

N. N. (Nikolai Nikolaevich) Punin:

An Inventory of His Diaries and Correspondence at the Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center

Descriptive Summary

Creator:	Punin, N.N. (Nikolai Nikolaevich), 1888-1953
Title:	N.N. Punin Diaries and Correspondence
Dates:	1910-1939
Extent:	1 box (.42 linear feet)
Abstract:	Diaries, conversation books, correspondence, and other papers document this art scholar and critic's relationship with poet Anna Akhmatova, as well as his experiences as a humanistic Russian intellectual living under a Communist régime.
RLIN Record #:	TXRC99-A9
Access:	Open for research

Administrative Information

Acquisition:	Purchase, 1974 (R6433)
Provenance	Punin left the majority of his personal papers with his daughter Irina Punina. Concerned that if those portions dealing with his relationship with Anna Akhmatova went to his daughter they might well find their way into Akhmatova's hands (where they might be censored), he left these in the care of his last wife, Martha Golubeva. Martha, in turn, passed these materials on to her daughter Nika Kazimirova at her own death in 1963. Nika did give a portion to Irina Punina but retained certain of Punin's diaries as well as his correspondence with Akhmatova. In 1974, when Konstantin Kuzminsky was seeking to leave Soviet Russia, Nika (Kuzminsky's ex-wife) sold, with the assistance of Sidney Monas, the Punin materials in her possession to the University of Texas to fund Kuzminsky's emigration.
Processed by:	Bob Taylor, 1999
Repository:	Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, University of Texas at Austin

Biographical Sketches

Nikolai Nikolaevich Punin

Nikolai Nikolaevich Punin was born on 28 Nov. 1888 into the family of a Russian army medical officer stationed in Helsinki. After graduating from the classical *gymnasium* at Tsarskoe Selo he attended St. Petersburg University from 1907 until 1914. Punin began a career as an art scholar and critic, writing for major St. Petersburg periodicals and co-founding the Department of Iconography in the Russian Museum of St. Petersburg.

In 1917 N. N. Punin married Anna Arens, a physician; they had one daughter, Irina. After the Bolshevik Revolution he continued his work as a scholar and critic in St. Petersburg, editing as well the journals *Iskusstvo Kommuny* and *Izobrazitel'noe Iskusstvo*. Punin's life from 1920 on was marked by repeated investigations and arrests by the Soviet secret police, but even so he was able to maintain his career with some success.

In the middle 1920s Punin began an affair with the poet Anna Akhmatova which lasted until the eve of the Second World War. In the final years of his life with Akhmatova, Punin was arrested a second time; finally after the Second World War, in 1949, he was arrested and sent to Siberia, where he died at Vorkuta on 21 Aug. 1953.

Anna Akhmatova

One of the century's great poets, Anna Akhmatova was born in the Ukraine, near Odessa, in 1889. As the young wife of the Acmeist poet Nikolai Gumilëv, Akhmatova began writing poetry and quickly established a major reputation. After the couple's son Lev was born in 1917 Akhmatova and Gumilëv divorced; in 1921 Gumilëv was executed without trial by the Soviet authorities.

Increasingly repressive political and cultural policies made it impossible for her to publish her poetry in the years down to the Second World War. After a period of cynical rehabilitation during the war Akhmatova was again forbidden to publish in the years preceding Stalin's death in 1953. Only in the final years of her difficult life did Akhmatova find it possible to publish her work without serious official hindrance and to enjoy a measure of public recognition in her homeland and abroad. She died in 1966.

Sources:

Punin, N. N. *O Tatline*. Moskva: "RA," 1994.

----- *The Diaries of Nikolay Punin, 1904-1953*. Edited by Sidney Monas and Jennifer Greene Krupala. Translated by Jennifer Greene Krupala (To be published in the fall of 1999 by the University of Texas Press; for the present project page proofs were made available through the generosity of Dr. Monas and the U.T. Press)

Reeder, Roberta. *Anna Akhmatova: Poet and Prophet*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1994.

Scope and Contents

The Punin papers at the Ransom Center document N. N. Punin's stormy relationship with Anna Akhmatova, as well as his treatment at the hands of the Soviet security apparatus. In a broader sense they give a remarkable view into the inner life of a humanistic Russian intellectual in the early years of the Communist régime, concentrating, as they do, in the years 1915 to 1926. The papers comprise four series: diaries, conversation books, correspondence, and other papers.

