

The Intelligentsia Meets the Enemy

Educated Soviet Officers in Defeated Germany, 1945

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“There She Is, Accursed Germany!”

Major Lev Kopelev entered East Prussia on a Ford truck. There were no markers, so he had to distinguish the border himself: “It had already been agreed upon earlier: as soon as we crossed the border, we would mark it in an appropriate fashion. Having stopped precisely on the line according to the map, I commanded, ‘Here is Germany, get out and relieve yourselves!’ It seemed witty to us, standing right next to the cuvette, to mark the initial entry into enemy territory in precisely this way.”¹

Germany welcomed Vladimir Gel’fand, the commander of a mortar platoon, in an ungracious manner, “with a snow storm, ferocious wind, and empty, almost extinct villages.”²

The war correspondent Vasilii Grossman entered German territory toward evening. It was foggy and rainy, and the “scent of forest rot” was in the air. “Dark pine trees, fields, farms, service buildings, houses with sharp edged roofs” stretched out along the highway. “There was great charm in this scenery,” Grossman wrote, “the small but very thick woods were nice, with bluish-gray asphalt and brick roads running through them.” His notes might seem like those of a tourist if not for the reference to the huge sign on the shoulder of the road: “Soldier, here it is—the lair of the fascist beast.”³

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¹ Lev Kopelev, *Khranit’ vechno* (Moscow: Terra-Knizhnyi klub, 2004), 1: 102.

² V. N. Gel’fand, *Dnevnik, 1941–1946* (militera.lib.ru/db/gelfand_vn/05.html, accessed 4 June 2009), 28 January 1945.

³ Vasilii Grossman, *Gody voyny*, ed. E. V. Korotkova-Grossman (Moscow: Pravda, 1989), 447.

The commander of a cannon platoon, Lieutenant Boris Itenberg, crossed the border of East Prussia in the region of Gumbinnen on an armored train. He saw Germany, “this accursed country,” for the first time on 25 March 1945.⁴

Three weeks later, Lance-Corporal David Kaufman crossed the German border: “From Birnbaum to Landsberg runs a narrow highway with trees planted accurately alongside it. Approaching Schwerin, a wide placard across the road read: ‘Here was the border of Germany.’ Here *was* Germany. I involuntarily felt anxious crossing this unseen border. Tiled roofs of settlements reddened welcomingly amid the clear winter crops on the brilliant and green backdrop of a spring morning. The serenity of the morning smoothed over the emptiness of the villages and the ugliness of the ruins. It introduced a certain simplicity to the regular and tidy landscape, the small pine groves, rolling hills, the even, cultivated fields.”⁵

Lieutenant Elena Kogan entered Germany along the same highway: “Outside Birnbaum there was a control-admission point (KPP). A large arch read, ‘Here was the border of Germany.’” Everyone who in those days traveled on the Berlin highway read yet another inscription, made with tar by some soldier on a half-destroyed house closest to the arch, in huge curved letters: “Here she is, accursed Germany!”⁶

Major Boris Slutskii ended the war not in Germany but in Austria. For the men in his unit, however, there was no difference between Germans and Austrians: “The army could sense a German. We didn’t know German well enough to distinguish between Prussian and Styrian dialects. We knew too little about world history to assess the autonomy of Austria within the Great German system.... The soldiers listened attentively to admonitions about the difference between Germany and Austria and didn’t believe a word of it.”⁷



This article was written on the basis of letters, diaries, and memoirs of Soviet servicemen who ended the war in the territory of the Third Reich. The youngest of them, Evgenii Plimak, a sergeant-major and translator for army intelligence, turned 20 in 1945; the oldest, the already well-known writer Vasilii Grossman, was 40. The majority were between the ages of 22 and 34, with ranks from junior lieutenant to major.⁸ They were not “typical” representatives of the Soviet officer corps. First, the majority came from Moscow; second, they had either completed

⁴ B. S. Itenberg, letter to his wife, 25 March 1945, in the personal archive of B. S. Itenberg.

⁵ David Samoilov, *Podennye zapisi* (Moscow: Vremia, 2002), 1: 216 (13 April 1945). The Schwerin discussed here was in Brandenburg.

⁶ Elena Rzhavskaia, *Berlin, mai 1945: Zapiski voennogo perevodchika. Izd. dop.* (Moscow: Sovetskii pisatel', 1967), 32.

⁷ Boris Slutskii, “Zapiski o voine,” *O drugikh i o sebe* (Moscow: Vagrius, 2005), 99.

⁸ David Kaufman was a lance-corporal but occupied an officer’s appointment.

or interrupted their studies in institutions of higher education, and third, many of them could communicate in German—some haltingly, some excellently. For several of them, work with the enemy became a military profession: they were either translators or propagandists. They could perceive the Germans as individuals rather than *en masse*. Whether they did so in practice is another matter. All of them were Soviet *intelligenty* of the new generation, if not born under Soviet power, then having grown up under it, typical and at the same time not altogether typical products of social engineering. Almost all of them were Jews. Vladimir Gel'fand and Evgenii Plimak were a little bit different from the others. Gel'fand, a "provincial", only managed to complete high school, dabbled in poetry, and what is more essential, kept a diary rare for its candor and naïveté. Plimak managed to finish only nine years of schooling, although he also took four years of foreign language correspondence courses in Moscow. He also read Heinrich Heine in the original.

Without going into detailed source analysis, we may note that most of the texts—diaries, notebooks, and letters—were written directly on the heels of events in which the authors participated and which they witnessed, and that they reflect both the events and the authors' relationship to them *at the time* better than do later texts. One should note that letters are a less "frank" source than are diaries, as they were written with an eye to the military censor. The question of memoirs is more complicated. Thus Slutskii's *Notes about the War* was published in 2000, although they were written in 1945; he gave them to friends to read at that time. Despite all the literary "reworking" of the text (although the *Notes* was not intended for publication), this in any case makes errors of memory less likely. "Everything I've said ... is the unadulterated truth," Plimak naively asserted in 2005, adding, however, "as it appears to me over the expanse of more than half a century."⁹ One hardly needs to explain that in 1995 and 2005, when the author was working on his memoirs, that he saw the "unadulterated truth" through the prism of the intervening years and in a somewhat different way than he had in 1945. (This is all beyond the natural errors of memory.) In contrast to the philosopher and historian Plimak, the writer Anatolii Rybakov (Aronov) was clearly closer to the truth, having defined the genre of his memoirs as "novel-reminders."¹⁰

I believe that despite all such reservations, and even given the inevitable aberration of memory and the changes experienced in the postwar years by the memoirists themselves, these memoirs remain a rather reliable source. Several authors, such as Kaufman, clearly relied on diary entries from the war years. But beyond this, in addressing subjects proscribed in the Soviet period—in particular, the brutalities that accompanied the Red Army's penetration of Germany—authors had no memoir tradition on which to draw. They could not repeat,

⁹ Evgenii Plimak, *Na voine i posle voiny: Zapiski veterana* (Moscow: Ves' mir, 2005), 7.

¹⁰ Anatolii Rybakov, *Roman-vospominanie* (Moscow: Vagrius, 2005), 5.

even unwittingly, established clichés, as was often the case in tales of exploits or tribulations. Rather, they wrote about what they actually remembered, although, of course, one can hardly rely upon the accuracy of dialogues and details of these or other events decades later. In some cases—and we shall see this in the course of later discussion—the accuracy of later memoirs or stories is confirmed by the diary entries of other witnesses of the same events.

In the texts and stories serving as the basis for this article, I have looked for the “image of Germany” and the perception of Germans held by these individuals in 1945. I propose that the war on German territory and the occupation of Germany became a mirror in which the image of the victors themselves—of Soviet individuals, of the Soviet people, the product of a quarter century’s development of Soviet society—was reflected. This image, distorted by extreme circumstances, was reflected in the accounts of witnesses to and participants in the events in question. The authors of these texts, Soviet officers-*intelligently*, were themselves reflected in the “German mirror.” The “portrait of an epoch” that they recorded inevitably became their self-portrait. What did they bring with them to Germany? What did they want? Naturally, like all Red Army fighters, above all they wanted revenge.

Revenge

On 18 June 1944, Kaufman wandered around the center of Gomel’, a city “that was once beautiful.” “Now only a few pine trees and parts of signs remained: ‘-otel,’ ‘Passage,’” he wrote in his diary. He concluded with a sort of citation: “Remember these ruins and avenge them!”¹¹

“The people here—the Germans—fear Russian anger. They flee, tossing aside all their property and possessions.... Germany is burning, and for some reason it is gratifying to observe this evil spectacle. A death for a death, blood for blood. I don’t pity these haters of mankind,” Gel’fand wrote on the day he entered Germany.¹²

The rationalist and Marxist Kopelev was against the division of Germany, the destruction of industry, against any sort of “un-Marxist, un-proletarian” vengeance. He thought that it was “only” necessary to shoot a million and a half people, including all those in the SS and Gestapo and the pilots who bombed cities. He proposed that approximately the same number of active members of the Nazi Party should be sentenced to long periods of imprisonment in camps. Simple party members, soldiers who participated in the occupation, leaders of the Hitler Youth, and so forth, according to Kopelev, should be sent to various countries for three to four years to restore what the Nazis had destroyed. One of the women he worked with, appalled by Kopelev’s cruelty, asserted that he hated the Germans so much because he was a Jew. The rock-hard internationalist

¹¹ Samoilov, *Podennye zapisi*, 1: 204.

¹² Gel’fand, *Dnevnik 1941–1946*, 28 January 1945.

responded that he hated not the Germans but the fascists.¹³ This conversation took place in 1942 and therefore had an abstract character. Crossing the border into Germany in 1945, the first thing Kopelev did was to express his hatred and scorn by urinating on German soil.

Itenberg wrote to his wife from Gumbinnen that, on the one hand, he felt bad about the “broken furniture and dishes, but on the other hand, when you remember how they burned and destroyed our Russian property, you want to exact vengeance even on this furniture, because it’s German furniture, because Fritz sat on it!” (25 March 1945).

Many recalled the particular impact of Ilya Ehrenburg’s (Il’ia Erenburg’s) publicistic work in cultivating hatred toward the Germans. “Like Adam and Columbus, Ehrenburg was the first to enter the country of hatred and to give a name to its inhabitants—Fritzes.”¹⁴ The day before entering German territory, Kaufman led a Communist Youth Movement (Komsomol) meeting of intelligence operatives with the theme, “On the behavior of Soviet fighters in the lair of the beast.” This was done at his own initiative, even before the “foundational” article by Grigorii Aleksandrov appeared in *Pravda*.¹⁵ The operatives, however, responded to Kaufman’s humanistic speech without enthusiasm. One of them advised him to read Ehrenburg. “Our boys were neither evil nor cruel, but they had struggled so long to get to Germany, and such a feeling of vengeance and ill-will had filled their hearts, that, of course, they wanted to go on a rampage and destroy, burn, swagger maliciously and merrily, unburden their hearts like Razin or Pugachev. This desire was constantly fed by slogans and poems, and especially by Ehrenburg’s articles.”¹⁶

Another “nod” to Ehrenburg came from Sergeant-Major Nikolai Inozemtsev, who on “receiving each routine decree to stop the arson, the destruction of property, rape, and so on,” recalled the formula coined by Ehrenburg, “to leave everything to the soldier’s conscience.”¹⁷ Ehrenburg was not alone. “The politics

¹³ Kopelev, *Khranit’ vechno*, 1: 286–87.

¹⁴ Slutskii, *O drugikh i o sebe*, 19.

¹⁵ On 14 April 1945 *Pravda* published an article by the party ideologist G. F. Aleksandrov, “Comrade Ehrenburg Simplifies,” which marked a shift in policy with respect to the German population. The article read, in part: “Comrade Ehrenburg writes in his articles that there is no Germany, only a ‘colossal gang.’ If one accepts the point of view of Comrade Ehrenburg as correct, it follows that the entire population of Germany should share the fate of the Hitlerite clique.” The article was printed at the personal order of Stalin. Aleksandrov’s article was taken very negatively by many frontline soldiers. According to Ehrenburg’s memoirs, never in his life had he received such warm letters, and on the street strangers shook his hand. In their letters, people openly took a stance against the new line of the Central Committee. A certain Major Kobyl’nik wrote to Ehrenburg: “You write correctly that Germany is one enormous gang. It’s necessary to remind the Germans and everyone in general, that they should look on the East with fear for a hundred years.” See Il’ia Erenburg, *Liudi, gody, zhizn’* (Moscow: Sovetskii pisatel’, 1990), 2: 385, 442–43. People feared that their right to vengeance would be taken away.

¹⁶ David Samoilov, *Pamiatnye zapiski* (Moscow: Mezhdunarodnye otnosheniia, 1995), 244.

¹⁷ N. N. Inozemtsev, *Frontovoi dnevniki*, 2nd ed. (Moscow: Nauka, 2005), 210.

of the Great Patriotic War, the work of thousands of political workers, taught hatred of the German *in all its variants*" (emphasis added).¹⁸ It was a general feeling. It was also established from above. The print newspaper of the army in which Elena Kogan served appeared on 9 February 1945 under the heading, "Be afraid, Germany; Russia is coming to Berlin."¹⁹ Almost everyone thought as Major Slutskii did: "Our anger and our cruelty didn't require justification. It wasn't the time to speak of right and truth. The Germans were the first to cross the line between good and evil. For that they would be repaid a hundredfold."²⁰

"Repaid"—but how and whom, precisely? Officers who thirsted for revenge met some Germans who were "not that sort." The first "ordinary" Germans that Kaufman met in Miedzychod (Birnbäum), two kilometers from the German border, turned out to be two elderly musicians with their wives, one of whom was paralyzed and was transported in a carriage. They had remained in Miedzychod because they had been unable to leave. Kaufman talked with them about music; because the Soviet officer understood little German, they used snatches of the melodies of Brahms and Tchaikovsky as "communication." "Then they were ordered to leave. They went, old-fashioned elderly men, skinny, in caps and fall coats, carrying behind them on a sled the carelessly tied remnants of their belongings and the sick old woman. Germany's woe—a deserved woe—passed before my eyes, and I swore to myself to offend neither the women nor the children of my enemy."²¹

The unit in which Grigorii Pomerants served moved westward "along the path of *Rennenkampf*" (who commanded one of the Russian armies in World War I): Tilsit, Gumbinnen, Stallupönen. At one point Pomerants saw the naked body of a 15- or 16-year-old girl on a rubbish heap. "Although suddenly an entire layer of hatred toward *any* German was stripped away from me, and although I remember that dead girl to this day, at the time I turned away, I did not think it through and clarify who had done this, *they* (from whom a world evil emanated) or *we*? And if we, then who [precisely]?"²²

The relatives of some of our protagonists were killed; some were spared misfortune. V. N. Rogov's entire family perished (despite his Slavic name, he was Jewish). He wrote to Ehrenburg from "accursed Germany":

I look at these human-like creatures and am literally amazed by their dimwittedness. They neither know about nor believe the brutalities in Russia perpetrated by their kin. They can't conceive that they—that is, Germans—could have killed a child, and they supposedly are unaware of the existence of the "gas chamber." When I present them with the destruction of my family at the hands of their

¹⁸ Slutskii, *O drugikh i o sebe*, 99.

¹⁹ Rzhavskaia, *Berlin, mai 1945*, 19.

²⁰ Slutskii, *O drugikh i o sebe*, 23.

²¹ Samoilov, *Podennye*, 1: 209–10 (7 February 1944).

²² Grigorii Pomerants, *Zapiski gadkogo utenka* (Moscow: ROSSPEN, 2003), 156.

accursed kin as proof, they direct their gaze at the ground, murmuring that they aren't guilty of all that. Talking with them demands a great deal in terms of my nerves and my well-being, but not to trouble their accursed tribe—if one may speak bluntly—was impossible; it was necessary at least to explain why and for what reason we had come. When I showed them illustrations from the frontline newspaper of the trial of the murderers of Majdanek, they turned their noses away and tried to change the conversation to another subject.... One needs hellish strength of will and patience to bear all this and restrain oneself.²³

Rogov agreed with the propositions of Ehrenburg's article, "Knights of Justice," published in *Krasnaia zvezda* on 14 March 1945, that Soviet soldiers should not kill children and rape women:

We should not, and we do not, do that, since we are better than they are and were raised in the Soviet spirit. But how to make them understand and feel what we, our wives, children, and old people lived through and are living through? I understand that the expression "an eye for an eye" does not need to be taken literally.... But we should abase them in some way, put them on their knees in such a way that remaining among the living is worse than being under the earth. It seems to me that this would be very just. In this way, we would be avenged for everyone and everything.²⁴

Still, it was unclear how exactly to do this. Rogov's letter to Ehrenburg was dictated by just this insuperable contradiction—the desire to avenge those who perished and the impossibility of violating one's own self, of becoming like those who poisoned women and children in the gas chambers. The desire for vengeance was replaced by incomprehension and confusion, possibly also because there were already enough avengers on hand who were not restrained by vacillation and doubt.

The literature has already addressed the bacchanalia of robbery, rape, and murder of civilians that accompanied the invasion of Germany by Soviet forces.²⁵ But researchers have relied primarily on German sources or Soviet official documents. Norman Naimark writes that "today, when interviewing veterans of the Soviet Military Administration in Germany or veterans of the East Prussian campaign, one gets the overwhelming sense that former Soviet officers are anxious to forget the behavior of their fellow soldiers (and their own indifference to it at

²³ Letter of V. N. Rogov to I. Ehrenburg, 21 March 1945, in *Sovetskie evrei pishut Il'e Erenburgu* (Jerusalem, 1993), 196.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 196–97.

