Soviet Transformation and Jewish Images in 1920s Russian Literature

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ABSTRACT

My thesis explores the portrayals of Jews in four Russian novels written in the 1920s. I argue that the Jewish characters in Isaac Babel’s Red Cavalry Stories, Ilya Ehrenburg’s The Stormy Life of Lasik Roitschwantz, Alexsandr Fadeyev’s The Rout, and Mikhail Sholokhov’s And Quiet Flows the Don correspond to period discussions about how Bolshevik ideology and policy could alter the individual and ethno-national group. Nationalities experts devised the Soviet Nationalities Policy, which appealed to the national sentiments of the many minority groups living in the Soviet state in order to gain their allegiance; and Bolsheviks conceived of the New Soviet Man who would tirelessly and selflessly dedicate himself to the state. Both required a faith in human malleability and a belief that previous human habits were not innate but circumstantial products. The representations of Jews reflect the individual author’s fears or hopes about these Soviet projects of transformation: the existence of stereotypical Russian Jews suggests doubt about the potential irrelevance of national identity and uncertainty in the potential of Bolshevism to modify any individual; however, Jews who are devoid of stereotypical qualities imply the feasibility of conversion from limited ethnic identity to a New Soviet Man.

The first section looks at the two policies, the New Soviet Man and the Soviet Nationalities Policy, and investigates their ideological influences. Though both believed that only external circumstances could mold an individual, they occasionally expressed doubt about the manipulability of human beings. The second section examines the specificities of the Russian Jewish experience and looks at the ways in which the conflicts between the ideology of the New Soviet Man and the Soviet Nationalities Policy
arise in the Jewish characters. This section introduces the characters' attempts to escape the past only to find it persistently relevant. Section three looks at Babel's and Ehrenburg's novels and their portrayal of stereotypical Jewish characters with qualities of physical weakness and overly intellectual minds. I argue that such depictions cast doubt on the Soviet project of transformation by implying that Jews cannot easily discard their national identity. Section four investigates Fadeyev's and Sholokhov's novels and their very unstereotypical Jewish characters who reflect qualities of leadership and commitment to the Soviet state. These images indicate the capacity of Jews to abandon their national commitments for the sake of the Soviet state and implies the plausibility of change. However, stereotypically Jewish traits still mark these characters and thereby reveal doubt about the Soviet project.

In essence, my thesis interprets portrayals of Jews as not just a reflection on the position of Russian Jews in the 1920s but as commentary on the ideologies of the young Soviet state. Whether or not an author uses stereotypical images in his work corresponds to his level of faith in Soviet transformation. Examining some of the literature of this period allows us to understand how individuals experienced the past and envisioned the future.
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INTRODUCTION

Confiding to his diary, Isaac Babel surveyed the dwindling Jewish community in Komarow, and lamented, "what a mighty and marvelous life of a nation existed here. The fate of Jewry."¹ As an embedded journalist with a Cossack Red Army Brigade during the Russian Civil War, Babel witnessed the radical and often violent changes that Jews had experienced as he pondered their future in Russia. With one of the first government ordinances granting complete equality and full-fledged citizenship, the Russian Revolution dramatically changed the situation of Jews. In this new Russia, Jews theoretically would no longer encounter the persecution and oppression that they experienced under the Tsar; but as the effects of the Revolution rippled throughout Jewish communities, Russian Jews wondered what their fate would actually now be. As it struggled to establish itself between theory and reality, the new Soviet Government confronted the future for Jews in Russia: would religion or ethnicity define them? And to what extent could Jews truly align themselves with Soviet goals?

As theorists, Bolsheviks emphasized that the power of Bolshevism, an ideology aligned with the science of history, could diminish the relevance of individual backgrounds to transform anyone into a productive, socialist citizen. Soviet thinkers conceived of a New Soviet Man and Woman who would not indulge in antiquated myths but would unquestioningly dedicate themselves to the state. The New Soviet was an obviously gendered construct: the New Soviet Man focused on physical tasks while the New Soviet Woman concentrated on organizing work. But rather than focus on their specific differences, this project will concentrate primarily on the trope, shared by both,

of transformation of the self. From hygienic policy to educational theory, thinkers articulated how individuals could remake themselves into New Soviet Men and Women. Soviets took strides into a future where individuals would reject archaic human behavior and forge themselves into stronger, better beings.

But this theory did not constitute their entire state-building strategy. Bolsheviks had to pragmatically respond to the demands of the present rather than just formulate plans for the hypothetical future. In an 1897 census, over half of the population under the Tsar reported having a first language other than Russian; and the question of how to deal with these groups remained with the Soviet government. Bolsheviks, suspicious of Russian nationalism since Tsarist Russia had embraced chauvinistic policies, knew well that Marxist theory explained national identity as a historical construction. But they recognized that theory would not erase nationalism and had to contend with the very real power that national identity had over the lives of non-Russian subjects. In response, they created a Soviet Nationalities Policy that supported mundane, depoliticized forms of national expression that did not threaten the Soviet state. Bolshevik policy, in essence, tried to abolish religion and other outdated beliefs but elected to accommodate ethnicity.

Yet the Bolshevik body was not harmonious but in tension with itself: the ideology of the Soviet New Man fantasized about the possibilities of the future, while the Soviet Nationalities Policy acknowledged the realities of the past. How were individuals

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2 When speaking generally, I will refer to the New Soviet Man as the theory of changing the individual in conjunction with Soviet principles. For Jews who embody this change, I will refer to them as New Soviet Jews; and for individuals who embody this change, I will refer to them as New Soviet Men and Women. Gender becomes important in my project when addressing Mikhail Sholokhov’s Anna, where I will speak of her as a New Soviet Woman. For more information on the specificities of the New Soviet Woman, see Lynne Attwood, *Creating the new Soviet woman* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1999) and Gail Lapidus, *Women in Soviet Society* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979).

3 Linguistically, Jews were especially perplexing. Many spoke Yiddish but most also spoke the dominant language of where they lived. Jewish Poles spoke Polish, Latvian Jews spoke German, and Odessan Jews spoke Russian or Ukrainian.
to make sense of their own identities when they looked backward and forward simultaneously? Jews, who experienced some of the greatest changes of any ethno-national groups, found themselves in the middle of this conflict. Could they become New Soviet Jews? Or would their past—either their self-chosen one or the one ascribed from anti-Semitism—bar their ideological evolution?

Exploring the portrayals of Jews in literature written during the time of these debates provides a useful way to examine how different individuals conceptualized the feasibility of conversion. Scholars have concentrated primarily on what these depictions suggest about the history of Jews in Europe and Russia, but have paid minimal attention to the implications of these images for the Soviet state. Focusing on Isaac Babel’s *Red Cavalry Stories*, Ilya Ehrenburg’s *The Stormy Life of Lasik Roitschwantz*, Mikhail Sholokhov’s *And Quiet Flows the Don*, and Aleksandr Fadeyev’s *The Rout*, this project analyzes the connection of these authors’ portrayals of Jewish minds and bodies to Soviet ideas about the individual and nation. Babel and Ehrenburg are both secular Jews, and they rehash Jewish stereotypes about feeble bodies and overly intellectual minds, while Sholokhov and Fadeyev are non-Jews and employ Jewish protagonists with defiantly non-stereotypical characteristics of strength and leadership. I contend that such depictions correspond directly to the Soviet New Man and the Nationalities Policy. Babel’s and Ehrenburg’s stereotypical depictions suggest that inheritance is inextricable from one’s body or mind and resist the totalizing efforts of Bolshevism, which argues the irrelevance of national difference. Sholokhov’s and Fadeyev’s portrayals of Jews testify in support of

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4 I have focused on the 1920s because artists for the most part created without state interference, and thinkers and policy makers had still not decided the nature of the Soviet state.
Bolshevism by implying that ethnic background need not impede an individual from becoming a forward-thinking, courageous Soviet citizen.

The first section will examine how various thinkers conceptualize the New Soviet Man. The theory behind the New Soviet Man rejected claims of human predisposition and dismissed all previous negative human behavior as a mere product of capitalism’s crippling effect. This section will also look at the Soviet Nationalities Policy, which aimed to harness the national feelings of non-Russian groups for the purposes of the Soviet state. Both express faith in human malleability and the Soviet state’s transformative power; but such thinking occasionally reveals doubts about the achievability of change. The fact that Bolshevik thinkers labeled some groups and individuals beyond correction undermined the New Soviet Man’s potential to come into being.

The second section will look at the some of the specificities of the Russian Jewish experience and begin to examine how the four novels imagine Jews who attempt to reject their past only to find it resurfaced. Each author, regardless of faith in Bolshevism, conceived of the Revolution as a breaking point: Jewish and Russian life before and after the Revolution was unimaginably different. As the Jewish experience progressed from persecution to acceptance, most Jews searched for their place in the Soviet state, while Bolshevik Jews eagerly attempted to persuade non-Bolshevik Jews into abandoning their religious ways for a political commitment to Bolshevism.

The third section will concentrate on the work of Jewish writers: Isaac Babel’s *Red Cavalry Stories* and Ilya Ehrenburg’s *The Stormy Life of Lasik Roitschwantz*. Babel published *Red Cavalry Stories* in 1924 under a Soviet regime that encouraged its artists to
write favorably of the state. In this collection of aphoristically short stories based on Babel’s experiences during the Russian Civil War in 1920, his narrator Lyutov, a spectacled Odessan Jew, joins a Cossack regiment known for its masculinity and brutality. Their operations are concentrated in formerly Russian Poland where the new Soviet state is attempting to reassert Russian control against Polish claims to an independent state. Lyutov struggles to fit in with his Cossack comrades whose virility contrasts with his frail Jewishness. Ehrenburg’s *The Stormy Life of Lasik Roitschwantz* tells the story of Lasik Roitschwantz, a Jewish tailor from Homel, a town in the Ukranian Pale. Unable to assimilate because of his Jewishness, he rambles throughout Russia and Europe and spends most of the novel in various prisons because he manages to create trouble wherever he goes. Ehrenburg wrote this novel in 1928 as a Russian émigré in Paris—and although Ehrenburg returned to the Soviet Union, his book was only published in Russia after the collapse of the Soviet Union.

Babel focuses on Jewishness materialized in the bodies of his Jewish characters while Ehrenburg concentrates on embodied Jewishness in the minds of his Jewish characters. Both of their negative and stereotypical portrayals of Jews refute the totalizing claims of Bolshevism, and suggest that humans (Jews especially) are not raw material that can be converted into New Soviet Men. For Babel and Ehrenburg, Jewishness represents a “contentless positionality”\(^5\) — Jewishness provides a way of being in the world without supplying any religious content; for Babel, it connects to a humanist tradition, while for Ehrenburg, it speaks to a legacy of Jewish skepticism.

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\(^5\) I am deeply indebted to Professor Ken Koltun-Fromm for helping me to articulate this concept more clearly.
The fourth section will examine the work of the non-Jewish authors: Aleksandr Fadeyev’s *The Rout* and Mikhail Sholokhov’s *And Quiet Flows the Don*. Fadeyev’s *The Rout*, written in 1924, depicts Levinson, a Jewish Bolshevik officer, who fearlessly leads a regiment of non-Jews in Eastern Russia during the Russian Civil War. The plot moves with the regiment from one part of Russia to another while they face the various vicissitudes experienced by men during war. Sholokhov’s *And Quiet Flows the Don*, published in 1928, is far from simple in its plot development; and its epic story of a Cossack family from the early 20th century to the Russian Civil War lacks a clear narrative arc. My analysis will focus on the fourth section of the novel, where Bunchuk, a Cossack Bolshevik, meets Anna, a Jewish Bolshevik who wants to learn how to operate a machine gun. When Bunchuk becomes sick with typhus, she nurses him back to health and they encounter the complexities of a romantic relationship under Bolshevism.

In Fadeyev’s novel, Levinson embodies the possibility of Jews in Soviet Russia: his leadership abilities rather than his Jewishness define him, as his men recognize him as their leader before they consider his ethnic background. In Sholokhov’s novel, Anna commits herself tirelessly to the cause of Bolshevism. She integrates ideology into her life and relegates Jewishness to an ethnic background detail. However, though both define themselves independently from previous conceptions of Jews, they still carry the stereotypical marks of Jewish intellectualism and feebleness. Fadeyev and Sholokhov attempt to assert that ethnic identity can be overcome, but somewhat inadvertently reinscribe its persistent relevance.

My project explores how the Jewish characters of these four novels must navigate this intersection of competing Bolshevik claims for the relevance of the past and future.
Literature is a useful source because it does not always depict what is but potentially offers an imaginative vision of what could be. The authors elaborate on the possibilities of life in post-Revolutionary Russia for Jews and non-Jews; and while the historical present shapes their work, it need not align with the overt realities of the present. In literature, scholars can locate the dreams, doubts, and anxieties that are not quite discernable in archives.

My analysis will focus on the depiction of Jews in these novels. I am not especially concerned with the plots of the novels because I do not think that they lend themselves to interesting analysis: the plots of The Stormy Life of Lasik Roitschwantz and The Rout are simplistic and repetitive; and Red Cavalry Stories’ disconnected short stories lack a traditional narrative arc. I will, however, focus on the plot developments of And Quiet Flows the Don because it is the only one of the novels to display legitimate character development in its Jewish character.

