] The action is set in the town of Kielce, when Jews who survived in camps or in hiding come back to town. Tensions develop between them and the local Poles. The pressure to return the Jewish properties, and envy for American care packages, ultimately lead to violence. With this background, a personal drama unfolds. A Polish family is reluctant to return to her parents the Jewish girl whom they

saved by passing her off as their own child during the war. Despite the story's potential, the film falls short of becoming a powerful psychological drama. Instead, the characters are formulaic, and the complex historical events are represented simplistically. The Jewish characters are all positive, and the Poles are all anti-Semites at heart. This is the signature style of Artur Brauner, who co-wrote and produced the film.

Artur Brauner was behind another Holocaust film, *Babi Yar* (dir. Jeff Kanew, 2003), which he also produced and co-wrote. Although presented as a German-Belarus co-production, this is hardly a post-Soviet film—the dialogue is in German, and the cast and crew are mainly international. In terms of plot, the film is a tragic story of two families, one partially Jewish and another non-Jewish, in occupied Kiev. The Jewish family includes young refugees who escaped from Poland (like Brauner himself). The war tears apart the lifelong friendship between the two families, and as some non-Jews are risking their own lives to save their Jewish neighbors, others betray them. Ultimately, the film ends with a graphic scene of a mass execution in Babi Yar, portrayed with utmost brutality. The final shots, when Nazi soldiers walk amid piles of corpses shooting accidental survivors, reproduce the famous Nazi photographs taken after the atrocities. The small ray of hope is provided by a successful escape of a young Jewish girl saved by a local boy. Unfortunately, poor writing and acting, as well as the anachronistic representation of Soviet Jews (portrayed in some scenes as Hassids) turn an important story into a weak film. Today, even Brauner himself does not like it.[33]

Almost at the same time, another *Babi Yar*, a TV film, was made in Ukraine (dir. Nikolai Zaseev-Rudenko, 2002). Sadly, this *Babi Yar* is even worse. It is a story of a Jewish woman, Eleonora (an aging Soviet film star, Eleonora Bystritskaia), who once lost her entire family in Babi Yar, but escaped execution herself. Now sixty years later, she comes to Kiev to visit the place where the others were killed. Improbably, there she encounters a former Nazi who also came to visit a site of the execution, where he was a perpetrator. The execution is shown graphically in a series of flashbacks. Disturbingly, this former Nazi is allotted almost as much screen time as the survivor; he is even given a chance to justify himself and excuse his actions. At the end, the former Nazi dies in Kiev, near the contemporary Babi Yar memorial, but not before the image of young Eleonora with her little son (whom this Nazi personally murdered) appears to him as Madonna, dressed in full Renaissance-painting regalia. Eleonora, meanwhile, returns to New York. Unfortunately, what could have become an important film fails due to extremely low production values and very disturbing directorial choices.

Another female survivor is featured in a Russian-American English-language co-production, *The Burning Land* (*V Iiune 41*, dir. Mikhail Ptashuk, 2003), a love story set in the first days of the war. Rosa, a young American Jew and an aspiring singer, arrives in a Belarus shtetl, the birthplace of her parents, for a family visit.

In just a couple of days, the Nazis attack the Soviet Union, enter the shtetl, and burn everyone alive. Only Rosa survives. She escapes, together with a Red Army officer, Ivan, who survived the demise of his battalion. They attempt to catch up with the retreating Soviet forces.

A passionate but tragic love story develops between Rosa and Ivan. The plot is somewhat reminiscent of *I'm a Russian Soldier.* However, unlike the earlier film, it is a Russian officer who is an innocent victim (due to some confusion, he is killed by the Red Army), whereas Jewish Rosa not only survives but also succeeds in returning to the United States, and parlays her adventures into a Broadway musical. Poor writing, inadequate acting, and glaring errors in depicting Jewish religious and cultural practices make this film compete for low grades with the two *Babi Yar*s.

In contrast, the 2004 Russian film *Daddy*, previously discussed, is beautifully shot and acted. Although the Holocaust is not the main story, the film culminates with war scenes, including the execution of Jews in the Tulchin ghetto.[34] The Holocaust is also referenced in the Russian-French film, *Roots* (*Bednye Rodstvenniki*, dir. Pavel Lounguine, 2005); in a highly emotional scene, an old Russian Jewish woman takes an American visitor to the field where her family was executed by the Nazis. Similarly, in a Russian-Israeli co-production, *Arye* (dir. Roman Kachanov, 2005), the two main characters are Holocaust survivors, hidden as children in an attic in their native Lithuania. A Lithuanian-German co-production, *Ghetto* (dir. Audrius Juzenas, 2006), based on the famous play by Joshua Sobol, is inspired by real-life tragic events in the Vilnius ghetto. Besides being a very weak film, it can hardly be seen as a post-Soviet film: the dialogue is in English and German and the casting is international.

In the late 2000s, there were no Holocaust feature films, but in 2008, Russian state-owned Channel One broadcast a state-funded sixteen-part TV series, *Heavy Sand* (*Tiazhelyi Pesok*, dir. Anton Barschevskii), based on a novel of the same name by Anatolii Rybakov. The novel, first published in 1978, was for years one of the very few works of literature available in the USSR that openly featured Jewish characters and gave expression to their historical fate. It would be no overstatement to say that for Soviet Jews this was a cult novel (regardless of its actual literary quality).

At the center of the epic plot is a story of Rakhil and Yakov, as they meet, fall in love, and raise a family. The action is set in a shtetl of Snovsk (an actual place where Rybakov spent his childhood), and follows the characters for over thirty years, from the early twentieth century to the 1940s. This means that they live through World War I, the Russian revolutions, Stalin's rule, and finally, the events of the Holocaust. The last episodes of the series are dedicated to the horrors of life in ghetto, where Rakhil loses her beloved husband and two children. At a key moment, when the ghetto is faced with liquidation, Rakhil becomes a leader of armed resistance. Assisted by the local partisans, ghetto Jews fight a

brutal battle with the Nazis and their collaborators. After the battle, dozens of Jews escape to the woods and survive. The series ends with documentary shots of a memorial to the victims of Nazism in real Snovsk.

The TV series, based on such an important novel, featuring a number of Russian film stars, and directed by an enterprising young Jewish filmmaker, was highly anticipated. But the series did not deliver. *Heavy Sand* might as well have been produced by Brauner: it features cardboard characters, either all-bad or all-good, with Jews represented especially idealistically. In the same way in which the characters of workers and revolutionaries in Soviet films could not be anything but perfect, in the films of "Jewish socialist realism," the Jews become model citizens and exemplary human beings. The series was also marred by low production values, including poor acting (despite the panoply of stars), and sub-par makeup and sets. In Russia, the series was aptly dubbed "Very Heavy Sand."

The reason for such low production values of this and other productions is a combination of the old Soviet legacy of "timely" or "important" themes, and of new corruption. In a reversal of old censorship, the subject of the Holocaust in New Russia is among the "timely" or "important" subjects. Funding films about the Holocaust makes both the Russian state and the private funders look good. This means that regardless of projected box-office success at times, Holocaust productions are willingly funded. For instance, *Heavy Sand* was made with Russian state funding, and the 2002 *Babi Yar* was co-sponsored by the all-Ukrainian Jewish Congress. Once funding is in place, it is then time for *otkat* and *raspil*, insidious production practices in New Russia. *Otkat* is a bribe given to a bureaucrat in control of state (or private) funding. In Russia, *otkat* (literally, "flow-back") may range from 30 percent to 50 percent of received funding. As a result, from the start, filmmakers have much smaller budgets to work with than they were officially granted. *Raspil* (literally, "cutting-up") refers to a practice by filmmakers and other crew members of further pocketing funds from the production budget. *Raspil* can take place at every level, from a producer who pockets a larger cut, to technical staff who take a smaller cut, and beyond. In this system, the profit does not stem from the box-office sales or TV ratings, but rather from divvying up the budget during the process of production itself. Hence no one is invested in the resulting product—everyone makes money even before a program airs or a film is released. The result is "Very Heavy Sand" and other low-end productions on "important" subjects.[35]

All these films made in the post-Soviet times are in some way in marked contrast to the ones made (or attempted) in the Soviet era. With censorship restrictions completely removed, these films no longer universalize: they speak openly about the Jewish identity of their characters and about the persecutions Jews faced. Similarly, instead of the prevailing discourse of the "internationalist friendship of Soviet people," they reflect instances of local anti-Semitism and collaboration with the Nazis. It is more common now to encounter minor

Jewish characters or Holocaust references in war dramas; the discourse of the Holocaust has been normalized. At the same time, some of the particular features of Holocaust representation are still preserved: as we have seen in at least some of the films, the externalization of the Holocaust, the Christian symbolism, and parallels between Stalinism and Nazism continue. Even the emergence of "Jewish socialist realism" can be seen as a part of the Soviet legacy. Of course, the very representation of the Holocaust is also, ironically, a part of the Soviet legacy of "thematic" production planning.

These developments amount to a mixed picture: representing the Holocaust openly, without relying on hints and hidden messages, did not result in quality cinema. Whether rehashing or revising the old Soviet legacy, post-Soviet films about the Holocaust, put simply, are not good movies. Economic constraints play a role in that too.

In the absence of censorship in contemporary Russia, filmmakers face the same challenges as in other countries. Holocaust films (unless directed by or starring mega-celebrities) usually do not attract mass audiences. This means that they are more difficult to fund and produce than more commercially viable projects. In Russia, these universal market pressures are compounded by local corruption, as mentioned above. As a result, the films made on the subject of the Holocaust suffer from poor production values, and, as a consequence, small distribution. It is not by chance, then, that many of the post-Soviet Holocaust movies are co-productions, drawing on additional funds and oriented toward international markets.

What is the future for Holocaust films in Russia? For sure, we are not likely to see many Holocaust films coming out of Russia. But referencing the events of the Holocaust in war or historical films has become the norm. Similarly, the Holocaust has become a subject of several important documentary films.[36] At the same time, the Soviet legacy of silencing or universalizing the Holocaust continues. For instance, the overall excellent dramatization of Vasilii Grossman's seminal novel *Life and Fate*, produced by the Russian state-owned Channel One (dir. Sergei Ursuliak, 2012), omits almost entirely the important plotline dealing with the events of the Holocaust. This is an alarming tendency.

17 Conclusions

The received wisdom today is that the Holocaust simply was not represented on Soviet screens—the assumption is that films about Jewish suffering during World War II would have been banned just like *The Black Book*. However, the films analyzed in this book are evidence to the contrary: the Holocaust *was* represented on Soviet screens. Not only that, but paradoxically, the Soviets were actually ahead of the curve in representing the Holocaust: in 1938, they were the first to make films exposing Nazi anti-Semitism; in 1945, they were among the first to depict a mass execution of Jews in a major fiction film. Moreover, the bulk of Soviet Holocaust movies were made (or written) in 1960s, whereas in the West, Holocaust film production peaked only in 1980s.[1]

All the Soviet films discussed here were made despite the best efforts of Soviet censorship to ignore or silence the subject. All of the films (or at least the treatment of the Holocaust in the films) were initiated "from below"—by filmmakers, never by the film industry or party leadership. At the same time, while the Holocaust (and anything Jewish) was a touchy subject for Soviet filmmakers, it was not completely taboo. Jews, whether as victims or as heroes, appeared on screens, whereas some other categories of people, for instance, gays or lesbians, were wholly excluded as if they never existed.

As in other media, the particular Jewish story on Soviet screens was submerged within the more "universal" war narrative. Jews were rarely, if ever, depicted as primary victims of the Nazis, or as having any kind of special status during the war. In the spirit of Soviet internationalism, Jews, to a degree to which they were featured at all, were not singled out—they appeared on screen as just one of the many categories of Nazi victims, be it Slavs and people of other nationalities, communists, commissars, partisans, or prisoners of war. Such universalization is not unique to Soviet film. In 1940s through the 1960s, Hollywood cinema also universalized the Holocaust in a variety of ways.[2] But in Soviet film, the universalizing tendency was more pronounced and more pervasive, expressed not only through story but also visually.

As part of this tendency, mass executions of Jews, which one would expect to be a hallmark of Holocaust representation in Soviet cinema, appear on screens very rarely. The images of Jews being marched toward their deaths are used as an indirect reference to such mass executions. In many cases, the Jewish identity of the victims is only inferred—they are "peaceful Soviet citizens." Only in the post-Soviet cinema are victims of mass executions represented explicitly as Jews.

An equally important and uniquely Soviet tendency was externalization of the Holocaust in film. This tendency had significant consequences for Holocaust iconography, which relied predominantly on familiar camp imagery. In some films, even the events of the Holocaust on Soviet soil are supplemented with camp imagery. Such representation was appropriate politically—in accordance with the party line, it located the Holocaust outside Soviet borders, conveniently avoiding the difficult questions of local collaboration and historic responsibility. But it also tapped into an enormous pool of symbolic power that camp images came to assume. The camp imagery on Soviet screens combined the best of both worlds: it passed the approval of the censors, and gave filmmakers an effective visual shortcut for representing the Holocaust.

Universalization and externalization significantly impeded the development of native iconography of the Holocaust in the Soviet Union. Therefore, when the Soviet cinema did depict events of the Holocaust, its iconography ranged from rare but authentic images based on local representational traditions to externalized images derived from representing the camps. *The Unvanquished* is a good example of the former: the scene of the execution of the Jews draws on representation of violence in Eisenstein's films, which, in itself, was influenced by pogrom imagery. *Eastern Corridor* presents an equally characteristic picture. Here the scene of execution draws on poetic cinematic language of the 1960s, including mythological motifs of water, fire, and religious mystery. Both films locate the events of the Holocaust on Soviet soil, yet both consciously sacrifice historical accuracy for the greater emotional power of the scenes.

Other films, like *Commissar*, present a composite or hybrid picture of the Holocaust: the famous sequence when Jews are marched toward their death is set on Soviet soil, but its representation relies on elements of camp imagery—striped uniforms with Jewish stars. Finally, in films like *Sons of the Fatherland*, the events of the Holocaust are completely externalized: no Soviet Jews are involved, and the action takes place in a German camp.

Although the events of the Holocaust on Soviet soil were rarely depicted on screens, a relatively large number of movies reflected the Jewish war effort, another unique feature of the Soviet Jewish war history. Characters of Jewish Red Army fighters and partisans appear for the first time in wartime movies, and remain a constant presence through the following decades, some in a more direct connection to the Holocaust, some far less. They continue to appear in post-Soviet films. By featuring Jewish soldiers, whether male or female, old or young, as serving in Red Army forces or the partisan movement, Soviet films undermine a Western canon of representing Jews as victims. Instead, these films model Jews as active heroes. Such representation needs to be located within the particular Soviet context of local anti-Semitism—at various times more or less pronounced. Characters of Jewish fighters appear as the filmmakers' response to

stigma and discrimination, which they themselves faced if they were Jewish or which they perceived through others if they were not.

As with the depictions of the Holocaust, a Jewish soldier or partisan is always just one of many other (non-Jewish) characters. However positive a Jewish character is, he or she is never the main hero. The Jewish fighter always appears on screen in a subplot or in the narrative margins, as a Soviet soldier who simply happens to be a Jew. Still, even this partial representation was likely to cause problems with censors. Needless to say, not a single film features a specifically Jewish partisan group. Only in perestroika and post-Soviet times was it possible for a film to place a distinctly Jewish soldier at the center of the plot.

The Jewish experience of fighting on the fronts finds at least partial expression, but evacuation and escape, significant chapters in the history of Soviet Jewry, are almost never depicted on screens. It is important to understand the context here: evacuation was a difficult subject, which is why it was rarely featured in Soviet war films. Unlike fighting in the fronts, evacuation was not a heroic subject, and did not fit the Soviet war narrative. Representing Jewish evacuation was even more problematic, since it would emphasize a special position of Jews as targets of Nazi violence, and would tap into the anti-Semitic stereotype of Jews as draft-dodgers ("Tashkent partisans"). When Jewish evacuation is shown on Soviet screens, Jews are depicted as children—a weak group legitimately in need of protection and rescue. Like Jewish soldiers, these Jewish evacuees are portrayed as members of a group of different nationalities, thus making them just one of many targets of Nazi violence, no different from all others.

