Out of Odesa: Yefim Ladyzhensky and the "Odesa text" of Jewish-Soviet Culture

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Out of Odesa
Yefim Ladyzhensky and the “Odesa Text” of Jewish-Soviet Culture

An honors thesis by Beatrice Voorhees
in the Department of Slavic Studies
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2023

Connecticut College
New London, Connecticut
“My works, which are the fruit of a life full of suffering and hard work, are clearly needed by humanity and will find their Eternal Viewer. I sincerely believe in this with all my wounded and broken heart.”

- Yefim Ladyzhensky¹

¹ Ostrovsky, “A Life in Art,” 91.
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Abstract

This honors thesis analyzes the artwork of Odesan Jewish painter Yefim Ladyzhensky by incorporating information from his unpublished essay collection to contextualize selections from his body of artwork. Ladyzhensky was born in 1911 in Odesa, Russian Empire, and died in 1982 in Israel. He began his artistic career as a set designer, and branched into easel painting in the 1960s, later emigrating to Jerusalem. My project focuses on two major painting series of his, *Odessa of My Youth*, a collection of over two hundred paintings of childhood scenes, and *Red Cavalry*, based on Isaac Babel’s short story cycle of the same name. After emigrating to Israel in 1978, he dictated twelve essays musing on his artwork and childhood to his daughter. Some selections have been translated and published, but the majority of the essays remain untranslated and inaccessible to English speakers interested in the subject. Incorporating these insights from the artist himself, it is clear that his artwork and writings not only are a valuable primary source on the history of Odesa, but also emerge from and conversate with the “Odesa text,” primarily the work of writer Isaac Babel. The “Odesa text” is understood as a common urban discourse appearing in work by writers and thinkers such as Sholem Yankev Abramovitsh, Sholem Aleichem, Isaac Babel, Eduard Bagritsky, and Valentin Kataev. It posits Odesa as a sort of anti-St. Petersburg, a sunny, diverse, criminal, dangerous, and importantly Jewish urban space. I argue that Ladyzhensky’s paintings and drawings are a visual continuation of the literary “Odesa text.” This connection appears not only in *Red Cavalry*, which is a direct adaptation of Babel’s story cycle, but also in Ladyzhensky’s *Odessa of My Youth*. 
Acknowledgements

First, I would like to extend my deepest thanks to Laura Little, my thesis advisor. Without her constant support, advice, knowledge, and guidance, this project would not have been possible. The enthusiasm and willingness to help of Mark Kelner, a representative of the artist’s family, was also essential to this project. I must also thank Rob Ober, an artist himself and former gallery owner in my hometown, whose exhibition was how I discovered the world of Ladyzhensky’s works. I am also incredibly grateful for Liora Ostroff, curator-in-residence at the Jewish Museum of Maryland, who coordinated the 2022-2023 Ladyzhensky show for which I had the honor of contributing some translations. I would also like to thank Yevgeny Kalinsky for his wealth of knowledge on all things Ladyzhensky.

I also would like to thank Professor Sharon Portnoff of Jewish Studies and Professor Eileen Kane of History for serving as my readers and contributing valuable feedback on my work. As well, Brynn Bernstein and Val Rothstein’s readings and translations of the Hebrew in YL’s paintings have been very helpful. Finally, I am eternally grateful to my unofficial readers, Annika Brown and Amy Voorhees, for their detailed and thoughtful critiques, as well as the support of all my friends, family, Connecticut College faculty, and fellow students during this process.
Notes on Transliteration

I have used the Bowdoin College Russian Department’s transliteration system, which is a simplified Library of Congress system that omits diacritic marks and two-letter ties. For surnames (фамилии) that end in ий, I have chosen to represent that with “у.” For example: Ладыженский → Ladyzhensky, Островский → Ostrovsky. For names with a commonly accepted transliteration that does not agree with the above rules, I use the commonly accepted version. For example, “Isaac Babel” instead of the transliterated “Isaak Babel’.”

When referring to places in the contemporary nations of Ukraine, Poland, and Belarus, I use the current version of the place name, rather than any former equivalent. For example, I use the Ukrainian spelling “Odesa,” instead of the Russian spelling “Odessa,” and Kazakh “Almaty” rather than the Soviet “Alma-Ata.” When referring to cities who had different names under Soviet rule (i.e. Stalingrad/Volgograd, Leningrad/St. Petersburg), I use the current version. I have elected to use current spellings and versions of place names despite their incongruence with the lived experience of Ladyzhensky out of a desire for clarity to the modern reader and a sense of respect for current post-Soviet sovereign governments. However, in regards to Ladyzhensky’s series Odessa of My Youth and Babel’s short story collection Odessa Tales, I use the Russian spelling as both titles were originally written in Russian using the Russian spelling, and most anglophone works use that spelling. Additionally, to describe things and people originating from the city, I use “Odesan,” rather than “Odessite,” as it is sometimes rendered.

For dates predating the reform of the Russian calendar, I use new-style Gregorian dates rather than old-style Julian ones.

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Introduction

In 1977, artist Yefim Ladyzhensky (1911-1982) (Plate 23) burned more than two thousand of his own paintings before he left the Soviet Union for Israel. Ladyzhensky was born on August 3rd, 1911, in the Jewish neighborhood of Moldavanka in Odesa, which was then within the Russian Empire, though it would not remain so for long. His childhood years were ones of turbulence and unrest, as the First World War began just before his third birthday, quickly followed by the Russian Civil War, and then by the implementation of Soviet power in Odesa. As a young adult, he attended the Odesa Art Institute, and as an adult, became a Moscow-based scenery and set designer for theater productions. In the 1950s and 60s, he began to pursue easel painting in earnest. In 1978, he emigrated to Israel, following many of his family and friends. This emigration was not only a personal choice, but also a part of the larger emigration of Soviet Jewry from the USSR, which became possible after a series of trade and policy negotiations between the United States and USSR liberalized emigration policy. Yet Ladyzhensky’s vast oeuvre of works could not go with him freely. Exporting artwork from the USSR meant that each work was subject to exorbitant tariffs. To avoid financial ruin, Ladyzhensky destroyed much of his own work.

I first encountered Ladyzhensky’s work in the snowy winter of 2020, while I was working part-time at the Ober Gallery in Kent, Connecticut; quite far removed, in both time and space, from sunny Odesa of the 1910s and 1920s. His paintings intrigued me, especially the ones depicting scenes from Isaac Babel’s Red Cavalry cycle of stories. Further research connected me with Mark Kelner, representative of the artist’s family, and Liora Ostroff, the curator-in-residence at the Jewish Museum of Maryland, from whom I learned about Ladyzhensky’s writings. This project has been the culmination of my own academic interests in art, Russian language, and

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3 Guertzman, “Emigration of Soviet Jews.”
Eastern European history, and I have been honored to work with such powerful artworks and texts.

This thesis is an interdisciplinary study drawing on twentieth-century social, cultural, and artistic history, as well as Ladyzhensky’s own writings, to contextualize scenes from his artwork. In particular, this thesis focuses on his *Odessa of my Youth* (Gorod moego detstvo) and *Red Cavalry* (Konarmiia) cycles. Before his death, Ladyzhensky dictated twelve essays to his daughter, in which he describes the thought processes behind his paintings. These essays move freely between recollections of artistic analysis and process to encounters and stories from Ladyzhensky’s childhood. By including translated quotations from these largely unpublished works, I aim to further enhance the understanding of these paintings as a primary source on Jewish-Odesan twentieth-century history. In his visual depictions of the city and culture of his youth, Ladyzhensky not only recovers the past, but also contributes spectacular visual works to the “Odesa text” of Jewish-Russophone culture. Through an examination of Odesan cultural and literary history, I argue that Ladyzhensky is a visual heir to an established Jewish-Odesan literary practice of representing, imagining, and mythologizing the city itself.

Ladyzhensky’s own reflective writings on his artwork, beyond adding significant context and meaning to his artworks, also make it clear that he is operating within an established intellectual framework. These essays allow a fuller analysis of the role Jewish-Odesan thought, particularly that of writer Isaac Babel, plays in his artwork. They provide another lens with which to view Ladyzhensky’s oeuvre: as an intermedial dialogue with prominent Jewish-Odesan writers and thinkers.

Ladyzhensky’s surviving paintings, many of which depict prewar Jewish Odesa, matter today more than ever. As war continues to rage on Ukrainian soil, Russian military motive and
intention remains inextricably entangled in its falsified narrative of World War II. Putin initially justified this “special operation” (spetzoperatsiia) as an attempt to “denazify” the current Ukrainian government, a claim based on the collaboration between Ukrainian nationalists and the occupying Axis Powers. He claims that the Ukrainian government is still under the influence of neo-Nazis, and that “genocide” has been perpetrated by Ukrainians against ethnic Russians in the Donbas. Meanwhile, in 2020, the Russian constitution was amended to include “the Russian Federation honors the memory of the defenders of the Fatherland and ensures the defense of historical truth. Diminishing the significance of the heroism of the people in defending the Fatherland shall not be permitted.” This “historical truth” entirely ignores the significance of the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact, which allied the USSR with Nazi Germany for nearly the first two years of World War II. Furthermore, by creating a narrative whose emphasis is on the Soviet struggle, loss, and eventual victory over Nazi Germany, this interpretation of World War II minimizes the Holocaust and its impact on Eastern European Jewish communities in favor of a falsified national myth. Historical truth about the Second World War matters now more than ever.

Yefim Ladyzhensky’s writings reveal an Odesan Jewish community that is indelibly marred by tragedy.

Ladyzhensky’s paintings and writings are not only a dialogue with the Jewish-Odesan intellectual school, but also an act of recuperative nostalgia and reassertion of his own personal identity as an Odesan Jew. Marc Scheps, director of the Tel Aviv Museum, said that Ladyzhensky’s work and style was “a clever way to say ‘The Jewish life I want to depict is a kind of dream that almost doesn't exist anymore, and a kind of dream that comes from my

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4 Treisman, “Putin’s claim of fighting Ukraine Neo-Nazis distorts history.”
5 Treisman, “Putin’s claim of fighting Ukraine Neo-Nazis distorts history.”
6 Pistan, “Alarming Alterations.”
childhood.” The Odesa Ladyzhensky remembers and reconstructs in *Odessa of My Youth* is a Jewish city, a pre-revolutionary community that no longer exists as it once did, save for in the memory of Odesans. In terms of Jewish life within the Russian Empire, Odesa was the largest city Jews could freely live in within the boundaries of the Pale of Settlement, making it a Russian Imperial city with a singularly Jewish urban culture. The *Odessa of My Youth* series is a representation and definition of the shared experience and identity of Jewish Odesans, and stands as an artistic monument against the inevitable obliterating passage of time.

Ladyzhensky’s works are complex and layered; in one scene, there might be four or five interactions between different figures, and layered nuance and humor within the composition. To decode these works and analyze their meaning is by no means a finished task, and there is room for continued analysis of his writings and artworks. In the discipline of Russian, Eastern European, and Eurasian studies, where publications continue to be flooded with perpetual analyses of Tolstoy and Dostoevsky, and study continues to orbit primarily around the cultural centers of Moscow and St. Petersburg, I hope that this project will highlight understudied perspectives and histories.

To understand Ladyzhensky’s paintings, it is essential to understand the urban environment he painted, the cultural and historical context in which he grew up, and the literary and intellectual tradition with which he was familiar. For this reason, my first chapter includes background information on the history of Odesa, as well as describes the religious and cultural fabric of the city in which Ladyzhensky spent his childhood and teenage years. As well, I describe the “Odesa text,” the literary discourse surrounding the city. My second chapter delves into Ladyzhensky’s biography and artistic career, as well as what restrictions affected his artistic production in the USSR. My third chapter is an in-depth analysis of selections from the *Odessa* 

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7 Shipler, “Naive Vision.”
of My Youth series, incorporating information and insight from Ladyzhensky’s writings. I discuss the historical basis for the paintings and their connections to imagery of Odesa present within the “Odesa text.” In my fourth chapter, I discuss Ladyzhensky’s two Red Cavalry series, and compare them to the Babel text on which they are based. Through the examination of Red Cavalry, I examine Ladyzhensky’s and Babel’s interconnected works and their explorations of Jewish identity.
Chapter 1: Odesa and the “Odesa Text”

Since so much of Ladyzhensky’s work revolves around the city of Odesa, it is essential to understand Odesa’s history, culture, physical geography and intellectual traditions. His work, especially *Odessa of My Youth*, emerges from an established Odesan discourse of Russian, Yiddish, and Hebrew thought. This chapter provides an overview of pertinent historical events and an examination of the works that make up the “Odesa text.”

Born in 1911, Ladyzhensky lived through the most tumultuous events in twentieth-century history, both globally and within the Russian Empire/Soviet Union. The city of his childhood, Odesa, was deeply affected by World War I, the Russian Civil War, and the Bolshevik Revolution; later, the community in which he grew up would be devastated by World War II and the Holocaust. His life, career, and eventual emigration were shaped by vast historical and political forces, which is why they are important to understand when considering his work.

1.1 Odesa in the Russian Empire

The settlement later known as Odesa began as a village in the Ottoman Empire called Khadzhibey, founded in the 14th century. By the late 18th century, it had been fortified with a small garrison. In 1789, Russian forces under the command of military officer Jose de Ribas, a nobleman of Spanish origin, conquered Khadzhibey as part of a larger campaign against the Ottomans. Upon return to Moscow, de Ribas made the case to Empress Catherine the Great that the settlement’s nature as a warm-water port and proximity to the Danube, Dniester, Dnieper, and Bug rivers would make it an excellent location for a port. On May 27, 1794, the Empress issued an edict ordering the development of the port as a commercial center, and named de Ribas the

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9 King, *Odessa: Genius and Death*, 51.
10 King, *Odessa: Genius and Death*, 51.
chief administrator of the city.\textsuperscript{11} The name “Odessa” was chosen after an ancient Greek settlement called Odessos, following a tradition of choosing Greek-inspired names for new Russian settlements.\textsuperscript{12} These origins of Odesa as a Russian imperial city are reflected in the name of one of its main streets, Deribasovskaia Ulitsa, as well as the statues of de Ribas throughout the city.

The three Partitions of Poland in 1772, 1793, and 1795, divided the territory of the Kingdom of Poland between the Russian Empire, Prussia, and Austria, with the last partition removing Poland from the map altogether.\textsuperscript{13} Along with this territory, the Russian Empire acquired a vast Jewish population, a demographic that had been sometimes banned from the empire altogether in the past. To solve this issue, Catherine the Great issued three edicts restricting the commercial activity of Jewish subjects, which evolved into a strictly defined area outside of which most Jewish residents were not permitted.\textsuperscript{14} This new “Pale of Settlement,” the standard English translation of cherta postoiannogo zhitel’stvo evreev (Area of Jewish Permanent Settlement), included both the territory acquired from the Partitions of Poland, where most Jewish subjects were already living, and the Black Sea region acquired from the Ottomans, which the Russians were interested in developing rapidly.\textsuperscript{15} 16 The term “pale” is an archaic English word meaning “a territory or district within certain bounds,” often used to refer to the area of Northern Ireland ruled by the British beginning in the sixteenth century.\textsuperscript{17} 18 The edicts were initially intended to prevent Jewish merchants from posing competition in Russian markets,

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{11} King, Odessa: Genius and Death, 51.
\textsuperscript{12} King, Odessa: Genius and Death, 52.
\textsuperscript{13} Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica, “Partitions of Poland.”
\textsuperscript{14} Jewish Virtual Library, “Pale of Settlement.”
\textsuperscript{15} Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica, “Pale of Settlement.”
\textsuperscript{16} Jewish Virtual Library, “Pale of Settlement.”
\textsuperscript{17} Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary, “Pale.”
\textsuperscript{18} Klier, “Pale of Settlement.”
\end{flushleft}
with a secondary purpose to promote the settlement of the Black Sea region. Later, such laws grew even more restrictive and antisemitic in character.

However, it is also vital to note the vastness of the Pale; it was approximately 472,590 square miles, and included the majority of modern Lithuania, Belarus, Ukraine, and Moldova, as well as parts of Latvia and Poland. Nearly one-half (46%) of the world’s total Jewish population lived within its borders. However, while the Pale was the center of Jewish life within the Russian Empire, Jews were still a minority within its borders, outnumbered by non-Jewish subjects. In 1897, 11.6% of the Pale’s population was Jewish. It is also important to note that there were Jewish populations excluded from the Pale’s restrictions: Bukharan Jews, Georgian Jews, and Jews living in Courland and Lifland provinces in Latvia. While not within the Pale itself, Jews in Courland and Lifland were still subject to double taxation in the 19th century, as well several other restrictions that did not apply to non-Jewish citizens. Bukharan and Georgian Jews were not included in the Pale because of Bukhara and Georgia’s relative geographic isolation from the Pale’s borders, and for the practical reason that Georgia was only conquered by the Russian Empire between 1800-1864 and Bukhara in 1868, long after the Pale’s initial establishment.