What is of primary interest to me is how Jews navigate the modern world while searching for their own identity. I will focus especially on images of Jewish bodies and portrayals of Jewish minds. Throughout, I deal with Bolshevism as a monolithic phenomenon. My interest is not in exploring subtle differences among Bolsheviks but examining how its overarching themes of transformation of the self and modification of the ethno-national group relate to these novels. I will deal with gender primarily in my analysis of Sholokhov’s Anna, as I read her character as a cultural demonstration of the new place of women and Jews in Soviet Russia. While Anna succumbs to Jewish stereotypes, she overcomes stereotypes of excessively emotional women and becomes a New Soviet Woman. Gender concerns me specifically in its relation to my thesis, which
contends that the portrayal of Jewish characters corresponds to debates on the feasibility of transforming the individual into a New Soviet Man or Woman.
THE SOVIET FUTURE

Nadezhda Krupskaya, the wife of Lenin and an accomplished Marxist critic, several years after the Revolution explained the task that lay ahead of the nascent Soviet state: “if we want to build a new social order...we have to create a totally new type of human being.” Such an ambitious statement characterized an era where Bolshevik thinkers and leaders argued that the Revolution had so radically rocked the possibilities of Russian life that it necessitated the creation of a Soviet Man and Woman: strong, unemotional, selfless, relentlessly dedicated to the state. This discourse of transformation in the 1920s revolved around the question of what constituted the human being. Despite the Bolshevik obsession with “science,” this was not a conversation of scientific specificities but a sociological discussion about the nation and individual. Science claimed limits to human capabilities but Bolshevik thinkers contended that proper human planning could overcome physical and biological imperfections to create an evolved real human being: a dedicated Soviet citizen. At stake was a question of nature versus nurture. Bolsheviks diminished the relevance of predispositions and elevated the importance of social forces to tailor policies that would give birth to men and women most conducive for Bolshevism.

Beneath rhetoric about educational theory and hygiene policy lurks a simple question: how could a human being become a New Soviet Man? Bolshevik thinkers applied this inquiry to all under the Soviet aegis: peasants and proletariats, Russians and non-Russians. This debate on transformation sets the stage for considering the dichotomy

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7 My use of the term “biology” does not refer to the specificities of science, but to the idea that life has internal operations unaffected by political or social forces. Bolshevism aims to overcome the humility that the study of biology ought to inspire in us.
of Jews in 1920s Russia. On the one hand, secularized Jews were highly visible in the upper echelons of Bolshevik ranks; but on the other hand, the values and lives of observant Jews conflicted with Marxist-Leninist thought. The Evsektsia, the Jewish wing of the Bolshevik party, felt especially compelled to rescue its fellow Jews from the backwardness of the shtetl past and bring them forward to the dynamic Soviet future. But could Jews become fully Soviet? Though the Evsektsia believed that their policies could turn Jews into New Soviet Jews, others doubted the feasibility of transforming all Soviet subjects, including groups like Jews whom Russians often regarded as perennially strange and backward. In the four novels under examination in this project, the images of Jews correlate to this debate about transformation. Their portrayal reveals either confidence or doubt in the projects of altering the individual and the group: stereotypically portrayed Jews question the success of conversion, while the portrayal of Jews indistinguishable from other Soviet subjects conveys its probability.

I will examine the Jewish position within two conflicting Bolshevik policies: the creation of the New Soviet Man and the Soviet policy toward nationalities. Faith in human malleability defined these policies but both revealed anxieties about a static human nature. To avoid national tensions from their large non-Russian population, Soviet leaders encouraged the development of a depoliticized national identity that directed attention to support the Soviet State. They aimed to appease demand for national identity but only to allow its development in a non-threatening, superficial manner. The philosophy behind the New Soviet Man suggested that human beings could radically reorient themselves in accordance with Soviet principles. Both rejected a purely scientific explanation of humanity: efforts toward forging a New Soviet Man emphasized that

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human beings could overcome previous harmful habits. The Soviet Nationalities Policy understood cultural and linguistic differences as social-historical products that need not hamper the Soviet state; national difference could instead enhance the vitality of the state as long as the various groups supported the same political ideology. For these Soviet thinkers, habit was not born out of innate inclination, and nationality was not a racial category. To convert individuals into Soviet citizens, both acknowledged a backward past and aspired toward its repudiation.

Yet a paradox sits at the heart of the 1920s: the New Soviet Man rejects archaic forms of the past and embraces something wholly modern, while a policy that appeals to national groups relies on the past. As Bolsheviks simultaneously expected individuals to evolve but supported ethno-national identity (a category from the destructive past that they had rejected), they created a tension in loyalties. How could Soviet citizens mediate competing claims for the realities of the past and the possibilities of the future?

The ideas and anxieties of this question embedded themselves in each novel.9 Studying the ideologies behind the forging of a New Soviet Man and the maintenance of ethno-national culture elucidates their portrayals of Jews. The proximity of Jewish characters to the ideal Soviet comments on the viability of transformation. To what extent can Bolshevism cause these characters to become the idealized New Soviet Men or Women? And to what extent does their Jewish past bar their development? All four works confront the potential of forming Soviet citizens given the reality of ethnic identity and natural human tendencies; and the Jewish characters are the battlegrounds upon which the debates about human nature and the nature of the state are waged. Each novel

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9 I am indebted to Professor Andrew Friedman for his elaboration of “embedded” during the Haverford History Department’s History and Literature colloquium on March 17, 2010.
debates the thickness of heritage and makes a claim about the ability of ideology to vitiate that inheritance. This section will examine the ideology behind converting the individual into a New Soviet Man, and will then look at the political realities behind the Soviet Nationalities Policy—with a constant focus on how heavily the past weighs down on the future for both Jews and Bolsheviks.

The New Soviet Man

As part of the Revolution, Bolsheviks took seriously the task of reforming the bodies of their citizens. They found the Russian empire backward industrially, militarily and also in bodily life, and their thrust toward better health, like most post-Revolutionary movements, reacted against the follies of the past. Bolsheviks wanted to modify the operations of the human body because they feared, in the words of Soviet psychiatrist Zalkind, that “the body had become disorganized by capitalism.” As capitalism had waged war on the proletariat, it had also detrimentally affected their bodies. Zalkind does not classify the body as a static organism but rather one that reacts to its surroundings. Bolsheviks inherited the responsibility of revivifying bodies that had developed in a “disorganized” way under capitalism. Lenin firmly believed that only a healthy state could produce healthy citizens as he explained, “the fight for socialism is at the same time the fight for health.” By aspiring to create a country that could form socialist minds and bodies, Bolsheviks posited that inherited, innate biological drama need not dominate the human body. The creation of a New Soviet Man, not simply an ideological plan to produce Bolshevik-oriented subjects, emphasized physical regeneration.

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11 Naiman, 126.
The process of forming a New Soviet Man rejected and sought to revise culturally and historically weak points of Russian life under the Tsar. Pavel Kerzhentsev, a leading proponent of Russian Taylorism, wrote “Organize Yourself,” one of many pamphlets published in the 1920s. He encouraged the creation of “a healthy body, the strong muscles of the warrior, the skilled hands of the worker,” and attacked “inefficiency and sloppiness,” traits he regarded as traditionally Russian. Such documents showed individuals how to live and inspired them to change in conjunction with national trends. Since the philosophy behind the New Soviet Man did not understand human behavior as biologically determined, Bolsheviks believed that proper guidance could help the Russian (and non-Russian) body transcend its limitations under Tsarism. Just as Bolshevism had altered political life in Russia after the Revolution, the Soviet state could establish a Bolshevik inheritance where ideology rewired the body and created new social beings.

Because of the scientific assumption that sexual behavior was biologically rooted, it became an important site for Bolsheviks to police; and since the theory of the New Soviet Man posited that the biological could be transcended, enforcing good sexual behavior was of the utmost relevance. Soviet biologist Boris Zavodorsky suggested that individuals “keep in check biological impulses and instincts in areas where they conflict...”

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13 For more on Russian Taylorism, see Richard Stites, *Revolutionary Dreams* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989). Taylor, an American, created the idea of mass-production through a factory assembly line, and Bolshevik thinkers sought to institute this practice in regular life.


16 When Marx suggested that environment dictates the development of consciousness, he avoids an internal and biological explanation of human behavior. Bolshevism was theoretically optimistic about the human capacity for change: if the Soviet state could help create an ideal Soviet body, an ideal Soviet mind would inevitably sprout.
with the interests of the entire collective.” Zavodorsky does not deny the biological underpinnings of sex, but insists that a Soviet citizen could successfully monitor personal sexual habits and keep them within reason. In line with Zalkind's image of a disorganized capitalist body, Soviet scientists equated excessive pleasure with the hedonistic bourgeoisie and some went so far as to claim that the “desire for sexual satisfaction was capitalistic.” The Soviet citizen should rein in his or her sexual urges to productively use them. The biological becomes secondary to the social; and a good Soviet citizen would not be dominated by sexual urges but rather would be the master of them. In Sholokhov's and Ehrenburg's works, the ability to police sexual conduct reveals the intensity of one’s commitment to the state.

The policies toward the New Soviet Man aimed to improve not just the physical state but the individual’s mind as well. In the system of education, Soviet thinkers found a valuable tool for ideological conversion. Albert Pinkevitch, a Soviet educator, echoes the Bolshevik conception of human malleability, as he did not believe that humans were born with innate habits but rather that “the newborn possesses merely certain tendencies...[which] may be either fully developed or suppressed.” Though humans displayed destructive propensities in the past, they were not biologically set in stone but could evolve through social programming into Soviet citizens; and the Soviet system could modify individuals into obedient subjects to work for the interests of the state.

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17 Naiman, 101.
18 Ibid, 130-1.
19 In Fadeyev's *The Rout*, Levinson’s lack of sexual behavior solidifies his commitment to the state, but ironically confirms stereotypes about Jewish sexual impotence. This is one of many ways in which Fadeyev attempts to create a New Soviet Jew but appeals to stereotypes from the past.
21 Ibid, 14.
The Soviet Nationalities Policy

As Bolshevik thinkers addressed individual conversion, they deliberated on how transformation could occur for the many non-Russian ethno-national groups under their auspices. With the establishment of the Soviet Union, Bolsheviks, deeply rooted in Marx’s anti-imperial discourse, had to confront the fact that they were definitionally an empire: they had conquered territory beyond their borders which had been part of the old Russian empire, harbored expansionistic goals, and thus had many non-Russians under their tutelage. However, Terry Martin argues that Soviet nationalities experts conceived of this as no ordinary empire, but rather an “Affirmative Action Empire”; instead of repressing national groups, the Soviet Nationalities Policy tried to earn their loyalty through encouraging their cultural development. The Policy worked by “granting the forms of nationhood” to ethno-national groups with the hope that it would de-politicize their national identity. The Soviet state would disarm nationalism through encouraging the development of apolitical national practices (clothing, food, language, etc.).

Through the implementation of “native languages, native subjects and native teachers,” the Soviet state tried to inspire loyalty in the groups under its aegis. Considerations of how to deal with such a wide array of nationalities dominated political conversation in the 1920s.

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22 The notion of conversion is one of many ways in which Bolshevik thinkers attempted to avoid the metaphysics of religion but relied on religious tropes.
24 Many non-Russians did not see Bolshevism as a redemptive ideology but as a dominating discourse that supported imperialistic expansion.
26 Martin, 8.
27 Martin, 3.
28 Slezkine, 205.
The issue of biology, immensely important in the discussions around the New Soviet Man, remained of equal though understated importance during the nationalities debate. Bolshevik thinkers wanted to recognize ethnic difference but did not want to imply a racist distinction. Just as hygienists and doctors dealing with sexual behavior considered backward behavior a product of environment, nationalities experts argued that ethno-national groups developed in response to their circumstances. They answered anti-Semites, for instance, by suggesting that some Jews had taken on specific economic positions because of capitalism and Tsarist policies; they contended that supposedly inherently Jewish qualities arose out of geographical, historical, and economic forces. The Jew was not naturally inclined to generating capital, but some had been placed in situations that resulted in accumulation of wealth; but different circumstances would generate a new Jew.29

Nationality experts made sure that descriptions of nationalities avoided racial language. In her study of Soviet policy toward Turkmenistan, Adrienne Edgar explains that Bolsheviks viewed nations not as “primordial entities but as historical constructs closely linked to modernity and capitalism.” Bolsheviks did not seek to employ the European language of racial superiority30 that had endorsed colonialist projects but

30 In “National Types” in *Picturing Russia*, Francine Hirsch examines photographs of individuals and their physical measurements made by Russian anthropologists during a research in 1927 in the Chuvash Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic. While such images may be evocative of Nazi biological-race propaganda, she contends that these images did not assert racial superiority but demonstrated the irrelevance of racial identity and the predominance of intermixing between different ethnic groups. Boris Vishnevsky, a physical anthropologist and editor of the findings, “concluded that data about the distribution of physical and constitutional traits...could provide important information about the historical interrelationships between different peoples.” Vishnevsky did not seek to assert racial superiority but to endorse ethnic commonality. See Francine Hirsch, “National Types” in *Picturing Russia*, ed. Valerie Kivelson and Joan Neuberger (New Haven Yale University Press: 2008), 161.
instead sought to embrace a sociological explanation of the ethno-national group.\textsuperscript{31} Capitalism could produce flawed bodies and nations, but biological inheritance could not be held responsible; a nation was not a biological entity, but a historical product that could be confronted. Bolshevik thinkers did not apply the revolutionary approach of the New Soviet Man to the Nationalities Policy, which acknowledged the resonance of national identity but aimed to prevent it from becoming a dominating communal force.

**Determined or Malleable Humans?**

However, despite the supposed ideological clarity of Bolshevism, policy makers did not always maintain a stark distinction between biological determinism and human agency. In the 1920s, Bolshevik leaders discussed the benefit of sending "dangerous groups" (e.g. "Gypsies") into exile.\textsuperscript{32} Such discussions challenge the sociological description of ethno-national groups by implying that some groups are naturally determined to be dangerous to the state, and that the Nationality Policy cannot convert all ethno-national groups into Soviets. Discourse in other fields also revealed biologically determined conceptions of humans. Forensic medical experts believed that they had located an explanation for suicide discoverable through autopsy. Though they saw their project as part of the Bolshevik aim to expose reality, they confirmed the human as a biological creature with internal reactions out of the control of external state force.\textsuperscript{33}

Discussions of education occasionally expressed a similar belief in unref ormability.


\textsuperscript{32} Eric Weitz, "Racial Politics without the Concept of Race," *Slavic Review* (Volume 61: Number 1, Spring 2002), 22.

Lunacharsky, Commissar of Enlightenment, believed that younger generations could be guided toward achieving Soviet ends but contended that some were past the point of correction: “only the grave can correct a hunchback.”\textsuperscript{34} Such rhetoric diminishes the reality of complete transformation. Bolshevism in theory should be strong enough to reform all, but Lunacharsky confirms that not all are within its redemptive reach. If hunchbacks cannot be corrected, are Jews beyond redemption?