Beyond the very minimal representation of evacuees on screen, the experience of survivors—the difficulties of return, their trauma, and the anti-Semitism they faced—are wholly absent from Soviet films. This is a particularly startling fact if we compare it with the enormous output of international films dealing with survivors, including films about the second generation. The reason for such a conspicuous absence is clear—to make a film about a Holocaust survivor means to engage with the subject of Soviet anti-Semitism, and with a particular Jewish fate during and after the war. This was unthinkable. It is significant that this trend continues in post-Soviet film. In the entire perestroika and post-Soviet era, when no subject was allegedly off limits, the postwar experience of Jewish survivors has remained taboo. There are still realms of complicated Jewish experiences completely untouched by post-Soviet filmmakers.

Unlike Western films, Soviet films consistently draw parallels between German Nazism and Stalin's totalitarianism, and their respective crimes, including anti-Semitic persecution. Such parallels already appear in the 1938 antifascist movies and remain a constant presence throughout Soviet times. In the Soviet era, the parallels are more subtle; to make such a connection bluntly was to sign one's own death sentence. But in the perestroika and post-Soviet era, with

the demise of censorship, the parallels become more obvious. Although such parallels also occur in some films made in the countries of the former Soviet bloc (such as a Hungarian film, *Sunshine*, 1990), overall this is a unique feature of Holocaust representation in Soviet films.

The secularized and Russified Soviet Jewish identity posed challenges for Holocaust representation. In the absence of direct references to Judaism or Jewish culture, the question is, who are Jews, and how are they to be represented on film? In some Soviet films, secularized Jewish identity is realized through narrative and dialogue. In others, the characters' Jewish identity is ambiguous, implied through casting or location. In some films, characters are Jews in name only. And yet, other films, even in the Soviet era, represent religious Jews, and even Hebrew liturgy. Representations of religion and Jewish tradition become more common in the perestroika and post-Soviet era. One thing remains constant in both Soviet and post-Soviet film, however: while they might make references to Judaism, these films reference Christianity even more. Most of the Soviet films dealing with the Holocaust, whether they are made by Jewish or non-Jewish filmmakers, rely on Christian allusions as a universal language of spirituality. This is not unique to Soviet and post-Soviet cinema: other national cinemas, mainly Hollywood, also rely on Christian ideas and symbolism in representing the Holocaust. Whether to consider this "the failure of the artistic imagination," or a successful adaptation for a mainstream culture is a different question. [3] In the Soviet context, Christian symbolism includes Jews in a common cultural context, making their story resonant for non-Jews, but, in doing so, it universalizes the particular Jewish story.

Soviet films about the Holocaust, like their Western counterparts, often deal with the issues of loss, pain, trauma, and memory. In Western films, according to Annette Insdorf, "the Holocaust experience can be expressed or approached through disorienting camera angles and movement, heightened lighting, distorting visual texture or color, stylized acting, contrapuntal soundtrack or music, and unconventional narrative structure."[4] This is equally true for Soviet films. However, the Soviet films about the Holocaust do not have the same generic range as films in the West. Most saliently, the entire subgenre of Holocaust comedies is absent. Comedic elements appear only in the films about Soviet Jewish soldiers. Since comedy presupposes a certain level of comfort with a subject, it is clear that for Soviet and even post-Soviet filmmakers, the subject of the Holocaust is still too threatening. Similarly, unlike the West, in Russia there are no movies about the Holocaust that specifically address young audiences. On the plus side, there are no Holocaust porn, Holocaust horror, or other Naziploitation movies.[5] Perhaps we have to be thankful to Soviet censors that there is no *Natasha: She-Wolf of the SS.*

In the Soviet Union, films about the Holocaust are a serious and solemn business, for a good reason: Western Holocaust films, particularly American ones,

often feature happy endings, or focus on an inspiring story (probable or improbable) even within the dire historical circumstances. By contrast, Soviet films can tolerate a greater degree of tragedy: their Jewish characters are executed or die, and even if their death may be portrayed as a spiritual victory, it is hardly a happy ending. Jewish corpses on screen do not invite a redemptive narrative. And, of course, the rhetoric of redemption in Zion, of rebuilding Jewish life in a Jewish state, is not simply absent, but also unthinkable in the Soviet context. Even in the post-Soviet era, this particular narrative can rarely be found on screen.

In Soviet film, the trends toward universalization and externalization of the Holocaust, variously enforced, result in a particular continuum of Holocaust coverage, from war films that do not touch upon the Holocaust at all, as if Jews never existed, to films where the main focus is the Holocaust. The first category of movies, encountered little or no censorship problems. The films in the latter category were never made and remained scripts, what I called here the phantom cinema. Between these two poles of the continuum are films that I call "the Holocaust without Jews" (films based on real-life Holocaust stories, but edited to be *judenfrei*); films where the Holocaust victims are marginal to the plot; and finally, films where an entire plotline deals with the Holocaust. The correlation is clear—the more the film focused on the subject of the Holocaust, the more problems it encountered during the various stages of the authorization process.

But even in the best-case scenario, when the films were made and circulated, the Holocaust still remained a phantom on the screen. Unlike Western cinema, the Holocaust in Soviet films never assumed a central position in the narrative. Soviet films are, in essence, "off-Holocaust." The trope of Jewish suffering is recruited to tell someone else's story: the entirety of the Soviet people, or, more specifically, Russian fighters, Ukrainian workers, Belarus partisans, Uzbek prisoners of war, and so on. Those inclined to do so—Jews, intellectuals, or, for that matter, party censors—may choose to elevate the Jewish content in a film and read it as a Holocaust story. For these viewers, a plotline or even a single scene involving the Holocaust can become the emotional apex of a film, and shift the entire dramatic emphasis. But those not in the know may not even be aware of a particular Jewish resonance, and read it as just another war film. Strangely, a film that was deemed too Jewish by a censor was probably not Jewish enough for its general audiences. These Soviet films are Holocaust films despite themselves. They are phantoms, which become Holocaust films only in a context of reading them as such.

This book is one such context. At my most ambitious, I want to make the phantoms real. To simply know these films, to watch them with an awareness of their particular histories and their partially realized potential to tell about Jewish loss, is a step toward this goal.

Ultimately, I hope we can fill the current void in our collective memories regarding the stories, people, tragedies, and meaning of the Holocaust on Soviet

soil. With that in mind, these films, or at least the best of them, can become a vital part of the international Holocaust film canon. By including them in film festivals and educational programs, these films may contribute to a revision of the current camp-biased images of the Holocaust. These films have the power to add to our collective memory images from the experiences of nearly three million Jews who perished in the Holocaust in the Soviet territories. If we attain this goal, the phantom of the Holocaust on Soviet screens can finally come alive and become integrated with the broader memory of the Holocaust.

A companion website to this book, including film clips and questions for discussion, is available at www.phantomholocaust.org.

Abbreviations and Acronyms

d.	*delo,* file
f.	*fond,* fund
GARF	Gosudarstvennyi Arkhiv Rossiiskoi Federatsii, State Russian Archive
Glavkinoprokat	Glavnoe Upravlenie po Prokatu kinofil'mov, Chief Department for Film Distribution, the main film distribution body in the USSR
Glavlit	Glavnoe Upravlenie po Delam Literatury i Iskusstva, Chief Department for Management of Literature and Publishing, an official censorship organ
Glavpur	Glavnoe Politicheskoe Upravlenie, Political Directorate of the Army, military censorship organ
GOSET	Gosudarstvennyi Evreiskii Teatr, Yiddish State Theater, Moscow
Goskino	Gosudarstvennyi Komitet po Kinematografii, Soviet film industry's chief governing body, called in 1938–1946, Committee for Cinema Affairs; in 1946–1953, Ministry of Cinema; in 1953–1963, Ministry of Culture; and in 1963–1988, Committee on Cinema
Gosfilmofond	Gosudarstvennyi Fond Kinofil'mov Rossiiskoi Federatsii, Russian State Film Archive, Belye Stolby
JAFC	Evreiskii Antifashistskii Komitet, Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee, 1942–1952.
LLMA	Lietuvos Literaturos ir Meno Archyvas, Lithuanian Archive of Literature and Art, Vilnius
op.	*opis,* inventory
RGALI	Rossiiskii Gosudarstvennyi Arkhiv Literatury i Iskusstva, Russian State Archive of Literature and Art, Moscow
RGANI	Rossiiskii Gosudarstvennyi Arkhiv Noveishei Istorii, Russian State Archive of Recent History, Moscow

SRK	Stsenarno-redaktsionnaia Kollegiia, an editorial board at a film studio
VGIK	Vserossiiskii Gosudarstvennyi Institut Kinematografii, Russian State Film School, Moscow

Notes

CHAPTER 1 — SCREENING THE HOLOCAUST IN THE SOVIET UNION

1. The total number of the Jewish victims of the Holocaust is estimated at 5.7 million. The numbers of the Holocaust victims in the USSR vary, depending on how and in which borders they are calculated. Yitzhak Arad's estimate is approximately 2.6 million; see his *The Holocaust in the Soviet Union* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press; Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 2009), 525. Ilya Altman's estimate is 2.8 million; see his *Zhertvy Nenavisti: Kholokost v SSSR 1941–1945* (Moscow: Fond Kovcheg, 2002), 303. For other estimates, see Harvey Asher, "The Soviet Union, the Holocaust, and Auschwitz," *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 4, no. 4 (2003): 887–888n1.

2. For general statistics of the Holocaust, see Raul Hilberg, *The Destruction of the European Jews*, 3rd ed. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 3: 1320–1321.

3. The Nazis only filmed one concentration camp, Theresienstadt. In contrast to the camps, the Nazis did film the ghettos. On the Nazi footage of Warsaw ghetto and its propaganda goals, see a film by Yael Hersonski, *A Film Unfinished* (2010).

4. On early U.S. documentaries, see Yvonne Kozlovsky-Golan, *The Shaping of the Holocaust Visual Conscience by the Nuremberg Trials: Birth of the Holocaust in Hollywood-Style Motion Pictures, The Impact of the Movie Nazi Concentration Camps* (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 2006). On early Soviet documentaries, see Jeremy Hicks, *First Filmmakers of the Holocaust: Soviet Cinema and the Genocide of the Jews, 1938–46* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2012), 44–78. On Polish documentaries, see Stuart Liebman, "Documenting the Liberation of the Camps: The Case of Aleksander Ford's *Vernichtungslager Majdanek-Cmentarzysko Europy* (1944)," in *Lessons and Legacies VII: The Holocaust in International Perspective*, edited by Dagmar Herzog (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2006), 333–351.

5. Hilberg, *Destruction*, 1320.

6. Timothy Snyder, *Bloodlands: Europe between Hitler and Stalin* (New York: Basic Books, 2010), xiv.

7. Hicks, *First Filmmakers*, 77–78.

8. Lawrence Baron, *Projecting the Holocaust into the Present: The Changing Focus of Contemporary Holocaust Cinema* (Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield, 2005), 10–11.

9. For instance, in nine hours of Claude Lanzmann's *Shoah* (1985), there was only one interview with a survivor from the former Soviet Union. In the hours-long miniseries *Holocaust* (1978) and *War and Remembrance* (1988), the Soviet experience is represented

only in brief scenes reenacting Babi Yar massacre. Only in 2000s, some mainstream films began to explore the events of the Holocaust in the USSR, most notably *Everything Is Illuminated* (2005), *Defiance* (2008), and *Wunderkind* (2011).

10. Catherine Merridale, "War, Death, and Remembrance in Soviet Russia," in *War and Remembrance in the Twentieth Century*, edited by Jay Winter and Emmanuel Sivan (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 61–83. In English, the Soviet term *Velikaia Otechestvennaia Voina* is usually rendered as the Great Patriotic War, but the Great Fatherland War is a more precise translation.

11. The term *Holocaust* came into use in Russian only in the 1990s. The Yiddish term *khurbm* was used only in the Yiddish press.

12. Zvi Gitelman, "Soviet Reactions to the Holocaust, 1945–1991," *The Holocaust in the Soviet Union: Studies and Sources on the Destruction of the Jews in the Nazi-Occupied Territories of the USSR, 1941–1945*, edited by Lucian Dobroszycki and Jeffrey S. Gurock (Armonk, N.Y.: M. E. Sharpe, 1993), 7; Zvi Gitelman, "Politics and the Historiography of the Holocaust in the Soviet Union," in *Bitter Legacy: Confronting the Holocaust in the USSR*, edited by Gitelman (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997), 14–43.

13. Karel C. Berkhoff, '"Total Annihilation of the Jewish Population': The Holocaust in the Soviet Media, 1941–45," *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 10, no. 1 (2009): 477–504; Kiril Feferman, *Soviet Jewish Stepchild: The Holocaust in the Soviet Mindset, 1941–1964* (Saarbrücken: VDM Verlag Dr. Müller, 2009); Yitzhak Arad, "Stalin and the Soviet Leadership: Responses to the Holocaust," in *Remembering for the Future: The Holocaust in an Age of Genocide*, vol. 1: *History*, edited by John K. Roth and Elisabeth Maxwell (Houndmills: Palgrave, 2001), 355–370.

14. For initial notes on the phenomenon of externalization, see Yitzhak Arad, "The Holocaust as Reflected in the Soviet Russian Language Newspapers in the Years 1941–1945," in *Why Didn't the Press Shout: American and International Journalism during the Holocaust*, edited by Robert Moses Shapiro (New York: Yeshiva University Press; Jersey City: Ktav Publishing House, 2003), 206–207 and 211–212; Berkhoff, "Total Annihilation," 97.

15. Gitelman, "Soviet Reactions," 20–21.

16. Snyder, *Bloodlands*, 376.

17. Amir Weiner, *Making Sense of War: The Second World War and the Fate of the Bolshevik Revolution* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 222.

18. Ibid., 235.

19. Altman, *Zhertvy Nenavisti*, 417, 454–464.

20. Gitelman, "Soviet Reactions," 18.

21. Arad, *The Holocaust in the Soviet Union*, 376–377.

22. Zvi Gitelman, "Remembrance of Things Past: Soviet Histories and Jewish Memories," in *Recalling the Past—(Re)Constructing the Past: Collective and Individual Memory of World War Two in Russia and Germany*, edited by Withold Bonner and Arja Rosenholm

(Helsinki: Kikimora Press, University of Helsinki, 2009), 289–303; Ilya Altman, "Memorializatsiia Kholokosta v Rossii: Istoriia, Sovremennost', Perspektivy," in *Pamiat' o Voine 60 Let Spustia: Rossia, Germania, Evropa*, edited by Mikhail Gabovich (Moscow: NLO, 2005), 509–531.

23. On writers and poets, see Harriet Murav, *Music from a Speeding Train: Jewish Literature in Post-Revolutionary Russia* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011), 111–245; Maxim Shrayer, ed., *An Anthology of Jewish-Russian Literature: Two Centuries of Dual Identity in Prose and Poetry*, 2 vols. (Armonk, N.Y.: M. E. Sharpe, 2007), especially the section "War and Terror, 1939–1953." On photography, see David Shneer, *Through Soviet Jewish Eyes: Photography, War, and the Holocaust* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2011). On art, see Marina Genkina, "Jewish Artists in the Soviet Union in the 1960s–1970s," in *Jews of Struggle: The Jewish National Movement in the USSR, 1967–1989*, edited by Rachel Schond (Tel Aviv: Beth Hatefutsoth, 2007), 80–104, as well as *Private Tolkachev: At the Gates of Hell: Majdanek and Auschwitz Liberated, Testimony of an Artist*. American Society for Yad Vashem, http://www.yadvashemusa.org/documents/Tolkachev.pdf.

24. For instance, Annette Insdorf, in her list of 267 international Holocaust films, includes only 7 Soviet or post-Soviet films, and of these 3 do not deal with the Holocaust; *Indelible Shadows: Film and the Holocaust*, 3rd ed. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 329–362. Similarly, in his list of Holocaust films made in 1990–2004, Lawrence Baron lists only 3 post-Soviet films (*Projecting the Holocaust*, 279–291). Jean-Michel Frodon's list of 139 international fiction Holocaust films includes only one post-Soviet film; *Cinema and the Shoah: An Art Confronts the Tragedy of the Twentieth Century* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2010), 294–337. None of the mentioned Soviet or post-Soviet films is analyzed at length in these books.

25. Baron, *Projecting the Holocaust*, 6.

26. Alison Landsberg, *Prosthetic Memory: The Transformation of American Remembrance in the Age of Mass Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004). For the importance of visual representation of the Holocaust, see also Barbie Zelizer, "Introduction: On Visualizing the Holocaust," in *Visual Culture and the Holocaust*, edited by Zelizer (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2001), 1–13.

27. Mordechai Altshuler, "The Unique Features of the Holocaust in the Soviet Union," in *Jews and Jewish life in Russia and the Soviet Union*, edited by Yaacov Ro'i (Portland, Ore.: Frank Cass, 1995), 171–188.