Odesa was the largest city within the Pale of Settlement that Jewish subjects could freely access. In the nineteenth century, Kyiv was smaller in population than Odesa. Jews were also not permitted to live in Kyiv from 1827 to 1855, which meant that in 1897, Kyiv only had a

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19 Jewish Virtual Library, “Pale of Settlement.”
20 Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary, “Pale.”
21 Klier, “Pale of Settlement.”
24 Klier, “Pale of Settlement.”
25 Liekis, “Courland.”
26 Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica, “Uzbekistan: Russian and Soviet Rule.”
27 Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica, “Georgia: History.”
28 Stanton, “Identity crisis.”
Jewish population of 32,000, while about 140,000 Jews lived in Odesa in that same year.\textsuperscript{29} \textsuperscript{30} \textsuperscript{31} Until 1857, Odesa was a free port, exempt from most commercial taxes, which attracted both wealthy foreign merchants and immigrants from nearby regions looking for economic opportunity.\textsuperscript{32} The city attracted Jews from small towns and villages across the Pale of Settlement, in addition to people of many other nationalities and ethnicities, such as Greeks, Turks, Italians, Armenians, Tatars, and Poles.\textsuperscript{33} This type of Jewish newcomer to the city seeking better fortune appears in Yiddish writer’s Sholem Aleichem’s The Letters of Menakhem-Mendl and Sheyne-Shendl, where Menakhem-Mendl seeks various risky business ventures.\textsuperscript{34} Odesa became a center of vibrant Jewish life, and Moldavanka, a neighborhood on the outskirts of the city, became a center for both Jewish community and organized crime. The name Moldavanka originated from the Moldovan workmen, living in that space, who labored to build the Ottoman garrison in Khadzhibey.\textsuperscript{35}

Although Jewish community and intellectual life thrived in Odesa, Jews were also under threat from their neighbors in the city. Actor Jacob Adler, who grew up in Odesa, recalled that “[e]very year at Passover the Greeks beat up the Jews and robbed them.”\textsuperscript{36} These pogroms, or mass violence and crime against Jews, were frequent occurrences in Odesa. In 1871, one such pogrom occurred around Easter and Passover, as Adler described. Mobs originating from a Greek church broke windows in synagogues and businesses, raided Jewish homes, and looted stores.\textsuperscript{37} The authorities in the city were not altogether concerned; the Governor-General said to a

\textsuperscript{29} Meir, “Kiev.”
\textsuperscript{30} This would rapidly change during the Russian Civil War, where Kyiv experienced a mass influx of Jews from surrounding areas.
\textsuperscript{31} Zipperstein, “Odessa.”
\textsuperscript{33} Pinsker, A Rich Brew, 18.
\textsuperscript{34} Pinsker, A Rich Brew, 18-19.
\textsuperscript{35} King, Odessa: Genius and Death, 129.
\textsuperscript{36} King, Odessa: Genius and Death, 151.
\textsuperscript{37} Humphrey, “Odessa: Pogroms”, 40.
concerned Jewish man: “The Jews are responsible for this; they started it. And don’t make a fuss: I have already taken the necessary measures.” A Cossack captain said “Do what you like, just don’t kill anyone.” In 1881, after the assassination of Tsar Alexander II by the revolutionary organization “People’s Will” (narodnaia volia) pogroms spread out to surrounding towns from the city of Elisavetgrad. In his book *Odessa: Genius and Death in a City of Dreams*, author Charles King partially attributes the uptick in pogroms after 1861 to freed Christian serfs arriving in the city from old noble estates, bringing with them “mob activism and an unwavering faith in the pronouncements of Orthodox priests.”

1.2 Jewish Intellectual Life and Cafe Culture

Due to its singular status within the Pale of Settlement as an urban Jewish space, as well as the relatively lax censorship laws (compared to elsewhere in the Empire), Odesa became a center for Jewish literature and intellectual community. The pre-revolutionary Jewish literary sphere in Odesa was a trilingual one, with many different periodicals established in Hebrew, Yiddish, and Russian between 1860 and 1917. In the late nineteenth century, a loose circle of Jewish writers, intellectuals, and political figures formed a circle known as the “Sages of Odesa.” The Sages included politician and writer Leon Pinsker (1821-1891), thinker Ahad Ha’am (born Asher Ginsburg, 1856-1927), historian Simon Dubnow (1860-1941), poet Hayim Nahman Bialik (1873-1934), editor and writer Yehoshua Ravnitsky (1859-1944), writers Moshe Lilienblum (1843-1910) and Elhanan Lewinsky (1857-1910), and others. The most

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41 King, *Odessa: Genius and Death*, 154.
prominent member of the circle, widely considered today to be the founder of modern Hebrew and Yiddish prose writing, was Sholem Yankev Abramovitsh (1836-1917), also known as Mendele Moykher-Sforim. His novella *Fishke the Lame (Fishke der krumer)* tells the story of a good-hearted disabled man and his twists and turns through life, including a failed foray as a bathhouse attendant in Odesa. Beyond published prose writing, due to bans on Yiddish entertainment elsewhere, Odesa was also a center for Yiddish playwrights and Yiddish theater.

Writer Shalom Rabinovitz (1859-1916), better known by his pen name Sholem Aleichem, moved to Odesa in 1890, after he had already begun his writing career in and around Kyiv. Known as one of the founding fathers of modern Yiddish literature, his epistolary novel *The Letters of Menakhem-Mendl and Sheyne-Shendl*, originally published beginning in the 1890s, is a seminal work of the “Odesa text,” a concept further discussed in section 1.5.. Aleichem continued to write and publish *Menakhem-Mendl* as individual stories in Yiddish periodicals up until 1913, when he published a collection of these stories as a novel. The novel follows correspondence between Menakhem-Mendl, a naive man pursuing various business opportunities in Odesa, and later in Yehupetz (Kyiv), and his practical wife, Sheyne-Shendl. Odesa is presented as a fantastical city of great diversity, opportunity, and possibility; yet at the same time, as a den of vice and potential misfortune.

Central to Jewish intellectual life in the late nineteenth century was the “thirdspace” of the cafe. As defined by Shachar Pinsker in his book *A Rich Brew*, the thirdspace is “located at and mediates between the real and the imaginary, the public and the private, elitist culture and

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47 Miron, “Abramovitsh, Sholem Yankev.”
48 Miron, “Abramovitsh, Sholem Yankev.”
51 Miron, “Sholem Aleichem.”
52 Miron, “Sholem Aleichem.”
53 Miron, “Sholem Aleichem.”
mass consumption. In the context of modern Jewish culture, the thirdspace of the cafe sits on the
threshold between Jew and gentile, migrant and “native”, idleness and productivity, and
masculine and feminine.”54 The cafe was an integral part of social, intellectual, and economic life
in Odesa of the nineteenth century. The first cafes in Odesa were founded by Turks, Greeks, and
Armenians, who had ties to the regions that were main producers of coffee under the Ottoman
Empire.55 Later, such cafes were owned by French people, Italians, Swiss and Jews.56 Such
ownership is reflected in the names of the cafes: Cafe Fanconi, Cafe Robinat, Cafe Liebmann,
Cafe Zambrini, etc; the multiplicity of national origins among their owners reflects the
cosmopolitan and diverse nature of the city.57 By the 1910s, Cafe Robinat and Cafe Fanconi
emerged as giants.58 Both appear as subjects in Ladyzhensky’s paintings. People, mostly men,
came to the cafes to drink coffee, to socialize, to play chess, to conduct business. They were, as
Pinsker says: “places of consumption and entertainment that were mixed with business, politics,
literature, art, and theater.”59

Cafes were places of business and risk as Aleichem’s novel Menakhem Mendl
emphasizes. The title character frequents Cafe Fanconi, whose regulars initiate him into a culture
of investment and speculation that leads to total loss; much as in Aleichem’s own experience.60
Café Fanconi was a place of social and commercial activity, particularly for the Jewish men of
Odesa. In 1887, Yehoshua Ravnitsky, a member of the Sages, remarked in an entry in a Hebrew
newspaper that “almost all the habitues of the café are our Jewish brothers… In the checkbook of
eyery Jew in our town… you would find a nice sum that was payable to Fanconi.”61

54 Pinsker, A Rich Brew, 10.
58 Pinsker, 36
60 Pinsker, 32-33
In 1911, the year Ladyzhensky was born, the city’s population was approximately 620,000, one-third of which were Jewish. Cafes, Jewish neighborhoods, religious services, weddings and funerals, major features of Jewish life and community during the 1910s and 1920s, feature prominently in his Odessa of My Youth series. However, his works do not only depict Jewish Odesan life and community, but also the changes experienced in the city during Sovietization and the antisemitic incidents perpetrated by the gentiles of the city.

### 1.3 1905-1921: Civil Unrest

In 1905, the city was experiencing economic unrest due to a recession exacerbated by the Russo-Japanese war.\(^{62}\) Beginning with the Bloody Sunday protest and massacre in St. Petersburg, across the Russian Empire, there was restlessness, peasants and workers organized strikes, and there were several instances of military mutiny.\(^{63}\) These widespread events comprised the Russian Revolution of 1905.\(^{64}\) One vitally important instance of military uprising as far as the history of Odesa is concerned was the Potemkin incident in the summer of 1905.\(^{65}\) In June, sailors aboard the battleship refused to eat the maggot-ridden borshch served to them, which escalated into a full mutiny, with the murder of several commanding officers and the declaration of a sailor’s council aboard the ship.\(^{66}\) The ship docked in Odesa, where a worker’s strike, accompanied by clashes between workers and police, had already been in effect for two weeks.\(^{67}\) The news of the mutiny stirred up revolutionary sentiment among the workers of the city, and huge protests were held at the docks on June 28th.\(^{68}\)\(^{69}\) As evening fell, the protests turned into

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\(^{62}\) King, Odessa, 160.
\(^{63}\) Encyclopaedia Britannica, “The Revolution of 1905.”
\(^{64}\) Encyclopaedia Britannica, “The Revolution of 1905.”
\(^{65}\) Bennett, “The Potemkin Mutiny.”
\(^{66}\) Bennett, “The Potemkin Mutiny.”
\(^{67}\) Cavendish, “The Mutiny on the Battleship Potemkin.”
\(^{68}\) Cavendish, “The Mutiny on the Battleship Potemkin.”
\(^{69}\) June 28th in the Gregorian Calendar (new style).
drunken looting and several fires broke out at the port.\textsuperscript{70} Martial law was declared in the city, and around midnight, troops fired on the crowd in the port, killing a disputed number of protesting citizens.\textsuperscript{71} This mutiny and subsequent massacre would later be translated to film in Sergei Eisenstein’s \textit{Battleship Potemkin}.

To quell the burgeoning revolution, Tsar Nicholas II signed the October Manifesto, which granted basic civil rights to all subjects of the empire and established the Duma as a central legislative body.\textsuperscript{72} Universal civil rights also applied to Jewish citizens, which provoked outrage among non-Jews. On October 18, 1905, scuffles between Russians and Jews after the, led to the worst pogrom the city had yet seen, which lasted a period of several days.\textsuperscript{73} It resulted in the deaths of about three hundred Jews and one hundred non-Jews.\textsuperscript{74}

On October 29th, 1914, Ottoman naval forces raided several ports on the Black Sea, including Odessa and Sevastopol.\textsuperscript{75} This was the precipitating event that would spur Russia, along with its allies France and Great Britain, to declare war on the Ottoman Empire. Due to its location between the Russian Empire and the Austro-Hungarian Empire, the territory of Ukraine was a major battleground on the eastern front during World War I. However, fighting was most concentrated in the region of Galicia, with Hebrew poet Yakov Fichman remarking that in 1915 Odessa was “calmer and quieter than the day it was established.”\textsuperscript{76} The Russian Army included about 3.5 million Ukrainian soldiers, while 250,000 Ukrainians served in the Austro-Hungarian

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{70} Cavendish, “The Mutiny on the Battleship Potemkin.”
\item \textsuperscript{71} Cavendish, “The Mutiny on the Battleship Potemkin.”
\item \textsuperscript{72} Weinberg, “Workers, Pogroms, and the 1905 Revolution,” 53.
\item \textsuperscript{73} Weinberg, “Workers, Pogroms, and the 1905 Revolution,” 53.
\item \textsuperscript{74} Weinberg, “Workers, Pogroms, and the 1905 Revolution,” 53.
\item \textsuperscript{75} Kent, \textit{The Great Powers}, 91.
\item \textsuperscript{76} Buzynski, “The History of Odessa.”
\end{itemize}
forces.\textsuperscript{77} About half of all able-bodied men in the Russian Empire were drafted into military service, which caused the prices of goods to rise drastically and led to widespread hunger.\textsuperscript{78}

Meanwhile, on October 25, 1917, the Bolshevik party seized power in Moscow.\textsuperscript{79} This resulted in the Russian Civil War. Bolshevik influence in Ukraine was exceptionally weak, with only 4000-5000 party members concentrated in the eastern region of Donetsk, and nationalist movements based out of Kyiv were more popular than Bolshevik rule.\textsuperscript{80} Six different armies operated on Ukrainian territory: Ukrainian nationalists, the Bolshevik army, the Whites, the forces of the Triple Entente, the Polish army, and the anarchists.\textsuperscript{81} From 1917 to 1920, the city changed hands nine times.\textsuperscript{82} Orest Subtelny, author of \textit{Ukraine: A History} remarks that “in the modern history of Europe no country experienced such complete anarchy, bitter civil strife, and the total collapse of authority as Ukraine did at this time.”\textsuperscript{83} Communication with the outside world and between cities broke down, and starving cities emptied people into the countryside in search of food.\textsuperscript{84}

As the new Soviet government attempted to establish itself, it was not only embroiled in civil war, but also in a military conflict with Poland. As discussed in section 1.1, there had been no Polish state since the last Partition of Poland in 1795, and much of the former Kingdom of Poland had been part of the Russian Empire. Yet at the end of World War I, after Germany’s surrender, Poland declared itself independent from its German occupiers.\textsuperscript{85} This led to a short-lived military campaign between the newly created Soviet state and the newly created

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{77} Subtelny, \textit{Ukraine: A History}, 340.  \\
\textsuperscript{78} Subtelny, \textit{Ukraine: A History}, 344.  \\
\textsuperscript{79} Subtelny, \textit{Ukraine: A History}, 348.  \\
\textsuperscript{80} Subtelny, \textit{Ukraine: A History}, 348.  \\
\textsuperscript{81} Subtelny, \textit{Ukraine: A History}, 359.  \\
\textsuperscript{82} Stanton, \textit{the Self-Invention}, 24.  \\
\textsuperscript{83} Subtelny, \textit{Ukraine: A History}, 359.  \\
\textsuperscript{84} Subtelny, \textit{Ukraine: A History}, 359.  \\
\textsuperscript{85} Smogorzewski, “Russo-Polish War.”
\end{flushleft}
Polish one from 1919-1921. This conflict is most relevant to the life and work of writer Isaac Babel, who served as a war correspondent and whose *Red Cavalry* story series is a semi-fictional account of the front.

In 1919 and 1920, amid the chaos of civil strife gripping Ukraine, old antisemitic feelings rose in non-Jewish Ukrainians and Russians, heightened by the false idea that most Jews supported the Bolsheviks. Ethnic Ukrainians and Russians perpetrated what would be the worst mass act of violence against Jewish people on Ukrainian soil until the arrival of the Nazis some twenty years later, killing between 35,000 to 50,000 Jews. The majority of pogroms were committed by Ukrainian nationalist forces under leader Symon Petliura (40%), independent local gangs (25%), and by the White Army (17%). While earlier pogroms focused on theft, looting, and property destruction, it is clear that the 1919-1920 pogroms were of a distinctively murderous character, and a distinctively massive scope, when compared to their predecessors. Ladyzhensky’s diptych *Self-Defense in My Building* (Plate 12) and *Petliura Has Come to the City* (Plate 13) depict one such pogrom.

### 1.4 Interwar Odesa

Seven years of war and strife, resulting in the deaths of around 1.5 million people, had left Ukraine in a uniquely unfavorable position to embrace the far-reaching social reforms the Bolsheviks were to implement. Starvation and lack of heating materials in cities had caused many to flee to the countryside, most factory production had ground to a halt, and disease was

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86 Smogorzewski, “Russo-Polish War.”
89 Abramson, “Russian Civil War.”
rampant.\textsuperscript{91} Strict grain rationing, along with a drought, led to a famine in 1921-22 that took hundreds of thousands of lives across Ukraine.\textsuperscript{92}

The New Economic Policy (1921-1928), which allowed some free-market commercial activity, helped to stabilize the economy in Ukraine as a whole and in Odessa.\textsuperscript{93} Many of Ladyzhensky’s works, such as \textit{We Are Wrapping Candies}, depict the kind of small-scale economic opportunity possible under the NEP. Odessa found itself now situated within the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic, which for Jewish citizens, meant a freedom they had not enjoyed in the Pale of Settlement: the ability to travel as freely as any other citizen of the USSR.

In the 1930s under Stalin, wide-reaching plans were implemented to industrialize and modernize the new country of the USSR. During the first Five-Year plan, 400 new industrial plants were built in the Ukrainian SSR.\textsuperscript{94} Meanwhile, more and more ethnic Ukrainians were moving to cities, including Odessa. In 1920 Ukrainians were 32\% of the urban population across the SSR, but in 1939, they constituted over 58\%.\textsuperscript{95} This shift would alter the demographic makeup of major cities such as Odesa, as Jewish people and those of foreign origin would no longer make up such a large percentage of the city’s population.

