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Searching for Irène Némirovsky: A Study of Némirovsky's Role in the Russian Diasporain Inter-Warparis

Justin Robert Fuentes-Keuthan

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SEARCHING FOR IRÈNE NÉMIROVSKY:

A STUDY OF NÉMIROVSKY’S ROLE IN THE RUSSIAN DIASPORA IN INTER-WAR PARIS

By

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This work is dedicated in loving memory of my grandmother, Celia Victoria Fuentes Gonzalez. In 1961, she and her husband, Robert Fuentes, emigrated to Miami, Florida from Matanzas, Cuba in search of a better life. Together, they were an inspiration for my interest in studying émigré communities.

Celia Victoria Fuentes Gonzalez

1940-2019

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ABSTRACT

This paper analyzes the critical literature on Irène Némirovsky in the context of her engagement of the Inter-war émigré Russian community of Montparnasse, Paris as well as the broader French public. This paper begins with a detailed account of the Inter-war Russian community of Montparnasse, Paris to provide historical context and evaluate existing research on the Russian émigré community. A traditionally held notion that the community was closed off from outside influence and unified ideologically will be dispelled as part of an effort to illustrate how the setting in which Irène Némirovsky worked and lived facilitated her ability to write and qualifies her as an appropriate subject for study of Russian émigré literature. It also serves a crucial role in providing context when analyzing her more controversial works such as "*David Golder*". Subsequently, an analysis of the scholarly work on Irène Némirovsky is conducted followed by an analysis of three of her most well-known novels. Study of these novels prove that Némirovsky was an atypical émigré in some ways but typical in others, but that above all, the community of Russian Montparnasse held a symbiotic relationship with its French host and a free exchange of literary ideas and cultures was available if it were sought after.

INTRODUCTION

Irène Némirovsky is not typically the first name that comes to mind when considering the Russian émigré writers of Inter-war Paris. Often hidden in the larger shadows of émigré giants like Ivan Bunin and Vladimir Nabokov, she has only recently come to resurface in studies of Russian émigré literature. The aim of this thesis will be to demonstrate that Némirovsky deserves to be considered seriously for both her contribution towards Russian émigré literature and in analyses of Russian émigré authors in Inter-war Paris. The quantity of research thus far made into the Russian émigré community of Paris, also known as Russian Montparnasse, which began to take shape during the aftermath of the 1917 Bolshevik Revolution in Russia, is generally small and incomplete.

By 1920, the first wave of chiefly white Russians and anti-communists to Paris had brought with them a social network which helped to establish Russian-language journals, newspapers and literary circles in the city. Historically speaking, study of this complex community has been made in a manner akin to a large brush stroke: that is, broadly, while presenting a single unified and isolated image. To facilitate historical context and a better understanding of the literary scene Némirovsky was to enter, this thesis draws on available research to demonstrate that Russian Montparnasse in fact held an open and symbiotic relationship with its French host and that the émigré community was susceptible to a variety of influences and various ideologies and politics in both society and literature, conditions relevant to the study of Némirovsky's poetics. This will also allow inspection of Némirovsky's role in the community and how her works reflect her experiences in France as a transnational émigré author. Further research should show that her experiences were in many ways atypical but that she still had similar experiences shared by other émigrés in Paris.

Review of Literature

Although research into the study of Russian Montparnasse largely has been ignored by scholars of Russian literature (leading to the name “the forgotten generation”), fortunate advances have been made by scholars such as Dr. Leonid Livak, a professor of Russian literature at the University of Toronto. His book, “*How it was done in Paris: Russian Émigré literature and French Modernism*”*,* provides a detailed look into the atmosphere of the émigré community as well as the divisions within it. Livak argues against a commonly regarded notion that the Russians of Montparnasse were unified in their writings and ideologies, and that they were closed off culturally and literarily from their host city of Paris. In her book, “*Russian Montparnasse: Transnational Writing in Interwar Paris*” Maria suggests that “The Human Document” was a common genre of writing by émigré writers. This is of interest because it manifests itself in the writings of Némirovsky, whose novel “*The Wine of Solitude*” is generally considered to be pseudo-autobiographical.

Angela Kershaw’s “*Before Auschwitz: Irène Némirovsky and the Cultural Landscape of Inter-war France*” provides rich insight into how Irène Némirovsky fit into the literary field of Interwar France without demanding that the reader consider Némirovsky’s fate at Auschwitz in the study of her work. Its self-stated mission being “to make the author’s position in the field central to its analysis in order to understand the literary space in which the author was located, as well as to highlight that which the author contributed to that literary space.”[1] Susan Suleiman’s biography “*The Némirovsky Question: The Life, Death, and Legacy of a Jewish Writer in Twentieth-Century France*” discusses Némirovsky’s Jewish ancestry in the scope of how it influenced her work and life in Inter-War Paris during such an infamous period of history. Jonathan Weiss’s book *Irène Némirovsky: Her life and works*” was created with the aid of Némirovsky’s two daughters who opened her files and photo albums and thus provided a more intimate connection to Némirovsky. The research here, especially in the chapter on "*David Golder*", is presented in such a way as to invite the reader not to separate the author from the literature. Thus, it helped to create an understanding which would be more complete than reading Kershaw's book, "*Before Auschwitz*", alone.

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[1] Kershaw, Angela, *Before Auschwitz: Irène Némirovsky and the Cultural Landscape of Inter-war France*, 2010. Pg. 5.

Alexey Gibson's book, "*Russian Poetry and Criticism in Paris From 1920 to 1940*", surveyed the literary field at the time Némirovsky was in Paris and offers insight into what émigré critics such as Zinaida Gippius were writing about other émigré authors. Additionally, Krauss and Victoroff's book "*Figures de l'émigré russe en France au XIXe et XXe siècle : Fiction et réalité*" aided this paper via its research in search of émigré Russians within émigré Russian literature. From this source a stronger analysis of Némirovsky's characters takes shape.

Finally, three of Némirovsky's novels were studied in depth for creation of this paper, "*David Golder*", "*Suite Française*" and "*The Wine of Solitude*". "*David Golder*" *and* "*Suite Française*" both showcase Némirovsky's most popular and perhaps greatest writings from two substantially different periods of her life, the former being written before the German invasion and the latter being written as occupation of France was underway. "*The Wine of Solitude*" exemplifies the genre of The Human Document, or autobiography, which was popular among several writers in Russian Montparnasse, as well as a unique take on the genre known as Bildungsroman. In order to discover Némirovsky, this paper will begin by painting the scenery of the community which Némirovsky was to enter.

CHAPTER ONE

RUSSIAN MONTPARNASSE

A Study of Russian Montparnasse as an Open Community

The study of the Russian Émigré community in Paris is often done chronologically by dividing time into “5-year” categories: 1917-1925, 1925-1930, 1930-1935, and 1935-1939. This methodology allows for categorization of developmental trends in the community of Russians living in Montparnasse, but it constrains research. The five-year arbitrary, more an aid to the scholar than an accurate portrait of the events of the time. To make matters simpler, study of this era usually contrasts two generations of émigré Russians writers, also referred to as “old school” and “new school” writers, to illustrate how change in cultural influences could have happened between generations.

Challenging the conventional characterization of these two generations of writers and their approach to the study of Russian Montparnasse, this paper will analyze Némirovsky as a writer who is understudied, but of high importance to literary development in émigré Russian writing. This will highlight the diversity of the content of émigré Russian writing as well as demonstrate how her émigré experiences have had an impact on her writings. To give historical context, this paper will begin with previous scholarly characterization of the Russian Montparnasse community before introducing the primary subject of this thesis: Irène Némirovsky.

The onset of the Bolshevik Revolution in 1917 Russia created shockwaves worldwide. Many “White Russians”, favoring the former ruling of the Tsar, were forced into exile with like-minded anti-Bolsheviks. In short, the revolution split Russia in two – USSR and Russia Abroad. A large number of these Russia Abroad émigrés settled together in communities like Paris, Berlin and New York. These were truly communities, and not merely groups of exiles. Many factors aided the development of these communities. For one, the encouragement and material aid of English academic circles and YMCA in Berlin, and for another, the cultural and linguistic connection to Paris.[2] Many aristocratic Russians of the old regime grew up with French governesses and learned to speak French (sometimes better than Russian). Perhaps more importantly, most social classes were represented. The community was not limited to the former ruling elites (government and court) and members of intellectual and professional leadership, but included workers and craftspeople, bourgeoisie, and even a large number of peasants. The Russian Abroad population, spread-wide, was not homogenous with respect to religion, ethnicity, education or economic composition[3].