²⁵ Norman M. Naimark, *The Russians in Germany: A History of the Soviet Zone of Occupation, 1945–1949* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap, 1996); Richard Overy, *Russia's War* (London: Penguin, 1998), 260–62; Antony Beevor, *The Fall of Berlin, 1945* (New York: Viking, 2002), published in the United Kingdom as *Berlin: The Downfall, 1945* (London: Penguin, 2002)—quotations are from the U.S. edition; Catherine Merridale, *Ivan's War: Life and Death in the Red Army, 1939–1945* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2006), 301–28.

the time).²⁶ Ten years after the publication of Naimark's book, Catherine Merridale writes, "set in a culture of almost total denial, [Leonid] Rabinchev's article and Kopelev's book are, to date, among the only discussions of this question in Russian."²⁷

In point of fact, several officers not only recorded the unexpected behavior of Soviet soldiers but also tried to explain it. Unfortunately, the majority of texts considered here, with the exception of Lev Kopelev's book, were published after the appearance of Naimark's book and therefore were unavailable to him. Nor, however, does Catherine Merridale mention them. In Russian historiography, the theme of the atrocities of the Red Army in Germany remains taboo. Thus a Russian historian of the new generation, Elena Seniavskaia, refers to "acts of revenge" as "psychological breakdowns" (which in itself is true for a significant number of Soviet troops). She insists, however, that these were exceptions rather than the rule. As proof, she cites the memoirs of one veteran. "We showed no mercy to the fascists who came at us with weapons in their hands," recalls the former artilleryman and Hero of the Soviet Union G. Diadiukin. "But we didn't touch those who laid down their weapons, who surrendered. I never saw an instance in which unarmed people were dealt with severely. That was against our spirit. And that goes without saying for civilians." Seniavskaia concludes, "The humanism and magnanimity of the victors were one of the most important manifestations of the moral superiority of Soviet troops, who in this Patriotic War were defending profoundly just goals against the Hitlerite aggressors, robbers, and murderers."²⁸ There is no doubt about the justice of the goals for which the Soviet soldiers fought. But the issue of humanism and magnanimity is far more complicated.

It is not that the issue of the atrocities of the Red Army with respect to the civilian population is not discussed, but it simply is not acknowledged by Russian society, much less by politicians. Thus, in a letter to the British newspaper *The Daily Telegraph*, the Russian ambassador in London called accounts of Red Army soldiers' rape of German women, and even Soviet women liberated from the camps, in Antony Beevor's *The Fall of Berlin, 1945* "an obvious lie and insinuations."²⁹ Yet times are changing, and Beevor's book was published in Russian translation in Moscow in 2004.³⁰ Let us return, however, to the testimony and reflections of direct participants in the events.

²⁶ Naimark, *Russians in Germany*, 85.

²⁷ Merridale, *Ivan's War*, 425 n. 49. The reference here is to Leonid Rabinchev, "Voina vse spishet," *Znamia*, no. 2 (2005), available at magazines.russ.ru/znamia/2005/2/ra8.html, accessed 4 June 2009. Rabinchev is discussed below.

²⁸ E. S. Seniavskaia, *1941–1945. Frontovoe pokolenie: Istoriko-psikhologicheskoe issledovanie* (Moscow: Institut rossiiskoi istorii RAN, 1995), 80–81. We note that it is as if the author was not much disturbed that the documents published by her as an addendum to the book contradict her conclusions.

²⁹ *The Daily Telegraph*, 25 January 2002.

³⁰ Antoni Bivor [Antony Beevor], *Padenie Berlina, 1945*, trans. from English by Iu. F. Mikhailov (Moscow: ACT; Tranzitkniga, 2004)

Slutskii, having stated that “our cruelty does not have to be justified” (see above), contradicted himself by writing, “our cruelty was too great to be justified. But it can and should be explained.”³¹ “What happened in East Prussia? Was such brutality by our people—violence, robberies—really necessary and inevitable? We wrote and screamed for sacred vengeance. But who were the avengers and whom did we avenge? Why were there among our soldiers so many bandits who in massive numbers raped women and girls spread out on the snow and in gateways, who killed unarmed people, who destroyed everything they couldn’t carry away, who defiled, who burned? And who destroyed senselessly, just to destroy. How did all that become possible?” Kopelev asked.³²

“Hitler was able to convince the population of Germany that the coming of the Russians meant its general destruction. One must admit that our soldiers did not try to overturn that conviction,” Kaufman carefully noted in his diary.³³ “The war took on prominent, personal forms,” Slutskii wrote about the soldiers of the Red Army who entered Austria and did not want to believe that the Austrians were in any way different from the Germans. “A German was a German. They had to ‘give it to him.’ And so they began to ‘give it’ to the German.”³⁴

The most striking description of the massive pogrom to which East Prussia was subjected was left by Lev Kopelev. Kopelev traveled through the burned-out German villages of Gross Koslau and Klein Koslau. He was certain that the fires were the result of the fighting, or that the Germans had burned the villages themselves. A soldier explained to him with “lazy malice”: “They told us: this is Germany. That means beat and shoot to have vengeance. But where can we spend the night, and where can we put the wounded?” However, the burning villages proved to be only the entry to hell. Ahead were Naidenburg and Allenstein. Kopelev’s task was to clarify the “political and moral mood of the enemy population.” At first, however, he encountered only corpses. The first was the body of an elderly woman in a torn dress: between the legs of the corpse was an ordinary city telephone; the killers had tried to force it into her. One of the soldiers, who had rushed from house to house in search of loot, explained that the woman was a spy, that “they caught her with a telephone.”³⁵ That was enough.

In Oranienbaum, near Berlin, Kaufman stopped soldiers who were planning to shoot a German for maintaining ties with the enemy. It turned out that the rather drunken soldiers mistook a radio receiver for a walkie-talkie. The German, who was frightened to death, was released.³⁶ The first living German whom Kopelev and his comrades met was an old woman looking for her daughter. Kopelev’s commander had feverishly seized a collection of “trophies”; they had

³¹ Slutskii, *O drugikh i o sebe*, 21.

³² Kopelev, *Khranit’ vechno*, 1: 12.

³³ Samoilov, *Podennye*, 1: 210 (10 February 1945).

³⁴ Slutskii, *O drugikh i o sebe*, 99.

³⁵ Kopelev, *Khranit’ vechno*, 1: 103–6.

³⁶ Samoilov, *Pamiatnye zapiski*, 288.

already loaded the car with an upright piano, tapestries, pictures, and things discovered in the richer abandoned houses, and he did not want to transport the old woman. He announced that the old woman was a spy who was confusing them and wanted to lead them off somewhere and that she should be shot. Kopelev grabbed the commander's hand with the pistol, but while the officers struggled, a soldier accompanying them shot the old woman.³⁷ Efforts to find anyone else alive were unsuccessful; in what appeared to be an inhabited house they found traces of a hurried robbery and a dying woman with stab wounds to her chest and stomach; next to her lay a dagger with an engraved handle. Such daggers were made by skilled soldiers.³⁸

The picture in Allenstein was about the same.³⁹ A more lapidary description of the East Prussian "pogrom" comes from Nikolai Inozemtsev who, judging from the notes of the publisher of his diary, crossed out part of his dangerous notes:

Burning German cities, traces of short-lived battles on the roads, groups of captured Germans (they surrendered in large groups, fearing they'd be shot if they did so individually), corpses of men, women, and children in apartments, lines of carts with refugees, scenes of mass [illegible], raped women ... abandoned villages, hundred and thousands of abandoned bicycles on the road, an enormous mass of cattle, all of them bellowing (no one was there to feed the cows or give them water)—all these were "battle scenes" of the offensive by an army of avengers, scenes of the devastation of Germany which compelled the surviving Germans and their children to renounce the struggle with Russia.⁴⁰

Inozemtsev is echoed by Efraim Genkin, who was in East Prussia at the same time. "The image of our 'penetration' continues to horrify me. The soldiers turned into some sort of wild beasts. The fields were strewn with hundreds of cows that had been shot, on the roads pigs and chickens with their heads cut off. The houses were pillaged and burning. Everything that couldn't be carried away was broken, destroyed. No wonder the Germans ran from us like the plague! There was no civilian population. All this was depressing and repellent."⁴¹

Such was not the case everywhere. Lieutenant Zeilik Kleiman's unit occupied a German village in which nearly all the residents—that is, women and children—remained. Kleiman wrote home on 3 February 1945 that "our soldiers

³⁷ Kopelev, *Khranit' vechno*, 1: 107–9.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 110–12.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 123–37, 141–46. Kopelev draws a truly apocalyptic picture. Meanwhile, Michael Vik, a German Jew, for whom the advance of the Red Army brought not freedom but only the move from one persecuted category of the population to another, believes that Kopelev understates the "scale and duration of the outrage" (*Zakat Kenigsberga: Svidetel'stvo nemetskogo evreia* [St. Petersburg: Giperion; Potsdam: Nemetskii forum vostochnoevropetskoi kul'tury, 2004], 191).

⁴⁰ Inozemtsev, *Frontovoi dnevnik*, 209. The portion of the citation removed (and signaled by the ellipses) contains illegible words.

⁴¹ *Sokhrani moi pis'ma: Sbornik pisem i dnevnikov evreev perioda Velikoi Otechestvennoi voyny* (Moscow: Tsentr i Fond "Kholokost," Mik, 2007), 281–82 (note from 25 January 1945).

are behaving in a cultured manner,” although “a girl of around 16 complained that a soldier had hit her in the head with a pistol.” The lieutenant summoned the soldier, whose entire family had been shot by the Germans; and in so far as his knowledge of German allowed, he told the local residents about this, as well as how Germans ran over children with tanks and bashed the heads of nursing infants on the stove. “If not today, then tomorrow we’ll be in battle again. There we’ll beat the German again. But to dirty your hand on a defenseless woman—we’re not Germans.” A week later, Lieutenant Kleiman died in battle.⁴²

Gel’fand and his comrades, in contrast, were particularly disturbed that a women’s battalion was fighting them: “We beat them soundly, and the captured cats, those German women, declared themselves the avengers of their husbands who had perished on the front. I don’t know what was done with them, but the good-for-nothings should have been punished mercilessly. Our soldiers suggested, for example, stabbing them in their reproductive organs and so forth, but I simply would have exterminated them.” After several days he remarked with satisfaction, “The women from the enemy side have not appeared since the body of one of them was impaled on a stake and sent back naked to the German positions.”⁴³

The personal experience and stories of those who experienced German captivity, who suffered under the Nazi regime were most significant in inculcating hatred. “Which one of us, having lived through the first winter of the war, will forget the bluish wash basin in the children’s camp,” Slutskii wrote, “where on iron hooks the Germans left accurate loops, here they hanged Pioneers, the first students of schools outside Moscow.”⁴⁴ “I found out and I want everyone to find out what the Germans really are,” wrote Vladimir Tsoglin, a private and intelligence operative in a mortar regiment from Belorussia, to his mother and sister in the summer of 1944. “They are not people, they are worse than beasts. Can people actually burn other people in houses, after pouring gasoline on them? I don’t know what I’ll find farther on, moving along the territory seized by the Germans in ’41, but what I have seen so far is enough to warrant destroying them like rabid dogs.”⁴⁵

Cruelty was often, however, explained by something else as well—by indifference, curiosity, laziness. Tolstoyan Platon Karataevs were no longer encountered at the front. Cruelty toward the civilian population did not emerge “just like that” and was not a consequence of merely crossing the German border. It was rather the direct continuation of cruelty toward the enemy. German troops had “set the tone” with their inhumane treatment of prisoners of war. The “response” of Red Army soldiers and the civilian population alike was no less cruel. Slutskii

⁴² *Sokhrani moi pis'ma: Sbornik pisem i dnevnikov evreev perioda Velikoi Otechestvennoi voiny*, 160, 165.

⁴³ Gel’fand, *Dnevnik 1941–1946*, 21 February and 26 February 1945.

⁴⁴ Slutskii, *O drugikh i o sebe*, 21–23.

⁴⁵ *Sokhrani moi pis'ma*, 261.

records in his notes several events that particularly struck him. In the winter of 1941, staff officers killed some of 40 captured Germans out of curiosity. They took the overcoats from the remaining prisoners and transported them farther in the open bed of a truck. When the soldiers heard something in the bed rattling around “like frozen potatoes,” they threw the bodies of those who had frozen to death out of the truck and into the snow. On 20 February 1943, at Michurinsk station, as Slutskii recorded with protocol-like accuracy, local residents exchanged watches, rings, and other valuables with prisoners driven mad by thirst—Romanians, Italians, and Yugoslavian Jews from a work battalion—for a lump of frozen snow covered with horse urine and saturated with coal dust. Dozens of corpses were piled up on the platforms next to the echelon of prisoners. One can only be amazed that the prisoners had managed to hold on to some of their valuables.

Intelligence officers, having seized their first prisoner, brought him with them for three weeks. The relationship was completely friendly; the German was amusing and not awful in any way. Then the question of sending him to the army staff headquarters arose. They killed the German, having first let him eat his fill. No one wanted to walk the eight kilometers in the snow to staff headquarters.⁴⁶ This incident may have served as the basis for a poem by Slutskii:

What's it to me!
 Did I christen the Germans' children?
 I'm neither cold nor hot to their loss!
 I feel bad for none of them!
 I feel bad only
 That
 a waltz twirled
 on the harmonica.

Prisoners were constantly being killed, perhaps more at the end of the war than at the beginning, perhaps because there were more prisoners then.⁴⁷ The troops killed while drunk, from fear, out of vengeance, and for no reason at all. The commander of a corps reconnaissance unit kept a prisoner from the SS as a personal driver. He liked to go see his mistress at the medical sanitary station in a trophy Volkswagen with a “trophy” chauffeur behind the wheel. When the higher command discovered the unaccounted-for prisoner at reconnaissance, the chauffeur was shot to avoid unnecessary explanations.⁴⁸ At the hospital at Graudenz, one of the wounded German officers was shot because he had an “SS mug.”⁴⁹

⁴⁶ Slutskii, *O drugikh i o sebe*, 20–21.

⁴⁷ Samoilov, *Pamiatnye zapiski*, 267, 272, 273, and 274–75.

⁴⁸ Plimak, *Na voine i posle voiny*, 29–33. Plimak recalls how in January 1945, a tank-driver of a T-34, driven insane by the stress he had experienced, crushed a column of prisoners of war under his tank treads, which his comrade-in-arms observed with curiosity (19).

⁴⁹ Kopelev, *Khranit' vechno*, 1: 183.

According to Vladimir Tsoglin, people's "hearts had turned to stone." As he wrote to his sister from East Prussia on 14 February 1945: "And if you say some time, 'Listen, soldier, you don't need to finish off that Hans, let him rebuild what he destroyed,' he would look up from under his raised brows and say, 'Aren't you a Russian? They stole my wife and daughter from me.' And he'd shoot. And he'd be right."⁵⁰ Tsoglin himself regretted that they took so many prisoners, since they had "so bloody many of them already" (*ikh i tak do cherta*).⁵¹

In our view, vengeance was obviously not "symmetrical." It did not always depend upon the personal experience or personal tragedy of a given Soviet soldier. The sufferings and losses experienced by one or another soldier in the Red Army were not the determining factor. What determined the outcome was the individual himself, his attitude toward life—his own and that of others—his lifetime (and not only military) experience, and his culture. Kopelev's younger brother disappeared without a trace at the start of the war, and his close relatives were killed in Kiev at Babi Yar. Yet it was precisely Kopelev who, in the opinion of his superiors, professed "bourgeois humanism."

The soldier Vasilii Churkin's wife and sister died in the Leningrad Blockade, and both of his sons and two brothers perished at the front. His entire family was lost. It would seem that he should and could think only of vengeance. In January 1945, in the city of Hindenburg, he and his comrades spent the night in a wealthy home, the owner of which for some reason had been unable or unwilling to flee:

We were met by the (superficially polite) owner, a young, interesting man of 30–40, and his still very young but full-figured, tall, sympathetic wife. He was a powerful bureaucrat; the wife was probably a housewife. Their two young girls attended a classical high school. Their apartment, which was rather large, occupied the first and second floors. The apartment was very comfortably furnished: expensive rugs, chic curtains, expensive furniture. The parquet floor, diligently polished, reflected like a mirror. Apparently, the girls lived on the second floor. A standing piano and nice washstand stood against the wall. Five fellows in our platoon and I were to spend the night on the second floor. We arranged ourselves on the shiny parquet floor. I remember how chunks of melting snow from our boots stood out on the parquet. Such puddles, bogs. Even now I feel somehow awkward, as if ashamed.⁵²

⁵⁰ *Sokhrani moi pis'ma*, 263.

⁵¹ Letter to his mother, 3 April 1945. Tsoglin did not have especially warm feelings for Soviets who had been freed from German camps either: "Among them, of course, are those who scarcely see freedom. If I were the commander, I would kill them all" (*ibid.*, 265).

⁵² Vasilii Vasil'evich Churkin. "Dnevnik opolchentsa 88-go artilleriiskogo polka 80-i strelkovoi Liubanskoi divizii Vasiliia Churkina, zapis' ot 29 ianvaria 1945 g.," in S. V. Kormilitsyn and A. V. Lysev, *Lozh' ot Sovetskogo Informbiuro* (St. Petersburg: Neva, 2005). Also available at militera.lib.ru/db/churkin_vv/index.html, accessed 4 June 2009.

The Germans had killed the entire family of Militiaman Churkin, who volunteered for the front in June 1941, yet he felt awkward about the mud left on the parquet of a German home!

Discussing the killing of prisoners in the last months of the war 40 years later, Kaufman (already Samoilov) wrote, “The war imposed the obligation to kill the enemy. They convinced us that we had the right to kill: kill the German! The worst, of course, took the obligation as a right. Their argument was: didn’t the Germans, the SS, the Gestapo behave worse? For a Russian person, nothing could compare with the Gestapo. We won because we were better, more moral. And the larger part of the army did not make use of the right to kill.”⁵³

That may be the case, but where did this minority—clearly not a small one, judging by the scale of robberies and killings in territory occupied by Soviet troops—come from? Who were these people, completely unlike either the ideal Soviet or the ideal Russian as described in Russian literature (true, not in all cases—“Peasants” and “In the Ravine” by Chekhov or “The Village” by Bunin do not at all depict Platon Karataevs and peasants like Dostoevsky’s Marei). Did the transformation of the Russian/Soviet occur only as a result of the war?

Recalling his Moscow childhood and youth in the 1920s–30s, Kaufman wrote about the demographic, social, and psychological changes experienced by the population of the capital.

