

УДК 821.161.3-3.09(092)Быков В.: (=411.16)

Еврейские протагонисты в творчестве В. Быкова: Вторая мировая война

Гимпелевич З.
Университет Ватерлоо, Ватерлоо (Канада)

В статье рассмотрена проблема еврейского населения в творчестве белорусского писателя В. Быкова и ряде работ литературоведческой и критической направленности.

Материал и методы. Работы исследователей, посвященные проблеме еврейского населения, а также произведения В. Быкова, в которых представлено отношение к еврейскому населению, в частности проживающему на территории Беларуси. В исследовании использованы описательный метод, метод сплошной выборки, метод рефлексивного анализа и др.

Результаты и их обсуждение. Современные исследования констатируют интерес к проблеме национальной и культурной идентичности народа. Ученые по-разному рассматривают жизненный путь еврейского населения и его представленность в художественной литературе. В произведениях В. Быкова образ еврейского народа занимает особое место. Автором созданы высокохудожественные и достоверные образы еврейских персонажей. В отличие от общепринятого в советской литературе и литературоведении канона к изображению евреев, белорусский писатель смог проиллюстрировать особенности их религиозного видения и этнического происхождения, выделив спектр характерологических признаков высокохудожественного и достоверного изображения еврейских персонажей.

Заключение. Как и многие белорусские писатели, В. Быков в своем творчестве использовал прием стереотипизации при изображении героев произведений, создавая типичных персонажей с теми или иными характерологическими чертами. Демонстрируя жизнь еврейского населения Беларуси, автор предпринял попытку доказать, что жизнь каждого человека бесценна и достойна уважения и памяти.

Ключевые слова: В. Быков, еврейского население, Великая Отечественная война, персонаж, творчество, личность.

(Ученые записки. – 2018. – Том 25. – С. 62–70)

Vasil Bykaŭ's Jewish Protagonists: World War II

Gimpelevich Z.
University of Waterloo, Waterloo (Canada)

The article covers the problem of the Jewish population in the works of the Belarusian writer V. Bykov and a number of literary and critical works.

Material and methods. The work of researchers devoted to the problem of the Jewish population, as well as works by V. Bykov, in which the attitude towards the Jewish population, in particular, living on the territory of Belarus, is presented. The study uses a descriptive method, a method of continuous sampling, a method of reflexive analysis, etc.

Findings and their discussion. Modern studies indicate an interest in the problem of the national and cultural identity of the people. Scientists differently consider the life of the Jewish population and its representation in fiction. In Bykov's works the image of the Jewish people occupies a special place. The author created highly artistic and authentic images of Jewish characters. Unlike the generally accepted in Soviet literature and literary criticism the canon for depicting Jews, the Belarusian writer was able to illustrate the features of their religious vision and ethnic origin and revealed characterological traits of a highly artistic and reliable depiction of Jewish characters.

Conclusion. Like many Belarusian writers, V. used a stereotyping means when depicting the characters and creating typical ones with some or other definite traits. Demonstrating the life of the Jewish population of Belarus, the author made an attempt to prove that any person's life is priceless and worthy of respect and memory.

Key words: Bykov, Jewish, Great Patriotic War, character, creativity, personality.

(Scientific notes. – 2018. – Vol. 25. – P. 62–70)

Many fine writers represent contemporary Bielarusian literature, but the novelist, essayist, short story writer, and literary critic Vasil Uładzimiravič Bykaŭ (1924-2003) is undoubtedly the best-known Bielarusian author. There are numerous worthy monographs and articles dedicated to his life and work. [1] These studies examine his writings about World War II and peacetime, where Bykaŭ found original ways of looking at lives and deaths of his contemporaries with a hard-earned sensibility. All of his critics in a noted bibliography could sign under Thomas Bird's pronouncement: "Bykaŭ has not merely written about the demands of conscience. He has practiced that difficult craft. . . . He is that rare twentieth-century being – a person possessed of uncompromising belief in moral absolutes." [2, 2] Indeed, Bykaŭ always stood up for the truth and any deserving underdog notwithstanding considerable personal burdens.

Material and methods. Despite above-noted attention to his life and creative works, there is still one underdeveloped topic in literary criticism, i.e., Vasil Bykaŭ's treatment of Jews (in particular Jewish Bielarusians) in his life and creative writings. There is only one monograph, written by Jacob Blum and Vera Rich, *The Image of the Jew in Soviet Literature: The Post-Stalin Period*, which focuses on Russian and Bielarusian Jewish characters in their corresponding sections about Soviet Russian and Bielarusian literature. [3] Vera Rich's part, "Jewish Themes and Characters in Bielarusian Texts," turns the reader's attention to Bielaruś, and till recent it was the only literary criticism in English dedicated to this topic. There are two articles, dedicated to Bykaŭ's writings about Bielarusian Jews, one in Bielarusian by Wolf Rubinčyk [4] and the other is in English by Z. Gimpelevich [5]. While Vasil Bykaŭ is one of the major representative of Slavic literary culture, majority of Bykaŭ translations into English do not transpire his literary talent. Thomas Bird's feelings about the generally weak translations of Bykaŭ's writings is shared by many critics: "Subtle in technique and psychological sensitivity, he has not been consistently well served by translators who have frequently homogenized his writing, by removing specifically Bielarusian elements and softening the harshness of his realism." [2, 2] The current study aims at the above-mentioned tasks with intention to fill the gaps in Bykaŭ's treatment of his Jewish Bielarusian protagonists and to present some excerpts from his works in English translation.

