Cheburashka and Friends: The Rootless Cosmopolitan as Ideal Soviet Citizen

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Cheburashka and Friends: 
The Rootless Cosmopolitan as Ideal Soviet Citizen

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Who is Cheburashka?

The Soviet Union’s film series Cheburashka has captivated audiences throughout the world. The main character, an unusual genderless creature named Cheburashka, is easier to define by what he is not. The beloved ambiguous Cheburashka swept through the Soviet Union in his debut twenty-minute film, Crocodile Gena, in 1969 with praise and admiration besides the fact that neither Cheburashka, his friends, nor the audience could define exactly what he was. Cheburashka is neither human, nor an animal. He does not have a commanding voice or demeanor. Rather, Cheburashka appears childlike with his high pitched breathy whispers and short stature. Covered in brown fuzzy hair, Chebruashka’s googly eyes, big rounded ears, and triangle shaped nose are anything but normal. Nonetheless, Cheburashka’s popularity and influence easily overtook the animated series Just You Wait!, a 1969 Soviet cartoon about a wolf chasing a hare that echoes Disney’s Tom & Jerry or Wile Coyote and the Roadrunner. In fact, some have categorized Cheburashka as the Soviet Union’s own Mickey Mouse. For decades, his symbol has followed on the backs of immigrants and later through the internet ever since his creation in the Moscow animation studio Soyuzmultfilm. His character is especially adored by Soviet and post-Soviet Jews. For example, in the United States, a poetry group called “The Cheburashka

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2 David MacFadyen, Yellow Crocodiles and Blue Oranges: Russian Animated Film Since World War II (McGill-Queen's Press-MQUP, 2005), 89.
Collective” formed by women and non-binary writers who immigrated in the post-Soviet diaspora, gather to read their poetry and provide immigration support centered around the symbol of Cheburashka and his relatability to the Soviet Jewish experience. Not only has he become a Jewish icon and hero, but his image has now spread internationally and been commodified into plushies, backpacks, and keychains. Cheburashka has even found a place on the shelves in Tokyo, Japan and has been redrawn into anime. Regardless, the Cheburashka which the world has grown to know and love is still shrouded in mystery. His unknown origin, identity, symbolic implication, and story have more to say than his adorable appearance which has caught the attention of generations of children, immigrants, and Soviet and post-Soviet Jews.

Cheburashka does have an identity although it be visibly ambiguous to his friends and the modern-day viewer. Contemplating his identity and origin reveals a more nuanced and dynamic character--one that symbolizes the Soviet Jewish community’s struggle for belonging. Cheburashka’s experience gives audiences a heart-wrenching story about the paradoxical treatment of Soviet Jews and their everyday experience as treated by the government in which they suffered, survived, and ultimately lived. Cheburashka represents a (Jewish) rootless cosmopolitan because of his origins as an undefinable foreigner and his maltreatment at the hands of the authorities. He is, however, a “subverted” rootless cosmopolitan, because unlike the parasitic language implying harm to the socialist collective that accompanied Stalin’s use of the

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term, Cheburashka is a beneficial member of socialist society. He is an ironic Soviet hero who ultimately assists in the building of a better Soviet state.

**Historiography of Soviet Animation and Cheburashka**

Important work on the experiences, content, and purposes of Cheburashka’s animation studio Soyuzmultfilm has been mainly covered in two historical texts and therefore demands more scholarly intervention. The first full length analysis that has considered Soviet animation and its purposes is David Macfadyen’s 2005 *Yellow Crocodiles and Blue Oranges*. In it, Macfadyen highlights the inadequate body of scholarly work on Soviet animation. He states, “Soviet cartoons were massively popular across the biggest country in the world for decades, but have garnered no scholarly attention.”⁷ Macfadyen’s book is one of the first attempts in English to understand Soviet animation, its history, and impact. The main argument of the book centers around what purpose unrealistic animations served in the Soviet Union. He explores why these films were allowed to be viewed even though they seemed unlikely to pass censorship committees for lacking Socialist Realist qualities. Macfadyen tackles the question: “How real, for example, were tales of magic and mystery?”⁸ As Macfadyen attempts to answer how Soviet animation survived and eventually thrived, he highlights the philosophical implication of animated film as both conformed and subverted Socialist Realist dogma with real and tangible propaganda purposes. Macfadyen argues that animated film served as emotional propaganda which could include all cultures in the Soviet Union. He explains how emotions transcend nations and races which made animated films a successful form of propaganda. However, animation had to “know, anticipate, and pander to the fickle, sentimental, or even funny patterns

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⁷ MacFadyen, *Yellow Crocodiles*, xix.
⁸ *Ibid*. 
of public demand,” in order to elicit preferred emotional responses. In terms of Cheburashka, Macfadyen muses on his philosophical implications. Posing him possibly as a symbol for a child’s lost innocence from the World Wars era, he does not allude to his entire social or ethnic identity. With no mention of Cheburashka’s possible Jewish identity, Macfadyen’s text centers more on the philosophical and emotional purposes of Soviet animation and the rules which seemed to loosely govern it.

The second substantive work on Soviet animation is Maya Balakirsky Katz’s 2016 book Drawing the Iron Curtain: Jews and the Golden Age of Soviet Animation. Katz’s book explores the history of the Soviet Union’s most prominent animation studio, Soyuzmultfilm, in close detail. In comparison to Macfadyen, Katz explores the social history of the film studio--who made animation films and why--rather than analyzing the film’s philosophical and emotional propaganda goals. She argues that too much emphasis on how animation fits and does not fit Socialist Realism dogma obscures who made the films and why. Through her research, she reveals that behind these dynamic animated films was a thriving Jewish artistic community. Animation, due to its unrealistic form, often made it easier for Jews to express culture and ethnic roots in animation. She believes that “radical performative experiments” and that “programmes for identity” were expressed in Soyuzmultfilm. For Katz, Soviet animation film’s purpose dealt more with aspects of Jewish experience and identity. Additionally, Katz argues that what the state wants versus what actually happens in Socialist Realism censorship committees are two completely different things. She explains that there is a “gap between state policies and actual

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9 Ibid., xiv
11 Ibid., 1.
studio practices,” and that Jewish animators had agency to promote their films through personal networks in censorship committees instead of being artistically silenced as previous historiography suggests. Katz’s book is field changing. She shows how the assumption that Jews in the Soviet Union had been artistically silenced was not true. Soyuzmultfilm’s vibrant animations were made by a largely Jewish animation team. In her book, Katz dedicates a chapter to Cheburashka and his identity as Jewish. Katz laid the groundwork for my analysis of Cheburashka and his friends identities as rootless cosmopolitans.

Examining Cheburashka through the lens of rootless cosmopolitanism meant I had to study the larger setting in the Soviet Union through its subverted, paradoxical, discriminatory, and complicated treatment of its Jewish population. Cheburashka is the vehicle for which this treatment is expressed by Soyuzmultfilm’s Jewish artistic community, whether it did so intentionally or subconsciously. As Katz argued, Cheburashka is Jewish. However, I extend the argument suggesting that he identifies even more broadly with a rootless cosmopolitan, presumably a Jew, and yet Cheburashka is the ironic Soviet hero. Cheburashka embodies the challenges many Jews faced after World War II with their Jewish identities. Many Jews felt that they belonged in the Soviet Union as full citizens, while in reality they were treated as second rate and attacked. The Cheburashka films therefore demand a deeper comparison of Jewish experience and treatment in Soviet society through the lens of the rooted cosmopolitan.

My analysis of Cheburashka is based on the visual films and their English subtitles. The history of the Soviet Union, Soviet Jewish experience, and other scholarly works inform my argument for why the Cheburashka character reveals more about Soviet Jews than previously

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12 Ibid., 20.
realized. Animation is understood through a visual medium and does not always need perfect English translations to be critically analyzed. However, the English translations that are available have been utilized for comprehending main meanings of character dialogues. Cheburashka’s subverted rootless cosmopolitanism brings recognition to the complicated and paradoxical position of Soviet Jews. To accomplish communicating this paradoxical position to a Soviet audience and passing censorship, many visual symbols are coded as Jewish stereotypes ranging from “Jaffa” oranges to “eastern European itinerant, klezmer” accordions.\(^\text{13}\) These symbols are discussed in detail throughout the paper. Due to Cheburashka’s international impact, most have grown to love him without perfect translation or historical context while feeling sympathy for his situation. Historian Zvi Gitelman points out that Soviet Jews had thin identities where I argue a character like Cheburashka mimics this thin identity and speaks to the reason for why he has garnered international popularity, but only recently academically studied in a Jewish context.\(^\text{14}\)

**Jewish Conditions in the Soviet Union**

With its characters and settings, the *Cheburashka* series represents the larger condition of Jewish life in the Soviet Union. The entire series, with its stop-motion animation, creates the setting which reflects the trials of the Soviet Jewish experience in post-World War II society. Marketplaces, zoos, playgrounds, factories, shops, train stations, and the Moscow forest, are all settings in which the two main characters, Cheburashka and Gena the crocodile, navigate the landscape of state policies, discrimination, and the state’s socialist failings they seek to address. Cheburashka and Gena face trickery, migration, greed, and displacement—all Soviet stereotypes


of Jews. These themes reflect the paradoxical condition of Jews in the Soviet Union and how their identities, projected as stereotypes, are misrepresenting actual Soviet Jewish lives. For example, Jewish people were anything but evil tricksters because they often made significant contributions to Soviet society in the intelligentsia, medicine, literature, politics, military, and animation. Holding these important positions was one reason why the government refused Soviet Jews’ exit visas when they applied to leave the country.\textsuperscript{15} However, in the anti-cosmopolitan campaign of the late 1940s and early 1950s, Soviet Jews were painted as the plague of society in an attempt to isolate and purge them. Even though many Soviet Jews took up Soviet socialist principles, they still were not treated as a beneficial nationality; instead, they were treated as distinctly harmful to the goals of building socialism. Therefore, the Cheburashka series manipulates the antisemitic term “rootless cosmopolitan” by reversing Jewish stereotypes and proving that Jews are actually saving socialist society rather than destroying it. The few obvious Jewish characters, marked by yarmulkes, for example, who are tricked in the films are meant to be purposefully ironic and draw the audience’s sympathy for injustice brought upon good-natured citizens. Cheburashka, Gena, and other Jewish characters are not playing at tricking society; rather society is usually playing tricks on them. The film speaks to Soviet society by questioning lingering stereotypes of antisemitism. It is hard to imagine Cheburashka as greedy or seeking out prosperity from bribery. In every film, Cheburashka is giving, supportive, productive, pure, innocent, compassionate, and socialist. This is the opposite of the antisemitic stereotypes of a rootless cosmopolitan Jew.

