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THE SEARCH FOR CHEKHOV'S DAUGHTER – SECOND PART*

5 – *May 1900 and Nina Korsh's pregnancy*

There is no doubt that Nina Korsh became pregnant at some point in May or early June 1900: 22 February 1901, the birth date of her daughter Tatiana, is attested both by relatives on the back of photos now in Russian archives and by herself in registration forms for Belgrade hotels in the 1920s. All we are unsure of is whether Tatiana's birth date is old style (the Russian Julian calendar was then 13 days behind the western Gregorian calendar), or whether it corresponds to our 7 March 1901. If Anton Chekhov was the father of her child, some leaps of faith are required to support the theory. There is no record of either Nina, or Chekhov mentioning one another in 1900. Nina is presumed to have been studying at the Bestuzhev courses in St Petersburg until the end of May, but in March 1900 she took leave and returned home to Moscow for Easter (22 April). In 1900, right until autumn, Chekhov was settling into his new house in Yalta. Just for a week, from 9 to 17 May, he came to Moscow. It is possible, but not very likely, that he met Nina there: she could have taken a night train to see him and then returned the next night to Petersburg. But the Bestuzhev courses expected students to attend examinations for nearly every day in May. The records of the Bestuzhev courses (in Peterburg's State Archive of History) do not, the archivist informs me, include Nina Korsh in the list of students who failed to attend examinations or left their course early in May 1900. Not until 20 June 1900, when Nina may have begun to suspect she was pregnant, did she address a petition to the director of the Guerrier Women's Courses in Moscow:

‘After receiving secondary education in Moscow's 1st Girls' Grammar School, governed by the department of the Empress Maria, where I graduated in 1893 with a silver medal, and a certificate of qualification as a Domestic Teacher, I enrolled in 1899 in St Petersburg's Higher Women's Courses, where I am at the present time. In view of the fact that my parents live in Moscow, I have the honour to ask most humbly, Your Excellency, to accept me as a student in the physics and mathematics

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department of Higher Women's Courses in Moscow. All the appropriate documents are in the Office of St. Petersburg Higher Women's Courses.'

Chekhov was staying in the Slaviansky Bazaar, one of Moscow's best hotels and restaurants: presumably, he could meet a young woman in his room without embarrassing questions. In his story 'The Lady with the Little Dog' of 1899 Chekhov has his heroine Anna staying at the Slaviansky Bazaar, where her lover, Gurov, comes to meet her. It was less likely (since his relations with the senior Korshes were cool) that he would visit Nina Korsh's parental home, although this was a mere half hour's walk, even for an invalid. His mood that week, to judge by his own and Olga Knipper's comments, and by his activities, was very gloomy and depressed: he was in love with Olga Knipper, but resisting her pressure to commit himself to marriage; he felt ill in the unseasonable heat of May 1900, and he had tiresome literary business to attend to (connected with retrieving and revising his early work for re-publication). He spent 13 May with his closest friend, the publisher Aleksei Suvorin, whom he had summoned from Petersburg by night train, so that they could spend the day walking around two cemeteries until they found Chekhov's father's grave, overgrown after only two years. Towards the end of his stay in Moscow, Chekhov went to visit and examine his old friend, the painter Isaak Levitan, who was bedridden and moribund with a failing heart. In such a difficult week would he have felt a strong urge for a fling with a besotted young student?

The following year, 1901, Anton spent mainly in Yalta, coming to Moscow in spring, first to have, at Olga's insistence, his first thorough medical examination, then to marry and travel on a medical honeymoon to the steppes beyond the Volga and take a six-week course of kumys, fermented mare's milk. The family ructions, with a sister and a mother who felt threatened by his marriage, must have overshadowed thoughts of Nina Korsh. Meanwhile, Nina disappears from the record in 1901: she is not listed in the comprehensive annual address books *All Moscow* and *All Petersburg* in 1902.

