

ISAAC BABEL'S SELECTED WRITINGS



TRANSLATED BY PETER CONSTANTINE
EDITED BY GREGORY FREIDIN

A NORTON CRITICAL EDITION

A NORTON CRITICAL EDITION

ISAAC BABEL'S
SELECTED WRITINGS



AUTHORITATIVE TEXTS

SELECTED LETTERS, 1926-1939

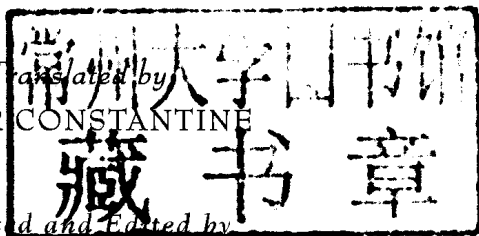
ISAAC BABEL THROUGH THE EYES
OF HIS CONTEMPORARIES

ISAAC BABEL IN CRITICISM AND SCHOLARSHIP

Translated by
PETER CONSTANTINE

Selected and Edited by

GREGORY FREIDIN
STANFORD UNIVERSITY



W. W. NORTON & COMPANY • *New York • London*

W. W. Norton & Company has been independent since its founding in 1923, when William Warder Norton and Mary D. Herter Norton first published lectures delivered at the People's Institute, the adult education division of New York City's Cooper Union. The firm soon expanded its program beyond the Institute, publishing books by celebrated academics from America and abroad. By mid-century, the two major pillars of Norton's publishing program—trade books and college texts—were firmly established. In the 1950s, the Norton family transferred control of the company to its employees, and today—with a staff of four hundred and a comparable number of trade, college, and professional titles published each year—W. W. Norton & Company stands as the largest and oldest publishing house owned wholly by its employees.

Copyright © 2010 by W. W. Norton & Company, Inc.

All rights reserved.

Printed in the United States of America.

First Edition.

Every effort has been made to contact the copyright holders of each selection. Rights holders of selections not credited should contact W. W. Norton & Company at the address below for a correction to be made.

The text of this book is composed in Fairfield Medium
with the display set in Bernhard Modern.

Composition by Binghamton Valley Composition.

Manufacturing by the Maple-Vail Book Group.

Book design by Antonina Krass.

Production manager: Eric Pier-Hocking.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Babel', I. (Isaak), 1894–1941.

[Selections. English. 2006]

Issac Babel's selected writings / Isaac Babel ; translated by
Peter Constantine ; selected and edited by Gregory Freidin.

p. cm.—(Norton critical edition)

Includes bibliographical references.

ISBN: 978-0-393-92703-0 (pbk.)

1. Babel', I. (Isaak), 1894–1941—Translations into English.
2. Babel', I. (Isaak), 1894–1941—Correspondence.
3. Babel', I. (Isaak), 1894–1941—Criticism and interpretation.
- I. Constantine, Peter, 1963–
- II. Freidin, Gregory.
- III. Title.
- IV. Title: Selected writings.

PG3476.B2A2 2006

891.73'42—dc22

2006047243

W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 500 Fifth Avenue

New York, N.Y. 10110-0017

wwnorton.com

W. W. Norton & Company Ltd., Castle House

75/76 Wells Street, London W1T 3QT

The Translator

PETER CONSTANTINE is the translator of *The Complete Works of Isaac Babel*, which received the Koret Jewish Literature Award and a National Jewish Book Award citation. His numerous translations include *Six Stories* by Thomas Mann, which was awarded the PEN Translation Prize, and *The Undiscovered Chekhov: Forty-Three New Stories*, which received the National Translation Award. He has also translated works by Gogol, Tolstoy, and Dostoevsky. He is currently co-editing an anthology of Greek poetry from Homer to the present.

The Editor

GREGORY FREIDIN is Professor of Slavic Languages and Literatures at Stanford University. He is the author of a critical biography, *A Coat of Many Colors: Osip Mandelstam and His Mythologies of Self-Presentation*, and has published widely on modern Russian literature, culture, and current affairs. After writing and lecturing on Babel for many years, he is completing a book on Babel's life and legacy.