The first series includes ten diaries kept by Punin. Nine of these cover the years 1915 through 1925, with the tenth containing entries from the summer of 1936. The diaries are not a systematic record of daily activities, but rather impressionistic jottings of Punin's preoccupations, social, cultural, and emotional. In a few cases entries have been heavily lined through, and in places leaves have been torn out. Related material--for example, thoughts originally recorded elsewhere--have been inserted, evidently by Punin himself, at various points in certain of the diaries. Inserted into the diary for 1923-24 is a small ornamental fish (cut from silvered paper and with a piece of yarn for hanging) attributed to Vladimir Tatlin.

Series II embraces the three "conversation books" found in the Punin papers. These are small pocket-size address books or calendars of appointments which Anna Akhmatova originally employed to record telephone numbers. In time they came to be used (quoting Jennifer Green Krupala) to record "short 'conversations' between Akhmatova and Punin, in which Akhmatova would make an observation and Punin would answer." These conversation books contain entries from the spring of 1923 to the summer of 1926.

In a third series is found the small body of correspondence related to Punin and Akhmatova, of which the largest fraction--21 pieces--is by Akhmatova. The majority of these are to Punin and are frequently without salutation or date, though they were generally written in the years 1923-1926. Other recipients of letters from Akhmatova include Olga Sudeikina, Mikhail Zimmerman, and an unidentified "Dania."

Of the nine pieces of correspondence by N. N. Punin, four (two letters and two telegrams) were written to Akhmatova. One postcard to his wife Anna Arens Punina ("Galia") and two postcards to Evgeny Arens date from his 1921 imprisonment. There is also a draft of a letter to Arthur Lourie, as well as a poignant request to a Cheka officer following his 1921 incarceration requesting the return of a book and his suspenders.

Galia Punina is represented by three postcards to her imprisoned husband in 1921, plus a 1926 letter to Akhmatova and a 1924 letter to "my dear friend Pusenka."

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There are also single pieces of correspondence from Lev Arens, Anatoly Lunacharsky, and Zoia Arens Punina. Punin's father N. M. Punin is represented by a telegram of 1916 telling Nikolai that his brother Leonid had perished in the war.

The last, and smallest series, "Other papers," includes two documents written by Punin during his imprisonment of 1921, an essay in draft form by Punin on "unification of the left," together with two graphological analyses of Akhmatova. Also included are one of her 1910 poems in manuscript, and Galia Punina's manuscript medical notes on the birth in 1923 of her daughter Irina Nikolaevna Punina.

Index Terms

People

Akhmatova, Anna Andreevna, 1889-1966

Subjects

Art critics--Russia--Biography

Poets, Russian--20th century--Biography

Political prisoners--Russia

Document Types

Diaries

Legal documents

Love letteres

Postcards

I. Diaries, 1915-1936

1915-17	Box 1 Folder 1
1917-20	Folder 2
1920-21	Folder 3
1921-22	Folder 4
1922-23	Folder 5
1923-24	Folder 6
1924	Folder 7
1924-25	Folder 8
1925	Folder 9
1936	Folder 10

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II. Conversation Books, 1923-1926

Books N1, N2, N3

Box 1 Folder 11

III. Correspondence, 1916-1931

Akhmatova, Anna

Box 1 Folder 12

Arens, L. - Punin, N. N.

Folder 13

Punina, A. - Shterenberg, D.

Folder 14

Punin, N.N. (Nikolai Nikolaevich), 1888-1953

IV. Other Papers, 1910-1939

Akhmatova, N. N. Punin, A. Punina, others

Box 1 Folder
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Punin, N.N. (Nikolai Nikolaevich), 1888-1953

N. N. Punin Diaries and Correspondence--Index of Correspondents

Names in bold appear in the RLIN record.

- **Akhmatova, Anna Andreevna, 1889-1966--1.6, 1.12**
- Arens, Lev, 1890-1967--1.13
- Lunacharsky, Anatoly Vasilievich, 1875-1933--1.13
- Punin, Nikolai Mikhailovich, d. 1920--1.1
- **Punin, N. N. (Nikolai Nikolaevich)--1.13**
- Punina, Anna Arens, 1892-1943--1.14
- Punina, Zoia Arens--1.14
- Russian S. F. S. R. Chrezvychainaia komissiia po bor'be s kontr- revoliutsiei i sabotazhem (Bogdanov)--1.4, 1.13
- Shterenberg, David, 1881-1948--1.14
- Soviet Union. Narodnyi komissariat vnutrennikh del--1.10