It seems that Nina followed convention for well-off young Russian women who fell pregnant out of wedlock. Just like Lika Mizinova in 1894, who conceived a child 'on the rebound' by Anton's friend Ignati Potapenko, Nina went to Paris, where she could hire an apartment, a midwife, a wet-nurse for the birth and return, no questions asked, to Russia. (Parisian archives list by arrondissement every birth in the 19th and early 20th century, but a foreigner who made discreet private arrangements, with no doctor in attendance, could give birth unrecorded.)

Soon after Nina returned, her father legally adopted Tatiana, thus making her a legitimate family heir: the result was an anomaly, for Tatiana now acquired the patronym Fiodorovna, and when in later life she filled in forms she gave her grandfather's name as her father's, but gave Nina's, her actual mother's name, creating the impression of an incestuous union. Tatiana may not ever have been told

the name of her biological father, but she certainly knew that Nina was her mother, not her sister — the family did not resort to the barely plausible fiction that she was a late child by Nina's mother, Ekaterina Ivanovna, who was, at Tatiana's birth, 46 and thus still capable of conceiving.

The first known mention in anyone's letters of Nina Korsh after she gave birth comes very early and from a surprising source: Olga Knipper, Anton's wife. She wrote to him on 27 November, 'Mme Bonnier, auntie Liolia, Nina Korsh, Mrs Yakunchikova, and then Maria Drozdova, Dr Chlenov visited.' (For years nobody would mention the existence of Tatiana in writing.) Never before had Nina been part either of Chekhov's Yalta circle (such as Sofia Bonnier), or his Moscow women friends (Yakunchikova, the artist Maria Drozdova, the venerologist Dr Chlenov), let alone of Olga Knipper's Moscow Arts Theatre circle (which had few actors in common with the Korsh theatre). Nina's pregnancy seemed to have given her an entrée to, instead of a ban from Chekhov's circles (and visiting Olga Knipper inevitably led to meeting Olga's flatmate Maria Chekhova). By now, Nina was a schoolteacher, and that, too, would brought her closer to Maria, who only now was deserting school-teaching to become Anton's Moscow agent and social secretary. Some of Nina's new connections would last for two decades. One might conjecture that the birth of Tatiana was Nina's gateway into the Chekhov family.

On 19 March 1902, just after Olga had left Yalta, following a visit to the Crimea by the Moscow Arts Theatre to perform *Uncle Vanya* for Chekhov, and just before a medical crisis — Olga's ectopic pregnancy (which would horrify Chekhov with its implications for the future of the marriage, and the unlikelihood of any future children), the Korshes reappeared in his life. 'Today Madame Korsh [*Nina's mother*] was coming to see me,' he wrote to Olga. The visit was repeated in the evening two days later. What was the reason for Ekaterina Korsh's visit to the Crimea, and what was talked about? Mid-March was not a good time for rest and recreation in Yalta, which could still be cold and wet: this implies that Ekaterina had come because she had something to discuss.

The following year Nina collected and sent the modest sum of 6 roubles for Chekhov's Yalta charity. The first Korsh to appear in 1903, on 13 March, was Nina's 19-year-old brother, Evgeni, who obligingly gave Chekhov the correct address of Olga and Maria's new apartment (Olga annoyed Chekhov by rarely giving her Moscow or Petersburg address). On 19 October 1903, Nina herself turned up, together with the infant Tatiana: 'Today Nina Korsh and her little girl had dinner with us,' Anton informed Olga. The visit of a single young woman with a baby must have set tongues wagging.