A Pugachevshchina came to the city in the early ’20s and celebrated its victory with plunder. The imprint of plunder lies on a whole generation. This is not the place to discuss how a people, plundered by the social system, responded with unsystematic plunder. We’re speaking here only of the moral consequences of plunder. A morally disordered city that participated in the “expropriation of the expropriators,” lost normal moral understanding and allowed the terror of the ’20s, the destruction of the church and cultural treasures, of their own national traditions, and allowed the wild forms of collectivization and 1937.⁵⁴

Describing the life of the residents of his multi-apartment house, of these new city dwellers who had lost the norms of village morality and had not acquired new ones—that is, a life whose fundamental characteristics were “drunkenness, unruly behavior, theft, illness, and frequent deaths”—Kaufman unexpectedly draws a connection to wartime events: “The city’s lower depths of the ’30–’40s emerged out of these families and produced the future criminalized soldiers of the Great War, those kids whom the devil didn’t take, who then abundantly indulged themselves in Prussia and Pomerania, avenging themselves on anyone for their hungry and benighted childhood.”⁵⁵

⁵³ Samoilov, *Pamiatnye zapiski*, 275.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 22.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 24.

Grigorii Pomerants, after the fact, also tried to account for what happened in 1945. “I don’t know what the decisive impetus was for the pogrom with which the war ended: a discharge of nerves after a tragic role played out? The anarchic spirit of the people? Military propaganda?”

On the road to Berlin
whirls the gray down of feather beds...

It wasn’t Ehrenburg on whom misfortune rained down then; it was Tvardovskii. Poems printed in the frontline newspaper, when Slavs burned and devastated empty German cities. The wind then buffeted clouds of down (in my memory it was white and not gray), and this white down shrouded the victory from top to bottom. The down was a sign of the pogrom, a sign of an unleashed will that circles, strengthens, burns... Kill the German. Avenge. You are an avenging warrior. Translate this from literary language into profanity (in which the whole army spoke and thought)... Kill the German and then take the German woman. There you have it, the soldier’s celebration of victory.⁵⁶

But where were the officers and generals during this “soldier’s holiday?” Why did they not stop the disorders? “But their own thinking was essentially no different” (*A oni tozhe dumali po-maternomu*). Here we encounter an unexpected “apology of inequality,” almost à la Berdiaev: earlier, too, officers could not always restrain Cossack or peasant anarchy. Thus in Izmail Suvorov’s legendary warriors slaughtered everyone when the Turks came out to surrender. But there was still a sense of nobleness, there was the honor of the nobility. “Peasants like Marei were good when they were kept in hand. And the nobles restrained them. But the revolution stripped off the upper stratum.” Now if officers were different from the rank-and-file soldier, it was often in a negative sense: “less patience, more condescension.” “Such officers ... in cases of mass rape establish order in the line.”⁵⁷

This was not just a metaphor. Leonid Rabichev recalls how in February 1945 in East Prussia, Red Army fighters, having overtaken a column of refugees, and

having forgotten about responsibility and honor and the German subdivisions that were retreating without a fight, flung themselves in the thousands upon women and girls. Women, mothers and their daughters, lay to the left and right of the highway and before each of them stood a chortling armada of *muzhiki* with their pants pulled down. Those covered with blood and losing consciousness were shoved aside, and the children throwing themselves to help were shot. Guffaws, snarling, laughter, cries and groans. Their commanders, their majors and colonels stood on the highway, and some laughed while others directed or, more precisely, regulated. This was in order that all their soldiers without exception participated. No, this was not collective responsibility, and not at all revenge on the cursed occupiers. This was hellish, fatal group sex. [It was] the

⁵⁶ Pomerants, *Zapiski gadkogo utenka*, 170–71.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 171.

all-permissiveness, the impunity, anonymity, and cruel logic of a maddened crowd. Shaken, I sat in the cabin of the truck, my driver Demidov stood in line, and Flaubert's Carthaginian appeared to me, and I understood that war cannot justify everything [*voina daleko ne vse spishet*]. A colonel, the one who had just been directing, can't restrain himself and gets in line too, while a major shoots the children and old men who are witnessing this in hysterics.⁵⁸

In truth, the picture drawn by Rabichev (who became a professional artist after the war) does not inspire great confidence. We know from documents and memoirs about the great number of group rapes, one of which Rabichev probably witnessed, and it is altogether possible that some officers "kept order in line." But that thousands simultaneously participated in such an action and moreover did so in broad daylight on the shoulder of a road and under the leadership of senior officers—this reminds one more of a Bosch painting extrapolated to 1945. It is even less likely that a colonel "stood in line" behind rank-and-file soldiers. Colonels behaved somewhat differently.

Lieutenant-Colonel Los'ev, the staff commander of a rifle regiment, sent his subordinate lieutenant into a cellar where Germans were hidden to select and bring him a woman. The lieutenant carried out the order, and the lieutenant-colonel raped the woman who had been brought to him. The punishment was not very severe; Los'ev was demoted in rank.⁵⁹ Colonel Dubovik, the commander of an artillery division who took part in collective rape, escaped with a brief scare: the commander of the political section of the division tried to charge him with a "party matter," but the army political section dropped the case and ordered that all papers related to it be destroyed.⁶⁰ Later, fellow officers learned to manage things without the use of direct force: in June 1945, Major Nikitin simply ordered the mayor of the city of Gera to send "two broads," one for him, the other "out of generosity" for the translator accompanying him. The order was carried out.⁶¹

Kaufman provided a different answer than did Pomerants as to why officers did not stop the use of force against the civilian population. "Our generals and officers, feeling that that the army shouldn't be allowed to kill every German without punishment, did not have the internal right to stop the killing, since the slogan before 17 April⁶² was always the same—'Kill the German!' An army of resistance and self-defense had imperceptibly become an army of ferocious vengeance. And here our great victory began to turn into a moral defeat that imperceptibly appeared in 1945."⁶³

⁵⁸ Rabichev, "Voina vse spisnet."

⁵⁹ *Russkii arkhiv: Velikaia Otechestvennaia. Bitva za Berlin (Krasnaia armiiia v poverzhennoi Germanii)* 15, pts. 4–5 (Moscow: Terra, 1995), 246.

⁶⁰ Pomerants, *Zapiski gadkogo utenka*, 82.

⁶¹ Plimak, *Na voine i posle voiny*, 41–43.

⁶² This refers to the publication of Aleksandrov's article in *Pravda* on 14 April 1945. See n. 15.

⁶³ Samoilov, *Pamiatnye zapiski*, 286.

Of course, not all officers were indifferent to what their comrades-in-arms did. Kopelev was told that the commander of the division, Colonel Smirnov, personally shot a lieutenant who, in a gateway, “formed a line to a German woman held on the ground.” Kopelev sat in military prison with a battalion commander, a senior lieutenant of the guard, Sasha Nikolaev from Gor’kii. Nikolaev had shot a sergeant, a cavalier of the Order of Glory, who had tried to rape an underage girl. The sergeant was drunk, behaved aggressively, and reached for his automatic. Nonetheless, he was considered the best intelligence officer in the regiment and was presented for a second Order of Glory; and the senior lieutenant was charged with exceeding the bounds of necessary self-defense.⁶⁴ Elsewhere, Kopelev describes an argument between a “captain-marauder” who pointed out the justice of revenge and cited the reliable Ehrenburg, and a senior lieutenant-sapper, one of the “severe youths of the great war.” The sapper also relied upon internationalist clichés in the press, but as if he was really convinced of what he said: “How can one speak of revenge on the Germans? That is not our ideology—to take revenge on a people.” Marauders, he said impassionedly, should be shot on the spot.⁶⁵

So who was ultimately responsible for the moral decline of the army (at least its active part) in 1945? Kaufman’s answer is simple and wholly in the spirit of the “children of the 20th Congress”: Stalin. Although the military devastation of Germany was advantageous for Stalin, its “moral destruction” was not. “This destruction would signify the victory of the idea of freedom and the necessity of satisfying in our state’s domestic policy the hopes to which the war gave birth for the Russian nation.... [B]y introducing organized forms of marauding and force, Stalin created something like national collective responsibility of amorality [*nechto vrode natsional’noi krugovoi poruki amoralizma*], and reduced the idea of internationalism to phraseology once and for all, in order to deprive the nation of the moral right to the realization of freedom.”⁶⁶ Kopelev, also in retrospect, wrote that the command specially approved of pillaging—“‘sacred revenge’ should have distinguished the Soviet people from foreigners.”⁶⁷

Stalin knew about the use of force against the civilian population in Germany. The leadership of the People’s Commissariat of Internal Affairs (NKVD) informed him about this in sufficient detail. Thus Beria reported in a secret communiqué of 17 March 1945 that “many Germans are declaring that in East Prussia all the German women who remained in the rear were raped by Red Army soldiers.” As if “recording” such an assertion by the Germans, Beria also brought forth concrete examples, confirming that they were not groundless. Germans spoke of group rapes by Soviet soldiers of all females, from underage girls to old women. The most outrageous case was the one recorded by the operational-military group of the NKVD in the township of Spaleiten. NKVD employees noted

⁶⁴ Kopelev, *Khranit’ vechno*, 1: 149, 340.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 112–15.

⁶⁶ Samoilov, *Pamiatnye zapiski*, 287.

⁶⁷ Raisa Orlov and Lev Kopelev, *My zhili v Moskve: 1956–1980* (Moscow: Kniga, 1990), 120.

during the filtration of the civilian population that 3 women and 12 children had cuts across their right wrists. These were the marks of a collective suicide attempt.

As one of the women recounted, on 3 February, when advance units of the Red Army entered the town, Red Army troops dragged her out in the courtyard, where she was raped in turn by 12 soldiers; other soldiers at the same time raped her neighbors. That same night, six soldiers entered the cellar and raped women in front of their children. On 5 February there were three rapists, and the next day eight drunken soldiers not only raped women but beat them as well. An NKVD officer recorded the testimony of the woman: "Under the influence of German propaganda about how the Red Army torments Germans, and having seen actual tormenting of them, we decided to kill ourselves, so on 8 February we cut the right wrists of ourselves and our children."⁶⁸ According to the account of one of the local residents, two German women who had been raped several times killed themselves in the attic of his house. Around ten suicides were registered in connection with the evacuation from the frontline region in the city of Grants on 18 and 19 February. "Suicide by Germans, especially women, has become more widespread."⁶⁹

However, a decree from Stalin about changing the relationship toward German POWs and the civilian population followed only a month later, on 20 April. It said that it was necessary "to treat the Germans better" and explained: "A more humane attitude toward the Germans will make carrying out military operations in their territory easier and without a doubt reduces the Germans' stubbornness in defense."⁷⁰

Stalin was Stalin, but enough "human material" was required to create "collective responsibility of amorality." War, especially *such* a war, does not make anyone better; however, one should not forget the quarter-century of violence and the glorification of violence, the cruelty of authority—and the part of the population that supported it—in relation to its own people. The "later" Samoilov (Kaufman) contended that the "people of Germany might have suffered even more, were it not for the Russian national character—the lack of spite, the lack of vengefulness, love of one's children, warmth, the absence of a feeling of superiority, the remnants of religious and internationalist consciousness in the very thick of the soldier masses." He also remarked that "the innate humanism of the Russian soldier showed mercy to Germany in '45."⁷¹ But this judgment seems more likely a tribute to the Populist tradition of the Russian intelligentsia than a reflection of reality. It is completely contradicted by his description of the new urban environment of the 1920s–30s.

⁶⁸ A secret report from L. P. Beria to I. V. Stalin and V. M. Molotov about the dishonorable behavior of soldiers of the Red Army in *Lubianka: Stalin i NKVD–NKGB–GUKR "Smersh." 1939–mart 1946* (Moscow: Mezhdunarodnyi fond "Demokratiia"; Materik, 2006), 503.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 503–4.

⁷⁰ *Russkii arkhiv: Velikaia Otechestvennaia: Bitva za Berlin*, 221.

⁷¹ Samoilov, *Pamiatnye zapiski*, 287.

Kopelev—who was one of the first in the Russian literature to describe the marauding violence and the murder of peaceful residents committed by fighters and commanders of the Red Army, and who tried to oppose it and was sentenced to ten years in the camps for “bourgeois humanism”—nonetheless did not distinguish himself from his comrades-in-arms.

The battle goes on outside the city [Allenstein]. And we collect trophies—Beliaev, along with me and a petty thief sergeant and other marauders. We are all together. The general at the station, ordering the collection of suitcases, and the lieutenant sapper, who believes in internationalism, and the tank driver, chased out of the unit, and all those who cross there, who crawl along the snow in black patches of explosions, and those who storm Königsberg, who shoot, die, shed blood, and those in the safe army reserves who drink, build up their courage, and pinch breads—we are all together. Honest and base, brave and cowardly, good and cruel.... We are all together, and there is no way and no time to get out of it. And glory is not separate from shame.⁷²

Yet Kopelev, Kaufman, and Slutskii tried, to one degree or another, to oppose the wave of senseless violence. This was illogical, given the principle of “repayment,” in light of the fact that they were all Jews.

Jews?

Nearly all the authors of the letters, diaries, and memoirs that have served as the sources for this article were Jews.⁷³ They were all *Soviet* Jews, who had had the chance to join the new internationalist majority. They made use of that chance, too, in most cases not even thinking about what was happening to them—and what was happening to their people. Grossman, who belonged to another generation, was an exception. He was born and spent his childhood in the “Jewish capital” of Berdichev, where his mother lived and was killed by the Nazis.⁷⁴

⁷² Kopelev, *Khranit' vechno*, 1: 146.

⁷³ In writing this article, I did not make any particular selection of memoirs by the ethnic origin of their authors. Evidently, such a notable predominance of Jews among the authors of frontline diaries and memoirs is explained to a significant degree by the higher level of education of Jews in comparison with soldiers of other nationalities. Thus, in accord with the USSR census of 1939, of 1,000 residents those (of both sexes) with a secondary-school education among Jews was 268.1, among Ukrainians 82.1, among Russians 81.4; those with a higher education among Jews were 57.1, among Russians 6.2, and Ukrainians 5.1. Of 1,000 men those with a higher education among Jews was 69.5, among Russians and Ukrainians 8.8. In absolute numbers, there were more Jews with a higher education than Ukrainians, and only 3.5 times fewer Jews with a higher education than Russians, even though Russians outnumbered Jews by 33 times. See *Vsesoiuznaia perepis' naseleniia 1939 goda: Osnovnye itogi*, ed. Iu. A. Poliakov et al. (Moscow: Nauka, 1992), 57, 86.

⁷⁴ Grossman's works on “Jewish themes” came out under that name in two volumes in Jerusalem in 1985 and were reprinted in 1990. See also John and Carol Garrard, *The Bones of Berdichev: The Life and Fate of Vasily Grossman* (New York: Free Press, 1996).

A 15-year-old Kaufman recalled that in his early childhood his father told him various stories from the Bible and tried to instill in him a “spirit of nationalism.” These efforts were, however, unsuccessful: “little of the nationalist developed in me, although I wasn’t without a feeling of national pride and self-esteem.”⁷⁵ “In essence, I didn’t have a people,” the grown-up Kaufman lightly asserted.

The spirit of Jewry was alien, incomprehensible, and distant from me. By conviction I was an internationalist, and in spirit ... also. Yet something brought me close to this people. I was certain that if some sort of misfortune befell them, I wouldn’t abandon them and that I would boldly accept any suffering with my brothers.... Yet still that people was distant from me. The expansive Volga song touched my heart more than the doleful and heartrending songs of my people. The language of my people is not my language, their spirit is not my spirit, but their heart is my heart.⁷⁶

In contrast to his father, who “didn’t make a judgment about the nation, but simply belonged to it,” Kaufman judges the “Jewish nation.” He judges it as an outsider, from the perspective of “Russian Jews,” who are more Russian than Jewish, who no longer go to synagogue but do not yet attend church—although later a significant number of them would.⁷⁷ Discussing the issue of Jews and his father many years later, Kaufman wrote: “I speak of *his* [emphasis added—O.B.] nation.”⁷⁸

Kopelev “never practiced the Jewish religion, didn’t know the Jewish language, and didn’t feel like or consider himself to be a Jew.” He identified himself as a “Russian of Jewish origins;” he was a Jew “by the formula of Tuvim”: his kinship with Jews was defined not by the blood which runs through veins but by the blood that flows out of them. Kopelev felt obliged to declare his Jewishness by the “cruel, mass antisemitism” in the USSR. Kopelev spoke about this subject in the late 1970s.⁷⁹ In 1945, as well as later, he professed internationalism. He explained antisemitism, whose growth from 1942 on Kopelev could not have ignored, as the natural exacerbation of class and national contradictions during the war, which were complicated “by the necessity of national and more particularly great-power patriotic propaganda, which was both a tactical and a strategic necessity.”⁸⁰ Even in the camps he firmly believed in the “approaching communism and in eternal Russia.” In 1948, Kopelev’s friends in the *sharashka*

⁷⁵ Samoilov, *Podennye*, 1: 47 (29 November 1935).

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 61 (6 March 1936).

⁷⁷ See Judith Deutsch Kornblatt, *Doubly Chosen: Jewish Identity, the Soviet Intelligentsia, and the Russian Orthodox Church* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2004).

⁷⁸ Samoilov, *Pamiatnye zapiski*, 54.

⁷⁹ Orlova and Kopelev, *My zhili v Moskve*, 190: an interview for German television on 26 June 1979.

⁸⁰ Kopelev, *Khranit’ vechno*, 2: 196–97, 16.

(a special camp in which scientific research work was carried out), Dmitrii Panin and Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, criticized him for not wanting to recognize himself “as a Jew above all,” and they did not agree with Kopelev’s self-definition as a “Russian *intelligent* of Jewish origins.”⁸¹

None of our protagonists observed any sort of Jewish traditions. Itenberg told his wife that on Red Army day there was “red wine and roast *pork* (which I’m especially fond of).” A month later, he wrote: “The food now is very good, roast *pork* with potatoes predominates, and I don’t need anything else.”⁸² Kaufman notes in his diary a memory about a simple joy at the front: “We spent the night ... having stuffed ourselves with *pork* and having drunk our fill of *milk*.”⁸³ Kaufman’s religious ancestors—his grandfather and especially his great grandfather, who abandoned his family and went to die in Palestine—probably would have spun in their graves having learned how their non-observant descendant violated custom.