In this context of doubt about human malleability, the position of Jews becomes particularly curious. The Revolution allegedly washed away all difference; Jews could live wherever they wanted and pursue all opportunities: political, social, educational, etc. But the Jewish Question perplexed Bolsheviks. The Tsarist regime had labeled Jews “inorodtsy,” part of the collection of nomadic people, but regarded them as a more permanent historical force than their other inorodtsy cohorts due to having defined territory in the Pale.\textsuperscript{35} They were treated (and repressed) as an ethno-national group, even though their religious qualities distinguished them from other ethno-national groups.\textsuperscript{36} How could Bolshevik policy confront a stateless people with defined characteristics and practices at odds with Marxist thought? Could Jews lose their

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\textsuperscript{35} Because of their now contentious geographic locale in a border area with independent Poland and Lithuania, there was an attempt in the 1930s to establish a new Jewish territory in Birobidzhan, as explored in Robert Weinberg’s \textit{Stalin’s Forgotten Zion} (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998).

\textsuperscript{36} Pipes, 5. The Bund, a Jewish Socialist trade union movement, formed because they believed that Jewish and Russian interests were not the same and that the Russian worker had no interest in his Jewish counterpart. The Evsektsia, the Jewish wing of the Communist party, was created to replace the Bund and other groups that had too heavily emphasized Jewish particularity. See D’Encausse, \textit{The Great Challenge}, 27-8, 50. Other ethno-national groups were additionally defined by religion. In “Envisioning Empire,” Douglas Northrop examines the Bolshevik battle against veils in Muslim communities in Central Asia. To Bolsheviks, veils represented “backwardness, primitivism, dirt, and debauchery;” and in the hopes of bringing Soviet Muslims into the Soviet future, Bolsheviks campaigned for the eradication of veils. See Douglas Northrop, “Envisioning Empire;” in Kivelson et al., \textit{Picturing Russia}, 162.
religious practice and become active Soviet citizens? Or was ethnic identity something more innately antithetical to assimilation?

Examining the portrayal of Jews allows for unique insight on the viability of developing the individual and supporting the group. Could the eternally backward Jews be made into New Soviet Jews? If Jews can be easily altered, the potential for success for the Soviet state is enormous; but if Jews cannot be transformed, their incorrigibility casts grave doubt upon the possibilities of the Soviet state. Was the Russian Jew of the 1920s a product of biological inheritance or environment? The Jew provides the perfect litmus test for the malleability of humans in the 1920s, as their portrayals will dictate to what extent Soviet citizens can be created out of ethnic identities. The questions of nationalism and the rebirth of the individual collide in the portrayals of Jews by Babel, Ehrenburg, Fadeyev, and Sholokhov.
THE JEWISH PAST

"An old man is lying there on his back, dead. His gullet has been ripped out, his face hacked in two, and dark blood is clinging to his beard like a lump of lead."  

Isaac Babel's *Red Cavalry Stories* commences with his haunting depiction of the carnage of war. Lyutov, the narrative voice of Babel's experiences as a war correspondent with a Red Cossack Brigade during the Russian Civil War, stumbles into a Jewish home afflicted by the pogrom violence of the Polish Army. The reader eventually discovers that the narrator has selected the pseudonym "Lyutov" to obscure his Jewishness in the midst of notoriously anti-Semitic Cossacks. While the stories are the fictional recasting of Babel's experiences and Lyutov his narrative voice, the reader never encounters the birth name of Lyutov but only his assumed name. The reader experiences the horror of war through Lyutov's lens, but persistently struggles with the unanswerable query: who is Lyutov and what is his connection to Babel? Beneath the thick skin that Lyutov tries (and often fails) to wear proudly, what qualities and experiences do we not see?

The obscurity of Lyutov’s identity mirrors the obscurity and paradoxes of the 1920s in Soviet Russia. It was, in essence, a decade plagued by inconsistency and burdened by a search for its own identity. As political leaders, who themselves operated under assumed names, vacillated between political ideology and pragmatic necessity, they struggled to forge the identity of the Soviet state. It was a decade that reacted against a Russian past to build a new Soviet future, but consistently witnessed the resurgence of

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38 Re-naming became an archetypal Soviet experience. In Babel’s story “Karl-Yankel,” two Jewish parents debate what to name their son—the religiously inclined mother wants “Yankel” and the Bolshevik father wants “Karl” in honor of Karl Marx. For them, the importance of naming is paramount. In the 1930s trials Jewish birth-names of party members always emerged in newspaper accounts.
that very past. Believing that the Revolution represented a clean break from Tsarism, Soviet thinkers labored to ensure that Russia would move in a new direction, as national policies sought to shift the new Soviet state away from elements of Tsarism dominated by the Orthodox church, structured by Russian chauvinism towards non-Russians, and tarnished by the pernicious legacy of state-supported anti-Semitism. However, the past persisted throughout the 1920s. The Soviet state, lacking the dictatorial structure and coherence for which it would later be known, struggled to achieve control over its people and its past; and even in that future it would fail to maintain an iron grip.39

As Bolshevik thinkers created the archetype of the New Soviet Man, they endorsed the potential for radical transformation through a severing of the past. These New Soviets would define themselves through their repudiation of archaic tropes and relentless drive to forge a Socialist state; yet, Bolshevik thinkers simultaneously created a Nationalities Policy that bowed to the necessities of the past and romanticized its content. One policy looked toward the future while the other peered back at the past, with those in the present pulled in opposite directions by equally compelling claims.

This conflict between the legacy of the past and the possibilities of the future did not just afflict Soviet state officials; it affected the lives of Soviet individuals. This clash manifested itself especially for Russian Jews who attempted to come to grips with a state that offered them unprecedented opportunity at the expense of diminished religious observance (and the persistence of unofficial anti-Semitic conceptions). As Bolshevik Jews attempted to assert their power over the larger Russian Jewish community, they tried to annul a Jewish past that threatened the Soviet state. The Evsektsia, the Jewish

wing of the Communist party which was founded in January of 1919, worked to create “a new kind of Jewishness” which would exist “within the parameters of Soviet society.”

They found traditional, shtetl Judaism archaic and outdated, and aimed to convert religious Jews into secular Soviet Jews.

In post-Revolutionary Russia, younger generations of Jews saw an opportunity to move past the sterility of their parents’ generation into a new self-consciousness. With Jewish identity in flux, they believed they could define themselves through their service to the state rather than through their ethnic identity. Fadeyev, Sholokhov, Ehrenburg, and Babel each address the position of the new Jew in a reborn Russia. In their works, characters parallel their time: they aim to break free from both the clutches of a limited culture and the restrictions that once impeded their parents. They simultaneously revolt against the perceived insularity of their parents and the repressive pre-revolutionary Tsarist Empire. But the autonomy of their rebellion is tarnished by an inescapable past and ethnic (and also, occasionally, “ethical”) Jewishness. This section will focus on moments of fracture: how trenchant ties to the past undermine the Jewish characters’ attempt to break free in the present. This section will provide a broad overview of the characters, who will be analyzed more closely within the context of their larger themes in sections three and four. The aim here is to understand the commonalities of the four books’ imaginings of how the rejected past resurfaces. I will place the Jewish characters

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41 Gitelman, *A Century of Ambivalence*, 32. The younger Jews perceived their parents’ culture as a provincial one that revolved around Talmudic learning with minimal opportunities for mobility.
within the context of changes experienced in the Russian-Jewish community during this tumultuous time.

Lyutov and Jewish Identity

"Crossing the River Zbrucz," the first story in Babel’s Red Cavalry Stories, introduces the struggle for a new Jewish identity in the tumultuous world of Russia after the Revolution. Lyutov asserts his emotional indifference to Jewish pogrom victims to establish his identity as a New Soviet Man removed from traditional Jews. When he walks into their home, Lyutov reveals his ambivalence toward Jewishness by offering this piteous description: "a pregnant woman and two red-haired Jews with thin necks, and a third Jew who is sleeping with his face to the wall and a blanket pulled over his head." Lyutov does little to treat the group of Jews genially: he enters the room where he plans to sleep and finds "ransacked closets, torn pieces of women’s fur coats on the floor, human excrement, and fragments of the holy Seder plate that the Jews use once a year for Passover. ‘Clean up this mess!’ I tell the woman. ‘How can you live like this?’" The reader confronts a flurry of contradictions: Lyutov is Jewish (what that means to him, to Cossacks, to other Jews, and to the reader is hard to determine) and the house has clearly been affected by a pogrom. However, he does not simply refuse to identify with the Jews but treats them with disdain. By speaking of "the Jews" as an abstracted category performing bizarre rituals, he establishes his distance from them.

Yet his immediate recognition of them as Jews demonstrates that Jewishness mediates his relationship with them. On some level, Lyutov cannot but identify with

43 Ibid, 204.
them—otherwise he would not have taken an interest in their label. His response is an untidy combination of familiarity and disgust. Lyutov recognizes the shattered plate used during Passover but defines it in a way that disassociates him from its use. While his identification of the fragments as religiously significant differentiates him from a non-Jew who might just see fragments, his failure to locate meaning in those fragments demonstrates that he is not an observant Jew. As a representative of Bolshevism’s modernizing thrust, he instead sees Jewish broken dishes as he attempts to separate himself from the Jews who, to him, seem backward and strange.\footnote{Lyutov identifies them as backward not only because of their presumed religious observance but also because they are Polish shtetl Jews and he is a city Jew. This divide mirrors some of the conflicts experienced by Bolsheviks (predominantly from urban environments) when trying to deal with the large Russian peasant population.} However, Lyutov’s project of detachment from the past is flawed: though he establishes his distance from the Jews, he reaffirms his proximity to them. Lyutov’s definition of the seder plate confirms his familiarity with Jewish practice and signals that his escape from Jewishness may not be as effortless as shouting at shell-shocked Jews. Disassociation from the past is neither tidy nor simple.

Lyutov’s action occurs alongside the Soviet attempt to separate the Soviet present from the Tsarist past and demonstrates the kind of cultural thinking that we will look for in the four novels. Babel’s work does not just reflect this historical and cultural moment, but actually embodies that very moment. The literary works of Babel, Ehrenburg, Fadeyev, and Sholokhov address the same themes found in Bolshevik party discussions of ethno-national identity or the educational potential of the New Soviet Man. Each author provides a distinct vision of the conflict between past and future; and the next
sections will interrogate whether the New Soviet Jew is a new branding or whether a Jew is always an amalgamation of fragments from the past.

**Russian Jews in an Anti-Religious Russia**

With the Revolution, Jews experienced some of the most significant changes of any group. In legal codes, the restrictions and probations that had plagued their existence during the 19th century vanished when the Soviet State provided them with the emancipatory benefits that their Western European peers had enjoyed since the last century. Jews, who had been forced to remain in the Pale of Settlement after 1772, could now move freely. No longer restricted to the shtetl life, Russian Jews migrated en masse to Moscow and other previously banned locales and explored the range of new opportunities available to them. As members of the Russian intelligentsia emigrated, literate Jews began to fill vacant positions. Other Jews exploded in vibrant cultural activity. Yiddish theatre, once banned in the 1870s, experienced a lively revival and Jewish avant-grade artists found state support. But how would the majority of Russian Jews respond to the prospects of the Soviet State, when "cycles of repression and relaxation" had defined the previous generation's experience? Liberalizing movements and pogroms had competed to dominate the 19th century, and had left a bewildered and bloodied Jewish people. But after the Revolution, the Soviet State would not bar Jews from any opportunity or subject them to state supported violence. In the context of these

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47 Moss, 1-2.
48 Gitelman, *A Century of Ambivalence*, 60, 64.
promises, the Soviet Nationalities Policy presented Russian Jews a choice: they could retain religious Jewishness and lose their chance to participate in the Soviet state, or they could adopt a secular Jewish identity and take their place at the Soviet table. By creating a dichotomy between ethnicity and religion, Soviet policy declared the Jew a fixed national category whose members should not need Talmudic learning or Rabbinic teachings. To be Soviet subjects, Jews had to disassociate themselves from their backward religious past.

Though the early NEP\textsuperscript{51} years in the 1920s departed from some strict adherence to Marxist programs, Bolsheviks remained committed to anti-religious activism.\textsuperscript{52} Since Marxist thought fervently advocated the eradication of religion, religion took on particular significance for Bolsheviks. Marx theorized that a belief in heaven and God’s redemptive powers tainted individuals’ perception of economic injustice and diminished the possibility that they would revolt.\textsuperscript{53} For Lenin and other Bolsheviks, combating religious influence became "the first and most profound step toward communist self-determination."\textsuperscript{54} Advocating for atheism demonstrated one of the characteristics of the godless New Soviet Man. For a deeply religious Russia, secularization had arrived much later than in European countries where discourses on religious modernization and liberalization had begun in the Enlightenment and had dominated the 19\textsuperscript{th} century. Thus, atheism provided another method for Soviet citizens to separate themselves from a

\textsuperscript{51} The New Economic Policy incorporated capitalist economic elements into what was supposed to be an economy centered around Marxist principles. It was a pragmatic reaction to the economic struggles of the early post-Revolution era.


backward past. Individual citizens could embody the national goal, “the metamorphosis of Holy Russia into an atheistic Soviet Russia,” by moving away from religious belief.

Bolsheviks virulently pursued religion in general and the Orthodox Church specifically, tainted by its legacy of anti-Semitism and relationship with the Tsar. The Declaration of the Rights of the Peoples of Russia, introduced in November of 1917, abolished all former religious privileges in Russia, and ended the dominance of the Orthodox Church. In the early years of the Soviet state, state officials exercised shocking brutality toward clergy members resistant to change. But even those who aligned themselves with Soviet goals could meet harsh ends. Bolsheviks shot the Metropolitan Yeniamin, who grew up humbly in rural Northern Russia and had demonstrated great beneficence to the Russian poor. Ya. S. Gurovich, a Jewish lawyer, passionately defended Yeniamin by disassociating him from the legacy of the Beilis blood libel case, an incident that had tarnished Tsarist Russia’s global reputation through its similarity to other global anti-Semitic incidents, such as the cases of Alfred Dreyfus in France and Leo Frank in the United States. In the tension between past and future, Bolshevik efforts to repudiate backward parts were not absolute. Yeniamin’s philosemitic tendencies and association with the proletariat connected him to Bolshevik priorities, but did nothing to absolve his affiliation with the Church. Despite Bolshevik attempts, the past cannot be rejected as a monolithic entity.

