Chapter 2

Il'ia Ehrenburg and the Holocaust in the Soviet Press

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The writer and journalist Il'ia Ehrenburg was the most significant voice in the Soviet press during World War II. Writing primarily for *Krasnaia zvezda* (*Red Star*), the newspaper distributed among Red Army troops, Ehrenburg became famous for his outspoken appeals to Soviet soldiers, insisting in article after article that they must hate the Germans in order to defeat them. His articles were so admired at the front that soldiers were instructed to cut them out and not use them for rolling cigarettes. Foreign Minister Viacheslav Molotov once told a visiting diplomat that Ehrenburg was worth a division, while Hitler, mindful of Ehrenburg's Jewish background and the impact of his articles, declared that he would hang Ehrenburg in Red Square were he to capture Moscow.

Ehrenburg was one of the few journalists to write about Nazi atrocities against the Jews in the Soviet press. Official Soviet attitudes about the Holocaust present a far more complicated picture than most people assume. Given Stalin's assault on Yiddish culture following World War II and the hostile actions of the Brezhnev regime toward Israel—including the Kremlin's concerted (and unsuccessful) attempt to quash the Jewish Emigration Movement—it is hardly surprising that even otherwise-informed Jewish observers accepted the widely held belief that the regime was studiously silent about German atrocities toward the Jews during World War II, including the terrifying, open-air massacres that took place throughout German-occupied Soviet territory. We now know that these massacres, including the use of mobile gas vans, resulted in the murder of over 2.5 million Jews, a startling percentage of the six million Jews who perished altogether. So how could the Kremlin ignore the mass murder of its Jewish citizens on its own territory by

the regime's most dangerous enemy? In a word, it was not oblivious to these crimes.

It is undeniably true that the Soviet press did not cover the mass murder of its Jewish citizens with anywhere near the prominence it deserved. But it is a falsification of the historical record to claim that the press did not cover it at all. For example, in November 1941, when the regime marked the twenty-fourth anniversary of the Revolution, at a time when the Wehrmacht was threatening Moscow, Stalin delivered a defiant speech. Among German atrocities, Stalin explicitly accused them of “happily organizing medieval pogroms against the Jews, just as the tsarist regime had done before.” Four days later, *Izvestiia* referred to a news source in New York in an article about the murder of fifty-two thousand Jewish men, women, and children in Kiev; this was the two-day massacre at Babii Iar. In December 1942, the Soviet press carried two prominent, front page denunciations of the massacres of Jews. On December 18, 1942, *Pravda* carried the full text of a joint declaration by eleven nations and the French National Committee condemning the persecution and murder of Jews in every territory occupied by the Germans, and declared that “such events can only reinforce the determination of freedom-loving peoples to overthrow Hitler’s barbaric tyranny.” On the next day, December 19, 1942, *Izvestiia* published an even more prominent article, under an impressive front-page headline: “On the Fulfillment of the Hitlerite Plan to Exterminate the Jewish Population of Europe.” In three long columns, the article described the deportation and massacre of Jews throughout Eastern and Western Europe, including Scandinavia and the occupied Soviet territories. It declared without any equivocation that the plan was intended to rid Europe of all its Jews.

These official declarations—which, again, were few and far between—should not obscure what a handful of Soviet Jewish journalists managed to publish in the Soviet press. Two months after the German invasion, on August 24, the Kremlin arranged for a group of prominent Jewish cultural figures to participate in a public meeting and an international appeal over short-wave radio. The appeal was directed to Jewish communities in the West, primarily in England and America. Stalin understood that he required the support of the Western democracies to overcome the German onslaught, but after his two-year alliance with Hitler’s Germany, he also understood that he had to repair relations with the West in order to secure desperately needed military assistance.

Several major figures gave talks that day, among them the Yiddish actor and theater director Solomon Mikhoels, the Yiddish poet Peretz Markish, and Il'ia Ehrenburg. They all highlighted the suffering of their fellow Jews in Poland and in newly occupied Soviet territory. All the speeches, of course, had been vetted by Soviet officials, and it is a mark of how far they were willing to compromise on what had been their policies toward the Jews that Mikhoels, Ehrenburg, and the others were able to appeal to their "brother and sister Jews" and invoke the image of a united Jewish people. Before that, Soviet propaganda had denied that there was any such thing as the Jewish people; it preferred to recognize the existence of separate Jewish tribes scattered in various countries around the world with little connection between them. In addition, the rally marked the first step toward the creation of the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee (JAC), one of five anti-fascist committees that Stalin would soon establish to help improve relations with the West. Mikhoels, Markish, and Ehrenburg became leading members of the JAC. By 1943, when the Red Army began to drive the Wehrmacht out of Soviet territory, Ehrenburg used his connections with the JAC to organize two dozen Soviet writers and journalists to follow the Red Army into liberated territory, locate survivors of the Holocaust, and collect documents and testimonies about the massacres. It was his intention to publish the material in *The Black Book*, a volume that the regime eventually banned. It was finally published in 1979 by Yad Vashem in Jerusalem.

These articles make clear that Il'ia Ehrenburg may well have been the first person, outside of the German High Command, to grasp the full magnitude of the Holocaust. Under appalling conditions, constrained by wartime deprivations, Soviet censorship, and indifference to Jewish suffering, he did what he could to alert the Soviet public and the West.

