

---

## Presentation

---

*By*

*Elena Dundovich*

Only a few fans and occasional readers are acquainted with the personal stories of Anna Akhmatova, Evgenia Ginzburg, Efrosinia Kersnovskaia, Nina Lugovskaia, Polina Molotova and Ol'ga Adamova Sliozberg. We are not referring just to the renown of their poetics, as in the case of Anna Akhmatova, or of the volumes of memoirs written by them and long since translated in Italian, such as Evgenia Ginzburg's "Journey into the whirlwind". We are rather referring to the manner in which their personal vicissitudes, which were marked in one way or the other by the event of stalinist repressions, were deeply stressed by the extraordinary history of the country where they were living. From this recognition, arises the idea of this collection of short essays devoted to the concentration camp experiences, either direct or indirect, of these remarkable women for whom writing took a meaning of liberty and survival. This moment of reflection seems to be more necessary in the light of the important historiographic novelties on stalinism that came out in the latest twenty years following the opening - too short - of the former Soviet archives in the first nineties.

It is a "world apart", as Gustav Herling defined the world of the Soviet concentration camp system and of the stalinist terror, the world of the women who wrote these pages. Still, their destinies were different, in a sense. Anna Akhmatova, for example, did not have a direct experience of lager life. However, over and over in the years, she was hit in her close affections, first by the red terror and then by the stalinist terror. Her first husband, the acmeist poet Nikolai Gumilev, was charged with participation in a subversive monarchic conspiracy, and was shot. Her son Lev was first arrested in 1938 and released in 1942, then he was arrested again in 1949, the year when the same thing happened to Nikolai Punin, a well known critic and art expert, and Anna's companion for many years, who on the contrary could not escape. These dramatic events marked in an enduring way her personal life and, consequently, her poetics to a great extent. It is along these lines that Elena Dundovich develops the article devoted to the poet.

Evgenia Ginzburg, professor of Russian literature at the University of Kazan', married to Pavel Vasil'evic Aksenev, a member of the Secretariat of the party regional Committee of Tataria, and a member of the Ussr Central Committee, she herself a fervent communist, was arrested in February 1937. She was transferred to

the Butyrka prison in Moscow and sentenced to 10 years of isolation imprisonment. The first two years were served in Jaroslav' prison, in central Russia. In 1939, the remainder of the sentence was commuted into hard labour, and she was transferred to Kolyma, through the Vladivostok transit camp. In February 1947, she was released, on condition of living in Magadan. There, in 1949, in the same year and for the second time as it occurred with Anna Akhmatova's son, Evgenia was arrested again and sentenced to confinement and residence requirement, a time she finished to serve only in 1955. To the history of those eighteen years of detention Evgenia Ginzburg devoted the fine book "Journey into the whirlwind" of which Volodia Clemente is talking here.

During her detention at Butyrka, Evgenia got acquainted with Nina Lugovskaia, a restless and curious teenager, the daughter of a socialrevolutionary condemned as "people's enemy", who had also been arrested in 1937 and sentenced to a five year camp to be served at Kolyma, just like Ginzburg. Nina's only guilt was that of being the daughter of her father and of writing a diary between 1932 and 1937, in which she noted down the anxieties and fears of a girl, and also her exceptionally sharp comments on the Stalin regime and the country's conditions. From the pages of that diary Nadia Cicognani draw the inspiration for her essay reconstructing the vicissitudes of Nina who was arrested in 1937 together with her mother and the sisters Ol'ga and Evgenia.

Also Ol'ga Adamova Sliozberg, like Evgenia Ginzburg, was a graduated and well known young woman, when, in 1936, she was arrested in Moscow and imprisoned at the Solovki. When, in 1937, this camp was turned into a penitentiary, the prisoners were transferred to other camps and Ol'ga was to serve her time at Kolyma, like Evgenia and Nina. She was released in 1944, with residence requirement, and she could go back to Moscow and embrace her sons again. However, this was only an interval. In 1949, Ol'ga was arrested for the second time, just like Lev, the son of Anna Akhmatova, and Evgenia Ginzburg, and was sentenced to confinement at Karaganda, a mining center of Kazakhstan, where she remained until 1954. This is the story voiced by Francesca Fici.

Also in Kazakhstan, at Kustanai, the well known Polina Semenovna Zhemchuzhina, married to Molotov, spent a five year exile. She was arrested on January 21, 1949, and was condemned in December of the same year. Her unshakable faith in the regime made her endure with dignity the sad descent of one of the most famous and powerful ladies of the stalinian entourage, compelled for years to share the same destiny of millions of citizens as imposed by the despot that she loved so much. In his essay, Andrea Giannotti reflects on this paradoxical story.

Among millions of women, soviet and foreigners, who were arrested and condemned in those years, there was also Efrosinia Kersnovskaia, a Bessarabia landowner, who was arrested in May 1941, and at first deported in the Narym district, near Novosibirsk. After a bold escape, she was seized again and sentenced to ten year camp. At the beginning she was to serve at Mezaninovka, then at El'covka. In 1944, she got a second sentence of ten year camp and was transferred to Noril'sk, beyond the polar circle, where she remained until 1952, when she was

released. Laura di Carpegna writes about Efrosinia's singular book of memoirs, consisting of twelve note-books complete with 680 drawings by the author.

To end off this issue, the Debora Spini's essay is devoted to a reflection on the specificity of women memoirs from the Soviet camps, in the light of the link between totalitarianisms, modernity and biopolitical paradigm. Through this prism, the author looks into the process and peculiarities of memory's development of the two great experiences of mass violence of the twentieth century, Shoah and GULag.