

To the Editor:

Marina Aptekman's review of my book *I Saw It: Ilya Selvinsky and the Legacy of Bearing Witness to the Shoah* (vol. 73, no. 3) contains a number of infelicities, several of which I note below, grateful as I am for the attention to my work. By January 1, 1941, Soviet troops had temporarily liberated the Kerch' peninsula, not the Crimean peninsula. The word *Jew* occurs twice in the text of Il'ia Selvinskii's "Ia eto videl" (I saw it). Selvinskii speaks of a "massacred Jewish woman" (*rasterzannaia evreika*). If this is not an explicit articulation of Jewish losses in a poem printed in the Soviet mainstream in early 1942, what is? Furthermore, while in Selvinskii's poem "Kerch'" the "dead" (*mertvetsy*) are not overtly identified as Jews, all four of the poem's witness-bearing personages—the "writer [Aleksandr] Romm," the "photographer" (most likely Mark Turovskii or Leonid Iablonskii), "myself" (Selvinskii), and the "critic [Veniamin] Goffenshefer"—are Soviet Jews. Could one claim to know who was "the first Soviet Jewish poet to see and witness" (698) the Shoah in the occupied Soviet territories, as Professor Aptekman asserts that I claim in my book? I don't believe so. What I suggest is that Selvinskii's "I Saw It" may have been the first published Russian-language poetic account of a massacre of Jews in the occupied Soviet territories. In writing on the price Selvinskii paid for what he had seen and written, I chose my words carefully.

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Professor Aptekman responds:

Professor Shroyer's explanations still have not convinced me of the validity of his main argument. Although I apologize for an accidental typo in writing "Crimean" peninsula instead of "Kerch'," I indeed do not think that the use of the word *Jew*, mentioned in the poem among other nationalities, can serve "as an explicit articulation of Jewish losses." Moreover, in an attempt to prove his argument, in the text of "I Saw It" published in his monograph, Shroyer decided to abandon powerful lines that describe a Christian victim of the massacre, an old female believer in the Virgin Mary who died side by side with a Jewish victim. In contrast to his statement, I believe that those lines prove that Selvinskii, very much in a Soviet manner, regarded the massacre at Bagerovo as a crime against humanity rather than against Jews only. Similarly, I find his notion that the poem "Kerch'" "articulates Jewish losses" due to the fact that the war correspondents mentioned in the poem all bear Jewish names to be extremely far-fetched: it still does not prove to me that Selvinskii wrote a poem about the murder of Jews. I think that his poem was inspired by a slaughter of innocent people, regardless of the nation they belonged to.

Shroyer's book now belongs to readers, and, being one of them, I expressed my opinion on it. I hope that this opinion will encourage others to read it too and decide for themselves.

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