His speech in Moscow on August 24 was carried in *Izvestiia* on August 26, 1941:

To the Jews

When I was a child, I witnessed a pogrom against the Jews. It was organized by tsarist police and a small group of vagabonds. But individual Russians hid Jews. I remember how my father brought home a letter by Lev Tolstoy that had been copied onto a slip of paper. Tolstoy lived next door to us. I often used to see him and knew he was a great writer. I was ten years old. My father read "I Cannot Be Silent" out loud; Tolstoy was outraged by pogroms against the Jews. My mother

broke out in tears. The Russian people were not guilty of these pogroms. The Jews knew this. I never heard a malicious word from a Jew about the Russian people. And I will never hear one. Having gained their freedom, the Russian people have forgotten the persecution of the Jews as if it were a bad dream. A generation has grown up that does not know even the word "pogrom."

I grew up in a Russian city. My mother tongue is Russian. I am a Russian writer. Like all Russians, I am now defending my homeland. But the Hitlerites have reminded me of something else: my mother's name was Hannah. I am a Jew. I say this with pride. Hitler hates us more than anything. And this adorns us.

I saw Berlin last summer—it is a nest of criminals. I saw the German army in Paris—it is an army of rapists. All of humanity is now waging a struggle against Germany, not for territory but for the right to breathe! Is it necessary to speak about what these "Aryan" swine are doing with the Jews? They are killing children in front of their mothers. They are forcing old people in their agony to behave like buffoons. They are raping young women. They cut, torture, and burn. Belostok, Minsk, Berdichev, and Vinnitsa will remain terrible names. The fewer words the better: we do not need words, we need bullets. They are proud to be swine. They themselves say that Finnish cattle mean more to them than Heine's verses. They insulted the French philosopher Bergson before his death; for these savages, he was just a *Jude*. They ordered the books of the late Tuwim to be used in soldiers' latrines. *Jude*! Einstein? *Jude*! Chagall? *Jude*! Can we speak about culture when they rape ten-year-old girls and bury people alive in graves?

My country, the Russian people, the people of Pushkin and Tolstoy, are standing up to the challenge. I am now appealing to the Jews of America as a Russian writer and a Jew. There is no ocean to hide behind. Listen to the sound of weapons around Gomel! Listen to the cries of tormented Russian and Jewish women in Berdichev! Do not block up your ears or close your eyes! The voices of Leah from the Ukraine, Rachel from Minsk, Sarah from Belostok will intrude on your still-comfortable dreams—they are crying over their children who have been torn to pieces. Jews, wild animals are aiming at you! Our place is in the front line. We will not forgive the indifferent. We curse anyone who washes his hands. Help everyone who is fighting this rabid enemy. To the assistance of England! To the assistance of Soviet Russia! Let each and every one do as much as he can. Soon he will be asked: What did you do? He will have to answer to the living. He will have to answer to the dead. He will have to answer to himself.¹

Ehrenburg found himself needing to counteract antisemitic attitudes among his fellow Soviet citizens and the frequently held assumption that “Ivan is at the Front while Abram is in Tashkent.” On November 1, 1942, Ehrenburg published an article in *Krasnaia zvezda* in which he focused on Jewish heroes.

Jews

The Germans tortured young Jewish women and buried elderly Jews alive. Hitler wanted to make a target out of Jews. Jews showed him that a target shoots back. Jews had been scientists and workers, musicians and longshoremen, doctors and farmers. Jews became soldiers. They will not hand over to anyone their right for revenge.

Falkovich was over 40. He was a philologist and had spent his life at a desk. Germans lick their lips over such types: catch and hang them. Cut off from his unit, he pulled 18 soldiers together. They confronted an enemy company. Falkovich ordered: “Attack!” Eighteen brave souls captured 35 fritzies. The philologist killed eight Germans with his own hands.²

A year ago, the Germans approached Moscow. Hayim Dyskin is the son of Crimean farmers. He was studying at the Literary Institute. When the war broke out, Dyskin was 17 years old. He volunteered for the front. At Mozhaysk he saw German tanks. Dyskin was an artilleryman; he destroyed the lead tank at point-blank range. Several Germans jumped out. Dyskin ordered himself: “Fire at the Fascists!” Injured, he stayed with his weapon. He was wounded a second time. Bleeding profusely, he continued to beat back the attack by himself. Fourteen separate wounds on his body, a gold star on the chest of this hero, five disabled German tanks—this is the story of the 17-year-old Hayim.

Perhaps Germans think that Jews don’t ski? This winter, Leyzer Papernik destroyed several dozen Germans in the village of Khludnevo. Seriously injured, he fell in the snow. The Germans hurriedly approached. Then Papernik lifted himself up and threw grenades at the Germans. Half-dead, he continued to fight against hundreds of Germans. With the final grenade, he blew himself up.

Perhaps the Germans think that Jews are not sailors? Israel Fisanovich is a Hero of the Soviet Union and captain of a Maliutka submarine; he showed the fritzies how a Jew can sink Aryan bandits. The Germans threw 329 bombs at the submarine, but the boat returned to its base. It sank four German transport ships. The fish rejoiced. But pure-bred German admirals were not too pleased.

Who in Leningrad does not know the heroic exploits of radioman Ruvim Sprintson? He broadcast into the air: "Fire into my position!" For three days, four radiomen were cut off from our troops: a Jew, two Russians, and a Ukrainian. Ruvim Sprintson carried out attacks, killing the enemy with his automatic weapon. The Germans came to understand: it is one thing to torment defenseless old women in Gomel; it is another thing to meet Ruvim Sprintson in battle.

Near Leningrad, Lev Shpayer burned a German tank and destroyed dozens of soldiers. The Germans thought they had the sacred right to disembowel unarmed Jewish women. With a Russian bayonet, Lev Shpayer pierced the greedy bellies of three predators. Shpayer fell in battle. Soldiers wrote a letter to his parents: "To the dear and beloved parents of Lev Shpayer: Your son was a hero at the front. He knew that behind him stood the pride of the Russian people—Leningrad. We will remember Lev—our heroic commander—to the Germans. And we will avenge him."