Oddly enough, a similar potentially scandalous event happened two years earlier. Olga Vasilieva, still a teenager, a very wealthy orphan, longing for help in charitably disposing of her fortune, had latched onto Anton Chekhov in Nice in 1897: her squat, childish figure and naïve neediness persuaded everyone that her relationship with Chekhov was unsullied by any sexual attraction. He gave

her a great deal of practical help, more than a sick man should have given, and in spring 1901 she came to Yalta from Nice for further advice, bringing with her a nanny and a little girl of three, Marusia, whom she had adopted, she said, from an orphanage in Smolensk. Anton took to the child. His friend, the writer Aleksandr Kuprin, was bemused to see Marusia clamber onto Anton's knee, and, babbling, run her fingers through his hair. Kuprin had never seen Anton fondling any creature except a dachshund. Gossip would have spread like wildfire, had others seen Anton's letters to Vasilieva, where he called himself Marusia's 'daddy' and jokingly threatened to beat the child: 'How's my lovely, my obedient daughter? Does she remember me?... She'd better behave herself properly and not be naughty, otherwise daddy may well use the cane.' Like Nina Korsh, Olga Vasilieva took the bull by the horns: she went to see Olga Knipper and took singing lessons from her mother, Professor Anna Knipper. Like Nina, she also got to know Doctor Chlenov, and proposed to give him the income from a house she had sold for his new venereal diseases clinic. Nobody in Yalta ever hinted that Marusia, let alone Tatiana Korsh, might be Anton's child.



Nina Korsh, 1906

6 – *Nina Korsh Changes Course*

In the following years Nina Korsh's interactions with Anton Chekhov's sister, mother and widow suggest that she had become a member, albeit outlying, of their family circle. In September 1906 Olga Knipper attended a party given by Varia Eberle, an inseparable friend of Lika Mizinova and a close witness to

Chekhov's frenetic love life ten years earlier: Nina Korsh and her younger sister Varvara were there. In May 1907, Nina and her sister travelled with Maria Chekhova, her mother and servant in the same carriage by train from Moscow to Sevastopol, from where they would sail to Yalta.

The Korshes and Chekhovs lost contact in 1908, when Fiodor Korsh, long troubled by a heart condition, distanced himself from his theatre and moved with his family to the spacious, albeit ugly, villa he had constructed in the new 'artistic' settlement of Golitsyno, some 25 miles west of Moscow. Here, Nina was preoccupied with bringing up Tania, looking after her father and teaching the children of other villa owners.

Something darker must have been brewing in Nina's mind since the birth of Tatiana: in her list of translations, one book stands out from the farces and ephemera she worked on for her father's theatre. Nina published in 1905 her translation from the German of an angry and eloquent (and little known) feminist tract by Ruth Bré (real name Elisabeth Bouness, 1862–1911), *The Right to Motherhood. An Appeal to Struggle with Prostitution and Sexual Diseases* [*Das Recht auf die Mutterschaft: Eine Forderung zur Bekämpfung der Prostitution, der Frauen- und Geschlechtskrankheiten*] of 1903. Elisabeth Bouness, like the Korsh ancestors, came from in Silesia, but she was born out of wedlock and unregistered. She endured a tough foster-family's upbringing, but, at 19, took a one-year women's teacher's training course which could lead to a post in a village school only if the graduate took a vow of celibacy. Bouness-Bré wrote lyrical poetry, but like Nina, however, also produced a series of farces, before choosing a new pseudonym for her infuriated protest against a patriarchy in which sexually contented males reduced women to frustrated celibates, diseased prostitutes, or impoverished and ostracised single mothers, and thus deprived them of the chance to found a family. She insisted on the right of unmarried women to have families and to enjoy respect, if only because they outnumbered men and there was not enough potential, willing or unmercenary husbands. She protested against the exclusion of women from the civil service, from business, and against the number of women's jobs that demanded celibacy. Bouness-Bré also sympathised with the views of the feminist Elisabeth Dauthendey that women wanted 'the precious drink' of love from 'golden bowls', not just the leftovers that men, who had squandered their youth and health on debauchery with whores, thought they could give a wife: venereal diseases made men fearsome and deadly, not just despicable. Bouness-Bré admired the Iroquois and the Cameroonians for their matriarchal view of the role of the sexes. After publishing her tract, she founded *The Union for the Protection of Mothers* [*Der Bund für Mutterschutz*], a society which the Nazis later exploited for their own ideology, but which fell victim to fears of 'dangerous women's rights nonsense' in 1970s Germany.

