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# Autumn in Yalta

A NOVEL AND THREE STORIES

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David Shrayer-Petrov

Edited and with an Afterword by Maxim D. Shrayer



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brought to the Soviet Union at the end of World War II and continued to be shown around the country as late as the 1980s.

p. 178

*muzhik*: Russian word meaning literally “peasant” and, figuratively and colloquially, “man.”

p. 180

“*Genug already*”: Yiddish for “enough.”

p. 182

*kasha*: Yiddish (of Slavic origin) for “gruel” or “cereal,” commonly used to refer to buckwheat meal.

## Afterword

VOICES OF MY FATHER’S EXILE

*Maxim D. Shroyer*

For many Anglo-American readers, the “Yalta” in the title of this collection readily suggests the Yalta Conference (February 1945), where the “Big Three” allied leaders, Churchill, Roosevelt, and Stalin, redrew the map of post-Nazi Europe.\* Already in the Yalta of 1945, both the Eastern Bloc and the Cold War—which surrounded David Shroyer-Petrov during the first three decades of his literary career—had become a looming reality. But for many Russian readers, Yalta is, above all, Chekhov’s Yalta. Writing to his sister Mariya on July 14, 1888, Anton Chekhov (1860–1904) described his first impressions of Yalta, which never fully abandoned him:

Looking at the shore from aboard the ship, I realized why it hadn’t yet inspired a single poet or given a plot to any decent artist-belletrist. Doctors and wealthy ladies advertise it, and that’s its main strength. Yalta is a cross of something European, resembling pictures of Nice, with something tacky and country-fairish. . . .  
(M.D.S: My literal translations, here and hereafter unless otherwise noted)

Chekhov kept returning to Yalta, and spending time in other coastal resorts nearby. To the poet and translator Aleksey N. Pleshcheev,

\*Parts of the afterword originally appeared in the magazine *Lifestyles*, vol. 33, no. 193 (2004).

Chekhov wrote these aphoristic lines on August 3, 1889: "In Yalta, there are many young ladies, but not a single pretty one. Many *littérateurs*, but not one talented person. Much wine, but not a drop of a decent one. The only good things here are the sea and the ambling horses." In Yalta, a number of women, including younger and older actresses, passed through the pages of Chekhov's life, some vanishing into the blank margins, others resurfacing in the black print of his stories and plays. Yalta's evanescent mix of "something European" and something Oriental (which also distinguishes the atmosphere of many Mediterranean resorts) did inspire Russia's greatest "artist-belletrist," as it has also inspired other Russian authors, providing them with a vibrant setting and an evocative place of composition.

Anton Chekhov in Fiume and Genoa, Ivan Bunin in Grasse and Juan-les-Pins, Vladimir Nabokov in Cannes and Menton . . . Whenever I have the good fortune to find myself on the Riviera, voices of Russian writers reach me there, dispatching long trains of biographical and literary associations. Illness and love, war and exile have chased Russian writers and their fictional representatives to the Mediterranean and Crimean shores. In Yalta, Abbazia (Opatija), Ospedaletti, Nice and other Rivieraized resorts, the very air conjures up a sense of unrecognizable, foreboding familiarity that so nurtures a literary imagination . . .

In October–November 2004, I spent five weeks at an artists' and authors' colony in Bogliasco, a Ligurian fishing village east of Genoa. Despite the charming distractions of a small Italian town still unspoiled by the development and wealth of Northern Italy, despite the view of Golfo Paradiso from my studio, I managed to work hard at Bogliasco. I was finishing a project of almost seven years: an anthology of Jewish-Russian literature from the early 1800s to the early 2000s. I faced a deadline. And I lived for the first ten days in anticipation of my wife's visit.

Because practicing primary care doctors have a difficult time

leaving their patients, Karen could only come for two weeks. She arrived the fourth week in October, and the day after, we walked from our villa down to the pocket-size Bogliasco train stop. On a misty late October morning, a commuter train—graffiti, Romany women with infants, and truant Italian schoolchildren—zipped us through Genoa's densely populated suburbs, their smatterings of clothing boutiques, *gelaterias*, and tobacconist shops visible from the train. On the right, we saw mountains, smoke (it was the season to burn branches) rising from the olive-green middle of the slopes, and the barren tops with the occasional pyramidal tree. On the left, when not in the throat of a tunnel, we saw the sea, beige and salmon villas, toothed cliffs, umbrella pines. I memorized the landscape without being conscious of its elements. During that train ride to Genoa, I thought of destiny. I remembered myself as a teenage *refusenik* reading about and imagining all the places a Soviet—especially a Jew—could only dream of visiting: the Italian Riviera, Venice, Capri. And when I saw—through the dusty windows of the train pulling into Stazione Brignole—the hilly skyline of Genoa studded with towers, domes, and palazzi, like a gilded chessboard of another life, I told my American-born wife that the odd moments of happiness come from knowing your destiny. It was mine to love her and to translate my father's stories.

The subject of a writer's destiny was still on my mind the next day, as Karen and I walked from Bogliasco to its fancier neighbor, Nervi, Genoa's easternmost suburb. We descended Via Aurelia past a now-empty Pit Bar. Bearing to the left, we passed a small baroque church. We left behind a dilapidated grand villa, sunk in a shady park. Turning left toward the water, we strolled past a former train station, now a private residence with an overgrown back garden, where overripe persimmons and bursting, forgotten eggplants hung from their burdened branches and vines. We passed a little harbor with a pebbly beach, old boats, and a boarded-up café. Enthroned on a bench, two swarthy keepers of the vessels were so engrossed in

solving the affairs of the world they barely responded to our greetings. Karen and I climbed up some steps, and there it was, the locally famed boardwalk, the *passagiata al mare*.

The *passagiata* stretches along the water for about a mile, ending in the old Nervi seaport. When we first walked there, the sun was setting over the sea, to our left. Elegantly dressed Italians, many of them with lapdogs of various breeds, sizes, and shapes, sauntered back and forth or congregated around benches facing the water. Trains whooshed by, the speedy intercity trains and the slower commuter ones. The *passagiata* was built on cliff ledges and probably on remains of medieval fortresses and walls. Narrow steps with rope railings went down to pools of water that, I have heard, owes its azure blueness to the pollution level of the Mediterranean. Using bread as bait, fishermen with long poles cast their lines from the flat platforms in the cliffs. Exhausted-looking Berber peddlers offered their wares—leather goods and music CDs. Ancient pines hung over the water, the cliffs, and the villas. The cafés with pink tablecloths and woven chairs looked more Viennese than Genoese. On our right, we left behind an underground passage to the Nervi train station and, on our left, the Hotel Ristorante Marinella, a lovers' retreat, right on the boardwalk. Although late October, the evening air was still hot. Sheltered from the winds by the surrounding cliffs and the maritime pines, perched betwixt sun and cliff wall, the *passagiata* was a greenhouse by the sea, a northerner's overheated dream.

