

In memory of Lev Nikolaevich Tsarev (1938–2017)

Памяти Льва Николаевича Царёва (1938–2017)

Table of Contents

Archives and Libraries	ix
Acknowledgments	xi
Introduction	1
Chapter 1. The People behind the Autograph	12
Nikolai Karlovich Kulman	15
Natalia Ivanovna Bokii-Likhareva-Kulman	44
Nikolai and Natalia Kulman: Their Story	52
Gleb Bokii: The Case of Myth Creation	60
Chapter 2. The Exodus	71
Chapter 3. Note on Translation of Letters	87
Chapter 4. Letters of Nikolai Kulman to Ivan Bunin (1922–1935)	90
Chapter 5. Letters of Nikolai Kulman to Vera Bunina (1928–1938)	146
Chapter 6. Letters of Natalia Kulman to Ivan Bunin (1944–1953)	166
Bibliography	183
Index	187

Archives and Libraries

Archive of the Institute of Russian Literature, Russian Academy of Sciences,
St. Petersburg (IRLI)

Cambridge University Library, UK

Central State Archives, St. Petersburg (TsGA SPB)

Leeds Russian Archives, University of Leeds, UK (RAL)

The Russian National Library, St. Petersburg (RNB)

The Russian State Archives of Literature and Arts, Moscow (RGALI)

The Russian State Archives of the Navy, St. Petersburg (RGA VMF)

The State Archives of the Russian Federation, Moscow (GARF)

The Russian State Historical Archives, St. Petersburg (RGIA)

Acknowledgments

This book started from three lines written in Bunin's hand. The rest has been a long and convoluted road, which would have been utterly impassable without the generous help, advice, and support of various people, to whom I owe a great debt.

Mel Bach, curator of the Slavonic collections of Cambridge University Library—for supporting my initial search and helping with the books' provenance. **Richard Davies**, archivist and curator of the Russian Archives in Leeds University—for finding the only existing photograph of the Kulmans together and other invaluable help and advice. **Father Alexander Kedroff**, archpriest of the Russian Orthodox Cathedral of Alexander Nevsky in Paris—for trying to help with sourcing some important documents. **Lilia Kolosimo** of the Institut de Théologie Orthodoxe Saint-Serge in Paris—for introducing me to Father Georgy and sister Anna of Our Lady of All Protection Nunnery (Bussy-en-Othe, France). **Andrei Korlyakov**, author of *L'émigration russe en photos 1917–1947* (Paris: YMCA Press, 1999) for giving me permission to use the only photograph of the Kulmans together. **Tatyana Marchenko**, head of the Russia Abroad Section of the Solzhenitsyn Research Centre for Russia Abroad, for interesting leads and encouragement. **Sergei Morozov** of the Russian Institute of World Literature in Moscow for giving me the answers to some tricky questions. **Father Georgy Pimenov**, archpriest of the Church of Resurrection in St. Petersburg and scholar, for filling so many gaps and generously offering his help. I would also like to thank my wonderful friend **Olga Shramko** for deciphering and translating various handwritten passages from French. Thank you to **Tessa Peskett** of Seillans in Provence, a friend and an artist who kindly agreed to design the cover of this book and was encouraging and supportive throughout.

Finally, I would like to thank **Chris** for his relentless support and numerous, endless drives from Cambridge to Leeds and back, as well as more picturesque ones in Grasse, Alpes-Maritimes; and **Sasha**—for finding the Belvedere and climbing the wall to take those magic pictures.

I am also very grateful to the Institut Pervoda (The Institute for Literary Translation) in Moscow for their financial support.

Unless otherwise indicated, all translations are the author's own.

Introduction

The title for this book—*Autographs Don't Burn*—is a deliberate echo of the famous phrase pronounced by Woland, the dark and mysterious protagonist of Mikhail Bulgakov's *Master and Margarita*: in chapter twenty-four the Master tells Woland that he cannot give him the manuscript to read, since it was burnt. To which Woland replies: "Manuscripts don't burn. Behemoth, pass me the novel!" This short phrase became something of an aphorism in Russian and has come to mean that something that is truly worthy can never disappear without a trace, cannot be erased—even if destroyed by fire.