\textbf{Historical Context for Antisemitism and Rootlessness}

The phrase “rootless cosmopolitanism” was first popularized in the late 1940s postwar Soviet Union as one tool in Stalin’s arsenal to mark, denigrate, and isolate Soviet Jews.\textsuperscript{16} To be labeled “rootless” meant lacking a connection to place and suggested one’s lack of patriotism to the Soviet Union. Left unchecked, the success of rootless cosmopolitanism would result in Soviet socialist ruin in the wake of the historic victory over Hitler’s Germany.\textsuperscript{17} To be labeled as a rootless cosmopolitan meant that one had no ties to the Soviet state and that they brought little value to the community. Rootless cosmopolitans were thought to not be invested in the country since they did not originate from there and, as important, had alliances elsewhere.\textsuperscript{18} During Stalin’s reign, being labeled a rootless cosmopolitan could result in imprisonment, social defamation, and possible execution.\textsuperscript{19}

The Soviet government shielded the public from information about Nazi Germany’s Holocaust by not disclosing the nationality of those murdered and/or erasing the Holocaust completely from Soviet textbooks.\textsuperscript{20} Several thousand Jews fled the horrors from both World Wars fleeing to central Asia, the Urals, and then returning to their liberated towns. It is not surprising that antisemitic rhetoric resurfaced strongly after the dust settled from the frontlines of World War II. Enter then into the lives and experiences of those working in the studios of

\textsuperscript{16} Gitelman, \textit{A Century of Ambivalence: the Jews of Russia and the Soviet Union, 1881 to the Present}, 236-240.
\textsuperscript{17} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{18} Ibid.
Soyuzmultfilm, creating animation for a country which questioned their very existence and where their loyalties should lie. Most of these Jewish artists experienced the devastation of World War II and suffered alongside with other Soviet citizens, and yet their presence in postwar Soviet society was always seen as suspicious. Although many Jews working for Soyuzmultfilm could trace their origins back to the Pale of Settlement, several hoped that with the destruction of the Pale they would be considered equal Soviet citizens rather than just Jews and “embrace the country’s universalist creed.”\(^{21}\) However, their Jewish identity stuck with them no matter where they went, even after the world wars. After 1933, inscribed on every Soviet citizen’s passport, in the fifth entry, was the nationality of the Soviet person, and to the Soviet Union, Jewish identity was considered a nationality.\(^{22}\) This distinction made Soviet Jews appear even more “rootless.”

One case of the extent of rootless cosmopolitan campaigns, the Doctor’s Plot of 1952-3, filled newspaper headlines of Pravda, the organ of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, with antisemitic references. Stalin had nine doctors, six of them Jews, arrested for medically assassinating Soviet leaders. The doctors, who had been framed for malpractice and the death of Stalin’s supposed successor, Andrei Zhdanov, were later released after Stalin’s death in 1953. However, the damage had been done and the Doctor’s Plot had reignited antisemitic fervor and the buzz word of rootless cosmopolitan became synonymous for “Jew.”\(^{23}\) The lives of Soviet Jews, and the artists who comprised the studio Soyuzmultfilm, reflect Cheburashka who finds himself alienated from his community. In the first few minutes of Crocodile Gena, Cheburashka

\(^{22}\) Peter Kenez, A History of the Soviet Union from the Beginning to Its Legacy (Cambridge University Press, 2016), 230.
\(^{23}\) Gitelman, A Century of Ambivalence, 238-240.
is carried off to a zoo for possible work. Yet the zookeeper comes back to announce, “It’s not
going to work out. We don’t know what he is. I don’t even know what cage to put him in.”

Before Stalin’s death in 1953 and then entering into Khrushchev’s Thaw, antisemitism
became quasi-state policy in the Soviet Union where many Jews felt a confused sense of
belonging. After World War II, the Soviet Union was economically devastated. During the
war, it served as a place of refuge for more than 250,000 Polish Jews who fled the German
invasion of Poland. Therefore, the societal presence of the Jew in Soviet life was felt more
profoundly by the population and caused a resurface of antisemitic suspicion.

The Rootless Studio, Context for Cheburashka’s Arrival

Soyuzmultfilm, the primary animation studio for the Soviet Union and creation center for
the Cheburashka films, was founded in 1936 and began primarily by producing World War II
propaganda and rival fairy tale films to counter the popularity of Disney in the Cold War.
What is distinct about the animation studio is that almost from its inception, it was made up of
primarily Jewish artists. Under the prescribed style of Socialist Realism, Jews were tasked with
having to portray a truly Soviet, Russian utopia. On top of this challenge, Jewish artists
sometimes faced a serious problem finding employment in the Soviet Union after Stalin’s party
purges, and if one did not find employment, then they could be considered a social parasite

25 Ro’i, “Union of Soviet Socialist Republics.”
26 John Goldlust, Wanda Warlik, Natalie Belsky, Eliyana R. Adler, and Maria Tumarkin, Shelter
from the Holocaust: Rethinking Jewish Survival in the Soviet Union. (Wayne State University
27 Laura Pontieri, Russian Animation of the 1960s and the Khrushchev Thaw. PhD diss., (Yale
University, 2006), 80-82.
taking advantage of the socialist state.\textsuperscript{29} In search of limited jobs available for Jewish artists, especially during the restrictive Stalin, Khrushchev, and Brezhnev eras, many found employment in animation, a newly burgeoning field.\textsuperscript{30} According to Katz, “the field developed a more hospitable character towards Jewish-born artists who found the fine arts (for example, sculpture, architecture, and painting) highly restricted by proletarianization projects.”\textsuperscript{31}

Soyuzmultfilm was considered more suitable for Jewish artists because the public knew it was a place for children’s entertainment in the years following World War II and appeared to many as an institution not important for highly intelligent artistic work.\textsuperscript{32} Due to Jewish discrimination and Stalin’s purges, Soyuzmultfilm became a motley network of Jewish painters, singers, writers, musicians, and actors who had been pushed into an available corner of the art world.\textsuperscript{33} Many Jewish artist’s troubles mirrored the Soviet Jewish community, who took direct fire during and after Stalin’s ruthless party purges. Stalin’s purges resulted in an embittered Soviet population unwilling to incorporate the Jewish community into their own.

The Cheburashka Films

The following are descriptions and analysis of the \textit{Cheburashka} films read through the lens of Jewish stereotypes, Soviet rootless cosmopolitanism, and the rootless cosmopolitan’s ironic and unexpected importance in improving the socialist state. I begin with a detailed description and analysis of the first film entitled \textit{Crocodile Gena}, where I argue that all speaking animal characters embody the concept of rootless cosmopolitan as a collective group that is

\textsuperscript{29} Katz, \textit{Drawing the Iron Curtain}. 49.
\textsuperscript{30} \textit{Ibid.}, 4.
\textsuperscript{31} \textit{Ibid.}, 2.
\textsuperscript{32} Pontieri, \textit{Russian Animation of the 1960s and the Khrushchev Thaw}, 1-5.
labeled negative for society even though they make society better. In the second, third, and fourth films I have selected particular scenes that enhance my arguments about how Cheburashka and his friends are assets in improving the socialist state regardless of their designation as rootless cosmopolitans. These selected scenes are vital to the plot of the films. For example, in episode II entitled Cheburashka, Cheburashka and Gena try to prove to a group of Pioneer Boy Scouts that they are good citizens worthy of being in their troop. Episode III, Shapoklyak, draws attention to the harmfulness of industrialization where Cheburashka and Gena save society by protecting the environment from a factory’s pollution while rooting out corporate corruption. Lastly, in episode IV, Cheburashka Goes to School, education for all without discrimination is shown as a collective good by invoking sympathy for how the good-natured Cheburashka struggles for admission into a school due to societal intolerance much akin to postwar Soviet Jews finding it difficult to be admitted into higher education.\footnote{Yuri, \textit{The Jewish Century}, 2019. 243.} Each description of the film is followed by an analysis which reinforces my reading of Cheburashka on the backdrop of Soviet Jewish history and society. These films stress the importance of why Soviet Jews belong in the Soviet Union and how they are not as rootless or parasitic as society made them out to be.


As Crocodile Gena opens, a Jewish man appears. He is marked as Jewish by the black yarmulke on his head. He walks to a vendor’s street shop who is selling oranges and proceeds to embark on a deal about which orange he will buy. The vendor, short and blue eyed, notices that the Jewish man is not satisfied with the orange’s weight on the scale in front of him. The vendor
picks up another orange and while the Jewish man is not looking, pushes the scale down to trick him into believing it weighs more than it does. Deceived, the Jewish man gives the vendor his payment for the orange and exits the scene. It is not until Cheburashka is unveiled from the orange crate and taken to the zoo before the audience sees the Jewish man return to the empty shop, where the vendor had left a sign declaring, “Gone to the zoo,” and weighs his orange to realize he had been tricked.

