THE SOVIET CRITIQUE OF A LIBERATOR'S ART AND A POET'S OUTCRY: ZINOVII TOLKACHEV, PAVEL ANTOKOL'SKII AND THE ANTI-COSMOPOLITAN PERSECUTIONS OF THE LATE STALINIST PERIOD

by

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THESIS ABSTRACT

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This thesis investigates Stalin's post-WW2 anti-cosmopolitan campaign by comparing the lives of two Soviet-Jewish artists. Zinovii Tolkachev was a Ukrainian artist and Pavel Antokol'skii a Moscow poetry professor. Tolkachev drew both Jewish and Socialist themes, while Antokol'skii created no Jewish motifs until his son was killed in combat and he encountered Nazi concentration camps; Tolkachev was at the liberation of Majdanek and Auschwitz. Both men were excoriated during the "anti-cosmopolitan" campaign. Using primary sources, I examine their art and the balance between Judaic and Soviet references, the accusations made and the connections between the attacks, the Holocaust, and Soviet paranoias of that era. While anti-Semitism played a role, I highlight the authorities' reaction to their style and content. This moment in cultural policy was part of a continuum of reactions to World War II and included themes that went beyond the native anti-Semitism of the period.

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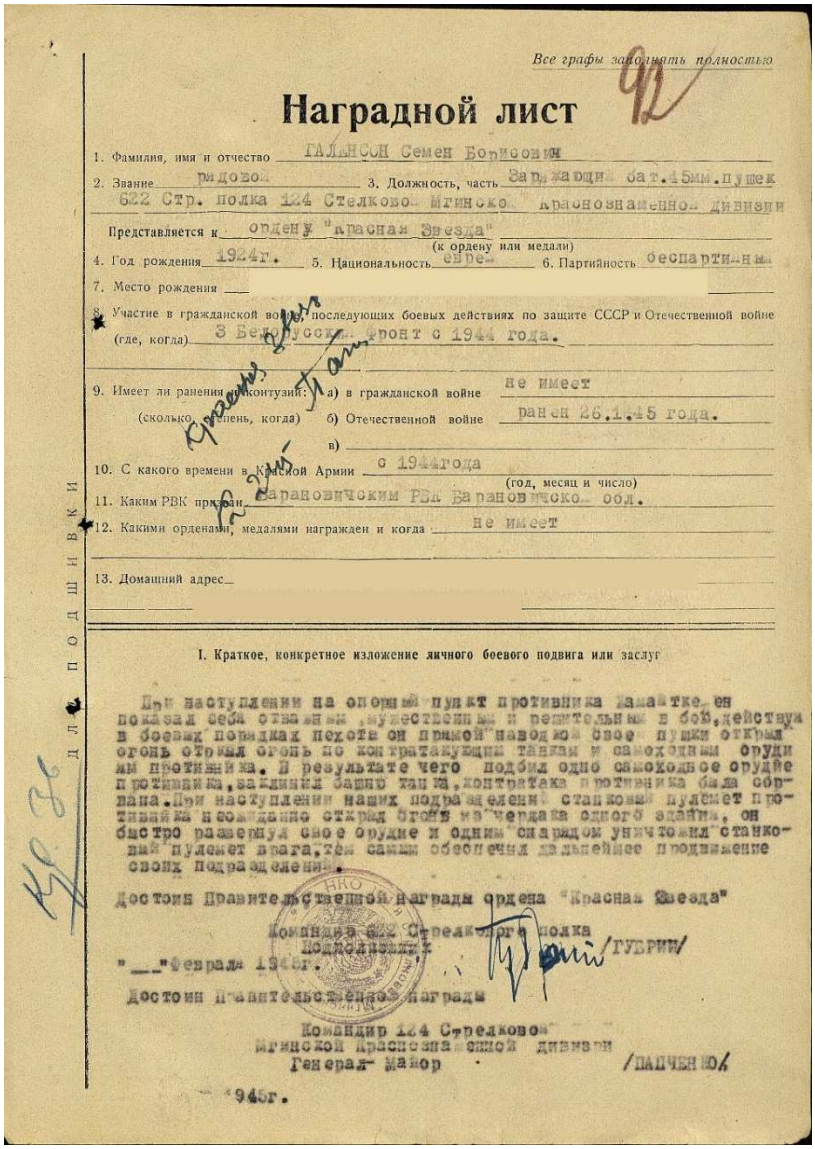
Dedication

To the memory of my maternal great-uncle, (Jewish-Belorussian) Red Army private Semyon Borisovich Galinson (born 1924, killed 1945), anti-tank gunner in the 622nd Rifle Regiment, 124th Rifle Division, Third Belorussian Front, awarded the Order of the Red Star for actions at the Battle of Pillkallen (Dobrovolsk, Kaliningrad) in February 1945, killed in action at the Siege of Konigsberg (Kaliningrad), April 9, 1945.



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92

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9. Имеет ли ранения, контузии: а) в гражданской войне не имеет
(сколько, степень, когда) б) Отечественной войне ранен 26.1.45 года.
в) ___
10. С какого времени в Красной Армии с 1944года
(год, месяц и число)
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I. Краткое, конкретное изложение личного боевого подвига или заслуг

При наступлении на опорный пункт противника Галактионов показал себя отважным, мужественным и решительным в бою, действуя в боевых порядках пехоты он прямой наводкой свое пушки открыл огонь отрыл огонь по контратакующим танкам и самоходным орудиям противника. В результате чего подбил одно самоходное орудие противника, заклинил башню танка, контратака противника была сорвана. При наступлении наших подразделений станковый пулемет противника неожиданно открыл огонь из чердака одного здания, он быстро развернул свое орудие и одним снарядом уничтожил станковый пулемет врага, тем самым обеспечил дальнейшее продвижение своих подразделений.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The USSR had not had an easy period since the Revolution of 1917, but the 1940s were perhaps the most destructive and the most tragic. The Second World War caused the deaths of tens of millions of its citizens, put intense pressure on every aspect of governance, planning and industry, and caused mortal tensions between the nation's population groups.

Among the many shocks absorbed by the Red Army and the Soviet system were horrific discoveries made outside its borders. In Poland between July 1944 and January 1945, the Soviet army liberated the Nazi extermination camps at Majdanek, Sobibor, Treblinka and Auschwitz. Even factoring in the tragedies that the Nazis had left behind within the borders of the USSR, and the knowledge of the mass murders committed by Stalin's own regime, the volume and mechanization of the Nazi camps seemed unimaginable to even these hardened soldiers.

In one of these Red Army units was a soldier and combat artist named Zinovii Tolkachev. Tolkachev was a Ukrainian-Jewish artist born in 1903. He became an adult in the wake of the Russian Revolution, and his art represented both Jewish themes and those more akin to Soviet realism and the philosophy of the New Soviet Man. After the liberation of these death camps, over a 30-day period, Tolkachev feverishly drew a number of lithographs and paintings expressing what he had seen and the emotional reactions that affected him and his army

colleagues. His drawings were used in the first Soviet-Polish war crimes trials in Lublin and were published in several albums in Poland, the USSR, and then at a later time in the West. Nevertheless, Tolkachev was purged during Stalin's postwar "anti-cosmopolitan" campaign, lost his teaching positions, and had to work out of the public eye until the 1960s. He was accused of various political violations – "bourgeois nationalism", "rootless cosmopolitanism", and "false worship of the West."

In a largely parallel example, the Russian-Jewish poet Pavel Antokol'skii, born to an elite and assimilated family of Jewish cultural figures in St Petersburg in 1896. Just after the Revolution he became a co-director of the Third Studio of the Moscow Art Theater. He had also begun publishing poetry in 1918 and his early works betray the influence of Boris Pasternak and Vladimir Maiakovskii. He was enamored with French revolutionary history and literature and was fluent in French. Throughout his career, he translated French (and Estonian) literature into Russian. In 1937, Antokol'skii began teaching at the Literary Institute in Moscow and by the end of the 1930s, had become a minor classic in Russian poetry circles. He was disinclined to discuss Jewish topics and dealt without constraint with themes dictated by socialist realism." During the war, he became a Party member and made numerous trips to the front as a correspondent for *Komsomol'skaia Pravda*, and lost his only son, a Red Army artillery officer, in combat. In this manner, he encountered the Holocaust both in the formerly-occupied areas of the USSR in Belarus and Ukraine, but also was present at the liberation of several Nazi extermination camps in Poland, certainly at Sobibor. After publishing several well-known poems about the Holocaust in 1945-1946, he was criticized during the full-blown anti-cosmopolitan campaign, lost his

teaching position in early 1949, and was not rehabilitated until after Stalin's death. Even though his persecution began a year later than did the attacks against Tolkachev, and thus took place in the backdrop of an even more virulent political period, he was in only one case attacked for his Jewish themes and Holocaust portrayals. Not unlike Tolkachev's experience, Antokol'skii was accused most often of "bourgeois nationalism" and an obsession with and preference for Western culture over that of the USSR.

In my paper, I hope to examine several areas of this story: First, I will look at Tolkachev's representation of the Holocaust and his chosen balance between specifically Judaic and Soviet references as well as his earlier works and political affiliations. Secondly, I will make the same examination of Antokol'skii's poetic works with an emphasis on how the War and the Holocaust led the poet into new areas of representation. Thirdly, I will then focus on the ramifications of these choices for the postwar careers of the two artists, when both became embroiled in Stalin's anti-cosmopolitan purges. Using primary sources, I hope to analyze the nature of the accusations against them and the connections between these accusations, the Holocaust, and Stalin's paranoias of that era. In that vein, the main question that I would like to answer is: does the experience of Tolkachev and Antokol'skii in the immediate postwar period help clarify whether the cultural purges of the late 1940s were founded on anti-Semitic, nationalistic, xenophobic, and/or patriotic tendencies?

My research has provided evidence of a complexity surrounding these issues. Many historians of this period (Dawidowicz, Weiner, Kostyrchenko, Groys, Gruner, Pinkus, etc.) put a stress on

the fact of anti-Semitism as the primary motivator of the anti-cosmopolitan campaign. I do not doubt that anti-Semitism was deeply imbedded in the actions of this tense period. Yet while Soviet anti-Semitism of the time no doubt played a role, boosted by the creation of the State of Israel and the resultant fear of "disloyal" Zionists and fifth columnists, contemporary documents show a detailed critique of the artistic philosophy of Tolkachev and other visual artists, both Jewish and Christian, that touches only tangentially on their religion, and more on their stylistic choices and, most directly, the underlying messages to the Soviet people conveyed by their art. A similar template was unveiled a year later in the critique of Antokol'skii's poetry of the period. The specific critique of Tolkachev went forward although he made a distinct effort to universalize his portrayals of the extermination camps. Only a minority of his drawings are of clearly Jewish victims, and he explicitly paints both non-Jewish political prisoners and POWs and also highlights acts of liberation by Red Army soldiers. Tolkachev was a Party member and a Soviet artist who, while he used an expressionistic and avant-garde style, also clearly believed in the ideal of the New Soviet Man. Ironically, one of the strongest critiques of his work was written by another Soviet Jewish critic. Antokol'skii, on the other hand, made many more specific references to the Jewish victims of the War, and yet the attacks against him were similar to the tenor of the critiques of Tolkachev. While it is clear that the anti-cosmopolitan movement was responding to a native anti-Semitism and xenophobia among Soviets and their leaders, it also was part of a seamless continuum of reactions based first and foremost on the experience of the Second World War and the necessity for the Soviet state to deal with the discoveries of the Holocaust. These included the ramifications of the victory over Nazi Germany, the balancing factors that needed to be considered in officially memorializing

the losses of the War, and the difficult questions that any formerly-occupied country faces about collaboration, patriotism, and the will to fight the enemy. I believe the examples of the artistic work of and discrimination towards Tolkachev and Antokol'skii help us understand the interplay of these issues in the Soviet Union of the late 1940s.

CHAPTER II

THE ROOTS OF THE ANTI-COSMOPOLITAN CAMPAIGN: THE CONTINUUM OF WAR AND ANTI-SEMITISM

The Stalinist "anti-cosmopolitan" campaign of 1946-53 which swept up Tolkachev and Antokol'skii is often seen as primarily a manifestation of anti-Semitism. It is certainly true that the campaign ended up with direct attacks on the Soviet Jewish intelligentsia. Yet in its "formative" years, it was also a campaign that was tied to xenophobia, the horrors and tragedies of the recent war, the burgeoning nationalist sentiments and national tensions brought to the fore by that conflict, the authorities' concern about the vast numbers of Soviet soldiers and civilians who had seen the West, and innate confusion about how to memorialize the wartime deaths and atrocities, the Cold War and the creation of the State of Israel.

During the war, many Soviet troops, both intellectuals and proletariats, hoped for a better life if they survived to return home. Some freedoms permitted during the war – opening of churches and greater freedom from censorship of personal correspondence – gave these women and men hope. Many veterans believed that they had earned the right to "live as they chose" and that their victory and its demonstration of "Soviet superiority" would lead to widespread reforms and a flourishing of new art and literature. Yet they were to find that they were mistaken. [1]

[1] I have benefited greatly in this discussion from Zubok's monograph *Zhivago's Children,* and Humphrey's article "Cosmopolitanism and Kosmopolitizm in the Political Life of Soviet citizens." *Focaal* 44 (2004).

