



DAVID GOLDER, THE BALL,
SNOW IN AUTUMN,
THE COURILOF AFFAIR

IRENE NEMIROVSKY

A KNOPF  BOOK



EVERYMAN,
I WILL GO WITH THEE,
AND BE THY GUIDE,
IN THY MOST NEED
TO GO BY THY SIDE

IRÈNE
NÉMIROVSKY

DAVID GOLDER
THE BALL
SNOW IN AUTUMN
THE COURILOF AFFAIR

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WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY
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INTRODUCTION

“Each of us has his weaknesses. Human nature is incomprehensible,” muses the mysterious Léon M., narrator of Irène Némirovsky's 1933 novel, *The Courilof Affair*. “One cannot even say with certainty whether a man is good or evil, stupid or intelligent. There does not exist a good man who has not at some time in his life committed a cruel act, nor an evil man who has not done good....” The complicated, often murky ironies of human interaction are the stuff of Némirovsky's fictions: no matter what her subject—and her range was considerable—her work is unified in its unsparing examination of the desires and feelings that lie behind the most apparently clear-cut scenarios.

In *The Courilof Affair*, Léon M., in his retirement in Nice, pens his memories of his revolutionary days in Russia in the early years of the century and, in particular, of his assignment to assassinate the Tsar's Minister of Education, Valerian Alexandrovitch Courilof, known as “the Killer Whale,” in 1903 (incidentally, the year of the author's birth). In preparation for the attack, Léon takes on the identity of Marcel Legrand, a Swiss doctor, and becomes the personal physician to Courilof. Over the course of their time together, he is moved by a growing understanding not simply of Courilof, but of human frailty. Compassion and revolutionary terrorism are not easily compatible, and his new knowledge threatens Leon's mission. As he recalls of Courilof and his politically problematic French wife (and former mistress), Margot, “It remains impossible for me to explain, even to myself, how I could... understand these two people.... For the first time, I saw human beings: unhappy people, with ambitions, faults, foolishness.”

This capacity genuinely and fully to *see* human beings, to acknowledge the tender humanity of their flaws, is one of the supreme gifts of fiction, both for the writer and for the reader. Nobody knew this better than Irène Némirovsky, whose novels are fiercely preoccupied with the unveiling of her characters' foibles but who, through that unveiling, provides her readers with a bracing, unnerving, and often moving vision of ourselves as we really are. This is nowhere more true than in her unfinished masterpiece, *Suite Française*, the relatively recent discovery and publication of which have brought Némirovsky to the attention of a new generation of readers. Set in France under German occupation and written, extraordinarily, under the circumstances it describes, *Suite Française* moves between chilling satire of the petty selfishness of the bourgeoisie and a poignant evocation of the realities of village life under occupation—realities much like those of Léon M., in which to recognize the enemy's humanity is to compromise, or disable, a warrior's hatred. In reading that novel—or, more properly, those two novellas, since the remaining three segments that would have completed the masterpiece were never written—this reader, for one, gained an understanding of what it meant to live in France during the Second World War that I had not had before, steeped though I was in books and films on the subject.

Consistently through her work, Némirovsky's vision is neither easy nor comfortable; nor

was her own life untainted by the moral complexities she captured so keenly in fiction. In its broadest outlines, of course, the tragic story of Irène Némirovsky's life is by now widely known: she was a refugee from the Russian Revolution who made France her home; she enjoyed literary acclaim and considerable privilege there during the '20s and '30s; and she mistakenly thought that privilege would protect her from the Nazis, an error that cost her her life. She was taken by the Germans in 1942 and died in Auschwitz of typhus not long after her arrival there. Her husband, Michel, left her final manuscript in the care of her two small daughters, who managed to salvage it in spite of their own tribulations during the war. They kept her notebook without reading it, for decades, and only in the 1990s did her older, surviving daughter, Denise Epstein, realize that these pages constituted not a diary but the fragments of a novel. It was published in France in 2004 and subsequently translated into English. The book has been an international best seller.

It may have seemed, to most English-language readers, that Némirovsky sprang into literary existence, fully formed, with the writing of *Suite Française*. In fact, however, she was in France a prolific, critically acclaimed, and popularly successful author, whose reputation long survived her. Her third novel, *David Golder* (the two first, *Le Malentendu* and *L'Ennemie*, were released in a monthly magazine, *Les Œuvres Libres*), was published when she was twenty-six, in 1929. The book made her name (and was made into a film and a play, both starring Harry Baur), and she was hailed by the *New York Times*, upon its 1930 translation into English, as a successor to Dostoevsky. In its wake she published a book almost every year until the Second World War. Her captivity and death, in this light, are all the more shocking: it is painful to think of the literary legacy that was lost.