Once Cheburashka has been taken out of the crate and determined to be an “unknown creature,” the fruit vendor takes him to the zoo to try and find work, as all good socialists must do, including the animals who “labor” at the zoo. When the zoo keeper comes back with Cheburashka announcing he does not know what cage to put him in because he is an unknown creature, the orange vendor realizes that he cannot be left at the zoo since they do not know his species. Consequently, the vendor meets with another human to discuss what should be done with the little furry guy in terms of employment. The two humans come up with an idea to have him stand in front of the shop to attract customers. Cheburashka’s foreignness is commodified as an alluring power to draw the attention of the Soviet people in which it appears his exotic looks are to be exploited. After accepting this dehumanizing employment, Cheburashka asks where he will live. One of the humans says, “That will be your, well, your house. Understood?” while pointing to a telephone booth. Therefore, Cheburashka is given a dirty public place as his home.
Inside Cheburashaka’s home, he owns three key items. One, is his crate label which functions as an oranges ‘passport’, second is a woven matt, third is a Russian spinning top. However, Cheburashka is unhappy alone in the telephone booth. His ears are turned downwards and his expression is a disheartened frown as he watches the spinning top go round and round. As he turns his gaze at the orange crate label and leans against the telephone booth wall, the spinner falls. Distraught, Cheburasha picks up the spinner and pumps it so it will move again. He sits back down and fixes his eyes on the spinner with a frown, dissatisfied with his predicament, and the Soviet children’s toy.

Crocodile Gena, who is first introduced in his cage at the zoo poses in front of visitors. Once the zoo bell is rung, he hurriedly stands behind a tree and gets dressed in his civilian clothes. As he walks out of the zoo with the other animals, they turn their key over, showing how they have ‘clocked out’ from work and how their labor is conducted in the cages and confines of the zoo like Jewish employment. Back at Gena’s home, he sits alone at a game of chess. As he switches the board from each side, he places his hat and pipe on a kettle pot which then resembles a man. This amuses Gena for awhile, but disappointed in his loneliness, he slides the game off the table. Eventually, Gena decides to write an advertisement for friends to combat his loneliness. The scene then cuts to how Gena’s advertisement has been placed around town on buildings, cars, and most importantly, Cheburashka’s phone booth. Reading the listing, Cheburashka walks away from the telephone booth to find Gena’s home and to seek a friend.
In the meantime, a little girl named Galya, who is blue eyed and blonde haired, finds a puppy dog crying. She tells the puppy to stop crying and follow her. As they walk together she notices Gena’s advertisement on the building. She goes to Gena’s house and says that she has read the advertisement and that they should be friends. Gena is delighted and hops up to greet them. Galya remarks on how messy Gena’s home is and starts to tidy it while Gena feeds Tolik, Galya’s puppy, some milk. Eventually, Cheburashka wanders by Gena’s home and goes inside. He announces that “It’s me, Cheburashka.” When Gena and Galya say they have never heard of a Cheburashka, Gena looks inside of the dictionary to see if he is listed there. With no luck, Gena tells Cheburashka it is not in the book. Disheartened, Cheburashka sadly says, “Does that mean you won’t be friends with me?” Galya exclaims, “Why!? We will, we will! I’ll show you how to knit.”

After the meeting between the new friends, a mischievous character called Shapoklyak prances into a new scene. Her appearance is unique, gripping, and unsettling. Clothed in black and white, Shapoklyak appears almost like a witch with a long nose, rosy red cheeks, a long curving smile, and sharp hat. Her eyes are cunning as she dances fancifully around a tall man with blonde hair holding a broom who
is sweeping the street. She sings advice that, “He who helps others wastes his time in vain. Good deeds shouldn't bring you fame.” As she trots off to her tune, she stops at a trashcan and knocks its contents all over the street. Further down the street, when no one is looking, Shapoklyak changes the street signs of an intersection and pulls out her slingshot to break a window. Finally, she looks at the advertisement poster board and writes that they are “not” looking for help. Shapoklyak then reacts to Gena’s advertisement for new friends by ripping it off of the poster board and slipping it into her handbag. By now Shapoklyak is seen as a devious antagonist who wreaks havoc upon society, a symbol of chaos and disorder headed straight for Gena’s home.

Galya, Tolik, and Cheburashka are playing a game where Gena is blindfolded and searching to catch his friends. Gena walks around blindly with his arms stretched as he accidently walks into Shapoklyak and catches her. After setting her down and removing his blindfold, Shapoklyak squirts him in the eyes with a spray. Gena blinks and clears the liquid from his eyes then tips his hat to properly greet Shapoklyak. She then reveals her pet rat Lariska from her handbag. Lariska scurries down to the street and frightens Gena as his eyes enlarge and he then runs. As Gena flees into his home, Galya and Tolik quickly follow. When Lariska circles around Cheburashka, he stands still and does not make an attempt to escape. Instead, Cheburashka stares at the rat. Shapoklyak asks, “You’re not afraid?” Cheburashka shakes his head, “No.” Shapoklyak ruminates out loud, “Strange,” while Lariska jumps back into her handbag. Gena, Galya and Tolik peer from behind the door, watching Cheburashka’s courage. Noticing the onlookers, Shapoklyak asks if Gena wrote the article she found on the poster board. Shapoklyak examines Gena and explains how his green texture would help her scare people if he would lay in the grass as she pretends her handbag is lost on the ground. When someone reaches
for the handbag, Gena could scare them. Gena, who is aghast at what Shapoklyak thinks is a wonderful plan replies, “No. Not wonderful,” followed by Galya adding, “And actually really stupid!” Infuriated at their responses, Shapoklyak declares war on Gena and his friends. Once Shapoklyak leaves the scene, a new character appears at Gena’s house. He introduces himself as Lion Chandler, and Gena shows him his friends. Chandler says, “Ah, I don’t have any friends,” while turning away to relieve them of his presence. Tolik the puppy begins to bark that he will be Chandler’s friend. Surprised, Chandler is pleased by this response and lovingly pets Tolik before they walk away together while Gena, Galya, and Cheburashka are left to contemplate the loneliness which seems to plague society.

After witnessing the loneliness that plagued Chandler and Tolik, Gena muses, “I wonder how many people in our city feel lonely...And nobody cheers them up when they are sad.” Immediately, Cheburashka jumps up to Gena and announces, “I want to help them!” With the enthusiasm for mending societal ills and creating a more cohesive functioning society, Cheburashka inserts himself as a new type of hero; even though Cheburashka is considered even less of a citizen because of his foreignness. Cheburashka has taken this challenge as an opportunity to exert himself as a unifying force for the people. Gena, Cheburashka, and Galya decide that the solution to loneliness within their city is to construct a home for those who do not have friends. The scene then shifts to a construction site where Cheburashka is seen carrying red
bricks the same size of his little body and building a cornerstone for the new home. From behind the construction fence, Shapoklyak peaks her eyes on Gena, Cheburashka, and Galya working on the friendship home. She throws watermelon rinds at them, and Cheburashka and his friends fall and slip. Gena knocks over the wall of bricks and it seems that their hard work is undone. The team of protagonists, appearing disheartened and downtrodden, are uplifted when a giraffe walks through the entrance of the construction zone asking if this was where the new home was going to be built. Following the giraffe, a crew of both animals and humans enter the scene—one being the familiar Jewish man from the beginning of the film who was tricked into buying an orange. One animal asks Cheburashka, “Do you need more helpers?” Cheburashka replies, “Of course we do. Come in and help,” and then they begin building the home together.

Eventually, when night has fallen, Shapoklyak returns to the construction site. As she is creeping around, she finds a picture of herself warning that she’s not to be allowed into the construction site. In defiance, she takes Cheburashka’s picture underneath the Board of Honor and swaps her picture with his. Cheburashka is now shown not to be allowed within the construction site instead of Shapoklyak. Breaking into the front gate, Shapoklyak confronts Chandler and Tolik guarding the building site. Tolik barks wildly and chases Shapoklyak out of the site and up a tree.

After ten days of hard work, the team finishes building the friendship house. The house stands out against the city as unique because of its stylish character and lopsided structure. The friendship home seems to defy conformity with its white paint and a birdhouse atop its red rooftop. To the side of the home is a winding staircase. Vibrant yellow, blue, and red painted flowers adorn the facade of the home. Shapoklyak hiding at the top of the house lowers a basket
filled with flowers. Gena stands before the workers with scissors ready to cut the red ribbon marking the opening of the House of Friends. As Gena cuts the ribbon, Shapoklyak’s basket of flowers falls into his hands. Gena reads a note within the basket of flowers that says, “Regards from Shapoklyak,” and then pushes it into the friendship home.

Cheburashka stands on the front step ready to give a short speech. He exclaims, “We worked and worked, and now it’s done! Hooray!” After a cheer, Gena announces that he will begin to make a list of people who need friends. The giraffe explains that they no longer need to make a list of people who need friends because they already have friends. The Jewish man then adds, in a frame which singles out his character, “Yes, We truly made friends by working.” Cheburashka, saddened at the possibility that they all worked in vain asks, “What comes of it all?” Galya explains that the home was a success because they all made friendships. She explains that the home should become Cheburashka’s home and that he will no longer have to live in the telephone booth. Cheburashka refuses the home, and says he would prefer the house to be made into a kindergarten. He adds that maybe he could work in the school as a toy for children. However, remembering his unknown origin, Cheburashka turns his head to the ground and drops his ears saying, “If anyone would take me...and it’s not clear who would.” Gena, upset at Cheburashka’s doubt, firmly asserts that he will support him to be welcomed in the school. The others join in surrounding and supporting Cheburashka’s
cause saying that they too will advocate for him in his quest to gain a position in the school. In the last segment of the first episode, Gena notices that Shapoklyak has returned. She silently hands Cheburashka a note which explains that she will be “going away.” Cheburashka happily smiles at Shapoklyak and the scene fades concluding the first episode of the Cheburashka series.

