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Minds Under Siege:  
Rethinking the Soviet Experience inside  
the Leningrad Blockade, 1941-45

By

Alexis Jean Peri

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

History

in the

Graduate Division

of the

University of California, Berkeley

Committee in charge:

Professor Yuri Slezkine, Chair  
Professor John Connelly  
Professor Irina Paperno

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## Abstract

### Minds Under Siege: Rethinking the Soviet Experience inside the Leningrad Blockade, 1941-45

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Alexis Peri

Doctor of Philosophy in History

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The Blockade of Leningrad during the Second World War was one of the longest and most devastating sieges in modern history, which claimed the lives of about one million of the city's residents. Rather than invade Leningrad, Hitler vowed to simply "let the city devour itself." For those trapped inside the city, the war became first and foremost an internal struggle against the demands of their own bodies, which, under conditions of severe starvation, literally fed upon themselves. Over the course of almost 900 days spent under siege, Leningraders turned their attention inward and closely monitored the deterioration of their city, their community, and their lives.

During the Blockade, Leningraders were confronted with the transformation of virtually every aspect of daily life, the defamiliarization of all that was known to them. Leningraders grew estranged from their physical bodies as well as from the identities, communities, attitudes, and beliefs that characterized their prewar lives. The Blockade thrust many established narratives—personal, historical, scientific, and ideological—into crisis. This dissertation examines how Leningraders struggled to make sense of the Blockade, and it draws on diaries that were kept during the siege as its main source base. I have uncovered a large corpus of blockade diaries from state, private, and family archives across Russia. These intimate accounts, which have largely been unknown to and untapped by scholarly research, are replete with insights about the how individuals endure extreme deprivation and the effects of prolonged trauma and starvation on the mind.

Although the diaries do not provide direct access to Leningraders' innermost thoughts, they do give us insight into the various interpretive and narrative strategies that the diarists used as they struggled to find meaning in such horrific, almost unthinkable suffering. This study traces how the diarists studied their new surroundings and attempted to formulate new, meaningful narratives of the body, self, society, and history in their journals. I demonstrate how the diarists placed their society under a critical microscope and, from their unique vantage point "inside the ring," reconsidered certain fundamental aspects of Soviet life and of

human existence more generally. Although they were aware of the particularity of their situation “inside the ring,” the diarists viewed their discoveries in universal terms, suggesting that the Blockade led them to new insights about human nature, laid bare by the siege. The Soviet regime may have attempted to radically restructure human nature through socialism, but, according to the siege diarists, the Blockade actually was succeeding in doing so.

To My Family

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Any mistakes that may appear in this dissertation are entirely my own.



## Contents:

“Inside the Ring”: an Introduction	1
Living Narratives: Comments on the Diary as a Source	9
One: From Leningraders to <i>Blokadniki</i> : Inhabiting the Siege Body	16
Two: Not “I”: Literary Expressions of the Self, Besieged	54
Three: Families under Siege: the New Forms, Functions, and Conflicts of Home Life	73
Four: A Living Experiment: Examining the Blockade through the Lens of Medical Science	122
Five: The Transformation of the Social Body: the Role of Food in reshaping Blockade Society	162
Six: “A Great Time Machine:” Living, Writing, and Reading History	196
Minds Under Siege: Concluding Remarks	232
Appendix	237

“The inhabitants of Leningrad have become absorbed in their unusual daily work. The life of each one of them would make a very different story. Some day thousands of diaries will lie on the historian’s table, and then we shall see how much there was that was remarkable in the unremarkable biographies of simple Russian people.”<sup>1</sup>

-Nikolai Tikhonov

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<sup>1</sup> Nikolai Tikhonov, *Leningradskii god, mai 1942-1943* (Leningrad: Voennoe Izdatel'stvo NKO, 1943), 64.

## “Inside the Ring”:

### an Introduction

“Mankind’s normal existence came to an end on 22 June 1941. That day signifies the beginning of our new era. We (the Soviet people) have a sacred date, 25 October 1917, which we all took as the start of a new era, of humanity’s rebirth. That is how things were until 22 June 1941. On that day, the terrible tragedy began.”<sup>2</sup> The historian and diarist Georgii Kniazev came to this conclusion in November 1941, just three months after the Leningrad Blockade began. The Bolshevik revolution had promised to usher in a new era and to build a fundamentally new kind of civilization under socialism. But now the war—and for Kniazev, the Blockade—was eclipsing the revolution as the new “year zero.” It created a great sea change that thrust established attitudes, beliefs, and identities into crisis. And, as Kniazev and other diarists came to suggest, in the ruins of the besieged city, a new kind of civilization indeed was emerging.

The Leningrad Blockade stands out as one of the most tragic events of the Second World War. Leningrad was the centerpiece of the longest battle of the war and one of the longest sieges in history, which lasted from September 1941 to January 1944. During those 827 days, about one million civilians died, almost half of the city’s prewar population. The death toll inside Leningrad was ten times that of Hiroshima or Nagasaki, twice that of Stalingrad or D-Day, and greater than the total wartime losses of several combatant countries including Italy, France, the United Kingdom and the United States.<sup>3</sup> Most Leningraders died of starvation, but thousands also perished from enemy bombardment, hypothermia, and disease. During the worst days of the Blockade, seventy-five percent of the population received just 125 grams (about 4.5 ounces) of bread a day. As Harrison Salisbury observed in his classic study of the Blockade, more people perished in Leningrad during the siege than in any other city, at any single moment in modern history.<sup>4</sup>

Leningrad also stands out from other besieged cities of the Second World War, such as Stalingrad and Sevastopol’, in that it was never invaded. The enemy presented himself to the city’s population only through the shells, bombs, and leaflets dropped on the city.

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<sup>2</sup> Kniazev’s diary entry for 29 November 1941 in Daniil Granin and Ales’ Adamovich, *Blokadnaia Kniga* (Saint Petersburg: Pechatnyi Dvor, 1994), 262. Granin and Adamovich’s classic study and anthology includes interviews, diaries, and stories from the Blockade. It was first completed in 1977 and published in several editions between 1979 and 1994; the later editions included larger excerpts from the documentary materials as well as a more candid discussions of taboo topics, such as cannibalism. The latest, and largest publication of Kniazev’s diary appears in: Granin and Adamovich, *Leningrad under Siege: First-hand Accounts of the Ordeal*, trans. Clare Burstall and Vladimir Kisselnikov (Barnsely: Military Pen and Sword, 2007).

<sup>3</sup> Although figures vary, this moderate estimate if the death toll is drawn from: David M. Glantz, *The Siege of Leningrad, 1941-45: 900 Days of Terror* (London: Cassell Military Paperbacks, 2001), viii. Out of a population of about 3 million, 1.6-2 million soldiers and civilians died, with 2.4 million total casualties. In making this assessment, I draw on the following estimates of mortality rates for the aforementioned events: Nagasaki: 100,000; Stalingrad: (490,000 Soviet; 147,000 German); D-Day: 425,000; American deaths: 300,000; British deaths: 388,000; French deaths: 810,000; Italian deaths: 410,000.

<sup>4</sup> Harrison Salisbury, *The Nine Hundred Days: The Siege of Leningrad* (Cambridge: Da Capo Press, 1985), 436.

Hitler vowed to simply “let the city devour itself,” and indeed, for Leningraders, the war became primarily an internal struggle against the demands of their own bodies, which, under conditions of severe starvation, literally fed upon themselves. During the winter of 1941-42, when it became too cold for the German pilots to fly, Leningraders turned their attention inward, monitoring the deterioration of their city, their community, and their lives. Without reliable news and few outside contacts to orient them, they became increasingly estranged from Soviet society. The *blokadniki* themselves were well aware of the peculiar, liminal space that they occupied, both geographically and mentally. Their city was neither at the front, nor rear, neither occupied nor free.

Inside “the ring,” as the encircled city came to be called, the *blokadniki* were confronted with the transformation of virtually every aspect of daily life, the defamiliarization of all that was known, the depersonalization of all that was intimate. Fundamental aspects of Leningraders’ bodies, identities, relationships, and attitudes were called into question. The horrific conditions of the Blockade not only radically altered Leningraders’ lives and identities, they also obliterated many fundamental conceptual categories that help to organize human experience and understanding. The blockaded city came to resemble what Giorgio Agamben has called a zone of “indistinction,”<sup>5</sup> where meaningful distinctions between self and other, male and female, young and old, alive and dead, human and inhuman, ordinary and extraordinary, disappeared. As these markers faded, the networks of meaning that had anchored Leningraders within their communities and within themselves unraveled.

This dissertation asks how Leningraders struggled to make sense of the Blockade over the course of these 900 days. To access these intimate experiences and reflections, it draws on diaries that Leningraders kept during the siege as its main source base. Of course, the diaries cannot be considered direct points of entry into Leningraders’ inner thoughts or conscious awareness. The stories and impressions they contain are mediated by the process of writing. Still, they do give us insight into the various interpretive and narrative strategies that Leningraders employed as they struggled to find meaning in a tragedy that seemed to defy explanation or understanding.<sup>6</sup> The diarists described besieged Leningrad—once so familiar to them—as a fundamentally opaque space, engulfed in smoke, fog, or darkness. For them, these conceptual barriers often seemed as constricting as the military blockade itself. With an eye to this internal struggle, several diarists confessed to feeling “besieged,” immobilized by feelings of anxiety and uncertainty.<sup>7</sup> In her retrospective semi-autobiographical *Notes of A Blockade Person (Zapiski blokadnogo cheloveka)*, based on her wartime notes and diaries, the literary scholar and siege survivor Lidiia Ginzburg observed that the metaphor of “the ring” referred not only to the line of German troops encircling the city, it “was the siege symbol of

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<sup>5</sup> Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, trans. D. Heller Roazen (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998).

<sup>6</sup> In my approach to the blockade diaries, I found Alexandra Garbarini’s approach and her discussion of the “interpretive strategies” used by Holocaust diarists to be very helpful. See: Garbarini, *Numbered Days: Diaries and the Holocaust* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006).

<sup>7</sup> An example can be found in: The diary of Aleksandra Pavlovna Liubovskaia, entry for 16 November 1941, 11. This source is hereafter referred to as “Liubovskaia.” I would like to thank Igor’ Liubovskii for sharing his mother’s diary with me and Tat’iana Voronina at European University in Saint Petersburg for coordinating this arrangement.

an introverted mind.”<sup>8</sup> For many *blokadniki*, the most pressing problem was not to break the German lines, but to break out of this mental trap. Similarly, scholars of siegecraft have noted how a siege can come to be internalized and “self-inflicted” by the encircled population.<sup>9</sup> During such a prolonged moment of self-confrontation, questions about the psychological, historical, epistemological aspects of experience and identity come to the fore.

The primary aim of this study is to trace how the uncertainty and confusion that pervaded the siege experience created space for the development of new meanings and perspectives. The Blockade thrust many established narratives—personal, historical, scientific, and ideological—into crisis. As Elaine Scarry has shown, intense experiences of pain and suffering can actually “unmake the assumptive world” of the victims, preying not only on their bodies, but violating their expectations, reversing norms, and dislodging long-held beliefs.<sup>10</sup> In the wake of this destruction, the victims learn to remake their world anew. This dissertation aims to shed some light on how this process occurred, how Leningraders attempted to formulate new, meaningful narratives of the body, self, society, and history in their journals. Ultimately, through my analysis of these texts, I hope to show how the Blockade was not just a destructive force, it was also a constructive one.

With this focus in mind, I read the siege diaries not for factual information about blockade life, but to get a sense of the questions, assumptions, and experiences that informed their thinking or, more precisely, the articulation of their thoughts on the page. I am interested in where they put their attention, what questions mattered to them the most, and how they explained various aspects of their experiences. I treat these accounts primarily in their capacity as “sense-making texts,”<sup>11</sup> as conceptual spaces where the attempt to break out of this “self-siege” took place. In this dissertation, I am not attempting to tell the whole story of the siege through diaries. The diaries do not capture all aspects of the Blockade experience, nor do they capture all aspects of the diarists themselves. They are incomplete, fragmented, often contradictory texts that often evoke, but do not represent the vast tragedy of the siege. Still, the diaries are replete with insights that greatly contribute to our understanding of how

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<sup>8</sup> Lidiia Ginzburg, “Zapiski blokadnogo cheloveka,” in *Prokhodiashchie kharaktery: proza voennykh let, zapiski blokadnogo cheloveka*, eds. Andrei Zorin and Emily Van Buskirk (Moscow: Novoe Izdatel'stvo, 2011), 358. This text was reworked by the author in the postwar era and is signed with three dates: 1942-1962-1982. For an English translation of this source, see: Lidiya Ginzburg, *Blockade Diary*, trans. Alan Myers (London: Harvill Press, 1996).

<sup>9</sup> I found the following collection of siege studies to be especially helpful in formulating my approach to the blockade diaries: *Situazioni d'Assedio/Cities under Siege: Conference Proceedings*, eds. Carle, Lucia and Antoinette Fauve-Chamoux (Montalcino: Pagnin E. Martinelli, Editori, 1999). Rocco Coronato's contribution, which describes how a siege can elicit “a hermeneutic interlude, a freezing pause wherein the besieger and the besieged were made to reflect upon themselves” was especially useful. See: Rocco Coronato, “King John and the Siege as Hermeneutics,” *Ibid*, 353-356.

<sup>10</sup> Elaine Scarry, *The Body in Pain: the Making and Unmaking of the World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 356-357. Similar arguments about the development of meaning out of calamity have been offered by scholars in the field of Holocaust studies. Of this vast literature, I found the following scholars' discussions of this theme in reference to personal documents to be particularly informative: Lawrence Langer, *Holocaust Testimonies*, James Young, *Writing and Rewriting the Holocaust*, and Alexandra Garbarini, *Number Days*.

<sup>11</sup> This term is drawn from: Donna M. Budani, *Italian Women's Narratives of their Experiences during World War II* (Lampeter: Edwin Mellen Press, 2003), 5. On this point, I also consulted the work of Marianne Gullestad, who takes a similar, “sense-making” approach to the study of autobiographies, which she conceptualizes as “everyday life philosophies.” See: Gullestad, *Everyday Life Philosophers, Modernity, Morality, and Autobiography in Norway* (Oslo: Scandinavian University Press, 1996), 31, 107, 117.

the blockade was experienced.

The blockade diaries are extraordinary documents, written about an extraordinary event. They tell the story of how individual Leningraders looked to various strategies—material, psychological, and creative—to survive. They teach us about individuals in extremis, about the effects of hunger and extreme suffering on human psychology, physiology, and relationships, knowledge, and creativity. Although well aware of the unique and peculiar aspects of their circumstances, the diarists demonstrated a strong tendency to cast their insights in much broader, universal terms, to generalize from their experiences about human nature. Ales Adamovich and Daniil Granin observed, but never fully explored, this phenomenon in their landmark publication *A Book of the Blockade* (*Blokadnaia kniga*), commenting that: “often the diarists displayed not only an ability to record facts and experiences but also a desire to comprehend both man and history in a new way and, in general, the whole world: the war and the Blockade presented plenty of reasons for this.”<sup>12</sup> The intellectual reach of the diaries is indeed remarkable, as they attempted to find meaning and purpose that transcended the confines of “the ring.” As Lidiia Ginzburg observed, “to write about the circle is to break the circle.”<sup>13</sup>

The diaries are indeed extraordinary, but they also tell us—in a peculiar, paradoxical way—something about ordinary life in the Soviet Union. After all, the city remained under Soviet control for all 827 days. The Germans’ encirclement of Leningrad had two contradictory effects: it both attacked and insulated the city, destroying and yet intensifying certain existing aspects of life inside the city. The same institutions, governing bodies, and basic ideological principles structured life inside the besieged city, and they helped to shape Leningraders’ experiences of deprivation, hunger, and loss. The diaries allow us to see how individuals interacted with these bodies in the daily struggle to survive. The curious combination of continuities and discontinuities that characterized life “inside the ring” led the diarists to think anew about their prewar lives. Moreover, by cutting Leningraders off from the “mainland”—as they called the rest of the Soviet Union—the Blockade provided the diarists with a unique vantage point from which to reflect upon their experiences under Soviet socialism. Some of the aspects of Soviet life that the diarists reconsidered include: utopian visions of the body and human nature, the project to transform Soviet citizens into New People, social stratification, class conflict and the tension between equality and privilege, the role of the family in socialism, and Marxist-Leninist theories of history. The diarists also engaged critically with the wartime press, which offered its own ideological and historical guidelines for understanding the Blockade. Not of the diarists became critical of the regime, but whether they questioned or ultimately upheld the Soviet system, they did so based on new insights stemming from the siege experience, reworking official narratives as they crafted their own personal ones.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Granin and Adamovich, *Blokadnaia kniga*, 102. English translation from: Adamovich and Granin, *Book of the Blockade*, trans. Hilda Perham (Moscow: Raduga Publishers, 1983), 134.

<sup>13</sup> Ginzburg, “Zapiski blokadnogo cheloveka,” *Prokhodiashchie kharaktery*, 358.

<sup>14</sup> There have been a number of studies that trace how the attitudes of both soldiers and civilians toward Soviet life shifted during and after the war. Among this body of research, I found the following works to be most useful: Amir Weiner, *Making Sense of War: The Second World War and the Fate of the Bolshevik Revolution* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001); Jeffrey W. Jones, *Everyday Life and the “Reconstruction” of Soviet Russia during and after the Great Patriotic War* (Bloomington: Slavica, 2008); Mark Edele, *Soviet Veterans of the Second World War: A Popular Movement in an Authoritarian Society 1941-1991* (Oxford:

The diarists' insights and questions extend far beyond Soviet themes and categories and toward more universal questions about human nature, morality, suffering, and resilience. In pursuit of these queries, they looked to alternative frameworks that might help them invest their experiences with meaning. They drew concepts and analytical techniques from literature, biomedicine, ethnography, sociology, and history. They also borrowed from these approaches in the style and structure of their writings. In short, much more than accounts of surviving the Blockade, these diaries capture Leningraders' meditations on both Soviet society and on human existence as they developed over the course of the siege. In coming to terms with the tragic and the extraordinary, the diarists also came to reconsider the everyday and the mundane.

Although the siege diarists shared this common drive toward inquiry and understanding, not all of them decided to keep diaries expressly for this purpose. Leningraders were compelled to write for a variety of reasons. Some kept diaries as sources of personal comfort and companionship; others wrote as a creative or emotional outlet, as a distraction from hunger. Still other Leningraders felt a strong sense of duty to document this unique historical moment. Many also hoped to preserve some trace of themselves, of their story, for posterity. Indeed, an important aspect of this dissertation is to investigate the role that this writing practice played in the diarists' daily lives and to monitor how the relationship between the diarist and the diary changed over the course of the war. But despite their different visions of the diary project and motivations for writing, all of the diarists shared an urgent impulse to uncover and document the larger social, political, intellectual implications of the Blockade. They also shared a strong commitment to the diary project. They wrote in spite of hunger, exhaustion, illness, and fear of reprisals.

This dissertation on the conceptual and narrational challenges of the siege experience is part of a growing scholarly literature on the Blockade that has focused on Leningraders' daily struggles to survive. In recent years, there has been a considerable increase in the number of document collections and historical studies published about the siege, including military histories of the Leningrad front and studies of the civilian life. In terms of the latter, historians have taken three main approaches to the siege since the 1960s. First, they have documented the efforts of local authorities to organize life inside the starving city, to defend the city, distribute food, and maintain its industrial sector. This research was pioneered by historian Leon Goure in 1962 and has been greatly enriched by Richard Bidlack and Nikita Lomagin. With access to closed military archives, Lomagin has made great contributions to our understanding of the relationship between Leningrad authorities and its citizens, especially the covert operations and surveillance work carried out by the NKVD.<sup>15</sup> The second approach—

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Oxford University Press, 2008). The historian Nikita Lomagin has studied how Leningrad authorities, the NKVD in particular, monitored the shifts in Leningraders' attitudes during the war and discovered a sharp increase in anti-Soviet attitudes. Lomagin has published both a document collection and a two-volume historical monograph devoted to this question. See Lomagin, *V Tiskakh goloda: blokada Leningrada v dokumentakh germanskikh spetssluzhb i NKVD* (Saint Petersburg: Evropeiskii Dom, 2000); Lomagin, *Neizvestnaia Blokada, Kniga I* (Saint Petersburg: "Neva," 2002). The second volume, produced by the same publisher, appeared in 2004.

<sup>15</sup> Goure, *The Siege of Leningrad*; Bidlack, "Workers at War: Factory Workers and Labor Policy in the Siege of Leningrad," *The Carl Beck Papers in Russian and East European Studies* (The University of Pittsburgh Center for Russian and East European Studies), No. 209 (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press); Lomagin, *Neizvestnaia Blokada*.

first advanced by journalist Harrison Salisbury in 1969 and recently taken up by Richard Bidlack and Jeff Hass—attempts to reconstruct the survival strategies, moral questions, and everyday struggles and that defined Leningraders’ lives “inside the ring.” Hass, a sociologist who also works with blockade diaries, draws on Bourdieu’s notion of *habitus* to analyze how Leningraders were socialized into the world of the siege as well as how they situated themselves within the new social order emerging inside of the city.<sup>16</sup> A third method focuses on personal and collective memory of the Blockade as it was expressed in state ceremonies, published memoirs, and interviews with siege survivors. Two recent studies at the forefront of this field—one conducted by a research team at European University in St. Petersburg and the other by historian Lisa Kirschenbaum—highlight the evolving legacy of the siege across generations, including the critical role played by postwar and post-Soviet political developments in shaping private and public memories of the siege.<sup>17</sup> I owe a tremendous intellectual debt to all of these studies and approaches, which have deeply informed my own understanding of the problematics of the Blockade. By focusing on the conceptual and narrational challenges of the siege experience, I hope to address a distinct set of concerns about the effect of trauma, starvation, and extreme deprivation on the inner worlds of Leningraders, and how it shaped their intimate, individual articulations of the ordeal.

Long before the war, the diary held a privileged place in the regime’s mission to transform its people into model citizens. The blockade diaries make an important contribution to the on-going scholarly discussion about Soviet views and habits of diary writing. Two of the leading scholars in this field, Igal Halfin and Jochen Hellbeck, have demonstrated how, at various points in the 1920s and 1930s, the regime encouraged the Soviet people to write diaries and other autobiographical documents in order to improve and purify themselves and to internalize the values of Soviet socialism.<sup>18</sup> In their analyses of such personal writings, Halfin and Hellbeck have focused on a particular aspect of selfhood,

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General histories of the siege that touch upon many of these themes and attempt to capture the texture of blockade life include: Michael K. Jones, *Leningrad: State of Siege* (New York: Basic Books, 2008); Albert Jan Pleyzier, *Frozen Tears: the Blockade and Battle of Leningrad* (Lanham: University Press of America, 2008). Andrei Dzeniskevich has been prolific in publishing document collections on the siege as well as his own historical studies including his research publication on medicine and the Blockade co-edited by John Barber, *Life and Death in Besieged Leningrad: 1941-44* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005).

<sup>16</sup> Salisbury, *The Nine Hundred Days*; Bidlack, “Survival Strategies in Leningrad” in *The People’s War: Responses to World War II in the Soviet Union*, ed. Robert W. Thurston (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2000), 84-107.

<sup>17</sup> M.V. Loskutovoi, *Pamiat’ o blokade: svidetel’stva ochevidtsev istoricheskoe soznanie obshchestva* (Moscow: “Novie” Izdatel’stvo, 2006); Kirschenbaum, *The Legacy of the Siege of Leningrad, 1941-45: Myths, Memories, and Monuments* (Cambridge University Press, 2006).

<sup>18</sup> In addition to diaries, of course, the regime sought the perfection and transformation of its citizens through a variety of means: labor, education, the reorganization of space, and the arts.

See: Igal Halfin, *Terror in My Soul: Communist Autobiographies on Trial* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003); Jochen Hellbeck, *Revolution on My Mind: Writing a Diary Under Stalin* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006).

Other historians, such as Shelia Fitzpatrick and Stephen Kotkin, have emphasized the importance of public identity and the self-presentation in the Soviet self. See: Shelia Fitzpatrick’s notion of “the useable self” in: *Tear Off Masks! Identity and Imposture in 20<sup>th</sup>-century Russia* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), and *Everyday Stalinism. Ordinary Life in Extraordinary Times, Soviet Russia in the 1930s* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995). Also see Kotkin’s notion of “speaking Bolshevik” in: *Magnetic Mountain: Stalinism as Civilization* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995).



subjectivity, or the self-conscious, self-reflexive individual subject. They have argued that, by creating such autobiographical testimonies, Soviet citizens strove to embody a particular ideal of subjectivity, which was collectivist rather than individualist in nature. In his pioneering study of diaries from the 1930s, Hellbeck argued that the diarists aspired to eradicate their individualistic selves and “to write themselves into the social and political order,” by “aligning” themselves with the collective.<sup>19</sup>

I hope that this dissertation will contribute to this groundbreaking research by highlighting both similar and different aspects of diary writing under Stalin. The blockade diaries revolve around different problematics of selfhood. Like the individuals described by Halfin and Hellbeck, the siege diarists demonstrate a strong impulse to monitor their self-development and to see themselves in historical terms. Often it is assumed that “work on the self” ceased between 1941-1945 because of the exigencies of war, but the siege diaries indicate that Leningraders continued to study and work on themselves in earnest. The circumstances and motivations for these activities were different than in the thirties because of the siege situation. I argue that the blockade diarists’ attempts as self-construction were tied to the task of immediate survival. Writing was an act of survival, a way to maintain some semblance of self against the self-effacing conditions of the Blockade. In this way, the journals suggest that other models of subjectivity existed for the diarists beyond the two extremes of a bourgeois individual self and a collectivist Soviet self. Much of the time, the diarists referred to a notion of self that is neither singular nor coherent, but rather is highly fragmented, mutable, and largely unknown to the individual. In the discussion below, I hope to demonstrate how the Blockade assaulted the integrity of the diarists’ bodies, minds, and identities and how they combated to these destructive conditions by constructing new notions of self, society, and humanity on the page.

Most studies of the Blockade are organized chronologically and follow a clear periodization that is based on changes to the material and military in the city and at the Leningrad front. The diarists, however, seem to have been much less cognizant of these shifts than historians have. Tied to the immediate realities of the struggle and survival, the diarists had little sense of perspective (or information) on how Leningrad’s front and blockade were progressing. Moreover, they avoided being prematurely optimistic that the second siege winter, for instance, would be easier than the first. Instead, the diarists emphasized the circularity of time “inside the ring,” and they often demarcated time by events in their personal lives such as shifts in their health or physicality, deaths in the family, and so on. But the diary accounts do show certain patterns of development: they follow certain trajectories of thought. This general pattern marks both the individual entries and the diary as a whole. The diarists tended to first comment on events in their personal lives, then broaden their focus to citywide developments, and eventually ruminate on more philosophical aspects of these changes. In the structure of this dissertation, I have tried to follow these pathways of thought. I begin with analyzing the most intimate themes of the body and self, then discuss the diarists’ relationships and kinship networks, and finally explore more abstract dimensions of the diarists’ meditations, addressing the biomedical, sociological, and historicist aspects of the siege experience. Although the texts do not all fit one conceptual framework, I have tried to structure the diary material around the themes to which the diarists paid significant attention

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<sup>19</sup> Hellbeck, *Revolution on My Mind*, 4-7.

in order to understand the great crisis they were experiencing.

Chapter One looks at the diarists' experiences of profound alienation from their own bodies and from what they understood about the human form more generally. I argue that, for the diarists, the siege experience brought about a whole new mode of being and apprehending the world. It left the *blokadniki* not disfigured, but transfigured into altogether different human beings. Chapter Two focuses on how these bodily changes informed the tasks of conceptualizing and presenting the self in the diary narrative. I examine some of the particular strategies that the diarists used to write their self-stories at a time when the nature of that self was in question. Specifically, I look at the diarists' methods of self-distancing to articulate the fraught relationship between the individual diarist and his/her "I." Chapter Three moves from reflections on the self to reflections on the family in which their self-concepts were embedded. The journals demonstrate how the circumstances of the Blockade, and the competition for resources in particular, led to a reconfiguration of the structures and functions of the family as well as the meaning of kinship.

The three remaining chapters explore less intimate, more conceptual aspects of the diarists' siege experiences. Chapter Four focuses on how the diarists critically engaged with the medical establishment and with authoritative biomedical discourse that regulated their bodies. They worked in parallel to the city's medical community to observe the Leningraders, to record their own discoveries and theories about the body and its ability to adapt and endure. Chapter Five examines how the diarists interacted with and studied the blockade community, making ethnographic sketches of their encounters in their diaries. In particular, the diarists monitored the development of a new social hierarchy based on access to food and on ration categories, which in turn led them to consider the themes of socialist equality, privilege, and class conflict as they evolved during the Blockade. Chapter Six studies how the diarists attempted to situate the siege and themselves historically first by chronicling the Blockade for posterity, and second by drawing on parallels with key events in the Russian and Soviet past. They reread official historical narratives as well as Marxist-Leninist assumptions about history in light of their own personal experiences.

## Living Narratives:

### Comments on the Diary as a Source

On 3 June 1942, in one of her famed wartime radio addresses, the poet Ol'ga Berggol'ts joyously announced that Leningrad and its inhabitants finally were beginning to recover after 10 months of horrific famine. Berggol'ts rejoiced that the worst days of the Blockade seemed to be waning, but she also expressed a newfound attachment to the desolate landscape left by the siege. Everything in the city, from a "poor, dark piece of bread" to a crumbling bit of fence, was "an eternally living piece of history" that "needed to be preserved, the whole thing just as it is, and taken to a museum." A story emanated from every building, every street corner, and every gaunt face. In her address, Berggol'ts urged Leningraders to treasure the city space in this way, like a rare historical text and, more specifically, like a diary:

Yes, the walls of our homes are like an open stone diary (*kamennyi dnevnik*)—a diary of the whole city, a diary of each of us. Come closer to the walls of your house, comrade, where last year's and today's leaflets and posters are glued, glance over them and [notice] how many feelings begin to speak to you! You will surely see the proclamation, already yellowing [...] 'Comrades Leningraders, dear friends! An unexpected threat of attack of German-fascist soldiers hangs over our beloved home city. The enemy is trying to break into Leningrad...Leningrad has become a front. The enemy is at the gates.' And next to this proclamation is another, pasted up last week: 'Leningraders—to the orchards!' [...] Here are two pages of your diary, Leningrader. Between them lies a year of war, ten months of the Blockade.

Our walls whisper, mutter, and yell [...] How many disasters rise up from these lines, stenciled right on the walls of a huge, civilized, terrifically modern city!<sup>20</sup>

Leningrad emerged from these many months of unimaginable suffering as a sacred space and as a sacred text. The landscape was thickly overlaid with stories of the city's struggle, seething with tales of suffering and determination, trials, and triumphs. It was saturated with layers of leaflets, signs, stories, and other fragments from the city-diary.

Berggol'ts emphasis on the affinity between the city and the diary was more apt than she knew. The Blockade produced a relatively large corpus of diary accounts. In this study, I have attempted to gather a wide array of texts authored by individuals of different ages, backgrounds, professions, levels of education, and relationships to Soviet power. This

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<sup>20</sup> Berggol'ts' address appears in: *Ia govoriu s toboi iz Leningrada: sbornik* (Leningrad: Detskaia Literatura, 1987), 164-165.

dissertation draws on 120 diaries, including 100 unpublished diary manuscripts. The diarists range from schoolchildren to workers to *intelligents* to party elites. Some of these individuals were lifetime diarists, but most took up the practice in order to document their wartime experiences specifically.<sup>21</sup>

There is no typical siege diary just as there is no typical blockade experience. The diaries also vary widely in their literary style, tone, and narrative approach. Some are personal, others impersonal in tone; some were written for private, others for public purposes; some are quite eloquent, while others are mostly notational. Many of the texts seem to have been hurriedly and spontaneously written, whereas others were crafted quite deliberately. A few diarists addressed their accounts to a specific reader—a family member, a friend, a future Soviet citizen, or a future version of themselves. In other cases, the presence of the reader is only vaguely implied. The diaries also vary in structure. Most were authored individually and contain chronological, dated entries, but a few were written collectively and are structured more loosely as a series of dated fragments. In crafting their texts, the diarists incorporated elements from other forms including novels, letters, paintings, maps, instructional manuals, calendars, medical case studies, and ethnographic field notes.<sup>22</sup> They also inserted various documents—newspaper clippings, photographs, drawings, and so on—into their journals. These are hybrid texts, flexible and inchoate. They are also exceptional texts. Even though diary writing was more widespread during the siege than previously thought, these comprise only 120 voices out of a possible three million. What they do represent, however, is the strong desire to document and interpret the siege experience. In truth, each diarist's perspective was unique and many warrant individual studies in their own right. But despite their exceptional and distinct qualities, I try to elucidate the particular themes and problematics that they share.

In this study, I can present only selections from the diaries I have gathered, and for this I have tried to select a diverse group of diaries, written by Leningraders of different ages, professions, and perspectives. I include diarists from all different regions of the city and whose accounts ended up in very different types of archival collections in St. Petersburg. A number of the diaries I studied are housed at the National Library of Russia's Manuscript Department in Saint Petersburg (*Otdel' rukopisei, Rossiiskaia natsional'naia biblioteka*). They tend to be written by prominent writers, often life-long diary writers with substantial personal archives. I also draw on diaries from the archives of the State Memorial Museum for the Defense of Blockaded Leningrad (*Gosudarstvennyi memorial'nyi muzei oborony blokadnogo Leningrada*). More diverse, these collections contain many accounts of both military and civilian experiences, especially those workers who were involved in the war effort. Perhaps for this reason, they or their loved ones felt compelled to donate those accounts to this museum, whose mission it is to commemorate the heroism and sacrifices that Leningraders made to save their city. A third group of diaries come from “And the Muses were not Silent (*A Muzy ne molchaly*),” a St. Petersburg museum dedicated to the arts under siege. Despite this, many of the diaries it holds do not directly pertain to individuals or events in the art world. This museum is tightly connected to survivors' and veterans' organizations

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<sup>21</sup> Although this dissertation focuses on the diary form in particular, its arguments are based on a wide variety of sources including state and party and municipal documents, medical records, and other personal documents such as letters, memoirs, and interviews to situate and contextualize the diaries.

<sup>22</sup> This dissertation is based on my reading of 100 archival and about twenty published diaries. See the Appendix for a full list of the unpublished diaries used in this study.

inside Leningrad, and thanks to this, I was able to interview several blockade survivors who also shared their diaries with me. The last, and largest collection of diaries that I examine here are from the Central State Archive of Historical and Political History, Saint Petersburg (*Tsentral'nyi gosudarstvennyi arkhiv istoriko-politicheskikh dokumentov Sankt-Peterburga*), formerly the Institute of Party History. Roughly half of the diaries that inform this study come from this collection. I also make use of various published blockade diaries.

The Central State Archive of Historical and Political History houses an extensive collection of diaries, interviews, and memoirs from the Leningrad Blockade, which were formerly the holdings of the Institute of Party History, which worked during the war to collect as many documents—especially personal testimonies—as it could about the siege experiences. Diaries were foremost among them. As early as November 1941, Party leaders in Leningrad's Kirov district (*raion*) drafted a campaign to encourage Leningraders to document their everyday experience. Under the stewardship of the Institute of Party History, this project was extended to all regions in the city, where local party committees in factories, institutes, and schools encouraged Leningraders to take up pen and paper.<sup>23</sup>

Unfortunately, there is a good deal about this collection that remains unclear from the documentary record. It is unknown exactly how (or how systematically) the Institute solicited and selected diaries for the collection. It is clear from the minutes of the preliminary meetings about this project that the party hoped to obtain a wide range of diary texts, written by Leningraders of all different professions and backgrounds, and that they intended them to serve as historical documents that would help future generations to understand this unique moment in the history of the war and city. Beyond these generalities, there seems to have been little consensus about what kinds of diaries should be collected and what guidelines (if any) should be passed on to the diary writers. The documentary record is patchy, but we do have minutes of meetings between members of the Kirov district's party committee, chaired by Secretary Efremov, who originally proposed the idea for a diary writing campaign. The committee members debated whether the journals should be collectively- or individually-authored and if they should they focus on events or experiences.<sup>24</sup> For instance, Isakov, a member of the local soviet, argued that the diaries should be concerned mostly with events at the front: "a diary, of course, is not the same thing as sentimental notes, not institutional memoirs, but the place where episodes of the war are contemplated (*boevye epizody myslitsia*). These episodes must be written down, of course, and put in service of the present."<sup>25</sup> But other committee members, including Secretary Efremov, felt that the diarists should focus on civilians and "the life of the district (*raion*)" and record interesting social data such as jokes, songs, and anecdotes that circulated among the *blokadniki*.

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<sup>23</sup> For example, the school inspector Lidiia Zabolotskaia explained that she decided to keep a diary because of speech made by the secretary of her district's party committee, but she worried that her diary would be too sentimental and not historically useful. The difficulty, but necessity of promoting diary writing is also discussed in journal of Leonid Pavlovich Gal'ko.

Tsentral'nyi gosudarstvennyi arkhiv istoriko-politicheskikh dokumentov Sankt-Peterburga (TsGAIPD) f. 4000, op. 11, d. 30, Lidiia Korlova Zabolotskaia: "Shkol'nogo inspektora Sverdlovskogo Raionnogo Otdela Obrazovaniia. Dnevnik," 29-30; "Iz dnevnika Leonida Gal'ko," *Oborona Leningrada, 1941-1944: Vospominaniia i dnevniki uchastnikov*, ed. E. G. Dagin (Leningrad: "Nauka" 1996), 540. This source is hereafter referred to as "Gal'ko."

<sup>24</sup> TsGAIPD, f. 4000, op. 10, d. 776: "Stenografichesky otchet RK VKP(b) g. Leningrada, 26/XI/41," 1-18.

<sup>25</sup> "Stenografichesky otchet RK VKP(b) g. Leningrada," 7.

The conversation soon evolved into a broader discussion about how to characterize the diary as a form. Was it public or private, objective or subjective, individualist or collectivist in nature? Must a diary be written in every day or just when something noteworthy happened? Might it include retrospective entries? Must the entries be dated? In their deliberations, the committee members struggled (unsuccessfully) to distinguish between the diary (*dnevnik*) from other, closely related texts—notes (*zapisi*), report (*otchet*), and logbook (*zhurnal dezhurnykh*)—underscoring the genre’s fluidity. The greatest challenges that the committee faced was to collect personal journals that contained “socially useful” facts and stories. As Efremov put it: “we need personal diaries that serve society.”<sup>26</sup> Again, the committee members were unable to decide how this balance between the personal and the social might be achieved. “What is a personal diary?” Kogan, a local propaganda official, asked at the meeting, “it is a very interesting affair. It consists of objective facts interpreted through subjective experiences. [...] The interesting diary is one that is multifaceted and, through one fact or another, can reflect the attitudes of every one of us.”<sup>27</sup> Did these personal diaries also have to be private diaries? Another member proposed that local officials review the diaries periodically in order to monitor them for correctness and gauge the level of morale in the city. The diaries could double as historical chronicles and tools of surveillance.<sup>28</sup> Efremov, however, warned that this practice would fail to produce open and honest accounts: “if Comrade Vasil’eva is going to look at my diary every day, maybe I will not write everything down in it,” he remarked.<sup>29</sup>

Ultimately, it seems that the committee made only vague recommendations that the diarists should try to write every day and that they should focus on their everyday lives (*byt*) and experiences (*opyt*) inside the ring.<sup>30</sup> It is clear from these deliberations that, many questions about the diary—its form, purpose, defining features, and components—remained unsettled for these party members. As a result, the diaries that were gathered through this campaign are quite diverse in structure, approach, style, and political content.<sup>31</sup> They also contain rather candid critiques of local leaders and policies. A few of the diaries were collectively written by work brigades, Komsomol organizations, and other committees. And, as a host of red-pencil marginalia illustrates, they were reviewed by superiors.<sup>32</sup> The vast

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid, 18.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid, 13.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid, 8-10.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid, 11.

<sup>30</sup> One diary from the propaganda division of Moscow region discusses how the serious period of collecting and soliciting diary-writers was in 1943, after the worst winter was over. It also alludes to the vague guidelines to diary writing given to them by their district party committees. TsGAIPD, f. 4000, op. 11, d. 124: “Dnevnik Otdela Propagandy i agitatsii RK VKP (b) Moskovskogo raiona. 10/XI/42- 25/III/43,” entries for 22 December 1942 and 3 January 1943, 13-14ob, 18ob.

<sup>31</sup> For a scholarly discussion of this collection, see: Nina Borisovna Lebedeva, “Kolleksiia dokumentov po istorii Velikoi Otechestvennoi Voiny v fonde Leningradskogo Instituta Istorii Partii,” *Bitva za Leningrad: Problemy sovremennykh issledovaniĭ* (Saint Petersburg: Izdatel’stvo Sankt-Peterburgskogo Universiteta, 2007), 117-124; Nina Borisovna Lebedeva, “Sotrudniki Leningradskogo instituta istorii partii i partarkhiva v gody voiny,” in *Zhenshchina i Voina: o roli zhenshchin v oborone Leningrada, 1941-1944 gg., sbornik statei*, ed. Andrei Dzeniskevich and M. I. Bozhenkov (Saint Petersburg: Izdatel’stvo Sankt-Peterburgskogo Universiteta, 2006), 255-6, 259-260.

<sup>32</sup> TsGAIPD, f. 4000, op. 11, d. 124 “Dnevnik (podlinniki) Otdela Propagandy i agitatsii RK VKP(b) Moskovskogo raiona,” 20. In this collectively-authored diary, each member of the staff took turns writing sections. This diary was clearly inspected and the corrections are marked in red pencil. In the entry for 6 January

majority, however, were individually authored and show minimal signs of editing. In general, the Institute processed the diaries hurriedly. The archivists typed up some of them, but many remained in manuscript form. It is not clear from these typewritten copies how much the Institute edited the texts, but it appears that it largely left redaction to the authors, who made edits to the manuscripts in ink and then signed off on them, signaling their approval. Most of these changes were minor stylistic changes. In fact, some diarists enclosed notes apologizing to the Institute that they did not have time to edit or rewrite their accounts for the sake of clarity. The Institute began collecting diaries as early as 1942, but catalogued most of them between 1943 and 1945.

Based on their early discussion, the party planned to use these texts to craft a collective diary that would chronicle Leningraders' tremendous sacrifices and everyday acts of heroism during the war.<sup>33</sup> This work was never completed, perhaps because the goals of the campaign shifted or perhaps because the Institute of Party History was too shorthanded to accomplish it. With only eight members of its staff working during the Blockade, the Institute's main task was to publish rousing propagandistic and historical articles and brochures.<sup>34</sup> Their most significant project, which was given to them by the city's party committee in June 1942, was to prepare a "The Chronicle of the Defense of Leningrad" for which the Institute (which had fourteen workers by this time) gathered a variety of texts including diaries, letters, memoirs, newspapers, brochures, and photos in late 1942. The result of this was *Heroic Leningrad, 1917-1942*, published in 1943. It was followed by a two-volume work, *Leningrad in the Great Fatherland War*, published in 1944 and 1947, and several other celebratory publications.<sup>35</sup> However, by 1946-1947, as the Leningrad Affair cast its shadow over the city's party elite and over the legacy of the Blockade, the Institute curbed its publications on the Blockade as well as its acquisition of diaries and other documents from those years.

As the members of the Kirov district's party committee discovered in their deliberations, the diary is an extremely difficult genre to define. In his classic study of early American diaries, Steven E. Kagle put it this way: "almost everyone knows what a diary is

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1943, for instance, the "editor" provides some instructions for how the diary is to be penned, recommending that the writers steer away from minutia and not describe every discussion of the department.

<sup>33</sup> "Stenografichesky otchet RK VKP(b) g. Leningrada, 26/XI/41," 1-3.

<sup>34</sup> Lebedeva, "Sotrudniki Leningradskogo instituta istorii partii," 255-6, 259-260.

<sup>35</sup> TsGAIPD, f. 4000, op. 10, d. 738, 3-8; Lebedeva, "Sotrudniki Leningradskogo instituta istorii partii," 257-258-9. Numerous other projects developed out of this collection of materials. In 1943, the Institute workers recorded (in shorthand) the accounts of decorated workers and soldiers. It also created a commission for a new project chronicling the wartime exploits (military and civilian) in Leningrad and Leningrad Oblast. In terms of civilian life, the collection emphasized the work of industries that contributed to the front or political work. The Institute helped to preserve and organize the individual archives of the city's plants and factories. Workers at the Kirov factory were encouraged to contribute materials, including diaries, to this archival collection. By January 1945, the Institute had 57,079 printed items and thousands of photos in its collection.

The Institute's subsequent publications included: *Leningrad v Velikoi Otechestvennoi Voine Sovetskogo Soiuz: sbornik dokumentov i materialov, Tom I: 22/VI/41-22/VI/43*, ed. S.I. Avvakumov (Leningrad: Ogiz-Gospolitizdat: 1944); *Leningrad v Velikoi Otechestvennoi Voine Sovetskogo Soiuz: sbornik dokumentov i materialov, Tom II: 23/VI/43-24/III/44*, ed. K.G. Sharikov (Leningrad: Lenizdat, 1947). Some of the first collections to feature these diaries in particular were: *Leningradtsy v dni blokady: Sbornik* (Leningrad: Leningradskoe Gasetno-Zhurnal'noe i Knizhnoe Izdatel'stvo, 1947); *Oborona Leningrada: 1941-1944: Vospominaniia, dnevniki uchastnikov*, ed. M.Z. Zakharova (Leningrad: Izdatel'stvo "Nauka L. Otdelenii," 1968).

until it becomes necessary to define one.”<sup>36</sup> One of the aims of this dissertation is to study the many functions and forms of diary writing that are demonstrated by the blockade accounts. Leningraders used the diary in a variety of ways as a repository of thought, as a private, confessional space, as a site of self-construction and self-preservation, a way to maintain social ties with far-flung family members, as “field notes” of their studies and observations, and as a way to document and bear witness to monumental historical events.<sup>37</sup> The purpose and utility of the diary practice varied both over time and by individual author. The theatrical director Aleksandr Dymov wrote candidly about how the purpose and focus of his diary shifted over the course of the war, capturing the variability of the diary project: “What I am writing is tedious, humdrum, and monotonous,” Dymov observed on 7 January 1942, “But to me these notes are a safety valve, a release for my growing despair, from the agony of days of starvation. I wanted to write down just the plain harsh facts, but it hasn’t worked out that way. I can’t help it. How else can I fill in time, distract myself from the horrors of everyday life?”<sup>38</sup>

As the literary scholars Felicity A. Nussbaum and Irina Paperno have shown, the diary is an incredibly flexible, fragmentary genre of a hybrid character, which readily adapted to Leningraders’ goals and to convey the complexities and inconsistencies in their articulations of the blockade experience.<sup>39</sup> Diaries generally aim to capture immediate and intimate experience, and are structured by dated, chronological entries that convey the flow and minutia of everyday life. Because the diary structure emphasizes temporality, change, and transformation, it preserves various shifts and reversals that characterized Leningraders’ stated beliefs and attitudes over the course of the Blockade.<sup>40</sup> Structured by constant stops and starts, beginnings and endings, diaries also illustrate the tension between continuity and disruption.<sup>41</sup> They can be read as series of independent texts, attempts to write, rewrite, and rethink experiences or as a single, unified narrative. In this way, they convey both the fragmentary and continuous nature of experience. As a site of self-reflection, the diary can contribute to the construction of a coherent self or witness the fragmentary, incremental nature of self. In this way, the diary is uniquely equipped for illustrating both unified and disjointed components of experience, self-expression, and life narrative.

The diary generally is written without an end, without certainty, without coherence or a unifying structure. Such uncertainty pervaded life “life inside the ring.” In fact, several

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<sup>36</sup> Steven E. Kagle, *American Diary Literature, 1620-1799* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1979), 15.

<sup>37</sup> For useful discussions of the various uses of diaries, both for diary-writers and for the scholars who study them, see: Mary Jo Maynes, Jennifer Pierce, and Barbara Laslett, *Telling Stories: The Use of Personal Narratives in the Social Sciences and History* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2008); Suzanne L. Bunkers and Cynthia Huff, *Inscribing the Daily: Critical Essays on Women’s Diaries* (Boston: University of Massachusetts, 1996).

<sup>38</sup> Dymov, entry for 17 January 1942 in: Granin and Adamovich, *Blokadnaia kniga*, 302. English translation from: Granin and Adamovich, *A Book of the Blockade*, 381.

<sup>39</sup> Felicity A. Nussbaum, “Toward Conceptualizing a Diary,” *Studies in Autobiography*, ed. James Olney (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 128-140. Irina Paperno, “What can be Done with Diaries?” *The Russian Review*, 63, 4 (October 2004), 561-73. On the fragmentary structure of the diary, also see: K. Eckhard Kuhn-Osius, “Making Loose Ends Meet: Private Journals in the Public Realm,” *The German Quarterly*, 54 (1981), 173.

<sup>40</sup> Thomas Mallon, *A Book of One’s Own: People and their Diaries* (New York: Ticknor and Fields, 1984), 1984; Philippe Lejeune, *On Diary*, eds. Jeremy D. Popkin and Julie Rak, trans. Katherine Durnin (Honolulu: University of Hawaii, 2009).

<sup>41</sup> Irina Paperno, “What can be Done with Diaries?,” 572-3.



blockade diarists confessed that they wished they were writing memoirs instead of journals because then they would know how the story of the siege ended and if they survived. Still, even if the diary narrative is inherently unfinished and inconclusive, a diary practice can be comforting. Individuals in extreme circumstances often turned to diary writing as a way of coping or coming to terms with their experiences. Rachel Langford and Russell West have argued that, historically, the diary has been a rather marginalized literary form that appeals to individuals in crisis or who have been marginalized themselves: it is a “mode of creating meaning in a meaningless world, and thus of maintaining subjectivity in the face of its annihilation.”<sup>42</sup> Its loose, flexible structure lends itself to capturing the fractious nature of crises and traumatic experiences. As a form, Nussbaum explained, the diary “creates and tolerates crisis in perpetuity,” crises like the 900-day Blockade.<sup>43</sup>

The blockade diaries were kept and preserved at a great price. Leningraders diverted a great deal of time, energy, and resources away from the immediate task of physical survival and toward their diaries, for it was incredibly difficult to secure notebooks, paper, pens, and time to maintain a daily writing practice. Still, they remained committed to their diaries. The diary provided them with a way to maintain their intellectual vitality as well as a way to prolong their own lives, at least on the page. Philippe Lejeune observed that the diary becomes so intertwined with the diarist’s own life that it is often written “against the end,” against death.<sup>44</sup> This was especially true when that life was threatened. As Alexandra Garbarini noted in her study of Holocaust diaries, “the ‘imperative to write’ was inseparable from the ‘imperative to live.’”<sup>45</sup>

This was precisely the dilemma facing sixteen-year-old Iura Riabinkin, who literally kept writing his diary until his final days. “This is perhaps be the last entry in my diary,” he wrote on January 1924, “I’m afraid that it is...that I won’t get to finish the diary, writing ‘The End’ on its last page. Someone else will write it using a different word, ‘Death.’ And I so passionately want to live, to believe, to feel!”<sup>46</sup> The life-narratives that emerged from Leningraders’ experiences are as unpredictable and extraordinary as the siege story itself.