Irène Némirovsky's ability to grasp life's contradictions was at least in part the result of the deeply contradictory facts of her own brief life. She was born in Kiev on February 11, 1903, the only child of Léon and Fanny (Margoulis) Némirovsky. Her father was a prosperous banker, allied with the Tsar's court, and as such the family enjoyed privileges rarely available to Jewish families. As for many White Russians, French was the lingua franca of their household. According to a recent biography by Olivier Philipponnat and Patrick Lienhardt, "she spoke a bookish Russian; so to speak, Russian was not her mother tongue," and possibly Némirovsky's closest early relationship was with her French governess, Marie, whom she called "Zézelle." But the political allegiances of the Némirovskys would cost them dearly, and the family fled their home, penniless, at the time of the Revolution, in January 1918, coming to France only after many peregrinations and a nearly yearlong stint in a village in Finland, just behind the Russian frontier. Once settled in Paris, Léon Némirovsky set about restoring the family fortunes, and as she reached adulthood, Irène moved in elite circles: largely politically conservative, generally Catholic (although she also contributed to left-wing journals such as *Marianne*). Her family was fully assimilated, and while she never denied her Jewishness (tellingly, she chose to marry a fellow Russian Jewish exile, Michel Epstein, whose history mirrored her own; and she asserted, in a 1935 interview, that "I never dreamed of hiding my origins. Whenever I had the occasion, I protested that I was Jewish, I even proclaimed it!"), she also did not fully embrace it. In 1939, Némirovsky converted to Catholicism, a decision that has caused controversy in recent discussions of her life, work, and relation to her Jewish heritage. It has been asserted that she was herself anti-Semitic—her novel *David Golder*, in particular, has been held up as an example of this fact, as has her religious conversion—a claim that has threatened to cast

a shadow upon her reputation.

The reality is, inevitably, more complicated. Certainly questions of social class play powerfully in Némirovsky's identity: in Russia, her family was set apart from other Jews not only by her father's occupation but by their situation in Kiev, where they lived among the wealthy in the hills high above the poverty-stricken Jewish ghetto of the inner city. Her unquestionably unsavory depictions of Jews (for example: "Golder looked with a kind of hatred at Fischl, as if at a cruel caricature. Fat little Jew ... He calmly held in his killer's hands a porcelain bowl of fresh caviar against his chest.") reflect both some measure of self-loathing and a willed detachment from the Jew as "Other." As Irène Némirovsky puts it herself in her veiled autobiography, *The Wine of Solitude* (1935), "I spent my life fighting an odious blood, but it is inside of me." That these two positions seem initially paradoxical is, in truth, but an illusion, one of the many that we all harbor in the hope of parsing life more clearly, of making orderly sense of the world. Némirovsky—allied from birth with White Russians and hence against her own people, the Jews, and consequently most naturally affiliated, in France, with political conservatives, who were often anti-Semitic—did not have the luxury of such illusions; and she does not grant them to her characters. What she sees may not be attractive, but she is resolute in seeing clearly and has the courage to record her truths, however unappealing they may be. Therein lies her courage as a writer.

(It is worth noting, indeed, that while many of her supposed literary friends in Paris abandoned her at the outset of the war, it was Horace de Carbuccia, editor of the notably right-wing and often anti-Semitic journal *Gringoire*, who arranged to publish her work pseudonymously during the occupation and who thereby guaranteed Némirovsky's family some desperately needed income. This apparent irony would not have surprised her.)

David Golder is the remarkable, compelling, and at times painfully unsympathetic portrait of an aging Russian Jewish businessman and his entourage in 1920s France. It opens, significantly, with the word "No," as Golder denies his business partner, Simon Marcus, support in a venture pertaining to Russian oil wells. Golder's denial prompts Marcus's suicide and encourages others, including the reader, to see Golder as a ruthless, even heartless, entrepreneur. As the novel unfolds, however, our sympathies cleave to this brutal ruin of a man, preyed upon and exploited by his grasping wife, Gloria; her lover, Hoyos; and their friends; and by his beautiful, spoiled, and adored daughter, Joyce. Golder rages that "I'm just expected to pay, pay, and keep on paying... That's why I've been put on this earth"; and it seems he isn't wrong in this assessment. Joyce is his passion—"Every time he came back from a trip, he looked for her in the crowd, in spite of himself. She was never there, and yet he continued to expect her with the same humiliating, tenacious, and vain sense of hope"—and his Achilles' heel. To the last, in spite of all he learns about her, he can deny her nothing—even his life.

Central to our ultimate understanding of David Golder is the portrait of his old acquaintance and cardpartner, Soifer, of whom we are told that "his meanness bordered on madness.... For several years now, since he had lost all his teeth, he ate only cereal and pureed vegetables to avoid having to buy dentures." Soifer is, regrettably, a grotesque caricature of the greedy Jew; and surely he provided fine fodder for the growing number of anti-Semites in 1930s France. By 1935, Némirovsky said of the book, "If there had been Hitler [at the time], I would have greatly toned down *David Golder*, and I wouldn't have written it in the same fashion"; and again, three years later, "How could I write such a

thing? If I were to write *David Golder* now, I would do it quite differently.... The climate is quite changed.” But there is, nevertheless, in Némirovsky's portrayal, a strange tenderness even for Soifer: she writes of him, in a searing passage, “Much later, Soifer would die all alone, like a dog, without a friend, without a single wreath on his grave, buried in the cheapest cemetery in Paris by his family who hated him, and whom he had hated, but to whom he nevertheless left a fortune of some thirty million francs, thus fulfilling till the end the incomprehensible destiny of every good Jew on this earth.”