The story of this book has many echoes with this line: there is something profoundly Bulgakovian in the way the story began, how it unfolded, not to mention at least one of its characters—more of which later. More important, though, is that hopefully this book will bring back to life the story, legacy, and memory of two people, who, despite their significant role at the time, seem to have strangely disappeared from the discourse about the cultural heritage of the first wave of Russian emigration in France, that last outpost of "old Russia."

This story began in Cambridge University Library, which is also home to the main part of the University's Slavonic Collections. The building itself might surprise an unprepared visitor: towering between the genteel architecture of Cambridge colleges with their manicured lawns and spectacular gardens, it stands as something of an oddity amongst this almost clichéd, picture-perfect setting. Designed in the early 1930s by Sir Giles Gilbert Scott—famous for his landmark London creations like Tate Modern and Battersea Power Station, made almost iconic by the cover of the Pink Floyd album *Animals*—and built with the help of the Rockefeller Foundation, the Cambridge University library building is something that would look much more authentic in a Third Reich setting or the early (modernist) Soviet Union. The plot was once part of a First World War military hospital and one suspects that in opting for something so cutting-edge and contemporary, Cambridge's aim was for its main library to look much more modern than its eternal rival, the Bodleian Library in Oxford. The way the library's collections are organized and catalogued is equally

controversial for the uninitiated. In fact, its main website helpfully describes the system of cataloguing as “idiosyncratic at times,” so it takes some patience, a lot of practice, and a healthy dose of intuition to find what you are looking for, even when equipped with all the right classification marks of the sought book.



Figure 1. Cambridge University Library

On that September evening in 2016, I went there to look for some books on traditional Moscow architecture. The Slavonic Section lives on the fifth floor of the North Wing, which does not get much natural light at the best of times. It was getting dark and the windup timed lighting system, probably state of the

art in the 1930s, kept turning itself off automatically before I could find what I was looking for. Using my phone as a torch and kneeling, since the book was supposed to be on a lower shelf, I finally pulled out the large volume I needed to find. As I was retrieving the volume, another book, much smaller, and definitely not of the coffee-table variety, fell down just behind it. I could not see the title, but for some reason took the book out.

Once back in the lighted zone, I opened the dark-beige volume and, before I could read what the title was, I saw handwriting that is recognizable to most Russians—Ivan Bunin’s autograph. What was also immediately striking was that the book looked almost new, its high-quality, thick paper untouched by any yellowing or that typical, slightly damp smell so often associated with old books that have not been handled for years, with some distinct watermarks that looked fresh in their imprint. Having turned the page, I realized that what I was holding in my hands was a first edition of Bunin’s masterpiece, *Mitina liubov'* (*Mitya’s Love*), published in Paris in 1925.

I was immediately aware that I was holding a treasure—a treasure on many levels. Ivan Bunin, the first Russian writer to have won the Nobel Prize for literature in 1933, so unfairly underrepresented and undertranslated in the English-speaking world, occupies a very special place in the Russian heart. Not many Russian writers—however great—command such universal, unconditional love as Bunin does. Something in his laconic, almost white-verse prose, his deep, almost tragic love for Russia, and his ability to go deep into that clichéd “mysterious Russian soul” in all its diversity and complexity strikes a profound sentimental chord within the national psyche. Bunin does not belong to the “Western” brand of Russian literature—represented by Dostoyevsky, Tolstoy, and Chekhov—and is not as recognizable, and yet somehow Russia’s love for Bunin goes deeper and is more complex and personal. Bunin died in 1953 in Paris and finding any of his autographs or letters that are not locked safely in various Russian, American, British, French, or Czech archives, or in fiercely guarded private collections, today is extremely rare.

Mitya’s Love is undoubtedly one of Bunin’s landmark works: written in 1924, it is often regarded as one of the most striking examples of that pure magic for which Bunin’s laconic, deeply psychological prose is known—a story of tragic, all-consuming, toxic love and desperation, with a famously abrupt finale.

The book itself, having spent decades hidden behind some coffee-table volumes in something of an almost miraculous time warp, a perfect natural capsule—dark, dry, not humid—that created the ideal conditions for its preservation, is also a significant bibliographic rarity. Like many of Bunin’s works of

that period, it first came out in paperback and very few original editions survive today; and those that have survived certainly look their age and are quite frail.