28. Arad, *The Holocaust in the Soviet Union*, 505–516; Mordechai Altshuler, "Jewish Warfare and the Participation of Jews in Combat in the Soviet Union as Reflected in Soviet and Western Historiography," in *Bitter Legacy: Confronting the Holocaust in the USSR*, edited by Zvi Gitelman (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997), 151–167.

29. Gitelman, "Remembrance of Things Past," 295–298.

30. Murav, *Music from a Speeding Train*, 112.

31. Mordechai Altshuler, "Escape and Evacuation of Soviet Jews at the Time of the Nazi Invasion: Policies and Realities, " in *The Holocaust in the Soviet Union: Studies and Sources on the Destruction of the Jews in the Nazi-Occupied Territories of the USSR, 1941–1945*, edited by Lucian Dobroszycki and Jeffrey S. Gurock (Armonk, N.Y.: M. E. Sharpe, 1993), 77–105; Rebecca Manley, *To the Tashkent Station: Evacuation and Survival in the Soviet Union at War* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2009).

32. Weiner, *Making Sense*, 227.

33. Ibid., 211. For historical documentation, see Shimon Redlich, *War, Holocaust, and Stalinism: A Documented Study of the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee in the USSR* (Luxembourg: Harwood Academic Publishers, 1995), 243–244.

34. Weiner, *Making Sense*, 191–192.

35. Snyder, *Bloodlands*, xi.

36. Altshuler, "Unique Features," 175–176; Zvi Gitelman, "Soviet Jewry before the Holocaust," in *Bitter Legacy: Confronting the Holocaust in the USSR*, edited by Zvi Gitelman (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997), 1–14.

37. Murav, *Music from a Speeding Train*, 112–113.

38. Pogrom violence is depicted in 1919–1920 documentary footage from the civil war in Ukraine. In fiction films, pogroms were depicted in *Where Is Truth?* (unknown director, 1913) and in early Soviet films, targeting anti-Semitism, including *Against the Will of the Fathers* (dir. Yevgeny Ivanov-Barkov, 1926–27), *General Rehearsal* (dir. Miron Bilinsky, 1930), *The Five Brides* (dir. Alexander Soloviov, 1929), and *Gorizont* (dir. Lev Kuleshov, 1933). *Battleship Potemkin* (1925) by Sergei Eisenstein originally had a pogrom scene as well, but it was later edited out.

39. This summary is based on Arlen Blium, *Sovetskaia Tsenzura v Epokhu Total'nogo Terrora, 1929–1953* (St. Petersburg: Akademicheskii Proekt, 2000).

40. For a historical overview of general Soviet censorship, see Tat'iana Goriaeva, *Politicheskaia Tsenzura v SSSR, 1917–1991* (Moscow: Rosspen, 2009). For a historical overview of film censorship, see Valerii Golovskoi, *Kinematograf 70-kh, Mezhdu Ottepel'u i Glasnost'u* (Moscow: Materik, 2004), 106–130.

41. For instance, Filip Ermash, a film industry head in 1970s, originally oversaw film at the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union.

42. Valerii Fomin, *Kino i Vlast': Sovetskoe Kino, 1965–1985 Gody* (Moscow: Materik, 1996), 11–60.

43. For numerous examples, see diaries and memoirs by Soviet filmmakers: Andrei Tarkovsky, *Martirolog: Dnevniki 1970–1986* (Florence: Istituto Internazionale Andrei Tarkovsky, 2008); Georgii Danelia, *Chito-Grito* (Moscow: Eksmo, 2008); Eldar Riazanov, *Nepodvedennye Itogi* (Moscow: Vagrius, 2007); Elem Klimov, *Nesniatoe Kino* (Moscow: Khroniker, 2008).

44. Fomin, *Kino i Vlast'*, 14.

45. All citations from the films, archival documents, and media coverage are in my translation.

CHAPTER 2 — SOVIET ANTIFASCIST FILMS OF THE 1930S

1. "Sovetskaia Intelligentsia Vyrazhaet Svoio Vozmuschenie i Negodovanie Evreiskimi Pogromami v Germanii," *Kino*, November 29, 1938, 2; "Sovetskaia Intelligentsia Vyrazhaet Negodovanie Evreiskimi Pogromami," *Literaturnaia Gazeta*, December 1, 1938, 4.

2. "Sovetskaia Intelligentsia Vyrazhaet Negodovanie Evreiskimi Pogromami," *Literaturnaia Gazeta*, December 1, 1938, 4.

3. Ibid.

4. "Evreiskie Pogromy v Germanii," *Pravda*, November 20, 1938, 1.

5. Mordechai Altshuler, "Escape and Evacuation of Soviet Jews at the Time of the Nazi Invasion: Policies and Realities, " in *The Holocaust in the Soviet Union: Studies and Sources on the Destruction of the Jews in the Nazi-Occupied Territories of the USSR, 1941–1945*, edited by Lucian Dobroszycki and Jeffrey S. Gurock (Armonk, N.Y.: M. E. Sharpe, 1993), 84.

6. There were other anti-fascist films as well: *Fighters* (*Bortsy*, 1936), *Carl Brunner* (1936), *The Struggle Is Going On* (*Bor'ba Prodolzhaetsia*, 1939), as well as several so-called "defense films," patriotic films about an upcoming attack on the USSR. In some of these films, including Alexander Macheret's *A Call to Arms* (*Rodina Zovet*, 1936), the enemy is unnamed, but swastikas on the enemy airplanes leave little doubt that this is Germany.

7. Oksana Bulgakova, "Les Juifs à l'écran au tournant des années 1930–1940 en Russie Soviétique, en Allemagne et à Hollywood," in *Kinojudaica: Les représentations des Juifs dans le cinéma de Russie et d'Union Soviétique des années 1910 aux années 1960*, edited by Valérie Pozner and Natacha Laurent (Paris: Nouveau Monde Éditions, 2012), 223–251.

8. For a close reading of the film, see Thomas Doherty, *Hollywood and Hitler, 1933–1939* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013), 189–196.

9. Friedrich Wolf, *Professor Mamlock: A Play*, translated by Anne Bromberger (New York: Universum, 1935), 28–30.

10. Ibid., 61.

11. Ibid., 80.

12. N. Kruzhkov, "Professor Mamlock," *Pravda*, July 28, 1938, 4; G. Poltanov, "Professor Mamlock," *Literaturnaia Gazeta*, September 10, 1938, 6; N. Kovarskii, "Obvinitel'nyi Akt Protiv Fashizma," *Iskusstvo Kino* 9 (1938): 28–32.

13. Yakov Grinvald, "Pobeda Aktiora," *Vecheriaia Moskva*, September 13, 1938; Yev. Kriger, "Professor Mamlock," *Izvesiia*, September 21, 1938.

14. TV series, *Zvezdnye Gody Lenfil'ma*, episode "Herbert Rapoport," (N+N for TV Channel Kul´tura, 2004).

15. This story, based on the newly opened archives, is reported in *Zvezdnye Gody Lenfil'ma*.

16. David Platt, "'Blockade' and 'Professor Mamlock' Chosen as the Leading Films of the Year," *Daily Worker*, January 2, 1938, 7; "Choice on the Left," *Motion Picture Herald*, January 14, 1939, 7. Cited in Doherty, *Hollywood and Hitler*, 193.

17. Both were published in Russian: Willi Bredel, *Ispytanie*, translated by A. Rudkovskoi (Moscow: GIKhL, 1935); Wolfgang Langhoff, *Bolotnye Soldaty*, translated by E. L. Kazanskaia (Moscow: GIKhL, 1936). The title of Langhoff's memoir refers to a song of the same name ("Die Moorsoldaten" in German) written in the Nazi labor camp for political prisoners. The song was later popularized by singer Ernst Busch.

18. Aleksandr Macheret, untitled, in *Vospominaniia o Yurii Oleshe*, edited by O. Suok-Olesha and E. Pelson (Moscow: Sovetskii Pisatel', 1975), 155–168.

19. Yurii Olesha and Aleksandr Macheret, "Walter," *Zvezda* 4 (1937): 14–46.

20. "Lager' na Bolote," *Kino*, July 23, 1938, 4.

21. RGALI, f. 2450, op. 1, d. 10, 8. Minutes of the film discussion, October 2, 1938.

22. Miron Chernenko, *Krasnaia Zvezda, Zheltaia Zvezda: Kinematograficheskaia Istoriia Evreistva v Rossii, 1919–1999* (Moscow: Tekst, 2006), 95.

23. Trumpeldor allegedly said while dying, "Never mind, it is good to die for our country!"

24. An earlier US film, *I Was a Captive of Nazi Germany* (1936), depicts a Nazi prison, but not camps, and certainly not Jews in camps.

25. Evgenii Margolit, "Kak v Zerkale. Germania v Sovetskom Kino mezhdu 1920–30 gg," *Kinovedcheskie Zapiski* 59 (2002): 77.

26. Evgenii Andrikanis, "Rabota nad Fil'mom 'Bolotnye Soldaty,'" *Za Bol'shevistskii Fil'm*, November 17, 1938.

27. Striped suits should have been a familiar sight: the cover of Bredel's novel published in the USSR in 1935 already featured an image of a prisoner in striped uniform.

28. RGALI, f. 2450, op. 1, d. 10, 5. Minutes of the film discussion, October 2, 1938.

29. Ibid., 23.

30. Ibid., 30, 29.

31. Ibid., 7.

32. Ibid., 31–34.

33. S. Tregub, "Bolotnye Soldaty," *Pravda*, October 21, 1938.

34. For an American perspective, see "Concentration Camp," *Variety*, March 22, 1939, 30.

35. "Fashistskii Zagovor v Soedinnenykh Shtatakh," *Izvestiia*, May 23, 1939. To the best of my knowledge, no reports of this incident appeared in the US press. However,

incidents of attacks during screenings of other anti-Nazi films were reported; see Jeremy Hicks, *First Filmmakers of the Holocaust: Soviet Cinema and the Genocide of the Jews, 1938–46* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2012), 18.

36. Yu. Bogomolov, "Aleksandr Macheret," in *20 Rezhisserskikh Biografii*, edited by R. Chernenko (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1971), 212–231.

37. "Zapiska zam. predsedatelia SNK I STO SSSR V. I. Mezhlauka I. V. Stalinu o Gonorare L. Feikhtvangeru za stsenarii fil'ma 'Sem'ia Oppengeim," in *Kremlevskii Kinoteatr, 1928–1953, Dokumenty*, edited by K. M. Anderson and L. V. Maksimenkov (Moscow: Rosspenn, 2005): 334.

38. For Roshal's memoirs, see Grigorii Roshal, "Rasskazy o Godakh," *Iskusstvo Kino* 5 (1991): 119–131.

39. Grigorii Roshal, *Kinolenta Zhizni* (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1974), 281–288.

40. Serafima Roshal and Grigorii Roshal, "Instsenirovka Romana L. Feikhtvangera," *Literaturnaia Gazeta*, January 10, 1939.

41. For detailed analysis of the novel's dramatization, see Jonathan Skolnik, "Class War, Anti-Fascism, and Anti-Semitism: Grigori Roshal's 1939 Film *Sem'ia Oppengeim* in Context," in *Feuchtwanger and Film*, edited by Ian Wallace (Bern: Peter Lang, 2009), 237–246.

Roshal, *Kinolenta Zhizni*, 281–288.

42. RGALI, f. 2450, op. 1, d. 13, 71. Minutes of the film discussion, November 20, 1938.

43. Ibid., 46.

44. B. Izakov, "'Sem'ia Oppengeim' na Ekrane," *Pravda*, November 20, 1938, 4; Viktor Fink, "'Sem'ia Oppengeim' na Ekrane," *Literaturnaia Gazeta*, December 1, 1938, 4.

45. "The Oppenheim Family," *Variety*, May 31, 1939, 14.

46. Margolit, "Kak v Zerkale," 77.

47. Ibid., 61.

48. Doherty, *Hollywood and Hitler*.

49. On Soviet "defense" films, see Vasilii Tokarev, "Sovetskaia Voennaia Utopia Kanuna Vtoroi Mirovoi," *Evropa: Zhurnal Pol'skogo Instituta Mezhdunarodnykh Del* 5, no. 1 (18), (2006): 97–161; Aleksandr Fedorov, "Sovetskaia Kinofantastika o Voine i Kosmose: Germenevticheskii Analiz," *Voprosy Kul'turologii* 11 (2011): 89–93; 2 (2012): 64–68; 3 (2012): 73–77.

50. *Professor Mamlock*, which was the featured film at the Soviet Pavilion at the New York World's Fair in 1939, was also pulled from screens in August. Macheret's earlier film (*A Call to Arms*, 1936) and Rapoport's later film, *Guest* (*Gost'*, 1939), ended up on the shelf, as well.

51. See, for instance, Benedict Sarnov, *Nash Sovetskii Novoiaz* (Moscow: Materik, 2002), 345–346; and Mikhail Shulman, "Proschai Trofimovna," *Mishpukha*, 25, http://

mishpoha.org/n25/25a16.shtml. The same stories were told to me by Jewish war veterans and Holocaust survivors at the Holocaust Center in Moscow (May 29, 2009). Altshuler reports similar findings in his interviews with survivors and witnesses ("Escape and Evacuation," 84). Hicks references numerous survivors' testimonies about *Professor Mamlock* (*First Filmmakers*, 29).

CHAPER 3 — THE FIRST PHANTOM

1. Shimon Redlich and Genady Kostyrcheno, eds., *Evreiskii Antifashistskii Komitet v SSSR, 1941–1948. Dokumentirovannaia Istoriia* (Moscow: Mezhdunarodnye Otnosheniia, 1996), 35–47.

2. "Evreiskii Antifashistskii Komitet," *Kholocaust na Territorii SSSR: Entsiklopediia*, edited by Ilya Altman (Moscow: Rosspen, 2009), 292.

3. Between 1942 and 1945, JAFC produced 888 programs (GARF, f. 8114, op. 1, d. 916). For background on other JAFC activities, see Shimon Redlich, *War, Holocaust, and Stalinism: A Documented Study of the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee in the USSR* (Luxembourg: Harwood Academic Publishers, 1995). On *The Black Book*, see Joshua Rubenstein and Ilya Altman, eds., *The Unknown Black Book: The Holocaust in the German-Occupied Soviet Territories* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008).

4. GARF, f. 8114, op. 1, d. 1063. This document is also available in English in Redlich, *War, Holocaust, and Stalinism*, 196–197.

5. GARF, f. 8114, op. 1, d. 1064, 17.

6. GARF, f. 8114, op. 1, d. 1063, 4. A reference to the Kiev Children's Film Studio is probably a mistake: a text of a screenplay shows it was intended for Kiev Film Studio.

7. Joseph Sherman, "David Bergelson: A Biography," in *David Bergelson: From Modernism to Socialist Realism*, edited by Joseph Sherman and Gennady Estraikh (London: Legenda, Modern Humanities Research Association and Maney Publishing, 2007), 51.

8. David Shneer, "From Mourning to Vengeance: Bergelson's Holocaust Journalism (1941–1945)," in *David Bergelson: From Modernism to Socialist Realism*, edited by Joseph Sherman and Gennady Estraikh (London: Legenda, Modern Humanities Research Association and Maney Publishing, 2007), 256.

9. Jeffrey Veidlinger, "*'Du lebst, mayn folk'*: Bergelson's Play *Prints Ruveni* in Historical Context (1944–1947)," in *David Bergelson: From Modernism to Socialist Realism*, edited by Joseph Sherman and Gennady Estraikh (London: Legenda, Modern Humanities Research Association and Maney Publishing, 2007), 273–274.

10. Amazingly, Bergelson's Holocaust stories were included in the two volumes of his works in Russian translations, with a circulation of 50,000 and 75,000 copies. Two stories, "A Witness" and "In the Light of Bonfires," appeared in David Bergelson, *Izbrannye Proizvedeniia* (Moscow: Der Ėmes, 1947). These two stories, as well as "A Yahrzeit Candle" and "The Sculptor," were also included in David Bergelson, *Izbrannoe* (Moscow: Sovetskii pisatel', 1957).

11. Shneer, "From Mourning," 265.

12. Cited in Redlich, *War, Holocaust, and Stalinism*, 180–181.

13. Shneer, "From Mourning," 261.

14. Harriet Murav, "Memory and Monument in *Baym Dnyepr* (1932–1940)," in *David Bergelson: From Modernism to Socialist Realism*, edited by Joseph Sherman and Gennady Estraikh (London: Legenda, Modern Humanities Research Association and Maney Publishing, 2007), 239.