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<sup>42</sup> Rachel Langford and Russell West, *Marginal Voices, Marginal Forms: Diaries in European Literature and History* (Atlanta: Rodopi, 1999), 9. On the diary as a method of coping, see: Wendy J. Wiener and George C. Rosenwald, “A Moment’s Monument: The Psychology of Keeping a Diary,” *The Narrative Study of Lives*, Vol. I, eds. Ruthellen Josselson and Amia Lieblich (London: Sage Publications, 1993), 30-58.

<sup>43</sup> Nussbaum, “Toward Conceptualizing a Diary,” 134.

<sup>44</sup> Philippe Lejeune, “How do Diaries End?” *Biography*, Vol. 24, No. 1 (January 2001) (University of Hawaii Press): 99-112.

<sup>45</sup> Garbarini, *Numbered Days*, 5.

<sup>46</sup> Riabinkin, entry for 3 January 1942 in: Adamovich and Granin, *Leningrad under Siege: First-hand Accounts of the Ordeal*, 414-415. This source is hereafter referred to as “Riabinkin.” As with Kniazev’s diary, Granin and Adamovich originally published some excerpts of Riabinkin’s journal in *Blokadnaia kniga* and then an expanded version of the diary text in this 2007 volume. All subsequent citations of Riabinkin’s diary come from the 2007 edition.

One:

From Leningraders to *Blokadniki*:

### Inhabiting the Siege Body

In September 1941, the Nazis began an intense bombardment of Leningrad. Hitler vowed that he would “erase Saint Petersburg from the face of the earth.”<sup>47</sup> German troops bombed and shelled the city, day and night, for up eighteen hours at a time, and dropped as 6,000 incendiary bombs and forty highly explosive bombs in one day.<sup>48</sup> Between June and October, the city was subject to 612 aerial attacks. On the ground, German and Finnish troops rapidly advanced on the city and within two weeks the front was located only two-and-a-half miles—just eight tram stops—from the city’s edge.<sup>49</sup>

The aerial attacks succeeded in destroying the city’s already limited food reserves, bombing the Badaevskii warehouses and the supply lines into the city, such that only 10 percent of food shipments destined for Leningrad actually made it into the city.<sup>50</sup> By October first, the city was already forced to cut bread rations in half.<sup>51</sup> Between September and November 1941, Leningrad authorities were forced to cut food rations five times. In order to stretch out the city’s flour supply, fillers like malt, sawdust, and cellulose were added to the bread, and at times they accounted for as much as fifty percent of the loaf.<sup>52</sup> On 20 November, rations hit their all-time low. All civilians who were not working in heavy industry—about two thirds of the population—barely subsisted on a daily diet of between 500-600 calories and received only 125 grams of bread a day. This marks an eighty percent

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<sup>47</sup> Hitler’s Directive No. 35 of 5 September 1941 provided the formal order to lay siege to Leningrad. See: Leon Goure, *The Siege of Leningrad* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1962), 85-7; Hitler’s statement appears in a **letter** to Germany’s naval chief of staff dated 29 September 1941 and is quoted in: *Frozen Tears: The Blockade and Battle of Leningrad* (New York: University Press of America, Inc., 2008), 70.

<sup>48</sup> These figures are drawn from: Albert Pleysier, *Frozen Tears*, 42; Svetlana Magaeva and Albert Pleysier, *Surviving the Siege of Leningrad* (New York and Oxford: University Press of America, 2006), 10. Scholars offer a range of figures in calculating the number of bombs dropped on the city. Valerii Selivanov estimates that the city suffered 148,478 artillery attacks and been struck by 4,638 highly explosive bombs and 105,520 incendiary bombs. David Glantz gives slightly different figures, suggesting that the city was hit by 3,295 highly explosive and 67,078 incendiary bombs in 1941 and by 21,000 artillery shells and 950 bombs in 1942. See: Valerii Nikolaevich Selivanov, *Stoiali kak soldaty: Blokada detei Leningrada* (Izdatel’stvo “Ego,” 2002), 18, 22, 76; Glantz, *The Siege of Leningrad*, 78-79.

<sup>49</sup> Bidlack, “Workers at War,” 12.

<sup>50</sup> Here, I refer to the supply line that led across Lake Ladoga to Osinovets and into Leningrad discussed in: Pleysier, *Frozen Tears*, 42-43.

<sup>51</sup> This is mentioned in the classic work on Leningrad’s food supply during the Blockade written by Dmitri Vasil’evich Pavlov, who oversaw the supply and distribution of food for the city and front of Leningrad. Pavlov, *Leningrad v blokade (1941 god)* (Moscow: Voennoe Izdatel’stvo Ministerstva Oborony Soiuzu SSR, 1958). Pavlov published an expanded edition this work, which was translated into English. See: D.V. Pavlov, *Leningrad 1941: The Blockade*, trans. John Clinton Adams (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1965).

<sup>52</sup> Bidlack, “Workers at War,” 44.

decrease from the rations set at the start of the war.<sup>53</sup> It was around this time that the temperature plummeted to record low temperatures, which made it too cold for Germany's pilots to fly and ground troops to advance. Although they continued to shell the city through long-range artillery, the skies above Leningrad fell silent. Hitler's new strategy primary was to simply wait for the city to "devour itself." There was little electricity, kerosene, gas, or firewood to heat residences or to power the city's factories and bakeries. When the city's pipes froze and the bakeries had no water with which to bake bread, they gave out small lumps of flour or nothing at all. In 1941, on Christmas Day alone, over 4,000 civilians died.<sup>54</sup>

Trapped "inside the ring," Leningraders struggled to combat starvation, hypothermia, illness, and extreme deprivation. The Blockade tested the body's ability to adapt, endure, and survive on a daily basis. Over the course of 827 days, many spent under conditions that were inimical to human life, Leningraders underwent a dramatic physical transformation. As daily recordings of Leningraders' intimate observations and self-reflections, the siege diaries reveal how many *blokadniki* interpreted these profound changes to their bodies. Initially, they focused on how many aspects of their personal appearance, especially the facial features and unique physical traits that distinguished them from others, were fading. As the conditions of starvation intensified during the winter of 1941-1942, the diarists noticed that they were losing more fundamental attributes such as age, gender, sensory and perceptive faculties, and motor control. These experiences elicited for the diarists a new mode of being in and apprehending the world. The senses could not be trusted as reliable guides to reality. Reflexes and instincts that once were automatic now had to be willed. Their bodies, the diarists observed, were taking on lives of their own.

This chapter examines how such formidable physical, perceptual, and ontological challenges led the diarists to conceive of the human body in dramatically new ways. In particular, they describe how Leningraders were transformed into altogether different kinds of beings, the *blokadniki*, who functioned according to distinct sensory, anatomical, and physiological properties. Their journals capture the process by which these new, experimental approaches to the body developed. Scholars of the Blockade generally have emphasized how hunger, bombardment, and disease left the *blokadniki* physically deficient, impaired, and disfigured.<sup>55</sup> The diaries suggest, however, that the experience of extreme suffering and deprivation left the *blokadnik* not disfigured, but transfigured. Rather than seeing themselves as merely dehumanized, the diarists described how the siege rendered them into qualitatively different beings. The accounts demonstrate how the siege precipitated, if not the destruction,

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<sup>53</sup> Magaeva and Pleysier, "Surviving the Siege," 16. An adequate human diet consists of about 3,000-3,500 calories a day.

<sup>54</sup> Glantz, *The Siege of Leningrad*, viii, 83-84, 230-1, 331.

It is difficult to accurately tabulate the total number of civilian deaths from the Blockade, and scholars have provided a range of figures, mostly between 1 and 1.5 million. At the Nuremberg trials, the Extraordinary Commission for Investigating Nazi War Crimes placed the number of civilian casualties quite low at 642,000. For reliable estimates, see: Bidlack, "Workers at War," 24; Glantz, *The Siege of Leningrad*, 78-79; Goure, *The Siege of Leningrad*, 102.

<sup>55</sup> Two important studies that emphasize either the disappearance or the disfiguration of Leningraders' emaciated bodies are: Lisa Kirschenbaum, "'The Alienated Body': Gender, Identity and the Memory of the Siege of Leningrad" in *Gender and War in Twentieth-Century Eastern Europe*, eds. Nancy M. Wingfield and Maria Bucur (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006), 221-34; Polina Barskova, "The Corpse, the Corpulent, and the Other: A Study in the Topology of Siege Body Representation," *Ab Imperio*, Vol. 1 (2009): 361-386.

than the deconstruction of many received concepts of the body—biological, philosophical, and ideological. In their wake, a new epistemology of the body emerged from the diaries.

Given the centrality of the body to Soviet revolutionary aims, the diarists' evolving understandings of the human form have certain political implications. Their observations of that a new siege body or a new man, the *blokadnik*, emerged from the horrific conditions of the siege reverberates, ironically, with the Soviet regime's aspirations to produce the New Soviet Man and to restructure human nature more generally. Scholars have discussed how the most important quality of the New Man was the acquisition of proletarian consciousness—political awareness, discipline, and self-mastery, including the strengthening, purification, and rationalization of the body. Of course, the physical properties that the diarists ascribed to the *blokadnik* or siege man were quite opposite of the traits of the ideal Soviet man. In the 1930s, Soviet ideologues and scientists advocated that the New Man could be trained to master his body, to overcome its constraints, and to control its impulses through a conscious and determined application of will.<sup>56</sup> The diarists characterize the siege body as physically weak, but also irrational, unruly, and disconnected from some kind of inner "self." Although they do not present this as a political critique, the diarists' conceptualization of the body opposes the view of human organism supported by contemporary ideological and scientific understandings. They point to various ways that the Blockade tested and redefined the parameters of the human.

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## I. The Mirror Test: Perceptions of Body, Self, and Reality

One afternoon in December, the chemist Elena Kochina was enjoying a rare moment of relaxation and huddled near the *burzhuika* stove as it spewed smoke into their apartment. Her serene mood suddenly was interrupted when an odd sensation crept over her skin. "Sensing that something strange is happening to my face," Kochina wrote in her diary, "I brought a piece of mirror from the kitchen and looked into it curiously. I looked like a pig seen from the tail end. 'What a mug!' I spat into the mirror." Ashamed, Kochina turned away from the loathsome form in the looking glass and peered at the inhuman, lifeless visage of Dima, her husband. For a moment, they stood eyeing each other. "Dima's gaze slid over my

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<sup>56</sup> I found Jochen Hellbeck's discussion of the ideal of the New Man and the role of diaries as tool for training Soviet citizens to control their "psychic and bodily processes" especially useful. This phrase is drawn from: Hellbeck, "Working, Struggling, Becoming: Stalin-Era Autobiographical Texts," *The Russian Review*, Vol. 60 No. 3 (2001): 351-353. For discussions of the ideal of the New Man in fiction of the 1930s, see: Keith A. Livers, *Constructing the Stalinist Body: Fictional Representations of Corporeality in the Stalinist 1930s* (Lexington Books, Lanham, 2004) and Katerina Clark, *The Soviet Novel: History as Ritual* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000). For discussions of Soviet science's approach to the New Man, see: Raymond Bauer, *The New Man in Soviet Psychology* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1968); David Joravsky, *Russian Psychology: A Critical History* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989); Loren R. Graham, *Science and Philosophy in the Soviet Union* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1972); Tricia Starks, *The Body Soviet: Hygiene, Propaganda, and the Revolutionary State* (University of Wisconsin Press, 2008).

face like a dead carp. He himself became swollen long ago.”<sup>57</sup> Over the course of three months spent under siege, Kochina gradually lost the defining features of her prewar life, including her career, friends, coworkers, and familial and marital support, but this moment of rediscovering her self in the mirror marked the culmination of a growing estrangement from her former identity.

Mirrors have long fascinated as sources of illumination, tools of contemplation, and paradoxical objects that both reflect and distort. As they stood before the mirror, the blockade diarists were unsure whether the unfamiliar image they glimpsed was an accurate likeness or an illusion. Vasilisa Malysheva, a party worker and soviet deputy for her district, admitted in her diary that she was petrified to look at herself: “How I have aged, how I have changed, so much so that I cannot bear to look at myself even one more time. Can it really be me, who once longed to lose weight? I can’t even believe it.”<sup>58</sup> The mirror not only displayed the scars that deprivation had inscribed onto the body, it also provided an apt stage for the confrontation between self and body. These mirror scenes such as these appear quite frequently in the corpus of diaries, which I have evaluated. The mirror was one of the most common narrative devices that the diarists used to convey the processes of self-discovery and self-transformation.

The diarists often presented these encounters with the looking glass as spontaneous or chance occurrences, which alerted them to the severity of their physical metamorphosis. The contrast between such casual glances into the mirror and the gravity of their discoveries underscores the growing disconnect between self and body, between one’s bodily state and bodily awareness. While dressing for work, a local health inspector and diarist Leonid Pavlovich Gal’ko discovered that his legs were too swollen to fit inside his boots. Curious about the rest of his body, Gal’ko paused to look in the mirror. It was then that he discovered a huge growth (*opukhol’*) protruding from his face. For Gal’ko, his face—once a hallmark of individuality—was an afterthought compared to his legs, which were absolutely necessary for survival. “With great effort” Gal’ko turned his attention away from his ghastly reflection and back toward his professional duties, cramming his feet into his boots and heading for work.<sup>59</sup>

Judging from their descriptions, this moment of self-reckoning elicited a multitude of emotional reactions from the diarists including shock, anger, indifference, and humor, or more often a combination of these. Such conflicted emotional states are characteristic of their accounts of the blockade experience. For Kochina, the shock of viewing the figure in the glass mixed with mistrust of the mirror’s accuracy filled the diarist with self-contempt. Others regarded the mirror as a magical, revelatory object that that could tell the future. Architect Esfir’ Gustavovna Levina quoted one of her colleague’s descriptions of this daily ritual of self-inspection as “‘looking at a sarcophagus,’” and seeing what lay in store for him.<sup>60</sup> Still others responded to their reflections with a kind of wry humor. Interestingly, this was

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<sup>57</sup> Kochina, “Blokadnaia dnevnik,” *Pamiat’: Istoricheskii sbornik*, Vol. 4 (Moscow-Paris: YMCA Press, 1979-1980), entry for 12 December 1941, 171. This source is hereafter referred to as “Kochina.” For an English translation of this diary, see: Elena Kochina, *Blockade Diary*, ed. and intro. Samuel C. Ramer (Ann Arbor: Ardis Publishers, 1990).

<sup>58</sup> TsGAIPD, f. 4000, op. 11, d. 65. Vasilisa Petrovna Malysheva, “iz dnevnika,” entry for 7 August 42, 12-13.

<sup>59</sup> “Iz dnevnika Gal’ko Leonida Pavlovicha.” entry for 12 January 1942, 516. This source is subsequently referred to as “Gal’ko.”

<sup>60</sup> TsGAIPD, f. 4000, op. 11, d. 57: Esfir’ Gustavovna Levina, “dnevnik,” entry for 6 July 1942, 25. This source is hereafter referred to as “Levina, I.”

especially true of diary entries written in the late spring and summer of 1942, after many months of starvation. Writer and translator Sof'ia Ostrovskaia was cleaning out her wardrobe one afternoon when she discovered that her sweaters hardly seemed to fit her anymore. "I looked in the mirror at my naked trunk and gloomily smiled: I have grown very thin, a Chekhov-like (*chekhovskii*) student could prepare an examination in anatomy based on me, all my ribs can be detected and each bone can easily be defined by sight and resounds with its Latin name."<sup>61</sup> Seventeen-year-old Elena Mukhina was shocked by her inability to feel connected to the strange figure in the mirror, and yet the incongruity of what she saw struck her as distinctly funny:

Already my brain is unable to respond to anything, I live as if in a half-dream. [...] To be honest it is quite funny (*smeshno*): after all, I am not some kind of invalid, neither an old man nor an old woman, I am a young woman who has everything ahead of her. I am happy, and soon I am leaving. Meanwhile, I look at myself, at what I have started to resemble. An indifferent, melancholy expression, I look like a Third Degree Invalid, I can scarcely (illegible), my legs barely hold me up. I myself do not recognize myself. [...] Earlier, perhaps a month ago, during the day I had sharp pangs of hunger and I developed the energy to find something to eat. For an extra bit of bread, something else to eat I would have gone to the ends of the earth, but now I almost do not feel hunger, in general I don't feel anything at all.<sup>62</sup>

Mukhina lost not only her health, but her age, her gender, and the sensation of feeling and inhabiting her own body.<sup>63</sup> Even the familiar pangs of hunger and the instinct to fight for food had faded from her. In this way, the mirror alerted her to more than just her changing external appearance, but also to internal changes to her physiology, anatomy, and perceptive abilities. Unable to relate to the image in the mirror, she felt as though existed between states of consciousness—in a "half-dream"—somewhere asleep and awake, alive and dead. Her very state of being had been called into question.

Doubtful of their own abilities to detect life in the siege body, some doctors in Leningrad's hospitals and clinics adopted the practice of using mirrors to check on the status of their patients. This notorious "pocket mirror test" was became a common procedure in blockade hospitals. Under conditions of severe starvation, the body drastically minimized its level of homeostatic regulation in order to conserve energy and resources. This made it difficult to detect whether a patient had a pulse or was breathing. The doctor and siege survivor Svetlana Magaeva explained how clinicians carried pocket mirrors with them on their rounds and held them up to each patient's mouth: "if it did not turn cloudy when held up

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<sup>61</sup> *Otdel' rukopisei, Rossiiskaia natsional'naia biblioteka* (OR, RNB), f. 1448, d. 9: S.V. Ostrovskaia, "dnevnik," Notebook 2, entry for 13 April 1942, 49ob. This source is hereafter referred to as "Ostrovskaia." Another "mirror scene" appears in: Ostrovskaia, Notebook 1, entry for 27 November 1941, 121ob.

<sup>62</sup> TsGAIPD, f. 4000, op. 11, d. 72: Elena Mukhina, "dnevnik," entry for 25 May 1942, 134ob. This source is hereafter referred to as "Mukhina."

<sup>63</sup> Mukhina, entry for 25 May 1942, 134ob. Another example of a diarist examining her body through mirrors and other tools of reflection can be found in: Liubovskaia, entry for 9 February 1942, 80-81. This source is hereafter referred to as "Liubovskaia." I would like to thank Igor' Liubovskii for sharing his mother's diary with me and Tatiana Voronina at European University in Saint Petersburg for coordinating this arrangement.

to the face of a dying person then doubt was resolved.”<sup>64</sup> This test was unsuccessfully administered to Magaeva herself at age ten, while she lay dying in a children’s hospital. Magaeva was led half way to the mortuary before the attending clinician had second thoughts and gave her an injection of glucose, which brought her out of her comatose state.<sup>65</sup> This experience of being pronounced dead while still alive is emblematic of the mirror’s unreliability as well as the difficulty of detecting the faint traces of life within the *blokadniki* to whom conventional assumptions about the body and generally accepted signs of vitality seemed to no longer apply.

Some medical practitioners, like Zinaida Sedel’nikova, also applied a version of this “mirror test” to check on the state of their own vitality. The experience of inhabiting the body was so different that Sedel’nikova deemed such checks necessary. During her twelve-hour shifts at the Medical Clinic No. 95, the diarist and medical student was immersed in a sea of bodies, where the lines between doctor and patient, living and dying grew faint. When she had a free moment, the diarist sometimes snuck glances at herself in the mirror in order to compare herself to the invalids around her. “My heart was distressed, my pulse at rest was 110 per minute, often seemed irregular, horrible weakness,” Sedel’nikova jotted down after one “check-up.” After another “look at myself in the mirror” she concluded that: “we are still alive,” but was alarmed by the strangeness of her appearance: “some kind of unfamiliar, dry, and grey mug (*fizionomiia*)” stared back at her.<sup>66</sup> In short, the diary accounts suggest that Leningraders—puzzled by the deathly feel and pallor of their bodies—became preoccupied with examining themselves in the mirror. They nervously searched their reflections for signs of life all the while questioning the reliability of both their perceptions and conventional ways of measuring vitality.<sup>67</sup>

In many accounts, an encounter with the gaunt, skeletal figure in the looking glass serves as a point of departure from which the diarists’ meditations on the body developed. The diarists built upon such intimate moments of self-discovery to distill some of the general properties of the siege bodies that they saw around them. As accounts of their daily observations, the diaries reveal the process by which they discovered and documented some of the key attributes of the *blokadnik*. These studies were motivated by practical considerations regarding their own health and chance of survival as well as by a growing intellectual curiosity about the human organism. The twin projects of physical and intellectual vitality drove them to keep striving and discovering. As diarist Irina Dmitrievna Zelenskaia put it, “Sometimes you ask yourself—what is this all for? I don’t find the answer right away. Possibly from one’s instinct for life, or possibly from curiosity about tomorrow, or possibly

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<sup>64</sup> Svetlana Magaeva, “Physiological and Psychosomatic Prerequisites for Survival and Recovery” *Life and Death in Besieged Leningrad 1941-1944*, eds. John Barber and Andrei Dzeniskevich, trans. David Fry (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 150.

<sup>65</sup> Magaeva, “Physiological and Psychosomatic Prerequisites,” 150-151.

<sup>66</sup> Sedel’nikova, Zinaida S. *279 Dnei Voiny: Blokadnyi dnevnik* (Volgograd: Volgogradskii Komitet Popetchi, 1995), entries for 14 January 1942, 65 and 22 January 1942, 68. This source is hereafter referred to as: “Sedel’nikova.”

A similar example appears in the memoir of Sof’ia Izrailevna Sapgir who volunteered as a medical assistant during the siege and used a mirror to diagnose herself with scurvy. See: *Dve Sud’by v Velikoi Otechestvennoi Voine*, ed. V.L. Vikhnovicha (Saint Petersburg: Izdatel’skii Tsentr “Gumanitarnaia Akademiia,” 2006), 57-58.

<sup>67</sup> Additional examples of a diarist checking his vital signs “for the sake of curiosity,” appear in: TsGAIPD, f. 4000, op. 11, d. 52, M. M. Krakov, “Dnevnik,” entry for 27 January 1942, 8. This diary is hereafter referred to as “Krakov.”

from not wanting to admit defeat, but I will fight anyway I can.”<sup>68</sup> The instinct to fight for life was matched by an equally strong impulse to imbue that life with meaning.

## II. “Overcoming Age and Sex”?

As the diarists watched themselves and others transform from Leningraders into *blokadniki*, they wrote extensively about the apparent disappearance of age and sex, which had long served as bases for defining and distinguishing between human bodies. Recall that Mukhina initially was unable to categorize the image she saw in the mirror and had to reassure herself: “I am [...] neither an old man nor an old woman, I am a young woman who has everything ahead of her.” Similarly, they had difficulty discerning features of age and sex in other *blokadniki*. Leningraders' bodies appeared to be growing more homogenous. “Everybody looks the same. Leningraders have lost their sex and age,” Elena Kochina declared.<sup>69</sup> At the marketplace, the diarist feared being swept up into this homogenous “sea of human flesh” of people selling their meager wares for bread.<sup>70</sup>

As she walked along the city’s crumbling, snow-covered streets, the librarian and translator Aleksandra Liubovskaia peered at the faces she encountered. Each one was pale, heavily muffled, devoid of individuality, and either so sunken-in or so swollen that “it was hard to understand if it belongs to a man or a woman or a child.”<sup>71</sup> The streets of Leningrad were crowded with children’s sleds—now the main form of transportation—that pulled or were pulled by indistinguishable human forms. Commenting on one such sled, the famous poet and blockade diarist Vera Inber noted: “The shape of the human form was clear enough, but you could not tell whether it was of a man or a woman. It had become merely a body belonging to earth.”<sup>72</sup> Interestingly, Inber’s use of the second person here suggests that a

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<sup>68</sup> TsGAIPD, f. 4000, op. 11, d. 35, Irina Dmitr'evna Zelenskaia, “dnevnik,” entry for 19 January 42, 55-55ob. This source is hereafter referred to as “Zelenskaia.” Portions of this diary have been published in: *Ia ne sdamsia do poslednogo’: zapiski iz blokadnogo Leningrada*, ed. V. M. Kolval’chuk et al. (Saint Petersburg: Nestor-Istoriia, 2010). A statistician and economist by training, during the war, Zelenskaia worked as the head of the planning department at Electrical Station No. 7 until 1943, when she began working to help the families of veterans in Sverdlovsk district.

Holocaust survivor and psychologist Viktor Frankl commented upon the persistence of curiosity, about human bodies and the human nature, as a protective measure in the death camps: “Apart from that strange kind of humor, another sensation seized us: curiosity [...] cold curiosity predominated even in Auschwitz, somehow detaching the mind from its surroundings, which came to be regarded with a kind of objectivity. At that time one cultivated this state of mind as a means of protection.” See: Frankl, *From Death Camp to Existentialism: A Psychiatrist’s Path to a New Therapy*, trans. Ilse Lasch, intro. Gordon W. Allport (Boston: Beacon Hill Press, 1959), 14-15.

<sup>69</sup> Kochina, entry for 10 December 1941, 170.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid, entry for 30 December 1941, 179.

<sup>71</sup> Liubovskaia, entry for 7 January 1942, 43.

<sup>72</sup> OR RNB, f. 312, d. 45, Inber, Vera Mikhailovna, “dnevnik,” Notebook 2, entry for 1 December 1941, 41. The published editions of Inber’s diary differ dramatically from her manuscripts. See: Inber, *Pochti tri goda: Leningradskii dnevnik* (Moscow: Sovetskii pisatel’, 1946). This text was reworked and republished in 1968. I cite from the manuscript unless otherwise stated.



certain uniformity of misperception between herself and her potential reader: neither would be unable to identify the gender or age of the individual.

Under conditions of starvation and chronic stress, sex-based characteristics and hormonal differences declined. The body's sex drive and the city's birthrate plummeted as hormonal levels fell in men and women; women stopped menstruating, their breasts became hardened and sunken in. The body was conserving and reorienting its reserves toward baseline homeostatic functioning, a reflection of what one diarist called "the strange economy of the organism in these difficult times."<sup>73</sup> Women who did conceive during the first year of the Blockade rarely were healthy enough to carry their babies to term. Sexual development in both boys and girls was delayed significantly.<sup>74</sup>

Changes in physical appearance and in conventions of dress and behavior made gender especially difficult to detect. During the record-low temperatures of January and February 1942, Leningraders buried themselves under whatever warm garments they could find, making gender even more difficult to detect. Gazing out of his window, the historian Georgii Kniazev reported how women dressed in men's trousers (often under their skirts), boots, overcoats, and naval uniforms while men donned women's fur coats and wrapped their heads and covered their mouths with women's kerchiefs.<sup>75</sup> Such reversals in gendered conventions of dress also obscured outward signs of an individual's profession and class. The architect Esfir' Levina recalled afternoon when she stood watching as former "ladies (*damy*)" donned the trappings of working class men including "sealskin coats, enormous felt boots" and carried shovels and axes, while men wore "women's kerchiefs, blankets, and drapes on their shoulders."<sup>76</sup> This continued into the spring of 1942. The philology student Natal'ia Uskova, who participated in such a work brigade clearing ice and debris from Nevsky Prospekt, also reflected upon how such garments made men and women, young and old look the same. "What a picture we must have made under the bright March sun," she wrote of the women laboring alongside her,

It mercilessly illuminated all our blockade flaws. It's funny and scary at the same time: some sort of formless scarecrows, you can't tell the gender or age. People are wearing all sorts of things; all that matters is that they are warm. I am in [her husband] Volodia's winter coat, which reaches my heels, belted up, like a coachman, [illegible] with a belt. A hat on my head, and over it a black scarf up to my very brows, like a nun. Other 'snow maidens' are no better than me. And we all look alike, like ghosts. And the expression of our faces is the same, focused and tense — to complete the work.<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> Zelenskaia, entry for 6 January 1942, 49-50. This comment is made in reference to her daughter Natasha, who stopped menstruating and wondered if she might be pregnant. Natasha in fact had become pregnant, but the combined effects of stress and starvation forced her to miscarry shortly thereafter.

<sup>74</sup> Andrei Dzeniskevich, "Medical Research Institutes during the Siege," *Life and Death*, 108-09. Due to stress, almost ninety-nine percent of women surveyed suffered from amenorrhea in the first two months of the siege, August to September 1941, before hunger set in. On sunken-in breast, see Mukhina, mirror scene.

<sup>75</sup> Kniazev, entry for 4 February 1942 in: Ales' Adamovich and Daniil Granin, *Leningrad under Siege: First-hand Accounts of the Ordeal*, 170. This diary is hereafter referred to as "Kniazev."

<sup>76</sup> Levina I, entry for 10 February 1942, 7.

<sup>77</sup> "A Muzy ne Molchali, (MNM)," f. 1, 5577, k.p. 6518. N. B. Uskova, "Dnevnik," entry for 19 March 1942, 51-52. This diary is hereafter referred to as "Uskova."

Although they were not the only ones to make this observation, the remarks that I quoted above were made by female diarists. Because of the mass mobilization of men to the front and the fact that men initially died at a much higher rate than women, by end of the war over two thirds of the city's population was female.<sup>78</sup> And yet, despite the sexual homogeneity of the city, the diarists still emphasized how sex and gender characteristics became increasingly elusive and ambiguous under siege. Although the majority of the individuals they encountered were female, the diarists continued to use more gender-neutral terms such as "*blokadnik*" (man or person of the Blockade) rather than "*blokadnitsa*" (woman of the Blockade). And when they referred to a person afflicted by the most common hunger-related malady, nutritional dystrophy (*alimentarnaia distrofiia*), they used the term "*distrofik*" (man or person with dystrophy) rather than "*distrofichna*" (woman with dystrophy).<sup>79</sup> In their well-known accounts of the Blockade, Ol'ga Freidenberg and Lidiia Ginzburg also favored androgynous terms that did not mark their experiences as gendered. Freidenberg referred to her recollections of the Blockade as describing a "person of the siege (*osada cheloveka*)," while Lidiia Ginzburg's "Notes of a Blockade Person (*Zapiski blokadnogo cheloveka*)" center around a genderless protagonist "N."<sup>80</sup> This tendency to favor gender-neutral terms underscores how the experience of profound physiological transformation led many *blokadniki* to posit themselves as sexually ambiguous, even androgynous, narrative subjects.

The growing proximity between life and death led to a blurring between young and old. The diarists also fixated upon age as another seemingly self-evident aspect of human physiology made problematic by the siege. Many diarists observed how the entire city population seemed to age. They noted how the bodies of adults and youths alike became wrinkled, shrunken, and gaunt. With great sadness, the librarian and translator Aleksandra Liubovskaia noted that she and her daughter Natasha, more than twenty years her junior, now appeared to be exactly the same age, "wrinkled and grey haired."<sup>81</sup> The young medical

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<sup>78</sup> The death rate in the city remained much higher for men until the middle of March 1942, when it began to increase for women. See the UNKVD reports on the death rates for men and women in: *Leningrad v osade*, ed. N.I. Boryshnikov (Saint Petersburg: Liki Rossii, 1995), 298. For a discussion of these gender disparities, see: Nadezhda Cherepenina, "Assessing the Scale of Famine and Death in the besieged City" and Igor Kozlov and Alla Samsonova, "The Impact of the Siege on the Physical Development of Children," *Life and Death*, 46, 62, 175-6.

<sup>79</sup> Out of 120 siege diaries, I have only encountered the term "*distrofichny*" (women with *distrofiia*) only once, in the diary of Sof'ia Ostrovskaia who used the term while describing the female-dominated staff of the Writers Union in 1942 (Ostrovskaia, Notebook 2, entry for 7 July 1942, 72).

<sup>80</sup> Freidenberg's observations on the siege appear in her diary-memoir *Probeg zhizni*; for the description of this document, see M.Iu. Sorokina, "Kratkoe opisanie materialov lichnogo arkhiva O.M. Freidenberg" in Freidenberg, *Mifi literatura drevnosti* (Moscow, RAN, 1998), 781.

In her recent dissertation, Emily Van Buskirk discusses the genesis of Ginzburg's *Zapiski* as well as provides an in-depth analysis of Ginzburg's decision to present her siege person "N" in a gender-neutral way. Van Buskirk argues that "N" is meant to illustrate the siege experience in general, to "serve as a window onto the lives of others" and "a center of perception" rather than as an active or life-like protagonist. See: Emily Stetson Van Buskirk, "Reality in Search of Literature: Lydia Ginzburg's In-Between Prose" (Ph.D. diss., Harvard University, 2008), 315, 405-415.

<sup>81</sup> Liubovskaia, entry for 9 February 1942, 80. More examples appear in: TsGAIPD, f. 4000, op. 11, d. 71: Aleksandra Nikolaevna Mironova, "dnevnik," entry for 27 February 1942, 19-19ob (hereafter referred to as "Mironova"); TsGAIPD, f. 4000, op. 11, d. 99, "dnevnikov Savinkova, Ivan Alekseevich," entry for 26 August 1942, 53 (hereafter referred to as "Savinkov").

student Zinaida Sedel'nikova also remarked that the experience of rapid aging was a source of concern for her and classmates at Leningrad's Second Medical Academy, who "became distressed that we will all be left old ladies." "I have become very weak and puffy," Sedel'nikova continued, "I cannot sit over my books for long. My hands have become like dry sticks, my fingers all wrinkled, my eyes are sunken in. The girls are amazed that I can still study."<sup>82</sup>

The transformation of young children was especially alarming. Their joints feeble and their bones brittle, young Leningraders acquired the same arthritic gait and stooped posture as the aged. They walked hunched over, leaning on canes for support. These "little old people (*malen'kie starichki*)," as Malysheva described them, also developed more disturbing features that obscured both their age and sex.<sup>83</sup> The sexual development and rates of growth slowed dramatically in boys and girls such that the pace of their maturation began to overlap to a much greater degree.<sup>84</sup> A more alarming symptom of starvation caused little boys and girls to grow a significant amount of hair on their faces. This shocked the evacuation staff and orphanage workers who welcomed them as they crossed over "the road to life" and onto the "mainland." "We called them little very old people (*malen'kie glubokie starichki*)," one evacuation worker recalled, "like old men."<sup>85</sup>

This apparent acceleration of the aging process prompted some diarists to question how, then, should age to be measured? By outward appearance, by years of life, or by state of mind? "When do you end your youth?" architect Esfir' Levina asked as she celebrated her first birthday under siege. "It was another time when age seemed to correspond with life," Levina observed.<sup>86</sup> The theatrical director Aleksandr Dymov also meditated abstractly upon the concept of age and concluded that it ought to be measured more by physical markers—of weariness and frailty—rather than by the passage of time:

Old age. Old age is the fatigue of well-worn components that are involved in the working of the human body, an exhaustion of man's inner resources. Your blood no longer keeps you warm, your legs refuse to obey you, your back grows stiff, your brain grows feeble, your memory fades. [...] We are, all of us, old people now. Regardless of our age. The pace of old age now governs our bodies and our feelings....<sup>87</sup>

While most diarists concluded that the population was aging, there were some who observed that the *blokadniki* appeared to become younger as though their physical development was regressing. Because starvation shrunk the physical body, reducing both

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<sup>82</sup> Sedel'nikova, entry for 26 November 1941, 44.

<sup>83</sup> Malysheva, entry for 7 August 1942, 12-13.

<sup>84</sup> Kozlov and Samsonova, "The Impact of the Siege on the Physical Development of Children," 174-196.

<sup>85</sup> This is from an interview that Granin and Adamovich conducted with Ol'ga Nikolaevna Mel'nikova-Pisarenko, who was awarded Order of the Military Red Banner on Leningrad Front for her work evacuating Leningraders over the *doroga zhizni*. See: Granin and Adamovich, *Blokadnaia kniga*, 162.

<sup>86</sup> Levina I, entry for 1 July 1942, 25.

<sup>87</sup> Dymov, entry for 17 January 1942, 302. English translation is drawn from: Granin and Adamovich, *A Book of the Blockade*, 380-381.

body size and weight, it could also create the illusion of youth. The painter-turned writer Ol'ga Konstantinovna Matiushina described how her best friend Nal'ia, a woman in her fifties, traded her matronly figure for that of an adolescent: "What has she turned into! Pink, plump, she was always oppressed by her stoutness, but now she resembles a fifteen-year-old girl, so flat and slender is her figure. The most frightening thing seems to be her thread-of-a-neck (*sheia-nitochka*) with a large head atop of it. Her nose and chin look sharp; her eyes are sunken in, squirrels could fit in them. How frightening we have become!"<sup>88</sup> Determining age was a puzzle even for medical professionals, such as the diarist and doctor Ol'ga Richardovna Peto who, when she examined her young patients, routinely mistook them for much younger children because of their slight stature, gaunt physique, and delayed physical development. I discuss Peto's observations of these children in Chapter Four.

The horrified reactions of the diarists reverberate with a certain irony when read against wartime propaganda about the Blockade. Soviet ideology had long advocated the eradication of gender- and aged- based inequalities as one of the main goals of socialism. This did not escape the notice of various Soviet writers during the war who celebrated the transformation of gender and age among the *blokadniki*, changes which deeply disturbed the diarists. Propagandistic texts penned by Nikolai Tikhonov, Aleksandr Fadeev, Aleksei Tolstoi, and others upheld this as a sign that inequalities based on age, gender and class were being eradicated, that solidarity and unity had increased in the body social.<sup>89</sup> Fadeev even drew an example of this from the family of his fellow war correspondent Nikolai Tikhonov, a native of Leningrad. In his diary, excerpts of which were published in the 1944 collection *Heroic Leningrad (Geroicheskii Leningrad)*, Fadeev described a visit to Tikhonov's family in April 1942. His description of this visit focuses on the transformation of Tikhonov's wife, the artist Mariia Konstantinovna. During the siege, her delicate, painter's hands had become leathery, her arms sinewy. She dressed in overalls and, "she looked like a lanky young workman [...] she was a different woman, a woman of besieged Leningrad."<sup>90</sup> According to Fadeev, the siege had literally transfigured her into the form of a strong, Soviet worker. Mariia Konstantinovna also drew attention to her own invigorated physical form, asking Fadeev with a smile: "well, do we look like *distrofiki*?"<sup>91</sup>

This work, along with many others from the war, celebrates the "unprecedented heroism" of women, who took on work and responsibilities typically fulfilled by men, and it suggests that the alterations made to sex-based traits stemmed from this heroic labor and not from starvation.<sup>92</sup> As Fadeev proclaimed: "Women of Leningrad! Will words ever be able to

<sup>88</sup> Matiushina, O. Matiushina, *Pesn' o zhizni: avtobiograficheskaia povest'*, ed. A. Lavren'eva-Krivosheva (Leningrad: Izdatel'stvo: TsK VLKSM "Molodaia Gvardiia," 1946), 134-5.

<sup>89</sup> Examples include: Tikhonov's essay "Georicheskii Leningrad" and his wartime stories "Devushka," "Devushka na kryshe," A. Tolstoi's article of 31 July 1942, "Stoikost'," and Vera Inber's poems "Zabotlivaia Zhenskaia ruka," "Zhenshchine!," "Devushka rodnaia." An analysis of gender in Inber's works can be found in: Cynthia Simmons, "Lifting the Siege: Women's Voices on Leningrad (1941-1944)," *Canadian Slavonic Papers*, XL, 1-2 (March-June 1998), 47.

<sup>90</sup> Fadeev, *Leningrad v dni blokady: iz dnevnika* (Moscow: Sovetsii Pisatel', 1944), 12-13. English translation in: *Heroic Leningrad: Documents, Sketches, and Stories of its Siege and Relief* (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1945), 37-39.

<sup>91</sup> Fadeev, *Leningrad v dni blokady*, 8-9.

<sup>92</sup> As Eric Naiman has shown, this celebration of gender ambiguity, especially the transformation of female form was a common trope of NEP-era literature, where female sexuality was seen as wild and irrational, an obstacle to the achievement of the regime's collective body ideal, which was based on the figure of the male worker.

express the grandeur of your labors [...] you wear the workers' overalls, the militiaman's uniform, the uniform of the anti-aircraft defense, the railway man, the army surgeon, and telegraphist!"<sup>93</sup> Strong, heroic, and able to endure incredible hardships, the siege woman represented a kind of New Woman. It is notable that the diaries emphasized a two-way homogenization of male and female bodies, whereas official propaganda stressed how the women of Leningrad had acquired the strength and physical toughness of men. Unlike the diaries, it did not acknowledge the reciprocal process and suggest that male bodies had come to resemble female bodies.

Even if sex-based differences were fading, the diaries illustrate that gender-based inequalities were far from eradicated. While their bodies grew less distinctively male and female, gender continued to play an important role in defining the diarists' roles both in their families and in society. Female diarists felt their gender distinctly. Under siege, traditionally "women's" work became essential to survival, whereas professional work outside the home became secondary in importance. According to the diaries, women were still expected to do the bulk of these—now arduous—domestic duties such as waiting in lines for food, cooking, cleaning, gathering firewood, and carrying for the sick. Still, because they occupied fewer positions in heavy industry, women tended to receive smaller rations because their work was deemed less valuable to the war effort. The sharp imbalance between the labor performed by husbands and became a major source of tension for families "inside the ring," as I discuss in Chapter Three.<sup>94</sup> In short, the diary accounts point to the radical re-conceptualization of perceived sexual and age-based differences. According to the diarists, physiological characteristics related to sex ceased to play integral roles in their identities, but it continued to determine divisions of labor and status. Thus, far from being eradicated, such inequalities remained in force. In this way, the Blockade seemed to drive a wedge between sex and gender.

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Naiman analyzes some of the most famous literary expressions of this critical view of femininity including the stories of Aleksandra Kollontai. See: Naiman, *Sex in Public: Incarnation of Early Soviet Ideology* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997). I found the discussions of the explicitly masculine nature of the Soviet New Man to be especially helpful: Clark, *The Soviet Novel*, 114-120, 124-125; John Haynes, *New Soviet Man: Gender and Masculinity in Stalinist Soviet Film* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003); Eliot Borenstein, *Men without Women: Masculinity and Revolution in Russian Fiction, 1917-1929* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000).

<sup>93</sup> Fadeev, *Leningrad v dni blokady*, 85. English translation from: *Heroic Leningrad*, 49.

<sup>94</sup> In their collection of women's writings of the Blockade, Cynthia Simmons and Nina Perlina argue for gender as "a definitive issue of the siege experience" whether or not Leningrad woman openly acknowledged this in their accounts. In making their case, Simmons and Perlina emphasize how the city population was predominantly female and how traditionally women's work—gathering food and water, preparing meals, and so forth—"acquired the utmost strategic significance" during the war. See: Simmons and Perlina, *Writing the Siege of Leningrad, Women's Diaries, Memoirs, and Documentary Prose* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2002). xxix, 3, 6.

### III. Apprehending the World of the Siege: The Fives Senses, Evolved

In addition to the external changes that they glimpsed in the mirror, the diarists wrote extensively about the internal transformation of Leningraders' vital organs, sensory systems, proprioceptive properties of bodily awareness. The human organism's perceptual and sensory systems completely mediate human apprehension of the outside world and, not unlike a mirror, reflect what is understood to be external reality. The prolonged malnourishment and chronic stress caused by the siege elicited certain chemical, physiological, and anatomical changes in the brain that profoundly altered sense perception. This had a direct effect on Leningraders' abilities to navigate the city, to find resources, to hear air-raid warnings, and to avoid falling explosives in their struggles for survival. The diarists were concerned with these challenges as well as with how this change in their perceptive abilities might effect their ability to chronicle the blockade experience. Could their senses be trusted as reliable guides for apprehending the besieged city, especially when both the body's perceptual apparatus and the world around them were changing so dramatically? This question emerges with force in their accounts.

Although wartime and postwar scientific research has emphasized the deterioration of Leningraders' perceptual abilities, the diarists offer a more mixed picture. They suggest that some of their sensibilities grew keener, while others grew duller. To borrow Michael Taussig's formulation, the ordeal of living in such a "nervous system" produced opposite nervous and sensory responses within the body. On the one hand, the body strove to conserve its meager resources and reduce its level of physical, sensory, and emotional reactivity for the sake of survival. On the other hand, the body's stress response systems remained acute because of the constant threat of death. The diary accounts showcase the constant oscillations between acute sensitivity and emotional numbness, nervous shock and apathy, clarity and confusion, which comprised the irregular heartbeat of blockade life.<sup>95</sup> In the struggle to understand and better control their sensory abilities, the diarists wondered whether these sensory changes placed them in a better or worse position for survival. They also became especially curious about the nature of the interactions between the brain, the body, and more immaterial entities such as consciousness, will, and some kind of interior self.

The diarists' preoccupation with this theme has parallels in Soviet psychology on the even of the war. In the mid-1930s, Soviet psychologists began revising the prior scholarly consensus on mind-body interactions, especially the role of consciousness in psychophysical functioning.<sup>96</sup> This discussion of "psychophysiological unity" was the corollary to the debate

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<sup>95</sup> I found the following discussions of the effect on prolonged stress on the body and mind to be very informative: Michael Taussig, *The Nervous System* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 13. Linda Green, "Living in a State of Fear," *Violence in War and Peace*, eds. Nancy Scheper-Hughes and Philippe I. Bourgois (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2004), 186-195.

<sup>96</sup> Joravsky, *Russian Psychology*; Miller, *Freud and the Bolsheviks*; Loren R. Graham, *Science and Philosophy in the Soviet Union* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1972); Raymond Bauer, *The New Man in Soviet Psychology* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1968); Martin A. Miller, *Psychoanalysis in Imperial Russia and the Soviet Union* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998). This development stemmed from the forceful reemergence of the Leninist theory of reflection during the first Five Year Plans, which allowed for man's ability to be active and not just reactive, to remake his environment and himself as the same time that these external conditions made him. This emphasis on man's creative and thinking capacity justified the principles of personal

over spontaneity-consciousness dialectic in ideological circles.<sup>97</sup> Scientists moved away from reflexology, which defined man's behaviors by nervous responses to environmental conditions, and toward a model of human development based on a confluence of three factors: biological inheritance, environmental conditions, and the "training" of the will and mind through acts of conscious will.<sup>98</sup> For this reason, in the years before the war there was a marked increase in studies on "sensation and perception as the primary point of departure in [man's] cognition of the world."<sup>99</sup> The siege diarists also focused on sense perception and in their accounts they recorded their own insights about the changing physiology and psychology of the *blokadniki*. Most likely, they were unaware of this research, but the Stalinist regime's general emphasis on the importance of will power, initiative, and mastering the body would have been very familiar to them. The Blockade prompted them to wrestle with a similar set of concerns over the interplay between biological, environmental, and mental factors in determining survival. In this way, the siege conditions inadvertently provided a kind of laboratory in which a kind of New Man—one reformed by war, not by labor—was cultivated, observed, and tested. It is to the diarists' meditations on sensation and perception that I now turn.

### *Is Seeing Believing?*

The vast majority of people primarily apprehend the world visually. This tendency is so strong that, in many languages, the phrases "I see" and "I understand" are used interchangeably. Almost immediately after the war began, the diarists turned to visual metaphors to convey their confusion about the state of affairs at the front and in the city. They described the city as an opaque, even illegible space engulfed in fog, smoke, or darkness, impeding clear understanding. Heavy artillery and aerial bombardment, frequent fires, and the lack of electricity meant that the city indeed was difficult to see clearly. When the initial phase of bombardment ended and the days of intense hunger began, evocations of visual impairment remained strong. The diarists couched their confusion and anxiety in somatic terms as a kind of "dystrophic fog (*distroficheskii tuman*)" or "dystrophic blackout

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responsibility, initiative, and will power during the regime's crash course in industrialization and collectivization. See: Bauer, *The New Man*, 35-36, 67.

<sup>97</sup> On the eve of the war, the key leader in this field was Sergei Lenonidovich Rubinshtein (1889-1960). Rubinstein founded the department of psychology at Moscow State University in 1942 and headed Institute of Philosophy at the Soviet Academy of Sciences from 1945-1960. Rubinstein argued for both a subjective element of consciousness as well as for the material determination of the brain and external environment in shaping the processes of sensation and perception. He dubbed this dialectical, all-embracing, yet somewhat confusing formulation "the theory of dual correlation." On "the principle of psychophysical unity" See: Graham, *Science and Philosophy*, 377-382.

<sup>98</sup> On the eve of the War a leader in this field was Sergei Lenonidovich Rubinshtein (1889-1960). Rubinstein founded the department of psychology at Moscow State University in 1942 and headed Institute of Philosophy at the Soviet Academy of Sciences from 1945-1960. Rubinstein argued for both a subjective element of consciousness as well as for the material determination of the brain and external environment in shaping the processes of sensation and perception; he also came under fire for it. He dubbed this dialectical, all-embracing, yet somewhat confusing formulation "the theory of dual correlation." See: Graham, *Science and Philosophy*, 377-382; Hellbeck, *Revolution on my Mind*, 33; Miller, *Psychoanalysis*, 111.

<sup>99</sup> Teplov, "Sovetskaia Psikhologicheskaiia Nauka za 30 let," 22. This is quoted in: Bauer, *The New Man*, 118.

(*distroficheskoe zatmenie*)” that clouded one’s clarity of thought.<sup>100</sup> In one entry from February 1942 the writer Sof’ia Ostrovskaia highlighted the interconnections between physical blindness and the disorientation and uncertainty that pervaded her daily life “inside the ring:”

Things are very bad with [my vision]. Almost all the time I live in a deep dusk—and I write and work that way. At night my eyes tear up constantly. It is very unpleasant for me and very alarming. I find it curious and frightening to think about the future. What kinds of prospects (*perspektivy*) are there for my city? When will they finally break through and remove the Blockade? When will people stop dying from emaciation? When will people return to basic conditions of the so-called cultured life of the city? [...] So far this is also not apparent (*ne vidno*). We will wait!<sup>101</sup>

For diarists like Ostrovskaia, the sense of blindness that accompanied the onset of the Blockade as one of the most salient and alarming aspects of the siege experience.

Of course, blindness was not simply a metaphorical device. There were physiological bases for the diarists’ visual impairment. Especially in the spring and summer of 1942, Leningrad doctors noticed that an epidemic of blindness was gripping the city.<sup>102</sup> They studied how emaciation, Vitamin C deficiency, and hypertension—all widespread among the besieged population—often triggered neuroretinitis, an inflammation of the retinal membrane. Optometrists also noticed an increase in the number of damaged blood vessels and cells in the eye as well as a general degeneration of the optic nerve.<sup>103</sup> In addition, starvation often induced a dramatic swelling of the body and face, including the areas around the eyes, which compromised vision.<sup>104</sup> For the diarists, however, blindness signified more than physiological degeneration; it was a clear sign that their grasp of reality was changing.

At the same time that the diarists lamented how unreliable their eyes had become, they observed that a certain measure of sightlessness seemed advantageous. On the one hand, blindness brought forth a flood of unsettling emotional states including panic, confusion, and vulnerability. On the other hand, limited or *selective* vision allowed them to focus on survival and block out distressing or puzzling elements of environment. In her diary, the chemist Elena Kochina likened Leningraders’ preoccupation with food to a kind of blindness: they “wander like blind people, groping their way with sticks, indifferent to everything but bread.”<sup>105</sup> Irina Zelenskaia favored “tunnel vision” as a strategy for conserving energy and maintaining her emotional stability. A manager at the Leningrad Gas and Electrical Station (Lenenergo), Zelenskaia described how she myopically focused on the minutia of daily tasks so as to overwhelm herself with the daunting task of survival. “We live in a state of half ease

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<sup>100</sup> Ginzburg, “Zapiski blokadnogo cheloveka,” and “Otrezki blokadnogo dnia,” *Prokhodiashchie kharaktery*, 349, 444.