Bunin's striking handwriting, in black ink, appeared remarkably well preserved, not faded, and one can see where, as Bunin was starting on the first letter, the ink must have dried up—so there is the distinct imprint of his attempt to write over the original line again. The autograph, written on the second page of the book, before the title page, in pre-1917 Russian orthography with its i's and ъ's, says:

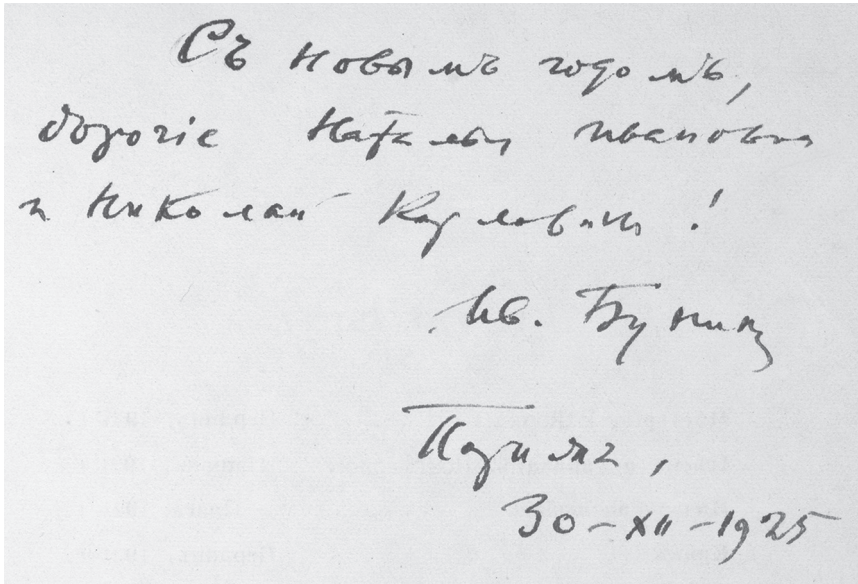


Figure 2. Bunin's autograph, 1925

Happy New Year, dear Natalia Ivanovna and Nikolai Karlovich!
Ivan Bunin
Paris, 30-XII-1925.

This discovery was the start of a long, extremely exciting, yet sometimes frustrating journey, which over the years has taken a number of twists and turns, with some false starts and unexpected revelations that I could never have hoped for, as well as some dead ends and still unanswered questions. What I wanted to establish first was: How did the book get here? Why was it in the wrong part and in the wrong section of Cambridge University library? Why was it—although, in this case, and by some stroke of fate—hidden from everyone's sight? Why was this unique volume stored in open access rather than the rare books section? Why was it hidden from everyone's sight and therefore never even been borrowed?

Unfortunately, after several years of searching, the answers to these questions remain hypothetical, and will probably stay that way: the system of cataloguing new Russian arrivals at Cambridge University Library was quite idiosyncratic until, from the mid-1980s onwards, the system went digital. The only pointers to the book's provenance is the original stamp with the date when it was first registered (December 15, 1960) and the letter B that stands for "Bought." There is also a handwritten note in faded pencil that says "Moutan and Co., Rijswijk." The latter turned out to be the name of a secondhand books' wholesaler/distributor in Holland that specialized in Russian books. It was confirmed that Moutan and Co. received quite a heavy traffic of books coming from France in the late 1950s and early 1960s when many of the first wave of Russian émigrés died and their old collections were picked up by anyone who was interested. In 1977, Moutan and Co.'s inventory was purchased by De Gruyter, a large academic publishing company and, unfortunately, no old records of the books' origins can now be traced.

One potential scenario is that *Mitya's Love* was acquired by Dr Elizabeth Hill,¹ the first established chair of Slavonic studies at Cambridge (1946–1968). One of her remits was to expand the University Library's Slavonic collection, and the date that Bunin's books were obtained coincides with her tenure. She could have bought it from Moutan and Co. directly or from another, more local source: George David's, the famous Cambridge secondhand bookshop, which at the time dealt a lot in Russian books.

