Contents

Preface*

Roman Katsman, Maxim D. Shrayer, Klavdia Smola

This volume celebrates the literary oeuvres of David Shrayer-Petrov (Давид Шраер-Петров)—poet, fiction writer, memoirist, playwright, essayist, and literary translator (and medical doctor and researcher in his parallel career).

David Shrayer-Petrov is one of the most important representatives of the Jewish-Russian literature that gained its shape and form during the post-Stalin years, developed in both officially sanctioned and underground conditions, subsequently emigrated from the USSR along with its creators, and is presently dispersed across many countries and five continents. A product of three historical epochs and a bearer of three dimensions—Soviet, émigré, and transnational—Jewish-Russian culture has transcended national boundaries. Once vibrantly alive, it is starting its descent into the depths of history and memory. This is why the task of studying and documenting its rich and diverse legacy has become especially urgent today.

Published in the year of David Shrayer-Petrov's eighty-fifth birthday, almost thirty-five years after the writer's emigration from the former USSR, this is the first volume to gather materials and investigations that examine his writings from various literary-historical and theoretical perspectives. By focusing on many different aspects of Shrayer-Petrov's multifaceted and eventful literary career, the volume brings together some of the leading

American, European, Israeli, and Russian scholars of Jewish poetics, exilic literature, and Russian and Soviet culture and history.

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Born on January 28, 1936 in Leningrad (now St. Petersburg), David Shrayer-Petrov entered the Soviet literary scene in the late 1950s as a poet and translator. He published a collection of poetry, many literary translations, and two books of essays in the 1960s and 1970s. Exploration of Jewish themes put Shrayer-Petrov in conflict with the Soviet authorities, limiting publication of his work and prompting him to emigrate. A Jewish refusenik in 1979–1987, Shrayer-Petrov lived as an outcast in his native country but continued to write prolifically, despite expulsion from the Union of Soviet Writers and persecution by the KGB. "Jews and Russians are the two peoples . . . closest to me in flesh (genes) and spirit (language),"[2] Shrayer-Petrov wrote in early 1986, less than two years before emigrating from Russia. He was finally allowed to emigrate in 1987, settling in the United States. Since emigrating, Shrayer-Petrov has published ten books of poetry, ten novels, six collections of short stories, two plays, and four volumes of memoirs. He is best known for the trilogy of novels about refuseniks and the exodus of Jews from the USSR. The English translation of *Doctor Levitin*, the first part of the trilogy, was published in 2018. In a 2014 interview, Shrayer-Petrov commented on his experience as an immigrant writer: "Most of my recent stories fashion Russian—Jewish-Russian—characters living in America. In this sense, I've become an American writer. . . . I think that I've rooted myself in New England. It has become my second—now my main—habitat."[3]

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Our volume consists of four sections and an addendum. Essays in the first section offer overarching views of David Shrayer-Petrov's life and works. Klavdia Smola considers the question of the writer's place in Jewish-Russian

2 David Shraer-Petrov, *Druz´ia i teni. Roman s uchastiem avtora* (New York: Liberty Publishing House, 1989), 9.

3 Maxim D. Shrayer and David Shrayer-Petrov, "Dinner with Stalin: A 3-Part Conversation with David Shrayer-Petrov," *Jewish Book Council / My Jewish Learning*, July 8–10, 2014, https://www.jewishbookcouncil.org/pb-daily/crypto-jews-and-autobiographical-animals-part-3-of-a-3-part-conversation.

culture, Roman Katsman analyzes the distinct features of Shrayer-Petrov's poetics in the context of late Soviet artistic nonconformism, while Maxim D. Shrayer offers a panoramic view of the writer's literary biography in dialogue with Jewish, Russian and American exilic literature.