German tanks attacked at Stalingrad. David Kats was sitting in a trench. He threw a kerosene-filled bottle at the lead tank. The tank caught fire. A second tank wanted to turn. But Kats cried out "Stop this nonsense!" and threw a grenade under the tracks. The tank stopped, but a machine gun still fired away at our men. So Kats stuck his bayonet into the enemy muzzle. Injured, he continued to fight—he was defending Stalingrad after all. Only after he was wounded a second time did David Kats allow himself to be taken to a field hospital. How can we not recall the ancient legend of the giant Goliath and the young David with his sling?

There was a time when the Jews dreamed of the Promised Land. Now the Jew has a Promised Land: the front line. There he can take revenge on the Germans for the women, for the elderly, for the children.

The Jews have a great love for Russia. It is a love for its spirit and people, for great ideas and native cities, for a country that has become their savior, and for the soil where their ancestors are buried. "For the Motherland!" screamed the Moscow worker Laizer Papernik, throwing grenades at the Germans. He died with these words, a true son of Russia.

On April 29, 1944, Ehrenburg wrote about the Yiddish poet Abram Sutzkever. Little-known before the war, Sutzkever had been among the tens of thousands of Jews who were rounded up and kept in the Vilna Ghetto in 1941, very soon after the German occupation of Lithuania. Sutzkever led a

group of Jews out of the ghetto, then joined a partisan unit; he also found and preserved precious literary manuscripts that had once been housed in a Vilna museum. In early 1944, Soviet officials brought Sutzkever to Moscow by air, where he befriended leaders of the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee, including Solomon Mikhoels. Among all the people he met in Moscow he was closest to Ehrenburg, and it was Ehrenburg who paid tribute to him in a startling portrait that covered almost a full page in *Pravda*. Ehrenburg later arranged for Sutzkever to testify at the International Military Tribunal at Nuremberg in February 1946.

The Triumph of a Man

In quiet times the world seems gray to some: black and white, nobility and baseness are covered by the fog of everyday life. We live in terrible times: everything is revealed, everything is checked—on the field of battle, on the rack, at the edge of the grave. The Soviet people have displayed a grandeur of spirit during this time of testing. I want to tell the story of one man. Like many others, it testifies to the victory of one individual over the power of evil.

A few days ago, a fighter from a Lithuanian Jewish partisan unit came to Moscow—this was the Yiddish poet Sutzkever. He brought letters by Maxim Gorky and Romain Rolland—he saved these letters from the Germans. He saved the diary of a servant of Peter the Great, drawings by Repin, a painting by Levitan, a letter by Lev Tolstoy, and many other valuable Russian relics.

I had long heard of Sutzkever's poems. Both a wonderful Austrian novelist and the Polish poet Tuwim used to speak to me about them. This was a time when people could still speak about poetry. Now we are in different times, but first of all I will speak of something else—not about verses, but about weapons.

In June 1942, near the town of Novaia Vileika, a German ammunition train was blown up. Who laid the mines? Prisoners of the Vilnius ghetto. The doomed Jews were fighting. The German train was heading east; the Germans were preparing for another attack. Partisans from the Vilnius ghetto blew up the train. The poet Sutzkever was not thinking about verses at that time. He was thinking about weapons; he was obtaining machine guns.

There were eighty thousand Jews in Vilnius. The Germans did not want to kill them right away: they wanted to take pleasure from their prolonged agony. They set up two ghettos—two camps for the condemned. They stretched out the executions. They killed the doomed Jews for two years, one group after another.

A film actor named Kittel lived in Berlin before the war. He wanted to play villains, but even the less-than-gifted directors of UFA Studios considered Kittel too untalented. He found another calling: he became a famous hangman. He killed tens of thousands of inhabitants of Riga. Then he came on a tour of Vilnius. They entrusted him with the "liquidation of the ghetto."

The prisoners were lined up in the morning. They knew that if the order sent them "to the right," they would be sent to work. If the order sent them "to the left," it meant Ponary and death. Each morning they saw the same fork in the road and waited, to the right or to the left. For seven hundred days. . .

"Here are some presents for you," said Kittel. Sutzkever recognized his mother's dress. She had been shot the night before.

They burned people alive. Buried them in graves. Poked out their eyes and wrenched their arms.

On the first day of the war, the poet Sutzkever tried to make his way east. He had a child in his arms, someone else's child, a friend's child. Sutzkever could not abandon the child, and this small burden decided everything—the Germans captured Sutzkever. And Kittel himself killed Sutzkever's small son.

What went on in this world of death, where people awaited execution, where women gave birth knowing that they were giving birth to the condemned, where doctors treated the ill, understanding that execution awaited the ill and the cured and the doctors themselves?

In January 1942, a partisan unit was formed in the ghetto. A 40-year-old Vilnius worker named Wittenberg became its commander. The Germans learned that Wittenberg's spirit was not broken. They came looking for him, but he concealed himself in the underground. Then Kittel announced, "If Wittenberg does not surrender alive, then everyone will be killed tomorrow." Wittenberg knew that in any case the Germans would kill all the doomed Jews, but he wanted the partisans to have enough time to get out to the forest. He said, "It's too bad that I cannot shoot myself." Bidding his friends farewell he went out to give himself up to Kittel. The Germans tortured him, poking out his eyes. He kept silent. Sutzkever had accompanied him to the ghetto's gate; recalling Wittenberg, Sutzkever turned away from me to hide his face.