Findings and their discussion. In a volume devoted to both Russian and Bielarusian literature, Rich's conclusions are substantially different from those in Blum's, who finds that most of Russian Soviet literature has been prejudiced to Jews. Rich, on the other hand, argues that, in general, Bielarusian Soviet literature often "shows considerable sympathy

for Jewish characters and this sympathy is reflected in the very considerable help extended to them by the Bielarusian heroes of these tales." [3, 241] However, even such a distinguished scholar as Vera Rich didn't elaborate on a unique characteristic of Bielarusian literature where many literary texts portray Jews *as equals* and without a trace of patronizing sympathy or overt antipathy. We will argue this point in connection with Bykaŭ's (mostly) military prose in the current text. Moreover, sentiments reflecting this attitude are fully elaborated in every line of the articles in the issue of *ARCHE*, and are crowned by Andrej Dańko's editorial statement: "Jews are an important element of Bielarusian identity." [6, 6] It is also important to note that independently of each other, Blum and Rich both singled out two different literary works by Bykaŭ about World War II as best examples of a highly artistic and authentic portrayal of Jewish characters in Russian literature in translation and original Bielarusian. However, neither Blum (who mistakenly considered Bykaŭ a Russian writer) nor Rich, fully articulated Bykaŭ's aversion to the pre-packaged template of Soviet literature, which was generally either silent about the Jewish population or just clumsy in its portrayal. While this Soviet-style treatment was acceptable to the ruling Communist party as well as to some systemic anti-Semitic expressions – which often coincided after WWII – Bykaŭ's works were contrary to these tendencies. Together with many of his friends and colleagues, for example, Aleś Adamovič and Ryhor Baradulin, he inflicted a blow to the Soviet literary canon. Bykaŭ thoughtfully turned away from the Soviet canon not only in depicting Jews, but also in portraying people of other religious and ethnic backgrounds. His battlefield stories are heavily populated with characters of many nationalities, including Germans who sometimes accidentally found themselves in the same trenches with the Soviets. In Bykaŭ's works, these Soviet and German soldiers, ordinary people, often helped each other with genuine human kindness and compassion. Among many such sympathetically depicted characters, there is a young, hard-working assistant cook, Carl in the *Sign of Misfortune* (1982), who treats the Bohačkas family humanely, and gets reprimanded for that by his Nazi bosses. Engel, the middle-aged schoolteacher of *The Dead Feel No Pain* (1965), hates war, but follows the orders of his superiors. One of my favourite examples of this sympathetic presentation of ordinary Germans and Soviets soldiers is a semi-humorous episode in the otherwise dramatic narrative of *His Battalion* (1975). A German soldier turns up in the same dugout as the Soviets, and when the others suggest killing him, stands up for that German: "No, no way, do not dare to touch him – Aūdzuškin said firmly. He saved me... he is a good Hans. If not for him, I would've choked to death on my own blood in this dugout." [7, v. II, p. 350]

This is what Vasil Bykaŭ's literary career delivered for almost half a century: the truth about ordinary people in extraordinary circumstances. Jack Miller, in his excellent introduction to the Blum/Rich volume, touches upon the historical reality of Russian Jewry's short life in Russia proper (over 200 hundred years) compared to Bielarusian Jewry's roots in their homeland (over 700 years). He also underlines the vast difference in the treatment of Russian and Bielarusian languages in the former USSR: "Russian is, of course, the predominant language of the USSR in literature as in other spheres. It is heavily favoured both by the political authorities and by the economics of publishing. The Bielarusian language, which, in the last century, has become once again the vehicle of a literature, is on the defensive against Russian encroachment. Thus, a Bielarusian writer who uses that language rather than Russian is expressing a commitment to local values, and this may well influence his depiction of Jews, not necessarily to their detriment." [3, v]

In the article, "Changing a Canon: The Image of the Jew in Vasil Bykaŭ's Military Prose" [5] as in the current study, I, also concentrate mostly on Bykaŭ's works about that war. But of course, Vasil Bykaŭ used Jewish characters not only in his military prose. His interviews as well as the memoir type of autobiography, *Doŭhaja daroha dadomu* [8], and, above all, the writer's perfect emotional memory lists a long line of Jewish Bielarusians, starting with his school friends, continue with Jews of all walks of life, and friends of his dear parents. Thus, he often remembers his mother's best friend, Ryva, killed by Germans, and told me that not a day went by when his mother didn't mention Ryva. Wolf Rubinčyk in his "Jewish themes in Vasil Bykaŭ's works," noted many Jewish characters in the writer's peace-time works and his participation in anti-racial organizations. [4] Among them he noted Bykaŭ's standing in such public organizations as the Committee in commemoration of Nazi's Jewish victims. Bykaŭ also helped to publish memoirs of Hanna Krasnapiorka, one of a very few survivors of Minsk's two ghettos. Rubinčyk quotes an excerpt of Bykaŭ's speech, dedicated to commemoration of 50th anniversary of one of the ghetto's annihilation: "And if Bielarusians are intend to be considered good and decent people, this is due to a significant contribution of our Jews, who lived with us for centuries. We lived well together for so long because in essence we are the same people. We are the people of Bielaruś." [4, 202] Rubinčyk's article also examines Bykaŭ's last short story, "Na balotnaj ściażynie," where Ryma Barysaŭna, a Jewess, teaches Bielarusians language in local school. This simple fact Bykaŭ raises to the level of a heroic deed simply because other teachers were afraid even to touch this subject due to a fear to prosecutions for nationalistic actions. Thanks to Ryma's work (and