The second section gathers together studies of David Shrayer-Petrov's poetry. Ian Probstein casts a long glance at Shrayer-Petrov's collections and cycles of poetry, written both in Russia and in America, while also identifying leitmotifs and prosodic trends. In his "notes in the margins," Oleg Smola regards such key terms of Shrayer-Petrov's poetry as fate and destiny, Jewishness, and Russianness, as well as his (neo-)futurist poetics and love lyric. Stefano Garzonio devotes his essay to the Italian themes and motifs in Shrayer-Petrov's poetic oeuvres. Andrei Ranchin contributes a detailed reading and analysis of one poem, thereby delving deep into Shrayer-Petrov's poetic laboratory. Finally, Evgeny Ermolin investigates one of the central literary-biographical lifelines in Shrayer-Petrov's career—his friendship with the "avant-garde classic" Genrikh Sapgir.

The third section of the volume focuses its attention on the refusenik trilogy, which has brought Shrayer-Petrov the most recognition. Klavdia Smola examines Shrayer-Petrov's writings in the context of the Jewish renaissance and the "*aliyah* literature" of the late Soviet period. Joshua Rubenstein zooms in on the theme of Jewish revenge as a psychocultural phenomenon in Shrayer-Petrov's refusenik fiction. Brian J. Horowitz considers the interrelationship of the author and his protagonist in *Doctor Levitin*—the first part of the refusenik trilogy. In her essay, Monica Osborne reads the novel as a reflection of the changing Jewish identity and of the relations between the Jewish community and power—both in the USSR of the late 1970s and early 1980s and in the present-day diaspora.

Essays, collected in the volume's fourth section, contribute to the study of Shrayer-Petrov's artistic prose. Marat Grinberg leans upon the figure of the writer "Grifanov" in Shrayer-Petrov's refusenik trilogy and draws far-reaching parallels between the writings of David Shrayer-Petrov and Yuri Trifonov. Leonid Katsis pursues various textual and cultural sources of Shrayer-Petrov's historical novel *Yudin's Redemption*, and in doing so unearths evidence of the spiritual quest that was characteristic of Soviet Jewish intelligentsia of the late Soviet period. Boris Lanin anatomizes the novella "Dinner with Stalin"—one of Shrayer-Petrov's best known works of short fiction—and also steeps it in the context of Russian-language prose, both Soviet and émigré, about the mythologization of Stalin.

The four sections of this volume reflect some, albeit not all, of the principal vectors of David Shrayer-Petrov's creativity. It is our hope that this book will serve as a catalyst for further study of his life and work. The addendum (Post Scriptum) is comprised of materials that could serve as a foundation for further study. Those include a long conversation with Maxim D. Shrayer, which raises a number of new and relevant questions, many of them related to the writer's "Jewish secret." The addendum also includes a curated pictorial biography, which highlights David Shrayer-Petrov's literary and professional formation and development. A detailed bibliography of the writer's publications concludes the volume.

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A Note on Transliteration and Spelling of Names

A modified version of the Library of Congress system for transliterating the Russian alphabet is used throughout the text of the essays included in this volume. Exceptions are Russian words and geographical and personal names that have gained a common spelling in English, such as Joseph Brodsky instead of "Iosif Brodskii," Osip Mandelstam instead of "Osip Mandelshtam," Vladimir Jabotinsky instead of "Vladimir Zhabotinsky," Babi Yar instead of "Babii Iar," and so forth. Bibliographical references, including authors' names and titles of Russian-language periodicals, in the footnotes and the bibliography are rendered in the standard Library of Congress system of transliterating the Russian alphabet, without diacritical marks.

Part One

David Shrayer-Petrov: Life, Art, and Thought

David Shrayer-Petrov, Russian-Jewish Writer*

Klavdia Smola

In 2021, David Shrayer-Petrov, poet, fiction writer, and memoirist, physician and medical scientist, former refusenik, turns eighty-five. Among the Russian-Jewish intelligentsia, Shrayer-Petrov had already become a legend: a man who, having experienced and described the history of the Jewish *aliyah* movement in the Soviet Union, became one of the most outstanding chroniclers of the late Soviet period and of the Jewish-Soviet diaspora. Shrayer-Petrov has been a medical scientist for most of his professional career, both in Russia and in America; he made some notable scientific discoveries in the fields of microbiology and cancer research.[1] Like one of his favorite authors, Anton Chekhov, with whom he carries on a creative dialogue in many of his texts (see Maxim D. Shrayer's essay in this volume), for many years Shrayer-Petrov worked as a practicing physician.[2] For students of Slavic literature and for those studying Jewish history and

An earlier version of this essay appeared in Russian as: "O proze russko-evreiskogo pisatelia Davida Shraera-Petrova," in *Russkie evrei v Amerike*, ed. Ernst Zal´tsberg, vol. 15 (St. Petersburg: Giperion, 2017), 135–150.