W. W. NORTON & COMPANY, INC.
Also Publishes

ENGLISH RENAISSANCE DRAMA: A NORTON ANTHOLOGY
edited by David Bevington et al.

THE NORTON ANTHOLOGY OF AFRICAN AMERICAN LITERATURE
edited by Henry Louis Gates Jr. and Nellie Y. McKay et al.

THE NORTON ANTHOLOGY OF AMERICAN LITERATURE
edited by Nina Baym et al.

THE NORTON ANTHOLOGY OF CHILDREN'S LITERATURE
edited by Jack Zipes et al.

THE NORTON ANTHOLOGY OF DRAMA
edited by J. Ellen Gainor, Stanton B. Garner Jr., and Martin Puchner

THE NORTON ANTHOLOGY OF ENGLISH LITERATURE
edited by M. H. Abrams and Stephen Greenblatt et al.

THE NORTON ANTHOLOGY OF LITERATURE BY WOMEN
edited by Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar

THE NORTON ANTHOLOGY OF MODERN AND CONTEMPORARY POETRY
edited by Jahan Ramazani, Richard Ellmann, and Robert O'Clair

THE NORTON ANTHOLOGY OF POETRY
edited by Margaret Ferguson, Mary Jo Salter, and Jon Stallworthy

THE NORTON ANTHOLOGY OF SHORT FICTION
edited by R. V. Cassill and Richard Bausch

THE NORTON ANTHOLOGY OF THEORY AND CRITICISM
edited by Vincent B. Leitch et al.

THE NORTON ANTHOLOGY OF WORLD LITERATURE
edited by Sarah Lawall et al.

THE NORTON FACSIMILE OF THE FIRST FOLIO OF SHAKESPEARE
prepared by Charlton Hinman

THE NORTON INTRODUCTION TO LITERATURE
edited by Alison Booth and Kelly J. Mays

THE NORTON READER
edited by Linda H. Peterson and John C. Brereton

THE NORTON SAMPLER
edited by Thomas Cooley

THE NORTON SHAKESPEARE, BASED ON THE OXFORD EDITION
edited by Stephen Greenblatt et al.

For a complete list of Norton Critical Editions, visit
www.wwnorton.com/college/english/nce_home.htm

Introduction

There are writers with a personal myth and writers without one. Ivan Turgenev and Henry James led interesting lives, but they did not cultivate their biographies in their fiction. It was otherwise for their contemporary, Leo Tolstoy. Having made his name with an eyewitness war story and the thinly veiled autobiographical *Childhood*, he went on to shape his long career in letters—from *The Cossacks* to *Confession*—as an increasingly personal moral and religious quest. A count turned peasant, an agnostic novelist turned religious prophet, a conservative turned radical visionary—Tolstoy became part of Tolstoy's writings, both in form and subject. Maxim Gorky, Tolstoy's celebrated young contemporary, radiated a mythic aura throughout much of his career. His public quest was even more personal. He ascended, or, better, pulled himself up by his bootstraps from the lower depths, to the summit of literary Olympus—an outcast and an exemplar of redemption through art who had crisscrossed on foot the length and breadth of provincial Russia. For his readers, Gorky's life lent a special authenticity to his fiction, and his fiction to his life.

Isaac Babel grew up in the shadow of Tolstoy's celebrity and entered the world of letters in 1916 as a protégé of Gorky. He was to become a worthy heir to their cultural legacy, but, as often happens in such cases, he did not inherit it entirely by choice. For his readers, however, his fiction and non-fiction, related documents and historical events naturally arrange themselves around their magnet—Isaac Babel, the author, the narrator, the man—all of them real and all of them imagined. After his meteoric rise to acclaim in the mid-1920s, Isaac Babel became inseparable from the Babel myth.