What happened once the volume reached Cambridge University Library is even more mysterious: new acquisitions were catalogued by people who did not know much about Russian literature, or, for that matter—the Russian language. One "amusing anecdote" tells the story of "a certain Mr. Pavlovsky whose knowledge of both English and Russian was not that good": while processing one newly acquired book, he could see that it was entitled *Life of Arseniev*, and so catalogued in the following way: "Title: *Life*. Author: Arseniev"²—quite an unfortunate misunderstanding of the Russian use of the genitive case, which indeed may literally translate as "*Life by Arseniev*." The book, of course, turned out to be Bunin's *Life of Arseniev*, which won Bunin his Nobel Prize for literature in 1933. ... Sadly, it had no autograph.

1 Dame Elizabeth (Liza) Hill (1900–1996) was born in St. Petersburg but moved with her parents to the United Kingdom. Appointed the first woman University Lecturer in Slavonic Studies. Interesting detail: Elizabeth Hill is credited with being an "inspiration" to one of the Cambridge spies, George Blake, who was her student of Russian.

2 Elizabeth Hill, *In the Mind's Eye: The Memoirs of Dame Elizabeth Hill*, ed., J. S. Smith (Lewes: The Book Guild, 1999).

After about three months of looking for information about the addressees of the first autograph (where only names and patronymics were given) and the provenance of the book, on another gloomy Cambridge evening, I was looking for something else and, just like the first time, pulled out another old volume that seemed strangely out of place among some more contemporary books on Soviet literature. I had a strange sense of déjà vu when I opened it. And there it was—another autograph, in the familiar handwriting. It said:

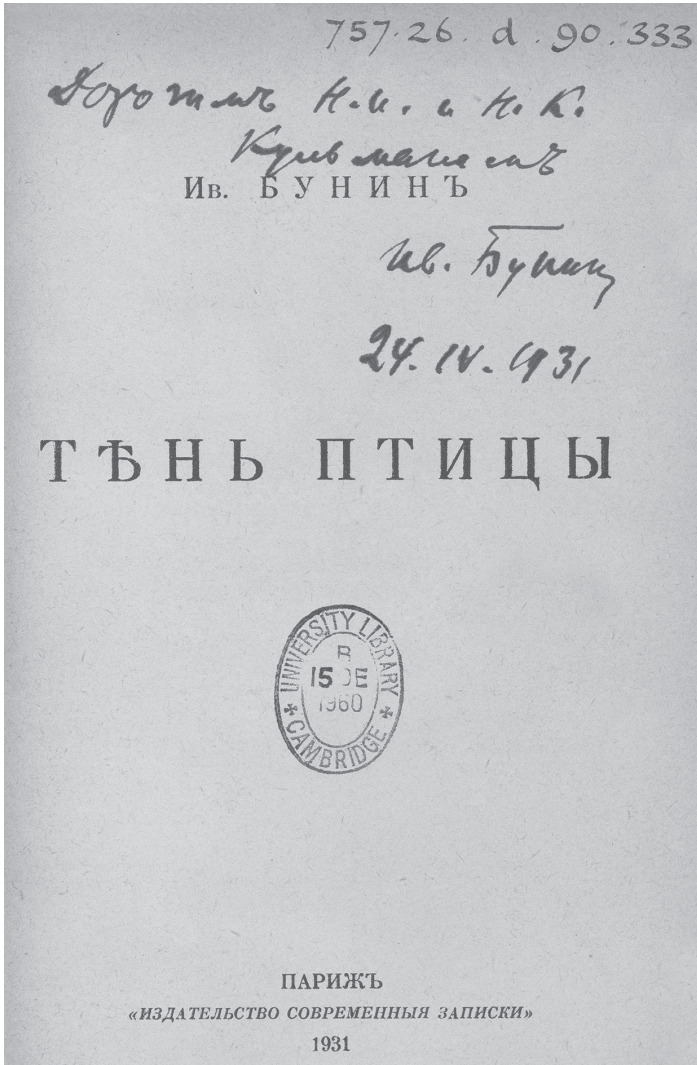


Figure 3. Bunin's autograph, 1931

To my dear N. I. and N. K. Kulman

Iv. Bunin

24. IV.1931, Paris.

This time it was *Ten' ptitsy* (Shadow of a bird), published in Paris in 1931: another first edition with a priceless autograph, preserved equally well, with an identical stamp confirming that it was purchased and the date of its arrival, December 15, 1960. It also had an identical handwritten note—"Moutan and Co., Rijswijk,"—so clearly it was from the same "batch." Similarly to the first book, it has not been seen or requested in sixty years, and no one was aware that these two first editions contained Bunin's autographs.