1 About Shrayer-Petrov's medical and scientific career, see his book *Okhota na ryzhego d´iavola. Roman s mikrobiologami*, ed. Maxim D. Shrayer (Moscow: Agraf, 2010).

2 About the parallels in the literary and medical biographies of Chekhov and Shrayer-Petrov, see also Maxim D. Shrayer, "Afterword: Voices of My Father's Exile," in David Shrayer-Petrov, *Autumn in Yalta: A Novel and Three Stories*, ed., co-tr., and with an afterword by Maxim D. Shrayer, Library of Modern Jewish Literature (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2006), 224–225.

culture, Shrayer-Petrov is a classic of the literature of the late Soviet exodus and an important figure in the Third Wave of Russian émigré literature. Until quite recently, his creative and academic biography, many of his texts, and his role in the intellectual history of Russian Jewry and Russian culture as a whole have not received sufficient attention. David Shrayer-Petrov's writings await further investigation. This essay—and this entire volume—seeks to close the gap while offering directions for further study.

"I feel that I am an American, a Russian writer, and a Jew, that is, three hypostases are now already conjoined within me: America, my Jewishness, and, of course, Russia, because language is the only weapon a writer has at his disposal," said Shrayer-Petrov in January 2016 during an interview with the St. Petersburg poet Tatyana Voltskaya on Radio Liberty (Radio Svoboda).[3] The question of the writer's identity that this self-characterization leads us to think about is as complex and, at the same time, as simple as it is for many writers of the transnational Jewish diaspora, going back to the period of the Haskalah (the Jewish Enlightenment) in Europe and the rise of Jewish assimilation. In many instances, it is precisely in artistic texts that this identity is best manifested through the syncretism of various cultural traditions at the level of imagery, style, themes, and authorial perspective. Toward the beginning of the second half of the twentieth century—the time of Shrayer-Petrov's adolescence and youth—the process of the Russification and Sovietization of Jews had been effectively accomplished.[4] At the same time, the awareness of their nationality by Soviet Jews—and the re-acquisition of ethnic knowledge that in many cases was already absent—was a symptom not so much of the cultural as of the political climate of the late Stalin years. Like many of his peers, Shrayer-Petrov experienced the state and popular antisemitism of the Stalinist and post-Stalinist period.

3 David Shraer-Petrov and Tat´iana Vol´tskaia, "Mertsanie zheltoi zvezdy," Radio Liberty, January 28, 2016, http://www.bigbook.ru/articles/detail.php?ID=25001, accessed June 3, 2020.

4 Cf. Zvi Gitelman, *A Century of Ambivalence. The Jews of Russia and the Soviet Union, 1881 to the Present* (Schocken: New York, 1988); Ludmila Tsigel´man, "The Impact of Ideological Changes in the USSR on Different Generations of the Soviet Jewish Intelligentsia," in *Jewish Culture and Identity in the Soviet Union,* ed. Yaacov Ro'i and Avi Beker (New York and London: New York University Press, 1991), 42–72; Igor Krupnik,"Soviet Cultural and Ethnic Policies toward Jews: A Legacy Reassessed," in *Jews and Jewish Life in Russia and The Soviet Union*, ed. Yaacov Ro'i (Routledge: Ilford, 1995), 67–86; Theodore H. Friedgut, "Nationalities Policy, the Soviet Regime, the Jews, and Emigration," in *Jewish Life after the USSR*, ed. Zvi Gitelman, Musya Glants, and Marshall I. Goldman (Bloomington-Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2003), 27–45.