We were approaching the spot where the road curves sharply before it drops into the seaport when Karen exclaimed, "Look, Sholem Aleichem!" And she pointed to a plaque immured in a concave cliff wall. Taking in so much else and happy to be reunited with my wife, I probably would not have noticed the plaque, if it had not caught Karen's eye. Right above the plaque stood an elegant, peach-colored stucco building. I took out a notebook to write down the commemoration. "A ricordo dei lunghi anni di soggiorno a Nervi

del brillante scrittore in lingue Yiddish Shalom Rabinovitz in arte 'Sholem Alejchem' (1859–1916) [*sic*]." The plaque had been put up recently, in February 2003, it said. As I stood in the middle of the boardwalk, a small crowd of onlookers gathered around me: two disheveled mothers with strollers and screaming babies, a group of bejeweled older ladies in fur coats, two distinguished elderly gentlemen wearing fine-tailored sport coats and cravats, and a dreamy young woman with an anxious Pomeranian on a long leash. I copied the inscription slowly, trying not to introduce any errors into the Italian, and I had a chance to see that the onlookers were equally bemused by the plaque itself, which they clearly had not noticed before, and by the peculiar foreigner studiously writing down what was written on it. In "memory of the long years" that a "brilliant writer in the Yiddish language" spent . . . in Nervi?

Well, it did not take me long to discover that Nervi had been an important coordinate in the life of Sholem Aleichem, just as the Ligurian coast, where I was a lucky resident that autumn, has been for many other writers who came from Russia. In autumn of 1908, after being diagnosed with pulmonary tuberculosis, Sholem Aleichem moved to Italy with his wife, Olga, and their daughters. At the time, because of its climate and location, Nervi was considered an ideal place for pulmonary patients to winter. From 1908 until 1913, when doctors pronounced Sholem Aleichem "recovered," he would spend the cold months in Nervi, dividing the rest of the year between the "magic" mountains of Switzerland and the spas of Germany's Black Forest.

Genoa had a small, Sephardic community. During the Nervi months, Sholem Aleichem lived in isolation from his native Yiddish-speaking milieu. The Italians identified Sholem Aleichem and his family as "Russians." A Jew in Russia and a Russian abroad, despite the remoteness of home, Sholem Aleichem worked prolifically during his European exile. Those were the years of his growing fame and international reputation, especially in Russian translation

and among Russia's mainstream readers and writers. The "good years" lasted until the outbreak of World War I and Sholem Aleichem's move to America, where he died in 1916.

Although Sholem Aleichem was fond of Nervi and the Ligurian vistas outside his windows, he did not take well to the contrast of hot sunny days and cold windy nights. In *My Father, Sholom Aleichem* (1968), Marie Waife-Goldberg recalled her father's first winter in Nervi:

The nights in Nervi were agonizing, for he could not sleep for coughing. . . . On a small table near his bed lay the book which was placed there each evening and a chair for the watcher to sit down and read to him until he fell asleep. The book was usually a collection of short stories by my father's favorite author, Chekhov, in the original Russian.

A "Yiddish Chekhov," they called him at home, and Sholem Aleichem was not unaware of this comparison. He wrote perfect literary Russian and, like his junior contemporaries, such as David Aizman (1869–1922) and Semyon Yushkevich (1868–1927), Sholem Aleichem might have become an excellent Jewish author in the Russian language if he had not chosen—had not been destined—to become a great Yiddish writer instead. He imbued his works with the best contributions of Russian writers, past and present, especially Gogol and Chekhov. By the time Sholem Aleichem had gained a broad Russian-language audience in Russia, Anton Chekhov, a contemporary of his, was gone. He died at a German spa town, of the same lung ailment that would later bring Sholem Aleichem to Italy. . . .

I kept thinking about our living so close to the place where Sholem Aleichem spent a total of several years. Karen went back to Boston, and I stayed on for two more weeks at Bogliasco. I focused on the editing and cotranslating of *Autumn in Yalta: A Novel and Three*

*Stories*. One of my tasks as this volume's editor was to check the translated texts against my father's Russian originals. A product of exile and a casualty of imperfect bilingualism, I could not help thinking that the Sholem Aleichem plaque, which my wife had discovered in Nervi, was a fatidic clue. One that applied to my own life as my father's son and translator, to Jewish-Russian writers' dialogue with Chekhov, and to my father's tales of exile that were gaining their final English-language contours under my laptop-tapping fingers.

*Autumn in Yalta* is the second book of my father's works that I have helped to English. In contrast to *Jonah and Sarah: Jewish Stories of Russia and America*, which appeared in the Library of Modern Jewish Literature in 2003 and retrospectively showcased his short fiction written both in the Soviet Union and in emigration, *Autumn in Yalta* features only the works my father has written in America since immigrating here in 1987. This volume is structured by the chronology, not of its composition, but of the events depicted in its works: childhood, World War II and the Shoah, 1930s and 1940s (*Strange Danya Rayev*); youth and disenchantment, 1960s and 1970s ("Autumn in Yalta"); and emigration, 1980s and 1990s ("The Love of Akira Watanabe" and "Carp for the Gefilte Fish").

Even more so than *Jonah and Sarah*, *Autumn in Yalta* is a labor of family love. My father wrote the stories in Russian; I edited and annotated the volume and cotranslated two of its stories. My mother translated another. My wife, herself a daughter of Jewish immigrants, both witnessed and welcomed these tales' rebirth in the English language. This book validates my family's experiences as Jewish-Russian cultural transplants from the former Soviet Union to the United States. Furthermore, the backgrounds of the other cotranslators—Arna B. Bronstein, an American-born descendant of immigrants from the Russian Empire, the Polish-born Aleksandra I. Fleszar, who has spent much of her professional career in America, and the Armenian-born Margarit Tedevosyan, who arrived in

America as a high school student, collectively underscore the extent to which today's American culture is genuinely one of multilingual émigrés and transplants.

A dual name, David Shroyer-Petrov, betokens my father's literary career. Born in 1936 in Leningrad (St. Petersburg), he descends, on his father's side, from Podolian millers and, on his mother's, from Lithuanian rabbis. As young people, both of my father's parents (he an engineer; she a chemist) made the transition, tantamount to emigration, from the former Pale of Settlement to Leningrad in the 1920s. Growing up, my father heard Yiddish in the traditional home of his paternal grandparents. Evacuated from Leningrad as the Nazi siege set in, he spent three years in a remote Russian village in the Urals, almost nine hundred miles from Moscow and Leningrad and from the front lines (the experience informs the novel *Strange Danya Rayev*). A Jewish youth coming of age in post-war Leningrad, my father formulated the questions, which his writings probe to this day: "Do Jews belong in Russia?" "Is assimilation (im)possible?"