In the early 1930s, Communist officials began the process of forcibly collectivizing agriculture, frequently by calling meetings in villages and forcing a positive result.\textsuperscript{96} In protest, many farmers beat officials and shot their own livestock in protest.\textsuperscript{97} In addition, the grain quotas set by the Communists were artificially and unreachable high, as Ukraine was a major agricultural producer for all of the USSR, and more grain was needed to feed industrial

\textsuperscript{91} Subtelny, \textit{Ukraine: A History}, 380.
\textsuperscript{92} Subtelny, \textit{Ukraine: A History}, 381.
\textsuperscript{93} Subtelny, \textit{Ukraine: A History}, 381-382.
\textsuperscript{94} Subtelny, \textit{Ukraine: A History}, 406.
\textsuperscript{95} Subtelny, \textit{Ukraine: A History}, 408.
\textsuperscript{96} Subtelny, \textit{Ukraine: A History}, 411.
\textsuperscript{97} Subtelny, \textit{Ukraine: A History}, 411.
endeavors across the country.\textsuperscript{98} As well, quotas rose every year to indicate continual Soviet progress. In 1932, Stalin raised the quotas by 44\%, which was enforced through violence from local party officials, who raided collective farms for grain to meet these numbers.\textsuperscript{99} This confiscation of grain, along with a reduced production due to drought, resulted in a famine known as the Holodomor, a word derived from the Ukrainian for “to kill by starvation”. The famine spanned 1932-33, with the worst period in the spring of 1933; in total, recent research estimates that between 3-5 million people perished, with higher estimates at 7-10 million.\textsuperscript{100} While Kyiv and Kharkiv \textit{oblasts} (districts) were most affected, Odessa also suffered. Sviatoslav Karavansky, a man who lived in Odessa as a child, recalled the famine at a hearing facilitated by the U.S. Commission on the Ukraine Famine:

“From my childhood years I remember that from 1929, the beginning of industrialization and collectivization, our family and all of the people of Odessa suffered a great shortage of food. Buttermilk, milk, sugar and even bread disappeared from the stores. In the period 1929-30 the whole city turned to the rationing system. The entire population lived on rations. The portions that were handed out continued to decrease, and in the winter of 1933 I, as a dependent, received 200 grams (seven ounces) of black bread per day. My mother, brother and sister received the same ration …

Our family lived in downtown Odessa, and I attended school there. I never saw starving people downtown, but many of the latter were seen on the outskirts of the city. Odessa was a port where foreign sailors and businessmen could always be found, so the authorities took measures not to allow hungry peasants to reach the downtown area. But everyone in Odessa knew that there was a horrible shortage of food in the villages. People swelled from hunger and died …

My parents wondered how it was possible that such great quantities of food were being exported while the village population was starving. To ask questions about this was dangerous. If a child asked about these things in school, the teachers assumed that he had been taught by his parents, who were thus placed in danger.”\textsuperscript{101}

\textsuperscript{98} Subtelny, \textit{Ukraine: A History}, 413.
\textsuperscript{100} Yefimenko, “More is not better.”
\textsuperscript{101} Staff writers, “For the record.”
1.5 The “Odesa Text” in the 1920s and 1930s

At the same time that Odesa was becoming a Soviet city, and experiencing the chaotic socio-political effects of that process, the Odesan literary sphere was flourishing. New writers emerged in Odesa: the Jewish writer Isaac Babel (1894-1940), the Polish writer Yury Olesha (1899-1960), the Russian writer Valentin Kataev (1897-1986), the Jewish poet Edward Bagritsky (born Eduard Diubin, 1895-1934), and the humorist duo of Jewish writer Ilya Ilf (born Ilya Fainzilberg, 1897-1937) and Russian writer Evgeny Petrov (born Evgeny Kataev, brother of Valentin Kataev, 1895-1934).102 This by no means is an exhaustive list of the writers of the Odesa school, but an overview of some of the most renowned and relevant to the artistic work of Ladyzhensky.

The concept of a literary tradition and mythos originating from Odessa was first identified in the 1930s by Viktor Shklovsky, who in his article “South-west” (Yugo-zapad) proposed a “Southwestern literary school”, characterized by its half-Russian, half-Western qualities.103 In 1984, V. N. Toporov put forth the framework of the “Petersburg text”, an analysis of how literature originating from and about St. Petersburg uses a shared mythos.104 In the 1990s, academic Boris Briker used Toporov’s framework to identify his concept of an “Odesa Text” in opposition to the “Petersburg text”.105 The Odesa text could not have been constructed without the parallel existence of the Petersburg text, not only for the conceptual framework, but also because the Odesa text stands in opposition to the Petersburg. In short, Odesa is an anti-Petersburg: both are port cities, standing at the border between Russia and Europe; but while Petersburg is cold, northern, and crawling with petty Russian bureaucrats, Odessa is sunny,
warm, and southern, a city of gangsters, thieves, and foreigners. Additionally, the Odesa text is unique in its origins in multilingual literary traditions, Hebrew, Russian, and Yiddish, as discussed in section 1.2.

One cannot approach the Odesa text without first acknowledging the monumentality of Isaac Babel’s works. Indeed, Briker’s “Odessa text” works backward from Babel’s writings, connecting them retroactively to the Odesan literature that came before. Despite the rich tradition of Russian, Hebrew, and Yiddish literature produced in Odesa, Babel’s impactful short stories and influential legacy overshadow what came before in the popular and the academic imagination. This is part of Briker’s argument: that Babel’s characterization of the city, his characters and plots, did not originate out of a void, but rather from a rich tradition of imaginings about Odesa. While Babel’s works are not the first instance of the Odesa mythos, his works are the ultimate exemplar of the concept.

Rebecca Stanton, in her article “From ‘Underground’ to ‘In the Basement’: How Odessa Replaced St. Petersburg as Capital of the Russian Literary Imagination”, expands on Briker’s “Odessa Text”:

“First, its roots stretch back into the 19th century and span more than one literary tradition; and second, its three most prominent features are Odessa’s ethnic diversity, its lawless… atmosphere, and its marginality vis-à- vis the capitals of the Empire, which made it a place outside the bounds of “normal” life, a destination of exiles and vacationers.”

By “span more than one literary tradition”, Stanton is referring to works of the Odesa text published in Yiddish and Hebrew, as well as Russian. While the image of Odesa presented in the Odesa text originates in the nineteenth century with the works of the Sages (see section 1.2), it blossoms in the twentieth with the work of these emerging writers.

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106 Stanton, “From ‘Underground’ to ‘In the Basement’”, 204.
107 Briker, “The Underworld of Benia Krik”, 115.
109 Stanton, “From ‘Underground’ to ‘In the Basement’”, 205.
In an early essay (1916) simply titled “Odessa,” Babel himself recognizes several key elements of the Odesan mythos. He writes: “An Odessan is the opposite of someone from Petrograd (St. Petersburg),” and inquires “If you think about it, doesn’t it seem that in Russian literature one has yet to find a truly joyful and vibrant description of the sun?”\textsuperscript{110} In this contrast between sunny Odesa and cloudy and gloomy St. Petersburg, Babel echoes Briker’s dichotomy between the Odesa and Petersburg texts. Babel also identifies what he considers the unique elements of the city, which he posits could serve as inspiration for a “literary Messiah:”

In the summer, its sunny bathing establishments gleam with the bronzed and muscled physiques of young sports enthusiasts, the powerful bodies of fishermen… And a small distance from the deep wide sea, there are factories puffing smoke, and Karl Marx is up to his usual business.

In Odessa there is a very poor and crowded, long-suffering Jewish ghetto…
In Odessa, there are sweet and languorous spring evenings, the spicy scent of acacia, and the unwavering and irresistible light of the moon above the dark sea.
In Odessa, in the evening, out at their comical vulgar dachas, the fat comical bourgeois lie about on their daybeds in white socks, digesting their full dinners…
In Odessa the “luftmenschen” root around the coffeehouses trying to make a ruble and feed the family, but there’s nothing to be made, because what can a completely useless person – a “luftmensch” – really make?
In Odessa there is a port, and in the port – ships from Newcastle, Cardiff, Marseilles, and Port Said; Negroes, Englishmen, Frenchmen, and Americans.\textsuperscript{111}

In this description, Babel identifies the main characteristics of the Odesa text, characteristics that also emerge in Ladyzhensky’s artwork, as I will discuss in Chapter 3. First, he notes the sun and the sea, the nature of the Odesan seaside as a summertime destination, which produces a revealed physicality and sensuality of “muscled physiques” that are not found in other, colder Russian Imperial cities. Babel also notes the Jewishness of Odesa as a main characteristic; in the first paragraph of the essay, he claims that “half of the population consists of Jews,” a slight exaggeration, but one that serves to emphasize just how important Odesa’s Jewish community

\textsuperscript{110} Babel, \textit{The Essential Fictions}, trans. Vinokur, 5.
\textsuperscript{111} Babel, \textit{The Essential Fictions}, trans. Vinokur, 6.
was in everyday life.\textsuperscript{112} He mentions the easily identifiable trappings of Odesan wealth, the Jewish \textit{luftmenschen}\textsuperscript{113} trying to strike business deals in cafes, and the diversity of the city-as-port. These qualities are what define the Odesa text; they join together works by Abramovitsh, Aleichem, Babel, and many others.

The concept of the Odesa text has also been applied to non-literary works, such as to songs by musician and singer Leonid Utesov, and to Sergei Eisenstein’s film \textit{Battleship Potemkin}. Utesov’s music belongs to the genre of \textit{blatnaia pesnia}, which was popular in the Soviet period, and featured darkly humorous songs on criminal and gangster-related themes.\textsuperscript{114} These were frequently suppressed by the Soviet state.\textsuperscript{115} These songs interacted with the criminal mythos of the city, intertwining with visions of real and fictional gangsters and mob bosses.

\textit{Battleship Potemkin} is perhaps the work of art that has most affected everyday people’s attachment to landmarks within Odesa. The silent film, made in 1925, produces a semi-fictional account of the 1905 Potemkin mutiny, protest, and massacre; it was meant to serve as a propaganda film by depicting the early stirrings of communism prior to 1917. Its most famous scene depicts the shooting of protesters by Imperial troops as they flee down the long staircase to the harbor. Most vividly, it includes a baby carriage tumbling down the steps. Eisenstein’s film and use of montage profoundly impacted many subsequent films, both within the USSR and elsewhere, and the Odesa steps sequence is still regarded as one of the most powerful scenes in early cinema.\textsuperscript{116} However, there is little evidence that any of the clashes between protesters and Imperial troops actually happened on the steps themselves. Rather, Eisenstein was inspired by

\begin{itemize}
\item[113] A Yiddish word meaning “an impractical contemplative person having no definite business or income.” Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary, “Luftmensch.”
\item[114] Rothstein, “How It Was Sung in Odessa.”
\item[115] Briker, “The Underworld,” 127.
\item[116] Sklar, “Battleship Potemkin.”
\end{itemize}
the monumentality of the staircase itself to stage the scene there.\textsuperscript{117} In cultural memory, the film vastly overshadows the actual historical events of 1905, so much so that many attempts at narrating the protests and massacre include ahistorical details from the film.\textsuperscript{118} The film catapulted the steps into a visual shorthand for Odesan resistance, despite the lack of historical basis, and today, the steps are commonly referred to as the “Potemkin steps” rather than the official “Primorsky stairs.”\textsuperscript{119}

At the same time that authors like Babel, Bagritsky, and Kataev were finding success and renown in the Odesan literary sphere, Jewish cultural and religious expression was becoming more and more limited. The Soviet state was pursuing a tactic of \textit{korenizatsiia}, or indigenization, in order to change leadership in the thirteen soviet republics from being predominantly Russian transplants to predominantly local citizens. In order to spread participation in the Communist Party, focus was put on national and ethnic identity within the republics, and indigenous languages were used to reach a wider audience, as well as conjure local participation in the party.\textsuperscript{120} In the Ukrainian SSR, this meant that usage of the Ukrainian language was standardized and encouraged. In 1922, fewer than 10 newspapers were published in Ukrainian, but in 1933, 373 out of 426 newspapers were.\textsuperscript{121} While Ukrainian language was promoted as part of \textit{korenizatsiia}, Yiddish language and Jewish identity were being discouraged due to the Soviet doctrine of state atheism. The number of Yiddish and Hebrew publications declined.\textsuperscript{122} After the consolidation of Soviet control in 1920, Jewish schools and synagogues were gradually closed

\textsuperscript{117} Selesneff, “A Much Talked About Mutiny.”
\textsuperscript{118} Selesneff, “A Much Talked About Mutiny.”
\textsuperscript{119} Sklar, “Battleship Potemkin.”
\textsuperscript{120} Subtelny, \textit{Ukraine: A History}, 387-389.
\textsuperscript{121} Subtelny, \textit{Ukraine: A History}, 389.
\textsuperscript{122} Zipperstein, “Odessa”.
due to state atheistic policies, and with the exception of Yiddish theater, most signs of visible Jewish life in the city had disappeared by the 1930s. As Jewish visibility disappeared from Odesa, so, too, did the members of the Odesa school. Eduard Bagritsky died from asthma complications in 1934, Ilya Ilf from tuberculosis in 1937, and Evgeny Petrov in 1942 in a plane crash. As part of the Stalinist purges, Babel was imprisoned in 1939 and shot in 1940. He was arrested and found guilty of participating in an anti-Soviet Trotskyite organization, contributing to a terrorist conspiracy, and being a spy for the French and Austrian governments; these were falsified charges. For nearly all Soviet citizens, Babel’s disappearance would remain a mystery until the truth of his imprisonment and death were uncovered in the 1990s. Ladyzhensky, who admired Babel and produced paintings and drawings of scenes from Babel’s story series Red Cavalry, would never know what happened to him.

1.6 The Holocaust and World War II

The 1926 census, the last reliable one conducted before World War II, recorded Odesa’s population as a little over 433,000 people, with 158,000 of those being Jewish. In the summer and early fall of 1941, the Soviets began to evacuate the city, with about 300,000 people remaining in the city. Estimates differ, but from 50,000 to 90,000 of those citizens were Jewish. On October 16th, 1941, the Soviets surrendered the city to Romanian and Nazi

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123 Zipperstein, “Odessa.”
124 Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica, “Ilf and Petrov.”
125 Shrayer, “Bagritski.”
126 Nakhimovsky, “Il’f, Il’ia Arnol’dovich.”
127 Sicher, “Babel.”
128 Updike, “Hide-and-Seek.”
129 Updike, “Hide-and-Seek.”
130 King, Odessa, 207.
131 King, Odessa, 207.
132 King, Odessa, 207.
German forces. Odesa was singular in that it was the only major city that had fallen under the control of an enemy other than Nazi Germany; while there were German troops active in the occupation, Odesa was considered part of Romanian-controlled Transnistria.

On the 22nd of October, Soviet NKVD officers set off a mine planted in their former headquarters, killing the Romanian commandant of the city, all of his staff, and several German officers. In retaliation for the bombing, the Romanians began to murder Jewish inhabitants of the city. They took about 5,000 men, women, and children to Dalnyk, a nearby village, where the Romanians locked the Jews in barracks, doused the barracks in gasoline, and set them afame. Another 15,000-18,000 Jewish citizens were shot and burned in the harbor area. In the weeks following the seizure of the city, Romanian and German forces slaughtered at least twenty-five thousand people. These massacres were part of the “Holocaust by bullets”, which was the way most people living in the western part of the Soviet Union experienced the war, as opposed to the mechanized murder in German and Polish death camps.

In November and December of 1941, the surviving Jews in the city were increasingly confined to the Slobodka ghetto on the outskirts of the city. On January 2, 1942, Gheorghe Alexianu, the civilian governor of Transnistria (a Romanian-controlled governorate which included Odesa), issued Order No. 35 that would deport all Jews to forced labor camps. Many Jews were shot and killed along the freezing journey. In camps such as Berezovka, Bogdanovka, and Domanovka, Jews were forced to labor under inhumane conditions, and

133 King, Odessa, 202, 229.
134 Yad Vashem, “Murder Story of Odessa Jews in Dalnik.”
135 Yad Vashem, “Murder Story of Odessa Jews in Dalnik.”
136 Yad Vashem, “Murder Story of Odessa Jews in the Harbor Area.”
137 King, Odessa, 212.
138 King, Odessa, 213.
139 King, Odessa, 214-215.
140 King, Odessa, 215.
illnesses such as typhus spread like wildfire.\textsuperscript{141} At Bogdanovka, an outbreak of typhus spurred the Romanian officers to massacre the inmates, and about 40,000 Jews, many from Odesa, were shot and killed in a nearby ravine.\textsuperscript{142, 143} In November of 1944, several months after the Soviets had regained control of Odesa, officials counted just 48 Jews living there.\textsuperscript{144}

Jews would never again be so large a proportion of the Odesan population as they were before the Second World War. Demographic data on the city’s immediate postwar population is imprecise, but as of the 1959 census, the first conducted after the war, there were 667,182 people living in Odesa, and about 108,000 of them were Jewish.\textsuperscript{145} These Jews were now-returned evacuees from the city before its occupation, labor camp survivors, and Jewish citizens from other regions who had moved to Odesa.\textsuperscript{146} Many Jews later emigrated from Odesa to Israel, the United States, and elsewhere during the 1970s and 1980s when it became possible to apply for exit visas. Emigration became more accessible after the fall of the USSR. In the 2001 Ukrainian census, 13,400 Jews were living in Odesa, or 0.6\% of its total population.\textsuperscript{147}

The city in which Yefim Ladyzhensky grew up no longer existed in his adulthood. The Jewish community of his childhood was first affected by Soviet atheism and religious suppression, and later decimated by Romanian and German violence during World War II. As further discussed in Chapter 3, his \textit{Odessa of My Youth} painting series recalls the people, places, and scenes that no longer were accessible to Ladyzhensky except through memory.

\begin{itemize}
  \item King, \textit{Odessa}, 215-218.
  \item Yad Vashem, “Murder Story of Odessa Jews in Bogdanovka.”
  \item Yad Vashem, “Murder Story of Odessa Jews in Bogdanovka.”
  \item King, \textit{Odessa}, 248.
  \item Jewish Virtual Library, “Odesa, Ukraine.”
  \item Zipperstein, “Odessa”.
  \item State Statistics Committee of Ukraine, “About number and composition.”
\end{itemize}
A Note on 1970s and 80s Emigration from the Soviet Union

After the end of the Russian Civil War in 1921, emigration was for the most part banned in the USSR. There were some exceptions; during the chaos of World War II, several hundred thousand Soviet citizens fled west. Otherwise, an exit visa was needed in order to emigrate, and the Soviet state did not frequently grant these. To apply for an exit visa, one had to quit their job and maintain unemployment to commit to their intended exit. However, since most visa applications were denied, this left many people in the late 1960s in the precarious position of being a “refusenik,” or one who had been refused a visa. Most of these refuseniks were Jewish, wanting to escape the growing antisemitism within the USSR and practice their faith openly elsewhere. In 1970, a group of sixteen refuseniks attempted to hijack a plane in order to flee the Soviet Union. All were arrested and imprisoned, which led to international backlash; up until this point, the refusenik cause had been the subject of concern among Jewish activists globally, but the 1970 plane hijacking brought more widespread attention. Whether it was this incident, international pressures, or other factors that led to the relaxation of visa granting is not clear, but in 1971, the USSR granted 1,000 exit visas. Between 1971 and 1980, over 300,000 Soviet citizens emigrated to Israel, the United States, Germany, Canada, and elsewhere. 246,000 of them were Jewish, while others were Germans, Armenians, or other ethnicities. This relaxation of Soviet visa policy is what allowed Ladyzhensky and his family to emigrate to Israel.