<sup>101</sup> Ostrovskaia, Notebook 2, entry for 1 February 1942, 2-2ob.

<sup>102</sup> P. F. Gladkikh, *Zdravookhranenie i voennaia meditsina v bitve za Leningrad: glazami istorika i ochevidtsev. 1941-1944* (Saint Petersburg: “Dmitrii Bulanin,” 2006), 31.

<sup>103</sup> Magaeva, “Physiological and Psychosomatic Prerequisites for Survival,” 143-144; Gladkikh, *Zdravookhranenie i voennaia meditsina*, 31-32.

<sup>104</sup> A diarist’s discussion of this appears in: Zelenskaia, entry for 26 January 1942, 58.

<sup>105</sup> Kochina, entry for 21 December 1941, 176.



absorbed with small concerns and only at moments does the torturous sight become clear enough to expose all the crazy and cruel [aspects] of our existence. This opens a door to the truth. Many times you slam it shut and you press against it with all of our might so that it flings itself open less often again. You can't stand it."<sup>106</sup> By shutting her eyes, the diarist tried to create their own reality, to erect a veneer of normalcy and predictability. Ostrovskaia also shut her eyes to the realities of war as a way of preserving her physical and mental strength. In September 1941, when the Nazis dropped as many as 6,000 shells a day on Leningrad, she declared: "I did not see any sort of explosions in the city. I do not want to see. I am protecting myself. A case (*sistema*) of prolepsis of the eyes (*opushchennykh glaz*)."<sup>107</sup> She welcomed this attack of prolepsis as a safeguard from upsetting aspects of her situation. In this way, the diarists were not just victims of compromised sight, at times they actively chose this.

In her retrospective notes about the Blockade, Lidiia Ginzburg described how the *blokadniki* were often of two minds on the benefits and disadvantages of limited vision. During a rare, openly autobiographical moment Ginzburg recalled how, during the first months of the Blockade, she often chose not to wear her glasses in order to distance herself from the chaos and devastation around her. When her glasses broke in the spring of 1942, according to Ginzburg "the world was wiped out, extinguished, as were many aspects of my former life." In time, she grew so accustomed to her new perspective on the city that near the war's end, she confessed: "now I didn't want my visual integrity back at all,"

I had a madman's fear that all this would be coming to an end. After all, that would mean the end of the life I was now leading, a strange, simple existence, stripped to the bare minimum with its agony and intense relief. A complex difficult process of restoring normal or apparently normal life was going to begin, with all its tedious desires. [...] The world, dimmed because of my broken glasses, impassable because of my warped footwear. A world without love. I sat in quiet torpor and any kind of love, past or future seemed an excessively bothersome business.<sup>108</sup>

The restoration of her sight would mean the end of the world as she knew it and return of the prior reality that was now so foreign to her. Ginzburg vividly recalled the same phenomenon that the diarists discovered during the first siege winter: the radical alteration of their vision of the world during the siege—sometimes prompted by circumstances, sometimes by Leningraders themselves, who opted to selectively expand or block their visual intake in order to improve their chances of physical, psychological, or emotional survival. I hope that even these brief selections from the corpus of siege diaries illustrate some of the ways that "siege blindness" was individually conceived, experienced and managed. These discussions highlight the interplay between the anatomical eye and the mind's eye in determining reality.

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<sup>106</sup> Zelenskaia, entry for 6 May 1942, 79ob.

<sup>107</sup> Ostrovskaia, Notebook 1, entry for 9 October 1941, 107ob. "Prolepsis" refers to either the reoccurrence of a periodic disease or an unexpected paroxysm.

<sup>108</sup> Ginzburg, "Zapisi i dni blokady," *Prokhodiashchie kharaktery*, 435, 437. English translation in: Ginzburg, *Blockade Diary*, trans. Alan Meyers, intro. Aleksandr Kushner (London: Torvill Press, 1995), 97-8, 100.

Some diarists not only deliberately modified how they viewed the world around them, they also experimented with the forms and meanings of blindness on the pages of their journals. A striking example of this appears in the wartime writings of the painter Ol'ga Matiushina, who explored the relationship between blindness and artistic expression at length. She penned two different interpretations of this theme. In the wartime “diary” that she kept between 1941 and 1942, Matiushina presented blindness as an impediment to expression.<sup>109</sup> However, in the autobiographical novella that she wrote between 1942 and 1944, Matiushina thematized sightlessness as a boon to creative self-expression. In an unusual move—which I discuss in Chapter Two—Matiushina wrote her diary in the third person and attributed her own experiences to a fictional heroine whom she called Evgeniia Mikhailovna. By contrast, her novella, *A Song about Life: An Autobiographical Novella (Pesn' o zhizni: avtobiograficheskii povest')*, presents a similar set of life events through a first-person narrator. In both texts, blindness comprises the most potent symbol of the transformation of Matiushina's body, identity, and perspective.

The diary and novella suggest different conceptualizations of the Blockade's relationship to blindness. In the diary, the fictionalized heroine, Evgeniia Mikhailovna, is partially blind at the start of the war. The diary gives no explanation of how Evgeniia Mikhailovna lost her sight, although age and illness are the implied culprits. In the first entry, the diary's narrator recalls, vaguely, that: “blindness came. It tore away (*vyrvala*), destroyed all that was dear to her,” especially her love of color and of capturing nature's beauty in painting.<sup>110</sup> *A Song about Life*, suggests a causal link between them: Matiushina claims that she became blind because of the siege—or more precisely, because of an enemy shell that exploded near her home. This moment, highly dramatized in its description, provides the foundational trauma from which the novella unfolds. It all happened on a picturesque summer day. Matiushina was seated in her garden, watching as a young girl, dressed all in white, strolled down the street. Suddenly, the wail of air-raid sirens, followed by a multitude of explosions, shattered this tranquil scene. Matiushina momentarily lost consciousness, but then quickly recovered and ran after the young girl, fearing for her safety. She returned home in defeat and suffering from a horrible throbbing in her head: “a blunt physical pain fused (*slilas'*) with the horrible experience.” “In the morning I could not understand—my eyes saw almost nothing...I was frightened. ‘What is happening to me?’ ‘I am not blind, am I?’” Three days later, when she found that she was still unable to read, Matiushina went to the doctor, who confirmed her self-diagnosis.<sup>111</sup>

Without knowing the actual strength of Matiushina's eyesight at the start of the war, it is unclear whether she invented this scenario for the sake of the novella or whether she omitted it from the diary. What remains are two different statements about how the siege transformed Matiushina's vision of herself, of her body, and of her environment. According to the novella, the Blockade brought about blindness and profound disorientation. By contrast, the “diary” suggests that the siege preyed upon the existing weaknesses of human

<sup>109</sup> I place “diary” in quotes because of the unusual, highly novelistic nature of Matiushina's unusual account. I discuss the features of this text in greater detail in Chapter Two.

TsGAIPD, f. 4000, op. 11, d. 68, “Ol'ga Matiushina, “dnevnik.” This source is hereafter referred to as “Matiushina, Diary.”

<sup>110</sup> Matiushina, *Pesn' o zhizni*, 2. She ended the novella with the notation: “Leningrad, 1941-44,” indicating its apparent documentary character.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid*, 91-93.

comprehension. These two interpretations led to different challenges for the heroines. Both Evgeniia Mikhailovna and Ol'ga Matiushina had to learn how to navigate their (now unfamiliar) surroundings in order to survive. In *A Song about Life*, Matiushina struggled with blindness, painstakingly relearning basic motor functions including walking and writing. In the midst of these struggles, she openly questioned whether a life enshrouded in darkness was worth living: "what will I do blind? How can I live like this? Not to see the sun! For me, not to see the sun! After all, since childhood it has been my happiness, my greatest joy! The night was dark, moonless. 'Such darkness will be the whole world for me now,' I thought. No, I can't give way to this. I don't want to give in! I am alive!"<sup>112</sup> By contrast, in the diary, Evgeniia Mikhailovna mastered these tasks more quickly and, unlike her counterpart in the novella, she felt motivated by her blindness. More willing to risk her life, Evgeniia Mikhailovna took on potentially dangerous activities like standing guard on watch duty, assisting the local fire brigade, and participating in the MPVO (the city anti-aircraft defense).<sup>113</sup> Blindness stirred her to make such sacrifices for the common cause.

Let's look at one moment, which illustrates how these different experiences of blindness led the two heroines to different understandings of the body, of the self, and of artistic expression. When Nal'ia, Evgeniia Mikhailovna's/Ol'ga Matiushina's best friend, gave her a bouquet of peonies, the artist was inspired to capture their beauty on paper. To achieve this, Evgeniia Mikhailovna/Ol'ga Matiushina had to learn to see with the mind's eye. The diary's presentation of this moment is replete with images of sight and luminance, which signal to the reader that Evgeniia Mikhailovna would triumph over her sightlessness:

Red-white, vibrantly delicate, they [the peonies] looked at her and Evgeniia Mikhailovna could not tear herself away from them. [...] Evgeniia Mikhailovna put them in a vase half-full of water. She could not tear her eyes from them. No matter what else she did or what she thought about, she returned to the flowers and gazed at them for a long time. And they, having taken to the fresh water, looked at Evgeniia Mikhailovna and demanded something of her. 'What can I do for you? I cannot capture your beauty on paper. I can't see.' 'You can,' they answered.

And as she looked to her inner strength, she began to draw. How she drew, she did not know herself. Only she wanted to draw them such as they were, a sign of the coming victory of her country, her beloved city. And the flowers were radiant. They shone, trying to help the poor-sighted person to transmit their beauty.

'Look Nal'ia, I drew your flowers almost with my eyes closed. These flowers of our victory, these flowers reflect the fascist darkness.' And Natal'ia Vladimirovna looked at the flowers and the artist: 'How grand! You have conquered blindness!' So too will our country conquer the hateful dark clouds of fascism. Natal'ia Vladimirovna did not take her eyes off the drawing, where

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<sup>112</sup> Matiushina, *Pesn' o zhizni*, 93.

<sup>113</sup> Matiushina, *Diary*, 42, 44-45, 61-67, 77-78. Contrast this with the novella, see: Matiushina, *Pesn' o zhizni*, 102-103.

the flowers swayed freely vibrant, vital, and transforming the interior [of the room] with light.<sup>114</sup>

Here, Evgeniia Mikhailovna's victory over her limitations foreshadows her country's victory against the Germans. This scene incorporates a number of clichés, some from Soviet literature, such as the luminance of the room versus the darkness of the fascists, the unlikely hero who triumphs through inner strength, not physical prowess, and the blind clairvoyant who can predict the outcome of the war. Moreover, the third-person narrative voice, dialogue, and extensive use of metaphor and personification give the text the literary air of a novel, as though it was crafted after the fact. It seems likely that this rather idealized account reflects what Matiushina hoped would happen for herself and for her country, rather than her actual experience of relearning how to draw.

By contrast, *A Song about Life* portrays Matiushina's attempts to sketch the peonies in deeply personal, less triumphant way. The intimate feel of this description is rather reminiscent of a conventional diary as opposed to the highly stylized nature of Matiushina's "diary." Published in 1944, the novella paints a more pessimistic picture of Matiushina's efforts to overcome sightlessness. Unlike Evgeniia Mikhailovna, Ol'ga Matiushina and the peonies do not exchange any longing glances or affectionate words. Rather, for Matiushina the process of drawing the peonies on paper was "torturous" and took two days to complete. It was a modest victory and one that was highly personal, not infused with political significance. In the end, when Nal'ia exclaimed: "You conquered blindness!" Matiushina was unable to return her enthusiasm, and vowed that this would be her last drawing.<sup>115</sup>

It was only the beginning, however, of the painter's struggle to express herself creatively through writing. "But words?... what words can you (*ty*) find to replace paints (*kraski*)?"<sup>116</sup> The novella lingers over Matiushina's trepidation about becoming a writer, about this change in her identity and sense of herself. By contrast, the transition from image to word does not have the same dramatic intensity or connection to sensory transformation in the diary.

In sum, the central theme of Matiushina's two wartime accounts is the difficulty of properly seeing and conveying the world of the siege. Matiushina used her diary and novella, both written during the Blockade, to experiment with this theme of sensory transformation. In her diary, blindness was a setback, but ultimately a motivator. In her novella, it was a shattering blow, which led the heroine to a whole new way of apprehending the world and herself as a writer.

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<sup>114</sup> Matiushina, *Diary*, 37-38.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*, 96-97.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*, 99.

On the cover of Matiushina's diary, the archivist described her profession as "author-artist?", which reflects this ambiguity of her professional status.

*Sounds of the Siege:*

Before losing her sight, Matiushina admitted that her hearing “was very weakly developed, but during the Blockade she was forced “to replace vision with hearing.”<sup>117</sup> The very title of Matiushina’s novella, *A Song about Life*, underscores this shift. Sound reconnected Matiushina to the outside world and became the primary mediator of reality.

The first time in the city noise, I was not able to detect the sound of an approaching car, to catch from what side he was approaching. Slowly I began to tell such sounds apart. Now only sound has meaning (*znanie*) for me. [...] Having grown accustomed to deeply feeling life, I wanted to know everything about her as before. I could not read. I had no radio. I walked to the neighbors’ or along Kirovsky Prospekt and listened to the broadcasts. From questions, random conversations, I started to learn about life as it had been created by war (*sozdannuiu voinoi*).<sup>118</sup>

Matiushina was determined to make this sensory shift in order to survive and to gather information about the *blokadniki* for her writing projects. Because she could no longer read facial expressions, Matiushina had to learn to rely on dialogue, intuition, and imagination to “unlock the psychology of a person.” “To be an artist with bad vision is impossible,” she observed, “but for a writer sound means a lot.” Relying on these audio cues, “one again, I started to write, once again I learned to see life.”<sup>119</sup>

It is a truism that, after injury or under extreme duress, sensory abilities that generally play a secondary role become heightened, more acute. A recent study, *The Sounds and Smells of Saint Petersburg*, argues this point, describing the siege as a fundamentally auditory experience: “a resident of the Blockade cannot see anything. He hears, and this is the sole means of receiving information.”<sup>120</sup> In light of the apparent difficulty of apprehending the blockaded world visually, diarists recorded numerous situations, where survival depended on how well they could hear various sounds—be they news broadcasts, air-raid sirens, or the differences between friendly and enemy fire. As with vision, the diarists give a complicated picture of how the Blockade effected audition, revealing ways that it was enhanced, impaired, or deliberately manipulated by Leningraders. Again, this differed from scientific research emphasizing that Leningraders’ hearing steadily deteriorated because of bombardment and malnutrition. Between late 1942 and early 1943, Leningrad’s Ear, Nose and Throat Research Institute mounted eight studies investigating how Leningraders’ senses associated with audition, olfaction, and speech were severely injured.<sup>121</sup> Damage to the vestibule of the ear was especially common. The diarists differed in their assessment of whether the Blockade

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<sup>117</sup> Ibid, 95.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid, 95.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid, 110-111.

<sup>120</sup> Vladimir Vasil’evich Lapin, *Peterburg: zapahi i zvuki* (Saint Petersburg: Evropeiskii Dom, 2007), 261.

<sup>121</sup> Andrei Dzeniskevich, “Medical Research Institutes during the Siege,” *Life and Death*, 104. This research was conducted in 1942 and 1943, but published in 1944 and 1947 respectively in the institute’s *Sbornik trudov LNII po bolezniam ukha, nosa, gorla, i rechi*, Volumes VII and VIII. Volume VIII, which did not appear until 1947, was devoted to hearing and speech disorders.

had a positive or negative on their hearing and which outcome was more favorable in terms of their physical and mental wellbeing. Many lamented over the loss of their hearing. The historian Georgii Kniazev and his wife both suffered significant damage to their hearing because of enemy explosives and pieces of shrapnel falling nearby. One shell left Kniazev partially deaf and poorly equipped to discern the sounds of aerial attack. “I still cannot make out whether what I hear is a noise inside my ears or the drone of propellers,” he observed.<sup>122</sup> The diarist and physician Anna Ivanovna Likhacheva reported similar findings using herself as the subject. Likhacheva suffered from three of the most common siege ailments, dystrophy, scurvy, and dysentery, and among the many symptoms that she endured, hearing loss was the one of the most debilitating. By June 1942, she was generally recovering well except for “the most frightening noise in my ears, which grows stronger with physical exertion. It torments me and disturbs my thinking (*meshat’ myslit’*).” She connected this ringing with malnutrition, especially “the shortage of fats and sugar.”<sup>123</sup>

Other diaries, however, suggest that the siege conditions heightened their abilities to hear. Examples of this appear in the journals of Esfir’ Levina and Irina Zelenskaia. Shortly after the city was cut off, the diarists despaired of how little she and other Leningraders knew about the world outside of Leningrad. They were both physically isolated and received only sparse misleading news reports from the Soviet authorities. “We live as though ‘blind,’ we know nothing about the war,” Zelenskaia declared. Levina attributed her own limitations to the news summaries themselves as “deaf.”<sup>124</sup> As a result, both diarists learned to decipher battles audibly and identify which explosions were “ours” (*svoi*) and which came from the enemy.<sup>125</sup> At the same time, Zelenskaia wondered whether her heightened sense of hearing did not bring with it a certain amount of distress, admitting that the frightening experience of listening to the raging artillery battles “makes you want to hold your ears.”<sup>126</sup>

The account of Mariia Sergeevna Konopleva, an art-historian and librarian, also emphasizes the complications of hearing acutely under siege. Konopleva portrayed the Blockade as a fundamentally auditory experience. Despite her professional training, Konopleva was skeptical about the reliability of both visual impressions and the written word, and she cautioned her potential reader against trusting posters, news summaries, or leaflets from either the Soviet or German authorities. Instead, she conveyed the world of the siege through sound. Almost every entry transmits the developing soundtrack of the siege—conversations, anecdotes, jokes, the quality and timber of the her fellow residents' voices, the explosions of shells, falling bombs, and roar of airplanes. Konopleva took great care to relay the exact words spoken between Leningraders using their “blockaded language” as well as the conversations between the Soviet *zenitki* and the German planes—an exchange that was only intelligible to the *blokadniki* with expanded powers of audition.<sup>127</sup> By contrast, Konopleva

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<sup>122</sup> Kniazev, entries for 2 July 1941 and 18 August 1942, 15, 191. His wife became deaf in one ear as the result of an air raid in March 1942.

<sup>123</sup> “Iz dnevnika Likhachevoi Anny Ivanovny,” *Oborona Leningrada 1941-1944: Vospominaniia i dnevniki uchastnikov*, ed. E.F. Dagin (Leningrad: Izdatel'stvo: ‘Nauka,’ 1968), entry for 20 June 1942, 688. This source is hereafter referred to as “Likhacheva.”

<sup>124</sup> Levina, entry for 10 April 1942, 17.

<sup>125</sup> Zelenskaia, entries for 2, 16 September 1941, 11, 15ob.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid, entry for 13 October 1941, 23.

<sup>127</sup> OR RNB, f. 368, Konopleva, “V Blokirovannom Leningrade: zapiski” Notebook 1, entries for 30 August, 1 September, 20 November 1941, 175-176, 52-55 and Notebook 2, entries for 17, 19 April and 28 June 1942, 59-

rarely recorded her own conversations or even many of her personal experiences. Taken together, her entries paint blockaded Leningrad—despite its artistic and literary legacy—as an oral-based society.<sup>128</sup>

At the same time, Konopleva warned that sound could reflect or distort the blockaded environment—not unlike the mirrors discussed earlier. Cautionary notes appear throughout her journal, but especially in her entries from spring and summer 1942, at which time, the diarist’s hearing began to decline from the long-term effects of starvation. Still, she tended to blame environmental factors for these difficulties.<sup>129</sup> As she helped her (potential) reader to sift through the audio world of the Blockade, she constantly alluded to the unreliability of these cues. Air raid sirens were often faked, a ruse to scatter breadlines and improve one’s place in the queue; or they were genuine, but often erroneous and sounded after the fact or not at all. Falling bombs sometimes did not explode and could not be located by sound; circulating rumors were false; radio broadcasts were deliberately misleading or silent about certain subjects, especially the mounting death toll at the front and in the city.<sup>130</sup> This task of decoding radio reports became almost an obsession for the diarist. Konopleva grew so doubtful of these broadcasts that when it was announced that the ring of the Blockade had been punctured on 19 January 1943, she dismissed it outright, sadly noting: “we have been deceived so many times.”<sup>131</sup> After listening to one rousing patriotic broadcast from Moscow, she wryly noted how report’s triumphant tone was belied by the sound of explosions in the background.<sup>132</sup>

In general, two narrative strains run through Konopleva’s account: one depicts Leningrad as a city of sound, the other as a city of silence. During the first winter, the difficulty of deciphering the sounds of the siege was exacerbated by the general quiet of the city: there were no train or factory whistles, no sounds of explosions or planes, no shouts of laughter from children, and few overheard conversations. Ivan Alekseevich Savinkov a brigade leader at the Molotov factory called this stillness “the most unpleasant” and “oppressive” aspect of siege life.<sup>133</sup> When she deposited her diary in the city’s public library in 1943, Konopleva emphasized that the value of her journal was that it provided an account of Leningrad “during the time when there were no newspapers, no radio, when the telephone and post did not work.” Although this statement makes a slight exaggeration, the diarist genuinely experienced and characterized the city in this way.

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60, 88-89. This source is hereafter referred to as “Konopleva.”

<sup>128</sup> This vision of blockade society was shared by other diarists, like Aleksandr Aleksandrovich Bardovskii, who jotted down the fantastical rumors circulating about Leningrad as pieces of the city’s “folklore” (TsGAIPD, f. 4000, op. 11, d. 7, A.A. Bardovskii, “dnevnik,” entries for 17 September 1941 and 3 January 1942, 34, 66ob).

<sup>129</sup> Konopleva, Notebook 1, entry for 20 April 1942, 60-63. In the summer of 1942, when evacuation was steadily increasing, Konopleva returned to this impression of Leningrad as a quiet, empty city. See: Ibid, Notebook 3, entry for 26 July 1942, 11-12.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid, Notebook 1, entries for 19 July, 5-9 October, 13 November 1941, 24, 126-133, 164; Notebook 3, entry for 4 July 1942, 1-2.

<sup>131</sup> Konopleva, Notebook 3, entry for 19 January 1943, 37-38. More examples appear in Ibid, On the radio, see: Ibid, Notebook 1, entries for 4, 13, 26 July and 22, 24 September 1941, 1-3, 10-11, 20-21, 98-101; Notebook 3, entries for 5, 9 July 1942, 1-3. In 1943, the diarist added a footnote that warned: “we were not aware that [radio] reports might not be true.” This footnote annotates her entry for 13 September 1941, 79-80.

<sup>132</sup> Ibid, Notebook 1, entries for 6, 7 November 1941, 160-162.

<sup>133</sup> For example, see: Konopleva, Notebook 2, entry for 26 July 1942, 11-12; Savinkov, entry for 13 September 1941, 5. Here, he emphasized the quiet of the factory because of the lack of electricity.

The problem of audition under siege takes a fascinating course in the diary of Aleksandra Pavlovna Liubovskaia. As a professional translator and philologist, Liubovskaia must have thought extensively about the challenges of meaningful communication and conveying “indescribable” or “untranslatable” cultural phenomena. In addition, Liubovskaia began to lose her hearing in the late 1930s and was legally deaf by the time the war began. She also suffered from very poor eyesight.<sup>134</sup> Liubovskaia was painfully aware of how these formidable perceptual obstacles hampered her efforts to capture the siege in her diary, and as she admitted in her diary’s “prologue” and very first entry, she relied heavily on her two children to supply her with information about the city using sign language. For this reason, she sometimes referred to the journal as “our diary.”<sup>135</sup> When considered together with other siege diaries, Liubovskaia’s sensory and perceptual obstacles were, I argue, emblematic of the siege experience.

Generally speaking, Liubovskaia’s inability to hear caused her a great deal of anxiety: it prevented her from receiving emergency warnings, from decoding explosions as friendly or enemy fire, and from anticipating the trajectory of falling shells. Moreover, it limited her ability to work and therefore to eat. However, like Zelenskaia’s who tried to “hold her ears,” Liubovskaia described how deafness occasionally was an asset. It helped her to avoid threats stemming from the social environment, such as conflicts with her coworkers or encounters with the police. On several occasions, Liubovskaia was almost punished for not going into the shelters during air raids, but she escaped being penalized because she was deaf. In the confessional space of the diary, she admitted that she was fully aware of the on-going bombardment and of the regulations stipulating that she take shelter, but she concealed this. When confronted by a policeman, “I responded that I was deaf and didn’t know what he wanted from me. (It is true that deep down started to guess what was going on).” At the metallurgical factory where she worked, Liubovskaia also avoided punishments for ignoring sirens or for damage done to library. “I diplomatically created the impression that I did not know anything” and, “because of the rudeness of several coworkers, I avoided asking questions,” and avoided a reprimand.<sup>136</sup> Being deaf made it possible for her to slip below the radar, to protect herself from social and political threats, even if it left her vulnerable to environmental ones. Both knowing and pretending not to know were essential survival skills, and—as the diarist observed—the senses could be marshaled for either purpose.

### *Feeling Hunger: Taste & Smell*

Vision and audition occupy especially prominent places in the diaries because, more than the other senses, they connected Leningraders their environment. As these faculties became compromised or enhanced, they forced alterations in the diarists’ sense of what was real. Taste and smell played a smaller role in mediating reality, but they were essential aspects of the siege experience because they closely regulated the diarists’ attitudes toward food. As with the other senses, the diarists were divided over whether taste and smell became

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<sup>134</sup> Liubovskaia, Prologue, 1.

<sup>135</sup> See: Liubovskaia, first entry (undated), 4-5ob; entry for 17 December 1941, 30.

<sup>136</sup> Liubovskaia, entries for 15, 19 November 1941, 11-12.



heightened or diminished among *blokadniki*, and their observations of these sensations—especially at mealtimes—led the diarists to reflect upon the organs, bodily systems, and chemical processes that regulated hunger.

At the heart of every blockade diary is an obsession with food. Some diaries read as lists of menus; each entry is broken into three sections: breakfast, lunch and dinner. Whether monitoring one's food reserves, describing meals, or recounting fantasies about food, the diarists indicate that eating—both as a social act and as a physiological necessity—underwent a dramatic re-conceptualization under siege. Most diarists focused their energies on how much they had to eat, as opposed to the smell or taste of their food. They gauged the value of a particular meal by its ability to fill them up and help them to live one more day. Still, they commented about taste constantly, if unconcernedly. Speaking for the collective, Elena Kochina observed that Leningraders evaluated their soup not by flavor, but by substance: “We long ago stopped saying ‘it tastes good’ or ‘it doesn’t taste good.’ Instead we say—thick or thin.”<sup>137</sup> Because caloric content and nutritional value far outweighed taste, common notions of what items were edible expanded widely. Leningraders enthusiastically ate glue, belts, wallpaper, pine needle extracts, and created numerous other foul-tasting concoctions. When her son was undeterred by the putrid taste of one “culinary experiment,” a homemade peanut butter made from oil paints, Aleksandra Liubovskaia read this as a sign of her son's extreme physical deterioration.<sup>138</sup> At the same time, Liubovskaia, who developed several culinary concoctions herself, used her diary as a place to record her favorite wartime recipes for posterity.

Another diarist who grew concerned about Leningraders' growing insensitivity to taste and smell was the doctor Anna Ivanovna Likhacheva. She wondered about the siege's effect on the physiology of the tongue, which might render it unable to detect taste. In the spring of 1942, Likhacheva oversaw food distribution and received patients at the outpatient clinic at the Red Banner Factory. One of her main tasks was to reorganize the clinic's cafeteria, where patients with second- and third-level *distrofiia* were given additional rations known as medicinal or “curative food” (*lechebnoe pitaniie*). Foremost among Likhacheva's concerns was the need to counteract the progressive degeneration of her patients' sense of taste. In her diary she pondered the body's need for a variety of flavors, not just a minimum number of calories, in order to quell the sensation of hunger, and she worried that the city's other cafeteria managers were ignorant of the role that taste played in creating the feeling of fullness: “In a typical canteen nowadays they give out noodles or some kind of kasha, pouring over it a broth made of the same stuff, lavishly made with water. Here, one gets the feeling of fullness in the stomach very quickly.” This was often eaten with bread, which added to the caloric weight of the meal. The problem, however, was that the entire meal was “dry,” “under-salted and flavorless,” and did not quell the body's hunger for saltiness or sweetness, for instance. “After all of this there remains a somehow bitter taste in your mouth and dryness of the tongue. This condition is persists for two hours after the meal. There is too little saliva and the sense of taste is noticeably diminished, it is difficult for you to sort out sour and salty [items] and sugar—there is too little sweetness.”<sup>139</sup> Likhacheva used her private diary to

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<sup>137</sup> Kochina, entry for 29 January 1942, 192.

<sup>138</sup> See Liubovskaia, entry for 12 January 1942, 51.

<sup>139</sup> Likhacheva, entry for 15 May 1942, 682.

monitor and record what she feared were serious alterations to the Leningraders' sense of taste and smell, brought about by the under-stimulation of the taste buds.

Other *blokadniki* claimed that the intense desire for food gave Leningraders a new appreciation for tastes and smell, which had previously gone undetected. In her *Notes of a Blockade Person*, which she crafted during and after the war, Lidiia Ginzburg recalled how the *blokadniki* dreamed of eating more of even the blandest foodstuffs in which they “discovered a multitude of novel taste sensations, but nothing recalled so many as bread, which had been hitherto unexplored territory.”<sup>140</sup> Of course, taste and smell are intimately related; olfaction is responsible for roughly seventy percent of taste. Kochina suggested that Leningraders' keen sense of taste was augmented by their superhuman ability to detect smells that ordinary beings could not. “Our olfactory (*obonianie*) senses have become quite acute. Now we've learned what sugar, grain, peas, and other ‘odorless’ goods smell like.”<sup>141</sup>

The budding philologist Natal'ia Uksova and the writer Sof'ia Ostrovskaia worried about the hazards behind sensory acuity in the *blokadniki*. They emphasized another aspect of sense perception, sense-memory, where olfaction can be particularly powerful in transporting a person back in time through their repository of memories. “Smell, song, music are great for associations,” Uskova observed and she added, in a bittersweet tone, how smelling a certain perfume conjured for her “a whole sliver of life, young, sunny, filled with love. A whole flow of tender memories, my thoughtless, crazy youth,” which had otherwise been forgotten, flooded her mind. Intrigued, Uskova searched psychology textbooks for more information about such ‘associations,’ recording her findings in her diary.<sup>142</sup> Ostrovskaia lamented how potent her sense-memories had become under siege, concerned that these painful recollections of life before the war might weaken her ability to withstand the hardships of the Blockade. Ostrovskaia described one incident when she succumbed her olfactory system, which was over stimulated to the point of hallucination:

For some reason I opened a bottle of French perfume (*Ambre Molinard Paris*), took a pinch of it, and suddenly, so sharply and terrifyingly, I became homesick, recalling, understanding, feeling, so precisely all the frightening and deathly obtuseness and the pettiness (*uzost'*) of my life, its senselessness, circularity, sense of doom, and horror. The tender and already foreign scent of expensive fragrances made me see myself like an animal in a cage, like a wounded bird. I wanted to yell: —save me, someone... I am perishing! ... Then I recomposed myself and smiled. The olfactory mirages and hallucinations disappeared. My mood reassumed its usual, soldier-like form. One must not recollect. One must not think. One must not read or write poetry. One must not listen to music. Under no circumstances should one partake of foreign perfumes, of which I have several.

I have many tasks to do today  
I must kill my memory completely,

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<sup>140</sup> Ginzburg, “Zapiski blokadnogo cheloveka,” *Prokhodiashchee kharaktery*, 351. English in: *Blockade Diary*, 65.

<sup>141</sup> Kochina, entry for 17 December 1941, 57.

<sup>142</sup> Uskova, entry for 25 July 1942, 60.

I must turn my soul to stone  
I must learn to live again.<sup>143</sup>

As the fragrance transported Ostrovskaiia to another moment in time, it drew attention to her current immobility, trapped “inside the ring” like “an animal in a cage.” The memory of possessing such luxurious items reminded the diarist of how primitive her existence had become. This powerful “hallucination” speaks directly to the two central questions addressed in the diaries: was it advantageous to feel so astutely, and to what extent could the mind control the body’s ability to do so? Greater sensitivity awareness might lead one to feel greater vulnerability and suffering. The arts were especially dangerous in this regard because of their ability to stimulate emotion. Ostrovskaiia resolved to dull her own sensibilities, and yet in this very pronouncement, she contradicted herself by recalling a verse from Akhmatova’s “Requiem”—a fact that suggests that Ostrovskaiia was deeply conflicted about how to handle these unpredictable shifts in sense-perception and whether or not she could regain control over her body by becoming numb, blind, deaf, or otherwise impervious.

Vision, audition, olfaction, and taste are all key avenues through which the human organism comprehends and interacts with the outside world. The diarists studied, with great curiosity and with great concern, how these four senses, once altered, transformed the physiological, perceptual, and experiential worlds that they inhabited. Although this was a common point of fascination for the diarists, they differed greatly in their assessments of which perceptual faculties grew stronger or weaker, and which ones facilitated or impeded survival. Their narratives capture the process by which they came to inhabit this new siege body and function in the world according to different sensory and physical properties. Moreover, far from mere victims of their circumstances, they reveal how intently the diarists strove to understand and even capitalize on these anatomical, physiological, and ontological changes.

### *The Unruly Body: Touch, Motor Reflexes, and Locomotion*

Some of the diarists’ most dramatic encounters with their own altered corporeality were mediated through the sense of touch. Leningraders noted how some of their most basic and characteristically human traits—including the opposable thumb and bipedal motion<sup>144</sup>—seemed to degenerate during the Blockade. Elena Kochina despaired that her toddler’s motor abilities seemed to regress. Having forgotten how to walk, her daughter was reduced to crawling. Lidiia Ginzburg echoed this point in her retrospective *Notes on the Blockade*,

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<sup>143</sup> Ostrovskaiia, Notebook 2, entry for 30 March 1942, 1. These lines are from part seven (“The Sentencing”) of Akhmatova’s poem “Requiem,” which at the time was only known to a few of her close friends, who committed it to memory because it was too dangerous for the poet to write it down. The final two lines have also been translated as: “I must crush my memory down / I must try living again.”

<sup>144</sup> Ginzburg, “Zapiski blokadnogo cheloveka,” *Prokhodiashchie kharaktery*, 318. Ginzburg used the example of how her siege man’s fingers and thumb—distinctly human anatomical features—degenerated progressively from a human hand to a “paw” (*lapa*), a “stump” (*kul’tiapka*), and finally an inanimate “club-like implement” (*palkoovbraznoe orudie*).

noting that adult Leningraders could not walk, only “run (or crawl, there’s no middle way),” highlighting the extremity of the siege body’s physiological restructuring.<sup>145</sup>

Walking took on a radically new meaning. Malnourishment, fatigue, and the lack of transportation made walking a grueling activity, but the frustration of being unable to control the body seemed to upset the diarists more than the physical exertion itself. Brigade leader Ivan Savinkov, who regularly trekked the distance from his apartment to the Molotov Factory where he worked, regularly recounted how he was unable to make his leaden legs move. Pain and weariness combined to make each step “awkward” at best. At worst, he felt that he had lost ownership over his own body: “You get the impression that your legs are not yours (*svoi*), but belong to another (*chuzhie*),” he observed in February 1942.<sup>146</sup> Each step alerted him to a growing disconnect between his external body and his inner self. He was losing not only her sense of touch, but also his proprioceptive sense of bodily awareness.

During the winter of 1941-42, the shop floor under Savinkov’s charge fell into greater disrepair, but, without the strength and command of his legs, there was little the diarist could do. He turned to his diary to release his frustrations, writing: “[I] need to stand on my feet and to take everything into my hands, but everything is falling apart,” including his hands and feet.<sup>147</sup> Savinkov continued: “My skin has begun to atrophy, my hands resemble the hands of a seventy-year-old man.”<sup>148</sup> And after suffering a terrible bout of scurvy in March 1942, Savinkov literally had to learn to walk again. His diary chronicles each stage of Savinkov’s battle to reassert himself over his body—from the terrifying experience of “laying helpless, unable [to] move” during enemy bombardment to the agony of taking his first steps after weeks of immobility. Savinkov also used his diary to formulate a recovery strategy. He calculated that he must take more than 10,000 steps a day even though, he despaired, he could manage no more than twenty before with collapsing in exhaustion.<sup>149</sup>

During the “ghastly dance lesson” of walking, the diarists’ regarded the body not only as an alien, but an antagonistic entity.<sup>150</sup> Their journals reveal how the mind-body relationship seemed to evolve dramatically under siege, leading them to question centuries of philosophical and scientific thinking on the unity of body and mind, not to mention the principle of “psychophysiological unity” advocated by Soviet scientists. Lidiia Ginzburg reflected that the siege body was “an emaciated envelope belonging to the hostile world,” detached from the mind and soul. This rendered the *blokadnik* “a graphic embodiment of philosophical dualism.”<sup>151</sup> This classic Cartesian dilemma was at the forefront of Ol’ga Matiushina’s mind. She described (her diary’s heroine) Evgeniia Mikhailovna’s struggles to

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<sup>145</sup> Kochina, entry for 10 January 1942, 182; Ginzburg, “Zapiski blokadnogo cheloveka,” *Prokhodiashchie kharaktery*, 319. Kochina also observed that her daughter “unlearned” how to speak.

The diarist Georgii Kniazev, who was generally used a wheelchair or crutch to get around, described how his (already limited) powers of movement virtually disappeared when the winter temperatures froze the axle grease on his wheelchair. See: *Leningrad Under Siege*, Kniazev, entry for 21-22 January 1942, 166.

<sup>146</sup> Savinkov, entry for 23 February 1942, 23; also see: *Ibid*, entry for 4 January 1942 15-15ob.

<sup>147</sup> *Ibid*, entry for 19 March 1942, 27.

<sup>148</sup> *Ibid*, entry for 7 January 1942, 15ob.

<sup>149</sup> *Ibid*, entry for 12 March 1942, 26. Savinkov’s first steps and his plan of recovery are discussed in: *Ibid*, entries for 11, 16, 17, 18 March 1942, 25ob-26ob.

<sup>150</sup> Ginzburg, “Zapiski blokadnogo cheloveka,” *Prokhodiashchie kharaktery*, 314. English in: Ginzburg, *Blockade Diary*, 9.

<sup>151</sup> *Ibid*, 314.

walk, especially after standing for hours in line for bread.<sup>152</sup> In this entry, the diary's third-person narrator generalizes from Evgeniia Mikhailovna's deterioration to the siege body in general:

The organism cannot control the head—it sucks all of the remaining juices (*soki*) out of itself. It was impossible to withstand this dualistic feeling (*sosushchee oshchushchenie*). [She] wanted to shout: 'I cannot endure this any more. Death is better!' Evgeniia Mikhailovna tried to calm herself. But can one really tame nerves that are so enraged?<sup>153</sup>

The translator Aleksandra Liubovskaia also despaired at the widening gap between her mind and body, which increasingly refused to obey her commands.

My arms and legs rise poorly in response to the orders of my brain. My arm movements are imprecise. My steps are not rhythmic, poorly measured. Because of the cold after a bit of walking my limbs refuse to obey (*sluzhit'*). My mind also works sluggishly. My wit has significantly slowed down. How will I work? I can't fix this.<sup>154</sup>

Awkward yet defiant, her legs sapped Liubovskaia's physical and mental stamina. In this sense, they joined forces with the cold, the darkness, and other hostile elements that she faced on daily basis. As Liubovskaia noted, without bodily control, she could not go to work and collect her rations. She could not survive. Like Savinkov, Liubovskaia dreaded her daily walks to the local housing bureau or to the factory where she worked (a distance of five kilometers), referring to it as "a loathsome and exhausting journey," a "death (*smertel'nyi*) march" and "a great migration" (*velikoe pereselenie*).<sup>155</sup> She likened her inability to walk to existing "without legs," a powerful expression of her transfiguration "inside the ring."<sup>156</sup>

In this internal battle of body and mind, motor reflexes had to be consciously willed. In his study of Stalinist corporeality, Keith Livers showed how by the late 1930s the regime's model of human nature predicted the ultimate triumph of the immaterial mind over the material body and environment. And because it claimed that socialism had been built, this view held that the Soviet people should be able to cure themselves of any mental or physical ailments, to remold their bodies through the right application of discipline.<sup>157</sup> Perhaps mindful of this, some diarists believed that they could restore their powers of locomotion by strengthening the will, not the physical body. This inner conditioning comprised the core of Irina Zelenskaia's survival strategy. "I also feel that awful lead in my legs," Zelenskaia wrote, but she fought against this through determination. "No, I am deeply convinced that one can be saved only by internal energy" she proclaimed in November 1941:

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<sup>152</sup> Matiushina, *Diary*, 154-155.

<sup>153</sup> Matiushina, *Pesn' o zhizni*, 121; Matiushina, *Diary*, 155-157.

<sup>154</sup> Liubovskaia, entry for 6 March 1942, 114-115.

<sup>155</sup> Liubovskaia, entries for 27 December 1941, 3 March 1942, and 22 July 1942, 33, 111, 188.

<sup>156</sup> *Ibid.*, entry for 19 May 1942, 155.

<sup>157</sup> See: Livers, *Constructing the Stalinist Body*, 5.

All of this can be overcome if you don't heed every minus and force yourself to move faster not to think about food and especially not to complain of anything—about yourself or about others. Only this way can you pull through, and I will pull through and even help others who can and want to take advantage of my experience.<sup>158</sup>

Six months later in May 1942, hunger began to take its toll on the diarist and her spirit began to suffer. This was especially apparent when she struggled to walk. Zelenskaia drew a direct parallel between the splintering of body and mind that she experienced when walking to the “divide” taking place in her “psyche.” “The eternal awareness of [my] lack of freedom,” she lamented, “irritates [me] the way the roads irritate my legs.”<sup>159</sup> The disintegration of the body in turn began to erode the integrity of the mind.

The doctor Anna Likhacheva spoke to this sense of detachment from the body by describing the opposite: the resurgence of feeling that she felt in the summer of 1942. The warmth of the sun brought a recovery of the senses and of dexterity. “We are beginning to feel our own feet and hands which—up to this point, in the winter—we did not feel, which were frozen, foreign (*chuzhii*), heavy, and awkward.” Still not at home in their bodies, progress was slow: “The lower limbs are always cold with the loss of sensation in the feet and hands, puffiness, and the hands are swollen from the cold.”<sup>160</sup>

In sum, through these various insights and reflections on the basic act of walking, the diary texts describe the new corporeal experience of inhabiting the siege body, one that came to bear on their fundamental understandings of the physiological and psychological dimensions of human nature.

### *The Tyranny of the Stomach*

If there was one part of the body that, according to the diarists, was the most hostile and the most successful in resisting their attempts at self-mastery, it was the stomach. The legs were leaden and clumsy, but the stomach was willful, aggressive, and defiant. The most common device that the diarists used to describe the stomach was personification—a move that underscores how deeply they felt this split between body and mind. By breathing life into their stomachs, the diarists played with the notion of humanness and demonstrated how they had become alienated from their bodies, which housed this new internal enemy.

When the German enemy faded from view in winter 1941-1942, internal enemies, including hunger and the demands of the body, loomed large. As Zinaida Sedel'nikova explained, the “stomach war” (*zheludochnaia voina*) was a battle she fought and lost on a daily basis. For the medical student, this experience was a great revelation about the nature of human anatomy. “I never thought that a hungry stomach could dictate behavior so

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<sup>158</sup> Zelenskaia, entry for 22 November 1941, 34-35.

<sup>159</sup> Ibid, entry for 12 May 1942, 80ob.

<sup>160</sup> Likhacheva, entry for 21 May 1942, 686.

powerfully,” she exclaimed, “I cannot force myself to study the latest microbiology chapter.”<sup>161</sup> Sedel’nikova wielded an arsenal of weapons to overcome her stomach’s demands, including will power, imagination, and physical force, but “once again you lose the ‘stomach war.’ You draw your legs into your stomach (*podtiagivaesh' k zhivotu nogi*), you press a fist into your stomach,” but in the end “it demands its own.”<sup>162</sup> Similarly, Ol’ga Matiushina tried to placate her stomach by distracting herself with work and by using various psychological tricks. Like many Leningraders, she divided her bread ration into three small portions in order to create the impression that she ate three regular meals a day. She hoped that this ritual would help her convince her stomach that it was full, “but the stomach is poorly convinced by this persuasion. He demands his.”<sup>163</sup> And as she watched one of her close friends perish, Matiushina became more convinced that ignoring the stomach’s demands was not a viable solution: “the body demands attention and the will ought to obey his requests.”<sup>164</sup> By depicting the stomach in this way, the diarists made clear that they were not battling some neutral force of hunger, but chronicling an all out war between two of the body’s vital organs, the brain and belly. According to Sedel’nikova and Matiushina, in the test of mind over matter, the latter emerged victorious.

The diarists’ descriptions of the mounting hostility between the stomach and some inner “self” were politically loaded. This conflict was one area where their attitudes about Soviet power reveal themselves. They likened the stomach to an oppressive Soviet dictator, a Soviet official, or to a usurper of Soviet power. They would have encountered similarly unyielding Soviet officials in the tense political atmosphere of blockaded Leningrad. Still, it is notable that, at least in their depictions, the diarists tended not to Germanicize the stomach or ally it with foreign enemies. Rather, they viewed it as a domestic, homegrown foe.

In the diary of Irina Zelenskaia, the figure of the dictator-stomach appears very early on before the food situation inside the city had become desperate. In her view, the stomach capitalized on Leningraders’ demoralized attitudes and grumblings against the party to gain new authority. She described this as a kind of power shift taking place inside the besieged city. Even in September 1941, Zelenskaia proclaimed: “everything is defined by rations” and “events are experienced only through the stomach.”<sup>165</sup> Leningraders “only listen to the little voice of their stomachs” heedless of any other authority or objective.<sup>166</sup> Once the centrality of food had been established, the party’s call for Leningraders to sacrifice themselves and tighten their belts was drowned out by the stomach’s imperative that residents fight each other for his share of resources. The diarist referred to this social disintegration as “the crisis of the stomach.”<sup>167</sup> By December 1941 she became dismayed that the dictatorship of the proletariat was threatened by “the dictatorship of the stomach.”<sup>168</sup>

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<sup>161</sup> Sedel’nikova, entry for 18 November 1941, 42. Further reflections on how her stomach was a menace to her studie appear in: Ibid, entry for 21 November 1941, 43.

<sup>162</sup> Ibid, entry for 22-23 December 1941, 58.

<sup>163</sup> Matiushina, *Pesn' o zhizni*, 121.

<sup>164</sup> Ibid, 125-126.

<sup>165</sup> Zelenskaia, entry for 2 September 1941, 11. Echoing Zelenskaia, Sedel’nikova also observed: “Nowadays everything is measured (*meriaetsia*) through the stomach” (Sedel’nikova, entry for 26 October, 1941, 44).

<sup>166</sup> Ibid, entry for 18 September 1941, 16ob-17ob.

<sup>167</sup> Ibid, entry for 22 September 1941, 18.

<sup>168</sup> Ibid, entry for 22 September 1941, 18.

A new party member, Zelenskaia noted that her ability to agitate diminished as “the voice of the stomach” grew louder. “Everyday I wreck my voice trying to convince, explain, and reproach,” but Leningraders have forgotten the Nazi invasion, “the direct cause of this impoverishment. When I remind people that we are in a besieged city, they answer me: ‘Don’t agitate! We should be full!’ For me, this wall of obtuseness is the worst of all.”<sup>169</sup> Despite Zelenskaia’s disdain for what she deemed the weakness of the masses, she was forced to reckon with her own hunger pangs that were “simply torturous.” She tried to distract herself with work, but found that it was not the solution for mastering the body, as the regime claimed: “It does not let you forget about your stomach, which is vigorously starting to remind you of itself.”<sup>170</sup> As the life of the *blokadniki* and their stomachs became opposed to each other, the nature and location of “self”—referred to here as “you”—was necessarily called into question.

As the food situation worsened, the diarists fixated on the stomach as the chief cause of their suffering. The factory worker Ivan Savinkov wrote that the *blokadnik* subjugated himself to the will of the belly like a servant to his master. “They” continually reduced rations, Savinkov wrote in April 1942, and “this made everyone slaves to the stomach itself, obeying it with every thought, care, conversation, connection, and so on about hunger.”<sup>171</sup> Here, speaking for the collective, Savinkov alluded to what he saw as a slavish mentality that was developing among besieged Leningraders. Hunger meant not just a lack of food, but a threat to his freedom to think and to act in pursuit of other desires other than to be full. In her retrospective *Notes*, Ginzburg observed that Leningraders, weary of this constant battle, gave into the stomach’s demands to overeat “to bursting point, until you were sick of the sight of food, to the point of vomiting, just to put an end to the shame, just to free your brain” from its dictates.<sup>172</sup>

Likewise, Aleksandr Dymov worried that the chief danger of the dictatorship of the stomach was thought-control. Dymov characterized the stomach not as an autocrat, but a petty, myopic Soviet functionary, who forced the *blokadnik* to obey out of a blind determination to follow the rules. Moreover, in the bleak month of January 1941, it had little work to do, but harass the *blokadniki*. Dymov staged this political drama as a dialogue between him and his stomach, which he cast in the role of a Soviet editor. In light of the diarist’s background as a theatrical director, this was a natural choice. In a famous passage from his account, Dymov composed a “letter to the editor of his sense,” complaining how his stomach’s stupid single-mindedness forced him and other Leningraders to think only about food.

Goodness only knows how important that hitherto humble, little respected organ—the ordinary human stomach—has grown these days. Because of unemployment and the frequent waste of time due to the lack of raw material, that food-processing organ has taken upon itself an uncharacteristic function—all thoughts and emotions are subject to its editorial control. At any rate, my thoughts and emotions are clearly of gastric origin. And not only mine. I am

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<sup>169</sup> Ibid, entry for 22 September 1941, 18-18ob.

<sup>170</sup> Ibid, entry for 12 December 1941, 41ob-42.

<sup>171</sup> Savinkov, entry for 16 April 1942, 31ob.

<sup>172</sup> Ginzburg, “Zapiski blokadnogo cheloveka,” *Prokhodiashchie kharaktery*, 349-350.



constantly aware of this crude interference of my stomach in my intellectual and emotional sphere. [...] After all, apart from digestion, there are also world literature, philosophy, art, and technical innovation.