This is why the present volume brings together, along with his writings in the award-winning translation of Peter Constantine, a selection of letters, key documents and reminiscences of his contemporaries, a small set of critical views from the early 1920s to the present, and a chronology of his life and works. The aim is to allow the English-speaking reader to re-create the ambient space in which Babel's distinct voice first rang out and has been resonating to this day.

Little in his background could have suggested such a distinguished career. He was born in 1894 to a middle-class Jewish family in the port city of Odessa on the southwestern border of a tottering imperial colossus—modern Europe's last *ancien régime*. Despite the official restrictions on Jews in Russia, Babel's parents threw in their lot with the country and its modernization. Unschooled formally, they made sure that their two children received a good secular Russian education, replete with foreign languages and music lessons. In the manner of the time and place, they exposed Isaac and his sister Maria to some traditional Jewish instruction,

but in moderate amounts (whatever Babel may have later claimed). Their firstborn, Isaac, was to make a successful career in business or law, or both. He graduated from a practical and progressive high school in Odessa (the so-called Commercial School), went on to get a business degree at the Commercial Institute in Kiev, and after graduation pursued a law degree at the Petrograd Free Public University (formerly the Psycho-Neurological Institute, founded by liberal Russian psychiatrist Vladimir Bekhterev).

But events in Petrograd took a surprising albeit not entirely unexpected turn. The heart of an aspiring author was beating under the uniform of the young *Bekhterevka* law student, and on an ordinary day in early November 1916, fortune smiled on him. He was, all of a sudden, lifted out of obscurity by Maxim Gorky's caring hand. By the end of the month, his name and that of Gorky, then Russia's most famous living author, were listed in the table of contents of *Letopis* (Chronicle), Gorky's journal of "literary and public affairs." Soon after came the Russian Revolution, and the rest . . . well, the rest is Babel's and Russia's history, both obscured and illuminated by Babel's compact and brilliant oeuvre.

Babel's early writings do not lend themselves readily to a "biography." He owed his later fame to the civil war and the revolution that triggered it. What sealed his fate was a cycle of stories ostensibly resembling entries in a personal diary—*Red Cavalry*—his unrivaled civil-war masterpiece. Published over a period of four years and collected into a book in 1926, these stories transformed a promising young author into a figure for whom the boundaries between his art and life were permeable, and whom readers perceived from then on in the glow of the Babel myth. When he stepped out onto the Russian and then international stage as the author of *Red Cavalry*, he came in the guise of his fictional legend: the proverbial bespectacled Jewish intellectual, transfixed, like his narrator and alter ego Lyutov, between a passionate commitment to a Marxist dream and the means—brutal, bloody, and base—required for its realization.

There was a need for such a proverbial character type in the twentieth century, as there was in the nineteenth for Balzac's Rastignac, Stendhal's Julien Sorel, Dostoevsky's Raskolnikov, or Tolstoy's Pierre Bezukhov. It fell to Babel's character Lyutov or Lyutov's creator Babel (often thought of as one and the same in myth) to fill this outstanding "social command"—the phrase Marxist critics invoked when they encountered writers or characters who seemed to be summoned up by history itself. Indeed, the twentieth century would be much duller without the figure of a politically engaged Jewish intellectual—"with glasses on his nose and autumn in his heart," at once an activist and *littérateur*, and one whose "ancient body" could "barely harness the storms" of his imagination ("How Things Were Done in Odessa" and "The Rabbi's Son"). We owe this prototypical figure to Isaac Babel. Creator and protagonist of the Babel myth, he both embodied and reenacted the deep and pervasive ironies of the century known for its world wars and one "world revolution."