This is an appalling indictment, not of Soifer himself but of the warping force of the society around him. If it is an anti-Semitic portrait, and crudely drawn, it is also a portrait of the potential horror of any immigrant's life: if one were to substitute the word “immigrant” for “Jew,” Némirovsky's depiction would carry the same force, with considerably less offense. How many immigrants have been emotionally deformed by their travails, have given everything for their families only to be hopelessly misunderstood and even abandoned by their kin? Is it not the fate of many in diasporas of different kinds, not simply of Jews? Agonizing isolation—to be unknown, unacknowledged, unloved—is mercifully not every immigrant's fate; but it is certainly a fate of immigrants, of the displaced, more surely than of the rooted. As Némirovsky wrote in 1934, “I continue to depict the society I know best, that is composed of misfits, those who have been expelled from their milieu, the place where they would normally have lived, and who do not adapt to their new lives without clashes or suffering.”

Unlike for Soifer, there is, for David Golder himself, a measure of grace. The novel concludes with his death, but not before he has returned to his native Russia and embarked from the port he knew as a youth, rendered by Némirovsky without a hint of sentimentality: “The port. He recognized it as clearly as if he had left the day before. The little customs building, half in ruins. Beached boats buried in the black sand, which was littered with bits of coal and rubbish; watermelon rind and dead animals bobbing in the deep, muddy green water, just as in the past.” Golder is, at the last, relieved, at least somewhat, of his lifelong deracination. Nor is he condemned to die alone: he is accompanied, in his final voyage, by a young Jew leaving Russia for the first time, to seek his fortune in the West. To him, at the end, David Golder speaks, for the first time in years, in his native Yiddish; and in the wake of their communication, in his last moments Golder is granted a vision of his own boyhood, and he hears the sound of his mother's voice.

The echo of Tolstoy's *Death of Ivan Ilyich* is strong in this novel, even if Golder's Gerasim is a young man on the make who will pocket the contents of Golder's wallet (with Golder's blessing) when he leaves. Némirovsky's vision is darker than her Russian forebear's; and her sense of her protagonist's fate is not rooted in a tradition of Christian redemption. But the debt is strong, and clear: from the novel's opening lines, Golder is learning how to approach death, and, very quickly, from his first heart attack onward, how to die. This is the matter of the book. Moreover, Golder's visit to Marcus's widow, early in the novel, echoes Peter Ivanovich's visit to Ivan Ilyich's widow in the opening pages of Tolstoy's masterpiece. And by the time Golder confronts death for the last time, in its absolute inexorability, he is both granted a Tolstoyan grace and must submit to a different, and mercilessly worldly, banality. *David Golder* is not without flaws (not least of which is a lack of genuine complexity in all the characters besides Golder himself) nor, to a contemporary reader at least, without problematic elements. But it remains a remarkable novel. Némirovsky was only twenty-

three when she wrote the first version of it; and yet none of her subsequent novels achieved comparable fame in her lifetime. The other early works gathered in this volume are perhaps less fully realized, and stand less firmly on their own merits, than *David Golder*. That said, each of them has distinct strengths, each moving the reader in a different way; and together they serve almost as instructive studies, or sketches, in Némirovsky's literary development, as she expands her range and sympathies, stretching toward the maturity that enabled the writing of *Suite Française*.

The Ball, first published in 1929 under the pseudonym "Nerey," is the slightest of these efforts, the story of a girl of fourteen, Antoinette Kampf, whose newly wealthy parents are preparing to throw a ball. Set in 1928, two years after Alfred Kampf's fantastic "killing on the stock market," the action is contained, and rather implausibly melodramatic. Antoinette, forbidden by her mother to attend the ball, wreaks her revenge by destroying all but one of the invitations when she is sent to post them, a sin masked by the fact that her English governess, Miss Betty—who was to have taken them to the post office but who was, instead, trysting with her boyfriend—maintains that she herself mailed the envelopes. As a result of Antoinette's vicious act, the single guest at the Kampf's ball is their Cousin Isabelle, a resentful and impoverished music teacher to the aristocracy, who gloatingly witnesses the debacle. Madame Kampf, in whom the vanity of the socially aspirant is excruciatingly caught, is bitterly shamed by her apparent failure in society and turns to her despised daughter for consolation. It is somewhat difficult to suspend disbelief in this tale—Would the Kampf's really have expected their guests to appear, not having heard from any of them? Would they not have smelled a rat?—but the novella's strength lies in its portrait of the relationship between Antoinette and her mother.