It is significant that the opening scene in the debut of the Cheburashka series is of a Jewish man being tricked. It sets the tone for the rest of the films. The Jewish man is not a greedy trickster like antisemitic stereotypes portray, but is an honest paying customer looking for a fair deal—looking for fair treatment. In fact, here the non-Jewish sales person deceives the Jew, not the other way around. This scene suggests that antisemitic stereotypes of Jews, like being tricksters and misers, are in fact being played out against Jews. Another important aspect of this Jewish character is that he is the only Jew who is an actual human being. Compared to other characters that I read as Jewish in the film, this man is the only one who has not been visually represented as an animal or an “unknown beast” like Cheburashka. I interpret this distinction of the Jewish man as a foil for the discovery of Cheburashka. Through Katz’s research, the symbolic value of the crate of oranges as Cheburashka’s identity marker references the state of Israel. 36 It is likely that the Jewish man would support other Jewish enterprises for a multitude of historical and contextual reasons. Jewish pride in the Soviet Union skyrocketed after the success of Israel over the Arab states of Egypt, Syria, Jordan, and Iraq in the Six Day War of 1967. Many Jews likened the victory to something out of biblical times, like that of David and Goliath. Israel defeated the Arab armies with a clear message to the larger global world: that they

36 Katz, Drawing the Iron Curtain. 127.
were a political entity here to stay.\textsuperscript{37} As Soviet Jews still experienced discrimination via anti-cosmopolitan campaigns, the desire to immigrate to the state of Israel after the Six Day War increased. Pre-existing anti-Zionist movements before the Six Day War intensified within Soviet state policy.\textsuperscript{38} \textit{Refuseniks} or those denied the permission to emigrate from the Soviet Union, were usually Soviet Jews interested in moving to Israel. Not only the support and admiration of Israel frightened government officials, but it brought about another distinct feature for Soviet political concern. Zionism was a blemish on the principles of Soviet ideology. Soviet society was supposed to be like a utopia. The Six Day War poured fuel on the fire about disloyalties of rootless cosmopolitanism and depicted how the Soviet Union was not as collectivized as the global world may have imagined. Since Soviet Jews had faced decades of discrimination as an individualized group, Israel was seen as a possible home for Jews where they could be permanently accepted. Politically, domestically, and internationally, Zionism and immigration efforts eclipsed the Soviet Union’s egalitarian societies and utopian dreams. Therefore, even though the Soviet government denigrated Jews and neglected to treat them with equality, they encountered their own ideology as the barrier for expunging the Jewish population. The Soviet Union did not want Jews, but they did not want them to flee in droves either. The spike of \textit{refuseniks} during this time represents the paradoxical treatment of Jews in the Soviet Union’s state policies. It is also worthy to note that many Jews, even with the Israeli victory in the Six Day War, did not actually want to move from the Soviet Union, but had been stunned with the


possibility of immigration which brought great confusion. Jews saw themselves as Soviet citizens and many felt that their home was in the Soviet Union and not in Israel. Yet, still, even those who wished to remain in the Soviet Union did feel pride for Israel and supported Israeli oranges. With added admiration of Israel came an added dose of anti-Zionist, antisemitic rhetoric. When Cheburashka is revealed from the crate of oranges, implying he has been secretly imported from Israel, the Jewish man set precedent for Cheburashka’s origin in Israel. However, as the film continues, Cheburashka does not express a desire to return to the place of oranges or really have much desire to. Katz explains, “Cheburashka is no Zionist...he harbors no desire to leave the Soviet Union and return to his native land...rather...oranges render him out of place...a strange creature who wants nothing more than to live a productive Soviet life.”

Cheburashka’s first appearance on Soviet television was in 1969. In the beginning of Crocodile Gena, a fruit vendor opens a crate labeled in English, “Oranges.” After the creation of Israel in 1948, the port town of Jaffa on the Levantine coast was known for producing citrus, ranging from lemons, limes, and its signature fruit, the orange. Here directly, by having a crate of oranges arrive from abroad, the viewer assumes that they are coming from the state of Israel. Therefore, this is a sign of Cheburashka’s Jewish rootless cosmopolitan origin in a land far, far away. Cheburashka’s arrvial comes just two years after the Six Day War in 1967, during which Zionist rhetoric swept through Soviet Jewry. In this, Cheburashka is the epitome of a cosmopolitan. He has come to the Soviet Union with no grounding, no patriotism, no ties to the

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40 Katz, Drawing the Iron Curtain, 128.
motherland. He has no home or work; he has no friends or relations. He is a cosmopolitan because of his foreign origin.

Cheburashka is probably from Israel, which the Soviet Union considered a usurpation by the imperial west, especially after 1967. Regardless of the Israeli designation, Cheburashka could still have been labeled cosmopolitan because of his rootlessness. Given the closed borders of the Soviet Union, any foreigner not being properly registered with the authorities would be considered suspect. Secretly packed into a crate of oranges, Cheburashka is not only “sneaking” across a border but he’s coming from a Zionist imperial imposition in the Middle East. None of this bodes well for Cheburashka.

The zoological setting as a workspace for Cheburashka speaks to Katz’s analysis of the purpose of zoos in Moscow during the 1960s. She observes that the zoo was seen as a socialist society depicted through nature. The different species of animals in open enclosures connect to the notion that through environment, void of hereditary factors, different species can coexist. Katz explains how the zoo works to show how the Soviets have failed “society to endorse the ‘friendship of peoples,’” by depicting those who work in the zoo as animalistic citizens unable to work anywhere but in cages. Extending onto this idea, I argue that the disconnect between animals and humans in the films signal that the different species are actually all Jews and are

\[43 \text{ Ibid.}, 136-137.\]
\[44 \text{ Ibid.}, 139.\]
rootless cosmopolitans because they are seen as inherently different. Since the animals are citizens of society, shown through Crocodile Gena and other animals clocking out when the zoo closes, the audience witnesses members of society who do not live at the zoo, but are distinctly caged for work and labor. The audience is presented with a curious contradiction. These animals are below the human race, yet they are citizens. These animals have the qualities of human beings, but they are not human. Since the animals are lions, giraffes, and crocodiles they also come from places outside of the Soviet bloc, hinting to rootless cosmopolitanism. Katz explains how some of the animals connected with Africa show colonial western imperialism and are therefore products of cosmopolitanism.45

Despite the wide array of identifiable fauna, Cheburashka is still the main oddity of the film as he is brought to the zoo and summarily rejected from it. The zookeeper says to the fruit vendor, “We don’t know what he is. I don’t even know what cage to put him in.”46 This is the scene in which the zookeeper refers to Cheburashka as an “unidentified beast” who has no cage. There is a larger meaning extended to the rest of the animals in the zoo rather than just Cheburashka as having no cage in this statement. Since Cheburashka is a true cosmopolitan coming from a surreptitious crate of Israeli oranges, the rest of the Jews in the Soviet Union have already found their “cage” because they have come legally or have been residents of the Soviet Union for decades. These identifiable animals are Soviet Jews who understand their position in the Soviet Union and the confines of their forced occupations. This would reflect the sentiment of artists in Soyuzmultfilm--how Jews had been led into employment in animation in contrast to other certain artforms because of Stalin’s party purges which swept through all professional

45 Ibid., 143.
fields. One example of employment marginalization was the closure of Moscow’s State Jewish Theatre in 1948, the beginnings of Stalin’s anti-cosmopolitan campaigns. Many actors of the Jewish theatre landed at Soyuzmultfim’s front doorsteps and contributed to animated films by using their voices to bring characters to life. Those watching animated films would often recognize the animated characters’ voices, remembering the Jewish actor’s voice at the theatre. Therefore, when the zookeeper returns to explain he does not know what cage to put Cheburashka in like other Soviet Jews, it suggests how Cheburashka defies existing categories of socialist knowledge because of his illegal immigrant origin. He is more ‘foreign’ than those who have been under Soviet control for decades. Once again, although I read talking animals as being coded as rootless cosmopolitans, it is Cheburashka who is the true foreigner. The animals in the zoo have been members of Soviet society for so long that they consider themselves as invested citizens interested in the success of the Soviet state. Cheburashka, on the other hand, is the essence of a rootless cosmopolitan; yet he still has the motivation to better others through his pure socialist will, thus subverting the paradigm of the rootless cosmopolitan.

Cheburashka’s placement in the telephone booth also hints to how foreigners in the Soviet Union were treated unjustly. This could explain why Cheburashka is expected to take lowly jobs and unsatisfactory working conditions. The contents of his telephone booth extend how Cheburashka’s true national identity is ambiguous. For example, the three items resemble how even though Cheburashka is a foreigner emblematized by his “oranges” label, he has begun to assimilate into Soviet culture. The spinning top which Cheburashka is playing with is a

48 Ibid., 89.
49 Goldlust et al., Shelter from the Holocaust: Rethinking Jewish Survival in the Soviet Union, 75-77.
popular Russian toy called Tenth Kingdom. The symbolic purpose of this item is to show even the most rootless cosmopolitan, like Cheburashka, can find ways to assimilate into the Soviet culture and how his heritage becomes even more concealed and foreign to even himself.