Starting medical school in 1953, the year of the anti-Semitic "Doctors' Plot," whose evil perpetrators were interrupted by Stalin's death, my father entered the literary scene as a poet and translator in the middle to late 1950s, during Khrushchev's Thaw. In 1958, on the advice of the influential Jewish-Russian poet Boris Slutsky (1919–86), he adopted the pen name "David Petrov," the surname being derived from his father's Russianized given name "Petr" (Peysakh). This assimilatory gesture hardly facilitated the publication of my father's poetry in the Soviet Union. His first poetry collection was derailed in 1964 in Leningrad, following the trial of the poet Joseph Brodsky, with whom my father was friendly at the time. During his Soviet years, he made a name for himself mainly as a literary translator, especially from Lithuanian and the South-Slavic languages.

After graduating from Leningrad's First Medical School in 1959, my father served as a military physician in Belarus. Two years after his marriage, in 1962, to my mother, Emilia Shroyer (née Polyak; born 1940), he completed his Ph.D. dissertation at the Leningrad Institute of Tuberculosis (defending it in 1966). His dissertation studied the impact of staphylococcal infections on the occurrence of tuberculosis in white mice, and its echoes can be heard in the story "Autumn in Yalta," in the experiments of its protagonist, Dr. Samoylovich, as well as in my father's early story "Mimosas for My Grandmother's Grave" (1997; written in 1984). In 1964, my parents moved to my mother's native Moscow, where I was born in 1967, and where my father worked as a researcher at the Gamaleya Institute of Epidemiology and Microbiology, from 1967 to 1978.

From his earliest poems, my father explored the dual nature of Jewish identity in Diaspora. Although he managed to publish a collection of poetry (*Canvasses*, 1967) and two books of essays in the 1970s, most of his writings were too controversial for Soviet officials to permit them to be published. Nor did his occasional flights into proscribed Soviet subjects (e.g., space exploration, the construction of the Baikal-Amur Railroad) in poetry, essays, and song lyrics earn him the trust of the regime. Despite recommendations by prominent writers such as Viktor Shklovsky, my father was admitted to the Union of Soviet Writers only after a protracted battle, in 1976. The manuscript of what would have been his second poetry collection, *Winter Ship*, never made it through the icebound straits of the "Soviet Writer" publishing house.

By the early 1970s, relations between Jews and Gentiles had become a principal concern of my father's writing. At a spring poetry festival in Vilnius, Lithuania, in 1978, he recited a poem of protest, "My Slavic Soul" (1975). That spring, I was almost eleven. I remember a shiver passing through the Lithuanian audience as my father read from the stage about the poet's "Slavic" soul, which abandons his "Jewish" body to hide in a hayloft. Immediately after

my father's return from Lithuania to Moscow, officials of the Union of Soviet Writers threatened him with expulsion. Ostracism for having transgressed the unspoken taboo on treatment of Jewish subjects weaned my father off his last illusions, pushing him to emigrate.

A family picture taken in 1978 shows my parents and me on an annual vacation in our beloved resort of Pärnu on the western coast of Estonia. Suntanned and caressed by Baltic winds, we look completely unprepared for future hardships. When, in January 1979, we applied for exit visas, my mother lost her academic teaching job, and my father his research position at the Academy of Medical Sciences. Neither my mother's dedication to her students nor my father's innovative research on staphylococcal infections, which had helped save peoples' lives, mattered to the Soviet state. My parents' careers were mutilated. We applied to emigrate when I was eleven. More than anything, I wanted to leave behind my stifling Soviet school and my classmates' habitual xenophobia. Like thousands of other Jewish families, we found ourselves in refusenik limbo. The shock of realizing that, along with my parents, I, too, had become a refusenik marked the end of my childhood.

Following my father's expulsion from the Union of Soviet Writers, the galleys of three of his forthcoming books were destroyed (he had already corrected the proofs of one of them and vetted the illustrations). The three books never appeared. My father was banned from publishing in the Soviet Union. In 1979–80, while driving an illegal cab at night and working in an emergency room lab, he conceived of a panoramic novel about the destinies of Jewish refuseniks. *Herbert and Nelly*, my father's novel exploring the exodus of Soviet Jews, will likely be his next work to be translated into English. (The complete edition of *Herbert and Nelly* was published in Moscow in 1992 and long-listed for the 1993 Booker Russian Prize; a revised edition appeared in St. Petersburg in 2006).

After we requested permission to emigrate, the KGB launched a series of measures against my parents, ranging from arrests and phys-

ical harassment to a smear campaign in the press. The persecution intensified in 1985, when plans for the publication of the first part of my father's novel about refuseniks were announced in Israel. (The first part of the Russian original appeared in Jerusalem, in 1986.) I remember the strange looks my university classmates gave me, as though I was related to a death row inmate. In central and provincial Soviet newspapers, my father was labeled a "Zionist" author and accused of "infecting" Jews with a "hostile" ideology. A real threat of being charged with anti-Soviet activity and imprisoned hung over my father's head; for parts of the fall of 1985, he went into hiding. The mounting pressures of being stalked by the Soviet secret police brought on a heart attack and subsequent hospitalization. Plainclothes KGB thugs waited for my father outside the hospital ward. On a frosty December night, my mother and I passed the open letter my father had written to his literary brethren in the West to a *New York Times* correspondent. Urgently appealing to politicians and diplomats, Jewish organizations in the United States, Canada, and Great Britain pushed for our cause. Courageous Americans, Canadians, and Britons visited us in Moscow, taking our pictures, showing their support.

A refusenik's isolation, coupled with the absurdity of being a Jewish writer who is at once silenced by and shackled to Russia, made my father's last Soviet decade prolific in spite of his persecution. From 1979 to 1987, he wrote two novels, several plays, a memoir, and many stories and verses. Permission to emigrate finally came in April 1987. After a long forced good-bye, our leave-taking was short. Our whole lives packed into five suitcases, we left the Soviet Union on June 7, 1987.

Spending the summer in Austria and Italy, we arrived in the United States on August 26, 1987. Providence, the petite capital of the smallest American state, became my parents' new home. Emigration and an outwardly peaceful life in New England accorded my father both distance from and perspective on his Russian past.

His arrival in the West brought forth new publications, including six novels and over forty shorter works of fiction. In January 2006, my father will turn seventy. He continues to divide his time between writing and doing cancer research (experimental therapy). In many of his works, notably in the title story of *Autumn in Yalta* and in the novel *French Cottage* (1999), David Shroyer-Petrov's medical interests overlap with those of a fictionist.

