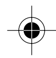

A Scandal in Letters: Nina Berberova and the Nazi Occupation of France

SIGGY FRANK

The Russian émigré writer Nina Berberova is widely known for her famously unreliable memoirs of the cultural, social, and political life of the First Wave Russian emigration, *The Italics Are Mine* (1969).[1] Within the Russian emigration she became also notorious for a scandal that erupted around her alleged Nazi collaboration in the aftermath of the Second World War. Rumors about Berberova started emerging from 1941 onward in a complex exchange of letters between writers, journalists and political figures of the Russian emigration in France and the United States. Beginning in the late 1930s, as established European émigré centers in Berlin, Paris, and Prague were or came under German administration and lost their formal institutions and a regular press, the Russian émigré community created and sustained its public discourse mainly by writing and reading letters. For a dispersed community, these missives—which were regularly forwarded, copied, or cited to third parties and read aloud at private and public meetings—provided crucial news and commentary on current affairs. Once regular postal traffic between the émigré communities in France and the United States had been reestablished in the winter of 1944–45, rumors and hearsay relating to Berberova's alleged wrongdoing during the Second World War proliferated in émigré correspondence and formed the basis for newspaper articles that listed her name alongside other alleged Russian collaborators. In September 1945, Berberova took drastic measures to defend herself against these allegations, writing an open letter to Mark Aldanov, one of the most successful émigré writers and a recognized moral authority, which she

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[1]Berberova's autobiography was first published in English translation, *The Italics Are Mine*, trans. Philip Radley (New York, 1969). The Russian original was published three years later as *Kursiv moi* (Munich, 1972), followed by revised editions in Russian (New York, 1983), French (*C'est moi qui souligne* [Arles, 1989]), and English (London, 1991).

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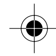

copied to leading figures of the literary, cultural, and political establishment of the Russian emigration. Yet, rather than putting the matter to rest, this public declaration of innocence only fueled intense discussions among Russian émigré writers in the autumn of 1945 about Berberova's role during the Nazi occupation of France.

The rumors, which circulated during and immediately after the war, alleged that Berberova had directly collaborated with the Germans, written propaganda for them, and invited other émigrés (notably Ivan Bunin and Vadim Rudnev) to the German-occupied zone of France to join other Russian émigrés in their support of the Nazis. She was said to have written a poem that favorably compared Hitler to Shakespeare.[2] She was also deemed guilty by association; it was alleged that her husband, Nikolas Makeev, had been a fervent pro-Nazi (who had supposedly even adopted the German aristocratic "von" in his name) and had profited from the sale of paintings expropriated from French Jews. She was accused of having established a literary salon in Paris, funded by the German occupiers, designed to facilitate an ideological rapprochement between émigrés and Nazis.[3] Rumors about Berberova's lavish lifestyle under the occupation—a time of severe hardship for a large part of the Russian community in France—particularly infuriated many émigrés. There is no evidence that Berberova ever invited other writers to return to Paris with the intention of recruiting them for the propaganda apparatus of the Nazis, or that she engaged in any concrete form of collaboration with the German occupiers. In the letter to Aldanov, Berberova did, however, admit that for a brief period she regarded Nazi ideology as a viable alternative to the crisis-stricken liberalism of interwar Europe, sentiments which she also expressed elsewhere.[4]

Berberova ascribed the accusations of Nazi collaboration to personal "jalousie," yet the distinctly public nature of the discourse about her suggests that her alleged transgressions had a wider symbolic significance for the Russian intellectual emigration as a whole.[5] Given that a scandal is the product less of a particular secret transgression (whether real or alleged) of accepted norms than of the public discourse about that transgression, I argue here that the Berberova scandal was a symptom of the deepening fault lines between Russian and Russian-Jewish writers that Leonid Livak has identified in the Russian émigré community in postwar France.[6] While émigré discourse largely failed to acknowledge this emerging

[2]A typescript of the poem (initially entitled "Zaklinanie") was enclosed in Berberova's letter to Boris Zaitsev, August 6, 1943, Bakhmeteff Archive of Russian and East European Culture (BAR), Boris Konstantinovich Zaitsev Papers, box 1. In the *teatrum mundi* tradition, the poem depicts the German invasion of the Soviet Union as one of Shakespeare's bloody tragedies and implores Shakespeare to intervene. It was subsequently published in a collection of Russian émigré poems under a different title, "Shekspiru," in *Na zapade*, ed. Iu. P. Ivask (New York, 1953), 99–100.

[3]Iakov Polonsky [to Mark Aldanov], March 28, 1942, Dom muzei Mariny Tsvetaevoi, KP-732/164, l. 16.

[4]In a 1942 letter to the Russian writer Ivanov-Razumnik, Berberova also mentioned the feeling of hope she had in 1940 following the German invasion of France. See Ol'ga Raevskaia-Kh'iuz [Hughes], ed., *Vstrecha s emigratsiei: Iz perepiski Ivanova-Razumnika 1942–1946 godov* (Moscow, 2001), 44.

[5]Maksim Shraer [Shrayer], Iakov Klots, and Richard Devis [Davies], eds., "Perepiska I. A. Bunina i N. N. Berberovoi (1927–1946)," in *I. A. Bunin: Novye materialy*, vol. 2, ed. Oleg Korostelev and Richard Devis (Moscow, 2010), 106.

[6]See, for instance, John B. Thompson, *Political Scandal: Power and Visibility in the Media Age* (Cambridge, England, 2000); John Garrad and James L. Newell, eds., *Scandals in Past and Contemporary Politics* (Manchester, 2006); and Johannes Ehrat, *Power of Scandal: Semiotic and Pragmatic in Mass Media* (Toronto,

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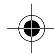

rift or the distinct identities and divergent experience of Russian-Jewish writers during the German occupation, the Berberova scandal marks a moment in émigré history when a small group of influential intellectuals tried to put the suffering of Russian-Jewish writers during the war years and the covert anti-Semitism in parts of the Russian emigration on the agenda. To this end, Berberova came to stand in for those Russian émigré writers who were seen to have been indifferent to the suffering of their Russian-Jewish colleagues during the occupation and who, in Livak's words, accepted the fate of their Russian-Jewish colleagues as "collateral damage."[7] This article therefore looks beyond the issue of Berberova's guilt or innocence and instead examines the function of the scandal and its underlying ideological conflicts within the complex process by which the Russian emigration negotiated its own demise as a culturally distinct group with a shared purpose during and after the Second World War.

Berberova was by no means the only Russian émigré writer accused of collaboration with the Nazis, but she commanded a disproportionally large amount of space in the correspondence of the literary and cultural elite during and after the Second World War. The judgment of her as a callous opportunist under the German occupation might have been shaped to some extent by lingering resentments among émigrés over her abandonment of Vladislav Khodasevich in 1932 (rather than fulfilling the role of dutiful wife to his literary genius). At least as important a factor, however, were the letters she had sent to other Russian émigré writers. The writer Boris Zaitsev identified these very letters as her principal mistake in the evolving scandal: ''She did only one stupid thing—she wrote something incautious to [Georgii] Adamovich!"[8] In the context of the distinct epistolary culture of the Russian emigration, which tended to conflate private and public correspondence, her personal letters became part of the public discourse. While other émigrés were merely suspected of having had Nazi sympathies, the letters' material existence was used as incriminating evidence against Berberova and her political views. Berberova's case, then, offered an ideal opportunity to probe the limits of a new political consensus spanning both the public and the private spheres.

Scholarly histories of the First-Wave Russian emigration tend to break off at the outbreak of the Second World War, implying that the geographical dispersal of émigrés in the wake of the German occupation of France marked the end of the cultural and political life of Russia Abroad.[9] Similarly, émigré memoirs of that period generally omit the war years, which is motivated, Livak has shown, by the attempt to avoid the difficult topic of the divergent experiences of Russian-Jewish and Russian writers during the war years.[10] It is symptomatic of this periodization that the Berberova scandal has not attracted much attention

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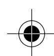
2011). See also Leonid Livak, "Two Solitudes of Russia Abroad: Russian and Russian-Jewish Writers in the Aftermath of World War II," paper presented at the ASEEES Convention, Philadelphia, November 2015.