The Marxist belief in "internationalism" did not put to rest concerns about "cosmopolitanism". Bringing the revolution to international spheres was one thing, but in a domestic Soviet context, socialism in fact was in opposition to diversity; the drawing together of classes, eradicating urban-rural differences; and leveling economic resources were the hallmarks of the ideology.[2] A formal role for the existence of "internationalism" existed, within a socialist context. Yet the Soviet concern was with relations with "the other" -- in this case, capitalist countries with their "alien unpredictability and enmity".[3] In this respect, cosmopolitanism was effectively defined as the ability to move between political spheres. For Soviet citizens, and particularly for the intelligentsia, exposure to the West and to Western ideas was the most dangerous space. This tension pre-dated Communism -- Tsarist Russia with its hold on the state religion of Orthodox Christianity, and its relative isolation, also held deep suspicions of foreigners and particularly Jews with their different traditions and international connections. And while early Soviet society until the late 1930s did show more openness to the rest of the world, the tensions of the late 1930s and then the war brought back traditional tendencies towards paranoia and self-reliance.[4]

[2] Humphrey, op.cit. p. 146.
[3] Ibid.
[4] Frank Gruner, "Russia's Battle against the Foreign: The Anti-Cosmopolitan Paradigm in Russian and Soviet Ideology," *European Review of History* (2010), pp. 448-50.

Specific concerns about so-called "cosmopolitans" started before this specific postwar campaign. For example, at a Kremlin dinner on April 20, 1941, Stalin discussed with some of his senior Party colleagues his desire to free global Communist Parties from being forced to be part of the Comintern and let them run themselves "in accordance with conditions in their own countries." Over the next few weeks, officials discussed and implemented Stalin's order – one of the chief concerns of the Soviets below Stalin was that in releasing other national parties, Moscow would have to "emphasize the maturity of national parties and combine proletarian internationalism with a healthy nationalism. It was here that Zhdanov specifically condemned 'rootless cosmopolitanism' which paves the way for the recruitment of spies and enemy agents". Here in 1941 is the same language and one of the same concerns that resurfaced in 1949. That being said, it is doubtful that Zhdanov in his 1941 utterance was referring only to Jews, but also to any community within the USSR or within other Communist states that had permanent links to the outside world.[5]

The cultural campaigns that led to the anti-cosmopolitan movement began soon after the war, as the Cold War against the West began to take shape. In August 1946, Central Committee Secretary Andrei Zhdanov gave a speech that was followed by several Party resolutions stipulating that "Communist morality" was the sole criterion and directive for cultural activity. Almost immediately, art forms faced negative politicization. For artists, a negative keyword was "formalism" – another way of saying art for art's sake and not art geared to a higher

[5] Firsov, Klehr, and Haynes. *Secret Cables of the Comintern, 1933-1943,* pp. 238-239.

revolutionary agitprop purpose. Related attacks were directed at several targets: activities and works that seemed "irrelevant" to Soviet reality and its challenges; "groveling" and "genuflection" to the West and its cultural and scientific values and achievements; and "bourgeois nationalism." This latter became a trap. Socialist realism involved a "rehabilitation" of national art forms. It was officially defined as "an art national in form and socialist in content". Lenin distinguished between the elements of democratic, socialist culture present in every national culture, and the dominant culture of 'bourgeois nationalism' to which these elements were opposed. Under the official ideology, artists had to attempt to maintain links with their own "national cultural traditions" while avoiding the trap of "bourgeois nationalism". Threading this narrow path was especially difficult for Jews, given the less-than-complete attitude toward their "nationality" status, and also because, with their links to Jewish communities outside the USSR and their concentration in business and intelligentsia professions, they were always open to accusations of links to "bourgeois elements."[6]

Zhdanov's decrees gave the Party direct control over culture and killed the nascent wave of general artistic creativity that had begun between 1944 and 1946. The goal of this *Zhdanovshchina* seemed to be to both isolate the Soviet population from the "decadent, enemy bourgeois camp" and to convince them of the superiority of the Soviet system, using the final victory of World War II as the underlying symbol and marker.

[6] Groys, "From Internationalism to Cosmopolitanism: Artists of Jewish Descent in the Stalin Era", op.cit. pages 81-82.

At this stage, the discrimination and purges were directed against the intelligentsia as a whole, and not specifically at the Jewish community. The intelligentsia was targeted both because of a suspicion that they were riddled with "subversive elements", and because of the above-mentioned tendency of those who had survived the war to believe that they earned greater personal and political freedoms. The early stages of *Zhdanovshchina* focused on the theatre and writers, plus theatre critics and their literary counterparts. By 1947, this had expanded to include musicians and composers, and by 1948, artists and art critics. And while the majority of literary critics, poets, playwrights, musicians and composers singled out in this period were Jewish, only about 35 percent of those artists and sculptors attacked between 1948 and 1953 were Jews.[7] As the campaign carried on throughout 1949 and 1950, visual artists were still underrepresented as recipients of criticism, compared to theater professionals and critics, writers and literary critics.[8] As Azadovskii and Egorov point out, the practice of equating cosmopolitanism with Jews began with a speech by Anatolii Fadeev in December 1948. In most subsequent articles and speeches, the anti-patriotism of theater critics was unequivocally connected with their Judaism. But that was not always the case with visual artists, who as noted made up a minority of criticized intellectuals.[9] In that vein, it is worth noting that the Jewish nature of many Soviet theatrical creations was evident because of the use of the Yiddish

[7] G.C. Batigin & I.F. Deviatko, "Еврейский Вопрос: Хроника Сороковых Годов," *Вестник Россиской Наук* (63:2, 1993), p.65.
[8] Benjamin Pinkus, *Evrei i evreĭskiĭ narod*…
[9] Konstantin Azadovskii and Egorov, Boris, "From Anti-Westernism to Anti-Semitism: Stalin and the Impact of the Anti-Cosmopolitan Campaigns on Soviet Culture", *Journal of Cold War Studies*, (2002), p.75.

language, whereas in the visual arts it was more difficult to determine the extent to which a particular work was the expression of Jewish culture. [10]

We will now turn to the specific cases of Tolkachev and Antokol'skii, and will come back to this contextual discussion that hopefully will be enriched by their examples.

[10] Pinkus, *The Soviet Government and the Jews 1948-1967*, p. 280.

CHAPTER III

THE ARTIST AND THE LIBERATION

Private Petr Dmitriyevich Pudov was a crewman on a Soviet SU-76 self-propelled tank. As part of the Red Army's First Byelorussian Front, his unit was one of those that liberated the Nazi concentration camp at Majdanek, outside of Lublin, Poland. In a postwar interview, Pudov recalled that:

> "Arriving in Lublin, we paused in our advance and went into the death camp at Majdanek. The things we saw there…the ovens (of the crematoria) still had the ashes of human beings everywhere. In the courtyard were three heaps of ashes standing a meter-and-a-half high. There was so much that we had to find cloths to clean the gun. And we then came to the warehouse where the victims had been stripped – shocking. Clothing and shoes had been cleaned and ironed, children's shoes in one area, women's shoes in another, all neatly laid out. And everywhere, women's braids and tresses…a horror…how could such things have been done? (*Translation by author*)[11]

On the same day, from one of the sister battalions of the First Byelorussian Front, Red Army combat artist Zinovii Tolkachev entered the camp at Majdanek. Tolkachev was a 41-year old private who had been serving in the Red Army since July 1941. He was born in the Jewish agricultural colony of Shchedrin in Belarus in 1903, and moved with his family to Kiev while he was still a child. He briefly attended a vocational school, but had to leave because of his family's

[11] http://iremember.ru/memoirs/samokhodchiki/pudov-petr-dmitrievich/ (in Russian). Accessed February 20, 2016

restricted finances, and was apprenticed to a signboard painter. In 1919, he joined a Soviet artists' cooperative, and he also became one of the first members of the Komsomol in the Ukraine, supporting the Bolshevik side in the Civil War through agitprop art.

As described by Mirjam Rajner, Tolkachev "after the Civil War started down the path of a successful Bolshevik artist, creating propaganda posters and painting murals as a member of a youth organization…".[12] In 1919, he spent a year in Moscow studying with the Russian artists Osmarkin and Kontsalovsky at the Higher State Artistic and Technical Workshop (VKhUTEMAS). In 1920, he returned to Kiev and, after a few months as an artist/reservist in the Red Army's 14th Army Corps, Tolkachev became responsible for the political education department of the Komsomol in the Ukrainian regions of Podolsk and Shulov. In 1922, he formally joined the Communist Party. During this same period, Tolkachev was associated loosely with the "Kultur-Lige" Jewish cultural group that had centers in Kiev and Warsaw. [13] This Jewish art society was closely associated with the avant-garde movement that Stalin later denounced. It served both cultural and political functions for the newly politically active Jewish communities in Ukraine and Poland immediately after the 1917 Revolution.[14]

[12] Mirjam Rajner, "From the Shtetl to The Flowers of Auschwitz and Back: The Creation, Reception, and Destiny of Zinovii Tolkachev's Art", in Heftrich, et al, *Images of Rupture* (2016), page 156.

[13] "Ukraine-Jewish Culture", *Encyclopedia of Modern Jewish Culture,* ed. Glenda Abramson.

[14] G. Kazovskiĭ, *Khudozhniki Kul'tur-Ligi*. Seriĭa "Sovremennye Issledovaniĭa", pp. 16-22.

He took a brief course in Kharkov at a Communist Party Academy, served as an artist on the staff of the newspaper "Proletariat Pravda" in Kiev, and from 1925-27 served again in the Red Army as a combat artist in a machine gun unit of the 3rd Caucasus Rifle Regiment. During that service, he created a series of lithographs entitled *The Red Army*, highlighting its role as a protector of the people. He subsequently produced a second series of lithographs called *Lenin and the Masses*, in which he used an avant-garde style to stress the connection between Lenin and the Soviet people. His expressionism also allowed him to manifest his individual artistic views. [15]

In 1928 he was regularly participating in Soviet art exhibitions in Kiev and Moscow, and in 1930 he became a Professor of Graphic Arts at the Kiev Art Institute, where he would stay until the outbreak of World War II. During the decade of the 30s, Tolkachev produced Soviet propaganda art and murals in the Soviet realist style. He also worked on a number of book illustrations, including the works of German author Erich-Maria Remarque (All Quiet on the Western Front), Russian writer Maxim Gorky and Russian-Jewish author Sholem Aleichem. Many of these pieces were done more freely, and embodied much from the German Expressionist School, particularly the works of Kathe Kollwitz. In his works that were tied to Aleichem's books, Tolkachev created pastels and oils that were exhibited at a 1939 exhibition in Kiev that celebrated the late Yiddish writer. Mirjam Rajner points out that this rekindling of interest in

[15] Autobiographical fiche, Center for the Study and Culture of Eastern European Jews, Kiev, Ukraine, f. 001, op. 223 (Zinovii Tolkachev); "Private Tolkachev at the Gates of Hell", page 1, Yad Vashem (accessed November 11, 2016): http://www.yadvashem.org/yv/en/exhibitions/tolkachev/about_Tolkachev.asp

the Jewish shtetl-related works of Aleichem took place during the period in which the USSR was absorbing many new Jewish citizens from the newly-annexed Baltic States and Poland.[16] The Soviets wanted to ensure the assimilation of these new Jewish citizens, and the cultural authorities began to see "Soviet-Jewish culture" as a legitimate piece of Soviet nationality policy and the Marxist class struggle. The re-publication of fourteen of Aleichem's books in 1939-40 with Tolkachev's drawings emphasized the peasant and proletariat roots of many of the Jews depicted in stories like Fiddler on the Roof, and their travails during the Tsarist period. Tolkachev's use of a Socialist realist style was intertwined with expressionist elements – for example, the more bourgeois characters from Aleichem's novels (stockbrokers and the like) are portrayed by Tolkachev using the more "foreign" style of German expressionism.