Bykaŭ, had always had a soft spot for Bielarusian teachers), Bielarusian children learn their native language: "Pre-war generation of locals went to the war with a fluency in their native language thanks to that Bielarusians Jewess. Ryma Barysaŭna is in the same common grave, where all the shtetl's Jewish population was shot. Only one of them wasn't a Jew: an old teacher of math, Stanislaŭ Albertavič, her father-in-law, grandfather of her Uladzik." [9]

Vasil Bykaŭ spent seven years in the military; he was first demobilized in 1947, only to be drafted again in 1949. His final freedom from the army came in 1955. By the early 1960s, Bykaŭ's individuality began to emerge with such forceful creativity that very soon he became one of the most prominent of the post-war Soviet writers. However, most of the "lieutenants' prose" representatives moved on to different themes over time while Vasil Bykaŭ's literary works continued to pay tribute to those who had lost their lives in such an untimely, and often senseless, fashion. My argument is that Bykaŭ's "return" to war – or the fact that practically he had never left that war, as Slavic literary critics such as D. Bugaev, I. Dedkov, L. Lazarev, A. Shagalov and others – might agree, came out of the writer's almost mystical belief that by writing about war he was defending peace.

Vasil Bykaŭ consecutively and incessantly commemorated and told the story of Soviet soldiers of various descent. Many of them were Bielarusian Jews. He, a consistent patriot of his country, considered his motherland to be a lawful place for every daughter and son born or adopted alike. One of the proofs of such tendency is that he almost single-handedly changed the canon of Soviet literary culture by frequently using Soviet Jews and other ethnicities as protagonists in his military prose. This was a challenge in itself since Soviets did not welcome Jewish and other non-Russian characters in literature. In fact, they inflicted a state anti-Semitism in the Soviet empire that flourished freely right after WWII. In terms of politics, Communist rulers refused to recognize Holocaust on Soviet territories. To them Jews were foremost Soviet citizens who were annihilated by the Nazis, and therefore their victimhood belonged exclusively to the state, not to the dead themselves or their kin.

The following review is based on Bykaŭ's six collected volumes, in which a Jew often plays a visible role in the plot of the writer's short stories, novellas, and novels. Due to the limits of space, we can only sparingly show how Vasil Bykaŭ portrayed Jews in his works and will be able to examine only a few Jewish protagonists in some details. These protagonists' role is predominately episodic and/or supportive in most of the narratives, but it is always visible, well delineated and skilfully rendered. While examining Bykaŭ's creative works we shall remember that he always used Bielarusian in his artistic works. This

conscious decision shows his personal courage and unwillingness to travel a well-trodden and opportunistic path. He showed an enormous and exemplary commitment to the Belarusian values of his times by re-introducing two major character types into his military prose, a Christian and Jewish Belarusian; these characters were remarkably inconspicuous at the start of his narrations. Despite their initial incognito, they played revealing and dominant roles in the unfolding plots of his works, starting with the writer's first short novel, *The Cry of the Crane* (1959).

Though V. Rich's study prompts the idea that Belarusian literature has been sympathetic to Jews and their difficult fate, I argue that V. Bykaŭ went much farther on in his treatment of the Soviet Jews. In these terms, I respectfully but strongly disagree with Rich's treatment of Barys Fišar's character, the only one of Bykaŭ's Jewish characters that she considers in her treatise. To Rich, Fišar, a PhD in art history, "appears to be the typical pattern: the oversensitive Jew, whose sensitivity renders him in some way unable to contribute his full efforts to the defense of the country." [3, 241] In fact, Fišar is anything but a Soviet-conceived canonical representative of a helpless, weak Jewish intellectual or a poor soldier. Despite his civilian appearance, Barys Fišar ends as a battlefield hero: he willingly gives up his life while warning his troops at the rear about the German advance. He also kills a German officer in an exchange of fire that he could have avoided but consciously had chosen not to. Barys Fišar, like many of Bykaŭ's other characters, had a choice. This choice was given to him by his superior, sergeant major Karpenka, who appointed Fišar as patrolman with an order to retreat as soon as he noticed an enemy approach. Instead, Fišar the soldier, chose to initiate a battle. In the eve of his own inevitable death Karpenka cannot stop thinking about Fišar, who changed his perceptions of those bespectacled, physically challenged (with an unhealthy narrow chest, prone to asthma and consumption) Jewish intellectuals. The narrator reveals Karpenka's last thoughts about Fišar: "The sergeant major was hopelessly trying to understand how he (Fišar) could have performed such a selfless and sacrificial act of bravery. Karpenka, who all his life respected simple, comprehensible, straight and physically strong people like oneself, for the first time has doubted himself. He felt the presence of some unknown force in the man, which definitely existed besides the familiar strength of muscle and the appearance of apparent determination." [7, v. I, 87-8] Karpenka, who at first came across as a typical, even canonical representation of a junior army officer, barely resembles this familiar type by the end of the short novel. In fact, none of the six soldiers in this novel act in a predictable manner, despite the fact that each of them initially seemed to represent the archetypes of different layers within Soviet so-