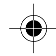
[7]See Livak, "Two Solitudes of Russia Abroad."

[8]M. Grin, ed., "Pis'ma B. K. Zaitseva k I. A. i V. N. Buninym," January 14, 1945, *Novyi zhurnal* 140 (1980): 165.

[9]See, for instance, Mark Raeff, *Russia Abroad: A Cultural History of the Russian Emigration, 1919–1939* (New York, 1990); and Gleb Struve, *Russkaia literatura v izgnanii: Opyt istoricheskogo obzora zarubezhnoi literatury* (New York, 1956). Robert H. Johnston, *New Mecca, New Babylon: Paris and the Russian Exiles, 1920–1945* (Kingston, 1988), covers the war years only in a cursory fashion in a brief chapter.

[10]Livak, "Two Solitudes of Russia Abroad."





in academic debates of the First-Wave Russian emigration. Berberova's circular letter was initially published as part of an eclectic selection of documents from the Sophia Pregel Collection without commentary or context.[11] It was republished by Oleg Budnitsky, who attempted to verify the facts of the "Delo Berberovoi" and her conduct during the occupation, based on a selection of related émigré letters.[12] While his conclusion—that the iconoclasm of her autobiography is Berberova's vindictive response to her accusers in the aftermath of the German occupation of France—is uncontroversial, Budnitsky's suggestion that the rumors about Berberova might have had a sound base sparked an ill-tempered exchange with Omry Ronen, who cited primarily circumstantial evidence (including reported slurs against her accusers) in Berberova's defense.[13] Although Budnitsky and Ronen arrived at different verdicts, their spat revealed a shared focus on the question of whether Berberova was guilty of any transgressions. The recent publication of correspondence between Bunin and Berberova, scrupulously edited by Maxim Shrayer, Yakov Klots, and Richard Davies, has since considerably advanced our knowledge of this episode and identified a wider group of players who were involved in the complex exchange of correspondence which generated the scandal.[14] This has opened the way to approach the Berberova scandal from a new angle, shifting the focus away from evidence regarding her rumored wartime transgressions onto the public discourse about her conduct and the competing agendas which generated it.

A MELTING *PASKHA*: CONFLICTING ÉMIGRÉ IDEOLOGIES

The widespread interest in Berberova's wartime activities must be seen in the context of the radical ideological shifts the émigré community underwent during and immediately after the war. Throughout the 1920s and 1930s the First-Wave Russian emigration defined itself through its relationship with the Soviet Union, or what Livak calls "the emigration's founding myth of heroic anti-Soviet struggle."[15] The scandals that shook the Russian emigration in this period erupted invariably over the discovery of pro-Soviet sympathies or actions among trusted émigrés, such as Nadezhda Plevitskaya and her husband's involvement in criminal NKVD activities, or the unmasking of Sergei Efron, Marina Tsvetaeva's husband, as a covert NKVD agent. Russian émigré writers translated this anti-Soviet consensus into opposition to all forms of Soviet literature. Livak has demonstrated that, within émigré discourse, Soviet literature became a negative touchstone against which the authenticity of true Russian literary values could be measured: "Soviet and émigré literatures were, by 1930, locked in a mutually defining relationship based on the esthetics of opposition—they rejected each other's values as 'noncultural.'" Maintaining the nineteenth-century view of

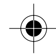
[11]Iuliia Gaukhman, ed., "Iz arkhiva Sof'i Iul'evny Pregel'," in *Evrei v kul'ture russkoi zarubezh'ia*, vol. 4, ed. M. Parkhomovskii (Jerusalem, 1995), 278–91.

[12]See Oleg V. Budnitskii, "'Delo' Niny Berberovoi," *Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie* 39 (1999): 141–73.

[13]See Omry Ronen, "Iz goroda Enn: Berberova (1901–2001)," *Zvezda* 7 (2001): 213–20; and Oleg Budnitskii, "Neladnoe chto-to v 'gorode Enn,'" *Zvezda* 7 (2002): 234–35.

[14]"Perepiska I. A. Bunina i N. N. Berberovoi (1927–1946)."

[15]Leonid Livak, *The Jewish Persona in the European Imagination: A Case of Russian Literature* (Stanford, 2010), 294.



a Russian writer as a "socio-political prophet," the discourse in émigré literature formulated the anti-Soviet stance as a moral and aesthetic imperative synonymous with the very notion of being a Russian émigré writer.[16]

The German invasion of the Soviet Union in June 1941 was a watershed moment for the ideological orientation of émigrés, kindling support for the German army as the potential liberator of the Russian fatherland on the one hand, but also a new-found patriotism for the Russian homeland, albeit under Soviet control, on the other. While pro-Nazi sentiments could be easily reconciled with the anti-Bolshevik norms of the interwar years, the firm anti-Nazism of the patriotic position tended to involve a significant modification of the formerly uncompromising anti-Soviet stance. As Fascism became the new agreed standard of political iniquity in the patriotic camp, Bolshevism was demoted to being the lesser of two evils. Aldanov, for example, would later admit that he welcomed the victories of the Red Army.[17] And Vasiliy Maklakov, the former Russian ambassador and spokesman for the Russian émigré community in France, thought that "a Soviet victory would be better [than a German victory] for Russia even if this strengthened the Soviets."[18] It is an indication of the impact this paradigm shift had that Vladimir Nabokov, a deliberately a-political writer, wrote the poem "No Matter How" (1943), which fiercely condemned the widespread softening of anti-Bolshevik resistance.[19] The disintegration of the anti-Soviet consensus among the Russian emigration would eventually become manifest in February 1945, when Maklakov, together with a group of pro-Soviet émigrés, accepted a formal invitation to the Soviet embassy in Paris.[20] The explicit legitimization of a potential rapprochement with the Soviet Union by a prominent Kadet with considerable political weight such as Maklakov marked for some no less than the end of the Russian emigration, while Aldanov cited Nabokov's idea of the emigration as a Russian *paskha* that had melted into a sticky, shapeless mess by Easter Monday.[21]

[16]Leonid Livak, *How It Was Done in Paris: Russian Émigré Literature and French Modernism* (Madison, 2003), 29, 16 (see ibid., 14–44, for an excellent discussion of the complex interaction of Soviet and émigré aesthetics).

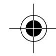
[17]Aldanov to Boris Isaakovich [Elkin], July 16, 1945, BAR, Mark Aleksandrovich Aldanov Papers, box 11.

[18]Maklakov to Kerensky, June 21, 1945, BAR, Vladimir Mikhailovich Zenzinov Papers, box 1.

[19]"No matter how the Soviet tinsel glitters/ upon the canvas of a battle piece; no matter how the soul dissolves in pity,/ I will not bend, I will not cease/ loathing the filth, brutality and boredom/ of silent servitude. No, no, I shout,/ my spirit is still quick, still exile-hungry,/ I'm still a poet, count me out!" («Каким бы полотном батальным ни являлась/ советская сусальнейшая Русь,/ какой бы жалостью душа ни наполнялась,/ не поклонюсь, не примирюсь/ со всею мерзостью, жестокостью и скукой/ немого рабства – нет, о, нет,/ еще я духом жив, еще не сыт разлукой,/ увольте, я еще поэт.»). See Simon Karlinsky, ed., *Dear Bunny, Dear Volodya: The Nabokov-Wilson Letters, 1940–1971*, rev. ed. (Berkeley, 2001), 109. The poem was written in 1943 in response to a request for new work from the New York émigré magazine *Novosel'e*. The poem was not published in *Novosel'e*, which had a patriotic orientation. Instead it circulated informally among Russian émigrés in New York and eventually made its way into the New York-based *Sotsialisticheskii vestnik* (5/6 [1944]), where it was published anonymously (*Nabokov-Wilson Letters*; 140–41).