You take up another book. ‘Your neighbor, my dear, provides food for all kinds of rumors...’ You must not read any further. ‘Food!’ The much-respected editor of my sense organs (my stomach) swiftly directs them along the lines of edible associations, although the word ‘food’ is clearly used metaphorically in the book. ‘Grief gnaws at my heart,’ it says on page thirty-five. That is also a metaphor. But my unsophisticated editor could care less. What is important to him is evoke the act of gnawing fat pieces of roasted meat. [...] These are cases of the associative influence of the superstructure on the basis. ‘Much respected citizen editor! Comrade Stomach! [...] You want me to look at everything around with your eyes. You insist on that. And in the majority of cases you succeed. But that’s not normal, I protest [...] I want to read books and appreciate their content just as I did in the past and not in your interpretation, and not from your narrow, prejudiced viewpoint. I refuse to think of nothing but gorging. [...] You understand, I want to be a human being. Don’t stand in the way.’<sup>173</sup>

Dymov implored with his stomach to stop censoring his intellectual activity, contending that such a stomach threatened not only his freedom of thought, but his very humanity. This entry represents a kind of literary act of rebellion against the regime, especially his assertion that food had replaced class conditions as the “base” on which the “superstructure” of Leningrad society rested. Granin and Adamovich published these excerpts from Dymov’s diary in *A Book of the Blockade* and they noted that the rich, literary style of this entry has been dismissed by critics as too sophisticated and fantastical to be authentic. They doubted that such an elaborate description of the body’s transformation could have been conceived by a mind operating on so little food. But when read together with the corpus of siege diaries containing the same motif of the stomach-dictator, Dymov’s text no longer seems an anomaly.

In keeping with the vision of the stomach as narrow-minded and petty, several diarists reasoned that they had to appease the belly, but should never submit to it fully. The clearest expression of the stomach’s “stupid single-mindedness” was its constant cries for more food, even though overeating could fatally shock the system. “Probably now, no matter how much you eat,” Liubovskaia observed, “the stomach will always ask for more and more. After all, everyone understands that this overloading of the stomach brings death (*vedet k gibeli*).” The Liubovskii family learned this lesson the hard way after indulging for their New Year’s meal and then suffering the consequences. “After the new years episode,” Liubovskaia explained, “we established a strict routine and adhere precisely to a daily allowance (*norma*).”<sup>174</sup> The cruel irony was that, as rations increased in late 1941 and early 1942, so did the body’s

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<sup>173</sup> Dymov quoted in: Granin and Adamovich, *Blokadnaia Kniga*, 304. I have modified the English translation in: Granin and Adamovich, *A Book of the Blockade*, 384-385.

<sup>174</sup> Liubovskaia, entry for 15 February 1942, 87-8.

appetite. The stomach war was a constant one: whether there was more food or less food available, the diarists portrayed themselves as constantly in a state of self-denial and self-resistance. They took over the role of the regime and setting their own norms.

### *The Virtues of Pain*

In many scholarly, documentary, and artistic depictions of the *distrofiki*—Leningraders suffering from acute starvation—they are characterized as deeply apathetic and seemingly numb. Languidness and indifference to life, including one’s own, were understood to be hallmarks of imminent death. Zelenskaia, Kochina, Skriabina, Likhacheva, and many others declared that apathy—what Natal’ia Uskova called “indifference of the doomed”—killed their sons and husbands.<sup>175</sup> The Blockade destroyed even this most basic instinct to fight for life.

At the same time, as I already mentioned, many diarists acknowledged that becoming numb to physical pain and emotionally impervious to the everyday tragedies of the siege placed them in a better position to endure and survive by allowing them to conserve valuable strength and energy. For Likhacheva, the most painful months of the siege came in summer 1942 when, in the warmth of the sun, the *blokadniki* began to recover their ability to feel, and as a consequence they became more susceptible to emotional pain. It was at this time that she fully felt the pang of her son’s and husband’s deaths the previous winter. “Spring has awakened the frozen human feelings and sharply reminded [me] of my personal grief,” Likhacheva lamented, “a sharp pain is constantly in my heart.”<sup>176</sup> Perhaps in light of such distress, some medical experts were of the opinion that a healthy dose of indifference could “protect the psyche from traumatization,” and caregivers—from parents to nurses to orphanage staff—taught the youngest *blokadniki* to practice emotional insensitivity.<sup>177</sup>

As the diaries indicate, the *blokadniki* had to walk a very fine line. They had to both heighten and dull their sensory reactions, to remain aloof towards the suffering of others but without becoming indifferent to their own fates. Given the body’s general unruliness, however, the question immediately arose: to what extent could the body’s level of sensitivity be willed? Even as they adopted one strategy or another, their accounts show that the diarists were torn over their choice of action.

Irina Zelenskaia and Sof’ia Ostrovskaia, who were quite opposite in terms of their politics, personalities, and approaches to diary writing, both claimed that the key to survival resided in their ability to become insensible to the pain pulsating through their bodies and through the body social. Their adoption of this highly individualistic, isolationist strategy strongly challenged the notions of collectivism, communalism, and camaraderie so prized by the regime.

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<sup>175</sup> Uskova, entry for 23 December 1941, 33. “There is evidently some measure of physical suffering beyond which a person becomes insensitive to everything except himself,” Kochina remarked in her entry for 28 January 1942, 190. English in: Kochina, *Blockade Diary*, 84. Also see her entries for 23 February and 30 March 1942, 181, 197, 204.

<sup>176</sup> Likhacheva, entry for 7 July 1942, 686-87.

<sup>177</sup> Magaeva, “Physiological and Psychosomatic Prerequisites,” 138-139.

I have mentioned how Zelenskaia increasingly resolved to become deaf, dumb, and blind—“closing the door to truth,” “shutting my ears,” and so on. As she wrote in May 1942, “We are strong only in our reserve and our numbness (*beschustvennost*), indifferent to our fate and that of other people. This brings a soaring calmness in the presence of shelling, deaths, and when face to face with perilous dangers.”<sup>178</sup> In a more playful description of the same tactic, Ostrovskaia claimed to model her behavior on a favorite childhood toy, the tin soldier. “All day and night,” as she interacted with other people and even with her own reflection in the mirror, “I shackle myself in armor, I have a cold, tin shell (*pantsyr*) on me: through touching me people can get hurt (*bol'no*). However, I am no longer hurt by the human touch [of others].”<sup>179</sup> The best way to survive “the ring” was to draw an even tighter ring around oneself.

As the image of the tin soldier suggests, dulling one’s senses also meant sacrificing some of one’s humanness and humaneness, to become a kind of parody of the steely Soviet Man. “I disciplined myself. I mechanized (*zamekhanizirovala*) myself,” Ostrovskaia proclaimed, “an ideal tin soldier.” But at times, she regretted this hardened approach such as when she watched, from a distance, her mother suffer through her final moments, the diarist asked in alarm: “But where is my heart?”<sup>180</sup> The irony that the living acquired the same numb, inhumane air as the dying was not lost on either Ostrovskaia or Zelenskaia. Zelenskaia commented on the similarities between those defying death and those succumbing to it in reference to a coworker at Leningrad’s electrical station, Vasia Mikhailov. When she spotted the severely emaciated Mikhailov at the entrance to the station’s cafeteria, she was struck by the “senseless, careless smile on his lifeless (*nezhivom*) face,” and the “nonhuman (*nechelovechnyi*) sharpening” of his features, which made him blend into the angular corner of doorway. Zelenskaia tried to chat with him as they ate, but Mikhailov spoke “soundlessly (*bezzvuchno*).” Yet, even more striking than his lifeless affect was her own insensitive reaction to his dystrophic state. As she lost compassion for the “nonhuman” *distrofik*, Zelenskaia discovered that she felt “somehow hardened and losing human feeling.”<sup>181</sup> The diarist could not help but notice that shared some of the qualities that she condemned in her coworker as signs of his lifelessness or inhumanness. However, she justified her insensitivity toward the *distrofiki* by declaring that they were no longer human. Zelenskaia noted that, although she had “a painful aversion” towards Mikhailov, “strangely I am sustaining kindness regarding people [...] where a human spirit lives.”<sup>182</sup> It was not that they, the *blokadniki*, were incapable of human feeling, it was that the inhuman *distrofiki* did not deserve it.

Although they tried to remain numb to the painful aspects of blockade life, the diarists admitted to their journals that at times their “protective shells” (as Ostrovskaia called them) were ruptured by a surge of emotions, painful blows (*udary*) that reminded them of their human vulnerability. Zelenskaia suffered such a jolt during a kindly, unexpected visit from a representative of the regional party committee who, aware of her failing health, decided to increase her rations. Zelenskaia was physically overwrought by this “unexpected” but “very

<sup>178</sup> Zelenskaia, entry for 6 May 1942, 79ob.

<sup>179</sup> Ostrovskaia, Notebook 2, entry for 13 August 1942, 80.

<sup>180</sup> Ibid, Notebook 2, entry for 8 May 1942, 275.

<sup>181</sup> Zelenskaia, entry for 10 December 1941, 40-40ob.

<sup>182</sup> Ibid, entry for 10 December 1941, 40-40b.

Soviet” concern about her and by what it indicated about the state of her health.<sup>183</sup> It prompted her to stand outside herself and to see the frailty of her body. “For the first time I looked at myself, not through the words of others, but through this display of the higher nervous (*nervnye*) qualities of human nature.” She felt like

a sick person who has lost psycho-physiological functioning and is experiencing a cerebral hemorrhage. I have studied this as the contemporary development of certain brain areas [still] in an embryonic state. This was a blow to many thoughts and the basis of a whole set of conclusions, which now I approach very carefully.<sup>184</sup>

The diarist interpreted her emotional reaction in somatic terms, likening it to a hemorrhage and blaming it on a malfunction of the body’s psychosomatic functions. The party’s attempt to intervene for the sake of her health ironically was experienced as a blow, both physical and psychological, that “shattered many thoughts” and “a whole set of conclusions” that Zelenskaia held about the human organism and human nature.

A paroxysm of pain also jolted Zinaida Sedel’nikova to a new understanding of the body and of consciousness. Unlike Zelenskaia, Sedel’nikova came to cherish this pang for it proved that she was still alive and still human. After all, pain is a fundamental aspect of the human experience. In December 1941, after another exhausting shift at Hospital No. 95, the medical student hiked all the way to the Vyborg district in order to take an examination at the Second Leningrad Medical Institute. When she finally arrived, Sedel’nikova discovered that the institute was closed, so she trekked back to the student dormitory, dragging her body along with her “as though carrying a heavy load (*na sebe*). It kept pressing down, down on me and I moved (*peredvigala*) my legs with great difficulty. [...] Something else clearly was alarming me more: will I make it home or not?” With each step, her control over her legs waned. Suddenly everything went black. The next thing Sedel’nikova knew she was laying in the bed of an army truck. Seated across from her was the soldier who had picked her lifeless body up off the street. “As if in a dream,” Sedel’nikova was only vaguely aware of how she made it back to her bedroom. As she “dropped down onto the edge of the bed,” the diarist began to examine herself for vital signs: was she still alive or was the numbness she felt the torpidity of death? The Blockade had reconfigured her body so dramatically that now the very nature of Sedel’nikova’s existence was called into question. As she lay there, feeling neither alive nor dead, the diarist began to mourn the loss of her own life.

Everything around me has lost meaning. It was as if I was steadily gazing at myself, listening attentively. As though I wanted to understand what it means to be alive, were these symptoms of life reliable? As if I was standing outside myself (*kak by so storony*) and studying all the details of what had occurred, but not grasping what was wrong with me...and how it could have happened that I was already dead (*menia uzhe net*)? ... Immeasurable pity for myself filled my chest, a lump reached my throat, ready to burst into sobs ...as though my heart suddenly had been pierced by a corkscrew (*shtopor*). I froze. There

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<sup>183</sup> Ibid, entry for 24 November 1942, 108.

<sup>184</sup> Ibid, entry for 24 November 1942, 109ob.

flashed [a thought]: ‘well, now a second death has come for me, only this one is not muted (*ne bezmolvnaia*), but acute (*bol’naia*)’... It had not dawned on me yet that this was a heightened (*obostrennoe*) sense of expectation that the end was coming—the loss of consciousness ... Suddenly the screw fell out and in its place a new pain took root (*zasadilo*) ... faint exhalation became intense inhalation... life returned to me...No, I ought to live, I ought to! I ought to just to spite the Fascists! And this way, convinced of life, I felt the hellish cold and painful spasm of my hungry stomach. I am alive!<sup>185</sup>

This moment when the medical student stood outside of herself and examined her body’s vital signs is highly reminiscent of the “mirror test” implemented by blockade doctors. Mystified by these foreign sensations, the medical student had to be “convinced of life.” In this task, the tyrannical stomach became her ally. Spasms of pain, sorrow, and hunger shocked her back to life. Sedel’nikova presented these two deaths (the first on the street and the second in her bed) and subsequent rebirths not as symbolic, but literal. For her, they proved that the body had come to operate on entirely different principles such that it flouted conventional understandings of the basic difference life and death.

The diary facilitated the diarist’s new understanding of the body and allowed her to experiment with different ways of capturing its transformation. Just after she recounted her brush with death, the diarist penned two poems that celebrate pain, hunger, and cold, which proved to her that she was indeed alive. Here is an excerpt from one of her compositions:

Having experienced two deaths in one day, / I began a second life / the second is not like any other—/ When I regained consciousness/ I immediately felt the cold / that the mortal body suffers. / I forgot about death. Once again [I experienced] HUNGER / and the thought (*mysl’*) that the flesh was enchanted. / [...] we met that morning for a second time —/ three specters (*teni*)— cold, hunger, and me.<sup>186</sup>

The whole scene—from the moment that she forced her disobedient legs to walk to the moment where she checked to see if she was conscious—was emblematic of the evolving notions of life and death, body and mind, under siege. Sedel’nikova played with the notions of humanness in this verse. She described herself as an ephemeral, disembodied ghost—existing between states of consciousness—at the same time that she animated certain inert elements of the environment such as cold and hunger. She greeted these two, ever-present companions to siege life as old friends. It was during this reunion that Sedel’nikova discovered how grateful she was to be alive, even in a world of deprivation and struggle. This symbolic death convinced her that life, even under siege, was better than the uncharted world of oblivion.

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<sup>185</sup> Sedel’nikova, entry for 19 December 1941, 53-54.

<sup>186</sup> Ibid, entry for 20 December 1941, 54-55. Capitalization appears in the original text.

Despite differences in their backgrounds, ages, and experiences, the siege diarists devoted a significant portion of their narratives to tracing the reveal the dramatic reconfiguration of the human body during the Blockade. Their journals chronicle the development of a new siege body during the first year of the Blockade. This siege body bore scant resemblance to their prewar corporeality in almost every respect, from age and sex to the physiognomy of its limbs, to the functioning of its organs, sensory, psychosomatic, and nervous systems. New norms of anatomical and physiological functioning were taking root “inside the ring.” In particular, the diarists focused on how these physical changes altered their perception of reality and their experience of being in the world. They questioned whether these alterations diminished or augmented their prewar abilities and how they might impact their chance of survival. The diarists differed greatly in their assessment of the exact ratio of gains and losses, but their narratives all suggest that, taken together, these alterations yielded a fundamentally different kind of being. In other words, rather than record this bodily transformation solely as a personal experience, they actively strove to understand it as a collective phenomenon within the larger frameworks of biology, theory of mind, and of human nature. This drastic transformation of the body provided the impetus, I believe, for radical questioning in other areas of their lives including an interrogation of self, kinship, social relationships and hierarchies, biomedicine, and history. In this way, this chapter serves as the foundation for all the subsequent sections of this dissertation.

A powerful articulation of the uniqueness of the siege body appears in the diary of Sof’ia Ostrovskaia. She recorded this particular entry during a rare moment of joy: running water finally had been restored to her apartment. In the midst of her celebration, Ostrovskaia anticipated and rebuffed her European readers who, she was sure, would understand neither her elation nor her ability to have gone without water for so long. Ostrovskaia proclaimed that the reason for their confusion was that Russians—whom the diarist subsumed with Leningraders—were different creatures altogether from Europeans or other humans. They were armed with unique powers of resistance, instincts, and sense perception. They operated with six senses, not five:

You, all manner of Europeans (*vsiakie tam evropy*), can you really understand this fully, you who have not known the hunger and disorganization of 1919-20, you who do not apprehend with your petty bourgeois five senses what the Russian citizen endures having entered for the second time 1919 in 1942? Yes, yes, dearest Europe, you do not know that among us there is developing—or perhaps has developed—a sixth sense (*shestoe chuvstvo*). We are very poor, very dirty, very ignorant. We are clumsy. We are rude and cruel. But we are Scythians (*skify*), we are Scythians, bearing a new sixth sense. Just think about that dear Europeans! Are you not frightened of us? [...] You are older than us, you are much, oh so much, smarter. In us, however, still lives an ancient man, wise in instinct and therefore living according to six senses.<sup>187</sup>

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<sup>187</sup> Ostrovskaia, Notebook 2, entry for 20 February 1942, 14ob.

The Scythian had long been a particular source of fascination for Russia’s modernist *intelligentsia*. Here and elsewhere, Ostrovskaia referred to Aleksandr Blok’s 1918 poem “Skify,” which describes the battle between west and east as one between “steel machines” and “Huns” on the one hand, and “the wild Tatar horde” on the other. The notion of a sixth sense, however, seems to be her contribution. On the Scythians in Russian

According to her vision, the *blokadniki* inhabited entirely different bodies and a different temporal universe than the Europeans, having developed along an alternative evolutionary trajectory. Their sixth sense, austere disposition, and heightened instincts were honed during repeated conflicts with the West including the Civil War, when Petrograders once again suffered conditions of extreme deprivation. They maintained the qualities of their legendary Russian ancestors, the Scythians, hailed for their steely bodies and unrelenting spirit in battle.<sup>188</sup> For Ostrovskaia, the *blokadniki* were in some ways inferior, in others superior to Europeans, but in all respects, there were fundamentally different beings.

Whether scrutinizing themselves in the mirror or studying the bodies of those around them, the diarists watched in horror as many of their unique physical traits and even their general human characteristics disappeared. And yet, their preoccupation with understanding the shifting boundaries of the human and to find some semblance of meaning in this terrible ordeal, to my mind, reemphasizes their humanness.

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intellectual tradition, see: Stefani Hope Hoffman, "Scythianism: a Cultural Vision in Revolutionary Russia" (Ph.D. diss. Columbia University, 1975); Ekaterina Bobrinskaia, "'Skifstvo' v russkoi kulture nachala XX veka i skifskaia tema u russkikh futuristov," in Bobrinskaia, *Rannii russkii avantgard v kontekste filosofskoi i khudozhestvennoi kul'tury rubezha vekov: ocherki* (Moscow: Gosudarstvennyi institut iskusstvoznaniia, 1999).

<sup>188</sup> In "Skify," Blok called for peace between western and eastern civilization, but he warned "if not –we have nothing to lose, / and we are not above treachery!" Ostrovskaia evoked Blok's promise in February 1942, one of the deadliest months of the Blockade, and rued Russians' proclivity to endure the worst conditions rather than surrender: "The public (and I underscore: the public) is tired out. Everyone wants peace. The war is dragging everyone down. Everyone wants to live. But still, this is how it is. Yes. Scythians. We are Scythians. Oh Blok, you infernal clairvoyant!" (Ostrovskaia, Notebook 2, entry for 3 October 1942, 92.). Other, less intellectual diarists, like the factory worker Ivan Savinkov, also noted this unique Russian quality: the unwillingness to surrender, but without referring to Blok (Savinkov, entry for 15 January 1942, 16ob-17).

Two:

Not “I”:

### Literary Expressions of the Self, Besieged

In April 1942, the architect Esfir’ Levina had just been released from the hospital after being treated for hunger and influenza. Levina returned home in a highly agitated state, which she claimed was caused not by the ordeal of her illness, but by the trial of watching other *blokadniki* lose their physical and mental integrity as they slipped into death. The Blockade’s brutal assault on Leningraders’ bodies and minds, Levina observed, also deprived them of a clear sense of self. The diarist expressed her hope that one day, after the Blockade was over, Leningraders’ sense of their “I” would be restored:

I have a fantasy that man lives, he survives the war, and that dystrophy ceases to be the fashion (*modno*). Man ought to find his character or perish. The country is on the upswing, and man is setting out on a journey searching for himself (*poiski sebja*) and through various circumstances he finds pieces of his ‘I’ (*svoego ‘ia’*): his sex, age, honor, morality, inclinations and habits. He gathers himself together and the result is not something new (a reforging (*perekovka*) during the war).<sup>189</sup>

Levina hoped that someday the transformative effects of the Blockade would be reversed and that Leningraders’ personalities and senses of self would be fully restored. But after suffering such an ordeal, was this type of restoration possible? Levina admitted that the search for the self in postwar period “could lead to tragedy or to a complete regeneration” of personhood, and she clearly hoped for the latter.<sup>190</sup>

Prominent members of Leningrad’s medical community echoed Levina’s concerns about the challenges that the Blockade posed to selfhood. In one of the very first scientific publications on a new siege-related ailment, *alimentarnaia distrofiia* (nutritional dystrophy), Professor M.V. Chernovskii stressed how starvation “left its stamp on the *distrofik*” by “wiping out the individual qualities of the character,” and creating either “a major or minor degradation of the self (*lichnost’*).”<sup>191</sup> Similarly, recent studies in fields ranging from literary studies to neurology have discussed the interactions between physiological development and the autobiographical impulse. As the literary scholar John Eakin explained, autobiographical narrative is built upon the story of the body—its neural sequences, homeostatic systems, and

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<sup>189</sup> Levina I, entry for 14 April 1942, 18.

<sup>190</sup> Ibid, entry for 14 April 1942, 18.

<sup>191</sup> Chernovskii, “Problemy Alimentarnoi Distrofii,” *Zdravookhranenie i mediki*, 30.



so on—and this narrative in turn regulates the body. Together, these processes preserve “stability in the human individual through the creation of a sense of identity.”<sup>192</sup>

What happened, then, when the diarists—who were experiencing such dramatic personal and physical transformations—put pen to paper and attempted to write their self-stories? How did they, as Levina put it, attempt to recover and reconcile the various “pieces of their ‘I’”? This chapter investigates how two particular blockade diarists thematized this loss of self in their accounts. The first diary was written by a sixteen-year-old schoolgirl, Elena Mukhina, and the second was kept by the professional painter Ol’ga Matiushina who was fifty-five at the time of the invasion. Neither of them was well known as a writer. Many blockade diarists described feeling uncertain about, even alienated from their former sense of self, I have chosen to focus on Mukhina’s and Matiushina’s accounts because they provide especially interesting and extreme examples of this phenomenon.

Despite vast differences in their backgrounds, abilities, and life-stages, Mukhina and Matiushina used similar literary strategies to depict this growing disconnect from the “self” under siege. First, both diarists refrained from consistently saying “I” and endeavored to write their life stories from the perspective of the “other.” Second, they made recourse to the structures and stylistics of fiction in their regular diary entries as well as penned short works of creative prose into their accounts. Mukhina eventually converted her journal into a novella about herself, “Lena.” Matiushina wrote her whole diary from the perspective of a fictionalized heroine, “Evgeniia Mikhailovna,” attributing her own experiences to this character. In this way, these unusual diaries read simultaneously as both document and fiction.<sup>193</sup>

The diarists’ inconsistent use of “I” reflects their deep uncertainty about how to represent and situate the self textually. It also suggests a desire to study the self from the perspective of the other. Mukhina and Matiushina deliberately switched between narrative persons (between the pronouns “I,” “you,” and “she”), which drew attention to the mutability of the self and brought the whole notion of self into dispute. At the same time, by choosing the diary, an autobiographical genre, to present their experiences, Mukhina and Matiushina sent a strong signal to readers to expect some measure of overlap between their written and lived selves.<sup>194</sup> In autobiographical writings, Philippe Lejeune has argued, the presence of

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<sup>192</sup> Paul John Eakin, *Living Autobiographically: How We Create Identity in Narrative* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2008), 153-155. In formulating this idea, Eakin drew on the work of neurologist Antonio Damasio, who has written studies of the development of consciousness and the self for a wide audience. See: Antonio Damasio, *The Feeling of What Happens: Body and Emotion in the Making of Consciousness* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1999); *Self Comes to Mind: the Conscious Brain* (New York: Pantheon Books, 2010).

<sup>193</sup> In making this distinction, I do not draw a hard and fast line between fiction and non-fiction. Some measure of fictionalization in documentary prose is to be expected, and the very act of giving a narrative form to thoughts and experiences can add some fictional elements to them. An insightful treatment of this phenomenon in the case of Soviet documentary prose about the Gulag experience can be found in: Leona Toker, *Return from Archipelago: Narratives of Gulag Survivors* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000).

The phenomenon of inserting fiction or presenting a fictionalized version of one’s self is not unique to the siege diaries, but the motivations for such a move are different, stemming from the unique conditions of the Blockade. For an example of a study that examines the use of fiction in Soviet diaries from the 1930s, see: Boris Wolfson, “Escape from Literature: Constructing the Soviet Self in Iuri Olesha’s Diary of the 1930s,” *The Russian Review*, Vol. 63, No. 4 (Oct., 2004): 609-620.

<sup>194</sup> In his analysis of various forms of autobiographical writings, Philippe Lejeune referred to the set of assumptions that readers and writers bring to an autobiographical text as “the autobiographical contract.”

some kind of subject—authentic or invented—is imperative, unavoidable. Thus, whether they used “I,” “you,” and “she” to stand for their “true” selves, literary personas or just linguistic placeholders, the diarists in effect “made a self in the text.” And the model of self that they present highlights the uncertain, disjointed, and fractured aspects of subjectivity.<sup>195</sup>

Mukhina’s and Matiushina’s uncertainty about how to represent the self textually, I argue, led them to experiment with the form of their accounts, including the basic distinction between fictional and documentary modes of writing. Rather than commit to either approach to articulate their experiences, Mukhina and Matiushina drew on elements from both fictional and documentary prose. They maintained the documentary authority of the diary while taking advantage of the flexibility and versatility of fiction to present themselves from various angles and perspectives.<sup>196</sup> A highly malleable and inherently fragmented genre, the diary form facilitated these authors’ experimentations with self-conceptualization. As Deborah Martinson explained, the diary form functions as “a site for the writer’s tension, rebellion, and remaking of self.”<sup>197</sup> It allows multiple opposing self-presentations to coexist side-by-side in different entries. The flexible structures of the diary allow Mukhina and Matiushina to maintain this uneasy balance between saying and not saying “I” in their efforts to capture the self under siege.

Of course, the concepts of self, subjectivity, and identity have been extensively debated and deconstructed by scholars. The notion of the self as a knowable, unified, stable, and bounded entity is highly disputed. Moreover, it is a historically specific concept and one that cannot be generalized across cultures and times. The ways that we discuss and represent ourselves to others are constantly shifting depending on context and audience.<sup>198</sup> By using these terms, I do not make any ontological claims about the nature of the self as such, nor am I suggesting that the disintegration of self was unique to the blockade experience. I focus on the diarists’ *presentations* of the self, and I use the term “self” to refer to their explorations of it. Mukhina and Matiushina continually alluded to the “self” through their language, often emphasizing the loss of a prior self-concept. The “self” both disappears from and inheres in their accounts.

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According to him, the shared expectations of reader and writer define autobiographical genres even more than the formal elements of the texts. See: Philippe Lejeune, “Autobiography in the Third Person,” *New Literary History*. IX, Autumn 1977, no 1., 29; Lejeune, “The Autobiographical Contract,” Tzvetan Todorov, ed., *French Literary Theory Today: A Reader* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 192-222.

<sup>195</sup> This phrase was drawn from: Martinson, *In the Presence of Audience*, 20.

<sup>196</sup> Among the studies that I inform my analysis here about the diary form are: Felicity A. Nussbaum, “Toward Conceptualizing a Diary;” Irina Paperno, “What can be Done with Diaries?,” Roy Pascal, *Design and Truth in Autobiography* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1960).

<sup>197</sup> Deborah Martinson, *In the Presence of Audience: the Self in Diaries and Fiction* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2003), 3.

<sup>198</sup> The literature on the problematic notion of self—in philosophy and literary studies—is too extensive to summarize here. My thinking about “concealing” or “naming” the self in autobiographical writing has been informed by several studies including: Alex Aronson, *Studies in Twentieth-Century Diaries: The Concealed Self* (Studies in Comparative Literature, Vol. 12) (Lewinston: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1991); Martinson, *In the Presence of Audience*; Katherine Ewing, “The Illusion of Wholeness: Culture, Self, and the Experience of Inconsistency,” *The Art of Medical Anthropology: Readings*, eds. Sjack Van der Geest and Adri Riensck (Amsterdam: Het Spinnuis, 1998).

Scholarly studies of the Soviet diaries have also noted the writers' hesitancy to say "I" and strong desire to craft a diary as something other than a personal account of inner life and experience. In his work on Soviet diaries from the 1930s, Jochen Hellbeck argued that diary writers of that era traded their "I" for a "we" as they attempted to destroy their individual bourgeois selves and "realign" themselves with the collective in order to become Soviet selves.<sup>199</sup> The blockade diaries demonstrate a different phenomenon in part because of the very different circumstances created by the siege. Unlike the diarists from the 1930s, the siege diarists did not present themselves as initiating this transformation of the self, but as struggling to maintain themselves against outside forces that assaulted their physical and mental integrity. In addition, their diaries do not show signs that Mukhina and Matiushina were attempting to replace their self-concepts with more collectivist or "Soviet" ones. They adopted detached, outside perspectives on the self, but more for the purpose of capturing—not replacing—some semblance of that self on the page.

Mukhina and Matiushina also may have avoided saying "I" out of a fear of political reprisal, but I would suggest that such concerns played a minor role. Mukhina and Matiushina continued to identify closely with their journals, signed their names on them, and took responsibility for their contents. Both diaries are part of the Leningrad Institute of Party History's collection, and both diaries contain numerous criticisms of the regime's management of the blockaded city, some of which *are* articulated in the first person or through the narrator. Many blockade diarists expressed anti-patriotic and critical sentiments in their accounts by attributing them to "others"—neighbors and strangers, for instance—but they did not take the additional step of writing about *the self* as another person. Fear alone cannot fully explain this move.

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## I. I, You, She: the Diary of Elena Mukhina:

On the eve of the Nazi invasion, sixteen-year-old Elena Mukhina had just completed the eighth grade at School No. 30 on Chernyshevsky Prospekt. Little is known about her other than what she revealed in her diary, including whether or not she survived the Blockade. Mukhina's journal extends from 22 May 1941 to 25 May 1942, roughly the same time period that is covered in Matiushina's diary. From an early age, Mukhina aspired to become a professional writer (or a zoologist), and she practiced her literary skills in her diary, where she drafted numerous compositions, sometimes giving them to her mother and others to critique.<sup>200</sup> Despite her youth, her uneven spelling, and occasional poor marks on school compositions, Mukhina's account is surprisingly literary and contains a rare combination of documentary and fictional prose. It blends conventional diary-style entries that are

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<sup>199</sup> Jochen Hellbeck, *Revolution on My Mind*.

<sup>200</sup> On her mother's reviews of her writings, see: entry for 23 November 1941, 58. Mukhina also copied other authors' works into her account.

chronological, narrated in the first-person, and detail her daily activities with an array of creative works. These include poems, short stories, and a novella. Mukhina did not always clearly demarcate these deliberately fictionalized passages from her daily chronicle, which lends fluidity and flexibility to the text.

From Mukhina's account, the siege experience emerges as one marked by profound isolation and disorientation. Especially in the first half of her diary, Mukhina frequently wrote about being overwhelmed and "tortured" by feelings of uncertainty. Frustrated by the lack of information about the fate of the city and the front, Mukhina repeated over and over "I understand nothing."<sup>201</sup> This sense of confusion only deepened as she began losing all those who were close to her, either from evacuation or starvation. First she lost her classmates and friends, then her family's dear friend "Aka," a grandmother figure to Mukhina, and finally her mother.<sup>202</sup> The entry she wrote after her mother died on 7 February 1942 illustrates how Mukhina's sense of self was embedded in and contingent upon her relationships.

How hard it is to be alone. After all, I am only 17. I am completely inexperienced in life. Who will give me advice? Who will teach me how to live now? All around me there are people, but no one approaches me or gives me anything. They all have their own concerns. Goodness, how will I live alone? No, I can't even imagine it.<sup>203</sup>

After becoming an orphan, Mukhina rarely attended school and spent many of her days alone. Her journal is filled with poignant entries that express her yearning for companionship and guidance and her fear that she could not survive without them. Alone in her apartment, Mukhina's world increasingly became one of the mind—a space that could be much more confining than the blockaded city.

At this time, the diary became her primary form of sociability and consequently grew more conversational in tone. In its pages, Mukhina wrote heart-wrenching letters to her departed mother, her distant relatives, and even to the city of Leningrad. She entertained her journal with jokes and riddles, and she appealed it for advice. "How hard it is to be alone," Mukhina confessed, "No one to tell my thoughts, concerns, and sorrows. In this regard, however, my diary helps me a lot."<sup>204</sup> "My dear, invaluable friend, my diary," she continued on another occasion, "I have only you, you are my only guide (*sovetchik*). I only have you in which to preserve my sad story." Literary scholars have long emphasized the dialogic aspects

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<sup>201</sup> Mukhina, entry for 27 November 1941, 59ob.

<sup>202</sup> "Aka" was Azaliia Kruts-Strauss, an English woman by birth, who worked as a governess for a noble Russian family before the 1917 Revolution, remained in Russia, and came to live with the Mukhin family in the 1930s. Much older than her mother, Mukhina described her throughout her diary as a kind of grandmother and a loved member of the family. She died in January 1942. Because of a terminal illness, Mukhina did not live with her biological mother Mariia Nikolaevna Mukhina, but with her aunt, Elena Nikolaevna Bernatskaia, whom the diarist refers to as "mother" and "Lena's mother" throughout the text. Mukhina's biological mother also died during the Blockade. I would like to thank Sergei Yarov of the Institute of History at the Saint Petersburg Academy of Sciences for this autobiographical information about Elena Mukhina. Yarov is currently preparing a publication of Mukhina's diary, along with his commentary and analysis, which will be published by "Azbuka-Attikus" press.

<sup>203</sup> Ibid, entry for 10 February 1942, 82ob.

<sup>204</sup> Ibid, entry for 3 April 1942, 99. More examples of letters, riddles and jokes appear in her entries for 5 March 1942, 12 April 1942, 89ob, 104-105.

of the diary form and its resemblance to epistolary writing.<sup>205</sup> In Mukhina's account, these two modes fused literally.

In her "story-fantasies (*rasskazy-fantazii*)," as she called her short stories, Mukhina found ways to escape temporarily the hardships of blockade life, invent different situations and circumstances for her life, and experiment with new personas.<sup>206</sup> For instance, upon studying a postcard that her mother had sent her three years ago from Piatigorsk, Mukhina recalled a time the previous winter when she and her mother dreamed of a holiday on the Volga. Suddenly, the reader finds Mukhina and her mother (who was still alive at the time that Mukhina wrote this entry) lunching in a comfortable railway car, while a speeding locomotive, the Red Star Express, carries them out of Leningrad toward a warmer, freer life "outside the ring:"

I remember how my mother and I had resolved to go travel somewhere in the summer. And this idea stayed with us. Mama and I are sitting in the cushy [train] car [...] and soon begins that happy moment when the train departs, breaks through the glass dome of the station (*vogzal* (sic)) to freedom. And we speed off into the distance, far, far away, we will sit at the little table [in the compartment] and eat something tasty and know that ahead there awaits us great amusements, delicious things, unfamiliar places, and nature with its blue sky, with its greenery and its flowers. Ahead of us every pleasure awaits, each one better than the next. And we will talk, looking at how Leningrad floats away into the distance behind us. That city where we endured so much, suffered so much, where we sat, hungry, in a cold room and listened attentively to the thunder of the *zenitki* and the hum of enemy planes. And we brush aside these recollections, as a trying, nightmarish dream I redirect my glance ahead, to somewhere in the distance, to where the Red Star Express is rushing us.

The text moves between diary, memoiristic and fictional modes smoothly, with only the shifts in tense to signal these modal transitions. Aboard the Red Star Express, Mukhina journeyed backwards through her repository of memories. She tried to push the siege into the past and create for herself an imaginary future, which her narrative describes as the present: "Mama and I are looking out the window and goodness, how happy we are. Memories repeatedly fly to my mind and I recall them and delight in the fact that you (*ty*) can only recollect this now,

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<sup>205</sup> Mukhina, entry for 22 April 1942, 110. That spring, as she struggled to decide whether to evacuate, Mukhina lamented: "Dear diary, what a pity that you can't give me advice" (Ibid, entry for 26 April 1942, 112ob-113). On diaries as forms of social existence, see: Lejeune, "The Practice of the Private Journal: Chronicle of an Investigation, (1986-1998)," *Marginal Voices*, 201; Robert Folkenflik, "Self as Other," *The Culture of Autobiography: Constructions of Self-Representation* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993), 215-234; Jerome Bruner, "The Autobiographical Process," *The Culture of Autobiography*, 38-56; Elizabeth W. Bruss, *Autobiographical Acts: The Changing Situation of a Literary Genre* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976) 4-32.

<sup>206</sup> Mukhina, entry for 23 November 1941, 58.

In my own analysis of Mukhina's and Matiushina's fictionalized diaries, I found the following discussions about the place of fictional prose in the diary and about the genre of the fictitious diary to be especially useful: Lorna Martens, *The Diary Novel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985); H. Porter Abbott, *Diary Fiction: Writing as Action* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1984); Andrew Hassam, *Writing and Reality: A Study of Modern British Diary Fiction* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1993).

that all of this has already past, that it will never return.”<sup>207</sup>

Playing with the forms of a travel narrative, the diary draws numerous parallels between the shifting physical and mental landscapes of Mukhina’s fantasy world. The train carries Mukhina and her mother past barren fields destroyed by war. Once German and now partisan territory, the landscape is saturated with layers of history, covered by snow, trenches, bomb craters, and the bodies of the fallen. The most fantastical aspect of this story-fantasy is the idea that she and her mother would immediately forget the siege even when faced with physical signs of its destruction.

Mama and I will stare unthinkingly at the empty, grasscovered hillsides, but already we will see nothing there that would remind us of the war we experienced. Already gone, although not distant, but still past, is everything that occurred, those historic days when the breakthrough was achieved and the Germans stopped advancing forward, when the Germans fell back and started to recoil (*otkatavat’sia* (sic)), when the Germans fled, when we entered the Berlin, when we fired weapons back for the last time, the last exploding shell, the last rifle shot. Already they are floating behind us, melting away and concealing themselves in the smoke [surrounding] distant and grey-colored Leningrad.<sup>208</sup>

By setting these past, present and futuristic figures of herself into dialogue—the Mukhina who is still pained by the sight of these horrors, the Mukhina who rides past them, taking no notice of them, and the Mukhina who already has experienced the end of the war—the diarist simultaneously inhabited different temporalities (past, present, and the future) as well as opposing mental states and epistemological positions. In this way, the diarist forced these “coterminous and contradictory subject positions” to confront each other on the page.<sup>209</sup> The story as a whole brings together these contradictory impulses to escape from and engage with Leningrad, to remember and to forget, to question and yet preserve the self. These dualities are central to Mukhina’s diary and to her experience of the Blockade more generally. Already in the first part of the story, she delighted that the war had become a mere memory, but in the latter half she and her mother were not even able to remember it—this is perhaps the most fantastical aspect of her “story-fantasy.” Mukhina gave this story to her mother to read, and her mother’s positive reaction encouraged the diarist to create more compositions and strengthened her resolve to become a professional writer.<sup>210</sup>

The device of the moving train facilitated Mukhina’s experimentations with self-presentation and construction. It allowed Mukhina to adopt a new perspective on her immediate life in the city: to visualize it from afar, from the future. Literary scholars often stress the “immediacy of the diary idiom” as one of its defining characteristics, one that distinguishes it from autobiography, where the author enjoys a much broader perspective and

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<sup>207</sup> Ibid, entry for 22 October 1941, 57.

<sup>208</sup> Ibid, entry for 22 October 1941, 57ob.

<sup>209</sup> This phrase is drawn from: Nussbaum, “Toward Conceptualizing a Diary,” 129. For a discussion of this practice of staging a dialogue between aspects of the self, see: Lejeune, “Autobiography in the Third Person,” 28, 35-41; Lejeune, “The Practice of the Private Journal,” 191; Folkenflik, “Self as Other,” 233.

<sup>210</sup> Mukhina, entry for 23 November 1941, 58.

is at greater liberty to direct the narrative away from the immediate, the episodic and the everyday. “The diarist is shortsighted,” as Roger Cardinal put it.<sup>211</sup> Mukhina found a way to overcome this shortsightedness. By blending elements of fictional story, diary, and memoir together, Mukhina transgressed limitations of genre as well as the restraints of time, space, and reality to create her own universe. This allowed her to escape, if only in her imagination, outside the confines of the siege. In later entries, Mukhina returned to the image of the train to describe her ideal future. “What do I want?” she asked herself,

Only one thing: that the days fly behind us like telegraph poles from the window of a strange (*kur'erskii*) train. If only, only, only these hard winter days would fly by. If only spring, warmth, and greenery would come. Events, unfold before us like frames on a screen. Run faster, faster, faster, hands of the clock.<sup>212</sup>

This moment when the sixteen-year-old commanded time to move forward comprises one of the most explicit examples of how this diarist wrote to usher in the future, not just to record the present, as the diary sometimes is expected to do.

In April 1942, the train went from being a metaphor to a literal promise of freedom as Mukhina began the long process of obtaining permission to evacuate. She crafted new renditions of this fantasy in her diary. In these later versions, many details are the same—the exhilarating train ride, the cozy compartment, the abundance of food, the image of the sky. As a fiction author might do, Mukhina played with her potential reader’s expectations, first presenting the evacuation as real and then revealing, in the last sentence, that it was just a fantasy. From moves like this, it seems clear that the young diarist envisioned some future reader as she crafted her diary.

Farewell, Leningrad. The sky is blue, blue, and above us, beyond the sun, planes are circling. [...] The train moves faster and faster. How grand. I open my suitcase, cut in half a large break off (sic) piece of bread, look out the window and eat. I am full. In the train station before our departure they feed us well: a bowl of soup with noodles. The soup is thick, thick, and pea kasha, and a whole orange (*korolek*). And I still have the kasha left. They also gave us 300 grams of beef sausage and a kilo of bread until we cross Ladoga and there again they will give us food. That is how wonderfully I have imagined leaving Leningrad.<sup>213</sup>

A key difference between this story and the fantasies of escape that I described earlier is that, at the time she wrote this, Mukhina’s mother was already dead. Here, “us” and “we” are used ambivalently, and could refer to other passengers on the train for instance. However, as the story continues, it appears that “we” may also refer to various aspects of herself. After all, Mukhina’s main companion on this trip was her self:

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<sup>211</sup> Roger Cardinal, “Unlocking the Diary,” E.S. Shaffer, ed., *Comparative Criticism, Vol. 12: Representations of the Self* (September 1990), 77-80.

<sup>212</sup> Mukhina, entry for 10 December 1941, 64.

<sup>213</sup> *Ibid.*, entry for 28 April 1942, 113-115ob.

Then a new life will begin. I am curious what it will bring. Ahead there is so much that is unknown, so much unknown, I want to know what's ahead, but patience, Lena, patience, everything it is own time. [...] Lena, tomorrow you will eat again. And today you ate and had enough. Just think, you will eat something at 2 o'clock, a heap of rasins, 150 grams. Poor, poor girl! Do not grieve over [spending] your last bit of money, you are going hungry [...].<sup>214</sup>

In these appeals, Mukhina moves from the first-person singular to first-person plural to the second person. In a motherly tone, she consoled herself that the journey soon will be over and that her hunger would soon subside. With no mother to provide her with guidance or companionship, the diarist takes on this role herself as she had before, by writing in her diary.

There is still another twist to this elaborate story-fantasy, Suddenly, the scenario, time, and place of the story changes abruptly as does the narrative voice. The narrative backtracks a bit to before Mukhina/Lena boarded the train and describes the moment when she rode the tram on her way to the railway station. Here again, Mukhina shifted from referring to herself in the second person to using the first-person plural (“we”), this time to underscore how the diarist began to identify with a new collective—not the *blokadniki*, but the group of fortunate evacuees. In other words, this imaginary journey accentuates the fragmentation of Mukhina's self (as “I,” “you,” and “we”) as well as provides her with new means of social belonging. Mukhina bound her “self” to this new collective so tightly that, as she rode the tram, she was puzzled by the sight of the *blokadniki* now fading into the background. Their emaciated appearance and their single-minded mentality already seemed strange to her, an evacuee and already an outsider. “Look at how people on the tram platform look at us. They are probably thinking how jealous they are of us or saying ‘good riddance, there will be more bread for us!’” Still tied to the immediate reality of the siege, the *blokadniki* can think of little else other than food. Mukhina, however has begun to transcend this worldview. Like the train, the tram cuts across “the ring” and through elliptical patterns of thought that kept the *blokadniki* confined.

Through the tram window, a device that facilitates her self-reflections, Mukhina spied what appeared to be a figment of herself among the crowd of *blokadniki*. Young, wraithlike, and clad all in white, the girl was a specter from Mukhina's past, herself during the winter of 1941-1942. Absorbed in her errands, the girl did not even notice the tram. She is caught up in the minutiae of the world that Mukhina was leaving behind. “How many times I [...] like she walked down this very street, carrying a doctor's certificate [for food]. The only differences were that it was winter, then everything was covered with snow and now it is spring, May, ahead you can see the flowering of the trees...”<sup>215</sup> The somber wintery undertones that color the girl's appearance and mood sharply contrast with the signs of springtime, rebirth, and renewal that absorbed Mukhina. From the tram she could see signs of the earth's regeneration, the beauty of the sky and the budding flowers. This critical distance sharpened her vision of what she was leaving behind—not only the city, but her former struggles, attitudes and mindset. In this way, the evacuation fantasy draws the future reader's attention to the instability and multiplicity of Mukhina's various selves, which confront each other from

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<sup>214</sup> Ibid, entry for 28 April 1942, 113-115ob.

<sup>215</sup> Ibid, entry for 28 April 1942, 115-115ob.



various points in time and space—the traincar, the tram, the platform, the street. The story-fantasy problematizes, dramatizes, and even exacerbates the contestation of self “inside the ring.”

During the winter of 1941-2, Mukhina subsisted on little more than 125 grams of bread a day, so it is understandable that she fantasized not only about escaping the city, but also escaping hunger. Like her vignette about the Red Star Express, her story-fantasies about food are as whimsical and surreal as they are revealing of her profound self-alienation. One such story begins by describing the sumptuous meals that Mukhina hoped to eat after the siege. At first glance it reads like a list of favorite foods, not a story. But as Mukhina imagined how her family would feast on these delicacies, the vignette unfolds. The emotional force of the derives not from the pleasure of eating, but from the disturbing image of the Mukhin family. They gorge themselves until they are completely “swollen, fat.” For any *blokadnik*, the image of the swollen body would have immediately called to mind the body of the *distrofik*. This association had become so firmly implanted in the minds of Leningraders that, by returning it to its prior meaning—to describe a stomach that is full rather than empty—Mukhina made this familiar image seem altogether strange, alarming. “Goodness,” Mukhina remarked, “we will eat until we ourselves become frightening.”<sup>216</sup> As author and protagonist, Mukhina was jarred by her own capacity for animalistic, ravenous consumption and her inability to control her body. And as with other diarists’ experiences of walking and eating described in Chapter One, during this imaginary feast, Mukhina became disconnected, alienated from her self under siege.

Six days later, Mukhina elaborated on her own animalistic transformation in a guilt-ridden entry. She relayed that she had received a wonderful set of chocolates from her birthday. Although she planned to ration them out, she had been unable to restrain herself and ate them all at once. To convey her “shame,” Mukhina cast herself in the role of a bloodthirsty villain devouring its helpless victims, the chocolates. “The poor things,” she explained, tragically met their end “in my unscrupulous mouth.” “It seems I could have left those unhappy victims in peace, but instead they were doomed; oh let them live once more [...] this means that now I cannot be stopped until I destroy everything that is delivered into my hands.” As she condemned and dehumanized her mouth, she humanized the chocolates: “My bar, beautiful bar of real English chocolate, where are you? Why did I eat you? You were so beautifully adorned (*nariadnaia*) that I fell in love with you, but then I gobbled you up. What a pig I am.”<sup>217</sup> This story—which is fundamentally about a starving child’s desperate desire for food—reverberates ironically with the siege situation. In Mukhina’s narrative, the roles are reversed: the victim cast herself as the aggressor. Just as Leningraders’ emaciated bodies attacked and fed upon themselves, Mukhina launched a moral assault on her body, preying upon herself for lacking will power. By partitioning herself into subject and object, villain and victim, the diarist crafted this story-fantasy to highlight the challenges that the Blockade posed to selfhood.

At the end of April 1942, Mukhina stopped writing story-fantasies and began to rework her diary into an autobiographical novella. Here again, Mukhina played with the

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<sup>216</sup> Ibid, entry for 16 October, 1941, 50ob-51.

<sup>217</sup> Ibid, entry for 22 October 1941, 55ob-56.

expectations of her potential reader by writing her first entry in this new mode and only later announcing: “I decided to now write my diary in a new form, from the third-person in the manner of a novella. Such a diary can be read as a book.”<sup>218</sup> This decision came at a particularly trying time for Mukhina, when she was struggling with food shortages, disorderly evacuation procedures, conscription into the anti-aircraft defense, and a host of other difficulties. She chose to record these difficult days in a third-person narrative voice.

The novella project marks the apex of Mukhina’s efforts to distance and displace her self through fiction. It stands out from the rest of the diary in terms of its tone, pacing, content, and form. The third-person narrator brings a sense of calm and detachment to her emotional state. At the same time, this move also suggests that Mukhina was somehow relinquishing control over life story, her fate, which increasingly seemed to be determined by outside forces. In the novella, Mukhina preserved the dated-entry structure of her diary, so that her text reads both as novella and diary—a diary of someone else. The novella is tightly structured around a coherent plot unlike Mukhina’s earlier diary entries, which written in a stream-of-consciousness style and were driven more by emotional developments than concrete events.

Why did Mukhina make this remarkable literary move? Literary scholars have suggested several reasons why an author might write about his/her self in the third person. In his study of the “self as other,” Robert Folkenflik presented a range of reasons why authors might “insist upon the self as an other,” including the desire to shield the self from scrutiny, to add a sense of impartiality and “historical meaning” to their self-presentations, or—by contrast—to “disdain,” and censure the self.<sup>219</sup> Whether for the sake of protecting, elevating, or diminishing the subject, this forced distance between self-conceptualizations facilitates dialogue between aspects of the self. With an eye to the formal implications of this move, scholar Philippe Lejeune has pointed out that, by alternating between narrative persons, an author can circumvent the limitations that one genre or perspective can impose on self-presentation.<sup>220</sup> Equipped with a more flexible narrative voice and generic structure, Mukhina endeavored to convey the multidimensional nature of individual identity or to draw attention to its fundamental disjointedness and malleability. The novella structure also permitted Mukhina to make freer use of stock scenes and classic story lines to develop this theme of self-creation. For instance, as novelist, Mukhina more frequently used mirrors as devices to facilitate Lena’s reflections (however distorted) on her self. She also developed characters who could stand in as shadows and foils to Lena to “condens[e] a whole group of relationships” or problems.<sup>221</sup>

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<sup>218</sup> Ibid, entry for 30 April 1942, 117.

<sup>219</sup> Robert Folkenflik, “Self as Other,” 218-233.