In autumn 1914, World War One changed everything. Nina Korsh stopped translating in 1908, after her father sold his lease of the theatre. She was, to judge by *All Moscow* for 1908, employed around 1907 as a teacher at the Rzhevskaya Women's Grammar-school, where Maria Chekhov and many of Chekhov's women friends had taught. By January 1908 Nina taught every other day in a progressive Moscow school, founded on Tolstoyan principles, *The House of the Free Child*, and subscribed to the monthly journal *Free Upbringing*. In 1914 she had moved to the Golovachiova private girls' school, and lived with Tatiana, separately from her parents. Then she abandoned teaching and became, like thousands of patriotic, well-educated Russian women, a Red Cross nurse in a Moscow military hospital. Here she found her vocation, and in December 1916 was awarded a gold medal and the order of St Anne, equivalent to one of the highest military medals.

Переписка въ дѣлѣ 88 1916 года.

Фамилія К О Р Ш Ъ

Имя и отчество Нина 225

Чинь или званіе Дворянка

Постоян. служба, должность

Должность по Красному Кресту Лаа. № 84 при Донск. 2-мъ городск. учил.
въ г. Москвѣ

Награда Золот. нагрудн. мед. на Аннинской лентѣ

Время ея пожалованія 15 ДЕК 1916

№ 64 часть 4 32207

Nina Korsh's nursing award record, 15 December 1916

Tatiana, still a schoolgirl, may have been a trainee nurse in the hospital, set up in a Moscow school, where her mother was working. According to Serbian sources, before she was seventeen, when the Russian countryside was already becoming impassable as the Bolshevik coup d'état turned into a civil war between the Reds and the Whites, Tatiana managed to join the White Army of Generals Denikin and Vrangel in the South. She had an aunt, her father's sister, in Gendzhik on the Black Sea coast, but was soon working as a volunteer nurse on the highly unstable front line in the Crimea. Nursing here was as dangerous as fighting, in fact more so: nurses wore phials with a fatal dose of morphine on a neck-

lace so as to avoid being raped, tortured and murdered if captured by the Reds. Few survived. For some three years she was cut off from her family. Her grandfather Fiodor, primarily because of his failing health, but still working as a committee member of the *Society of Dramatists and Opera Composers*, also came south to Gelendzhik in 1917: revolution cut him off.

Not until summer 1920 did Nina managed to travel the now almost defunct Russian railway system and visit the Caucasus: she had to tell her father that her mother Ekaterina had died on 8 November 1919. They did not know what had happened to Tatiana, but Nina resisted the White army's invitation to join the nurses in the Crimea, where the eventual triumph of the Reds, now that most armed opposition and the Bolsheviks' war with Poland were coming to an end, seemed inevitable. Eventually, Nina and her father returned to Golitsyno, where they could no longer be sure of being allowed to live in their concrete villa, and to Moscow.



Tatiana Korsh, c. 1918

In the Crimea Tatiana was not just a nurse, but a courier: she was nominated for the George Cross for her courage in retrieving wounded soldiers from the battlefield. At the end of 1920, as the White Army was driven towards the sea by the Reds and degenerated into a panicking crowd of refugees scrambling onto any ship, military or civilian, French, Turkish or British, leaving Russian, now Soviet, territory for Istanbul, Tatiana left her homeland. She may have travelled in the company of a 22-year-old White army captain, Igor Zavadsky-Krasnopolsky, in which case they would have landed in Gallipoli in Turkey and proceeded via Bul-

garia to Serbia, now part of the newly formed Kingdom of Yugoslavia. Serbia, one of the European countries that in 1921 welcomed Russian refugees with open arms, gave them housing, subsidies, university and army places, even wives. (Serbia had a terrible toll of male war casualties, and the influx of refugees, mainly military men, redressed the demographic imbalance, as well as providing much needed medical, intellectual and military personnel.)