55 Peris, 5-6, 78.
56 Ibid, 1.
57 Peris, 21.
58 Pospielovsky, Soviet..., 2.
60 Gitelman, A Century of Ambivalence, 26.
Movements against religion occurred side-by-side the Soviet policy toward nationalities, which allowed for greater expression of national identity and culture. While the campaign for atheism affected Jewish religious life, the Nationalities Policy opened the door for Jewish social mobility. Lenin’s argument that the Tsarist Russian empire had been a “prison-house of nationalities” demonstrated the Soviet state’s desire to avoid the chauvinism of the old Russia. The primary goal in the new Russia was that national groups would not suffer under the force of an oppressive, nationalistic Russian regime. But by severing ties to one aspect of a restrictive past, they tolerated and acknowledged growth of non-Russian national cultures which inadvertently solidified their dependence on other parts of the past; and to indulge a nation’s culture encouraged reflection on its past. While the policy would shift dramatically by the Second World War, the dynamic possibilities for national cultures complicated claims made by those envisioning the New Soviet Man.

Even though Marx believed that the indulgence of national identity threatened the internationalism of the proletariat, ethno-national identity remained an official, identifying category in Soviet Russia. As with the New Economic Policy, ideology diminished in importance to practical and political need. Even though it was not the defamatory category of the 19th century, Jews continued to be labeled as ethno-nationals, as were Georgians or Ukrainians. In Sholokhov’s And Quiet Flows the Don, Bunchuk, a Cossack Bolshevik soldier, instructs Anna, a Jewish Bolshevik, in how to use a machine gun. Jewishness still marks Anna despite her commitment to Revolutionary goals; Bunchuk remarks, “you show little signs of your nationality.” Just as Lyutov identifies

with some conception of Jewishness in his interaction with the pogrom victims, Bunchuk’s comment demonstrates that Jewish identity remains tied to stereotypical conceptions of Jews. The legacy of the past marks Anna and provides a way to understand her and interpret her actions. In some ways, her label does not limit her opportunity but amplifies her achievement: she embodies a new Jewishness by seeking to participate in the forging of the Soviet state. But her role as a Jew who has transcended stereotypical imaginings of Russian Jew demonstrates Sholokhov’s dependence on images from the past. Her soldierly activity shows that some Jews are involved in spreading Bolshevism but also reminds the reader of the perennial backwardness of other Jews. Jewishness, as an identifying category, has not fled her body at the sight of Bolshevism.

Anna comes of age in a new Russia that has cleared the way for Jewish participation and achievement. Not only did Jews benefit from the Revolution, but also they participated in making those changes. Jewish stereotypes did not disappear but new situations made way for new stereotypes: the prevalence of Jews in the Bolshevik ranks, coupled with a history of Jewish socialist activity, associated Jews with radical ideology. Maxim Gorky (the first patron of Isaac Babel) believed that Jews, “the old, thick yeast of humanity” had “given birth to the scourge of the powerful; the religion of the masses, socialism.” In Ehrenburg’s *The Stormy Life of Lasik Roitschwantz*, Lasik Roitschwantz wanders around a German town where he meets Mister Rosenblum, a German Jew who identifies as “not a Hebrew, but a pure-blooded German,” who fears that Lasik as “an Eastern Jew... might infect us with cholera, typhus and Bolshevism.”

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63 Slezkine, 164.
only alludes to images of Jewish bodies as inherently frail and sick but also treats Bolshevism as a natural component of Eastern European Jews through its inclusion in a list of illnesses. Just as Rosenblum assumes Russian Jews to be carriers of disease, he thinks that Jews biologically bring Bolshevism with them. Ehrenburg humorously inverts the Soviet equation of religion with filth not by describing Jewishness as pathology but by suggesting that Europeans fear that it produces the political pathology of Bolshevism. Just as with Anna, Jewishness persists in a physical form but here in its association with revolutionary ideology. The image of Lasik as a Bolshevik depends upon stereotypical associations of Jews with political radicalism and physical frailty. Though Bolshevism presented Jews with new opportunities, it still linked their present to a stereotyped past. Lasik and Anna cannot rid themselves of their Jewishness even as they step into the future—those who gaze upon them will always find a way to detect Jewishness.

A New Jewishness

Bolshevik Jews undoubtedly sought to avoid the limitations of their ethnic background; and pinpointing the backwardness of Jews plagued by religious observance constituted a primary method of their Soviet assimilation. If ethnic Jewishness could not be avoided, religious Jewishness invited attack. The Evsektsia, the Jewish wing of Bolshevism, attempted to vanquish the legacy of the past through propaganda to “separate Jews from Judaism”—a process that occurred within the larger anti-religious

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65 Shternshis, 153.
66 The idea of Bolshevism as a disease that had to be “quarantined” was a cliché in post-WWI Western Europe.
movement. Bolsheviks did not seek to exterminate Russian Jews but to transform them into Soviet citizens. While Bolsheviks unleashed a wave of brutality against the Orthodox Church, its clergy members and infrastructure, their strategy of dealing with Jews was remarkably different: churches often faced destruction, but synagogues fared an alternative fate. Bolsheviks did not choose demolition but conversion of synagogues into secular buildings. The audience was still Jewish and the language Yiddish but Bolshevism had allegedly removed religion from the foundation. The Evsektsia stripped religious practice from the now purely ethno-national Jewish identity. Though most Jews would regard the secular transformation of synagogues as a gravely anti-Semitic act, Anna Shtershis argues that the Jewish community saw this rather as a demonstration of government support for Jewish culture. The preference for conversion demonstrated the Bolshevik choice of inclusion over pogroms.

Within the Soviet Union’s encouraging policy toward national expression, the Evsektsia appealed to Jews through traditionally Jewish means to produce a Jewishness compatible with Soviet values. Yiddish language, the language of the Russian Jewish

67 Shtenshis, 2. The Evsektsia focused on two connected enemies in addition to the religious practice of Judaism: the Hebrew language and Zionism. Hebrew, as a language for Zionism, and Zionism both overemphasized Jewish particularity and worked counter to the goals of the Soviet state. The Evsektsia maintained an exclusive outlook which made no room for a competing ideology. Even if Zionists pursued socialistic policies, their ultimate desire to leave the Soviet Union for the lands of Palestine was unpalatable to the Evsektsia. (See Gitelman, *Jewish Nationality and Soviet Politics*, 276-7, 292.) They pursued their platform with alarming fierceness: Maxim Gorky sought to help a group of Hebrew writers leave the country but the Evsektsia worked to prevent them from leaving. Zvi Gitelman argues that their insecurity as Jewish Bolsheviks caused them to work with particular forcefulness (See Gitelman, *A Century of Ambivalence*, 77, 82).

68 In “Soviet Images of Jehovah in the 1920s,” Robert Weinberg examines how The Godless at the Workbench, an anti-religious periodical, inadvertently incorporated anti-Semitic images in their depictions of the Jewish God, Jehovah. He claims, “ironically, the depictions...may have subverted the regime’s attempt to undermine anti-Semitism: they may have fostered suspicion of all Soviet Jews...the artists who drew for this journal may have unwittingly nurtured the survival of anti-Jewish sentiments among the Soviet populace.” Though Bolsheviks intended that the separation of religious and ethnic identity would positively affect the lives of Jews, the results were not always clear. Robert Weinberg, “Soviet Images of Jehovah in the 1920s,” in Kivelson et al., *Picturing Russia*, 156.

69 Ibid, 7, 14.
people, provided the Evsektsia an avenue to forge a Soviet Jewish population. Jewish Bolsheviks sought to help Jews transcend the past through the creation of a non-religious, secular Yiddish culture to appeal to the Jewish population.\textsuperscript{70} They preserved but altered old elements: Jews could observe Passover but the Soviet Haggadah interchanged “the October Revolution” for the antiquated concept of “God.” Seders remained uniquely Jewish but became thematically Soviet.\textsuperscript{71} The skeletal structure of Jewish religious practice survived, but with a new heart and brain that did not embrace its ancestors’ faith. Bolshevik Jews replaced religious Judaism with a national Soviet Jewish culture where Jewishness was exclusively an ethnic identity.\textsuperscript{72} Yet, the retention of synagogues and Haggadahs betrays a clear dependence on the past.

The old Jewish communities began to change dramatically after 1917 as Jewish communal life began to crumble and Jews found independence that they had never before experienced.\textsuperscript{73} In Ilya Ehrenburg’s \textit{The Stormy Life of Lasik Roitschwantz}, Lasik represents this newly mobile Russian Jew, as he proudly proclaims to his comrade Mischka Mintschik, “a Jew who is not on the move is almost indecent.”\textsuperscript{74} As Lasik drifts from place to place in Russia and beyond, his life of movement repudiates a prior conception of Russian Jews as immobile in the Pale. Yet, his rejection of one stereotype endorses a different one: Lasik’s similarity to the figure of the schlemiel connects him to

\textsuperscript{70} Shtenshis, 43. The new Yiddish culture failed to emerge as a meaningful replacement for the old one. Many Jews saw Yiddish as a force more likely to confine their development (akin to the impediments to assimilation that Jews encountered during Tsarist times) than to allow them to reap the benefits of the Revolution: and some even found it an absurd dilution of religious faith. The desires of social advancement and the ability to peacefully practice Judaism, sometimes conflicting, remained fastidious hurdles to Bolshevik transformation.

\textsuperscript{71} Ibid, 29. Passover celebrates God’s freeing of the Hebrew people from Egypt, and the Haggadah is the book used for the ceremony (the seder) to celebrate liberation.

\textsuperscript{72} Shneer, 3. A valuable further study would examine how this culture compares to secular Israeli culture.

\textsuperscript{73} Zvi Gitelman, \textit{Jewish Nationality and Soviet Politics}, 267.

\textsuperscript{74} Ehrenburg, 72.
traditional imaginings of Eastern European Jews,\textsuperscript{75} and his character also parallels the Wandering Jew.\textsuperscript{76} Though Roitschwantz represents new aspects of Jewish life in post-Revolutionary Russia, his retention of traditionally Jewish traits challenges the potential transformation of Jews into Soviets. Stereotypical imaginings persist when discussing the development of the future. Lasik’s body is a converted synagogue: imagined by some to be free of traditional religious associations, but still clearly connected to traditional ideas of Jewishness. He may break some bonds with the past generation, but cannot dissolve them completely.

Often Lasik’s contemporary cohort of Russian Jews, through anti-religious propaganda or state sponsored avant-garde theatre, reacted against their past. Many avant-garde Jewish artists saw the creation of this culture as a rejection of their status as children of merchants.\textsuperscript{77} In Fadeyev’s \textit{The Rout}, Levinson, a Jewish leader of a Russian brigade stationed in Eastern Russia, works to distance himself from an embarrassingly petite bourgeois past: his father, a merchant, sold second-hand furniture, dreamt of being rich, was afraid of mice, and played the fiddle poorly.\textsuperscript{78} Levinson establishes a new identity, not through a name change like Lyutov, but through a fervent embrace of his status as a Bolshevik soldier. Levinson embodies the generational change that the Bolsheviks and Evsektsia so desperately wanted: the contributions Levinson makes to the

\textsuperscript{75} See Ruth Wisse, \textit{The Schlemiel as Modern Hero} (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1971), 4, 13. Wisse parallels the function of the schlemiel to the Fool in \textit{King Lear}: “in an insane world, the fool may be the only morally sane man.” Roitschwantz personifies the schlemiel’s “antirationalism” in his rejection of the utilitarian Soviet state.

\textsuperscript{76} Ahasverus, who upon denying Christ a resting place on his march to Golgotha, is condemned to wander aimlessly until the Second Coming. Ahasverus embodies the eternal Diaspora of the Jewish people: forever condemned to move from place to place without a home. For more information on The Wandering Jew, see George Anderson, \textit{The legend of the Wandering Jew} (Providence: Brown University Press, 1965).

\textsuperscript{77} Moss, 234, 14.

\textsuperscript{78} Alexander Fadeyev, \textit{The Rout} (Moscow, Foreign Language Publishing House), 50. One thinks of Babel’s “The Awakening” and his description of the young Jews having violin lessons: “the factory of Jewish dwarfs in lace collars and patent leather shoes.” See Babel, \textit{The Collected Stories of Isaac Babel}. 392.
Soviet state, not his ethnic identity, define him. Akin to Leon Trotsky (who ironically did change his name), Levinson’s leadership stands in for the limitations that his Jewishness might present. He rejects his father’s way of life and thus establishes his Soviet Jewish identity. But like the other Jewish characters who in their very rejection of Jewishness betray their dependence upon it, Levinson identifies himself in relation to a Jewish past. His actions as a leader take on specific importance because the reader understands that Jews are normally like Levinson’s father. The creation of the New Soviet Jew inevitably retains elements of the old Jew—in section four, we will examine how Levinson’s body and mind are still marked as uniquely Jewish.\(^7^9\)

The visions of Ehrenburg, Babel, Fadeyev, and Sholokhov all demonstrate ambivalence with the past through their images of Jewish characters. But they each imagine the fractured past differently. In the Russias of the non-Jews Fadeyev and Sholokhov, the persistence of an ethnic Jewishness is not a problem so long as one commits fully to the Soviet State; but in the universes of Ehrenburg and Babel, the persistence of Jewishness impedes Jews from finding a place in this new Russia despite its promises. Russian Jews in the 1920s hovered between multiple worlds and countless paradoxes. Could they be both Jewish and Soviet? Could they drift comfortably from Russian to Yiddish? There may have been Revolution of the Jewish street\(^8^0\) but the street’s direction remained unclear. Despite the efforts at removing the past, Jews still felt its weight, sometimes positively but often negatively. Whether they would become New

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\(^7^9\) Levinson’s history is reminiscent of young Russian Jews as diverse as Trotsky and Ehrenburg. Both articulated a sense of discontent with their parents that produced a sense of disconnect. For Trotsky, this disconnect inspired him to find Marxism, while Ehrenburg’s disconnect inspired a wild goose chase of different solutions: Marxism, monasticism, bohemianism, and later in his life, Stalinism. For more information on the life of Ehrenburg, see Joshua Rubenstein, *Tangled Loyalties* (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 1999).