149 Schuster, “Refuseniks Try to Hijack Plane.”
150 Schuster, “Refuseniks Try to Hijack Plane.”
151 Schuster, “Refuseniks Try to Hijack Plane.”
152 Schuster, “Refuseniks Try to Hijack Plane.”
153 Gitelman, “Exiting from the Soviet Union,” 44.
Chapter 2: The Artist Himself

In this short biography, I aim to present an overview of Yefim Ladyzhensky’s life and career. I draw mainly on Grigory Ostrovsky’s monograph, published in 2008 alongside a collection of Ladyzhensky’s drawings and paintings, Victoria Ladyzhenskaia’s memoir “My Father the Artist,” and the essays of Ladyzhensky himself.

2.1 Biography

Yefim Bentsionovich Ladyzhensky was born on August 3rd, 1911 in Odesa, which at that time was a city under Russian imperial rule. His father worked as a mackerel salter.156 His family lived on Bazaar Street, at the eastern edge of the neighborhood of Moldavanka.157 Moldavanka was a poor, predominantly Jewish neighborhood that attained a semi-mythical status from its depiction in Isaac Babel’s Odessa Tales, which is set in the 1910s, the same time Ladyzhensky was living there as a child. In his memoir essays, Ladyzhensky recalls that in the multi-winged apartment building in which he lived, only one of the thirty-eight families was ethnically Russian and not Jewish.158

In 1925, at the age of fourteen, Ladyzhensky began to study painting at the studio of Yulii Rafailovich Bershadsky, a well-known Moldavanka painter who offered classes for young art students.159 Bershadsky encouraged him to attend Odesa Art Institute (Odesskie khudozhestvennoe uchilishche160), where he studied in the theater and scenery department.161 In 1931, at the age of twenty, Ladyzhensky graduated from the institute and began work in regional theaters as a set designer. He executed his first professional stage design work in cities across the

158 Ladyzhensky, “Madam Mirvis”, 2.
160 Later named Grekov Odessa Art School (Odesskoe khudozhestvennoe uchilishche imeni M. B. Grekova.)
newly Soviet Empire, including Krasnodar and Volgograd in the Russian Soviet Republic; Tashkent, Uzbekistan; and Ashkhabad, Turkmenistan. In 1935, Ladyzhensky moved to Moscow, where he worked at the Moscow Drama Theater (Moskovskii dramaticheskii teatr) as a set designer. The theater was directed by Fedor Nikolaevich Kaverin, an avant-garde theater director whose imaginative and boundary-pushing productions did not easily fit into a socialist realist mold. Kaverin’s nontraditional style is important to consider when positioning Ladyzhensky’s work within the Soviet art world; he worked with avant-garde producers on innovative projects, rather than toeing the establishment line.

During the Second World War, Ladyzhensky stayed with Kaverin’s theater, and worked on designing sets for troupes who were being sent to the front to boost morale among soldiers. Musical and theatrical entertainment for soldiers at the front has long been a tradition not only in the USSR, but across the globe, and it was one Stalin himself sponsored. He excused almost a thousand actors and dancers from mandatory military service, and over the course of the war, thousands of performances were staged by various theater troupes.

Beyond his professional career, the war was intensely tragic for the Ladyzhensky family. While Ladyzhensky, his wife, and their children lived in Moscow, many of his friends and relatives still lived in and around Odesa, which as discussed in Chapter 1, was occupied by the Axis powers during World War II. In the bitter winter of 1942, Ladyzhensky’s older brother, Vladimir Bentsionovich Ladyzhensky, who was serving as a field doctor, went missing in action. He was never found. Their father, who had long suffered from various illnesses, passed

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164 Kino-Teatr.ru, “Fedor Kaverin.”
165 Gonzales, “The Bolshoi Theater.”
166 Gonzales, “The Bolshoi Theater.”
167 Gonzales, “The Bolshoi Theater.”
168 Ladyzhenskaia, My Father the Artist, 13.
away soon after learning of Vladimir Bentsionovich’s death. Ladyzhensky’s Aunt Roza and her daughter Klara were shot by German and Romanian soldiers in Kriva Balka, a village not far from Odesa. His cousins, Aunt Roza’s grandsons, were killed defending Odesa. In Moscow, people were dealing with rationing and shortages, both of food and heating supplies. Ladyzhensky’s daughter Victoria recalled that during the war years her father would give his entire ration to her, her mother, and her brother, and he himself subsisted on tea and cigarettes.

In 1945, the last year of the war, Ladyzhensky worked on a theater production in Almaty, then the capital of the Kazakh Soviet Socialist Republic. Following his return to Moscow, he began working at the Moscow Academic Satire Theater (Moskovskii akademicheskii teatr satiry), where he worked for the majority of the 1950s and ‘60s. In the early 1960s, he worked at the Taganka Theater (Teatr na Taganke), which was struggling to retain audiences under its director Aleksandr Plotnikov, who favored a pompous, histrionic style that was losing popularity. In 1963, Plotnikov resigned, and Ladyzhensky left the Taganka Theater. In 1964, he designed his last set for a production at the Maly Theater (Gosudarstvennyi akademicheskii malyi teatr), a fundamentally traditional theater that performed and continues to perform classical productions.

In Ladyzhensky’s last years of theater work before retirement, he began to produce tempera paintings in earnest. He became more focused on painting after a 1959 trip to Tallinn and Riga, where he produced several landscapes, and became enamored with easel work. As

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169 Ladyzhenskaia, My Father the Artist, 13.
170 Ladyzhensky, “Watermelon Dock.”
171 Ladyzhensky, “Watermelon Dock.”
172 Ladyzhenskaia, My Father the Artist, 3.
175 Teatr na Taganke, “Istoriia.”
176 Teatr na Taganke, “Istoriia.”
177 Gosudarstvennyi akademicheskii malyi teatr, “Istoriia.”
quoted in Grigory Ostrovsky’s retrospective on the artist, Ladyzhensky said about this shift from theater art to painting: “I had the feeling of entering ice-cold water after basking in the sun.”

This imagery of plunging into water mirrors the paintings of his childhood Odesan seaside (see section 3.1 and Plate 4.) As quoted from Ostrovsky’s monograph, Ladyzhensky writes: “The easel paintings born under my brush in 1967 could appear only after I had left the theater… Leaving theater work behind, the trivial bustle stopped, and my mind was freed from others’ invented images, from scenes and events that were forced upon me.”

In the 1960s, on trips to Latvia, Central Asia, Kosovo, Novgorod, Suzdal, and the Caspian and Azov seas, Ladyzhensky produced many gorgeous landscapes and architectural scenes, some of which are included in the 2008 book *Yefim Ladyzhensky: Drawings, Watercolor, Tempera*. In his adult life, Ladyzhensky traveled to and lived in many different places across the Soviet Union, from the Caucasus to the Baltics to Central Asia. This far-reaching journey illustrates both the vastness of the Soviet sweep and the wide-ranging geography Ladyzhensky became familiar with.

In 1970, Ladyzhensky’s mother passed away, and shortly thereafter, his daughter Victoria and her children emigrated to Israel. As noted in Chapter 1, this type of emigration was only just becoming possible in the early 1970s. The confluence of his mother’s death and daughter’s emigration prompted Ladyzhensky to first consider emigrating himself, but he did not pursue that path in earnest until 1977, after he suffered his second heart attack. Emigration from the USSR was not an easy decision, for once you had left, you could not return. Soviet citizens in the 1970s and 1980s had no way of knowing that this system would collapse in the early 1990s, so their decisions were made in the belief that they were permanent.

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182 Ostrovsky, “A Life in Art”, 123.
183 Ostrovsky, “A Life in Art”, 123.
As Jewish political scientist Zvi Gitelman wrote, “Paradoxically, since 1971 one of the modes of persecution of Soviet Jews has been the harassment and deliberately created uncertainty and tension connected with their attempt to emigrate.” As Ladyzhensky considered emigration, his body of work, an accumulation of a fifty-year-long artistic career, became the subject of contention. To bring his sketches, paintings, and drawings with him to Israel meant paying outrageous fees to the Soviet authorities. With his savings, he could not afford to export the thousands of paintings he owned, so he began to systematically burn them rather than leave them behind in storage. He destroyed over two thousand of his own works. Ladyzhensky’s extraction of 690 paintings, achieved through a long and painful negotiation with Soviet customs officials, cost 20,000 rubles, a sum equalling $131,856 in 2022 dollars. The Soviet authorities did not permit the export of his Red Cavalry painting series in particular because of its Jewish themes. Since Ladyzhensky’s destination was Israel, the official line was that the Soviets did not want it to be “repatriated.” The Red Cavalry paintings languished in a Ministry of Culture warehouse for the rest of Ladyzhensky’s life. Only years after his father’s death was his son, Victor Ladyzhensky, able to retrieve the paintings. These 690 paintings he managed to bring with him did include the majority of the Odessa of My Youth series, and Ladyzhensky added another twenty to the series after emigrating.

In September 1978, Ladyzhensky emigrated to Jerusalem. His first artistic venture in Israel was a series of large-scale pen and ink drawings recreating the confiscated works of the Red Cavalry series, followed by the darker-in-tone series Lyublin Cemetery in Moscow and The

185 Ostrovsky, “A Life in Art”, 123.
186 Ostrovsky, “A Life in Art”, 43.
190 Ladyzhenskaia, My Father the Artist, 32
Despite the language barrier between himself and the broader Israeli art world, Ladyzhensky enjoyed relative success in his years in Israel, with solo exhibitions at the Israel Museum in Jerusalem (1979), the New Gallery at Haifa University (1980), and the Jerusalem Artist’s House (1982). However, despite the success with his exhibitions, no Israeli museum bought work by Ladyzhensky, which greatly saddened him. Grigory Ostrovsky’s analysis of this disappointment was that Ladyzhensky was projecting the expectations of the Soviet art scene, where state recognition was the definitive signal of success, onto a different context in which state recognition was less meaningful than commercial success. For Ladyzhensky, the artistic value of his work far overshadowed any monetary appeal. He wrote, “Artists here are terribly influenced by the commercial side of things. In Russia its influence is very weak, in fact almost totally absent. This is very important, and it’s why I look down on those artists, who look down upon us, the painters who came from Russia.” Ladyzhensky valued art’s inherent worth, and was disturbed by the commercialization of art in Israel. As well, his comment about those “who look down on us” indicates that he sensed a sort of alienation from the Jerusalem art scene because of his Soviet origins.

In Israel, Ladyzhensky felt alienated from broader Israeli culture, as he did not speak Hebrew. He also felt a deep disconnect between his own upbringing and self-identity as an Odesan Jew and the Israeliite culture in which he now found himself immersed. Ladyzhensky said of Israel: “this is not a Jewish country. This is not a formal analysis, but a purely emotional statement: Israel isn’t Jewish. They do not have any imagination! Are these people supposed to be Jews? Only everything from the West and America is valued, but Israel cannot be a Western

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192 Ostrovsky, “A Life in Art,” 142.
country, she has other roots, and other forms of existence. Jews in Israel lose their Jewish spirit and form, by starting to look up to the West, to everything American, and this makes me very sad.”

Because of the suppression of Jewish identity and culture in the USSR, the “thickest” Jewish culture Ladyzhensky experienced was Odesa as a child. Coming from a Jewish community in Eastern Europe, he was upset by the Americanization he believed Israeli culture was embracing, rejecting Westernness and stating that Israel had “other roots” not in the West. As well, his comment about Israeli Jews not “hav[ing] any imagination” links back to his initial critique of commercialization. He found a lack of art done for art’s sake, springing from genuine imagination and creativity.

In the spring of 1982, as his fourth exhibition in Israel at Ein-Harod kibbutz was being prepared, Ladyzhensky tragically committed suicide.

2.2 Mentors and Influences

The first major influence on Ladyzhensky’s teacher Iulii Rafailovich Bershadsky. For three years, from the age of fourteen to seventeen, Ladyzhensky studied at Bershadsky’s studio school. This early art training gave him a strong foundation in classical methods of realist art, a training that can be seen directly in his landscapes, portraits, and particularly the Armatures and Plants drawings. It was Bershadsky who urged Ladyzhensky to study theatrical design at the Odesa Art Institute, which initiated the trajectory of Ladyzhensky’s artistic career.

Bershadsky himself was born in 1869 in Tiraspol, a city in the modern-day Moldovan breakaway region of Transnistria that borders western Ukraine. Like Ladyzhensky, he studied

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at the Odesa Art Institute. During his studies there, even with the financial support of his brother, Bershadsky struggled financially, living in a tiny rented room in Moldavanka and teaching classes to amateurs in his free time to earn extra money. He graduated with two silver medals for excellent work in 1892, at the age of 23. Bershadsky then wanted to study at the Imperial Academy of Arts in St Petersburg, but was forced to wait two years due to the institution’s admissions quota on Jewish students, as well as his own financial hardship.

At the Imperial Academy of Arts, he studied under the famous painters Ilya Repin and Nikolay Kuznetsov, the latter of whom was also from Odesa. His work was highly complimented by Repin, who remarked on his work even years after Bershadsky had graduated. After graduation, Bershadsky returned to Odessa. In 1907, he opened a private studio school. Because he was Jewish, he was not permitted to teach at Russian imperial institutions. His studio school was very popular; many students who intended to study at the Odessa Art Institute took classes there before they applied, or even while they were attending the institute. Along with paying students, he also taught many talented young Jewish children from Moldavanka for free.

It is important to note Bershadsky not only because he gave Ladyzhensky his early art training, but also because Bershadsky’s own background grounds Ladyzhensky as an heir to a legacy of artists. Bershadsky’s own schooling at the Imperial Academy, especially his instruction from Repin and Kuznetsov, connects him, and thus Ladyzhensky, to some of the most famous artists in Russia.

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203 Dragun, “Bershadsky Iulii Rafailovich.”
205 Dragun, “Bershadsky Iulii Rafailovich.”
Russian artists and art traditions of the nineteenth century. Beyond that, however, Bershadsky’s own Jewish heritage and experience living in Moldavanka further connect Ladyzhensky to a legacy of Odesan Jewish artists.

Another highly important influence on Ladyzhensky was the work of writer Isaac Babel. As introduced in Chapter 1, and further discussed in Chapters 3 and 4, Babel was an Odesan Jewish author known for his short story collections *Odessa Tales (Odesskie rasskazy)*, which is about the underworld of the city on the brink of the Revolution of 1917, and *Red Cavalry (Konarmiia)*, a collection of stories set during the Polish-Soviet War.\textsuperscript{210} He was born in 1894, making him significantly older than Ladyzhensky. Babel’s works began to gain traction in the Soviet literary world in the 1920s, when Ladyzhensky was a teenager. He also wrote the play *Sunset (Zakat)*, an adaptation of *Odessa Tales*, and *Maria (Mariia)*, a play about life in St. Petersburg during the Russian Civil War. He also wrote the screenplay for the film adaptation of *Benya Krik (Benia Krik)*, also based on the *Odesa Tales*. *Odessa Tales*, set in Bershadsky and Ladyzhensky’s neighborhood of Moldavanka, vividly captures the life of Jewish gangsters and neighborhood personas, the most memorable of whom is the local crime boss Benya Krik. *Red Cavalry* was based on Babel’s own experience during the Polish-Soviet war, during which he served under Red Army commander Semyon Budyonny. Babel’s semi-fictional account presents the horrors of war in a harshly realistic way and his protagonist, Lyutov, navigates his own identity as a Soviet Jew.