[20]See "Emigranty u Bogomolova," *Novyi zhurnal* 100 (1970): 270-72; David Bethea, "1944–1953: Ivan Bunin and the Time of Troubles in Russian Émigré Literature," *Slavic Review* 43:1 (1984): 5–7; and O. V. Budnitskii, "Popytka primireniia," in *Diaspora: Novye materialy*, ed. Vladimir Alloi, vol. 1 (St. Petersburg, 2001), 179–240.

[21]Mark Vishniak, for instance, declared in the aftermath of Maklakov's visit that the Russian emigration no longer existed (see Budnitsky, "Popytka primireniia," 181). See also Aldanov to Boris Isaakovich [Elkin],



These conflicting reactions to the German invasion of the Soviet Union brought to the surface an emerging division between Russian-Jewish and Russian émigrés. During the interwar period, the dominant Christian culture within the Russian emigration left little space for Russian-Jewish writers to develop a consciously Russian-Jewish ethnoreligious or artistic identity. Russian-Jewish writers negotiated their place in the literary hierarchy of the Russian emigration by adopting assimilative strategies, like Aldanov, or risking artistic marginalization, like Iurii Fel'zen. This ambiguous position of Russian-Jewish writers, let alone any explicit distinction along ethnoreligious lines, was rarely articulated in an émigré literary discourse marked by a distinct "asemitizm."[22] In a similar vein, the question of anti-Semitism was conspicuously absent in debates about Nazism before and during the war.[23] But support for the German invasion implied sympathy for—or at least acceptance of—the Nazis' anti-Semitic ideology, which held far-reaching implications for Russian-Jewish writers. "How many [émigrés]," wondered the journalist Iakov Polonsky after the war,

> though not compromising themselves through active collaboration (because they were too cautious), condoned the liberation of Russia from the Soviet regime at such a price? It isn't as if [people from our circle] were without blame, but who of us could have reconciled themselves with the promised land (in the widest possible sense [that is, Russia]) for the price of the physical extinction of a whole innocent people? But a lot of Russian émigrés (including Democrats and Socialists) were able to do so.[24]

Russian émigrés with Nazi sympathies, even if primarily motivated by a continued anti-Bolshevik stance, continued to maintain a literary hierarchy in which the concerns of Russian-Jewish writers were subordinated to the interests of the ethnic-Russian majority. Berberova was accused of precisely this disregard for her Jewish colleagues. The literary critic Adamovich, for instance, reported her has having written to him that the "battle between different races is by definition not the concern of a Russian writer."[25] Excluding Russian-Jewish writers as a separate "race" from émigré literature, Berberova here explicitly stated her indifference to Jewish problems, which is underpinned by the idea that any Russian-Jewish concerns are too specific to be assimilated to the set of national values marking the Russian writerly identity.

Responses to the Berberova scandal can be mapped neatly across these political divisions. Although by no means organized in any kind of group or faction, Berberova's supporters—including her stoutest defender, Zaitsev, as well as the historian Sergei Mel'gunov, Alexander Kerensky, and, surprisingly, the Russian-Jewish journalist Peter

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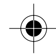
December 23, 1945, BAR, Aldanov Papers, box 1; and Aldanov to Adamovich, April 16, 1946, BAR, Aldanov Papers, box 11.

[22]Livak, *Jewish Persona*, 337–68.

[23]See Livak, "Two Solitudes of Russia Abroad."

[24]Polonsky to Poliakov, June 15, 1946, BAR, Aleksandr Abramovich Poliakov Papers, box 2.

[25]Adamovich to Bakhrakh, n.d., BAR, Alexander Bacherac Papers, box 1. Similar statements by Berberova were reported by Roman Gul' and Gaito Gazdanov. See Gul' to Gazdanov, January 16, 1970, Amherst Center for Russian Culture (ACRC), Journal *New Review* Records, box 3, file 49; and Roman Gul', *Ia unes Rossiiu*, vol. 3 (New York, 1989), 106.



Ryss—shared a belief in the continuing validity of the anti-Soviet norms of the interwar years. It is telling that Zaitsev, in a complete misreading of the political mood, thought it acceptable to cite latent anti-Semitism as a mitigating factor when he explained to Bunin that Berberova "has sometimes expressed 'heretical' opinions ... and has [always] preferred Russians to Jews and put Russian interests above Jewish ones."[26] Qualifying her German sympathies as an unfortunate but integral part of her anti-Bolshevik views, Zaitsev, for instance, was prepared to ignore Jewish concerns in order to retain the anti-Soviet consensus.[27]

On the other side of the debate about Berberova's alleged collaboration was a group of Russian-Jewish intellectuals united by a robust anti-Nazism. During the interwar period, all of them had been part of the professional network around the Paris émigré daily *Poslednie novosti*. Coming from the ranks of the liberal Kadets and the right wing of the Socialist Revolutionaries, these literary and political figures shared a firm commitment to the humanist-liberal tradition of the nineteenth-century intelligentsia. Among the men who condemned Berberova's behavior were prominent *obshchestvennye deiateli* of the Russian émigré community, including Aldanov; journalists of *Poslednie novosti*, including Iakov Sedykh (Tsvibak) and Alexander Poliakov; the writer Don Aminado (Aminad Shpoliansky); the lawyer Samson Soloveichik; the journalist and bibliophile Polonsky, who was married to Aldanov's sister; and the politician, editor, and lawyer Mark Vishniak. Based in France throughout the interwar period, they experienced the German occupation as a direct threat to their lives. Except for Don Aminado and Polonsky, all of them fled to the United States to escape Nazi persecution.

Polonsky played such a central role in the developing scandal that Berberova and others singled him out as her personal nemesis.[28] Although he and his family remained in Nice during the war and survived the German occupation physically unharmed, the experience came to define his attitude toward Berberova during and after the war. As Polonsky's relatives and friends left for the United States, his sense of isolation grew: "So few people from our circle are left," he wrote to the writer Mikhail Osorgin.[29] And this feeling of isolation was compounded by a burgeoning panic when his attempts to leave with his family for the United States (or even just send his son away) failed because he could not muster the necessary sum to pay for the passage.[30] His son put himself into

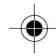
[26]"Pis'ma Zaitseva k Buninym," 165. In correspondence with Aldanov, Zaitsev would be more discriminating and refer to her inappropriate views as "heretical" (February 8, 1945), explaining them as part of her human faults (November 12, 1945, BAR, Aldanov Papers, box 8).

[27]Petr Ryss to Aldanov, June 19, 1945, BAR, Aldanov Papers, box 7; Mariia Tsetlina to unknown, December 2, 1947, Sophie Pregel and Vadim Rudnev Collection, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champain Archives, box 1; Zaitsev to Aldanov, February 8, 1945, BAR, Aldanov Papers, box 8.

[28]"Perepiska Bunina i Berberovoi," 105, 106; "Pis'ma Zaitseva k Buninym," 164. Bakhrakh reported similar impressions of Polonsky's particular dislike of Berberova ("Perepiska Bunina i Berberovoi," 33). Vladimir Veidle also identified Polonsky as the source of rumors about his alleged Nazi collaboration. See Veidle to Poliakov, July 10, 1945, BAR, Poliakov Papers, box 2; and Berberova, *The Italics Are Mine*, 260.

[29]Polonsky to Osorgin, August 13, 1942, Bibliothèque de documentation internationale contemporaine, Mikhail Osorgin Papers, F Δ res. 841 (6) (2). See also Polonsky to Poliakov, August 16, 1942, BAR, Poliakov Papers, box 2.