<sup>220</sup> While recognizing this decision to write the self from the perspective of the other was a distinct stylistic move, both Folkenflik and Lejeune also observed that the sheer act of writing forces some splitting or objectification of the self. “The first person always conceals a hidden third person,” Lejeune remarked (Lejeune, “Autobiography in the Third Person,” 32).

<sup>221</sup> This term is drawn from: K. Eckhard Kuhn-Osius, “Making Loose Ends Meet: Private Journals in the Public Realm,” *The German Quarterly*, 54 (1981), 173, whose work informed my analysis of this moment. Also see Pascal’s discussion of the autobiographical novel in: *Design and Truth in Autobiography*, 171, and Deborah Martinson’s discussion of the incorporation of fiction(s) into diary accounts as a way of “blurring imagination and observation, creating scenes and characters that record their lives and recreate their own histories” (Martinson, *In the Presence of Audience*, 33).

For instance, this can be seen in her entry for 2 May 1942, which finds Lena sitting on a park bench trying to read, but engrossed by a group of laughing children playing before her. The sight of their joy prompts Lena to reflect on her own tragic childhood: “Lena thought, well they are little boys now and, when they become [older] like her, they will be happier than she and in general they will have their youth! Light and happy. They will not have to go through all that she has experienced. Their parents will not die, yes, they will be happier.”<sup>222</sup> Interestingly, here Lena and perhaps the narrator, assume that the Blockade—or at least the worst part of it—was over. While this incident in the park might very well have been real, but it is described with an air of “intended generality,”<sup>223</sup> a stock quality, which does not color her earlier entries. The symbolism is also more transparent: the children clearly represent Lena’s lost childhood. Childhood had passed Lena by. She was denied a childhood free from responsibility, suffering, and loss.

In her evacuation fantasy, Mukhina also created a younger version of herself (on the tram platform), but in the novella, she figures as the outsider, the one who is left behind. Shadowed by the melancholy undertones of winter, Lena sat alone while the boys play in the warm sunshine. Lena grasped a book in her hand, a suggestion that she still clings to text as a way to connect to the world outside of herself. However, she was unable to read and unable to interact with the children—a double failure to overcome her solitude. This scene presents several different figures of Mukhina: the carefree child, the lonely orphan, and the knowing narrator. Each one represents the young girl at different life stages, emotional states, and epistemological perspectives, and together they paint a bleak picture of her past and future.

In the novella, Mukhina replaced the intimate tone of the diary with a less personal style of storytelling. The novella’s narrator is detached and watches Lena with a fond, but critical eye, repeatedly stressing her mistakes and naiveté.<sup>224</sup> As Robert Folkenflik observed, the use of third person in autobiographical writing is especially effective when the life story being told centers around themes of self-censure, failure, or guilt.<sup>225</sup> The narrator also takes rather critical glances backwards into Lena’s prewar life. In one episode, the narrator reproached Lena for not appreciating simple pleasures like sharing a cozy meal with her mother and Aka. Unlike the scene in the park, here the narrator suggests that Lena *did* have a carefree youth, but that she took it for granted:

At the time, Lena did not value it. [...] It seemed to her that there was nothing special about having her Aka and mama [...] And it is only now that she has lost Aka and mama that she really values all of her past life [...] She would never again see Aka and mama, only in her dreams. [...] Yes, fate has taught her according to her just deserts (*po zaslugam*), it has already been very grim. Now, contemplating all of this, Lena said to herself: “Studies lie ahead of you, you will value every crumb, you will know the value of everything and it will be easier for you to live on this world. ‘There is no bad without good’ (*net khuda bez dobra*), the wise Russian proverb says.” Of course, after this school, life [begins]. It will be easier for Lena to live in the future. And not only her.

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<sup>222</sup> Mukhina, entry 2 May 1942, 119ob.

<sup>223</sup> This term is drawn from: K. Eckhard Kuhn-Osius, “Making Loose Ends Meet,” 174.

<sup>224</sup> Additional examples can be found in: Mukhina, 120ob-130.

<sup>225</sup> Folkenflik, “The Self as Other,” 223-224.

Postwar life will be easier, happy, and productive for all soviet citizens, who have lived through this horrible time.<sup>226</sup>

The narrator points out Lena's past mistakes, but also tries to motivate her and rouse her spirits. Paraphrasing a party slogan, the narrator notes that Lena's situation and suffering are not unique and that she should find comfort in the collective struggle, study hard. Then life indeed will become happier. The "school" of the Blockade would prepare her for a future on her own. A voice of authority, the omniscient narrator provided an epistemological counterweight to Lena, benefiting from a sense of certainty about the future and a clarity of thought, which the *blokadnitsa* could not have obtained. In this respect, Mukhina's storyteller represents an idealized version of herself, whose broad, penetrating perspective could only have existed "outside of the ring."

The last two entries of Mukhina's diary-novella add another layer of complexity to the relationship between her various self-concepts and narrative voices. Each of these entries contains a mirror scene, where first Lena ("she"), then Mukhina ("I") examine their bodies—now drastically altered—in the looking glass. When read together, these scenes demonstrate two different perspectives on the self. In the first of these two entries, Lena gazes into the mirror and is pleased to discover that her "normal" appearance is returning. The narrator reports that: "her face was no longer as frightening as it had seemed before," even though "her body had really grown thin, just bones, and nothing remained of her swollen breast."<sup>227</sup> Lena sees some small signs of progress in her appearance.

In the next and final entry, however, Mukhina was barely able to recognize herself at all. More striking still is the fact that, after penning numerous entries from this third-person omniscient perspective, in the last entry Mukhina returned to the first-person. This decision to say "I" again might seem to indicate some reunification between reconciliation between Lena and Mukhina—their perspectives, experiences, and voices. It seems that Mukhina may have hoped for such a reunion because it was with great disappointment that the diarist discovered that she could hardly recognize herself. Standing in front of the mirror—a moment I mention in Chapter One—Mukhina felt entirely disconnected from the figure she saw reflected: "Already my brain is unable to respond to anything, I live as if in a half-dream. [...] I myself do not recognize myself." As if half asleep, Mukhina felt detached from herself and disconnected her surroundings: "now I almost do not feel hunger, in general I don't feel anything at all."<sup>228</sup> Although she tried to return to the "I" in this scene, she was still unable to place it, to distinguish her self from the other in a meaningful way. I should note that there is a two-week gap between these last two entries, so it is possible that Mukhina physically deteriorated substantially in that time. It seems just as likely, however, that two weeks did not create a huge difference after a year of starvation and that these mirror scenes were meant to juxtapose that the diarists' depictions of "I" and "she," to showcase either the elusiveness or fragmented nature of the self.

Another factor in support of this point is that, even in this last entry, Mukhina opted to switch between narrative voices. mutability of selfhood. This final entry is written in the first person, all except for the very last lines, where Mukhina traded "I" for "she." It is unclear if

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<sup>226</sup> Mukhina, entries for 30 April 1942 and 1 May 1942, 116ob-118ob.

<sup>227</sup> Ibid, entry for 2 May 1942, 120.

<sup>228</sup> Ibid, entry for 25 May 1942, 134ob.

this was done in response to her alienating encounter with the mirror or if Mukhina wanted to tie up the loose ends of her novella. When one examines this last installment of Lena's story, however, the latter seems unlikely. Speaking as "I," Mukhina implied, hopefully, that she would evacuate soon and her siege experience would end. She denied Lena such a clear and satisfying conclusion. While Mukhina prepared to leave Leningrad, Lena remained tied to the immediate, day-to-day concerns of blockade life, absorbed in mundane tasks. The diary ends with this very familiar image from the siege: "Lena decided to return 'home' tonight and boil boil (sic) some soup from nettles and meat."<sup>229</sup> The final portrait of Lena, attending to the evening meal, remains deliberately unfinished. In a way, the ending of the diary-novella brings Mukhina's story fantasy to fruition: Mukhina will leave Lena—that girl clad in white—behind on the platform and consumed in the world of the siege.

The final scene provides an interesting point of contrast to the widespread understanding of diary writing as an open-ended genre, which Philippe Lejeune has called "writing without an end."<sup>230</sup> Mukhina's explicitly personal, first-person narrative *does* have a tight conclusion, more like a novella or an autobiography. In this way, even in its very last lines, the generic flexibility of Mukhina's account continues to facilitate the development of her main theme, the self under siege. The fluctuations and tensions in Mukhina's fragmented self-concept endure to the very end.

## II. Self as Other: the Diary of Ol'ga Matiushina

One can hardly imagine a more different figure from Elena Mukhina than Ol'ga Matiushina. Matiushina was fifty-five when the war began, the widow of artist Mikhail Vasil'evich Matiushin. She was a professional painter, and well connected member of the Soviet artistic *intelligentsia*. Matiushina was born in 1885 and moved to St. Petersburg in 1905. She was a student at the city's Psycho-neurological Institute, and in the years before the 1917 Revolution she began an intimate association with the Bolsheviks, working for their underground press and bookshops. She was arrested twice by the imperial police for these political activities. In the 1930s, she became a professional painter and worked two years on the Agricultural Exhibition in Moscow. She returned to Leningrad shortly before the German invasion and penned her memoirs of Gorky and Mayakovsky. Despite her artistic background, Matiushina emphasized her amateur status as an author, claiming that she learned to write during the war. Recall her struggles to draw and write after losing her eyesight. Her diary covers the first year of the war and was deposited into the party's official diary collection in November 1943, certified by the author's signature and promise of authenticity ("*s podlinnym verno*").<sup>231</sup>

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<sup>229</sup> Ibid, entry for 25 May 1942, 135. The gap between these two entries is the longest in the journal, about two weeks, so it is possible that Mukhina physically deteriorated substantially in that time. It also underscores how the diarists' depictions of Lena and of herself were quite divergent.

<sup>230</sup> Lejeune, "How Do Diaries End?," 189-191.

<sup>231</sup> During the war, she wrote two autobiographical works, *Pesn' o zhizni* and later *Zhizn' pobezhdaet*, ' about the Blockade. She also published several works after the war on Mariia Il'ichna and Vladimir Il'ich Lenin. Matiushina was later decorated with the order of the "Red Banner." There is a short biography of Matiushina in:

Matiushina explicitly labeled her account as a diary, but it is a very unconventional one. The text is structured both by dated and undated sections, traditional entries and deliberately fictionalized passages including a number of short stories. A few of her entries are out of order, and it is unclear whether they were mislaid and later inserted or whether they were written retrospectively.<sup>232</sup> In general, the diary structure is less apparent in Matiushina's account than in Mukhina's. Matiushina's diary conveys a greater sense of literary artifact. It is possible that Matiushina may have considered her account as a literary work more than a diary, and indeed it seems to have been the main source from which her novella, *A Song about Life*, was written. For these reasons, one must exercise a good deal of caution in categorizing and analyzing this unusual narrative.

Nevertheless, Matiushina's novellesque "diary" demonstrates great uncertainty about saying "I," which the author was far more comfortable using in *A Song about Life*, which she began around the summer of 1942.<sup>233</sup> Unlike the diary, *A Song about Life* covers the full period of the siege, from 1941 to 1944. The manuscript went to print in late 1945 and appeared in Leningrad in 1946. Matiushina later reworked the novella substantially and published this new edition in 1970.<sup>234</sup> The novella is written in the first-person, but the majority of Matiushina's "diary" is written in the third-person about a fictionalized heroine, Evgeniia Mikhailovna. No surname is given for her. As a diarist, Matiushina "hid and dispersed the narrative 'I'" to a greater extent than Mukhina, never revealing to her reader that Evgeniia Mikhailovna was her literary creation.<sup>235</sup> Yet, despite all of her efforts to distance herself from her narrative, Matiushina did not or could not avoid "I" entirely. There are significant moments when, by using the first-person, Matiushina suggested that the experiences and impressions she attributed to the protagonist were really her own.<sup>236</sup> These fluctuations might have occurred accidentally, but I would suggest that they were deliberate. Matiushina herself was aware of these changes in narrative voice because she carefully reviewed her text (and inserted minor stylistic corrections) before submitting her account to the Institute of Party History. She allowed this inconsistent, contested self-presentation to stand. Still, regardless of whether they were done deliberately or accidentally, through these

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*Leningradki: Vospominaniia, Ocherki, Dokumenty*, ed. Sof'ia Vinogradova (Leningrad: Lenizdat, 1968), 408-09.

<sup>232</sup> Several of Matiushina's dated entries are out of order, for instance, a clump of November 1941 entries are inserted into those for February 1942, but as these entries detail the day's events in great detail, it seems more likely that they were misplaced rather than entirely constructed retrospectively.

<sup>233</sup> Although it is not clear when exactly when Matiushina began the novella, the diary suggests that it was in summer of 1942, just as the journal was ending, at which time the diary's protagonist, Evgeniia Mikhailovna, decided to embark upon a new project about the Blockade. Most likely this was the novella.

<sup>234</sup> O. Matiushina, *Pesn' o zhizni: povest'* (Leningrad: Lenizdat, 1970).

Prepared for the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Victory Day, the 1970 edition of the novel has many changes. The word "autobiographical" was removed from the subtitle, the Afterword to the novel explicitly states that the work was based on her diary notes (*dnevnikovye zapisi*). Most of the references to Stalin are significantly paired down, while new material about other professional writers is added. Most striking of all is that real names are restored to many of the figures in the novel. Compare these passages: Matiushina, *Pesn' o zhizni* (1946), 113-114; Matiushina, *Pesn' o zhizni* (1970), 103-104, 228-230, 196-197.

<sup>235</sup> This phrase is borrowed from: Martinson, *The Presence of Audience*, 12.

<sup>236</sup> Matiushina, *Diary*, 17, 34-35.

Matiushina also created pseudonyms for other the characters in her diary, including that of her closest friend, artist Mariia Vladimirovna Ender (1897-1942), who is called Natal'ia Vladimirovna or Nal'ia in the diary.

shifts between the first and third person, Matiushina's text invites a highly ambiguous reading of the self.

Mukhina and Matiushina favored using a detached, third-person perspective on the self, but beyond this, their narratives are quiet different. Unlike Mukhina's authoritative and omniscient narrator, Matiushina's third-person limited narrator, although intimately acquainted with Evgeniia Mikhailovna's innermost thoughts, cannot see beyond the confines of "the ring." Recall that Mukhina's narrator made imaginary flights outside of the world of the Blockade and could also foresee events in Mukhina's future. By contrast, Matiushina's narrator was herself a *blokadnitsa*, sharing Evgeniia Mikhailovna's anxieties, concerns, and confusion. Frequently, their two voices and perspectives blended through the use of free indirect discourse. Matiushina's narrator also seems to be a peer, addressing the heroine respectfully and formally with her name and patronymic, whereas Mukhina's parent-like narrator referred to the heroine as "Lena" and "Alenushka."

Matiushina also drew on elements of fiction in order to articulate, yet separate herself from her blockade experiences. Not only is her "diary" written in the third-person, it is not intimate in tone. Matiushina omitted from her private diary some of the traumatic experiences and anxieties that she openly discussed in *A Song about Life*.<sup>237</sup> The novella highlights her inner emotional life, her personal struggles and choices as a writer much more candidly than the diary. By contrast, the diary places greater emphasis on the collective story of the *blokadniki*. Much of the text is apportioned to recording the conversations that she overheard between Leningraders. "Evgeniia Mikhailovna loved to overhear conversations. Sometimes she noted them down exactly, in shorthand," the narrator explains.<sup>238</sup> As her eyesight worsened, Evgeniia Mikhailovna apparently came to rely on these conversations in order to capture the world of the blockade on paper. In the diary, this chorus of voices includes the voice of the party, which makes fewer appearances in the novella.<sup>239</sup> In this way, there is considerably more self-reflexivity and self-referentiality in the novella than in the diary. In addition, like Mukhina, Matiushina interspersed her entries with short stories or "fairytale" (*skazki*) as she called them. In fact they were fictionalized portrayals of very real phenomena and events. As Matiushina put it, "the fairytales grew on their own" and "they began to intertwine themselves with reality."<sup>240</sup> Because all of her short stories explore a particular theme, the family, I withhold my remarks on them until Chapter Three.

The complexity and confusion of the narrative "I" is evident throughout Matiushina's unusual diary, from the very start of the war. The problematics of self-representation appear very prominently in the very first entries, which strongly colors the reader's impression of the account as a whole. The first entry describing the Nazi invasion is written in the form of a three-way exchange between different aspects of the self. At least initially, quotation marks are used to mark this text as a conversation, but when they are dropped, the identity of the speaking subject becomes blurred:

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<sup>237</sup> See: Matiushina, *Diary*, 54, 169.

<sup>238</sup> Matiushina, *Diary*, 102. A large, continuous section of recorded conversations appears in: *Ibid*, 102-107.

<sup>239</sup> For a discussion on the use of official rhetoric in private diaries, see: Natal'ia Kozlova, "The Diary as Initiation and Rebirth: Reading Everyday Documents of the Early Soviet Era," *Everyday Life in Early Soviet Russia: Taking the Revolution Inside*, eds. Christina Kiaer and Eric Naiman (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006), 282-298.

<sup>240</sup> Matiushina, *Diary*, 124-125.

Every person of the Soviet country, having learned about this frightening betrayal, has posed the question to himself: ‘how will I help the motherland?’ This question stood sharply before Evgeniia Mikhailovna. ‘To the ranks! Together with everyone is the only [place] where I can put my strength,’ she answered strongly. ‘But after all, you are almost blind, you cannot even read a newspaper!’ ‘True, all that is true. But at such a time can one really sit at home? Yes, your heart will stop from the slightest exertion, this is true... what will I do?’

I will write. About what? About the usual things—impossible at such a moment. [...] I will try to note down the feelings, thoughts, and words of these last twenty-four hours. How little time has passed and how much our country has experienced already.<sup>241</sup>

The slippage between “I” and “she,” is clearly apparent in these lines. While it is unclear whether “I” refers to author or the heroine, the ambiguous narrative perspective seemed to unite them at this moment, when together they resolved to keep a written record of the war.

This apparent unity between their voices and purposes, however, is broken up by the appearance of a third, opposing voice: the narrator. The narrator questions Evgeniia Mikhailovna’s ability to successfully become the siege’s “chronicler.” First, the narrator claims, she is an inexperienced writer and second, she is too weak to undertake such a project. As the narrator, Evgeniia Mikhailovna was still recovering from a previous bout with tuberculosis. But the biggest obstacle of all was her eyesight. The narrator explains:

Blindness disrupted her ability to work. It was also very difficult for her to write. She had not yet adjusted to it. It is true that she could not discern any writing without a magnifying glass, but it was not necessary for her to read. The pen (*pero*) was not her usual way of working and moreover she did not really enjoy it. She was an artist and loved paints [...] To capture on paper a ray of luminous sunshine, the trembling of leaves, the aroma of flowers—this is what she loved and what she lived for.<sup>242</sup>

This first entry combines the literary subject positions and perspectives of “I,” “you,” and “she” into a three-way discussion of whether this individual would survive and how she might contribute to the war effort. By literally partitioning her subject into three fragmented selves and opposing positions—author, narrator, and protagonist—Matiushina suggested how the war created a certain discord within her. Of course, some of these inconsistencies may have stemmed from the fact that Matiushina was an inexperienced and perhaps not a very apt writer. All the same, this great uncertainty about saying “I” seems intimately connected to her uncertainty about that “I’s” purpose (“what will I do?”), to Matiushina’s conflicted view of herself, both as an individual and as an artist.

The next diary entry only adds to the already ambiguous narrative voice and complex presentation of self. This second entry relays the moment—her reaction to the German

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<sup>241</sup> Ibid, entry for 23 June 1941, 1.

<sup>242</sup> Ibid, entry for 23 June 1941, 2.



invasion—but now through a first-person perspective only. Dated 22 June 1941, one day before the previous entry, this passage contains traces of retrospective construction. It is saturated with well-worn narrative clichés about the invasion: the last days of summer, the loss of innocence, the calm before the storm, and so on. Now speaking as “I,” Matiushina seemed much more confused and indecisive than Evgeniia Mikhailovna had been. She herself expressed the doubts that were attributed to the narrator in the previous entry. As she listened to Molotov’s radio address, Matiushina claimed that she was unable to understand what was happening and what she should do in response:

I am listening and understand nothing, I think they are broadcasting a story (*rasskaz*) from the past. I look around faces are strained internally all are totally perplexed. Finally someone yells: ‘The scoundrels, fascists!’ ‘What happened?’ I asked a passerby. ‘War with Germany!’ [...] How will I help the motherland? Never before have I been so tormented by blindness. It is a very hard time to be an invalid. What can I do? There is nothing I can do.<sup>243</sup>

What appeared as a three-way discussion in the first entry takes the form of a monologue in the second entry. This move invests the moment with very different emotions—intimacy, uncertainty, and fear. Compared to Evgeniia Mikhailovna (“she”), Ol’ga Matiushina (“I”) was more hesitant than determined about how to serve in the war effort, especially as a writer. Later, Matiushina used the material in this second entry to reconstruct her reactions to the German invasion for *A Song About Life*.<sup>244</sup>

In sum, whether written as a dispute between figures of her self or as a private reflection, these two opening passages highlight how Matiushina’s conceptualization of self was manifold, malleable, and deeply conflicted. From its very first pages, Matiushina’s unusual “diary” brings the contested notion of “self” to the fore. This theme continues to permeate Matiushina’s further descriptions of her experiences during the Blockade, especially the way that the conditions of the siege challenged her understanding of her own body and her professional identity as an artist. I will return to comment further on this fascinating and unusual text in subsequent chapters.

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Diary writing has often been understood as an avenue to self-knowledge and, by extension, self-conquest. Scholars often have argued that diary writing is an exercise of self-actualization and empowerment that gives the writer a sense of control and coherence.<sup>245</sup> The diary narratives of Mukhina and Matiushina, however, not only draw attention to the

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<sup>243</sup> Ibid, entry for 22 June 1941, 3, 6-7.

<sup>244</sup> Here is how Matiushina presents her reaction to the news of the invasion in her novella: “I am tortured by the thought: what should I do to help? Silently we stand, finding it difficult to speak. We do not know, we cannot find the words [...] ... What now? I am an artist, but now one should not draw nature, flowers. What should I do? ...I need to join the ranks. Probably some kinds of artists’ brigades will be organized, but for what purpose? ... My mind is all a tangle” (Matiushina, *Pesn' o zhizni*, 62).

<sup>245</sup> One work that makes this case is: Bunker and Huff, *Inscribing the Daily*, 43.

destabilization and unpredictability of the self, they accentuate it through a variety of devices and modes that further displace the “I.” At the same time, Mukhina and Matiushina turned to their diaries as spaces for preserving the self—at least textually—against the self-effacing conditions of the Blockade. Uncertain about both the present and future, they explored various identities and created a variety of scenarios, which placed their various self-concepts in confrontation with each other. The diarists also blurred the line between reality and fantasy, document and fiction, self and other through their narrational and stylistic choices. In short, through experimental narrative approaches, Mukhina and Matiushina presented themselves from various, often conflicting angles as they attempted to come to terms with the meaning of the siege for their own lives and for all *blokadniki*.

Above all, the complex problematics of self-construction and self-presentation contained in these two diaries demonstrate the essential and inseparable connection between lived identity and narrative identity, between who we are and the stories we tell of ourselves. As John Eakin put it in his study *Living Autobiographically*, “When it comes to our identities, narrative is not merely *about* self, but is rather in some profound way a constituent part *of* self.”<sup>246</sup> Indeed, for Mukhina and Matiushina, the narrative produced by this daily writing practice came to be entangled with life itself. The diary became “a metaphor of survival, of ‘everything human’”—literally their “life’s work.”<sup>247</sup> Real life and life on the page became fused, coextensive, and mutually constitutive. Mukhina declared that, as long as she could write, she knew “I was still alive.”<sup>248</sup> Similarly, Matiushina’s alter ego Evgeniia Mikhailovna believed that, if she wrote, then “life will help me to hold on.”<sup>249</sup>

Although diary writing may have helped Mukhina and Matiushina to preserve or reconstruct the self, it did not seem to contribute to integrity of their self-concepts. Holocaust scholar Amos Goldberg has emphasized the paradoxical nature of this activity, arguing that the powerful urge to write first-person accounts has made the Holocaust “the era of the ‘I.’” The process of recording the self, however, revealed “a fundamental epistemic breakdown” and the “collapse of narrative identity. They say ‘I’ only in order to report this ‘I’s’ death,” Goldberg argued.<sup>250</sup> As I have tried to show, through their techniques of self-distancing Matiushina and Mukhina took an active role in such a process. They consciously and creatively worked to convey the peculiarity of their situation. For them, the practice fostered both self-discovery and self-estrangement.

Trapped inside Leningrad, Matiushina and Mukhina struggled to obtain some kind of insight and perspective on their own lives. They worked to break out of the siege by stepping outside of the self, experimenting with new vantage points and personas. Escaping the “I” suggested the possibility of escaping, if only textually, the physical, personal, and intellectual confines of “the ring.”

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<sup>246</sup> John Eakin, *Living Autobiographically*, 3.

<sup>247</sup> Aronson, *Studies in Twentieth Century Diaries*, 109-110, 117, 120.

<sup>248</sup> Mukhina, entry for 22 September 1941, 43ob.

<sup>249</sup> Matiushina, *Diary*, 168.

<sup>250</sup> Goldberg, *Holocaust Diaries as ‘Life Stories’* (Jerusalem: Vad Yashem. 2004), 13-18.

Three:

Families under Siege:

the New Forms, Functions, and Conflicts of Home Life

“When a newcomer talks to Leningraders, [he gets] this feeling of belonging to a single house, to a single united family makes him think about big and important things, about the war and its meaning, about our country, its past, present and future.”<sup>251</sup>

-Aleksandr Fadeev

The family was one of the first casualties of the war and of the Blockade. This began almost immediately after the German invasion, when Leningrad households were turned upside down in the throes of rapid evacuation and mobilization. As their early entries illustrate, the diarists worried that the forces of war—including prolonged separation, violence, and death—threatened to tear their marriages and families apart. The family comprises the most fundamental social and economic unit in virtually all cultures. It provides a network for sharing resources, a model of social intimacy, a touchstone of collective identity. The family’s radical transformation under siege prompted the diarists to question the family’s ability to fulfill its basic material and emotional functions, which in turn led them to whether they had a better chance of surviving on their own or together with their kith and kin. In consideration of this dilemma, the diarists reflected anew on some of the core principles that define and regulate one’s relationship to society. These include: individualism, competition, cooperation, and altruism. Based on their own experiences at home or on their observations of the families around them, the diarists attempted to glean more general insights about human nature and sociability.

This chapter explores how the structures, functions, and meanings of marriage and family shifted dramatically under siege and how the diarists, parents and children, worked to make sense of this transformation. It asks: what did kinship come to signify for the diarists? In Part One, I examine how the spaces of home—once strongholds of peace and stability—

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<sup>251</sup> Fadeev, *Leningrad v dni blokady*, 15.

acquired new meanings and associations for the diarists. The remaining three sections of this chapter focus on family relations during the Blockade and, in particular, the typology of new family models produced by the diarists' observations. Part Two explores the experiences of biological families and married couples as they fought together to survive "inside the ring." Part Three looks at non-biological collectives that developed under siege, sometimes in place of the traditional family. Part Four investigates the situation of families and spouses that were physically separated during the Blockade, with some members living inside, some outside of Leningrad.

Each of these three familial arrangements had its challenges and benefits and operated according to different understandings of what family meant. They suggest that proximity was the chief factor that determined how familial and marital relations fared under siege. The diarists' experiences and understandings of kinship hinged upon whether they were physically together during the Blockade. According to their accounts, Leningraders who stayed with their spouses and children "inside the ring" fared much worse—in terms of material and emotional wellbeing—than those who separated from them. The diarists tended to discuss and evaluate these intact families and marriages in terms of their material functions as networks for the pooling and sharing of resources. In their accounts, they often confessed that they resented having to share their food and explained how this burden undermined the feelings of love, trust, and loyalty between kin. In other words, the material functions of the family interfered with its emotional functions.

Of course, not all such marriages and families deteriorated during the Blockade, but it is significant that the diarists focused on their failure to an overwhelming degree, almost never mentioning cases of the family's endurance or triumph. Moreover, many worried that the damages done to kinship networks were irreparable, that the family could never recover. Because of these conflicts over sharing food, some *blokadniki* opted to abandon their marriages and children and live on their own. Even very young Leningraders often preferred to live in new collectives, such as children's homes, which they felt were better equipped to provide for them than their biological families. In this economy of scarcity, proximity seemed to breed contempt.

By contrast, for Leningraders whose relatives and spouses relocated outside of the city, family functioned primarily as a source of moral, not material support. For them, family acquired enormous symbolic importance as a source of emotional fortitude, an anchor of social identity, and a reason to continue fighting for life. These separated families sometimes were held together by texts, memories, or acts of imagination. For these Leningraders, family was a source of strength and inspiration. The diary accounts played a critical role in facilitating communication between far-flung kith and kin. They functioned as tools of social interaction as much as tools of private reflection.

The family always played a central role in Soviet society. Children had long stood as symbols of the promise and potential of the revolution. The revolution could only be successful if its utopian inspirations were instilled firmly in the next generation. In its early decades, the Soviet regime was highly suspicious of the nuclear family as a possible breeding ground for bourgeois individualism and female oppression.<sup>252</sup> But by the late 1930s, faced

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<sup>252</sup> For a discussion of the regime's shifting policies toward the family—from its efforts to replace parents with state-run schools and orphanages in the 1910s to its more cooperative approach that combined home- and

with a falling birthrate and a rising rate of child abandonment and delinquency, the regime took a more “paternalistic and conservative approach” to the family.<sup>253</sup> It began to praise the nuclear family as a cornerstone of social stability and national strength.<sup>254</sup> New protective measures enforcing parental responsibility were put into law; they prosecuted parents for abandoning their children and created new provisions for foster care so that children without parents might still have a home environment.<sup>255</sup>

The sanctification of the family reached a new height after the Nazi invasion. Now the regime relied on the family to maintain social stability as well as to elicit moral indignation and a fighting spirit in its people. Inside Leningrad, the official press depicted mothers, wives, and children as the chief targets of Nazi aggression and stressed the connection between a soldier’s duty to protect his motherland and his biological mother.<sup>256</sup> Propaganda posters were inscribed with slogans such as “Death to the child killers” and “Protect ‘our children, our hearths.’”<sup>257</sup> The new family law code that was promulgated in 1944 continued to uphold the nuclear family model. It awarded monetary sums upon the birth of a child (especially three or more), medals to women who had five or more children, and taxed men and women who were childless.<sup>258</sup>

In this way, the regime called upon Leningraders to preserve the nuclear family came at a time when it seemed to place a great burden on survival. As the diaries suggest, family unity was threatened not only by the German besiegers, but also by the behaviors and attitudes of the members themselves struggling to survive, any way they could, “inside the ring.”

## I. Where is Home?

Even before the Nazis began their siege, many Leningrad households began to unravel as parents and children were drafted, evacuated, or otherwise relocated. In the summer of 1941, roughly 500,000 Leningraders evacuated from the city with their schools, factories, and

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school-based aspects of socialist upbringing in the mid-1930s, see: Lisa A. Kirschenbaum, *Small Comrades: Revolutionizing Childhood in Soviet Russia, 1917-1932* (New York, Routledge Falmer, 2001).

<sup>253</sup> Judith Harwin, *Children of the Russian State: 1917-1995* (Aldenot: Ashgate Publishing, Ltd., 1996), 19.

<sup>254</sup> This theme is discussed in: David Hoffman, *Stalinist Values: the Cultural Norms of Soviet Modernity, 1917-1941* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003), 88-117; Catriona Kelly, *Children’s World, Growing Up in Russia, 1890-1991* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), 243-244.

<sup>255</sup> Harwin, *Children of the Russian State*, 18-22.

<sup>256</sup> Lisa A. Kirschenbaum, “Our City, Our Hearths, Our Families”: Local Loyalties and Private Life in Soviet World War II Propaganda. *Slavic Review*, Vol. 59, No. 4 (Winter, 2000), 827-828, 838. Kirschenbaum has demonstrated how Soviet wartime propaganda drew on the images, stories, and sentiments of the individual family in order to personalize the national cause and sacrifices.

<sup>257</sup> For more examples of these family-centered slogans, see: Kirschenbaum, “Our City, Our Hearths,” 837; Pavlov, *Leningrad 1941*, 120-121; Kropaneva, *My stoiali kak soldaty*, 163.

<sup>258</sup> By 1944, state policymakers made abortion virtually illegal and divorce very difficult to obtain in order to reinforce the nuclear family model. They also came up with a host of carrots and sticks—including financial assistance, bonuses, and tax penalties—to encourage women to have more children. The highest distinction of “hero mother” went to those women who had ten or more children (Harwin, *Children of the Russian State*, 20).

institutes, leaving their parents, spouses, and children behind.<sup>259</sup> Even those who did not leave the city were sometimes separated from their families because of new wartime labor requirements. In August 1941, the establishment of “barrack conditions” required a large number of industrial laborers to leave their homes and take up residence at their places of work. These workers were permitted to visit their families no more than once a week. This policy created an immediate rift between one’s professional and home life. Roughly half of my diarists who were workers moved out their homes during the Blockade. For instance, between 1941-1943 engineer Mikhail Krakov left his factory to go “home” just twice.<sup>260</sup> After just a few months of living at the Molotov factory, brigade leader Ivan Savinkov noted how “personal life has become so similar to [life at] the factory (*lichnaia zhizn' ochen' priblizilas' k zavodu*).”<sup>261</sup> The growing tension between work and home life was openly acknowledged in official magazines such as *Rabotnitsa*, which discussed how Leningrad mothers devoted themselves to labor first and to their families second. They were quoted in one 1942 article as stating: “When we go to work in the morning, we do not even know if our homes will still be standing when we return in the evening, and we have left our children at home.”<sup>262</sup>

Similar waves of relocation impacted the service sector as well as the arts. Many employees of the Hermitage and Russian Museum moved, along with the collections, into the basement of the Winter Palace for much of the first year of the war. In his pictorial diary, the architect Aleksandr Nikol'skii sketched the “artists colonies” that developed in the palace’s catacombs.<sup>263</sup> The art historian and preservation specialist Vladimir Makarov lived in the basement of Saint Isaac’s Cathedral with artifacts from the Russian Museum for much of the siege. Later, his work led him to visit the empty apartments of the city’s deceased intellectuals and artists, where he took an inventory of their artistic works. These abandoned homes reminded him of the Blockade’s assault on the family.

At the same time, those diarists who stayed behind when their factories and institutes evacuated also experienced this growing tension between their home and professional lives. Elena Kochina traded her career as a chemist to stay with her husband and child, but she came to domestic life stifling when she had no professional or social outlet. Kochina regretted her decision not to evacuate with her coworkers, observing: “I shouldn’t have lost touch with my institute. Then things wouldn’t have been so difficult, so lonely.”<sup>264</sup> Although Kochina spent

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<sup>259</sup> Rebecca Manley, *To the Tashkent Station: Evacuation and Survival in the Soviet Union at War* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press), 56; documentary evidence of these evacuations is provided in: Dzeniskevich, *Leningrad v osade*, 84-87, 301. Another 500,000 were evacuated beginning on 22 January 1942. By that April, an estimated 970,000 people had left the city, but Leningrad’s population still exceeded one million in the summer of 1942.

<sup>260</sup> TsGAIPD, f. 4000, op. 11, d. 55, M.M. Krakov, “Dnevnik,” entry for 17 January 1943, 52, 2, 4. This theme, along with slightly different evacuation figures, are discussed in: Granin and Adamovich, *Leningrad under Siege*, xiii-xiv. Diarists like Vasilii Timofeev, M.M. Krakov, Irina Zelenskaia, Aleksandra Zagorskaia, Georgii Kniazev, Elizaveta Sokolova, and Ivan Savinkov were among those who moved into their places of work.

<sup>261</sup> Savinkov, entry for 24 September 1942, 60.

<sup>262</sup> Matveeva, “My o tstoiali rodnoi Leningrad,” *Rabotnitsa*, No. 11 (1942), 10-11. This is quoted in: Lynne Attwood, *Gender and Housing in Soviet Russia: Private Life in a Public Space* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2010), 143.

<sup>263</sup> OR RNB, f. 1037, d. 901. Aleksandr Sergeevich Nikol'skii, “Dnevnik o zhizni v blokade. Leningrad. 1941-7/IV/1942,” 13.

<sup>264</sup> Kochina, entry for 20 February 1942, 196.

much more time at home, this did not foster greater unity or intimacy between her and her family.

Judging from the diaries, Kochina's experience was quite typical. During the summer of 1941, many diarists noted how they had begun to feel physically or psychologically detached from their homes and families. With her husband gone at the front and many of her neighbors and friends away doing defensive work, Elena Skriabina, a housewife at the time, felt physically and emotionally detached from both the city and her family. Just three days after the invasion, Skriabina declared: "Now our family is seldom together. It is only the fourth day of war and the normal, everyday routine has been upset. Our windows are blacked out. Thick blue paper blinds separate us from the familiar city."<sup>265</sup> These precautionary measures meant to protect her home and family only accentuated her sense of isolation from them. At the same time, Skriabina did not see her situation as unique and spoke generally about the contradictory impulses towards intimacy and isolation in households across the city: "Simultaneously with this isolation from the outside world appears the pressing need to concentrate all one's interests in those nearest him, in one's relatives, in one's family."<sup>266</sup> At precisely the time that she longed to feel closer to her relations, circumstance and the spatial transformations of the city exacerbated her sense of separation.

By September 1941, Leningraders' homes were assaulted directly by enemy bombs and shells. German bombardment destroyed sixteen percent of the city's housing stock.<sup>267</sup> The spaces that Kochina and Skriabina described as confining were now literally torn asunder, violently exposed to the outside world. Skriabina described the ruins of one bombed-out bedroom this way:

In the corner, an icon; on the floor, toys, scattered everywhere as if the children had just finished playing. Further down was a room half buried under debris, but against the wall, a bed with fluffy pillows and a lamp...household items, surviving by chance, open to the eyes of the passerby—silent witnesses to the fact that someone or something alien tore mercilessly into the private life of people and barbarously defaced it.<sup>268</sup>

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<sup>265</sup> Elena Skriabina, entry for 25 June 1941, in: *V blokade: dnevnik materi*. (Iowa City: Herausgeber, 1964), 12-13. This source is hereafter referred to as "Skriabina." She republished her diary in 1975 under the title *Gody skitanii: iz dnevnika odnoi leningradki*. English translations were published more recently in 1983 and 2000. Similarly, Ginzburg commented: "the symbol of the boarded-up windows took on a grim reverse significance—it became a mark of people buried alive, and perishing as they were, jammed together, it had the funeral symbolism of boards, immuring people into cellars, and the weight of upper storeys collapsing on them" (Ginzburg, "Zapiski blokadnogo cheloveka," *Prokhodiashchie kharaktery*, 325. English in: Ginzburg, *Blockade Diary*, 24-25).

<sup>266</sup> Skriabina, entry for 25 June 1941, 12-13.

<sup>267</sup> Ed Bubis and Blair A. Ruble, "The Impact of World War II on Leningrad," *The Impact of World War II on the Soviet Union*, 189. On the nationwide housing shortage created by the war, see: Elizabeth White, "After the War Was over: The Civilian Return to Leningrad," *Europe-Asia Studies*, Vol. 59, No. 7 (Nov., 2007): 1145-1161; Donald Filtzer, "Standard of Living versus Quality of Life: Struggling with the Urban Environment in Russia during the Early Years of Post-War Reconstruction," in *The Dilemmas of De-Stalinization: Negotiating Cultural and Social Change in the Khrushchev Era*, ed. Polly Jones (New York: Routledge, 2006), 84. Filtzer argues that of the 270 million square meters of urban housing stock in 1940, only 200 remained during the war.

<sup>268</sup> Skriabina, entry for 9 September 1941, 33-4.

Once a symbol of stability and normalcy, “home” ceased to provide a refuge for many Leningraders. Distinctions between private and public, interior and exterior space began to fade. The only ones who seemed at home in the city, Skriabina remarked, were the German bombers.<sup>269</sup>

Bombardment touched off a frantic search for housing. Forgetting their emotional attachments to their homes, displaced or anxious Leningraders searched for apartments that they hoped were more structurally sound or less likely to be targeted by the enemy. Lidiia Ginzburg later observed in her *Notes* how this fostered a kind of housing mania: “a new attitude toward houses developed: People began to talk about their houses, think about their houses. [...] Each house was now a defense and a threat,” and its familiar walls, stairways, ceilings, niches were “regarded analytically” for their protective value.<sup>270</sup> The diarists described how their households were constantly in flux throughout the autumn of 1941. They settled in with their relatives or family came to live with them, hoping for some kind of safety in numbers. Skriabina jokingly called these relocations “the Barbarian invasions,” but she was also serious concerned that “it is crowded even by Soviet standards, how will they all be able to fit?” she wondered, “There can’t be enough air for everyone. Of course, no one is worried about that. Like animals, people cling to one another in time of danger.”<sup>271</sup> When freezing temperatures and famine gripped the city in the winter of 1941-42, Leningraders moved again, this time downstairs to first-floor apartments, which made it easier to haul water, firewood, or one’s own body back and forth. These numerous moves were possible, of course, because so many apartments stood empty after their former inhabitants either died or evacuated.

In the fall of 1941, Leningrad families were beset by the chaos of relocation and bombardment. In the winter of 1941-1942, they met their demise through isolation and death. Schools, factories, clubs, and institutes closed for much of the winter. This solitary existence was exacerbated by the decline of other places of social interaction—work, clubs, theaters, and the street. Cut off from the “mainland” (*bol’shaia zemlia*) and connected the Soviet Union only by a water passage over Lake Ladoga, many diarists referred to their city as a kind of island. In truth, the city was composed of about 100 islands. “In our room,” Elena Kochina wrote, “we live as if we are on an ark, seeing nothing and meeting no one. We don’t even know what is going on at the front. Only by chance do we hear something while standing in line.”<sup>272</sup> Without electricity or motorized transport and too weak to cover great distances on foot, Leningraders restricted their movements to what diarist Georgii Kniazev called one’s “small radius.”<sup>273</sup> This was roughly the area between one’s apartment, place of work, and local bakery.

The constriction of physical space was matched by a parallel restriction of informational space. Concerned about the effects of enemy propaganda, city officials helped to sever Leningrad’s ties to the outside: private phones were disconnected, radios were confiscated; the only news sources were the brief reports made by the Soviet Information

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<sup>269</sup> Ibid, entry for 7 November 1941, 44.

<sup>270</sup> Ginzburg, “Zapiski blokadnogo cheloveka,” *Prokhodiashchie kharaktery*, 325. English translation from: Ginzburg, *Blockade Diary*, 24-25.

<sup>271</sup> Skriabina, entries for 24 June 1941 and 6 October 1941, 12, 38. For a scholarly discussion of this theme, see: Attwood, *Gender and Housing in Soviet Russia*, 142.

<sup>272</sup> Kochina, entry for 9 January 1942, 181-182. English translation in: Kochina, *Blockade Diary*, 70.

<sup>273</sup> See: Granin and Adamovich, *Leningrad under Siege 2*, 90.



Bureau.<sup>274</sup> The lack of news was particularly alarming to party members who were accustomed to having privileged access to information such as Elizaveta Sokolova and Irina Zelenskaia. The latter worried that these official silences as symptoms of a growing “estrangement between the powers that be and the masses.”<sup>275</sup> Informal networks of communication also suffered because of Leningraders’ limited powers of mobility and because of the sporadic postal services. Natal’ia Petrushina, who worked as a mail carrier during the Blockade, remarked that she often “did not meet a single soul” on her rounds.<sup>276</sup> Likewise, Elena Kochina joyously described one postal delivery as a sign that there was still life was stirring “inside the ring:”

Someone had brought this note and put it in my door. And others had made inquiries and found me. Which meant that some institutions were still working. The post office. Somebody was performing the mailman’s job, walking on foot from one end of the city to the other, climbing the dirty, hoar frosted stairs, wandering along the dark recesses of hallways and the deserted wasteland of apartments and, finally, upon finding the addressee, perhaps meeting the open mouth and the clenched teeth of a stiffened corpse instead of a thankful smile.<sup>277</sup>

The delivery momentarily rescued Kochina from total seclusion, proving to her that others in city knew of her existence and her whereabouts.

As the winter intensified, this inner ring, one’s “small radius,” grew even smaller. Weak with hunger, the *blokadniki* confined themselves to their rooms. Their apartments became their whole universe—or, as Lidiia Ginzburg later put it: “the accepted unit of the city became the house, just as previously it had been the street.”<sup>278</sup> Similarly, in 1941 an essay in the journal *Ogonëk* described blockaded Leningrad as one great communal apartment, underscoring the metaphorical link between city and home and shifting divide between personal and public, inside and outside space.<sup>279</sup>

Librarian and translator Aleksandra Liubovskaia was one of many diarists who regarded her household as a kind of microcosm of Leningrad. At the start of the war, Liubovskaia drew a floor plan of her thirteen-room communal apartment in her diary, identifying each resident’s room, age, profession, and current location—the front, the rear, or in the city. Liubovskaia emphasized the representativeness of this group. “These were people of different ages and professions, there were laborers and service workers, school children and college students, infants and preschool-aged children and also old people,” she observed.<sup>280</sup> As famine ravaged the city’s population, Liubovskaia tried to calculate the overall death toll in the city based on the number of deaths in her apartment and in her department at work,

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<sup>274</sup> Granin and Adamovich, *Leningrad under Siege*, xiv.

<sup>275</sup> Zelenskaia, entry for 16 September 1941, 15ob-16. Sokolova, entry for 26 August 1941, 10.

<sup>276</sup> Granin and Adamovich, *Blokadnaia kniga*, 78.

<sup>277</sup> Kochina, entry for 4 December 1941, 168. English translation from: Kochina, *Blockade Diary*, 50-1.

<sup>278</sup> Ginzburg, “Zapiski blokadnogo cheloveka,” *Prokhodiashchie kharaktery*, 325. English translation from: Ginzburg, *Blockade Diary*, 24.

<sup>279</sup> V. Beliaev, ‘Leningradskie nochi,’ *Ogonëk*, No. 3 (1941), 6-7. This is quoted in: Attwood, *Gender and Housing in Soviet Russia*, 143.

<sup>280</sup> Liubovskaia, figure 1, 2.

where “out of six workers, two have died. That is, the same thirty percent have died in our apartment. It is interesting to observe that out of five million Leningrad residents, would thirty percent die of hunger? That means 1.5 million people! It is very possible.”<sup>281</sup> Although Liubovskaia overestimated the city’s population and underestimated its mortality rate, the figure she gave of 1.5 million dead matches some scholarly estimates of the total number of deaths in the city.

The same apartments where families and friends crowded together in the fall of 1941 were slowly emptied of their residents that winter. The diarists noted how their neighbors either died or appeared so rarely that they could not be sure of their existence. They “slip[ped] noiselessly down the corridor, like ghosts (*privedeniia*), almost impossible to catch,” Elena Kochina. Silence resonated throughout her apartment building, creating a booming echo in the empty corridors. In fact, the diarist occasionally amused herself by spitting over the stairwell landing “and listen[ing] to how the spittle smacked resoundingly below.”<sup>282</sup>

In their depictions of this transformation of the city’s urban and domestic spaces, the diarists emphasize how inside spaces seemed to meld with the outside world. Frost gathered inside frozen apartments, ice coated the stairwells and corridors. To stay warm, Leningraders confined themselves to their beds, so going “outside” began the moment they emerged from under the bedclothes. Others left their front doors wide open in order to save themselves the trouble of bolting and unbolting them. They had little fear that strangers might leave their beds and intrude upon them.<sup>283</sup> Covered with frost and ice and littered with bodies, these apartments became filled with an icy cold feel of death. For thirteen-year-old Dima Afanas’ev, home was “completely quiet, as in a grave. Dark and cold. [...] We lay in the dark. So frightening.”<sup>284</sup> Mariia Konopleva, a librarian at the Russian Museum, remarked upon the irony that her deathly coworkers were living in the catacombs of the Winter Palace, a literal fusion of the home and the grave.<sup>285</sup> As she walked about the city in February 1942, Kochina noted how the elements of the home and the grave became entangled upon the crumbling cityscape: “a tomb-like silence lingered in the ruins like strong wine. Iron beds were scattered nearby, twisted into spirals that looks the strange skeletons of prehistoric animals.”<sup>286</sup>

At times, Leningraders perpetuated this assault upon domestic space themselves, ripping apart the city’s old wooden buildings for firewood. Upon returning to their original homes, many diarists were shocked to discover that their neighbors had pilfered them, burned up their wooden furniture and floorboards for firewood, or stored their dead there. When she discovered three bodies lying on her bed in her old apartment, Kochina observed “Evidently the neighbors have set up a morgue in my room. Well then, let them: corpses don’t bother me.”<sup>287</sup> Others found that new occupants had taken over their rooms. In his diary, the art

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<sup>281</sup> Liubovskaia, 1-2, 113ob, 200.

<sup>282</sup> Kochina, entries for 23 September 1941 and 23 December 1941, 163, 176.

<sup>283</sup> A similar example appears in: Levina I, entry for 7 February 1942, 204.

<sup>284</sup> Dmitri Vladimirovich Afanas’ev, “Dnevnik,” entry for 25 January 1942 in: Tamara Staleva, *Vechnyi Deti Blokady: dokumental’nye ocherki* (Moscow, The Author, 1995), 28.

I am grateful to Natal’ia Aleksandrovna Afanas’eva for giving me permission to use the manuscript of her late husband’s diary. I also thank Ol’ga Prutt at “A Muzy ne Molchali” and Tamara Staleva for coordinating this arrangement. This diary is hereafter referred to as “Afanas’ev.”

<sup>285</sup> Konopleva, Notebook 2, entries for 7, 9 January 1942, 18-20.

<sup>286</sup> Kochina, entry for 25 February 1942, 197-198. English translation from: Kochina, *Blockade Diary*, 93.

<sup>287</sup> Kochina, entries for 5, 7 February 1942, 193-4.

historian Nikolai Punin summed up these changes to domestic space this way: “In a word, home has ceased to exist here.”<sup>288</sup>

## II. The Family, Besieged

Behind the crumbling walls of these skeletal houses, relationships within the family deteriorated. Parents and children, husbands and wives addressed the same dilemma in their diaries: was the family beneficial or detrimental to survival? The diarists especially wrestled with this question during the first year of the Blockade, vacillating between feelings of affection and aversion for their relatives, between gratitude for the family’s material or moral support and resentment of burdensome family obligations. In every culture, the act of sharing food is generally understood as having practical, social, and symbolic importance; it is a way to nourish bodies as well as relationships. Under siege, however, the family stood at the center of the citywide competition for resources. The diaries document how the Blockade brought two of the family’s most important functions—to provide materially and emotionally—into conflict. The stress of sharing food and resources placed a tremendous strain on the sense of trust and intimacy between members of the household. The challenges of providing one seemed to interfere with providing the other.

In the first months of the Blockade, some diarists expressed that they felt closer and more devoted to their families, but by mid-winter almost all of them acknowledged the burdens of family life, and they toyed with the idea of striking out on their own. The diary provided them with a private place where they could divulge these conflicts and fantasies. Some did more than consider leaving: parents abandoned their children, husbands and wives separated, and children sometimes opted to live in orphanages where they felt they would be better fed. By contrast, family members who were separated from each other and free from the obligation to pool resources, remained strong sources of emotional support. As their accounts indicate, the diarists were often inspired to survive by the prospect of reuniting with relatives who were outside “the ring.” These families maintained and strengthened their ties through acts of correspondence, memory, and imagination rather than through physical contact.