Nina still did not know what had happened to her daughter: in November 1920 she wrote from Gelendzhik to Maria Chekhova, who was sitting out the worst of the civil war in Yalta in the Chekhov villa: 'I've just heard of the occupation of Crimea by our [Red] troops and I write to you in haste. Would you have any news of my Tania? If you do, for God's sake write to the following address, Sanatorium № 1, Gelendzhik, where I work as a nurse in the children's sanatorium. Papa is in Gelendzhik.' Nina wrote again on 6 December, but had no reply to either letter. When Nina and Fiodor returned to Golitsyno, she tried to set up a kindergarten for the local peasant children, and he used his remaining strength to sort out, as far as possible in the USSR, where private property had virtually been abolished, his children's inheritance.

7 – Mother and Daughter Reunited

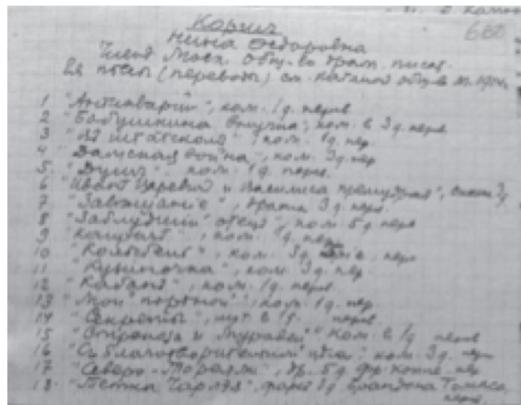
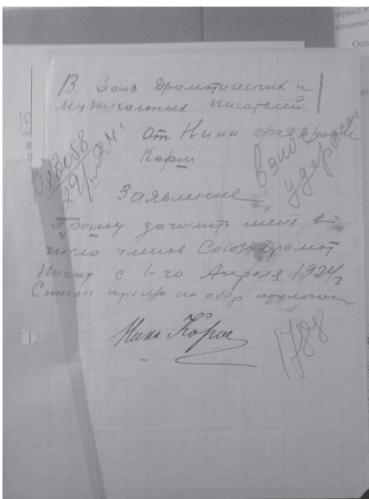
In 1922, Nina Korsh prepared to leave the USSR to join her daughter — by then no easy task, even though Nina had under the Tsars had a passport for foreign travel. First of all, the family's remaining property had to be reassigned: the plays registered by the Korsh theatre with the *Society of Russian Playwrights and Opera Composers* were one of the few kinds of private property recognised by the Soviet government, which maintained the Tsarist system by which theatres paid authors (or translators, if the author was foreign) 2% of their gross ticket sales for each of up to five acts of any play or opera performed. These royalties were the only certain income remaining to the Korsh family. In August 1918, as he left for the Caucasus, Fiodor Korsh notified the *Society* that he had sold his rights for all but one of his plays to his daughter Nina for the token sum of 300 roubles. If Nina were to leave the country to join Tatiana in Serbia, the income from these plays would be forfeited. On 29 September 1923, just one month before he died, Fiodor Korsh wrote to the *Society* with a new transfer: 'By agreement with my daughter Nina Fiodorovna, I withdraw the document concluded with her on 22 August 1918... and transfer to my son Evgeni Fiodorovich Korsh the property rights for all my plays included so far in the *Society's* catalogue (with the exception of *The Matchmaker*)'.

