

Introduction

Alexandra Andreevna Voronine's memoirs reflect a dramatic life in which tragedy, betrayal, and misunderstanding were softened by optimism and moments of great happiness. Her soul-searching began more than seventy years ago in an effort to understand her marriage to Vidkun Quisling, the Norwegian whose name became synonymous with traitor during the Second World War, but whose early career included Ukrainian relief work as Fridtjof Nansen's trusted assistant. It was in this early period (1922–24) that Quisling met, married, and abandoned Alexandra, a girl as petite as he was tall and sturdy, and eighteen years his junior.

She wanted to comprehend what had brought them together and what had caused them to become so painfully separated, for if she could discover what had gone wrong, she might avoid similar mistakes in the future. Far from bringing clarity and understanding, however, Alexandra's quest led only to greater confusion when she realized that she had been a pawn in a complicated game of politics and personal ambition. Trying to uncover the purpose of that game became as important as understanding both the feelings she and Quisling had brought to their marriage and the reasons he had chosen Maria Vasilievna Paseshnikova over her.

Making her story known became more urgent to Alexandra after Maria Quisling's death in Oslo on January 17, 1980. The subsequent auction of Maria's possessions sharpened the Norwegians' interest in Vidkun Quisling and his private life, including his relationships with Alexandra and Maria. Maria is generally regarded as Quisling's widow, although no record of their marriage exists. For Alexandra, the closing of Maria's estate marked the end of her many efforts to retrieve personal belongings from Erling Skjalgssonsgate 26, and the confused and confusing information provided by the daily press made it seem even more important to let the public, especially the Norwegians, know about her relationship with Maria and Vidkun.

It was Alexandra's wish to set the record straight about those years in Vidkun Quisling's life, which he and Maria evidently had been most eager to erase from the public record. The publication later, in 1980, of *Maria Quislings Dagbok og andre etterlatte papirer* (*Maria Quisling's Diary and other posthumous papers*), edited by Øistein Parmann, did nothing to tear the web of mystery and contradictions with which Maria and Vidkun had surrounded themselves. It was also in 1980 that I was asked, in my capacity as an historian and novelist, to help Alexandra and her husband, W. George Yourieff, with her memoirs. I agreed because I fully shared Alexandra's wish to shed new light on Quisling's controversial personality and because I was impressed with the source material she and her husband laid before me. Mere chance had led to my being asked to help.

At the time of Maria's death, I was still teaching Norwegian at Stanford University, although I had long since resumed my research into early voyages of discovery in the North Atlantic. In addition, I was quite busy as a translator because everyone who called the University asking for a Norwegian language specialist was referred to me. That was also the case when George Yourieff needed translation of some Norwegian articles about Maria's es-

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tate. He never said why he was interested in Vidkun Quisling's widow and her possessions, and I naturally did not ask, although I got along very well with this exquisitely courteous and well-dressed Russian.

One day toward the end of 1980, he called and asked if I had time to translate the preface of a newly published book and to give him an oral report on the rest of the work's contents. When he handed me the book, which turned out to be *Maria Quislings Dagbok og andre etterlatte papirer*, he asked me somewhat hesitantly to pay special attention to any statements concerning "the first Mrs. Quisling." When I told him I'd had no idea that Maria had had a predecessor, he replied that there were many who did not know that!

Toppen Bech knew it, however, when she was the editor of the Norwegian weekly *Alle Kvinner (All Women)*, and she saw to it that the magazine, in 1975, published three articles largely based on interviews with Alexandra in her California home. Maria refused to be interviewed and was, according to Øistein Parmann's preface in *Maria Quislings Dagbok*, very upset by what *Alle Kvinner* had published. Parmann, nevertheless, made it clear that there is no doubt that Quisling already was married to Alexandra when "Maria was married to Quisling in 1923," and that we are dealing with a complicated story. Then he wrote: "Alexandra has written her autobiography, and I have had the opportunity to read it in manuscript. As a book it would not have found a market here in Norway. Aside from the chapters about her marriage to Quisling, it concerns her career as a dancer and painter. Her story about falling in love with and marrying Quisling nevertheless seems believable." (pp. 18–19)

Neither Parmann nor anyone else in Norway, with the exception of Alexandra's Norwegian lawyer Lars Tobiassen, who read the preliminary manuscript a good while after *Maria Quisling's Diary* was published, has had access to Alexandra's memoirs ei-

ther before or after 1980. At the time Parmann claimed he had read the manuscript, her recollections lay well preserved in a bank box here in the U.S., its components not yet pulled together. The only information in *Maria Quislings Dagbok* about Alexandra's marriage to Quisling that could be traced directly back to Alexandra came from what had been published in *Alle Kvinner*. What she had told *Alle Kvinner* reporter Lars Torekull on that occasion was true, but it was by no means the whole story. This she wanted to tell in her own way, in her own time.