ciety. Among those six, who threw away their conventional selves, the most unexpected transformations happen in a Belarusian peasant, Vasil Hliečyk, and in a Soviet Jew with Belarusian roots, Barys Fišar. Hliečyk's and Fišar's biographies offer an additional thick layer of intimate knowledge of these characters, as if Bykaŭ, the artist, is using a different techniques while he draws portraits of Hliečyk and Fišar compared to the ways in which he depicts the other four protagonists. The other four characters are also brilliantly written while transformed in the end of the novel. However, the writer's deep knowledge of the Hliečyk and Fišar characters and the wholeness of their emotional worlds show the different palette that the writer used to create these two. Here we have a modernist, who is masterfully using contrasting, strong, rich colors together with bleak and pale ones as a foreground of his characters' biographies. Though the writer expects his reader to be educated in Soviet circumstances, he also inconspicuously brings up some additional information. Thus, it is stated that art historian Barys Fišar, unlike his brother, a successful scientist, is not involved in conformist politics. The attentive reader will immediately grasp the crucial meaning of this subtle detail. A Jew with a liberal arts background who managed to stay out of Soviet politics represents nothing less than the strongest form of resistance in the Soviet political and cultural system of the 1930s. With this seemingly impressionistic detail, Bykaŭ is clarifying how this apparent bookworm, the bespectacled Fišar, got his stamina to perform his heroic deed. In fact, this detail is also aimed at those who would create the myth of a meek and incapable Jewish soldier. Even the less suggestive biographical details about Fišar's life (his MD father, and his birthplace, Leningrad) carefully elaborate on the protagonist's cultural and ethnic background. During his father's youth, Belarusian Jews who aspired to a professional and artistic life would strive to go to Petersburg more than to commercial Moscow. It is also hard to agree with Rich's treatment of the role and symbolism of Benevento Cellini's *Autobiography* in the transformation of Fišar the artist and intellectual into Fišar the soldier. In Rich's perception, this book, which Fišar never parted with, was his security blanket, or even a pacifier. It seems, however, that Bykaŭ used this telling detail for a different reason. Besides being a world-renowned artist, sculptor, and goldsmith, Cellini was also a brave soldier. Keeping this in mind, the tattered pages of the *Autobiography*, left behind after the death of Cellini's modest student, should symbolize more than Fišar's inability to survive or "the wanton destruction of culture by the Nazis." In fact, I consider this symbol to be essential for understanding both the author's and this particular character's philosophy of life. Indeed, Bykaŭ had defied the odds in demolishing the archetypal images of

the Jew and the Bielarussian in *The Cry of the Crane*. Thus, Hlicyuk, initially appearing as a meek, subordinate, and powerless Bielarussian simpleton (with a telling first name, Vasil), not only turns into a military hero but presents original philosophical ideas. And for a Fišar-type, the *Autobiography* became a symbol of his role model and of endurance, a sign of continuity, meaning, and the survival of art. It also represents human dignity for Fišar, whose national archetype was treated improperly by popular hearsay and by some literary works. These perceptions could be attributed either to general ignorance or the political climate of the time, and Bykaŭ could abide neither. Indeed, all of Bykaŭ's Jewish protagonists, starting with Fišar, are treated with respect equal to that accorded to any other ethnic or religious group and individuals, portrayed in his prose.

Captain Trotsky, the commander of the battalion in Bykaŭ's short novel *The Third Flare* (1961) is an unappealing character. In this novel, Bykaŭ introduces an episodic but nevertheless familiar archetype of a Jew with the telling name of Trotsky (in the Russian edition this last name is changed to Protsky). Trotsky's character is the archetypal antagonist of Barys Fišar. Politically attuned to Soviet values, Trotsky, despite his lack of a biography in the novel, could be considered by some an even more typical of a Soviet Jew than Fišar. Notwithstanding his fleeting appearance in the novel, the role of Trotsky in both the plot of the short novel and the fate of each of the protagonists is enormous. Trotsky is characterized as "the regiment's strictest battalion commander." [7, v. I, 130] In fact, he is responsible for all the deaths in that novel because of his conscious decision to sacrifice servicemen from one particular artillery battery for the sake of the battalion's military task. Trotsky's thinking was pragmatically cruel: while this group will fall to the concentration of the enemy's fire, the rest of the battalion will have time to regroup and attack the Germans from the rear. Nothing, however, went as planned. Lazniak, the only survivor of the ordeal, a former Bielarussian partisan and the narrator of the short novel, is probably more familiar with the type of Jews like Trotsky than other servicemen in the battery. Trotsky, most likely, was an enthusiastic revolutionary in his youth, who ended up as any fanatic would: a cold-blooded monster. In fact, he looks like an excellent caricature of his famous namesake. Bykaŭ had the same disdain for this type of commanders, regardless of faith or nationality. In his short story "The Commander" (1995), he portrays the legendary Russian hero, Marshal Zhukov, as the epitome of senseless Soviet military cruelty. On the one hand, Captain Trotsky is a typical Soviet commander, and he is what he is, but not because he is a Jew. On the other hand, Trotsky is definitely breaking the Soviet canon of the weak, pathetic, and fragile Jewish soldier. After all, Trotsky, who

did not show much empathy for his soldiers' lives, did not care about his own either, and he was killed in the same battle in which his men died. Another fleeting Jewish character in this novel is Dr. Frumkin from Lazniak's partisan detachment. This character is as sketchy as the protagonist of a single paragraph could be. Apparently, he saved Lazniak's leg and his sanity by sending the emotionally unstable Lazniak to the hospital at the rear, where he was nursed back to health. Lazniak's mental condition was damaged by the scene, which he, the wounded partisan, had witnessed: the liquidation of Bielarussian villagers and the destruction of the village by Germans. While Lazniak recovered at that hospital where the partisan doctor sent him, he was nostalgic about Frumkin's primitive field hospital and felt that "doctors (at the rear) were strangers, unknown people; could they ever understand my soul's anguish?" [7, v.1, 135]. The novel openly shows why these two characters did not need spoken language in order to feel each others' common pain while others, the non-Bielarusians, cannot. Indeed, their adherence to local values and a common history of persecutions formed Lazniak's and Frumkin's oneness.