Tolkachev's pre-war biography thus shows that he had a foot in three artistic "camps" – those encompassing Soviet, avant-garde expressionist, as well as Jewish traditions. At this time, all three tendencies served both his artistic purposes and those of the State. As we will see with his wartime art, it appears that Tolkachev genuinely hoped to combine all of these strains into one unified personal style. If we look more broadly at cultural trends of this period, it is clear that Tolkachev was able to attempt this stylistic approach because of several underlying truths. Russian culture is broadly more literary than visual and within the visual arts, book illustration and graphic arts were subject to less censorship in the Soviet period than were the "high arts" of painting and sculpture. [17] His attention to Jewish themes, if articulated in a Socialist style,

[16] Rajner, "From the Shtetl to the Flowers of Auschwitz and Back…" **op. cit**., p. 157-8.
[17] Boris Groys, "From Internationalism to Cosmopolitanism: Artists of Jewish Descent in the Stalin Era", in *Russian Jewish Artists in a Century of Change, 1890-1990*, ed. Susan Tumarkin Goodman, p. 87.

might have been seen as a "proper" incorporation of Soviet national traditions into a broader Socialist body of work.[18]

As Nazi Germany invaded the USSR in June 1941, Tolkachev was named as the head of the Committee of the Communist Artists of the Ukraine and in that role evacuated many artists and their families (including his own) ahead of the advancing Nazis. He and his family ended up in the city of Ufa, in the Urals Region just west of Magnitogorsk and Chelyabinsk. Soon after arriving, he re-joined the Red Army (in spite of being 38 years old) and was assigned to the 8th Independent Infantry Division as an engineer (a reserve unit later attached to 13th Guards Rifle Division -- the "Poltavskaia Division"). It also appears that he had duties as an official army artist during this time. In December 1942, for example, he wrote a personal letter from the town of Mary in Turkmenistan back to a Professor Trukhimenko in Ufa identifying himself as a private in this unit and as a "combat artist." [19]

By the summer of 1944, Tolkachev had been dispatched to serve as a combat artist in the Political Department of the First Ukrainian Front, under Marshal Ivan Konev. Having moved into Poland, in early July 1944, Tolkachev's unit liberated the Majdanek extermination camp outside of Lublin.

[18] Ibid., p. 86.
[19] RGALI, (Rossiiskii Gosudarstvennyi Arkhiv Literatury i Iskusstva), f. 2094, op. 1, d. 907-2, p. 1; and Center for the Study and Culture of Eastern European Jews, Kiev, Ukraine, f. 001, op. 223, page 3.2 (Zinovii Tolkachev).

The Shock and the Internationalism of Tolkachev's Artistic Response

Majdanek had begun its existence as a camp for Soviet POWs, but after 1942 became instead an extermination camp for political prisoners, Jews and Poles. The Red Army's advance in this sector was so rapid that the Nazis had little time to destroy the evidence of their atrocities, and thus Majdanek became a visual archetype of an extermination camp. Tolkachev was ordered to document in art what he and his fellow troops had witnessed, with an eye towards war crime trials that were already being discussed with the pro-Soviet Polish Government in Lublin. For thirty-five days, Tolkachev worked feverishly, creating about 35 graphics and drawings depicting what he had witnessed. These were the first accounts of an artist who had witnessed Nazi atrocities, and using his previous experience in depicting the Russian Civil War and the German occupation from 1941, he "created highly individualized, emotionally-charged pictures that immediately became recognizable as visual symbols depicting the Holocaust."[20] (*Please see Figures 1 through 6 for a sample of his artworks from Majdanek and Auschwitz*.) In 1967, Tolkachev told Soviet art critic G.L. Muravin that:

> "I stood for a long time next to the crematorium that turned into ashes Russians and Jews, Poles and Ukrainians, Greeks and French – people of different nationalities, different ages, and different religions that were concentrated here from all the ends of occupied Europe."[21]

[20] Rajner, "From the Shtetl to The Flowers of Auschwitz and Back…." **op.cit**., page 160.
[21] Gennadiĭ L'vovich Muravin, *Двое из многих тысяч,* Moskva, 1967, p. 101.

Tolkachev was in this way careful to hew to the Soviet internationalist line about the diversity of victims of the Nazis. That being said, his statement is factually correct – a sizeable minority of the dead of Majdanek were Jews, but the prisoners overall were decidedly mixed by nationality and religion.

As horrifying as Majdanek was, the experience did not prepare Tolkachev completely for what he would witness next. The best description of the next cycle of his work is contained in the catalogue of an exhibit of Tolkachev's work held at Yad Vashem in Israel:

> "Tolkatchev showed his works to a member of the Polish-Soviet Nazi Crimes Investigation Commission, who urged him to finish the series before November 27, 1944, the opening day of the Majdanek camp commanders' trial. The exhibition opened the day before the trial, at the Lublin Art Museum and was reviewed extensively in the Polish press. In Lublin alone, 128,000 tickets were sold, and from there, it traveled to other cities. In the Majdanek series, Tolkatchev's was able to create, as if from nowhere, a set of symbols that express the horrors of the Majdanek extermination camp. The fact of the matter is that Tolkatchev enlisted those same capacities already encountered in his earlier works, that is, his ability to synopsize and focalize. However, now Tolkatchev was painting neither in the service of the Revolution, nor of the author-poet; rather, he bluntly presented his viewers with the hard and brutal reality that he experienced and which had stricken his people, Soviet and Jewish alike.
>
> A cold winter wind howls over Auschwitz, surrounded by three rows of barbed-wire fence…the barbed-wire fences of Majdanek did not prepare Tolkatchev for his next mission. At the end of January 1945 he accompanies the Nazi Crimes Investigation Commission to Auschwitz, literally hours after the entrance of the Red Army into the camp. Again Tolkatchev is seized by the urge to capture the scenes… In the absence of drawing paper he enters the camp's former headquarters and takes stationery with bold black letters: *Kommandantur Konzentrationslager*

> *Auschwitz*; *I.G. Farbenindustrie Aktiengesellschaft*; *Der Oberpräsident der Provinz Oberschlesien*. The typography becomes an integral part of the composition and the image of the Nazi oppressor, who Tolkatchev refrains from perpetuating, stands before us…Abutting his sketches he adds densely written lines with the testimony of the few survivors able to utter words. Adjacent, he jots repeatedly – "to remember, not to forget". By using meager materials of pencil and paper, intimate in scale, Tolkatchev succeeds in creating art of monumental scope. The understanding that on these very same pieces of paper just a few days prior were written orders of extermination endow them with a tragic power that causes one to shudder."[22]

Tolkachev's drawings are spare, direct, done simply with pencil on captured Nazi stationary. His style is not unlike the expressionism of Goya or Diego Rivera – striking in its simplicity. In political terms, Tolkachev either universalized his victims because he believed that ideological turn of mind or because he felt that he could not focus on just the Jewish victims. And, of course, at Auschwitz more than at Majdanek, the majority of the dead and living were Jews from all the nations of Europe. The camp had been partially destroyed by the Germans and most of its prisoners had been evacuated before the arrival of the Red Army, but in spite of that there remained seven thousand living yet desperately ill prisoners still at the camp site, along with untold thousands of unburied corpses. This and the sheer size of the camp leave him shocked. His drawings include many of shocked survivors, piles of human hair and shoes, and corpses, but he also illustrates subjects more closely tied to Soviet iconography – Red Army soldiers as liberators and inmates in revolt.[23]

[22] "Private Tolkachev at the Gates of Hell", Yad Vashem: http://www.yadvashem.org/yv/en/exhibitions/tolkachev/about_Tolkachev.asp

[23] Rajner, "From the Shtetl to The Flowers of Auschwitz and Back…." op.cit. pages 163-64.

As noted earlier, Tolkachev made efforts to universalize the diversity of the victims of the Nazis. Few of his drawings have a specifically Judaic theme: his portrait of Jesus in Majdanek (see Appendix) shows Jesus wearing the Nazi camp symbols for Jews, Poles, and political prisoners; in another drawing (not shown) a proud but shattered prisoner wears the symbology of a Pole; his drawings of women and children (see Appendix) show no identifiable national or religious origin. The one clearly Jewish reference is the colored drawing of a Jewish male's prayer shawl (a *taleskoten*) stuck to the barbed wire of the Majdanek camp fence, evincing loss of faith and loss of family. His drawing of a Red Army trooper surrounded by liberated children is stylistically very close to traditional Soviet Realism.

Tolkachev's Auschwitz drawings were more immediate, more shocked, and more reportorial than his art from Majdanek. He produced several albums from his drawings sourced at both camps – perhaps the best known were a collection of his drawings of children at Auschwitz titled "The Flowers of Auschwitz". As Mirjam Rajner pointed out, Tolkachev's choice of highlighting the surviving children "is clearly oriented towards the future and the rebuilding of a new world," as opposed to focusing only on the dead. He was clearly anticipating the Soviet cultural response to the war and to the postwar political reality – an irony to keep in mind when we later examine the critique of his work expressed in 1948 and 1949.[24]

Many of his drawings were exhibited in Lublin, Lodz, Warsaw and Krakow even before the war had ended. By 1946, different political currents were coming into view. The Black Book of Soviet Jewry, a catalogue of atrocities against the Jews in the USSR and Poland, compiled by Ilya

[24] Ibid, page 164.

Ehrenburg and Vasilii Grossman, was banned from publication. The Soviets did publish a great deal of information about atrocities against civilians in the volumes organized by the "Extraordinary State Commission to Investigate German-Fascist Crimes Committed on Soviet Territory," but in these volumes, identification by religion and Soviet nationality was subsumed into the newly-correct definition of "peaceful Soviet citizens." Tolkachev was demobilized from service in Poland that year and returned to Kiev. The criticism of his work that we will examine in the next section began in late 1947, and caused him to be expelled from the Soviet Union of Artists, lose his job at the Kiev Academy of Arts, and forced him until the mid-1960s to live as a portrait painter, often publishing his art under assumed names.

Zinovii Tolkachev's works were feted by Soviet officialdom through 1946. In April of that year, Tolkachev wrote to the head of the Soviet Trade Mission in Poland requesting help with sending his art works of Majdanek and Auschwitz back to the USSR after they had been on exhibit in "all major cities of Poland." Tolkachev noted that these exhibits had been the result of a specific order from Foreign Minister Molotov to the Soviet Military Representative in Poland, Red Army General Vasilii Shatilov, to ensure that Tolkachev's representations of the extermination camps be exhibited throughout Poland and then sent back to the USSR for exhibitions at home. [25]

This early approbation notwithstanding, the critique of Tolkachev began in October 1947 in a comprehensive and critical article in the Kiev edition of *Pravda* that highlights the complex

[25] *Letter to Торгпредство СССР в Польше from Tolkachev*, April 15, 1946, U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum, Personal Archives of Zinovii Tolkachev, 1943-1970. RG-31.029*01, Series 1, Folder 1.

elements that I believe lay behind the attacks on Tolkachev's work. By extension, it also illustrates the context of postwar Soviet views on the Holocaust and "cosmopolitanism".

The article begins with a broad complaint about Tolkachev's adoption of a "decadent, Western, expressionistic style", commenting specifically on the irony of a Soviet postwar artist using German expressionism. Next, the author (a non-Jewish Ukrainian artist named V. Vovchenko) begins the main line of argument: namely, that Tolkachev shows the Soviet people as weak victims of the Fascist – "a hopeless group under the heels of the Hitlerites." In spite of the Soviet victory, Tolkachev's subjects are "exhausted and tortured by the enemy, not victorious as they have earned the right to be portrayed." Vovchenko goes on to critique the series of paintings "Christ in Majdanek", excoriating them for their "reactionary mysticism" and for Tolkachev's choice to replace the necessary hero image of the Soviet solider-liberator with that of a passive Christ.

In this article, however, Vovchenko brings to the fore the only example of a Judaic-related critique towards Tolkachev that I have found, but interestingly, it is a critique in part sympathetic to the Jewish wartime experience. Here is the key paragraph:

> "A sea of working-class Jewish blood was shed by the Fascist executioners in Majdanek, in Auschwitz and at Babi Yar, at the hands of Hitler's dogs, the blood of hundreds of thousands of Soviet citizens and other nationalities. It is a shame for the sacred memory of the Jews who died at the hands of the Nazi sadists that there is this element of bourgeois nationalism in Tolkachev's work (*n.b., a Star of David perceived as a symbol of Zionism)*, which he uses in an attempt to snatch the Jewish victims out of the close-knit family of Soviet peoples who fought together against the Fascist aggressors. Only those people with a limited view of the concept of

> nationality might argue that the tragedy of Auschwitz, of Majdanek, that these tragedies were predominantly only of the Jewish people rather than tragedies of all freedom-loving peoples, at the head of which are the great Russian people in the days of mortal struggle against fascism. And only those with a similarly limited national viewpoint could attempt to unite under any single symbol all classes of the Jewish people, using the counter-revolutionary language of Zionism, as Tolkachev attempts to do."[26]

It would be subjective to say whether or not this critique is anti-Semitic. On its face, it goes against the grain of the Soviet postwar period in clearly acknowledging that the Holocaust was a Jewish phenomenon. It shows sympathy for the suffering of the Jews, and again at face value, seems to want to strengthen the membership of the Jews in the USSR among the panoply of Soviet peoples. One could also argue, however, that it forces the nature of the Holocaust to be part of a larger mold of Soviet memory. What the critique does identify is its place as part of a postwar intellectual continuum: USSR officialdom was deeply concerned to show its people as strong and unbowed, united by revolutionary conviction and by shared suffering, and ready to engage in the class struggle against capitalism and Zionism that they perceived was growing in the wake of the Second World War.

A few months later, in February 1948, a not dissimilar critique was part of a longer article in the journal *Советское Искусство* about Ukrainian artists (most of whom were not Jewish). Ironically, the author of this piece was himself a Soviet-Jewish art critic and art historian named

[26] "В атмосфере либерального примиренства", *Київська Правда* (October 19, 1947) , p 3.