The partisans found type for an underground Polish newspaper. That was how prisoners of the ghetto helped their Lithuanian and Polish brothers. The ghetto was Soviet territory: the condemned listened secretly to the radio, printed communiqués from the *Sovinformburo*, and celebrated May 1, November 7, and February 23.

A German arsenal blew up in Burbishek. Two Jews from the ghetto perished. Kittel thought that it was an accident, but it was a military action. The two did not die in vain.

Tiktin was 16 years old. He penetrated a sealed wagon from which he took hand grenades. But he was discovered and wounded when he tried to escape. They let him recover before executing him. "Why did you take the grenades?" Kittel asked. Tiktin answered, "In order to throw them at you. You killed my father and mother."

One time they brought a group of Jews for execution. They threw themselves onto the Germans and strangled seven German soldiers with their bare hands.

Three hundred Jews in the ghetto obtained weapons. The Germans were blowing up houses with dynamite. The daring three hundred broke out of the ghetto and joined Lithuanian partisans. The poet Sutzkever was among them.

Those who were escaping the ghetto got out through the sewers. One went mad.

A Lithuanian peasant woman hid Sutzkever. A Lithuanian man had been hanged in that village. A sign on the gallows read, "He was hiding Jews." One German told this Lithuanian woman, "You know what is written there?" She responded, "Yes, I know." Then she saved the poet. The Soviet people know that friendship is not just a word.

"Rosenberg's headquarters" was located in Vilnius. This was an enterprise for plundering valuable books, paintings, and manuscripts. Doctor Miller directed this "headquarters." The Germans brought the Smolensk museum to Vilnius and handed it over to Miller. An institute with the finest collection of Jewish books and manuscripts in Europe was located in Vilnius. Sutzkever thought he himself would perish, but he wanted to preserve cultural monuments. He saved drawings by Repin, fifteenth- and sixteenth-century manuscripts, letters by Tolstoy, Gorky, and the Yiddish writer Sholem Aleichem.

I said that he was thinking of weapons, not verses. But a poet will always remain a poet. He obtained machine guns. He awaited execution. He saw Kittel. And he wrote poems. In the autumn of 1942, he wrote the long poem "Kol Nidre." Its subject recalls an ancient tragedy, but it was taken from the life of the ghetto. The Jews are awaiting execution in the courtyard of the Lukishki Prison. An old man is summoning death. The Germans had killed his wife, four sons, and grandsons. An injured man whose legs are broken is brought out. He wears a Red Army overcoat. That is the man's fifth son; they had not seen each other for twenty years. The father recognized his son. The son did

not recognize his father. A German storm trooper arrives. He demands to be treated like a king. The wounded soldier throws a stone at the German. Then the father kills his son in order to save him from torture. This story might seem improbable. But anyone who saw Kittel knows that there was no limit to his baseness, and he who accompanied the worker Wittenberg to his death knows that there was no limit to selflessness.

The poet Sutzkever, together with other partisans, fought for the freedom of Soviet Lithuania. There were Lithuanians and Russians, Poles and Jews in his unit. They were not saved by words but by love for their Motherland. The poet Sutzkever carried an automatic weapon in his arms, new poems in his head, and Gorky's letters in his heart. Here they are, pages with faded ink. I recognize this well-known handwriting. Gorky wrote about life, about Russia's future, about human strength. This insurgent of the Vilnius ghetto, a poet and a soldier, saved his letters as a banner of humanity and culture.³

By the summer of 1944, Soviet troops liberated Majdanek and Treblinka in Poland. They were uncovering more evidence of German atrocities on an unimaginable scale. Ehrenburg continued to write. With the Soviet army approaching German territory, he focused once again on the fate of the Jews. His article "On the Eve," which appeared in *Pravda* on August 7, was as forthright as anyone could expect in the Soviet press:

On the Eve

While there were still street battles in Vilna, I spoke with captured German officers in a suburb. One was an Austrian military doctor. He had a quick and observant mind. "The Germans are still hoping," he told me. I asked, "What exactly are they hoping for? For Fau 1? [This is what they call 'airplane-munitions.'] For total mobilization?" "No," said the Austrian. "For your forgetfulness." A year ago they said, 'Russian power is not strong enough.' Now they say, 'Russian memory is not long enough.'"

As the Red Army approaches the German borders, I want to speak one more time about the ferocity and malice of the Hitlerites.

Some people, perhaps, reading about Germans surrendering to supply convoys, even to children, think, "They are seeing the light." Perhaps some Muscovites, looking at the despondent processions of German POWs, are wondering, "Is it possible that they did the hanging?" Perhaps news about the

conspiracy by German generals is giving hope to a naïve reader: "A conscience is awakening in the Germans." No and no: They remain the same. They surrender because they are scared of dying. They do not pity children, they pity themselves. Just a day or sometimes an hour before surrendering, they are still murdering the innocent. It is not their conscience that is awakening, it is their fear.

On the order of the Germans, slaves are digging up corpses of the tormented and burning them: the criminals want to conceal the evidence. They calmly murdered for three years. In the fourth they got alarmed: they began to destroy the corpses. This is their "conscience." They are already preparing for the day when they will yell, as if on command, "It was not us who did the killing. It was Hitler." Why did some colonel plant a bomb near his Führer? The colonel understood: Hitler is evidence. Captured Oberleutnant Philips told me that the German officers are reading the bulletins of the Extraordinary Commission with apprehension: they look to see if their names are there. They understand that there will be a trial.