[30]See the letter from Polonsky to Elkin, April 19, 1941, in Ol'ga Demidova, ed., "'Kraine tiazhelye dni': Pis'ma iz Frantsii," in *Russkie evrei vo Frantsii: Stat'i, publikatsii, memuary i esse*, ed. M Parkhomovskii and



precarious situations; in 1941 he was expelled from the local lycée for wearing the Cross of Lorraine, a symbol of support for Free France, and his father reported that he had joined the French Resistance.[31] Anxiety about his son's welfare, together with reports about arrests of Russian-Jewish friends, which Polonsky recorded in his diary and passed on in the correspondence of these years, must have heightened the feeling of living under a constant threat. If Aldanov's reports that Polonsky was involved in counterfeiting false papers for Jews are accurate, then this illegal activity would have put Polonsky under further pressure.[32] This traumatic experience explains to some extent his actions in the postwar era, when Polonsky seems to have become obsessed with seeking out Nazi collaborators, as Adamovich insinuated in a thinly veiled complaint to Aldanov: "Polonsky's position is such that many even consider him (jokingly, of course) ill. There are really no limits to his unforgiving [attitude toward former Nazi sympathisers]."[33] Elsewhere, Adamovich and other émigrés refer to Polonsky's state of "rage"—which is also evident in the agitated tone of Polonsky's correspondence and writings of the postwar era.[34] Polonsky himself stated openly that he had adopted a new system of values, admitting that his dislike of the Soviet regime paled in comparison to the feeling of "genuine, fierce anger" [which he had] for any Nazi sympathisers.[35]

The experience of the German occupation certainly framed the responses of members of this network to the allegations against Berberova, but it also had a direct impact on their identity formation. Nazi persecution, in combination with the perceived or real anti-Semitism of their Russian colleagues, defined and cemented a distinctly Russian-Jewish identity even in assimilated Jews like Aldanov. It was this separate position of Russian-Jewish émigrés during the Second World War which shifted the terms of reference in an increasingly polarized émigré debate from Soviet/anti-Soviet to anti-Nazi/pro-Nazi.

POSTCARDS FROM NINA

Rumors about Berberova started circulating in the Russian émigré community in France as early as December 1941. Fel'zen, for instance, raised suspicions about Berberova in a letter to Adamovich, who reported to a friend that "Fel'zen has written to me something disapproving about Nina, but he has never liked her much."[36] In a postcard to Adamovich,

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D. Guzevich (Jerusalem, 2001), 230; and letters from Polonsky to Poliakov of June 15 and August 16, 1942, BAR, Poliakov Papers, box 2.

[31]See Miliukov to Polonsky, May 8, 1941, in A. I. Serkov, "Istoriia russkoi emigratsii perioda vtoroi mirovoi voiny v perepiske, P. N. Miliukova," *Zapiski otdela rukopisei* 54 (2012): 242-91; and letters from Polonsky to Elkin, April 19, 1941, and December 17, 1944, in "Kraine tiazhelye dni," 233 and 237, respectively.

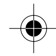
[32]Aldanov to Vishniak and to Soloveichik, November 26, 1945, in Budnitskii, "'Delo' Berbervoi," 158.

[33]Adamovich to Aldanov, July 28, 1945, BAR, Aldanov Papers, box 1. See also Adamovich to Aldanov, September 21, 1945, BAR, Aldanov Papers, box 1; and Adamovich to Poliakov, August 27, 1945, BAR, Poliakov Papers, box 1.

[34]Adamovich to Poliakov, July 20, 1945, BAR, Poliakov Papers, box 1; Shpoliansky to Aldanov, August 8, 1945, BAR, Aldanov Papers, box 7.

[35]Polonsky to Poliakov, June 15, 1946, BAR, Poliakov Papers, box 2.

[36]Adamovich to Poliakov, no date, BAR, Poliakov Papers, box 1. Because Adamovich refers to the Merezhkovskys' return to Paris, but not to Dmitry Merezhkovsky's death in December 1941, this letter must have been written during the autumn of 1941.



written at the beginning of 1942, Berberova seems to have insinuated that she had changed her views and anticipated a disagreement with Adamovich. As a fervent anti-Nazi who had fought as a volunteer in the French Foreign Legion against the Germans, Adamovich inferred from this that Berberova had become a Nazi supporter. The postcard has not been located, but Adamovich summarized its contents for Poliakov:

> I have received a postcard from Ninon Berberova [writing] that "you (that is me) and I will probably get into an argument." She is obviously warning me that her [political] sympathies are shifting. I've already heard something about that.[37]

After the war, Adamovich paraphrased the postcard once more in a reply to Berberova's enquiry whether he was spreading rumors about her:

> At some point in the past, about three years ago, or more, I received a postcard from you, in which you wrote that "you have rethought much" and that "you and I will now part ways in many things." The quotation is of course not verbatim, but its essence is correct. I admit that those phrases made an impression on me: I did not expect this from you.[38]

Reports of Berberova's correspondence to Adamovich spread fast during the spring of 1942, reaching beyond Poliakov to Bunin, the politician and editor Pavel Miliukov, Aldanov, Sedykh, and the writers Don Aminado and Vasiliy Ianovsky.[39]

Around the same time Vladimir Mogilevsky, the former administrator and bookkeeper of *Poslednie novosti*, must have written to Polonsky about Berberova's Nazi sympathies and given details of her notably improved financial situation since the beginning of the Occupation.[40] Polonsky passed this information on to his brother-in-law Aldanov in the United States, writing that Berberova had become a convinced Nazi supporter who was reaping financial rewards directly from the German occupiers for her ideological conformity. In May 1942, Aldanov commented on the rumors in a letter to Sedykh, who was by now working for the New York émigré daily *Novoe russkoe slovo*:

> I am most of all surprised by the stupidity of her actions. She'll spend the [thirty] pieces of silver and lose the apartment on the Av[enue de la] Bourdonnais and then what? Even if Hitler wins the war, she'll be finished as a writer for Russian readers—and what others could she have—she is hardly [Dmitry] Merezhkovsky. There cannot be any doubts about the facts anymore.[41]

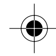
[37]Adamovich to Poliakov, n.d. [written after December 1941], BAR, Poliakov Papers, box 1.

[38]See "Perepiska Bunina i Berberovoi," 108.

[39]Bunin to Zaitsev, January 21, 1945, BAR, Zaitsev Papers, box 1; Miliukov to Polonsky, March 12 [1942], in Serkov, "Istoriia russkoi emigratsii," 242–49; Polonsky [to Aldanov], March 28, 1942, Dom muzei Mariny Tsvetaevoi, KP-732/164, l. 16; Sedykh to Ivask, August 20, 1981, ACRC, Ivask Papers, box 6, folder 2; Aminad Shpolianksy to Mark Vishniak, December 9, 1945, Hoover Institution Archives, Mark Vishniak Papers, box 10, folder 42.

[40]Polonsky cites Mogilevsky's letter as his source of information in another letter about Berberova to Osorgin, August 13, 1942, Bibliothèque de documentation internationale contemporaine, Mikhail Osorgin Papers, F Δ res. 841 (6) (2). Mogilevsky's letter to Polonsky is also mentioned in a letter from Bunin to Zaitsev, January 21, 1945, BAR, Zaitsev Papers, box 1.

[41]"Perepiska Bunina i Berberovoi," 20.



Aldanov later estimated that these accounts were reinforced by at least another ten letters from France which also reported Berberova's misconduct to the Russian émigré community in the United States.[42] In the summer of 1942 rumors about Berberova's Nazi collaboration appear to have been already accepted as a fact to such an extent that Liudmila Veidle, the wife of the literary critic Vladimir Veidle and a close friend of Fel'zen, simply used the phrase "Nina's new friends" as a coded shorthand for "German occupiers" in correspondence.[43]

Another serious charge against Berberova was based on several postcards which she wrote to Bunin during the German occupation. In November 1941, Berberova invited Bunin to Paris, adding that some mutual acquaintances had also returned.[44] A year later followed a postcard which informed Bunin about several Russian writers' attitudes toward the Germans.