Couple of more characters of Jewish origin are described as someone who lives on in the memory of Lieutenant Ihar Ivanoŭski, a Bielarussian protagonist from Bykaŭ's novella *To Live until the Dawn* (1972). Ivanoŭski recalls how courageously Fix, an episodic character with whom he served during the first days of war, endured his terrible wound. That excellent military scout preferred to kill himself than be a burden to his comrades. Another cliché is undermined by Bykaŭ's subtle narration: Fix's appearance. This "light-eyed and light-haired athlete with the last name of Fix, who was fluent in German" [7, v. 1, 370] was familiar to Ivanoŭski, who grew up in Bykaŭ's school town, Kubličy. He reminded him a Bielarussian Jewish village smiths or millers. In addition to Fix, there is a youthful version of a Fišar-type protagonist in *To Live until the Dawn*, the young soldier Pivavaraŭ, whom Ivanoŭski lovingly calls Pivavarčyk. Through his neighbours, "čyk" is a familiar suffix to Ihar Ivanoŭski, Pivavaraŭ represents a line of "hidden" Jews in Bykaŭ's works. This type displays some typical Jewish physical features or characteristics, which hint at the origin of the protagonist without underlining it. These "hidden" Jews had a rather complicated mission in Bykaŭ's plots. By not singling them out overtly, the author shows the humanity of these characters and their typicality: each of them is just one among many. Trotsky is detested for his fanatical cruelty, and not by the writer but by other characters, and Fix is honored for his courage and sensitivity by his military comrades. Yet, if the character is likeable to the writer personally, he finds the way to reveal it. Bykaŭ's Jewish protagonists are not destined to be mostly negative types (as in the

works of Kochetov, Gavrutto, Shestov, Solzhenitsyn, and others) or mostly positive types (Paustovskii, Panova, Evtushenko, and Grekova). As with his “openly” Jewish characters, Vasil Bykaŭ’s “hidden” Jews equality is a given, and they confirm their ordinariness simply by their presence on the pages of Bykaŭ’s battlefield narrations. An indication at the author’s special treatment of the Pivavaraŭ is this character’s comprehensive biography and appearance. We learn that Pivavaraŭ is a typical mama’s son; his appearance is typically Jewish: he has a distinctive darker Jewish skin; the whites of his eyes are very bright, in sharp contrast to his darker pupils. He was raised by his mother, who lived first in Petersburg, then in Leningrad, and suddenly moved to a provincial city where she taught in a school. This is a familiar fate of the Jewish intellectual exile in these years. Physically, Pivavaraŭ is not strong, but he is an excellent serviceman with an inherent, almost biblical sense of duty. Despite his marginal military appearance, Ivanoŭski completely relies exclusively on Pivavaraŭ, and the lieutenant feels most comfortable only with this soldier: he fervently mourns Pivavaraŭ’s death before his own demise.

The second volume of Bykaŭ’s collected works in Bielarusian begins with his novel *Sotnikaŭ* (1970). Blum singled out Bykaŭ’s *Sotnikaŭ* as one of the few works in Russian literature that demonstrates Jewish courage. Blum discusses a Jewish child, Basia, who exemplifies humanity, humility, and courage. Basia just turned thirteen, and she was the only survivor of the Jewish massacre in her township. Caught by the Nazis and molested by the Bielarusian policemen, she did not name people who helped her hide after the massacre. As Blum points out: “Basia is bound to die, but she has the choice of dying in terror, a helpless victim, or bravely, as a responsible human being. She chooses the latter, betrays nobody and is hung along with Sotnikaŭ and all the others except Rybak.” [3, 48]. Blum also makes a case for the uniqueness of this particular work by Bykaŭ in comparison with everything else written in Russian and fails to note the Bielarusian origin of the work, the novel’s original language, Bielarusian setting, and the fact that the main characters are Bielarusians. While the critic’s treatment of Bykaŭ’s work as an exceptional phenomenon in general is obvious, the writer’s distinctiveness stems from Bykaŭ’s literary technique that shaped his own canon: his protagonists of all faiths had always had a choice. Of course, Basia, cruelly violated by policemen, had no choice in their treacherous acts, but they did. So had many village people who helped the girl to survive until she was accidentally found by police in her last hiding place. Blum also didn’t elaborate on villagers’ indignation with the German and Police cruelties towards the Jewish population, and there are plenty of illustrations of this in the text. It is also important to

note that Basia, despite being an episodic character is granted a full biography in the novel. This alone is a sign of an utmost respect and emotional closeness on the writer’s part. Though Blum missed Basia’s Bielarusian-Jewish origin, the critic noticed Bykaŭ’s uniqueness in breaking with the Soviet literary canon. For years, literary critics (and Blum is typical in these terms), have avoided Bykaŭ’s divergent characteristic: his works about WWII had been continually and exclusively dedicated to creation, development, and examination of a Bielarusian rather than a Russian character. And, as it also happened over seven hundred years earlier in real life, a Bielarusian Jew often stands together with his neighbour of Christian origin.