Némirovsky, whose relations with her own mother were strained, repeatedly creates monstrously selfish middle-aged women in the maternal role, women who rage at the passing of their beauty and who see material compensation as their due and their only hope (Gloria Golder is another such character). The novella's interest lies, particularly, in the mind of young Antoinette, who sees herself and her parents more clearly than they possibly can, and yet whose immaturity prevents her from feeling any compassion: "No one loved her, no one in the whole world... But couldn't they see, blind idiots, that she was a thousand times more intelligent, more precious, more perceptive than all of them put together—these people who dared to bring her up, to teach her? These unsophisticated, crass nouveaux riches?" Antoinette is a dual creature, a living paradox, enacting at once her inevitable association with, and simultaneous detachment from, her parents: like Irène herself, she is caught between two worlds, one in which she can step back and condemn her parents as "unsophisticated, crass nouveaux riches," and another in which, at the novella's end, she eagerly accepts her mother's needy embrace. That this young woman is condemned to live this paradox, and that this paradox awakens in her a terrible and inevitable rage, is what makes *The Ball* more than a simple melodrama: there is here, albeit in embryo, a novelist's understanding of the intractable ironies of human nature of which Léon M. speaks so frankly in *The Courilof Affair*.

Snow in Autumn appeared a year after *The Ball*, in 1931, but is the definitive version of a tale published in 1924, "La Niania," a discreet homage to her grandmother, Rosa Margoulis, who had just fled from the USSR to France. It represents a departure of sorts for Némirovsky, in that it tackles the Russian émigrés' flight to France from a different angle,

and also in its choice of a servant as the protagonist. The Karine family is aristocratic, and the novel opens on their Russian estate as their two sons, Youri and Cyrille, depart for war against the Bolsheviks. The story focuses on Tatiana Ivanovna, the household's nanny, who has been with the Karine family for fifty-one years and who sees anew, in the departure of these young men, the departure and loss of her earlier charges, generations before. The unraveling that ensues—the loss of one son, the family's retreat to Kiev and eventually to France, where they are forced to begin again with nothing—is painful to Tatiana Ivanovna chiefly as the loss of history. Long the repository of family lore and the keeper of family belongings, she carries the memory of the contents of every cupboard, of every piece of furniture, of every childhood incident on the lost Karine estate. But survival for the Karines requires a definitive break with their past, and Tatiana Ivanovna's role becomes painfully obsolete.

There is, as in *David Golder*, an intimation of the autobiographical in *Snow in Autumn*: the Némirovskys did not have a large country estate or the former serfs who would have remained on such properties; but their fraught removal to France, and the agonies of starting over, are at least somewhat reflected in the Karine family's trajectory. Loulou, the Karines' twenty-year-old daughter, is, like Joyce Golder, a hard, cold young woman, cynical and greedy for pleasure; but unlike Joyce, whose petulance is that of a spoiled child, Loulou's ferocity is born of all she has endured. At one point she breaks down, like a child, with her nanny: “Nianiouchka... I want to go home! Home, home!...Why have we been punished like this? We didn't do anything wrong!” The Karines are different from the Golders in genuinely having had a home, and in having lost it, rather than having left voluntarily in search of something better. The strangeness of Némirovsky's life is that she could identify with both the Golders and the Karines, and she could write their stories with equal authenticity. She could even inhabit the mind of Tatiana Ivanovna, for whom the loss of identity—an identity bound up in a place, and in things, and in a long life's history—proves insurmountable.

The Courilof Affair is a political novel; but its analysis of politics is ultimately, as another biographer, Jonathan Weiss writes, “a reflection on the moral corruption of all politics and ideology.” Weiss further maintains, “It is clear that for Irène, the motivation for political action is not substantially different from the motivation of the businessman; in both cases, self-preservation and the willingness to sacrifice others for one's own profit take precedence over human kindness and generosity,” but this reading is, I think, inaccurately harsh: the trajectory of Léon M.'s story records, in fact, a growth from unthinking political zeal into humanity and compassion, and thence into sorrowful cynicism, a recognition that it is possible fully to feel the agonies of the enemy and yet still to be forced, by history and circumstance, to show none of the mercy one feels. Léon says, “As long as we are on this earth, we have to play the game. I killed Courilof. I sent men to their deaths whom I realized, in a moment of lucidity, were like my brothers, like my very soul...”

The range of emotions that Léon experiences for Courilof anticipates, clearly, the emotions experienced by Lucile for her German soldier in “Dolce,” the second section of *Suite Française*. Némirovsky could evoke, so effectively, the contradictory emotional ramifications of war, even in the midst of war, because she had already known those contradictions in the Russian Revolution: they defined her life and her work. *The Courilof Affair* is not a direct antecedent to *Suite Française*, but it anticipates many of its themes. And in our own time of

political instability and terrorism, it offers both a window upon the revolutionary mindset and, powerfully, hope for an antidote to that mindset. It is a book that, rather like Dostoevsky's fiction, seems almost troublingly contemporary in its understanding of *ressentiment* and anomie.