All of them, of course, knew about the Nazis’ extermination of the Jews. Many lost close relatives. Itenberg’s grandfather remained in Gomel’ to guard their home, not believing stories about German brutalities. The house was saved, but his grandfather was killed.⁸⁴ Kaufman noted the terrible story of the Łódź ghetto in his diary.⁸⁵ Pomerants also knew about the extermination of the Jews. But as he acknowledged himself, this did not deeply affect him. He was both a “Russian” and a resident of the capital through and through: “The army Russian ‘we’ also affected my initial understanding of the genocide. It was spoken about as if of someone else’s sorrow. I, too, saw it as someone else’s sorrow. I thought of those who had perished as shtetl Jews [*mestechkovye evrei*]*—that is, those who weren’t like me. I felt bad for them, of course, but as if for someone else.*” Pomerants hoped that the majority of urban, Jewish *intelligenty* had managed to evacuate. In general, in a war where millions of people were dying, there was no point in distinguishing by nationality among those who perished. It already “got to him” when he was returning from Germany, in Majdanek, “near a mass of children’s shoes heaped in a pile”: he “felt for those who perished as for his own children and for the first time fully experienced the words of Ivan Karamazov about little children who weren’t guilty of anything.”⁸⁶

In one instance General A. D. Okorokov said to Kopelev, with respect to the denunciation written about him after his trip to Naidenburg and Allenstein (see below): “But you’re a Jew after all. How can you love the Germans so much? Don’t you know what they’re doing to the Jews?” Kopelev answered, “What do you mean, ‘love’? I hate the fascists, but not as a Jew—I haven’t had occasion to

⁸¹ Kopelev, *Utoli moia pechali* (Moscow: Slovo, 1991), 46.

⁸² Itenberg, letters to his wife, 26 February and 16 March 1945.

⁸³ Samoilov, *Podennye*, 1: 208 (4 February 1945).

⁸⁴ Itenberg, interview, April 2007.

⁸⁵ Samoilov, *Podennye*, 1: 208 (10 February 1945).

⁸⁶ Pomerants, *Zapiski gadkogo utenka*, 158.

think about that very often—but as a Soviet person.... As a person from Kiev and Moscow, but above all as a Communist. That means my hatred could not be expressed in raping women, in marauding.”⁸⁷ In the fall of 1942, when Kopelev asserted that it would be necessary to shoot a million or a million and a half Nazis to “tear out all the roots of Hitlerism,” a coworker ascribed his cruelty to the fact that he was a Jew and therefore hated all Germans.⁸⁸ In 1945, he was obliged to demonstrate that he, a Jew, was faithful to the internationalist doctrine of the party. He apparently did not suspect that the party had changed doctrine, even though its adoption of a new state anthem was a clear reflection of this change: as of 1 January 1944, the Soviet Union woke up to the sounds not of the “Internationale” but to the music of Aleksandr Aleksandrov.

Kopelev’s behavior was so unusual for his environment that the denunciation of him, directly inspired by his superior and written by someone who considered him a friend, stated that as a child Kopelev was raised in the family of a German landlord.⁸⁹ With the goal of “instructing”—or perhaps as a provocation—Kopelev’s immediate superior, Zabashanskii, described his trip to Majdanek and asserted that the tap of the gas chamber was turned not by Hitler or Goebbels but by ordinary Germans, since only Jews were liquidated at the camp. Having exploded with anger about this “chauvinistic speculation on corpses,” Kopelev spoke of “his kin” shot at Babi Yar in Kiev and about how in Oster they hanged everyone with his family name; and with regard to his only brother, who had disappeared without a trace, Kopelev hoped that he died in battle, “because if he was captured, then he was gassed there in Majdanek.” “But I hate all fascists and I can’t hate an entire people.”⁹⁰

They really were genuine Soviet people. The problem was that the conception of a genuine Soviet person had changed. Not everyone managed to notice this.

Sometimes our protagonists had occasion to discuss the “Jewish question” with Germans. Itenberg, who did not pass up a chance to practice his German and often spoke with prisoners, asked them: “Why do Germans dislike Jews?” “And a 36-year-old Fritz, a gardener by trade, began to talk to me about it with enthusiasm and to my joy I understood [by “to my joy,” Itenberg meant that he could make sense of the German]: ‘When Hitler came to power, the majority of banks, enterprises, factories, and other commercial establishments were owned by Jews, and to seize all that, they began to shoot the Jews and put Germans in their place.’ Is that close to the truth?” This is how Itenberg wrote his parents, as if trying to find a “materialist” explanation for the Nazis’ extermination of the Jews.⁹¹

⁸⁷ Kopelev, *Khranit’ vechno*, 1: 163–64.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 286–87.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 162–63.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 295–97. About the death of Kopelev’s relatives, see Kopelev, *Utoli moia pechali*, 289–91.

⁹¹ Itenberg, letter to his parents, 13 August 1944.

Gel'fand, half a year after the end of the war, recorded a conversation he had had with a German woman whom he had literally picked up on the street.

She spoke of Jews with contempt—she acquainted me with race theory. She prattled on about red, white, and blue blood. This irritated me, and everything within me objected. The ignorance of this and other younger German women roused my indignation, which I hastened to tell her. I even tried to convince her that all people had the same blood, red and hot, wherever they were from, and that fairy tales about some sort of “noble Aryan blood” were a complete fabrication and the obscurantism of talentless fascist theorists of the Rosenber [sic] type [!]. But she couldn't understand this.⁹²

Disagreements on the race question, however, did not prevent Gel'fand from making an effort (this time, unsuccessfully) to seduce the woman.

Soviet officers were surprised to encounter living German Jews in Berlin and its outskirts. In Berkenwerder, Kaufman met four German Jews: “Their fate was awful. However, the vitality of these Jews was striking. They say that around 2,000 Jews are hidden in the outskirts of Berlin.” The next day he met another Jewish family—actually, a mixed family. He was surprised to see that the Jewish wife continued to wear the yellow star with the word *Jude* on it. When he asked why, she answered that it was a “good thing now.” Thus Kaufman concluded, “A sign of shame had become a kind of passport for them.”⁹³

At the end of April 1945, the staff of the corps in which Anatolii Aronov served was based at Wilhelmstrasse in Berlin. On the very first day, the major noticed a “skinny woman in dark glasses, a black overcoat and black scarf” in the courtyard, staring fixedly at him. The next day the woman made a decision, went up to Aronov and held out to him a scrap of paper with a Star of David drawn on it. “Having recognized” the Soviet officer as a Jew, she decided to “reveal herself.” The worn-out, graying woman who appeared old in fact turned out to be 16. In 1940, her family had been deported to Poland. Frau Kreber, with whom the girl had learned to play the piano, hid her in the pantry of her apartment for five years. The girl wanted to hang herself, but it was not possible to do that without exposing her music teacher. Her hope for the future was tied to relatives who lived in America. Major Aronov never saw her again.⁹⁴

In Berlin, Elena Kogan met Doctor Bruk, a dentist. He lived under an assumed name, and his former student and assistant Käthe Häuserman and her sister helped hide him. The piquancy of the situation lay in the fact that Häuserman now worked as an assistant to another dentist, Professor Blashke, Hitler's personal dentist.⁹⁵ Gel'fand spent time in postwar Berlin with the Rischovsky

⁹² Gel'fand, *Dnevnik 1941–1946*, 23 November 1945, Fürstenberg.

⁹³ Samoilov, *Podennye*, 1: 218 (24 and 27 April 1945).

⁹⁴ Rybakov, *Roman-vospominanie*, 103–5.

⁹⁵ Rzhavskaia, *Berlin, mai 1945*, 177–78.

family, German Jews, and surreptitiously “exchanged kisses” with their eldest daughter, Elsa.⁹⁶ But the meeting of German Jews with their Soviet brethren did not always bring happiness or even understanding. Michael Vik noted that the senior lieutenant-translator of the command was ashamed of his Jewishness and tried to hide it. He responded to the Jewish attestations of Vik and his family by stating, “Everyone knows that Hitler killed all the Jews; and since, despite that, you’re still alive, that means you collaborated with the Nazis.”⁹⁷

Few of our protagonists discussed the liquidation of the Jews. Nazism was an absolute evil; for most people the time had not yet come to think about its origins, essence, and politics. Only Kaufman, in the context of his “theory” about Hitlerism as the apotheosis of *Bürgertum*, of the petty bourgeoisie, logically deduced the motives for the destruction of the Jews: “The Burger hates the Jewish shopkeeper, Hitler destroys all the Jews. The Burger considers himself and his wife the most well-ordered Burgers in the world. Hitler screams that only a nation of Burgers is fit to exist on earth.”⁹⁸ In an obvious attempt to wound this “nation of Burgers,” Kaufman, “for fun,” told Germans he met around Berlin that he was a Jew: “They were terribly glad, as if I weren’t a Jew but a rich uncle who was also about to die.”⁹⁹

It seems what worried our protagonists most was not the Germans’ attitudes toward Jews—with them “everything was clear”—but the attitudes of their fellow countrymen, their comrades-in-arms, as the purported internationalism of the Soviet people began to evaporate before their eyes (if it had ever existed beyond the confines of a narrow circle of the urban intelligentsia).

With the exception of Grossman, Boris Slutskii was undoubtedly the most worried about the fate of Jews and the Jewish question. He recorded the “story of the Jew Gershel’man” about his travels in occupied territory, including what was most bitter—how his former coworkers, neighbors, acquaintances, and even his brother-in-law (Gershel’man was married to a Russian woman) not only did not want to give him refuge but tried to hand him over to the Germans. Gershel’man survived. He survived, of course, because he was helped by a wide variety of people. However, his conclusion—that “those who helped me were ten times greater in number than those who sold me out”—was not very inspiring. This was in part because in the story Slutskii recorded that those who helped were far from being ten times greater in number, and in telling the story of his travails to an officer he barely knew, although a Jew, Gershel’man should have reached the “correct” conclusion. What was important was something else: Gershel’man’s story—like many other stories of this sort, most of them with a sad ending—undermined certainty in the “internationalism” of the Soviet people. Before the war,

⁹⁶ Gel’fand, *Dnevnik 1941–1946*, 17 and 19 October 1945.

⁹⁷ Vik, *Zakat Kenigsberga*, 192.

⁹⁸ Samoilov, *Podennye*, 1: 218 (17 April 1945).

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 218 (23 April 1945).

Gershel'man, in his own words, had completely forgotten that he was a Jew.¹⁰⁰ He was reminded of it during the war, and not only by the Nazis.

Slutskii clearly recognized this. "In Austria I ran into a different attitude of the Russian toward the Jew," he wrote right after the optimistic close of Gershel'man's story. He then tells the story of a Viennese Jewess, who was hidden for two years by Styrian peasants out of "peasant decency" and pity for her three-year-old son. "She was a colorless woman, with slack skin and dull reddish hair. It always seemed to me that there couldn't be any racial commonality between cheerful Odessans and the rickety Litvaks, that one group came from the swarthy victors of Canaan and the others from poor Philistines weakened by slavery." Here is her story: "I often listened to the radio and knew the Red Army well. I waited for you. In my entire life I had made love to only one man. And now I have to sleep with every soldier who passes through the village. Upon his first request."¹⁰¹ The story is not very unusual for those days. It is interesting (if that term is appropriate for *such* a story) not in itself but for the interpretation that Slutskii gives to it. The soldiers compelled the woman to sleep with them not at all because she was Jewish. It is unlikely they concerned themselves with details, since the woman spoke German. For them, she was Austrian—German—and one could do with them what one liked. Yet Slutskii clearly, painfully sensed how the Russians' attitude toward Jews had changed (or appeared clearly during the war).

He tried to find a rational explanation for this. In his words, the "Russian peasant established an inarguable fact: he fought more than anyone, better than anyone, more faithfully than anyone." Moreover, the state decided to play the patriotic card (which could easily become the nationalist card). "The war brought us the wide dissemination of nationalism in its basest, aggressive chauvinistic variety," Slutskii noted. "The calling up of the spirits of the past proved a dangerous procedure." A variety of peoples of the Soviet Union met one another during the war. These included the illiterate or barely literate residents of Central Asia or the Caucasus mountains, who did not understand Russian and were unable to handle military technology. "The peoples ... became acquainted with one another. They did not necessarily improve their opinion of one another after this acquaintanceship."¹⁰² "There was internationalism, then it became internationalism minus the Fritzes; now the shining legend that 'there weren't bad nations, but bad people and classes' was finally destroyed. The minuses had become too numerous."¹⁰³

Jews occupied a special place on this scale of mutual antipathy, which with time was nonetheless transformed into a fighting comradeship. It seems that this transformation of hostility to comradeship affected the Jews least. Grigorii Pomerant's Order of the Red Star was stolen in the hospital (in the officers' unit!).

¹⁰⁰ Slutskii, *O drugikh i o sebe*, 107–17.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 117–18.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 118–21.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 120.

There was probably “nothing personal” in this. The order fetched 10,000 rubles on the black market. A captain, a “Russified Bashkir,” however, came up to him and began to explain that it was perhaps not Pomerants himself who deserved such an insult but Jews in general. The captain heard from senior officers with whom he lay in the same hospital unit that after the war there would be an “anti-Jewish revolution,” because there were no Jews on the front, “but in the rear, the Fifth Ukrainian Front took Tashkent.”¹⁰⁴

“A thousand Jews on the front had a distinct feeling that the military service of their people was inadequate, that what had been done was insufficient,” Slutskii noted, as if agreeing with those who accused the Jews. “Shame and anger were directed at those who brought attention to this, and through self-sacrifice some sought to make up for the absence of their timid compatriots at the front.”¹⁰⁵ This was a clearly expressed “Jewish complex,” not alien to Slutskii himself. He explained the absence of Jews in the infantry by noting, first, that they had a higher educational level and, second, that from 1943 on the infantry was filled with peasants from liberated regions, where Jews had simply been obliterated. These uneducated infantrymen gave in more easily to Nazi propaganda, given the absence of Jews at the front. At the same time, Jews made up a significant share of the artillery, sapper, and other technical units, which were overwhelmingly proletarian in composition. This encouraged the development of philosemitism in certain types of units. Antisemitism “gradually declined to nothing” in the officer corps as well, where Jews were valued as staff officers, artillerymen, political workers, and engineers.¹⁰⁶

Clearly these were entirely logical mental conclusions; for example, no objective data testified to “philosemitism” in “proletarian” technical units, no “assessments” of the attitude toward Jews among officers were made. One thing was clear: “proletarian internationalism” was shaken; and Slutskii, a major in the Red Army and a Communist, did not want to reconcile himself to this at all. The precise and sharp observer in him starkly coexisted with the quasi-Marxist “theorist.” While clearly presenting a picture of the destruction of European Jewry, independent of the class status of those being killed, Slutskii still related the following story: “One of the few Jewish men who returned to Sombor [Yugoslavia—O.B.], the son of a rich merchant, gave his property to the Communist Party of Yugoslavia. It was said that his sister protested vehemently. This example characterizes the existence of two currents in contemporary Jewish life—the builders of capitalism and its destroyers.”¹⁰⁷ In actuality, Jews in 1945 were not divided by the issue of one’s attitude toward capitalism. They were divided into two unequal parts: those who survived and those who did not. The former were in the minority.

¹⁰⁴ Pomerants, *Zapiski gadkogo utenka*, 156.

¹⁰⁵ Slutskii, *O drugikh i o sebe*, 122.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 122–23.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 128.

A sense of the “inadequacy of the military achievement” of Jews, which tormented Slutskii, had no real basis. Antisemitic attitudes, which grew stronger at all levels of Soviet society during the war, could be explained in a number of ways, but not by the absence of Jews from the front. Official data from the Ministry of Defense puts the number of deaths among Jewish servicemen at 142,500. In absolute numbers, a larger “blood contribution” to victory was made by Russians, Ukrainians, Belorussians, and Tatars, whose numbers exceeded the size of the Jewish population. It should be kept in mind that less than one-third (30.2%) of the Jewish population lived in territories not occupied by the Nazis during 1941; and exactly the same proportion (30.2%) lived in territories seized by the Nazis in the period of June through August of that year. The overwhelming majority of the latter were killed. Another 39.6 percent of Soviet Jews were located in territories occupied between August and November 1941. How many of those managed to evacuate is not known. The Nazis also seized territories with a considerable Jewish population later, in 1942. Overall, the losses of the Jewish population (including those who lived in territories annexed by the USSR in 1939–40) totaled 2,733,000 or 55 percent of the entire Jewish population of the USSR in June 1941. This accounts for over 10 percent of all demographic losses in the USSR during the Great Patriotic War. Considering that more than half of the Jewish population was exterminated by the Nazis, our calculations suggest that Jews who perished at the front constituted over 6 percent of the remaining Soviet Jewish population.¹⁰⁸ Jews were not distinguished by “timidity,” judging by the number of those decorated with orders and medals during the Great Patriotic War. Their number reached 141,502 people; by this measure, Jews were surpassed only by Russians, Ukrainians, and Belorussians.¹⁰⁹

Major Slutskii overcame the Jewish “military complex” later, although not in prose, but in verse. His well-known poem was entitled, “About the Jews”:

Jews don't plant any crops,
 Jews do deal in their shops,
 Jews prematurely go bald,
 Jews grab more than they're owed.

¹⁰⁸ G. F. Krivosheev, ed., *Rossia i SSSR v voinakh XX veka: Poteri vooruzhennykh sil* (Moscow: OLMA-Press, 2001); *Vsesoiuznaia perepis' naseleniia 1939 goda*, 57; M. Kupovetskii, “Liudskie poteri evreiskogo naseleniia v poslevoennykh granitsakh SSSR v gody Velikoi Otechestvennoi voiny,” *Vestnik Evreiskogo universiteta v Moskve*, no. 2 (9) (1995): 152, table 9; Mordechai Altshuler, *Soviet Jewry on the Eve of the Holocaust: A Social and Demographic Profile* (Oxford: Berghahn Books, 1998), 16–18.