In his autobiographical prose, notably in the short novel *Strange Danya Rayev* (*Strannyi Dania Raev*),[5] he frequently depicts this reawakening—a forcible reminder of the young Jewish protagonist's own descent. In the novel's first chapter, from the mouth of Dodonov, formerly a frontline soldier and now a local law-enforcement officer in the Uralian village where Danya and his mother had been evacuated from the besieged Leningrad, the seven-year-old Jewish boy hears a typical set of insults and insinuations aimed at an elderly evacuee (actually a Karaite whom Dodonov presumed, based on phenotypical characteristics, to be a Jew): "Понаехали сюда горбоносые да картавые и свои порядки устанавливают. Я кровь рабоче-крестьянскую проливал, а вы, гады ползучие, по тылам отсиживаетесь. [. . .] Видишь, Владимировна, за какую мразь мы с немцем воюем" ("All of you hooked noses, you can't even roll your r's properly, and now you've descended on us and try to install your way of life. I spilled my peasant-worker's blood for the Motherland, while you, creeping reptiles, were lounging around behind the lines. [. . .] See, Vladimirovna, what scum we defend from the Germans?"[6]).

Judging by much evidence of this kind, the Jewishness of David Shrayer-Petrov and his texts was both nourished and reinforced against the backdrop of the Soviet discrimination. This connects him to a broad range of Russian-Jewish writers born in the 1930s and 1940s and their stories about a Jewish childhood in the Soviet Union: Aleksandr Melikhov, Mark Zaichik, David Markish, Izrail Metter, Yulia Shmukler, Lyudmila Ulitskaya, Yury Karabchievsky, and Boris Khazanov (penname of Gennady Faibusovich), to name a few. Both Jewish ethnic renaissance and the struggle for repatriation to Israel (*aliyah*), which began in the second half of the 1960s, stemmed from these experiences: a negatively formed Jewish identity, fomented by antisemitism, turns into one of the strongest emancipatory, anti-assimilationist movements of ethnic minorities in Russian and Soviet history—indeed, into one of the most interesting phenomena of the European cultural and political underground. Like Eli Lyuksemburg, Efrem Baukh, or Felix Kandel, Shrayer-Petrov becomes

5 David Shraer-Petrov, *Strannyi Dania Raev*, in *Eti strannye russkie evrei* (Moscow: Raduga, 2004), 5–92; English translation, David Shrayer-Petrov, *Strange Danya Rayev*, tr. Arna B Bronstein and Aleksandra I. Fleszar, in *Autumn in Yalta: A Novel and Three Stories*, ed., co-tr., and with an afterword by Maxim D. Shrayer, Library of Modern Jewish Literature (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2006), 1–101.

6 Shraer-Petrov, *Strannye russkie evrei*, 55; idem, *Autumn in Yalta*, 57–58.

a writer of the exodus in the biblical sense of this word. Thus the novel *Doctor Levitin* (*Doktor Levitin*, 1979–1980), the first part of the refusenik trilogy and an exemplary work of Russian prose of the second half of the twentieth century, draws its imagery (albeit in a pointillistic fashion) from the many centuries of Judaic culture while at the same time tapping into the traditions of the world literature of Zionism.

Shrayer-Petrov's biography offers keys to some aspects of his poetics and the circle of his literary interests, which come vibrantly alive in his literary memoirs of Leningrad and Moscow,[7] in the scientific memoir *Hunt for the Red Devil* (*Okhota na ryzhego d´iavola,* 2010). Some information about Shrayer-Petrov's biography and creativity can also be gathered from his essays dispersed across collections of his works and anthologies or still uncollected. Finally, and insofar as a writer's life may be read through the prism of his poetry, some of Shrayer-Petrov's shorter and longer lyrical poems with Jewish and Judaic themes, such as "My Slavic Soul" ("Moia slavianskaia dusha," 1975) and *Villa Borghese* (1987–1990), or longer narrative poems, such as *Flying Saucers* (*Letaiushchie tarelki*, 1981) and *Runner Begoon* (*Begun*, 1987), offer powerful interpretive tools for an interdisciplinary study of his life and art.