15. *I Will Live!* was staged by Habima Theater in Palestine and by the New Yiddish Folk Theater in New York, and by another theater in Romania (Sherman, "David Bergelson," 60). Although the play was approved for production at GOSET in 1943, it was never staged there (RGALI, f. 656, op. 5, d. 678).

16. Sherman, "David Bergelson," 60.

17. Dovid Bergelson, "Kh'vel Lebn!" *Eynikayt*, December 27, 1942. Unfortunately, Bergelson's son Lev Bergelson does not remember when his father worked on the screenplay, and does not have any materials in his archive about the screenplay or the play. Author's interview with Lev Bergelson, Jerusalem, January 12, 2011.

18. *I Will Live!* was translated into Russian by Abram Efros, a Soviet writer and critic, who later also worked on *The Black Book*. The title page lists Kiev Film Studio, even though at that time—1942—Kiev was still occupied.

19. Author's interview with Lev Bergelson, January 12, 2011.

20. Noemi Bergelson, the writer's daughter-in-law, recalls that David Bergelson usually abstained from Soviet public activities, but with the beginning of the war became very active, as he wanted to help the war effort. Author's interview with Noemi Bergelson, Jerusalem, January 12, 2011.

21. Here and elsewhere, I cite the screenplay according to the manuscript found at GARF, f. 8114, op. 1, d. 1090, 163–215.

22. Yael Zerubavel, *Recovered Roots: Collective Memory and the Making of Israeli National Tradition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 13–33.

23. Shneer, "From Mourning," 251.

24. Perets Markish also inserted segments of his own speech at the August 24, 1941, rally into his characters' mouths in his two wartime plays, *The Ghetto Uprising* and *An Eye for an Eye*. Thanks to Jeffrey Veidlinger for pointing this out to me.

25. Veidlinger, "*Du lebst, mayn folk*," 282.

26. For instance, the January 1943 essay "Dos iz er!" ("That's him!"), cited in Shneer, "From Mourning," 258.

27. Shneer, "From Mourning," 254.

28. Unfortunately, it is not clear which lines Bergelson was giving to his character: there is a blank space in the Russian text where the Hebrew text was to be inserted.

29. For an analysis of Jewish responses to the Holocaust through the story of Job, see Michael L. Morgan, *Beyond Auschwitz: Post-Holocaust Jewish Thought in America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).

30. The last time Hebrew was heard on Soviet screen was 1935, in the controversial film *The Border* (*Granitsa*, dir. Mikhail Dubson)—and even then it was already an anachronism, emphasized by the fact that the Hebrew was spoken only in the religious context, and was used by "class enemies" in bourgeois Poland.

31. A Yiddish phrase (*swet sain gut*—"all will be well") is also repeated throughout the Russian text.

32. For background on these propaganda shorts, and on Soviet film during World War II, see Peter Kenez, *Cinema and Soviet Society from the Revolution to the Death of Stalin* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2008), 165–185; and Denise Youngblood, *Russian War Films: On the Cinema Front, 1914–2005* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2007), 55–82.

33. On Soviet films, see Jeremy Hicks, *First Filmmakers of the Holocaust: Soviet Cinema and the Genocide of the Jews, 1938–46* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2012), 44–78, 107–133 (on newsreels and documentaries), and 79–106 (on fiction films).

34. Harriet Murav, *Music from a Speeding Train: Jewish Literature in Post-Revolutionary Russia* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011), 126.

35. GARF, f. 8114, op. 1, d. 1063, 4.

36. GARF, f. 8114, op. 1, d. 1068; 1073; 1076; and 1085.

37. Jeffrey Veidlinger, *The Moscow State Yiddish Theater: Jewish Culture on the Soviet Stage* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001), 245.

38. Miron Petrovskii, *Gorodu i Miru: Kievskie Ocherki* (Kiev: A+C and Dukh i Litera, 2008), 360. Thanks to Ilya Altman for pointing this source out to me.

39. RGALI, f. 656, op. 5, d. 678.

40. Other plays about the Holocaust were treated in the same way. For instance, in 1947 a censor wrote about a play by Peretz Markish: "It doesn't fit for Russian or some other theaters because of its limited scope of problems addressing exclusively Jewish people" (RGALI, f. 656, op. 5, d. 5150).

41. Shneer, "From Mourning," 264.

42. GARF, f. 8114, op. 1, d. 913.

43. See, for instance, 1945 JAFC report about its activity, GARF, f. 8114, op. 1, d. 916.

44. GARF, f. 8114, op. 1, d. 912, letter, October 13, 1944.

CHAPTER 4 — HOW A SOVIET NOVEL TURNED INTO A JEWISH FILM

1. According to many Russian Internet sources, *The Unvanquished* received a gold medal in Venice (e.g., http://russiancinema.ru/template.php?dept_id=15&e_dept_id

=6&text_element_id=37). However, according to the archives of the Venice Film Festival, *The Unvanquished* did not receive any official prizes.

2. Miron Chernenko, *Krasnaia Zvezda, Zheltaia Zvezda: Kinematograficheskaia Istoriia Evreistva v Rossii, 1919–1999* (Moscow: Tekst, 2006), 126–127.

3. Boris Gorbatov, "Nepokorennye (Sem'ia Tarasa)," *Pravda*, May 17, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23; September 25, 26, 27, 30; October 2, 3, 4, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 1943.

4. Author's interview with Alexander Donskoi, Moscow, June 25, 2011. For further stories about Mark Donskoi, see the Russian documentary *Mark Donskoi, the King and the Fool* (dir. Alexander Brunkovsky, 2011), written by Alexander Donskoi.

5. Thanks to Ala Zuskin-Perlman, Veniamin Zuskin's daughter, for drawing my attention to this fact.

6. In 1942, Donskoi directed a short, *The Signal* (*Maiak*), lauding civilian resistance. This film was included in the compilation he edited, known in the USSR as *Boevoi Kinosbornik #9*, and released in the United States under an improbable title, *Diary of a Nazi*.

7. For a detailed recollection of this anecdote, see Oleg Iakubovich, "Voennye Fil´my Marka Donskogo," in *Kino i Vremia*, vol. 4 (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1965), 92.

8. Peter Kenez, *Cinema and Soviet Society from the Revolution to the Death of Stalin* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2008), 175.

9. Ibid., 179; Denise Youngblood, *Russian War Films: On the Cinema Front, 1914–2005* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2007), 60.

10. For the analysis of these two films, see Chapter 14.

11. Jeremy Hicks, *First Filmmakers of the Holocaust: Soviet Cinema and the Genocide of the Jews, 1938–46* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2012), 92.

12. Mark Donskoi, "My Work on the Film *Unvanquished*," *Cinema Chronicle* no. 10 (1945): 9–16. Thanks to Jeremy Hicks for sharing this source with me.

13. Author's interview with Alexander Donskoi, June 25, 2011.

14. Jeremy Hicks, "Confronting the Holocaust: Mark Donskoi's *The Unvanquished*," *Studies in Russian and Soviet Cinema* 3, no. 1 (2009): 41–43.

15. Anne Nesbet, *Savage Junctures: Sergei Eisenstein and the Shape of Thinking* (London: I. B. Taurus, 2003), 173.

16. See also Hicks, "Confronting the Holocaust," 43.

17. Influenced by the pogrom scene in the screenplay of *Battleship Potemkin*, a German director, Carl Theodor Dreyer, made a film about pogroms in Russia in 1905, *Die Gezeichneten* (1922). On Jewish themes in Eisenstein's films, see Victoria Sukovataia, "Bolshevistskoe ili Evreiskoe Kino? Iazyk Simvolov i Narrativnye Politiki v Tvorchestve Sergeia Eisenshteina," *Tirosh—Trudy po Iudaike* 9 (2009): 160–175.

18. Milena Musina, "Ischislenie Roda," *Kinovedcheskie Zapiski* 51 (2001): 197.

19. Donskoi conducted these interviews in 1944, as part of his research for the film. Hicks, *First Filmmakers*, 135.

20. Ala Zuskin-Perlman, *Puteshestvie Veniamina* (Moscow: Gesharim, 2002), 262.

21. Zinovii Tolkatchev, who was ethnically Jewish, served as an official artist of the Red Army, attached to the forces liberating Majdanek, and later Auschwitz. Tolkatchev depicted terrible scenes he witnessed in the camps.

22. Judith Doneson, "The Jew as a Female Figure in Holocaust Film," *Shoah: A Review of Holocaust Studies and Commemorations* 1, no. 1 (1978): 11; Annette Insdorf, *Indelible Shadows: Film and the Holocaust*, 3rd ed. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 77–92.

23. Valerii Fomin, *Kino na Voine: Dokumenty i Svidetel´stva* (Moscow: Materik, 2005), 431.

24. Shostakovich remained silent during the meeting, but years later, in 1961, he set a part of his Thirteenth Symphony to the words of Evgenii Evtushenko's poem "Babi Yar."

25. Elena Baraban, "Semeinyi Krug: Traktovka Rodstva, Evreev i Voennoplennykh v Stalinskom Kino o Voine," *Ab Imperio* 3 (2009): 476.

26. RGALI, f. 2456, op. 1, d. 1056, Minutes of Artistic Council meeting. For analysis of *Wait for Me*, see Chapter 14.

27. RGALI, f. 2456, op. 1, d. 1056.

28. Ibid.

29. RGALI, f. 1992, op. 1, d. 160.

30. Karel C. Berkhoff, '"Total Annihilation of the Jewish Population': The Holocaust in the Soviet Media, 1941–45," *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 10, no. 1 (2009): 477–504; Kiril Feferman, *Soviet Jewish Stepchild: The Holocaust in the Soviet Mindset, 1941–1964* (Saarbrücken: VDM Verlag Dr. Müller, 2009).

31. Berkhoff, "Total Annihilation," 70.

32. For more examples of Romm's advocacy, see Fomin, *Kino na Voine*, 538–546; Mikhail Romm, *Kak v Kino: Ustnye Rasskazy* (Nizhnii Novgorod: Dekom, 2003). See also Chapter 5 in this book.

33. RGALI, f. 2456, op. 1, d. 1056.

34. Ilya Ehrenburg, "Pomnit´!" *Pravda*, December 17, 1944, 3, cited in Berkhoff, "Total Annihilation," 70. *Feferman, Soviet Jewish Stepchild*, 44.

35. Fomin, *Kino na Voine*, 550–551.

36. RGALI, f. 2456, op. 1, d. 1056.

37. Ibid.

38. In the same vein, Jews were euphemized as "Italians" in the later Soviet slang.

39. Yurii Morozov and Tatiana Derevianko, *Evreiskie Kinemotagrafisty v Ukraine, 1917–1975* (Kiev: Dukh i Litera, 2004), 174.

40. RGALI, f. 2456, op. 1, d. 1056.

41. Ibid.

42. Fomin, *Kino na Voine*, 537.

43. RGALI, f. 2456, op. 1, d. 1056.

44. S. Burov, "Nepokorennye," *Sovetskoe Iskusstvo*, October 26, 1945, 2.

45. D. Kalm, "Nepokorennye," *Moskovskii Bolshevik*, October 21, 1945.

46. N. Zhdanov, "Nepokorennye," *Izvestiia*, October 23, 1945; M. Beliavskii, "Nepokorennye," *Vecherniaia Moskva*, October 22, 1945, 3; M. Ilushin, "Nepokorennye," *Trud*, October 21, 1945, 2.

47. S. Borzenko, "Nepokorennye," *Pravda*, October 24, 1945.

48. A. Kamenogorskii, "Nepokorennye," *Moskovskii Komsomolets*, October 20, 1945, 3; A. P. Shtein, "Nepokorennye," *Krasnyi Flot*, October 21, 1945.

49. I. Sokolov, "O Neprimirimykh i Nepokorennykh," *Komsomolskaia Pravda*, October 21, 1945.

50. I. Kruti, "Nepokorennye na Ekrane," *Literaturnaia Gazeta*, October 20, 1945.

51. Hicks demonstrates that at least in Moscow and Kiev the film was shown in the theaters for less than two months ("Confronting the Holocaust," 45).

52. Iakubovich, "Voennye Fil´my Marka Donskogo," 99.

53. Josephine Woll, *Real Images: Soviet Cinema and the Thaw* (London: I. B. Taurus, 2000), 63.

54. I. G. Bolshakov, *Sovetskoe Kinoiskusstvo v Gody Velikoi Otechestvennoi Voiny, 1941–1945* (Moscow: Goskinoizdat, 1948), 51–52.

55. I. G. Bolshakov, *Sovetskoe Kinoiskusstvo v Gody Velikoi Otechestvennoi Voiny, 1941–1945*, 2nd ed. (Moscow: Goskinoizdat, 1950).

56. Berkhoff, "Total Annihilation"; Feferman, *Soviet Jewish Stepchild*.

57. Feferman, *Soviet Jewish Stepchild*, 27.

58. Berkhoff, "Total Annihilation," 93.

59. Feferman, *Soviet Jewish Stepchild*, 44.

60. Iakubovich, "Voennye Fil´my Marka Donskogo," 100.

Chapter 5 — The Holocaust on the Thawing Screens

1. Josephine Woll, *Real Images: Soviet Cinema and the Thaw* (London: I. B. Taurus, 2000), 3–6.

2. Ibid., 12–13.

3. In the film *Soldiers* (*Soldaty*, 1957). For the analysis, see Chapter 14.

4. Woll, *Real Images*, 64.

5. Evgenii Evtushenko, "Babi Yar," *Literaturnaia Gazeta*, September 19, 1961. For Evtushenko's account of a controversy surrounding the publication of his poem, see his memoir, *A Precocious Biography*, translated by A. R. MacAndrew (New York: Dutton, 1963), 116–122. For an analysis of the controversy, see Kiril Feferman, *Soviet Jewish Stepchild: The Holocaust in the Soviet Mindset, 1941–1964* (Saarbrücken: VDM Verlag Dr. Müller, 2009), 46–50.

6. For full text of the speech, see Mikhail Romm, *Kak v Kino: Ustnye Rasskazy* (Nizhnii Novgorod: Dekom, 2003), 214–220.

7. On Khrushchev's visit to an art show in Moscow Manege, see Petr Vail and Aleksandr Genis, *60-e: Mir Sovetskogo Cheloveka* (Moscow: NLO, 2001), 190–191.

8. Khrushchev's speech at the meeting of the party leadership with Soviet writers and artists was published under the title "Vysokaia Ideinost' i Khudozhestvennoe masterstvo: Velikaia Sila Sovetskoi Literatury i Iskusstva," *Pravda*, March 10, 1963, 1–4. Excerpts in English are available in Benjamin Pinkus, *The Soviet Government and the Jews 1948–1967: A Documented Study* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 74–77.

9. Michael Beizer, "Jews of Struggle: The Jewish National Movement in the USSR, 1967–1989," in *Jews of Struggle: The Jewish National Movement in the USSR, 1967–1989*, edited by Rachel Schond (Tel Aviv: Beth Hatefutsoth, 2007), 134–136. For a larger picture of the Jewish national movement in the USSR, see Gal Beckerman, *When They Come for Us, We'll Be Gone: The Epic Struggle to Save Soviet Jewry* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2010).

10. For instance, Marlen Khutsiev's film, *I Am Twenty* (*Mne Dvadtsat' Let*), made in 1962 and released only in 1965.

11. In terms of literary work, the most significant was Anatolii Kuznetsov's *Babi Yar* (Moscow: Molodaia Gvardiia, 1967), but there were also novels by Icchokas Meras (discussed in Chapter 9), poems by Aleksandr Galich, and translations of Januzh Korczak's diaries (discussed in Chapter 10).

12. Woll, *Real Images*, 202–208; Valerii Fomin, *Kino i Vlast': Sovetskoe Kino, 1965–1985 Gody* (Moscow: Materik, 1996).

13. Andrei Shemiakin, "Dialog s Literaturoi," in *Kinematorgraf Ottepeli*, edited by V. Troianovskii (Moscow: Materik, 1996), 146, quoted in Woll, *Real Images*, 208.

14. *The Fate of a Man* was seen by nearly 40 million people.

15. RGALI, f. 2453, op. 3, ed. 1153. Minutes of the Artistic Council meeting, December 24, 1957.

16. Author's telephone interview with Shukhrat Abbasov, February 5, 2012.

17. Ibid.

18. For the analysis of these three films, see Chapter 14.

19. This is how the filmmakers themselves defined it. See Maya Turovskaya and Yurii Khaniutin, "My, Romm, i Kinokamera," in *Obyknovennyi Fashizm*, edited by Mikhail Romm, Maya Turovskaya, and Yurii Khaniutin (St. Petersburg: Seans, 2006), 40.