Aleksandr Abramovich Kamensky, an expert on the art of Marc Chagall. The substance of his critique of Tolkachev's Holocaust-related art is very telling:

> "How and with what goal in mind does Tolkachev express his themes? Let's take a look at his large graphic serials such as 'The Flowers of Auschwitz'. Firstly, it shows the huge boots of German soldiers breaking the spine of a naked child who cries out in horror. Further, examine his works 'In the Crematorium', 'In Front of the Firing Squad', and 'The Children of Auschwitz'. These art pieces make the most horrible fantasies of Goya pale in comparison…We will never forget Auschwitz, Majdanek, nor Babi Yar. The Soviet people preserve well the memories of the victims of Fascist atrocities. But is it not blasphemy to turn their sacrifices and tragedies into the theme of an artistic exhibition? Is it not a direct assault on the memory of the tortured Soviet citizenry to show them as completely submissive, with no strength left in them, showing not even contempt for the Fascist executioners? And, finally, which feelings can be kindled in the hearts of people who see Tolkachev's works and those of Ovchinnikov and others? Fear, or a slowing of the spirit? It seems that some Ukrainian artists want our people to adopt a fatalistic impotence like that of the Americans and Europeans, in the face of a dark and evil power." (*Translation by author*) [27]

There are a number of unexpected issues raised in this article. Firstly, the fact that the critic is himself Jewish would lead one to believe that he would appreciate or at the least understand the memorialization of extermination camp victims. Perhaps he was practicing the contemporary version of political correctness, or of course he may have believed in the suggested artistic immorality of forcing the public to see such sights, and/or the problem of understating the resistance against the Nazis made by the Soviet peoples.

[27] Александр Kamenskii, "Художники Украины," *Советское Искусство* (February 14, 1948), page 2.

It is noteworthy that in this article, Tolkachev was not specifically identified as Jewish, nor were his Holocaust themes critiqued because they could be seen as "Jewish" (the other artist mentioned, Vasilli Ovchinnikov, was not Jewish but had done a well-known triptych painting of the Babi Yar massacre.) Even Tolkachev's painting of the Jewish prayer shawl caught on the barbed wire of Majdanek did not receive any direct notice. Rather, the key message from this critique might be: The USSR memorializes a memory of strength and resistance, not passivity in the face of atrocities, even if they were civilian victims. Any other portrayal would be a "deformation of the image of Soviet Man".

And what of his specification of the artists as "Ukrainians" – was there an implied critique therein of Ukrainians in the immediate post-war period, given the collaboration of some Ukrainians with the Germans during the war and given the fact that Kamensky was a Russian Jew from Moscow? Or was he simply describing Ukrainian art without a value judgment in that respect?

One last question arises. In point of fact, only a small minority of the victims of Majdanek and Auschwitz were citizens of the Soviet Union. While there were some Soviet POWs in both camps, and undoubtedly some civilians from Belarus or Ukraine, the vast majority of inmates at Majdanek were either Polish political prisoners or Jews, and at Auschwitz the majority were Jews from all over Eastern and Western Europe, but rarely from the USSR. This signals a broader concern than historical memory – the cultural authorities were set against sympathetic portrayals of any victims of fascism who did not fight back.

This same critique repeated itself one year later during the Third Session of the USSR Academy of Arts, in a speech given by Academy delegate П.М. Сысоев:

> "The contemporary group of Ukrainian formalists, Z. Tolkachev and V. Ovchinnikov and some others, declare themselves as being successful at developing examples of the rich national art of the Ukraine. But in truth they represent cosmopolitanism, and are oriented toward the rotten bourgeois art of the West. The artist Zinovii Tolkachev's works contain exaggerated mysticism which preach the submissiveness of Christianity, non-resistance and turning the other cheek. His artistic ideology uses a form that is foreign to the Soviet people and their artistic traditions. In Tolkachev's works, the Soviet people are not shown with their usual great courageous spirit and strength, nor in their limitless striving to overcome difficulties, deserving of their victory, but rather as wallowing in Christian submissiveness and obedience. This comes across most clearly in his works entitled "Jesus in Majdanek", "The Children of Auschwitz", and other examples. (*Translation by author*) [28]

Here, in 1949, the catch-phrase "cosmopolitanism" has entered the dialogue, in line with the broader trends of this period of anti-intellectualism. The Soviet critique has moved from an attack on ideology and form to a somewhat-veiled attack on Jews and foreign influences. Yet, there is no specific identification of Tolkachev as Jewish, and in fact (ironically) he is accused of preaching Christian mores. In the final Resolution of the Academy of Art's plenary session, Tolkachev is included in a list of artists formally criticized for their "negative considerations". While some of the names of the other artists are Jewish, the majority are Russian or Georgian non-Jews.

[28] П.М. Сысоев, "Борьба за социалистический реализм в советском изобразительном искусстве", in *Сессии Академии художеств СССР. Третья сессия: Вопросы теории и критики советского изобразительного искусства*, Москва, February 1949, pp. 35-36.

> "Formalism and naturalism, primitivism, stylistic and other negative considerations are embodied in the works of the following painters, sculptors and graphic artists: Altman, Bechteev, Vilkovich, Goncharov, Gudyashvili, Doroxov, Kuznetsov, Korolev, Matveev, Osmerkin, Ryblev, Sandomirskaya, Tolkachev, Traygot, Tishler, Udaltzova, Favorskii, Falk, Fonvisin, Chazanov, and others…" (*Translation by author*)[29]

Tolkachev specifically and visual artists in general were not the only recipients of this multi-faceted critique. In an official article in the Ukrainian edition of Pravda, Ovchinnikov was also accused of "distorting the image and memory, and falsely highlighting the spinelessness, of the Soviet peoples…showing them as incapable of resistance" in his work on Babi Yar. In addition, a number of the works of Ukrainian sculptor Lev Muravin were criticized for "using formalism to misrepresent both the culture and the historical image of the Soviet people."[30]

The most politically-clichéd critique of Tolkachev's art came in May 1949, when the same newspaper stated that:

> "A deeply vicious cycle is evident in the art of Zinovii Tolkachev, expressing elements of corrupt and depressing Western bourgeois art. This is particularly true in his works such as "Majdanek", "The Flowers of Auschwitz", and "Jesus in Majdanek." These works are closely intertwined with the trends of bourgeois nationalism and rootless cosmopolitanism. These pieces insult the dignity of the Soviet people, showing them as spineless victims in the face of ferocious enemies." (*Translation by author)*[31]

We see here that the terminology has hardened into politicized language. "Rootless cosmopolitanism" at one level refers to those who are oriented toward the wider world

[29] Резолюция Третьей Сессии Общего Собрания Академии Художесть СССР, Принята 1 Февраля 1949 года.
[30] "За дальнейший под'ем украинского советского изобразительного искусства" , *Правда Украины* (May 25, 1949) , p.1.
[31] Ibid**.,** p. 1.

without a grounding in a home state or nation. In a more pejorative, Soviet sense, it refers largely to Jewish intellectuals who, in a period encompassing the Cold War, heightened levels of espionage, and the creation of the State of Israel, were under suspicion for being disloyal citizens of the USSR. It also includes deep-seated anti-Semitic tendencies. While this might support the hypothesis that his critics were acting out of anti-Semitic motives, I believe that even here we are largely seeing a continuum of criticism that starts with the Soviet experience of the Great Patriotic War. Reading these critiques together begs the question of whether the reluctance of the 1950s to discuss the Holocaust, as well as Jewish deaths inside the USSR, was as much a fear of weakness and a concomitant State-led memorialization of strength and sacrifice as it was anti-Semitism? Given the almost immediate breakdown of the wartime East-West alliance based on ideological differences and the West's objections to Stalin's subjugation of Eastern Europe, it must have appeared to Soviet authorities that they were in a military interregnum, in practice gearing up for the next war. This made a priority of State-managed memory, ideological control, and stoking a certain national paranoia in the face of a coming conflict, be it a Cold or Hot War. It also explains the reliance on a culture of strength and not empathic victimhood or the turning of the other cheek, and it gives insight into the lack of acknowledgement that the subjects of Tolkachev's art were generally not Soviet citizens. Most of the victims of the camps were from areas now under Soviet control, and in a conflict with the West, those survivors and the way in which they were remembered would be part of the ideology of future conflict. Soviet Man writ large cannot afford the weakness of "fatalism" or "the compassion of the victim."

There is a strange episode that adds some confusion but also perhaps some understanding of the broader Soviet cultural policy of the period and citizens' responses to such policies. After the above critiques, and even after Tolkachev had lost his job at the Kiev Academy, he was praised in an official Soviet journal while the culture wars were still at their height. In the June 1950 issue of the popular magazine *Ogonyok*, there appeared an article by one of the USSR's most doctrinaire Soviet painters, a man steeped in the tenets of Socialist Realism, Fyodor Pavlovich Reshetnikov. In the article, entitled "Hand Weapons" (Оружием кисти), Reshetnikov praises the contributions of Soviet artists who at a Moscow international art show exhibited works on the theme of world peace, as a "weapon against the militarism of the bourgeois West". In describing those participants from the "brother republics", he specifically praised the Ukrainian Tolkachev as one of the "masters of fine arts actively defending the cause of world peace."[32]

In fact, after some research, we identified the graphic art created by Tolkachev for this exhibit as a work entitled "American Tempo" (see Figure 7). It was listed as such in the exhibition catalog without an illustration, albeit noting that the work was published in the Ukrainian satirical journal *Peretz* in 1950. As it turns out, Tolkachev submitted this drawing plus several others for a contest organized by *Peretz* to produce anti-capitalistic satirical art, and several of the submitted works, including Tolkachev's, were picked up by the art show managers. [33]

[32] "Оружием Кисти", *Огонёк*, June 4, 1950, p. 25.
[33] *Перець* (Ukrainian satirical magazine), March 1950. – No. 6 (185), pp. 2.

This work has some similarities to Tolkachev's earlier graphic pieces – it is humanistic in its portrayal and is not exaggerated in terms of its sarcasm – more melancholy than savage. True to the Soviet agitprop view of the West at that time, it highlights the allegedly cruel nature of the capitalist system. The captions (in Ukrainian) have the two men in the foreground looking over the squatters' camp and stating that "this place used to be empty and now it is filling up quickly with 'housing'", while the "reportage" in the upper corner notes that in America, it is very common for working-class families to not be able to afford an apartment. In a second work that he submitted to Peretz (Figure 8), the subject here is the alleged anti-Soviet nexus between the new State of Israel and the U.S. The figure of the infant Israel is asking Uncle Sam if Sam is his father, giving the reason for his question the fact that they both share the same global outlook – one of "anti-Sovietism". Subjectively, some observers might find at least a hint of anti-Semitic cliché in the drawing of the "infant Israel".

It is difficult, in the absence of any writings by Tolkachev himself on the matter, to say with confidence what transpired regarding his participation in this exhibition. Recalling the fact that he came from a working-class milieu and was part of the Revolutionary generation, and that he had been a Party member since 1922, one possibility is that he genuinely believed in this Cold War view of the West. Perhaps even more so since, he had never been to the West (other than to Germany in the army during the final days of the War.) One could further speculate that the horrors that he saw at Majdanek and Auschwitz also influenced negatively his view of industrialized capitalist countries (such as Nazi Germany). The anti-Israeli piece raises more questions – did Tolkachev want to pay a nod to what he might have perceived as the fixture of

anti-Semitism in the USSR? Or as a Soviet Jew whose nation was the first to recognize the formation of the State of Israel, did he feel betrayed by Israel's pro-Western orientation? It is also plausible, and not mutually exclusive from these suppositions, that he was trying to get along with the system and what the political masters wanted – a *kon'ionkturshik* in the Russian idiom. A final and less prosaic option is that having lost his job during the purge, he needed the money and the magazine *Peretz* was offering cash prizes for the winners. Yet, for the purposes of this paper, the most interesting question is why the State would highlight at a government-sponsored exhibition the works of a "disgraced cosmopolitan artist?"

Is it possible that this excursion outside of the anti-cosmopolitan framework occurred because the Soviets understood that Tolkachev's art would help to convince the wider world of the USSR's commitment to communism and the fight against "militarism" and "capitalism" more than did the standard visual of Socialist Realism? Or was it as simple as the "left hand not knowing what the right hand was doing"? Given the public nature of the critiques against Tolkachev, I would opt for the likelihood that Tolkachev was invited to exhibit at this official art show in spite of his reduced status because agitprop officials needed to be able to overcome such contradictory impulses so as to support their internationally-oriented propaganda.

Epilogue

After the subsequent dark period of severe anti-Semitism, including the trial and execution of the leaders of the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee and the "Doctors' Plot", official attitudes

began to change in the mid-1960s. In the spring of 1961, Tolkachev wrote from Kiev to his friend and literary critic Dmitri Mironovich Moldavsky in Leningrad, asking Moldavsky for help in getting certain of his Auschwitz drawings published, noting that he thought it was possible at that time. In fact, he was hoping that they would be published in Volume 6 of the journal *Юность* (Youth). In his letter to Moldavsky, Tolkachev added "if you are interested in learning more about Auschwitz, just ask me and I will tell you anything." [34] Eventually, during the celebrations in the USSR to mark the 20th anniversary of the end of the Second World War in 1965, Tolkachev's drawings made on Auschwitz stationary were finally published in Kiev in an album simply entitled "Auschwitz". For the next ten years, he taught at his restored faculty position in Kiev, and produced illustrations of books and portraits of Ukrainian literary figures. He died at home in Kiev in 1977.