The French capital city housed the highest percentage of foreigners to total population within Europe.[4] In "*Russian Montparnasse: Transnational Writing in Interwar Paris*", Maria Rubins alludes to the Paris of the 1920's as being like a funnel, into which a strong stream of emigrants from all countries flowed. In Paris, the Russian émigrés went through stages of adjustment to Montparnasse. From their initial sincere admiration of the city they experienced the competition, the humiliation, and poverty associated with the difficult path of emigration before succumbing, in Rubins's opinion, to arrogant self-involvement and embittered contempt for one another.[5] She notes that the city of Paris, providing an "illusion of being at home" had different implications for different individuals within the Russian diaspora. Many Russians felt no need to go beyond the comfort of their "mononational" Montparnasse.[6] They felt no need to engage in meaningful cross-cultural dialogue. Rubins notes that many of these isolationists wound up in a number of literary narratives as targets of irony. Leonid Livak, meanwhile, disagrees. He claims that the “spiritual atmosphere” of the transnational city could not have been enough to bring the community into fruition. He argues that there had to be an organized effort on the part of the Russian diaspora to create a network of both intellectual and cultural communication with the French hosts. [7]

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[2] Raeff, Marc, *Russia Abroad*, 1990. Pg. 158

[3] Raeff, Marc, *Russia Abroad*, 1990.Pg. 5.

[4] Rubins, Maria, *Russian Montparnasse: Transnational Writing in Interwar Paris,* 2015. Pg. 49.

[5] Rubins, Maria, *Russian Montparnasse: Transnational Writing in Interwar Paris,* 2015. Pg. 63.

[6] Rubins, Maria, *Russian Montparnasse: Transnational Writing in Interwar Paris,* 2015. Pg. 50.

The Russian émigré Lev Shestov is cited by Livak as an example of what that effort could have looked like. Shestov owed his career in France to a connection with his translator, Boris Shlecer, who was an émigré himself and already established in France.[8] Through this contact Shestov had initial success with publishers at *La Nouvelle Revue Française*, which then led him to make new connections in French literary circles. A well-established Russian émigré writer, Ivan Bunin, was met in France by the press with enthusiasm in due to his work, “*The Gentleman from San Francisco.*” By 1922, Bunin had made professional connections with literary critics and writers, Benjamin Crémieux and André Gide. In turn, they persuaded an important French literary figure, Paul Desjardins, to invite Bunin to the literary circle, Décades de Pontigny, where they facilitated his efforts with Parisian magazines.[9] Shestov and Bunin both exemplify successful assimilated as cited by Livak. Némirovsky used Bunin’s memoirs when creating her Biography of Chekhov.

Curiously, in much of the texts of Russian émigrés, Montparnasse is considered essentially a meeting place for Russians, with almost no recognition provided to the existence of other ethnic groups, including the French. Thus, many Russian writers projected their cultural identity into the city. When a protagonist would enter a Montparnasse Café, there would usually only be occupants of the same ethnicity. [10] Perhaps this is what led Ivan Bunin to say, “The strength of Paris lies in the fact that the city does not tie your hands. People can live in Paris for years on end, but in no way do they ever become ‘Parisians.’ Rather, they remain the way they were”.[11] Many desired to feel at home in a familiar Russia-like space, surrounded by other Russians and may have projected that onto Montparnasse.

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[7] Livak, Leonid, *L’émigration russe et les élites culturelles Françaises 1920-1925*, 2007. Pg. 27.

[8] Livak, Leonid, *L’émigration russe et les élites culturelles Françaises 1920-1925*, 2007. Pg. 28.

[9] Livak, Leonid, *L’émigration russe et les élites culturelles Françaisees 1920-1925*, 2007. Pg. 28.

[10] Rubins, Maria, *Russian Montparnasse: Transnational Writing in Interwar Paris,* 2015. Pg. 64.

Certainly, other émigré writers felt a similar comfort through perceived isolation. The émigré writer, Ivan Sharshun, stated that “It was easy to breathe at Montparnasse…I was sort of in the Russian capital there. There were intellectuals, Russian writers, I lived not just in a Russian community but practically in Russia. We organized our meetings right in the middle of Montparnasse. And my career as a writer started then”.[12] Thus, Montparnasse inspired a sense of belonging that the diaspora was missing: a place “where one could speak his native tongue and socialize with his compatriots. A kind of home away from home in the midst of the foreign metropolis”.[13] Émigré writer Georgy Adamovich found that deprived of the cultural and social protection his ancient Russia had provided him, he was living in isolation in Paris. Yet he claimed this isolation brought him closer to God, deepening his self-awareness and stimulating his artwork.[14] Adamovich believed that since traditional Russian literature favors the spiritual over the material, losing all sense of material security was advantageous in that it allowed the writer, in complete exile, to open the consciousness to “the most important”.[15]

1920 - 1930

According to most scholars of inter-war Russian diaspora, the first ten years of emigration were the most constructive. The main ingredient being a collective hatred of the Bolshevik regime, a sentiment which was very strong at the time. As many émigré figures developed a network spanning journals, newspapers and literature, they could invite a younger

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[11] Marullo, Thomas, *Ivan Bunin: The Twilight of Émigré Russia 1934-1953*, 2002. Pg. 56.

[12] Rubins, Maria, *Russian Montparnasse: Transnational Writing in Interwar Paris,* 2015. Pg. 66.

[13] Rubins, Maria, *Russian Montparnasse: Transnational Writing in Interwar Paris,* 2015. Pg. 65.

[14] Livak, Leonid, *How it was done in Paris: Russian Émigré Literature and French Modernism, 2003. Pg. 27.*

[15] Livak, Leonid, *How it was done in Paris: Russian Émigré Literature and French Modernism, 2003. Pg. 27.*

Russian émigré generation into participation. The first generation of Russian émigré writers (also called the “old school”) was considered most active during the first ten years of exile, slowing down considerably thereafter due to handicaps such as old age and ill health.[16] By the time the “new school” of writers came to prominence in local literary circles, having no memory of their Russian “homeland,” many began to look to Parisians for inspiration in literature. At the same time, Parisian writers were going through a movement of “soul searching”. There was a growing trend to reject “artificiality” and “insincerity” as a reaction to positivism, which many French believed to be a contributing factor in the war, according to Livak.[17] In 1924, French novelist Marcel Arland wrote “*Sur un Nouveau mal du siècle*”, in which he argued that younger writers were overcome with anxiety and isolation stemming from the notion that the positivist culture that had “killed God” had been ruined by the war.[18] Thus, Parisians, in search of “existential protection”, replaced “fiction” with “sincerity” in a “human” and “documentary” literature that, as Livak puts it, “answered the urgent questions of existence by reflecting the psychological and intellectual vicissitudes of its creators”.[19] In essence, the émigré Russian-French dichotomy, during a time in which French literature rejected its former “estheticism”, brought French writers closer to the Russian tradition.[20]

In Soviet Russia, apart from underground literature, writers were now aligned with the political authority, and deemed to be “un-Russian” by many émigrés. From the perspective of many émigrés, the Soviets had transgressed the idea of the Russian writer by betraying the title of “prophets of Truth”.[21] Additionally, because Soviet literature focused on politics, many émigré writers chose to not write on the subject. By 1930, the Soviet-émigré polarization boiled to a point where both sides rejected the other's right of existence. In 1932, the Union of Writers of the USSR was established, introducing socialist realism and turning the question of "what is Russian literature" into a black and white issue.

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[16] Iswolsky, Helen, *Twenty-Five Years of Russian Émigré Literature*, Vo. 1. No. 2., 1942. Pg. 63.

[17] Livak, Leonid, *How it was done in Paris: Russian Émigré Literature and French Modernism, 2003. Pg. 22.*

[18] Livak, Leonid, *How it was done in Paris: Russian Émigré Literature and French Modernism, 2003. Pg. 23.*

[19] Livak, Leonid, *How it was done in Paris: Russian Émigré Literature and French Modernism, 2003. Pg. 24.*

[20] Livak, Leonid, *How it was done in Paris: Russian Émigré Literature and French Modernism, 2003. Pg. 25.*

[21] Livak, Leonid, *How it was done in Paris: Russian Émigré Literature and French Modernism, 2003. Pg. 33.*

The émigré community was able to excuse the growing pro-Soviet sympathy of the French as the Russian and French esthetics grew closer. French infatuation with communism was brushed off as misguided and as a misunderstanding. New émigré Russian writers were drawn towards the French "new malady" and its individualistic esthetics in the face of Soviet collectivism, proving the Russian-French dichotomy was undermined in light of the Russian-Soviet opposition.[22] Yet, Livak, in his article, "L'émigration russe et les élites culturelles Françaises 1920-1925," writes that as early as 1925 there was a re-establishment of ties between the Soviet Union and France which greatly upset the Russian émigré community. This occurrence provided the French periodicals and publishers with a tough choice: to give voice to the émigré authors or to their Soviet counterparts.[23]

1930 - 1940

By 1930, another issue arose from within the émigré community. The younger generation of writers were seen as "un-Russian", in a certain sense, by the older generation of émigrés. Zinaida Gippius, herself an émigré writer and critic belonging to this older generation of writers, did not accept the idea that the new school of writers had nowhere to publish as justification for what she called their loss of questioning, skepticism, and literary compassion.[24] However, the issue was more complex. Gippius believed that the fracturing of the political left and right of the émigré community was fatal and led to the overall failure of the community to remain intact. "Медленное разделение на флаги правый (не совсем) и левый (тоже не совсем). Левое крыло – Эфрон, Слоним, - привлекают молодых в свои пражские журналы". ("Slow divisions into right flags (not absolutely) and left (also not absolutely). The left wing – Efron, Slonim – attracts young people to their Prague magazines").[25] Especially from 1930 to about 1935, political divisions fractured among older émigrés and proved to be crippling. There was also further division within the younger émigrés, who many found more sympathetic towards the Soviets, a feeling shared by the French. This was reflected in the types of journals and newspapers they began reading. Parisian trends also drew away many from the community, which was no longer close knit.[26]

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[22] Livak, Leonid, *How it was done in Paris: Russian Émigré Literature and French Modernism, 2003. Pg. 37.*

[23] Livak, Leonid, *L'émigration russe et les élites culturelles Françaises 1920-1925*, 2007. Pg. 27.