> Do you read the *Novoe Slovo*? Do you know that they throw themselves (like starving people) on your books in Kiev? ... [Ivan] Shmelev and Al[exandre] Benois have already taken sides. Boris [Zaitsev] not yet. Both [are] in the Paris newspaper [*Parizhskii vestnik*].[45]

That Berberova did not express any explicit support for writers sympathetic to the Nazi cause could have worked in her favor, but in the context of the rumors about her Nazi sympathies, attention focused on her failure to condemn Shmelev and Benois for having published in the German-funded émigré newspaper *Parizhskii vestnik*. Polonsky who was told about Berberova's postcard by one of Bunin's close associates, Leonid Zurov, immediately construed her words as a barely veiled invitation to Bunin for collaboration with the Nazis, noting in his diary that

> Ivan Alekseevich [Bunin] has received a postcard from Berberova.
> She cajoles him: "People are throwing themselves on your books in Kiev" ... and then: "We love you and embrace you—Benois and Shmelev have already taken a clear position, Zaitsev not yet." Consequently, it's your turn. They clearly need Bunin because of his prestige.[46]

It was in this interpretation that news of Berberova's correspondence with Bunin reached other émigrés, including Sedykh, Adamovich, and Yanovsky.[47]

Polonsky was central to the development of the scandal, feeding the continuous flow of rumors about Berberova (and other émigrés in France who were accused of pro-Nazi

[42]See Aldanov to Sergei Mel'gunov, December 20, 1945, BAR, Aldanov Papers, box 11. See also Aldanov to Adamovich, April 16, 1946, BAR, Aldanov Papers, box 1.

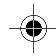
[43]Liudmila Veidle to Aleksandr Bakhrakh, July 27, 1942, in Leonid Livak, "Materialy k biografii Iuriia Fel'zena," *From the Other Shore* 1 (2001): 64.

[44]See Berberova to Bunin, November 12, 1941, in "Perepiska Bunina i Berberovoi," 77.

[45]Berberova to Bunin, October 17, 1942, "Perepiska Bunina i Berberovoi," 84. *Novoe slovo*, a Russian émigré newspaper based in Berlin, had pronounced anti-Semitic and pro-Nazi views.

[46]"Ivan Bunin vo Frantsii: Dnevnik Ia. B. Polonskogo," ed. Efim Etkind, *Vremia i my* 56 (1980): 292.

[47]Vasilii Ianovskii, *Polia eliseiskie: Kniga pamiati* (New York, 1983), 51. Yanovsky dates this event incorrectly to spring 1941, that is, about half a year before Berberova had invited Bunin to Paris in autumn 1941. The incident is repeated almost verbatim elsewhere in the memoirs, where Yanovsky quotes the content of a letter by a female writer to Bunin: "Now the real unification of the emigration has become possible" (ibid., 173).



sympathies) across the Atlantic while postal traffic was functioning. The transformation of these letters into newspaper articles was facilitated by Polonsky's close relationship with his former colleagues from *Poslednie novosti*, Poliakov and Sedykh, who after their flight from Europe had found work at *Novoe russkoe slovo*. After the liberation of Paris, Polonsky became one of the newspaper's "Paris correspondents," in which position he published two articles, "The Political Mood of Russian Paris," signed "XXX," and a long piece, "Hitler's Collaborators," under his own name.[48] The first article mentioned in passing rumors that Berberova had been arrested shortly after the liberation of Paris, but then released due to a lack of evidence. In the second piece, which was essentially an extensive list of names rather than a coherent feature article, Polonsky also mentioned Berberova as one of the emigration's collaborators and insinuated that she supported the dissemination of propaganda by émigré writers in the occupied territories of the Soviet Union. In the same article, Polonsky also accused Berberova's husband of having Germanized his name by adding "von" to it.[49] Although the article was based on unproven allegations and hearsay, and despite Aldanov's misgivings, Sedykh and Poliakov published it.[50] Shortly after, an article by Sedykh reproduced further allegations made by the Paris journal *Chestnyi slon*.[51] The appealing sensationalism of articles such as "Hitler's Collaborators," which purported to reveal details about individual émigré collaborators, veiled their principal function: to effectively normalize and cement anti-Nazism as an integral part of the moral code for Russian émigrés.

The leniency with which her supporters judged Berberova's inappropriate political views was an unthinkable response for their Russian-Jewish colleagues. Aldanov, for instance, emphasized that her opinions were outside the social norm, advising Sedykh in 1942 to make her alleged misconduct public: "I would at least say a few words [about Berberova] in order not to evoke the impression of social impunity in cases of similar conduct."[52] Allegations about Berberova's lack of concern attained further gravity as the debate about her in the aftermath of the liberation of Paris coincided with emerging news about the death of less fortunate Russian-Jewish friends and colleagues in Nazi concentration camps (Ilya Fondaminsky, Iurii Mandel'shtam, Fel'zen). Against this background, Berberova's reported sympathies became, in Aldanov's view, indefensible "for people whose

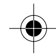
[48]See XXX [Polonsky], "Politicheskie nastroeniia russkogo Parizha," *Novoe russkoe slovo*, February 14, 1945; Ia. Polonskii, "Sotrudniki Gitlera, ot sobstvennogo korrespondenta 'Novogo russkogo slova' v Parizhe," *Novoe russkoe slovo*, March 20, 1945. In a letter to Vishniak, Soloveichik reported that Polonsky signed some articles with XXX and that the letter upon which "The Political Mood of Russian Paris" was based had included further, unprinted accusations against Berberova (Soloveichik to Vishniak, February 17, 1945, Hoover Institution, Vishniak Papers, box 10, folder 73).

[49]Polonsky's claim referred to Makeev's visiting cards, which abbreviated his patronymic, Vasil'evich, to its initial V. ("Perepiska Bunina i Berberovoi," 28). Although Polonsky's accusations were baseless, they were also effective, as Zenzinov commented in a letter to Vishniak: "'Nikolaus von Makeev!' That's quite something! This will stick to him until he dies!" (Zenzinov to Vishniak, March 20, 1945, Hoover Institute, Vishniak Papers, box 13, folder 27).

[50]Aldanov to Boris [Elkin], March 24, 1945, BAR, Aldanov Papers, box 11.

[51]Sedykh, "Na chernuiu dosku." Sedykh's article referred to *Chestnyi slon*, no. 5 (March 31, 1945). The accusations were so similar to those of Polonsky's earlier article that Berberova suspected Polonsky was behind the journal ("Perepiska Bunina i Berberovoi," 105).

[52]"Perepiska Bunina i Berberovoi," 20.



relatives and friends were being tortured in 1941 by [the very people] who Berberova [still] hoped [would liberate Russia]."[53] As Sedykh, who had fled via Portugal and Casablanca to the United States, recalled in the 1950s: "I know that she was no collaborator and has not committed any particular crimes, but we cannot forgive her for what she wrote to us during the years of the occupation while we felt hunted by [the German] brutes."[54] It is interesting to note that both Aldanov and Sedykh ascribe the deep sense of resentment toward Berberova to her political views (and by implication her indifference to the plight of Russian-Jewish colleagues) rather than to any concrete acts of collaboration. It was precisely her ideological nonconformity within a set of new ethical values that was under scrutiny in the developing scandal. The Berberova affair became the testing ground for the new code of behavior for émigré writers that her accusers tried to establish and control.

