Remembering Tatiana Bakunin

And All the Other Invisible Figures in History

CrimethInc.

July 30, 2019

To observe the 204th anniversary of her birth, we remember Tatiana Bakunin, sister of the revolutionary anarchist Mikhail Bakunin. On the basis of all the available information, Tatiana and her sisters were as courageous and creative as Mikhail. Tatiana repeatedly played a pivotal role behind the scenes in her brother's life and in the intellectual development of several other important thinkers. The fact that her name and ideas are not widely known today attests to the barriers she faced and the deficiencies of the "great man" model of history.

Nearly all of what we know about Tatiana appears in the margins of stories written about men. She is one of the countless people who remain invisible through the lens of patriarchal memory, which conceals both her contributions and the things she could have accomplished if the institutions and conventions of her time had not denied her personhood. Her correspondence and writings have yet to be translated.

Tatiana and her sisters grew up in the Russian countryside studying literature, music, and history. Their father raised them to speak several languages, bringing in tutors from Western Europe; he had picked up liberal ideas during his youth working in Italy as a diplomat, though his politics shifted to the reactionary end of the spectrum as he aged. In this environment, Tatiana Bakunin distinguished herself for her love of reading and writing and her reflective spirit.

While her brother Mikhail left home at the age of fourteen to attend military academy, Tatiana and her sisters continued their studies into adulthood. They developed a private mysticism based in poetry, powerful feeling, and asceticism, which they referred to among themselves as *la religion.* The sisters were the first ones in the family to rebel, revolting against the role prescribed for women in 19th-century Russia as wives and mothers. When their parents pressured the eldest daughter, Lyubov, to marry a military officer, the sisters opposed this choice and eventually forced their parents to let her break off the engagement. Tatiana herself never married.

In 1835, Mikhail was serving as an artillery officer in the Russian occupation of Poland. Likely inspired by his sisters' rejection of their socially ordained role, Mikhail went AWOL and left the military. When he arrived home, Tatiana and Lyubov took him to Moscow to introduce him to their friends, including Nikolai Stankevich, a student of philosophy and the organizer of an independent reading group. Together, Nikolai, Mikhail, Tatiana, and the other Bakunin sisters studied, Kant, Fichte, and Hegel and began to develop the ideals for which Mikhail later became famous.

Tatiana also maintained passionate intellectual relations with Vissarion Belinski, one of the most influential critics in the history of Russian literature, and later, Ivan Turgenev, the author who popularized the concept of nihilism with his novel *Fathers and Sons.*

> "My love does not fit in any of your categories. Call it folly or what you will. I was simply in love; and before I had realized it, I spent days which it is even now joy to remember… I lived with my whole heart and soul, every vein in me throbbed with life, everything around me was transfigured. Why must I now renounce all this?"

-Tatiana Bakunin, reflecting on her relationship with Turgenev in correspondence with her brother in the 1850s

After the repression of the revolutions of 1848, Mikhail Bakunin was captured and sentenced to death in three countries, then condemned to life imprisonment in Russia. Defying the hostility of the Russian government, Tatiana repeatedly visited him and smuggled secret messages out of the prison at great risk to herself. Petitioning the authorities, she and her mother and siblings eventually managed to effect Mikhail's transfer to Siberia, from which he was ultimately to escape and resume his revolutionary activities. If not for Tatiana, Mikhail Bakunin's name might also be unknown to us today.

In his contributions to the development of contemporary anarchism, Mikhail always emphasized the importance of women's liberation. The credit for this is due to Tatiana and her sisters, who set an example by advocating for themselves and teaching him much of what he knew about self-emancipation. The best way we can honor Tatiana is by recognizing the important roles that all those whose names are unknown to us—the majority of them women—have played in history.

> "Women almost everywhere are slaves, and we ourselves are the slaves of their bondage; without their liberation, without their complete, unlimited freedom, our freedom is impossible; and without freedom, there is no beauty, no dignity, no true love. We love only to the extent to which we desire and call for the freedom and independence of the other—total independence in relation to everything and even and especially in relation to ourselves. Love is the union of free beings and only this love uplifts, ennobles us. All other love disgraces the oppressed and the oppressor and is a source of depravity."

-Mikhail Bakunin, letter to his siblings, May Day, 1845

find each other.

anti-copyright
creative commons zero (cc-0)
do whatever you want

CrimethInc.
Remembering Tatiana Bakunin
And All the Other Invisible Figures in History
July 30, 2019

Retrieved on 17th June 2021 from crimethinc.com

lib.edist.ro