[24] Gibson, Alexey, *Russian Poetry and Criticism in Paris from 1920 to 1940*, 1990. Pg. 9.

On the eve of World War II, there was a complete demoralization felt against a backdrop of general crisis in Europe and Russian émigrés became less critical of Soviet policies (some were openly sympathetic). Additionally, by 1937, Paris held only one Russian language lycée. For émigré children it became harder to avoid French assimilation.[27] The French language supplanted Russian at every level of the social ladder. Russian scout camps intended to encourage the use of Russian became ineffective. Of the 379 émigré children in scout camps in 1937, ten percent spoke Russian poorly, fifty percent not well, and five percent spoke no Russian.[28] Children found more ease with French than with Russian and only spoke their native tongue when supervised. The lack of commitment to Russian is presumed to come largely from a lack of personal connection to Russia. When looking to the past, the children had no interest in knowing their Russian history, and looking to the future, they did not feel the same will to combat the Bolsheviks nor to strive for a free Russian homeland. When asked if a Russian can live and write outside of Russia, Bunin once said, "Some can, some cannot. But one cannot if he does not have a profound, indestructible, and bloody tie with Rus".[29]

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[25] Gibson, Alexey, *Russian Poetry and Criticism in Paris from 1920 to 1940*, 1990. Pg. 9.
[26] Gibson, Alexey, *Russian Poetry and Criticism in Paris from 1920 to 1940*, 1990. Pg. 9.
[27] Marullo, Thomas, *Ivan Bunin: The Twilight of Émigré Russia 1934-1953*, 2002. Pg. 9.
[28] Marullo, Thomas, *Ivan Bunin: The Twilight of Émigré Russia 1934-1953*, 2002. Pg. 9.
[29] Marullo, Thomas, *Ivan Bunin: The Twilight of Émigré Russia 1934-1953*, 2002. Pg. 55

In 1939, following the invasion of France by Nazi forces, society in France was extremely oppressed. Literary circles were no exception. What small number of individuals remained from the shredded Russian community went underground. Some authors, like Elsa Triolet, became part of the underground resistance against the Nazis and went on to write novels related to that experience. Others, like the Nabokovs, fled to the United States and continued writing. Yet many, like Némirovsky, would perish in the Holocaust.

The Russian émigré community of inter-war Parisian Montparnasse existed as long as it did in part thanks to a diverse, transnational and receptive French community which found itself in a movement of soul searching. The nature of Paris allowed for some émigrés to imagine themselves preserved in their Russian form, independent from all other walks of life in the city. At the same time, the symbiotic relationship between the Russian diaspora and French hosts afforded an exchange of influences. The rejection of estheticism by younger French writers encouraged interrelations between the French and Russians, which in turn exposed the younger Russians to a strong process of French cultural assimilation. Ultimately, this aided to the destruction of the Russian émigré identity. The Soviet-Russian, émigré-Russian and French political triangle also led to increasing division before the onset of World War II. The Russians would not have been initially successful if not for an organized effort on the part of the émigrés, along with already established links to French publishers by figures like Bunin and Shestov, which helped to jump-start the community.

Maria Rubins wrote that the Russian émigrés did openly exchange with their French counterparts in different ways during the community's roughly twenty years of existence. During the 1920's, Paris was a location which proved to be very receptive to the Russians, as it was already distinguished as a transnational hub due to unprecedented cosmopolitanism and diversity, and it was upon this background which Irène Némirovsky made her way to the top of literary circles in Paris.

CHAPTER TWO

IRÈNE NÉMIROVSKY

History

Born in Ukraine in 1903, under what was then the Russian Empire, Irène Némirovsky grew up in a family of rich Jewish bankers. As political turmoil unfolded in Russia, her family moved to Saint Petersburg, Russia, where life was more financially stable. Irène often writes her parents into her novels, describing her father, Leon Némirovsky, as having both a drinking and gambling addiction. Irène's mother had numerous love affairs. She held a self-centered personality and often denied having a daughter to make herself appear younger to others. After the Russian Revolution, her family emigrated to Finland where they lived comfortably for a year. Then they moved briefly to Sweden before settling in Paris in 1919. There, Irène Némirovsky began to publish in French. After obtaining a degree in Russian Literature from the Sorbonne, she gained great success with her novel, "*David Golder*". In 1938 she applied for French citizenship but was denied. As political divisions rose in Europe, she and her husband converted to Catholicism in 1939. During the occupation of France by Nazi forces she had been in the middle of writing her best-known work, "*Suite Française*", when she was arrested by Nazi officers and sent to Auschwitz. She was arrested for the crime of being a stateless Jew. She met her fate there shortly after.

Irène Némirovsky presents a fascinating challenge for scholarly research. In consideration of Irène Némirovsky as an émigré Russian writer in inter-war Paris, one first feels obliged to make the claim that Némirovsky was a *Russian* Émigré: and many critics have dubbed her so only when convenient. Owing to her Jewish ancestry, her roots in Ukraine, and her primary use of the French language in her life, she proves difficult for critics to categorize in terms of a particular identity, (French, Russian or Ukrainian). At the same time, she is not devoid of one and it can often feel very difficult to view her works as independent of her life experiences.

Traces of Russia and France

Maria Rubins once wrote, “although Némirovsky is wholly a part of French literature, her prose is colored by her fragmented and hybrid identity: Russian, Jewish, French”.[30] Unlike many Jewish Russian émigrés, Némirovsky came from a White Russian household with a mother who, herself a Francophile, made it imperative that only French be spoken in the home.[31] By large, Némirovsky grew up in both French as well as native Russian culture with the support of a French governess. In the study, “Figures de l’émigré russe en France au XIXe et XXe siècle : Fiction et réalité”, Rubins made an appeal to Némirovsky’s “Russianness”(what is also referred to as Mode Russe) by denoting the sense of Russian nostalgia present within many of her writings. In her pseudo-autographical novel, *The Wine of Solitude,* Némirovsky began the first chapter with Eastern imagery. “…the wind brought the smell of the Ukrainian plains to the city, a mild yet bitter scent of smoke, cold water and rushes that grew along the riverbanks, The wind blew in from Asia; it had pushed its way between the Ural Mountains and the Caspian Sea; it brought with it whirls of yellow dust that cracked between the teeth; it was dry and biting; it filled the air with a howl that faded as it disappeared towards the west”.[32]

In the biography, “*Irène Némirovsky, her life and works*”*,* Jonathan Weiss stresses that even Némirovsky’s very first literary efforts were written in French: “Like everything she wrote, Irène’s first literary efforts were in French”[33] (although this conflicts with what Suleiman writes:

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[30] Krauss, Charlotte and Victoroff, Tatiana, *Figures de l’émigré russe en France au XIXe et XXe siècle :Fiction et réalité*. 2012. 378.

[31] Krauss, Charlotte and Victoroff, Tatiana*, Figures de l’émigré russe en France au XIXe et XXe siècle :Fiction et réalité*. 2012. 378.

[32] Némirovsky, Irène, *The Wine of Solitude*, 2011. Pg. 3.

[33]Weiss, Jonathan, *Irène Némirovsky: Her Life and Works*, 2007. Pg. 17.

"Némirovsky's own first literary attempts, however, were in Russian").[34] Due to her upbringing in a well-off family, she lived most of her daily life in French which in turn influenced her writings. Némirovsky was an admirer of Flaubert for his objectivity.[35] In an interview, Némirovsky stated that she attempted to "pour into a French mold – as clear, ordered and simple as possible – a foundation that is still somewhat Slavic"[36]. Through this lens it has been said by author Jean Jacques Berland that Némirovsky is "able to think Russian in French".[37] In truth, her "Frenchness" and "Russianness" may be inseparable. Five of the fifteen novels written by Némirovsky reference Russia in one way or another.