Shrayer-Petrov's literary debut was connected with his studies in medical school: "I met the future outstanding film director Ilya Averbakh. And together with him and Vasya [Vasily] Aksyonov, we founded a literary seminar. Later it became the literary seminar at the Palace of Culture of Industrial Cooperation (*lito Promkooperatsii*, or Promka), frequented by such future important writers as [Evgeny] Reyn, [Sergei] Volf, [Dmitry] Bobyshev, [Anatoly] Nayman, [Aleksandr] Kushner, [Mikhail] Eremin, and [Viktor] Sosnora."[8] Shrayer-Petrov organically entered the cohort of young Leningrad poets of the late 1950s and early 1960s, who sought to resurrect the Petersburg school of the Silver Age while also capitalizing on the great accomplishments of early Soviet poetry. Like other poets of the postwar Soviet period, very often of Jewish heritage, who existed entirely or partially in the space of unsanctioned culture, in the 1960s and the

7 David Shraer-Petrov, *Druz´ia i teni. Roman s uchastiem avtora* (New York: Liberty Publishing House, 1989); idem, *Moskva zlatoglavaia. Literaturnye vospominaniia* (Baltimore: Vestnik Information Agency, 1994); idem, *Vodka s pirozhnymi. Roman s pisateliami*, ed. Maksim D. Shraer (St. Petersburg: Akademicheskii Proekt, 2007).

8 David Shraer-Petrov and Gennadii Katsov, "Ia dumaiu, chto my vse drug druga chemu-to nauchili . . . ," RYNYweb.com, May 17, 2011, http://www.runyweb.com/articles/culture/literature/david-shayer-petrov-interview.html, accessed June 3, 2020.

1970s Shrayer-Petrov mainly published poetry translations.[9] His original poetry appeared in print in 1959 in the monthly magazine *Young Pioneer* (*Pioner*), not long before he left for Belarus to serve as an army physician (about Shrayer-Petrov's poetic debut, see Stefano Garzonio's essay in this volume). In 1967 some of his earlier poems were collected in *Canvasses* (*Kholsty*), the only book of poetry he would publish in the Soviet Union.[10] In his literary publications of the Soviet 1950s–1970s, the writer used a Russianized penname, David Petrov, which the authorities often pressured him to shorten to "D. Petrov," so as to obliterate the non-Russian, and likely Jewish, first name.

Before emigrating to the United States in 1987 with his family—his wife Emilia and son Maxim—the writer spent over eight years as a refusenik. The conflict with the regime began with Shrayer-Petrov's decision to read his poems with Jewish themes in public. "I suddenly understood that, of course, I was obligated to write about Jews. This is the main line of my life. Who if not I?" he stated in a 2011 interview.[11] Shrayer-Petrov's living testimony of the scope of the Jewish movement and of the punitive actions taken by the Soviet authorities contradicts the fairly widespread opinion (including on the part of some Western historians) about the relative insignificance of the refusenik community and the alleged elitism of the interests of the participants in the Soviet *aliyah* movement:

> It was a lesser form of genocide [*malyi genotsid*; малый геноцид] that the Soviet authorities committed. In Moscow alone there were fifty thousand Jewish refuseniks, and moreover, which is the most important thing, they for the most part let people with [less education or blue collar workers] and filtered out and mostly kept as refuseniks the intelligentsia. And the intelligentsia was being degraded. For example, I know that one Artist of Merit of the Russian Federation, a violinist, his name escapes me now, worked as a custodian in an underpass on Smolenskaya Square.

9 On the phenomenon of Jewish translators during the Soviet period, see the novels *Stop the Plane—I'm Getting Off!* (*Ostanovite samolet—ia slezu!*) by Efraim Sevela (1975), *A Certain Finkelmeyer* (*Nekto Finkel´maier*) by Felix Roziner (1975), and *Decade* (*Dekada*) by Semyon Lipkin (1980).