Fiodor Korsh died of old age, his certificate states, on 29 October 1923 at Golitsyno. The following spring Nina signed a document (whether in advance, or while abroad — the signature is definitely hers) requesting, 'I ask to be admit-

ted as a member of the Union of Playwrights from 1 April 1924. I add a list of my works on the reverse of this letter.’ (Some 22 plays were listed.) On 24 February, the Commissariat of Education authorised the *Society* to pay Fiodor Korsh’s son Evgeni the royalties his father used to receive, but on 26 February, Nina’s brother Evgeni, on People’s Commissar Lunacharsky’s authorisation, renounced all royalties inherited from his father and resigned from the *Society*, leaving Nina as the sole recipient of future royalties.

When did Nina leave the USSR? Maria Drozdova wrote to Maria Chekhova 25 January 1922, ‘I met Nina Korsh, we were terribly happy to see one another’. (Nina was then reported setting up a kindergarten in Golitsyno.) Nina probably left in spring 1922, for on 5 May, now that the USSR had established diplomatic relations with most European countries, leaving the USSR legally became much harder (leaving illegally was potentially lethal): ‘only by special authorisation from the People’s Commissariat of Foreign Affairs... in the form of a visa stamped on foreign passports issued to the traveller. Before this, the person leaving must apply to the *State Political Administration* [GPU, secret police] and show a residence permit, a guarantee from two citizens of the Russian Federal Soviet Republic who have no criminal conviction and are not under investigation, a certificate from a place of work or record office that there are no obstacles to travelling abroad, in which case the GPU will issue a certificate of the absence of any legal obstacle to exit.’

Why did Nina belatedly join the *Society of Dramatists and Opera Composers* in 1924? If she was abroad, the roubles she earned would not be convertible. Only if she intended to return, perhaps with Tatiana, to the USSR, would the money be of any use.



Nina Korsh’s application of 1924, and list of plays

In 1922 Tatiana registered as a member of the *Union of Russian Students in Belgrade University* and enrolled in the medical faculty, where her nursing experience qualified her for entry to a degree course in medicine. On 11 July 1922, in Zemun (a formerly Hungarian town that in 1918 became a satellite of metropolitan Belgrade) Tatiana married Captain Igor Vladimirovich Zavadsky-Krasnopolsky, who had a meteoric rise in the White Volunteer Army, rising from 2nd lieutenant in March to Staff Captain in April. He was three years older than her, from a good Petersburg family and school. His Gallipoli associations, however, led him into the murkiest circles of the Russian emigration. He stayed with Tatiana only for three years, before moving to France as a protégé of General Skoblin, under whom he had fought in Crimea. France selected Zavadsky-Krasnopolsky from the *Office for the Protection of Refugees and Stateless Persons* and enlisted him in their security services, while he declared himself a follower of the *Russian National Labour Union of Russian Solidarists (NTS)*, a well-established group of émigrés, many of them military, some intellectual, who were anti-Soviet and later anti-Stalinist, but abjured violence and were inclined to compromise with ‘softer’ elements in the USSR. They were easily infiltrated by the successors of the Cheka, OGPU and the NKVD, and Igor soon became a double (if not a triple agent). From 1930 to 1935 he appears to have been on an intelligence mission in Bulgaria, from where he was expelled. Back in France, he lived with a Russian milliner and collaborated with General Skoblin and the singer Nadezhda Plevitskaya in kidnapping and, in effect, murdering two White generals at the behest of the Soviet secret police. Although suspected, the *NTS* kept him on. When France fell to the Nazis in 1940, the Gestapo was in two minds whether to use the *NTS* or to exterminate them. Igor was arrested and sent to Sachsenhausen concentration camp, where a Gestapo ‘handler’, Josef Dedio, saved him and gave him a salary and a car, with instructions to report on the illegal activities of Russian forced labourers in Germany. At the end of the war, both Dedio and Zavadsky-Krasnopolsky were in Prague: Dedio slipped through de-nazification and ended his days as a furniture dealer in Bad Homburg, Igor just vanished from history.