It may seem contradictory that Irène Némirovsky has said she refused to teach her daughter Elizabeth Russian at all. In several interviews, Némirovsky has insisted on the fact that she has mastered French even more so than her native language of Russian. "Je pense, et je rêve même en français" (I think and I even dream in French).[38] Meanwhile, Némirovsky has, since her childhood, been an avid reader of the Russian classics and received a "brilliant" education in the humanities in Kiev. Later when she attended the Sorbonne she specialized in Russian literature. In archives there, several Russian poems from her youth have been preserved to testify to her fascination for the poetics of the Silver Age and above all of Anna Akhmatova.[39] Némirovsky has also insisted that she has never written a word of Russian outside of "scholarly redactions". However, Maria Rubins declares that in rare interviews granted to émigré press, Némirovsky spoke in very elegant and sophisticated Russian.[40] Paris officially acknowledges Némirovsky as "a renown French writer and totally integrated member of French society".[41] However, it is also officially noted that Némirovsky was never granted French citizenship.

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[34] Suleiman, Susan, *The Némirovsky Question*,2016. Pg. 49.

[35] Suleiman, Susan, *The Némirovsky Question*,2016. Pg. 5.

[36] Weiss, Jonathan, *Irène Némirovsky: Her Life and Works*, 2007. Pg. 17.

[37] Weiss, Jonathan, *Irène Némirovsky: Her Life and Works*, 2007. Pg. 17.

[38] Krauss, Charlotte and Victoroff, Tatiana, *Figures de l'émigré russe en France au XIXe et XXe siècle :Fiction et réalité*. 2012. 379.

[39] Krauss, Charlotte and Victoroff, Tatiana, *Figures de l'émigré russe en France au XIXe et XXe siècle :Fiction et réalité*. 2012. 379.

[40] Krauss, Charlotte and Victoroff, Tatiana*, Figures de l'émigré russe en France au XIXe et XXe siècle :Fiction et réalité*. 2012. 380.

In Némirovsky's biography of Chekhov, she comments in her notes that Andre Maurois, as a Frenchman, is incapable of understanding the Russian author Turgenev.[42] In fact, in 1931, Némirovsky published a review in Russian of a biography of Turgenev published by Andre Maurois in which she commented on certain imperfections, and picked up on certain nuances that only a Russian reader could. She reproached Maurois for his "superficial judgement, rapid and abstract." "Вероятно, имеются почти непреодолимые трудности для правильной оценки писателя, если не знать ни языка его, ни страны, особенно если страна представляется французу такой архаичной и странной, как Россия 40-х годов" .... "(Моруа) не достает только полного понимания того, что, даже не анализируя, ощущает каждый русский : той особой прелести, смешанной с чистотой, меланхолией и нежностью, которым мы даем название 'Тургеневские.'"[43] ("Probably, there exist insurmountable difficulties for the correct appreciation of the writer if you do not know his language or country. Especially if the country seems to the French as archaic and strange as Russia of the 40s" … "(Maurois) lacks only a complete understanding of what, even without analyzing, everything that a Russian senses: that special charm mixed with purity, melancholy and tenderness, which we call "Turgenev-ish").

The influence of Turgenev is apparent in her work "*Suite Française*", with descriptions of the French rural landscape mixing realism and "poetic tenderness" reminiscent of Sketches from a Hunter's Album.[44] Chekhov's influence is present as well. In "*Suite Française*", the character Jean-Marie Michaud, while he is being sheltered by farmers, has cherries placed beside his pillow. Jean-Marie becomes disoriented and child-like as he continuously loses consciousness. Yet, throughout this he is fully aware of the presence of the cherries.[45] In her writing, Némirovsky's writing is economical and the cherries do not serve a merely historical purpose as they would have in a Tolstoian novel. They act as an anchor for Jean-Marie's subconsciousness. That the motif of cherries reoccurs in the scene demonstrates her brand of realism as distinct from Tolstoy's. Her first posthumous work published was the aforementioned Chekhov biography. In it she ponders the beginnings of the revolution in Russia. She labels the corruption among officials as this "ancient evil, eternal, evil of Russia," the naivete of the intelligentsia who idealized the *muzhik* (a sort of Russian peasant) who she did not care to know, and the free range of cruelty of the peasants.[46] Rubins believes that these reflections even echo the thoughts of Ivan Bunin.

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[41] 2013 DU 243 Attribution à une voie de la dénomination"allée Irène Némirovsky" (15^{e})

[42] Weiss, Jonathan, *Irène Némirovsky: Her Life and Works*, 2007. Pg. 17.

[43] Krauss, Charlotte and Victoroff, Tatiana, *Figures de l'émigré russe en France au XIXe et XXe siècle :Fiction et réalité*. 2012. 380.

Jeanine Delpech described Némirovsky's writing style as "a temperament, an apprehension of the world and very Slavic being, a clarity and sense of composition which is very French: this marriage of inclination allows this Russian to give us works which fascinate us without disconcerting us too much".[47] It may seem that Némirovsky wrote for a particularly French audience, whom she understood very well. It also appears that she was selling the idea of "Russianness" to this French audience in a time when right wing sentiment was also growing. Many of her works featuring eastern European characters who love France but portray their foreign traits, such as the use of Russian language in the "*Wine of Solitude*".

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[44] Dunmore, Helen, More war than peace, The Guardian, 2006. Accessed 9/16/2018.

[45] Dunmore, Helen, More war than peace, The Guardian, 2006. Accessed 9/16/2018.

[46] Krauss, Charlotte and Victoroff, Tatiana, *Figures de l'émigré russe en France au XIXe et XXe siècle :Fiction et réalité*. 2012. 381.

[47] Krauss, Charlotte and Victoroff, Tatiana, *Figures de l'émigré russe en France au XIXe et XXe siècle :Fiction et réalité*. 2012. 379.

Traces of Judaism

During this era in the West there were strong antisemitic opinions being shared openly. In France, an antisemitic journal, *Je suis partout* (I am everywhere), devoted an entire issue to “La Question Juive”. The main solution propagated in the first few articles was to tear away citizenship, and all rights associated with it, from Jews in France. One of the two main editors wrote “It is impossible, as many liberals believe, to belong to two nations, the Jewish and the French”.[48] Némirovsky was atypical as a Jew in Paris. That she was a foreign Jew from the East, however, would not allow her to be classified as a Juif de l’Est or Ostjude in the normal sense given her background as educated, wealthy and with conservative political sentiments. Therefore, while in France, most Russian Jewish immigrants belonged among Jews in the Israelite dichotomy, Némirovsky and her husband did not.[49] Maria Rubins hints that perhaps Némirovsky frequently wrote about Jews precisely because they were increasingly seen by the public as “foreign” or “eternal strangers”, making them relatable characters to herself.[50]

Irène Némirovsky married Michel Epstein in 1926. It is interesting that she chose to marry someone with a similar life to hers. Michel was the son of a wealthy Russian banker. He was Jewish but not religious and had aspirations to live comfortably and assimilate in France. In the eyes of many, this aided the perception of Némirovsky as a foreign Jew while at the same time classified her by wealth. Regardless of the fact that Némirovsky’s father came from poor upbringings and created his own wealth, her mother was from the middle class. This influenced Némirovsky’s life because her mother had certain lifestyle expectations. As mentioned, Némirovsky had a French governess and only spoke French with her mother growing up. After publishing *David Golder,* she lived a comfortable life in Paris herself, and aspired to be respected in literature and in life. Her aim was the Académie Française.[51]

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[48] Suleiman, Susan, *The Némirovsky Question*,2016. Pg. 23.

[49] Suleiman, Susan, *The Némirovsky Question*,2016. Pg. 33.

[50] Krauss, Charlotte and Victoroff, Tatiana, *Figures de l’émigré russe en France au XIXe et XXe siècle :Fiction et réalité*. 2012. 390.

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[51] Suleiman, Susan, *The Némirovsky Question*,2016. Pg. 34.

CHAPTER THREE

POETICS OF NÉMIROVSKY

David Golder

As a Jewish woman trying to make a living writing books, it has been suggested that Irène Némirovsky wrote "*David Golder*" to appeal to a growing far right audience; that she was in such fine tune with society that she recognized it was the right topic to push.[52] "*David Golder*", as a novel, portrays a corrupt world headed for disaster.[53] Written in French, as with all her major works, it was her first big success and landed Némirovsky in top literary and social circles in Paris. Most of the characters presented in the novel are one-dimensional caricatures of Jewish stereotypes. The opening paragraphs immediately presents Golder's ruthlessness in business. The first sentence sets the tone by depicting Golder as a greedy Jewish caricature. The first word reads, "No," as Golder refuses to sell his assets to his business partner, leading the partner to later commit suicide.[54] However, the main protagonist does have redeeming qualities, especially towards the end of the novel.