10 David Petrov, *Kholsty*, poetry collection published as part of the collective volume *Pereklichka* (Moscow: Molodaia gvardiia, 1967), 116–160.

11 Shraer-Petrov and Katsov, "Ia dumaiu, chto my vse drug druga chemu-to nauchili. . . ."

> There was a plethora of such examples; all of our friends essentially worked as manual laborers, electricians, boiler-room attendants, although these were doctors, engineers, and so forth. Although doctors had it a little easier in that I went from being a "senior research investigator" down to the position of a rank-and-file physician, but at least I was working, this was my profession, while very many suffered. During the time we were refuseniks, our whole family started intersecting very rigorously with such activists as Slepak, Begun, and others. [The authorities] warned me many times, snatched up and arrested me several times, took me in to the station, conducted intimidating interrogations, and so on and so forth. It culminated in essence with a trial that was publicly staged by the newspaper *Arguments and Facts*, in which a lengthy article appeared [. . .].
>
> They sent me subpoenas to the prosecutor's office. I decided I would not go. As a result I ended up in the hospital; I collapsed with a heart attack, after which [the persecution campaign] suddenly went away. They left me alone.[12]

Despite the injustice and suffering, the experience of being a refusenik, the expulsion from the Union of Soviet Writers and the persecution by the authorities became a powerful creative impulse, which fueled many of Shrayer-Petrov's works composed not only before but also after emigration, and led him to identify himself as a refusenik writer.

We should note that the style, artistic texture, and intellectual basis of Shrayer-Petrov's writings were formed in his pre-emigration period and subsequently enriched in the United States—above all, by his experience of the life and anxieties of Russian Jews abroad, especially in America. In this sense, Shrayer-Petrov is specifically an émigré and exilic writer and not a representative of the newer Russian-Jewish literature, transnational in spirit, problematics, and geography, which gives evidence of the open and polyvalent identity of the young authors of Russian-Jewish (or Soviet-Jewish) origin who not infrequently write in two languages. This is not surprising if one takes into account that Shrayer-Petrov, born in 1936, left for the West in 1987 at the age of fifty-one. By that time, he had already created a large corpus of lyrical and narrative poetry, his main novels (the first two parts of his refusenik trilogy, which I examine in a separate essay in this volume) as well as a memoir, a body of short stories, nonfiction, and literary criticism. During his Russian (Soviet) decades he had imbibed the

12 Shraer-Petrov and Katsov, "Ia dumaiu, chto my vse drug druga chemu-to nauchili . . ." (transcription errors in the publication have been corrected in the English translation).

unique multi-layered atmosphere of Jewish culture in late Soviet Russia with its exceptional hybridity, its (anti-)Soviet Jewish self-awareness, with the memory of the Shoah that had been suppressed by the authorities, and with the official obfuscation of various historical stages of Soviet antisemitism. Moreover, prior to emigration Shrayer-Petrov had reflected intensively on the cultural and political Zionism of *aliyah*, his attitude to which appears ambiguous. Finally, still prior to becoming an émigré and an immigrant, Shrayer-Petrov had already displayed a double stylistic and intertextual orientation—both towards Russian and towards Western European and American literature. However, the question of the possible development of Shrayer-Petrov's poetics compared to other Jewish writers of this same generation who live or have lived in the United States, Canada, Germany, and other countries outside Russia (such as Grigory Svirsky or Friedrich Gorenstein) calls for a separate investigation.