The little Russian girl Galya, whom Katz reads as a reflection of one of the animators, can be interpreted as a child who unknowingly assists rootless cosmopolitans like Cheburashka in bettering their environments and skills by showing them how to move around culturally and socially in their new world. Since Galya is a child, she has not yet fallen victim to the societal discrimination of Jews and foreigners. For instance, throughout the series there are several Russian adults who are suspicious of Cheburashka and Gena as they move throughout the Soviet landscape in contrast to the Russian children who prove to be more accepting. Galya the child is open and receptive to Cheburashka and Gena. She does not know or care what Cheburashka is and decides that she will improve his situation by teaching him things and becoming friends. Galya is upholding the egalitarian values of a Soviet society in which she is able to enact positive social change. Due to her innocence of not yet being tainted by the Soviet state, she reminds audiences of the inhumane treatment of others in a society which touts false collectivism, where many are still individualized.

Shapoklyak is another distinct character in the context of the film. She is an evil trickster, one that is dressed in the outfit of a 19th century woman wearing a hat referred to in French as chapeau-claque (claque is slap in French) or sometimes called a gibus. A gibus is a type of top hat that is collapsible and would have been worn to the opera house. These hats had become a

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50 Katz, Drawing the Iron Curtain, 137.
sign of aristocratic status in the 19th century. Both men and women wore the collapsible top hat in different versions. Therefore, due to the anachronism of Shapoklyak’s fashion in a film produced in 1969, she represents the older, elite class which is disgruntled at the Soviet system for removing them from power after the revolution. Thus, she wants to ruin the socialist system that destroyed her. Shapoklyak represents those remaining in society who were never loyal to the Soviet movement and are stuck in their old ways of wishing to see the Soviet agenda fail.

Chandler the Lion is a character Katz analyzes in detail in which she explains, “the lion formally introduces himself as ‘Lev Chander,’ a non-Slavic name with a distinctly Yiddish-sounding cadence and close approximation of the Yiddish phrase ‘Lieb Shander’ (Yiddish for ‘Lion’s Shame’)”52 Chandler is posing directly in the film as a distinct Jewish character with a Jewish name and also a very large stereotypical nose who can add to the argument that all of the animal characters are rootless cosmopolitans, who feel a need to network because of their alienation and abandonment in society. This loneliness that pervades Soviet society is rectified by Cheburashka’s ability to forge socialist settings where all people are welcome. He builds the bonds of teamwork and cooperation while demonstrating that doing the right thing for the community is doing the right thing for oneself. This goes directly against old elite Shapoklyak who sings how good deeds do not bring fame and seeks out personal profit. Cheburashka and Gena’s hope to mitigate Jewish alienation is accumulated through the efforts of building the House of Friends, which will provide a meeting spot of those who need positive human connections and communal recognition.

The House of Friends is visibly out of place with the film’s setting which has more uniform buildings. The lack of conformity for the House of Friends compared to the rest of the city hints that celebrating diversity could actually be the key to an egalitarian society. Conformity may not be the answer to creating a perfect socialist society, but the thing which makes its citizens feel most uneasy. Conformity could possibly make people feel overwhelmingly apart from society. What Cheburashka and his friends want is to be recognized and acknowledged as a community which is thriving and alive by building a place for them to have a distinct community. Everyone who had built the House of Friends realizes that they have forged new connections through the fruits of their labor. The workers insist that Cheburashka should take the house and make it his home instead of living in a telephone booth because they accomplished their goal of making friends. Keeping his persona as an ideal Soviet citizen, Cheburashka believes the House of Friends should be given to a kindergarten. Cheburashka insists he would rather find employment as a children’s toy.

**Episode II: Cheburashka (1971):**

Cheburashka and Gena continue their adventures in the second episode of the series. The beginning of their return to the screen starts with Crocodile Gena singing a birthday song for himself on the accordion which often is coded as a Jewish klezmer instrument. This represents how Jewish folk klezmer stood for a symbol of apparent Jewishness in Soviet society. Cheburashka soon appears to congratulate Gena on his birthday with a flying helicopter as a gift. When they play with the helicopter, Cheburashka grabs it from the bottom and it lifts him up into

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53 Ibid., 151.
the sky then plops him down in front of a squadron of Pioneer Boy Scouts. Cheburashka watches as the boy scouts make bird houses and tells Gena, “Let’s ask if we can join.” Gena looks at Cheburashka hopelessly, “No, Cheburashka, they won’t take us.” Cheburashka encourages skeptical Gena to try, and they both approach the boy scouts. The scouts quickly say they will not let Cheburashka and Gena join their troop. However, one scout proposes that they could act as their pets. Cheburashka replies, “We don’t want to be pets! We want to be scouts!” The boys then proceed to ask them what skills they have that could make them count as scouts. They ask, “Do you know how to make birdhouses? Ever had to set up a campfire? Perhaps you know how to march?” Cheburashka and Gena reply that they do not know how to do those things. The head scout remarks, “See? You guys are not ready yet. Besides, being scouts is only for the best of the best.” Saddened by this response, Gena and Cheburashka exit the scene and try building birdhouses themselves. As they look at their misshapen mess of birdhouse attempts, Cheburashka and Gena give up. To console their sadness at failing to fulfill the requirements of the boy scouts, Gena begins to play the accordion while Cheburashka dances. However, they are quickly distracted as a group of Soviet children find themselves in a series of dangerous events. Gena rushes to catch one child who is climbing a high ladder, and then rescues him again from a storm drain. Gena asks the children, “Have you nothing better to do?” and they reply, “No. We have nothing to do!” Cheburashka quickly intervenes in the situation as he remarks, “They have nowhere to play. That’s why they go where they shouldn’t.” Cheburashka and Gena decide that they need to help the children find a space to play so that they stay out of trouble. Gena first tries turning an electric unit into a house, but that fails as he sees a danger of being electrocuted.
Instead, he decides to use an open space to build a playground, once again invoking the socialist and good natured citizenship of animal citizens.

Pushing logs and building material into the area, Gena starts to break ground on the playground with a jackhammer. As he struggles to understand, control, and use the equipment, Cheburashka takes care of the children and helps lift things for Gena. The boy scouts, alerted at the noise that is coming from Cheburashka and Gena’s playground building, are drawn to investigate. As they watch them work, the lead boy scout asks, “Hey, you guys need any help?” Gena remarks while drilling, “Thanks, but you guys are already busy.” One scout asks if he can have a chance at drilling and Gena retorts, “No way!” as Gena loses his grip on the drill saying, “You might let go of the jackhammer.” The boy scouts march away and Cheburashka sadly says, “Now they definitely won’t let us join.” Gena looks guilty away thinking he has blown their chances at belonging to a reputable Soviet institution.

After the playground is built, an officer comes to question Gena for using a compressor. Both Gena and Cheburashka raise their hands in front of the officer as he interrogates them about what they used the equipment for. Cheburashka explains, “We built a playground for little kids.” Satisfied, the officer watches the children on a well-built playground spin on a merry-go-round and bounce up and down on the seesaw. He exclaims, “Hah, good job! Don’t worry about the compressor, I’ll return it myself.” As the officer
leaves, Gena fans himself with his hat, overcome with anxiety and heat. Both Cheburashka and Gena walk aimlessly, signaling how the two characters act disoriented after the police officer leaves. Then, the boy scouts march past them with recycled scrap metal and catch their disoriented attention.

Cheburashka and Gena watch as the boy scouts carry rusting kettle pots and large pieces of shiny silver metal. Excitedly, Gena tells Cheburashka that he knows where they could find lots of scrap metal to give the boy scouts. Maybe then the boy scouts would allow Gena and Cheburashka into their troop. Cheburashka and Gena go to a shipping dock where Gena dives into the water and retrieves miscellaneous metal items. They carry these items to the collection point where the boy scouts have gathered their scrap metal. Gena says, “Here, we got this for you,” and Cheburashka adds, “We wanted to help you out.” Overjoyed to see the scrap metal Cheburashka and Gena have brought, the boy scout leader exclaims, “Hurrah! The first place is ours!” Cheburashka says, “We’re very happy for you,” and grabs Gena’s hand as he says, “Bye now,” and they turn to walk away from the celebrating troop.

The leader exclaims, “Wait! We accept you in our troop!” Gena says, “But we don’t know how to march or make bird houses,” recalling their inability to live up to the Pioneer Boy Scout’s institution’s standards. The leader looks at Cheburashka and Gena. He proudly says, “That’s not important. You did so many other good deeds!” One boy scout jumps forwarding imploring, “And we’ll teach you how to march!” Cheburashka and Gena jump behind the boy scouts in their line. Gena points for Cheburashka to get behind him and be last in line. Cheburashka moves to the back and the group begins to march. As they march, Cheburashka tumbles, stumbles, and rushes to keep up with the others. He scurries behind as the troop exits.
the scene. In the closing seconds, a butterfly flies across the screen and the animation fades into black.