Before turning to the subject of my father's exilic dialogue with doctor and author Anton Chekhov, and with Russian-American master Vladimir Nabokov (1899–1977), I would like to take a step back and revisit the years of World War II, Shroyer-Petrov's formative years. It was then that the future writer experienced the unspoiled richness of the Russian language as the peasants in the Urals still spoke it. Shroyer-Petrov depicted the birth of a dual, Jewish-Russian identity in his autobiographical novel *Strange Danya Rayev*. Set in Stalinist Russia in the late 1930s–1940s, the novel focuses on the wartime childhood experiences of Danya (Daniil) Rayev, its Jewish-Russian protagonist and narrator-storyteller. Danya and his mother Stella are evacuated from the besieged Leningrad to Siva, a village in the Ural Mountains. In Siva, far away from the war front and the life he knew as a small child, Danya nearly forgets about his otherness, assimilating after a Russian peasant fashion. When he returns to the destroyed city of Leningrad in 1944, Danya confronts challenges of his dual identity while also learning that his father, a decorated naval officer, has a “second wife” and started a new family. Told in a confessional voice, the novel ends as its young protagonist regains the bitter knowledge of anti-Semitism while celebrating the Soviet victory over Nazism on the ruins of his native city and family.

Young Danya Rayev of *Strange Danya Rayev* and the older Samoylovich of “Autumn in Yalta” are in essence the same Jewish boy from the author's native city of Leningrad or, to put it differ-

ently, Samoylovich is a projection of Danya Rayev onto postwar Jewish-Soviet history. The transparent links between their names, on the one hand, and the quintessentially Jewish (especially so in Soviet Russia) names and corresponding books in the Hebrew Bible, on the other, highlight the affinity between the two characters (Daniil = Daniel; the surname “Samoylovich” derives from “Samoyla” = Samuel).

By reading *Strange Danya Rayev* and “Autumn in Yalta” in succession between the same covers, readers can best experience the transposition of the theme of Jewish-Russian identity in both texts. Danya spends the war years away from Leningrad and the Nazi siege, which extinguished possibly as many as a million lives. Although the episode with the police officer Dodonov and the mysterious Karaite Bobukh serves as an early warning, Danya does not consciously suffer from visceral, still incomprehensible anti-Semitism until after his return home in 1944. The casual anti-Semitism of an adult, the woman baker at the bread factory, shocks and literally nauseates him; the furtive, malicious baiting by his classmate Mincha transforms Danya into a Jewish fighter. Recall the episode in which the adult Samoylovich, himself a survivor of the siege of Leningrad, remembers his first day in elementary school, when he is surrounded by a group of hungry children asking for food. Nowhere in the story does Shroyer-Petrov identify his protagonist as “Jewish”—although readers are given cultural identity markers: Samoylovich's last name, the occasional Yiddish expression his grandmother drops behind the narrative scenes, the Jewish chopped herring, *farshmak*, she prepares for him. In this brief recollection, occurring in a moment of desperate reckoning with the past, readers face the habitual anti-Semitism of a group of Russian, non-Jewish children, who stereotypically believe that their Jewish classmate has more food than they do, and that his family (Samoylovich has lost both parents in the war) is richer, better-off than theirs. The adult Samoylovich is only a partial extension of Danya

Rayev. Samoylovich never learns to fight back, to be tough, to suspect malice in others (or, as Shrayev-Petrov put it in December 2004, responding to my e-mail query), “Samoylovich becomes Danya—the fighter—too late”). A Jewish doctor in post-Stalinist Soviet Union, one who has lived as a young man through Soviet Jewry’s darkest years, Samoylovich continues to cure those around him with love, with his “soul”—regardless of their origins. A writer-doctor, Shrayev-Petrov creates a privileged protagonist in Dr. Samoylovich. Having sacrificed ten years of freedom for his beloved, the actress Polechka, who is not Jewish, Samoylovich returns to Moscow from a prison camp in Siberia, seeking—or not seeking—to settle scores, to come to terms with his ruptured past. Judging by the reference to the re-renaming of Leningrad, which occurred in 1991, the story ends during the liminal years 1991–92. A former doctor and medical researcher, the Soviet Jew Samoylovich has been reduced to an underground man of sorts, a nighttime driver of an illegal cab. Yet the flourishing of Samoylovich’s love for Polechka dates to the Leningrad of the late 1960s, when he was still a successful academic, and she a “promising” young actress, though also a TB patient. The story culminates in the late 1970s or early 1980s, at a tuberculosis sanatorium in the resort town of Simeiz, south of Yalta. Which brings us back to the tubercular Dr. Chekhov, his Yalta, and the biographical and historical background behind the composition of “Autumn in Yalta,” the title story of this volume.

A deterioration of Chekhov’s health in 1897 led the writer to move to Yalta, where he was based during the last five years of his life. In Yalta, from 1899 to 1904, Chekhov wrote *Three Sisters* and *The Cherry Orchard*, and a number of his greatest stories, among them, “Lady with a Lapdog” (1899). In October 1898, Chekhov started building a house in a suburb of Yalta. One of Dr. Chekhov’s contributions was his well-publicized 1899 appeal to the public to

donate funds for the construction of a charity tuberculosis sanatorium in Yalta. (Lung ailments and stories of desire between doctors and their TB patients are a notable subject of Chekhov’s fiction and drama, from the early “Belated Flowers” [1882], with its Dr. Toporkov and the dying Princess Priklonskaya, to *Ivanov* [1887], with the “kikess” Anna Petrovna, née Sara Abramson, and the compassionate Dr. Lvov.)

At the turn of the century, Chekhov’s presence had energized Yalta’s provincial cultural life. The Moscow Art Theater gave performances in Yalta in April 1900. Some of Russia’s best writers who walked in Chekhov’s footsteps—Maxim Gorky, Ivan Bunin, Aleksandr Kuprin—visited him in Yalta. And so did Olga Knipper-Chekhova, an actress at the Moscow Arts Theater, both before and after she and Chekhov were married in 1901. Sometimes feeling like an exile in Yalta, Chekhov longed to see Knipper-Chekhova and pined for Moscow and central Russia. Yalta’s cold, stormy winter weather was hardly good for his health. Chekhov left Yalta in May 1904, never to see it again.

In Yalta, perhaps more so than elsewhere, Chekhov socialized with Jewish (and Karaite) acquaintances, including Jewish doctors. In the fall of 1898, Chekhov stayed in Yalta at the dacha of Dr. Isaak Altshuller. Another colorful Jewish acquaintance was Isaak Sinani, owner of a local book and tobacco shop, which was a meeting place of Yalta’s tubercular exiles. From the 1880s to the 1900s, Chekhov observed and described the hunger for Russian literature among acculturated Jews. In “My Life” (1896), Chekhov wrote about a southern provincial town where “only Jewish adolescents frequented the local . . . libraries.” In “Ionych” (1898), Chekhov stressed again that “the people in S. read very little, and at the local library they said that if it hadn’t been for unmarried ladies and young Jews, one might as well close the library.” The Jewish question certainly preoccupied the creator of *Ivanov*, “Steppe” (1888).

and "Rothchild's Fiddle" (1894); during his final years in Yalta, Chekhov was likely to hear from his acquaintances among the Jewish-Russian intelligentsia about the birth of Zionism . . .