Babel is widely regarded as one of, if not the, greatest Soviet Jewish authors. His concise, rich stories drop the reader into the seaport of Odessa under a blazing sun, a shtetl occupied by the Red Cavalry, and the spaces in between. Ladyzhensky was deeply inspired by Babel, but wrote that he was initially intimidated by the density of his literary work, finding it somewhat

\textsuperscript{210} For more information on the Polish-Soviet war, see section 1.3.
Inaccessible. Only in 1964 did he paint sketches for a potential staging of *Sunset*. In 1967, his interest in Babel’s work was further ignited when Babel’s son, fellow Moscow artist Mikhail Ivanov, gave Ladyzhensky a copy of Babel’s recently published *Selected Works*.

Babel’s work was a source of great inspiration for Ladyzhensky, not only for his *Red Cavalry* series, which was based directly on stories from the book, but also for *Odessa of My Youth*, which while not directly depicting scenes from *Odessa Tales*, references them and hallmarks of the Odesa text frequently. This is discussed further in Chapter 3 and 4.

### 2.3 Making Art in the Soviet Union

Soviet restrictions on artistic expression affected Ladyzhensky’s entire adult career. It is impossible to understand the flight of Soviet artists from the USSR in the 1970s without understanding from what they were fleeing. After 1921, restrictions on artistic expression, as well as the tumult of the civil war and other factors, led to an emigration of great artists: Marc Chagall, Wassily Kandinsky, David Burliuk, and others. Not until the 1970s would a similar emigration take place. Soviet control on art tightened over time; in the 1920s relatively independent schools like Bershadsky’s studio could still operate. But on April 23, 1932, the Central Committee of the All-Union Communist Party issued a decree dissolving all former organizations in the fields of musical, literary, theatrical, and visual arts, and instituting centralized artists’ unions. These unions became the only legal source of “commissions, sales,
and exhibitions - and also of housing, studio space, paint, canvases, printing presses, foundries."

In 1934, socialist realism became the single acceptable form of art across all mediums. In its Soviet application to visual art, it meant an adherence to realism and a rejection of abstraction and a promotion of Leninist-Marxist ideals. Agricultural and industrial laborers were frequent subjects of socialist realist artwork, as well as portraits of Soviet leaders. In the 1930s, membership in an artists’ union quickly became a requirement for any degree of artistic commercial and distributional success. As Igor Golomshtok wrote in his analysis of Soviet artistic life “by making acceptance of the principles of socialist realism a condition of membership in the Artists’ Union, and membership in the Union a condition for being able to practice professionally, the state provided itself with a convenient mechanism for steering the creativity of every artist into the channels it required.” The nebulous definition of socialist realism meant that artists could not be sure of exactly what elements were forbidden and which permitted; this led to a kind of self-censorship and avoidance of potentially sensitive theming. Socialist realism aimed to glorify the Soviet Union, its leaders, and its peoples, and implicitly opposed modernism and abstraction, which became associated with the “decadent West.”

Visual arts were regulated by a triumvirate of authority: the Academy of Arts, the Union of Soviet Artists, and the Ministry of Culture. The Academy of Arts was a body that had existed during Imperial Russia, but was resurrected in 1947 to “contribute to the creative

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218 Wallach, “Censorship in the Soviet Bloc.”
219 Wallach, “Censorship in the Soviet Bloc.”
223 Reid, “(Socialist) Realism Unbound,” 268.
development of the principles of socialist realism in the practice and theory of the Soviet multinational artistic culture.”

The Academy of Arts governed all forms of artistic education, and enforced adherence to the principles of socialist realism. In these institutions, most art movements postdating nineteenth-century realism were considered “decline” and “decay,” and a hierarchy of genres was established, with the “thematic painting” extolling Soviet values being the most important. After graduating from an art institute, an artist would then find it necessary to join the Union of Soviet Artists in order to gain access to supplies and be able to exhibit their work. The local branch of the Union would then distribute orders for thematic paintings, giving to the artist about a quarter of the payment up front, and withholding the rest until the work was completed. As well, the rest of the payment would only be awarded to the artist if the work followed both the theme given and the standards of socialist realism. The Ministry of Culture controlled many aspects of artistic production, most importantly which artworks were displayed for public consumption in national and international art museums. The Ministry would purchase works from Union exhibitions for this purpose, and maintained vast storage facilities in which artworks rested for future display.

Under Stalin, breaches of such restrictions carried harsh consequences, such as what happened to Babel. The Stalinist purges, beginning in the late 1930s, targeted so-called “enemies of the state:” wealthy peasants, members of the intelligentsia (doctors, lawyers, writers, artists, etc.), and ethnic minorities. The constant threat of mysterious arrests and imprisonment led to an aura of fear and self-censorship in artistic and literary circles. After Stalin’s death in 1953,
Nikita Khrushchev replaced him as First Secretary of the Communist Party. In 1956, Khrushchev made his famous “Secret Speech” condemning Stalin’s repressionist policies, “cult of the individual,” and mass deportations.\textsuperscript{232} Under Khrushchev, there was a loosening of restrictions on publications, television media, and transnational interactions. This became known as “The Thaw,” taking its name from Kievan Jewish author Ilya Ehrenburg’s novel of the same name (\textit{Ottepel’}). But this thaw was not a permanent change; at an exhibition celebrating the 30th anniversary of the Moscow Artists’ Union, Khrushchev erupted in anger over modernist works he saw, particularly the work of Ernst Neizvestny.\textsuperscript{233} This outrage forced open experimentation with abstraction and modernism once again into the realm of private studios and underground exhibitions.

Though Ladyzhensky completed his studies at Odesa Art Institute in 1928-1931, before the tightening of control over artistic education, restrictions on artistic creation and expression impacted Ladyzhensky for his entire career. He was a member of the Soviet Artists’ Union until his retirement.\textsuperscript{234} He participated in more than twenty union exhibitions. However, his works that dealt with Jewish themes more explicitly were the subject of some controversy.\textsuperscript{235} At his 1969 solo exhibition at the Central House of Artists (\textit{Tsentralnyi dom khudozhnika}), Soviet officials balked at the inclusion of selections from \textit{Red Cavalry} and \textit{Odessa of My Youth} because of their Jewish elements.\textsuperscript{236} After a debate that lasted several weeks, the officials relented, and the exhibition opened as planned.\textsuperscript{237} Upon his emigration, that same \textit{Red Cavalry} series was not authorized for export by the Ministry of Culture, and languished in a Ministry warehouse until their retrieval by Victor Ladyzhensky after the fall of the Soviet Union.

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{232} Khrushchev, “On the Cult of Personality.”
\item \textsuperscript{233} Yelshewskaiia, “The Thaw and the 1960s.”
\item \textsuperscript{234} Ostrovsky, “A Life in Art.”
\item \textsuperscript{235} Ostrovsky, “A Life in Art.”
\item \textsuperscript{236} Ladyzhenskaia, \textit{My Father the Artist}, 20.
\item \textsuperscript{237} Ladyzhenskaia, \textit{My Father the Artist}, 20.
\end{itemize}
2.4 Ladyzhensky’s Artwork Today

Ladyzhensky’s works have been the subject of many posthumous exhibitions, accompanied by various publications and catalogs. These exhibitions span three nations: Russia, Israel, and the United States. Currently, his works reside in private collections and in museum collections. Though none, to my knowledge, are on permanent display, the Jewish Museum of New York owns *Vera Kholodnaia’s Funeral (Pokhorony Very Kholodnoi)*, and the Zimmerli Art Museum in Rutgers, New Jersey owns 48 of his paintings and drawings as part of their Russian Art and Soviet Nonconformist Art Collection.

The catalogs published in association with the 2002 Zimmerli Art Museum exhibition “Yefim Ladyzhensky”, the 2007 Ann Loeb Bronfman Gallery exhibition “Reconciling Worlds: The Work of Soviet Artist Yefim Ladyzhensky”, and the 2022-2023 Jewish Museum of Maryland exhibition “Odessa: Paintings by Yefim Ladyzhensky,” have all been essential for the research and development of this thesis. As well, the film produced by Mark Kelner in association with the “Odessa, Odessa: Babel, Ladyzhensky, and the Soul of a City” show at Yeshiva University, which explores connections between Ladyzhensky’s artwork and Babel’s writings, was a launch point for my own exploration of connections between Ladyzhensky’s work and the broader Odesa text.

2.5 Identities, Labels, Identifications

Yefim Ladyzhensky has been labeled in many ways: as a “Russian” artist, a “Soviet Jewish” artist, an “Odesa painter,” a “nonconformist.” Some of these labels can be unclear or misleading, and this is a problem not only with Ladyzhensky, but also with Babel. Some labels

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238 For a full and up-to-date list of exhibitions, see [https://www.yefilm ladyzhensky.com/583544494043](https://www.yefilm ladyzhensky.com/583544494043).
are better than others, and some are worse, but all of them fall somewhat short of a full picture. Identities are also fluid, and change over time. It is hard to put someone’s entire life, work and career under a few short words. These labels are important because they matter to broader histories: whether works end up in Russo-centric collections or Judeo-centric ones, which affects future research and scholarship.

“Russian” when applied to both Ladyzhensky and Babel is somewhat misleading. Ladyzhensky lived and worked in Moscow for most of his career, but it is clear from his paintings and written recollections of his childhood that it is the experience of growing up as a Jew in cosmopolitan, multicultural Odesa that formed his identity. It is also misleading to call them “Russian” as most people in the USSR would not have categorized them as such but rather as Jewish. In the Soviet Union, ethnic information was listed under “nationality” on one’s internal passport, which made ethnic identity an easily accessed marker. Further, there is a common habit among Americans, especially those unfamiliar with Eastern European cultures, to label anyone or anything originating from the Soviet Union or post-Soviet countries as “Russian”. To do so ignores and obfuscates the diversity of cultures, peoples, and languages present in those regions, many of whom would never identify themselves as Russian, but rather as Jewish, German, Ukrainian, Georgian, Chechen, Chukchi, etc. So is Ladyzhensky a “Russian” artist? Is Babel a “Russian” writer? A truer description might be that Ladyzhensky is an Odesan Jewish painter, and Babel is an Odesan Jewish writer.

Why “Odesan” Jewish, and not “Soviet” Jewish? Ladyzhensky was a Soviet Jew in that he was Jewish and spent part of his life in the Soviet Union. But the issue lies within the collective definition of what it means to be a Soviet Jew. Historian Yaacov Ro’i suggests that in the post-Stalin years “Soviet Jews developed a “thin” Jewish culture… meaning that their Jewish
identity and culture became extremely amorphous since they lacked a language of their own, a religious tradition, a distinctive habitat, or dress.”

But Ladyzhensky grew up in the very thick culture of Jewish Moldavanka, which disrupts this narrative of thin Soviet Jewish culture - especially because the “habitat” where Ladyzhensky spent his first ten years was not yet Soviet. The same issue arises with Babel, and the label “Soviet Jew” becomes even more misleading since Babel spent more of his life in the Russian Empire than in the Soviet Union. In the introduction to his translation of Babel’s work, Val Vinokur notes that “Babel was a Jew who became a Russian writer.”

This short sentence belies a myriad of identity complications, leading to a false implication that Babel had to shed his Jewishness in order to become a great “Russian” writer. Further, even “Russian” is unclear: it is true Babel wrote and published his works in the Russian language, but his works are most relevant and important to Soviet history, not Russian.

Beyond the artist himself, Ladyzhensky’s artistic style is similarly difficult to categorize. His work has been called “primitive,” “folk-like,” and most frequently, “naive.” This trouble of categorization reflects the various language insufficiencies of the art world, and not so much on Ladyzhensky’s own work. It is clear Ladyzhensky knows his style quite well; it is recognizable across the majority of his work. His work is no doubt simplified and somewhat child-like, and toys playfully with perspective; yet that playfulness obeys certain principles. It matters what Ladyzhensky’s artwork is categorized as since many of the aforementioned labels imply a certain ignorance of formal technique and study, which contributes to a false impression of Ladyzhensky’s training and intentionally naive style.

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239 Ro’i, Yaacov, New Jewish Diasporas, ed. Gitelman
“Primitive” has been rejected as a label by art critics, curators, and academics for being an Eurocentric denigration of indigenous American, African, and Asian art. Likewise, “primitivism” refers to art made by mostly European artists that draws on non-European objects and artworks as inspiration. Ladyzhensky’s work is certainly not primitivist, but is it primitive? It certainly is not an attempt at realism; a better descriptor, and one frequently used by critics and writers to describe his work, is “naive” art. “Naive art” refers to artwork that uses childlike ways of representing the world, without formal use of perspective. Yet naive art is usually used to describe self-taught artists without formal training, like Ladyzhensky’s contemporary Maria Primachenko. Artists with formal training who intentionally choose to paint in a naive style are sometimes called “pseudo-naive.” I think this the best way to describe Ladyzhensky’s artistic style, as his early paintings and all his drawings reveal his firm grasp on realistic detail and form.
Chapter 3: Painting Odesa

Odessa of My Youth (1962-1979) was Ladyzhensky’s most extensive series, featuring over two hundred paintings done in tempera paint on pasteboard. They illustrate a vast diversity of urban life from Ladyzhensky’s childhood, depicting crowds and markets, hurdy-gurdy players, scenes in courtyards and homes, beach and boat scenes, Jewish professions, weddings, and funerals, and family members and friends in their habitual settings. They also depict memorably unique events like queues for goods during shortages, seasonal traders, circuses, traveling musicians, and gangsters. These scenes are rooted in specific memories of people and places, as reflected in their names: My Uncle Sholom, Madam Mirvis Bought a Piano, Yoska’s Pigeons, etc. While Ladyzhensky’s works are autobiographical, they emerge from an established urban discourse, drawing on the mythos of the Odesa text, as well as his own memories of the city, alongside explicit references to notable authors; taken together, these qualities position his works as visual additions to the literary “Odesa text.”

To engage with the Odesa text, to engage with these Jewish Odesan authors and to represent pre-Soviet Odesa was to go against the atheist Soviet narrative. Beyond recreating memories, Ladyzhensky’s paintings, created in the 1960s and ‘70s, recover intellectual discourse from the 1920s and 30s in a newly visual dimension. To recover a prewar Odesa is also to create a statement opposing the decimation of the Jewish Odesan community. These are inextricably linked, as literary works of the 1920s and 30s depicting Jewish Odesa necessarily reminded him of his own childhood, and vice versa. In the face of both the Holocaust and Russo-Soviet

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241 The title of this series has been referred to several different ways, by Ladyzhensky himself and by others, both in English and in Russian: Odessa: City of My Youth, Odessa of My Young Years, Odessa: The Town of My Childhood. In the most recent album on this collection, Misha Zagorski translates it as “Odessa of My Youth”, which is what I have referred to it as. Ladyzhensky did not date specific paintings, which is why I have not provided dates, but they were all created between 1962-1979.

242 See section 1.5 for a more thorough discussion of the Odesa text.
antisemitism, to create *Odessa of My Youth* is a bold statement opposing the erasure of Odesan Jewishness and Jewish intellectuals like Babel.

### 3.1. *Odessa of My Youth* as an Autobiographical and Historical Document

Ladyzhensky’s *Odessa of My Youth* paintings primarily depict working-class Jewish life as their main subjects. Many of these paintings of men and women at work are titled with the names of specific people, depicting Ladyzhensky’s neighbors and acquaintances from childhood, many of whom perished in the intervening years. In *Mr. Shpitz and Sons (Gospodin Shpitz i synov’ia)* (Plate 1), three men bend over the metal coffins they are constructing in a lamplit workshop. Mr Shpitz and his two sons were Ladyzhensky’s downstairs neighbors in his childhood apartment complex. Ladyzhensky vividly recalls Mr. Shpitz’s artistic skill in his essay of the same name. It was they who made the coffin for the famous Odesan actress Vera Kholodnaia, which shone so brightly it was “practically silver,” and was “the subject of long, flowery conversations and gossip throughout the whole city.” But this artisanry could not last; when zinc was required to aid in economic recovery, Mr. Shpitz was forced to become a roofer of metal roofs, repurposing his metalworking skills. Ladyzhensky lamented the loss of Shpitz’s profession:

> Now in his workshop there were no sheets of glittering zinc, instead they were gloomy deep blue, with a red-green-purple sheen, and edges resembling oil spills on the surface of water: sheets of roofing iron. The skill was the same, but the profession was different. What Shpitz now had to do was as different from his previous work as carpentry is from cabinetmaking. [...] He was a sophisticated master in proximity to death, yet became an undifferentiated tradesman upon approaching life.

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243 Ladyzhensky, *Mr. Shpitz and Sons.*
244 Ladyzhensky, “Mr. Shpitz and Sons.”
245 Ladyzhensky, “Mr. Shpitz and Sons.”
246 Ladyzhensky, “Mr. Shpitz and Sons.”
247 Ladyzhensky, “Mr. Shpitz and Sons.”
248 Ladyzhensky, “Mr. Shpitz and Sons.”
Ladyzhensky’s recollection of the colors of the metal evoke the coloration of his paintings, and the complexity of his description of his occupation as an artist. The physical destruction of the war years ended the specialized craft of coffinmaking that Ladyzhensky spent his boyhood years watching with awe. At the end of the essay, Ladyzhensky writes:

On one of my visits to my mother, I found out that Mr. Spitz had fallen off a roof, been in the hospital, and steadfastly endured both an operation and the death of his wife. He continued to cover the dwellings of the living with iron.

In 1941, he and his two sons, who had remained to defend the city, were hanged from the balcony over his former workshop.\(^{249}\)

This writing illuminates Ladyzhensky’s motivation for recovering his childhood memories through painting. All of the people he depicts had their lives profoundly changed by the World War II; in the case of Mr. Spitz, he is forced by the changing economy to switch professions, is the victim of a terrible accident, loses his wife, and is killed by Nazi forces during the occupation of Odesa. The memories of Ladyzhensky’s childhood are forever altered by what follows them, which is why he attempts to represent past stories and scenes that others are not able to tell or describe.