ÉPURATION À LA RUSSE

The detailed interest in Berberova's conduct during the German Occupation was part of the process by which the anti-Nazi faction in the Russian emigration tried to define, identify, and punish collaboration with the Nazis. This internal *épuration* was linked to the provision and distribution of aid among the Russian émigré community in France, which was organized by the U.S.-based Fund for the Relief of Men of Letters and Scientists of Russia, whose executive committee was formed by members of the literary and political elite, including Aldanov, Sedykh, Aleksandr Konovalov, Boris Nikolaevsky, and Vladimir Zenzinov. The Fund relied on financial support from Russian and Russian-Jewish émigrés who demanded that Nazi sympathisers be ineligible to receive any form of support.[55] The concrete repercussions for émigré writers who had been found guilty of supporting the Nazis—the withholding of care packages from the United States—were negligible, but their symbolic power was significant; receipt of care packages confirmed a clean record, while their absence could easily taint a person with suspicion of collaboration.[56] Concealed behind the charitable purpose of the Fund, then, lay a quasi-legal system that helped to formalize and legitimize the new code of behavior within the émigré community.

As part of this quasi-judicial process, the executive committee of the Fund tried to develop a set of guidelines that could be applied to determine the guilt or innocence of individual émigrés. Several clearly defined transgressions were regarded as conclusive evidence of collaboration and led to the automatic exclusion of writers from the list of parcel recipients. These included having published in the pro-Nazi *Parizhskii vestnik* (as, for instance, the dramatist Ilya Surguchev, the writer Ivan Shmelev, or the famous theater director Nikolai Evreinov had done); having been a member of the Nazified Russian Writers' Union (which included Georgii Ivanov, and Surguchev as its head); having participated in

[53]Aldanov to Aleksandr Poliakov, August 9, 1945, BAR, Poliakov Papers, box 1.

[54]Sedykh to Teffi, December 13, 1950, BAR, Nadezhda Aleksandrovna Teffi Papers, box 1.

[55]Aldanov to Adamovich, July 12, 1945, BAR, Aldanov Papers, box 1; Aldanov to Elena Nikolaevna [?], July 24, 1945, BAR, Aldanov Papers, box 11.

[56]The writer Georgii Ivanov, for instance, was more concerned about his reputation than the content of the parcels after his name was removed from the list of writers receiving aid (see Zenzinov to Aldanov, August 19, 1945, BAR, Aldanov Papers, box 8).

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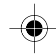


any official literary evenings, readings, or other cultural events during the German occupation (such as Shmelev's readings or Evreinov's involvement with the Russian Dramatic Theater); or having openly and publicly endorsed the policies of the Nazi regime (as, for instance, Merezhkovsky had reportedly done in a radio broadcast in June 1941). Beyond these categories of active collaboration, the Fund worked according to a broad stipulation: any writer who had harbored Nazi sympathies, irrespective of whether they had taken any action in support of the Nazis, did not receive parcels.[57]

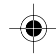
From the start the Fund's work was marred by procedural difficulties and moral inconsistencies. Aldanov, for instance, admitted that in practice the ill-defined charge of Nazi sympathies was difficult to prove, as information about political orientation during the occupation was based on hearsay and as such unreliable and contested, while evidence about several other writers' misconduct was deliberately ignored or suppressed.[58] Aldanov's repeated proposals to formalize the process further through émigré "courts of honor" in France were never acted upon, while attempts to establish a network of trusted witnesses who would provide guarantees for accused émigrés did not take off.[59] Despite these inadequate procedures, the continuing émigré correspondence about Berberova provided, within this quasi-judicial system, a sound basis to omit her from the list of writers in France who received care packages, a symbolic punishment that was accompanied by social and professional ostracism by the literary elite. Eminent writers of the Russian emigration severed all social relations with her and—by refusing to have their names printed alongside hers—effectively boycotted her work in the New York émigré publications *Novyi zhurnal* and *Novoe russkoe slovo* in the immediate postwar period.[60] That this system operated

[57]Aldanov to Boris Elkin, March 24, 1945, BAR, Aldanov Papers, box 11.

[58]See Aldanov to Adamovich, July 12, 1945, BAR, Aldanov Papers, box 1; and Aldanov to Elena Nikolaevna [?], July 24, 1945, BAR, Aldanov Papers, box 11. Zaitsev, for instance, had also invited Bunin back to Paris and had gone so far as to meet the Nazi representative for the Russian emigration, Yuri Zherebkov, in person to negotiate Bunin's return from the south of France, but his political integrity was never investigated (see M. Grin, ed., "Pis'ma B. Zaitseva I. i V. Buninym," *Novyi zhurnal* 146 [1982]: 126, 131; and Polonsky to Poliakov, June 15, 1946, BAR, Poliakov Papers, box 2). For Alexandre Benois, a famous painter and art historian who had been a contributor to *Parizhskii vestnik*, the strict principles of the Literary Fond were simply disregarded by Aldanov, Sedykh and Konovalov (see Aleksandr Benois, "Fokin," *Parizhskii vestnik*, September 13, 1942, 5; Alexandr Benois, "Fokin [2]," *Parizhskii vestnik*, September 20, 1942, 2; and Aldanov to Dobuzhinsky, March 30, 1945, BAR, Aldanov Papers, box 11). Aldanov also managed to keep Aleksei Remizov's name out of any newspaper articles about Nazi collaborators, even though Remizov had published in the French Nazi newspaper *La Gerbe* (see Aldanov to Zaitsev, May 30, 1945, BAR, Zaitsev Papers, box 1; and Aldanov to Teffi, September 9, 1952, BAR, Teffi Papers, box 1).

[59]See, for instance, Aldanov to Adamovich, October 1, 1945, BAR, Aldanov Papers, box 1; Aldanov to Elena Nikolaevna [?], July 24, 1945, BAR, Aldanov Papers, box 11; and Aldanov to Poliakov, August 9, 1945, BAR, Aldanov Papers, box 11.

[60]See Aldanov to Zaitsev, March 17, 1945, BAR, Zaitsev Papers, box 1; Aldanov to Sergei Petrovich Mel'gunov, December 20, 1945, BAR, Aldanov Papers, box 11; Gaito Gazdanov, *Sobranie sochinenii v piati tomakh* (Moscow, 2009), 5:214–15; and Sedykh to Ivask, August 20, 1981, ACRC, Ivask Papers, box 6, folder 2. Berberova's work appeared in a New York publication for the first time in 1947 ("Voskresenie Motsarta," *Novyi zhurnal* 17 [1947]: 60–82). Berberova probably benefited from the fact that the journal at that point was solely edited by Mikhail Karpovich, an old friend of Berberova's first husband, Vladislav Khodasevich, who extended his loyalty and friendship to the woman with whom Khodasevich had shared most of his life in emigration. In 1949, *Novoe russkoe slovo* started printing Berberova's dispatches from the trial of Viktor Kravchenko, initially without a byline or honorarium until Berberova successfully insisted on both (Berberova to Zenzinov, March 5, 1949; Zenzinov to Berberova, March 12, 1949, BAR, Zenzinov Papers, box 1).



without any contingency for differentiating between active collaborators and passive (even repentant) sympathizers indicates the unforgiving attitude among the émigré community in the United States, which had seen a large influx of Russian-Jewish intellectuals. Although the rigidity with which moral standards were applied (in most cases) prevented moral relativism, it also opened up the Fund to criticism for harsh and unfair judgment—weaknesses which Berberova exploited in her defense.

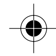
COMPETING AGENDAS

Barred from access to émigré publications in the United States, in September 1945, Berberova forced the issue of her alleged collaboration into the open by writing a letter to Aldanov, which was copied to other representatives of the cultural and political elite.[61] Occasionally indignant in tone, punctuated with bursts of uncontrolled rage against her principal opponent, Polonsky, and intensely personal, the letter laid out a defense against the allegations of collaboration and—given the widespread punishment of alleged and real collaborators by the French population at large and the French government—attempted to make her readers appreciate the risks individuals accused of collaboration were exposed to. At the same time, Berberova lent a more formal function to the letter by strongly challenging the new moral categories being applied to emigres' behavior. While on the surface recognizing the work of the Fund, the letter essentially condemned the very notions of "proper behavior" that guided the Fund's operation.