Cheburashka and Gena prove themselves useful to society in episode II. Even though they are initially turned down by the boy scout troop, they are ultimately the ones who help protect Soviet society and bring the troop and community to success. They initially are left out from the troop because the boy scouts do not see them as outstanding citizens, or really citizens at all, because they have not trained to conform to Soviet standards of masculinity. Cheburashka and Gena threaten the boy scouts’ masculinity when they provide independent innovation to improve their community. Cheburashka and Gena’s veering away from conformity could explain why the boy scouts tell Cheburashka and Gena that they could act as pets instead of troop members as a way to emasculate them. Cheburashka retorts that they want to be in the troop, not pets. This interaction signals how those in society presented as rootless cosmopolitans were seen as primal, low level without the smarts or wits to be useful, much less human. On top of this, Cheburashka and Gena fail to understand how to do the skills the boy scout’s Soviet masculine institution considers useful such as building birdhouses, making campfires, and marching. However, Cheburashka and Gena’s efforts in making the community better override the notions of what skill sets define what makes people good socialist citizens. Cheburashka and Gena’s willingness to better their community by critically analyzing their surroundings, makes them into the outstanding socialist citizens the community did not even know they needed. For example, when the children, a symbol of innocence and the next generation of Soviets, are goofing around in troublesome environments because they have nothing better to do, Gena not only saves their
lives from the potential dangers of their industrialized and urban city, but build for them a place of safety and belonging. Cheburashka and Gena build a playground that serves the betterment of their society’s next generation, safeguarding the wellbeing of the Soviet state and therefore, national security. This can render the Pioneer Boy Scouts as an obsolete institution because they are not fighting to protect the very citizens which will come to inherit the Soviet state.\footnote{Katz, \textit{Drawing the Iron Curtain}, 149.}

The choice for Cheburashka and Gena to build a playground adds to the message of the first \textit{Cheburashka} episode, where they build the House of Friends. Both of these choices in building structures that serve the collective are socialist. Cheburashka and Gena do not build structures that are individualized or for their own good; instead they build structures that welcome all people from every spectrum of Soviet society--they are egalitarian and are more effective than the boy scout troop that individualizes themselves from society by what skills they can do and what others can not. The boy scouts do this all for the title, prestige, and prizes that come along being a part of supported Soviet institutions.\footnote{Kenez, \textit{A History of the Soviet Union from the Beginning to Its Legacy}, 217-218.} This ideal of personal gain became especially rampant during the 1964-82 Brezhnev years when corruption infested every level of Soviet institutions, reaching the top levels of society into Brezhnev’s own family causing great public scandal. This references the very backwardness of Soviet economic and political structure during the years the \textit{Cheburashka} films which were released between the years 1969-84. Soviet society was more oriented to self-serving than helping. In this episode, Cheburashka and Gena are subtly critiquing these corrupt Soviet institutions.

Another notable moment for Cheburashka and Gena is their treatment by the government official. Right when Gena and Cheburashka are interrogated by the tall blue eyed and blonde
officer, they shoot their hands up shows how they are afraid of what the officer could do to them. This immediate response to throw one’s hands up show that Cheburashka and Gena have been taught to fear the Soviet police. Furthermore, the officer’s height symbolically plays into the power dynamic of Soviet police compared to short innocent Cheburashka. It is not surprising that the main characters would be scared of the police officer, specially Cheburashka who comes from unknown origin and would be seen as a rootless cosmopolitan spy. Soviet police and KGB would arrest, terrorize, and take Jewish people who had been labeled as rootless cosmopolitans since Stalin’s call for the anti-cosmopolitan campaign.

The antisemitic rhetoric of the post World War II era shaped Soviet Jewish identity, where Cheburashka and Gena marked as Jewish throughout the films, have intrinsically been taught to fear the government and their policing policies that link antisemitism with rootless cosmopolitanism. However, the police man is not upset with Cheburashka and Gena after he sees what they have done for society. This calls attention to the fact that although the Soviet justice system and investigations which accuse out of paranoia and stereotypes may be corrupt, individuals can step outside of those corrupt institutions. This situation is reminiscent of the Doctor’s Plot paranoia and how after Stalin’s death, many of the jailed doctors finally were released. The officer in this film conducts a fair investigation of Cheburashka and Gena to make sure they have built a playground for children and used the equipment for good. Therefore, because Cheburashka and Gena were judged on their actions and not their external appearances of (Jewish) rootless cosmopolitans, they are allowed to be released from inspection and arrest. However, they still walk about aimlessly traumatized by the potential harassment they avoided.
Another important symbol shown throughout episode II is Gena’s accordion. The accordion is a stereotypical Jewish klezmer instrument. Gena drops this accordion when the police officer approaches, relinquishing the association of him being Jewish and his desire to blend in with the rest of society, to hide his Jewishness. He does this to protect not only himself, but the dancing Cheburashka next to him. Cheburashka and Gena do not want to be seen as Jewish by the officer and Gena hides the accordion in an attempt to conceal his identity, and blend in with Soviet culture.

Finally, once Cheburashka and Gena collect and bring the scrap metal to the boy scouts, they are finally accepted. The leader of the boy scouts explains how they have helped them win first place and Gena, expecting to still be discriminated against by the troop, turns to leave with Cheburashka. However, the leader stops and implores them to take part in their troop. One of the boy scouts explains he will teach them how to march as a way to convince Cheburashka and Gena that they can be part of their team as long as they are open to learning.

Gena instructs Cheburashka to get behind him before learning to march. This action shows how Gena thinks himself possibly above Cheburashka, the true foreigner since he is the immigrant and Gena has most likely been living in the Soviet Union most, if not all of his life. In this case, Gena, who is marginalized by society, is capable of marginalizing others—particularly those who are immigrants. Cheburashka scurries to the back of the troop line and struggles to keep up, learn how to march, and not stumble. Once again, Cheburashka willingly learns the rules of yet another Soviet institution into which he struggles to assimilate. His determination to strive to belong increases the chances of Cheburashka and Gena being accepted by an institution.

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58 Sapoznik, "Klezmer," *Grove Music Online.*
of the Soviet Union, the Pioneer Boy Scouts. It was Cheburashka’s determination that led them in this new position in society. No longer are they seen as pets for entertainment as proposed before. Instead, they are upstanding Soviet socialist citizens, like the leader of the troop had said, “Scouts are only for the best of the best.”

Episode III: *Shapoklyak*(1974):60

Old Shapoklyak returns to foil Cheburashka and Gena after her absence in the second film. When Cheburashka and Gena begin their departure for a holiday away from Moscow to Yalta, they are placed into the second compartment of the train. As they get on the train and unload their things, the train bumps and starts to move, making Cheburashka fall to the floor. Shapoklyak peers through the window from the top of the train and snags Cheburashka and Gena’s train tickets while Gena is trying to help Cheburashka recover from his fall. When the ticket master returns to inspect Cheburashka and Gena’s train tickets, they have to explain that they just disappeared and no longer have them. The ticket master, upset with the two, tells them that at the next stop they will have to get off. Cheburashka and Gena are dropped off at the next stop with all their bags, briefcases, and personal items. A group of tourists passes them enthusiastically into the forest singing about how the Moscow forest is full of the wildlife they can gather, collect, and exploit for personal gain. Meanwhile, Shapoklyak calls Gena’s name from behind the train and waves the tickets to show how it was she who stole them when they were not looking, perhaps here viewers are called to consider not only Jewish diaspora, but the status of *refuseniks*. Gena and Cheburashka race after her when she jumps on the top of the train and says to them, “I’ll teach you a lesson for riding without me!” As the train pulls away, Gena

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and Cheburashka realize their tickets will not be returned. Turning to the railroad, Cheburashka sadly begins walking down the train tracks with Gena.

Gena explains to Cheburashka that in the fall there are no puddles or mud on the tracks, implying he knows something about walking on the tracks before. Gena walks a little further and sets down their things with a melancholy expression. Cheburashka pulls on Gena’s sleeve and asks, “Is it very hard for you to carry our things?” Gena replies, “I don’t know how to say it Cheburashka, very hard.” Cheburashka implores Gena to allow him to carry some of the bags for him. Gena agrees and they will walk down the tracks back to Moscow some 199 kilometers away. As they continue, Cheburashka and Gena begin to leave their bags behind as they are too heavy and slowing them down, possibly referring to how their personal identities had to be shed when assimilating into the Soviet Union. Shapoklyak follows behind picking up each bag with a trolley as she rides after them down the tracks. Gena remarks to Cheburashka again, “The main thing, Cheburashka, is that if you walk on the tracks, you'll never lose your way. Understand?” Cheburashka tells Gena that he understands. Then, after they run into a dead end, Cheburashka and Gena find themselves backtracking to a fork in the road. As they are picking up nuts and berries, Cheburashka and Gena get caught in Moscow tourists’ traps. Shapoklyak walks their way and is trapped in their hunting equipment as well. She asks who has
done this and Gena replies that is the tourist campers from the train. Shapoklyak frees herself and then frees Cheburashka. She says defiantly, “I’ll teach them a lesson for hurting Cheburashka! Your wretched poachers, I’ll show you...”

Shapoklyak finds the campers’ tents and sets their own hunting traps against them. Shapoklyak lures a bed of ants to their tent and then all the campers go running into their traps while being bitten. Once the tourists free themselves, they decide to forget the traps and to go fishing instead. Since Shapoklyak switched out their dynamite with Cheburashka’s cake, they are unable to blow up the river to catch fish. Instead they decide to throw a net into the river and when the net’s bell rings they will pull it in with whatever they have caught. Cheburashka and Gena then stumble upon two children near the river. Both of the children are covered in a bluish liquid. Gena asks, “Why are you so dirty?” They replied, “We were swimming in the river.” Gena inquires why the river has become polluted and the children point and say, “The factory.” Cheburashka and Gena decide to investigate the pollution coming from the factory recalling their duty to protect the children of the Soviet state from harm.