This notion that families inside the ring did not fare as well as other familial arrangements stands out strongly in the diaries, but it stands in sharp contrast to many scholars’ accounts of the Blockade, which argue that proximity had a positive effect on social behavior. According to this view, Leningraders tended to cooperate and even sacrifice themselves for family members, while they may have competed with other *blokadniki*.<sup>289</sup>

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<sup>288</sup> Punin, entry for 12 September 1941, “Blokadnyi dnevnik,” *Zvezda*, 1 (Saint Petersburg, 1994), 98. Excerpts of Punin’s diary were published in *Zvezda* in 1994 and republished in the 2000 volume: *Mir svetel liubov’iu*. On Leningraders’ struggles to reclaim their former homes, see: Rebecca Manley, “Where should we resettle the Comrades Next?,” *Late Stalinist Russia: Society between Reconstruction and Reinvention*, ed. J. Fuerst (New York: Routledge, 2006), 233-4; White, “After the War was Over,” 1145-1161.

<sup>289</sup> The historian Sergei Yarov and the sociologist Jeff Hass have argued that, although the Blockade placed a tremendous strain on the family, Leningraders remained relatively loyal to their families, as opposed to strangers. They have not compared families “inside the ring” with those separated by it. Using many of the same diaries, Hass claimed that the diarists appealed to instrumental logic against outsiders, but cooperative logic

There are several possible explanations for this difference in our conclusions. First, these arguments use select and structure their material differently. They tend to focus on families that lived together inside Leningrad without comparing them to those who lived apart or to other household configurations. Second, I would challenge their conclusions as partial. Even if Leningraders behaved more generously toward their kin than toward strangers, this does not mean that there were no strong opportunistic and individualistic tendencies or attitudes within the family. The diaries I have collected clearly indicate that Leningraders wrestled with cooperative as well as competitive impulses in the fight for life. To demonstrate this, I now take a closer look at three types of households: those inside Leningrad, those separated during the war, and those that were bound by circumstances, not biology.

### *Families Inside the Ring:*

One day in early December 1941, Irina Zelenskaia was sitting in the Lenenergo cafeteria, eating her soup and eavesdropping on the conversations of coworkers nearby. The stories that caught her ear came from workers who had small children at home. “Il’chenko talked about his family,” she later wrote in her diary, “he has nothing to feed his long-awaited child. Father and mother give him everything they can from their rations (*paika*), and go hungry themselves. All of their reserves are spoken for. He himself lives from soup-to-soup once daily.”<sup>290</sup> “How do families with children live?” she wondered, “it is simply hard to imagine and terrifying to hear the conversations of people with families.” She observed that those workers with family obligations were marked not only by their conversations, but by their telltale anxious expressions and by the pails they carried. They used them to carry their rations home to their families.

Like many parents, Il’chenko and his wife faced an impossible choice: how much food should they give to their child and how much should they eat themselves in order to stay alive and keep providing for him? Il’chenko needed to stay strong enough to keep his worker’s ration, but each bite he took felt like one less mouthful for his son. And what of who had multiple children? Was it possible to keep the family alive and together inside “the ring?” Zelenskaia recalled how, earlier that summer, many parents refused to evacuate their children, confident that they could provide for them better than the state. But “now when children are so close to hunger, it is a different matter,” Zelenskaia observed, “it is unlikely that there are

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within the family. The example of the mother’s sacrifice, the sense of mutual sacrifice, and the presence of children all fostered loyalty and cooperation among family members. See: Sergei Yarov, “Leningradtsy v ‘smertnoe vremia’: predposylki izmeneniia nraivstvennykh tsennostei,” *Vestnik Leningradskogo gosudarstvennogo universiteta im. A. S. Pushkina, seriia istoriia*, No. 4 (2009): 23-46; Yarov, “‘Pishite sirotam.’ Leningradskaia sem’ia v 1941-1942 gg.: sostradanie, uteshenie, liubov’,” *Bitva za Leningrad. Diskussionnye problemy*, ed. Nikita Lomagin (Saint Petersburg: Evropeiskii Dom, 2008), 137-172. Hass made this argument in a conference paper given at the annual convention of the Association for Slavic, East European, & Eurasian Studies (ASEEES) in Fall 2010: “Strategies and Stories of War: Habitus, Framing, and Survival Tactics in the Blockade of Leningrad,” 15; 16-17, 23, 30.

<sup>290</sup> Zelenskaia, entry for 3 December 1941, 37ob-38ob.

many children in Leningrad, not all of them will be able to evacuate. It is very frightening for them.”<sup>291</sup>

Zelenskaia was intrigued by the family situations of her coworkers and filled her diary with portraits of them. For example, in her entry from 22 November 1941, she outlined three different types of families based on three conversations she had with coworkers at Lenenergo. First, she spoke with the young machinist Shura Fokina about what it was like to live on her own. The single-person household, Zelenskaia noted, was free from the burden of sharing food, yet it had no support network. Isolated and lonely, Fokina had become depressed: “I am completely without strength. I can’t work. It is better to quit and to stay at home.” [...] She is single, living in the barracks. She eats twice a day, but she completely lacks a sense of internal energy.”

Next, Zelenskaia came upon a group of coworkers who were talking worriedly about two members of their collective, Frolov and Romanov, who were gravely ill: “They have to feed dependents. They both have dystrophic children (*deti-distrofiki*). Here, the situation is even more serious because they have to give their cards to their families. On a dependent’s ration, one can live for only 2-3 days out of every ten, no more. Of course, there won’t be any talk of doing extra work. Utter dejection.” Finally, Zelenskaia came upon Churkin whose family had safely evacuated Leningrad, which left him free to eat his whole ration himself: “I am jealous of Churkin—he is more full. His family evacuated, he [lives in] the barracks, he eats a bit better and spends his workers’ ration on himself alone.”<sup>292</sup>

As Zelenskaia’s “family portraits” suggest, the family was not simply a liability or an asset. Rather, its success under siege depended on a confluence of specific factors including the number, ages, locations, and ration categories of its members: were they workers or dependents, adults or children, men or women, well or ill, dead or alive? Did individual members have an incentive to share food or to keep their rations to themselves? The difficulty of pooling resources and keeping the family together was well known to Zelenskaia, who often wrote about how her life and those of grown children were “inseparably connected.”<sup>293</sup> As a manager, she received a service worker’s (Category II) ration and had had to rely on son and daughter to share their worker’s rations (Category I) with her.<sup>294</sup> Still, she vacillated between competing impulses to solidarity with and independence from her family, reminding herself that ultimately “they can’t help you, you have to rely on yourself!”<sup>295</sup> After she lost her son to hunger and her daughter to evacuation, Zelenskaia moved out of her apartment and into the Lenenergo station. Once there, her observations of the blockade family intensified.

The dilemma of deciding how to allocate family resources weighed heavily on the minds of children as well. This was the central theme of every entry penned by sixteen-year-old diarist Iura Riabinkin between October 1941 and March 1942, the month when he finally lost the battle against hunger. Riabinkin painstakingly described how practically every meal he shared with his mother and eight-year-old sister Ira turned into a shouting match of suspicions and accusations. His mother scathingly reminded him of her sacrifices, that he

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<sup>291</sup> Ibid, entry for 5 December 1941, 38-38ob.

<sup>292</sup> Ibid, entry for 22 November 1941, 33ob-34.

<sup>293</sup> Ibid, entry for 22 November 1941, 33ob.

<sup>294</sup> Ibid, entry for 5 December 1941, 38.

<sup>295</sup> Ibid, entry for 20 September 1942, 99ob-100.

(because he had access to the school canteen) received more food than she, while his sister, he claimed, looked for ways to “torture” them.<sup>296</sup>

At meals Ira eats slowly on purpose, not just to derive pleasure from eating, but also to enjoy the feeling that she is still eating while the rest of us, who have already finished eating, sit there watching her with hungry eyes. Mother is always the first to finish her share and then she takes a bit from each of us. When the bread is divided up, Ira bursts into tears if my little piece outweighs hers by as much as half a gram.<sup>297</sup>

Like his sister, Riabinkin always suspected that his mother divided the food unevenly and unfairly even though he admitted that he received more than his sister because of his age and service to the family: it was his job to wait in line for hours to redeem the family’s ration coupons while his mother was at work. “When mother doles something out, Ira and I watch her like hawks to make sure that she does it accurately. It’s a bit embarrassing to write such things down,” he admitted.<sup>298</sup> Riabinkin dismissed the possibility of an accident or chance played a role in these perceived inequities, and over time he became convinced that his mother and Ira had an unspoken alliance against him.<sup>299</sup> Much more than sibling rivalry, Riabinkin came to see his sister’s wellbeing as a direct obstacle to his own and even begged his mother to give him Ira’s ration card even though he knew that this would certainly seal her fate.<sup>300</sup>

### *Theft in the Family*

Riabinkin was ashamed of his suspicions, but the corpus of siege diaries suggest that they were typical. Because so many *blokadniki* hid their food in their homes, they suspected their kin of stealing much more than strangers. The diaries are rife with accusations and confessions regarding theft in the family. Elena Kochina constantly suspected and occasionally caught her husband Dima stealing food from their toddler Lena, so she carried her food with her when she left the house.<sup>301</sup> She assumed that a stranger was less likely to steal it than her husband. Valia Peterson accused her stepfather Aleksandr Petrovich of eating first her bread and then her Irish setter, Sylvie. “I hated him terribly. Hunger uncovered his filthy soul, and I have gotten to know him,” she wrote, recording this discovery in the school

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<sup>296</sup> Riabinkin, entry for 9-10 November 1941, 102. I have modified this translation slightly for clarity.

All citations from Riabinkin’s diary have been taken from: Ales’ Adamovich and Daniil Granin: *Leningrad Under siege* (2007), which includes much more of Riabinkin’s text than the excerpts in *Blokadnaia Kniga*. A comparison between the two reveals that familial strife and theft come across much more strongly in the latter publication.

<sup>297</sup> Riabinkin, entry for 2 December 1941, 128. I have modified this translation slightly for clarity.

<sup>298</sup> Ibid, entry for 9-10 November 1941, 105.

<sup>299</sup> Ibid, entry for 2 December 1941, 128.

<sup>300</sup> Ibid, entry for 28 November 1941, 109.

<sup>301</sup> Kochina, entries for 25, 26 November 1941, 166-167.

notebook, where she kept her diary. When Aleksandr Petrovich died some months later, Peterson cheered, although she was a little taken aback by her delight at his death: “I was happy. Yes, happy at his death. [...] He dies and I laugh! I was ready to jump for joy, but I was too weak, did not have enough strength.”<sup>302</sup> The architect Esfir’ Levina echoed this point, speaking both about her own family and those of others. Levina wrote angrily about her brother Lenia’s deceit or Masha’s thefts and generalizing from her family to society as a whole, observing: “relatives and neighbors tended to blame each other for thefts [...] under the influence of hunger even the most honest person becomes an animal (*zveree*).”<sup>303</sup>

Of all the blockade diarists I have encountered, Iura Riabinkin was the most candid in admitting that he regularly stole from his mother, sister, and neighbor Anfisa Nikolaevna. His diary provided him with a confessional space, where he berated himself as an “egoist” who lived at the expense of his family. Riabinkin’s guilt-ridden entries alternate with irate ones, where he indignantly defended himself from his mother’s accusations or accused her and Ira of stealing from him.

How self-centered I am! I am getting callous. What has happened to me? The day before I scraped food out of Anfisa Nikolaevna’s pan with a spoon, I secretly stole butter and cabbage from the hidden reserves for this ration period, I watched greedily how mother divided a sweet into pieces for Ira and me, and I pick a quarrel over every little fragment of food, each tiny crumb. What has happened to me? I feel that, to turn myself back into what I used to be, there would have to be hope, the conviction that tomorrow or the day after my family and I will be evacuated—that would be enough for me, but it won’t happen. There won’t be an evacuation.<sup>304</sup>

Such confessions became a regular feature and function of his diary practice, and yet at times the sixteen-year-old struggled to admit the truth even to himself. He concealed or openly denied various thefts in certain entries only to acknowledge them in later ones.<sup>305</sup> Because it was his job to collect the family’s food, Riabinkin had ample opportunity to steal. Despite making numerous vows to the contrary, he was unable to resist the temptation. Night after night, he turned to his journal to release his self-loathing. “Well, this is really it... I have lost my integrity, lost my belief in it, I have reached the end of the road,” he declared on 15 December 1941:

Two days ago I was sent out to get sweets. It was bad enough that instead of sweets I bought sweetened cocoa (counting on Ira not wanting to eat it and so increasing my share), but also that I helped myself to half of the total amount—a miserable 600 grams that is supposed to last us for the whole ten days (*dekada*)—and invented a story about how three packets of cocoa had

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<sup>302</sup> TsGAIPD, f. 4000, op. 11, d. 86: Valia Peterson, “Uchenitsa 7 klassa 239 srednei shkoly goroda Leningrad,” entries for 25, 29 December 1941, 6ob, 7ob.

<sup>303</sup> Levina I, entry for 19 January 1942, 17-18.

<sup>304</sup> Riabinkin, entry for 28 November 1941, 109-110. I have modified this translation.

<sup>305</sup> For an example, see: Ibid, entry for 24 December 1941, 148-149.

been snatched from my hands. I acted out the whole comedy at home with tears in my eyes and I gave Mother my word of honor as a pioneer that I have not taken a single packet of cocoa for myself...and later on, watching with a hardened heart mother's tears and distress at being deprived of something sweet, I ate the cocoa surreptitiously.

Today, on my way back to the bread shop, I took little extra pieces of bread weighing about 25 grams from Mother's and Ira's rations and ate that on the sly too. [...] and at home I again took a part of their share for myself.

I have slid down into that abyss called depravity, where the voice of conscience is totally silent, where there is dishonesty and disgrace. I am an unworthy son to my mother and an unworthy brother to my sister. I am an egoist, a person who, in a moment of adversity, forgets all about his nearest and dearest. And, while I am behaving like this, Mother is straining herself to the breaking point [...] trying to wrench us out of here. I have lost my belief in evacuation. It has ceased to exist for me. As far as I am concerned, the entire world has turned into food. Everything that is left has food as its purpose, getting it, receiving it...I am a ruined person. Life is over for me. The prospect that lies ahead of me is not life.

I would like two things to happen immediately: for myself to die here and now, and for mother to read through this diary. May she curse me as a filthy, unfeeling, and hypocritical creature, let her renounce me...I have sunk too low, too low...What will happen next?<sup>306</sup>

As his account poignantly indicates, the problem of survival placed Riabinkin in an impossible dilemma. Although he stole food to stay alive, Riabinkin suggested that this moral depravity had already killed him, ruined him, so much so that he wished for death to quell the pangs of his conscience. He chastised himself based both on societal and familial measures of integrity, calling himself a bad pioneer and a bad son.

In the entry above and those that followed in January 1942, there is a notable shift in the tone and purpose of Riabinkin's confessions. Rather than write out of guilt or anger, the diarist gave up hope of redeeming himself. Instead, he began to contemplate his family's view of him after his death and recorded his misdeeds not to clear his conscious, but so that his sister and mother might read his journal after his death and understand him. This goal became the diarist's primary motivation to keep writing and explaining himself even in the last days before his death. Truly his life's work, Riabinkin's diary and his very existence became inseparably intertwined:

This is almost the last entry in the diary. I am afraid that even this one...I don't think that it will fall to me to finish off this diary of mine, to write the words 'The End' on the last page. It will be someone else who will note the word

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<sup>306</sup> Riabinkin, entry for 15 December 1941, 146-148; also see: Ibid, entry for 11 December 1941, 141.



‘Dead’ on it. [...] Mother and Ira have broken off with me. They will leave me behind. Mother’s nervous system is in such a state by now that she is ready to lose control, and then...as has already happened, as she tells me everyday, she and Ira will get out of here somehow, but I won’t [...] Mother is so rude to me nowadays, sometimes she hits me and she curses me at every turn. But I am not angry with her for that. I can see that I am a parasite, hanging around her and Ira’s necks. Yes, death, death is up ahead. And there is no hope at all, only the fear that I will force my own mother and sister to perish with me.<sup>307</sup>

Riabinkin’s predictions about his imminent death and his diary’s legacy came true. In his last entry, penned three days later on 6 January 1942, Riabinkin recounted how he bade goodbye to his mother and sister before they boarded a convoy and evacuated from Leningrad. According to Granin and Adamovich, who first published excerpts of Riabinkin’s diary in *A Book of the Blockade*, his last lines were written in tiny, crowded letters as the diarist attempted to make his life story last a little longer.<sup>308</sup> During the interview that the Granin and Adamovich conducted with Irina Ivanovna Riabinkina, the diarist’s sister, she explained that her brother was unable to walk and they too weak to carry him, so they were forced to leave him behind. Antonia Mikhailovna Riabinkina, the diarist’s mother, died on 26 January 1942 en route to Vologda, and Ira lived in an orphanage before returning to Leningrad in 1945. Riabinkina did not know that Iura’s diary had survived.<sup>309</sup> Granin and Adamovich explained to her that Riabinkin’s diary passed through many hands before it came to Tatiana Ulanova who had it published in the youth newspaper *Smena* in 1970.<sup>310</sup> After it was published in their *A Book of the Blockade*, Riabinkin got his wish: countless readers, including his sister, have learned about his profound struggles between family devotion and self-preservation under siege,

Theft within the family comprises the central theme of the short works of fiction that Ol’ga Matiushina penned in her diary. The challenge of maintaining the family under siege was a very personal problem for Matiushina, but like Zelenskaia she chose to document the struggles of other families rather than her own. Short-story writing provided her with a way to capture social phenomena that either she did not witness or that she did not want to associate herself with directly.<sup>311</sup> Also like Zelenskaia, Matiushina took up this task as she lost the members of her own household to evacuation, mobilization, and death.<sup>312</sup> In this way, although Matiushina wrote about fictional households, her emotional connection to them is implied.

Matiushina’s stories read like a series of family portraits. They are broadly and abstractly drawn, undated, and separated from the diary entries only by breaks on the page.

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<sup>307</sup> Riabinkin, entry for 3 January 1942, 151-152. Translation has been modified slightly for style.

<sup>308</sup> Ibid, entry for 6 January 1942, 153.

<sup>309</sup> This is recounted in the epilogue to Adamovich and Granin’s *Leningrad Under Siege*, 199-202.

<sup>310</sup> *Smena* editor Alla Beliakova then passed it on to Granin and Adamovich. This information comes from the interviews they conducted with Riabinkina and Ulanova in: *Blokadnaia kniga*, 378-382.

<sup>311</sup> Matiushina, Diary, entry 15 November 1941, 112-113. “People were changing and Evgeniia Mikhailovna saw these changes,” the diary explains. “She experienced their falls and became joyous at the triumph of the human character. Observing this, she could not *not* describe (*zarisovat*) it.”

<sup>312</sup> Matiushina, Diary, 176, 177.

Explicitly fictionalized, the text makes no great attempt to feign a sense of “the real” by adding references to exact times, locations, or last names. The generality of these stories gives them an air of accessibility, familiarity, and universality. Moreover, because she mostly wrote about crime within the family, Matiushina may have turned to fiction as a safe, indirect way to address social ills without implicating herself or others she knew. Yet at the same time, she called her collection of stories “a frightening fairytale about reality,” highlighting the special situation of the diary that uses fiction to document real events or experiences.<sup>313</sup> Matiushina’s stories are interspersed with diary entries or newspaper excerpts that ground the stories in “reality,” underscoring that these family portraits are drawn from larger developments in blockaded society. They represent ideal types of families distilled from thousands of stories into seven portraits about the decline of the family “inside the ring.”

Of the seven family portraits that appear in Matiushina’s diary, six are about parents and children, brothers and sisters, aunts and nephews who intentionally or unintentionally threaten each other’s survival. In most of these cases, the characters are either victims of theft or thieves themselves. In the story of a six-year-old child, Valia, the kindness and *maternal* warmth of a woman waiting in the breadline fools the young girl into handing over her and her mother’s ration cards “for safe keeping.” Another tale presents the opposite situation, where a mother loses the family bread rations to a thief and grieves knowing the fate of her child is sealed.<sup>314</sup> Both stories show how closely the fates of family members were intertwined. The individual mistakes or misfortunes of one member put the entire household in danger.

The remainder of Matiushina’s stories depict *blokadniki* who tried to feed themselves by stealing from their families. There is the tale of Igor’ Aleksandrovich, for instance, a young man who takes food from his dead sister, and then is immediately beaten and robbed in the street. Then, just below this tale, the diarist included a news excerpt testifying to the general escalation of crime in the city, especially theft and child neglect, commenting: “the battle for life has taken a cruel form. The first victims of this battle are the weak. For children, not knowing the cruelty of life it has become especially difficult.”<sup>315</sup>

What of theft not within, but between families? Many diarists struggled with the moral qualms of eating food that was illegally procured by the family. This theme emerges with force in the diary of the chemist Elena Kochina. As her husband developed his skills as an accomplished thief, Kochina became more conflicted about whether or not to eat this stolen food. Ultimately, the pangs of her stomach trumped the pains of her conscience, and she acquiesced. As she ate some stolen buckwheat, she cried for the first time during the Blockade.<sup>316</sup> Although it prolonged their individual lives, Kochina’s contempt for her husband’s thievery ultimately destroyed the love and affection between them. Similarly, the architect Esfir’ Levina described how her brother Lenia’s stealing and graft put her household at odds. After initially lying about how he had obtained some sugar, Lenia admitted to accepting bribes and to stealing ration cards. Lenia rationalized his actions, claiming that he took the cards from a man in the street who was probably going to die anyway. Should Lenia be held accountable for his actions? The family deliberated on this question of Lenia’s insanity or shrewdness. Levina recounted the household’s discussion this way: “Arguments:

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<sup>313</sup> Matiushina, *Pesn’ o zhizni*, 141-142.

<sup>314</sup> Matiushina, *Diary*, 126-130; 134-36.

<sup>315</sup> *Ibid.*, 127.

<sup>316</sup> See: Kochina, entries for 17 January 1942, 186; 9 December 1941, 169-170; 20-26 December 1941, 174-177.

Is he sick or a criminal—a criminal, of course, an engineer, a director of a trust (*tresta*), a party member—mama is weakly trying to ‘soften the picture’ with illness, hunger, and death. We shatter this with the psychology of a soldier- of ‘going to the slaughterhouse’, of real death (*real'naia smert'*). ‘According to your theory, you can just run down and rob a comrade?’ Mama is convinced.” For Levina, Lenia’s behavior raised more general questions about the shifting nature of morality under siege. “These days reveal people with the utmost clarity,” she concluded of both her brother and mother.<sup>317</sup> Three days later, the diarist continued to contemplate this incident and what it revealed about human nature. “People have been crystallized by the war,” she observed, “good and bad are presented very clearly. If we survive, we will know a lot: the value of bread, fire, and human compassion (*uchastiia*)—it is a shame that at some point we threw away crusts. [Our] former lives and feelings seem like surrogates (*surrogaty*).”<sup>318</sup> For Levina, the reality of the Blockade revealed ordinary human tendencies and instincts, both to cooperation and cutthroat competition. The norms and niceties of prewar life had only concealed or temporarily replaced man’s true nature among his kin and among strangers.

### *Marital Struggles and Strife*

The bonds of marriage were among the first to weaken “inside the ring.” And even though hungry children placed a tremendous strain on the family, those marriages that no children to keep them together were especially vulnerable. The diarists regarded their children as innocent victims of the siege, whereas they tended to blame their spouses for many hardships they suffered. The diarists recorded tension in their marriages from a very early stage. With each entry, the enmity between Elena Kochina and her husband, Dima, mounts. As early as July 1941, Kochina noted that the war had driven a wedge between them: “We were [...] no longer who we had been before the war. We were changing catastrophically quickly.”<sup>319</sup> Kochina reported that the malice between them deepened as conditions worsened. “We sleep together,” she wrote, “there’s only one bed in the room—but even through padded coats it’s unpleasant for us to feel one another’s touch.”<sup>320</sup> At the same time, their lives grew increasingly interdependent, creating a kind of symbiosis that Kochina resented. The troubled emotional state or the poor health of one jeopardized the vitality of the other.

Dima and I have become like one organism. If one of us is sick, or feels bad, or is in a bad mood, the other instantly feels it painfully. And at the same time we’ve never been removed from one another as we are now. Each of us struggles silently with his own sufferings. There is no way we can help each other. After all, it is my heart (only I hear its irregular beat), my stomach (only I feel its aching emptiness), and my brain (only I feel the burden of

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<sup>317</sup> Levina I, entry for 16 January 1942, 2-3.

<sup>318</sup> Ibid, entry for 19 January 1942, 5.

<sup>319</sup> Kochina, entry for 5 July 1941, 159. See also: Ibid, entry for 13 December 1941, 171.

<sup>320</sup> Ibid, entry for 6 January 1942, 181.

unexpressed thoughts)—only I can force them to endure. We realize now that man must be able to struggle alone with life and death.<sup>321</sup>

Here again, the obligation to share resources was the greatest source of strife between spouses. Together, the Kochins could pool their rations, but the stress of dividing their reserves and coping with feelings of anger or depression that arose from the ordeal proved too great. The drive for self-preservation along with the violent mood swings, irritability, and erratic behavior that accompanied prolonged starvation killed feelings of sympathy and affection between husbands and wives. Couples lost their sex drive; women stopped menstruating. Among my diarists, wives complained most frequently about their husbands' seemingly insatiable appetites. Kochina poured her thoughts of animosity and indignation onto the page. Her diary helped her to shoulder the burden of these unexpressed thoughts, which she could not share with her spouse.

Kochina insisted that her friends who had lost their spouses were better off than she was. The diarist contemplated leaving her husband when she ran into her friend Irina and discovered that her husband evacuated without her while she was in the hospital, recovering from childbirth, hunger, and fever: “‘As you can see, I’m here. I was in the maternity ward when he left.’ ‘He left you alone?’ ‘Yes, but all things considered, the hell with him. If he had been here, I would have turned up my toes (*zagnulas*’) a long time ago. He ate everything I had. Do you understand what ‘everything’ means?’ Yes, this I understood.”<sup>322</sup>

Vera Inber wrote in a similar, candid fashion about the failure of her friends' marriages over food. She recorded one conversation with her friend Efrosiniia Ivanovna who feared that her husband's insatiable appetite threatened her physical and mental stability. “Efrosiniia says, ‘He will be the death of me,’” Inber observed.<sup>323</sup> With her husband at the front, Elena Skriabina also focused on the deteriorating marriages of her friends. “People virtually turn into animals before our eyes,” Skriabina exclaimed on 8 October 1941, “Who would have thought that Irina, always such a quiet, lovely woman, would be capable of beating her husband whom she always adored. And for what? Because he wants to eat all the time and can never get enough. He just wants for her to bring something home and then he throws himself on the food. Of course, she is hungry herself. But it is hard for a starving man to leave even one little piece!”<sup>324</sup> The diarist witnessed the same cruelty among her neighbors, the Kurakins. The father recently returned from exile, half-starved and unable to provide for his family, whose bodies had begun to swell from starvation: “It is simply horrible! There is little left of his wife's former love. She is constantly irritated and argumentative. Their children cry and beg for food. But all they get is spankings. However, the Kurakins are no exception. Almost everyone has changed as a result of hunger, the Blockade, and this desperate situation.”<sup>325</sup> Perhaps because they published their diaries, Inber's and Skriabina's accounts say little about strife in their own marriages. Still, by focusing on the struggles of others, they effectively framed these personal anecdotes as illustrative of a citywide phenomenon.

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<sup>321</sup> Kochina, entry for 9 January 1942, 181. I have modified the translation in: Kochina, *Blockade Diary*, 70.

<sup>322</sup> Kochina, entry for 25 February 1942, 199.

<sup>323</sup> Inber, entry for 3 January 1942, 30ob-31.

<sup>324</sup> Skriabina, entry for 8 October, 1941, 39.

<sup>325</sup> *Ibid.*, entry for 8 October 1941, 39.

The diary of the radio worker Arkadii Lepkovich, for example, tells the story of marital strife from the perspective of a husband. The diary genre is perfectly suited to revealing the gradual process by which his once strong marriage collapsed over time. Before December 1941, Lepkovich wrote of his wife, Vera, with great tenderness and affection, thanking her in his diary for helping him to endure hunger, cold, and illness: “From the bottom of my heart, I am very grateful to her overall for her attitude towards me. Thank you, Verochka,” he declared on one occasion.<sup>326</sup> At the same time, Lepkovich began to suspect that their friends whose marriages were suffering were discouraging Vera from staying with him. He suspected one couple in particular, Lena and Grisha. His misgivings grew stronger that winter. By February 1942, Lepkovich surmised that “Lena was trying to starve Grisha to death, eating his bread herself” and that she tried “teaching Verochka not to look after me, as if was going to die anyway, saying it is better to protect yourself. But so far Verochka has done such a good job (*molodets*). Thanks to her, I have not seen any changes. Rather, I have felt her help and her concern.” Mindful of the vulnerability of his marriage, he continued: “she is good to me, and I am happy that I have such a wife, such a friend. I don’t know what will happen in the future, but we shall see.”<sup>327</sup>

Just ten days after he praised his wife’s loyalty, the (now bedridden) diarist became convinced that starvation inevitably would ruin their relationship as it did to all relationships “inside the ring:”

Hunger, what it has done to people and to their relationships, it is frightening to think about and imagine such a life. [There are] examples from my personal life and from the lives of people I know. To this point, my relationship with Verochka could not be better (*kak ne nado luchshe*). I felt her concern [for me] and paid attention to her myself. Never shall I forget the love and care that Vera showed me during surgery (my illness) and during the war - this is truly pure, crystalline love for a person, a husband. But what has happened now?] I am a hated burden to her.<sup>328</sup>

Lepkovich went on to accuse his wife of conniving against him, of selling his personal belongings for food, and of succumbing to Lena’s insistence that she save herself first. Lepkovich imagined how Lena and Vera would rationalize this decision by noting that “I remained firmly in bed,” that “Arkadii and Grisha were dying anyway.” Increasingly convinced that this was true, he continued: “Vera—not even Verochka but some devil in a skirt—[...] [did] take and hide the bread and every hungry crumb from us in order to strengthen herself at the expense of me and my poor health. All this is true, but I think I might be exaggerating from a severe nervous exhaustion.”<sup>329</sup> Lepkovich was aware that the physiological and neurological damage induced by prolonged hunger could lead to delusional or paranoid perceptions, yet this did not prevent him from letting this seed of doubt take root. And the diary—with its fragmentary structure—provided the perfect outlet for him to convey these ambivalent sentiments, built on suspicions and imagination.

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<sup>326</sup> Lepkovich, entry for 31 December 1941, 14.

<sup>327</sup> Ibid, entry for 10 February 1942, 16.

<sup>328</sup> Ibid, entry for 21 February 1942, 17.

<sup>329</sup> Ibid, entry for 21 February 1942, 17.

Like Riabinkin and many others, Lepkovich used his diary both as a kind of confessional space and a record of the apparent injustices perpetrated against him. In his entries for March, April, and May, the diarist described himself as a victim of persecution and a burden to everyone, from his wife to the police. “I am still alive,” he wrote on 27 March 1942, but everyone around me “cannot seem to wait for my death, I don’t know why, and Lena and Grisha are planning to separate and I am the reason for this.”<sup>330</sup>

Even as Lepkovich commented on the specific circumstances of his failing marriage, he continually noted how common this was as though somehow contagious—as the constant references to Lena and Grisha suggest—and inevitable. In his view, his marital struggles were a symptom of the larger breakdown in social relations and norms in the city:

All winter—even autumn and winter and half of spring—I had to fight for life not only against strangers, but even my formerly beloved wife, and the struggle was consistently awful (I must repeat in the diary all that I know to be true). The question is whether hunger, having torn through the city and country, has made relations between people completely different than in normal, satiated (*sytnaia*) life.

Based on the example of his own marriage, Lepkovich began to formulate a broader vision of the overall decline in pro-social, cooperative behavior across the city. Hunger made strangers of the most intimate friends and relatives, and crime was the worst symptom of this. He continued:

Even relations between mother and child, husband and wife has been made completely—I would say—inhuman (*nechelovecheskie*). A mother wishes death for her child, and a husband of his wife and vice versa. One does not need to go far [to find] examples. The whole city has become this way because the battle for life has brought despair to every living individual [...] all this made cultured people into idiots and boors. People have become so coarse that those who survived this time are not who they used to be, but nowadays apparently we have grown used to sorrow.<sup>331</sup>

At the time that he wrote this entry, in May 1942, the diarist observed a vast improvement in the food supply and in the material condition of the city. He calculated that life in Leningrad was 85 percent normal. And yet he did not foresee a restoration of peaceful relations between husbands and wives, parents and children.<sup>332</sup> The enmity between him and Vera was irreparable. As he wrote from his sick bed, Vera had become “more than an enemy.” He even projected it back onto all seven years of their marriage. “For about a seven-year period of life together she never told me the truth, but lied [about] everything and stole. [...] One cannot live without trust,” he added “everything is false and deceptive.”<sup>333</sup> The final blow came some months later when Vera, unable to find her coat, angrily accused her husband of “eating

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<sup>330</sup> Ibid, entry for 27 March 1942, 17. On police persecution: Ibid, entry for 20 May 1942, 18.

<sup>331</sup> Ibid, entry for 20 May 1942, 18-18ob.

<sup>332</sup> Ibid, entry for 20 May 1942, 18ob.

<sup>333</sup> Ibid, entry for 22 May 1942, 19-19ob.

it” (selling it for food).<sup>334</sup> Wounded by this accusation, Lepkovich resolved to evacuate without her, and with the apparent end of their marriage, the diarist also ended his diary practice.

In sum, the diarists documented the extreme vulnerability of marriages “inside the ring.” In his entry for 26 November 1941, the prominent art historian Nikolai Punin put it this way: “It is good to be on your own at such a time. One person can make it somehow.”<sup>335</sup>

### *New Family Roles*

The daunting tasks of securing and sharing resources not only compromised family affections, it also altered the dynamics between parents and children. The diaries demonstrate how divisions of labor and authority were reconfigured by the siege. In an economy based on food, one’s authority in the family came to be defined first by one’s earning power—that is, but the size of one’s rations. Family roles that had traditionally been determined by age and gender were redefined according to this new criterion.

After sacrificing their rations for their children over a number of months, many parents became ill and enfeebled. As a result, their young children took over the responsibilities of feeding, nursing, and caring for them. This was the situation of nine-year-old Tat’iana Rudykovskaia who, because of the deathly state of her father and grandmother, ran the household while her mother was at work. As her diary progresses, Rudykovskaia ceased writing about school, childhood games, and friends, and instead focused on household finances (that is, on food reserves) and on strategies for finding food. With a mother’s pride, Elena Skriabina proudly noted the maturity and responsibility of her five-year-old son Iura. While she stood in line for bread and fetched water from the Neva River, Iura chopped wood and did heavy domestic chores. “In such a way Iura, who is not yet six years old, works like an adult,” she beamed.<sup>336</sup>

Both during and after the Blockade, children were officially acknowledged for tackling these adult-sized responsibilities. Party pamphlets commended them for taking on domestic chores, working in factories, digging trenches, building fortifications, harvesting vegetables, and gathering warm clothing for the front. Children assisted in hospitals, read to and performed for wounded soldiers, and worked in the local air defense patrolling the city, neutralizing explosives, and rescuing people from the wreckage. In recognition of their contribution, they received the same honors as adults: 36,000 schoolchildren were decorated for their service and, of these, 15,000 were granted the coveted medal “For the Defense of Leningrad.”<sup>337</sup> As the poet Iurii Voronov observed, “In 1943/ they gave us medals/ and only

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<sup>334</sup> Ibid, entry for 20 September 1942, 20ob-21.

<sup>335</sup> Punin, entry for 26 November 1941, 101.

<sup>336</sup> Skriabina, entry for 20 November 1941, 40, 48.

<sup>337</sup> Historians estimate that there were between 2.5-3 million people inside siege at start and of those about 400,000 were children. As early as 27 June 1941 Leningrad state and party officials began drafting over 5,000 boys and girls (ages 14-17) into factory labor; several times this number were recruited for fortifications work. See: Stanislav Kotov, *Detskie doma blokadnogo Leningrada* (Saint Peterburg: Politekhnik, 2005), 4; Valerii Nikolaevich Selivanov, *Stoiali kak soldaty: Blokada detei Leningrada* (Izdatel’stvo “Ego,” 2002), 124-5, 149-55, 167, 173-174; N.V. Sedova, “Shkola v gody voiny,” *Zhenshchina i voina: o roli zhenshchin v oborone*

in ‘45/ passports.’<sup>338</sup> Of course these official celebrations did not mention any adverse effects of these new responsibilities, but the diaries do indicate that this shift in child-parent roles created conflict in the family. This was certainly true for Tat’iana Rudykovskaia, who came to resent her starving grandmother and father, and the more she nursed them. The more childish and temperamental they seemed to her. After their deaths, the (then ten-year-old) diarist discovered that she could only mourn them only when she dreamt or wrote in her diary—the two times when she was not busy preparing meals, waiting for bread, or doing household chores.<sup>339</sup>

The monumental task of keeping the family unit alive and together fell into the hands of eighteen-year-old Nina Rudal’fovna Mervol’f. Mervol’f’s journal also showcases—as many diaries do—the emerging conflict between the material and emotional functions of the family. The diarist was unsure of whether she could survive *with* her parents (by giving them her food) or *without* them, without their love and moral support. Initially, her family grew closer under siege, comforting each other through the hardships they faced. Mervol’f felt this connection to her family for longer than many other diarists did. On 10 January 1942, the young theater student wrote: “How right Mayakovsky was that: ‘Only in this winter / did it become clear to me the heat / of love, friendship, and family.’ Our family has grown much closer and [illegible] because of this time. I somehow especially value Mama and do much more for my family than during peace time.”<sup>340</sup> The security and warmth that she felt at home began to fade, however, as conditions worsened and the bodies and personalities of her grandparents, aunts, uncles, and parents began to change. On 14 January 1942—just four days after the rather optimistic entry above—several of her relatives had died and her father, rapidly losing his grasp of reality, seemed halfway gone.

As for Rudykovskaia, the more unfamiliar her loved ones became, the harder it was for Mervol’f to grieve for them. Mervol’f reflected on her own fluctuations between apathy and sorrow as she watched the most beloved people in her life transform into veritable strangers:

In one day half of our apartment (*polkvartiry*) has died out [...] Of course it’s sad, but above all it is dreadful because a shadow of death has emerged in every family. Every day so many people die. Death has even ceased to make an impression; it has become an ordinary occurrence. What a huge misfortune this would be—the deaths of Koka and (uncle) Sergei—if it happened at another time. But this has been met with a kind of dull indifference, and we adjusted to the thought that they are no longer here so quickly [...] Now all acquaintances and friends are cut off from one another, everyone is weak [...] they think about how to support their own lives.<sup>341</sup>

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*Leningrada, 1941-44, sbornik statei* (Saint Petersburg: Izdatel'stvo Sankt Petersburgskogo Universiteta, 2006), 100-101.

<sup>338</sup> *Skorb' i radost' popolam* (Saint Petersburg: IPK “Vesti” 2006), 13. Examples of this can also be found in: Mironova, entries for 2, 3/VIII/41, 7ob.

<sup>339</sup> Gosudarstvennyi memorial'nyi muzei oborony i blokady Leningrada (GMMOBL), f. RDF, op. 1R, d. 1, punkt 7. Grizova-Rudykovskaia, Tat’iana, “dnevnik,” entries for 15 June 1942, 16; 18 September 1942, 29; 2 August 1942, 20; 5 April 1943, 45.

<sup>340</sup> Mervol’f, entry for 1 October 1942, 11.

<sup>341</sup> *Ibid.*, entry for 14 January 1942, 17-18.



Even though Mervol'f acknowledged that her own family tragedy was typical of households across besieged Leningrad, she was stung by her friends' apathetic reactions to her family's predicament. "Papa is not well," she continued, "and there is no one to help us, not even anyone to talk to, no one to share the grief with. Now all deaths are received with such indifference. Grandmother is not here, Koka is gone, Olia herself is at death's door, and Aunt Asia is now completely indifferent toward us. Well, how can I get used to the thought that Mama will die? I do not believe myself; this seems a cruel, awful dream."<sup>342</sup>

That March, Mervol'f became the sole provider for her two ailing parents. She worked all day doing agricultural labor and then rushed home to feed and nurse her bedridden father and mother. She literally wept into her diary that her mother was "deformed," "emaciated;" she suffered from dysentery, Category III *distrofiia*, and was covered with scabs. Her father also was "half dead" with *distrofiia*.<sup>343</sup> The young theater student was certain that, with her parents so close to death, her own physical and emotional vitality hung in the balance. She tearfully confided these concerns to one of her only remaining companions, her diary:

If Mama and Papa are to die, it will not be life at all. I simply cannot imagine it—that I would come home and that they would not be here. I would have no one to talk to, there would be no one to take pity on me, to console me, no one to rejoice with me if someday better times come. As I write there are tears pouring like hail—here on the diary. Lord, Lord (sic) help us. If only they could survive, if only they could survive, I would not need anything more than for them to be sick, weak, all sorts—I would joyfully do everything for them, if only they would live.<sup>344</sup>

By June 1942, Mervol'f was the only living member of her family. As it turned out, she began to recover her physical strength, eating her full ration and benefiting from the warmer weather. Emotionally, however, she felt lonelier than ever, as she lived alone in a house of ghosts. Mervol'f described her childhood home this way: "Strange, eerie conversations in a dark room lit by an oil lamp; the apartment [is] full of the ghosts of five dead people, with a corpse in each room."<sup>345</sup> Mervol'f's diary underscores that not all Leningraders lost affection for their families despite this conflict between the family's material and moral support structures. Mervol'f was deeply grieved by her relatives' deaths even though she recognized that they significantly improved her chances of survival.

The phenomenon of young people struggling to bear the burden of the family on their own became a familiar sight to Irina Zelenskaia. At the start of the chapter, I mentioned how she became interested in her coworkers' family stories. This fascination intensified when, in May 1943, her district's local party committee ordered her to work at a new administrative department for arranging the affairs of veterans' families (*otdel po ustroistvu semei voennosluzhashchikh*). She was one of three inspectors who arranged aid, benefits, and

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<sup>342</sup> Ibid, entry for 14 March 1942, 58.

<sup>343</sup> Ibid, entries for 19 March 1942, 60; 22 May 1942, 76-77. These categories are discussed in Chapter Four.

<sup>344</sup> Ibid, entry for 22 May 1942, 77.

<sup>345</sup> Ibid, entry for 17 June 1942, 97-98.

employment assistance to wives and children of the local party committee representatives.<sup>346</sup> This work marked a turning point for her professionally and textually, such that in the last pages of her diary she stopped writing regular, dated entries and instead listed the families she encountered and the circumstances of each.<sup>347</sup> In this new job, Zelenskaia discovered how some local children were fighting to support their families virtually on their own. “Those who touch me the most deeply (*do glubiny dushi*) are the children,” she observed, who “fight for life like adults” but who did not have any kind of adult-level of strength.”<sup>348</sup> “Poor children,” she continued, “they look and act like adults, weighed down with worries (*podavlennye zobotami*).” She met seven-year-old boys who cared for their sick parents and did all the household chores.<sup>349</sup> One thirteen-year-old girl, who lost her mother in the city and her father at the front, lived by herself and came in to see Zelenskaia to discuss apartment rates and financing options. Inspired by the girl’s strength and independence, Zelenskaia had high hopes for the younger generation: “one can hope that they will be people of character and not these rags and mops (*triapochki i mochalki*) like so many of their mothers and aunts of the older generation.”<sup>350</sup>

Zelenskaia was equally taken with another thirteen-year-old girl who came in to request her father’s pension. This girl, Zelenskaia believed, was fighting for life in spite of her mother who no longer felt obligated to care for her child.

As it turns out, her mama is one of these wild people in whom hunger and deprivation has stifled even her maternal instincts. She abandoned her daughter, lives separately, and not only does not help her, but takes her last [crumb]. The girl is now alone, but has not quit school, is an excellent student, her teacher gives her the very best recommendations (*otzvyv*). She does her own sewing, laundry, looks tidy, speaks with a cheerfulness, smiles, and only at the end, turning from the door, blushed and embarrassed, asked ‘don’t tell mama when she comes that I [asked for] the books separately because she would be so offended.’<sup>351</sup>

Zelenskaia presented the girl and her mother as opposite in their appearance, behavior, and familial roles. While the mother was wild, thoughtless, emotionally unstable, and incapable of caring for the family, the girl was clean, composed, organized, and exhibited great emotional stamina. Zelenskaia remarked that she was clearly embarrassed at having to take over the family’s finances and hide her actions from her mother.

Even adult children experienced a great deal of stress when positions of authority shifted in the family. Because of her relatively good health, writer and editor Sofia Ostrovskaia became the chief caregiver for her emaciated brother and mother. “I have two

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<sup>346</sup> Zelenskaia, 117. The last installment of her journal, for example, takes the form of three episodes separated by paragraph breaks, each details a coworker’s struggles to keep their household afloat. These studies span more than twelve pages and comprise the longest “entry” in the diary.

<sup>347</sup> This entry has no date, but was written after 21 April 1943, 118b-123ob.

<sup>348</sup> Zelenskaia entry for 5 April 1943, 114ob. A similar example appears in: Ibid, entry for 21 April 1943, 118ob.

<sup>349</sup> Ibid, entry for 8 April 1943, 116b

<sup>350</sup> Ibid, entry for 5 April 1943, 115-115ob.

<sup>351</sup> Ibid, entry for 5 April 1943, 114ob-115.

children: mother and brother,” she declared.<sup>352</sup> Rather than bring them closer together, Ostrovskaia despaired that the burden of these familial obligations made her feel more alone than before: “I feel very clearly that all the responsibility for my mother’s and brother’s lives rests with me alone, that no one can help me, that I will not receive any kind of help from anywhere even if I bang my head against the wall, even if I scream at the top of my voice! No one will help me. I am completely alone.”<sup>353</sup>

Ostrovskaia’s new role as caregiver created conflict between her and her mother. In two competing displays of maternal sacrifice, Ostrovskaia and her mother attempted to place each other’s health above their own. The diarist determinedly tried to give her mother a decent meal by sharing her own rations, but her mother resisted. Out of “a kind of illogical, but benevolent motherly love,” the diarist’s mother claimed that she was full. In response, the diarist found herself scolding her mother “in a pedagogical tone.” At times, Ostrovskaia had second thoughts and wondered whether an “affectionate” and “tender” manner was better.

Callous dryness and smart coldness—this is my only defense, my only way of resisting in this frightening and overwhelming task. If I cross this line, I perish (and WHILE I cannot die, I do not want to) [...] better to be considered a mean pedagogue and a cold cynic! Let them take offense at me! [...] Perhaps having preserved my resistance, having protected myself, I preserve their lives. I must not fall or come undone. I am alone.<sup>354</sup>

At the risk of being insensitive, Ostrovskaia chose to maintain her family through discipline. She was determined to guard herself against hunger and against emotional vulnerability in order to save her family. However, in the end, like Rudykovskaia, Ostrovskaia grew deeply resentful of those she called her “children.” And when they died, she confessed that she felt a deep sense of relief.

The diary of Aleksandra Liubovskaia presents this shift in familial roles and authority from the opposite perspective, that of the parent. Compared to other diarists, Liubovskaia’s family remained relatively close throughout the Blockade. Hers is a rare, important example of how not all family stories ended in tragedy. Liubovskaia often described her home as a refuge, where she spent cozy evenings reading or chatting with her two grown children Igor’ and Natasha. They pooled their resources and decided by family council” (*semeinyi sovet*) how much food to eat and save each day.<sup>355</sup> But as her son’s health faltered and relations between Igor’ and Natasha worsened, the diarist avoided going home. At one point, she described her son as a “dark cloud” and her daughter as “lightening” precipitating these stormy family disputes.<sup>356</sup> Liubovskaia, however, felt poorly positioned to mediate their quarrels because she assumed that the hierarchy of authority rested on how much (food) one contributed to the family. Her Category II ration gave her a more dependent position in the household. Her children both earned workers’ (Category I) rations. Determined to regain her authority and restore family peace, Liubovskaia resolved:

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<sup>352</sup> Ostrovskaia, entry for 27 November 1941, 117-118.

<sup>353</sup> Ibid, entry for 27 November 1941, 117-118.

<sup>354</sup> Ostrovskaia, entry for 27 November 1941, 118. Capitalization appears in the original.

<sup>355</sup> Liubovskaia, entry for 24 February 1942, 99.

<sup>356</sup> Ibid, entry for 19 May 1942, 155.

Before me I have the task of taking advantage of this time [when we have] more food so that I restore my strength and ability to work and so that once again the leadership role in the family returns to me. Even though my children are more able-bodied (*trudosposobnye*) than I am now, they are young and they do not have life experience. They have not passed through that severe school (*surovaia shkola*) [of life], which I had to go through. Up to this point their lives have flowed smoothly without concern.<sup>357</sup>

Her children may have been better providers, but they lacked the maturity and strength of character to lead the family through these hard times. Liubovskaia disapproved of the shifting parent-child dynamics in her own family as well as in others' households. In February 1942, she wrote at length about an acquaintance, Mariia Aleksandrovna, who tragically lost her ration card and relied on her sisters and her children to save her. On the one hand, having witnessed this decline of the familial loyalty in society, Liubovskaia marveled:

Can it be that she is really counting on the kindness of her neighbor or on her sisters, Ania and Lidiia. Who now dares to tear off even one crumb from their rations! Right now, many serious conflicts are taking place in a lot of families because of bread, which everyone lacks. I am honestly sorry for Mariia Aleksandrovna, but besides advice I do not have enough strength to share anything more with her.<sup>358</sup>

On the other hand, Liubovskaia rebuked Mariia Aleksandrovna's children for hesitating to help their mother. Because they blamed her for losing her ration cards, they resisted giving their mother food and deferring to her authority. With an eye toward larger social developments, Liubovskaia presented such individual cases as typical of a general decline in family loyalty under siege.

Now relations in their family are very abnormal, even hostile. All the children reproach their mother for eating more than her share (*ob"edala*) at this very difficult time, winter. Now they are taking their ration cards from her and each one eats their own food parcel (*paek*). Perhaps she was not exemplary (*primerno*) [in her behavior], but nevertheless she is their mother and to leave her at such a moment, without a ration card, ill, is cruel.<sup>359</sup>

The diarist wrote at length about Mariia Aleksandrovna and her family, but later she crossed out every mention of them in her diary. Perhaps Liubovskaia regretted taking such a disapproving stance or that she wished to erase this disturbing incident from her record. Still, the text remains clearly legible, a fact that seems to symbolize the ambiguity of her emotions about these shifts in the familial authority. In any event, Liubovskaia's commentary on her friend's situation reveals the diarist's own understanding of kinship ties and of the

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<sup>357</sup> Ibid, entry for 19 May 1942, 155.

<sup>358</sup> Ibid, entry for 14 February 1942, 86.