Chekhov's Yalta runs like a watermark through the pages of Shroyer-Petrov's story. Reading "Autumn in Yalta," one comes across various telltale signs of its author's dialogue with Chekhov's "Lady with a Lapdog," a masterpiece of short fiction. In "Lady with a Lap Dog," the lovers Anna and Gurov first meet in autumnal Yalta. And, in a significant structural reversal of Chekhov's narrative, Polechka and Samoylovich meet for the "last" time also in the Crimean resort and in autumn, during the so-called *barkhatnyi sezon* (velvet season). This fateful meeting, which leads to Samoylovich's "crime," brings the story to the brink of a Chekhovian adultery narrative: just like Anna, Polechka (as she is quick to inform Samoylovich) is a "married lady." Indicators of this literary dialogue—occurring almost a century later and across the Atlantic—are numerous in Shroyer-Petrov's story. Consider, for instance, the scene in a Yalta café where Polechka asks if she is "contagious," and Samoylovich replies, in a seeming non sequitur, "I love you, Polechka." The scene recalls both the first meeting of Gurov and Anna in a café on the Yalta embankment and the subsequent episode with the arrival of a steamship and a festive crowd of vacationers (in a bout of hyperrealism, Chekhov has planted more generals than one would ever expect to see on any one day on the waterfront of a Riviera resort). Even Sazonova (Sazonova-Casanova?), the name of the fictitious, ageless stage diva in "Autumn in Yalta," hints at a real-life contemporary of Chekhov, the writer Sofia Smirnova-Sazonova (1852–1921), who recorded in her diary for July 1899: "I saw Chekhov on the promenade. He sits all alone on a little bench" (I quote from Donald Rayfield's *Chekhov: A Life* [1997]).

"Autumn in Yalta" might not have become an exilic, Russian-American story if, besides Chekhov's Yalta, it had not also dia-

logue with Nabokov's Fi(Y)alta. By taking an epigraph from Nabokov's fabled tale of love and exile "Spring in Fialta" (1936), Shroyer-Petrov signals, not only his debt to Nabokov, but also his awareness that Chekhov's "Lady with a Lapdog" had served as a major point of departure for Nabokov's story. Composed in Berlin in 1936 and published the same year in Paris, "Spring in Fialta" belonged—by Nabokov's own admission—to "the leading troika" of his stories. Comparing "Spring in Fialta" to Chekhov's "Lady with a Lap Dog" and Kafka's "The Metamorphosis," Nabokov called it an "exemplary" short story. (In 1956, the New York-based Chekhov Publishing House issued Nabokov's third collection of Russian stories under the title *Spring in Fialta*.) Mindful of Chekhov (his "predecessor," as he put it), Nabokov set his story in interwar Europe and created a fictional resort. Nabokov's Fialta, with echoes of the Dalmatian Fiume (now Rijeka) and the Crimean Yalta, hosted exiles whose lives conflated lofty memories of Russia with the quotidian realities of Europe in the early 1930s.

Nabokov's "Spring in Fialta" (the "spring season," the "spring of memories," and the "narrative spring") resonates through Shroyer-Petrov's "Autumn in Yalta," inviting comparatists to investigate a three-generational literary dynamic. Consider, for instance, that in "Lady with a Lapdog," omission and silence are Chekhov's chosen devices to depict sexuality. Immediately after Gurov and Anna disappear to her hotel room (to make love), Gurov is shown eating watermelon to the accompaniment of Anna's sobs and her self-flagellation as a "bad . . . woman." In Nabokov's covertly modernist text, sex is depicted partly with metaphor, partly with allusion, and partly with silence. Consider this recollection by the narrating protagonist Vasenka ("Victor" in the English version of the story, first published in *Harper's Bazaar* in 1947):

[Nina] turned and rapidly swaying on slender ankles led me along the sea-blue carpeted passage. A chair at the door of her room sup-

ported a tray with the remains of breakfast . . . and because of our sudden draft a wave of muslin embroidered with white dahlias got sucked in, with a shudder and knock, between the responsive halves of the French window, and only when the door had been locked did they let go that curtain with something like a blissful sigh: and a little later I stepped out on the diminutive cast-iron balcony beyond to inhale a combined smell of dry maple leaves and gasoline. (Translated by Vladimir Nabokov and Peter A. Pertzoff)

Even though, in Shrayev-Petrov's love story, the classical Russian chastity of Chekhov's art yields to Nabokov's more nuanced and liberal portrayal of sexuality and lovemaking, and even though Shrayev-Petrov brings a medical researcher's, rather than a lepidopterist's, eye to his tale, Dr. Samoylovich still refuses to refer to Polechka's sexual numbness in clinical terms. "That," he calls her unresponsiveness, perhaps forgetting to recognize his own lovemaking as that of an "eternal student" (pace Chekhov). It is Polechka, not Samoylovich, who resorts to medical terminology, evoking, as do both Chekhov and Nabokov in their own ways, the fundamental divide between the world of sexuality and the world of romantic fulfillment. "Maybe my own exalted imagination or how much I was actually driven to him stood in the way of my normal sensations?" Polechka confesses to Samoylovich after the New Year's party and her "rendezvous" with Kaftanov. "You know what I mean, don't you, Samoylovich? You doctors call it frigidity. I would call it waiting for a miracle. I've been waiting for it my whole life."

Thus writing on the shores of New England and modeling a life in his former homeland, Shrayev-Petrov returns from the fictionality of Nabokov's locale (Fialta) to the reality of Chekhov's Yalta. This re-fictionalized space of the resort blends the Jewish-Russian writer's own exilic recollections with layers of collective memory stored in the Russian language he has brought with him to America. When Samoylovich waits for Polechka at his Crimean seaside

cottage, finally prepared to "believe" that "Polechka had deceived him," does he also recall, as I do when I read Shrayev-Petrov's story, this episode from the middle of "Lady with a Lapdog"?

In Oreanda [Anna and Gurov] sat on a bench, not far from the church, looking silently at the sea down below. Yalta was hardly visible through the morning fog; white clouds stood motionless upon the mountain peaks. Leaves didn't stir on the trees. crickets screamed, and the monotonous, hollow sound of the sea coming up from below, spoke of quietude, of the eternal sleep awaiting us all. The same sound could be heard from down below when there was no Yalta or Oreanda, and it was still heard now and would continue with the same indifference and hollowness when we were no longer around. And in this permanence, this sheer indifference to the life and death of each one of us, there lies, perhaps, the promise of our eternal salvation, of life's uninterrupted stride on earth, of continuous movement toward perfection.