Parallel to the character of a wimpy "four-eyed" war reporter and propagandist embedded amid Red Cossack brutes, Babel was developing the myth of his native city. *The Odessa Stories* were written and published at the same time as the *Red Cavalry* tales, and they transformed Babel's provincial birthplace into Russia's mythic Marseille by the Black Sea. Verily, the fabled author of *Red Cavalry* could not have been born anywhere

other than in a fabled city. In Babel's fiction, the actual declining Odessa of his youth was outrigged as a giant stage on which larger-than-life operatic characters—the Jewish gangster Benya Krik and Lyubka the Cossack—could strut their outsized passions and instincts in full-dress Rabelaisian fashion. A mirror of the tragic world of revolution and civil war, Babel's Odessa was a comic, parodic parallel universe where colorful life overflowed with pleasures and men of violence preferred to shoot in the air “because if you don't shoot into the air you might kill someone” (“The King”). This personal myth turned out to be a great find, a true gold vein, and Babel mined it with gusto and imagination.

Next came the invention of Babel's mythic childhood, what Babel himself once offhandedly referred to as his “fictional autobiography.” The result was another cycle, named after the first of its novellas, *The Story of My Dovecote*. Written between 1925 and 1937, these stories illuminated decisive moments, enchanting and cruel, in the narrator's early years. As a totality, they added up to an archetypal twentieth-century Jewish boyhood. There are only five novellas in this cycle, but they form a strong and prolific literary tree. Its roots go back to the fictionalized childhoods of Tolstoy and Gorky, while its branches, cross-bred with psychoanalysis, stretch all the way to the United States, where they bore fruit in the first-person cyclical narrative fiction of Grace Paley, Philip Roth, and others.

Even before the publication of *Red Cavalry* as a book in 1926, Babel began to chafe under the burden of the myth that he and the Revolution had created. In his film script for *Benya Krik*, he put a bullet through the head of the famous gangster, his mythic outlaw other. Babel may not have taken his film work seriously, but this was nevertheless a fateful gesture. He paraded Benya Krik for the last time in his 1928 play *Sunset*, in which Krik figures as a greedy mobster willing to risk killing his father for the sake of bourgeois respectability and cash.

“Make way for time” is a phrase repeated throughout the play, and in the late 1920s, Babel tried to heed it. Although the imaginary universe of his myth had an infinite potential for expression, the kind of expression it could generate fit poorly with the rhythms and colors of a country undergoing another—this time *Stalinist*—revolution. Irony, absence of a clearly articulated authoritative tone, and a deliberately elusive authorial intent—the very timbre of Babel's voice—were out of tune with the bravura music of the Five-Year Plans' cultural regimentation and repression. Babel looked for ways to adjust to the new realities.

He tried his hand at longer, third-person narrative fiction (*The Jewess*), but for whatever reason—lacking the instinct for this genre, discouraged by censorship, or both—he could not sustain it. Later on, in the manner of the day, when writers and artists were urged by the party-state to bear witness to the great feats of socialist construction, he traveled widely to collect material and impressions for what he thought would be his new fiction. Two of his stories about the collectivization of agriculture have survived, and one “Gapa Guzhva” (1931), was published. It is a tale about a village whore who, after days of rustic revelry, decides to join the collective farm because “under socialism whores will have a different, better life.” In the sole surviving “industrial” story, oil refineries and production goals commingle with the personal drama of a young pregnant Russian

woman, who has been abandoned by her Jewish lover, an engineering luminary, and is deciding whether to abort or not ("Petroleum," 1934). Although not disloyal, the stories were uncompromising in tone, pungent, vintage Babel, and—out of place.

Babel imagined he would be able to respond to the new challenge by resurrecting his operatic Jewish gangster type as the semi-reformed Soviet criminal Kolya Topuz. Nothing came of it. Babel either did not like the results or may have decided to drop the concept, realizing Topuz had been eclipsed by Ostap Bender, the sly operator protagonist of *The Twelve Chairs* and *The Little Golden Calf*, picaresque satires co-authored by young Odessans Ilya Ilf and Evgeny Petrov that were enormously popular in the early 1930s. All that has survived of Babel's experiments with Kolya Topuz are the memories of Babel's associates, who recall laughing heartily as he regaled them with anecdotes about Kolya's trials and tribulations.