I was at Bolshoi Trostianets shortly after the Germans escaped. Half-charred corpses stacked like firewood were still smoldering. The children were carefully placed at the end of each row. This was the last batch. And they didn't have time to burn it. I saw around me dug up earth and a field of skulls. Beginning in the spring, the Germans were burning the corpses of those who had already been buried. And they could not finish the job. Bolshoi Trostyanets near Minsk was one of the factories of death. There they killed Soviet POWs, Belorussians, Jews from Minsk, Vienna, and Prague, killed using a "gevagen"—a mobile gas van. A German engineer improved these machines: he made it possible for the compartment filled with corpses to automatically tip to disgorge the asphyxiated victims. More than a hundred thousand innocent people perished in Bolshoi Trostianets.

There were more "factories of death" in Ponary near Vilna, in Belzhets near Rava Russkaia, in Novy Dvor, and in Sobibor. The trains with Jews arrived from France, Holland, and Belgium. They were told: "You will be working here." They were led to the barracks: "Take off all your clothes—disinfection, bath." They shaved off the women's hair and collected it in bags. Then they asphyxiated the doomed. Then through a tunnel leading from the "bath" the bodies were taken to the ovens. The Germans used to say: "The daily capacity was up to two thousand people."

In the "death factories" they killed Jews, they killed Soviet POWs, they killed Russians, Belorussians, and Poles. In Vilna whole neighborhoods "went to

Ponary." The executioners had a schedule: on some days they killed Jews, on other days Poles. There were "Russian days" too.

This is hard to imagine: millions of people, neat, quiet elderly women, mothers with nursing babies, beautiful young women and girls with braids, were murdered in the "death factories." Each and every one of them lived their own life. . . .

A German clerk would note down: so many units destroyed. I cannot describe this terrible picture, for centuries people will come back to this trying to comprehend the full magnitude of the suffering.

I will write about Valia Komarova. She lived in Yalta. She was affectionate and given to laughter. The Germans killed and violated her: they cut off her left breast, the breast of a fourteen-year-old girl. I will tell about a Belorussian girl, Marusia Ponomareva. She was seven. The Germans burned her. She screamed: "Mama!" Her mother could not hear her. She had been murdered the night before. But there is Mother Russia. She heard Marusia's screams and she will never, never forget them.

A doctor from Yalta, Druskin, treated children for fifty years. In a guidebook about the Crimea from 1899, you can read: "Dr. L. M. Druskin—Children's Diseases." The Germans killed the old man near Krasnaia Budnia. They buried hundreds of children alive with him. And next to the babies, in the same mass grave, lay the tortured bodies of sailors.

Here is the place where, until recently, the Russian village of Artiukhovo was. On the road from Dukhnovo to Idritsa. The village was burned, burned with all its inhabitants. Sergei Stepanovich Stepanov was 67. The Germans were hitting him with the butts of their rifles and yelling "Dance!" In front of Matrena Leonova, a German took her baby and threw it in the fire. The list of those burned alive is terrifying. It includes the old woman Vera Semenova and the little babies—Maria Kuzmina, ten months; Nikolai Ivanov, six months. Anyone who ever caressed the soft hair of a baby, anyone who has seen a mother's tears will never forget the ashes of Artiukhovo: these are people's ashes.

Ekaterinapol is a small town where Jews lived. They killed them all. No one is left except for a little girl named Sonia. She recounts the sorrow of these people. The old barber Azril Pritsman lived in Ekaterinapol. He was seventy-six. Five of his children were at the Front. The barber cried out to the Germans: "Shoot me. My children will avenge me." The cooper Glikov was eighty. Wounded, he raised himself from inside the pit and said: "Bastards, shoot. One bullet will not kill me." I do not know if the barber's sons are alive, but every tortured old man has sons:

the Soviet people. They are already in the Beskids, approaching Warsaw, on the Prussian border. The hangmen will pay.

The pilot Andrei Filipovich Kolomeets received a letter from his sister at home. Andrei Filipovich was surprised: "Why didn't father write?" Then the sister responded: "Andriusha, don't get angry with dad—he cannot write with his own hand because the Germans burned out his eyes. He did not want to work for them. They took him to the Gestapo, kept him there for two days, and when they let him go he had wounds instead of eyes." Pilot Kolomeets says: "I became more sharp-eyed from that day on. Now the Germans have nowhere to hide from me." Together with Lieutenant Kolomeets, our entire army is searching for hangmen. We see an old man with empty sockets instead of eyes and this image will stay with us until the end. Woe to the Germans!

Here is a letter from a fifteen-year-old boy named Senya Deresha: "Dear Uncle Misha! I am writing from my hometown Iziaslavl, which you would not recognize now. A pitiful half of the town remains. It would be better if it never existed. It would be better if I had never been born! Now I am not the Senya you used to know. I do not know who I am anymore. Out of eight thousand people that used to live in Iziaslavl, only I and our neighbor Kiva remain. Everyone is gone: my dear mother, my father, all our relatives. If I were to tell you everything that I lived through, I doubt you would understand. I looked death in the eye often, worked with partisans, only a German bullet stopped me for awhile. But I am okay now. My leg healed and I will be searching for the enemy to take my revenge. Uncle Misha, remember that this is our worst enemy, the fascist cannibals. Strike them, cut them into pieces. My letter turned out to be chaotic, like my chaotic life, but I am still alive for revenge. It is as if I returned from the next world, now I am beginning a new life—that of an orphan. Write me often. My address is the same, actually I will receive the letter wherever you send it. I am the only one here." He is alone in a dead city. He hears voices from under the ground. The silence of endless cemeteries lit by the cold moon—this silence invades our nights. It pulls us to the west. The boy Senia is marching. Uncle Misha is marching with his military decorations of Glory—our entire army is marching decorated with fire and blood.