Soviet Men and Women—or rather, whether the Soviet state would allow them—was unclear at this point. The Jewish community sat on the cusp of radical change as a nation struggled to find its soul.
THE JEWISH JEW

Bolshevism approached the Jewish Question similarly to other ethno-national questions: Jews had a common language, tradition, and set of practices; they were a relatively homogeneous group that could adapt through the Soviet Nationalities Policy. The perception of these characteristics had once established Jews as a category in Russian eyes and had created negative stereotypical images of Jews that had resonated for Russians in the 19th century. Proclivity to greediness, talent for unethically amassing capital, physical weakness, and provincial lifestyle defined Jews. According to Elena Katz, in her study of Jewish characters in 19th century Russian novels, “Russian writers...made use of the Jewish images when contemplating the essential qualities of 'the Russian.' Jews were outsiders whose exotic characteristics became a useful foil for designating essential Russian traits.”⁸¹ Jews provided a sense of the Other for their more dignified Russian counterparts.

Bolshevik thinkers explained that the Tsarist repressive policies had produced these stereotypes and that now under the Soviet state, Jews could blend normally into the Soviet population. Ethnic difference would still mark them but would not limit their opportunities or prevent their access to state resources. Through programs that appealed to Jews (Yiddish Schools, Yiddish Theatres etc.), Bolsheviks believed that the Jewish population could be ushered into modernity. Bolshevik Jews were brashly confident, while other Russian Jews, wary of persistent anti-Semitism, debated the extent to which they could assimilate into the body politic.

Isaac Babel's *Red Cavalry Stories* and Ilya Ehrenburg's *The Stormy Life of Lasik Roitschwantz* imagine Jews who have not advanced into a Soviet paradise but have lingered behind in a Jewish past. *Red Cavalry Stories* details Babel's experiences (through the narrative voice of Lyutov) as a war correspondent embedded in a Cossack brigade during the 1920 Russian invasion of a Poland attempting to establish its national state independence. Lyutov too attempts to assert his autonomy, but finds himself at odds with the Revolution and his more masculine Cossack comrades. *The Stormy Life of Lasik Roitschwantz* is the tale of Lasik Roitschwantz, a bumbling Jew who moves from place to place as he fails to assimilate. Initially, he finds acceptance but his Jewishness continuously marks him as an outsider, and he must search for a new residence. The Jews of Babel and Ehrenburg are not strong or confident, but are weak and unassimilated; their Jewishness labels them outsiders, and they do not reap the benefits of the new, allegedly "philosemitic" Russia. While they encounter a world that had been closed to their parents, they experience their own problems and face a world, Russian and beyond, that still regards Jewishness as an intrusion.

In Babel's and Ehrenburg’s works, Jews are not convertible, raw materials but rather the embodiment of their particularly Jewish bodies, minds and tendencies. These Jews diverge from the image of the New Soviet Man and so cast doubt on the Soviet project of changing individuals and a nation. Although the 1920s were not a time of direct artistic censorship, Babel faced political pressure to not write something explicitly anti-Bolshevik.82 Babel thus concentrates on how the Jewish body’s incorrigibly ethnic...
Jewishness limits assimilation, but devotes little time to how Jewishness shapes intellectual and ideological commitments. However, in the privacy of his diary he expresses doubt about Bolshevism and the Revolution.\(^{83}\) Ehrenburg wrote *The Stormy Life of Lasik Roitschwantz* in the Russian expatriate community in Paris and expressed his political anxieties more openly. Writing without the pressures experienced by Babel,\(^{84}\) he focuses on a persistent physical Jewishness and demonstrates how Jewishness lends itself to modes of thinking incompatible with Bolshevism. In Ehrenburg’s mind, a Jewish tradition of doubt does not fit with Bolshevik rigidity of thought.

Despite their protagonists’ desire to escape the Jewishness that the Evsekstia found so backward, they often return to its world and wisdom. While Lasik describes “Talmudists [as]...the most ridiculous mongrels in the world,” he tells stories portraying Hasids as purveyors of truth;\(^{85}\) and despite Lyutov’s denigration of traditional Judaism, he finds comfort in the company of Jews. They attempt to assert their Russianness to distinguish them from practicing Jews but their association of Jews with a venerable past complicates this separation. While Lasik and Lyutov never fully explicate what Jewishness means to them (and it often seems that it carries no real Jewish substance), its persistence renders it irrevocable and destabilizes the feasibility of the Soviet project. In this project, I introduce the concept of Jewishness as a “contentless positionality” where traditional elements of Jewish practice are irrelevant to the characters. They do not care

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83 Babel did encounter trouble with the publication of *Red Cavalry Stories*. Some felt that they had been defamed—and to his misfortune, he wrote negatively of individuals (such as the Cossack commander Budyonny) who would ascend to position of power and leadership under Stalin.

84 Ironically, Ehrenburg later became a public face of Stalinism and an important journalist as a Jew during World War II. His association with Stalin tarnished his reputation permanently and still seems to discourage readers and scholars from discovering his books.

85 Ehrenburg, 58.
about the specificities of Torah or Talmud but associate Jewishness with a particular
social position and way of thinking. For Ehrenburg, it is skepticism; for Babel, it is a
humanist tradition. Their contentless positionality emerges in opposition to the utilitarian
efforts of Bolshevis. Bodies and minds in their novels appear naturally Jewish through
stereotypical conceptions of weakness and intellectualism. With Babel, I will focus
specifically on Jewish bodies and the divide between his private (diary) and public
(novel) selves; and with Ehrenburg, I will concentrate on his idea of the Jewish mind.
Though Jewish identity was in flux during the 1920s, the ideological influence of
Bolshevis could not erase Jewishness.

Isaac Babel and the Jewish Body

Babel’s stereotypical Jewish bodies undermine Bolshevik claims about human
malleability by situating the Jewishness of his characters as physically embedded and
marking their bodies as perpetually Jewish. Babel, himself very small, constantly alludes
to the physical weaknesses of Jews. Frail, inferior Jews lurk in every corner of Red
Cavalry Stories. Taking in a Sabbath meal, Lyutov places a Rabbi in a history of weak
Jews as "an ancient fool with inflamed eyelids, a hunchbacked little old man." This
image implies an uncorrectable deficiency in the bone structure of the Jew. Despite
Bolshevik projects of re-creation, physical limitations derail the formation of the New
Soviet Man. The Rabbi’s place in Jewish history disqualifies him from a place in the

87 Babel’s description echoes Lunacharsky’s use of the common Russian saying, that education could create
Soviet citizens out of virtually all, but that “only the grave can correct a hunchback.”
Soviet present—just as a strong connection to traditional Jewish practice disrupts Russian Jews’ search for a new identity in the Soviet state.

Babel establishes Lyutov’s physical ineptitude early in the stories: while exploring a church in Novograd, Lyutov falls and emits a "weak cry," and Cossack soldiers have to "come down to haul [him] out from the basement."\(^{88}\) Eliot Borenstein, in his study of gender roles in Revolutionary Russian literature, asserts, "there could hardly be more antithetical male types than the Cossack and the Jew."\(^{89}\) Physical development has been predetermined by genetic heritage, as Jews are naturally feeble while Cossacks are strong. When Lyutov encounters the pogrom-ravaged Jews in the first story, his surreal description of their bodies accentuates the strangeness of the Jewish body: “the two Jews get up from their chairs. They hop around on their felt soles and pick up the broken piece of porcelain from the floor. They hop around in silence, like monkeys, like Japanese acrobats in a circus, their necks swelling and twisting.”\(^{90}\) Their bodies appear inhuman and in stark contrast to masculine, physically refined Cossack bodies. Their jerky and frenetic nature inhibits them from performing physical labor and serving a useful function in the Soviet state. Even stereotypically Jewish intellectual qualities are not just located in Jewish minds but on Jewish bodies. During his first interaction with Cossacks, they explain, “you get hacked to pieces just for wearing glasses,” and mock him: “this man has suffered on the fields of learning.”\(^{91}\) Poor vision threatens Lyutov’s integration because wearing glasses identifies him as a Jewish intellectual.

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90 Babel, “Crossing the River Zbrucz,” 203.
91 Babel, “My First Goose,” 231.
Through implying the physicality of Jewishness, Babel undermines Bolshevik potential to correct Jews. Babel cleverly does two things: he develops a sense of what defines a Jew and what defines a Cossack, and solidifies these categories of ethnicity. Though the Soviet policy explained national characteristics as sociological products of geography and economy, Babel implies something more innately physical. In a letter in 1929, he described a woman as having “like every other little Jewess, very short legs.” When Babel casually places her shortness within the context of general Jewish physical inferiority, he reinforces this stereotype. By using this stereotype in the confidentiality of a letter in addition to the public form of the novel, Babel signifies its persistence in reality.

An inadequate physicality causes Lyutov to struggle with women and further complicates his ability to be a productive citizen. During his first night with the Cossacks, the women of his camp refuse to serve him. He murders a goose to assert his dominance over them and demonstrate that Jewishness does not deleteriously affect his masculinity. Like the Bolshevik Jews who ferociously persecuted traditional Jews to assert their commitment to the Soviet State, Lyutov overcompensates in attempting to overcome his Jewish physical weakness. Lyutov’s other notable interaction with a woman happens in a dream, where she tends to him only because she believes that he is dead. A lack of sexual vitality detracts from his masculinity and prevents him from being

92 Alice Nakhimovksy, Russian-Jewish Literature and Identity (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002), 71. Even when establishing the differences between the Southern Jews that he encountered in Odessa: “jovial, potbellied, sparkling like cheap wine” and those in Poland, “these long bony backs, the tragic yellow beard...no fat or warm pulse of blood,” Lyutov establishes the existence of natural Jewishness. He rejects the idea of a monolithic Jewishness but still believes in specifically Jewish qualities. Jews in the South are different from Jews in Eastern Poland, but both are identified by their common Jewish physical attributes. Babel, The Collected Stories of Isaac Babel, 241.
a New Soviet Man. While Soviet biologists sought to control unnecessary sexual urges, Lyutov’s sheer inability to succeed sexually hinders his contribution to the Soviet state.\(^95\) Jewishness defines and limits his sexual life. He cannot direct his sexual energy toward the state, and the state does not convert him into a productive sexual creature. Lyutov’s biological ethnicity limits his civic functionality.\(^96\)

For Babel, Jewishness does not just surface as a physical quality but as a way of being. Religious observance does not define his life but a specifically Jewish sensibility inflects his mannerisms and attitudes. After Lyutov kills the goose, he laments, “my heart, crimson with murder, screeched and bled.”\(^97\) Though he acts to assert his masculinity and secure a place for himself among the Cossacks, the violence does not sit well with him. Jewishness makes him stereotypically predisposed to nonviolence; and when he overrides this disposition, he does not feel the pangs of guilt intangibly but locates his response physically. The random act of brutality disrupts his internal sense of Jewishness; and his attempt to assert his masculinity fails to achieve that virility. Lyutov may work toward becoming a New Soviet Man but his internally embedded Jewishness curbs his rebellion against Jewishness.

Though Lyutov has Jewish sensibilities, he does not embrace a traditionally Jewish identity. Rather, he seeks out Bolshevis.GD and does his part to propagate its ideology. Tangentially connected to Jewish practice, Lyutov, like members of the Evsektsia, works to expose backward Jews to the new ideology. He uses his position of

\(^95\) Neither Lyutov nor Lasik Roitschwantz is like Babel’s Benya Krik who dazzles Russian women in spite of his Jewishness. I’m not including Benya Krik in Babel’s \textit{Odessa Stories} in my account but want to address potential concerns since he embodies non-stereotypical attributes of Jewishness. I would argue that Benya Krik takes on non-Jewish qualities because he is placed in a specifically Jewish context—and his masculinity and strength are thus emphasized.

\(^96\) Ironically, Babel suffered no such problems in his personal, sexual life.

\(^97\) Babel, “My First Goose,” 233.
familiarity to encourage Jews to listen to him, because he knows that they will pay
attention to his words.\textsuperscript{98} Even though he is a perpetual outsider, he views himself as part
of the Bolshevik project. When Lyutov interacts with Gedali, an observant Jewish
shopkeeper, Gedali states his doubts about the Revolution and his frustration that it
“keeps hiding from Gedali.” Lyutov’s simple response is that “we shall rip open those
closed eyes.”\textsuperscript{99} Babel’s violent language implies that Lyutov seeks to be an ideal Soviet
citizen but recognizes the violence inherent in Bolshevism. Near the beginning of the
Stories, Lyutov somewhat ambivalently links himself to the Bolsheviks by identifying
himself as a “violent intruder.”\textsuperscript{100} Though Lyutov aspires to be part of the new Soviet
state, he struggles to square himself with its methods and goals.

The disparity between the self presented as Lyutov in the Red Cavalry Stories and
the self in the 1920 Diary shows more clearly how an attachment to some notion of
Jewishness undermines Babel’s faith in the Bolshevik project. His fractured self
correlates to the experience of Jews trying to make a place for themselves in
Revolutionary Russia. In Red Cavalry Stories, Babel addresses the suffering of Jews but
rarely airs his own internal struggles and doubts. As an author, he closes himself off to
the reader and presents Lyutov as an observer most comfortable when removed from the
transpiring drama. This narrative decision makes his partnership with Bolshevism seem
seamless and natural; but when we encounter Babel in his Diary, we see that he struggles
with questions about his own identity. In this first-person account, Babel derives clear
pleasure from his encounters with the shtetl Jews (whom Lyutov looks down upon in the

\textsuperscript{98} In his diary, Babel writes how he “explains what the Revolution means” and that “everything [is]
changing for the better” for the benefit of the Jews. Babel, 1920 Diary, 7, 33. Despite being Jewish, Lyutov
in fiction and Babel in reality differentiate themselves as Bolsheviks from the shtetl Jews they encounter.
\textsuperscript{99} Ibid, “Gedali,” 228.
\textsuperscript{100} Babel, “The Church in Novograd,” 206.
first story of *Red Cavalry Stories*) and explains his satisfaction “talking to the Jews, I feel kin to them, they think I’m Russian and my soul is laid bare.” The Jews see and understand him in a way that the Cossacks do not, and their Jewishness provides them with that special lens. Babel articulates faith in a tangible Jewishness found in neither synagogues nor texts but in how Jews act and treat others. In his *Diary*, Babel uses the first-person plural to identify with the Jews he encounters, “we are an ancient people, exhausted, but we still have some strength left.” Babel does not dissect the differences between Polish Jews and Odessan Jews but treats them as a cohesive entity with which he identifies.