A similar fate awaited another attempt to march in step with the times. Babel projected a book or a set of stories about Betal Kalmykov, the party boss of the small, poor, and backward Caucasus republic of Kabardino-Balkaria, then making remarkable progress. Kalmykov and Babel became friends: one, a "native," provincial viceroy with a heavy hand and a good heart, the other, the empire's literary celebrity, mesmerized by power. What drew Babel to Kalmykov was the contrast between the primitive and the visionary—a contrast that electrified his civil war stories. But there were problems. By the mid-1930s, the Soviet Union was already laying claim to great power status while projecting a more conventional, civilized image of itself abroad. Any emphasis on backwardness or primitivism was, on Stalin's orders, invariably suppressed. Babel learned this the hard way. The film *Bezhin Meadow*, on which he collaborated with director Sergei Eisenstein in 1936, was banned the following year, its entire stock destroyed, because the film, loyal in every other respect, dwelled on the contrast between the traditional forms of village culture and the new "content" of Soviet rural life. The Kalmykov project was no longer worth pursuing, except in table talk with good friends.

There was little chance for the realization of Babel's other much rumored project, a book about the Cheka, the Soviet secret police. As repression mounted, stories about the all-powerful "organs" became unfit even for oral transmission. In this atmosphere, Babel had ample reason to be practicing what he himself called in 1934 "the genre of literary silence." But there were significant pauses in this silence, too.

Stalinist cultural policies greatly narrowed the range of themes that could explore ambiguities of any sort, limiting it to the days of the old regime and to some extent the period of the Revolution and civil war. Given these constraints, Babel had no choice for expression except through the medium of the story lines he had established in the 1920s, which formed the core of his personal mythology. In the early 1930s he turned to rewriting his early Petersburg stories, using them also as a setting for the play *Maria*—all part of a strategy to safeguard his integrity as an artist and his reputation as an active author, even if this forced him into reviving his old myths.

Red Cavalry too was "recycled," receiving a new ending, the story "Argamak" (1932). In it, Lyutov, whom the Cossacks mock for his horsemanship, becomes an expert at riding a submissive mount. Pegasus has been tamed,

its wings clipped. *The Odessa Stories* evolved in a like manner. Some of the more colorful figures were forcibly relocated to a new Soviet old-age home, and the good gangster Froim Grach was unceremoniously executed in the backyard of the Odessa Cheka ("The End of the Almshouse," 1932, and "Froim Grach," 1933).

The last known "childhood" story, "Di Grasso" offers a glimpse into the way Babel may have intended to develop his autobiographical fiction. The irreverent, adventuresome boy of *The Story of My Dovecote* is now seen scalping tickets for the primitive but powerful Sicilian tragedian on tour in Odessa. The boy has pawned his father's watch and is contemplating an escape abroad, unless he can make enough money to redeem the timepiece. Knowing Babel's biography, one reads the story as an allegory of Babel's career as an author—from *The Odessa Stories* and *Red Cavalry* to his failure to write a new Soviet masterpiece about the Five-Year Plan. To appreciate the allegory, one need only substitute Babel's *Red Cavalry* and *The Odessa Stories* for Di Grasso's primitive art (a distillation of circus and Italian opera); Babel's unredeemed publishers' advances for the pawning of a watch; Babel's lucrative moonlighting as a writer of film scripts and dialogue for the boy's ticket scalping; and Babel's thoughts about emigration (he contemplated it more than once) for the boy's escape plans. As to the father whose wrath was almost enough to drive the boy out of the country, one can easily draw an analogy with the "father of all people," Joseph Stalin; he haunted the thoughts of Babel's contemporaries, especially if they owed Stalin a debt, as Babel did. The story has a happy ending. The wife of the gangster who had pocketed the boy's watch is so moved by Di Grasso's great performance that she forces her husband to make restitution. A beneficiary of Di Grasso's artistry, the boy, the future writer, is now free to experience his final epiphany. The story ends with him standing alone under the moonlit statue of Alexander Pushkin, transfixed by the world's "serenity and ineffable beauty."