The novel *His Battalion* (1975) confirms the affinity and connections between Bielarusians and Jews in Bykaŭ’s military prose. *His Battalion* is narrated in the third-person, which gives the omniscient storyteller a tone of objectivity. Captain Vałošyn, the commander of the battalion, must have been Bykaŭ’s favourite protagonist, since the writer gave him a combination of the most becoming characteristics from his artistic treasure-box. Besides being of Bielarusian origin (born and raised in Viciebsk), Vałošyn was a student of Pen and Dabyžyński. The reader learns from Vałošyn’s mother last letter that both artists (academician and realist Pen and modernist Dabyžyński) praised Mikalaŭ Vałošyn’s considerable artistic talent. Despite this, and to the great disappointment of Vałošyn’s parents, he chose a professional military career. His father, who died early, was an accountant and his mother was a schoolteacher. Bykaŭ had a truly soft spot for teachers – the most valuable profession in the writer’s books – therefore, for decoding Vałošyn’s origins and the evolution of his character, his mother’s letter carries a considerable verisimilitude. First of all, in the Russian translation (1976) this letter replaces a rather disappointing love letter from the captain’s lover that appeared in the Bielarusian original. In this respect, the mother’s letter was a welcome addition, for it not just conveyed a meaningful and expressive mother’s love for her son but clarified the captain’s origin. This letter bears a striking resemblance to another mother’s letter found in Vasily Grossman’s magnum opus, *Life and Fate* (chapter. 18). [10] Grossman’s main protagonist, Victor Shtrum, is the physicist who shares some biographical characteristics with the famous Soviet physicist Lev Landau. Shtrum’s mother (like Vałošyn’s also a teacher), has written the letter before her inevitable death at the hands of the Germans. The remarkable connection of these letters is two-fold. On the one hand, the mother in each novel is well aware of her inescapable and imminent death, and of the fact that her letter is the last symbolic token of her motherly love. Despite the fact that Bykaŭ couldn’t know about Grossman’s novel which was prohibited

in the USSR at the time of writing his own, there is a great deal of similarity in which Grossman's and Bykaŭ's mother-characters identify themselves. The only reason for Shtrum's and Valošyn's mothersto die under Germans soon after writing their last letters was their Jewish origin. Though Captain Valošyn, whose patronymic is Ivanovič does not concentrate on his mother's origin, we know that Bykaŭ doesn't allow "accidental" details. The death of Valošyn's mother in Viciebsk, which was inhabited by many Jews before the Germans annihilated them, could not be explained by any other way.

In Bykaŭ's *His Battalion*, there are a few more protagonists who reflect on and enhance Valošyn's character but the most important is his orderly, Hutman. Indeed, he is the closest person to the loner Valošyn. In the novel, which is heavily populated with characters of all the nationalities of the former Soviet Union, he is an archetype of the ideal soldier. Hutman is honest, brave, and open. He speaks his mind, and is extremely resourceful. He is also a handyman, an ingenious, creative, sober, and witty individual who is inherently loyal to his commander, Valošyn. In short, sometimes Hutman is too good to be true. But Hutman cannot stand cowardice of Valošyn's second in command, lieutenant Markin. Thus, Valošyn is teasing Hutman in relation to Markin: "Oh, you had never been terrified?" "Me? Why? Indeed, I am often afraid. Nevertheless, saving my skin by hiding behind others? No, this I have never done." [v. II, 360] Both Hutman and Valošyn are wounded in the last bloody battle. Valošyn fought the final moments of the battle as a simple foot soldier because of Markin's sleazy machinations. Wounded Valošyn should be hospitalized; instead, he decides to return to the remnant of his battalion and sends Hutman with a group of wounded to the rear: "Till we meet again, Hutman," – said the captain, standing up. "Thank you for your service. And thank you for your friendship." – "Well, do not mention it, comrade Captain. God willing, we will meet again." [v. II, 369] The reader will never know Hutman's further fate. A high probability, however, is that he, as many other foot soldiers, will meet his end as his favorite commander did. Valošyn's death is revealed in the last chapter, which ends with a final short paragraph. It reads like an archival document, consisting of only one sentence. This paragraph shows a death certificate that, as Dedkov observes, sounds more like a funeral note addressed to the reader: "The commander of Infantry Regiment № 294, Hero of the Soviet Union Major Valošyn Mikalaŭ Ivanavič, was killed on 24 March 1945 and buried in a communal grave located 350 meters north-west of the town of Steindorff (Eastern Prussia)." [v. II, 369]

The next short novel in this volume, *The Accursed Hill* (1968), also has a couple of Jewish characters. One of them, the brave soldier Šnejder, is as

natural a part of the plot as is its narrator, Bielarussian Vasil Vasiukoŭ. The reader meets Šnejder when he translates during the interrogation of a captive, an SS officer. This lanky, somewhat clumsy soldier knocks down the SS officer who called him a "kike." The scene that follows shows Bykaŭ's explicit artistry in rendering the situation. Anańieŭ, the company's commander, is a "bit of an anti-Semite" himself, which means that he personally might be prejudiced against Jews in general but is fair and comradely disposed to those Jews he knows. After Šnejder's quick and violent response to the SS officer, Bykaŭ notes: "Anańieŭ rapidly laughed but this laughter was lacking natural merriment. Anańieŭ swiftly stopped laughing and repeated with the same false cheer: "– Great! Hey, absolutely great, Šnejder! Weren't you a boxer before the war?" – "I was a locksmith" – answered Šnejder with hardly reserved anger, and not taking off his piercing eyes from the German." [v. II, 409] It is clear that Šnejder is also angry with his commander for his insensitivity. Anańieŭ, however, later redeemed himself by making Šnejder responsible for the exchange of the SS officer for a Soviet soldier. With this act, Anańieŭ honoured Šnejder and put the SS officer in his place.