Does Samoylovich the Jewish idealist turned gypsy cab driver still believe, however faintly, in this Chekhovian "movement toward perfection" when he encounters his past after having returned from the labor camp? (Shrayev-Petrov suggested to me on New Year's morning of 2005 that the character of Dr. Samoylovich might be closely related to the self-sacrificing Dr. Dymov of Chekhov's "The Grasshopper" [1892].) "Autumn in Yalta" ends by bringing readers back to its establishing scene, where Samoylovich recognizes his beloved Polechka in one of the "classy" ladies (the other one, presumably, is Nina, the woman from the wintry dacha outside Moscow, and the men are the actor Kaftanov, who became Nina's husband, and the astrophysicist Murov, Polechka's husband). Clashing with the breakneck pace of Soviet historical time, this almost miraculous stoppage of character time can only hint at a possibility of death or revenge beyond the story's ending (Ivan Bunin's stories

from *Dark Avenues* come to mind as Samoylovich strokes a gun hidden in his jacket pocket). Such an artistic choice on Shrayer-Petrov's part takes stock both of Chekhov's open ending, rife with tremulous possibilities, and of Nabokov's decision to kill Nina, the female protagonist of "Spring in Fialta," in a banal car crash. Indeed, Shrayer-Petrov's Polechka takes after Nabokov's Nina much more than she does after Chekhov's Anna (Shrayer-Petrov purposely gave the name and something of the aura of Nabokov's Nina to his own Nina of consignment store fame). And yet, no matter what outcome readers may project beyond the physical end of Shrayer-Petrov's text, in the triangulating composition of "Autumn in Yalta" it is Polechka who belongs with "those salamanders of fate, those basilisks of good fortune," as Nabokov labeled Nina's belletrist husband Ferdinand and his cohort Segur, who survive the car crash that claims Nina's life in Fialta. Shrayer-Petrov's consumptive Polechka will probably live on, whereas her driver Samoylovich . . . (Readers can speculate for themselves.)

And finally, in assessing a Jewish-Russian writer's double homage to Chekhov and Nabokov, one might consider the impact of Shrayer-Petrov's medical experiences on the making of "Autumn in Fialta." This is not only Chekhov's and Nabokov's (pre-Soviet) Yalta; it is also Soviet Yalta, where Dr. Shrayer-Petrov worked during a cholera epidemic. In the summer of 1970 a vast territory of southern Russia and the Crimean peninsula was struck by cholera. It was part of the seventh world pandemic of cholera, spread to the former Soviet Union from the Southeast Asia. Soviet newspapers, radio and TV preferred not to tell the people about the dangerous situation at home, with only a small piece of information concerning "sporadic cases" of gastroenteritis of "unknown" bacterial origin being published in the Moscow-based *Medical Gazette*. Eventually, more and more residents of the stricken areas became gravely ill. The symptoms of the disease were typical for cholera. The outbreaks occurred in Astrakhan (on the Caspian Sea), Kerch (on the

Black Sea and the Sea of Azov), Feodosiya and Yalta (both on the Black Sea). In September 1970, soon after the outbreak had been registered, a group of five microbiologists from Moscow's Gamaleya Institute of Epidemiology and Microbiology was dispatched to Yalta. As a member of this group, Dr. Shrayer-Petrov worked in Yalta for a month in the midst of the cholera epidemic. The purpose of their mission was to find the best ways to prevent the spread of cholera, to provide treatment to the deathly ill patients, and to study the biology and molecular genetics of the causative agent, *Vibrio cholerae*. Less than a year later, in the summer of 1971, Shrayer-Petrov's article on cholera appeared in the Soviet magazine *Nature (Priroda)*. It was possibly the first Soviet academic publication where the 1970 epidemic was discussed in no uncertain terms.

Many years later, first in Russia and then in the United States, Shrayer-Petrov revisited the subject in his novel *French Cottage*, where a chapter is set in Yalta during the 1970 cholera epidemic. The protagonist of *French Cottage*, Daniil Geyer, shares much in common, not only with Samoylovich of "Autumn in Yalta," but also with Daniil Rayev of *Strange Danya Rayev*. In going back to the wartime past and his character's childhood, Shrayer-Petrov rehearses aspects of the future Danya Rayev both in Samoylovich, whose fictional existence stops in 1991 or 1992, and in the medical journalist Geyer, who becomes a refusenik and emigrates to America in the late 1980s. Because Shrayer-Petrov's artistic method privileges Nabokov's combination of the "eye"-narrator with the "I"-storyteller over Chekhov's dispassionate omniscience, Shrayer-Petrov's semiautobiographical narrators both look out from within and stare in from without. "How difficult it is," the adult Danya Rayev remarks, "to separate those sixty-year-old impressions from my present memories of those impressions!"

Jews and Russians are the "two peoples [who] are the closest to me in flesh (genes) and spirit (language)," Shrayer-Petrov wrote in 1985,

two years before emigrating from Soviet Russia, in *Friends and Shadows*, a memoir-novel of the late 1950s Leningrad. Over fifteen years later, in the preface to the collection *Jonah and Sarah*, he commented: "These fourteen stories bear testimony to over fifteen years of setting roots in my new country. Whether they feature characters still living in the old country or having already arrived in the New World, these stories are a record of a Jewish writer's separation from his Russian homeland."

In a number of stories written after coming to America, love between Jews and Gentiles fuels Shroyer-Petrov's imagination. Some of the stories are gently ironic. Others, like the story "Hände Hoch!" about the legacy of the Shoah in modern America (featured in *Jonah and Sarah*), are sharply polemical, going against the grain of commonly perpetuated stereotypes. Such is also the case of the story "Carp for the Gefilte Fish" (in this volume), where love of a non-Jewish, Belarusian man for his Jewish wife endures across the boundaries of time, language, and country, whereas hers for him does not (or at least seems not to at first glance). Exile and its many forms and varieties has become a focus of Shroyer-Petrov's writing, and the author's own Jewish experience provides a point of calibration when he writes of other, non-Jewish immigrants in America (in the present volume, the Japanese protagonist of "The Love of Akira Watanabe").

Characters in the novel *Strange Danya Rayev* and the story "Autumn in Yalta" struggle with the dilemmas of their dual, Jewish-Russian selves. To complement a novel and a story written in America but set in Russia, this volume also features two tales of transplantation onto a new culture and language. Both "The Love of Akira Watanabe" and "Carp for the Gefilte Fish" depict Soviet immigrants interacting with and confronting native-born Americans—as coworkers, intellectual and romantic rivals, as lovers and non-lovers. Newcomers to the United States, arriving in the predominantly Jewish 1970s and 1980s wave of emigration ("Third

Wave") from the former Soviet Union, are habitually subsumed into two categories: Jews as "Russians" and Russians as "Jews."