Despite his candidness as a diary writer, Babel does not always identify so openly with Jews. While a Jew is being beaten, Babel explains, “I keep quiet, because I’m Russian.” I read Babel’s silence during this act of violence as I do his avoidance of questions of personal Jewish identity in the *Red Cavalry Stories*. Though he struggles with these questions, to address them publicly would solidify the difference that his Jewishness signifies. While Babel’s Jewishness inhibits his connection to the Bolshevik project, he sought to make a comfortable life for himself and knew that openly questioning the feasibility of the Bolshevik project would diminish that opportunity. In the *Diary*, he openly states, “this isn’t a Marxist revolution,” while his doubts in the *Stories* focus on the gross violence of war rather than this war’s specific ideological

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102 Ibid, 28.
103 Ibid, 35.
104 Babel lived in the Soviet Union until his execution by the secret police in 1938. During the Stalinist years when writers faced stricter guidelines than in the early 1920s, Babel largely kept quiet and wrote little. At the Writers’ Congress in 1934, Babel explained that he was “the master of the genre of silence.” Lionel Trilling, introduction, to *The Collected Stories* by Isaac Babel (New York: Criterion Books, 1955), 13.
105 Ibid, 64.
underpinnings: “the chronicle of our everyday crimes oppressed me as relentlessly as a bad heart.” Babel hides his doubts about the aims of Bolshevism in the public format of the novel by focusing on violence as a natural part of war rather than a product of Bolshevism. In his diary, he airs his suspicions more frankly.

While Babel as a novelist does not explicitly doubt the Bolshevik project, he presents Jewishness as not simply the absence of Bolshevism but a humanistic alternative to its ideological logic. When Lyutov wanders through the town of Zhitomir “on the eve of the Sabbath,” he seeks out Gedali’s shop in search of “some Jewish biscuits, a Jewish glass of tea, and a piece of that retired God in the glass of tea.” Gedali explains his ideal revolution: “I want the International of good people, I want every soul to be accounted for and given first-class rations. Here, soul, eat, go ahead, go and find happiness in your life.” In Gedali’s imagining, a revolution need not be violent but can offer bloodless improvement in the lives of individuals. Babel uses this narrative moment to link Gedali’s Jewishness to a humanist sensibility that can provide a political alternative to the sweep of Bolshevism.

Whether or not Babel agrees with Gedali’s proposal is irrelevant; of importance is that Jewishness offers the possibility for redemption in the face of so much violence. Efraim Sicher describes Babel’s attachment to Judaism: “Babel adhered to the humanitarian ideals and some traditional customs of Judaism, rather than to Jewish law.” Law and doctrine pale in relevance to their spirit. He envisions Jewishness as a contentless positionality: the textual specificities matter less than the Jewish inclination to a philosophically humane position. Though Babel does not specify

its spirit, Jewishness resists the scientific logic of Bolshevism. While their Bolshevik peers take the Revolution at its face value, Jewishness influences Babel’s Jews to interpret the world uniquely. “The humanitarian ideals” of Jewishness preclude the domination of an inflexible ideology like Bolshevism. Babel in life and Lyutov in fiction live on the outskirts of society but textual appeals to Jewishness suggest a spiritual home governed by the logic of chosenness. Neither they nor Gedali truly need to have their eyes ripped open by Bolshevism because the intellectual heritage of their religious background has predisposed them to eyes that interrogate the surrounding world.

Ilya Ehrenburg and the Jewish Mind

In Ilya Ehrenburg’s *The Stormy Life of Lasik Roitschwantz*, Lasik, a bumbling, wandering Jew, moves from place to place in Russia and beyond. Though he occasionally assimilates with success, his Jewishness exposes him as an outsider and represents his incompatibility with Bolshevism and the modern world. While the idea of visible ethnic Jewishness is relevant, Ehrenburg focuses especially on his own idea of contentless positionality. For Ehrenburg, Jewishness makes Jews perennial cynics and diminishes their compatibility with the dogmatism of Bolshevism. As with Babel, Jewishness could be read onto and into the body. Lasik Roitschwantz, as a collection of stereotypical images of Jews, is very short, the son of a hunchback father and a lame mother, and visually impaired.\(^{109}\) His Jewishness manifests itself tangibly and renders him immediately identifiable. His stereotypical body affects how others interact with him, as Jewish diminutive stature does not lend itself to sexual proficiency. Lasik falls in love with Fenya Hershanowitch, the town beauty of Homel, a town in the Pale, but she rejects

\(^{109}\) Ehrenburg, 8, 17, 99.
him by saying, "you have no sex whatsoever." Throughout the novel, Lasik fails with women who continue to scorn him for his smallness. Jewishness is not a discardable external quality but has tangible effects in the world; and in this case, it prevents Lasik from being a sexually productive Soviet citizen. Bolsheviks hoped that nationality would not affect the position of individuals in Soviet society, but Lasik struggles to fit comfortably. Persistent physical characteristics cause ethnic identity to dominate Jewish lives as Jewishness is permanently written on the body.

Lasik extends the idea of embodied Jewishness when he explains that adding up bones and joints in the human body equals 613—the number of mitzvot, or obligations, for Jews to follow. Although Lasik rejects many aspects of traditional Judaism and professes his atheism, he establishes a link between the Jewish body and Jewish identity, and naturalizes Jewishness as rooted in the human body. Lasik’s body is fundamentally Jewish and not an accidental product of environment or society. Akin to Lyutov’s nauseated reaction to killing the goose, Jewishness dominates Lasik’s internal life. He continually reminds readers that he is a “tailor from Homel”—perhaps an allusion to the conception of tailoring as an archetypal Jewish trade and the Bolshevik idea that contributions to the state defined an individual. While this fact provides him with identity and purpose, Jewishness remains the dominating fact in defining Lasik. Jews in Soviet Russia cannot be just another ethnic group but are first and foremost seen as bodily Jews.

Though Ehrenburg focuses on the role of Jewishness in defining bodies, most descriptions of Lasik examine his way of being intangibly Jewish. Where Babel in *Red Cavalry Stories* concentrates on embodied Jewishness, Ehrenburg ruminates on an embedded Jewishness that manifests itself through acting, speaking, and thinking. The

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110 Ibid, 48.
novel commences when Bolshevik leaders interpret Lasik’s involuntary sigh during a Bolshevik funeral as an act of political defiance. Though the sigh allegedly emerges accidentally, it sets Lasik on an unstable course of perpetual struggle with authority. When Ehrenburg opens the novel with ironic contingency: “it all might have been different had he not sighed,” he links what transpires over the next 300 pages to a seemingly incidental action.¹¹¹ But rather than expressing nothing, the sigh is essential to Lasik’s character and embodies Ehrenburg’s conception of Jewishness. Instead of consisting primarily of traditional Judaism, it provides Lasik a way of being in the world. Though one cannot locate traditional Jewishness in Lasik’s actions, Jewishness nevertheless molds him as a social actor, makes him inclined to question his surroundings and directs him toward conflicts with Bolshevism. Because Jewishness materializes in ways tangible and intangible, Jewish skepticism emerges regardless of action or desire. Lasik cannot control his sighs just as a Jew cannot wield control over his Jewishness. Immediately, Ehrenburg hints toward the natural conflict between permanent Jewishness and a Bolshevism that depends on ethnic malleability.

Though Bolshevik thinkers asserted the transformability of human beings, Lasik must live with his Jewishness as neither the master of his own body nor his destiny. When Bolshevik leaders interrogate him about his sigh, Lasik contends, “if I could use certain expressions and laugh triumphantly...I would certainly not be an unhappy, insignificant tailor.”¹¹² He believes that Jewishness predisposes him to live in a specific way that often conflicts with the goals of Bolshevism. As he explains to Mischka Mintschik, a Bolshevik in Kiev: “in my opinion, a Jew who is not on the move is almost

¹¹¹ Ehrenburg, I.
¹¹² Ibid, 12.
...indecent." While Bolshevism puts one on a historical trajectory that moves toward a socialist society, Jewishness predisposes a Jew to wander aimlessly in pursuit of something unattainable. National identity is not as pliant as Bolsheviks hoped that it would be and can even make subjects more inclined to resist Bolshevism.

Lasik’s Jewishness is not a tangential part of his identity that can be transformed into a Soviet identity devoid of substance, but an integral part of his sense of self. When Mintschik commands him to remove “all ideologically damaging books” from Bolshevik club libraries, Lasik suggests Jewish texts are alive as material thought: “I have the Talmud only in my head, and I cannot do away with my miserable head.” Though the Talmud might run counter to the state, it represents a form of physical Jewishness that cannot be uprooted. Rather than just narrowly fitting onto bookshelves, the Talmud finds its way into the brains and bodies of Jews to take on an embodied life of its own. Such interiority cannot be so easily eradicated.

Lasik distances himself, like Lyutov, from traditional Jewish practice. When speaking to Mintschik and other Bolshevik party members, he denigrates primary Jewish texts: “Talmudists were the most ridiculous mongrels in the world” and “the backward Jews believe in the Torah.” He is an avowed atheist and explains to Mintschik that in heaven, “I know there is only ordinary gas—or let’s say chewed up bones.” Both Lasik and Lyutov aspire to be modern and are emblematic of changes that Jews experienced in Revolutionary Russia. Lyutov has the mobility that Tsarist authorities had denied to previous generations; and Lasik is a globetrotting cosmopolitan. Despite their Jewishness,

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113 Ibid, 72.
114 Ibid, 57, 59.
115 Ibid, 58, 68.
116 Ibid, 229.
which differentiates them from the surrounding populations, they manage to find places for themselves. But this place is always a transient state. Lyutov never feels genuinely at home with the Cossacks and his Jewishness excludes him from their community. Lasik lacks a stable home, and unsuccessfully creates temporary homes. With every place that he moves, permanent residents evict him and force him to a new destination.

Ehrenburg airs doubts about Bolshevism and the position of Jews more openly than Babel. When the District Attorney Wassiljew questions Lasik in jail after the sighing incident, Lasik prioritizes a sense of humanity over political ideology by claiming “even though we are both genuine Marxists, we are...also real human beings.” 

Lasik senses that Bolshevism denies the realities of human life because it fails to take into account how humans actually operate. Real human interaction disrupts Marxism as Lasik’s encounters with others spoil his status as a Soviet citizen. Working counter to Soviet biologists who wanted to minimize superfluous sexual desire, Lasik explains his attraction to the Homel town beauty, Fenya Hershanowitch, “when I saw those eyes, in one moment I lost all my class-consciousness.” While Lasik is no Casanova, his sexual attraction disturbs his commitment to Bolshevism. He does not internalize its ideological tenets but allows his instincts to roam freely. Because Bolshevism does not take the complexity of human experience into account, he acknowledges to Mintschik that he will “remain a miserable party-candidate as long as I live, for it would be easier for me to die amidst the prison cobwebs, than to forget the fragrance of deluding lilacs.” Where Bolshevism offers an alienating ideology, Lasik finds in Jewishness a more humanistic

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117 Ehrenburg, 38.
118 Ibid, 38.
119 Ibid, 63.
Lasik exemplifies Jewishness as a humanistic alternative to Bolshevism in a story he tells: during Yom Kippur, a Zadik, a religious leader, ascends to Heaven to argue over the fate of a sinner. The Zadik not only valiantly defends this sinner but also begins to persuade God that life on earth is such that the Messiah ought to redeem it immediately. Just as he and God almost reach a decision, the Zadik realizes that one of his older congregants will die if he does not return to earth to break the fast. Though the man has little life left, the Zadik chooses to return to save him rather than stay in the discussion with God to hasten the return of the Messiah.\textsuperscript{120} The man dies only a month later but this is precisely why Lasik admires the action: the humanism in the Zadik’s action contradicts the utilitarian logic of Marxism and Bolshevism—ideologies that reduce human life to materiality and numbers (what Lasik describes as “such soulless multiplication”).\textsuperscript{121} The Zadik does not calculate the value of lives relationally, but asserts their immeasurable value: even though the old man is about to die, his life is infinitely worth saving.

Jewishness, irrespective of its technical and textual details, gives Lasik something intangible that challenges Bolshevism’s inflexibility. Like Babel’s conception, Ehrenburg’s idea of Jewishness is that of contentless positionality—comprised not of traditionally Jewish elements but representing a contrarian social position. For Ehrenburg, Jewishness provides a dissident voice, as Efraim Sicher argues: “Ehrenburg’s logic dictated that the Jew could only live in exile, for only in the Diaspora did he fulfill

\textsuperscript{120} Ibid, 85.

\textsuperscript{121} Ehrenburg, 77.
his role among the nations.” Ehrenburg believed Jews were innate “skeptics and dissenters.” Jewishness produces this quality in Jews and renders them incompatible with Bolshevism’s totalizing efforts.