After facing death on several occasions with symptoms of a heart attack, he becomes aware of the shallowness of his family, and the world around him. He learns his wife and daughter have been using him for his money, and that his daughter, Joyce, may not actually be his own. "He had really loved her, his Joy, his daughter, his little girl…He had given her everything and she couldn't care less about him. She had snuggled against him in the same way a slut caresses and kisses the sad old man who's in love with her. She knew very well that he wasn't her father. Money. Money was the only thing that mattered to her".[55] He gradually starts to clearly see the greed in those around him. Yet he holds a genuine love for Joyce as any father would hold for his daughter. By the end, David Golder feels remorse and forgiveness towards Joyce. Even though Joyce herself might care nothing for him and very well may not be his legitimate daughter, he demonstrates that he still loves her unconditionally. As he is dying on board a steamer carrying him from Russia to Europe, he finds compassion within his soul to forgive Joyce, and saves her in his will from a life of financial bondage to a former rival.[56] In his final moments of consciousness, he reflects on his life. "For a moment, he thought he was actually touching Joyce's hair, her skin. Then she seemed to pull away, to abandon him, as he plunged deeper into darkness. One last time, he thought he could hear her laugh, light and sweet, like a bell ringing in the distance. Then she was gone" … "And, as he reached the end, all he could see was a shop, behind an icy window, the night, snow falling, and himself…He could feel snowflakes on his lips, which melted with the taste of ice and water so familiar to him from the past".[57] Compared with Tolstoy's "*Death of Ivan Illich*", it is possible to see many similarities as Tolstoy's protagonist's illness and prospect of death highlights his own isolation. As he lay dying he too reflected on the shallowness of his family. Upon this reflection on his own life he finds compassion and true values. In Némirovsky's work, David Golder still holds contempt for most of the world, but he does show signs of guilt for those he has wronged and most of all he shows his unconditional fatherly love for Joyce.

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[52] Suleiman, Susan, *The Némirovsky Question*, 2016. Pg. 9.

[53] Riemer, Andrew, "*David Golder*," The Sydney Morning Herald, 2007. Accessed 9/16/2018.

[54] Némirovsky, Irène, *David Golder*, Pg. 3.

[55] Némirovsky, *David Golder*, Pg. 91.

Much emphasis in the critical literature is placed on the Jewish personalities of the novel. One theory is that Némirovsky felt that she had left her antecedents far behind and may have regarded some aspects of Jewish life as unappealing.[58] Another popular possition is that, in consideration of a growing far right audience, she was attempting to subtly persuade that there are good qualities in Jews. In her biography "*The Némirovsky Question*", Susan Suleiman calls

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[56] Némirovsky, Irène, *David Golder* Pg. 140.

[57] Némirovsky, Irène, *David Golder* Pg. 142.

[58] Riemer, Andrew, "*David Golder*," The Sydney Morning Herald, 2007. Accessed 9/16/2018.

Némirovsky "*une écrivaine attachante,*" that is to say, a person to whom you become attached despite their flaws. Suleiman notes, in regard to Némirovsky, that this attachment comes not always despite her flaws, but because of them. "If I notice her using a cliché, I slide over it, the way one overlooks a dear friend's occasional or even more than occasional lapses of taste; if I wince at some of her descriptions of Jewish characters, I excuse them as being of her time, not ours, and find other descriptions of Jewish existence that strike me as extraordinarily clear-sighted and true".[59] Given the complexities of historical context and Némirovsky's background, many readers look for various ways to read her stories, and this diverse reception itself presents yet another challenge to the study of the novel and of Némirovsky as an author.

It has also been suggested that Némirovsky wrote the novel as a defense for her family in consideration of the growing power of the Nazis and far-right movements in France. Némirovsky, for all her love of France and her use of French as a primary language, was never permitted citizenship and may have been trying to separate herself from her Jewish identity. In 2013, the mayor of Paris acknowledged as much when the decision was made to name an alley in her honor.[60] Interestingly, many Jews in Némirovsky's works are recent arrivals in France, having created their wealth, or trying to make it after a childhood of poverty in an "eastern city" such as Odessa or Kiev[61]. Given her untimely death, one can only speculate as to why she wrote such a novel like "*David* Golder". She came from a Jewish family, she wrote specifically about Jewish characters in one of her most popular works, and she was arrested all the same by Nazis and died in Auschwitz under the crime of being a stateless Jew.

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[59] Suleiman, Susan, *The Némirovsky Question*, 2016. Pg. 9.

[60] 2013 DU 243 Attribution à une voie de la dénomination "allée Irène Némirovsky" (15^{e})

[61] Suleiman, Susan, *The Némirovsky Question*, 2016. Pg. 35.

Suite Française

Just before onset of the invasion by Nazi Germany, Irène Némirovsky and her family took refuge in the Bourgogne village, d'Issy-l'Évêque. While writing here, she was arrested on June 13, 1942 and deported to Auschwitz where she died of illness, with her husband also dying in Auschwitz soon after. Only years later, long after the war, Irène's daughter discovered the manuscripts of what turned out to be the workings of a major novel, "*Suite Française*".

As with her first success, "*David Golder*", this two-part novel was also written in French. The novel is remarkable as it was created in the same timeframe as the narration taking place in the story: the occupation of France. The work saw huge success, even surpassing "*David Golder*". "*Suite Française*" even received the Prix Renaudot. It is noteworthy that this is the first time the prize was given posthumously. "*Suite Française*" was intended to expand the length of 5 books: Storm in June, Dolce, Captivity, Battles and Peace. However, at the time of her captivity only the first two, "*Storm in June*" and "*Dolce*", were completed. What many critics find peculiar is the absolute absence of Jewish characters in this novel taking place under Nazi occupation. What is often overlooked is that in Némirovsky's notes, under her plans for the next book planned entitled, "*Captivity*", she wrote "FOR CAPTIVITY FOR THE CONCENTRATION CAMP THE BLASPHEMY OF THE BAPTISED JEWS "MAY GOD FORGIVE US OUR TRESPASSES AS WE FORGIVE YOU YOURS" – Obviously, martyrs would not have said that."[62] Although this paper focus is mainly on the first two completed books of "*Suite Française*", this reference may be relevant. Very unfortunately, it is almost impossible to know for sure because the rest of the books were never completed.

When Irène Némirovsky set out to write "*Suite Française*", she was very interested in examining the different levels of society in France (the upper and middle class, the working class, the intellectuals) and how they lived through defeat and occupation. She sought to present history as a background to examine the human spirit. “The most important and interesting thing is the following: historic facts, revolutions, etc. must be touched upon, whereas what will be developed is daily lives, human feelings, etc. – especially the human comedy”.[63] The story follows the lives of victims, opportunists, and survivors.

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[62] Némirovsky, Irène, *Suite Française*, Pg. 381.

“*Storm in June*” is usually the less examined of the two books as most of the action driving the plot takes place in “*Dolce*”. Yet, within the first book there are very important details which may be overlooked in the details of Némirovsky’s Tolstoy-like realism as she creates individual experiences of different social statuses. One of the families which Némirovsky chooses to bring to life is the Péricand family. The family strongly comes to symbolize materialism and hypocrisy. The family outwardly acts spiritual, however their intentions are always self-serving. Belonging to the wealthy Péricand family, Father (Philippe) Péricand was ordained a priest. Between Philippe and his mother, Madame Péricand is a contrast between worldly and spiritual love. His mother had hoped since she “had given him up to the Lord,” that she would be given some worldly glory and that her son would be destined for greatness. But instead he was teaching the catechism to small farmers in a poor parish.[64] The family had a charitable organization which existed solely to make themselves feel charitable “As Madame Péricand explained in her annual letter to the Friends of the charitable institution (Founding member, 500 francs per year; Benefactor, 100 francs; Member, 20 francs), the children lived in the best possible material and moral conditions…”.[65]

After Philippe was senselessly murdered by the children he was watching over, a mass was held. His brother, Hubert, upset with his mother, stated: “Philippe” … “He wasn’t afraid of this world. Other people talk about heaven all the time but they only think about this world…Philippe, he came from God and he must be very happy now".[66] Hubert judged his family harshly at the mass and upon leaving for the family automobile he mentally recalled his grievances with his father. Monsieur Péricand had once described France as a "decaying regime" while that same evening the he "had twenty-four places set for dinner at their apartment, with their most beautiful tablecloths, wonderful foie gras and expensive wines, all in honor of a former minister who might be re-elected and might therefore be useful to Monsieur Péricand". Once they had reached their vehicle, Madame Péricand noted the many refugees funneling through the town. "Their cars full to bursting with fine linen and silver caught up among the refugees, and his mother, pointing to women and children forced to walk with just a few bits of clothing wrapped up in a piece of cloth, remarked 'Do you see how good our Lord Jesus is? Just think, *we* could be those unfortunate wretches!'".[67]

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[63] Weiss, Jonathan, *Irène Némirovsky: her life and works*, 2007. Pg. 133.

[64] Némirovsky, Irène, *Suite Française*, Pg. 21.

[65] Némirovsky, Irène, *Suite Française*, Pg. 22.