I received a letter from a twelve-year-old boy. He writes: "They murdered the young right away, and forced the elderly and us children into the forest. There they surrounded us and started to shoot, they threw children into a pit. I ran away. A German ran after me. I climbed a tree and he couldn't find me. I saw how they killed everyone and for three days I could hear the sounds

of blood crying out from the earth." What can I add? Words fail me: blood is crying out.

Our scouts found eighty people in the Prenetskii woods near Lvov. They lived in the forest for two years. A three-year-old girl did not know what a "house" was. She was very surprised when she saw a house. But even this girl waiting for our troops said: "Father Stalin will get here and we will go home." The doomed never lost hope. Many could not hope that they would survive, but they all knew that Russia would survive. The Belorussian peasant Shura Gorbunova screamed at the butchers: "It is easy to kill me, but you will never destroy my Motherland!" In Iarishchev, in the Vinnitsa region, they took out the mathematics teacher Gita Iakovlevna together with her six-year-old son Leva to be executed. She cried out to other victims: "Our brothers are there at the Front. They will be back. Soviet power is there. It is immortal. Stalin is there. He will never forget." Then she screamed at the butchers in German: "Did you hear me? Stalin will not forget this." Yes, Stalin is not only our commander-in-chief, not only our inspiration: Stalin is our conscience. All of us are thinking about the man who in the fall of 1941 knew that the Red Army would be in Berlin, a man who suffered everything our people suffered, a man who knows the agony of every mother and the tears of every child; thinking about this great and simple man, we all understand that he will not forget this.

The newspaper *The Catholic Herald* shamelessly writes: "In this war, the Germans conducted themselves more properly than in the previous war." I do not know what these gentlemen mean by "proper": wells filled with children, or the gas chambers, or perhaps blinded old men? I would take them to Ganusievich, the dean of a Catholic cathedral, who told me: "I am an old man who has read many books about the nature of evil, but I could not imagine such bloodthirsty and heartless creatures walking on the face of the earth." Ganusievich saw a woman throwing a baby out of a burning building. A German picked the baby up and carefully, as if it were a smoldering log, threw it back into the fire. They took the old prelate Lubenets from the village of Kleban and tortured him to death. Two Catholics priests were tortured in Pershov. In Ponary, Gonsporovsky, the oldest priest in Vilnius perished. They collected all the parishioners inside an orthodox church in Dorii, then set the church on fire.

I know the Germans will say: "Isolated criminals carried out the killings. Drops in the ocean." But in front of me is a "Summary Report." It is signed by Captain Zauer. This is a report about the liquidation of the residents of Pinsk. Captain Zauer writes: "Fifteen thousand people were forcibly driven to the collection

point. The sick and the children who had been left at home were executed on the spot. In this manner an additional twelve hundred people were executed in the ghetto. The units carrying out the combing of the ghetto had to use axes, pole-axes, and other tools because almost all the doors were locked shut. Even when there were no cellars, a large number of people hid under the floors. You need to use search dogs (in Pinsk the dog Asta performed remarkably).“We will remember all this in Berlin—not the dog—but Captain Zauer and many other Germans. We will remember “the factories of death.” We will remember those who gave the orders and those who did the killing. Why is it that the heart of every Soviet citizen is racing with emotion when he hears these words on the radio:“The order of the Supreme Commander?”We are not only on the German border, we are on the eve of a trial.

Near Vilnius, I spoke to fighters who had just advanced 400 kilometers on foot in ten days. They were covered in dust, and this gray dust looked like gray hair. Their eyes were red with fatigue and their lips were dry. They said,“We are getting closer.”They were inspired by the proximity of the German border. To some foreigners our advance may look like an easy walk. In fact this is a road covered in blood. Who will describe the heroism of the infantry which crossed the Pinsk swamps? People were carrying heavy weapons on their shoulders. In Vilnius, infantrymen, for five days and nights without a break, stormed the ancient walls. In western Belorussia, the general of a tank unit, together with his soldiers, carried logs of wood for crossing a river. A colonel was carrying a cannon. These people were drenched with sweat, sweat and blood.

One colonel told me, “There were fortifications in Brest. The Germans thought they were safe. We went around. In the forts, we beat them, stabbed them, and cut them. I literally walked on the corpses of these monsters. I remembered my murdered mother, brothers, sisters, children. We will soon be in Germany.”

Once more, the Germans are foolishly deceiving themselves, counting on our forgetfulness. But if there could be a winter without a thaw, there could be hatred without relenting. Each soldier knows that we have to reach Berlin; otherwise our conscience will eat us alive. We could forgive for ourselves, but we cannot forgive on behalf of our children. We could try to forgive a bad person, but not the inventors of the mobile gas vans. It is not revenge that is leading us, but a longing for justice. We want to stamp out the serpent’s nest. We want to make sure that the Germans will never fight again. Not only the followers of Hitler, but the rebellious generals of the Reichswehr, who hope to be able

in 1964 to correct the mistakes of 1944. We want to march through Germany with a sword so that the Germans will forever forget their love of the sword. We want to go to them so that they will never again come to us. The shadows of the martyrs are always with us. They rise from their graves, they emerge from ravines, wells, and ditches; the elderly and the infants, Russians and Ukrainians, Belorussians and Jews, Poles and Lithuanians, they all wanted to live, they loved the sun and the flowers; slaughtered, they tell us, "Remember." I know that we will soon reach the Spree: I saw our army filled with wrath. I know that justice will prevail. And when life appears unbearable, for me or for any of us, I sustain myself with the beautiful words: "Stalin will not forget."

In December, the Red Army was about to invade East Prussia. Ehrenburg was not above calling for revenge even as he invoked the number six million to refer to Hitler's Jewish victims; this was likely one of the first times this iconic number appeared in a major newspaper. "To Remember" appeared in *Pravda* on December 17, 1944.