Carrying on with the Bulgakov theme, they would be earmarked for culling in the near future—two old Russian books that no one ever wanted. ... But Bunin's autographs do not burn—so, following this discovery, and with the authenticity of Bunin's autographs established, these two volumes are now kept in the Rare Books Department. A happy ending.³

But the provenance, while fascinating to bibliophiles, is ultimately overshadowed by the fundamental question thrown up by these short autographs: who were the individuals addressed so affectionately by Bunin and what are their stories?

It would not be unfair to say that we live in a world of clichés, and one of them is that history is always alive, ever evolving, ever changing. But that probably applies mostly to the way we interpret historic events and figures, an activity that is often removed from history in its original, pure form. At its core, history is about telling stories. It is a certain cultural or literary archaeology in which a piece of the material culture of an era long gone can uncover a layer that was previously unknown and bring back names and events that were either forgotten or never known back to life. This makes us reflect upon and reexamine the past, enabling us to tell stories that have never been told before. I was fortunate enough to have been given this rare opportunity and have been humbled by the discovery that the cliché is true: history is indeed alive, always evolving, always changing.

3 It was indeed a happy ending. These volumes, together with another find, Bunin's first edition of *Chasha zhizni* (*Cup of Life*), published in Moscow in 1915 and resident in Cambridge University Library since 1939—and never requested—with an autograph addressed to Isaac Shklovsky, together with several books by Tolstoy and Teffi, all with the authors' autographs, were displayed at an exhibition "Out of the Shadows" that can now be seen on-line at <https://exhibitions.lib.cam.ac.uk/outoftheshadows/>.

But in this instance, we will be dealing with history by association and extension, if one follows Maurice Halbwachs's hypothesis that history is formed by millions of private stories that, in turn, form our memory.

This book will tell the story of the two extraordinary people whose names appear in Bunin's autograph. Nikolai Karlovich and Natalia Ivanovna Kulman were close friends, loyal allies, and sometimes even financial supporters of Ivan and Vera Bunin for the almost sixty years the couple lived both in Russia and—after the tragedy of 1917 and the great Russian exodus—France. Their lives, works, and heritage have somehow been almost forgotten, even though Nikolai Karlovich Kulman was one of the most brilliant scholars of Russian language, literature, and history in prerevolutionary academic and literary circles and later became the leading cultural ideologist of the Russian emigration from 1920 to the 1940s; and whose contribution to preserving the Russian language and culture in what turned out to be his eternal exile cannot be underestimated. His prerevolutionary research was classified as anti-Soviet and was kept in the special access collections in the State Public Library (now the Russian National Library in St. Petersburg) until recently. His life and extraordinary work in prewar Paris is not well documented either. One comes across references to his name, but only in passing, in association with the “stars” like Ivan Bunin, Nadezhda Teffi, Konstantin Balmont, Vladislav Khodasevich, Ivan Shmelev, Boris Zaitsev, Pavel Denikin and others. Whereas these good friends, colleagues, and allies are remembered, Nikolai Kulman is not.

This book will try to address a number of interconnecting layers of memory and heritage leading to a wider notion of history. Without diving too deep into academic debates about what history is, perhaps it would be right to suggest the easiest route: from one unknown autograph to two life stories narrated in private letters to Ivan and Vera Bunin, which have never been seen or published before and which are now kept in the Ivan and Vera Bunin Archive in Leeds (RAL).