¹⁰⁹ “Spravka Otdela po uchetu i registratsii nagrazhdennykh pri Sekretariate Prezidiuma Verkhovnogo Soveta SSSR o kolichestve nagrazhdennykh ordenami i medaliami SSSR za vremia Velikoi Otechestvennoi voiny [15 maia 1946 g.], Gosudarstvennyi arkhiv Rossiiskoi Federatsii (GARF) f. R-7523, op. 17, d. 343, ll. 11–12. The document was presented by L. S. Gatagova.

Your Jew's a conniving bastard;
 He's not much good in the army:
 Ivan in a trench doing battle,
 Abram doing trade at the market.

I've heard it since I was a child,
 and soon I'll be past any use,
 but I can't find a place to hide
 from the cries of: "The Jews, the Jews!"

Not a single deal have I pulled,
 never stolen, and always paid,
 but I bear this accursed blood
 within me like the plague.

From the war I came back safe,
 So as to be told to my face:
 "No Jews got killed, you know! None!
 They all came back, every one!"¹¹⁰

"Jewish revanche" in Germany occurred unexpectedly, although participants in the action themselves were the last ones to think of it in precisely these terms. Elena Kogan was part of the group that was tasked with finding Hitler, or what remained of him. After the discovery of the remains, for a time she kept Hitler's teeth, which were placed in a box that had held perfume or cheap jewelry (there was no safe on hand). Not for a moment could she take her eyes off the box, which contained the only incontrovertible proof of the identity of the burned body discovered in the courtyard of the *Reichskanzlerei*, and of Hitler. Kogan was annoyed that she had to drag around the box with Hitler's teeth under her arm the whole time; it was inconvenient.¹¹¹

The pathology examination of Hitler's body was carried out under the supervision of the chief forensic expert of the First Belorussian Front, Lieutenant-Colonel Faust Iosifovich Shkaravskii.¹¹² Even in his worst nightmare the Führer, who expended so much energy on the extermination of the Jews, could not have foreseen that his burned corpse would be opened up by a Jew with the symbolic name of Faust, and that a Jewish woman would drag his teeth around under her arm and, moreover, would be annoyed that they interfered with her celebrating the capitulation of the Third Reich.

¹¹⁰ Boris Slutskii, *Stikhi raznykh let: Iz neizdannogo* (Moscow: Sovetskii pisatel', 1988), 121. Translation from Boris Slutsky, *Things That Happened*, ed. and trans. G. S. Smith (Moscow: Glas, 1999), 185.

¹¹¹ Rzhavskaia, *Berlin, mai 1945*, 171–73.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 164–66.

The “Package Campaign”

On 26 December 1944, Stalin approved a decree for organizing the receipt and delivery of packages from Red Army soldiers, sergeants, officers, and generals from active fronts to the country’s rear. The sending of packages was permitted not more than once a month in the following amounts: for a rank-and-file soldier and sergeant 5 kilos, for officers 10 kilos, and for generals 16 kilos.¹¹³ The significance of the decree was obvious: the possibility of sending home “trophies” was supposed to serve as a stimulus for the campaign in Europe. It was, among other things, a means of countering German propaganda, which posed the question: “Why fight on foreign soil?” It also drew the attention of Red Army troops “to the imagined and real advantages of European life.”¹¹⁴

Private Vasilii Churkin saw the decree, which appeared on “crossing into German territory,” as equivalent to an “approval of marauding.” Viewed from another perspective, this decree, which in Churkin’s estimation was “no good,” was justified by the fact that “every month the German soldier was allowed to send home a package of 16 kilograms from the territories they had seized.”¹¹⁵ “The popularization of the war by means of the ‘package campaign’ deeply nauseates me. Was it necessary, in avenging the scoundrel, to resemble him?” Kaufman asked rhetorically.¹¹⁶ Slutskii noted that a “revolutionary leap” in terms of marauding took place after the authorization of sending packages.¹¹⁷

Describing what he had seen the night after the taking of Gumbinnen, from which the German population had fled, Efraim Genkin wrote on 22 January 1945, “Our people, like a horde of Huns, threw themselves on the houses.”

Everything is burning; down from feather pillows flies in the air. Everyone, from the soldier to the colonel, drags goods. In a matter of hours, wonderfully furnished apartments, the richest homes, were destroyed and now look like a dump, where torn pictures are mixed up with the contents of broken jars of jam.... This picture provokes repulsion and horror in me.... It’s vile to look at people digging in someone else’s goods, greedily grabbing everything they can get their hands on. At the same time, the stimulus to this, to a certain degree, is the permission to send packages back home. It’s vile, disgusting, and base!!! This is just like the Germans in Ukraine.¹¹⁸

¹¹³ *Russkii arkhiv: Velikaia Otechestvennaia. Prikazy narodnogo komissara oborony SSSR (1943–1945 gg.)*, 13, pts. 2–3 (Moscow: Terra, 1997), 344–48.

¹¹⁴ Slutskii, *O drugikh i o sebe*, 35.

¹¹⁵ Churkin, *Dnevnik opolchentsa*, 6 February 1945.

¹¹⁶ Samoilov, *Podennye*, 1: 211 (20 February 1945).

¹¹⁷ Slutskii, *O drugikh i o sebe*, 96.

¹¹⁸ *Sokhrani moi pis'ma*, 281. Genkin, however, also saw a “second side” of the matter: “Crucified German city! It answered for the torments of thousands of our Russian brethren, turned into ashes by the Germans in 1941.”

Itenberg interpreted the decree completely differently, having seen in it a just rendering of accounts: “Now there is a directive: you can send packages from the front, so I’ll do so at the first opportunity when I can send something. Now the time is over when packages to Germany were stuffed to overflowing with our Russian things, now it’ll be the other way around. Women with simple Russian names—Nina, Marusia, Tonia, and many others—will receive packages from beloved husbands, fiancés, and friends; they will rejoice in the victories of the Red Army and curse our enemies.” He wanted to get to Prussia as quickly as possible, while “there were still some trophies there.”¹¹⁹ The first German city that Itenberg reached was Gumbinnen. It was several days after advance units had seized it. Considering what has been discussed above, there was little in the way of trophies there. According to Itenberg, all that remained in the houses were the “skeletons of furniture.” The upholstery had been expertly cut off.¹²⁰

Lieutenant Gel’fand had no doubts about the “package” decree: “No one prevents anyone from taking and destroying what the Germans had stolen from us earlier. I am completely satisfied.” Gel’fand was taken aback only by the barbaric attitude of his comrades-in-arms (with whom, by the way, he had a very unfriendly relationship) toward classical German culture. His company commander smashed a bust of Schiller and “would have destroyed Goethe as well if I had not ripped it from the hands of this madman and buried it, having wrapped it in rags.” “Geniuses cannot be equated with barbarians,” the commander of the platoon mused, and to destroy their memory is a great sin and disgrace for a normal person.”¹²¹

Three days later, instead of relaxing Gel’fand had to spend his nights “emptying bags of superfluous trophy goods—it wasn’t possible to carry it all.” He was a successful marauder; and dozens of watches, which served as small change, passed through his hands. Most did not work, but for the soldiers they were still valuable.¹²² The command approved of the seizure of goods and pillaging. As soon as Gel’fand’s unit established itself on the west bank of the Oder, the command gave orders to “check the houses.” Gel’fand’s take consisted of a fountain pen, a pack of playing cards in a case, a regular watch, and a silver watch chain. True, the watch he found was immediately taken by the commander of the neighboring company.¹²³

Kaufman describes a similar, though larger-scale picture of the “expropriation of the expropriators.” Not far from Berlin, in Strausberg, already at the very end of the war, the commander of a reconnaissance company ordered soldiers sitting in trucks crammed with goods to place trophies on the ground and return to their units. A group of officers, having lain in wait for the return

¹¹⁹ Itenberg, letters to his wife, 18 January and 10 February 1945.

¹²⁰ Itenberg, interview, April 2007.

¹²¹ Gel’fand, *Dnevnik, 1941–1946*, 30 January 1945.

¹²² *Ibid.*, 3 February and 1 March 1945.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, 3 April 1945.

of the rank and file from their looting campaign, dug into the pile of overcoats, suits, underwear, radios, and accordions and began tying up the better items into packages. Colonel Savitskii, who was the most senior in rank, could not carry away everything that caught his eye and on top of this ordered that the biggest accordion be sent to him. The effort to palm off a smaller instrument on him was unsuccessful, as Savitskii had counted up all the buttons on his preferred accordion and had found that it had more.¹²⁴

Watches, together with alcohol, were the hardest form of currency among the victors. In a villa outside Berlin where Grigorii Pomerants and his comrades were quartered, there were no clocks left, aside from a two-meter-tall grandfather clock. “We’ll publish a law so that smaller clocks aren’t produced,” Ruth, the owner of the villa, joked bitterly, “because your guys stole all the rest.” One of Ruth’s friends complained about the Soviet *Militärfrauen* [military girls]. “The male soldiers robbed her in a straightforward fashion: they grabbed food, wine, and watches. But the *Militärfrauen* immediately figured out where she hid the jewelry, felt the *matreshka* on the teapot, and uncovered everything.” Frau Ruth teased Pomerants “about the dictionary of the Russian soldier”: *Ring, Ohr, Rad, Wein* [ring, watch, bicycle, wine].¹²⁵ These were the “blue chips” of the exchange market.

Even urban residents from well-to-do families of the USSR first had the opportunity to try out many things that were ordinary for Europeans only in Germany, even if they might have seen them before. Gel’fand learned how to ride a bicycle on the outskirts of Berlin on 22 April 1945, as he noted precisely in his diary.¹²⁶ Bicycles were highly valued by the victors. There were not enough for everyone, and thus for these trophies one had to go head to head. Itenberg, already demobilized at the end of 1945, left for home with a bicycle, although he did not quite get it all the way back: he went by steamship; and courteous German machinists fixed it up on the tender, from which it was taken. Itenberg had no doubt that “our guys” had stolen the bicycle.¹²⁷

Itenberg generally had little luck with trophies. His only booty was a set of dinnerware. It was buried by residents who had fled, but Red Army troops discovered the hole and dug it up. Itenberg wrote to his wife: “Even I didn’t stand firm and took for myself ten plates, six of which were the same, with a wonderful drawing, a crystal carafe and five wine glasses, one of which was broken; then I took another two little cups with little plates—all Bavarian china (the best china in the world)... . To send the china in a package is senseless—it would break. So we’ll wait until the end of the war and then we’ll fill the carafe with wine and drink from the wine glasses.”¹²⁸ The dishes, unlike the bicycle, made it home.

¹²⁴ Samoilov, *Pamiatnye zapiski*, 290.

¹²⁵ Pomerants, *Zapiski gadkogo utenka*, 164, 167.

¹²⁶ Gel’fand, *Dnevnik, 1941–1946*, 25 April 1945.

¹²⁷ Itenberg, interview, April 2007.

¹²⁸ Itenberg, letter to his wife, 10 April 1945.

Soldiers continued to “squeeze” things out of the civilian population until the last days of the war.¹²⁹ Pillaging and mass drunkenness ruined the aesthetic of victory. Pomerants recalled his Berlin impressions of early May 1945: “One of the greatest victories in the world. Everything rejoices and sings in one’s breast. And sharply breaking through the rejoicing is shame. A world capital. Groups of foreign workers bunched up on corners, returning to France, Belgium, and before their eyes—what shame! Soldiers are drunk, officers are drunk. Sappers with mine detectors search in garden beds for buried wine. They also drink methyl alcohol and go blind.”¹³⁰

The accuracy of Pomerants’s recollections is confirmed by the diary entries of other witnesses and participants. Grossman’s impressions of the “colossal nature of the victory,” the general rejoicing—the “barrels of rifles bloomed with flowers, like the trunks of spring trees”—were substantially ruined, as he acknowledged later, by the fact that many of those who celebrated were “living dead men”: “they’d drunk up an awful poison from kegs with a technical mixture in the Tiergarten—the poison began to act on the third day and killed mercilessly.” A great victory, and at the same time the atmosphere of a flea market: “Barrels, piles of manufactured goods, boots, leather goods, wine, champagne, clothes—all this they carried and lugged on their shoulders.”¹³¹

On 1 May 1945 in Berlin, Captain Efraim Genkin noted that he learned not to be surprised and that “there are no pretty words to be written,” perhaps because “everyone was drunk” around him. “Everyone and everything.” The captain, who had been fighting almost from the beginning of the war, was one of the few who experienced not only the happiness of the victory but also its shame: “Berlin is crucified. Crucified like Prussia, Pomerania, Silesia, like all of Germany, where the Russian boot has managed to step.... Berlin is crucified. Terribly crucified. I can’t even write about it.”¹³²

Grossman could. “Everything is on fire,” he wrote in Schwerin. “Looting is in full swing.... An old woman has thrown herself from a window of a burning building. We enter a house, there’s a puddle of blood on the floor and in it an old man, shot by the looters. There are cages with rabbits and pigeons in the empty yard. We open their doors to save them from the fire. Two dead parrots in their cage.”¹³³ In Berlin, Grossman went to the famous zoological garden, where fighting had taken place. He saw the bodies of marmosets, tropical birds, and bears.

¹²⁹ Samoilov, *Podennye*, 1: 222 (21 April 1945).

¹³⁰ Pomerants, *Zapiski gadkogo uenka*, 167.

¹³¹ Grossman, *Gody voiny*, 456.

¹³² *Sokhrani moi pis'ma*, 283.

¹³³ Vasily Grossman, *A Writer at War: Vasily Grossman with the Red Army 1941–1945*, ed. and trans. Antony Beevor and Luba Vinogradova (London: Pimlico, 2006), 326. The publishers of his notebooks of the wartime period (*Gody voiny*), which appeared at the end of *perestroika*, did not risk or could not print these entries and several others by Grossman. The full text of the notebooks has not been published in Russian in post-Soviet Russia either. We note, at the same time, that the publishers of the English translation of Grossman’s “Notebooks” seemingly did not suspect—or at

The body of a gorilla that had been killed was in a cage. “Was it dangerous?” he asked an onlooker. “Not, it only snarled loudly. People are dangerous.”¹³⁴

The Tears of Trojan Women

Researchers who have addressed the theme of mass rapes perpetrated by Soviet soldiers and officers in Germany note that this theme was taboo in the Soviet/Russian literature: “Neither in memoirs nor in histories of the period is the issue of rape treated as a proper subject of discussion.”¹³⁵ “The subject [of rape] has been so repressed in Russia that even today veterans refuse to acknowledge what really happened during the onslaught on Germany territory.”¹³⁶ There is nothing surprising in this. It was not just a question of prohibitions. “You know, I don’t feel bad for the Germans at all, let them shoot them and do whatever they want with them,” Nikolai Safonov said to his friend Nikolai Inozemtsev at the end of January 1945. “In any case nothing can be compared to what they did to us, since it had governmental organization and scope. But it’s shameful that all these rapes lower the dignity of the army as a whole and each Russian individually.” Safonov perished on 6 April 1945.¹³⁷

If fighters were thinking of the army’s honor in 1945, veterans worried about it, too. Those who survived did not want the acts of rapists to darken the memory of the fallen, these “upright youth of the great war” (*strogie iunoshi velikoi voiny*). In conversations, war veterans were not very forthcoming, apparently also because the interviewer was a foreigner.¹³⁸ This undoubtedly may be explained not only by fear (after August 1991 there was not really anything to fear) but by a reluctance to “hang out dirty laundry,” even if the discussion was about a time long past. Maybe it was precisely because veterans did not want to darken the bright image of the victory. After all, victory in the Great Patriotic War is considered perhaps the only indisputably all-national value in Russia.

You cannot change the past, however, and the only means to “overcome” it is to “accept” and explain it. Therefore, diaries and memoirs are of particular interest, as they were written in the heat of events, in which the authors are not looking back at a developed tradition and do not fear “effacing” the victory. This also applies to veterans who gradually freed themselves from the Soviet system of values and did not consider themselves obliged to follow the official version of the past. Several of them, both during the war and many years later, strove not only to describe, but to explain what had happened.

least did not mention—that they had been published in the original language, even if with several cuts. See the review by Frank Ellis in *Journal of Slavic Military Studies* 20, 1 (2007): 137–46.

¹³⁴ Grossman, *Gody voiny*, 457. Subsequently from this note grew the story of Grossman’s “Tiergarten.” See Vasilii Grossman, *Neskol’ko pechal’nykh dnei* (Moscow: Sovremennik, 1989), 277–302.

¹³⁵ Naimark, *Russians in Germany*, 85.

¹³⁶ Beevor, *The Fall of Berlin, 1945*, 31.

¹³⁷ Inozemtsev, *Frontovoi dnevnik*, 210, 218.

¹³⁸ Naimark, *Russians in Germany*, 85; Merridale, *Ivan’s War*, 319–20.

The problem of rape is one of the central issues in the writings of the intellectuals we have been examining. Perhaps, like Pomerants, they were capable of feeling “for the victor and for the defeated unfortunate women.” Drinking with a chance acquaintance in a German town, “in a house full of German women,” Pomerants remembered lines from Schiller’s “Feast of Victory”:

Priam’s castle-walls had sunk
Troy in dust and ashes lay.

Contrasting the “joy of the Achaens” with the “tears of the Trojan women,” Pomerants was simultaneously filled with “rejoicing and horror.”¹³⁹ Thereafter, in memories about the war in Russia—more accurately about its final stage—there remained only the “joy of the Achaens” and rejoicing. The majority preferred not to recall the “tears of Trojan women.”

Slutskii tried rationally to explain the absence of any discernible struggle against the rapes, the numbers of which grew sharply when the army entered Austrian territory. Austrian villages that looked large on the map turned out to be a collection of houses scattered on hills, separated from one another by forest and valleys: “Often, one could not hear a woman’s cries from one house to another.” In most farms and little villages there were neither garrisons nor commanders. At the same time, Austrian women, having been deprived of men, “were not too resistant.”