"To Remember"

"Die Pommersche Zeitung" writes, "Our struggle was honest from the very beginning; we did not cross our borders in blind madness intending to subjugate other nations. On the contrary, needing to leave our borders behind us, we went as the messengers for a new order and a new justice. Not one German ever dreamed of annihilating Englishmen or punishing Frenchmen or enslaving the Dutch or any other peoples in order to live by the blood and sweat of other nations. On the contrary, our victories emitted tranquility."

Poor dears, apparently they were forced to go to the Caucasus and to Egypt in order to emit tranquility, and now, when they are allowed to return to Cologne and to Eastern Prussia, they meekly say, "whoever we hurt, we don't hold it against them."

What were their intentions when they crossed their borders? This question can be answered by the maps they published between 1939 and 1942. This is an atlas of "blind madness:" "Greater Germany" included Lille and Kiev, Riga and Nancy.

They did not want to enslave other nations and live by others' blood and sweat? Didn't Gruppenführer Gasse declare not long ago to the newspaper *Hamburger Freie Presse*, "The former Russia will be colonized by Stormtroopers

and their children"? And the *Danzigger Fortpost* was estimating, "Every German colonizer will be served by eight to ten families." Yes, at that time they were not overly modest. And the German firm Bremen was promising stockholders cotton from Turkmenistan. At that time they declared that "a nation of merchants, Englishmen do not deserve a place on Earth" (*Felkisher Beobachter*). At that time they were threatening, "Shooting hostages will show the French that nothing will stop us" (*Parizer Tzeitung*). Shipping off the Dutch to the Ukraine, they declared, "Only history books will remember Holland as a state" (*Antriff*).

Where did they "emit tranquility"? In the "desert zone" or perhaps stoking the ovens of Majdanek or Treblinka?

Isn't it too early for them to renounce themselves? They are still shooting and already starting to whimper. They are still tearing children's bodies apart and already starting to wash their bloodied hands.

We have a saying, "To remember is to live." Indeed, a man who loses his memory loses half his life and starts to fade away. But to remember means not only to live, it also means to save a life, to save future generations, to preserve the idea of what it means to be human.

There occur historical events which confound wise men. Hitler's Germany is not a sphinx. It is typhus-bearing lice. Now everyone understands what fascism is but not everyone wants to remember what they understood. To forget means to forgive. And to forgive the stokers of Majdanek means to bring up children for even more efficient future ovens. I am not a politician, but in my work I deal with human feelings because every writer is a psychologist. Every writer is also a moralist, even if he does not think about morality. As a writer I want to remind you about the spiritual sources of fascism.

For many years, the Nazis brainwashed German youth. What were they conveying to the little fascists? A feeling of superiority. Now the world knows what racial or national arrogance means. If every nation decided that they were first in the world and therefore had the right to order others about, we would see new Majdaneks in the twentieth century.

So where is the foundation of this German feeling of superiority? In the past, some will say. There is no doubt that in the past Germany had remarkable philosophers, musicians, poets, and scientists. No anti-fascist thinks about putting down Goethe or Beethoven, but you cannot live off the legacy of culture. Culture is a continuing process of creation. And in fascist Germany nothing is left from the glorious past. We laugh at the degenerate who tries to replace a lack of wisdom and knowledge with an impressive past. It is ridiculous

and despicable for a nation to burn museums and libraries while at the same time pointing to Schiller and Kant.

Others would argue that Germans are proud of their present. What is there to be proud of? A money-grubbing Goering? A lascivious Goebbels? Ignorant and lewd ministers? A hardworking Himmler? Or are they perhaps boastful of their sophisticated technology, well-kept cities, and comfortable houses? But the fascists did not create any of this: Hitler only ravaged Germany. It is also good to recall that American technology is more highly advanced, that Dutch cities are cleaner, and that Swedish housing is more comfortable. Besides, technology alone cannot be the pride of a people unless the strength of a nation is connected to its higher aspirations. And in fascist Germany civilization serves only the lowest aspirations. So the gas chambers for the mass murder of children became a natural expression of German technology.

No, the feeling of superiority that the fascists instill in their children is based neither on the past nor on the present. German superiority is steeped in prejudice, in the belief in the magic properties of German blood, a conviction that everything German is better than anything non-German.

About thirty years ago I witnessed an amusing conversation; this was in Champagne, where a Russian brigade was stationed at that time. A soldier from Gascogne saw Russians cooking groats in a pot and said, "We only feed this to cattle." To which a Russian replied, "You eat frogs, and our cattle would never eat that." There is no arguing over taste. (Personally I like groats and frogs.) But the fascists drowned the whole world in blood to establish the superiority of German taste and German lack of taste. A young fascist is instilled with the opinion that blond Kathen is better than olive-skinned Jeannette, that beer is better than cider or kvass, that Berlin is more beautiful than Leningrad or London, that the person who says in place of "*Guten tag*" "*Zdravstvuite*" or "*Bonjour*" is inferior.

The origins of rivers of blood appear to be seemingly innocent swamps of human stupidity. Children sometimes make fun of things they are not familiar with; then mothers reproach them and the child, as he grows up, learns that the world does not end at the corner of his street. Each person and each nation loves what they grew up with. What Russian would be indifferent to a white birch tree? But we have never claimed and never will claim that a birch tree is more noble or more worthy than a cypress tree or a cedar tree. Your mother may be smarter than your neighbor, but you do not love her for that, you love her because she is your mother. Genuine patriotism is modest and has nothing

to do with nationalism: patriotism is brotherhood; nationalism—carnage and death.