The entire volume is unified by its author's obsession with identity markers and his self-conscious adherence to the canons of the European love story of Guy de Maupassant, Anton Chekhov, Thomas Mann, Ivan Bunin, Vladimir Nabokov, and Isaac Bashevis Singer. A characteristic example of how Shroyer-Petrov explores parameters of identity through variations on the traditional love story is "The Love of Akira Watanabe." In this story, told in first person, Shroyer-Petrov creates an alternative model of exile and alienation. A partially autobiographical, Jewish-Russian scientist meets and befriends a Japanese professor as they both take "English as a Second Language" at an American university, in the company of other campus-based immigrants. The Japanese professor, an estranged scion of a Samurai family, and hardly a man of his time, either at home or abroad, falls in love with their ESL teacher, only to learn that she shares her life with a female partner. In taking an epigraph from Nabokov's story for "Autumn in Yalta," Shroyer-Petrov fondly acknowledges a literary master. By contrast, in drawing an epigraph from "A Story about the Writing of Stories" (1926) by Boris Pilnyak (1894–1937), he polemically sets "The Love of Akira Watanabe" against the fictions of stereotyping. Naturally, fiction writers play with various perceptions and misperceptions of stereotypes. What distinguishes Pilnyak's portrayal of a Japanese officer married to a Russian woman in "A Story about the Writing of Stories" is the degree to which Pilnyak adheres to a simplistic and negative stereotype of a Japanese man dating back to the turn of the twentieth century and the Russo-Japanese War. (In his portrayal of Jewish characters, the talented writer Pilnyak also clung to off-putting, albeit stylistically accomplished, stereotypes.) As drawn by the Jewish-Russian narrator-storyteller, the character of Akira Watanabe serves to undermine stereotypes. To phrase this differently, Akira Watanabe is a stereotype debunking stereotypes. Ironi-

cally, the narrator-storyteller himself falls prey to stereotyping by Akira's rival in the story's love triangle, Margaret's partner, Leslie: "Like all Russians, you probably drink your vodka *straight*?"

We create our own, unique diasporas by undoing stereotypes, be they ethnic, religious, or sexual, suggests this story with a surprisingly lyrical ending. The undoing of stereotypes continues in the volume's final story, "Carp for the Gefilte Fish." Set in Rhode Island, Shroyer-Petrov's home since 1987, and nurtured by memories of his military service in western Belarus in 1959–60, this story features a tetangle of desire linking an émigré couple, Fyodor and Raya Kuzmenko, and their American employers, widowed furniture store owner Harry Kapler and his daughter, Rachel. Hailing from a provincial Belarussian town in the heart of the former Pale of Settlement, the Kuzmenkos bring to America the contrapuntal contradictions of a mixed marriage: Raya is Jewish; Fyodor is not. The couple is without children, and Fyodor (who has no living blood relatives) periodically goes on drinking binges. The Kuzmenkos distance themselves from Raya's *meshpucha* in Providence, moving to a small town where no other Russians live, but where a small Jewish community has established itself. At the end of the story, a turn of events involving Raya's adulterous adventure with their American employer, Fyodor's fishing expedition and eschewing of temptation, and an old Ashkenazic cooking recipe, brings the émigré couple back together. (Or does it?)

A volume of Shroyer-Petrov's selected stories, published in Moscow in 2005, bears the title *Carp for the Gefilte Fish*, testifying to the privileged place the author assigns to the story. The story's debunking of stereotypes functions as an admonition to the kind of self-righteous Jewish reader who appreciates only the tales where other Jews alone emerge as positive characters. Rather than create a fictional hierarchy of ethics, Shroyer-Petrov examines his subjects from many different ethical, aesthetic, and metaphysical perspectives, often presenting conflicting and incongruous points of view. Coupled with the conviction that the author does not know much more

than his characters do, this (Dostoevskian?) quality of nonnarrative analysis of the narrative events is manifest in modern Jewish writing.

"Literature can very well describe the absurd, but it should never become absurd itself," wrote Isaac Bashevis Singer (1904–91) in the "Author's Note" to his *Collected Stories* (1982). Whether or not one agrees with Singer's dictum, one can see that, at some of the most dramatic points of Shroyer-Petrov's fiction (e.g., Samoylovich's escape attempt, where a boat transmogrifies into a yard dog), Shroyer-Petrov places his characters on the brink of the absurd. This teetering on the verge of the absurd, this dybbuk dancing on the author's humanist imagination, brings to mind not only the traditions of what Ken Frieden calls "classic Yiddish fiction" (S. Y. Abramovitsh, Sholem Aleichem, and I. L. Peretz forming the triumvirate), but also the fiction of Bashevis Singer. I find Singer's post-Shoah exilic tales *Enemies: A Love Story* (1966) and *Shosha* (1974), one of America and maturity, the other of Poland and youth, especially pertinent to the career of David Shroyer-Petrov in general, and to the present volume, in particular. In Bashevis Singer's novels—as in much of Shroyer-Petrov's fiction—encounters between Jews and non-Jews (Slavs) prompt the workings of the love story.

Already gearing up for an open challenge to Soviet officialdom in 1975–76, my father composed poems where disharmonies of his Russian and Jewish selves adumbrated a conflict with the regime. Earlier I mentioned the poem "My Slavic Soul" only in passing; let me quote another poem, "Early Morning in Moscow" (1976), in its entirety. Published in English in 1993, it appeared in my father's first American collection of Russian poetry, *Song of a Blue Elephant* (1990).

#### EARLY MORNING IN MOSCOW

The woodpecker knocks on the pine tree  
rehearsing his wooden reverie

*knock-knock-knock*

*knock-knock-knock*

On the ground

falls the deadening wooden sound.

The janitor shovels the street

rehearsing his snowy reverie

*dirty Jew dirty Jew*

*dirty Jew—*

In the camps

I'd break your head in two.

The doctor knocks on my chest

rehearsing his wishful reverie

*one day we'll*

*one day we'll*

*one day we'll*

be free to sing in the spring.

Sounds filling the dawn

keep time with my salt tears

*on the verge of life*

*on the verge of life*

*on this low verge lies*

Moscow muffled in snow.

Commenting on the translation, a product of my collaboration with the American poet Edwin Honig, my father wrote in 1992: "this poem of mine in English translation (I almost wrote in 'American translation') acquired a particularly revelatory and lament-like intonation, akin to what I hear in the character of the writer Robert Cohn in Hemingway's novel *The Sun Also Rises* [1926]." (Published in 1935 in Vera Topor's fine translation and better known in Russian

as *Fiesta*, Hemingway's novel had been immensely popular in the Soviet Union of my father's youth.)