The text accompanying the publication of his Auschwitz drawings in 1965 stressed the international character of the camp prisoners, and exaggerated the Communist and Soviet individuals in the camps who led revolts against the Fascists.[35] Even then, the memorialization of the War by the State had to stress the themes of bravery, resistance and heroic death, and could not dwell on the horrors of the war crimes against innocents. This made Tolkachev the beneficiary of a type of political schizophrenia: his drawings could be used to build international sympathy for Communist strength and resistance, but not for their losses nor their victimhood. Insofar as his works had directly memorialized the War, Soviet heroism and the Red Army's

[34] RGALI, f. 2873, op. 1, d. 367-3, page 4.
[35] Rajner, "From the Shtetl to The Flowers of Auschwitz and Back…." op.cit. p.167.

genuine status as liberators, Tolkachev was more protected than were theater critics or authors of fiction who could be purged simply because of their "cosmopolitanism" or their Jewish themes and background. And while at times his "German-style expressionism" and "formalism" offended the cultural bosses in Moscow, they were happy to promote his same artistic works when the audience was right. Additionally, in 1967, the Soviet Art Press in Moscow published a book entitled *Two of Many Thousands* (*Двое из многих тысяч*). One of the main chapters was on Tolkachev and his wartime art, with the text noting that he had memorialized the sufferings of Soviets and their brother nationalities, and that he had shown the efforts made by the Red Army to liberate the victims of Fascism. The author flirted with a political statement, showing a bit of the post-Stalinist liberalization, when he stated that the Russian people were not familiar with Tolkachev's works "because people in power had made sure that his works were not shown at public exhibitions." [36]

[36] G.L Muravin, *Двое из многих тысяч*, op.cit, p. 62.

CHAPTER IV

THE POET, THE POET'S SON, AND THE SHOAH

The contemporaneous experience of another member of the Soviet Jewish intelligentsia helps us to understand the politics and realities of the anti-cosmopolitan persecutions. Pavel Antokol'skii was a well-known Soviet poet, who was one of the few non-journalistic cultural figures who served alongside the Red Army in the combat zone and, like Tolkachev, experienced the liberation of Nazi extermination camps.

Pavel Antokol'skii was born into a well-known St Petersburg family of Jewish cultural figures in 1896. [37]His grandfather was the famous Russian sculptor Mark Antokol'skii and his father an assimilated lawyer in the Czarist capital. Pavel studied at a private high school and then at the Law Faculty of Moscow University, although he did no complete that course. Beginning in 1915, he was an actor on the stage, and then became a co-director of what became known as the Third Studio of the Moscow Art Theater. He remained at that theater until 1935. He had begun publishing poetry in 1918 and his first poems were built around trips to Sweden and Germany with the theater staff (these foreign trips and influences would be critical markers that would be politically resurrected during the postwar period.) According to Shrayer, some of these

[37] The biographical information in this section is taken largely from the biographical essay included in Maxim Shrayer's chapter on Antokolsky in: Shrayer, *An Anthology of Jewish-Russian Literature*, pp. 580-583, and from the subject's biographical chapter of the *Great Soviet Encyclopedia*.

poems would turn out to be Antokol'skii's best works, and betray the influence of Boris Pasternak and Vladimir Maiakovskii. Antokol'skii was fluent in French and translated many French verses into Russian. In addition, he combined French revolutionary tropes and Russian revolutionary themes to produce several propagandistic verses (*Robespierre and Gorgona* (1931) and *The Commune of 1871* (1933)). At that time, his corpus of works transitioned to "a poetry of ideological commission".[38] In 1937, Antokol'skii began teaching at the Literary Institute in Moscow and from 1938-39 served as the poetry editor of the *Novy Mir* literary journal. In short, by the end of the 1930s, he had become a minor classic in Russian poetry circles and conformed closely to socialist poetry norms. As was the case with many Soviet Jewish writers and poets, he was disinclined to discuss Jewish themes. Evelyn Bristol views Antokol'skii has holding "no apparent distinction between a dedication to art and service to the state…his essential concern was for the history and growth of cultures as such. He regularly depicted France and Germany but also dealt without constraint with themes dictated by socialist realism."[39]

Antokol'skii became a member of the Communist Party immediately after the Nazi invasion of the USSR in 1941. His only son Vladimir joined the Red Army, completed an officer's course and became a lieutenant in a front-line artillery unit. Pavel's apartment in Moscow meanwhile became "something between a literary center and the hotel for front-line soldiers."[40] In mid-July 1942, he received a letter from another officer in his son's unit which related:

[38] Shrayer, op.cit., page 580.
[39] Bristol, *A History of Russian Poetry*, p. 259.
[40] Прашкевича, Геннадия, *Самые знаменитые поэты России*, p.92

> "From the Army in the field: To Antokol'skii Pavel G., from the comrade of your son Antokol'skii Volodya. Dear parents, I want to inform you of a very sad event. Though I know how much this will upset you, I must inform you that your son Volodya, in a fierce battle with the German bandits, died the death of the brave on the battlefield on July 6, 1942. We will try, for your son Volodya, to take revenge on these German bastards. Volodya's military friend Vasya Sevrin will also write you. Your son was buried near the river Resset - the tributary of Zhizdra (*n.b., just northeast of the city of Bryansk*). Goodbye, with fervent greetings to you."[41]

One of Antokol'skii's close friends, the writer Venyamin Kaverin, visited soon after and was deeply troubled by Pavel's appearance:

> "I found the poet to be unrecognizably older, with an almost indifferent petrified face, and it was this that frightened me. Pavel was busy drawing his son and not for the first time, but maybe for the twentieth time he was drawing his son in an officer's uniform. The drawings lay on the window, on the desk, on the office, and could be seen behind the glass of the bookcase. And my presence did not tear him from this occupation. We embraced, and then he sat down again and took a pencil in his hands...I suddenly said: 'Pavlik, you should not draw Volodya. You must write about him. Tell me what he was like at school, what he was interested in, with whom he was friendly, how he spent the night after leaving school, who he was in love with.'"[42]

Antokol'skii in this way began writing what would become his most renowned poem, entitled, simply, "Son" ("*Сын*" in Russian). His friends later reminisced that during these months of writing, the drafts of the poem lay open on his desk and that a diary was there in which family and friends could write their thoughts and memorials to Vladimir. Many of those diary entries were included in the poem. The poem became a lengthy mourning – 28 pages long – and was published in the magazine "Smena" in 1943. To illustrate the heartbreak of this work, please allow me to quote one of the stanzas of the final section of the poem:

> Farewell then –
> No trains ever come from those regions,

[41] Ibid.
[42] Ibid., p. 93

Unscheduled and scheduled.
No aeroplanes fly there.
Farewell then my son,
For no miracles happen, as in this world
Dreams do not come true.

Farewell –
I will dream of you still as a baby –
Treading the earth with little strong toes.
The earth where so many already lie buried –
As this song to my son then has come to its close. [43]

According once again to Venyamin Kaverin, Antokol'skii wanted to have the magazine "Smena" include a portrait of Vladimir next to the poem when it was published. The magazine agreed, but the Central Committee of the Komsomol forbad it. They wanted the poem to be as general as possible as a memorial to all fallen Komsomol members. Kaverin noted that both he and Antokol'skii understood this because in their view, "the Komsomol seal is the only one worthy of the memory of Volodya".[44] This universalization of Volodya's death would recur in less honorable circumstances a few years later.

In 1946, Antokol'skii was awarded a Stalin Prize (Second Degree) in Literature for this single poem.

After the publication of this poem, Antokol'skii wanted to work in the front lines, and for a year he joined the staff of *Komsomol'skaia Pravda* as a war correspondent, managed a front-line

[43] Translation done by BBC/Thames Television and read by Sir Laurence Olivier in the BBC television series *The World At War* (Volume 2, Episode 4), Thames Television (UK), 1973.
[44] *Самые знаменитые поэты России*, op. cit., p. 93

theater and continued composing his own poetry. He traveled with the Red Army to newly-liberated areas of the USSR and even then (October 1943) as he witnessed the liberation of much of the Ukraine and Kiev (which before the war had large Jewish populations now mostly murdered), he still wrote nothing about the absence of Jews or the Holocaust by bullets. [45] His articles and surviving diary entries all reflect shock at the staggering losses (without specifying nationalities) and destruction, and admiration for the Red Army and the fortitude of partisans. For example, in a diary entry written in Kharkov on October 6, 1943, Antokol'skii wrote:

> "The editor of the newspaper Sovetskaya Ukraina, one Chekanyuk, briefly told us what is going on in Ukraine. In Poltava Province, unheard-of destruction and unheard-of atrocities by Germans against all civilians; each and every one is herded to the right bank of the Dnieper and annihilated. Children are chopped in half. The fighting is on the right bank of the Dnieper, near Kiev.[46]

Antokol'skii did touch on Jewish victims in several poems written that year (for example, 'Hatred' ("Ненависть")), but even here his references are muted and inferred in a larger context of collective Soviet victimhood. For example, in one stanza he writes of the hatred that would lift human remains "from ditches, crematoria and gas chambers", thereby invoking the circumstances of the Shoah. Yet the poem as a whole is much broader in its reach. (Shrayer in his excellent article provides several other examples of a sort of reluctance by Antokol'skii to address the Holocaust head on, rather to describe it as one type of human tragedy from the war.)[47]

[45] c.f. his article in *Komsomol'skaia Pravda*, November 5, 1943, describing the Dnieper River front in Ukraine
[46] Quoted in Shrayer, Maxim D., "Pavel Antokolsky as a Witness to the Shoah in Ukraine and Poland"
[47] Translated by Shrayer, op. cit.

In early 1944, Antokol'skii returned to Moscow and began teaching poetry at the Gorky Institute of Literature. In the fall of 1944, he once again went into Belarus and Poland with the Red Army, and on this trip encountered outside of the USSR the Nazi death camps of Majdanek and Sobibor. The shock of these extermination centers had the effect, as it had for Ehrenburg, Simonov, Gorbatov and Selvinsky, of changing Antokol'skii's descriptions into focused poetic explications of the Holocaust. Chief among these works was his poem "Death Camp" ("Лагерь Уничтожения") – an effort in which he identifies with the "we" – this pronoun now denoting the destroyed civilization of Eastern European Jews rather than the Soviet peoples. His characters (the dead and the survivors) are clearly Polish Jews (not Soviets). The poem relates the metaphorical search of the old woman Rachel for her disappeared sons, Joseph and Benjamin. The final stanza of the poem concludes:

> "The killers used their cans of gas.
> Death in its beauty would soon pass
> Down the highway from this morass,
> Because in the new waving grass,
> In evening dew and in birdsong,
> In gray clouds over the world's grime,
> You see, we are not dead for long
> We have arisen for all time."[48]

The publication of "Death Camp" in 1946 was produced at the same time as were Shoah-related poems by Ehrenburg and Selvinsky, published in larger-than-normal print runs of the

[48] "Death Camp", final stanza, as translated by Shrayer, op.cit.

national journals *Znamya* and *Oktyabr.* This period from the final days of the war through the first half of 1946 was a period of relatively open and liberal discussion and writing with the USSR about the Holocaust, especially the camps located outside the borders of the Soviet Union. A diverse audience of Soviet readers could read lengthy journalistic pieces in *Pravda, Izvestia* and *Krasnaya Zvezda* by Ehrenburg, Simonov and Gorbatov about their eyewitness experiences at Majdanek, Sobibor, Treblinka and Auschwitz, and in poetic verse by Antokol'skii and his colleagues. Antokol'skii also contributed material to the ill-fated *Black Book of the Soviet Jewish People*, edited by Ilya Ehrenburg and Vasily Grossman – with his friend and fellow writer Venyamin Kaverin, he co-authored a chapter on the prisoner uprising at the Sobibor Extermination Camp. Historians of the period, including Shrayer, Arad, Berkhoff and Kondoyanidi, point to the fact that the Red Army was victorious, the camps were located outside of Soviet borders, and that their existed a brief period of a cultural "thaw" until August 1946.

It was during this same period that Tolkachev published the first of his drawings of Majdanek and Auschwitz, and it is clear that he benefited from the same thaw that opened up publication possibilities for literary figures and journalists. A question which will be worth returning to later in this paper is that of why both Antokol'skii and Tolkachev stopped producing works oriented toward Judaism, even after the Thaw that began after Stalin's death? Before the war, Tolkachev had shown a continual interest in Soviet-Jewish themes in his art, but by contrast, Antokol'skii (admittedly a more assimilated Russian Jew from an elite family) did not touch on Judaic themes until he was confronted with the Holocaust in Poland in 1944-45. In that brief period,

both artists produced multiple sensitive works of literature and visual art that tried to deal with their shock, anger and need to memorialize what they had both seen. Yet after this burst of directed energy, they both oriented themselves to other themes, even when the anti-cosmopolitan campaigns ended and they had some room to return to Judaic representations. Is it possible that part of the reason was an internal turmoil that Antokol'skii himself expressed in a diary entry on October 25, 1943 as he was witnessing what had been done to the civilian population of Ukraine and Belarus:

> "With my poems, a total and complete failure. I am not only incapable of writing them, but I also do not want to: any language seems approximate, poor, alien. And rhyme and rhythm irritate me as a convention. I cannot say in verse anything that has not been said a thousand times before…"[49]

What a challenge it must have been by extension to try and represent the Polish extermination camps later encountered.