"Di Grasso" was published during the centenary of Pushkin's death in 1937, the year that also marked the peak of Stalin's mass terror. Babel's friends, the friends of his friends, as well as their friends had been disappearing at an alarming rate. Against this background, "Di Grasso" reads like a magic spell, a wish, a prayer for a deliverance. But what happened later unfolded according to a script very different from the one in the story. The "silent" Babel owed a debt to the Revolution that had once exalted him, and the debt kept compounding. Stalin inquired about Babel's progress on "his book" and soon after gave the sanction to arrest him. On May 15, 1939, at a time when the Great Terror was actually waning, the gates of the Lubyanka prison closed behind Babel and his entire personal archive. Neither was to be seen again.

In his 1932 story "Guy de Maupassant," a young writer learns that success in belles lettres exacts a price, but the story ends before he has to pay it. During his first interrogation in the Lubyanka prison, before he was formally charged, Babel was asked to give the reason for his arrest. In response, he cited his recent failure to write and publish. He was doubly a prisoner of the Gulag and of his own myth of the revolutionary writer, to which he owed his celebrity. On January 26, 1940, in a Kafkaesque parody of a trial, Babel was convicted of the preposterous charge of espionage for France and Austria as well as membership in an anti-Soviet Trotskyist

organization. The next day he was shot in the back of his head by one of the chief executioners. He was forty-five years old. His body was cremated and buried in the same unmarked grave as his friend, Betal Kalmykov and his accuser, Nikolay Ezhov, former head of the NKVD.

"You don't know what you love, Gedali! I am going to shoot you, and then you'll know, and I cannot *not* shoot, because I am the Revolution!" he wrote in his 1924 story "Gedali." The writer's tragic end authenticated his fiction.

The "social command" of history that once summoned Babel to write *Red Cavalry*, *The Odessa Stories*, and *The Story of My Dovecote* emerged in another place and another time. In the United States of the 1940s and 1950s, a pleiad of young American writers began to narrate stories of their own emergence from a more traditional, marginal Jewish-American milieu into the world of full-throated cosmopolitan American citizenship. The transition was paid for in the blood spilled by their fathers, uncles, and older brothers in World War II. To paraphrase Philip Roth, Babel's *ghost* could still be seen bending over the desk of more than one American *writer*.

A Note on the Translations and Annotations

The writings of Isaac Babel published here are in Peter Constantine's translation, first published in *The Complete Works of Isaac Babel* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2002). Some of the annotations to Babel's works that appear in this Norton Critical Edition are his; others—marked "Ed."—are by its editor, Gregory Freidin. Isaac Babel's letters are translated by Andrew R. MacAndrew and Max Hayward; unless otherwise indicated, reminiscences of his contemporaries, and contemporary views are translated and annotated by the editor of this Norton Critical Edition.

A Note on the Organization of the Collection

With the exception of *Red Cavalry* there is no accepted standard order to the publication of Babel's works. As a rule, editors respect the boundaries of his more or less complete cycles (*Red Cavalry*, *The Odessa Stories*, and *The Story of My Dovecote* or the "childhood cycle"), divide his works by genre (for example, stories, journalism, plays, essays), and wherever possible pay homage to the chronological order and Babel's editions published in his lifetime. Babel himself worked in "cycles," conceiving his stories as parts of a larger set, its meaning different from and exceeding the sum of its parts. In this regard, Babel followed the path well-trodden by Russian modernist poets, especially Alexander Blok. For reasons that may have had little or nothing to do with the author's will and everything with the times and the author's violent death, some of the cycles remained barely sketched out, some reached us woefully incomplete, and others, like the *Hershele* cycle and a planned "industrial" set, are represented by only one story. I have chosen to downplay the genre distinctions and to structure this volume according to key themes: geographic locations so important to Babel (Petersburg, the Polish Campaign, the Caucasus, Odessa, Paris) and subject (childhood, collectivization, and industrialization). Within each section, I tried to observe chronological order, making the 1933 play *Maria* part of the Petersburg section and the 1926 *Sunset* part of Odessa. This form of organization, I hope, will give the reader a better sense of what Babel's complete oeuvre might have looked like.