Readers discovering Némirovsky in these pages for the first time will thrill to her acuity and her frankness, and will marvel at her ability to evoke scenes, both externally and in their unspoken interiority. Even though she considered herself a French writer—and much about her work, formally and in its subject matter, is emphatically French—Némirovsky also remains a deeply Russian writer, whose gifts draw upon the examples of Tolstoy and Dostoevsky. She remains, as a woman and a writer, a contradiction who embraced her contradictions. F. Scott Fitzgerald famously said that “the test of a first-rate intelligence is the ability to hold two opposed ideas in mind at the same time and still retain the ability to function.” Némirovsky's entire life and her literary output were about reality's duality, or multiplicity, and they constitute a stand— true, often beautiful, and in her own case, tragically doomed— against limitation, singleness, and impossibility. Fitzgerald went on to say, “One should, for example, be able to see that things are hopeless and yet be determined to make them otherwise.” In the courage of her writing, Némirovsky undertook just that task. If, in our times, we need an example of why literature matters, even in the face of adversity and death, then Némirovsky stands as that example. Already in these early works, she reveals herself to be a writer of the utmost seriousness, and of considerable importance, whose clarity in the face of complexity enlarges our capacity for compassion and expands our humanity. You can't—in fiction or in life—ask for more than that.

Claire Messud

CHRONOLOGY

DATE	AUTHOR'S LIFE	LITERARY CONTEXT
	Irma Irina (Irène) Nemirovsky is born in Kiev on February 11, the only child of	Balmont: <i>Let us be like the Sun</i> . Bryusov: <i>Urbi et Orbi</i> . Zola: <i>Vérité</i> .
1903	Leonid (Léon) Nemirovsky, a prosperous Jewish banker, and Anna (Fanny) Margoulis.	Huysmans: <i>L'Oblat</i> . First Prix Goncourt awarded (to <i>Force Ennemie</i> by J. A. Nau).
1904		Chekhov: <i>The Cherry Orchard</i> . Death of Chekhov. Bely: <i>Gold in Azure</i> . Tolstoy: "Alyosha Gorshok"; "Fëdor Kuzmich." Kuprin: <i>The Duel</i> . Merezhkovsky completes trilogy, <i>Christ and Antichrist</i> . Blok: <i>Verses on the Beautiful Lady</i> .
1905	Anti-Jewish pogrom in Kiev (October 18). Irène is hidden by the family's cook, Macha.	
	Attends the Carnival of Nice, on the French Riviera, which becomes her earliest memory. Travels regularly in the winter to France until the war:	Tolstoy: "What For?" Andreev: "The Governor." Bryusov: <i>Stephanos</i> . Blok: <i>The</i>

1906 Paris, Vichy, Plombières, Cannes, Biarritz, etc. Summer holidays are spent in Yalta and Alushta, on the Ukrainian Riviera.

Puppet Show. Rolland: *Jean-Christophe* (to 1912). Claudel: *Partage de midi*.

1907

Gorky: *Mother*.
Sologub: *The Petty Demon*. Conrad: *The Secret Agent*.

HISTORICAL EVENTS

Russian Socialist Congress in London; schism between Bolsheviks and Mensheviks. Father Georgi Gapon forms Assembly of Russian Workers. In France, the Bloc Republicain, an alliance of left-wing and center parties, has been in power since 1899, providing stable government after the Dreyfus affair. First Tour de France. First powered flight of Wright brothers.

Russo-Japanese War: Japanese cripple Russian fleet off Port Arthur and defeat army at Liaoyang in China. Assassination of Plehve, Russian minister of the interior. Anglo-French Entente Cordiale. “La belle époque” in France. Failed revolution in Russia. “Bloody Sunday” in St. Petersburg: troops fire on peaceful workers’ procession led by Father Gapon (January). Widespread strikes and sporadic rioting follow. Universities closed (February). Union of Unions formed by professional classes, demanding constitutional reform (May). Mutiny on battleship *Potemkin* (June). After further Russian defeats, Peace of Portsmouth with Japan (September). General strike; first Soviet formed by workers in St. Petersburg, followed by 50 others; Witte appointed Russian premier, persuading Nicholas II to capitulate to demands for an elected assembly with legislative powers (October). Reactionary backlash: more than 600 pogroms around the country. Insurrection of workers in Moscow (December) brutally suppressed by military force. Completion of Trans-Siberian Railway (begun in 1891).

Separation of Church and State in France—culmination of a series of anticlerical reforms. Withdrawal of socialists from the Bloc Républiqueain and creation of unified Socialist Party (SFIO). Until 1914 and mostly until 1940, France is governed by a series of centre coalitions, generally dominated by the Radicals, while the Socialists remain in opposition.

Fall of Witte (April). Fundamental Laws promulgated, restricting powers of first Duma which meets in May. Conservative Stolypin, new premier, institutes regime of courts-martial to suppress revolutionary terrorism and peasant disorders; hundreds executed 1906–7. Also introduces land reform enabling peasants to leave local communes and own private property (a quarter of the peasantry do so by 1917). Tsar dissolves Duma (July), after the majority party (the Kadets) passes a motion of no confidence in his government.

Dreyfus finally vindicated by a civilian court in France. Clemenceau becomes prime minister (to 1909). His program of social reform is blocked by parliament; industrial unrest is firmly suppressed.