Antokol'skii's Treatment During the Anti-Cosmopolitan Struggle

The political criticism of Antokol'skii began later than did the campaign against Tolkachev, with the poet first being singled out in the press and in state journals in February 1949. This followed a general trend of anti-cosmopolitan attacks first targeting theater professionals and critics, then visual artists, and finally literary figures.

[49] Quoted in Shrayer, "Pavel Antokolsky…". op. cit

An early and preparatory style of critique against Antokol'skii appeared in an interesting article published in *Literaturnaia Gazeta* on June 29, 1947. This pre-dates the anti-cosmopolitan fervor on the postwar political timeline, but it sets up the nature of some of the future arguments made against Antokol'skii. The author is a Red Army officer, Major A. Kuznetzov, serving in the city of Sambir in western Ukraine. Kuznetzov references an unspecified article on culture that Antokol'skii wrote in the journal *Znamya,* and argues with Antokol'skii's definition of what embodies "culture" in a Russian sense. One of his main critiques in this long piece is the accusation that Antokol'skii defines culture in a manner dependent too much on foreign mores. He uses an example from the Znamya article: evidently, Antokol'skii had written about a Red Army lieutenant that he had met outside of Berlin when Antokol'skii was with the army as a correspondent on one of his reporting trips near the end of the war. He had praised the officer who, although his appearance was not up to military standard, had impressed Antokol'skii by the fact that he read German fluently and in fact had discussed Goethe with the poet. Kuznetzov retorts that Antokol'skii ignores uncultured elements from a Soviet perspective because of his obsession with foreign high culture. Kuznetzov says that it is "un-Russian" for a victorious combat officer in enemy territory to be walking around with his hands in his pockets, neglecting to use a handkerchief to wipe his nose, and eating sunflower seeds and spitting the shells on his own boots, and to be excused just because he can read "Faust". He goes on to note that in his opinion, when Soviet citizens were in the West, they remained more cultured than did the foreign citizens, not shopping or enjoying pleasures of the flesh, but rather visiting museums and libraries. He asks rhetorically why Antokol'skii cannot be satisfied with the

cultural levels of Soviet people, who after all have "proven their superiority by crushing the Fascists." [50]

The first instance of public criticism during the anti-cosmopolitan campaign was an article in the February 16, 1949 issue of *Pravda*, entitled "Fighting Cosmopolitanism and Formalism in Poetry". Authored by reactionary Soviet poet Nikolai Gribachev, the lengthy article touches on "suspect" poets, mostly Jewish, such as Antokol'skii, Boris Pasternak, Margarita Aliger and the non-Jewish poet Anna Akhmatova. After generally critiquing Antokol'skii's "bourgeois formalism", it focuses on the fact that he is teaching many up-and-coming literary figures at the Gorky Literary Institute, and worries that his teachings include "uncontrolled lessons which drag down Soviet poetry through formalism, cosmopolitanism, aestheticism, snobbism and subjectivism." The article then focuses on Antokol'skii's well-known love of French literature and his translations of the same, and his teachings of "French sonnets and ballads" that pollute the minds of his students. The concern for his students (which includes Aliger) is based on Antokol'skii's alleged preference for foreign styles of poetry, which "denies the heroic depth of the contemporary Soviet people" and which reportedly caused students to voluntarily leave his lectures. Interestingly, Gribachev makes an exception for Antokol'skii's poem "Son", saying that this was a poem highly respected by Soviet readers, and justifiably so. But "so many of his other poems sound like translations of foreign literature which sets back the cultural development of Soviet poetry." [51]

[50] *Literaturnaia Gazeta*, June 29, 1947, p.3
[51] *Pravda*, February 16, 1949, p.3

These two official articles set the stage for the critique of Antokol'skii – his "genuflection toward the West", and beliefs about his preference for foreign poetry over Russian-language verse, his translations of European texts, and his commensurate belief that Russian poetry and culture falls behind that of the West. Still, to this point, there has been no outright critique of his Jewishness, nor of his Holocaust-related poetry which contain Jewish themes (although of course some of the language such as "bourgeois nationalist" and "cosmopolitan" are clearly code words, in part, for Jews. To descend into cliché, not all cosmopolitans were Jews but all Jews were Cosmopolitan, in the view of Zhdanov and probably Stalin.)

It is noteworthy that in the poem *Son*, for which Antokol'skii won the Stalin Prize, there is a direct reference to the Holocaust and his Jewishness, in the following stanza:

> The hot ashes of all burnt bibles,
> All Polish ghettos and concentration camps,
> For all, for all who died,
> He, half-Russian and half-Jewish,
> Woke up for war from lethargy
> Infant and felt one thing:
> Do it the way others (friends) do!
> Everything else is predetermined here ...[52]

Yet even in the coming weeks, when Antokol'skii was in fact accused of Zionism tied to his Jewish themes, this poem was always exempted. We can only conclude that a combination of the work's intense popularity, the Stalin Prize, and the fact that Antokol'skii's son died honorably in combat as a Red Army officer, effectively immunized it from criticism.

[52] Poem "Son", by Pavel Antokolsky, passage translated by author

The next step in the persecution of Antokol'skii came within weeks of Gribachev's article, signaling the premeditated nature of these actions. A front-page article in the journal *Kultura i Zhizn* complained about the existence of "cosmopolitanism and formalism" at the Gorky Literary Institute in Moscow (Antokol'skii's employer). Quoting the Institute's Party Council, it specifically pointed to the writings and teachings of critics Grigori Brovman and F. Levin, and the teachings of the poet Antokol'skii. All three men were Jewish. The article focuses on the "anti-patriotic and cosmopolitan aestheticism" taught in their classes. In the section on Antokol'skii, the article concentrates on the "theoretical and foreign influences that supersede the practical work that should be the focus of Antokol'skii's teaching" and he is roundly criticized for showing anger toward his students who insisted on focusing on contemporary practical themes rather than the "bourgeois aesthetic" that Antokol'skii preferred. [53]

Several weeks later, in the March 10, 1949 issue of the same journal, was printed a brief announcement that "as a result of the Institute's Party Council deliberations as outlined in the February 20 article of this Journal, Brovman, Levin and Antokol'skii have on this day been dismissed from their positions at the Institute."[54] Antokol'skii would be out of a job until Stalin's death and "the Thaw", circa 1953.

[53] *Kultura i Zhizhn*, February 20, 1949, p. 1
[54] Ibid., March 10, 1949, p.3

In March 1949, the critique for the first time touched directly on Antokol'skii's religious background and his poetry relating to the Shoah. In a lengthy critical essay entitled "Problems in Soviet Poetry" written by doctrinaire poet Mikhail Lukonin in the March 1949 issue of the journal Zvezda, Lukonin devoted two pages to a running criticism of Antokol'skii's mindset as an artist. He offered that Antokol'skii "was one of our best Soviet poets", yet noted repeatedly the poet's need to "free himself from remnants of the past". In this theme, Lukonin attacked Antokol'skii's "exaggeration" of the political value of the literary works of Alexander Blok. Opining that while Blok may have been "a talented Symbolist", Lukonin goes on to say that Blok did nothing noteworthy to "push forward the faith of the proletariat in the Soviet system", the main task of any Soviet cultural figure. He states that Antokol'skii's attraction to Blok is tied together with the former's attraction to Western "decadence", both representing pretty but useless literature. In the same vein regarding Antokol'skii's attachments to the past, Lukonin specifically regretted the poem "No Eternal Memory (Не Вечная Память)" a verse which touches on the Jewish rites for the dead, in this case the victims of Nazi massacres. These lines, wrote Lukonin, "were deeply erroneous, full of Zionism and bourgeois nationalism."[55]

In all, a good summary of the political attacks on Antokol'skii was written by his friend L. Levin, who summarized in 1969 that Antokol'skii had been classified as a formalist whose works were more reminiscent of the translations of foreign poetry than they were representative of the Russian literary soul – even though the State always exempted from any critique the poem

[55] *Zvezda*, March 1949, pp. 181-200; and Pinkus, *The Soviet Government and the Jews 1948-1967,* p. 178.

"Son". Soviet officialdom also worried about the teachings that Antokol'skii passed along to his students – the "war generation" of Soviet poets -- "many of whom after listening to Antokol'skii cannot or do not want to see the heroism of the Soviet people."[56]

During the Thaw beginning in 1954, Antokol'skii returned to his position at the Literary Institute, and became not only a minor Soviet classic but also a renowned professor of poetry. He published a number of collections of his own works as well as translations of poems from Estonian and French, and died in 1978.

There are two instructive and interesting epilogues to this discussion of the postwar travails of Antokol'skii. In the first, Russian poet Vladimir Lugovsky wrote in 1956 (during the Thaw) a long paean to Antokol'skii in *Literaturnaia Gazeta* on Antokol'skii's sixtieth birthday. He expresses admiration for Antokol'skii's work in such a way as to reverse many of the specific critiques made against him in 1949: Antokol'skii's poem "Son" captures the heroism and sadness that immortalizes all Soviet youth of the war generation; that Antokol'skii's lyrical style in his war poetry is not "formalistic" but rather a concrete guide as to how life approximates the Front – in battle, in work, in love, and that this practical view of life as a forward-looking struggle, as per Lenin's teachings, was the ideal philosophy to be promulgated by a true Soviet poet. In fact, says Lugovsky, was not Antokol'skii's attraction to foreign poetry proof "that Russian poetry is

[56] Levin, *Четыре жизни, p. 225.*

strong enough to maintain its own identity while interpreting all the themes and images of world culture?" He continued:

> What happened to us during the years of the cult of personality? We lost our search for creativity, we homogenized our verse, we caused confusion among the poetic youth, we began to be afraid of any innovation, and stopped working on Russian verse. And the influence of false odes, praising the cult of personality in all its forms, struck at that time an even greater blow to the multicolored and beautiful Soviet poetry. It would be better to have less blows and more creative friendship…the friendship of the poets of Russia, the friendship of the poets of the great Soviet Union, the fraternal conversation about even foreign verses and not gloomy attempts to undermine each other….and celebrating the sixtieth birthday of one of our most important Soviet poets, Pavel Antokol'skii, let's resume this conversation. Renewable, because Antokol'skii is a great poet, because he did a lot for the brotherhood of the peoples, for the culture of our country, and for popularizing for us world literature (and above all, French poetry) because he educated many talented poets and because he remained himself. [57]

As for the second epilogue, in a 1990 article, Professor Kalpana Sahni of Jawaharlal Nehru University in New Delhi's Center for Russian Studies, outlines some of the background to Antokol'skii's purge. Sahni is writing about the meeting of the Moscow Writers Union that met in 1958 to demand the expulsion of Boris Pasternak. She describes the contemporary (1990) debate in the Russian literary press about this session and the later guilt of the participating authors. Via letters written to the editor of the newspaper *Soviet Culture*, she tells the story of Russian writer Vladimir Soloukhin who, after reading Pasternak's poems on television in 1990, was called to task by readers who could not forget that Soloukhin was one of the fourteen writers who had authored the Writers Union resolution in 1958 expelling Pasternak. In one of these letters, a "former friend" of Soloukhin named Grigory Pozhenyan recalled that it was Soloukhin who had "denounced their teacher, the poet Pavel Antokol'skii, as a cosmopolitan in 1949 and had then denounced me (Pozhenyan) for having created a group of supporters for

[57] *Literaturnaia Gazeta,* July 3, 1956, p.3.

Antokol'skii. The Writers Union bosses clearly thought that you could be successfully asked to denounce people in 1949 as well as in 1958." The discussion-by-letter continued for some time, examining the moral standard of participating in denunciations versus remaining silent versus being brave enough to refuse or at least to absent oneself from such meetings. In a telling paragraph, a Russian historian named Proshurin wrote that:

> "It is the duty of every union of creative intellectuals to defend its members from all kinds of oppression…otherwise, what is the need for a union? It is still fashionable for us to raise mournful eyes and imply that the decision-making is all done up there, in the party apparatus. But this is nothing but a pathetic excuse for assuaging one's conscience…when an atmosphere is created in a collective where there is no freedom of opinion or opportunity to criticize, and where on need not prove or refute anything, then it is mediocrity that triumphs…and the show is managed by envious and revengeful hypocrites, sycophants, conceited and ambitious careerists. Their voices drown and defeat everyone and everything."[58]

In this respect, we might ask ourselves about the impact on Soviet intellectuals of the experience of sustained political persecution, lack of agency, and "groupthink" in the anti-cosmopolitan campaign. Not all inputs to these purges derived from the sweeping historical contexts that this paper is otherwise examining. Some of these campaign's inner workings must have derived from individual ambitions, jealousies, and political cowardice. Both Lugovsky only six years later and Proshurin in the early 1990s recognized that the cultural and political critique was false and that individual colleagues of Antokol'skii played their roles, in most cases as the State expected and had trained them to do.