“But above all other factors, it was fear—universal and hopeless—that compelled women to put their hands up on encountering a soldier, and that forced husbands to stand at the door while their wives were raped.”¹⁴⁰ Slutskii himself led an improvised investigation in the settlement of Sichauer, on the border of Styria and Burgenland. He questioned six girls who had been raped, including one who had been raped six times in three days. The “flirt Angelika,” who seemed proud that she had been raped only once because she cunningly hid in kitchen gardens, described what happened in a single phrase: “they hunt us like rabbits.” Soldiers knocked at the door in the middle of the night; if it was not opened, they broke the glass and raped women “right in the common bedroom.” “They could at least have driven the old ones into another room,” the victims complained. Girls did not spend the night at home but instead slept in haystacks. They waited with dread for the fall, when it would get cold.¹⁴¹

Kaufman seconds Slutskii, except that the event he describes took place not in Styria, a village far from the eyes of the command, but ten kilometers from Berlin: “A young girl, Helga. Seventeen years old. She had been raped five times by soldiers. The women asked that they not touch her anymore—she couldn’t handle

¹³⁹ Pomerants, *Zapiski gadkogo utenka*, 163.

¹⁴⁰ Slutskii, *O drugikh i o sebe*, 101.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 101–3.

it. What a horror! She herself asked me about it. I spend all day with old men, broods, and their children, protecting them from all sorts of encroachments.”¹⁴²

Gel'fand recorded a similar story. In Berlin, he met a large German family. The youngest girl, by her account, had been raped by roughly 20 soldiers in front of her mother. In a state of despair, the girl proposed that Gel'fand live with her, since he was an officer and then the others would not touch her. Her mother also requested this for her daughter.

In the city of Forst (in Brandenburg), while searching for an apartment for billeting, Pomerants discovered an old woman lying in bed in one of the houses. “Are you sick?” “Yes, your soldiers, seven of them, raped me and then shoved in a bottle; now it's painful to walk.”¹⁴³

In Allenstein, Kopelev met a woman with a bloodied bandage on her head, together with her 13-year-old daughter. The girl had “blond braids,” she had been crying. “A short little coat, long legs, like on a foal, on her light colored stockings—blood.” The woman constantly tried to turn back; the girl pulled her to the other side. According to her mother, two men raped her daughter and she herself had been raped by “very many,” and then they were thrown out of their house. But what worried the woman most at that moment was that soldiers had beaten her 11-year-old son: “He's lying there, in the house, he's still alive.” The girl, sobbing, tried to convince her mother that her brother was dead. The only thing Kopelev could do for them was to direct them to a collection point under the guard of an older soldier who, learning what had happened, cursed the “bastards and bandits.”¹⁴⁴

Grossman wrote about the “horrible things” that happened to German women. In Schwerin, some of the victims tried to complain to the military authorities: the husband of a woman who was raped by ten soldiers; the mother of a young girl, raped by a soldier from a signal command attached to the army staff. The face, neck, and hands of the girl were bruised; one eye was swollen. The rapist was there—red-cheeked, fat-faced, sleepy. He seemed not very frightened of punishment, evidently for good reason. Grossman observed that the commandant questioned him without much enthusiasm. In another case, a nursing mother was raped in a barn. Her relatives asked the rapists to take a break, as the baby needed to nurse and was crying the whole time.¹⁴⁵ In a paradoxical episode, German women cried and pleaded for a Jewish officer with whom they felt themselves safe to remain on duty. The paradox lies in the fact that the Jewish officer's entire family had been killed by the Nazis, and he was living in the home of a Gestapo agent who managed to flee but left his family behind.¹⁴⁶

¹⁴² Samoilov, *Podennye*, 1: 222 (21 April 1945).

¹⁴³ Pomerants, *Zapiski gadkogo utenka*, 163.

¹⁴⁴ Kopelev *Khranit' vechno*, 1: 144–45.

¹⁴⁵ Grossman, *A Writer at War*, 326–27.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 327.

Evgenii Plimak left a note with the parents of a raped and wounded girl of 15 or 16 years—a bullet had passed close to her heart—addressed to “any commander or fighter of the Soviet army,” with a request to get the girl to a medical station. It was the only thing he could do to help, as the corps staff was moving forward. A week later, he spoke with a 40-year-old woman who had been subject to gang rape. Plimak advised her to hide for two to three days until the commandant showed up, which in no way guaranteed security, as the experience of those days showed.¹⁴⁷

In a suburb of Berlin in the last days of war, Pomerants heard much that was impartial from the owner of the villa in which the editorial board of the division’s newspaper was quartered and in which he served. “Those who didn’t believe in Hitler’s propaganda were the ones who remained in Berlin—and look what they got.” She herself “got” a night with the commandant of a staff division, having been presented with a pistol as an order. “Generally a pistol acted as an arrest order in Moscow. Frightened women submitted. Then one of them hanged herself. She’s probably not the only one, but that’s one I know about. At the time, the victor, having gotten his, was playing in the courtyard with her boy. He simply didn’t understand what it meant to her.”¹⁴⁸

Grossman noticed “many crying young women” on the streets of Berlin. “Evidently, they suffered at the hands of our soldiers,” he concluded (the last phrase was omitted in the Soviet publication of his notebooks). No special efforts were required to come to that conclusion. “Monsieur, I love your army,” a young Frenchman told Grossman, “and that’s why it’s very painful to see their behavior toward girls and women. It will be very harmful to your propaganda.”¹⁴⁹

Who were the rapists, these “bastards and bandits”? Slutskii believed that there was a distinct “group of professional cadres of rapists and marauders” in the army. “They were people with relative freedom of movement: reservists, petty officers, those from the rear.” Discipline progressively declined in accordance with movement across Europe, “but only here, in the Third Reich, did they actually fall upon blond broads, their leather suitcases, their old kegs with wine and cider.”¹⁵⁰

In the army, those from the rear were unloved, if not hated. Pomerants recalled fires in the cities of East Prussia seized by Soviet troops: “The Slavs shot automatics at the crystal they couldn’t shove in their kit bags and set the rest on fire [*i puskali krasnogo petukha*]. This wasn’t directed against the Germans. There were no Germans in the city. It was troops from the rear, who were loading up bags with trophies. The hatred of the soldiers was turned against those who got rich in the war. If not me, then no one! Destroy everything!”¹⁵¹

¹⁴⁷ Plimak, *Na voine i posle voiny*, 20–21.

¹⁴⁸ Pomerants, *Zapiski gadkogo utenka*, 164, 166.

¹⁴⁹ Grossman, *Gody voiny*, 456; Grossman, *A Writer at War*, 340.

¹⁵⁰ Slutskii, *O drugikh i o sebe*, 100–1.

¹⁵¹ Pomerants, *Zapiski gadkogo utenka*, 162.

In any army there is service in the rear. And it is not necessarily the case that only bad people serve there. It is completely clear, even judging only by the testimonies considered in this article, that military personnel in forward units were dominant among the rapists. Those soldiers who perpetrated terror among the female residents of Sichauer and among whom Slutskii carried on “educational work,” “not according to law but according to a sense of humanity,” were the most ordinary rank and file of the Red Army, in no way distinct from the others.¹⁵²

The literature’s explanations for this behavior of Red Army soldiers toward German women, with its focus on revenge and denigration of the “superior race,” are partially accurate. The party organizer of the unit in which Pomerants served said in 1942: “Where’s my wife now? Probably sleeping with a German.” Then he added, “Just you wait, when we get to Berlin we’ll show those German women!”¹⁵³

Sometimes these explanations are anecdotal. Thus, according to Antony Beevor, “Stalin ensured that Soviet society depicted itself as virtually asexual. This had nothing to do with genuine puritanism: it was because love and sex did not fit in with dogma designed to ‘deindividualize’ the individual. . . . The regime clearly wanted any form of desire to be converted into love for the Party and, above all, the Great Leader.” Beevor points to the “dehumanizing influence of modern propaganda,” which included “the Soviet state’s attempts to suppress the libido of its people.” As a result, “most ill-educated Red Army soldiers suffered from sexual ignorance and utterly unenlightened attitudes toward women.”¹⁵⁴

I would suggest that no propaganda has ever succeeded in suppressing people’s “libido.” More than enough “libido” had built up for hundreds of thousands of soldiers, deprived for years of contact with women. When finally they had desirable and completely defenseless women in their power, they did not fail to take advantage of this. In this case drunkenness served not as the cause, as Beevor writes, but as an accompanying element of the rapes.¹⁵⁵ Although there was no “sex education” in Russia before or during the Soviet regime, Russian men courted women and had families, and it never occurred to anyone that love for the Great Leader could replace love for a woman. Stalin was, of course, a villain, but he undoubtedly understood that children are not the result of love of the Party. Thus Red Army soldiers treated German women “inappropriately” not because they did not know how to “treat a woman.” They simply did not consider that necessary. For them German women were beings of a lower order, the spoils of war. The “idea that has captured the masses is becoming material strength,” Pomerants noted ironically. “Marx stated that completely correctly. At the end

¹⁵² Slutskii, *O drugikh i o sebe*, 103.

¹⁵³ Pomerants, *Zapiski gadkogo utenka*, 120.

¹⁵⁴ Beevor, *The Fall of Berlin, 1945*, 32.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

of the war, masses were taken with the idea that German women from 16 to 60 were the rightful spoils of the victor. No sort of Stalin could stop the army."¹⁵⁶

Efforts were made to stop the army at the end of April. When Slutskii reported what had happened in Sichauer to the command, he was actually listened to. As he wrote: "The time was now past when my signals about attempted rape were interpreted as slander on the Red Army. The issue now concerned the political loss of Austria." Moreover, "stern" and "definitive" telegrams began to arrive from Moscow. "But even without them, the innermost elements of party spirit, of developed internationalism—which you can never escape—and of humaneness were boiling up," wrote the incorrigible Communist and humanist Slutskii.¹⁵⁷

But it proved difficult to overcome the inertia of permissiveness, despite the imposition of very severe measures. If in Vienna relative order was established, it was much more complicated to control troops in the provinces. In the region of Krems during the week of 26 June to 3 July 1945, several dozen women were raped and "up to 17" civilians were injured. The instigator, or the one "designated" as such, was shot. This "educational measure," probably "driven home" to his comrades-in-arms, had little influence on them. The "removal" of cattle, birds, and other property from the population, as well as rapes, continued. Women working in the fields were often raped.¹⁵⁸ Given that a significant number of women became pregnant as a result of rape, the provisional government of Styria had to allow abortions "for ethical reasons in proven cases of rape," thus suspending the existing law that criminalized the artificial termination of pregnancy.¹⁵⁹

According to Pomerants's memoirs, stern telegrams from Moscow, even orders from Stalin himself, had no effect. Soldiers and officers cooled down only around two weeks after the end of the war. "It was like after an attack, when the

¹⁵⁶ Pomerants, *Zapiski gadkogo utenka*, 166. "[W]omen, well-dressed urban women—the girls of Europe—were the first tribute we took from the vanquished" (Slutskii, *O drugikh i o sebe*, 44).

¹⁵⁷ Slutskii, *O drugikh i o sebe*, 103.

¹⁵⁸ "Soprovoditel' noe pis'mo politicheskogo sovetnika po delam Avstrii E. D. Kiseleva zamestiteliu narodnogo komissara inostrannykh del SSSR V. G. Dekanozovy k dokladnoi zapiske o politicheskikh nastorniiakh v g. Vena i v sovetsskoi zone okkupatsii Avstrii," in *Die Rote Armee in Österreich: Sowjetische Besatzung, 1945–55. Dokumente / Krasnaia Armia v Avstrii: Sovetskaia okkupatsiia, 1945–1955. Dokumenty*, ed. Stefan Karner, Barbara Stelzl-Marx, and Alexander Tschubarjan (Graz: Oldenbourg Wissenschaftsverlag, 2005), 300, 304. Half a year later, cases of robbery and rape continued to be noted, and after a year and a half the level of criminality among soldiers of the Soviet occupying troops in Austria was still rather high. At the end of 1946, according to information from the Austrian Ministry for the Interior, in the course of a month 562 crimes were committed by Soviet troops, compared to 38 by Americans, 30 by the French and 23 by the English. "These data were clearly compiled tendentiously," G. N. Molochkovskii, a TASS correspondent in the Central Committee Department of Propaganda and Agitation, stated. "However, Soviet commanders confirm frequent acts of undisciplined behavior by Soviet troops and violations of the law committed by them." See *Die Rote Armee*, 614, 630.

¹⁵⁹ "Tsirkuliar vremennogo pravitel'stva zemli Shtiriia vsem otdelam zdavookhraneniia o regulirovanii voprosov preryvaniia beremennosti po sostoianiiu zdorov'ia ili drugim osnovaniim, 26 maia 1945 g.," in *ibid.*, 606–8.

surviving Fritzes weren't killed but were given cigarettes. The plunder stopped. The pistol ceased being the language of love. A few necessary words were mastered and agreements were reached peacefully. And the incorrigible descendants of Genghis Khan began to be tried. They got five years for a German woman, for a Czech woman—ten."¹⁶⁰ The epoch of violence had ended. The era of love had begun.

Lieutenants' Romances

The first time the theme of love between a German woman and a Russian officer appeared in literature was in the novel of the established Soviet writer Iurii Bondarev, *The Shore* (Bereg, 1975). The hero of the novel, Lieutenant Nikitin, having established a relationship with the beguiling Emma, "understood that something unreal was happening to him, something despairing, akin to betrayal, to a crime committed in one's sleep, an impermissible violation of something, as if he were thoughtlessly crossing over and had crossed over an unspoken forbidden border, which for several reasons he had no right to cross."¹⁶¹ The romantic story of Nikitin and Emma was inspired by many real "stories" that had taken place between Russians and Germans. True, the reality, as is its wont, was rather more prosaic. There was little romance in it, and much more "prose" of the hungry postwar years.

Once, Lieutenant Gel'fand met "two pretty German girls" outside the mess hall of his unit. The girls began to compliment Gel'fand on his looks (rather than vice versa!). Soon the mother of one of the girls, who "happened" to be nearby, came up and began to show her photographs to Gel'fand and two of his colleagues. The matron evidently was playing the role of *souteneuse*. The lieutenant was still so naive that he did not understand what was going on. Gel'fand, intrigued by this meeting, "ate lunch without appetite," wrapped his pastries up in a newspaper, and gave them to the girls. "They were very hungry, although they didn't show it. But I guessed it, and when one took my package in her hands and guessed what was in it—she happily jumped up, expressing her gratitude." When a colleague of Gel'fand's gave the girls chocolate, "they were won over in such a way that it's impossible to convey even a part of the delight that transformed these little figures unrecognizably."¹⁶²

This time, "the loss of innocence" of Gel'fand's naive virgin did not happen. Half a year later, not a trace of his naïveté remained. He wanted to take "abundant pleasure" in the caresses of a new acquaintance, the student of a hairdresser, the pretty Margot. "Just kisses and embraces" were not enough for Gel'fand. He "anticipated more, but I was not bold enough to demand and insist. The girl's mother was pleased with me," he wrote. "And why shouldn't she be! I brought

¹⁶⁰ Pomerants, *Zapiski gadkogo utenka*, 166.

¹⁶¹ Cited in thelib.ru/books/bondarev_yurii/bereg-read.html, accessed 4 June 2009.

¹⁶² Gel'fand, *Dnevnik, 1941–1946*, 15 May 1945.

candies and butter, sausage, and expensive German cigarettes to the altar of trust and good will of her relatives. Even half of these goods provided sufficient basis and right for me to do whatever I wanted with her daughter in front of her mother, and the latter would say nothing, since foodstuffs today are dearer than life itself, even of such a young and nice sensitive girl like the tender beauty Margot.”¹⁶³

Frau Ruth Bogerts, the widow of a merchant and owner of the villa occupied by the divisional newspaper, invited her women friends over so the Russian officers would not be bored. They arranged musical evenings at the villa, and “sometimes the whole crowd went for a stroll.” Obviously, the women’s interest was completely pragmatic: they got defense and the chance to be fed. When the merry company went strolling, the neighbors glanced at them through the gates of their yards, “where they waited with dismay for the next robbery or act of violence.” Pomerants fell in love with one of the hostess’s friends, Frau Nikolaus. Once he set off to her house as a guest, in order to make a declaration of love. The woman did not show much enthusiasm, but when Pomerants “carefully embraced her around the shoulders” she did not resist: “She had a six-month-old baby who needed to eat; she needed to feed him, and I had brought canned goods.” True, such “purchased love” did not satisfy Pomerants, who wanted a “spiritual response”: “I tried to explain what a joy it was to emerge from the cloud of hatred and to meet such a kind, intelligent woman here in Berlin, who read the same poems I loved.” (Frau Nikolaus kept a volume by Heine, who had been banned by the Nazis.) Pomerants felt let down by his poor understanding of German, which prevented him from expressing the whole depth and sincerity of his feelings. The matter ended when he peacefully fell asleep to the great satisfaction of the hostess.¹⁶⁴

Over half a year, Gel’fand’s relationship with women generally, and German women in particular, underwent a significant evolution. Like the majority of young people of his generation, he “missed” the “normal” period of falling in love and the possibility of acquiring a “normal” sexual experience. Now he wanted terribly to make up for all this, both at a romantic and a physiological level. “Completely in vain I dream of love, even with a German woman, if only she were smart, beautiful, and with a good figure, and most important, if she loved me devotedly. Things didn’t go farther than dreams of this: embraces, kisses, and two- to three hour conversations. I still hadn’t found a completely suitable girl. Those who were tender were stupid, or if passionate then capricious; a third group was ugly; a fourth didn’t have good figures. Meanwhile, Russian girls were proud and susceptible to all the subtleties of conversation,” he wrote in June 1945.¹⁶⁵

¹⁶³ Ibid., 26 October 1945.

¹⁶⁴ Pomerants, *Zapiski gadkogo utenka*, 164–65, 167–68.

¹⁶⁵ Gel’fand, *Dnevnik*, 1941–1946, 3 June 1945.