<sup>359</sup> Ibid, entry for 9 April 1942, 137.

commitments, responsibilities, and roles that each family member ought—but was failing—to fulfill.

### *Life-sustaining Deaths*

Because of the enormous difficulty of keeping the household together, many diarists welcomed deaths in their family. Death could bring relief to a long-suffering relative or to the family's meager food reserves. Even very young diarists pointed out practical benefits to such losses. For instance, as she watched Aka—a dear friend who lived with the family—die, seventeen-year-old Elena Mukhina confessed to her diary: “To tell the truth, if Aka dies it will be easier for her, for Mama, and for me...[Aka is] only an extra mouth. I don't know how I can write such lines. But my heart is now stone. This isn't horrible to me. I don't care whether Aka dies so long as we keep her ration cards. How heartless I am.”<sup>360</sup> Torn between a desperate desire for food and shame at her own callousness, Mukhina confessed to these ambivalent feelings in her diary, where her insensitivity and Aka's death figure as two acts of the same tragedy.

Deceased family members could prolong the lives of their surviving relatives by leaving their ration coupons behind. Elena Kochina likened these cards to “inheritances,” the new family treasures passed on to the surviving heirs.<sup>361</sup> Even though it was illegal to use them many Leningraders kept their deceased relatives alive—at least on paper—until the end of month, when they had to reregister for their coupons. The architect Esfir' Levina described how her friend Tania's grandmother “died successfully, at the beginning of the month; her cards remained with the family until March” and could be used until then.<sup>362</sup> The radio worker Arkadii Lepkovich also commented on this peculiar family inheritance when he unexpectedly met his seven-year-old niece, Musia, in a breadline. The girl happily exclaimed: “‘Uncle Arkadii, my mom died,’ [...] in a burst of happy emotion (*volneniia*). ‘Why are you happy?’ ‘Because I still have the [ration] cards. They reverted to us.’”<sup>363</sup> Because the law required that the family hand over the deceased's ration card in order to obtain a death certificate, dead relatives often lingered on in the family for weeks. Tania Rudykovskaia's father remained in the family apartment for over a month after his death. Initially, Leningraders hid the bodies until after all of that month's coupons were used, yet even then they lingered on. Few *blokadniki* had the strength or the means to bury their dead, and sometimes they simply left the bodies in their apartments, in nearby hallways or stairwells, or at the entrance to the morgue.<sup>364</sup>

Rumors flew that some families lived off of their dead relatives, literally. Overlaid with connotations of savagery and primitiveness, cannibalism was perhaps the most extreme sign that human nature was changing. Practically speaking, cannibalism was a pressing concern. Although the rumors likely exceeded the number of incidents, historian Richard

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<sup>360</sup> Mukhina, 68.

<sup>361</sup> Kochina, entry for 26 February 1942, 198-199.

<sup>362</sup> Levina I, entry for 4 March 1942, 12. An additional example appears in: Ibid, entry 26 August 1942, 29.

<sup>363</sup> Lepkovich, entry for 24 December 1941, 11-11ob.

<sup>364</sup> Also see: Zelenskaia, entry 9/1/42, 50ob.

Bidlack reported that there were over 1500 arrests for cannibalism during the siege.<sup>365</sup> The city police and NKVD were sufficiently alarmed by the escalation of this crime that they created special divisions of police and of psychiatrists in the NKVD's Department of Criminal Investigation.<sup>366</sup>

While it is unclear how many instances of cannibalism took place in the family, it is notable that the diarists most frequently discussed cannibalism within the context of the family rather than between strangers. They usually presented it as a horrific act of selfishness, but occasionally as an act of supreme sacrifice. Stories circulated about desperate parents trying to sustain themselves with their children's bodies or trying to feed their children with human flesh. Aleksandra Mironova, whose job it was to rescue abandoned children from their homes, wrote about the Kaganov children whose mother gave them human flesh in a desperate attempt to save them. The diarist was scared to interact with these "ghastly, dirty" children. "The doorman did not want to go with me to this apartment." Mironova had difficulty in coaxing the children to come with her to an orphanage: "the children did not want to leave their uncooked meat."<sup>367</sup> However disturbing, this anecdote does suggest that, despite the fact that the Blockade placed the family under a tremendous strain, the impulse to sacrifice for one's family endured. More often, the diarists emphasized the opposite and provided many more examples of parents devouring their children. "They are talking about cases of cannibalism," Esfir' Levina wrote offhandedly of the rumors, "a woman eats a child, children eat their mother."<sup>368</sup> Irina Zelenskaia remarked casually, "there are many cases of cannibalism, missing children, even eating one's children. The police are inundated with such reports."<sup>369</sup> When Zelenskaia visited an ill coworker, Kuptsova, in the hospital, the woman ranted and threatened to eat her daughter Liusa: "bite her somewhere fleshy. I will drink the blood and get well."<sup>370</sup> As her mother spoke, Liusa was within earshot, "sitting on a chair, lifeless, life a doll. Only there were tears in her swollen eyes."<sup>371</sup>

Ol'ga Matiushina tackled the same theme in one of her stories about the besieged family. This is the story of Andrei Ivanovich. Tormented by hunger, Andrei Ivanovich cannot help but contemplate ending his son Tolia's life in order to prolong his own. As he watches Tolia play, he surmises that the boy was growing weaker everyday and most likely would not survive the siege.

They say that human flesh is delicious...if it is boiled ...it probably makes a tasty soup. But what am I talking about? ...He turned away from the children. Their voices were irritating...Nevertheless Tolia, the youngest, sickly, won't

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<sup>365</sup> Estimates of the number of arrests for cannibalism varies. Richard Bidlack gives the figure 1500, while Boris Belozarov provides a somewhat lower estimate of 1380. See: Bidlack, "Survival Strategies," 99; Boris Belozarov, "Crime during the Siege," *Life and Death*, 223-224. Many of the NKVD's official reports on the monthly rates of cannibalism and murder in the besieged city have been published in: Lomagin, *V Tiskakh goloda: blokada Leningrada v dokumentakh germanskikh spetssluzhb i NKVD* (Saint Petersburg: Evropeiskii Dom, 2000).

<sup>366</sup> Belozarov, "Crime during the Siege," 223.

<sup>367</sup> Mironova, entry for 25 February 1942, 19.

<sup>368</sup> Levina I, entry for 3 February 1942, 6.

<sup>369</sup> Zelenskaia, entry for 12 April 1942, 74ob-75.

<sup>370</sup> Ibid, entry for 15 March 1942, 69.

<sup>371</sup> Ibid, entry for 15 March 1942, 69.

survive. Already he looked indifferently at the boy. He thought how easy it would be to end (*prikonchit'*) him. An iron against the head would be enough—and that is it. The boy noticed his father's intent glance. Smiling, he looked at him with big, blue eyes, and raised his light red brow.<sup>372</sup>

Through free indirect speech, Matiushina gives an intimate look into the protagonist's innermost thoughts. She also reveals how Andrei Ivanovich is horrified by the seemingly alien aspects of his own mind. Appalled by his own capacity to contemplate the most egregious crimes against his son, he tries to confide in his wife: "I am afraid for myself (*za sebia*)...I could...you yourself know how hungry I am," he finished weakly.<sup>373</sup>

As shocking as Andrei Ivanovich's story is, Matiushina implied that it was by no means unrealistic or unique. Below this story, the diarist included a short newspaper clipping mentioning that: "these days many have sunk to the point of cannibalism. Several have used their last bit of strength to restrain themselves. Many have risen above themselves, to the level of heroism."<sup>374</sup> But, as the story of Andrei Ivanovich indicates, many had not, at least in Matiushina's view. This image of eating, murdering, or sacrificing one's children—so often used in the dramas of antiquity—reinforces the extremity of the human tragedy taking place inside the besieged city. By painting these family portraits, Matiushina sent a strong message about how the siege pitted the instinct to survive against familial commitments and codes of behavior. Whether referring to personal experiences, rumors, or fantasies that they created, the diarists described the most tragic incidents as taking place within the family more than between strangers.

### III. Non-Biological Families

Since the revolutionary and civil war periods, the Soviet regime struggled with the persistent presence of homeless and abandoned children. This situation worsened in the 1920s when a campaign against the nuclear ("bourgeois") family was inaugurated, and it persisted into the 1930s, when famine, collectivization, political repression, and forced relocation created, as one scholar put it, "a genuine plague" of abandoned children. Their numbers reached into the hundreds of thousands. In response, the regime ordered a 150 percent increase in the number of children's homes and passed new laws to catch runaways and enforce compulsory education in order to discourage childhood neglect and juvenile delinquency.<sup>375</sup>

Before this situation could be remedied, the war broke out and wreaked further havoc on families. In Leningrad, the evacuation of children was considered a high priority, however it was hastily planned, unevenly executed, and limited in scope. Even after the initial

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<sup>372</sup> Matiushina, *Diary*, 158-159.

<sup>373</sup> *Ibid.*, 159.

<sup>374</sup> *Ibid.*, 158.

<sup>375</sup> This quote and the figures are drawn from: Lewis Siegelbaum and Andrei Sokolov, *Stalinism as a Way of Life: A Narrative in Documents* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), 356-420, 400-402.

evacuation of children in the fall of 1941, at least 400,000 children remained in blockaded Leningrad. As more and more *blokadniki* died, city authorities rushed to organize their children into orphanages, detention centers, or foster homes. There were only seventeen children's homes in December 1941. The city's executive committee (*ispolkom*) promised that "there will be no orphans among us" (*u nas ne budet sirot*) and, on 13 February 1942, it planned sixty-two homes and temporary reception centers for children.<sup>376</sup> Adoption, once considered "a necessary evil," was temporarily praised as an act of patriotism.<sup>377</sup> These children's homes became overcrowded with youths whose parents had died or who had such demanding military or labor duties that they were unable to look after them.

Although in the 1920s, children's homes and schools were presented as an ideal setting for raising children with socialist values, by the mid-1930s, the regime reversed this position and upheld the two-parent nuclear family as the new celebrated model for Soviet socialization. As David Hoffman has shown, this was part of a general shift toward pronatalism and conservatism in familial and gender policy, which culminated in the family law code of 1944. Leningrad's wartime orphanages were not glorified on ideological grounds as replacements for the nuclear family. Rather, they were seen as necessary responses to the Nazis' assault on house and home. In fact, at the end of the war, the regime resumed its "hard-line" approach to dealing with orphans when they again were regarded as socially undesirable and associated with delinquency, a lack of discipline, and moral depravity.<sup>378</sup>

The diaries of wartime orphanage workers (*vospitateli*) provide insight both into the breakdown of the nuclear family "inside the ring" and the new prominence of the "accidental families" that formed in children's homes. In some cases, these journals illustrate that parents and children sometimes preferred the children's homes to a "traditional" home life. In this respect, the Blockade brought about a kind of ironic fulfillment of early Bolshevik ideals of family. Although many diaries offer a glimpse into this phenomenon, I have chosen to focus on two in particular: the diaries of Aleksandra Mironova and Nina Gorbunova. They describe very different periods and aspects of the relocation process: Mironova's diary covers the children's transition out of the family home and into the children's home, while Gorbunova's examines the later transitions out of the orphanage and back into the nuclear home.

Aleksandra Nikolaevna Mironova was a history teacher by profession, but during the war—when many schools were closed—she took a job with the city services for abandoned and endangered children. In late December 1941, she worked in a children's home, where twenty of her former pupils were now living. Mironova took one little girl, Lelia Bogdanova, under her wing, letting her live with her when "her mama did not return from the factory."<sup>379</sup>

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<sup>376</sup> Selivanov, *Stoiali kak soldaty*, 30, 50-59; Kelly, *Children's World*, 246.

<sup>377</sup> Kelly, *Children's World*, 243. Kelly described how the regime adopted an uncharacteristically charitable and sympathetic approach to orphans during the war, seeing them as innocent victims of Nazi crimes.

<sup>378</sup> David Hoffman, "Mothers in the Motherland: Stalinist Pronatalism in Its Pan-European Context," *Journal of Social History*, Vol. 34, No. 1 (Autumn, 2000): 35-54; Kelly, *Children's World*, 243.

In April 1945, Sovnarkom ruled that orphaned Leningraders were not allowed to return to the city because—as Elizabeth White argued—"they did not want the burden of their care and feared child vagrancy" (White, "After the War was Over," 1147).

<sup>379</sup> Mironova, entry for 20 December 1941, 14.

Mironova worked at School No. 14. When the war began, she oversaw convoys of children traveling to work on collective farms in Liubytino for the summer holiday. Mironova also worked in School No. 6 when schools reopened in October (School No. 14 was converted into a hospital) and the care-giving work she did there was very similar to the work she did at the orphanage. School No. 6 closed in late December 1941.



Mironova became the head of a new kind of family made up of her biological and adopted children. Then from January to March 1942, Mironova took a job with Sverdlovsk District “Commission for the Protection of Children,” where her task was to “round-up” (*oblavly*) abandoned children and bring them to one of the temporary children’s homes or “gathering points” (“*punkt sosredotocheniia*”).<sup>380</sup> As a diarist, Mironova focused on documenting the children’s stories rather than her own personal experiences in her diary. In 1945, she gave her diary to the Institute of Party History, which is somewhat surprising considering its condemning portrayal of Leningrad family life and of many Leningrad officials during the siege.<sup>381</sup> A very different version of Mironova’s diary was published in the 1968 collection *The Defense of Leningrad*, which omitted her most critical entries.<sup>382</sup>

Mironova’s intimate diary takes the reader behind the closed doors of besieged family homes. Each day, following leads from the local school or housing administration, party organization, or residents, Mironova trekked across Vasil’evsky Island, looking for neglected children. Some, like the Golubev children, had been living on their own in a parentless household for some time and had the attention of authorities because of a household accident.<sup>383</sup> A few children found Mironova and actively pleaded for a place in the orphanage. Eleven-year-old Vitia Krasnobaev begged her to save him from death, saying: “I don’t want to go to Smolensk Cemetery, and I am afraid that they will send me there.”<sup>384</sup> Galia Nikolaeva also came to the home voluntarily because her parents could not provide for her.<sup>385</sup>

Often the children Mironova discovered were still living in close proximity to their dead parents. She found Verochka and Ania on Proletarian Victory Avenue (Prospekt Proletarskoi Pobedy), hungry, without ration cards, and the two-day-old corpse of their mother was still seated on a chair. But, according to the diarist, an even more “astonishing” sign of this family’s demise was the behavior of the girls’ uncle, who had dropped by the apartment a few days earlier in order to carry off an oak dresser, but did nothing to help them. The girls were too emaciated to walk, and Mironova had to drag them to the children’s home on a sled.<sup>386</sup> Six days later, she found eleven-year-old Shura Sokolova lying in a pile of dirty laundry underneath a mattress. Her father was at the front and her mother’s cold body lay in the kitchen. “Auntie” (*tetka*) had taken the family’s ration cards. “I was not able to find the lady’s address,” Shura added naively.<sup>387</sup>

Out of the twenty or so incidents that she reported, Mironova did record one case,

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<sup>380</sup> Mironova, entry labeled “January 1942,” 15ob.

<sup>381</sup> Ibid, postscript, 30-30ob. On the first page of her diary, Mironova composed a note apologizing to the party that she did not have time to “rewrite” her account in a clearer hand.

<sup>382</sup> “Iz dnevnika Mironovoi Aleksandry Nikolaevny” *Oborona Leningrada 1941-1944: Vospominaniia i dnevniki uchastnikov*, ed. E.F. Dagin (Leningrad: “Nauka,” 1968), 754-761. This published edition of the diary is missing all entries before September 1941, most entries from November and February 1942, and all entries from 1944. Compared to the manuscript, some sections of the text were moved to different entries in the published version. All mentions of cannibalism and her criticisms of coworkers, party members, and party decisions were removed.

<sup>383</sup> Mironova, entry for 18 January 1942, 16.

<sup>384</sup> Ibid, entry for 4 March 1942, 22-22ob.

<sup>385</sup> Ibid, entry for 27 December 1941, 14-14ob.

<sup>386</sup> Ibid, entry for 22 January 1942, 16-16ob. In the published edition of her diary, this passage appears in the entry for 20 January 1942. An additional example appears in: Ibid, entry for 28 February 1942, 20.

<sup>387</sup> Ibid, entry for 28 January 1942, 16ob. “Tetka” can refer either to an aunt or to a stranger, and from the minimal context given, it is not clear what Shura meant by the term.

she observed a strong bond between the child and his (albeit deceased) mother. When she took nine-year-old Iura Stepanov from the bed where he lay with his mother's body, he wailed, unwilling to abandon her: "The farewell between Iura and his dead mother moved the diarist profoundly. 'Mama, what did they do to you, what is wrong with you mama, what did you do to me? I do not want to go to the children's home.' It took a lot of strength and words to talk the boy into it," Mironova admitted.<sup>388</sup>

Iura's enduring affection for his departed mother was exceptional among the children that Mironova rescued, the majority of whom had been abandoned by their parents or had fled from home. All of these cases were edited out of the published version of the diary, but Mironova's manuscript reads like a litany of crimes against children. In one (excised) entry, the diarist focused on one apartment building on Vasil'evsky Island as an illustration of the sharp increase in childhood abandonment under siege.

How many have begun to abandon their children. It is horrible that mothers themselves leave their children. The house manager for Number 23 left a child without registration. For the month of February nine people ranging from age one-and-a-half to three years old [have been abandoned], [children] who cannot explain [what happened], but they wait for mama and believe she is alive.<sup>389</sup>

Unregistered, these children could not receive ration cards and therefore had no way to fend for themselves. As a mother herself, Mironova singled out these women as the main targets of her outrage.

Mironova's descriptions of such parents were interspersed with discussions of children mirroring their behaviors. There was one incident in particular that shook her to her core because it involved one of her favorite students, Shurik Romantsov. She fondly recalled Shurik as a pioneer, "the tidy one in the red necktie," polite and well behaved. In March 1942, a much-transformed Shurik came to his former teacher to confess to a crime:

He told me some frightening news. He killed his older sister with an axe. She stole his [ration] card. Oh, those damned Fascist beasts. But the Soviet people will survive (*vynesti*) all the suffering. Today I can't seem to think. I forgot where I needed to go. I was forced to give Shurik over to the Soviet authorities, I gave him my bread ration; there was nothing more that I could do.<sup>390</sup>

Shurik's situation posed such a moral dilemma for Mironova that she became disoriented, incredulous. On the one hand, Mironova clearly blamed the German fascists, rather than persons or forces inside Leningrad, for forcing the child into this predicament. In fact, this was the only time that she reproached the enemy, and not the family members, for a household's demise. On the other hand, as his former teacher, she felt some personal responsibility for him. The same questions that Esfir' Levina and Elena Kochina asked of their brothers and husbands haunted Mironova: could an individual living in such conditions really be held responsible for such actions? She seemed doubtful of her own ethical

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<sup>388</sup> Ibid, entry for 28 January 1942, 17.

<sup>389</sup> Ibid, entry for 31 February 1942, 20-20ob.

<sup>390</sup> Ibid, entry for 3 March 1942, 21ob-22.

responsibilities as well. Shurik's tragic story powerfully speaks to the ethical challenges of blockade life, the fierce competition for survival, and the erosion of existing social norms in regulating even the most intimate relationships.

In chronicling these families under siege only once did the diarist describe her own family's situation. There is hardly a mention of any of her own three biological children except for one single moment of personal catharsis. In one entry February 1942, the diarist suddenly announced that she remained so committed to rescuing the city's children because she had been unable to save her own: "Kostia died. Ania and Vasia died. My dear ones. What will become of the children? How much grief! I ought to live and save more children. They will replace Kostia, Vasia, Ania and everyone."<sup>391</sup>

### *Inside the Children's Home*

Although Mironova helped to save many children by bringing them to the children's homes, these facilities could hardly be described as ideal homes. They were overcrowded and poorly equipped at best; infectious diseases, stealing, and other behavior problems were rampant.<sup>392</sup> Mironova explained how the children were scared, miserable, and shy when they first came to the orphanage, but while there their hunger worsened, their tempers, hygiene habits, and manners seemed to deteriorate further. "They all sit at the stove, dirty and mean. No one wants to go to bed, the beds are not made," she observed in late December 1941.<sup>393</sup> Like adult Leningraders, the children "are not interested in anything, they say nothing but 'will we eat soon,'" sleeping in their overcoats to stay warm.<sup>394</sup> When they transferred them to a new home on the Seventeenth Line of Vasil'evsky Island, she and the other staff had to pull some of the children on sleds because they could not walk on their own. A similar picture of the blockade children's home appears in the diary of wartime school director, orphanage worker, and inspector Glafira Nikolaevna Korneeva, who noted how the children lay on their bunks most of the day, unable to sit up. They constantly asked and spoke about food, but they told Korneeva the tragic stories of their parents' deaths or abandonment without tears. They were too exhausted to cry or whine.<sup>395</sup>

Brutalized by their experience, not only did they behave inhumanely towards each other, they had even lost their human appearance. "In the cafeteria," Mironova remarked, "they behaved in a disgraceful manner, snatching bread from the teachers' trays. The children

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<sup>391</sup> Ibid, entry for 25 February 1942, 19.

<sup>392</sup> Kelly, *Children's World*, 245-248.

<sup>393</sup> Mironova, entry for 27 December 1941, 14-14ob.

<sup>394</sup> Ibid, entry for 29 December 1941, 15. On this day she found a boy in the oven in the kitchen, refusing to leave because it was warm in there.

<sup>395</sup> TsGAIPD, f. 4000, op. 11, d. 51, "Dnevnik Korneevoi Glafiry Nikolaevny," entry for 6 October 1942, 50-51. This source is hereafter referred to as "Korneeva."

From November to February 1942 Korneeva worked in school No. 16; from February to April 1942 she worked in a children's home. Beginning in April 1942-September, she worked as a school inspector for RONO. From September 1942-August 1943 she directed a kindergarten. After this, she became the director school No. 3 in the Sverdlovsk district. Korneeva was especially sensitive to the theft of cats because of an incident where a beloved cat was stolen and eaten by members of her own household (Ibid, entry for 26 September 1942, 36-37).

look like hungry beasts. 10-15 children die a day in the orphanage.”<sup>396</sup> Korneeva was also shocked that the children at one orphanage spoke openly with her about stealing food or hunting down neighbors’ cats and dogs in order to survive. When the diarist asked one boy about his family, he answered that his warmest memory was eating fruit compote and jam that his father had snatched from a bombed-out store on Vasil’evsky Island. The boy’s father, mother, and sister were all dead now, but according to Korneeva, “he did not feel these losses, and his recollections about the compote were radiant [...] It is obvious that people have little self control and powerful acute animalistic characteristics (*zhivotnye svoistva*) already are weakly developed in them. And once the mind ceases to dominate the senses, then how can they answer for this, these types [of people]? We hate these cat-eaters as our own personal enemies. So what that they have died? I have little pity for them (*Pust’ podykhali, malo zhal’*).”<sup>397</sup> Like Mironova, Korneeva interpreted the children’s behaviors as a sign of their fading humanity. Yet Korneeva was also far less sympathetic to their plight. She herself showed little humanity by wishing that they would die without pity, never noticing the irony of her position. However, as with Mironova, the children’s stories prompted Korneeva to meditate on the relativity of moral norms and freedoms “inside the ring:”

So, the unusual has become commonplace. Dulled sensitivity. In a person good and bad are mixed. What some could call callousness is for others the usual behavior of a man caught up in harsh circumstances. If one takes up the theoretical premise that everyone (or a lot of people) recognizes what will happen, that freedom is a perceived necessity, as Marx said it was.<sup>398</sup>

Over time, especially after a few weeks of regular food, Mironova noticed an improvement in the state of the children in the orphanages. The children appeared cleaner, less aggressive, and more interested in their surroundings as opposed to just food. Mironova had to do fewer and fewer “round-ups (*oblavy*),” and by the end of the March she began leading convoys of evacuating children as they prepared to cross over Lake Ladoga.<sup>399</sup> Her diary ends in the spring of 1942 with a description of how the children came to be at home in the orphanage and bonded with the caregivers and other children there. Around the time that Mironova ended her diary, the orphanage director Nina Grigor’evna Gorbunova began to keep a diary about the children in her charge.

Like Zelenskaia, Matiushina, Mironova, and others, Nina Gorbunova devoted much of her diary to studying the family under siege. She especially documented the children’s views

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<sup>396</sup> Mironova, entry for 31 February 1942, 20ob-21.

<sup>397</sup> Korneeva, entry for 8 October 1942, 55. Korneeva moved between schools and orphanages during the Blockade. From November to February 1942 she worked in School No. 16, and from February to April 1942 she worked in a children’s home. In April 1942, she returned to schools, first as an inspector for RONO and later as the director of several different schools.

<sup>398</sup> Korneeva, entry for 6 October 1942, 54.

<sup>399</sup> Mironova, entry for 4 March 1942, 22-22ob. In the published edition, this passage is placed under the entry for 3 March 1942. She discussed improvements to life in the orphanage in entry 24 April 1942, 24ob. On 1 March 1942 Mironova’s work at the orphanage ended, and she was ordered by the regional party committee to become a political organizer for House Management No. 66 in the Sverdlovsk district. But by 24 June, she was again working with the orphanage. That November, she resumed her job teaching the sixth grade at School No. 10 (Ibid, 27- 28).

of their parents changed over time. She barely expended a word about her personal life and situation, and so we know little about her personal background. There are clear differences between Mironova's and Gorbunova's perspectives on the family, which stem in part from the distinct moments in which they wrote. Mironova's diary covers the first blockade winter and highlights children's troubled relations with their parents and their transition out of the home. Gorbunova's diary, which mostly covers January 1942-May 1943, focuses on the children's transition out of the orphanage and either back home or to the rear.

### *Unhappy Family Reunions*

Many of the children in Gorbunova's charge had parents who were working long shifts in factories and hospitals in the city. They visited their children on occasion and eventually came to retrieve them. Gorbunova described these reunions between parents and children in great detail and ultimately demonstrated how, as the biological family declined, this new collective or family, the children's home, grew stronger. Despite the rough transition to the orphanage, according to Gorbunova, the children had grown so used to it that they refused to leave. They agreed to evacuate with the orphanage, but generally resisted going home with their parents. She quoted one group of girls exclaiming: "yes, we really, really love our children's home (*d/dom*). It is our real (*rodnoi*) home!"<sup>400</sup> "The children really love their children's home," the director remarked in December 1942, "They refer to it simply as 'our home' (*svoi dom*)."<sup>401</sup> Gorbunova continued:

Today, there was an incident. Mothers who are returning for good must come and take their children from the orphanage. So, Shurik's mother returned, wanting to take her child. Shurik was very upset (*ogorchen*), he did not want to leave. Then Shurik's mama came by and said that she could not take him because they were sending her back to work and asked that I call him so that she could say goodbye. 'Shurik, I am coming soon,' the mother said. Shurik came out and asked, 'Mama, you came for me?' 'No, my son (*synok*), I am going away again, but don't you miss me, I am coming again soon,' the mother said. 'No mama, I will not be sad.' Having said goodbye to his mother, Shurik ran to his group and shouted loudly to his caregiver (*vospitateliu*): 'Ol'ga Ivanovna, I am staying at home with you, and mama has again left for work! How happy I am!!!'<sup>402</sup>

The diarist described these awkward reunions in an ambivalent, bittersweet tone without commenting on them directly. On the one hand, the sight of such estrangement between parent and child pained her. On the other hand, she was proud that she and the other staff members had created such an appealing home life for the children. This might be one reason why she focused on the children's refusals so extensively in her journal. Like Gorbunova, the

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<sup>400</sup> TsGAIPD, f. 4000, op. 11, d. 27, Nina Georgievna Gorbunova, "dnevnik," entries for 10, 15 April 1943, 32ob, 33ob-34. This source is henceforth referred to as "Gorbunova."

<sup>401</sup> Gorbunova, entry for 27 November 1942, 16-16ob. Similar examples appear in her entries for 2, 8 December 1942 and 2 March 1943, 18, 29ob.

<sup>402</sup> Gorbunova, entry for 27 November 1942, 16-16ob.

regime also was ambivalent about the children's home during the war. City authorities upheld Leningrad orphanages as places where the children's heroism and the regime's commitment to care for them was demonstrated. At the same time, they never presented them as a desirable, long-term replacement for the family. Two important moments of self-congratulation came on the anniversary of the October Revolution and on New Year's Day 1942 at which time the children were required to participate *en masse* in Sunday workdays (*voskresniki*) and in patriotic performances, where they danced, sung, and recited poetry for state and party leaders.<sup>403</sup> On New Year's Day, famed writer Nikolai Tikhonov visited Gorbunova's orphanage in order to document it as a success story for *Moskovskaia Pravda*. This article was translated into English and published internationally as a propaganda piece honoring the heroic children and the preservation of normalcy in Leningrad. Of course, no mention was made that the triumph of these pseudo-Soviet families coincided with the breakdown of individual, nuclear families. When read alongside Gorbunova's diary, the deterioration of traditional family structures seems especially glaring.

The primary reason why young *blokadniki* wanted to stay at the children's home was the food. The children's homes did not seem to suffer under the same economic and emotional stresses as family households. Not only were food deliveries more reliable, but because all children received the same ration, there were fewer suspicions about unequal or unfair distribution there than in the family. The orphanage inspector Glafira Korneeva noted that the promise of food attracted children and staff to the children's home. Both assumed that they "would be more full (*sytnee*)" at the orphanage. "At that time we were already half-crazy with hunger, so that you can forgive us for this horrible (*gadkaia*) thought," she added apologetically.<sup>404</sup>

Even very young children trusted the orphanage more than their families to feed them. Ten-year-old Vasia Dmitr'ev, for instance, left the orphanage in great trepidation, concerned that his mother would not be able to feed him. He asked Gorbunova if he could still return and have lunch there. "I am going to mama," he told her, "but I don't know how we will live. Will there be enough to live on through our [ration] cards? Well, I will live and learn (*pozhivu i uvizhu*). If it is bad, then I will move back to the children's home," he resolved.<sup>405</sup> Similarly, when her aunt came for her, Larochka Iliushchenko refused to go.<sup>406</sup> She had lived with her aunt after her mother's death and claimed that she took her ration cards and did not give her enough to eat. Whether or not this was true, it is clear that the children were highly skeptical of the family's ability to provide and manage resources, and they resolved to allow the state to take responsibility for their welfare. In short, at times both parents and children abandoned the nuclear family. Mironova's account describes how parents left their children—deliberately or through death—and Gorbunova's journal relays how children refused to return to their parents.

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<sup>403</sup> Gorbunova, entries for 20 December 1942, 19-190b; 1 February 1943, 27. Rudykovskaia described the experience of participating in such performances in her entries for 20 December 1942 and 1 February 1943, 50. For a scholarly discussion of this practice, see: N.V. Sedova, "Shkola v gody voiny," *Zhenshchina i voina: o roli zhenshchin v oborone Leningrada, 1941-44, sbornik statei* (Saint Petersburg: Izdatel'stvo Sankt Petersburgskii Universiteta, 2006), 102.

<sup>404</sup> Korneeva, entry for 6 October 1942, 50-51.

<sup>405</sup> Gorbunova, entry for 1 December 1942, 17ob.

<sup>406</sup> *Ibid.*, entry for 7 May 1943, 37ob-38.

In addition to these disputes over food, Gorbunova observed how parents and children became emotionally distant from each other. Parents sometimes appealed to the orphanage staff who were much closer to their children, for advice in raising their children. Gorbunova recalled how fifteen-year-old Nadia Sorokina's mother returned her to the orphanage after a row. The mother accused her daughter of stealing food and selling off her belongings while she was ill. The suspicion of theft drove a wedge between them as it did for so many families. In a plea for guidance, Nadia's mother burst into Gorbunova's office and demanded: " 'Help me raise my daughter into an honest person!'" Interestingly, Nadia's mother asked not only for practical help, but for insight about the ethics of her daughter's behavior, asking Gorbunova: " 'can such things be forgiven?'"<sup>407</sup> In the end, as Nadia herself put it, she was "dumped" back in the children's home. Gorbunova was sympathetic to, but also critical of the mother's decision: "I still got the impression that Nadia's mother loves her daughter, but not unconditionally (*ne slepo*). She asked for help with correcting and guiding Nadia. She [Nadia] will come to us and [I] along with the caregivers will mind her particularly strictly."<sup>408</sup> Gorbunova simply accepted that the orphanage was better equipped to raise this child than her mother who had limited time, resources, and parenting skills.

Parents and children became so altered and relations between them so distant that occasionally the parents who came to retrieve their children were unable to recognize them. In January 1942, Gorbunova recorded one episode about a soldier who came to visit his seven-year-old daughter. The girl was so emaciated and ill with scurvy that her father could not identify her. The little girl sobbed as her father refused her: "not recognizing his own child [he] said, 'no, this is not my child. [...] Can it really be you, Valia? This is what you have become (*takaia stala*)? No, no, this is not my daughter!" In the end, the soldier actually tested the insistent child by showing her a family photograph and asking her to identify everyone by name. In the end, Gorbunova remarked,

The father was satisfied, but I was watching how he was not himself, how he had to hold himself together a bit. He sat down with the child, became himself again and was silent...the silence lasted for five minutes. Then he stood up, warmly kissed her and we left. Arriving at my office, his strength left him and he started to cry. I did not say anything to him—the tears relieved his soul of this drama (*dushevnaia drama*).<sup>409</sup>

Conversely, there were also episodes when children falsely identified their parents, mistaking other adults for them. Unlike the scene above, which speaks to the disconnect between family members, these incidents illustrate a different aspect of the family's deterioration, a child's desperate desire to find surrogate parents and create a new family life for himself. Gorbunova observed this especially on holidays such as Red Army Day or International Women's Day, when groups of adults visited the orphanage or when the children visited military hospitals and performed for the wounded.<sup>410</sup> During a recital at the

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<sup>407</sup> Ibid, entry for 29 November 1942, 17.

<sup>408</sup> Ibid, entry for 29 November 1942, 17.

<sup>409</sup> Ibid, this entry is labeled "Jan.-Feb. 1942," 7ob.

<sup>410</sup> For examples, see: Ibid, entries for 23 February and 8 March 1943, 29, 30.

Hospital on the Fifteenth Line, four-year-old Slavik Andrienko was about to read his poem when suddenly he yelled “papa!” and ran into the audience. Certain that he had spotted his father among the wounded soldiers, Slavik would not leave the man’s side the whole day.<sup>411</sup> In the popular press, official propaganda, and letter-writing campaigns, Red Army men were often presented as father figures to the Soviet children, and the case of Slavik provides a literal instance of this.<sup>412</sup>

In sum, at precisely the time that the state was trying to strengthen the nuclear family, collective families grew stronger and sometimes were preferred both by children and their parents because it alleviated them of the burden of sharing food within the family. However, the diaries of Mironova and Gorbunova also emphasize the growing emotional distance between parents and children, who at times had trouble recognizing each other or recognizing moral obligations to each other. As a model for social intimacy, the family was often at the center of Leningraders’ queries about the nature of siege ethics.

#### IV. Families Separated by the Ring

For those *blokadniki* whose spouses or children lived outside of the city, the monumental task of sharing food was of little concern. For these diarists, family came to acquire an altogether different significance and purpose: it symbolized stability, peace, and normalcy, and it provided emotional strength and a greater sense of purpose. The prospect of one day reuniting with relatives helped to inspire these *blokadniki* to fight for life. In this way—to reiterate—not all families or marriages grew weaker under siege. In some cases, marital and familial bonds grew stronger, but ironically this happened more often between those who were separated during the Blockade. At least this is the view that the diaries convey. These family ties were maintained not through physical contact, but through text, memory, and imagination. By studying their own families as well as those of others, the diarists traced the peculiar evolution of “family togetherness” under siege: physical togetherness seemed to create emotional distance and tension within the family, while geographical distance, bolstered by memory and fantasy, contributed to a sense of emotional closeness.

The diary of Boris Apollonovich Lesin provides a strong example of how those trapped inside the ring grew in appreciation and affection for their families on the “mainland.” Unlike most of the diarists, Lesin was not a native of Leningrad. A war correspondent, editor, and writer, Lesin came from Moscow in 1942 to cover the Blockade, leaving his wife Zoia and nine-year-old son Anatolii (Tol’ka) behind in Molotov. Lesin’s diary is full of his professional writings, but in a few private moments, the diarist worried about his wife and

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<sup>411</sup> Ibid, entry for 25 February 1943, 29-29ob.

<sup>412</sup> Other diarists reported that their loved ones could not recognize this. A strong example appears in Savinkov’s diary. When he visited his wife and daughters in February 1943, they could not recognize him. The daughter hesitated to open the door to the stranger at the door until Savinkov wondered: “can it really be that I am a stranger? I am one of the family (*ia svoi*), a Leningrader resurrected from the dead!” To his daughter he cried: “It’s papa. Open up, I am one of the family! (*ia svoi*).” In: Savinkov, entry for 9 February 1943, 78ob-80ob.



son. Lesin longed for his family on holidays, wondering how they were celebrating “more than a thousand kilometers from here.” On “your name day, Zoia, things were especially calm in Leningrad,” he observed on 15 May 1942.<sup>413</sup> Similarly, on the eve of May Day, he inquired: “How are you, my dear wife and son, celebrating this holiday in that land so far (*trideviat' zemel'*) from here. Do you have the same thoughts? The same memories? I think that they are identical, like our passionate desire for victory and to meet.”<sup>414</sup> He also wondered how his son had grown in the two years he had been gone and worried whether they had grown apart based on their different war experiences. When they were reunited, how would they relate to one another, “in what tone” would they speak?<sup>415</sup> Because his family had become largely a touchstone of moral support, the thought of such conceptual or emotional divide seemed a great threat to the diarist.

As a member of the official press corps, Boris Lesin enjoyed several privileges including access to more food and to travel in and out of Leningrad by air. Before the war, Lesin recalled that he took his vacations away to get a reprieve from his family. Now he requested permission to use his time to visit his family.<sup>416</sup> On another trip to Moscow some months later, Lesin reflected that he used to take his family’s affections for granted. How lightly he approached travel in those days: “I remember past trips. How normal everything was. [I’d arrive at] the train station in twenty minutes time, sometimes I would not even kiss Zoia or pat my son. [Now] the reasons are simply different and the road is different, difficult. Does something, someone, somehow await me (*chto zhe i koe-zhe i kak-zhe*)? Do they wait for me in the capital?”<sup>417</sup> Lesin’s joyful descriptions of these reunions after long periods apart contrast sharply with the reunions that Gorbunova relayed, where children sometimes refused their parents. Unlike these children, Lesin was not teetering on the brink of starvation nor was he under obligations to share his food with his family. They speak to how differently Lesin viewed his family than the *blokadniki* who remained with their families inside Leningrad did.

### *Bound Together by Text*

Unlike Lesin, most diarists did not have the opportunity to reunite with their relatives until after the Blockade. As a result, they maintained relations textually—through the post, telegraph, or diary itself. Their journals functioned as imaginary or potential forms of correspondence, where they addressed their entries to their spouses and children or enclosed and recopied actual letters in the diaries. When he sense his death was near, Aleksandr Matveevich Vyianov wrote his final farewells to his wife and daughter in his diary. He closed the journal with two letters, where he offered his advice and bequeathed his property to

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<sup>413</sup> Lesin, entry for 15 May 1942, 5ob. Similar reminiscences about family on holidays can be found in: Savinkov, entries for 29 April 1942 and 6 May 1942, 35, 36ob.

<sup>414</sup> Lesin, entry for 30 April 1942, 5-5ob.

<sup>415</sup> Ibid, entry for 15 February 1943, 21ob.

<sup>416</sup> Ibid, entries for 25 October 1942 and 21 December 1942, 19, 20.

<sup>417</sup> Ibid, entry for 10 May 1943, 23ob.

them.<sup>418</sup> Because these lines bound them together, each letter or telegram that the diarists received was life affirming, a signal that the family endured. Conversely, the irregularity of the post was a direct affront to the integrity of their families. Sometimes, these notes brought as much worry as they did comfort. After his wife and daughter evacuated, M.M. Krakov moved into the factory where he worked and tried to distract himself from thoughts of them. “In my diary,” he openly admitted, “I never say anything about my family, about my personal ‘spiritual’ experiences associated with it and even with my house (‘former [house]’ because it is just a room I visit once every three-four weeks [...] locked with a huge padlock.”<sup>419</sup> His wife’s letters, however, jolted him out of this self-imposed mental isolation. Krakov cherished and dreaded her letters. When he read that they were hungry, that his daughter had no felt boots for winter, the diarist became overwhelmed with worry and, although he was starving himself, he sent money to help them: “Now the state of my (*dushevnoe*) spiritual consciousness has been severely disrupted by what an infinitely difficult situation they are in!”<sup>420</sup> Like Krakov, the diarists seemed willing and eager to sacrifice money or resources for their families when they were far away and could be viewed as victims, rather than as competitors, in the fight for life.

Aleksandra Pavlovna Zagorskaia, the director of the ‘Krasnyi Futliarshchik’ plant, also tried to hold her family together through the practices of writing and remembering.<sup>421</sup> She remained behind in Leningrad while her son Pavel (Pavlik) and husband Mikhail (Misha) were at the front. Zagorskaia wrote to her family everyday and copied many of their letters in her journal.<sup>422</sup> In this way, she drew her faraway loved ones into her daily life by allotting them space in her account of that life. The center of Zagorskaia’s emotional life and support came to reside not in her immediate, physical environment, but in these written and imagined ties with her husband and son. She lived for any communication from them, for it was the only proof she had that they were alive.<sup>423</sup> Conversely, the lack of news and irregularity of the post tormented her. When her husband Mikhail wrote in January 1942 that he had not received any of her recent letters and furthermore had been writing to her at the wrong address, Zagorskaia was infuriated.<sup>424</sup> Later, between March and May 1942, her letters to her son and husband were returned to her regularly because they could not be located. This threw her into a panic about whether or not her family members were alive.<sup>425</sup> “Got a letter from Misha,” she wrote on 4 March 1942, “which was sent on 25 November [1941] from Mulovki. The letter traveled for three months and had lost all meaning. Now I don’t know how Misha is—is he alive or not?”<sup>426</sup> The more her (almost daily) letters went unanswered, the more her journal entries were devoted to analyses of these silences. For Zagorskaia, an active correspondence came to symbolize her family’s vitality; silence meant death. As a result, the

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<sup>418</sup> TsGAIPD, f. 4000, op. 11, d. 19, Aleksandra Matveevich Vyianov, “dnevnik,” 58-60.

<sup>419</sup> Krakov I, entry for 17 January 1943, 51-52. This source is hereafter referred to as “Krakov, I.”

<sup>420</sup> Ibid, entry for 17 January 1943, 51-2.

<sup>421</sup> Zagorskaia, entries for 26 March 1942, 2-3 April 1942, 17ob-19.

<sup>422</sup> Ibid, entry for 26 January 1942, 11ob.

<sup>423</sup> Ibid, entry for 12 January 1942, 10ob-11. In this entry, Zagorskaia discussed how two soldiers show up to her door and delivered a letter from Pavlik to her and explained that he had won a prize two weeks ago. This is discussed in her entries for 4 February 1942, 19 September 1941, 12-18 October 1941, 3, 6ob, 7, 13ob.

<sup>424</sup> Ibid, entry for 11 January 1942, 10-10ob.

<sup>425</sup> Ibid, entries for 26 March 1942, 2-3 April 1942, 17ob-19.

<sup>426</sup> Ibid, entry for 4 March 1942, 16.

diary became a surrogate for the textual interactions that were missing or misleading. There, she spoke with them directly and frequently asked them about their whereabouts and wellbeing.

It was not until 20 May 1942 that Zagorskaia finally learned that her Mikhail had been killed five months earlier in January.<sup>427</sup> Although she had no confirmation of her son's death, she deduced this from the silence. One month later, while she was still steeped in grief for both Mikhail and Pavel, the diarist received a painful jolt: one of her letters was returned to her, but this time with a note saying that the addressee, Mikhail, was living in a military hospital. "What does this mean?" she implored her diary, "I was in complete bewilderment. Happiness filled my soul. But I don't know what to believe—the notice that Mikhail was killed or the letter with the enclosed notice that Mikhail is in the hospital." This note resurrected Mikhail and her hope that he survived. The next post, however, brought a letter from a friend that confirmed Mikhail's death.<sup>428</sup>

No news arrived from Pavel for six more months until November 1942 when Zagorskaia received word from Leningrad's Military Prosecutor (*voennyi prokuror*) that he had been wounded in February and sent to a military hospital in Leningrad. Confusingly, she was also notified that there was no record of him in any of the city's military hospitals. The thought that he might be so close, but she did not know where, tormented her. Without written communication from him, it was difficult for her to imagine Pavel alive: "what happened to him? Probably he is no longer alive. It is difficult to think about that. This thought brings cold shivers to my body. Can I really have lost my son as well? Soon 1943, the new year, is coming. What will it bring us?"<sup>429</sup> She never received final confirmation of her son's death, which left Zagorskaia vacillating between hope and despair. One day she insisted that "obviously" Pavel had died, but in the very next entry she wrote of him as not only alive, but growing and maturing from his war experience: "Today is Pavel's twentieth birthday," she observed, "if he is alive, how he has grown up, hardened (*zakalilsia*) in battle. He has become a grown man. But how is he? I still know nothing after a year and four months!"<sup>430</sup> Zagorskaia preserved her son's imaginary life, along with her fears that he was dead, on the page.

Other *blokadniki* also used diaries and letters to resurrect and preserve the voices and images of relatives who had perished. As her household dwindled from hunger, eighteen-year-old Nina Mervol'f tried to revive the memories of the love and joy her family once shared by reading their correspondence. In particular, she read the letters between her aunt Olia and uncle Sergei. "I have been so greedy for other people's letters, diaries, etc., so my curiosity won out over morality," she explained.<sup>431</sup> Olia's letters were a revelation for Mervol'f, a reminder of how her aunt and uncle were before they became hardened by the Blockade. The letters transported Mervol'f back to a time of "so much tenderness and poetry. Such an essence of love, youth, springtime. That time simply emanates from these letters. And I got so sad thinking that I will never again get these kinds of letters. These trite and banal diminutives ordinary for lovers, this passion and unrestrained fits of desire." In these

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<sup>427</sup> Ibid, entry for 20 May 1942, 22.

<sup>428</sup> Ibid, entry for 22 June 1942, 24.

<sup>429</sup> Ibid, entry for 7 November 1942, 29.

<sup>430</sup> Ibid, entry for 22 June 1943, 30ob-31.

<sup>431</sup> Ibid, entry for 6 May 1942, 66.

shadows from the past, Mervol'f hardly recognized the “coarse, dry, and irritable” persons that they became in the winter of 1941-42. As she read, the diarist remembered that less than a year ago Sergei was “brilliant, cheerful, and talkative” and Olia “was completely different too, elegant, merry, pretty.” Mervol'f continued, reflecting: “My eyes glisten with tears when I look back on everything in her last days—a yellow, covered face, with swollen, worn-out, angry eyes, with puffy hands and feet, motionless. She was so afraid of death, and she so wanted to survive and see Iliusha [her son] in Kabozha this summer.”<sup>432</sup>

Mervol'f clung to these letters about youth, love, romance, raw, unbridled emotion—all that she had been deprived of under siege—and reproduced many of them in her diary. In this way, her account stands not only as a chronicle of her private thoughts, but a record of the family's history as well. Above all, Mervol'f was captivated most by how quaint minutia—indicative of a simpler time with simpler concerns—were juxtaposed against bold declarations of love and devotion on the page. Here is a very small sampling:

In 1925 Sergei wrote her [Olia] little notes like this next one:

‘My dearest darling! I use the misfortune of others (illegible) so that I can say pure bliss to you, that I love you just as before and I think with pleasure about the time when we can be together... ‘Together’ (*vdvoem*)—just think, Olen'ka, what a wonderful word it is. And don't you dare think of any unpleasant things, only of good [ones]. Alright?... S.’

Or an even earlier note—apparently even before their marriage:

‘I feel so ashamed for such a stupid—and such an unnecessary thing—yesterday... the day before, etc. And I am ashamed, even more ashamed that I wrote to you from Rozanov that “we will kiss...”... Olen'ka, my dear, please forget, forget—I love you... S.’<sup>433</sup>

The diary of art historian Vladimir Kuz'mich Makarov provides a remarkable example of this blending of diary and letter and of the critical role that both played in preserving relations between kith and kin. Much of Makarov's diary was written as he lay in Sverdlovsk Hospital on the Fontanka in mid-1942. His main pastimes were reading and writing letters to his daughter Vera, who evacuated, and to his soon-to-be wife Zinaida Pavlovna Annenkova.<sup>434</sup> Makarov mentioned Annenkova in his diary as early as October 1942, but only in passing as an acquaintance—she was a kind medic who visited with patients in the hospital.<sup>435</sup> Their relationship became intimate in the winter of 1942. From this point

<sup>432</sup> Mervol'f, entry for 6 May 1942, 67-8.

<sup>433</sup> Mervol'f, entry for 6 May 1942, 69-71.

<sup>434</sup> OR RNB, f. 1135, d. 55, Vladimir Kuz'mich Makarov. “Dnevnik. Notebook 1: 2/X/42-2/V/44,” entries for 16 October 1942, 6 December 1942, 4ob. This source is hereafter referred to as “Makarov, Diary I.” This version of the diary was rewritten in a more legible hand by his wife Z.P. Annenkova with almost no errors. The original manuscript for the diary can be found in: OR RNB, f. 1135, d. 54.

<sup>435</sup> Makarov, Diary I, entry for 17 October 1942, 5-7.

forward, Makarov's correspondence with Annenkova became his lifeline. The diarist often referred to her as "my Madonna," his savior.<sup>436</sup> Of course, Annenkova was literally a lifesaver by virtue of her profession. Annenkova was a medical officer in the army and, although she returned for short visits, she spent most of the years 1942-1945 at the front.<sup>437</sup> The act of writing fostered a deeper emotional connection between these two individuals whose direct personal interactions had been rather limited.

Makarov's diary was full of excerpts from their correspondence, such that it often reads as a coauthored text. The letters greatly resembled the diary entries not only in their content, but also in their form and appearance on the page. Many of his letters were written in installments and divided into dated sections, covering a period of time or a progression of thought.<sup>438</sup> Moreover, Makarov and Annenkova elaborated upon previous conversations by numbering their letters and continuing previous exchanges by citing the number.<sup>439</sup> The letters were coextensive with their life together. They began renumbering their letters during the war and started over again after the German surrender. As Makarov put it: "in all relationships the count (*schet*) begins with one, because [we have] a new address and a period of peace."<sup>440</sup> In this way, even without Annenkova, Makarov spoke with her constantly, living with her day-to-day by narrating each moment and experience. Here again, the diary functioned as a space of imagined interaction with kith and kin.

Some of the letters that Makarov composed in his diary were never posted, but the act of writing gave Makarov with a much-needed emotional release and sense of connection to his absent loved one.<sup>441</sup> In both sets of letters, sent and unsent, Makarov repeatedly emphasized how the passion of their personal connection linked them viscerally, so that they could feel each other's pain no matter how far away they were from each other.<sup>442</sup> Moreover, as he read her letters or wrote his own, Makarov claimed he could hear her voice and asked if she could hear him.<sup>443</sup> She responded with a similar sentiment: "With what pleasure, with what relish and delicacy, I read your lines ... 'Konti\*', you are a treasure' ... I hear this ... it is

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<sup>436</sup> Ibid, entry for 31 December 1942, 18ob; OR RNB f. 1135, d. 55, V.K. Makarov, "Dnevnik," Notebook 2, entry for 17-18 June 1944, 112 (hereafter "Makarov, Diary II").