Most of Bykaŭ's partisan novels do not have major Jewish characters because the writer concentrated on ethnic Bielarussian partisan units acting in the area. However, practically every partisan doctor was a Jew, even if before World War II he or she was just a dentist, like Paikin in *The Wolf Pack* (1975). These doctors, Bykaŭ states lovingly in his writings, quickly learned surgery and all the necessary skills of military field medicine needed for the partisans' survival. [7, v. III, 166]

One of Vasil Bykaŭ's most personal works about occupied Bielarus is *The Sign of Misfortune* (1982). Indeed, it feels like the elderly couple, Ściapanida and Piatrok are his symbolic parents with reversed roles, where Ściapanida reminds the writer of his strict but just and hardworking father and Piatrok of his kind and soft-hearted mother. Bielarussian Jews are shown in the novel as a part of the country's natural landscape, damaged first by the tsarist empire, second by the Bolsheviks, and third by the Nazis. Thus the reader gets an intimate portrait of Liejba, the blacksmith, Piatrok's good friend, who had to leave the village because the Soviets expropriated his shop. They took over Liejba's smithy and now, twenty years later, Piatrok is nostalgic about this hardworking, honest, and fair person. Piatrok, remembering their friendship, feels that Liejba was the only one he could ever turn to in need because: "they had never had any problems, disrespect or misunderstandings." [7, IV, 36]

This nocturnal flashback differs greatly from Ściapanida's thoughts about the fate of Bielarussian Jews in their miastečka. The writer shows Ściapanida's

genuine horror, disdain, and revulsion for the Nazis' and the police's behaviour in the massacre of the miastečka's Jews. It was stated that Ściapanida became numb when she found out about the killings. There are also some ground-breaking ideas, which Ściapanida carries in her mind. They express her "politically incorrect" condemnation of the elders and leaders of the Jewish community, who kept the community together and, practically, handed it over to the killers. After the ghetto was established near the river, the Nazis, Biełarusian, and internal Jewish Police kept everything in German order and under control. Ściapanida recalls that: "People were saying: Oh, this situation will not last, they will kill us anyways, and we have to break out. Surprisingly, not a single one did. Everyone was sitting there and procrastinating. There were youngsters and even some wise individuals among them. Apparently these wise folks thought that Germans are humans too, and that they also have a faith in God (this is even written on their buckles), therefore they will not kill. These 'smart' ones spoke so well, and people listened to them. Obviously, if a person wants to believe, he will always find a justification; first he will convince himself and later, the others; or vice-versa. That is how the people of the township ended up in a quarry." [7, v. IV, 169] Once again, we should note Bykaŭ's courage for speaking the truth. Indeed, Biełarusian Jewish communities were firmly ruled by the elders before and after the tsars' partitions of the Biełarusian territories. These highly religious elders had tremendous power within the community, and therefore their role in the mass destruction should not be overlooked. Vasil Bykaŭ, who never underestimated the guilt of the Biełarusian police, the Nazis, and the Soviets in the Holocaust, does not absolve the elders of a Jewish community. He reveals those thoughts through his favourite protagonist, Ściapanida with such sincere pain, that the reader understands that these feelings moved beyond empathy or even sympathy into the heartfelt personal pain of unfulfilled responsibility.

The title of Vasil Bykaŭ's next novel, *The Quarry* (1985), suggests the place where Jews from *The Sign of Misfortune* could have been massacred. Four leading characters in this novel show their sincere pain for Jewish suffering. One of them, Baranoŭskaja, hides the main character Ahiejeŭ, who shares her disdain towards actions from Germans and local police. He is a wounded Red Army officer, and Baranoŭskaja (who taught school before the revolution), presented him as her son, who was killed during German shelling of Soviet evacuees. She is the widow of a priest, persecuted by the Soviets, therefore kind of trusted person by a new regime, which she herself detests for their treatment of "the people." We should note once again that Bykaŭ's character doesn't differentiate between Christians and Jews,