20. For the analysis of *The Judgment of the Peoples*, see Jeremy Hicks, *First Filmmakers of the Holocaust: Soviet Cinema and the Genocide of the Jews, 1938–46* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2012), 186–210.

21. For an extended discussion of Romm's narration and voice in the film, see Wolgang Beilenhoff and Sabine Hänsgen, "Speaking about Images: The Voice of the Author in *Ordinary Fascism*," *Studies in Russian and Soviet Cinema* 2, no. 2 (2008): 141–153.

22. Maya Turovskaya, "Ochuzhdenie," in *Obyknovennyi Fashizm*, edited by Mikhail Romm, Maya Turovskaya, and Yurii Khaniutin (St. Petersburg: Seans, 2006), 272.

23. Although at that time neo-Nazism was very rare in the USSR, critic Grigorii Pomerantz recalls that a local neo-Nazi group was uncovered in the 1960s. Grigorii Pomerantz, "Mozhno li Ubedit'?" *Iskusstvo Kino* 5 (1992): 86–88.

24. Parts of Turovskaya's story have been published, and whenever possible I cite the published sources.

25. For excerpts from the original treatment, see Turovskaya and Khaniutin, "My, Romm, i Kinokamera," 28–52.

26. In early 1943, Romm wrote a letter to Stalin, strongly objecting to nascent anti-Semitism in Soviet culture. He followed up with an even more extensive letter to Georgii Aleksandrov, then a head of the Propaganda Department of the Communist Party. Romm, *Kak v Kino*, 126–134.

27. Among others, Romm was critical of a campaign in a literary magazine, *October*, directed against Evtushenko's poem "Babi Yar." Following his 1962 speech, Romm was forced to write an official explanation, but the letter that resulted cannot be confused for an apology. If anything, it states Romm's position even more firmly. For full text, see Mikhail Romm, *Kak v Kino*, 214–227.

28. Author's interview with Maya Turovskaya, January 18, 2008.

29. Turovskaya, "Ochuzhdenie," 273–274.

30. Turovskaya and Khaniutin, "My, Romm i Kinokamera," 31–32.

31. RGALI, f. 2944, op. 5, ed. 46. Minutes of the SRK meeting, July 12, 1964.

32. Author's interview with Maya Turovskaya, January 18, 2008.

33. Ibid.

34. For Romm's own account, see Mikhail Romm, "Mne Esche Raz Povezlo," in *Obyknovennyi Fashizm*, edited by Mikhail Romm, Maya Turovskaya, and Yurii Khaniutin (St. Petersburg: Seans, 2006), 25–26.

35. Turovskaya, "Ochuzhdenie," 275.

36. Ibid., 281.

37. For Turovskaya's account of this story, see Mumin Shakirov, "Izdana Kniga Mikhaila Romma 'Obyknovennyi Fashizm,'" Radio Svoboda, February 14, 2007, http://www.svobodanews.ru/content/article/377841.html. In a different version of this story,

Turovskaya suggests that the initiative to include the film in the Leipzig Film Festival came from the festival itself, or even from Andropov. See Maya Turovskaya, "Some Documents from the Life of a Documentary Film," *Studies in Russian and Soviet Cinema* 2, no. 2 (2008): 155–165. But in 2012, Turovskaya approved the version of the story as told in my chapter.

38. L. Malugin, "Poema Pechali i Gneva," *Sovetskaia Kul'tura*, November 25, 1965; K. Simonov, "Istoriia Oblichaet," *Izvestiia*, November 4, 1965; V. Shabrov, "Obyknovennyi Fashizm," *Leningradskaia Pravda*, January 4, 1966.

39. A. Mikhalevich, "Smotria v Glaza Proshlomu i Buduschemu," *Literaturnaia Gazeta*, January 13, 1966.

40. For sample of world press coverage, see Romm, Turovskaya and Khaniutin, *Obyknovennyi Fashizm*, 242–247.

41. Maya Turovskaya, "Mikhail Romm, ili Dvadtsat' Let Spustia . . . ," in *Obyknovennyi Fashizm*, edited by Mikhail Romm, Maya Turovskaya, and Yurii Khaniutin (St. Petersburg: Seans, 2006), 264.

42. This story is told in the TV series *Zvezdnye Gody Lenfil'ma*, episode "Rasskaz o Fil'makh na Voennuiu Temu" (N+N for TV Channel Kul´tura, 2004).

43. Author's interview with Maya Turovskaya, January 18, 2008.

44. *Ordinary Fascism* is relatively widely available on DVD with German voiceover, but is extremely rare in English. Only once was it issued with the English voiceover, on two VHS tapes, inexplicably titled *Hitler: The Rise and Fall of German Nazism* (London: Spearhead, 1993).

45. Maya Turovskaya, "Ob Etoi Knige," in *Obyknovennyi Fashizm*, edited by Mikhail Romm, Maya Turovskaya, and Yurii Khaniutin (St. Petersburg: Seans, 2006), n.p.

46. The Russian original came out as *Obyknovennyi Fashizm*, edited by Mikhail Romm, Maya Turovskaya, and Yurii Khaniutin (St. Petersburg: Seans, 2006). For German translation, see *Der Gewöhnliche Faschismus: Ein Werkbuch zum Film von Michail Romm*, edited by Wolfgang Beilenhoff and Sabine Hänsgen in collaboration with Maya Turovskaya (Berlin: Vorwerk 8, 2009).

Chapter 6 — The Holocaust at the Lithuanian Film Studio

1. RGALI, f. 2329, op. 12, d. 1862. All quotes from the screenplay are from this text.

2. Miron Chernenko, Krasnaia Zvezda, *Zheltaia Zvezda: Kinematograficheskaia Istoriia Evreistva v Rossii, 1919–1999* (Moscow: Tekst, 2006), 189.

3. "Litva," in *Kholocaust na Territorii SSSR: Entsiklopediia*, edited by Ilya Altman (Moscow: Rosspen, 2009), 529.

4. Author's interview with Grigorii Kanovich, Nida, Lithuania, August 7, 2009.

5. Kiril Feferman, *Soviet Jewish Stepchild: The Holocaust in the Soviet Mindset, 1941–1964* (Saarbrücken: VDM Verlag Dr. Müller, 2009), 60–63.

6. For minutes of the meeting, see Laimonas Tapinas, *Laiškanešys, Paklydęs Dykumoje* [A messenger lost in the desert] (Vilnius: Alma Littera, 2009), 84–86. Thanks to Mindaugas Karbauski for translating the text from Lithuanian.

7. Mikhail Krutikov, "Constructing Jewish Identity in Contemporary Russian Fiction," in *Jewish Life after the USSR*, edited by Zvi Gitelman, Musya Glants, and M. I. Goldman (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2003), 252.

8. Gritsus would later work on such famous films as *Hamlet* (*Gamlet*, 1964) by Grigorii Kozintsev, and *No One Wanted to Die* (*Nikto ne Khotel Umirat'*, 1965) by Vytautas Žalakevičiaus.

9. Cited in Tapinas, *Laiškanešys*, 324–325.

10. Ibid., 324

11. The second novella in the film, which is based on Icchokas Meras's novel (analyzed in Chapter 9), is equally uncredited. In 2009, I asked Sevela's lawyer about this fact. She feigned ignorance, and blamed the similarity of Sevela's plots to the screenplay and the novel on coincidence.

12. Kinoshock Film Festival, Anapa, Russia, September 12–19, 2010.

CHAPTER 7 — THE HOLOCAUST WITHOUT THE JEWS

1. Author's interview with Grigorii Kanovich, Nida, Lithuania, August 7, 2009. From the 1960s to the 1980s, Kanovich served on the SRK of the Lithuanian Film Studio. In that capacity, he saw the inner workings of the studio.

2. Author's interview with Grigorii Kanovich, August 9, 2009.

3. Aleks Faitelson, "Pobeg iz Forta Smerti," *Dialog: Rossiisko-Izrailskii Almanakh Evrejskoj Kul'turi* 1 (1996), http://almanah-dialog.ru/archive/archive_1/av3.

4. RGALI, f. 2329, op. 12, d. 3983. Letter from October 11, 1961.

5. Bleiman's role in Soviet film history is controversial. According to the Russian film critic Evgenii Margolit, some (like Valerii Fomin) think that he is pure evil, but others (like Natalya Trauberg, a writer and a daughter of the great director Leonid Trauberg) consider him a righteous person. Personal communication with Evgenii Margolit, May 7, 2009.

6. In Claude Lanzmann's *Shoah* (1985), one of the testimonies explains that the Nazis forced inmates to use such terms in order to dehumanize the bodies of victims.

7. Denise Youngblood, *Russian War Films: On the Cinema Front, 1914–2005* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2007), 57.

8. Ibid., 125.

9. Ibid., 136.

10. It's anyone's guess whether Bleiman read European film criticism, but a similar debate about the depiction of the abject was unfolding in publications like *Cahiers du*

Cinéma in 1960s; see Jean-Michel Frodon, "Intersecting Paths" in his *Cinema and the Shoah: An Art Confronts the Tragedy of the Twentieth Century* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2010), 8–9. Bleiman was not far from his French counterparts in his concerns.

11. RGALI, f. 2329, op. 12, ed. 3983.

12. Ibid.

13. T. Chebotarevskaia, "O Svoem—Dlia Vsekh," *Sovetskaia Kul'tura*, December 5, 1963.

14. V. Ivanova, "Zhivye Boriutsia," *Moskovskii Komsomolets*, November 5, 1963.

15. Author's interview with Grigorii Kanovich, August 7, 2009.

16. Author's interview with Grigorii Kanovich, August 9, 2009.

17. RGALI, f. 2944, op. 4, ed. 1236, SRK letter from October 7, 1968.

18. RGALI, f. 2944, op. 4, ed. 1311.

19. RGALI, f. 2944, op. 4, ed. 1044.

20. For an analysis of *Drawing Fire upon Ourselves*, see Chapter 5 above.

21. For background on Mother Maria's activity during the war, see T. Stratton Smith, *The Rebel Nun, the Moving Story of Mother Maria of Paris* (Springfield, Ill.: Templegate, 1965), 147–252.

22. Author's telephone interview with Sergei Kolosov, August 22, 2009.

CHAPTER 8 — KALIK VERSUS GOSKINO

1. Author's interview with Mikhail Kalik, Jerusalem, July 25, 2008.

2. See chapter 14 for a brief analysis of the character of a war veteran in *Man Follows the Sun*.

3. Author's interview with Mikhail Kalik, July 25, 2008.

4. Ibid.

5. The same documentary footage was used by Roman Karmen in his *The Judgment of the Peoples* (1946), a documentary about the Nuremberg Trials.

6. In 1937, Valerii Chkalov, a Soviet aircraft test pilot, flew his plane from Moscow to Vancouver, setting a record for ultra-long flight, which pioneered the polar air route to the American Pacific Coast. Chkalov's accomplishment was widely celebrated in the Soviet Union.

7. These excerpts are taken from Soviet footage, reproduced in several Soviet documentaries: *Auschwitz* (1946), *Film Documents of Atrocities Committed by the German-Fascist Invaders* (*Kinodokumenty o zverstvakh nemetsko-fashistskikh zakhvatchikov*, 1946), and *The Judgment of the Peoples* (1946). On Soviet documentaries of Nazi atrocities, see Jeremy Hicks, "From Atrocity to Action: How Soviet Cinema Initiated the Holocaust Film: Imagining the Unimaginable in a Soviet Context," in *Justice, Politics, and Memory in*

Europe after the Second World War, edited by Suzanne Bardgett et al. (Portland, Ore.: Vallentine Mitchell, 2011), 249–266.

8. See Thomas Elsaesser, "'Rescued in Vain': Parapraxis and Deferred Action in Konrad Wolf's *Stars*" in his *Terror and Trauma: The Violence of the Past in Germany's Present* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, forthcoming).

9. Kalik recalls discussing this with Askoldov. Author's interview with Mikhail Kalik, July 25, 2008. For discussion of *Commissar*, see Chapter 13.

10. Balter's novel was first published in the popular literary magazine *Yunost'* (1962, issues 8 and 9).

11. Author's interview with Mikhail Kalik, Jerusalem, January 7, 2010.

12. RGALI, f. 2453, op. 4, ed. 2514, Screenplay *Goodbye, Boys!*

13. Khrushchev's speech is cited in Chapter 5.

14. RGALI, f. 2453, op. 4, ed. 2440. Minutes of the Artistic Council meeting, June 25, 1963. Baklanov (whose real name was Friedman) later wrote a script for a television film, *It Was a Month of May* (discussed in Chapter 7).

15. RGALI, f. 2453, op. 4, ed. 2440. Minutes of the Artistic Council meeting, June 25, 1963.

16. RGALI, f. 2453, op. 4, ed. 2440. Minutes of the Artistic Council meeting, July 19, 1963.

17. Author's interview with Mikhail Kalik, January 7, 2010.

18. RGALI, f. 2944, op. 4, ed. 338. Minutes of a discussion of a screenplay *Goodbye, Boys!*, August 28, 1963.

19. RGALI, f. 2453, op. 4, ed. 2440. Minutes of the Artistic Council meeting from November 19, 1963.

20. Author's interview with Mikhail Kalik, January 7, 2010.

21. Ibid.

22. RGALI, f. 2453, op. 4, ed. 2440. Minutes of the Artistic Council meeting, September 18, 1964 and an accompanying letter, September 21, 1964.

23. Author's interview with Mikhail Kalik, July 25, 2008.

24. RGALI, f. 2453, op. 4, ed. 2440. Minutes of the Artistic Council meeting from October 8, 1964. Author's interview with Mikhail Kalik, July 25, 2008.

25. Author's interview with Mikhail Kalik, January 7, 2010.

26. Author's interview with Mikhail Kalik, July 25, 2008.

27. RGALI, f. 2453, op. 4, ed. 2527. Minutes of a studio discussion, May 21, 1965.

28. RGALI, f. 2453, op. 4, ed. 2488. Minutes of the public meeting of workers of the Moscow car factory named after Likhachev, June 17, 1965.

29. RGALI, f. 2453, op. 4, ed. 2527. Letter from Mosfilm to Kalik, September 22, 1965.

30. Author's interview with Mikhail Kalik, July 25, 2008.

31. Author's interview with Mikhail Kalik, January 7, 2010. A reference to Suslov is also cited in an article by Natalya Balandina, "Poeticheskoe Prostranstvo Mikhaila Kalika," *Kinovedcheskie Zapiski* 57 (2002): 371–372.

32. The film was anticipated by warm reports from the sets: for example, *Moskovskaia Pravda*, May 22, 1964, and *Sovetskii Ekran* 13 (1964): 7. But its release two years later was barely covered: V. Barebyshev, "Zdrastvuite, Mal'chiki," *Kaliningradskaia Pravda*, January 30, 1966; B. Galanov, "U Zavetnoi Grani," *Sovetskii Ekran* 1 (1966): 4–5.

CHAPTER 9 — *STALEMATE* (1965) BETWEEN THE FILMMAKER AND THE CENSORS

1. Icchokas (Yitzhak) Meras, "Vechnyi Shakh," *Druzhba Narodov* 8 (August 1965): 100–167. For English translation of the novel, see Icchokas Meras, *Stalemate*, translated by Jonas Zdanys (New York: Other Press, 2005). Here, the novel is quoted in my translation.

2. Lev Anninskii, "Mir Derzhitsia?" *Druzhba Narodov* 7 (July 1996): 219.

3. Icchokas Meras, *Gel Tonas Lopas* (Vilnius: Vaga, 1960). For Russian translation, see *Zheltyi Loskut*, translated by I. Dektoraite (Moscow: Detgiz, 1963).

4. Author's interview with Icchokas Meras in Holon, Israel, February 6, 2011.

5. On resistance in Vilnius ghetto, including a first-person account, see Herman Kruk, *The Last Days of the Jerusalem of Lithuania: Chronicles from the Vilna Ghetto and the Camps, 1939–1944*, translated by Barbara Harshav, edited by Benjamin Harshav (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002).

6. The novel was first serialized in a local literary journal, then was published as a book. See Icchokas Meras, "Lygiosios Trunka Akimirka," *Pergalė* 9–10 (1963); Icchokas Meras, *Lygiosios Trunka Akimirka* (Vilnius: Vaga, 1963). Lithuanian publication was soon followed by Yiddish translation: Icchokas Meras, "Eibiker Shakh," translated by B. Halpern and A. Zinger, *Sovietish Heimland* 5 (1964): 3–79.