I confess that as I worked with Margarit Tadevosyan on the Englishing of "Carp for the Gefilte Fish," I "heard" in the emergent, translated voice of the narrator echoes of Bernard Malamud's novel *The Assistant* (1957). (Heard or wanted to hear?) And in the character of Fyodor Kuzmenko there is perhaps something of Frank Alpine, Malamud's archetypal American goy who takes upon himself the great burden of Jewishness, driven to it by a mixture of desire, love, guilt, and self-hatred. Frank Alpine, the Italian-American Catholic "holdupnik" of a measly Jewish grocery store, identifies with Saint Francis of Assisi, and Malamud engages him in an *imitation* of Morris Bober, the old Jewish grocer. Answering Alpine's question what it means to be a Jew, Morris first tells him this: "My father used to say to be a Jew all you need is a good heart." Only later does Bober share with Alpine his justification of not following *koshrut*, his notion of Jewish Law, and his idea of Jewish suffering. Referring to Alpine's circumcision, Malamud ends his American novel with one of the most enigmatic sentences composed by a Jewish writer: "The pain enraged and inspired him. After Passover he became a Jew." The "he" refers to Frank Alpine. Marking the protagonist of "Carp for the Gefilte Fish" with the name "Fyodor" (from the Greek *Theodoros*, "Gift of God"), my father remarks in the middle of the story: "He [Fyodor] had lived among Jews for many years but could never really understand them completely." Fyodor may not have "become a Jew," but he stays with "them" his whole life, loving Raya more than anything, more than his Belarusian homeland.

Four years ago, in an afterword to *Jonah and Sarah: Jewish Stories of Russia and America*, I speculated about the trajectory of my father's writing career, which has led him to writing about the Jewish-, the Russian-, and—increasingly—unhyphenated Americans. *Autumn in Yalta* is, finally, less a Jewish-Russian than a Jewish-American

book, particularly in its multiplicity of cultural perspectives, its diversity of subjects, its seeking to overcome stereotypes, but also in its insistence on getting over the traumas of the past. Despite the piercing sadness that wafts through many of its pages, this American book breathes with hopefulness. Looking back at our shared past and my father's earlier fiction, I can hardly imagine his writing a book like *Autumn in Yalta* in post-Soviet Russia. Consider this passage from the ending of "Carp for the Gefilte Fish":

[Fyodor] drove on, thinking what a happy guy he really was. Here he was, in a new country, where he came, not like some sort of a loser, but as a married man. Both he and Raya have jobs. They have their house and a garden. And they haven't hit old age. It's too bad, of course, that they don't have a boy or a girl. But who knows, maybe they'll get lucky? Here in America, even worse kinds of ailments get cured. If it's all from his drinking, then he's practically on the wagon. And what if?

#### *What if?*

A literary translator is someone who couches the original in the words of another language while also interpreting its meaning. As someone who has translated works by many writers from a number of languages, my father knows this well. When an author's son is also his translator and editor, he wants to represent more than his father's voice. Before me on the page were not only my father's words. In my mind's eye was my father's life story.

I first tried my hand at translating my father's work into English when we were still refuseniks, in 1986. One of his poems that I had rendered into English, quite awkwardly, was smuggled to the West, printed on a leaflet, and recited as a supplemental 1986 Passover reading in synagogues in the United States and Canada. My first serious attempts at translation go back to my undergraduate years at Brown, 1987–89, when, under the sympathetic gaze of John

Hawkes and Albert Cook, I was making a transition from my native Russian to my adopted English. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, translations of my father's prose and poetry began to appear in American periodicals. In 1999, having collaborated with other translators on several of my father's stories, I began to put together and translate a collection that eventually appeared under the title *Jonah and Sarah*. The idea for the present volume emerged during a series of readings and book signings my father and I did together in the fall, no. in *autumn* of 2003, after the publication of *Jonah and Sarah*. In preparing *Autumn in Yalta*, I was lucky to have the contribution and collaboration of four devoted translators, Arna B. Bronstein, Aleksandra I. Fleszar, Emilia Shroyer, and Margarit Tadevosyan.

Now that *Autumn in Fialta* is heading for publication—and plans for translating other works are under way—my father and I joke about loving disagreements that arose when I edited the final text. This was no ordinary translation project for me. Over the years, I have had the privilege of translating works by a number of Jewish-Russian writers, among them, David Aizman, Vladimir Jabotinsky, Lev Ginzburg, and Boris Slutsky. But this was not simply a writer whose work I admired, but my own father. I wanted the translations to capture his intonation, his breath, and his silence, in the most fitting Anglo-American idiom. And I wished them to stand as a memorial to our ancestors, carrying on Jewish thought and spirit. While working on the translations, I was often transported to the past. In one of my father's favorite stories, "Dismemberers," from the collection *Jonah and Sarah*, my father's Olympia typewriter continues to type subversive stories even after her owner has left Russia for good. The tale was composed in May 1987 in our Moscow apartment while Dan Rather and a CBS crew were filming a segment about my parents for the special *Seven Days in May*. The typewriter story took me back to the lessons my father gave me when I was four. He sat me at his writer's desk and let me bang out my first

compositions—Cyrillic characters, arranged on a page like a Dadaist manifesto. He simply let me be myself in language, and he still does today.

Something that has always sustained me as a son and my father's translator is his belief in a form of universal harmony, in a "saving proportionality," as he termed it in the preface to *Jonah and Sarah*: "Not a harmony in the grand poetic sense of the word, but a proportionality, intended for the purpose of distributing happiness and unhappiness among people." As I worked on Englishing my father's prose, I would call him frequently, asking to make small alterations. "This is my story, and this is how I came to know it—no, how my characters did," my father would reply. I know he has helped preserve this harmony by saving me from the temptation of knowing better than the author himself.

A book's future is alluring, enchanting . . . My wife and I are visiting my parents in Providence, about a mile from where Karen grew up. We are sitting in the backyard of my parents' house. It's the end of September, a summery afternoon. Maple leaves fall at our feet, keeping time with our conversation.

"They are going to love *Autumn in Yalta*," I say with what is supposed to be the smile of a tireless promoter.

"You think so?" asks my gentle father.

"What do *you* think?" I reply.

"What do I think? I wrote the book, but it also wrote me," says my father. And he pauses, before adding, "And the same for you: you edited and cotranslated it, but it also edited and cotranslated you. A book is a destiny."

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## About the Translators

Arna B. Bronstein and Aleksandra I. Fleszar (translators of *Strange Danya Rayev*) are professors of Russian and Slavic studies at the University of New Hampshire. Longtime collaborators, they have coauthored acclaimed textbooks of Russian widely used across the Anglophone world, including *Making Progress in Russian*. Their translations from Russian include *Five Russian Stories*.

Emilia Shrayer (translator of "The Love of Akira Watanabe") works at the Rockefeller Library, Brown University. Her translations into Russian, with David Shrayer-Petrov, include works by Erskine Caldwell, Maxim D. Shrayer, and Australian poets. She has translated into English Shrayer-Petrov's monograph *Staphylococcal Disease in the Soviet Union* and a number of her husband's creative works.

Maxim D. Shrayer (translator of "Autumn and Yalta" and "Carp for the Gefilte Fish")—see the editor's biography following the copy-right page.

Margarit Tadevosyan (translator of "Carp for the Gefilte Fish") is completing a Ph.D. dissertation about writers in exile and literary bilingualism. She has published articles on Aleksandr Grin, Vladimir Nabokov, and Evelyn Waugh and has translated fiction from Armenian and Russian, including stories by David Shrayer-Petrov.