As they approach the factory, Cheburashka and Gena find an industrial pipe that has black liquid pouring straight into the bank of the river. Gena says, “It’s disgraceful,” and Cheburashka adds, “They poison nature.” As they pass a guard protecting the factory they see how trees are being shredded down by a machine. Gena finds the manager’s office and proceeds to knock on the door. When he enters he explains, “We are here regarding
the river pollution.” The manager responded by saying, “Oh, are we polluting?” Another Soviet institution is shown as backwards, corrupt, and ignorant. The factory as a Soviet institution presents itself in a similar, but more dubious manner than the Pioneer Boys highlighting that Cheburashka and Gena are critiquing all aspects of Soviet society from bureaucracy, hierarchy, and the environment. Gena assures the manager that the river is very polluted. The manager who had fallen into his chair stands up and tells Gena to say no more. The manager places a phone call and informs the person on the other end of the line to bury the pipe. Gena questions, “So, you will remove the pipe?” and the manager replies, “For sure.” When they pass the guard they see that the pipe is no longer pouring black liquid and has been buried. Cheburashka and Gena return to the children and explain they are ready to go swimming. Gena is the first to go into the river to realize it is still being polluted by the factory. He dives down deeper into the river and finds the pipe spraying underneath. He uses his body to stop the flow of the liquid from pouring out and the liquid backs up flooding and destroying the factory. On Gena’s return to the top of the river, he gets caught in the tourist’s net. The bell rings from on the shore and Shapoklyak tells everyone to hide. The campers come and pull up the net and are frightened as Gena pops up. Shapoklyak yells as they run away, “You don’t need a crocodile?” and then goes to terrorize them with her rat.

In a new scene, Cheburashka and Gena are at the train tracks with the two children from the river. They gift Cheburashka and Gena a frog from the river, but Cheburashka believes that it should be let go and be allowed to hop around. Gena says, “What a pity guys, that we have nothing to give you.” The oldest child responds, “What for? You gave us the river. The clean one.” The youngest child shakes both of their hands and exits the scene.
Along the tracks comes Shapoklyak on the trolley with all of their luggage being pushed by the tourist campers, proving Shapoklyak is an ally, even though reluctant in her old elite ways. The train starts to come along the track and she stops it with the tourists pushing the trolley. She returns to Cheburashka and Gena all of their luggage. One camper comes to Cheburashka who has a small box and tricks him to look away so he can take the box. However, Shapoklyak when inspecting them like an old general, sees that one of them is holding a box with a string. She pulls it and dynamite explodes that was once the campers. A black soot flies all over. The other tourist camper retorts that their friend is a “knucklehead.”

Shapoklyak turns to Gena and gives him back their train tickets. Cheburashka asks her, “And you, do you have tickets?” She explains that she has no tickets, but plans to ride on the top of the train. Gena, who does not like this plan says that she should ride with Cheburashka in the train and he will sit on the top because she is a lady. Shapoklyak, flattered to be called a lady, enters the train with Cheburashka. As the train is moving, Gena sits on the top of its caboose. Cheburashka finds him and sits on the end saying he will ride with Gena. Not soon after, Shapoklyak joins them both by sitting on the back and saying how Cheburashka is a good friend. She pulls from her hand purse Gena’s accordion and asks him to play them a song. The song is about how time is passing, people have been hurt in the past, but there is hope for the days ahead.
Two repeating lines in the song are, “Everyone, everyone believes in the best,” and, “All the best is ahead, like a carpet, like a carpet, a long road unrolls ahead and it pushes up against the sky.” The film ends with Cheburashka in between Gena and Shapoklyak riding off into the distance as Gena sings his song.

Cheburashka and Gena have multiple antagonists in *Shapoklyak*, and it seems clear that society can literally send them packing. The old pre-revolution elite Shapoklyak makes her way to disrupt Cheburashka and Gena because she feels left out of their adventure and therefore fears becoming obsolete. She decides to teach them a lesson about leaving her out because she feels like she has been forgotten in a Soviet system in which she was once important and now struggles to find a sense of belonging. Furthermore, we see discrimination of both Cheburashka and Gena when they are considered second class citizens, as when they enter the first cart of the train, then turn around and get into the second compartment, reminding themselves of their lower social status. When their tickets go missing, the ticket master shows signs of suspicion, disbelieving that their tickets went missing and inherently mistrusting their story. He refuses to believe the two characters have been wronged, and instead, believes that they are the ones who are trying to profit by lying to him. This relates to the idea that Cheburashka and Gena are social parasites who are characterized by negative Jewish stereotypes. Once kicked off the train, Shapoklyak makes it known that she is the one who has taken their tickets because Cheburashka and Gena have forgotten about inviting her on their trip. When she escapes with the tickets, Cheburashka and Gena are sent packing and forced to walk along the train tracks back to Moscow. This scene refers to two particular instances in Soviet Jewish history.
First, the refusal of Cheburashka and Gena to travel due to their “ticket” mysteriously disappearing is comparable to the experience of refuseniks. Refuseniks are Soviet citizens, mostly Jews, who were denied access to emigrate to Israel in the mid 1960s. Jewish interest to move to Israel skyrocketed first in the late Khrushchev period and even more so after the victory of Israel over the Arab states in the Six Day War. However, the Soviet Union highly restricted Soviet Jews from emigrating to Israel and often arrested them when they applied. Some of the offenses for being labeled a refusenik could result in having one’s phone tapped or being charged with treason. Many of those labeled as refuseniks fell under forced arrests and charged for faulty crimes. These innocent Soviet Jews were then sent to psychiatric hospitals or labor camps for punishment and social erasure. Therefore, the railroad is a highly symbolic reference to the refusenik experience and to the Holocaust trains which led many Jews into concentration and labor camps. Additionally, at the end of World War II, the displaced peoples from various countries lay scattered all over the face of Europe with no way to get home. Railroads smashed and destroyed during wartime for tactical defense had been rendered incapable of use, but the tracks usually provided those displaced persons a guiding map of how to return home. Gena’s having traveled on the tracks of railroads before suggests that he could have been displaced in World War II. Gena, like a wise elder, gives advice to Cheburashka about how one should navigate the train tracks, in a sentiment that seems to come across that he is educating the youth on how to survive in case of another mass genocide or displacement. Furthermore, Cheburashka and Gena’s luggage enhance this vision of World War II atrocities by traveling only with

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essentials. When Gena seems to be taking a long break sitting on the tracks surrounded by their luggage Cheburashka asks, “Is it very hard for you to carry our things?” Gena replies, “I don’t know how to say it Cheburashka, very hard.” The luggage then references both the experience of the historical plight of the Jewish diaspora, the recent Holocaust, and the emotional scarring it has left on the Jewish people. Identifying with the lineage of continual displacement and travel shows for Gena the heavy burden of being a Jew in the Soviet Union, a susceptible perception of rootless cosmopolitan. After they dive deeper into the forest, the social ills of the Soviet state present themselves as challenges that the negative and outcast rootless cosmopolitans are eager to address.

As Cheburashka and Gena navigate the tracks, the tourist poachers who laid traps catch the three outcasted members of society, Gena, Cheburashka, and Shapoklyak. Angered by the insensitivity and injustice of being confined, caged, and condemned as things to be hunted, Shapoklyak takes it upon herself to show the tourists that when their behaviors are turned against them, they are just as helpless and human. She sets their hunting traps, dynamite, and fishing nets against their intended purposes for profit. Shapoklyak reverses the narrative that the poachers who have come to abuse the natural environment and society are the ones who are actually hurting themselves. Metaphorically, this situation can be read that those who were able to ‘catch’ rootless cosmopolitans or old elites could profit by turning them in to the government for social prestige and personal profit even when they were innocent. This concept is made even more pronounced in the film when Cheburashka and Gena find themselves concerned at the river’s pollution. The river’s pollution which has tainted the skin of the next generation of Soviet citizens calls Cheburashka and Gena to intervene. Cheburashka and Gena take a position of
staunch environmentalism and look for the factory to voice their complaints and then clean the river up. They do not have a problem with the factory itself, but how the factory carelessly produces and infringes on the health of the environment and those around them, drawing attention to more Soviet corruption. Since the children had been implicated in the environmental disaster, there is a correlation between the peril of rapid industrialization and the health of those who are impacted by carelessness for greed and profit at the expense of others. When Gena confronts the manager of the factory, the manager lies to Gena’s face that the pollution will be stopped. The manager proceeds to hide the pollution instead of redressing the issue by burying the pipe. This shows corruption in the Soviet Union in factory and industry in the Brezhnev years as mentioned in episode II with the Pioneer Boy Scouts. Often, managers of industries would lie, use the black market, and lobby their way to make quotas and keep their positions of power and privileges. 

Therefore, Cheburashka and Gena are calling out the hypocrisy of Soviet industrial corruption and how they, even though seen as a rootless cosmopolitans, can stand by the Soviet ideals of equality and prosperity for all by stopping the pollution in the river and taking matters into his own hands.

After Gena stops pollution and the factory is destroyed, Cheburashka and Gena are thanked by the children. They try to give Cheburashka and Gena a gift of a frog, but Cheburashka insists that nothing should be owned that is alive, and sets it free. This is much like how Cheburashka and Gena were seen as pets to the Pioneer Boy Scouts and were stripped of their human dignity. Therefore, Cheburashka and Gena refuse to perpetuate inequality, ownership, and privatization in their personal lives. This shows how they are both ironically

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ideal Soviet citizens who stand up to authority and fight for social wellness when no one is looking.

At the end of the film, when Shapoklyak gives back the tickets to Cheburashka and Gena, they invite her on their journey. Cheburashka and Gena have transformed Shapoklyak into an upright socialist citizen who helps expose people who are bad and fights to better their community. Cheburashka and Gena invite her to accompany them onto the train. She is completely welcomed in their friendship. When all three of them are on top of the train Gena sings about a carpet unrolling into the sun, signalling the potential for better days as his song hints, “Everyone, everyone believes in the best.” This was not something Shapoklyak had once believed, but now she too has been transformed by Cheburashka and Gena’s ability to change and alter society for the better. The old elite Shapoklyak has found sympathy and comradery with Cheburashka and Gena through marginalization and the benefit of doing good for the collective over individual needs.