Triple Entente of Great Britain, France and Russia. Second Duma proves as anti-Tsarist as the first and is again dissolved. Third Duma (1907–11) elected under a restricted franchise, producing a majority of moderate supporters for the government. Campaign against illiteracy in Russia—number of elementary schools doubles between 1908 and 1913. Cubism begins in Paris.

DATE AUTHOR'S LIFE

LITERARY CONTEXT

1909

Gide: *La Porte étroite*.

1910

Death of Tolstoy. Bunin: *The Village*.

1911

Irène, dressed as Sarah Bernhardt, recites verses from *L'Aiglon* by Edmond Rostand for the military governor of Kiev, General Vladimir Soukhomlinov.

Hippius: *The Devil's Doll*. Conrad: *Under Western Eyes*.

1912

Remizov: *The Fifth Pestilence*. France: *Les Dieux ont soif*. Mann: *Death in Venice*. Wharton: *The Reef*.

1913

Léon Némirovsky moves with his family to St. Petersburg.

Gorky: *Childhood*. Mandelstam: *Stone*. Proust: *Du côté de chez Swann*. Alain-Fournier: *Le grand Meaulnes*. Akhmatova: *Rosary*.

1914

France and Russia are both at war. The Nemirovskys remain in St. Petersburg.

Joyce: *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (to 1915).

1915

1916

During the February Revolution, Irène witnesses the bread riots and attends the sham execution of her concierge,

Bely: *Petersburg*. Jean-Richard Bloch: *Et Compagnie*. Max Jacob: *Le cornet à dés*.

1917 the sham execution of her concierge, Akhmatova: *White Flock*.
 Ivan. In October, her French governess Pasternak: *Above the*
 Marie commits suicide after being sent *Barriers*. Remizov: “Lay
 away by Fanny. The family flees to of the Ruin of the
 Moscow, then back to St. Petersburg. Russian Land.”

HISTORICAL EVENTS

Diaghilev founds Ballets Russes in Paris (to 1929). Marinetti's Futurist Manifesto.

Assassination of Stolypin. Agadir crisis: Germans resist French attempt to make Morocco a protectorate. Marie Curie wins Nobel Prize for Chemistry.

Fourth Duma elected. Massacre of striking miners at Lena, provoking strikes throughout Russia: industrial unrest continues until the outbreak of war. Fall of French premier Caillaux: Poincare forms a cabinet. Nationalist revival as fears of German expansion grow. Poincare, strongly opposed by antimilitaristic socialists, strengthens the army and reinvigorates diplomatic alliances. Morocco becomes a French protectorate. First Balkan War. Second Balkan War. Poincare becomes French president (to 1920). Stravinsky: *Le Sacre du printemps* premiered in Paris, provoking riot. “Coco” Chanel opens her first shop in Paris. *Victory over the Sun*—Russian Futurist opera premiered in St. Petersburg. Goncharova: *The Cyclist*.

Assassination of Austrian Archduke Franz Ferdinand and his wife at Sarajevo (June 28). Allies drawn into World War 1 as a result of championing Serbian independence when this is threatened by Austria-Hungary. Crushing defeat of Russian Second Army by Germans at Tannenberg (August 26–28). St. Petersburg renamed Petrograd. Assassination of Jaurès, French Socialist leader (July 30). Nicholas I takes personal command of Russian army (August), leaving government to the Tsarina who is increasingly under the influence of the “mad monk,” Rasputin. Malevich: *Black Square*.

Rasputin assassinated. German artillery attack on Verdun (February–June). Brusilov Offensive (June–August) ruins Austria-Hungary as a military power, but Russians suffer over a million casualties. First Battle of the Somme (July–November). Einstein's General Theory of Relativity. February Revolution: troops ordered to suppress bread riots and strikes in Petrograd side with the workers. Abdication of Nicholas II (March 2). Provisional government set up under liberal Prince Lvov, though the Petrograd Soviet is a rival center of power. Lenin returns to Petrograd (April 3). Socialist Kerensky becomes prime minister (April). Bolshevik (October) Revolution. Lenin becomes head of state. US enters war (April). Serious mutinies in French army. Clemenceau recalled to premiership (November). Balfour Declaration: Britain pledges support for a Jewish national home in Palestine.

Freud: *Introduction to Psychoanalysis*. Duchamps: *Fountain* (The Urinal). Satie/Cocteau/Diaghilev/Picasso: *Parade* (ballet).

DATE AUTHOR'S LIFE

LITERARY CONTEXT

Blok: *The Twelve*.