**Contentless Jewishness**

Yet there is something missing. Jewishness is undoubtedly important in its effect on the lives, decisions, and actions of characters but Judaism itself is not innately meaningful to the authors. They focus substantially on how Jewishness plays out in thought or action but rarely do they explicate what constitutes that Jewishness. Ehrenburg’s statement that Lasik’s “name was an integral part of his well-weighed, deliberate plan of life,” implies that his name is an inextricable part of his identity but he undermines this claim when Lasik goes on to say, “Schwantz means nothing. It is just an empty sound.” Though his name is fundamental to his identity, it ultimately means nothing. Is Jewishness essential in its specific qualities or is it just an empty sound? At the end of the novel, Lasik dies after immigrating to Palestine. He chooses a random spot to lie down, but when the watchman explains its religious significance, Lasik asks rhetorically: “do you think I knew that this here was Rachel’s grave? No.” Ehrenburg places Lasik in a land of immense significance to Judaism, by the grave of one of the primary figures of the Hebrew Bible, but Lasik still comments, “this land looks like any other land.” One does not necessarily need to identify with the idea of a Jewish

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122 Sicher, 197.
124 Ibid, 5.
125 Ibid, 6.
126 Ibid, 305.
127 Ibid, 286.
homeland to experience Jewishness in a meaningful way, but Lasik's utter lack of interest questions the role of Jewishness for Ehrenburg. With a novel that ends with the dead body of its Jewish protagonist in Jerusalem, the fate Ehrenburg sees for Jews does not seem optimistic. But he manages to capture a vision of the spirit of Jewishness; and while this spirit causes its owners to clash with the world, it is, for Ehrenburg, indubitably the possession that makes them unique among the nations. Ehrenburg does not claim that Jews are particularly well suited for the modern world, but illuminates the qualities that will continue to define them. Even though Lasik dies in the end, he refuses to be anything but a Jew on the move.

*Red Cavalry Stories* also ends with a somewhat gloomy affirmation of the uniqueness of Jewishness. When Lyutov's regiment arrives in Kovel to find a devastated Red Army brigade, he finds Ilya, the Bolshevik and rebellious son of a Rabbi, dying among "portraits of Lenin and Maimonides." By attempting to unite two powerful symbols, one of Judaism and one of Bolshevism, Ilya represents the Russian Jewish attempt to fuse a Soviet present to a traditionally Jewish past. Babel ends the *Stories* tragically: "he died before we reached Rovno. He died, the last prince, amid poems, phylacteries, and foot bindings. And I, who can barely harness the storms of fantasy raging through my ancient body, I received my brother's last breath." Ilya cannot fuse Judaism and Bolshevism perfectly because ideology cannot vanquish that perpetually "ancient body" of Jews. As Babel and Ehrenburg express sorrow about the future for Jews in Russia and the world, they conclude their novels with a clear, contentless

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128 In Ehrenburg's 1922 *Julio Jurenito*, his other major piece of fiction concerned with Jews, a character predicts that Jews will become the scapegoats for European problems and will be murdered en masse.
130 Ibid, 333.
Jewishness: Lasik dies by an important Jewish landmark that is meaningless to him, and Lyutov watches the attempt to fuse a Soviet future and a Jewish past breathe its dying breath. In the curse and blessing of chosenness, Jewishness keeps Jews away from Bolshevism but renders them aimless. Russian Jews are caught between Bolshevism and Judaism—unable to find a physical home in either. But in the worlds of Ehrenburg and Babel, the existence of a contentless positionality located in Jewishness ensures that the Jew will always have a spiritual resting place in the eternal state of homelessness.
THE SOVIET JEW

Transformation, the hallmark promise of Bolshevism, appealed to a Russian people beleaguered by their sense of backwardness to their European counterparts. Bolshevism's faith in the power of rhetoric for class struggle was so strong that Bolsheviks believed that the horrors of capitalism and the promises of communism could override individual national or religious commitments. It did not matter if one were Ukrainian, Russian, or Jewish—the revolution would connect ethnic groups to the larger goals of class struggle. However, the strength of ethno-national identity challenged Bolshevik optimism as Bolshevik thinkers discovered the clash between ideology and historical realities. Their dismissal of national identity as a bourgeois historical construction did not eradicate its relevance for individuals under the Soviet regime.

The thorniness of the Jewish question rested in the lack of clarity about the position of Jews in Russia. As a nomadic group with a clear ethno-national identity, Jews lacked a fixed homeland like that of the Poles or Ukrainians because the Pale of Settlement was located in Polish, Lithuanian, Latvian, and Ukrainian space. The Nationalities Policy aimed to solidify Jews as a purely ethno-national group by extinguishing their religious faith and replacing it with a reverential commitment to Soviet goals and needs. The future of Jews in Soviet Russia had a great bearing on the fate of the state. With Bolshevism promising transformation of both the individual and group, its appeal should be such that Russian Jews would abandon their backward ways and meld with the larger national project. But if Jews did not change, their stasis would cast great doubt upon Soviet capabilities to create a New Soviet Man and new Soviet ethno-national group.
Aleksandr Fadeyev's *The Rout* and Mikhail Sholokhov's *And Quiet Flows the Don* deal in images of positive, transformed Jews who have abandoned obsolete commitments in their dedication to the Soviet state. Their devotion to Bolshevism, assertiveness, and qualities of leadership disconnect them from their clearly Jewish parents. They are, simply, inversions of stereotypes about Russian Jews and enormous departures from Ehrenburg's or Babel's Jews. These portrayals imply the success of the Soviet project: even Jews, that allegedly ever-elusive group clinging to the past, had the potential to commit (and even sacrifice) their lives for the state. Fadeyev and Sholokhov suggest that Jews are no different from their Russian neighbors in their compatibility with Bolshevism and even imply that some aspects of Jewish identity connect them even more strongly to Bolshevism. Some scholars\(^{131}\) have dismissed the Jewishness of these characters because traditional Jewish practice and commitments do not appeal to them. But it is exactly that lack of observance that creates the substance of their Jewish identity. They are definitively Jewish in their attempted defiance of Jewishness. Additionally, their stereotypically Jewish qualities imply a more innately Jewish identity and body. While these images increase the feasibility of transformation (Jews can change in some ways, but not all), the New Soviet Jew of Fadeyev and Sholokhov still relies heavily upon past stereotypes. They may be committed to the cause but their intellectualism and physical ineptitude mark them as Jewish. The positive, non-stereotypical aspects of their

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characters emerge in recognition and confirmation of other stereotypes. Even in their future-oriented vision, the past continues to play a dominating role.

Fadeyev's *The Rout* details the exploits of a Bolshevik brigade fighting in Eastern parts of Russia during the Civil War. With relative ease, Levinson, a Jewish Bolshevik party veteran, leads Russian men and acquires their admiration. In the last section of Sholokhov's *And Quiet Flows the Don*, the epic story of a Cossack family, the Bolshevik Cossack, Bunchuk, meets Anna, a young Jewish woman, whom he takes under his wing and with whom he falls in love. Though she appears weak initially, she transforms into a powerful character who sacrifices her life at the end of the novel. I read Anna’s gender as commentary on the changing state of gender roles in Revolutionary Russia. Bolsheviks sought to undermine traditional conceptions of men and women; and thus, a woman on the battlefield would challenge previous conceptions of Russian women. But while Anna does embody some of the qualities of the New Soviet Woman, she struggles to transcend stereotypical Jewishness.

Comparing these novels to *Red Cavalry Stories* and *The Stormy Life of Lasik Roitschwantz* proves troubling to some, because critics have dismissed Fadeyev’s and Sholokhov’s works as didactic and simplistic; one Russian literary scholar labeled Fadeyev’s work as “texts...marked by sterility and banality.” That the two became “canonical socialist realism texts” makes a comparison with the non-propagandistic literature of Babel and Ehrenburg seem even more questionable. Yet these two novels

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133 Socialist Realism encouraged straightforward texts with strong proletariat protagonists devoid of self-doubt or any internal questioning.
134 Katerina Clark, *The Soviet Novel* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), 4. But at the time they were written, each text was regarded as ideologically problematic. Russian critic Kirpotin complained that "the Rout's hero Levinson...is depicted with too much exploration of the inner man and his doubt" (See Clark, *The Soviet Novel*, 30). In regard to Sholokhov, Edward Brown notices that, "no clear political thesis
cannot be so easily dismissed. They were both written before Socialist Realism became the dominant literary theory, and have their own intricacies. *The Rout's* complex characters struggle with their tumultuous internal lives; and *And Quiet Flows the Don's* somewhat ambivalent examination of Bolshevism looks favorably upon characters who resist its creeping influence. Both texts are compelling, complex, and invite further study.

**Aleksandr Fadeyev and the Soviet Jew as Leader**

In *The Rout*, the Jewish Levinson is a strong-willed, assertive soldier. From the beginning of the novel, Fadeyev emphasizes his leadership qualities as an experienced Bolshevik. Because his defining feature is not that he is Jewish but that he is a leader, Levinson demonstrates that Jews too can be effective Bolsheviks. Levinson takes on a position of power and wins the admiration of his men for his steadfastness and fortitude. One of his men plaintively states, “without him, we’d all be lost.”¹³⁵ He presents a collected façade that exudes certainty, even though his internal life is not always balanced. In order to project confidence, his “whole attitude was calculated to produce the impression that he understood perfectly how these events had come about.”¹³⁶ Levinson confesses uncertainty only when he writes letters to his wife. His public persona remains distinct from the private personality of his letters. Doubt takes on a specifically Jewish quality in *The Rout*. Just as he remains quiet about his Jewishness, Levinson keeps his questions to himself to demonstrate his commitment to Bolshevism.

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¹³⁵ Fadeyev, 82.
¹³⁶ Ibid, 52.
Though he is Jewish and prone to doubt, Levinson hides those qualities to solidify his status as a New Soviet Man.

This fictional dichotomy played out historically through the biographical divide between Babel as diarist and novelist. In his novel, Babel keeps his doubts to himself; but when he writes privately, he speaks candidly. The contrast between Babel and Levinson is a valuable avenue to explore. Where Babel struggles to fit in with the Cossacks, Levinson glides in seamlessly. In one of the opening scenes, a group of peasants, who see Levinson as a mediator and sympathetic set of ears, greet him enthusiastically. Levinson’s integration parallels the unrealized wish of younger generations of radical Russian Jews who “went” to the Russian people in the 1870s in hopes of converting them to radical politics. Most of these ventures ended in failure when the revolutionaries realized the persistence of anti-Semitism among the populace.

In Fadeyev’s reinvention of this history he establishes Levinson as a New Soviet Jew and a distant cousin to Lasik Roitschwantz or Lyutov. Robert Maguire, in his study of the literary journal Red Virgin Soil, suggests that Levinson is “Lyutov’s wish fulfillment.” Because he demonstrates that individuals, despite ethnic particularity, can become good Bolsheviks and support the Soviet state, Levinson is also a Bolshevik wish fulfillment. As a Jew, he is unique because to his men, “the distinctive thing about him was the fact that he was in command,” while Babel’s Lyutov deals with the reality that to the Cossacks, his un-commanding Jewishness defines him. While Jewishness holds back Lyutov, Levinson transcends its limitations. Where Lyutov killed a goose to solidify

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137 Ibid, 37.
139 Maguire, 340.
140 Fadeyev, 50.
his masculinity among the Cossacks, Fadeyev ups the ante by depicting Levinson killing a pig. Lyutov intellectualizes his action, while Levinson thinks little of it. In this moment, Fadeyev links Levinson’s assertion of masculinity with his repudiation of Jewish ritual tradition. His New Soviet “square-jawed ruthlessness” has little in common with bespectacled Lyutov.

Levinson defines himself through his commitment to Bolshevism and avoidance of anything Jewish. As part of a new generation of Jews, Levinson is remarkably different from his stereotypically Jewish father. The memory of his father, described as a second-hand furniture salesman, a poor fiddler, and someone who “had dreamed all his life of becoming rich,” embarrasses Levinson who hopes to prevent his men from finding out about this past. Fadeyev clarifies Levinson’s separation from a Jewish past when he reflects on his childhood: “the only thing he could clearly see in the past was an old photograph of a skinny Jewish boy...who looked...at the spot in the camera where he had been told a pretty little bird would fly out.” In this allegory of Marxist discovery, Levinson sees his own separation from the boy in the photograph who had been tricked by both the promise of a bird and the other lies that “many people spend their lives waiting for.” As a committed Bolshevik, Levinson links the photograph to a backward past embodied by his father’s Jewishness.

Levinson’s reflection suggests the intensity of his abstract relationship with the past. He does not reminisce warmly but finds something as easily discardable as a photograph. The photo contains a deceitful memory linked to an undesirable past, which

141 Ibid, 112.
142 Brown, 136.
143 Ibid, 52.
144 Ibid, 148.
has no enduring effect on and importance for Levinson. Significantly, this is the first and only moment when Fadeyev identifies Levinson as Jewish; and its use in reference to a fraudulent past further solidifies Levinson’s detachment from his past and its traditional Jewish life. His present commitment to Bolshevism defines his identity, as Fadeyev describes. “there would have been no Levinson at all, but someone else, if he were not urged by an overpowering desire, to live to see men stronger, kinder and more beautiful.”145 His religious dreams take shape as a just, socialist future rather than ones tainted by Judaism; and with Jewishness as a superficial ethnic detail, Levinson’s most salient characteristic is this faith in Bolshevism’s transformative power to elevate human beings.146

But even though Levinson departs from most Jewish stereotypes, Fadeyev relies on fragments of the past when constructing him. Fadeyev alludes to the positive qualities of a Jewish heritage by imposing a Jewish intellectual tendency on Levinson. One of Levinson’s most powerful moments is when he inspires his men before battle, where he “bent forward abruptly, and his last word flew from him like an uncoiled spring, so that everyone suddenly felt merciless iron fingers grip his throat.”147 Fadeyev connects Levinson to an actual example of Jewish revolutionary leaders embodied most clearly by Leon Trotsky, whose notable speaking skills Isaac Babel highlighted in his story “Line and Color.” Trotsky and Levinson defy notions of Jewish weakness and inability to commit to the Soviet state through their stereotypically intellectual quality. Though their

145 Ibid, 147.
146 Rufus Mathewson argues that Levinson himself is “not the new man...[but] is keeping alive the strain that will ultimately issue in the higher human type he dreams of.” Rufus Mathewson, The Positive Hero in Russian Literature (New York: Columbia University Press, 1958), 196.
147 Fadeyev, 80.
role as leaders or agitators defines them, their speaking skills still demonstrate a Jewish inclination for rational thinking.