"Man muss die Slaven an die Wand drucken." "We need to put the Slavs against the wall." The Germans were raised on this stupid and vile expression. They were never told that the Slavs gave the world Hus and Copernicus, Tolstoy and Chekhov, Chopin and Tchaikovsky, Mendeleev and Lobachevskii. They were repeatedly told: "Against the wall!" And their brutal disciples really did decide to put large, talented, vibrant nations against the wall. Why? Because Hans is wearing a green hat with a feather, because Willy adores Nine-Pin Bowling, because Franz whispers *"ketzken"* to his wife.

In the countries they captured, the Germans killed all the Jews: the elderly and nursing babies. Ask a captured German, why did your compatriots annihilate six million innocent people. And he will say, "They are Jews. They are black (or red-haired). They have different blood." This began with vulgar jokes, with name-calling by hoodlums, with graffiti, and all this led to Majdanek, Babii Iar, Treblinka, to ditches filled with children's corpses. If before Treblinka antisemitism could appear to be a common, ugly outburst, now it is a word soaked with blood; the Polish poet Julian Tuwim says, "Antisemitism is the international language of fascists."

The whole world now sees the consequences of racial and national arrogance. The ovens of Majdanek—where the Germans consumed people of thirty nationalities because they were Russians, French, Poles, or Jews—these frightening ovens did not emerge right away. They grew out of an upbringing based on the hatred of whole nations. People all over the world need to remember that nationalism is the road to Majdanek. If a nation builds its freedom on the oppression of another, if a state restricts the rights of citizens of a different color, if a society persecutes a man because the shape of his nose or the way he speaks differs from that of his neighbors, so that nation, that state, that society is in danger. We gave the world a vivid example of friendship among peoples. We see how these same ideas inspire the new Yugoslavia where people, who until recently hated each other, today feel as brothers. We believe that all nations, large and small, will declare any manifestations of racial or national intolerance as the most severe crime.

Fascism was born at the very bottom of human consciousness. It is not surprising, therefore, that some of the initial followers of fascism were people devoid of morals: murderers, pimps, resentful ne'er-do-wells, and bandits. It is not sufficient, though, to recognize the origins of fascism; we need to

remember that many “respectable” people (or those regarded as such) were assisting these criminals. In recent years some have forgotten about the founder of fascism—the vainglorious and bloodthirsty Duce. Since Italy woke up to its new life, Mussolini became a common German parasite. But we need to recall his successes: recall in order to remember, and remember in order to live. For many years some democrats admired Mussolini as a wise statesman. And yet Mussolini began his career with pogroms: his Blackshirts burned houses, destroyed books, forced castor oil down the throats of teachers, students, and workers, and they murdered honest citizens. At the time, some “democrats” thought: better Italian castor oil than Russian books, in the same way that later, during the time of Munich, they reassured themselves: better Hitler than the triumph of freedom. Insane statesmen wanted the use of rabid wolves as if they were chained dogs. They figured that rabid wolves would bite only when ordered to. Europe and the world now see the moral of this amoral policy: ruined Warsaw, grieving Paris, wounded London—this is the price nations paid.

We must remember: fascism was born out of the greed and stupidity of some, and the perfidy and cowardice of others. If mankind wants to put an end to the bloody nightmare of these years, it must put an end to fascism. Half measures will not do here. If fascism is left somewhere to breed, then in ten or twenty years we will again see rivers of blood. A nail drives out a nail, but you cannot drive fascism out with fascism. You cannot liberate nations from one brand of fascism and deliver them into the hands of fascists of a different brand. Fascism—a terrifying cancerous tumor. It cannot be treated at mineral spas. It needs to be removed. I do not believe in good-hearted people who cry over executioners: these alleged do-gooders are preparing the deaths of innocent millions. The nations of Europe fought courageously against the invaders; and nations are not Moors who could leave after finishing their work. The French have a good saying: “in his house, the collier is a master.” It is not only the French who understand this saying. The Red Army has demonstrated what it means to liberate: the Poles, Norwegians, Serbs, and Slovaks understand this. We do not install half-fascists in place of fascists: we liberate without quotation marks. We know that democracy is the daughter of a nation and not a glamorous lady whom you could only adore from a distance. But even then you need connections.

Nations who experienced the fascist tyranny will understand us without any lengthy explanation: this is a time of nations and not diplomats. The courageous

people of France will understand us. Our allies will understand us. There was a time when the British believed in the magical properties of the English Channel. Now they understand that the Channel is not a barrier against fascism. For a long time, the British prohibited the entry of dogs into the country: this is how they try to protect their country from rabies. But rabid, two-legged creatures in contrast to four-legged ones possess different "Fau." And only the complete destruction of fascism—from Warsaw to La Linea—can protect England from a new disaster.

When *Die Pommersche Zeitung* dares to claim that the Germans left their borders as the most peaceful of missionaries, it means that the fascists now have only one hope: the loss of memory. After a severe injury, doctors sometimes diagnose a condition called amnesia. The injuries to the world are immense, but nations do not suffer from amnesia. They will remember everything in the days of judgment. Even after the victory, they will not forget these terrible years. We must remember: this is our obligation to the dead heroes and to the children.

These cruel visions must remain before our eyes: this is the price for saving our world. I know that it is easier to forget but we will not forget. We solemnly swear: remember, remember, remember!

Notes

- ¹ Unless otherwise noted, all translations are by Joshua Rubenstein.
- ² Eli Falkovich (1898-1979), a leading Soviet Yiddish linguist, was awarded the Order of Lenin in 1942.
- ³ First published in English in *An Anthology of Jewish-Russian Literature: Two Centuries of Dual Identity in Prose and Poetry*, vol. 1, ed. Maxim D. Shrayer (New York: M. E. Sharpe, 2007), 535-38.