[58] Sahni, "Pasternak's Resurrection", *Economic and Political Weekly*, New Delhi, pp. 665-67.

Chapter V

CONCLUSION: WHAT THESE EPISODES SAY ABOUT THE IMPACT OF THE WAR, THE HOLOCAUST, ANTI-SEMITISM AND PARANOIA ON THE POSTWAR USSR

Western and Russian historians who have written about this period in Stalinist history, often concluded that these anti-cosmopolitan spasms were essentially examples of institutional anti-Semitism. They saw a development of traditional Russian and Ukrainian anti-Semitism that reached its crescendo with the Doctors Plot and associated trials and executions of Jewish medical personnel. It is obvious and evident that anti-Semitism played a role in the attacks that we have examined herein. But I believe that this episode has more to tell us about the developing psychology of the war-damaged USSR and the Cold War, the Party's perception of Soviet nationality policy, and the nation's reaction to the discovery of the Holocaust.

In recent years, historians of Stalinism have begun to move toward a more multifaceted examination of the anti-cosmopolitan campaign. Among these scholars are Kiril Tomoff of the University of California at Riverside, Mark Edele of the University of Western Australia, and Juliane Furst of the University of Bristol (UK). [59] In his study of the politics of Soviet music and composition, Tomoff in describing the period from 1949-53 notes that:

> "One of Stalinism's most consistent characteristics was a tendency to undertake periodic ideological campaigns to mobilize the Soviet population, campaigns like the Zhdanovshchina. Another crucial postwar campaign that has received less attention…is the struggle against cosmopolitanism…Participants, victims and historians alike have correctly understood the anti-

[59] See especially Tomoff, *Creative Union* and Edele, "More than Just Stalinists: The Political Sentiments of Victors 1945-1953"

> cosmopolitan campaigns as primarily anti-Semitic. However, this understanding is incomplete. A close study of the music profession during the campaign demonstrates that anti-Semitism was an essential component of anti-cosmopolitanism, but in no sphere, were the two coterminous…Anti-cosmopolitanism had a diverse array of coexistent meanings. Besides anti-Semitism, the most widely recognized feature of anti-cosmopolitanism has been fear of foreign influence, but other essential meanings included a patriotic preoccupation with 'contemporary reality' and a pro-Russian bias in cultural preferences…" [60]

Not dissimilarly, Mark Edele in a discussion about anti-Semitic beliefs during and after the War in the USSR, pointed out that openly-expressed anti-Semitism was itself a misunderstanding of the official line. In the case of anti-cosmopolitanism, Edele states that

> "'Cosmopolitan' did not simply mean 'Jewish.' It was a wider term which included all sorts of 'rootless' persons including jazz fans, *stiliagi*, scholars who quoted foreign scholarship, composers who drew on a Western tradition, listeners of foreign radio stations, anybody interested in things foreign, and 'Zionists'. Officially there was no anti-Semitism in the Soviet Union, and agitators stressed its difference to anti-cosmopolitanism. This is often seen as a cynical move, but it should be taken more seriously, because this complexity of the official line explains why open anti-Semitism was punished." [61]

In fact, Soviet youth in the immediate postwar period were also targets and subjects of the anti-cosmopolitan campaign. As Juliane Furst points out

> After a lull in ideological work during the war, when propaganda was deliberately inclusive to gather all strengths available, 1946 saw the first return to a campaign championing ideological purity. Zhdanov in his attacks on Akhmatova and Zoshenko were keen to underline the detrimental effect their work had on youth…and (*the Zhdanovshchina and*) the anti-cosmopolitan campaign were keen to involve young people…who were feared to be the victims of Western influence, while at the same time they were expected to take on the role of persecutors of their contemporaries and –more controversial, but also more enticing—their elders. [62]

I believe that Tomoff, Edele, Furst and others have moved the discussion onto a more revealing and sophisticated level. This paper's examination of the professional lives and political

[60] Tomoff, *Creative Union*, op. cit., pp. 152-153.
[61] Edele, "More than Just Stalinists", pp. 172-173
[62] Furst, Juliane, "The Importance of Being Stylish", pp. 220-221.

persecutions of Tolkachev and Antokol'skii adds detail and visible form to the shades of paranoia and adaptation that preoccupied Soviet officials from 1945 to Stalin's death in 1953.

The two artists that I have examined have significant similarities as well as differences in relation to these issues. Both Tolkachev and Antokol'skii were assimilated, non-observant Jews who were loyal, institutional Soviet artists, with strong Revolutionary credentials, and both were Party members (although Tolkachev joined much earlier in life, and Antokol'skii seems to have joined the Party because of heightened patriotism after the start of the Second World War.) Tolkachev's visual art had made some references to Jewish themes (specifically his illustrations for editions of Sholem Aleichem's short stories), while it took the Holocaust to bring Antokol'skii to write Judaic themes into his poetry. Tolkachev's only known pre-war foreign contacts were rare, probably with some young German expressionist artists in the 1920s through the Kultur-Lige; Antokol'skii traveled to Western Europe several times in the 1930s and was enamored by French literature and produced many literary translations from that language. During the war, Tolkachev served in the Red Army full time for two years at the front; Antokol'skii made trips to the front but as a war correspondent. Both encountered the Holocaust in person, Tolkachev at Majdanek and Auschwitz as well as the "Holocaust by Bullets" in Ukraine and Belarus; Antokol'skii in Ukraine, Belarus, the Sobibor camp in Poland and possibly at other extermination centers. Both provided information to Ilya Ehrenburg's ill-fated Black Book project. Both received official recognition for their Holocaust-related work in 1945 and 1946 – Tolkachev by being asked to produce art to support war crimes trials of Nazi officials in Poland, and Antokol'skii by winning a Stalin Prize for the poem "Son", which touched

on Judaic themes. Both were art teachers at state institutes after the War – Tolkachev at the Kiev Academy of Arts and Antokol'skii at the Gorky Literary Institute in Moscow. Neither wrote nor said anything in public statements about the creation of the State of Israel in 1948. Finally, Antokol'skii produced more Holocaust-specific works in 1945-1947 than did Tolkachev, and they received much more attention at the time.

The attacks made against them during the Zhdanovshchina and the anti-cosmopolitan campaign were similar but slightly skewed, and took place at different stages of these political movements. The fact that Tolkachev was attacked earlier than Antokol'skii may be closely related to the fact that the campaign went in waves: theater critics and producers, then visual artists, and finally literary figures and poets became victims in that general order. The sequence of attacks may well be sectoral, but the timing of the overall campaign itself was very much a product of the historical position that the USSR found itself in beginning with the victory in 1945.

Let us examine the domestic and international context, as seen from the position of Soviet officials in 1945-1948.

- After the victory over Nazi Germany, hundreds of thousands of Soviet combat troops, rear echelon personnel, former POWs of the Nazis as well as slave laborers and Holocaust survivors from the Soviet republics, began to return to the USSR. Many of

them initially spoke and wrote about the high levels of infrastructure, public wealth, and good medical care they witnessed in the West;

- The Cold War positioning began in earnest almost immediately upon Roosevelt's death and victory in Europe. Tensions at the border between East and West (the divided city of Berlin and the future Iron Curtain) were high and increasing;
- The USSR had just lost approximately 25 million soldiers and civilians in the War: 22 percent of all Soviet citizens between the ages of 20 and 25; [63]
- Conquered territories outside of the USSR (Poland, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, etc.) were restive and not at all enamored with being satellites of the Soviet Union;
- The growing knowledge about the Holocaust created internal tensions between Soviet Jews, suddenly more conscious of their "nationality" and wanted their sufferings to be treated as a unique occurrence, and the State which did not want to engage in nationality-specific mourning but rather in memorialization of all Soviet peoples who needed to be seen as having fought bravely;
- The creation of the State of Israel by UN vote in 1948 (which the USSR supported) created what to the Kremlin were millions of Soviet citizens (Jews) who now had dual political allegiances. As it became clear that Israel would be part of the U.S. geopolitical sphere, anti-Zionism in the official USSR grew rapidly;

[63] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/World_War_II_casualties_of_the_Soviet_Union (accessed April 29, 2017).

- The United States, relatively undamaged by the war which brought Europe and Asia to its knees economically, showed a new confidence/hubris and internationalism on the backs of anti-socialist capitalism.

From the point of view of Stalin and his colleagues, it must have seemed as if victory's clear advantages were mirrored by new difficulties. Some of the challenges listed above compounded each other: for example, not only did the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee continued to press for the Black Book and Jewish-specific memorials to the dead, but they also mobilized large crowds to welcome Golda Meir to Moscow when she visited as the head of the first diplomatic mission from Israel in 1948. This tapped into the anxieties about Jews' divided loyalties and smacked of Trotsky's internationalism (and of course, Trotsky had been Jewish).

At the same time, many of the returning veterans (and those former POWs who were not immediately sent to the Gulag upon their return from Nazi camps) often agitated below the political surface for greater freedoms, greater common prosperity, and greater action against institutional corruption. [64] To be sure, veterans also often initiated anti-Semitic discussions, usually interpreted as an effect of Nazi propaganda and a lack of press reports about Jewish soldiers' heroism at the front, which led Amir Weiner to describe the wartime Red Amy as "the ultimate incubator for anti-Semitic statements." [65]

[64] C.f. the discussion in Edele, "More than Just Stalinists"; and Humphrey "Cosmopolitanism and Kosmopolitizm in the Political Life of Soviet Citizens".
[65] Quoted in Edele, op.cit., p. 172.

It is my contention that these concerns were as much behind the Zhdanovshchina and the anti-cosmopolitan campaign as was straightforward anti-Semitism. Examples can be drawn from the vocabulary of criticism levied against Tolkachev and Antokol'skii. Both, of course, were critiqued for "Western decadence" and Antokol'skii was repeatedly savaged for his love of and supposed belief in the superiority of French literature to Russian creations. In the early stages of the campaigns, both were criticized for "formalism" which was itself a code word for a Western aesthetic. This represented a heightened need for patriotism and nationalism on the part of the authorities. The specific complaint that Tolkachev produced drawings that "insult the dignity of the Soviet people, showing them as spineless victims in the face of ferocious enemies", shows another type of worry. How in this threatening global climate can the Soviets be perceived as so recently weak, so recently able to be swept up by the Nazis? In addition, how can questions be raised that bring to the fore the collaboration of many Soviets (the many Ukrainian POW and concentration camp guards come immediately to mind)?

We can also look again at the comments made by USSR Academy of Arts delegate Sysoev:

> The artist Zinovii Tolkachev's works contain exaggerated mysticism which preach the submissiveness of Christianity, non-resistance and turning the other cheek. His artistic ideology uses a form that is foreign to the Soviet people and their artistic traditions. In Tolkachev's works, the Soviet people are not shown with their usual great courageous spirit and strength, nor in their limitless striving to overcome difficulties, deserving of their victory, but rather as wallowing in Christian submissiveness and obedience.

And we can also refer back to the artist Vovchenko's comments regarding Tolkachev's imputed attempt to:

> "…snatch Jewish victims out of the close-knit family of Soviet peoples who fought together against the Fascist aggressors. Only those people with a limited view of the concept of

> nationality might argue that the tragedy of Auschwitz, of Majdanek, that these tragedies were predominantly only of the Jewish people rather than tragedies of all freedom-loving peoples, at the head of which are the great Russian people in the days of mortal struggle against fascism.

These concerns about Tolkachev's adoption of Western artistic styles (expressionism) and his "Christian" (read: Judeo-Christian) theology reflect the elements of his art that would have not only gone against the anti-religious nature of the Communist Soviet Union, but also would have shown submissiveness and lack of strength. These elements would have all been anathema to Soviet officials of that era. At the same time, the criticism of his "Christian" mores was not what one would have expected had the goal of the critique been solely an expression or reflection of anti-Semitism. Indeed, as noted earlier in this paper, Vovchenko's commentary could be seen as somewhat sympathetic to the Jewish wartime experience. While it is certainly Russo-centric, it does suggest a placement of Jewish victims within the Soviet "family" and while denying to Soviet Jews a unique victimhood, it does not exclude them from acknowledgment both of their suffering and their contribution to ultimate victory.

Interestingly, Tolkachev was never directly accused of "Zionism", even though his career portfolio contained many more Jewish-themed creations (mostly pre-war works) than did Antokol'skii. As we will recall, the critique of Antokol'skii is standard for the time in many ways—an attraction to Western "decadence" and "formalism". Concern is expressed specifically about Antokol'skii's role as a teacher and by extension that he is teaching his students to honor corrupt Western literature.