**Episode IV: Cheburashka Goes to School (1983)**

The final episode for the *Cheburashka* series begins with Gena waiting at the airport.

Gena announces that Cheburashka should have come for him at the airport. Since Cheburashka is nowhere to be found, Gena calls a man with a cart. Placing all of his baggage on the cart the man leans against it without moving. Gena picks him up and places him on the top of his luggage. Gena then

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pushes the cart to where the taxi can pick him up. The man who had brought him the cart jumps down from the luggage and tells him to, “Pay for four pieces of luggage.” Gena explains that he had only used the cart for three pieces of luggage. The man replies, “And how about myself?” Gena quickly says, “Correct, here’s the money,” and gives him his unfair payment.

After Gena arrives at Cheburashka’s apartment, he scolds him for not meeting him at the airport, “How come you didn’t meet me?” Gena inquires. Cheburashka explains he didn’t know he was coming to visit. Gena is shocked by this response because he had sent Cheburashka a telegram in the mail about his visit. Cheburashka shows Gena how he hung his telegram on the wall next to his calendar. Gena can’t believe that Cheburashka did not read his telegram. He asks, “But did you read it?” Cheburashka shakes his head, “No. I was waiting for you to come read it to me.” Gena pieces the situation together and is completely shocked, “So you don’t know how to read Cheburashka!” Cheburashka confirms that he has no idea how to read and Gena tells him he is lucky that tomorrow is the first of September because that is when school starts. Gena wants Cheburashka to go to school and they both decide that is a good idea. Shapoklyak hears the conversation from outside of the apartment and decides that she would like to go to school as well so that she can start a new life.

As Cheburashka and Gena walk to school, Cheburashka tells Gena that after he graduates he will come to work with Gena at the zoo. Gena retorts while patting Cheburashka’s head, “No Cheburashka, no way. You cannot work with us at the zoo….Why? Because they’ll eat you up.” Then, Gena turns wildly in front of a clothing store window and realizes that they forgot Cheburashka needs to purchase a uniform for school. Inside the store, Gena tries to help find Cheburashka a uniform. He asks the store clerk for one, but the clerk explains that there is not
one for Gena’s size and that there has “never” been one for his size. Gena knocks down the items on top of the clerk’s station and places Cheburashka in front of him saying that it is not he who needs a uniform, but Cheburashka. The clerk again says there is also no size available for Cheburashka. With his ears turned downwards Cheburashka sadly states, “Now they won’t let me in school.” Gena assures Cheburashka that he will be admitted to the school as they leave the store. As they exit, Shapoklyak enters asking the clerk for a school uniform. He tells her that she looks like a grandma and not a boy or girl that is more properly suited for a school uniform. Shapoklyak uses her pet rat to scare the clerk into giving her a uniform.

Outside of the store is a delivery truck which she steals and drives into the back of another automobile. She hops out of the delivery truck and then into the empty convertible car she backed into. When she drives off, a man is revealed underneath repairing the car and wearing a checkered keffiyeh. He chases after with the wrench in his hand as she gets away.

At the school, Cheburashka and Gena find the principle and a little girl sitting on the steps. They are sad because the school is closed for remodeling and the principle explains he cannot teach Cheburashka to read or write because they are remodeling and the school has been temporarily closed. Shapoklyak drives up to the school in the stolen automobile and jumps
out. After hearing the situation she and her pet rat scare the workers into finishing the remodeling. However, when she meets everyone back outside on the steps there seems to be another problem. The principle does not have a nature teacher. Gena offers himself as the nature teacher and Shapoklyak adds that she could teach about carpentry, slingshots, and driving various modes of transportation. Cheburashka exclaims, “And an airplane?” Shapoklyak replies, “And an airplane. Hmm. If I manage to get one,” and the scene fades into black completing the original Cheburashka series.

In the very first scene of the film, Gena is treated unfairly by the luggage man. The man seems to be indignant to help Gena with his luggage and makes him do all the work to transport it to the taxi station. Gena does the man’s job and loads his own luggage and the actual body of the man who is standing in the way. Gena lifts him up and places him on the top of the luggage showing that not only is Gena discriminated against and cheated of the business the man seems to be offering, he also has to carry the man himself who is lazy and uninterested in working. Since everyone is an employee of the Soviet state, this man acts as the continuing motif of parasitic workers who should be considered the actual criminals of the Soviet system instead of Cheburashka or Gena. After Gena unloads his luggage and the man, he asks Gena to pay for more luggage than he brought. Gena explains that he does not have that much luggage, but concedes to the man’s monetary demand. Gena’s conciliatory nature depicts how he is nervous of the consequences if he does not pay. Gena would rather lose money to an unfair business than draw attention to himself in a disagreement. Brezhnev’s mafia resembles this endemic bribery
and corruption which plagued the Soviet system and echoes again within this scene.\textsuperscript{64} This systemic discrimination shows how corruption impacted all areas of Soviet business, economy, and justice. During the Brezhnev years, corruption was one of the ways people overcame socialist shortages. After paying the man his unearned dues, Gena takes a taxi to Cheburashka’s.

When Cheburashka explains that he does not know how to read or write Gena is shocked. Upset that Cheburashka (who seemed to be able to read before this episode) has not been properly educated, Gena insists that he goes to school on the first of September. Since Cheburashka is a true foreigner, it is possible this scene acts as a way to discuss the social inequalities those who come from immigrant backgrounds are faced with when coming to a new country. Immigrants often have to learn the culture, language, and procedures of places they decide and sometimes are forced to settle. Therefore, Cheburashka represents the struggles of an immigrant in the Soviet Union. Gena, who has been more established in the Soviet Union than Cheburashka, seeks out ways to address this inequality by helping him go to school and eventually try to pay for his uniform.

The uniform scene shows how Cheburashka, Gena, and Shapoklyak are all evaluated as not good enough for education. The shopkeeper blandly explains that the store does not make uniforms for their types of bodies. Cheburashka and Gena leave the store upset, but still determined to reach their goals. They understand that they do not need a uniform to transform their lives. Instead, they will stick with their identities in order to enact change. Shapoklyak forces the shopkeeper to give her a uniform. She escapes with the uniform and steals a delivery man’s car. She crashes into another automobile that appears vacant. As she drives off in the new

\textsuperscript{64} Kenez, \textit{A History of the Soviet Union from the Beginning to Its Legacy}, 217-218.
car, an Arab man emerges. This shows how no matter who comes across Shapoklyak in society, she will use them to get what she wants.

At the schoolhouse, Shapoklyak hurries the remodeling process of those who are lazily not doing their jobs. Tying back to the man who was supposed to carry Gena’s luggage, the workers are intentionally slow and do not seem like they want to work. Shapoklyak straightens them out by frightening them with her rat and hurrying the completion of the school. Knowledge of the next generation depends on it.

Finally, Gena and Shapoklyak volunteer their unique talents and gifts to help educate Cheburashka and the community. They are finally recognized as having a place in society and that their knowledge is valid, useful, and important to the future Soviet citizens. This shows how both Gena and Shapoklyak are capable of giving back their experiences in the Soviet Union to others in purposeful ways. In a sense, the identity of their becoming teachers shows how they have become sources of knowledge and history for their life's work. Therefore, their old identities as aimless or unsettled, find a space to be appreciated in academia.

Conclusion:

Cheburashka’s ability to uplift his community with determination for equality and justice demonstrate that he is an ideal Soviet citizen. His charm, demeanor, and odd circumstances garnered attention from all around the world. Although his struggles may have not been initially understood as Jewish before the work of Katz, I offer an extension of his identity to be linked to the pervasive term of ‘rootless cosmopolitan,’ but one who subverts the idea that the rootless cosmopolitan is an unproductive member of Soviet society. To this day, Cheburashka finds
himself being lovingly adored everywhere. From Soviet postage stamps\(^{65}\) to Russian Olympic athletes holding Cheburashka plushies\(^{66}\) to an American organization dedicated to supporting post-Soviet Jewish diaspora called The Cheburashka Project,\(^{67}\) Cheburashka’s image has given joy, hope, and sympathy to many. In the first episode, where viewers find the mysterious creature tucked away in the orange crate unable to fend for himself, Cheburashka becomes the unlikely and ironic cornerstone for Soviet society’s success. By definition, Cheburashka is rootless, and from his connection to Israel, a cosmopolitan. However, Cheburashka and his friends, although discriminated against because of their Jewish identities, seem to transform Soviet society and to improve it through good deeds. The historical backdrop of Stalin’s anti-cosmopolitan campaigns, paranoia, and execution of Jews depict how revolutionary Cheburashka’s character is. Cheburashka is the unlikely and ironic hero who inspires others to help address the ills of the corrupt Soviet system which aims to control and erase Soviet Jews. Therefore, Cheburashka’s legacy is something more mythical and legendary. He becomes a hero who lives on after the collapse of the Soviet Union in the hearts of


the Jewish and non-Jewish people who witnessed his tale. He becomes a mythical hero for the post-Soviet Jewish diaspora where his message clear: no matter where a Jewish immigrant settles or is forced to settle, they can be the essential members of any society. Post-Soviet Jewish immigrants might tumble, fall over, or struggle to keep up in their new homes just like Cheburashka, but they are indispensable for the wellbeing of society. Immigrants from the post-Soviet diaspora and around the world can cling to Cheburashka for hope in understanding that they too can adapt and create friendships in their new homes. Cheburashka’s spirit of inclusivity, hard work, positivity, and the pursuit of equality remind those settled to seek what is right and fair, and to see immigrants for the many talents they bring.
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