Naturally, I knew nothing of all this when I first read *Maria Quislings Dagbok*. When I called George Yourieff to say that he could pick up my translation of the preface and hear my report on the rest of the book, I told him what I thought about the work and gave him a general idea of Maria's brief comments regarding Alexandra. After a long pause at the other end of the line, he told me: "I have proof that Maria is lying."

Those were strong words, so when he came to pick up the material, I cautiously reminded him that Parmann claimed to have read the memoirs of Quisling's first wife. "He cannot have," said Mr. Yourieff curtly. He sat there for a while deep in thought before continuing: "We need someone who can help us write a book on this topic. I hope you are willing to take part in this."

I replied truthfully that, in the first place, I already had too much to do and, in the second place, this was not a subject I knew much about—I had not even known that Quisling had been married when he took up with Maria!

"We have more than enough material," he said gravely. After another long pause, he added: "The first Mrs. Quisling is my wife."

Who could resist such a challenge?

At that point, Alexandra's recollections about Quisling consisted of a large collection of written notes and tape recordings in English and Russian. Her husband's translations, transcriptions,

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and registers constituted an additional several hundred pages. As I worked my way through them, I discovered that many episodes were described repeatedly, often from slightly different angles, but always with identical core and dialogue. Naturally, I asked her how she could remember who had said what so many years ago. She gave me a long look and replied:

“You must remember that I had nothing to do during that first period [i.e., after Quisling had abandoned her] than to relive these episodes time after time in my head. I had no books or other reading matter, and I was completely alone in a strange place.”

I was soon to discover that Alexandra still had a phenomenal memory, in addition to her ability to observe and then describe what she had seen and heard. However, when I came into the picture, she was so physically reduced that she was no longer able to form her memoirs into a book, and her husband had his hands full looking after both her and his business. There was, nevertheless, reason to believe that she might regain enough of her old strength to see the project through with outside help. We hoped that the three of us together could win the race with time and complete Alexandra’s memoirs while she was alive. Unfortunately, that was not to be.

Alexandra’s mind remained clear to the end. Most of her book had been written, and she had carefully gone over the major portion of it when her health took such a rapid downturn that it became impossible for her to continue active work at all. But glimpses from the period we had not yet covered still came through during our many conversations before she died and in conversations with George Yourieff afterwards. In addition to these conversations and the written material, over the years I consulted a number of secondary sources, as well as archives in Norway, England, and the U.S.

This material I have now used to create a frame around Al-

alexandra's personal document. Within this frame appear all the chapters that Alexandra had approved before she died on October 1, 1993. I had matched these chapters as closely as I could to her spoken style because all of her Russian notes had reached me through her husband's English translation, making it impossible for me to reproduce her own "written voice." The contents of the chapters are unchanged, with one important exception: I am now free to reveal Alexandra's family background. Having solemnly promised her mother not to reveal the latter's maiden name, she did not tell even Vidkun Quisling what that name was. Nor did George, who shared Alexandra's innermost thoughts for over fifty years, learn this name until they went together to a bank here in California to open an account in her name, and she had to give the bank clerk her mother's maiden name.

But Maria Vasilievna Paseshnikova and her mother in Kharkov knew the secret from the time before the Revolution, and Alexandra's story will show how they later used that knowledge. I myself did not learn the full story until October 7, 1993, when Alexandra was buried.