Deserted, by 1926 Tatiana was granted a divorce. She concentrated on her medical studies and in 1930 graduated as a doctor. A condition of her studies was that she should serve wherever the government sent her: they chose the small town of Aleksandrovac, in southern Serbia, near Kosovo: the town now had its first doctor. Nina accompanied her there. In their registration forms, Tatiana is recorded as divorced, and Nina first as a ‘housewife’ and later as a ‘widow’.

Tatiana was welcomed to Aleksandrovac in the wine-making province of Župa by Dobrivoje Ger Popović, a popular maecenas and member of the Yugoslav parliament, who had been a volunteer regimental doctor and in 1928 served for four months as minister of health in the Yugoslav government. With initial American aid, Popović set up a number of walk-in clinics in the main provincial villag-

es and towns. These were medical cooperatives, where the local inhabitants, after paying a subscription of 50 dinars (then equal to one dollar), were treated free of charge (Брборић 2006: 89). Tatiana had by 1931 remarried, since she was now known as Korsh-Popirev.

Nina's husband, to judge by the surname Rustem recorded in the Russian archives, seems to have been a Bosnian Muslim or a Kosovar. The two women brought with them to Aleksandrovac an orphaned Russian girl, called Aleksandra, whom they had adopted from the nunnery at Hopovo (on Fruška Gora in north-west Serbia, on the Croatian border). Tatiana died of pneumonia on 11 January 1938 and is buried in the Aleksandrovac cemetery. Her grave stone is inscribed Korsh-Popireva, but so far, we know nothing of her presumed husband Popirev (the surname is not Serbian, but may be Bulgarian, Ukrainian or, as Popyrev, even Russian). After 1946, a cross was added to the grave stone with a small portrait of an elderly woman, presumably Nina Korsh.



Tatiana and Nina Korsh's grave in Aleksandrovac

Смрт жене-лекара коју оплакује цела жупа

Александровац, 13. јануара

После неколико дана боловања умрла је у крушевачкој болници од запаљена оба плућна крила гђа др. Татјана Корш, лекар Среске здравствене задруге у Александровцу.

Веома спремна, вредна и пожртвована лекарка, Коршова је за неколико година својим енергичним радом стекла велики број поштовалаца у срезовима жупском и коцкиничком. Рад Коршове у овоме крају може да послужи за пример како се и колике се жртве подносе за добро ближњих: она никада није жаљала труда да и у најхладније и најопасније време иде сама, јашући јакоњу, у неко доба ноћи, по забаченим селима, која су по десетину и више километара била удаљена од Александровца, само кад је у питању човечији живот, а нарочито када су у питању биле породице.

Њена смрт изазвала је велико и ретко узбуђење у целој Жупи. Јер је Коршова оставила у овом крају само лепе и светле успомене.

Tatiana's obituary in Politika 15 January 1938

8 – Back in the USSR

By the early 1920s, Nina's brother Evgeni, unable to beget children, was divorced from his wife Serafima, who remarried and became famous as Serafima Fonskaya, for decades the director of the Golitsyno villa, which became a rest home and cultural centre for writers and artists. Evgeni is said to have died in 1937, a date that coincides with the worst of the Great Terror, in which a person of his background (gentry, with a sister and a niece living abroad) and with his surname (Germanic-sounding) may well have been a victim. Nina's younger sister, Varvara, was married to Vladimir Sablin, a famous bookseller with connections to the Chekhov family: Sablin died in 1916, but Varvara had three distinguished sons by him: an army commander Iuri, executed in Stalin's purge of the Red Army; Vladimir, a film director, who lived until 1974; Igor, a journalist who spent 25 years in Stalin's camps— while Varvara died in 1955. In the 1930s, it was very dangerous for a Soviet citizen to keep up correspondence with foreign relatives: only at the end of World War Two, when many in Russia expected a relaxation of Stalin's xenophobic paranoia, as a result of the war-time alliance with Britain and the USA, did Varvara manage to exchange a few letters with Nina.