Meanwhile, another character is the writer Gabriel Corte, whom Némirovsky uses as a punching bag to represent the literary world. Writing in her notes "Hit the writers hard, example: AC…we have never attacked some authors, like A.B.".[68] Although it is not clear who these initials refer to, the character Corte is described as "violently collaborationist." His love of himself and his love of comfort make him dependent on members of the Vichy government.[69] When he flees Paris he is somewhat shocked to see that hotel rooms are all booked and that he cannot even buy his way into a room. The porter in one hotel tells him to try in town to which he replies: "In town? But I've just come from there! I've been knocking at doors since five o'clock this morning. They treat me like a dog! I'm not just anyone! I'm a physics teacher at the Saint-Omer sixth-form college. I've been decorated for services to education."[70] Pushing into the hotel bar, Corte notices several familiar famous faces, and among their company he wonders with awe, "It was inexpressible relief to see once again all his famous friends, even his enemies. Today, any disagreements seemed unimportant. They were living proof that nothing was changing. Contrary to belief, they weren't witnessing some extraordinary cataclysm, the end of the world, but rather a series of purely human events, limited in time and space, which, all in all, affected only the lives of people they didn't know."[71]

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[66] Némirovsky, Irène, *Suite Française*, Pg. 152.
[67] Némirovsky, Irène, Suite Française, Pg. 154.
[68] Weiss, Jonathan, *Irène Némirovsky: Her Life and Works*, 2007. Pg. 134.
[69] Weiss, Jonathan, *Irène Némirovsky: Her Life and Works*, 2007. Pg. 134.
[70] Némirovsky, Irène, *Suite Française*, Pg. 163.

One character named Jeanne Michaud, coming from a peasant family, depicts a France which is broken; in which the rich may still profit off the poor in the midst of historical events taking place, and would probably have had something to tell Corte if she could have heard those thoughts. Jeanne Michaud and her husband Maurice worked for a bank run by a man named Corbin who had instructed them to flee Paris and meet up at a company bank in Tours. However, on their way, a bomb had made the road unpassable. As a result, Corbin left the Michauds a letter informing them that they had been fired for tardiness. Meanwhile, their son Jean-Marie had run off to support the French war effort against his parents' wishes and they had no idea where he was or if he was even still alive. Jeanne Michaud indignantly asks "'But why are we always the ones who have to suffer?' she cried out in indignation. 'Us and people like us? Ordinary people, the lower middle classes. If war is declared or the franc devalues, if there's unemployment or a revolution, or any sort of crisis, the others manage to get out through all right. We're always the ones trampled! Why? What did we do? We're paying for everyone else's mistakes."[72]

The second book of the "*Suite Française*", though maybe less complex, is generally denoted as the more successful story. The plot centers around the love story between French Lucile and German officer Bruno. The setting for "*Doulce"* takes place once the Nazis have occupied Paris, and the occupied French must cope with the reality that life must go on. Nazi officials had been designated to live with French families and be provided shelter. It is this pairing of the French citizenry and Nazi military which interests Némirovsky. By showing the blossoming love story develop between Lucile and Bruno, Irène presents the theme that love knows no bounds. She sought to strip away nationality and focus on the individual: presenting victims and actors on both sides of the war.

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[71] Némirovsky, Irène, *Suite Française*, Pg. 164-165.

[72] Némirovsky, Irène, *Suite Française*, Pg. 177.

In the book, the German occupiers are generally respectful towards the inhabitants of the village of Bussy and are even disappointed and confused that they cannot seem to earn the trust of the French. As Jonathan Weiss explains: "Their distrust – and for some of them, their resistance – comes not from a response to Charles de Gaulle's appeal or moral outrage at what Germany has done to the population it has conquered."[73] Weiss notes that Némirovsky wrote the sentiment as coming from "obscure movements of the blood", which possessed Madame Angellier to refuse the German soldier access to the family piano. As well, Lucille (her daughter-in-law) resisted the advances of Captain Von Falk, despite his redeeming and civilized personality."[74] Interestingly there are few deaths written into the novel, with one major event being when a French peasant, Benoît, who shoots a Nazi for giving his wife a suggestive look. After fleeing the scene, he is given protection by the Angellier family and hides there. This is one more example of the "obscure movements of the blood" which created an instinctive thrust for the Angellier family to help out one of their own kind.[75]

At the end of the novel, Némirovsky puts her thesis of love and individual human spirit on full display: "Everyone wanted to see the Germans leave. In these final hours, a kind of melancholy and human warmth bound them all together: the conquered and the conquerors. Big Erwald with the strong thighs who held his drink so well and was so funny and robust; short, nimble, cheerful Willy, who had learned some French songs (they said he was a real comedian in civilian life), poor Johann who had lost his whole family in an air raid, "except for my mother-in-law," he said sadly, "because I've never had much luck".[76] There is a suggestion of an attempt to blur the lines of enemy and ally here, as the Germans and French, in face of everything, are still able to interact with one another on an individual level. The author also begs the reader to consider the fate of the individual Nazi soldiers on a human level, who felt genuinely human emotions and worried when they learned they were being shipped to the eastern front to wage war against the Soviet Union. "All of them were about to be attacked, shot at, in danger of dying. How many of them would be buried on the Russian steppes? No matter how quickly, how successfully the war with Germany might finish, how many poor people would never see the blessed end, the new beginning?".[77]

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[73] Weiss, Jonathan, *Irène Némirovsky: Her Life and Works*, 2007. Pg. 137.
[74] Weiss, Jonathan, *Irène Némirovsky: Her Life and Works*, 2007. Pg. 137.
[75] Weiss, Jonathan, *Irène Némirovsky: Her Life and Works*, 2007. Pg. 137.

Finally, as the dust settles and the Germans have vanished from the village into the distance, life returns to the inhabitants. It is a lovely day and children are out playing. "It was a wonderful night: clear, moonlit, without even a breath of wind. It was the time of year for cutting the branches of the lime trees. The time when men and boys climb up into the beautiful, leafy trees and strip them bare while, down below, women and girls pick flowers from the sweet-smelling country lofts and, in winter, will make herbal tea. A delicious, intoxicating perfume filled the air. How wonderful everything was, how peaceful Children played and chased one another about; they climbed on to the steps of the old stone cross and watched the road."[78]

"*Suite Française*" was most likely inspired by Tolstoy's "*War and Peace*".[79] It is not too difficult to find supporting evidence of this. Némirovsky herself wrote several times about the necessity to emulate "*War and Peace*" in her notes on "*Suite Française*". For example, she placed high importance on showing the life of individuals on the foreground of a historical backdrop: “If I show people who ‘influence’ events, that would be unacceptable. If I show people who act, that is certainly more realistic, but at the expense of keeping it interesting. Never the less, I must limit myself to that. It’s quite fair (though banal, but let’s admire and embrace banality), what Percy says – the historical scenes are the best (see ‘*War and Peace*’), the ones that are seen from the perspective of the characters. I tried to do the same thing in ‘*Storm*’, but in ‘*Dolce*’, everything to do with the Germans, all that must be separate.”[80]

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[76] Némirovsky, Irène, *Suite Française*, Pg. 365.
[77] Némirovsky, Irène, *Suite Française*, Pg. 366.
[78] Némirovsky, Irène, *Suite Française*, Pg. 367.
[79] Dunmore, Helen, More war than peace, The Guardian, 2006. Accessed 9/16/2018

Criticism of the novel proves fascinating as the critic’s perception of Némirovsky as an author usually gives away their position away. For an example, critics looking to sell Némirovsky as a Russian novelist wrote headlines, “More War than Peace.”[81] Other critics sought to present her as a French novelist and went for more French clichés: “A tour de force,” is quoted on the book cover by the New York Times Book Review.

Némirovsky considered what could have made Tolstoy’s work successful and pondered how to apply it to her own work. “I think that what gives *‘War and Peace’* the expansion Forster talks about, is quite simply the fact that in Tolstoy’s mind, ‘*War and Peace*’ is only the first volume that was to be followed by ‘*The Decembrists*’, but what he did unconsciously (perhaps, for naturally I really don’t know, I’m imagining), in the end what he did consciously or unconsciously is very important to do in a book like ‘*Storm*’ etc., even if certain characters are wrapped up, the book itself must give the impression of only being one episode…which is really what is happening in our times, as in all times of course”.

Also hidden within her notes is a hint that while she was writing “*Suite Française*”, she was reading Tolstoy’s “*Anna Karenina*”. “Maie woods: 11 July 1942. The pine trees all around me. I am sitting on my blue cardigan in the middle of an ocean of leaves, wet and rotting from last night's storm as if I were on a raft, my legs tucked under me! In my bag, I have put Volume II of '*Anna Karenina'*, the diary of K.M. and an orange. My friends the bumblebees, delightful insects, seem pleased with themselves and their buzzing is profound and grave".[82] It may be relevant that she chose to read this book while writing her own novel, suggesting further influence from Tolstoy.

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[80] Némirovsky, Irène, *Suite Française*, Pg. 386.

[81] Dunmore, Helen, More war than peace, The Guardian, 2006. Accessed 9/16/2018.