Another way Ladyzhensky depicts people at work is in the painting *We Are Wrapping Candies* (*My zavorachivaem konfety*) (Plate 2).\(^{250}\) Here, Ladyzhensky portrays work in which he himself engaged. Under the New Economic Policy (1921-28), some private commercial activity was allowed, and his neighbor Madam Stiro ran a business wrapping candies in paper for individual sale.\(^{251}\) To aid in this work, Madam Stiro “employed” the children of the neighborhood, as Ladyzhensky reminisced: “After handing in fifty wrapped sweets, we would receive one unwrapped sweet for ourselves. Such was the price the old exploiter paid for free

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249 Ladyzhensky, “Mr. Shpitz and Sons.”
250 Ladyzhensky, *We Are Wrapping Candies.*
251 Ladyzhensky, “We Are Wrapping Candies.”
labor from children.” In the painting, children all sit on one side of a table in mismatched chairs, an enormous mountain of pink candies, yet unwrapped, lying in front of them. Outside the window, the viewer can see Ladyzhensky’s dog Squirrel (Belka) waiting for her owner to return. Squirrel was the name of Ladyzhensky’s childhood pet, a small brown-and-white dog that frequently appears in Odessa of My Youth.

Ladyzhensky’s paintings depict Odesan weddings, funerals, crowds gathered at the marketplace, goods gathered for sale. In Bessarabian Wine (Bessarabskoe vino), We Are Wrapping Candies, and Salting Mackerel (Zasolka skumbrii), Ladyzhensky layers objects to form a textured pattern, whether they be barrels, candies, or fish. This tiling effect, a frequent technique of his, impresses the viewer with the color and repetition of the object, but also emphasizes the vast quantities of goods flowing in and out of the port of Odesa. These depictions of plenty contrast with the later Soviet shortages. The intense repetition and detail to each item represents the reliance of everyday life in Odesa on the flow of goods in and out of the city, and their massive quantities received.

When Ladyzhensky employs this technique with crowds, he emphasizes the vast number of people present at an event. In Our Theater is Burning (Nash teatr gorit), the people are shaded in red by the light of the fire that gleams as if just outside the frame, and they tile together so thickly that only their faces are visible, forming a giant, detailed mass. In A Man Got Run Over By A Tram (Chelovek popal pod tramvai), another crowd gathers around an unseen accident, a crowd of darkened silhouettes gathered around two medics in bright white leaning over the tracks. In The Crimea-Caucasus Line (Krymsko-Kavkazskaia liniiia), a dense crowd of people

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252 Ladyzhensky, “We Are Wrapping Candies.”
253 Ladyzhensky, “Watermelon Dock.”
254 Ladyzhensky, Bessarabian Wine.
255 Ladyzhensky, Salting Mackerel.
256 Ladyzhensky, Our Theater is Burning.
257 Ladyzhensky, A Man Got Run Over By A Tram.
is seen exiting a ship, being greeted by the people onshore. All wear white, which strengthens the repetitive sense of anonymity. The crowd thickens most at the ship’s edge, where the faces are layered so thickly they overlap. Beyond the people is a stand of barrels, as densely packed as the people before them. Ladyzhensky’s use of repetition adds emphasis and drama to certain scenes, giving them more astounding visual weight. These duplicative masses allow for large blocks of color to predominate in the painting; for example, the silver and blue in *Salting Mackerel* produce a powerful visual effect.

Ladyzhensky’s depictions of Odesa-as-port extend not only to the commercial goods that arrived in the city, but also to its docks and seaside institutions. In Ladyzhensky’s essay about *The Watermelon Dock (V arbuznoi gavani)* (Plate 3), he describes the wooden boats that sailed to Odesa bearing hulls chock-full of watermelons every year, with seasonal traders in “striped sailors’ shirts and shirtless, richly tattooed, [...] baked by the sun of Tavria and weathered by the winds of the Black and Azov Seas.” These watermelons were coming to Odesa from Crimea, and so were their merchants; being a port meant a constant in and outflow of sailors, merchants, and other foreigners. Ladyzhensky fondly describes the taste and appearance of the watermelons, which were called *kavun* in the Odesan regional dialect.

> “In a *kavun* there is a defiant gorgeousness… that cannot match any other fruit. When seen for the first time, it should produce a stunning effect, with its contrasting outside and inside, with its whimsically striped vivid dark and light green outside, with its bright, open red inside, and finally its black pips. Say what you like, but this is a beautiful, impressive spectacle, which is why it has been a frequent motif of master painters.”

Certainly, at least, the melon was a frequent motif of Ladyzhensky’s, featured in not only *The Watermelon Dock*, but also in *They’ll Be Selling Watermelons In the Morning (Utrom budut torgovat’ kavunami)*, *Ripe Watermelons (Spelye kavuny)*, *Watermelon Alley (Kavuny na

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259 Ladyzhensky, “Watermelon Dock.”
260 Ladyzhensky, “Watermelon Dock.”
vyrez), Monastery Watermelons (Monastyrskie kavuny), and On an Oaken Boat with Watermelons (Na arbuznom dubke). Indeed, kavuny are featured more than any other product in Ladyzhensky’s port paintings, perhaps due to the vastness of the watermelon harbor during their seasonal sale, or the novelty of their seasonal nature. Either way, they fix a strong memory of a seasonal treat.

Beyond the docks, Ladyzhensky painted the Odesan seaside, which he traveled to by tram, being outside the heart of the city. Ladyzhensky’s seaside paintings favor the ellipsoid shape of boats as seen from above, often contrasted with the flat golden glow of the sands. In Morning on Lanzheron (Utrom na Lanzherone), beachgoers in minimal swimwear lie on the beach, the heat of the summer day conveyed by the reddened tan skin of the figures, especially in contrast with the pale figure at the upper right whose head is beneath a white sun tent. This same humor is present in We Are Preparing for Exams (My gotovimsia k exzamenam), where two nude young men lie in a boat, their tan lines revealing just how much time they have spent in the sun “studying.”

Ladyzhensky describes his attraction to the Lanzheron beach in his essay Lanzheron:

“I started coming to Lanzheron as soon as the seawater – and only that of the Black Sea where it washes Odessa – could cool my body, which was hot both from the inside and from the outside. I walked, I rushed, and I ran towards it to feel its saltiness and bitterness on my tongue, to smell the seaweeds and the iodine, to fill my lungs with the sea air.”

To Ladyzhensky, Lanzheron was not only a place for respite from the summer heat, but also a place of wildness and freedom. His description evokes multiple senses: “feel its saltiness and bitterness on my tongue, to smell the seaweeds and the iodine” as well as feeling the coolness of the water on his skin. Reinforcing this sensuality of the seaside is the nudity and

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261 Ladyzhenskaia, Odessa of My Youth, 8, 144, 150, 212, 216.
262 Ladyzhensky, Morning on Lanzheron.
263 Ladyzhensky, We Are Preparing for Exams.
264 Ladyzhensky, “Lanzheron.”
semi-nudity present in his beach paintings. This environment of freedom was clearly embraced by others as well, as Ladyzhensky describes an uncomfortable experience rowing a boat for a couple who did not know how to row: “they were drinking and eating, hugging and kissing each other. In order to avoid discomfort and to allow complete freedom to their hands and lips, I turned my back towards them, stopped rowing and backed the oars and turned my eyes in glasses to where the horizon divides the water from the sky, or maybe, contrariwise, where they become one.” Indeed, Vacation Continues (Kanikuly eshche prodolzhaiutsia) and Morning on Lanzheron depict groups of young people of both genders mingling and having fun.

His work The Guys Are Painting Well (Khorosho patsany risuyut) (Plate 4) shows three young artists with portable painting kits working on the beach; behind them stand several onlooking fishermen with cigarettes and pipes hanging out of their mouths, watching the artistic process intently. This scene is drawn from Ladyzhensky’s memories of his teenage summers. He remarks: “The fishermen who lived near Lanzheron knew me well. I often sketched on their territory, painting their white flat-roofed cottages, their colorful rowboats named after their girlfriends, and even the fishermen themselves, who occasionally modeled for me.”

This is not the only painting depicting Ladyzhensky’s early artistic career. His painting Bershadsky’s Studio (Studiia Bershadskogo) (Plate 5) shows the art school he attended as a young teenager, showing a group of young boys hard at work in a classroom, each attempting to paint the still life of a watermelon, a basket, and a bottle at the front of the room. None of their paintings are turned to the viewer, so the skill of the boys remains hidden. At front, a man in a suit, Bershadsky, critiques a boy’s painting. This is a depiction of the classroom setting in which

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265 Ladyzhensky, “Lanzheron.”
266 Ladyzhensky, Vacation Continues.
267 Ladyzhensky, The Guys are Painting Well.
268 Ladyzhensky, “Lanzheron.”
269 Ladyzhensky, Bershadsky’s Studio.
Ladyzhensky received his early art education; although it seems from his memoirs that he spent considerable time completing painting exercises on the beach as well.

Ladyzhensky’s *Odessa of My Youth* paintings do not only present pleasant memories from his childhood, but also his recollections of hard times and difficult change in the city. The seaside was not only a place of physical, sexual, and spiritual freedoms; during the first World War and the civil war, Lanzheron was a place for street children (*besprizorniki* 270) to gather. Ladyzhensky describes in *Lanzheron* how “in revolutionary and post-revolutionary times street boys occupied [the beach] for longer periods of time.” The orphans came to the beach to “wash themselves and their sexless and colorless rags, to search for lice and to shave each other’s heads using broken bottle glass.”271 Such groups of parentless and homeless children were common in the war years, as established infrastructure such as orphanages was not adequately equipped to care for the vast numbers of orphans produced by more than seven years of civil unrest.

Ladyzhensky depicts these orphans in the painting *Street Boys at the Deep End* (*Besprizornye na Glubokom Massive*) (Plate 6), where six nude boys recline as their clothes dry on the ground around them.272 One boy combs another’s hair, while the other four gather to play cards, most likely the game “twenty-one” that Ladyzhensky recalls.273 In many ways, *Street Boys at the Deep End* resembles the other seaside paintings, depicting nude figures relaxing by the shore. But for the street boys, this relaxation has a very different character; they have no homes to return to, and leisure is not a break from busy life but rather an extended period of limbo.

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270 Беспризорники, also sometimes translated as “orphan” or “waif.” It refers to a child or teenager who is not encompassed by a nuclear family. It does not strictly mean “orphan” in that one or both parents might still be alive, just not involved in their care. There is not a great translation in English so I have used “orphan,” ”street child,” and “street boy” as substitutes.
271 Ladyzhensky, “*After the Night Raid.*”
272 Ladyzhensky, *Street Boys at the Deep End.*
273 Ladyzhensky, “*After the Night Raid.*”
In his essay “On the painting After the Night Raid” he described the origins of these orphans in more detail:

“The war of 1914 laid the foundation for this orphan class to emerge, and both their numbers and distribution were expanded by the civil war that engulfed the whole country. The homeless children were of both genders and of different ages. Two good books have been written about them, *The Republic of ShKID* and *The Pedagogical Poem*, as well as the film "Road to Life". There are also endless, sugary, sentimental stories about the kindness of Lenin and Dzerzhinsky to them. This is how it was in books, on stage, in the cinema- but in real life? God forbid.”

Ladyzhensky wrote compassionately about the orphans he remembered from his childhood, many of them he was personally acquainted with. He became acquainted with several children from a nearby orphanage, one of whom, Yasha Timofeev, studied at Bershadsky’s studio along with Ladyzhensky. He also spent part of one summer assisting at the Reformatorium, a juvenile prison. Another place Ladyzhensky remembers the presence of street children is near the asphalt boilers in the city.

After years of destruction, repairing the sidewalks lined with Vesuvius lava tiles required considerable effort from city officials, and, apparently, this is why they chose an easier way: to fill the tiles with asphalt. The homeless found shelter at night among warm ashes and unburned pieces of wood in these asphalt smelters; the remaining asphalt in them, smelted during the day, was warm for a long time… In the morning, the homeless emerged from the furnace so painted with soot, so astonishing in appearance that no grease paint, no human effort, and no master costumer could imitate it either on the stage or on film.

Even while he writes on other topics, Ladyzhensky retains the eye of an artist. His impression of the homeless emerging from the asphalt smelters is tied to theatrical production and costuming; when he describes the waters of Lanzheron, he compares it to “Berlin blue and

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274 Ladyzhensky, “After the Night Raid.”
276 Ladyzhensky, “After the Night Raid.”
277 Ladyzhensky, “After the Night Raid.”
French green.”

He laments the slapdash repairs to an architecturally complex city, with ancient tiles being paved over with asphalt. This echoes a similar sentiment found in “Mr. Shpitz,” where Ladyzhensky regrets that Mr. Shpitz’s new career as a roofer removes his capability for artistry.

The pre-Soviet Odesa Ladyzhensky depicts is full of bright colors, while his paintings set in 1917 and beyond, such as New Power in Our Street Again (Na nashei ulitse opiat’ smenilas’ vlast’), are duller and more drab. In depictions of the beach, the markets, and celebrations such as weddings or carnivals, he depicts a sunny, bright Odesa through his use of saturated, vivid color. Ladyzhensky’s Odesa is a bustling, vibrant city, filled with vast numbers of people, as shown by his repeating crowds. And what kind of people? Many are Jewish, like many of the neighbors and relatives he paints, or the men in his synagogue paintings, and many others are Russians or Ukrainians. Yet his paintings like Chinese Handicraft (Kitaiskie rukodeliia), The Roma Come to My Town (Tsygane prishli v gorod), To Mecca Through My City (V Mekku cherez moi gorod), or even Watermelon Dock with its tattooed sailors reveal the diversity of Odesa as a vital cosmopolitan space with many people arriving from all over. His repeated use of large crowds could also symbolize the vast community of Odesans, particularly Jewish Odesans, that was destroyed and traumatized by the violence of the Holocaust and the hardship of the Second World War. His Odesa is never a static one, as some of his paintings depict early Soviet change in the city and its effect on the people who live in it.

3.2 Cafes

As covered in section 1.2, the cafe was an essential and popular space in Jewish Odesan culture. Ladyzhensky painted three of the Odessa cafes: Fanconi, Robinat, and Pechyosski. In

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278 Ladyzhensky, “Lanzheron.”
279 Ladyzhensky, New Power in Our Street Again.
280 Ladyzhenskaja, Odessa of My Youth, 26, 172.
281 Ladyzhenskaja, My Father the Artist, 23.
Cafe Robinat (Kafe Robina) (Plate 9), the cafe faces a busy street, and there is a clear separation between those beneath the awning of the cafe, and those who pass by on the cobblestones. On the street, a blind man plays violin, a young boy shines shoes, and a dog begs for food from the cafe patrons. There is a sense of bustling activity, and countless inaudible conversations between the more than two dozen figures depicted. In Ladyzhensky’s painting, Cafe Robinat is a center of hustle and bustle, one by virtue of its open-air nature connected to the pedestrian city streets. The painting is dominated by the neat green stripes of the cafe awning and the mottled blue-gray squares of the cobblestone streets, as if to further represent this inside-outside relationship.

In Pechyosski’s Cafe (Kafe pechesskogo) (Plate 7), a very similar scene is depicted, but from a reversed perspective. Instead of viewing the cafe from the outside, this time we view it from the inside, although the streets are still visible through the windows. Unlike “Cafe Robinat,” all the figures wear white, perhaps due to summer heat, but also suggesting the blur of memory. At the door stands an almost militaristic figure, in cap and striped pants, at parade rest; perhaps an off-duty sailor, or a doorman of sorts.

In front of The Former Fanconi Cafe (Kafe byvshii Fankoni) (Plate 8), a similar guard stands, this one in a white uniform and red cap, his coat trimmed with gold. The status of “former” indicates the painting is meant to be set after the Bolshevik revolution, when private property was nationalized and ownership of Odesa’s cafes was transferred to the state. The white curtains and awning, as well as the intricate green fencing along the patio, match pictures of the cafe from the 1920s. What Ladyzhensky’s painting can give us, unlike the black-and-white photographs, is the vibrancy of color, breathing life into the scene. The sidewalk tiles almost

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282 Ladyzhensky, Cafe Robinat.
283 Ladyzhensky, Pechyosski’s Cafe.
284 Ladyzhensky, The Former Fanconi Cafe.
285 Buzynski, “Cafe Fanconi.”
seem to glow in different shades of blue, pink, green, and brown, as if reflecting a summer sky. Out on the street, two horse-drawn chaises linger, one driver absorbed in conversation, and the other by a cigarette, probably waiting to pick up passengers from within the cafe. The cabbies are dressed in the clothes of workmen, with brown and blue coats and caps, yet the cafe patrons and pedestrians are uniformly dressed in white, perhaps to indicate their middle-class summer attire. Ladyzhensky uses white clothes to depict upper-class people at leisure, such as in his painting *Restaurant at the London Hotel (Restoran v gostinitse Londonskaia)*, where young women and old men all dressed in white sit around white tables, drinking red wine, while waiters in black tails attend to them; perhaps this is the case as well with *The Former Fanconi’s Cafe.*

### 3.3 Odessa of My Youth and the Odesa Text

Ladyzhensky’s *Red Cavalry* series is the most direct confluence of literary and visual Odesa text, but the connection reaches into *Odessa of My Youth* and beyond. Beyond *Odessa of My Youth*, in the 1940s, Ladyzhensky created scenery sketches for Babel’s play *Sunset* and also Eduard Bagritsky’s poem *The Lay of Opanas*, considering both plays as works “after his own theme.”**287** Neither of these choices were ideologically safe within the Soviet regime, especially after Babel’s 1939 arrest, execution, and subsequent blotting from the page of Soviet literary history.**288** What exactly happened to Isaak Babel would have been unclear to Ladyzhensky, as well as to all other Soviet citizens, as information regarding his arrest, imprisonment, and was only revealed in the early 1990s.**289** The explicit Jewishness of Eduard Bagritsky’s poems made them the subject of scrutiny under Soviet rule, attacked by critics as contributing to the “Jewish ‘destruction’ of Russian culture.”**290** Ladyzhensky’s familiarity and engagement with these

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**286** Ladyzhensky, *Restaurant at the London Hotel.*


**288** Babel, *The Complete Works*.

**289** Babel, *The Complete Works*.

**290** Shrayer, “Bagritskii, Eduard Georgievich.”
controversial works both cements his engagement with the Odesa text, but also affirms his position as a nonconformist artist.

