



VINTAGE

**LE BAL**  
**IRÈNE NÉMIROVSKY**

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## About the Book

*Le Bal* is a sharp, brittle story of a girl who sets out to ruin the mother she hates. The Kampf family has risen swiftly up the ranks of 1930s Parisian society. Painfully aware of her working-class roots, and desperate to win acceptance, Madame Kampf decides to throw a huge ball to announce her arrival to society. Her daughter Antoinette, who has just turned fourteen, dreams of attending, but Madame Kampf is resolved not to present her daughter to potential admirers. In a fury of adolescent rage and despair, Antoinette exacts a swift and horrible revenge...

*Snow in Autumn* pays homage to Némirovsky's beloved Chekhov and chronicles the life of a devoted servant following her masters as they flee Revolutionary Moscow and emigrate to a life of hardship in Paris. As the crisis pushes the family to the brink of dissolution, Tatiana struggles to adapt to life in Paris and waits in vain for her cherished first snow of autumn.

## About the Author

Irène Némirovsky was born in Kiev in 1903, the daughter of a successful Jewish banker. In 1918 her family fled the Russian Revolution for France where she became a bestselling novelist, author of *David Golder*, *Le Bal*, *The Courilof Affair*, *All Our Worldly Goods* and other works published in her lifetime or afterwards, such as *Suite Française* and *Fire in the Blood*.

Némirovsky was prevented from publishing when the Germans occupied France and moved with her husband and two small daughters from Paris to the safety of the small village of Issy-l'Evêque (in German occupied territory). She died in Auschwitz in 1942.

Sandra Smith is a fellow of Robinson College, Cambridge, and has translated ten of Irène Némirovsky's novels into English.

Also by Irène Némirovsky

*Suite Française*

*David Golder*

*The Courilof Affair*

*Fire in the Blood*

*All Our Worldly Goods*

*The Dogs and the Wolves*

*Jezebel*

*The Wine of Solitude*

*The Misunderstanding*

IRÈNE NÉMIROVSKY

Le Bal  
and  
Snow in Autumn

*Translated from the French by Sandra Smith*

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## Translator's Preface

Since the publication of *Suite Française*, many of Irène Némirovsky's earlier works are being reprinted in French and translated into many languages. The two novellas in this volume, *Le Bal* and *Snow in Autumn*, show the author at her most skilful, mastering the genre to present an insightful analysis of two of her most important themes: the interaction between different members of a family and how foreigners were treated in the Parisian society of the 1930s.

In *Le Bal*, written in 1930, Némirovsky presents the Kampf family. Alfred, a German Jewish immigrant, struggles to be accepted for years until he makes a fortune on the Stock Market. Once wealthy, he marries Rosine, a woman with a dubious moral background, and converts to Catholicism for her. They have a daughter, Antoinette, whose relationship with her mother is complex and hostile. Rosine is obsessed with being accepted into the upper classes, material possessions and status. The ball they give is intended to confirm their acceptance in Parisian high society, but Rosine's and Antoinette's relationship will intervene to give the tale a scathing twist.

With *Snow in Autumn* Irène Némirovsky gives us her unique perspective into Russian society in the process of collapse, during the Revolution of 1917, and the effect on the White Russians: the fortunate ones who survived, who were stripped of all their possessions and forced into exile.

The story follows the experiences of the Karine family, wealthy White Russians, told from the perspective of their faithful old nanny, Tatiana Ivanovna. Némirovsky skilfully details the plight of many such families of the time who, having lost everything, immigrate to Paris. Their fear, poverty and desperate attempts to make a new life in a strange country, where foreigners were treated with suspicion and contempt, are sensitively treated by Némirovsky. *Snow in Autumn* is a moving tale that is unforgettable.

Sandra Smith  
Robinson College  
Cambridge  
August 2007



# Le Bal

# 1

MADAME KAMPF WALKED into the study and slammed the door behind her with such force that a gust of air made the crystal beads on the chandelier jingle with the pure, light sound of small bells. But Antoinette didn't stop reading; she was bent so far forward over her desk that her hair brushed the pages of her book. For a moment, Madame Kampf watched her daughter without saying anything; then she went to stand in front of her, arms crossed over her chest.

'You know, Antoinette, you could stop what you're doing when you see your mother,' she barked. 'Is your bottom glued to that chair? What refined manners you have! Where's Miss Betty?'

From the adjoining room came the sound of a sewing machine, punctuated by snatches of song, crooned in a youthful but rather poor voice: 'What shall I do, what shall I do when you'll be gone away ...'

'Miss Betty,' Madame Kampf shouted, 'come in here.'

'Yes, Mrs Kampf,' the young woman replied in English, slipping through the half-open door. She had rosy cheeks and soft, frightened eyes; her hair was gathered in a honey-coloured bun that sat low on her neck, framing her small round head.

'I believe I hired you,' Madame Kampf began harshly, 'to look after and educate my daughter, and not so you could make yourself dresses. Does Antoinette not know she is meant to stand up when her mother comes into the room?'

'Oh, Ann-toinette! How can you?' said Miss Betty in a kind of sad twitter.

Antoinette was standing up now, balancing awkwardly on one leg. She was a tall, lacklustre girl of fourteen, with the pale face common to girls of her age - a face so thin and taut that it seems, to adults, like a round, featureless blotch. Dark circles were under her lowered eyelids, and her mouth was small and tight. The fourteen-year-old body ... budding breasts that strain against the tight schoolgirl's uniform, that are painful and embarrassing to her delicate, childlike body; big feet and long arms like sticks of French bread that end in red hands and ink-stained fingers (and which one day, who knows, might turn into the most beautiful arms in the world); a spindly neck; short, dull hair that is dry and fine ...

'Don't you see, Antoinette, that your manners are driving me to despair? Sit down again. I'm going to come back in, and this time you will do me the honour of standing up immediately, understand?'

Madame Kampf took a few steps out of the room and once again opened the door. Antoinette stood up so slowly and with such obvious reluctance that her mother clenched her teeth.

'Perhaps you can't be bothered, is that it, Miss?' she asked sharply, her voice threatening.

'No, Mama,' replied Antoinette quietly.

'Well, then why have you got that look on your face?'

Antoinette attempted a smile, but with so little effort that it merely distorted her features into an unfortunate grimace. Sometimes she hated grown-ups so much that she could have killed them, mutilated them, or at least stamped her foot and shouted, 'No! Just leave me alone!' But her parents frightened her. Ever since she was a tiny child, she'd been afraid of her parents.

When Antoinette was small, her mother had often held her on her lap, cuddled her, and kissed her. But Antoinette