One stark contrast between Tolstoy's novel and Némirovsky's manifests itself in the depictions of rich aristocratic families fleeing an approaching army. In "*War and Peace*"*,* the Rostov family is in the midst of preparations to flee their wealthy Moscow estate as Napoleon's forces are advancing on the city. Servants load their belongings into carts to be taken out in evacuation. Natasha Rostov feels shame that the carts are not instead used to carry wounded soldiers lying in the courtyard and is horrified by her family's materialism. She protests to her family and as a result convinces them do the right thing and help the wounded. "People gathered around Natasha and could not believe the strange instructions to hand over all the carts to the wounded and put the trunks in the storerooms." … "Now the servants not only did not find it strange, but, on the contrary, it seemed as though it could not be otherwise; just as, a quarter of an hour before, not only had no one found it strange that the wounded should be left behind and objects taken along, but it had seemed as though it could not be otherwise."[83] Némirovsky seems to experiment with this scene in her own novel, "*Suite Française*" and a parallel is created.

While the Rostov family eventually finds redemption in Tolstoy's novel, the wealthy French Péricand family of Némirovsky's behave all throughout with selfishness as they flee their own wealthy home. This time it is not in face of Napoleon's approaching forces they are preparing to evacuate, but Hitler's. While the Rostovs were delayed in their departure because they reversed course to tend to the wounded soldiers, the Péricands are delayed only because the linen is not back from the laundry and their servants are too distracted and afraid. “At first, they had been delayed because their clean linen hadn’t been delivered and the laundry couldn’t be reached by telephone.”[84] Némirovsky writes, “Panic obliterated everything that wasn’t animal instinct, involuntary physical reaction. Grab the most valuable things you own in the world and then…!”[85] The Péricands found it impossible to make their servants listen to reason and the scene ends shamefully with Madame Péricand’s father needing to be taken back upstairs “…to do pee-pee…”[86] and is accidentally, for a moment, forgotten at the house as they begin to leave.

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[82] Némirovsky, Irène, *Suite Française*, Pg. 388.
[83] Tolstoy, Leo, War and Peace, pg. 863.

The Wine of Solitude

Némirovsky again employs exoticism in her pseudo-autobiographical novel, “*The Wine of Solitude*”. Most scholars note that the main protagonist, Hélène Karol, serves as a reflection of Irène. Born in a city on the Dnieper river, which many believe to be Odessa or Kiev (“between the Ural Mountains and the Caspian Sea”), Hélène is a single child of upwardly mobile Jewish parents, Bella and Boris Karol.[87] The family often traveled to France and had high aspirations for Hélène, providing her with a French governess, Mademoiselle Rose. Hélène’s mother is a despicable character from a middle-class family. She is a self-absorbed woman who cares more about her love affairs than her own daughter which parallels Irène’s own sentiments to her mother.[88] Hélène’s father, meanwhile, is chiefly preoccupied in his wealth and racing farther away from his poor beginnings. Boris speaks only Russian, which gives others the perception that he is socially inferior. Boris even perceives himself in such light: “Il n’appartenait visiblement pas à une 'bonne famille'" (He clearly did not belong to a 'good family'). Némirovsky's decision to use 'bonne famille' in quotation marks is significant as it implies a sense of sarcasm.[89]

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[84] Némirovsky, Irène, Suite Française, Pg. 31.
[85] Némirovsky, Irène, Suite Française, Pg. 32.
[86] Némirovsky, Irène, Suite Française, Pg. 35.
[87] Suleiman, Susan, *The Némirovsky Question*, 2016. Pg. 174
[88] Suleiman, Susan, *The Némirovsky Question*, 2016. Pg. 174.

Once the Russian Revolution commences, the family moves to Saint Petersburg, where the financial outlook is very positive. There, Hélène becomes very watchful of the adults around her, noting that money is the only thing that excites the men. Even later on after the Bolsheviks have seized Russia, Jewish men still keep their interest on money: "The Jews talked about business and, either to amuse themselves or to keep in practice, sold each other land, mines and houses even though the Bolsheviks had confiscated them months earlier".[90] After seeing her mother with her young cousin, Max, Hélène makes the assumption that his presence must mean that he is also rich too.

As Némirovsky had done, Hélène's family leaves Saint Petersburg in 1917 for Finland, then Sweden, before ultimately settling in Paris two years later. In order to exact a life-long dream of vengeance on her mother, Hélène seduces Max who subsequently falls in love with her and proposes marriage.[91] Eventually her hatred of her mother becomes muddied with a sense of pity as she watches her grow old. "But that evening Hélène was prepared to feel sorry for her; she was an ageing, argumentative woman who sat opposite of her but never looked at her, as if the sight of her young face was too painful; her beautiful hands and bare arms covered in bracelets rested sadly on the tablecloth" … "but it seemed as if her flesh was giving way from the inside, and that its smooth, pink-and-white surface was slowly sagging, revealing the ravages of age; yet she still had a wonderful figure, with pert, firm breasts".[92]

Harking back to "*David* Golder", as Hélène's father is on borrowed time, he still demands that his wife return money that he lent her. Bella, in tears, claims that the money is all spent, but Hélène believes she has hidden the money to spend on her lovers.[93] Once her father dies of a stroke, she leaves the family behind for good, feeling a sense of freedom. Helen describes her past as an apprenticeship: "I am not afraid of life" …" The past has given me my first experiences of the world. They have been exceptionally difficult, but they have forged my courage and pride. And that immutable treasure is mine, belongs to me. I may be alone, but my solitude is powerful and intoxicating."[94]

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[89] Suleiman, Susan, *The Némirovsky Question*, 2016. Pg. 182.
[90] Némirovsky, Irène, *The Wine of Solitude*, 2011. Pg. 136.
[91] Némirovsky, Irène, *The Wine of Solitude*, 2011. Pg. 204.
[92] Némirovsky, Irène, *The Wine of Solitude*, 2011. Pg. 214.

Suleiman argues that although Némirovsky never positioned herself as a feminist writer, what is remarkable about "*The Wine of Solitude*" lies in the fact that women protagonists did not, traditionally speaking, fit into any version of the bildungsroman owing to the genre presuming a degree and autonomy, choice and self-centeredness which had been restricted to many.[95] Bildungsroman meaning "novel of formation", generally portrayed a male protagonist on a journey to discover his "authentic self and vocation in the world (for example, Proust's "*À la recherche du temps perdu*", which takes a more artistic twist on the genre resulting in Marcel becoming a writer).[96] Usually female figures fighting to establish their own independence, do so in terms of sexuality or often by refusing marriage. These attempts mainly resulted in punishment.

By the 19th century, in many western nations including France, participation in the literary marketplace by women increased. However, their fictional female protagonists who sought independence by means through work, as opposed to sex, did not.[97] Némirovsky's protagonist, Hélène, is an exception. Suleiman wrote, "Although we are not told what form her work will take, everything that precedes this declaration of independence implies that Hélène will become an observer of other people's secrets, one who describes the life around her without illusions – in other words, a writer".[98] Although Hélène's sexual relationships with Fred Reuss and Max Safronov are important plot developments on her journey, it is her ultimate rejection of these relationships that Bildung is achieved.[99] Being known for her insightful cruelty towards many of her own characters, and the harsh quality of her writing, Némirovsky was often cited by French critics of her time as a *romancier*, the masculine or gender neutral term for a novelist, as opposed to the feminine *romancière*.

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[93] Némirovsky, Irène, *The Wine of Solitude*, 2011. Pg. 237.
[94] Némirovsky, Irène, *The Wine of Solitude*, 2011. Pg. 247.
[95] Suleiman, Susan, *The Némirovsky Question*,2016. Pg. 176
[96] Suleiman, Susan, *The Némirovsky Question*, 2016. Pg. 176
[97] Suleiman, Susan, *The Némirovsky Question*, 2016. Pg. 176

The novel also holds a foreign, though not disconcerting, atmosphere. Hélène's father, Boris Karol, does not speak French. Thus, when characters like Bella speak with him it must be in Russian. In fact, most emotional dialogues are held by the characters in Russian, even if they were just as capable of speaking in French. "On Sundays, as soon as she opened a book, her grandmother would groan, 'My darling, my sweet, sweet treasure, you're going to wear out your beautiful eyes…"[100] Although the original French read "Ma chérie, mon trèsor tout en sucre" (my sweet treasure all in sugar), which would have given more of a foreign connotation than the English translation. There are also hints that many of the dialogues in the novel are carried out in Russian, as opposed to French. In one instance, the author makes explicit mention when a character is speaking French: "'Our conversation isn't very interesting for Madame,' he said amiably in French," implying that the preceding conversation must have been carried out in Russian.[101]

Hélène, recalling her various trips to Paris, describes the city as a "haven of light." She expresses strong desire to live in Paris and envies the French: "How she envied them! She never great tired of studying them. To be born in these ordinary, peaceful neighborhoods where all the houses looked alike – how wonderful that would be. To be born and grow up here. To have Paris as her home."[102] Almost in the same breath she alludes to her home country Russia as a "barbaric country where she didn't really feel at home either, because she spoke French better than Russian…"[103]

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[98] Suleiman, Susan, *The Némirovsky Question*, 2016. Pg. 177

[99] Kershaw, Angela, *Before Auschwitz: Irène Némirovsky and the Cultural Landscape of Inter-war France*. 2010. Pg. 93.