The letter followed a two-fold strategy that rested on a careful distinction between active forms of collaboration and innate political sympathy. Throughout the letter, Berberova denied any "political crimes" such as publishing under the Nazis, participating in public readings or cultural events, joining the Nazified émigré Writer's Union, or openly declaring support for the Nazis. She also denied having invited Bunin to produce propaganda for the German occupiers. Her defense was anchored within the moral framework of the Fund, signalling agreement with the condemnation of any acts of open collaboration. At the same time Berberova went on the attack—surprisingly through an admission of guilt. She conceded having had initial Nazi sympathies (even if she qualified them by referring to a general sense of political disillusionment at the time), yet in a crucial move defined her letters and her political views as private matters for which she could not be held accountable. With her complaint that "if it is true that my private letters to Rudnev and his wife have been published, then it is not I who should be embarrassed but the person who disseminated them," she criticized what she saw as illicit intrusions into private conversations.[62] By extension she attacked the distinctly illiberal tendencies inherent in the process by which a new moral code was stretched to include privately held beliefs.

[61]Additional recipients of Berberova's letter included Vladimir Zenzinov, Georgii Fedotov, Mark Vishniak, Sophia Pregel, Mikhail Karpovich, Mariia Tsetlin, and Aleksandr Poliakov. Following a request from Mel'gunov, Berberova also sent copies to the latter, as well as to S. Konovalov, Boris Nikolaevsky, N. Timashev, and Viktor Chernov (Berberova to Zaitsev, n.d., BAR, Zaitsev Papers, box 1. See also "Perepiska Bunina i Berberovoi," 107).

[62]"Perepiska Bunina i Berberovoi," 102.



Although the letter generated heated discussions about her, it did not change the way she was viewed or treated. Most of her accusers who read the letter ignored the distinction she tried to draw between personal beliefs and political actions. For Aldanov, only a complete denial would have been an acceptable response: "In her own defense she should have denied everything: 'Never in my life have I been for any "cooperation," this is all vile slander!'"[63] Aldanov's thinking is underpinned by a belief in the binding validity of universal moral principles for Russian writers, which span both the private and the public sphere. Aldanov even refused to reply to her because she had insulted his brother-in-law Polonsky in the letter, calling him variously *negodiai*, *klevetnik*, *podlets*, and *merzavets*. As a personal defense the letter failed, but as an attack on the Fund and its value system it constituted the first instance of open resistance to what had become the dominant moral imperative of anti-Nazism.

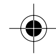
Berberova's letter suggests that there was a different mood in the Russian emigration in France, where questions of collaboration with the Nazis did not carry the same weight as it did in the American émigré community. By 1946, concerns among émigrés in France had returned to familiar territory: Maklakov's visit to the Soviet embassy, the increasing dominance of such Soviet-friendly Parisian newspapers as *Russkii* (later: *Sovetskii*) *patriot* and *Russkie novosti*, persistent rumors about the possible forced repatriation of all Russian émigrés without French citizenship—these and other issues caused more immediate anxiety than moral questions about individual conduct under the German occupation. It is indicative of this different mood in France that on March 16, 1946, the editors of the two pro-Soviet newspapers, as well as Polonsky and Don Aminado, were blackballed when they stood for the executive committee of the Paris Writers' Union. Polonsky blamed his failure on a pro-Nazi backlash within the Union that, he claimed, blocked him because of his exposure of collaborators and his insistence on a purge of all collaborators from the Writers' Union.[64] (When the results were read out, somebody—possibly Polonsky himself—was reported to have shouted: "The Fascist group has seized power!") Polonsky, however, failed to recognize the strong anti-Soviet sentiments that were driving events and that were focused not on him, but on the two pro-Soviet editors.[65] Polonsky's credentials as the main prosecutor of Nazi collaborators had become irrelevant for a large part of the postwar emigration in France, where geographical proximity to the Soviet Union determined political priorities.

Zaitsev, who had been elected as the chairman of the Writers' Union, formalized this reversal in orientation by setting a new agenda for the recently elected executive committee:

[63]Budnitskii, "'Delo' Berberovoi," 158.

[64]Aldanov to Adamovich, April 16, 1945, BAR, Aldanov Papers, box 1; Polonsky to Poliakov, June 15, 1946, BAR, Poliakov Papers, box 2. See also a typescript of Zaitsev's "Letter to the Editor" (dated May 3, 1946), in which he defends the Union against similar accusations which were presumably made by Polonsky reporting for *Novoe russkoe slovo* (BAR, Zenzinov Papers, box 2). Berberova later claimed that Polonsky's failure had been carefully prepared by her (*The Italics are Mine*, 261). It is clear from letters she wrote to Mel'gunov preceding the Writers' Union meeting that she was indeed organizing a group of like-minded writers to oppose Polonsky's election, in the event of which the group threatened to leave the Union (Berberova to Mel'gunov, December 18 and 21, 1945, and March 8, 1946, Archives and Rare Books, LSE Library, Mel'gunov, Berberova Correspondence). Berberova also reportedly wrote with a certain amount of satisfaction about Polonsky's downfall to Aldanov (Aldanov to Zaitsev, April 3, 1946, BAR, Zaitsev Papers, box 1).

[65]Zaitsev to Aldanov, March 26, 1946, BAR, Aldanov Papers, box 8.



"The current executive committee does not intend to engage with any politics. Although the executive committee has established a commission for [an internal] épuration (*komissiia po épuration*), the executive committee sees the aim of its activity not in this [épuration], but in the [reestablishment] of the Union as it was under Miliukov [in the interwar period] and the consolidating of exclusively literary activities." Implicitly dismissing any concerns over past Nazi attitudes as an unnecessary politicization of a purely literary organization, Zaitsev attempted to reestablish the previous binaries of Soviet and anti-Soviet as normative by drawing the line along which the Union was split not between Nazi collaborators and their opponents (a division which he incidentally condensed in the phrase *liniia ... prolegaet ne cherez B-[erberov]u*) but between "supporters and enemies of a free literature and a free press."[66] Against this, Aldanov speculated that the events at the Writers' Union might lead to a split into a "Bolshevik" and a "Collaborationist"/"Fascist" Writers' Union.[67] These different interpretations point to the polarizing labels that had emerged in the description of political orientation in émigré discourse: anti-Soviet/pro-Nazi on the one hand, pro-Soviet/anti-Nazi on the other. The divergent narratives and their attendant terminologies indicate the increasingly irreconcilable differences separating different groups within the Russian emigration.

The 1946 drama turned out to be a dress rehearsal for a more serious schism in the Writers' Union a year later, when it was decided at a general meeting to expel all members who had obtained Soviet citizenship following Stalin's 1947 amnesty for all Russian émigrés in France. Several prominent literary figures, including Bunin and his wife, Adamovich, Gaito Gazdanov, and Leonid Zurov protested against this decision by formally resigning from the Union.[68] Although the departure of Bunin dealt a serious blow to the Union's authority, the two thirds-majority vote for the expulsion of Soviet citizens was a strong mandate for the Union to return to prewar concerns and priorities. The vote formalized the political reorientation of émigrés in France that had begun to emerge soon after the Allied liberation. As early as 1945, even émigrés with solid anti-Nazi backgrounds such as Adamovich and Bunin seem to have lost interest in the question of Nazi collaboration. Adamovich, for instance, wrote to Berberova: "I can't tell you, how much all these investigations and inquiries are annoying me," while Bunin agreed with Zaitsev that the accusations against Berberova were "nasty" in the current climate.[69] Both declined Aldanov's invitation to participate officially in the Fund's vetting process by which Nazi sympathizers were identified.[70] The detachment of two major Russian literary figures from this process implied that the anti-Nazi policies of the Fund were primarily a Russian-Jewish issue, rather than an issue of concern to all of émigré literature. Adamovich went so far to suggest a general amnesty for all Nazi collaborators and sympathizers for the sake of a wider

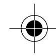
[66]Zaitsev to Aldanov, April 9, 1946, BAR, Aldanov Papers, box 8. He also insinuated that Bunin's refusal to become a member of the board had been interpreted as a concession to the Soviets.