The publication of previously unknown letters is always important: not simply because it releases new archive material into circulation, but because it tells stories. They are human documents that give access to history in its genuine, pure form, as opposed to its hypothesized version. Letters also form a very complex medium that is by its nature both very personal and subjective. Bunin himself was known to categorically oppose any publication of his letters, asking his wife Vera not to allow this to happen after his death. Remembering her conversations with Bunin in the south of France, where both were staying in the Russian House in Juan-les-Pins, Irina Odoevtseva remembers Bunin saying:

Letters? No one ever tells the truth in letters. One always has to bear in mind what your addressee wants to hear ... there is always an element of presenting oneself in the best possible light. I want all my letters to be burnt, I don't want them published. One can be honest in life, but never in letters but will anyone listen to me?⁴

And yet it is only through letters—probably among the best carriers of memory—that we can genuinely connect with history via private stories, to carry out what Pierre Norra describes as the “historical reconstruction” that allows us to reassess and reevaluate the past, to remove or edit existing and previously created myths and politicized hypotheses.⁵

In telling the private stories of two people whose lives were irrevocably broken into two parts—before and after—by the tragedy of the 1917 Revolution, the notion of myths and politicized hypothesis becomes especially relevant. Even now, more than a hundred years after 1917, this watershed in Russian history is felt as something of an acute birth trauma which society has neither recovered from nor reconciled itself with—although, ironically, in today's Russia the day of the 1917 Revolution (October 25, old style) is celebrated as “The Day of Reconciliation.” ... No one quite knows where this name came from.

One important aspect of this “people's tragedy” was the loss of the country's intellectual, scientific, cultural, military, and business elite, which was either wiped out or emigrated. The experiences of millions of people thrown out of their country through no fault of their own, with no possibility of return, and their attempts not only to rebuild their lives, but also to preserve their culture, their language, and their heritage, have often been compared to the Exodus from Egypt. The scale of this human tragedy has been thoroughly discussed and researched in various ways both abroad and, after 1991, in Russia. Numerous publications of private letters, diaries, and memoirs of those who had to leave have contributed hugely to what we now know about the Russian emigration in France. What makes this book different is that one small discovery not only led to the first publication of a considerable corpus of letters, almost every one of which contains a story worth telling, but also resulted in bringing back into the light the significant body of prerevolutionary works by Nikolai Kulman that

4 Irina Odoevtseva, *Na beregakh Seny (On the Banks of the Seine)* (Paris: La presse libre, 1983).

5 Pierre Norra, “Between Memory and History,” *Representations 26: Memory and Counter-Memory* (Spring 1989): 7–24.

had been published in Russia but which, due to his now almost forgotten role as one of the leading cultural and educational ideologists of the White emigration in Paris, were never republished or debated. Yet, they contain new and interesting discoveries that he made in the field of Russian history and, in particular, Russian literature, in brilliant critical works on Pushkin, Gogol, Tolstoy, and others. This is the first time that this body of work has been brought back to life—over a hundred years after it was first written.

Kulman's letters to Ivan and Vera Bunin also reveal an entire layer of his work after the emigration. It has to be said that in the enormous body of documents, letters, books, and memoirs about the cultural heritage of the Russian immigration in France, conducted both in Russia and elsewhere, his name makes regular appearances and is usually accompanied by the well-worn phrase "the famous Professor Kulman." But these references are fairly short and contain only very basic information, so one is left wondering precisely what it was that made Nikolai Kulman "famous." And this brings us back to the question of memory, private stories, and history: the memory of someone who has been forgotten and brought back to life by private stories recounted in letters will hopefully add to what we already know, correct some mistakes, shatter some myths, shed new light on gray areas, fill gaps, and open up fresh lines of research.

While Nikolai Kulman enjoyed a brilliant academic and public career in prerevolutionary St. Petersburg, and was fortunate enough to continue his very successful work in Paris, his wife Natalia at first appeared to me as somewhat in the shadow of her husband. All this changed once, as sometimes happens, a small detail led to the discovery of Natalia's role as one of Bunin's first editors and commentators; and a very dark family history that does not quite fit into usual biographical conventions. This line of research will hopefully challenge some established notions about the White emigration and the Kulmans' relationships both with their own world and the world they were forced to leave behind after 1917, but which was still there to haunt them throughout their lives.

Finally, this book will endeavor to address the very complex issue of "politicizing history" and "myth creation." In the first years after the collapse of the USSR, what is known as "The White Idea" enjoyed—to paraphrase a term from Soviet historiography—a triumphant march. In its simplified form, almost everything that was "Red" in this specific discourse was, in post-Soviet historiography, deemed evil, while everything that was "White" was, by definition, deemed good. There is still a tendency in contemporary Russia to follow this

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

Приобрести книгу можно

в интернет-магазине

«Электронный универс»

e-Univers.ru