- 1918 The family escapes from Russia to Mustamäki, a Finnish village close to the Russian frontier (January). Irène writes her first poems in Russian.
- 1919 In April, the Némirovskys flee Mustamäki for Helsinki, then Stockholm. Irène and her mother leave Sweden for France in June. They first settle in a furnished flat in Paris. Léon is able to continue as a banker and to rebuild the family fortunes.
- 1920
- 1921 Studies French, Russian and Comparative Literature at the Sorbonne (to 1925). Forms lifelong friendship with Madeleine Avot. The Avots, a well-to-do Catholic provincial family, come to represent for Irène an ideal of French life that imbues her literary work. Publishes the first of her “petits contes
- Decembrists.*
Apollinaire: Calligrammes.
Cocteau: Le Coq et l'arlequin. Duhamel: *Civilisation.* Tzara: *Dada Manifesto.*
- Gide: *La Symphonie pastorale.* Roland Dorgelès: *Les Croix de bois.* Myriam Harry: *Siona à Paris.*
- Duhamel: *Vie et aventures de Salavin* (5 vols, to 1932).
Aragon: *Feu de joie.*
Mansfield: *Bliss.*
Wharton: *The Age of Innocence.* Pound: *Hugh Selwyn Mauberley.*
- Elissa Rhä??: *Les Juifs ou la fille d'Eléazar.*
André Spire: *Samaël.*
Chardonne: *L'Epithalame.*
Akhmatova: *Anno Domini MCMXXI;*
Plantain. Tsvetaeva:

<p>drolatiques”—“Nonoche and the Super-lucid”—in the fortnightly magazine <i>Fantasio</i>, under the pseudonym “Topsy” (August).</p>	<p><i>Mileposts</i>. Gumilyov: <i>The Pillar of Fire</i>. Zamyatin: <i>We</i>. Dos Passos: <i>Three Soldiers</i>.</p>
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HISTORICAL EVENTS

Democratically elected Constituent Assembly meets and is dispersed by armed force. Lenin's cabinet brings Russian calendar in line with Western Europe and moves seat of government to Moscow (January); makes peace—on humiliating terms—with Central Powers at Brest-Litovsk (March). Assassination of Nicholas II and his family (July). “Red Terror”: Soviet police force (Cheka) carry out brutal reprisals against pre-Revolutionary privileged classes. Civil war in Russia and Ukraine (to 1921). Large-scale exodus of refugees from Russia begins—many head for Berlin, Paris, Warsaw, Sofia, Belgrade, Tallin and Riga.

President Wilson's Fourteen Points for world peace (January). Armistice signed between Allies and Germany (November 11).

Versailles Peace Treaty (US refuses to ratify). Weimar Republic in Germany (to 1933). France regains Alsace and Lorraine. Clemenceau secures 8-hour day for workers in France, but further union reforms are blocked.

Postwar Jewish immigration to France swelled by arrivals from North Africa, Turkey, Greece and Eastern Europe (later from Germany and Austria).

In 1914 there were an estimated 20,000 Jews in France; by 1939, c. 300,000. Workers from Poland and Algeria, later refugees from Italy, Armenia, Russia and Spain make France the most popular destination for immigrants in Europe.

Cocteau and “Les Six” frequenting the Gaya bar (soon to become “Le Boeuf sur le toit” after Milhaud's ballet of 1920, and one of Paris's most fashionable bohemian nightspots). Sylvia Beach opens bookshop Shakespeare & Company in Paris.

Vast program of reconstruction of devastated north-east France (to 1925). General election (November): huge majority to right-wing coalition (Bloc National), who rigorously enforce the terms of the peace treaty, maintain large standing army and seek to make military alliances with all Germany's neighbors. French mandate in Syria and Lebanon. Socialist Party splits at congress at Tours: foundation of French Communist Party (SFIC). League of Nations founded. Stravinsky: *Pulcinella*.

French resist British attempts to lower German war reparations. Start of regular radio bulletins from the Eiffel Tower. Tenth Party Conference: Lenin bans opposition within the Communist Party and introduces New Economic Policy (NEP). Famine in Russia (to 1922).

Paris in the 1920s viewed as the cultural capital of the Western world, attracting artists and intellectuals of many nationalities. Famous expatriates there include Picasso, Man Ray, Miro, Chirico, Stravinsky, Prokofiev, Ford, Joyce, Beckett, Durrell, and the “Lost Generation” of American writers, e.g. Hemingway, Pound, Williams, Stein, Dos Passos, Anderson and Fitzgerald. Les Six: *L'Album des Six*; première of *Les Mariés de la Tour Eiffel* by the Ballets Suédois.

DATE AUTHOR'S LIFE

LITERARY CONTEXT

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1922 Her grandparents arrive from Russia. She writes "La Niania," a story set in Russia and Paris.

Martin du Gard: *Les Thibault* (10 vols, to 1940). Vignaud: *Nicky, roman de l'émigration russe*. Mandelstam: *Tristia*. Gorky: *My Universities*. Pasternak: *My Sister Life*. Joyce: *Ulysses*. Mansfield: *The Garden Party*. Eliot: *The Wasteland*. Cummings: *The Enormous Room*. Edmond Fleg: *Anthologie juive*. Colette: *Le Blé en herbe*. Radiguet: *Le Diable au corps*. Alexei Tolstoy: *The Road to Calvary* (to 1945).

Writes *L'Enfant genial* (The Genius Kid), a novella with a Russian setting and a Jewish protagonist (published in 1927).

1923 Moves to her own flat in the rue Boissiere. Leads a wild life: jazz clubs, flirtations, late-night escapades, joyriding and "water cures" to soothe her asthma.