[67]Aldanov to Adamovich, April 16, 1946, BAR, Aldanov Papers, box 1.

[68]Perhaps to soften the blow to his old friend Zaitsev, Bunin left with a two-week delay, claiming personal reasons. For detailed background of this schism see Bethea, "Ivan Bunin and the Time of Troubles," 1–16.

[69]"Perepiska Bunina i Berberovoi," 108; Bunin to Zaitsev, January 21, 1945, BAR, Zaitsev Papers, box 1.

[70]Aldanov to Adamovich, July 12, 1945, and Adamovich to Aldanov, July 28, 1945, both in BAR, Aldanov Papers, box 1.



reconciliation within the Russian émigré community in France. His idea of a tea party (*chaepitie*) where all sins would be forgiven earned a fierce rejection from Aldanov, who wrote to him:

> Perhaps [this tea party] will soon take place in Paris. The New Yorkers will wait for another year or two. ... I read your truly excellent article in *Vstrechi* [where you write:] "They burned [Fondaminsky] in an oven." Yes, they did burn him. And [you suggest] we should have a tea party and kiss those who had sympathies for the people who burned him in an oven![71]

In December 1946 while in Paris, Aldanov detected among emigres a distinct indifference toward questions of collaboration. "A large part of the Russian emigre community has gone over to the Bolsheviks," he wrote to a friend in New York. "The other part had sympathies for the Nazis but now pretends that this was nothing—as if it wasn't worth remembering. All in all, there are perhaps twenty or so people left from our old circles whom I'd be happy to meet."[72] Aldanov's pessimistic assessment indicates the growing gulf between two different émigré communities whose geographical separation matched the incompatible value systems shaping émigré life in Paris and New York.

AFTERLIFE OF A SCANDAL: *THE ITALICS ARE MINE*

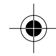
Accusations of Nazi sympathies continued to haunt Berberova after her move to the United States in 1950 to embark upon a successful academic career teaching Russian at Yale and Princeton. In 1969 the controversy around her alleged misconduct during the Nazi occupation flared up again, coinciding with the publication of *The Italics Are Mine*. While some émigrés pointed out specific historical inaccuracies, Roman Gul', the editor of *Novyi zhurnal*, accused Berberova outright of fabricating "untruths," "fictions," and "myths," and he dedicated a large part of his review to reminding his readers of the Berberova scandal and restating the accusation that she had held sympathetic views of the Nazis.[73] As a modernist experiment in subjective perception, Berberova's memoirs were bound to disappoint any expectations of historical accuracy that the Russian emigration still attached to the notion of memoirs. Indeed, they are presented as an irreverent exercise in deliberate mythmaking, as she freely confessed: "I'm writing the saga of my life, of myself, in which I am free to do as I want, to reveal things or keep them to myself, speak of myself, speak of others, not speak of something, stop at any point, close this notebook, forget about it, hide it somewhere."[74] With this disclaimer she playfully invites but ultimately resists explorations

[71]Aldanov to Adamovich, October 1, 1945, BAR, Aldanov Papers, box 1.

[72]Aldanov to Aleksandr Abramovich [Poliakov], France, December 4, 1946, Andrei Sedykh Papers, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University, GEN MSS 100, box 1, folder 42.

[73]See Gleb Struve, "Dnevnik chitatelia: Eshche o dne ot"ezda M. Tsvetaevoi v SSSR," *Russkaia mysl'* (November 6, 1969): 5; Anna Evreinova, "Pis'mo v redaktsiiu," *Russkaia mysl'* (April 6, 1970); Tatiana Ossorguine, "Kak eto bylo," *Cahiers du monde russe et soviétique* 31:1 (1990): 95–102; and Roman Gul', review of *The Italics Are Mine*, *Novyi zhurnal* 99 (1970): 283–92.

[74]Berberova, *The Italics Are Mine*, 376. Several studies have addressed Berberova's deliberate construction of self in her autobiography. See, for instance, Judith E. Kalb, "Nina Berberova: Creating an Exiled Self,"



of her authentic self and marks her memoirs as a public space where she performs rather than discloses a private self. This assertion of narrative agency can be read as a delayed response to the earlier scandal; Berberova takes control of her own public history rather than submitting to the narratives that had developed in émigré letters about her.

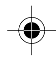
In her memoirs, Berberova avoids referring directly to the scandal of the postwar years. Although she comments on émigrés collaborating with the Nazis and remarks that Ivanov was "somehow unofficially and almost silently condemned for his Germanophilia [during the Second World War]," she does not mention the accusations that were raised against herself.[75] Yet the scandal distinctly shapes the narrative of her memoirs as she continues the debate over her Nazi sympathies on several levels. Her iconoclastic views on such cherished figures of the Russian emigration as Bunin, the relegation of important public figures like Aldanov or Adamovich to the status of marginal players, and the deliberate blotting out of certain émigrés from the historical record (Sedykh) were, as contemporary and subsequent reviewers pointed out, a form of revenge against her former accusers.[76] In the memoirs Berberova also addresses the controversy about herself in less obvious ways. Interestingly, none of the reviewers commented on the historically most suspect part of Berberova's autobiography: the "Black Book," a purportedly authentic diary inserted as the sixth part of the autobiography, which interrupts the biographical narrative on the eve of the German invasion of Poland. With the supposedly documentary evidence of the "Black Book," Berberova draws a compelling portrait of herself as a disillusioned, apolitical writer during the Second World War, trying to stem the increasing intrusions of the outside world (German soldiers, Gestapo interrogations, Communist members of the Maquis) by turning to contemplations on Russian literature and life—a portrayal of detachment which is implicitly but profoundly at odds with any depictions of her as an enthusiastic supporter of the Nazi cause.

THE SCANDAL AROUND BERBEROVA was not the driving force behind the disintegration of the Russian emigration in the postwar period, but it revealed the existing fissures running through the literary emigration. The resultant visibility of the growing separation into a Russian and a Russian-Jewish emigration marks a distinct change in the conduct of the relationship between these two groups. The scandal around Berberova was part of the attempt of Russian-Jewish writers to claim a firm, integral position in émigré literature in the wake of their separate experience of the Second World War by drawing attention to their extraordinary suffering and victimization under Nazi persecution. The paradigm shift they ultimately demanded met with resistance, dismissal, or indifference from the majority of Russian writers, who thereby excluded Russian-Jewish concerns once more from any Russian émigré agenda. Although partly motivated by a pervasive latent or overt anti-Semitism in émigré

Russian Literature 50 (2001): 141–62; Leonid Livak, "Nina Berberova et la mythologie culturelle de l'émigration russe en France," *Cahiers du monde russe* 49:2–3 (2002): 463–78; and Nadya L. Peterson, "The Private 'I' in the Works of Nina Berberova," *Slavic Review* 60 (Fall 2001): 491–512.

[75] Berberova, *The Italics Are Mine*, 463.

[76] See Gul', review of *The Italics Are Mine*. Gleb Struve also suspected that Berberova was settling accounts (review of *The Italics Are Mine*, *Russian Review* 29 [January 1970]: 92–94).



discourse, the conservative impulse behind Berberova's and other writers' insistence on the continuing primacy of anti-Soviet moral codes and norms of behavior in the émigré community reveals a high degree of anxiety over an increasingly precarious émigré identity which had started to give way under external and internal political pressures. Behind the scandal, then, lay not only a clash of different moral codes and value systems but also an ongoing struggle over the question of what constituted an authentic Russian émigré identity in a postwar world.