Ladyzhensky also engaged with the work of Valentin Kataev, painting sketches for a potential staging of Kataev’s “The Lonely White Sail” (“Beleet parus odinokii”). These paintings show a fish market, barrels aboard a ferry, and a blockaded street: nearly identical imagery to much of his autobiographical work.291 Kataev’s novel recounts the events of the 1905 Potemkin mutiny from the eyes of two young boys, a similar perspective to Ladyzhensky’s throughout Odessa of My Youth and Babel’s in his short story “The Story of My Dovecot.”

The Odessa of My Youth series is not ideologically safe, nor is it socialist realist. Its flattened, simplified style combats the adherence to realism, as does its creative and artistic use of color. It does not shy away from the hardships of the 1910s and 1920s, even those under Soviet rule, as shown in the lines of people queuing for deficit goods, or the images of homeless street children. Its persistent Jewishness, as well, was not beloved by Soviet authorities, as evidenced by the controversy at his 1969 show (discussed further in section 2.3.)

Even in Ladyzhensky’s scenes from his childhood, there are echoes of Babel. His gangster paintings are the clearest example. Gangster, His Bride, and His Best Men (Naletchik, ego nevesta i shafery) (Plate 10) immediately evokes Babel’s short story, “The King” (Korol’), which opens with Benya Krik’s sister’s wedding ceremony.292 293 The Gangsters are Racing to Make Love (Plate 11) places nine figures in an imagined space, showing both three men in white suits being driven in separate carriages on the street, while in the top half of the painting three nude women recline.294 White dominates the painting, from the white sheets of the beds to the

292 Ladyzhensky, Gangster, His Bride, and His Best Men.
294 Ladyzhensky, The Gangsters are Racing to Make Love.
white suits of the gangsters to the white-furred horses pulling the carriages. This light color palette and lighthearted scene contrasts strongly with standard visions of Odessa’s criminal underworld, which is dominated by nighttime, dark suits, intimidation, and violent crime. Here, the gangsters appear nonthreatening, holding flowers instead of weapons, and the overall tone of the scene is comedic. This same lighthearted contrast is present in the wedding scene as well, with gangsters taking on the roles of groom and best men, instead of their usual role as participants in organized crime. Ladyzhensky’s wry humor and depiction of Odesan gangsters falls right in line with Babel’s depictions of gangsters in *Odessa Tales*.

Babel and Ladyzhensky both depict antisemitic violence in Odesa of the 1910s-1920s, and their works are in conversation with one another. In *Self-Defense in My Building* (*Samooborona v moem dome*) (Plate 12), Ladyzhensky’s male neighbors move striped mattresses, chairs and tables to form a makeshift barricade to defend against the threat of a pogrom.295 *Petliura has Come to the City* (*Petliura prishel v gorod*) (Plate 13) is the other half of this diptych, depicting the inside of the building, where curtains are drawn over the windows, and elderly men and women, younger women, and children gather worriedly.296 Similar striped mattresses to the ones being carried are leaning against the inside of the windows. In the left of the painting, a woman leans down to tend to a boy’s scraped cheek. This diptych is depicting a pogrom under Symon Petliura, the leader of the short-lived independent Ukraine between 1918-1921. This depiction of a pogrom from the eyes of a young boy is quite similar to Babel’s short story “The Story of My Dovecot”, in which a young boy is struck across the face by a neighbor of his during the pogrom of 1905.297 The young boy with the facial injury in Ladyzhensky’s painting seems to almost directly reference the events of Babel’s powerful story.

296 Ladyzhensky, *Petliura has Come to the City*.
297 Babel, *The Essential Fictions*, 64.
Pogroms and vigilante justice are also shown in *Mob Justice (Samosud.*)* Here, four wagons and their drivers surround an injured man. This is one of Ladyzhensky’s most explicitly violent paintings, with the red blood on the injured man’s face immediately drawing the eye in contrast to the drab grays and browns of the rest of the scene. Three of the men turn their backs to the injured man, while one peers down at him, holding something hidden, his jacket removed. Even the horses drawing the wagons seem to turn their heads to the side. While somewhat opaque in its narrative, the painting appears to depict antisemitic violence in Odesa. The turned-away men and horses evoke the attitudes of gentile bystanders and police towards pogroms in the city, which were essentially permissive, as discussed in the opening chapter.

In his painting *The Movies Come to My Town (U nas snimaetsia kino),* Ladyzhensky depicts an actor descending the Odesa steps. Yet this painting does not reference Eisenstein’s 1925 *Battleship Potemkin,* but a different film made in that same year: Alexander Granovsky’s *Jewish Luck.* The film was an adaptation of Aleichem’s *Menakhem Mendl* stories, and the screenplay was written by Babel himself. *Jewish Luck,* while silent, had intertitles in Yiddish, and was part of short-lived Soviet Yiddish film production. Its use of the Odesa steps by cinematographer Eduard Tissé may have inspired his work on a later project that same year: *Battleship Potemkin.* Tissé worked on both. Ladyzhensky’s choice to depict this lesser-known Yiddish film in a painting, rather than Eisenstein’s propagandistic one, is a choice to center Jewish and Yiddish film in the creation of the Odesa steps mythology. As well, it connects Ladyzhensky again to works of the Odesa text, Babel’s screenplay and Aleichem’s characters.

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300 Kelner, “Odessa, Odessa.” (film)
301 National Center for Jewish Film, “Jewish Luck.”
302 National Center for Jewish Film, “Jewish Luck.”
Just as Ladyzhensky’s *Red Cavalry* illustrates stories from Babel’s *Red Cavalry*, so too does *Odessa of My Youth* show us familiar scenes, characters, and settings from *Odessa Stories*. This is not what Ladyzhensky set out to do; he set out to depict the city of his childhood, scenes and people he remembered. It is not directly a series of illustrations of Babel’s stories, but the two series complement each other beautifully. Ladyzhensky brings the physical spaces of Babel to a visual medium, showing us Fanconi’s Cafe, the streets of Odesa, the docks and ships in the harbor in color, developing a visual opus that reflects Babel’s literary one. To return to Babel’s 1916 “Odessa” essay, previously quoted in Chapter 1:

> In the summer, its sunny bathing establishments gleam with the bronzed and muscled physiques of young sports enthusiasts, the powerful bodies of fishermen… And a small distance from the deep wide sea, there are factories puffing smoke, and Karl Marx is up to his usual business.

> In Odessa there is a very poor and crowded, long-suffering Jewish ghetto… In Odessa, there are sweet and languorous spring evenings, the spicy scent of acacia, and the unwavering and irresistible light of the moon above the dark sea.

> In Odessa, in the evening, out at their comical vulgar dachas, the fat comical bourgeois lie about on their daybeds in white socks, digesting their full dinners…

> In Odessa the “luftmenschen” root around the coffeehouses trying to make a ruble and feed the family, but there’s nothing to be made, because what can a completely useless person – a “luftmensch” – really make?

> In Odessa there is a port, and in the port – ships from Newcastle, Cardiff, Marseilles, and Port Said; Negroes, Englishmen, Frenchmen, and Americans.\(^\text{303}\)

Here, Babel is enumerating what he believes to be the unique and essential components of Odesan culture, and this quote reads almost as a list of Ladyzhensky’s painting subjects. First, we see in Ladyzhensky’s paintings the muscularity and sexuality of the half-clothed seaside, appearing in *Morning on Lanzheron, The Guys are Painting Well, Vacation Still Proceeds*, and others. Ladyzhensky’s depiction of working-class Jewish life in Moldavanka is considerably more sympathetic than Babel’s “very poor and crowded, long-suffering Jewish ghetto.”\(^\text{304}\)

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Babel was born in Moldavanka, he did not grow up there, but in the more middle-class downtown; his father was a businessman of agricultural machinery.\(^{305}\) Perhaps this wealthier upbringing contributed to his view expressed here. Moldavanka was also not a ghetto in the sense that Jews were required to live there; it was simply a Jewish neighborhood. Regardless, it is Moldavanka that appears beneath Ladyzhensky’s brush, reflecting Babel’s list of Odesa’s unique aspects. Ladyzhensky’s paintings of the wealthy at leisure, such as in *Restaurant at the London Hotel*, match precisely with Babel’s “fat comical bourgeois [who] lie about on daybeds in white socks.”\(^{306}\) Ladyzhensky’s paintings of Cafe Robinat, Pechyosski and Fanconi depict the very space where a luftmensch might try to “make a ruble and feed the family.”\(^{307}\) Finally, Babel notes the diversity of Odesa as a stop for far-flung sailors and travelers. Ladyzhensky’s depictions of Chinese people, Muslims, and Roma traveling and living in Odesa reflect this multicultural, cosmopolitan dimension of the city. Babel does not in this essay describe criminality as an essential Odesan element, but he makes clear in the *Odessa Tales* that Jewish gangsters such as Benya Krik are an essential part of the culture and underground of Odesa. Ladyzhensky’s paintings, too, encompass the dimension of criminality.

Ladyzhensky’s direct engagement with the works of Babel, Bagritsky, Eisenstein, and Kataev firmly plant his *Odessa of My Youth* series within the concept of the Odesa text. Not only does he make use of the elements that define the text, but he also engages with and illustrates the literary works that constitute it. Ladyzhensky’s more than two hundred *Odessa of my Youth* paintings, done in the 1960s and 1970s, are a direct continuation of the Odesa text that emerged in the nineteenth century and blossomed in the 1920s and 1930s.

\(^{305}\) Sicher, “Babel.”


Chapter 4: Red Cavalries

Isaac Babel’s *Red Cavalry* (Konarmiia, 1927) cycle is a semi-fictional account of the Polish-Soviet war of 1919-1920. Babel himself worked as a journalist at the front under commander Semyon Budyonny, and Lyutov, the narrator of the *Red Cavalry* stories, is likewise a war correspondent. The stories are compact scenes of war, focused not on grandiose battles or war heroes, but on snippets of everyday violence, soldiers quartering in civilians’ homes, and the poverty and suffering that war effects. Babel’s protagonist, Lyutov, is a Jewish Communist who experiences antisemitism from other soldiers and navigates self-identity as a Jew through his relationships with the Jews he encounters living in shtetls, much as Babel himself did. The *Red Cavalry* stories were published in different newspapers and periodicals individually in the 1920s, and later released as a collection.

Ladyzhensky’s *Red Cavalry* series divided forcibly by time and place. He considered the paintings to be among his best and was profoundly saddened when they were requisitioned by the Ministry of Culture when he emigrated in 1978. In Israel, he produced eighteen intricate pen-and-ink drawings replicating the lost paintings, all utilizing detailed vertical cross-hatching. Victoria Ladyzhenskaia writes: “This was his own way of settling the score with the Soviet authorities that had seized his Babel-based painterly series and stored them in their infamous depositories. Large-scale, complex compositions, exhaustion-inducing work. But this was his way to free his mind of his grief and ease the pain, at least a bit.” These drawings were published alongside Babel’s stories in Val Vinokur’s 2018 translation of Babel’s works. Some

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308 Ladyzhenskaia, *My Father the Artist*, 30-32.
310 Babel, *The Essential Fictions*. 
pairs, like the *Berestechko* painting and drawing, resemble one another almost exactly. But with others, like *My First Goose (Moi pervyi gus’)* (Plate 16), there are significant differences in the composition of the scene and depiction of figures.

Why did Ladyzhensky make this series twice? In his memoir essays dictated to his daughter, he wrote: “*Red Cavalry* was for me what the Bible or Greek myths are for most artists — an origin and impetus to express my thoughts and feelings.” Here, Ladyzhensky refers to the nineteenth-century European tradition of illustrating classical scenes, either from Greek or Roman mythology or the Bible, a tradition taught in the Russian Imperial Academy of Arts and embraced by nineteenth-century realists like Ilya Repin. This tradition emerged from a time in the Russian history of art when there were quotas limiting Jewish attendance at imperial art colleges, and the beating heart of the art world was St. Petersburg. Depictions of classical mythology and the Bible belong to an artistic tradition that in the Russian context excluded Jewish artists, while Babel’s *Red Cavalry* is a profoundly Jewish, modern, and Odesan work, one that aligns both with Ladyzhensky’s life experiences as well as the themes of his *Odesa of My Youth* paintings. When the Soviet authorities withheld his original *Red Cavalry* paintings series, Ladyzhensky lost his works that represented themes he considered the most important to be illustrated. Recreating them in drawing form, Ladyzhensky created replacements, which could be shown in their place if the paintings were never recovered.

Babel’s story series opens with a sudden and grim confrontation with the violence of war. In “Crossing the River Zbrucz” (“Perekhod cherez Zbruch”), Lyutov is quartered in his “assigned billet,” where after a nightmare, it is revealed that his bedmate is a dead man’s corpse. His host, a Jewish woman, explains that this is her father, murdered by Polish soldiers. In

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311 This is the name of a Ukrainian town; the transliteration is the same as the English title.
312 Ladyzhensky, *Berestechko*.
Ladyzhensky’s painting of the same title (Plate 14), the woman and her father are shrouded in white, the white moon behind them appearing like a human face.\textsuperscript{314} In Babel’s story, the sun and moon are both compared to faces when “an orange sun rolls across the sky like a severed head” and later, at night, “only the moon with its blue hands clasping its round, sparkling, carefree head, tramps about under the window.”\textsuperscript{315} Red suffuses the painting, with Lyutov himself in monochrome red, hands clasped and head bent, at the left of the painting, a horse’s head floating behind him. The dead man’s hands and face are outlined in a shock of pure cadmium, contrasting with his teal skin. Beyond, in the blue darkness, there are two distressed figures: the “red-haired, thin-necked Jews” that live in this home in Babel’s story. The painting is suffused with vibrant color, red, teal, white, and blue, creating vivid visual drama to illustrate the shock of this scene.

The corresponding drawing (Plate 15), by virtue of its pen-and-ink medium, lacks the information conveyed by the painting’s color.\textsuperscript{316} Lyutov, at left, is shrouded in dark shadow, and his glasses reflect the brightness of the white center figures. Throughout Babel’s \textit{Red Cavalry}, Lyutov’s glasses mark him as an intellectual Jewish outsider among the Cossack cavalymen and Red Army soldiers, and Ladyzhensky employs this attribute to visually identify him throughout his paintings and drawings. No face appears in the circle of the moon, and three figures in the background raise their hands in surprise. At right, an overturned chair is drawn in detail. While in the painting, the two central figures are highlighted in white, while Lyutov and the men appear in red and blue, the drawing achieves this contrast through value, with bright white at center and deep shadow in the rest of the scene. Both illustrations convey the central horror of “Crossing the River Zbrucz”; the sudden confrontation with senseless violence, and the kneeling, mourning woman showing war’s impact on civilian families.

\textsuperscript{314} Ladyzhensky, \textit{Crossing the River Zbrucz}.
\textsuperscript{315} Babel, \textit{Red Cavalry}, trans. Vinokur, 15-16.
\textsuperscript{316} Ladyzhensky, \textit{Crossing the River Zbrucz}. 
The composition of the painting *My First Goose* (Plate 16) and the drawing *My First Goose* (Plate 17) are entirely different. In the story, Lyutov is teased for his appearance and background: “You’re one of those pansies! [...] And with glasses on your nose. What a little louse! … They send you without so much as checking with us – and you get cut to pieces for glasses around here.” The Ukrainian Cossacks he is billeted with toss his trunk over the fence, scattering Lyutov’s belongings. Babel’s hero wins the respect of the other soldiers when he kills a wandering goose with a saber and demands the woman hosting them to cook and serve it. Ladyzhensky’s painting, dominated by teal and green, depicts this central moment of Babel’s story. Lyutov drags a white goose half the size of himself, which is trailing pinkish-red blood, and carries a saber of similar color. He directly faces the woman, who looks horrified.

In the drawing, too, he faces the woman, but holds the goose aloft, speared on the saber. Its head dangles, replacing his own, while he, decapitated, holds his head in his hand. Instead of striding toward the woman, he stands still. This woman is older, seated, her eyes closed, and appears less visibly distressed. The goose’s head replacing Lyutov’s shows the swap of his original appearance as an educated Jew for the appearance of a tough warrior, ready to commit violence even when unnecessary. His glasses are a visible representation of the difference between Lyutov and the other soldiers: first, that he is not a soldier, but a journalist, and second, that he is a university-educated man, while the Cossacks that he is boarding with cannot read. In Babel’s story, Lyutov sacrifices his former self, replacing it with violent acts and intimidation, in order to fit in. The visual swap of the goose’s head with Lyutov’s shows this transformation in Ladyzhensky’s drawing.