Mikhail Lukonin's 1949 attack on Antokol'skii specifically targeted the poem "No Eternal Memory" a verse which touches on the Jewish rites for the dead. These lines, wrote Lukonin, "were deeply erroneous, full of Zionism and bourgeois nationalism." Yet no similar public critique was made of Antokol'skii's poem "Death Camp" which was much more clearly Jewish-themed and Holocaust-related than was "No Eternal Memory", and this poem was published officially within the USSR during the relatively liberal period (in relation to the Holocaust) from 1944 through 1946. It should be noted that Antokol'skii had won a Stalin Prize in 1946, that his son had been an officer killed honorably in combat, that most of his Holocaust poetry referred to death camps located outside of the USSR, and that he had shown no prewar literary interest in Jewish themes. Was the lack of attention to Antokol'skii's Holocaust literature related to any or all of these facts?

What we can say is that the text of the poem "No Eternal Memory", unlike "Death Camp", refers in several instances back to Jewish figures outside of the USSR, for whom Antokol'skii gives pride of place (Baruch Spinoza and Albert Einstein) and to Jewish biblical figures from the Old Testament. Is it possible that the critique of Antokol'skii's alleged "Zionism" is tied more to this connection between a Soviet Jew and foreign Jewish communities, individuals and traditions abroad, which might have raised warning flags to the Kremlin in the same period as witnessed the creation of the State of Israel?

A similar instructive event occurred to Soviet Jewish poet Margarita Aliger in 1947. In a cycle of her immediate postwar poems, one of her main themes was that "the war, with the

privatization and suffering that it entailed, left a scar that can never be effaced, that the future can never be quite like the past, that life, though at times it may seem a burden, will and must go on." [66] This vision did not align with the Party's bright vision of a postwar world. And although Konstantin Simonov rose to her defense, noting that:

> "I cannot and do not wish to consider a sober, sensible viewpoint as poverty of ideas. Life is difficult, full of struggles and trials. These struggles and trials stand before us in the future. And a poet is right when he reminds me, the reader, of this." [67]

the editors of *Literaturnaia Gazeta* and *Novy Mir* forced Aliger eventually to make changes to her texts before they could be published. The changes placed greater emphasis on "courage" and "will" and by the omission of passages which referred to feelings of uncertainty and anguish. Once again, nothing was said or implied about Aliger's Jewishness – rather, the focus was on her depressed stance on the future, which she regarded as a less heroic construct than did the agitprop officials in Moscow.

Harold Swayze, late of the University of Washington, in his 1962 study of political control of Soviet literature (in which he discussed the Aliger case noted above), had an interesting perspective on anti-Semitism and the period of the Zhdanovshchina and the anti-cosmopolitan campaign. He wrote that:

> "Because the anti-cosmopolitan campaign coincided with a severe attack on Jewish cultural institutions generally, Western writers have sometimes tended to identify the two and regard the whole campaign as a manifestation of anti-Semitism. In literature, anti-Semitism played a secondary role in a campaign whose ultimate significance is quite different…in general, the regime played on anti-Jewish feeling to drum up support for its accusations, and it may have

[66] Swayze, *Political Control of Literature in the USSR, 1946-1959*, p. 49.
[67] Quoted in Swayze, op.cit., p. 50.

> been that the suggestion of Zionism helped to strengthen the absurd charges of a literary underground linked to international political forces." [68]

In addition to the suggested use of anti-Semitism as suggested by Swayze, I would offer in terms of visual arts at least a parallel possibility. An aspect of the Jewish aesthetic may also have contributed to the criticism of the art of this period. Given the long co-residency of Jews and Russians, Belarussians and Ukrainians, and the restrictions placed on Jewish life in both the Tsarist Empire and the USSR, in many cases Jewish art was focused backwards in time, documenting the history and travails of Jewish life. Committed Jewish Soviets often absorbed the Socialist credo of the idolization of the future, industry and growth, but many less-politicized Jews of the Soviet Union may have preferred a more nostalgic artistic palate. We can see this in Tolkachev's illustrations of the stories of Sholem Aleichem. The grip of history on their work also suggested an artistic style more redolent of the expressionist movements in the West, as seen in the works of Marc Chagall, Natan Altman and Tolkachev.

This aesthetic would have been in many cases the stylistic foundation on which the Holocaust was dealt with by Soviet Jewish artists. The thrill of victory over the Nazi regime in 1945, for Jews, must have been quickly followed by the bleakness of tragedy and loss, as they learned of the fates of their friends and families, victims whether in Russia, Ukraine, Belarus, the Baltic States, or Poland. No wonder that Aliger was reluctant in her poetry to portray a shining future. And in Tolkachev and Antokol'skii's cases, having witnessed the death camps firsthand but not having survived them as inmates, the shock to their systems must have been more immediate

[68] Swayze, op.cit., p. 63.

than for artists who created works within the camp system. No wonder they adopted an expressionist and in many instances a religious theme that would have run counter to the postwar Soviet artistic ideology.

This religious theme also connects to a unification of two basic ideas of Jewish art of the 1920s-1940s, manifested in particular by Chagall in his paintings done during the rise of Nazism and the War itself: *The White Crucifixion*, *The Yellow Crucifixion* and *Obsession.* As pointed out by Amishai-Maisels:

> "Chagall's use of the Crucifixion during the Holocaust can be seen to unite two basic traditional ideas: he identifies Jesus as the archetypal Jewish martyr while using him to reproach the Christian word for their deeds." [69]

This symbolism is at the core of Tolkachev's series *Christ in Majdanek* and to some of Antokol'skii's Biblical imagery in *No Eternal Memory* and *Death Camp.* Is it not likely that these references offended Soviet critics both because of their own anti-religiosity and because of the implied responsibility of the Christian world for the Holocaust?

In conclusion, it is not an accident that the anti-cosmopolitan campaign was unleashed at a time of enormous stress for the Soviet Union. Anti-Semitism served as a foil and a contributing factor in the campaign, but a focus on that singular subject risks sidelining the other significant elements of this period: a restive corps of youth and veterans who were no longer ignorant of the West; the weight of the Holocaust and the challenges it carried not only for memory and

[69] Amishai-Maisels, *Depiction and Interpretation: The Influence of the Holocaust on the Visual Arts*, p. 185.

national myth creation but also for a political society bent on the future; the strains of a multi-national society formed out of centuries of differing and competing “national” traditions; the concrete threats and paranoia-induced tensions of the cold war; and the growth of Israel and Zionism as a force for internationalism within and without the borders of the USSR. These – and traditional prejudices such as anti-Semitism -- were the struggles that consumed the Soviet elites and drove their cultural campaigns in what they perceived as the dangerous environment that followed victory.

APPENDIX

LIST OF FIGURES

Fig. 1 – "Red Army Liberator", by Zinovii Tolkachev, Auschwitz, 1945

Fig. 2 – "Christ in Majdanek", by Zinovii Tolkachev, Lublin, Poland, 1944

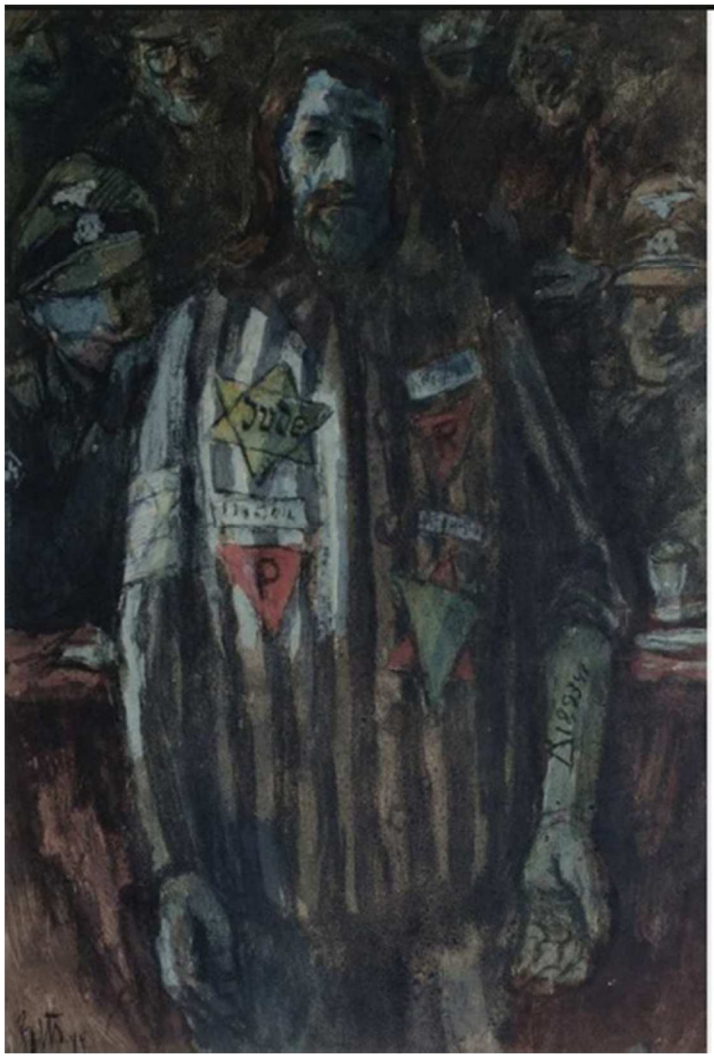


Fig. 3 – "Untitled", by Zinovii Tolkachev, Auschwitz, 1945

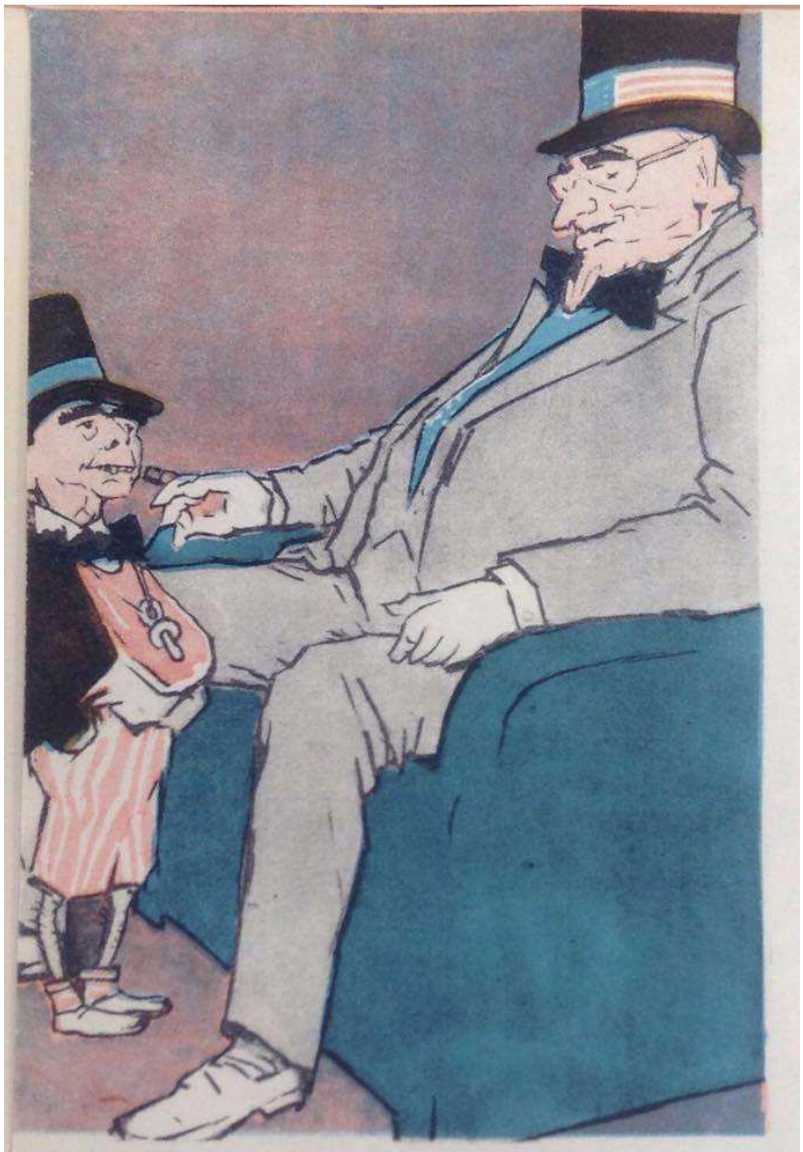
Fig. 4 – "Burial", by Zinovii Tolkachev, Auschwitz, 1945

Fig. 5 – "Gott Mit Uns", by Zinovii Tolkachev, Lublin, Poland, 1944

Fig. 6– "Taleskoten", by Zinovii Tolkachev, Lublin, Poland, 1944

Fig. 7 – "American Tempo", by Zinovii Tolkachev, *Peretz* satirical weekly, Kiev, March 1950

Fig. 8 – "Young Israel and Uncle Sam", by Zinovii Tolkachev, *Peretz* satirical weekly, Kiev, March 1950



Мал. З. ТОЛКАЧОВА

Посол Ізраїля в США Елат нещодавно прямо заявив, що, по суті, Сполучені Штати та Ізраїль обстоюють те саме. У них є історична спорідненість, а також єдність духу та ідеалів.

(З газет).

— Дядю, я догадуюсь, що ви мій тато.
— Звідки це ти взяв?
— Від нас з вами одним духом несе — антирадянським.

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