In 1945 she told the artist Maria Drozdova that she was expecting Nina ‘to return from “evacuation”’ (the word ‘emigration’ was too dangerous to use in correspondence), and that Tania had died.

By 1941, Nina had married (or remarried), to judge by her registration document which has a note: ‘For the first time with her husband Jovan’. In any case, however, Nina may have been too afraid to go back to Russia: with one nephew executed as a traitor, and another a prisoner in the camps, a return to the USSR could have sent her straight to the Gulag. She stayed in Serbia, where she died in 1946. On 22 January 1949, Varvara wrote to Maria Chekhova:

‘Dear Maria Pavlovna, I heard yesterday via Vsevolod Sablin [*her nephew*] that you asked to be told of the fate of Nina Fiodorovna and Tanya. I was very touched that you remembered us. But both have now died. [...] Tanya was a doctor and Nina taught Russian and French. Tanya died in February 1938 of pneumonia. I managed to get in touch with Nina, after many years of silence, in January 1946 we exchanged two or three letters, then I received news of her death on 12 February of that year. All those eight years of solitude were inner torment for her, after all, if Tanya hadn’t been out there, she would never have left, and anyway she had a bad heart and after an operation for cancer of the right breast fifteen years previously she had gradually lost the use of her right arm. It all turned out so sad. [...]’

To this day, on the appropriate saints’ days, someone places flowers on Tatiana Korsh’s grave.

Conclusion

Only DNA from Tatiana Korsh can confirm or refute the conjecture that Tatiana Korsh was Chekhov’s daughter. Anton Chekhov’s DNA is, however, now available through the Israeli biotechnologist Professor Gleb Silberstein, who analysed a bloodstain on the shirt Chekhov wore on his deathbed (and which his widow never washed) for traces of his medication and for the immediate cause of death. Exhumation from a Serbian cemetery, however, would never be authorised, but documents (especially stamps or envelopes) which Tatiana may have handled can give DNA samples. So far, we can only guess the likelihood that Anton Chekhov was Tatiana Korsh’s father: subjectively, I would estimate this at 40–50%.

Acknowledgements and sources

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Доналд Рејфилд

ПОТРАГА ЗА ЧЕХОВЉЕВОМ ЋЕРКОМ

Резиме

Деведесетих година прошлог века почеле су да круже гласине да је око 1901. Чехов постао отац ћерке Нине Корш, ћерке Фјодора Корша, који је поставио Чеховљевог *Иванова*. Од тада су гласине постале уверљивије. Извор је био поуздан – Алиса Шебалина, удовица композитора, која је одрасла с тим дететом и којој је мајка поверила ко је њен отац. Али с друге стране не постоји никаква писана или слична потврда о томе. Докази који се наводе у овом чланку потичу из преписке Антона Чехова, Марије Чехове и њеног круга, као и породице Фјодора Корша. То могу бити индиректни показатељи да те гласине имају основе. Зачеће се сигурно одиграло у мају 1900. године, када је Нина Корш похађала Бестужевљеве курсеве у Санкт-Петербургу, а Антон Чехов био у Москви поводом неодложних обавеза. Међутим, распоред Ниних испита и Чеховљево мрачно расположење смањују изгледе да се љубавна афера догодила. Године 1903. Нина и њено дете посетили су Чехова на Јалти, што је чињеница коју Чехов преноси својој супрузи без коментара. Но, Нина се мења – постоје близак пријатељ Чеховљевих кругова (његове сестре и удовице), феминисткиња, а затим и болничарка у рату. Татјанина каријера је слична – мајка и ћерка емигрирале су у Југославији, где је Татјана постала доктор, а умрла је 1938. године од последица упале плућа (сличности с Чеховљевог судбином могу, наравно, бити чиста случајност). Очинство је могуће, али га само упоређивање ДНК може потврдити.

Кључне речи: живот Антона Чехова и његовог круга, руско позориште на прелазу из 19. у 20. век, породица Корш, руска емиграција у Краљевини СХС.