1924 "La Niania" appears in the daily *Le Matin* (May 9).

Breton's Surrealist Manifesto. Desnos: *Deuil pour deuil*. Bulgakov: *The White Guard*. Ehrenburg: *The Love of Jeanne Ney*. Mann: *The Magic Mountain*. Ford: *Parade's End* (to 1928). Gide: *Les Faux-monnayeurs*. Morand: *L'Europe galante*. Cendrars: *L'Or*.

1925 Last year in the Sorbonne University. Bunin: "Mitya's Love." Nina Berberova: *The Billancourt Holidays* (to 1940). Kafka: *The Trial*. Fitzgerald: *The Great Gatsby*. Woolf: *Mrs. Dalloway*.

Marries Michel Epstein, also a Russian Jew and the son of a well-known banker. Her first novel, *Le Paysan de Paris*. Cendrars: *Moravagine*. Aragon: *Le Malentendu* (The Misunderstanding), is published in the monthly *Les Œuvres Libres*. Writes the first version of *David Golder*.

1926 Kessel: *Les Captifs*; Edmond Fleg: *Makhno et sa Juive*. Nabokov: *Mary*. Babel: *Red Cavalry*. Tsvetaeva: *The Ratcatcher*.

HISTORICAL EVENTS

Stalin becomes Secretary of Communist Party Central Committee. Russia becomes USSR. Mussolini's march on Rome. British mandate in Palestine. Paris emerging as political and cultural centre of the Russian diaspora; Committee of the Zemstvos formed to set up schools and provide financial assistance for refugees. Forty Russian professors engaged by University of Paris. During the 1920s over a hundred Russian cabarets, restaurants and cafés open.

Hyper-inflation in Germany. Repeated German defaults on reparations lead Poincaré (French prime minister once again) to send troops into the Ruhr Valley. Hitler's Munich *putsch* fails. Matisse: *Odalisque aux bras levés*. *La Roue*— film directed by Abel Gance. Poulenc: *Les Biches* (ballet).

Dawes Plan ends reparation crisis. Poincaré's Bloc National beaten by a coalition of the left, the Cartel des Gauches. French financial crisis which a series of seven cabinets (to 1926) fails to resolve. France recognizes USSR. Death of Lenin. Russian conservatoire in Paris founded, the composer Rakhmaninov later becoming honorary chairman. League of Nations estimates number of Russian refugees living in France at *Paris qui dort* (first science-fiction film) and *Entr'acte*, directed by René Clair. Period of Franco-German reconciliation—*apaisement*—under foreign minister Briand (to 1930). Locarno Pact guarantees existing Franco-German frontier. French troops evacuate the Ruhr. Hitler: *Mein Kampf*. Society of Young Russian Writers and Poets holding regular literary evenings in Paris: lecturers include Zaitsev, Khodasevich, Shestov, Shmelyov, Berberova, Ivanov and Tsvetaeva. Russian artists working in Paris include Chagall, Bilibin and Goncharova. Picasso: *Les trois danseuses*. Bonnard: *La Fenêtre*, *Le Bain*. Paris International Exposition of Decorative Arts & Modern

Bonnard: *La Fenêtre, Le Bain*. Paris International Exposition of Decorative Arts & Modern Industries. *La Peinture Surrealiste*—the first ever Surrealist exhibition, at Galerie Pierre in Paris. Russian Orthodox church and Theological Institute opens in Paris. Josephine Baker makes her Paris debut in *La Revue nègre*. Union Nationale forms government led by Poincaré, whose conservative policies (slashing government expenditure and raising taxes) stabilize the French economy. France sponsors Germany's entry into the League of Nations. Briand and Stresemann share Nobel Peace Prize. Trotsky dismissed from Politburo in USSR. Jean Renoir directs *Nana*. Chanel launches the “little black dress.”

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		Zaitsev: <i>The Golden Design</i> . Kafka: <i>The Castle</i> .
		Hemingway: <i>The Sun Also Rises</i> . Proust: <i>A la recherche du temps perdu</i> (published in full, posthumously). Mauriac: <i>Thérèse Desqueyroux</i> .
1927	<i>L'Enfant genial</i> is published in <i>Les Œuvres Libres</i> .	Khodasevich: <i>Collected Verse</i> . Bunin: “Sunstroke.” Remizov: <i>Whirlwind Russia</i> . Heidegger: <i>Being and Time</i> . Colette: <i>La Naissance du jour</i> . Breton: <i>Nadja</i> . Yourcenar: <i>Alexis</i> . Malraux: <i>Les Conquérants</i> . Saint-Exupéry: <i>Courrier sud</i> . Kessel: <i>Belle de jour</i> . Nabokov: <i>King, Queen, Knave</i> . Ehrenburg: <i>The Stormy Life and Lazar Roitschwantz</i> . Shmelyov:
1928	Her second novel, <i>L'Ennemi</i> (The Enemy), is published in <i>Les Œuvres Libres</i> , under the pseudonym “Nérey,” an anagram of “Irène.”	