Despite his stereotypical qualities, Levinson fulfills the faith behind the Nationalities Policy that ethno-national individuals can fully devote their energy to the Soviet state. Levinson succeeds in the Soviet state because the stereotypically intellectual tendency of Jewishness shapes him without providing him any religiously Jewish substance. Fadeyev describes his interrogation of a Russian scout and compares him to an "old wolf of the taiga which...still compels its pack to follow its lead by the sheer force of indomitable wisdom inherited from past generations." Judaism does not hold him back because he extracts elements of its intellectual tradition: he has inherited the ability to achieve wisdom from his ancestors without internalizing any of their actual wisdom. When Levinson looks at Morozka, one of his tougher, more traditionally Russian men, he demonstrates his intellectual propensity: "took in Morozka, boots and all, seeing in him many things of which, perhaps, Morozka himself felt unaware." Levinson’s Jewish intellectualism endows him with a class-consciousness that allows him to truly understand the world. Ironically, Levinson’s ethnic heritage prompts him to move away from the specificities of that heritage. In Fadeyev’s contentless positionality—where Jewishness provides an individual with a social position and way of being in the world but does not supply them with specifically religious content—Jewishness shapes Levinson to reject Judaism for Bolshevism. This is indeed Bolshevik wish fulfillment:

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148 Ibid, 28.
149 Ibid. 8.
Levinson, a non-practicing Jew with a loose connection to his heritage, embraces his ethnic identity through being a leader in the battle for Bolshevism.\footnote{Whether or not Anna’s connection to Judaism provides her with anything positive is not as explicitly laid out as in \textit{The Rout}. I find it compelling to see her humane qualities and her intellectual tendencies connected to her Jewishness, but the text leaves it unclear.}

Fadeyev honors the unique potential for Jews in the Soviet state and demonstrates that all ethnic groups can contribute distinctively. The Nationalities Policy sought not to vanquish ethnic difference but to minimize its divisiveness and utilize its loyalties; and Levinson embodies its end goal. However, since such celebration solidified ethno-national difference, it imported the past into the present. Levinson’s men allude to his ethnic background when they describe him as “a man of a special, superior breed.”\footnote{Fadeyev, 50.} While such a statement aims to support the idea of diversity in Russia, it invokes racial essentiality and produces racialized subjects. Levinson’s Jewishness makes him better suited to be a leader of men and the soldiers admire him for utilizing his potential. But in this tribute, Fadeyev confirms stereotypes about Jewish intellectualism and demonstrates that Levinson is not entirely free from a Jewish past.

**Mikhail Sholokhov and the Soviet Jew as Learner**

While Levinson is as an assertive leader from the beginning of \textit{The Rout}, Mikhail Sholokhov’s \textit{And Quiet Flows the Don} demonstrates Anna’s transformation and ideological maturation over the course of the novel. Her politics remain consistent throughout but ideology becomes a more natural part of her daily actions. When she joins the regiment to train as a machine-gunner and works with Bunchuk, the violence of war horrifies her: “Anna dropped her field-glasses and groaned, covering her terror-stricken
eyes with dirty palms.”¹⁵² The battle is so grotesque that she physically reacts to its horror.¹⁵³ Bunchuk coaches her, “there can be no sentimentality, once it is a question of the fate of the Revolution.”¹⁵⁴ Like a proper Soviet, Bunchuk speaks to the triumph of ideology over instinctual reaction and the potential for Bolshevism to reorient how an individual experiences the world. If Anna is to become a New Soviet Woman, she must understand life differently to conquer stereotypes of being a woman and a Jew.

After nursing Bunchuk back to health from typhus, she demonstrates this internal shift. Though Anna becomes emotionally attached to him and a springtime romance sits on the cusp of blossoming, she articulates a triumph of human reason over natural, emotional inclination: “out there life is fermenting. It calls for the application of all one’s strength, and I think at such times feeling dissipates our concentration on the struggle.”¹⁵⁵ In The Stormy Life of Lasik Roitschwantz, Lasik’s loss of class-consciousness when he sees an attractive woman demonstrates his failure to integrate ideology with his natural reaction. Anna keeps class ideology firmly in mind; she explains that, in spite of the rebirth of both spring and Bunchuk, they must not let instinct affect their commitment to Bolshevism. Though it would be easy to fall into a traditional romance with Bunchuk, they must resist temptation in order to work for Bolshevism. Anna further explains how one must act in the face of love: “we must be wholly absorbed in this struggle for liberation, we must—must fuse with the collective group and forget ourselves as isolated parts.”¹⁵⁶ By arguing against the potential tyranny of romance, Anna establishes the

¹⁵² Sholokhov, 430.
¹⁵³ The physical reaction to violence is reminiscent of Lyutov’s nausea after killing the goose. Both situations imply that Jewishness creates a naturally Jewish internal state averse to violence.
¹⁵⁴ Ibid, 430.
¹⁵⁵ Ibid, 479.
¹⁵⁶ Ibid, 480.
importance of Bolshevism over natural habit. She has so thoroughly integrated its principles into her life that she can maintain focus despite her blooming sexual and emotional relationship with Bunchuk. Since love could detract from individuals' commitment to the Bolshevik project, Anna wants their concentration to remain on the creation of a socialist society. Here, Anna triumphs over traditional conceptions of women as excessively emotional. In order to be a New Soviet Woman, she must forfeit a stereotypically female emotional self and orient a logical persona toward Bolshevism; and in Anna's internal life, reason wins out over biology or emotion, and she confirms her position as a New Soviet Woman.

By separating Anna from traditional Jewish practice, Sholokhov leans her even closer to being a New Soviet Woman. Anna's mother, however, is a different case; when Bunchuk meets her, her Jewishness is immediately visible: "slightly hooked nose...rheumatically contorted fingers...noticeably Jewish accent." Sholokhov makes it clear that she lives between two worlds when she speaks to Bunchuk in Russian but to Anna in Yiddish. Though she understands both languages, Anna uses Russian consistently to escape the limitations of Jewishness and assert her Soviet identity. Her knowledge of Yiddish adds specifically Jewish elements to her character but highlights its minor role in her identity. She keeps Jewish particularities inside the home but even uses Bolshevik language there—she introduces Bunchuk to her mother as "my comrade." Anna continues to demonstrate that Jewishness need not interfere with her being a New Soviet Woman. She asserts, like Levinson, that socialism stands in for Judaism as her religion. In a conversation with Bunchuk after he has recovered from

157 Sholokhov, 490.
158 Ibid, 490.
typhus, she plaintively dreams of a better future: “and won’t life be beautiful under Socialism?” She does not want to be a distinctly Jewish woman like her mother but to be a part of the larger struggle for a more just world. Anna becomes a New Soviet Woman because she defines herself through her commitment to Bolshevism rather than through Jewishness.

Yet, akin to Levinson, Anna cannot so easily avoid the past. Even as she commits to Bolshevism and avoids Jewish particularity, she still behaves stereotypically in her preference for an intellectual life. Though she had initially hoped to learn how to use a machine gun, she decides that she ought to do something different: “agitation is more in my line than machine guns,” she explains to Bunchuk. Ironically, her decision to avoid the battlefield in some ways confirms Bunchuk’s initial comment about Jews: “the Jews have a certain reputation... only do all the ordering and never go under fire themselves. This is not true, and you will prove splendidly that it isn’t true.” Anna’s function in the narrative parallels her function as a cultural symbol. Bunchuk, articulating the dream of both Jewish and non-Jewish Bolsheviks, hopes that she will demonstrate that Jews can participate in war as vivaciously as their non-Jewish neighbors. Such a reality would validate the Bolshevik theory about nationalities, but Sholokhov implies that Jews are better behind desks than behind guns and reiterates the stereotype of Jewish weakness witnessed in Ehrenburg and Babel. Her Jewishness interferes with her transformation into a Bolshevik soldier.

159 Ibid, 480.
160 Ibid, 481.
161 Ibid, 426.
162 Her move to propaganda also suggests that, for Sholokhov, though women can overcome certain stereotypes, there are limits to their transcendence.
Permanent Jewishness

Though Fadeyev and Sholokhov both put forth positive Jewish characters who shirk Jewishness, they still depend on Jewish stereotypes and make it clear to readers that these are ethnically Jewish characters. Both apply quasi-mystical qualities to the Jewish characters through descriptions of their eyes. Fadeyev writes of “that strange look in Levinson’s eyes. Large and deep as twin lakes” and gives him “a sixth sense, like a bat in the dark.”¹⁶³ Even though Levinson is an esteemed leader, he is still a foreigner, and his Jewishness envelops him in an exotic mystery. Both Levinson and Anna conform to stereotypes of Jewish shortness and frailty—Bunchuk even reads Jewishness in “the shape of [Anna’s] ears.”¹⁶⁴ The Jew may participate in Bolshevism but still sticks out as a Jew.

Such stereotypical descriptions undermine the reader’s ability to read these fictional exploits as plausible realities. Will there be a place for Jews in Soviet Russia if the Jews most disconnected from a Jewish past still stick out “like a gnome from a children’s fairy tale?”¹⁶⁵ This puzzling comparison introduces the question of whether or not The Rout and And Quiet Flows the Don present realistic portraits or the pipe dreams of their authors. With Anna’s “wild beauty…the bottomless depth of her black irises,” will she truly find a place in this new socialist state that she dreams of so fervently? The strangeness of the characters in some ways foreshadows the broken promises of Soviet Russia to its Jewish population. Though Bolshevism suggested that they could be equal participants in this new national project, Jews always were to find themselves still marked by their Jewishness.

¹⁶³ Fadeyev, 8, 27.
¹⁶⁴ Sholokhov, 426.
¹⁶⁵ Ibid, 90.
There is tragedy in these characters at the end of the novels: Anna dies as a result of a "beautiful yet surely useless gesture" when she charges thoughtlessly against a White Army brigade;¹⁶⁶ and a Japanese regiment massacres Levinson's brigade and leaves him with only nineteen men and the sense that he has lost his leadership abilities. Just as in *The Stormy Life of Lasik Roitschwantz* and *Red Cavalry Stories*, the novels conclude with corpses. However, Sholokhov and Fadeyev depict characters who evade their Jewishness but are still doomed. The tensions of their novels mirror the paradox of the 1920s as the longing for a future and the eternality of the past split Anna and Levinson. Babel and Ehrenburg are more explicit in their idea of how Jewishness plays out: they acknowledge that Jewishness persists and precludes Lasik, Lyutov, and "New Soviet" Jews from a happy or easy future. The four protagonists do not dwell in a Soviet paradise but must live and die in relation to their Jewishness. The Bolshevik hope for a future of ethnic irrelevance dies in all four novels as the permanence of Jewishness, whether in a physical form or in a mode of being, endures even in bodies that have tried to eradicate that difference.

¹⁶⁶ Sholokhov, 527.
CONCLUSION

In her study of Russian-Jewish literature from 1860 to 1940, Zsuzsa Hetenyi takes issues with Saul Bellow’s alleged reduction of Babel’s Russianness in the introduction to Great Jewish Short Stories; she paraphrases and then quotes Bellow, and afterward challenges his claim: “[Bellow] raises the question as to why, if Babel knew Yiddish well enough to be able to write in Yiddish, he still chose for his works Russian, the language ‘of his oppressors, of Pobedonostev and the Black Hundreds? He wrote in Russian from motives we can never expect to understand fully...Who was Babel? Where did he come from? He was an accident.’ Saul Bellow is wrong several times over. It was not an accident that Babel wrote in Russian; it was his mother tongue.”

Hetenyi is correct in asserting that Babel logically would write in Russian—he wanted to be a part of the Russian future and sought to not be held back by an archaic Jewish past. But if Bellow were actually dismissing Babel’s Russianness as a tangential detail, one might feel compelled to applaud him for his ironic inversion of Sholokhov’s and Fadeyev’s reduction of Jewishness to a circumstantial, ethnic detail; but Hetenyi misses Bellow’s larger point by cutting the quote short. Bellow continues after calling Babel “an accident,” “We are all such accidents. We don’t make up history and culture. We simply appear, not by our own choice. We make what we can of our condition with the means available. We must accept the mixture as we find it—the impurity of it, the tragedy of it, the hope of it.” Bellow’s point does not diminish the importance of Russianness for Babel but emphasizes the degree to which he—and all of us—are shaped by historical contingencies out of our control.

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167 Zsuzsa Hetenyi, In A Maelstrom (New York: Central European University Press, 2008), 3. I have placed Bellow’s words in italics for maximum clarity.
168 Sicher, 71.
While Babel can be considered a Jewish writer, his Jewishness did not arise in a vacuum but came to life in the unparalleled world of Russia. Isaac Deutscher’s *The Non-Jewish Jew* expounds upon the uniqueness of the Russian Jewish experience: “to look at the Jewish problem in Russia through the prism of Jewish life in Western Europe, is to see with distorted vision... You must not for a single moment imagine that Jewish life and the Jewish community in Eastern Europe and in Russia resembled in any way the Jewish community in England, in France, or even in the United States.”¹⁶⁹ Deutscher points to a combination of factors that distinguish the Russian Jewish experience: Jews in Western Europe were largely bourgeoisie, while Jews in Eastern Europe were poor workers; Jews in Western Europe experienced emancipation during the 17th and 18th centuries, whereas Jews in Eastern Europe had to wait until the Revolution; and, among other factors, with emancipation came assimilation for Western European Jews, while most Eastern European Jews remained unassimilated past the Revolution.¹⁷⁰ To lump Jews together as a homogenized group reduces the diversity of their experiences. One can read Anna, Levinson, Lyutov and Lasik within the history of modern Judaism—but to truly understand their nuances and complexities, one must read them primarily within the history of Russian Judaism.

The 1920s in Russia are not simply the background to these novels but the cultural moment that the authors digested and interpreted in their work. Their novels are social commentary that reflect the political and cultural aspects of their time, and they are philosophical testaments to the universal struggle of humans to change in the face of overwhelming odds. But they are also historical products. Only the atmosphere of Russia

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¹⁷⁰ Ibid, 61-2, 66.
in the 1920s could have birthed these novels, and only these novels allow us to fully understand Russia in the 1920s.
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