Throughout his career, Babel continued to revise his writings for aesthetic reasons and when forced by political circumstances or personal considerations. Wherever possible the translations in this edition are based on the last published version to appear in Babel's lifetime. In exceptional cases, differences between the earlier and later versions are indicated in the annotations. In those cases where Babel's revisions were clearly forced by the censor, the translation follows the earlier, uncensored publication.

Acknowledgments

This edition would have been impossible without the work of the Isaac Babel editors and scholars—Antonina Pirozhkova and the late Nathalie Babel foremost among them—who have kept his legacy alive and his writings accessible to the public. I am especially indebted to Nathalie Babel, a friend of many years, who proposed this edition and helped me along as the volume was taking shape. The three English-language collections of her father's writings she edited and introduced over the last four decades have been invaluable. I am equally grateful to Antonina Nikolayevna Pirozhkova and Lydia Isaakovna Babel who have always been generous with their knowledge and advice. I have repeatedly relied on the two-volume edition of Isaac Babel that Pirozhkova edited and compiled, with annotations by Sergey Povartsov: *Sochineniya v dvukh tomakh* (Moscow: Khudozhestvennaya literature, 1990). Among many Russian-language editions of Babel, I would also like to single out the two that were edited and annotated by Efraim Sicher: *Petersburg 1918* (Ann Arbor: Ardis, 1989) and *Detstvo I drugie rasskazy* (Jerusalem: Biblioteka Aliya, 1979). Another volume of distinction is *Izbrannoe*, edited and annotated by Elena Krasnoshchekova (Moscow: Khudozhestvennaya literature, 1966). I have consulted these editions on a regular basis.

During the many stages of manuscript preparation, I have been assisted by Stanford University's graduate students who share with me a keen interest in Isaac Babel and modern Russian literature. I wish to express my special gratitude to Elif Batuman, Martha Kelly, and Ilja Gruen for their help with editing and translations. I want to thank Philipp Dziadko, who rendered valuable assistance with archival collections in Moscow. I am also grateful to my colleagues Evgeny Dobrenko, Lazar Fleishman, Joseph Frank, Monika Greenleaf, Gabriella Safran, Eric Naiman, Yuri Slezkine, William Mills Todd III, Carl Weber, Victor Zhivov, and Steven Zipperstein for their comments and suggestions regarding my own contributions to this volume. I want to thank Tatyana Litvinova and the late Ilya Slonim for sharing with me their memories of Babel and his circle; their recollections breathed life into more than one scholarly annotation. I have also benefited from the unfailing sense of style and phrasing of Anna Bonnell-Freidin, my daughter, who has given me many hours of editorial assistance and advice. When I agreed to undertake this Norton Critical Edition, I had only a vague idea of its scope and complexity; what made it possible for me to keep to the publication schedule while enjoying the intellectual challenge was the encouragement, support, and, most important, expert editorial assistance offered generously by my wife, Victoria E. Bonnell, to whom I owe my deepest gratitude.

Contents

Introduction	ix
A Note on the Translations and Annotations	xv
A Note on the Organization of the Collection	xvi
Acknowledgments	xvii
Isaac Babel's Selected Writings	1
<i>Unacknowledged Beginning</i>	3
Old Shloyme	3
<i>Conquering Petersburg</i>	6
DEBUT IN FICTION	6
Elya Isaakovich and Margarita Prokofievna	6
Mama, Rimma, and Alla	9
The Bathroom Window	15
MAN ABOUT TOWN	17
The Public Library	17
Nine	19
Odessa	21
Doudou	24
JEWISH FOLKLORE	26
Shabos-Nakhamu	26
A CULTURAL AND SOCIAL CRITIC OF THE REVOLUTION	31
Mosaic	31
An Incident on the Nevsky Prospekt	33
At the Station: A Sketch from Life	34
PETERSBURG TALES	36
An Evening with the Empress	36
Chink	38
The Sin of Jesus	39
Line and Color	42
Guy de Maupassant	44
The Road	50
The <i>Ivan and Maria</i>	55
<i>Maria: A Play in Eight Scenes</i>	64
<i>The Polish Campaign: Civil War or World Revolution</i>	94
RED CAVALRY	94
Crossing the River Zbrucz	95
The Church in Novograd	96
A Letter	98
The Reserve Cavalry Commander	101
<i>Pan Apolek</i>	102

