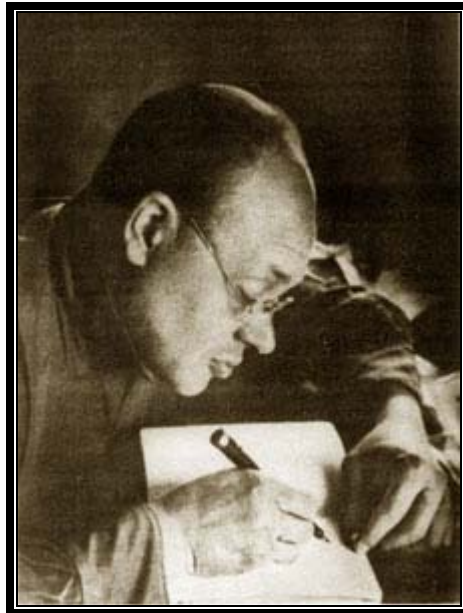


STANFORD UNIVERSITY
DEPARTMENT OF SLAVIC LANGUAGES &
LITERATURES

PRESS RELEASE

ISAAC BABEL EVENTS
AT STANFORD UNIVERSITY
27 JANUARY–2 MARCH 2004



I. Babel. 1933. Photo by Georgii Petrusov

ISAAC BABEL (1894-1940)

I began to speak about style, about an army of words—an army that deploys all kinds of weapons. No steel can pierce the heart of man as icily as a full stop placed at the right moment. She listened, with her head bent sideways and her painted lips slightly parted...

I. Babel, “Guy de Maupassant” (1932)

Writing and violence, seduction and revolution, humanity and raw power are at the core of the spare and brilliant legacy of Isaac Babel, a Russian Jewish master of short story, who began his career with the blessing of Maxim Gorky in 1916, rose to international renown with the publication of his *Red Cavalry* in 1926, and perished after Stalin waved his executioner’s wand in 1940. He has also been one of the most translated Soviet author of his generation and, perhaps, the most influential among modern Russian writers in the United States. Hemingway, Grace Paley, Phillip Roth, Cynthia Ozick and John Updike and others have all paid tribute to him.

Now a series of public events are planned at Stanford University and Hoover Institution commemorating his life and art:

- 1) an exhibition, “Isaac Babel, A Writer’s Life: 1894-1940” (January 27 - March 2)
- 2) a stage production Babel’s play, *Maria* (February 19-21 and 26-29)
- 3) an international conference, “The Enigma of Isaac Babel” (February 29 – March 2)

The **exhibition, “[Isaac Babel, a Writer's Life: 1894-1940](#)”** will be on display at the Herbert Hoover Memorial Exhibit Pavilion (next to Hoover Tower) from January 27 to March 2, 2004, 11 AM-4 PM, Tuesday-Saturday (inquiries: 650/ 723-3563). The Exhibition was designed and organized by Professor of Slavic Cultures Gregory Freidin in collaboration with Elif Batuman and Amelia Glaser (Department of Comparative Literature), and Joshua Walker (Department of Slavic Languages and Literatures), with assistance from Elena Danielson, Director of the Hoover Library and Archives, Cissie Hill, Linda Bernard, Lora Soroka, and other staff members of the Hoover Institution Library and Archives. The exhibition is based on the Irwin T. and Shirley Holtzman Collection at the Hoover Institution Archives as well as other

holdings at the Hoover Institution, the Stanford Libraries, and private collections.

[The US premiere of Babel's play *Maria*](#) is produced by the Stanford Drama Department under the direction of Professor Carl Weber, a famous German-born American director, who early in his career collaborated with Berthold Brecht. Written in 1933, *Maria's* action unfolds during the Russian Civil War (1918-1921) in Petrograd, the moribund but still beautiful former imperial capital. The Bolshevik revolution and the suffering wrought by the Civil War have now obliterated class and status distinctions and erased the line between savagery and civilization. Characters familiar from Russian classics must throw in their lot with Jewish mobsters, crippled smugglers, secret police, and Red cavalymen... *Maria* was not produced until the 1960s, and since then has had a successful life on the European stage (Italy, Germany, France, the Czech Republic, Russia and elsewhere). In the late 1978, it was the BBC-TV "play of the month," and in 1990 had a successful run at Old Vic in London.

***Maria* will have its US premiere in Stanford's Pigott Theater on February 19–21 and 26–28, 8 PM, and February 29, 5 PM.**

[International conference, "The Enigma of Isaac Babel" \(February 29-March 2\)](#) is the scholarly centerpiece of the Babel events at Stanford University. The conference is organized by Gregory Freidin (Slavic), Gabriella Safran (Slavic and Jewish Studies) and Steven Zipperstein, (History and Jewish Studies). Conference speakers and guests come from the US, Russia, Hungary, Israel, and China. Among the Conference guests are Babel's daughter Nathalie, his widow, Antonina Pirozhkova and their daughter Lydia, and the translator of the W.W. Norton *Complete Babel* (2001), Peter Constantine. The conference will open at the Herbert Hoover Memorial Exhibition Pavilion (next to the Hoover Tower) at 1:30 on Sunday, February 29, 2004. It will run for two more days at the Tresidder Student Union Oak Lounge (Monday, March 1: 9:30-5:30 and 8:00-9:30 PM; and Tuesday, March 2, from 9:30 AM to 1:30 PM).

In short this is a major event of international significance, and we would be grateful if you will alert your community to the incredible artistic, intellectual, and visual treat that awaits them.

To find out more about Isaac Babel, the production of *Maria*, the Exhibition, and the Conference, please visit Stanford's Babel website:

www.stanford.edu/group/isaac_babel.

Please contact Gregory Freidin at babel_conference@lists.stanford.edu or by phone at 650-725-0006 or 510-524-3518

Sponsors:

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