During his American years, Shrayer-Petrov has published more than twenty books. While publishing his pre-emigration poetry and prose, some of it revamped and revised, he has created a large body of new shorter and longer poems, short stories and novellas, novels, literary memoirs, as well as essays and criticism (see Shrayer-Petrov's Bibliography in this volume). To date, four books of his fiction have appeared in English, edited and co-translated by his son, Maxim D. Shrayer, a literary scholar and author in his own right; among Shrayer-Petrov's translators, his wife of over fifty-five years, Emilia Shrayer, deserves a special mention. In collaboration with his son, Shrayer-Petrov wrote the first book monograph about the leading poet of the postwar avant-garde, Genrikh Sapgir, with whom the writer was close for many years.[13]

Of the works of fiction written by Shrayer-Petrov in the United States, I have a special appreciation for the two novels *Strange Danya Rayev* (*Strannyi Dania Raev*, 2001) and *Savely Ronkin* (*Savelii Ronkin*, 2004) published under the same cover in the volume *These Strange Russian Jews* (*Eti strannye russkie evrei*, 2004), as well as some of the short stories and novellas included in the collection *Carp for the Gefilte Fish* (*Karp dlia farshirovannoi ryby*, 2005). Shrayer-Petrov's selected works of shorter fiction

13 Maksim D. Shraer and David Shraer-Petrov, *Genrikh Sapgir: Klassik avangarda* (St. Petersburg: Dmitrii Bulanin, 2004). Two more editions have since appeared. Shrayer-Petrov and Shrayer also edited the first academic edition of Genrikh Sapgir's poetry, published in 2004 by the "New Poet's Library" series; see Genrikh Sapgir, *Stikhotvoreniia i poemy*, ed., introduction, and commentary by Maksim D. Shraer and David Shraer-Petrov, Novaia biblioteka poeta, Malaia seriia (St. Petersburg: Akademicheskii proekt, 2004).

were subsequently reprinted in the volume *Round-the-Globe Happiness* (*Krugosvetnoe schast´e*), published in Moscow in 2016.

As a work of autobiographical fiction, *Strange Danya Rayev* encompasses the prewar childhood years of the main character in Leningrad and the wartime years spent in evacuation in a remote village in the Northern Ural region. The short novel culminates with the hero's return to Leningrad in 1944 and ends in the summer of 1945 following the defeat of Nazi Germany. The artful simplicity and organicism of this novel's language, the deliberate choice of recollected and narrated impressions and experiences, and the humor and quaintness characteristic of "infantile" storytelling reveal a kinship not only with classical works about children by Lev Tolstoy (*Detstvo* [*Boyhood,* 1852]) or Anton Chekhov (such as "Grisha," 1886), but also with the Soviet- and post-Soviet-era works by such writers as Anatoly Pristavkin (*Nochevala tuchka zolotaia* [*A Golden Cloud Spent the Night,* 1987]) or Aleksandr Chudakov (the novel *A Gloom Is Cast upon the Ancient Steps* [*Lozhitsia mgla na starye stupeni,* 2012]). As in the best examples of literature about childhood, the limited scope and the estrangement of the child's perception paradoxically give the most accurate portrait of a historical period. A vibrant picture emerges first of prewar life in Leningrad and of the Uralian village during the war. Shrayer-Petrov's narrator converts the memories into an artistic narrative—an adult's correlation of facts is woven into the poetics of a child's perspective: short sentences, the present tense (the time of the hero's outlook) interlaced with the past tense, the concreteness of the optics, the gradually expanding space of perception:

> Помню деда Вульфа. Он старый. У него белая борода. Он почему-то в полушубке. Значит была зима? Да, зима. Он сидит у окна кухни. За окном улица. Сугробы. Крыши деревянных домов покрыты снегом. Дым идёт из бурых кирпичных труб. Я сижу на коленях у деда Вульфа. Он кормит меня сладкой булкой и дает запивать молоком из кружки. «Это Полоцк, сынок, — говорит дед Вульф. — А когда-то мы жили в золотой Литве, в Шауляе». Из маминых рассказов я знаю, что дедушка Вульф, бабушка Ева, мамины сестры Ривочка и Маня, брат Митя и моя мама бежали из Литвы от белополяков. Поляки убили Ривочку. Бабушка Ева умерла от горя и от тифа. Дедушка с остальными детьми поселился в Полоцке. Он стал учителем еврейского языка. Тогда в Белоруссии ещё были еврейские школы.[14]

14 Shraer-Petrov, *Strannyi Dania Raev*, 17.