7. Author's interview with Icchokas Meras, December 30, 2009.

8. Minutes of the *Druzhba Narodov* editorial meeting, July 8, 1963. Private archive of Icchokas Meras.

9. Ibid. For a more extensive discussion of Soviet definition of naturalism, see Chapter 7.

10. Icchokas (Yitzhak) Meras, "Na Chem Derzhitsia Mir," *Yunost'* 4 (1966): 18–55.

11. Icchokas (Yitzhak) Meras, *Na Chem Derzhitsia Mir: Nichia Dlitsia Mgnovenie* (Moscow: Khudozhestvennaia Literatura, 1966); Icchokas (Yitzhak) Meras, "Vechnyi Shakh," in *Voennye Povesti* (Moscow: Izviestiia, 1966).

12. Author's interview with Mikhail Kalik, Jerusalem, January 7, 2010.

13. LLMA, f. 29, op. 3, d. 100.

14. LLMA, f. 29, op. 3, d. 100, all further quotes are from the same text.

15. LLMA, f. 29, op. 3, d. 100. Letter, November 5, 1965.

16. LLMA, f. 29, op. 3, d. 100. Letter, November 9, 1965.

17. Kalik and Grigoraitis had a telephone conversation, the content of which is described in Grigoraitis's letter.

18. LLMA, f. 29, op. 3, d. 100. Letter, November 13, 1965.

19. LLMA, f. 29, op. 3, d. 100. Letter, December 2, 1965.

20. These ideas later became widespread in the Soviet dissident movement. See Vladimir Albrecht, *Kak byt' Svidelem*, offprint, 1976. Available at http://www.vehi.net/samizdat/albreht.html#_ftn1; Vladimir Bukovskii. *I Vozvraschaetsia Veter . . .* (New York: Khronika, 1978).

21. LLMA, f. 29, op. 3, d. 100. Letter, December 5, 1965.

22. This meeting is mentioned in Kalik's letter to J. Lozoraitis and M. Zingeris. LLMA, f. 29, op. 3, d. 100, November 5, 1966.

23. LLMA, f. 29, op. 3, d. 100. Letter, September 5, 1966.

24. LLMA, f. 29, op. 3, d. 100. Letter, October 8, 1966.

25. Roman Dolzhanskii, "Budet Tiazhelo," *Kommersant*, February 5, 2010.

26. Olga Egoshina, "Vyigrat' Smert,'" *Novye Izvestia*, February 16, 2010.

27. Maria Sedykh, "Lubov' k Geometrii," *Itogi*, February 15, 2010.

28. Marina Davydova, "Nichia bez Pravil," *Izvestia*, February 11, 2010; Grigorii Zaslavskii, "Bez slez, bez Sozhalenia," *Nezavisimaia Gazeta*, February 15, 2010; Roman Dolzhanskii, "Kholodnyi Pat." *Kommersant*, February 11, 2010.

29. Dina Goder, "V Ozhidanii Smerti," *Vremia Novostei*, February 11, 2010. Other positive review include Alla Shenderova, "Getto Vselenskogo Masshtaba," *Novye Novosti*, February 11, 2010; Alena Karas, "Vechnyi Shakh," *Rossiiskaia Gazeta*, February 15, 2010; Marina Timasheva, "Rozhdennye, Nerozhdennye, i Ubiennye," Radio *Svoboda*, February 13, 2010; Marina Tokareva, "Aksioma Karbauskisa," *Novaia Gazeta*, February 15, 2010; Olga Galakhova, "Prem'era v RAMTe: Igra Tsenoiu v Zhizn,'" *RIA Novosti* February 12, 2010, www.rian.ru; Irina Alpatova, "Vybor Khoda," *Kul'tura*, February 18, 2010.

CHAPTER 10 — KALIK'S LAST PHANTOM

1. Betty Jean Lifton, "What Was Janusz Korczak?" Introduction to Janusz Korczak, *Ghetto Diary* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), xxix.

2. In an informal survey that I conducted in 2010, all of my respondents, Russians in their sixties and seventies, were able to recall Korczak's story in great detail, but were convinced that he was an ethnic Pole.

3. Janusz Korczak, *Izbrannye Pedagogicheskie Proizvedeniia* (Moscow: Prosveschenie, 1966).

4. Aleksandr Sharov, "Janusz Korczak i Ego Deti," *Novyi Mir* (October 1966): 152–179.

5. Author's interview with Mikhail Kalik, Jerusalem, January 7, 2010.

6. For English version of the memoir, see Igor Newerly, "Preface" to Janusz Korczak, *Ghetto Diary* (New York: Holocaust Library, 1978), 67–77.

7. RGALI, f., 2944, op. 6, d. 696. Screenplay *King Matt and the Old Doctor.* My translation is based, in part, on English translations of Korczak's writings cited here.

8. Janusz Korczak, *Ghetto Diary* (New York: Holocaust Library, 1978), 146.

9. Ibid., 188.

10. Janusz Korczak, *When I Am Little Again* and *The Child's Right to Respect*, translated by E. P. Kulawiec (Lanham, Md.: University Press of America, 1992), 7–15.

11. Author's interview with Mikhail Kalik, January 7, 2010. The Nazi footage of the Warsaw ghetto that Kalik planned to use later appeared in a Polish film, *Korczak* (dir. Andrzej Wajda, 1990). For the full Nazi footage of the ghetto and the history of its filming, see the documentary *A Film Unfinished* (dir. Yael Hersonski, 2010).

12. Mikhail Kalik, introduction to "Korol' Mateush i Staryi Doktor," *Narod i Zemlia* 1 (1984): 106.

13. Korczak, *Ghetto Diary*, 175.

14. This particular phrase, as poignant as it is in the screenplay, is taken out of context. In Korczak's original text, the phrase occurs in his discussion of different phases of human life, and refers simply to a middle age of forty-nine, which he considers a happiest time for a person. See Korczak, *Ghetto Diary*, 145.

15. This entire scene is based on the witness account by Nahum Remba, a Judenrat official. Cited in Lifton, "Who Was Janusz Korczak?" xxviii.

16. There are several versions of the story about the Nazi offer to Korczak, but they differ only in minor details, whereas his refusal to leave the children remains the same in all versions. For further discussion, see Yitzhak Perlis, "O Zhizni i Tvorchestve Ianusha Korchaka," introduction to Janusz Korczak, *Izbrannoe* (Jerusalem: Biblioteka Aliya, 1990), 40.

17. This is a quotation from Korczak's "Rules of Life" essay. For a Russian translation, see Janusz Koczak, "Pravila Zhizni," in his *Izbrannye Pedagogichskie Proizvedeniia* (Moscow: Prosveschenie, 1966), 368.

18. Kalik, introduction, 106.

19. RGALI, f. 2944, op. 5, d. 165. Resolution of the Artistic Council, October 10, 1966.

20. RGALI, f. 2944, op. 5, d. 165. Letter, October 20, 1966.

21. Author's interview with Mikhail Kalik, January 7, 2010.

22. RGALI, f. 2944, op. 5, d. 165. Letter, January 22, 1967.

23. Kalik, introduction, 106.

24. RGALI, f. 2944, op. 5, d. 165. Letter, February 10, 1967.

25. Author's interview with Mikhail Kalik, January 7, 2010.

26. Zvi Gitelman, *A Century of Ambivalence: The Jews of Russia and the Soviet Union, 1881 to the Present* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001), 175.

27. Ibid., 174.

28. Nati Kantorovich, "Vvedenie," in *Park Sovetskogo Perioda: Sovetsko-Izrailskie Otnoshenia v Zerkale Politicheskoi Karikatury*, edited by B. Sandler and I. Sandler (Moscow: Gesharim, 2009), 16.

29. For dramatic examples of anti-Israel political cartoons, see Sandler and Sandler, *Park Sovetskogo Perioda*.

30. RGALI, f. 2944, op. 5, d. 191. Letter, March 1967, n.d.

31. Unfortunately, today Mikaelian does not recall any such plans. Author's telephone interview with Sergei Mikaelian, April 14, 2009.

32. RGALI, f. 2944, op. 5, d. 191. Letters, March 1967. Select documents about *Babi Yar* are included in Fomin, *Kino i Vlast'*, 312–313.

33. RGALI, f. 2944, op. 5, d. 209a, Review of *Nuremberg Diaries* by M. Bleiman, March 29, 1967.

34. RGALI, f. 2944, op. 5, d. 209a. Letter, June 23, 1967.

35. RGALI, f. 2944, op. 5, ed. 209a. Resolution of SRK about *Nuremberg Diaries*, July 8, 1967.

36. Mikhail Kalik "Otkrytoe Pis'mo k Russkoi Intelligentsii," May 2, 1971. Personal archive of Mikhail Kalik. The letter was published in *Sobranie Materialov Samizdata* vol. 22, document no. 1014 (Munich: Samizdat Archive Association, 1970–1972).

37. In Russian film publications, there has been only one scholarly article about Kalik's films: Natalya Balandina, "Poeticheskoe Prostranstvo Mikhaila Kalika," *Kinovedcheskie Zapiski* 57 (2002): 371–372.

38. Author's interview with Mikhail Kalik, Jerusalem, July 25, 2008.

39. Kalik, introduction, 106. Curiously, at that time Israelis did make a film about Korczak: *Korchak VeHaeladim* (*Sie Sind Frei, Doktor Korczak*) was an Israeli-German co-production directed by a veteran Jewish filmmaker, Aleksander Ford, in 1975. It was released in the United States in 1976 under the title *The Martyr.*

40. Mikhail Kalik, "Korol' Mateush i Staryi Doktor," *Narod i Zemlia* 1(1984): 105–149. This publication lists Kalik as the sole author, although in his foreword he clearly calls Sharov his co-author.

41. Mikhail Kalik and Aleksandr Sharov, "HaMelekh Matia ve'haDoktor haZaken," in Mikhail Kalik, *Sirtei Mikhael Kalik* (Jerusalem, 1988).

42. Mikhail Kalik and Aleksandr Sharov, "Korol' Mateush i Staryi Doktor," *Ekran i Scena* 28 (July 18–25, 1996): 8–10.

43. Chernenko, *Krasnaia Zvezda*, 146.

44. Mikhail Kalik and Aleksandr Sharov, "Korol' Mateush i Staryi Doktor," *Lechaim* 4–6 (2005), http://www.lechaim.ru/ARHIV/156/matiush.htm.

CHAPTER II — THE FILM THAT COST A CAREER

1. According to Timothy Snyder, of the 9 million of Belarus population in 1941, about 1.6 million were killed by the Germans, including 700,000 prisoners of war, 500,000 Jews, and 320,000 people counted as partisans. Timothy Snyder, *Bloodlands: Europe between Hitler and Stalin* (New York: Basic Books, 2010), 250–251.

2. Most of the art featured in the film as a character's paintings and sculpture (Egor's) is anachronistic, and belongs to the movement of the "severe style" (*surovyi stil'*), which appeared in the Soviet Union in the 1960s.

3. About 7,000 German and Austrian Jews were deported to the Minsk ghetto. Hamburg Jews were congregated together in a separate group within the German-Jewish subghetto. See "Minsk," in *Kholocaust na Territorii SSSR: Entsiklopediia*, edited by Ilya Altman (Moscow: Rosspen, 2009), 599.

4. Historically, Belarusian Jews in ghetto were marked by yellow round patches, whereas German Jews were required to wear patches with Stars of David and a letter "J" for "Jude."

5. "Minsk," 600–601.

6. Author's interview with Valentin Vinogradov, Moscow, June 16, 2011.

7. *Eastern Corridor* was shown at the Moscow International Film Festival in 2008, and on Detective-Fest annual festival in 2009. Belarus TV made a documentary about the film, *Kilometers of War* (*Kilometry Voiny*). Filmmaker Andrei Kudinenko made a montage short, *Vinogradov's Dreams* (*Sny Vinogradova*). A journalist and film critic, Sergei Kuznetsov, included a discussion of the film in his webcast about Soviet Jewish cinema, *A Flickering Jew* (*Mertsaiushchii Evrei*).

8. Aleksandr Fedorov, "Strukturnyi Analiz Mediateksta: Stereotipy Sovetskogo Kinematograficheskogo Obraza Voiny i Fil'm V. Vinogradova 'Vostochnyi Koridor' (1966)." *Voprosy Kul'turologii* 6 (2011): 110–116.

9. Author's interview with Valentin Vinogradov, June 16, 2011.

10. Vida T. Johnson and Graham Petrie, *The Films of Andrei Tarkovsky: A Visual Fugue* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), 21.

11. Although Vinogradov claims that the drowning scene was fully fictional, there were some historical precedents of executions of Jews by drowning or by shooting them in rivers.

12. The cantor was probably David Mikhailovich (Moiseevich) Styskin, a cantor of the Leningrad Choral Synagogue in the 1960s.

13. RGALI, f. 2944, op. 4, d. 666. Belarus Goskino memo, January 29, 1966.

14. RGALI, f. 2944, op. 4, ed. 666. Minutes of the Goskino meeting, February 11, 1966.

15. Valentin Vinogradov's diary from 1966. Private archive of Valentin Vinogradov.

16. A. Kapler, "Taina Rozhdenia Plokhikh Fil'mov," *Literaturnaia Gazeta*, August 16, 1966, 6–7. Aleksei (né Lazar') Kapler was an interesting character in his own right: aside from his work on several prominent Soviet films, he had an affair with Stalin's daughter Svetlana, following which he was arrested and sent to a gulag.

17. RGALI, f. 2944, op. 4, d. 666. Letter from A. Kuleshov and V. Guzanov, August 1966, n.d.

18. Valentin Vinogradov's diary from 1966. Private archive of Valentin Vinogradov.

19. RGALI, f. 2944, op. 4, d. 666. Memo, October 21, 1966.

20. RGALI, f. 2944, op. 4, d. 666. Telegram, October 22, 1966.

21. RGALI, f. 2944, op. 4, d. 666, Memo, October 22, 1966.

22. Valentin Vinogradov's diary from 1966. Private archive of Valentin Vinogradov.

23. Valentin Vinogradov's diary from 1966. Private archive of Valentin Vinogradov.

24. RGALI, f. 2944, op. 4, d. 666. Memo, January 9, 1967.

25. Masherov's opposition to Vinogradov and Pilatovich's advocacy does not mean that Masherov was a conservative and Pilatovich was a liberal. In the case of Elem Klimov's film *Come and See*, they played the opposite roles (see Chapter 13).

26. M. Bleiman, "Net, o Vkusakh Sporiat! Broskaia Krasivost' i Podlinnost' Chustv na Ekrane," *Literaturnaia Gazeta*, September 13, 1967.

27. T. Ivanova, "'Modern' i Sovremennyi Stil'," *Sovetskoe Kino*, March 23, 1968. The same ideas are espoused in her later extended article, T. Ivanova, "Trudno—Esche Trudnee—Sovsem Trudno," in *Ekran, 1969–1970*, edited by S. Chertok (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1970), 90–95.

28. N. Ignat'eva, "Mnimye Effekty," *Sovetskii Ekran* 6 (1968): 5.

29. A. Nevskii, "Vostochnyi Koridor," *Iskusstvo Kino* 3 (1968): 51–52.

30. E. Trefilova, "Zamysel i Voploschenie," *Udmurtskaia Pravda*, March 3, 1968.

31. I. Levshina, "Final'nyi Schet Plus Kommentarii," *Sovetskii Ekran* 12 (1967): 2.

32. A letter from a Soviet Bureau for Propaganda of Film Art, September 19, 1967. Personal archive of Valentin Vinogradov.

33. Fedorov, "Strukturnyi Analiz," 113.

CHAPTER 12 — MUSLIMS INSTEAD OF *MUSSLMANS*

1. Jonathan Trigg, *Hitler's Jihadis: Muslim Volunteers of the Waffen-SS* (Mill, UK: History Press, 2008), 35–67; O. V. Roman'ko, *Musul'manskie Legiony vo Vtoroi Mirovoi Voine* (Moscow: Transitkniga, 2004), 229–231. According to Roman'ko, all together about 300,000 Soviet Muslims served in the German forces, the majority of them (180,000)

from Central Asia. For a personal account of participation in Turkestan Legion, see Stephen Lee Crane, *Survivor from an Unknown War: The Life of Isakjan Narzikul* (Upland, Pa.: Diane Publishing, 1999).