Italian Sun	107
Gedali	110
My First Goose	112
The Rabbi	115
The Road to Brody	116
The <i>Tachanka</i> Theory	118
Dolgushov's Death	119
The Commander of the Second Brigade	122
Sashka Christ	123
The Life of Matvey Rodionovich Pavlichenko	126
The Cemetery in Kozin	130
Prishchepa	131
The Story of a Horse	132
Konkin	134
Berestechko	136
Salt	138
Evening	141
Afonka Bida	142
At Saint Valentine's	146
Squadron Commander Trunov	149
Ivan and Ivan	154
The Continuation of the Story of a Horse	158
The Widow	159
Zamosc	162
Treason	165
Czesniki	167
After the Battle	170
The Song	173
The Rabbi's Son	174
<i>RED CAVALRY: ALTERNATE ENDINGS</i>	176
Argamak	176
The Kiss	180
1920 DIARY	184
REPORTING FOR <i>THE RED CAVALRYMAN</i>	251
We Need More Men Like Trunov	251
The Knights of Civilization	251
Murderers Who Have Yet to Be Clubbed to Death	252
Her Day	254
<i>The Caucasus</i>	255
At the Workers' Retreat	255
Bagrat-Ogly and the Eyes of His Bull	257
Information	258
<i>The Odessa Stories</i>	261
The King	261
How Things Were Done in Odessa	266
Lyubka the Cossack	272
Sunset: <i>A Play in Eight Scenes</i>	276
Karl-Yankel	305
The End of the Almshouse	311
Froim Grach	317

<i>Collectivization and the Five-Year Plan</i>	322
Gapa Guzhva	322
Kolyvushka	328
Petroleum	332
<i>Paris</i>	337
Dante Street	337
The Trial	341
<i>Autobiographical Fiction: Childhood</i>	343
At Grandmother's	343
The Story of My Dovecote	347
First Love	355
The Awakening	360
In the Basement	364
Di Grasso	370
Selected Letters of Isaac Babel to His Sister and Mother, 1926–1939	375
Isaac Babel Through the Eyes of His Contemporaries	405
Nathalie Babel • [The Family]	407
M. N. Berkov • We Knew Each Other since Childhood	411
Pyotr Pilsky • [The Young Babel]	414
Elena Pilsky • [Babel in Odessa, 1919–1920]	415
Konstantin Paustovsky • Life's Novel. The Time of Great Expectations	416
Yuri Annenkov • Isaac Babel	417
Dmitry Furmanov • Notes from the Diary 1925–1926	419
Semyon Gekht • By the Walls of the Passion Monastery on a Summer Day in 1924	421
Kornei Chukovsky • Diary (1901–1969)	422
Tamara Ivanova (Kashirina) • A Chapter from My Life (Memoirs. Letters of I. Babel)	426
Vyacheslav Polonsky • Diary, 1931–1932	430
Stalin–Kaganovich Correspondence	434
Gorky's Letter to Babel about <i>Maria</i>	435
Boris Souvarine • My Last Conversations with Babel	436
Ilya Ehrenburg • A Book for Adults	440
• People, Years, Life	441
Clara Malraux • The Sound of Our Steps: Suddenly Summer Comes	442
Valentina Khodasevich • Babel as I Saw Him	443
• Meetings at A. M. Gorky's Country House Before and After His Death	444
NKVD Reports on Babel, 1934–1936	446
Erwin Sinko • A Novel about a Novel. Moscow Diary	450
Nadezhda Mandelstam • Hope Against Hope	452