IMMIGRANT BAGGAGE
Morticians, Purloined Diaries, and Other Theatrics of Exile
Praise for *Immigrant Baggage*

“In Maxim D. Shrayer’s extraordinary *Immigrant Baggage: Morticians, Purloined Diaries, and Other Theatrics of Exile*, he claims place through movement, expression through translingualism, all while inscribing history onto our collective present consciousness. Incorporating photographs into the stories of his travels and adventures, Shrayer offers eyewitness evidence of the past, even as his writing invites readers to marvel at improbable connections, surreal coincidences, and occasional forays into imagined endings that bring together past and present. An elegant and compelling narrator, Shrayer invites readers to visualize, understand, hear, and experience the richness of multiple languages, cities, and characters. He does this by inviting us not only to experience specific moments in time and place, but also to reflect on the spaces in between—indeed, it is in these moments that Shrayer seems most at home.”

—Jessica Lang, Dean, Weissman School of Arts and Sciences, Baruch College, CUNY and author of *Textual Silence: Unreadability and the Holocaust*

“Maxim D. Shrayer writes like Nabokov’s long lost cousin. Funny, poignant, elegant, and light on his feet, Shrayer serves up a banquet of émigré pleasures and sorrows, in the new world as well as the old. *Immigrant Baggage* is a compact, pang-filled, hilarious marvel.”

—David Mikics, Moores Professor of Honors and English, University of Houston, and author of *Stanley Kubrick: American Filmmaker*
“The lively stories that comprise Maxim D. Shrayer’s *Immigrant Baggage* burst with a passionate devotion to literature—the Russian literature of Shrayer’s past, in particular, before he and his parents left Russia after eight persecuted years as Jewish refuseniks. Whether describing a literary discussion among friends from his Soviet youth, or among colleagues in America today, the conversations are of utmost importance; indeed, intellectual arguments can be loveable ‘tirades’ when the nature of literature is at stake. Poignantly, reading into this memoir familiarizes us with the texture of what it is to live exiled, as an immigrant, with one’s mind perpetually in more than one world, and speaking more than one language. Shrayer’s gift is to guide us, through his ‘adventures,’ to an understanding of the many meanings of the phrase *Immigrant Baggage*, including the inevitable weight of the past, the ever-present quality of being multicultural, and the literal need and desire to travel across the globe to stay connected to a world left behind. The son of a writer, Shrayer brings a certain wistfulness for the literary life of the past when he describes—to his daughters whom he lovingly shares his literary life with—his father taking him to editorial offices in Moscow and then for a treat of ‘something delicious like a smoked tongue sandwich and pear soda.’ The past is present, and made alive again, in this most engaging memoir.”

—Elizabeth Poliner, author of *As Close to Us as Breathing* and *Mutual Life & Casualty*

“Maxim D. Shrayer is a faithful student of the great masters of Russian literature. And he is also top-of-the-class as a literary Russian émigré in his own right. This is a charming and breezy book, written by a wordsmith from two worlds—sparkling with the Soviet skepticism of a Jewish novelist who hasn’t quite
unpacked all his baggage in America, darting back and forth like a Nabokovian butterfly between locales, languages, and the Kafkaesque surprises and vexations of life.”

—Thane Rosenbaum, author of *How Sweet It Is!* and *The Golems of Gotham*

“Maxim D. Shrayer has the sharp humor of a Russian literary outsider, the longings of a Jewish émigré, and the artistic discipline to examine his experiences without sentiment or shtick. Nabokov would have read this book with pleasure.”

—David Samuels, literary editor of *Tablet Magazine* and author of *Only Love Can Break Your Heart*

“Maxim D. Shrayer is a precious object: a kind of living Rosetta Stone who embodies multiple literary cultures. In this compelling literary memoir, he moves between the stagnant decades of the late Soviet Union to present-day America, illuminating his tales with dazzling aperçus from the treasure-house of Russian-language literature. Shrayer’s wry, witty, wise, and nuanced writing weaves together strands of Soviet, Russian, Jewish and American culture in moments of translingual epiphany. Now more than ever, his work is a vital reminder of our common humanity.”

—Marcel Theroux, author of *The Sorcerer of Pyongyang* and *Far North*
for Karen, Mira, Tatiana—
my guiding stars