2. The entire Crimean Tartar people were uprooted from their homeland and deported in collective retribution for collaboration with the Nazis.

3. Simonov lived in Tashkent at that time, and the scene was filmed in his apartment. Like Simonov's poem "Wait for Me," a poem by Ghafur Ghulom, "You Are Not an Orphan" (1942) also served as an inspiration for a film of the same name. See Chapter 5 for an analysis of the film.

4. Nekhama Lifshitz (née Lifschitzaite) is a famous Yiddish singer. Born in 1927 in Kaunas, Lithuania, she spent the war in evacuation in Uzbekistan. In 1969, she emigrated to Israel. Lifshitz is not credited in the film, and the song is used in the film without her knowledge or permission. Instead of crediting her performance of the Yiddish song, the credits list the use of "Uzbek folk melodies." Thanks to Nekhama Lifshitz for identifying the song for me.

5. This phrase, familiar the world over as a Nazi slogan adorning the gates of Buchenwald, is misattributed to Nietzsche. This phrase, referring to ancient Greek judicial principle, "to each his own," was popularized by its use in the Prussian kingdom, where it symbolized liberalism and religious tolerance of the empire.

6. Although Nazis did not crucify Jews, the scene of crucifixion has at least vague historical basis: some priests were crucified in Buchenwald. See Radomír Luža, *The Resistance in Austria, 1938–1945* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), 70.

7. *Nazi Concentration Camps* (dir. George Stevens, 1945) was not widely seen in the Soviet Union. By choosing to show excerpts from this film, rather than footage from the more familiar Soviet documentaries about the Nazi camps, the director probably was looking to create a greater impact on the viewer.

8. Even more striking to a Western eye is a scene in *Moabit Notebook*, where the rows and rows of soldiers in Nazi uniforms—Soviet POWs recruited to serve in Muslim Legions—perform namaz.

9. In actual Buchenwald, on which fictional Schpilhausen is based, the death toll was high, but there were no gas chambers, and the camp was not primarily a destination for Jewish inmates in the same way as the death camps in Poland were. The camp in the film is a composite image.

10. RGALI, f. 2944, op. 4, d. 1363. Rozhkov's letter to Faiziev, n.d.

11. Author's e-mail correspondence with Furkat Faiziev, a son of Latif Faiziev, December 3, 2011. Following our telephone conversation, Furkat Faiziev sent me a letter based on his recollections, and on Latif Faiziev's memoirs from their private archive. Unfortunately, Furkat Faiziev was very protective of his father's legacy and did not give me access to this archive. His letter presented an extremely sanitized Soviet-style narrative of Faiziev's life and work. I supplemented this source with informal

interviews with more forthcoming filmmakers who knew Faiziev père and worked for years at Uzbekfilm.

12. RGALI, f. 2944, op. 4, d. 1363. Uzbekfilm memo, January 13, 1967.

13. RGALI, f. 2944, op. 4, d. 1363. Uzbek Goskino memo, January 11, 1967.

14. RGALI, f. 2944, op. 4, d. 1363. Bleiman's letter, January 22, 1967.

15. Ibid.

16. The story of Mother Maria became a plot of a Soviet film some years later; see Chapter 7.

17. RGALI, f. 2944, op. 4, d. 1363. Bleiman's letter, January 22, 1967.

18. RGALI, f. 2944, op. 4, d. 1363. B. Andronikashvili's letter, n.d.

19. The Soviet losses during World War II continue to be a controversial topic. During Khrushchev's era, the circulated number was 20 million. Today the estimate is close to 27 million people. However, it would be more accurate to place Jewish deaths in the context of civilian deaths. In the Soviet Union, approximately 7 million civilians died as a result of World War II, out of them about 40 percent were Jews. Michael Ellman and S. Maksudov, "Soviet Deaths in the Great Patriotic War: A Note," *Europe Asia Studies* 46, no. 4 (1994): 671–681.

20. For analysis of Soviet rhetoric, which silenced discussion of the Holocaust and the Jewish experience of the war, see Timothy Snyder, *Bloodlands: Europe between Hitler and Stalin* (New York: Basic Books, 2010), 334–335 and 376–377.

21. RGALI, f. 2944, op. 4, d. 1363. Goskino memo, March 4, 1967.

22. RGALI, f. 2944, op. 4, d. 1363. Bleiman's letter, April 3, 1967. The film *Arena*, which is, indeed, a very weak film, is discussed in Chapter 7.

23. See his review, M. Bleiman, "Net, o Vkusakh Sporiat!" and its analysis in Chapter 11.

24. RGALI, f. 2944, op. 4, d. 1363. L. Balikhin's letter, n.d.

25. For dramatic examples of such rhetoric, see B. Sandler and I. Sandler, *Park Sovetskogo Perioda: Sovetsko-Izrailskie Otnoshenia v Zerkale Politicheskoi Karikatury* (Moscow, Jerusalem: Gesharim, 2009).

26. RGALI, f. 2944, op. 4, d. 1363. Uzbekfilm memo, June 2, 1967.

27. RGALI, f. 2944, op. 4, d. 1363. SRK memo from June 16, 1967.

28. RGALI, f. 2944, op. 4, d. 1363. Bleiman's letter, July 27, 1967.

29. RGALI, f. 2944, op. 4, d. 1363. SRK memo, January 10, 1968.

30. RGALI, f. 2944, op. 4, d. 1363. Uzbekfilm memo, August 23, 1968.

31. RGALI, f. 2944, op. 4, d. 1363. Goskino memo, October 2, 1968.

32. RGALI, f. 2944, op. 4, d. 1363. Goskino memo, November 22, 1968.

33. "Syny Otechestva," *Sovetskaia Kul'tura*, April 26, 1969.

CHAPTER 13 — *COMMISSAR* (1967/1988)

1. Aleksandr Askoldov, an interview included on the DVD *Comissar* (New York: Kino International, 2007).

2. Annette Insdorf, *Indelible Shadows: Film and the Holocaust*, 3rd ed. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 56–57.

3. For detailed readings of the film, see Joe Andrew, "Birth Equals Rebirth? Space, Narrative, and Gender in *The Commissar*," *Studies in Russian and Soviet Cinema* 1, no. 1 (2007): 27–44; Daniela Berghahn, "Do the Right Thing? Female Allegories of Nation in Aleksandr Askoldov's *Komissar* (USSR, 1967/87) and Konrad Wolf's *Der Geteilte Himmel* (GDR, 1964)," *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* 26 (2006): 561–577; Maria Deppermann, "The Genealogy of the Woman Commissar in Soviet Culture: Askol'dov's Film *The Commissar*—A Farewell to Arms of Socialist Realism," in *Modern War on Stage and Screen*, edited by Wolfgang Görtschacher und Holger Klein (Lewiston, N.Y.: Edwin Mellen, 1997), 559–583; Elena Monastireva-Ansdell, "Redressing the Commissar: Thaw Cinema Revises Soviet Structuring Myths," *Russian Review* 65, no. 2 (2006): 230–249; Graham H. Roberts, "The Sound of Silence: From Grossman's Berdichev to Askoldov's *Commissar*," in *Russian and Soviet Film Adaptations of Literature, 1900–2001: Screening the Word*, edited by Stephen Hutchings and Anat Vernitski (London: Routledge, 2005), 89–99.

4. The prayer, pronounced indistinctly in an Ashkenazi accent of Hebrew, is "Hashkiveinu," part of the daily *Maariv* service. The Russian text is not a translation of the Hebrew, and the Hebrew, unlike Yiddish, is inauthentic.

5. Askoldov, an interview included on the DVD *Comissar.*

6. Author's telephone interview with Aleksandr Askoldov, November 25, 2012. The same story is told in William Wolf, "Askoldov! The Man Who Made '*Commissar*,'" *Film Comment* 24, no. 3 (June 1988): 72.

7. In later interviews about this scene, Askoldov refers to "crematoriums" and "gas chambers." See Askoldov, an interview included with the DVD *Comissar*; Anne Williamson, "Askoldov! The Man Who Made '*Commissar*,'" *Film Comment* 24, no. 3 (June 1988): 69–72.

8. In a later interview, Askoldov claims that he made a deliberate choice to include dialog in Yiddish in order to express "respect for the tradition of Yiddish films that existed in the twenties and for the rich contributions of Yiddish writers." Wolf, "Askoldov!," 68.

9. In the original screenplay, there was a longer scene of Vavilova visiting rabbi Ginzburg in a synagogue; RGALI, f. 2468, op. 6, d. 223. Minutes of the discussion at the Gorky Film Studio, January 11, 1967.

10. I owe this observation to Evgenii Margolit.

11. The soundtrack in the film is by Alfred Schnittke, a composer famous for his atonal music. Schnittke was also Jewish and out of favor with the regime.

12. According to Askoldov, the name Maria was suggested by Grossman's notebooks (RGALI, f. 2468, op 6, d. 221. Minutes of the SRK discussion, September 7, 1965). For a discussion of Christian religious symbolism in the film, see Andrew, "Birth Equals Rebirth?" On the connotations of the name Kiril in both Babel's *Red Cavalry* and in Askoldov's *Commissar*, see Monastireva-Ansdell, "Redressing the Commissar," 244.

13. Monastireva-Ansdell, "Redressing the Commissar," 244–245.

14. Rolan Bykov, an interview included on the DVD *Komissar* (Russian Cinema Council, 2004).

15. For detailed account, see Elena Stishova, "Strasti po Komissaru," *Iskusstvo Kino* 1 (1989): 110–121; reprinted in English translation as Elena Stishova, "Passions over 'Commissar,'" *Wide Angle* 12, no. 4 (1990): 62–75; Valerii Fomin, "Komissar" in *Polka* (Moscow: NII Kinoiskusstva, 1992), 46–76. For Askoldov's own account, see Alexander Batchan, "The Uncompromised *Commissar:* An Interview with Alexander Askoldov," *Cineaste* 17, no. 1 (1989): 9–11; as well as Williamson, "Askoldov!," 69–72.

16. RGALI, f. 2468, op. 6, d. 221. Minutes of the SRK discussion, September 7, 1965.

17. For the text of the letter, see Fomin, "Komissar," 50–51.

18. For the text of the document, see Fomin, "Komissar," 51–52.

19. Williamson,"Askoldov!," 69.

20. Bykov, an interview included on DVD *Komissar.*

21. RGALI, f. 2468, op. 6, d. 223. Minutes of the discussion at Gorky Film Studio, January 11, 1967.

22. Ibid.

23. RGALI, f. 2468, op. 6, ed. 224. Minutes of the Artistic Council meeting, August 21, 1967.

24. Ibid.

25. Ibid.

26. Ibid.

27. Monastireva-Ansdell, "Redressing the Commissar," 247.

28. Williamson, "Askoldov!," 69–72

29. For the text of the letter, see Fomin, "Komissar," 60–61.

30. For excerpts from these reviews, see Fomin, "Komissar," 62–68.

31. For excerpts from the minutes of the meetings, see Fomin, "Komissar," 73–75.

32. Cited in Stishova, "Passions," 73.

33. Author's interview with Aleksandr Askoldov, November 25, 2012. This story is also told in David Howard, "Son of Glasnost: Alexandr Askoldov," *The World and I* 8 (1988): 230–235.

34. For several other documents evidencing Askoldov's persecution by the heads of Soviet film industry, see Valerii Fomin, ed., *Kinematograf Ottepeli: Dokumenty i Svedetel'stva* (Moscow: Materik, 1998), 277–281.

35. Herbert Marshall, *Masters of the Soviet Cinema: Crippled Creative Biographies* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1983).

36. This novel has been published in Germany, where Askoldov has been living, dividing his time between Berlin and Moscow: Alexander Askoldow, *Heimkehr nach Jerusalem* (Berlin: Volk und Welt, 1998).

37. On Soviet anti-Zionist propaganda films and on Jewish characters in narrative cinema, see Miron Chernenko, *Krasnaia Zvezda, Zheltaia Zvezda: Kinematograficheskaia Istoriia Evreistva v Rossii, 1919–1999* (Moscow: Tekst, 2006), 187–233.

38. RGALI, f. 2944, op. 6, d. 2695. Screenplay by Vasil' Bykov, November 12, 1972.

39. Ibid.

40. Shepitko is cited in L. Karakhan, "Krutoi Put' *Voskhozhdeniia*," *Iskusstvo Kino* 10 (1976): 89.

41. RGALI, f. 2944, op. 4, d. 3524. Letter from SRK to Mosfilm, July 18, 1975.

42. Karakhan, "Krutoi Put'"; Zoya Kutorga and Ovidii Gorchakov, "Vozvraschennoe Proshloe," *Iskusstvo Kino* 5 (May 1977): 55–60; Elena Stishova, "Khronika i Legenda," *Iskusstvo Kino* 9 (1977): 30–41.

43. A. Romanenko, "Voskhozhdenie: O Fil'me Larisy Shepitko," *Pravda*, September 6, 1977; Evg. Gromov, "Poslednii Poedinok Sotnikova," *Literaturnaia Gazeta*, April 20, 1977.

44. The quotation is from Zoya Kutorga, from her conversation with Ovidii Gorchakov in Kutorga and Gorchakov, "Vozvraschennoe Proshloe," 58.

45. In some way, *Come and See* can be seen as an early perestroika film. Although it was made before Gorbachev came to power, it was released and recognized as a masterpiece in perestroika times.

46. See testimonies by Elem Klimov, "Ia Sam Vybral Svoi Udel . . . ," and by Ales Adamovich (his scriptwriter), "Kakia Nevolia Slasche . . . ," in Fomin, *Kino i Vlast'*, 173–190 and 209–222. Curiously, unlike Vinogradov, both Klimov and Adamovich recall that Masherov took their project under his wing, whereas Pilatovich played the role of an oppressor.

CHAPTER 14 — AN ALTERNATIVE TRACK

1. Cited in Yuri Slezkine, *The Jewish Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), 288.

2. Cited ibid., 292.

3. Yitzhak Arad, *In the Shadow of the Red Banner: Soviet Jews in the War against Nazi Germany* (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem; New York: Gefen, 2010), 8–11.

4. Ibid., 3–6; Yitzhak Arad, *The Holocaust in the Soviet Union* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press; Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 2009), 505–516; Mordechai Altshuler, "Jewish Warfare and the Participation of Jews in Combat in the Soviet Union as Reflected in Soviet and Western Historiography," in *Bitter Legacy: Confronting the Holocaust in the USSR*, edited by Zvi Gitelman (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997), 151–167.

5. Arad, *In the Shadow of the Red Banner*, 6, 24, 116–117.

6. Ibid., 115–126.

7. Ibid., 22–24; 125.

8. See Jarrod Tanny, *City of Rogues and Schnorrers: Russia's Jews and the Myth of Old Odessa* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2011), 48–82.

9. Miron Chernenko, *Krasnaia Zvezda, Zheltaia Zvezda: Kinematograficheskaia Istoriia Evreistva v Rossii, 1919–1999* (Moscow: Tekst, 2006), 117.

10. RGALI, f. 2450, op. 2, d. 479. Screenplay *Two Fighters*, 1942, n.d.

11. Mark Bernes, "Soldaty Velikoi Otechestvennoi (O Rabote v Kino)," in *Mark Bernes v Vospominaniiakh Sovremennikov* (Moscow: Molodaia Gvardiia, 2005), 122–124.

12. Author's interview with Alexander Donskoi, Moscow, June 25, 2011.

13. RGALI, f. 2450, op. 2, d. 479. Screenplay *Two Fighters*, 1942, n.d.

14. For a sample of positive reviews in influential publications, see G. Aleksandrov "Rodnoi Brat Sily," *Ogonek'* 40–41 (1943): 14; Savva Golovaninskii, "Frontovaia Druzhba," *Krasnaia Zvezda*, October 6, 1943, 3; V. Pudovkin, "O Fil'me 'Dva Boitsa'," *Pravda*, October 6, 1943, 4.

15. On the censure of *The Big Life*, see Evgenii Margolit and Viacheslav Shmyrov, *Iz'iatoe Kino* (Moscow: Dubl'-D, 1995), 93–95.

16. In his entire prolific career, Sverdlin played two Jewish roles—the very first one in *Wait for Me*, and his very last one, in Kalik's TV film *The Price* based on the Arthur Miller play, where Sverdlin plays an old Jewish furniture seller, Solomon. Kalik made *The Price* in 1969, right before his emigration to Israel, following which the film was shelved.

17. See, for instance, O. Leonidov, "Zhdi Menia," *Komsomol'skaia Pravda*, November 11, 1943, 4; L. Pogozheva, "Zhdi Menia," *Vecherniaia Moskva*, November 15, 1943, 3.