Finally, his downfall was accomplished—with a German woman and in far from romantic circumstances. Gel'fand settled in the apartment of the regimental commander when his unit relocated. He occupied himself collecting books that he sent to the USSR. At the same time, he read medical books “dealing with sexual impotence and other matters.” The “threat of always remaining sexually incapable frightened me like never before, and I decided no matter what to use my last days in the city to help myself, having made an oath to myself to be persistent to the end, overcoming my shyness and scruples.”

The problem was solved unexpectedly easily: he noticed from the window a “pretty girl, a blonde with just a hint of auburn in her hair, walking down the street.” Gel'fand went out on the street and, “without prolonging the conversation, proposed that she come into the house.” He seemed not to have threatened her or offered her food. Nonetheless, after a playful conversation the girl agreed to come in and soon the couple got down to business. The story of Gel'fand's downfall could serve as a subject for a beginner in psychoanalysis. The whole time he had to overcome a feeling of repulsion—and not at all because his partner was German. The woman smelled “like a dog” (soap was no less a deficit item in postwar Berlin than was bread or chocolate).

But this did not stop the lieutenant, and he asked the woman to undress:

It was time for her to undress—I felt impatient. I drew in my imagination the form of this treasure that was just now being revealed to me for the first time. In my memory there arose pictures by famous and unknown artists, photographs, and even some pornography I saw once long before—all this blended together for me into a generalized conclusion about the appearance and character of “that.” Even in the worst case I could not disfigure my dream in such a way that she would not seem to me as marvelous and smooth, as was everything in a woman. But how great was my surprise, my disappointment and shame, when instead of my mythical and imagined image I saw something different, real, reddish, protruding, wet, and ugly to the point of loathing.

Gel'fand's first sexual partner had a “small figure, with bug bites, scratched, with not yet fully developed but already pendulous breasts.” Why the woman got into bed with the lieutenant who had hailed her remains unclear. In any case, when a knock came at the door and the cook suggested it was time to eat (the cook noticed that Gel'fand had brought in a girl and said that he was next in line), the German woman refused food even though she was very hungry, saying, “I can't serve everyone, that's no good. I'd rather stay hungry.”¹⁶⁶

Gel'fand's successes with Russian girls were less evident. Having received the expected affront, he nonetheless wrote in his diary: “German women weren't for me, either ideologically or morally. There were good-looking, even beautiful ones among them, but they couldn't touch me truly and stir my thoughts and feelings

¹⁶⁶ Ibid., 18 July 1945.

of love. They didn't refuse caresses, or indeed anything at all." "Having picked up" "two Frauleins," with a friend one time, Gel'fand in the end dropped them, since he was repulsed by "their made-up lips, their put-on airs, and especially that they fell in love with me."¹⁶⁷

Meanwhile, the once naive and persnickety lieutenant with time even stopped being squeamish about the services of a prostitute from Alexanderplatz, although her "brows were drawn on, pomade was caked on her lips, and she smelled of mold and eau de cologne. She wasn't without beauty, but the hand of an ugly, vulgar artist removed all her freshness and attractiveness."¹⁶⁸

But he still longed for something "grand and pure." For Gel'fand such pure love was represented by Margot from Welten (discussed above)—indeed despite the morality of the Soviet officer, he clearly preferred her to his Russian girlfriend. When he was with the "wonderful Margot," then "here there were no amiable slaps in the face, nor pinches, nor such 'caresses' as with the Russian Ninotchka, but only tenderness—shy, feverish, almost childlike, simple and pure."¹⁶⁹ This was in contrast to the pretty but dissolute Nina, who was "four years older than the German woman and not as fresh and innocent. She curses, saying 'she is already used to it' ... but she's Russian. But what is most important ... she isn't taken yet—a very rare situation among Russian girls. They're all 'wives' or 'PPZh,'¹⁷⁰ wherever you looked."¹⁷¹

Gel'fand pursued Margot for a fairly long time, and he put up with her repulsive old mother, who in turn put up with the lieutenant only because he brought food and soap.¹⁷² Summing up his amorous adventures, Gel'fand wrote at the end of 1945:

As an adolescent studying in school I was shy, uncommunicative, timid, and my female peers never took any interest in me. I wasn't lucky in love. Over the course of the war, I became better acquainted with love and pleasure, but I never experienced one or the other, although very many women—I can't remember most of them now—were hot for me. I first became intimate with a woman only after the war, in Berlin, and only because she wanted it. I slept with five women after that time, three of whom were in Berlin, two in Welten. One of the five was the prostitute from Alexanderplatz, another had gonorrhoea (it's surprising that I didn't get infected!), the third was repugnant, the fourth ... I don't want to talk about her. And in only one case was it a woman who stayed in my mind and was to my liking. Such is "love."¹⁷³

¹⁶⁷ Ibid., 26 July 1945.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid., 16 October 1945.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid., 25 October 1945.

¹⁷⁰ PPZh—*polevaia pokhodnaia zhena* (mobile field wife), as steady lovers were called in the army.

¹⁷¹ Gel'fand, *Dnevnik, 1941–1946*, 26 October 1945.

¹⁷² Ibid., 12 December 1945.

¹⁷³ Ibid., 23 December 1945.

Sergeant Plimak also was first intimate with a woman in Germany. Before that, though, there was romantic love. The future philosopher kept a photograph of Letti (Charlotte Schultz) from Kirchhain and even published it in his memoirs. But he lost his innocence in the arms of an altogether different woman, Anni. It happened in Gera, where, the reader may recall, Major Nikitin demanded that the local *burgomeister* send him “two broads.” One of them, obtained in the end for the major’s translator, Sergeant Plimak, was Anni. His loss of innocence did not, however, happen right away. Although she had already worked for a considerable time as a prostitute—who else could the *burgomeister* have sent?—Anni was not a professional. At least this is what she said. She fled the bombing in Berlin with her eight-year-old daughter for Gera, where her relatives lived. Her husband had disappeared without a trace on the Western front. There was no work, and Anni began to trade on her body. The first night, the two of them only talked: the sergeant was not able to overcome his youthful timidity, but in parting he gave the lady an impressive bundle of marks “confiscated” from prisoners. This good turn was not forgotten, and a week later the lady returned the “debt” and took the initiative herself. The romance continued for three weeks, until Anni, having received news that her house in Berlin was undamaged, returned home.¹⁷⁴

The story did not end there, and the sergeant continued to go back and forth between Lotti and Anni. A quarter-century later, having read Dostoevskii’s *The Idiot*, Plimak compared his situation in retrospect with that of Prince Myshkin, who went back and forth between Nastas’ia Filippovna and Aglaia Ivanovna. True, the passion in any case did not reach the tension it did in Dostoevskii’s novel, and in the end the sergeant parted with both German women and ended up happily married to the translator Masha. Also, in contrast to Prince Myshkin, he ended up not in an insane asylum but in the philosophy department of Moscow State University—which in the late 1940s was only slightly better.¹⁷⁵

Soon after entering German territory, the vigilant command demanded an end to “intimate relations with Polish and German women.” At an educational Komsomol meeting in one of the subdivisions, the Komsomol member Bushuev appealed not to besmirch the honor of the soldier-liberator “on the hems of dirty German women.”¹⁷⁶ The majority of officers and soldiers, however, had the completely opposite opinion of German women: “in our humble Soviet prewar experience we had never seen such young, available, affectionate, well-groomed German girls, who smelled good and were dressed in the ‘foreign style,’” Major Anatolii Aronov recalled. In Reichenbach, where the future author of *Children of the Arbat* was stationed with his corps staff, efforts by the command to limit

¹⁷⁴ Plimak, *Na voine i posle voiny*, 34–38, 41–49.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 52–53 and 5–9.

¹⁷⁶ “Iz direktivy Politotdela 19-i Armii o merakh po ukrepleniiu politicheskoi bditel’nosti i voinskoi distsipliny ot 26 fevralia 1945 g.; Iz doneseniia politotdela 205-i strelkovoi divizii ob ukreplenii voinskoi distsipliny, poriadka i organizovannosti v podrasdeleniakh ot 8 aprelia 1945 g.,” cited in Seniavakaia, *Frontovoe pokolenie*, 206, 209.

relations between the soldiers and the local population—especially females—were unsuccessful: “In Reichenbach there were many single women, and they longed for the men no less than we did for the women.” In most short lived—though sometimes also rather extended—romances not a small role was played by the fact that the cavaliers could feed their girlfriends. The ladies “placed a piece of bread, spread with butter, on the plate and ate it with a fork and knife as if eating a second course. Such refinement pleased our ‘cavaliers.’”¹⁷⁷ But the issue did not concern good manners; the German women were hungry.

Kaufman also fell in love—something to which he was generally quite inclined. But this particular period was not reflected in his diary. “For many days I haven’t written a word. During that time—a trip to Leipzig, an impetuous romance with Eva Maria, then the transfer from Berlin to Babelsberg, and little Inga with the big blue eyes. I catch myself thinking about women more and more often. Sometimes—in moments of skepticism—I think, what’s all this for? And then there’s the same wish—no, not to possess a woman!—but to own her heart, to come to her each night with a soul full of kisses.”¹⁷⁸

Later, Kaufman’s Leipzig romance found reflection in his poem “Lands Nearby” (*Blizhnie strany*), which he defined as “Notes in Verse.” Of course, a poem can hardly serve as an historical source. Poems do not convey facts but rather recreate a mood. Kaufman is describing here a moment when it does not matter that a “nice girl likes the Führer” while at the same time she likes Russia and doesn’t like the English at all. It is also completely unimportant that she has kasha for brains, since the “epoch of comfort and everyday life” has arrived.

In this Leipzig near the station
 I have a pretty good gal.
 Her little room smells of soap.
 Her clothes smell of peppermint.
 We sleep together and often drink together
 (Inga likes Russian vodka),
 And the neighbor already knows me.
 And the old lady behaves tactfully
 (The old lady likes Russian vodka
 And meat stew along with it).
 I gossip with my gal,
 Somehow I chatter in German,
 Switching cases and articles.
 We’ve almost gotten used to each other.¹⁷⁹

¹⁷⁷ Rybakov, *Roman-vospominanie*, 108.

¹⁷⁸ Samoilov, *Podennye*, 1: 225 (4 September 1945).

¹⁷⁹ David Samoilov, “Blizhnye strany,” in *Izbrannye proizvedeniia*, 2 vols. (Moscow: Khudozhestvennaia literatura, 1990), 2: 23.

But let us return from verse to prose. The most reliable key to a woman's heart, much less her body, in Germany in 1945 was still not gallant manners, but chocolate and cigarettes. Or butter and lard, these "two whales," as David Samoilov wrote. "Two holy ideals," at the mere mention of which "creamy Cupids" (*slivochmye kupidony*) shone in the eyes of a German matron.¹⁸⁰

Germans: Things and People

The first impressions of Soviets in Germany were not of people but of the things that they had encountered very rarely if ever. "For the first 20–30 kilometers beyond the Oder we didn't encounter a single civilian. All of Germany was ready to be saved from frightful retribution, from which they anticipated there was no escape."¹⁸¹

"The luxury of the situation was indescribable; the richness and elegance of all the property was striking," as Gel'fand recorded his first impression produced by everyday German material culture.¹⁸² In Gumbinnen, Itenberg saw "destroyed homes; furniture that had been tossed out; roadways accurately planted with trees; libraries with new, unread books; and many other little things that spoke to a life that was unbelievably good, the life that these parasites enjoyed.... Everything was left in the houses. The furnishings were especially striking: what chairs, sofas, wardrobes—how they lived! What else did they need?! They wanted war, and they got it."¹⁸³ Such feelings were experienced by many Soviet soldiers, who discovered this "unbelievably good" life: Why did the Germans attack Russia? What had they needed?

In Oranienbaum, Kaufman attention was drawn to the kitchens, sparkling with "hellish cleanliness" and filled with things of which neither he nor his colleagues even knew the use. Elena Kogan writes about a "most comfortable" kitchen, "glistening with cleanliness"¹⁸⁴ in a small house in Landsberg, "sitting astride the war's path": "On the shelves was an undisturbed row of beer glasses. The ceramic skirt of the sly auntie set on the buffet puffed out. This cheery knick-knack was given to the owner on her wedding 32 years earlier." Two horrific wars had raged, but the pottery auntie with the slogan on the apron: *Kaffee und Bier—das lob ich mir* ("Coffee and Beer—that's what I love") was intact.¹⁸⁵

Kaufman, who was also in Landsberg, "was struck by the detailed organization of daily life, which was evident in all the trivial details of custom, in a thousand things, abandoned regalia and knick-knacks. At the same time, so few books! On my table is an old watch, which always chimes something like a Cracovienne. Tasteless pictures on the walls. Portraits of people in dress uniforms

¹⁸⁰ Ibid., 24.

¹⁸¹ Samoilov, *Pamiatnye zapiski*, 281.

¹⁸² Gel'fand, *Dnevnik*, 1941–1946, 30 January 1945.

¹⁸³ Itenberg, letter to his wife, 25 March 1945.

¹⁸⁴ Samoilov, *Pamiatnye zapiski*, 289.

¹⁸⁵ Rzhavskaia, *Berlin, mai 1945*, 33.

and without them. Under one of them was the inscription: *Gefallen fürs Vaterland am 27 März 1918* (Perished for the Fatherland on 27 March 1918). There was also the usual beer stein with the inscription:

*Der grösste Feind des Menschen Wohl
Das ist und bleibt der Alkohol
Doch in der Bibel steht geschrieben
Du sollst auch deine Feinde lieben.¹⁸⁶*

Elena Kogan saw the same traditional row of beer steins and the usual earthenware auntie, dragging a gilded shoe, suggesting one drink from it—"from these cheery knick-knacks that are given as wedding gifts"—in an apartment on the outskirts of Berlin in which she spent the night in early May.¹⁸⁷

Beer steins with various instructive or humorous inscriptions became a sort of symbol of Germany for the Russians, a symbol of banality and Philistinism (*meshchanstvo*). Operators of frontline film chronicles invariably shot them.¹⁸⁸ "Man becomes a slave of things," Kaufman philosophizes.

Here a thing is not simply an object of daily life. No! Things instruct, things have their philosophy, things profess a truth. Oh, the flat, wooden, self-assured philosophy of things! Their sermons are printed in thorny Gothic script in all corners of a German residence. A towel, a stein, a shelf, walls, a chamber pot, a plate all sermonize. They have their views on happiness, on love.

*Der Liebe ist,
Wenn zwei Personen
Auf Erde schon
Im Himmel wohnen!¹⁸⁹*

These are sentimental and self-satisfied things, just like their owners. They, too, were things in their homes. And they are given over to demolition, like their houses, like the ugliest thing in the world—Germany.¹⁹⁰

Grossman recorded a conversation with a beautiful 35-year-old woman, the wife of a horse trader. She was very upset that soldiers had taken her things. "She sobs and right after that calmly tells a story about how her mother and three

¹⁸⁶ Samoilov, *Podennye*, 1: 216–17 (13 April 1945). In the original citation, the word *Wohl* seems to have been misplaced, appearing just before *Alkohol*. Both the rhyme and the syntax suggest that the word order presented here is correct. On this basis the translation would read: "Drink has been and will remain / The greatest enemy of man / But the Bible does command us / To show love even to our enemies." I wish to thank Alexander Martin for his advice on this score.

¹⁸⁷ Rzhavskaia, *Berlin, mai 1945*, 92–93.

¹⁸⁸ According to Valerii Pozner.

¹⁸⁹ Love is when two people on earth live in heaven.

¹⁹⁰ Samoilov, *Podennye*, 1: 217 (14 April 1945).

sisters died in Hanover in the American bombing. And with relish, she relates rumors about the intimate lives of Göring, Himmler and Goebbels.”¹⁹¹

Memoirists emphasize the attachment, the devotion of Germans to things. Not far from Berlin, which was about to fall any day, Kaufman met Ukrainians, Russians, Dutch, and French, liberated from the captivity of “labor” slavery, and Germans leaving the battle zone. If the French were hungry, they were still cheerful, but the “Germans, in contrast, had a terrible look. Since they had never been oppressed, however, they hadn’t forgotten about things and dragged them along with antlike persistence.”¹⁹²

The assistant to Hitler’s dentist, Käthe Häuserman, supposedly refused to leave burning Berlin and fly to Berchtesgaden, because she had buried her dresses in the ground not far from the city. They had to be saved, even if the house on Pariserstrasse in which she lived was burned down.¹⁹³ The story is not very believable. Elena Kogan took it seriously, however, because it accorded with her image of Germans’ attitudes toward things, of their Philistinism, their soullessness.

Even Gel’fand, who later got used to the “indescribable luxury” and elegance of German property that had initially delighted him, writes with contempt soon after the end of the war: “Now it’s time in Germany for rain and tears. The Germans snivel about food, about goods, about the good old days when everything was plentiful.”¹⁹⁴ “They snivel” not about freedom but about goods!

Gel’fand himself, however, gave due attention to German “goods” and was a frequent if not constant visitor to the black market on Alexanderplatz. In destroyed Germany, the material situation was still better than in the USSR. Consider his results for one market day: “For 250 marks I bought a *Rasier Apparat* (an electric razor), got two pairs of women’s slippers cheap (for 100 and 200 marks)—I’ll send them to mama. Women’s clothes were being sold at reasonable prices. However, I was swindled on a coat. In the morning, when I looked at it carefully, it turned out to have so many holes that you couldn’t even make pants out of it.”¹⁹⁵

“Maybe it was easier to achieve a revolution in Russia because ‘things’ never were the master there,” Kaufman reflected. “I don’t think in Russia there was ever such close attention to everyday life [*byt*], such a dominance of things.”¹⁹⁶ Philistinism, according to Kaufman, was the environment that nurtured Nazism: “Hitlerism is the philosophy of the brutal Philistine [*filosofia ozverevshogo meshchanina*], who reached a manic level in his self-regard, self-infatuation, hatefulness, envy. It is a sort of pathos of banality and nothingness, a monstrous exposure of instincts, a wallowing in the filth of his ‘I.’ This is the logical end of

¹⁹¹ Grossman, *Gody voiny*, 453.

¹⁹² Samoilov, *Podennye*, 1: 222–23 (23 April 1945).

¹⁹³ Rzhavskaia, *Berlin, mai 1945*, 178–79.