[100] Némirovsky, Irène, *The Wine of Solitude*, 2011. Pg. 38.

[101] Némirovsky, Irène, *The Wine of Solitude*, 2011. Pg. 87.

Hélène is unable to shake the feeling of being an outsider to both France and Russia. "But no. She wasn't like the others. Not completely. It was such a shame! And yet…She had a richer and fuller life than other children. She had experienced so many things. She had seen so many different places. She sometimes felt that two distinct souls inhabited her body".[104]

Reading the contrasting images of the preceding quotes one might argue that Némirovsky is employing a common cultural stereotype held by many interwar Parisians. On the one hand is the imagery of the ordered and structured society of Paris, with its look-alike houses all in a row, and on the other an image of Russia as a barbaric country immediately following. Further, the depiction of the French governess, Mademoiselle Rose, as quiet, calm, moderate and reasonable, who does not lose her temper even when Bella sends her away. Meanwhile, Hélène is a strange character, from a family home described as incoherent.

Angela Kershaw, in her book, "*Before Auschwitz,*" argues that because Boris Karol is not a member of aristocracy, but a *nouveau riche,* he and his family are the sort of émigrés who are able to enjoy the decadent lifestyle of Paris during the années folles. This scenery sets up the background for the sexual rivalry of Hélène and her mother during their affairs with Max Safronov, providing the stereotype of "excessive, violent, and vengeful Russian passion".[105]

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[102] Némirovsky, Irène, *The Wine of Solitude*, 2011. Pg. 61.

[103] Némirovsky, Irène, *The Wine of Solitude*, 2011. Pg. 62.

[104] Némirovsky, Irène, *The Wine of Solitude*, 2011. Pg. 62.

[105] Kershaw, Angela, Before Auschwitz: Irène Némirovsky and the Cultural Landscape of Inter-war France. 2010. Pg. 83.

CONCLUSION

As an émigré to Paris she contributed to the collective interwar Russian community of Paris and enriched émigré literature study with her poetics. Owing to the fact that she strove to be accepted as a member of the established literary elite of Paris she often wrote what she believed would appeal to mainstream French readers, readership that, it would appear, she perceived to be leaning towards far-right politics which may help to explain such works like "*David Golder*". She pandered to her French audience just as well by selling them foreign eastern characters who emigrate to France. Némirovsky often relied on the use of cultural clichés. When describing the content of her writings she once said the following: "What do you understand exactly by French, or Slavic? Yes, I know well, French means measure, self-mastery, harmony. But Slavic? Is it disorder? Is it fatalism?" …" And well, I try to color myself in a French form, that is to say, clear and ordered and as simple as possible, a background that is naturally still a little Slavic (or Eastern, if you prefer)".[106]

Némirovsky's background can often hinder critique of her works. Study of Némirovsky becomes difficult when one seeks to anchor her to one identity. Rubins perhaps got the closest to the truth when she argued that Némirovsky's prose is colored by her fragmented identity.[107] Others have given more weight to her eastern roots: "Némirovsky comes across as an intensely Russian writer, lyrical, forceful, earthy, idealistic and yet without illusions".[108] Yet, her fate claimed her as a "stateless person of Jewish descent". If the Russian community of Montparnasse was isolated then it would not explain how someone as unorthodox as Irène

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[106] Krauss, Charlotte and Victoroff, Tatiana, *Figures de l'émigré russe en France au XIXe et XXe siècle :Fiction et réalité*. 2012. 379.
[107] Krauss, Charlotte and Victoroff, Tatiana, *Figures de l'émigré russe en France au XIXe et XXe siècle : Fiction et réalité*. 2012. 378.
[108] Dunmore, Helen, More war than peace, The Guardian, 2006. Accessed 9/16/2018.

Némirovsky was able to interwork the Parisian literary circles, coming into contact with French and Russian critics.

While her first success, "*David Golder*" baffles contemporary critics due to the Jewish caricatures presented it was very popular during its time. It is not exactly clear why she wrote the novel. It may be that she wanted to show a growing right-wing French audience that Jews can have favorable traits as the main protagonist David Golder exhibits by the end of the novel. However, she could have also written the book in order to protect herself and her family. A combination of both is a possibility. Others suggest donning Némirovsky with the label of "self-hating Jew", which even Suleiman does not rule out. Her posthumous success, "*Suite Française*" demonstrates that Némirovsky was in sync with the events unfolding before her and perhaps illustrates her prowess as a writer more so than it does illustrate her "Frenchness" or prove her "Russianness". Irène Némirovsky makes for an interesting subject of scholarly study in émigré literature especially in relation to broadening research on the inter-war Russian community of Paris and Montparnasse.

APPENDIX

Némirovsky was born in Kiev, a city in present day Ukraine, in 1903. She grew up in a family of rich Jewish bankers and was afforded a French governess who helped teach Némirovsky to gain fluency in French. Before the onset of the Russian Revolution, her family emigrated first to Saint Petersburg for social stability and then to Finland in 1918, where they enjoyed a comfortable lifestyle. In 1919 her family briefly lived in Sweden before finally emigrated to France. Némirovsky earned a licence de lettres at the Sorbonne in 1926. Although she had been publishing short stories since 1923, her first novel, "*Le Malentendu*", was published in 1926. In that year she also married Michel Epstein and had two daughters. Denise was born in 1929 and Elisabeth in 1937. In 1929 she had published her first major novel, "*David Golder*". Her next novel, "Le Bal", was published in 1930. In 1939 the Nazi's invaded France. Shortly prior to this, Némirovsky had her two daughters baptized and then sent to Issy-L'Évêque to live with the parents of their nanny. By 1940 Némirovsky was no longer being published by her editors and was made to wear the yellow star to mark her as a Jew. The next year she and her husband moved to Issy-L'Évêque to rejoin with her daughters. Hiding in this village, she began writing her novel, "*Suite Française*". From 1940 until 1942 finished writing the first 2 parts of the five-part novel. Shortly after the completion of the second part, she was arrested in front of her family sent to Germany.[109]

After Némirovsky's arrest her husband, Michel, made a desperate appeal to the German ambassador, Otto Abetz, via a letter. The letter was dated 1 July 1941. It nearly begins with an enclosed document that a German officer assigned to live with the family for several month's left behind. Translated from German, it reads: "Comrades. We lived with the Epstein family for a long time and got to know them and they are a very respectable an obliging family. We therefore ask you to treat them accordingly. Heil Hitler!”.

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[109] Flitterman-Lewis, Sandy, "Irene Nemirovsky:1903-1942", 2019. Accessed 5/2/2019.

Michel Epstein went to great lengths to explicitly denounce the Jewish faith and claim Catholicism as the family religion. “… Even though my wife is of Jewish descent, she does not speak of the Jews with any affection whatsoever in her works. My wife’s grandparents, as well as my own, were Jewish; our parents practiced no religion; as for us, we are Catholic and so are our children who were born in Paris and are French”.[110] It appears obvious that for safety of his family her husband wrote such a letter. However, it is not clear that Némirovsky wrote *David Golder* for the same reasons. In an interview conducted shortly after the publishing of *Suite Française*, Irène’s daughter, Denise, reaffirmed that her mother converted to Catholicism to save her family in troubling times.

This last plea was denied, however, she perished soon after in Auschwitz. Two months later her husband was also arrested, sent to Auschwitz and immediately sent to death in a gas chamber. The French gendarmes who arrived to arrest her husband showed mercy on her children, instructing Denise and Elisabeth to run home, grab what they could, and disappear. They managed to take a suitcase containing the manuscript for the unpublished work, “*Suite Française*”. The content was known to the daughters but they did not attempt to have it published until 2004. One reason being that in 1992 Elisabeth was publishing her own biography on her mother, “*Le Mirador*”. Currently, with the renewed popularity of her works, many of her novels are now being translated and published in English for new audiences.

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[110] Némirovsky, Irène, *Suite Française*, Pg. 404.

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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Justin Fuentes-Keuthan received his B.S. in Russian and East European Studies from Florida State University in 2017. He has taken graduate seminars on Vladimir Nabokov, transnational literature, Tolstoy and Dostoevsky, Solzhenitsyn and Russian underground literature, as well as Russian twentieth century literature. During summer of 2015 he participated in the Critical Languages Institute Russian language program at Tempe, Arizona. During summer of 2016 he completed the STARTALK Russian language program at CSUN. In summers of 2017, 2018 and 2019 he studied at the Derzhavin Institute in Saint Petersburg, Russia with the Critical Languages Institute, having twice received the Title VIII Fellowship. He has been a French and Russian Graduate Teaching Assistant of elementary French and elementary and intermediate levels of Russian. He has studied French in both France and Québec and his love for both languages partially inspired this thesis. He completed his M.A. in Slavic Studies at Florida State University.