18. Chernenko, *Krasnaia Zvezda*, 119.

19. RGALI, f. 2450, op. 2, d. 601. Screenplay *Wait for Me*, n.d.

20. David Shneer, *Through Soviet Jewish Eyes: Photography, War, and the Holocaust* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2011), 325.

21. Ibid., 233.

22. I. G. Bolshakov, *Sovetskoe Kinoiskusstvo v Gody Velikoi Otechestvennoi Voiny* (Moscow: Goskinoizdat, 1948), 58, 75–77.

23. For instance, *Guadalcanal Diary* (1943), *Air Force* (1943), and *Pride of the Marines* (1945). For analysis of characters of Jewish soldiers in Hollywood war film, see K.R.M. Short,

"Hollywood Fights Anti-Semitism, 1940–1945," in *Film and Radio Propaganda in World War II*, edited by K.R.M. Short (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1981), 156–158.

24. Smoktunovskii also played a remarkable Jewish character in the 1990 Holocaust drama *Ladies' Taylor* (see Chapter 16). Smoktunovskii was rumored to have Jewish roots. Whether or not this is true, he was tremendously sympathetic toward Jews. It helped that his beloved wife was Jewish, and his mother-in-law, whom he admired, was the Yiddish writer Shira Gorshman (1906–2001), an interesting character in her own right. Gorshman had worked on a kibbutz in Palestine, founded a Jewish commune in Crimea, served as a war correspondent during World War II, traveled to Birobidjan, and continued writing in Yiddish during the darkest Soviet times. In 1989 she emigrated to Israel.

25. In 1946, the novel appeared in a literary journal, *Znamia*, in issues 8–10.

26. Naum Kleiman, a talk given at the Moscow Book Festival, June 12, 2011.

27. RGALI, f. 2329, op 12, d. 1140. Screenplay *In the Trenches of Stalingrad*, n.d.

28. Chernenko, *Krasnaia Zvezda*, 137.

29. Ibid., 138.

30. Nekrasov was also keenly aware of Jewish losses during the war and later participated in the struggle to memorialize it. In 1966, in his native Kiev, Nekrasov took part in an underground memorial meeting organized by Jewish activists in Babi Yar. He invited his famous friends, writers and filmmakers, to come, and he spoke at the meeting. This was an act of tremendous bravery, as the participants later were tracked by the KGB and charged with Zionist agitation. In 1969, Nekrasov was severely reprimanded by the authorities for his repeated participation in the meetings in Babi Yar. For a brief biography of the writer, see "Nekrasov, Viktor Platonovich," in *Biographical Dictionary of Dissidents in the Soviet Union*, edited by S. P. Boer, E. J. Driessen, and H. L. Verhaar (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1982), 391–392.

31. RGANI, f. 5, op. 37, d. 12. Letter from Glavpur, November 17, 1955.

32. RGANI, f. 5, op. 37, d. 12. Letter from Marshal A. Eremenko, May 5, 1956.

33. RGANI, f. 5, op. 37, d. 12. Letter from Agitprop, May 30, 1956.

34. RGANI, f. 5, op. 37, d. 12. Letter from I. Konev and A. Zheltov, October 4, 1956.

35. RGANI, f. 5, op. 37, d. 12. Letter from the Department of Culture of the CC CPSU, November 21, 1956.

36. RGANI, f. 5, op. 37, d. 12. Memo, the Culture Department of the CPSU of the Russian Republic, January 3, 1957.

37. I. Ivanov, "Krupnye Proschety Avtorov Fil'ma 'Soldaty,'" *Krasnaia Zvezda*, August 15, 1957, 2.

38. RGANI, f. 556, op. 16, d. 24. Letter, the Culture Department of the CPSU of the Russian Republic, December 20, 1957.

39. Aleksandr Galich, *Dress Rehearsal: A Story in Four Acts and Five Chapters* (Bloomington, Ind.: Slavica, 2008), 119.

40. RGALI, f. 2944, op. 4, d. 1026. SRK memo, December 19, 1967.

41. L. Muratov, "Sluzhili Tri Druga," *Pravda*, March 13, 1968.

42. Yu. Savostin, "Pikiruiuschie v Bessmertie," *Birobidzhanskaia Pravda*, July 5, 1968.

43. Chernenko, *Krasnaia Zvezda*, 182.

44. Lemke continued playing Jewish characters in the perestroika era. Among his many Jewish roles is Trotsky, whom he played in two films, *Esperanza* (1987) and *Enemy of the People—Bukharin* (*Vrag Naroda—Bukharin*, 1990).

45. For characteristic reviews, see G. Kapralov, "Aplodismenty Geroiu," *Pravda*, October 4, 1974; and Lev Anninskii, "Ikh Krov'iu," *Iskusstvo Kino* 1 (1973): 21–33.

46. A. Shevtsov, "Podvig na Tikhoi Zare," *Birobidzhanskaia Zvezda*, January 17, 1973.

47. Sevela's two other Holocaust films, *Lullaby*, and *Chopen's Nocturne*, are discussed in Chapters 6, 9, and 16.

48. Mashkov's film was inspired mainly by the famous 1990 theater production of the play at Tabakov's theater in Moscow, where he played Abram, one of his most successful on-stage roles.

49. For an extended analysis of *Daddy*, see Olga Gershenson, "Ambivalence and Identity in Russian Jewish Cinema," in *Jewish Cultural Studies*, Vol. 1: *Jewishness: Expression, Identity, and Representation*, edited by S. J. Bronner (Oxford: Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2008), 175–195.

CHAPTER 15 — THE LAST PHANTOM—THE FIRST FILM

1. Boris Pinsky, "Dar!" *Sovetskii Ekran* 18 (1990): 4–5.

2. Valentin Kataev, "Otche Nash," *Ogonek* 12 (1946): 11–13. For English translation, see Valentin Kataev, "Our Father Who Art in Heaven," translated by Marie Winn, in *Great Soviet Short Stories*, edited by F. D. Reeve (New York: Dell, 1990), 202–212.

3. Kataev, "Our Father Who Art in Heaven," 204–205.

4. Author's telephone interview with Olga Savin, Ermolaev's former wife, July 24, 2012.

5. The script was rewritten multiple times. Here, I base my description on the director's treatment, which, in addition to the text, also has director's notes and scene breakdown. RGALI, f. 2944, op. 6, d. 685. Screenplay *Our Father.* All subsequent quotations are from this document.

6. In the earlier version, there was a scene with a Jewish tailor recognizing one of the coats as sewn by him.

7. Krystyna Zywulska, *Ia Perezhila Osventsim* (Moscow: Inostrannaya Literatura, 1960).

8. RGALI, f. 2453, op. 5, d. 1302. Minutes of the Mosfilm SRK meeting, July 23, 1964. All following quotes from the meeting are from this source.

9. RGALI, f. 2944, op. 5, d. 86. Letter, September 29, 1964.

10. RGALI, f. 2944, op. 5, d. 86, Letter, November 9, 1964.

11. RGALI, f. 2944, op. 6, d. 702. Screenplay *Our Father.*

12. RGALI, f. 2944, op. 5, d. 86. Letter, January 14, 1965.

13. RGALI, f. 2944, op. 5, d. 86. Letter, March 2, 1965.

14. RGALI, f. 2944, op. 5, d. 86. Letter, March 28, 1965.

15. RGALI, f. 2944, op. 5, d. 86. SRK letter, April 16, 1965.

16. L. Moskovskaia, "Snimaetsia Fil'm Otche Nash," *Sovetskaia Kul'tura*, June 29, 1989, 4.

17. On the revival of Jewish themes in films during perestroika, see Miron Chernenko, *Krasnaia Zvezda, Zheltaia Zvezda: Kinematograficheskaia Istoriia Evreistva v Rossii, 1919–1999* (Moscow: Tekst, 2006), 234–236.

18. As mentioned earlier, other films dealing with the Holocaust appeared in the 1980s in the USSR: *Come and See* (1985), *Lullaby* (1986), and *Commissar* (1967/1988). Still, *Our Father* was the first Soviet film on the subject of the Holocaust. In *Come and See* and *Commissar*, the Holocaust is not a focal point. *Lullaby*, although the Holocaust is its main subject, was not a Soviet film: it was made abroad by an émigré director, and had almost no circulation in the USSR.

19. At the time, several significant films, such as *Repentance* (*Pokaianie*, 1984/1987), *Assa* (1988), and *Little Vera* (*Malen'kaia Vera*, 1988) dealt with previously taboo subjects, such as sex, religion, and recent history, debunking myths of the Soviet past. Whether realistic or phantasmagoric and surreal, perestroika films presented a dark, pessimistic view of reality. For a survey and analysis of perestroika films, see Anna Lawton, *Before the Fall: Soviet Cinema in the Gorbachev Years* (Washington, D.C.: New Academia, 2002).

20. The author's interview with Pavel Ilyshev, Moscow, April 16, 2009.

21. L. Moskovskaia, "Snimaetsia Fil'm Otche Nash," 4.

22. Valerii Turovskoi, "Otche Nash," *Sovetskii Ekran* 4 (1990): 6.

23. A. Lipkov, "Vtoraia Chast' Zaboinoi Trilogii," *Sovetskii Ekran* 17 (1989): 18.

24. Lev Anninskii, "On Pugaet, a Mne ne Strashno," *Ekran i Stsena* 9 (May 9, 1990): 4.

25. Lawton, *Before the Fall*, 280. Nancy Condee, *The Imperial Trace: Recent Russian Cinema* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 49–85.

26. Ermolaev does not have a phone, and I only succeeded in talking to him once, when his son with a mobile phone was visiting him. They refused my repeated requests for either an in-person or a telephone interview.

CHAPTER 16 — PERESTROIKA AND BEYOND

1. Nancy Condee, *The Imperial Trace: Recent Russian Cinema* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 52–55.

2. In just three years, 1989 to 1991, a thousand movies were made, more than twice the normal number. See Daniil Dondurei, "Mestobliustiteli," in *Kino, Kotoroe My Poteriali*, edited by Larisa Miliukova (Moscow: Novaia Gazeta, Zebra E, 2007), 5.

3. M. Levitin, "Argumenty i Fakty," *Sovetskii Ekran* 11 (1989): 23. Cited in Anna Lawton, *Before the Fall: Soviet Cinema in the Gorbachev Years* (Washington, D.C.: New Academia, 2002) 220.

4. Miron Chernenko, *Krasnaia Zvezda, Zheltaia Zvezda: Kinematograficheskaia Istoriia Evreistva v Rossii, 1919–1999* (Moscow: Tekst, 2006), 235. Among these Soviet Jewish films were Kalik's *And the Wind Returns* (1991), mentioned in Chapter 10, and Sevela's *The Parrot Who Spoke Yiddish* (1990), discussed in Chapter 14.

5. *Iskusstvo Kino*, 1992, issue 5.

6. Aleksandr Borschagovskii, "Damskii Portnoi," *Teatr* 10 (1980): 142–167.

7. Author's telephone interview with Leonid Gorovets, May 7, 2009.

8. Brochure for *Ladies' Tailor* (Fora-Film, 1990).

9. Judith D. Kornblatt, "*Ladies' Tailor* and the End of Soviet Jewry," *Jewish Social Studies* 5, no. 3 (1999): 180–195.

10. Aleksandr Galich, "Poezd" (a poem written in memory of S. Mikhoels in 1961), in his *Kogda ia Vernus': Polnoe Sobranie Stikhov i Pesen* (Posev: Frankfurt/Main, 1981), 17.

11. Kornblatt, "*Ladies' Tailor*," 181.

12. S. Lavrent'ev, "Nuzhnyi Fil'm Novoi Epokhi," *Iskusstvo Kino* 5 (1992): 63–64; M. Shvydkoi, "Ukhodiaschaia Natura," *Ekran* 1 (1991): 13; L. Anninskii, "Na Kraiu Katastrofy," *Sovetskaia Kul'tura*, March 23, 1991; Yu. Morozov, "Damskii Portnoi," *Sovetskii Fil'm* 6 (1990): 34–35.

13. Larisa Lisutkina, "Zlo Ostaetsia Nadolgo," *Ekran i Stsena* 44 (November 1, 1990): 4.

14. Author's interview with Leonid Gorovets, May 11, 2009.

15. The film is available from the National Center for Jewish Film at Brandeis University.

16. Author's telephone interview with Vladimir Savel'ev, January 12, 2012.

17. The novella "Simon-Riznik" was published in Ukrainian in a collection by Anatolii Dimarov, *Bohy na Prodazh: Mis'ki Istorii* (Kiev: Radianskii Pys'mennyk, 1988), 325–348.

18. Author's interview with Vladimir Savel'ev, January 12, 2012.

19. Author's interview with Artur Brauner, Berlin, June 16, 2010.

20. For an overview of Brauner's Holocaust films, see Ronny Loewy, "'The Past Is the Present': The Films of Producer Artur Brauner and the Dominant Narratives on the Genocide of European Jews in German Cinema," in *Cinema and the Shoah: An Art Confronts the Tragedy of the Twentieth Century*, edited by Jean-Michel Frodon (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2010), 173–181.

21. V. Vakhramov, "Sokhranit' v Sebe Cheloveka," *Vecherniaia Moskva*, February 11, 1992, 3; S. Trimbach, "Poeziia i Pravda," *Iskusstvo Kino* 5 (1992): 64–65.

22. Even though in Russian the film was titled with an imperative (*Pomni*), in Hebrew, inexplicably, the film's title was *Zakharnu* ("we remembered"). Yet in the dubbing, the title was pronounced as *Zoikher* (Ashkenazic pronunciation of the present singular of the verb "remember"). Savel'ev probably did not have a good translator.

23. Author's interview with Vladimir Savel'ev, January 12, 2012.

24. Daniil Dondurei, "Kinoprokat: Zhemchuzhina Industrii Razvlechenii," *Otechestvennye Zapiski* 4 (2005), 258–272.

25. M. Vasil'eva, "O Lubvi i ne Tol'ko o Nei," *Vecherniaia Moskva*, February 20, 1992, 6.

26. For discussion of *The Parrot Who Spoke Yiddish*, see Chapter 14.

27. *Schinlder's List* was a widely debated film in the United States. See Miriam Bratu Hansen, "*Schindler's List* Is Not *Shoah:* Second Commandment, Popular Modernism, and Public Memory," *Critical Inquiry* 22 (Winter 1996): 292–312.

28. Lev Karakhan, "Cinema without Controls: Nostalgia for the State," paper presented at the American Association for the Advancement of Slavic Studies, Boston, November 1996. Cited in Condee, *The Imperial Trace*, 68. Condee blames the film's failure on Russian distributors rather than audiences' preferences.

29. L. Karakhan, "'Bluzhdaiuschaia' Maska Fashizma," *Iskusstvo Kino* 10 (1994): 3.

30. Author's interview with Maya Turovskaya, Munich, January 18, 2008.

31. Personal conversation via Skype with Alik Loevsky, a theater and film critic and editor, March 4, 2012.

32. On 1944–1945 pogroms in Ukraine, see Amir Weiner, *Making Sense of War: The Second World War and the Fate of the Bolshevik Revolution* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 191–192.

33. Author's interview with Artur Brauner, June 16, 2010.

34. For an analysis of *Daddy*, see Chapter 14.

35. This analysis is based on my interviews with Russian TV producers and directors, whose anonymity, for obvious reasons, I want to preserve.

36. The most significant documentaries include *Rebellion in Sobibor* (*Vosstanie v Sobibore*, 1989), *Children from the Abyss* (*Deti iz Bezdny*, 2002), and *David* (2002). For further reference, see "Kino," in *Kholocaust na Territorii SSSR: Entsiklopediia*, edited by Ilya Altman (Moscow: Rosspen, 2009), 407–412.

CHAPTER 17 — CONCLUSIONS

1. For statistics about the Western Holocaust films, see Lawrence Baron, *Projecting the Holocaust into the Present: The Changing Focus of Contemporary Holocaust Cinema* (Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield, 2005), 6, 10.

2. Ilan Avisar, *Screening the Holocaust: Cinema's Images of the Unimaginable* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988), 90–133, especially 131.

3. Ibid., 132.

4. Annette Insdorf, *Indelible Shadows: Film and the Holocaust*, 3rd ed. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 43.

5. For analysis of these genres in Western Holocaust cinema, see Aaron Kerner, *Film and the Holocaust: New Perspectives on Dramas, Documentaries, and Experimental Films* (London: Continuum, 2011).

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