In the Russian Orthodox church in Menlo Park the day before, many people had come to kiss the consecrated brow band placed above those still classically beautiful features, and many followed Alexandra's coffin to the cemetery in the golden October morning on the day of her burial. When the last fistful of earth had been tossed on her coffin and the last silent greeting sent to the woman in the grave, the other mourners went home while I accompanied my grieving friend George to his mother's gravesite at the same cemetery. On the back of his own mother's headstone was the only visible memorial to a woman who had done everything in her power to prevent anyone from knowing who she really was: an inscription dedicated to the memory of Alexandra's mother Irina, "born Kossuch." George explained

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that this is a Russian version of the German noble name von Kotzebue.

There was good reason to keep this name secret. When revolution, civil war and terrorism began to wash over the Ukraine, Irina von Kotzebue realized that if she and her daughter were to have a chance of survival, nobody must know that Alexandra was the descendant of a Russian tsar's viceroy in Poland and that they both were descended from Rörek, the Viking king. In the aftermath of World War I and the 1917 Revolution, a genealogy like hers was as good as a death sentence in the Ukraine.

Now that Alexandra's family story may be told, George Yourieff has helped provide more detailed information regarding her background, where there were only allusions before. If family connections are capable of causing a person's death, they are also an important part of that person's experiences in life. Otherwise, every effort has been made to stay true to Alexandra's own distaste for people who liked to boast of their ancestry. The irony here is that Quisling never knew that the young girl he married and then betrayed came from the very background he had helped Maria invent for herself.

"All is fair in love and war," we say. It might be better to say that under those two conditions, the participants often disregard the normal rules for human intercourse, while non-participants look the other way in embarrassment when they sense that there is too much they do not understand. This is, therefore, above all the story of a little-known period in Vidkun Quisling's life. It is otherwise my hope that Alexandra's memoirs will be read not as a tale about saints and sinners, but about three people whose fates were intertwined under the extreme conditions that the combination of war, revolution, and famine created in Russia. Alexandra would have been in full agreement with such a view, and were she still alive, she would also have joined me in thanking all the people who helped me collect material for this work.

First and foremost among them is her faithful life's companion, George. Without his self-sacrificing work, this book would never have seen the light of day. Alexandra, George, and I all owe the Fredrikstad lawyer Lars Tobiassen a great deal. When he entered the picture, it was the first time that Alexandra and her husband had met with sober understanding in Norway, and this gave them the courage to continue their work on the book despite many difficulties. Having ascertained the facts, Tobiassen quickly understood the claims that Alexandra had vainly tried to forward in Norway, and he did his best to help her and to provide her with needed information.

Furthermore, I am personally indebted to John Herstad and Ole Kolsrud at Riksarkivet (the Norwegian National Archives), to Sverre Flugsrud of the Manuscript Department at the Oslo National Library (formerly the Oslo University Library), and to the archivists on duty at the Hoover Institution of War, Revolution and Peace at Stanford University in California. The Hoover Archives contains well-organized information about both the Russian activities of the American Relief Administration (ARA) and Nansen's and Quisling's work in Russia.

I also owe great thanks to the Norwegian television producer, author, and publisher Arve Juritzen for his good friendship and many valuable insights. In the course of doing research for his 1988 book *Privatmennesket Quisling og hans to kvinner (The Private Quisling and His Two Women)*, he found several important and hitherto unknown documents and pictures related to his subject at Norsk Folkemuseum (the Norwegian Folk Museum), among other places, and he interviewed many people who had known one or more of his three main characters. In addition, I am grateful for a long and useful talk with Paul M. Hayes, late of Keeble College, Oxford. He was the author of *Quisling: The Career and Political Ideas of Vidkun Quisling* (Indiana University Press, 1971).

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Last, but not least, I want to thank Sarah Tyacke, now retired from her post as Keeper of Public Records in England, who called my attention to her institution's recently released documents concerning Norway just before and during the German occupation period. These documents give one pause, both because they are a reminder of the care we must take not to judge in black-and-white, with no shades in between, and because they show so clearly that even under the extreme conditions brought about by war and despair, individuals, on the whole, behave according to their basic nature, although their experiences may obviously cause great changes both in their perspective on life and in their actual lives.

Alexandra stated very clearly why she wished to go public with her memories about Maria Paseshnikova and Vidkun Quisling:

"This book is not written to dishonor the memory of the dead. But for more than sixty years the truth about what happened to me so long ago has been deliberately hidden, and soon I, too, shall be a mute memory. I want to tell what I know so that one day, perhaps, the whole truth may be known."

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