¹⁹⁴ Gel’fand, *Dnevnik, 1941–1946*, 14 August 1945.

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 17 October 1945.

¹⁹⁶ Samoilov, *Podennye*, 1: 217 (14 April 1945).

any sort of Philistinism. The well-ordered German *Burger* inevitably had to come to this.” Kaufman ended his ponderings with a phrase reflecting the persistent yearning for world revolution: “And all the *Burgers* of the world will come to the same if we don’t suppress them, if we don’t wipe them off the face of the earth.”¹⁹⁷

Almost all the sources discussed in this article strove to emphasize the low intellectual culture of Germans, as opposed to their material culture. They emphasize the absence of books in homes, the weak knowledge of literature or the reading of lowbrow literature. Itenberg asked a prisoner of war, a 36-year-old gardener, “whether he knew of the writer Feuchtwanger.” It turned out that “this thick-headed Fritz” had not heard of this writer (one could have expected as much, since the works of Feuchtwanger were banned by the Nazis). Yet, Itenberg noted with indignation, “he had finished the eighth grade.”¹⁹⁸

“Berliners read much and everywhere,” Gel’fand noted. “But what do they read? I was interested in the content of the books they read—not a single internationally known author; even Goethe was hardly found. Every sort of schlock.”¹⁹⁹ Having seen a concert by actors in Kremmen, Gel’fand concluded that the general qualities that “characterize the whole style of contemporary theater art is vulgarity.” He was especially unpleasantly struck by the number “A Bathing Woman,” in which the actor “not only represented all parts of the female body but allowed himself, to the indescribable delight of the public, to mime the bulge of her breasts being washed and several times to draw a towel between her legs to create the impression of a woman drying her private parts.” In another number a “dog” pissed on a bouquet of flowers given to it, while the public squealed with delight. “The characteristic attribute of the German spectator,” the lieutenant concluded, “was love for all sorts of cheap effects and unprincipled light laughter. Therefore, the affectation and clowning of the artist is more accessible to the public than a serious and thoughtful performance.”²⁰⁰

Nearly everyone recalled the submissiveness, fear, and servility of the civilian population of the Third Reich once the Red Army arrived. There were no cases of resistance to speak of, and it was extremely rare to encounter even efforts of the population to preserve its dignity. Kaufman recalls an old woman who stubbornly refused to speak to the Soviet soldiers who planned to spend the night in the region of Miedzychod (Birnbäum) and refused to leave the house. Another old woman, left by someone to die in the semi-basement of a detached house in one of the towns on the approaches to Berlin, called the Russians bandits. She had nothing left to lose. “The rest were servile,” he wrote in his diary.²⁰¹

“The Germans are afraid; they’re cowardly. For some reason, they’re all stupid, dull-witted, like statues, which I had not anticipated, given my earlier opinion of

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 218 (17 April 1945).

¹⁹⁸ Itenberg, letter to his parents, 13 August 1944.

¹⁹⁹ Gel’fand, *Dnevnik, 1941–1946*, 14 November 1945.

²⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 29 October 1945.

²⁰¹ Samoilov, *Podennye*, 1: 209 (5 February 1945); also in Samoilov, *Pamiatnye zapiski*, 281.

them,” Gel’fand noted with surprise.²⁰² In Austria, “whole villages were topped with white rags. Old women put their hands up when they encountered someone in a Red Army uniform.”²⁰³ In Landesberg, Elena Kogan was struck by the fact that “every single person—both adults and children—had white armbands on their left sleeves. I hadn’t imagined this could happen—that a whole country would don white armbands of capitulation—and I don’t remember reading about such a thing.”²⁰⁴ In Berlin, Germans “all as one” also wore white armbands. On 28 April 1945 on the streets of Berlin it was already “noisy and crowded with people.” The Germans “no longer feared us and all strolled along the streets.”²⁰⁵

The population strove to adapt to new circumstances and new authority. “The Germans are the sort of people who are willing to serve anyone as long as they have marmalade and food [*shmama*],” wrote V. N. Rogov with conviction.²⁰⁶ In Arensfeld, in the house where Kaufman and his comrades were staying, a group of women and children appeared, led by a lady of around 50, a certain Frau Friedrich. When they asked to be “registered,” they were told that this would be possible only when the command arrived. But the German women and their children, “with wailing and tears,” repeated the request of their leader. Apparently, they already had experience in dealing with Soviet soldiers or had heard something about the way they dealt with women. As a matter of fact, Kaufman sent them to the basement of the house until the normal occupying authorities arrived. Frau Friedrich approached Kaufman with the suggestion to select several of the younger women to satisfy the “small needs” of the soldiers. Evidently, this was a proposal to pay for defense of the group. Kaufman broke off the conversation. Nonetheless, tribute from the vanquished was taken in any case: an NKVD man with the army who soon appeared, having confirmed the presence of civilians, took with him one of those hidden in the basement, a “girl of unusual prettiness.” Kaufman recalled her name, Eva-Maria Strom.²⁰⁷

Itenberg characterized the submissiveness of the German population in territories occupied by the Red Army as a manifestation of the German love for order, their recognition of “the rules of the game.” “In the Baltics, one couldn’t go out on the street after it got dark—you’d get killed. In Germany—go ahead. Once they had lost [the war], that was it, game over.”²⁰⁸ *Order* was yet another key concept that was always associated with Germany and the German national character in Russia (and not only there). Our sources also remarked upon this traditional German trait.

²⁰² Gel’fand, *Dnevnik*, 1941–1946, 3 February 1945.

²⁰³ Samoilov, *Podennye*, 1: 99.

²⁰⁴ Rzhavskaia, *Berlin, mai 1945*, 32.

²⁰⁵ Gel’fand, *Dnevnik*, 1941–1946, 28 April 1945.

²⁰⁶ *Sovetskie evrei*, 197.

²⁰⁷ Samoilov, *Pamiatnye zapiski*, 281–82.

²⁰⁸ Itenberg, interview, April 2007.

In Allenstein, which had just been seized by the Red Army, Kopelev was struck by two well-groomed ladies who had set off in search of a store where they could use their ration cards, since all the stores were closed or destroyed on their own street. He directed them to go home and wait a day or two until order was restored in the city. Until then, he warned, they could be killed or raped. The older of the two women could not believe this: "But that's impossible. It's not allowed!" The younger one couldn't understand why someone would do such a thing. "For no reason at all," Kopelev tried to explain, "because among the soldiers there are many who have become cruel, who want revenge.... German soldiers robbed, killed, and raped in our country." The older one again refused to believe it: "It can't be."²⁰⁹ For these women, the sensible, rational world turned out to be not at all like it seemed. *Order* was violated. And it was impossible to believe that. Yet for all that it was striking that the German postal system worked right up to the end. On 18 April, in one of the homes left by the residents, Kaufman found that day's issue of *Völkischer Beobachter*.²¹⁰

On 3 May 1945, Elena Kogan spent the night in the apartment of an older couple in Bisdorf on the edge of Berlin. They owned a chandlery shop, set up in their house. It was almost the first night for Kogan in normal conditions after four years of war. A traditional German assemblage of things was in the room: "On the table freshly cut flowers in a vase, a parrot in a cage, in a frame on the wall the saying '*Himmel, bewahr uns von Regen und Wind und von Kameraden, die keine sind*' (Heaven protect us from rain and wind and from unfaithful friends), photographs of a boy, then a soldier—the son of the owners, who disappeared without a trace on the Eastern front."²¹¹

In the morning, the host unexpectedly asked the lodger whether he could go to the dentist. Kogan answered in the affirmative, "War is war, but people have to get their teeth pulled." It turned out that it was not a toothache: the owner simply had made an appointment two weeks earlier to visit the dentist that morning, 4 May 1945! "Fresh flowers in a vase, cut in the garden the day after the fall of the city, a visit to the dentist three days afterward. How is that?" Kogan asked. "The selfish attraction to equilibrium, stability, regularity? Was this not an ally in Hitler's seizure of power?"²¹²

It is easy to see that the "image" of Germans—their traits as depicted in the diaries, letters, and memoirs of Soviet officers—was mostly written in established stereotypes manufactured in both Russian literature and Soviet wartime propaganda: Philistinism, banality, conformism, soullessness, the love for order. It is also clear that officers judged Germans in part by external attributes. With time, whether sooner or later, officers began to notice that individual Germans did not always fit the stereotypes: the old musicians from Birnbaum, the lover of poetry

²⁰⁹ Kopelev, *Khranit' vechno*, 1: 148.

²¹⁰ Samoilov, *Pamiatnye zapiski*, 284.

²¹¹ Rzhavskaia, *Berlin, mai 1945*, 92–93.

²¹² *Ibid.*, 93.

and music Frau Nikolaus, the poisonous Frau Bogerts, the “good old gals” Inga and Margot. What had seemed to be impossible—ordinary relationships with Germans—developed gradually. Although it was already 20 years after the end of the war, Elena Kogan wrote that at the front she rarely came across captured German soldiers whose psyche “was thoroughly saturated with Nazism.” Much more often they resembled ordinary people.

On the day of Berlin’s capitulation, Grossman noticed a couple on a bench at the zoological garden, a wounded German soldier embracing a girl, a nurse. “They didn’t glance at anyone. The world did not exist for them. When after an hour I went past them again,” Grossman wrote, “they were sitting in the same way. The world didn’t exist; they were happy.”²¹³ This is a Tolstoyan perspective on the world—not Tolstoi the philosopher but Tolstoi the writer. After all, the Germans had killed Grossman’s mother; he was the first to write about the Nazi liquidation camp (“The Hell of Treblinka”), about the perishing of Ukrainian Jewry (“Ukraine without Jews”). Yet he had not lost the ability to see the Germans as people.

The last German city in which Elena Kogan spent any considerable time after the end of the war was Stendal. She liked many of the city residents, and the “‘fascist’ phenomenon in those conditions generally wasn’t in evidence.” The town was undamaged, and life in it went on as always—middle-aged women dug in their gardens.

The old-fashioned hairstyle and lengthened hemline of the skirts made them look like their contemporaries to the east.... German children played in the square, and—which never ceased to amaze us—they never cried or made a ruckus, even if they were playing war. The old women sat in mourning clothes in the square—perhaps already from the time of World War I, in the entryways—and old men on chairs they’d brought out; in the windows of the houses women loomed, finished with housework and watching what was going on in the street.... Peaceful, staid life as if nothing had happened.... The volcanic crater of war, it turned out, could be extinguished instantly after the retreat.²¹⁴

Air of Freedom

It may seem paradoxical, but in occupied Germany, as in other European countries not notable for their democratic regimes, Soviet soldiers received a dangerous taste of freedom. “All reports from the period of the foreign campaign carefully considered the reverse influence of Europe on the Russian soldier. It was very important to know what ‘our people’ were bringing back with them to the homeland,” the political worker Slutskii testified: “Athenian pride in their land or with an inside-out Decembrism, with an empirical as well as political Westernism?”²¹⁵

²¹³ Grossman, *Gody voiny*, 457.

²¹⁴ Rzhavskaia, *Berlin, mai 1945*, 188–90.

²¹⁵ Slutskii, *O drugikh i o sebe*, 55.

Stalinist fears of a new Decembrism were not groundless. It was not just the striking difference in the material level of life, which dealt a fatal blow to propaganda about the advantages of the Soviet system. Ruth Bogerts once said to Pomerants: “Your broadcasts are like ours. They’re not interesting to listen to. We preferred the BBC.” Pomerants carelessly remarked that in the rear in the USSR all the radio receivers were taken away. “Oho,” Ruth said, “You’re even less free than we are.”²¹⁶

At first, the Soviet command progressively limited the possibility of contact between Soviet soldiers and Germans, then forbade it altogether. Marshall Zhukov’s order, issued in early August 1945, created a real storm in Gel’fand’s soul. At first, soldiers were “forbidden to speak with Germans, forbidden to spend the night with them, to buy from them. Now the last thing has been forbidden to us—to appear in a German city, to walk on its streets, to look at its ruins,” the lieutenant complained. “Now it’s time to relax a little, to see what we had never seen before—the world abroad, to learn what we knew so little about and had no clear image of—life, morals, and customs abroad, and finally, to see people, to talk, to travel freely, to enjoy a tiny share of happiness (if there is such in Germany).”

“What I want,” he summed up, “is freedom! Freedom to live, think, work, the freedom to enjoy life.”²¹⁷ That was precisely what his superiors feared. Some others (although perhaps not so many) also wanted the freedom to live and think. In any case, many expected changes after the war. “The perfect type of person for our time is the Decembrist type; but a Decembrist who has come to power,” Kaufman wrote on 26 December 1945, on the eve of the 120th anniversary of the Decembrist Revolt.²¹⁸

Decembrism did not happen. What happened was a hardening of the regime and a conscious, decades-long “cleansing” of the memory that contradicted the official Soviet and post-Soviet canon of the history of the Great Patriotic War and of the Red Army’s campaign in Europe. However, “another memory,” as the texts we have considered here show, continued to exist. “A culture of complete denial” not only of Red Army bestialities in Germany, but also of other aspects of the history of the Great Patriotic War not established in the official canon, is nothing more than a historiographical myth. Unfortunately, over the course of nearly half a century after the end of the war, Soviet veterans could not—and many did not want to—tell the “whole truth” about the past. Now, sadly, there are very few left, and human memory is not the most reliable preserver of information, especially if one turns to it 60 years later. The texts that have been published up to the present time, however, indicate that the number of “personal sources” on the history of the war, texts written without concern for internal or external

²¹⁶ Pomerants, *Zapiski gadkogo utenka*, 164.

²¹⁷ Gel’fand, *Dnevnik, 1941–1946*, 9 August 1945.

²¹⁸ Samoilov, *Podennye*, 1: 226 (26 December 1945; 14 December 1825 by the old calendar).

ensorship, is far greater than one could have recently imagined. I would suggest that further searches in family and state archives—especially when historians gain access to the materials of the military censors—will bring many more discoveries.

“Personal sources” allow one also to look in a new way at the history of the Soviet intelligentsia, including its Jewish part. The Bolshevik “cultural revolution” yielded fruit, including those that its creators did not anticipate. A still very thin layer of educated people, capable—despite intensified “brainwashing”—of independent thought, of reflection, and of a critical perspective of the reality that surrounded them, had appeared in the USSR. It is difficult to make broad generalizations on the basis of a few voices “standing out from the chorus”; however, in my view, Soviet people clearly were intellectually much freer, observant, and daring in their conclusions than is generally believed. At least some of them were.

It is striking that despite an upbringing in the Soviet spirit of class hatred and in the “science of hatred” taught to Soviet people—especially Jews—by the Nazis in the war years, despite the Nazis’ killing of their relatives and friends, our protagonists, Soviet *intelligenty*, remained humanists. The lines of a well-known poem by David Samoilov (Kaufman), “Recalling Our Dates” (1961), write about these “guys”—“That in ’41 they became soldiers / And humanists in ’45”—are not poetic metaphor.²¹⁹ They are instead autobiography.

With the exception of Anatolii Aronov, who had a past of arrest and exile, none of the authors of the texts analyzed had any “disagreements” with the Soviet regime before the war. With respect to the history of Soviet Jews, more specifically the history of the Jewish intelligentsia, one can assert that Jews continued to be exemplary Soviet people. In contrast, the Soviet regime ceased being exemplary, becoming to an ever greater degree a hybrid of communism and nationalism—something that appeared distinctly during the war. Consequently, in part thanks to the taste of freedom they received during the campaign in Europe, but to a greater degree as a result of the politics of the Soviet regime in the postwar period, many of them remained just as exemplary, but now in an entirely new way—as anti-Soviet citizens.

In lieu of a postscript, let us say a word about the sources, as well as the protagonists of our article (in alphabetical order). Anatolii Naumovich Aronov (pen name Anatolii Rybakov) (1911–98) became a very popular writer. His novel *Heavy Sand* (1979) was the first book published in the USSR to address the theme of the Holocaust. His novel *Children of the Arbat* appeared in the *perestroika* period (1987) and enjoyed resounding success. After the war, Vladimir Natanovich Gel’fand (1923–83) finished university in Molotov (Perm’) and for more than 30 years he taught history and social studies in a vocational school: one can only wonder if he ever told his students about his military experience. Before the war, Efraim Isaakovich Genkin (1919–53) had already completed the M. V. Lomonosov Institute of Chemical Technology and the K. E. Voroshilov Military Academy

²¹⁹ Samoilov, *Izbrannyye proizvedeniia*, 1: 58.

of Chemical Defense in Moscow. Other details of his biography and the cause of his early death are unknown. Vasilii (Iosif Solomonovich) Grossman (1905–64) wrote the great novel *Life and Fate*, the manuscript of which was seized by the KGB in 1961 and published abroad only after his death (in 1980). Nikolai Nikolaevich Inozemtsev (1921–82) was an economist, contributor to the journal *Kommunist* and the newspaper *Pravda*, a member of L. I. Brezhnev's group of speechwriters, member of the Academy of Sciences, and director of the Institute of World Economy and International Relations of the Academy of Sciences of the USSR. He belonged to the reformist contingent of the party. Boris Samuilovich Itenberg (born 1921) earned his doctorate in history and became a professor and author of many works in the history of revolutionary populism and Russian liberalism. He lives in Moscow. David Samoilovich Kaufman (his pen name was David Samoilov) (1920–90), a poet and translator, was a cult poet of the Russian intelligentsia in the 1970s–80s. Elena Moiseevna Kogan (pen name Elena Rzhenskaia) (born 1919) is a writer living in Moscow. Lev Zinov'evich Kopelev (1912–97) was a literary scholar, critic, and memoirist, a professional Germanist, and dissident. He was imprisoned from 1945 to 1953, was stripped of his Soviet citizenship in 1981, and died in Germany. Evgenii Grigor'evich Plimak (born 1925) has a doctorate in history and is a philosopher living in Moscow. Grigorii Solomonovich Pomerants (born 1918) is a publicist, cultural critic, and dissident. He was imprisoned from 1950 to 1953 and lives in Moscow. Boris Abramovich Slutskii (1919–86) was one of the most popular Soviet poets in the 1950s and the author of many uncensored works published after his death.

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