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318 Babel, *Red Cavalry,* 51.
Like the two versions of *My First Goose*, Ladyzhensky’s *Cemetery at Kozin* 
(*Kladbishche v Kozine*) (Plates 18 and 19) painting and drawing differ significantly in composition, though not in content. The corresponding short story in Babel’s *Red Cavalry* cycle describes a cemetery in a Jewish shtetl that contains the tomb of the Rabbi Azrael, slain in the 17th century by the Cossacks of Bohdan Khmelnitsky. It contains no real plot or characters, just a description of the graveyard and one specific tomb. The story emphasizes the ancientness of this place, where “four generations lie buried,” marked by “carved gray stone with inscriptions three centuries old”, and “moss-covered inscriptions.” The painting, colored drably in grays and browns, depicts four shrouded bodies lying horizontally within an open crypt. Despite the ancientness of the gravesite, the faces of the bodies still appear as if sleeping. Babel’s narrator, Lyutov, recognizable by his glasses and red-starred *budyonovka* cap, lurks at right. On the crypt the words “O death, O profit-seeker, O greedy thief, why have you not spared us, even once?” are painted, the last line of the Bedouin’s prayer that Babel includes in his story.

The story, short but impactful, illustrates the longevity of antisemitic violence in Eastern Europe. The first way it does so is in its portrayal of this centuries-old grave of a rabbi killed by the forces of Bogdan Khmelnitsky, a Ukrainian Cossack commander whose troops massacred thousands of Jews in a campaign against Poland in 1648. Babel makes a deliberate connection between the present-day violence in which his narrator participates and past antisemitic violence. The second is the inclusion of the prayer’s end, which Ladyzhensky chose to include in the

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319 Ladyzhensky, *Cemetery at Kozin*.
322 O smert’, o korystoliubets, o zhadynej vor, otechego ty ne pozhalal nas, khotia by odnazhdy?
324 Stampfer, “What Actually Happened to the Jews of Ukraine in 1648?”
painting. “Why have you not spared us, even once?” evokes the past and present struggles of the Jewish people against its oppressors and persecutors.325

Ladyzhensky’s drawing features the bodies described in Babel’s story arranged vertically, upside-down to the viewer, and rather than giving the appearance of sleeping men, their skulls are exposed, the rest of the bodies covered by shrouds. Unlike the painting, which is painted loosely with rough brushstrokes, the drawing is intensely detailed. The tombstones alongside the crypt are much more distinct, with visible carvings on each. Here, Ladyzhensky includes the first lines of the prayer cited by Babel on the crypt’s inscription:

Azrael, son of Ananias, mouth of Jehovah.
Ilya, son of Azrael, mind locked in single combat with oblivion.
Wolf, son of Ilya, prince snatched from the Torah in his nineteenth spring.
Judah, son of Wolf, rabbi of Krakow and Prague.326

The prayer’s first four lines describe the men in the crypt, the “four generations” of Jewish rabbis of the Kozin shtetl. In the painting, it appears a stone lid has been moved from the crypt, exposing the bodies. But in the drawing, a tallit forms a canopy over the crypt, and a candle is lit above the inscription. These two gestures make it seem like someone has recently visited the grave, and is lighting the candle in remembrance, whereas in the painting it feels like a place that has been abandoned for a long time. The inclusion of the Jewish tallit and detailed Hebrew gravestones would have been controversial under the Soviet state, but entirely possible in Israel.

In “Gedali,” Babel explores the intersections between communism and Judaism. In the story, Lyutov wanders through the town of Zhytomyr on a Friday night - Sabbath eve. He is “tormented by the rich sorrow of memories,” remembering his grandparents on Sabbath eves in his childhood, lamenting “O the Talmuds of my childhood, reduced to dust! O the rich sorrow of

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memories!" He wanders through an abandoned marketplace, where “mute padlocks hang upon the booths,” in search of “a shy star” - the star of David. Throughout the story, Lyutov’s thoughts emphasize the ancientness of the town and its Jewish population with its ancient synagogue, that “twinkles and fades, the shy star…” The old Jewish shopkeeper Lyutov encounters later that evening, the title character Gedali, represents an outdated mode of life. Within the deserted bazaar, only Gedali’s shop remains, where the narrator “wends his way through a labyrinth of globes, skulls and dead flowers, whisks his motley brush of rooster feathers and blows the dust off the perished flowers.” Gedali spends his time among ancient objects in a state of physical decay, and he himself “rubs his little white hands, tugs at his little grey beard,” emphasizing his small stature and elderliness. Gedali embraces the Bolshevik revolution, but struggles to reconcile it with traditional Jewish life: “The revolution – we’ll say ‘yes’ to her, but will we say ‘no’ to the Sabbath?” Gedali is interested in a communist future, but wishes to integrate with it Jewish elements. He is a member of the Communist International. Yet he is torn, for he cannot reconcile the ideological framework of the communists with their violent acts: “But good men do not kill. So the revolution is the work of bad men. But the Poles, too, are bad men.”

This story makes clear why Babel’s works were such an inspiration for Ladyzhensky. “Gedali” opens with a narrator sifting through his memories of a Jewish childhood, much as Ladyzhensky does in his Odessa of My Youth series. Lyutov’s reference to the “rich sorrow of memories” echoes the bittersweet nostalgia present in Ladyzhensky’s works. Lyutov’s

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327 Babel, Red Cavalry, trans. Dralyuk, 46.
329 Babel, Red Cavalry, trans. Dralyuk, 46.
330 Babel, Red Cavalry, trans. Dralyuk, 47.
331 Babel, Red Cavalry, trans. Dralyuk, 47.
332 Babel, Red Cavalry, trans. Dralyuk, 47.
conflicting feelings over banishment of Judaism within an officially atheist state is deeply related to Ladyzhensky’s own relationship to Jewish identity under the Soviet Union. Lyutov, like his creator Isaac Babel, is pulled between new and old, between the communism of the Red Army and the Jewish traditions of his childhood, much like Ladyzhensky.

In Ladyzhensky’s painting *Gedali II* (Plate 19), seven men gather around a gramophone. The gramophone’s horn rises red into the red of the background, and from its opening red figures march out, bearing the banner of the Communist International. The painting is divided into a top and bottom half, the lower half occupied by the black-clothed men and the black of the record on the gramophone, whereas the upper half is entirely painted in tones of red with bluish shadows. One interpretation of this division is that the upper half is meant to represent the realm of the abstract, in opposition to the lower half being the realm of the physical. Throughout *Red Cavalry*, there is a contrast between the Jewish attachment to the abstract and spiritual and the atheist-Communist attachment to the material. This division can be seen in “My First Goose” as well, when Lyutov is excluded for his intellectual nature, and must perform a physical act of violence to gain inclusion with the Cossacks. In “Gedali,” the title character “heeds the invisible voices drifting down to him” as he tends to his shop. These voices could represent Gedali’s religiosity, heeding the voice of God; or given his love of music, the invisible voice of the gramophone as it plays. In Ladyzhensky’s *Gedali II*, the upper portion gives the viewer an entry into such invisibility, as the red of the figures blends with the red of the background.

Another interpretation of the two halves of the painting could be that they represent a disconnect between the old ways of Jewish life in the Pale of Settlement and its impending Soviet future. The dark hats, clothes, and beards of the gathered men evoke traditional Jewish dress, which contrasts sharply with the uniforms of the communist marchers. It is the

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gramophone that connects the men to the imagined International, a piece of modernity and technology acting as a conduit to the Soviet future. The red background and upper half of the painting further emphasizes the “red” communist future.

The composition of the drawing Gedali (Plate 20) is completely different. Here, Ladyzhensky depicts Babel’s character floating alone above the abandoned Zhytomyr bazaar, pressed close to his gramophone. Behind him hangs a surreally large tallit, its tassels brushing the rooftops of the bazaar. The floating figure above a shtetl references the work of Marc Chagall, whose paintings frequently included luftmenschen floating above the shtetl of Vitebsk. In the painting, the men seem to be connected to the International members, while the drawing evokes a sense of escapism, as if the gramophone’s music allows Gedali to float detached from Zhytomyr, ascending towards the candlelit space of the superimposed tallit. The drawing emphasizes Gedali’s naive dreamerly qualities as “the founder of a hopeless International,” as Babel characterizes him, who would combine both communism and Judaism. The abandoned bazaar beneath him adds to the desolate quality of the drawing.

What is most interesting about Ladyzhensky’s two Red Cavalry series is their differences. The paintings are rough in their strokes, with visible texture of paint rising off the canvas. The focus is on color, rather than detail. The colors are exaggerated: bright red, conveying the violent atmosphere of Babel’s cycle of stories, and the incoming Communist future, suffuses many of the paintings; dead or injured soldiers appear with green skin. Meanwhile, the drawings, intended as a recuperative act for the loss of his beloved paintings, are intense and precise in their detail, carving out shape in form with persistent vertical cross-hatching. In “Chesniki” the horses are rendered with a level of anatomical detail and precision that is a far distance from Ladyzhensky’s

335 Babel, Red Cavalry, trans. Dralyuk, 49.
336 A village in Ukraine.
simplistic renderings of horses in the *Odessa of My Youth* cycle. Yet his use of signature flat perspective and playful interpretations of time and space are also present in the *Red Cavalry* drawings, much as in *Odessa of My Youth*. *The Rabbi’s Son* features a collage-like combination of figures and images: at top center, the Ten Commandments; below, Rebbe Motale Bratslavsky, in front of the Torah; at left, the rabbi’s wife, seated in some unknown chair; and at right, the titular rabbi’s son, seen from a bird’s eye view as he lies dying. The multiplicity of perspectives makes this work a fascinating visual puzzle, as pieces of text are stitched together into a surrealist presentation. Ladyzhensky employs this technique in *Odessa of My Youth* as well, such as in *The Gangsters Are Racing to Make Love*

Ladyzhensky utilizes a flattened, surreal perspective in “Treason”. Here, we view the brick wall of the hospital upside-down, as indicated by the text at the bottom of the drawing. The three traitors from the story stand at center, as if on a street, despite their position on the wall. The hospital bureaucrat, the enemy of the story’s narrator (who is not Lyutov), sits at a desk at a vertical right angle to the three invalids. At the bottom, Ladyzhensky himself is seen peering out of the hospital window. This multiplicity of viewpoints gives the impression that multiple scenes are being stitched together, combining various aspects of the story into one visual work. And why is Ladyzhensky himself in this painting? The narrator of this story concludes his account with a tirade: “Treason, I tell you, Comrade Investigator Burdenko, treason is laughing at us from the window, treason walks barefoot inside our house.” In his illustration, Ladyzhensky himself is the “treason” in the window; perhaps a self-referential observation about his emigration from his native country.

The two series, produced in different media and under radically different circumstances, show two different aspects of Babel’s *Red Cavalry*: the paintings depict the violent, sudden

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nature of war with textured brushstrokes and surreal color, while the drawings emphasize the detailed, compact realism of Babel’s prose, and the attention to everyday detail even in the midst of war. Ladyzhensky was only a child in Odesa during the Polish-Soviet war, but the themes of *Red Cavalry* were still pertinent to his own life. Babel’s semi-autobiographical hero Lyutov travels from shtetl to shtetl throughout Polish and Ukrainian territory, witnessing the suffering of Jewish citizens during this period of civil unrest, and grappling with what it means to be Jewish himself. Babel explores the disruption of Jewish traditions through violence in stories such as “The Cemetery at Kozin” and “The Rabbi’s Son.” These themes echo Ladyzhensky’s own life experiences: the loss of friends, family and neighbors from Odesa during World War II, and the navigation of his own Jewish identity under state atheism and antisemitism. Together, their works show the continuity of anti-Jewish violence in Odesa, Kyiv, and Galicia from the Tsarist era to the Revolution, to the Civil War, to Stalinism, to World War II, and into the Brezhnev era.
Conclusion

Since Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine, in the past year and a half, like in Ladyzhensky’s childhood, Odesa has again become a war zone. While remaining in Ukrainian-occupied territory, and far from the directly contested zones in the east, the city has been under attack from Russian missiles and drones since February. Just like in the Odesa Ladyzhensky lived in a century ago, a new chapter is unfolding in the history of Odesa, and the outcome of the current war will determine the future of the city and its history. The precarious future of the city also makes its past precarious. As Russia indiscriminately turns its missiles to sites of historical importance, the physical history of Ukraine is at stake. And as Ukrainian civilians, the elderly of whom still remember World War II, face danger and death, so too do their first-hand memories of the past, including cultural traditions, historical events, and personal experiences.

As war once again grips the city, so too does the memory of the past. A Ukrainian Odesan woman who was four years old during the Axis occupation recalled: “I remember the Germans, they were kind… they didn’t rape children, didn’t kill them.” Such testimony directly effaces the large-scale massacres of Jewish residents during the German-Romanian occupation. As contemporary understandings of Ukrainian military identity evolve during the current conflict, understandings of the past warp and change. It is more important than ever to preserve, celebrate, and memorialize the history of Jewish Odesa.

In 2021, the Ukrainian government passed legislation outlawing antisemitic expression and vandalism, but this was pressed into action only because of rising antisemitic graffiti and

338 Shwirtz et al, “Ukraine News: West Condemns Russia’s Strike on Odesa Port.”
339 Liu, “Ukraine’s Cultural Heritage Is Crumbling.”
340 Mirovalev, “Ukraine’s Odesa is alive.”
vandalism in the preceding years. In 2019, the Bogdanovka Holocaust memorial, a camp at which German and Romanian military killed thousands of Odesan Jews, was spray-painted with swastikas. While individual antisemitic incidents are prevalent in Ukraine, the Russian government and state media have embraced antisemitic rhetoric in their official statements. Russian officials have frequently discounted Ukraine’s Jewish president Volodymyr Zelenskyy’s identity, claiming he has lost his Jewishness. In May 2022, Russian foreign minister Sergei Lavrov claimed that Adolf Hitler was part Jewish and that “wise Jewish people say that the biggest antisemites are the Jews themselves.” It is not only in Eastern Europe, but across the globe: antisemitic incidents in the US have nearly tripled in the past six years.

It is clear that in an age of rising antisemitism, Jewish identity, art, culture, and history are important to celebrate, preserve, and remember. Yefim Ladyzhensky’s artwork and writings are an essential component of that heritage, and emerge from a uniquely Jewish urban space and culture. The current Russian World War II narrative that centers the suffering of the Soviet Union above all else makes invisible the suffering and loss of Soviet Jews. In a world where such dangerous rhetoric continues to spread, the work of Jewish writers, artists, and thinkers about identity and loss becomes increasingly relevant and important. Ladyzhensky’s artwork and writing explore themes of Odesan Jewish identity and belonging, depicting a pre-Soviet past where Jewishness and Odesa were inextricable, and the complicated changes wrought by the Bolshevik Revolution. His works are a memorializing project, witnessing and bringing to life the irretrievable past, with all its quirks, jokes, music, and lively Odesaness.

342 Chernick, “Antisemitic incidents rampant.”
343 Chernick, “Antisemitic incidents rampant.”
344 US Department of State, “To Vilify Ukraine.”
345 Medvedev, “Pochemu bessmyslenny kontakty.”
346 Cosh, “Myths of Hitler’s Jewish Blood.”
347 Shveda, “Antisemitic Incidents in the US.”
Ladyzhensky’s extensive oeuvre is a wealth of riches; one can only imagine how much there would be to explore had difficult circumstances not forced him to destroy so much of his work. This destruction, though, makes what works he chose to bring with him all the more valuable. His artwork and the Odesa text engage in an intermedial dialogue, evoking the physicality, mythology, and history of early twentieth-century Odesa. Merging the visual and literary arts, Ladyzhensky's work not only celebrates the creativity of Odesa’s artistic community but also offers a window into the city's rich cultural heritage.

As quoted in the epigraph of this thesis, Ladyzhensky’s works truly are “the fruit of a life full of suffering and hard work.”

Decades after their creation, the perpetual relevance of his paintings suggests that they still are, in fact, “clearly needed by humanity.” It is my hope that they will continue to find their Eternal Viewer in decades to come.

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348 Ostrovsky, A Life in Art, 91.
349 Ostrovsky, A Life in Art, 91.
Appendix: Plates

All images included here are reproduced with the permission of the Artist’s Estate.

Plate 1. Mr. Shpitz and Sons (Gospodin Shpits i synov’ia).
Plate 2. We Are Wrapping Candies (My zavorachivaem konfety.)
Plate 3. The Watermelon Dock (Varuzhnoi gavani.)
Plate 4. *The Guys Are Painting Well* (Khorosho patsany risuyut.)
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Plate 6. Street Boys at the Deep End (Besprizornye na Glubokom Massive.)
Plate 7. Pechyosski’s Cafe (Kafe pechesskogo.)
Plate 8. The Former Fanconi’s Cafe (Kafe byvshii Fankoni.)
Plate 9. Cafe Robinat (Kafe Robina.)
Plate 10. Gangster, His Bride, and His Best Men (Naletchik, ego nevesta, i shafery.)
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Plate 12. Self-Defense in My Building (Samooborona v moem dome)
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Plate 21. Treason (Izmena.)
Plate 22. The Rabbi’s Son (Syn rabbi.)
Plate 23. Self-Portrait
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Bibliography of Visual Sources

The paintings below are presented in alphabetical order by title, omitting “the,” “a,” or “an.”