using the same word, "people" for naming both groups individually. Baranoŭskaja could have been unresponsive to the Jews, people of a different faith. Instead, she is full of compassion: "– Oh, what are they doing with the people! They gathered them all together. All of them, all of them... They did not leave behind a single soul; they took all of their possessions... They made me collect their grain too. Anything that was left was grabbed. – And where did they drive them to? – asked Ahiejeŭ. – Well, who knows? People say, to the railway station. They will send them somewhere. Others say: they will shoot them in the Harely marshes. – And what, no one was trying to run away? – How could you? They put guards with guns everywhere, on the streets and behind them." [7, v. V, 75] Baranoŭskaja also feels more affinity with the communist Volkaŭ than with Drazdienka, the Chief of Police, for Volkaŭ and Baranoŭskaia share the same sentiments about the Jewish massacre. According to the previous regime, Volkaŭ must have been her class enemy; however, he turns out to be a good person, who tried to help this widow during the difficult times of his party's persecutions of priests and their families. His views of the events are in tune with those of the priest's widow. Volkaŭ's answers to Ahiejeŭ's questions are brief, sober, helplessly painful, and truthful: "– What, will they be destroyed? – It looks like they will be.... – How appalling! – "Appalling" is not strong enough. It is a crime! One half of the town is dead. And they were living here for hundreds of years. At the local cemetery you will find many generations of Jews. – And nothing could be done? – What could be done? We were not ready. After all, we don't have enough strength yet. The struggle just has started." [7, v. V, 77] Ahiejeŭ and his lover Maryia are full of indignation about the fate of the local Jews. Nevertheless, because Biełarusians of a different faith are trapped under the Nazis occupation, mutual compassion was all they could offer each other at that time. The main thought that unites most Biełarusians under the Nazi occupation was already expressed by Pyotra, in Bykaŭ's *Sotnikaŭ*: "They started with the Jews, but they will finish with us." [7, v. II, 113] This perception symbolizes Bykaŭ's position on the communality of Biełarusians fate, based on its equality, similarity, and independence from different faiths. This position is also a central element of one of the writer's first and strongest anti-collectivization works of the Soviet and post-Soviet periods, *The Chill* (1969, 1991). The novel, set during the early days of World War II, features a peasant son, Jahor Azievič, who created a breathtaking career for himself during and after the collectivization. The reader learns about Azievič's past and his wartime present from the impartial voice of the omniscient narrator, who travels between Azievič's past and present, detailing this character's efforts to reflect on and evaluate

his actions. Certainly the protagonist's scruples were often jeopardized since career meant more for him than wellbeing of his own family and even his countrymen. The reader revisits Azievič's past through this character's own honest self-evaluation, while his present takes place during the first days of World War II. Jewish and Bielarussian names are often used in the narration of that novel. Some of these names make a single appearance; others are attached to an event or a period of Azievič's life as a backdrop or a highlight of his own biography. The most telling stories are dedicated to the NKVD actions. One of them is a short story about an elder, the religious Jew, shoemaker Isak, who rents a room in his modest dwelling to Azievič. Isak's home, two-rooms plus a cold den, had attracted the attention of the NKVD staff, which was growing astronomically, and was greedy for living space in Minsk. This capital city had been partly destroyed during World War I and the Soviet-Polish war. As the result, people like Isak and Jahor Azevič, were automatically deprived of the roof over their heads. Isak was arrested for reading Torah in his home, and was, probably, shot, while Azevič "voluntarily" left his rented room, knowing that otherwise he might share the fate of his elderly friend, Isak. This short novel was hard to publish during and even after the Perestroika in Bielarus. The novel made it by the last moment and with much censorship and considerable cuts into the final volume of Bykaŭ's six-volume edition in 1994. By 1994, the Bielarussian-Jewish exodus to the West was almost over, and Bykaŭ had practically stopped writing about wartime or pre-war situations, as he was fully involved in the democratization process of his country. However, his understanding about rightful Jewish presence in Bielarus had never diminished and was demonstrated many times in his private and public battles against anti-Semitism in his country. This included his leading role in "Bielarussian Chagall's affair."

Conclusions. Vasil Bykaŭ, like many Bielarussian writers of different generations (as presented and analyzed in my forthcoming book, *The Portrayal of Jews in Modern Bielarussian Culture* [11], used strong typical characters – Bielarussian, Jewish, and others. Each of his protagonist is based on the writer's life experiences, artistic vision, and moral convictions. By doing so, Vasil Bykaŭ changed Soviet war canon and left us with the hope that all victims of Stalinist and Nazi atrocities did not perish in vain.

Literature

1. There are too many to mention here. The most important critical material can be found in bibliography, notes (pp. 215-249), and indexes: Gimpelevich, Z. Vasil Bykaŭ: His Life and Works. – Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2005, 260 pp. // Vasil Bykov: Knigi i sud'ba. – Moscow: NLO, 2011, C. 396.
2. Bird, T. E. Introductory Word. – Zapisy– 1996 № 22– p. 2.
3. Blum, J. and Rich, V. The Image of the Jew in Soviet Literature: The Post-Stalin Period. London: Ktav, 1984, 276 pp.
4. Rubinčyk, W. Jaŭrejskija temy ŭ tvorčaści Vasil Bykaŭa" [Jewish themes in Vasil Bykaŭ's works]. Proceedings of international conference, *Ethnic, Language, and Cultural Variety in Modern Society*. Mahilioŭ: MDUX, 2014, C. 199–203.
5. Gimpelevich, Z. Changing a Canon: The Image of the Jew in Vasil Bykaŭ's Military Prose. – *Čajtšryft*– 2011 № 1 – pp. 135–58.
6. Daňko, A. Introductory Word. – ARCHE– 2000 № 3 – C. 6.
7. Bykaŭ, V. Zbor tvoraŭ u šaści tamach (Collected works in six volumes). – Minsk: Mastackaja lit., 1992-96. Hereafter in the text we will indicate a number of volume and a page.
8. Bykaŭ, V. Doŭhaja daroha dadomu (A long way home). – Minsk: Kniha, 2003, 464 pp.
9. Bykaŭ, V. Na bałotnaj ściažynie. – *Naša Niva* April 2 – 2001 – C. 9.
10. Grossman, V. Life and Fate. – The Harvill Press: London, 1985, 879 pp.
11. Gimpelevich, Z. *The Portrayal of Jews in Modern Bielarussian Culture*. (forthcoming)– Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2018, over 450 pp.

Поступила в редакцию 18.01.2018 г.