<sup>437</sup> This can be seen from the various addresses he used in his letters to her in: OR RNB f. 1135, d. 475: V. K. Makarov, "Pis'ma (84) Zinaide Pavlovne Annenkovoi," letters of 31 March 1945, 21 February and 5, 6 March 1945, 9-11, 64. This source is hereafter referred to as "Makarov, Letters."

<sup>438</sup> Each section was dated, either headed by a calendar date or a time and place such as "at home" or "morning" and thus strongly resemble the diary on the page (an example is the letter for 3 May 1945). Some are hand- and some are typewritten and often appear three to a page. This along with appearance of Annenkova's handwriting suggests that she recopied some of the letters when she compiled his papers after the fact. For instance, the letters for 12, 17 March 1945, 26-27, 34 were written in hourly installments.

<sup>439</sup> Makarov, letters of 29 March 1945, 5, 13 April 1945, 60, 80, 84.

On the 29 March 1945, for example, Makarov received four letters from Annenkova in one day and in his responses he listed the letters by number.

<sup>440</sup> Ibid, letter of 14 May 1945, 146. Letter number 62 was penned on 9 May 1945. The last letter in the file, sent on 30 May 1945, was numbered as "9."

<sup>441</sup> Makarov, Diary II, entry for 12 February 1945, 123ob-124. Makarov later commented: "The idea is emerging for 'unsent letters.' I will write to ZP (Zinaida Pavlovna) about it. 'Unsent' letters do not write themselves" (Ibid, entry for 28 March 1945). There is a fascinating collection of unsent letters used to maintain familial bonds in: Pleysier, *Frozen Tears*, 94-109.

<sup>442</sup> Makarov Letters, letter of 12 March 1945, 26-27ob.

<sup>443</sup> Ibid, letter of 6 March and 9 May 1945, 6-7, 140.

\* This nickname for Makarov is written in Roman letters in the diary.

not written, but said, uttered (*prozvuchalo*). I saw your smile at this (*pri etom*), your smile, how terribly sweetly your lips and head move, helping you to understand, to feel the whole meaning of this form of address (*obrashchenie*)...<sup>444</sup> In addition, as other diarists, each day that Makarov did not receive a letter from her filled him with foreboding, with the sense that his death was drawing nearer. There was a time in early 1945 when Makarov was unable to send any letters because Annenkova was moving from hospital to hospital; she had no permanent address. The inability to contact her seemed to threaten his chance of survival: “If she does not return, then I will not live. It is worse than living as a cripple (*kalekoi*). Life, frightful and dear life, spare and protect her for us. We still have not drunken a glass to ‘our happiness.’”<sup>445</sup> This connection to another, even to someone whom he knew mostly from writing, formed the basis of Makarov’s vitality. His sense of life and his future were invested in this textual connection with her, and he reinforced and revitalized the bond between them every day he sat down to his diary.

In May 1945 victory came. Makarov, however, was more elated by the latest letter from Annenkova than by the news of the Nazis’ capitulation.<sup>446</sup> This personal triumph overshadowed the national one. In fact, rather than bring him comfort, the Soviet victory increased his anxiety about when Annenkova would be demobilized and return home. Now, with this prospect at hand, the diarist became somewhat dissatisfied with an epistolary relationship and felt his loneliness more acutely. “In life I love only her and ‘ours.’ I am waiting.”<sup>447</sup> Makarov penned numerous letters (many unsent) and entries, beckoning to her—“hurry and knock on my door, Pani Zinusha, I am waiting for you!”<sup>448</sup> The more he waited, the more her arrival became the purpose and meaning of his life. Makarov felt that his life was directly linked to hers: “I do not know if this is how it is with you,” he wrote in one letter of May 1945, “but everything that was before you (after you will not be, outside of you is not real ... I remember when ‘before you’ I often asked myself in horror, ‘will it really be this way?’ This is what my life is ... but now that you entered it you became my life, I am afraid of only one thing, the thought of the inevitable ending of everything.”<sup>449</sup> His life began and ended with her. When Annenkova did in fact return to the city, Makarov ended his diary. Once they were together again and married, these textual ties were no longer needed.

### *Imagining Marital and Family Life*

Because they had only known each other a short time before her departure, the depth of feeling between Annenkova and Makarov largely grew out of the diary practice and correspondence. The dates on the letters reveals how their relationship grew during her longest absence from Leningrad at the end of the war: there are only three letters from 1941,

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<sup>444</sup>Ibid, letter of 14 April 1945, 94.

<sup>445</sup> Makarov, Diary II, entry for 15 February 1945, 124.

<sup>446</sup>Ibid, entry for 29-30 April 1945, 130ob.

<sup>447</sup> Ibid, entry for 15 November 1945, 144.

<sup>448</sup> Ibid, entry for 11 November 1945, 143ob. Underlining is in original text. Similar examples in: entries for 3 June 1945, 10 August 1945, 132-132ob, 136. This is in reference to a “Letter of 27 June from ZP.” Here the end of the war with Japan was made only in passing.

<sup>449</sup> Makarov, Letters, letter of 17 April 1945, 100.

none from 1942-43, one from 1944, and 80 from 1945. While the first letters show signs of little more than friendship, the notes from 1945 reveal the depth of their emotion. In this way, their romance mostly developed *in absentia*. Although they fell in love three years ago, Makarov joked: “I am still not entirely ‘accustomed’ to you.”<sup>450</sup> In light of their short time together, one way that he kept their life together alive was to imagine past events with Annenkova—such as how they met—and to anticipate their future life together in Leningrad.

It was difficult to find common memories between them because they had known each other a limited time and because of the great age difference between them. Makarov noted that he was nineteen or twenty when Annenkova was only two or three years old. For this reason, Makarov used locations in the city and surrounding suburbs that were very familiar to them both as the basis for creating new shared experiences. He was intrigued by the thought that their paths may have crossed accidentally many times in the past, and so he looked for potential points of intersection on the cityscape.<sup>451</sup> For instance, Makarov’s main wartime oeuvre was his history of Gatchina. In 1945, after giving a talk on the palace’s architectural style, he imagined how Annenkova might respond to his lecture and what kinds of memories the palace might trigger for her. “You would listen too...and then after the talk we would recall trifles—a vase for flowers [...] a dark, golden glass, with hanging tablecloth of pretty tea roses, perfumes spilled onto an oriental brocaded robe, a body of dark beauty (*smugloe telo*), and many other wonders of the castle that burned down...my Love...how I love to recall everything that we had then and recently. And [things] are immeasurably better than a while ago...aren’t they?”<sup>452</sup> In this scene, Makarov overlaid fantasy, his beloved’s reaction to his lecture, her imagined memories, and real emotions and experiences.

In his letters and diary, he imagined walking with Annenkova or he observed how various places in the city conjured up memories of their brief life together. On these strolls, Makarov pieced together a new historical narrative of Leningrad, one that linked together historical “epochs and stages” of the city’s history to moments in their relationship’s development.<sup>453</sup> In this way, he situated their intimate encounters in the narrative of the city as well as in the great narrative of history. As he strolled, Makarov tried to anticipate her words, looks, and reactions. On the first warm spring day in 1945, he wrote to her: “I walked about the Summer Garden, about our favorite broad pathway along The Mars Field... the beauty in the garden is ‘Somov-like’ (*Somovskii*). ‘Konti, how nice,’ you would say, placing your face under the almost warm rays [of sun] [...] There, every little path reminds me of our walks.”<sup>454</sup> Equally important were the moments when he returned back home from an errand or walk and imagined her at home waiting for him. As he explained in one letter of 7 May 1945, “sometimes I, lingering (*podoidia*) by the door of our building, call out...and I wait and summon from my memory the sound of your steps to the door and your voice, forever beloved...’ who is it?’ or ‘Konti is it you?’ My love, my fate, I wait for you [...].”<sup>455</sup>

The diarist took great pleasure in these imaginings as a way of both reconnecting with his wife, and mentally escaping outside of blockaded Leningrad. He admitted that it was

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<sup>450</sup> Ibid, letter of 24 April 1945, 113.

<sup>451</sup> Ibid, letter of 2 April 1945, 70.

<sup>452</sup> Ibid, letter of 15 March 1945, 21ob.

<sup>453</sup> Ibid, letter of 24 April 1945, 113.

<sup>454</sup> Ibid, letter of 30 May 1945, 162. This is probably a reference to the modernist artist Orest Somov, who painted the city in the style of eighteenth-century art.

<sup>455</sup> Ibid, letter of 7 May 1945, 136ob.

exhilarating, intoxicating to indulge in fantasy as though it were a narcotic that could alleviate the pain of illness and the hardships of the siege. “I am probably not drawn to smoke and drink like almost everyone around me, because I have something better than this—a thought, a memory, a sensation of you in life...and there you go! (*vot*)”<sup>456</sup> It was through this combination of fantasy, imaginary remembrances, and real recollections, Makarov created common experiences, which bound them together over many miles of distance. Makarov summoned his distant, and somewhat imagined, beloved to him through his diary and letters. Under the conditions of the Blockade, when his physical existence was threatened daily, this act of creating an intimate or family connection was Makarov’s lifeline, a necessity and a pledge of his continued existence.

Other diarists also experimented with creating familial interactions in their diaries. This was the driving force behind architect Esfir’ Levina’s diary—that is, in one of two distinct versions of her diary. Each diary presents two distinctive types of families. In the archival manuscript of her journal, Levina openly discussed her household and their efforts to pool their resources, share food, and diffuse tensions between them. I already mentioned how theft created discord between them. However, a published edition of her diary, which appeared in 1947, never discusses any specific relatives by name. Instead, it explores—in an abstract way—how far-flung kith and kin could provide each other with great emotional strength.<sup>457</sup>

Aside from similarities in the biographical information and some general overlap in content, these two diaries are completely different. While the published version begins in December 1941, the manuscript, which is part of the party’s official collection, does not begin until January 1942. This unpublished version of the diary adheres to the traditional structure of a diary and is laid out in chronological, dated entries. By contrast, the published diary is structured as a series of dated “letters to a friend,” a loved one “outside of the ring,” who functioned as a beacon of strength and support for her. These letters express the same historicist drive to document the world of the siege and the changing city spaces as the diary does, but through a conversation structure. “I want to, with definite clarity, to memorize (*zapomnit*) Leningrad at this time, to know, remember, and to pull through (*vynesti*),” she explained to her friend in her first entry.<sup>458</sup> In this way, like Makarov’s diary, Levina’s account draws attention to the fluidity between the diaristic and epistolary forms.

Levina’s “Letters to a Friend” are very intimate in tone, yet the identity of the addressee remains concealed. A close examination of the text suggests that the letters were addressed to a man—real or imagined—with whom she had a long, intimate, relationship in Leningrad and who was now fighting at the front.<sup>459</sup> She worried about his safety, trying to

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<sup>456</sup> Ibid, letter of 24 April 1945, 113.

<sup>457</sup> E.E. Levina, Diary “Pis’ma k drugu” *Leningradtsy v dni blokady* (Leningrad: Lenizdat, 1947), hereafter “Levina II.” Because of the usual structure of her diary entries, I refer to them in the notes as “entry/letter.”

<sup>458</sup> Levina II, entry/letter for 12 January 1942, 198. In the preface to the publication of the “letters,” Levina implied that they were genuine and accurate in content, but crafted after the fact. She explained that she “could not write” under siege, but later put her wartime notes “in order.” “I did not add anything to what I wrote down in the days of the siege,” she affirmed, insisting on the text’s authenticity (Ibid, 195).

<sup>459</sup> Ibid, entry/letter for 12 January 1942, 200. “I close my eyes and see you with a rifle a tilt, with a grenade on you belt [...] You ‘go of the rear to the retreating enemy’ like in a naïve children’s film [...] and, don’t laugh, it helps me to think that a breakthrough is quite close.” As she described her hardships inside the city, she



guess what front he was on and how close he was to danger. Although he was not a member of her family in the strict sense, judging from the tender, romantic tone with which she addressed him, he may have been a lover or life partner. Like Makarov, Levina used images of the city to create a imaginary space to share with her absent or imaginary beloved. The diarist frequently reminisced about their life in the city before the war. She referred to private jokes that they enjoyed, to previous correspondence between them, to people that they both knew. Because she never mentioned her family members in her “letters,” Levina’s “friend” provided her with a reprieve from (what she presents as) a rather lonely life and with much-needed emotional outlet. For example, after describing a busy day drafting new designs for bomb shelters, the diarist promised, “I will remember it all in order to write to you tonight.” Then she paused to reflect on why she took such pains to record her daily activities: “Who among us needs such letters? I think that, for me, my discussions with you provide constant ways to control myself.”<sup>460</sup>

Like Makarov, Levina used the narrative of the city to reminiscence and fantasize about her “friend,” to reinforce an imagined world that she willed to be real. And also like Makarov, she frequently imagined them strolling together.<sup>461</sup> As they walked, Levina would interpret the landscape, commenting on the historical or architectural significance of certain structures rather like a tour guide. “Do you want to go out with me along the streets of Leningrad?,” she asked on one occasion, “We will choose ‘windows’ as the theme for today’s stroll. We will see shop windows covered with anti-shatter boards.”<sup>462</sup> Levina enthusiastically led her friend on these architectural tours about the city, but at other times, she relied on her friend for support. On one walk, faint with hunger and fatigue, Levina apparently collapsed in the snow, yet in her mind she continued to stroll, albeit leaning heavily on her friend: “I walked slowly and felt that you were walking nearby. I wanted to lean on your arm and say that I am very tired, that sometimes it is hard for me to write composed (*spokoinye*) letters. Then I regained consciousness. I was alone on an empty street.”<sup>463</sup>

On these strolls and in every entry, it is the presence of a dear companion outside of the city that drives the narrative’s momentum and propels the author to keep fighting for life. Because there is limited biographical information on Levina, the reader cannot discern which of her two, very different diaries, is more authentic; she presented both accounts as such. Regardless of whether this “friend” actually existed for her, whether the letters were sent or unsent, or whether they were written during or immediately after the Blockade, they articulate a very specific and common configuration of social support that developed during the siege. Like others diarists who wrote to their relatives outside the city, the presence of this interlocutor and the drive to keep the conversation going pushed the diary and diarist forward.

After the Blockade, many families that had been separated remained scattered. A large number of those who had been evacuated were not allowed to return to the city, especially between 1944 and 1945, but were ordered to remain with their factories, orphanages, and schools in the rear. Normalcy was very slow to return to domestic life.<sup>464</sup>

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concluded: “and so, (don’t get offended), it is easier at the front” than inside the ring (Ibid, letter/entry for 22 January 1942, 201-202). Also see: Ibid, letters/entries for 18 April 1942 and 20 May 1943, 210, 217.

<sup>460</sup> Ibid, entry/letter for 7 February 1942, 204.

<sup>461</sup> Ibid, entry/letter for 20 May 1943, 217.

<sup>462</sup> Ibid, entry/letter for 1 October 1942, 213.

<sup>463</sup> Ibid, entry/letter for 15 January 1943, 214-215.

<sup>464</sup> For an insightful discussion of the restrictions placed on Leningraders who had evacuated, see; White, “After

Although we do not know how most of these families and marriages fared after the war, the diaries suggest ways that they grew closer to their kith and kin under conditions of separation. For them, the forms and functions of the family and marriage—as a material and emotional networks—changed dramatically. As they became materially independent from their relatives, these diarists seemed to grow more emotionally invested in them. Whether they directly communicated with them through letters or indirectly through reading and writing, imagining and remembering, the presence of a child or spouse motivated them to fight for survival. These journals highlight the diary’s commonalities with epistolary forms and its potential as a socially interactive text, not just a private, introspective one.

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The blockade diaries clearly indicate that there was no one concept, configuration, or purpose of family under siege. The spaces and meanings of the family were radically transformed under siege. Intimacy and interior spaces were violently assaulted by enemy shells; private apartments crumbled and melded into the deteriorating cityscape. As factories, schools, and institutes shut down during the first siege winter, the family took on a more central role in maintaining the physical and emotional wellbeing of individual *blokadniki*. And yet, according to the diaries I have examined, this interdependency did not foster necessarily greater intimacy or appreciation between family members. In most cases, proximity bred contempt. At the same time that the regime celebrated the nuclear family as the new social and domestic ideal, the journals indicated this familial ideal seemed almost impossible and even undesirable to many *blokadniki*.

The Blockade tested the strength of familial ties as well as norms of sharing food among kith and kin, but it also seemed to strengthen imagined, remembered, and anticipated intimacy with one’s spouse, children, or imagined beloved. For those *blokadniki* who were separated from their spouses and children, family represented an ideal of peace, stability, and normalcy. Through the lines, these families supported each other and rarely became enemies or competitors the way that relatives inside the city did. By contrast, inside the ring, family generally referred to the household, an economic and social network of exchange. In short, the Blockade seemed to bring far-flung families together and to pull those who were together further apart.

But beyond their personal struggles, marriage and the family became subjects of fascination and regular inquiry for the diarists inside Leningrad. They studied the family—their own households and those of others—and laid out typologies of the various familial configurations that existed. Taking the family “inside the ring” as a kind of model of social intimacy, the diarists wondered what such familial strife revealed about social ethics, relationships, and human nature. They asked whether Leningraders would ever regain their impulses to generosity, altruism and parental sacrifice. “Heroism, self-sacrifice, the heroic feat—only those who are full or who haven’t been hungry long are capable of these,” Elena Kochina declared, “As for us, we came to know a hunger that degraded us and crushed us,

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the War,” 1145-1161.

that turned us into animals. May those that come after us and happen to read these lines have mercy on us!”<sup>465</sup> It was in the diaries—a domain tolerant of ambivalent emotions and a space of confession, of intimacy with oneself, of imagined intimacy with the other—that the human condition of families under siege received naked, painful expression.

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<sup>465</sup> Kochina, entry for 28 January 1942, 191. English translation in: Kochina, *Blockade Diary*, 84.

Four:

A Living Experiment:

Examining the Blockade through the Lens of Medical Science

The Blockade was a moment of great crisis, but also of great opportunity for creative and intellectual inquiry. The siege diaries, rich in insights and observations, attest to this. One area that was especially ripe for intellectual discovery was medical science. The Blockade created a public health crisis that was unprecedented in Leningrad's history. Inside the city, doctors, nurses, hospital administrators, and patients watched as the medical establishment struggle to apply its limited resources and existing knowledge to the treatment of these fundamentally new beings, the *blokadniki*. Many of them kept diaries. These accounts describe in great detail how the Blockade exposed the limitations of medicine—both as a body of knowledge and a method of healing. Whether they were medical professionals or mere observers, these diarists took the medical model to task for its failure to stem the rising tide of death in the city.

At the same time, it occurred to the diarists that their situation “inside the ring” was not unlike a great human experiment. Everyday, the Blockade pushed the human organism to its limits, testing its ability to endure conditions inimical to life. The conditions of the siege created a closed off, controlled, and concentrated environment—an almost ideal setting for scientific observation. As the doctor, blockade scholar, and siege survivor Svetlana Magaeva put it, the siege “conducted an experiment of terrible harshness in which more than two million Leningraders were brought to the limit of survival,” but from this ordeal—and other episodes of starvation—“discoveries of fundamental importance to physiology and medicine are made” and “broaden existing views on the latent reserves of human beings and the mechanisms involved.”<sup>466</sup> The diarists initiated such investigations themselves. On a daily basis, they examined their bodies, experimented with new survival strategies, and developed

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<sup>466</sup> Svetlana Magaeva, “Physiological and Psychosomatic Prerequisites for Survival and Recovery,” 156-7.

To date, a small number of scholarly studies have documented the discoveries and achievements of Leningrad's besieged medical professionals. The perspective of everyday Leningraders, amateur investigators of the siege body who worked in blockade hospitals and clinics, is much less well known. The remembrances of some Leningraders who worked as wartime medics are slowly being published, but these texts tend to focus on the Leningrad front and they are clearly written from the perspective of military victory. This retrospective picture obscures the experiences of the patients and medics who actually participated in this system. The leading studies of professional medical research and activity during the Blockade are: Barber and Dzeniskevich, *Life and Death in Besieged Leningrad*; P. F. Gladkikh, *Zdravookhranenie i voennaia meditsina v bitve za Leningrad*; Svetlana Magaeva and Albert Pleysier, *Surviving the Siege of Leningrad*. For a Soviet-era publication on the Blockade and the advancement of Soviet medical science, see: G.L. Sobolev, *Uchenye Leningrada v gody velikoi otechestvennoi voiny, 1941-1945*, ed. V.M. Koval'chuk (Moscow: “Nauka,” 1966), 68-69.

theories about the best ways to avoid or treat disease. They also studied the physical deterioration of those around them. The diary accounts provides concrete examples of how Leningraders—rank and file doctors and amateurs alike—worked as though in parallel with the city’s elite medical researchers to record medical discoveries, and suggest better methods of diagnosis, treatment, and prevention. Their journals testify to the impoverishment of patient care, but at the same time they abound with insights about health and medicine.

This chapter explores the diarists' inquiries into biomedicine during the first years of the Blockade. This was before significant scholarly papers were published on Leningrad’s medical crisis in 1944. Part One focuses on the diarists’ critiques of curative medicine, especially its failure to heal the patients who were languishing in Leningrad's clinics and hospitals. Part Two examines the spirit of scientific inquiry that thrived among the diarists. The diarists were dubious of the medical practices being used inside blockaded Leningrad, but they were not skeptical of medicine in general. In fact, they earnestly engaged with the concepts, terms, and practices of medicine and worked towards developing their own theories of health and pathology. Medical terms and categories strongly inform the structure of the diarists' narratives as well. Even those diarists who had little exposure to medicine drew on genres of medical writing, especially the case history.<sup>467</sup> More than just passive victims of starvation and sickness, the diarists privately participated in the conceptualization of health and illness under siege.

This chapter focuses on a handful of diarists who provide a range of experiences and perspectives on wartime medical care. The first two diarists were medical doctors, Anna Likhacheva and Ol’ga Peto. The third diarist, Zinaida Sedel’nikova, was a third-year medical student at the Second Leningrad Medical Institute, who began working as a hospital assistant in 1942. The fourth and fifth diarists, Mariia Konopleva and Irina Zelenskaia, were not medical professionals at all—Konopleva was an art historian and Zelenskaia a manager at Lenenergo—but over time they took on administrative duties in clinics. All five struggled to survive on a service worker’s (Category II) ration, which at its lowest point consisted of just 125 grams of bread.<sup>468</sup> Irina Zelenskaia was the most privileged. As a member of the management, she occasionally received extra food from her supervisors.<sup>468</sup>

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<sup>467</sup> For a discussion of how the case history as a mandatory and a particularly integral aspect of medical practice in the Soviet Union. See: Mark G. Field, *Doctor and Patient in Soviet Russia* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1957), 138-41.

<sup>468</sup> As her health worsened, Zelenskaia received “special food” (*spetspitanie*) in May 1942. This is mentioned in: Zelenskaia, entries for 13 November 1941, 2 April 1942, 12 May 1942, 31ob-32, 72, 80ob-81.

## I. Examining an Ailing Medical System

### *Inside the blokadnaia klinika: A Day in the Life of a Medical Assistant*

When the war began, Zinaida Sedel'nikova was in her a third-year at the Second Leningrad Medical Institute. A dedicated student, Sedel'nikova was determined to finish her coursework ahead of schedule even though the fall semester was constantly interrupted by air raids and bombings.<sup>469</sup> As part of her practical training, Sedel'nikova had the opportunity to care for soldiers who were wounded in the first months of fighting. This experience strengthened her determination to quickly graduate so that she could better help the victims of the war: "Soon, soon I need to become a doctor because it is impossible to be a witness to all this suffering..."<sup>470</sup> When the Medical Institute temporarily closed in November 1941, Sedel'nikova took a job as an assistant in the neuro-therapeutic wing of Hospital No. 95.<sup>471</sup> Until she evacuated in March 1942, the hospital became her primary university.

Sedel'nikova's first day on the job shattered many of her assumptions about the prowess of medicine and about her own abilities as a healer. Her studies did little to prepare Sedel'nikova for administering care during the Blockade because—as she later put it—the medicine used on the *blokadniki* was "almost not medical."<sup>472</sup> It was reduced to basic care-giving tasks such as serving meals, wiping the patients' brows, and turning them in their beds, which required no medical expertise at all. Sedel'nikova discovered, however, that she could barely accomplish these tasks. In her diary, she unfolded the story of that first day as a kind of tragicomedy of errors.

It started with hot water bottles that needed to be changed. I took one from under the leg of one patient and it was icy. I went down to the boiler room, poured out the hot water and brought it to the patient. Immediately, I heard a few voices, asking for a hot water bottle. It turned out there were six of them and I could not satisfy them all. I did not have enough strength to constantly go down and back up to the third floor.<sup>473</sup>

As a student, she barely subsisted on the smallest rations and had grown very weak. Small tasks like filling the water bottles and making rounds exhausted her strength. "Only at the end [of the day] did I understand the full difficulty of the work that I have taken on," she reflected.<sup>474</sup> The task of serving the midday meal, however, was "the most nightmarish of

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<sup>469</sup> Sedel'nikova, entry for 25 October 1941, 333.

Of the five journals I highlight, two were published: Anna Likhacheva's and Zinaida Sedel'nikova's. Sedel'nikova's diary was published in the post-Soviet period. Although Sedel'nikova's bleak descriptions and denunciations of medical care under siege are striking, readers must be mindful that the text could have been altered by the author or the editor. On Likhacheva's diary, see: Note 483.

<sup>470</sup> Sedel'nikova, entries for 3, 9 October 1941, 27, 28.

<sup>471</sup> Ibid, entries for 24 October and 19 December 1941, 33, 53.

<sup>472</sup> Ibid, entry for 4 March 1942, 80.

<sup>473</sup> Ibid, entry for 18 December 1941, 52-53.

<sup>474</sup> Ibid, 53.

all.” As Sedel’nikova bustled about delivering the soup, the patient’s cries for “potatoes or a piece of pie,” “unwittingly” tormented the starving medical assistant.<sup>475</sup> Sedel’nikova not only exhausted herself in trying to serve the meal, she lost her own bread ration in the process:

They brought plates of soup and set them down on the big table and I carried them out to each patient. There were three portions left for those [patients] whom we had to feed ourselves because they did not have the strength to sit or even to hold a spoon. I headed towards one of them. But here something unexpected happened. From an indistinct, general moaning I understood that one patient was asking for bread as though he did not receive it, but then two others persistently demanded seconds, seeing the remaining plates on the table. I got upset. I started to show, pointlessly, that the first’s [patient] declaration was a mistake when the doctor on duty entered. I took my own bread from my case and gave it to the patient. But my distress did not subside. When I ended up with the doctor in the hallway, I [started to explain that I] had nothing to apologize for, but the doctor did not wait for this. He understood everything correctly and said that one dishonest person simply took advantage of my inexperience. [...]

At dinner things went more smoothly, but I remained completely hungry until the end of the shift. How thoughtlessly I gave away my bread. In twenty-four hours I received fourteen new patients. All cold, hungry, half-alive. After dinner I had already certified the first death and then three more by morning.<sup>476</sup>

For Sedel’nikova, the most trying aspect of this work was the overwhelming feeling of helplessness, she could do little but witness the patients’ suffering. She approached one man, whimpering in pain as he slid into death, and thought: “He was dying and I was merely present...how, how can I help him?” Even if the lead doctor had been there, “what is there for him to do here? I myself can prescribe simple (*nekhitrye*) medicines and certify deaths.”<sup>477</sup> Although she had looked forward to this work, excited by the prospect of helping her fellow *blokadniki*, from her first day on the job, Sedel’nikova understood how little doctors could do to help the hungry. They had far too many patients and far too little food, medicine, or energy to treat them.

Before ending her shifts, Sedel’nikova performed two final tasks. First, she tabulated the total number of patients who had been “discharged”—that is, died—that day. Both a personal and a professional record, she copied some of these figures into her diary. During her shift for 3 and 4 January 1942, for instance, her ward took in twelve new people and “discharged” fourteen dead patients in a twenty-four hour period. Second, she had to perform “the grueling physical labor”<sup>478</sup> of lugging the corpses to the “morgue.” In truth, the mortuary

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<sup>475</sup> Ibid, entry for 22-23 December 1941, 57.

<sup>476</sup> Ibid, entry for 18 December 1941, 52-53.

<sup>477</sup> Ibid, entry for 22-23 December 1941, 57.

<sup>478</sup> Ibid, entry for 3-4 January 1942, 62.

was little more than a mound of bodies kept in the courtyard of the clinic. The view of this courtyard from the ward was a brutal reminder to her and her patients of what it meant to be “discharged.” “The scene is astonishing,” Sedel’nikova remarked, “the corpses lay on top of each other, stack up with plywood tags on their legs...There is no one and no reason to carry them off to the cemetery.”<sup>479</sup> In December 1941, as she walked home after another exhausting shift, the diarist confessed: “I could not remove myself from the feeling of guilt and dread to become one of those 'stacked up' (*'shtabelei'*)” in the courtyard. The images of these bodies haunted her as ominous shadows of her own fate. “Somewhere close by is my turn.”<sup>480</sup> Because she was too weak from hunger to haul the bodies there by herself, and she often had to enlist “patients who are a little stronger to help lay them on stretchers” and add them to the pile outside.<sup>481</sup> As her account demonstrates, the distinctions between living and dying, doctor and patient, hospital and morgue, seemed to be fading.

This single entry from Sedel’nikova’s diary summarizes some of the central difficulties that the medical community faced under siege. This account and other blockade diaries point to three issues in particular. First, without adequate human and material resources, little could be done to treat patients beyond giving them a little extra food or dietary supplements. Under such conditions, a physician’s main duty was to provide basic comforts, to write prescriptions for additional food or medical leave, and to certify deaths. As the journals demonstrate, in the world of the Blockade, food became a prescribed medicine, not a human necessity, and the clinic little more than a cafeteria.

Second, because of this connection between doctoring and providing food, a physician's job grew increasingly political (and less medical) during the Blockade. Medical staff worked with political authorities to determine who was eligible for bed rest, extra food, conscription, or mandatory labor. These decisions were based on concerns about productivity on the military and industrial fronts as much as on health concerns. For this reason, many diarists considered doctors to be bureaucrats or even enemies, who refused treatment as much often as they provided it. Whether or not these sentiments were justified, given the constraints and physical condition of doctors, this picture emerges strongly from the diaries.

Third, as in the rest of the Soviet Union, the bulk of Leningrad's medical supplies and personnel had been rerouted towards the front, leaving the civilian hospitals grossly undersupplied and understaffed.<sup>482</sup> In light of the mounting death toll, city authorities rushed to open more clinics and medical stations, but these facilities were hastily erected, overcrowded, unheated, often without electricity, and targeted by enemy shells. The mortality rates in hospitals were astounding, as high as 84 percent during the first blockade winter.<sup>483</sup>

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<sup>479</sup> Ibid, entry for 19 December 1941, 53. A similar description of a ward can be found in the diary of philologist Natal’ia Uskova, who also worked as a medical assistant during the first months of the war (Uskova, entries for 27 July and 6 August 1941, 11, 20-21.

<sup>480</sup> Ibid, entry for 19, 30-31 December 1941, 53, 60.

<sup>481</sup> Ibid, entry for 22-23 December 1941, 57.

<sup>482</sup> Before the war, Leningrad had been home to some of the country’s best public health services, facilities, and academies, so their sharp decline after the Nazi invasion was especially jarring. The city boasted 73 hospitals, 18 clinics, 131 polyclinics, and 384 first-aid stations, but many of these organizations’ human and material assets were reallocated in service of the front or evacuated to the rear. See: Henry Siegler, *Medicine and Health in the Soviet Union*, 291; Cherepenina, “The Demographic Situation and Healthcare on the Eve of War,” *Life and Death in Besieged Leningrad*, 18-19. Another statement on the effect of these reallocations in Leningrad hospitals can be found in: Uskova, entries for 21, 27 July and 9 October 1941, 7, 11, 19.

<sup>483</sup> Unfortunately, there are no accurate figures on hospital mortality rates until April 1942, when the Health



In light of this, many diarists described the blockade hospital as little more than a glorified morgue. Taken together, these three factors created a veritable revolution in the practice and profession of medicine inside blockaded Leningrad.

### *The Hospital as Cafeteria*

As Sedel'nikova discovered during her first shift, the role of the physician was greatly obscured by the siege. According to the diaries, a doctor's professional life, like the personal lives of virtually all *blokadniki*, came to revolve around food. One of the clearest illustrations of this appears in the diary of Doctor Anna Likhacheva, who worked in the clinic at the Red Banner Factory. Likhacheva's main duties consisted of prescribing food to patients and managing the clinic's cafeteria and kitchens. Likhacheva summed up her job as "the observation and study (*izuchenie*) of workers who have been approved for extra food at our factory's cafeteria," hardly distinguishing the treatment center from the canteen.<sup>484</sup> This was literally the case in the Red Banner Factory. Likhacheva's examination room and office were located inside the canteen, separated only by a flimsy partition, which she erected herself. With very few medicines at her disposal, Likhacheva mostly prescribed rest and extra food. But these "prescriptions" or supplemental food coupons were typically too little too late because one had to be very near death in order to qualify. Leningraders joked that the name of this coupon, UPD, stood not for "increased supplementary food" (*Usilenoe Dopolnitel'noe Pitanie*) but for "you'll die a day later" (*Umresh' Dnem Pozzhe*).<sup>485</sup>

Because of these conditions, Likhacheva aspired to organize a kind of curative cafeteria that could treat her patients *en masse* and more effectively than she could on an individual basis. She was constantly thwarted, however, by the city's policies regarding rationing and its organization of food distribution. Shipments of food often arrived late and in amounts much smaller than what she and the patients had been promised. The cafeteria menu, which was drawn up based on official norms, was a fiction. "Theoretically," Likhacheva dismayed, "the caloric intake was higher than 3100 and the menu consisted of different items, but in practice, alas, often the supplies [with which] to meet the norms were

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Department issued its first comprehensive report. Hospitals varied in how they kept their records and many did not distinguish between the number of patients discharged and those who died. Still, according to the city's Health Department, the average hospital mortality rate for 1942 was 24.43%, ranging from 31.1% at the start of the year to 3.7% in the final four months. In Karl Marx Hospital the death rate reached as high as 84% in January 1942. Sobolev gave the figure of an average 72% hospital mortality rate for the first year of the siege (Cherepenina, "Assessing the Scale of Famine and Death," 46-48; Sobolev, *Uchenye v Leningrade*, 65-66).

<sup>484</sup> "Iz dnevnika Likhachevoi Anny Ivanovny," entry for 15 May 1942, 682. This source is hereafter referred to as "Likhacheva." Likhacheva's diary was published during the Soviet period as part of a celebratory collection of workers' journals honoring their ability to keep working. Likhacheva's own self-presentation, however, is anything but heroic. Although it is uncertain how much the diarist or editor altered the original account, Likhacheva's scathing criticisms of the Leningrad medical community and of city health policies remain on the page despite the risk that such a stance might tarnish the memory of the Blockade.

<sup>485</sup> This anecdote is drawn from: William Moskoff, *The Bread of Affliction: The Food Supply in the USSR during World War II* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 196.

such that they counteracted the distribution of food and the very effectiveness of that nourishment.”<sup>486</sup>

Given that treatment had been reduced to food and food was difficult to obtain, some Leningrad diarists saw little reason to solicit the advice of a physician. This view of the doctor’s futility colors the pages of many diaries kept by medical staff and patients alike. “Almost the whole city is on the sick list (*bol’nichnyi list*),” the chemist Elena Kochina observed on 11 December 1941, “but the doctors do not visit the sick, and the sick do not go to the doctor. Doctors’ excuses from work (*biulleteni*) are extended in absentia.”<sup>487</sup> Health inspector Leonid Gal’ko was desperate to help his starving wife, but he was doubtful that a physician could help through certifications or consultations. Regarding his wife, he wrote: “she received a doctor’s certificate for sick leave, but what is the point. The doctors say (and I myself know this no less than they do), that she needs to eat. [She] needs fats. But nowadays it is useless to talk about that.”<sup>488</sup> Writer Sof’ia Ostrovskaia also joked about the impossibility of following doctors’ orders. Upon hearing one physician’s advice for how to care for her brother, both she and the physician had a good laugh: “The doctor says: ‘Diet. Rice flour. White meat. White bread—and not fresh, but with rusks.’ I chuckle. The doctor also laughs. Alas, the sick one does not laugh. *Le peuple rit!* So much the better: that means that they are still alive.”<sup>489</sup> Ostrovskaia performed the same charade with a doctor several months later, who after examining her mother, made impossible recommendations for her care: “‘Give her food, medicine, and peaceful surroundings (*pokoi*). Then your mother will pull through.’ The doctor speaks and knows: in the city there is no medicine.” Ostrovskaia plead with the doctor for help, explaining that she did not have enough food to help her mother:

‘For the second week I am feeding my family pea soup,’ I say, ‘I have nothing else. If in a normal time I feed my ill family members peas, what would you say?’  
‘That consciously or deliberately you are committing a crime.’  
Yes. It seems that there is too little hope.<sup>490</sup>

Although both Ostrovskaia and the doctor agreed that it was criminal to deny her mother proper care, there was seemingly little that they could do. As her mother drew nearer to death, Ostrovskaia changed her mind and decided to take her dying mother to the hospital, knowing that she would receive comforts, but would not be cured. Because her mother was “without hope,” Ostrovskaia arranged a hospital bed for her: “it will not help her with anything, it will not return her to health or to life: it is only so that the care for her will be better.”<sup>491</sup> That way, Ostrovskaia could focus on feeding and nursing her brother at home.

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<sup>486</sup> Likhacheva, entry for 21 May 1942, 685.

<sup>487</sup> Kochina, entry for 11 December 1941, 170. English translation in Kochina, *Blockade Diary*, 54. Two entries later, the diarist slightly contradicted her own claim, noting that: “everyone in our building is sick. Only the doctor is working. Everybody else stays at home” (Ibid, entry for 14 December 1941, 172; English translation in: Kochina, *Blockade Diary*, 55).

<sup>488</sup> Gal’ko, entry for 18 January 1942, 517.

<sup>489</sup> Ostrovskaia, Notebook 1, entry for 3 November 1941, 111.

<sup>490</sup> Ibid, Notebook 2, entry for 25 April 1942, 54.

<sup>491</sup> Ibid, Notebook 2, entry for 8 May 1942, 62ob.

## *The Politicization of Medicine*

Because food was the chief factor in how well Leningraders could be treated and the food supply was controlled by the state, medicine became embroiled in the politics surrounding the ration system and the organization of labor. In general, one's ration category was determined by one's work status, and doctors were often called in to certify that Leningraders were fit for manual labor, for military service, or for medical leave. There were precedents for this; before the war, Soviet doctors worked with trade unions and state agencies to regulate the labor force. This political component of their profession, however, seemed to reach a premium during the Blockade, where employment dictated ration cards and therefore the difference between life and death.<sup>492</sup> As Mark Field writes in his study of Soviet medicine, a physician's job was to keep workers fit for work "regardless of the limitations posed by the human organism." In fact, Soviet doctors did not take the Hippocratic oath because it indicated a loyalty to their patients and profession ahead of their loyalty to the state.<sup>493</sup>

As long as the medical community functioned as a gatekeeper to the food supply, it was susceptible to political forces and to corruption. The diarists almost uniformly believed that favoritism and bribery played a key role in determining who received food and who was admitted to the clinic. In their view, hunger was shaped as much by social entitlements as by a shortage of food.<sup>494</sup> This suspicion was voiced in the diary of Aleksei Chernovskii, a historian at the Museum for the History of the City of Leningrad, when he commented on the museum's medical station: "I do not understand, why the 'clinic' is basically a cafeteria for the administrators."<sup>495</sup> Because everyone was hungry and could justifiably receive "treatment," there was considerable wiggle room in how "patients" were chosen

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<sup>492</sup> Howard Waitzkin, "Micropolitics of Medicine: Theoretical Issues," *Medical Anthropology Quarterly*, Vol. 17, No. 5 (November 1986), 134-5.

In many societies, including the Soviet Union, medicine has defined health as the ability to work. A classic formulation of this notion can be found in Talcott Parsons' pioneering work, where he defined "the sick role" in terms of "relevant task performance" and health and illness as sociologically defined concepts. See: Parsons, "Definitions of Health and Illness in the light of American Values and Social Structure," *Patients, Physicians, and Illness*, *Sourcebook on Behavioral Science and Medicine*, ed. E. Gartly Jaco (Glencoe, Illinois: The Free Press, 1958), 165-187; P.B. Brown, *The Transfer of Care* (Boston: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1985).

<sup>493</sup> "The doctor may be told," Field explained, "Illness interferes with the production of engines. These engines are of great importance to our production program. You must see to it that more workers are available on the assembly line." In the prewar period doctors could be punished for not forcing the sick back to work (Field, *Doctor and Patient*, 40). On the Hippocratic oath, see: G.S. Pondoev, *Notes of a Soviet Doctor* (London: Chapman and Hall, Ltd., 1959), 58-59; Field, *Doctor and Patient*, 35, 38, 40-42, 147, 221-222. Siegerist, *Medicine and Health*, 26, 41.

<sup>494</sup> I draw on Amartya Sen's distinction between not having enough food and there not being enough food. In his study of modern famine, Sen argued that modern famines are general caused by inequalities in entitlement. In the case of Leningrad, I argued that it was both a problem of food supply and unequal distribution. See: Sen, *Poverty and Famines: An Essay on Entitlement and Deprivation* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981). For a history of the evolution of hunger as either biologically or a politically construed concept, see: James Vernon, *Hunger: A Modern History* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University, 2007).

<sup>495</sup> TsGAIPD, f. 4000, op. 11, d. 119: Chernovskii, Aleksei Alekseevich, "Dnevnik. V Leningrade, 1941-42," entry for 6 February 1942, 88. This source is hereafter referred to as "Chernovskii."

Other diarists claimed that doctors skewed diagnoses and prescriptions, but in order to help as many *blokadniki* as possible, not just elites. Mariia Konopleva observed this phenomenon her very first day working as a secretary in Clinic No. 22. The art historian left her job at the Russian Museum in 1942 and took up this new job, lured by the desire to do “socially useful” labor and the prospect of better rations. There were three official categorizations of invalids, Group I being the most severe and Group III the least severe. At times, one category was more “desirable” over the others depending on food distribution and evacuation policies. As she witnessed her first day on the job, “the diagnosis of these patients is almost always the same for everyone—*distrofiia*.” Yet, regardless of their condition, they all begged the doctors certify them as fit for work (*rabotosposobnyi*) and to place them in Invalid Group III for those with the least serious conditions. As Konopleva explained, “the doctors, like the patients,” secured this status for themselves because “only through work can one receive more food in the cafeterias [...] The doctors, *in order* to save those patients who can still stand up and who want it, transfer them from Invalid Group II where they are not given the right to work, to Group III for able-bodied people if only to help them recover from starvation.”<sup>496</sup> Later, when Leningraders in the worst physical health were given top priority for evacuation, the situation at Clinic No. 22 reversed itself: everyone wanted to be classified a Category I or II Invalid.<sup>497</sup> Konopleva’s diary highlights how malleable medical categories of health and illness became under siege, where diagnoses, prognoses, and treatments could be determined almost independently of the clinical reality. This was another aspect of the “non-medical” nature of blockade medicine.

Doctor Likhacheva similarly manipulated categories of illness and health in order to extend her patients’ stay in the clinic and therefore their access to extra food. The factory generally allowed workers only two weeks in the clinic before forcing them back to work. This policy nullified her efforts to repair the damage incurred by months of starvation. This system also shocked the organism—by giving it a sudden increase, then a sudden decrease in food. As Likhacheva put it, “they complain of a swift and sharp decrease in strength.” Because of this, her patients immediately began deteriorating after they lost access to supplemental rations and promptly reapplied for admission to the hospital. This policy also disrupted productivity and only added to the clinic’s bloated bureaucracy, overloaded with repeated requests for admission. By manipulating the certification process, “I managed to pull through (*protolknut*)” especially valuable workers for a second time. I hope that in the month of June we will have managed to fill all of the plant’s workers with food a second time,” she observed.<sup>498</sup> As Konopleva’s and Likhacheva’s accounts illustrate, a doctor’s ability to prescribe food or to certify illness gave him tremendous power over life and death, but in wielding this power he had to contend with the policies of the city’s industrial and political leadership. Their diaries reveal how some Leningrad physicians walked a tightrope between following and resisting the party’s authority to determine proper care.

Likhacheva’s efforts to work against the system in order to save lives were short-lived, however. Beginning in spring 1942, the city began closing clinics based on the claim that the population had been restored to health. Lenenergo’s clinic where Zelenskaia worked was

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<sup>496</sup> Konopleva, Notebook 3, entry for 22 May 1942, 74-75. A similar discussion appears in: Ibid, entry for 18 June 1942. Konopleva worked on the *vrachebno-trudovaia ekspertaia komissii* (VTEK).

<sup>497</sup> Konopleva, entry for 24 August 1942, 9.

<sup>498</sup> Likhacheva, entry for 21 May 1942, 685.

liquidated in April 1942; Likhacheva's clinic was closed apparently due to "improved conditions" and ration increases in June 1942.<sup>499</sup> According to the diaries—where grievances against state and party leaders were often aired—this decree was prompted by the need to increase the city's industrial productivity, not by a genuine increase in patient recovery. "They are not registering new patients," Likhacheva dismayed, "it is really too bad that there is no possibility now of bringing people to a normal state."<sup>500</sup> To make matters worse, according to her, factory policy-makers further crippled the health care system by cutting food available to medical staff. In her diary, the doctor submitted her medical history as evidence that those decisions bore no relation to any actual recovery:

The shortage of fat and sugar is making itself felt, but the norm issued to us, to the healers (*lechebniki*), has decreased. Earlier they gave us up to 60 grams of sugar and 40 of fats a day [...] now we get only 10 grams per day of fats and 10-20 grams of sugar or glucose. [...] I am needed here because of the shortage of doctors. I must have a Category II illness in order to leave the city. [Besides] I must admit that I am sorry to leave, I have made it through so much, only there is no way one could make it through a second frightening, hungry, cold, and dark winter [...] If only we could eat. The body (*organizm*) is too emaciated.<sup>501</sup>

The predicament of doctors differed little from that of their patients. They too were hungry, malnourished, and constrained by the city's strict policies and official categories regarding health and illness. With too little bread and too many mouths to feed, the hospital was hardly different from any Leningrad cafeteria or home.

### *The Hospital as Morgue*

During her graveyard shifts at Clinic No. 95, Sedel'nikova was chilled by the ward's "grave-like silence" (*grobovaia tishina*). A quick glance at the stack of bodies in the courtyard reminded her of how close life and death had become.<sup>502</sup> Natal'ia Uskova, a philology student-turned-medical assistant, felt herself slipping into a deathly, ghost-like state during her shifts in the hospital. "I don't like night shifts. The darkened windows with blue paper curtains, light from blue lamps, layer everything a cold, deadly hue. I move around the ward and feel disembodied (*besplotnaia*)."<sup>503</sup> This sinister view of the city's hospitals is also reflected in the diarists' linguistic choices, where the term "morgue" was used as a kind of shorthand for "hospital." This was especially during the winter of 1941-42, when most *blokadniki* were brought the hospital either to die or after they were dead. Sof'ia Ostrovskaia extended the metaphor of the morgue to Leningrad as a whole, calling it "not a

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<sup>499</sup> Zelenskaia, entry for 25 April 1942, 78.

<sup>500</sup> Likhacheva, entry 20 June 1942, 688.

<sup>501</sup> Ibid, entry for 20 June 1942, 688-89.

<sup>502</sup> Ibid, entry for 22-23 December 1941, 56-57.

<sup>503</sup> Uskova, entry for 13 August 1941, 21.

city, not people but [a world of] ghosts, phantoms [...] a panopticon, an open-air morgue.”<sup>504</sup> In her diary, eighteen-year-old Nina Mervol'f used “morgue” and hospital” interchangeably as she described the process of securing burial for her dead father at (the rather elite) Erisman Hospital.<sup>505</sup> And from poet Vera Inber’s description of Erisman’s facilities, Mervol’f’s slippage seems more than justified: “In other rooms, in the corridors, patients sit or lie as a matter of course. They are on benches, on stretchers, or simply on the floor, like corpses only they are dressed. Only their eyes are alive...two women doctors move amongst them. They look like corpses themselves.”<sup>506</sup> “We are surrounded by corpses,” Inber continued in her diary, “The whole territory of the hospital is full of corpses. Today they carried away 500, but there are 2,000 left.”<sup>507</sup> Inber’s husband, Il’ia Davidovich, was the head doctor at Erisman Hospital. His wife observed that he was so used to directing new “patients” to the morgue that he sometimes forgot to check if they were alive or dead.<sup>508</sup>

It was not just that the city’s hospitals functioned as houses of the dead. According to some diarists, the clinical environment itself hastened death. As he watched his coworkers at the Molotov Factory leave the clinic, for instance, diarist Ivan Savinkov grew convinced that they were actually sicker than when they arrived: “they leave feeling worse.”<sup>509</sup> Translator and librarian Aleksandra Liubovskaia had similar concerns when she and her son Igor’ checked into the hospital to be treated for advanced *distrofiia* and dysentery. Liubovskaia observed how the bright and sunny atmosphere of the ward contrasted with the gloomy and morose attitude of its residents:

They [the patients] say that all of the ill die in the end and that not one of them has gotten better. They lie around, not talking, they stop eating and they die of starvation. In general, judging from the conversation, there is little comfort awaiting us. But I don’t want to believe in this, and I will fight for the life of my son in every way that I know. Most of all, it is necessary to tear him away from such depressing conversations and to instill [in him] hope and interest in life.<sup>510</sup>

Even though the patients received more food in the clinic, the depressing atmosphere led them to stop eating and killed their will to live. Liubovskaia feared that interacting with them might prove more fatal than *distrofiia* itself.

This perceived causal link between illness or death and the ward became one of diarist Irina Zelenskaia's core beliefs. Zelenskaia was a manager in the Planning Department of the Lenenergo plant in Sverdlovsk district. On a daily basis, she monitored her coworkers on the station, the dormitory, the cafeteria, and the clinic.<sup>511</sup> It is curious,” Zelenskaia wrote on 4

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<sup>504</sup> Ostrovskaia, Notebook 2, entry for 27 April 1942, 55ob.

<sup>505</sup> Mervol'f, entry for 9 June 1942, 82-83.

<sup>506</sup> Inber, entry for 5 January 1942, 34.

<sup>507</sup> Ibid, entry for 3 February 1942, 49. This entry only appears in her diary manuscript. Similar examples appear in her entries for 5-6 January 1942, 340ob.

<sup>508</sup> Ibid, entry for 12 June 1942, 32.

<sup>509</sup> Savinkov, entry for 25 February 1942, 23ob-24. A similar example can be found in: Makarov, entry for 8 January 1943, 32ob-33.

<sup>510</sup> Liubovskaia, entry for 16 July 1942, 183.

<sup>511</sup> Zelenskaia, entry for 1 March 1942, 64.

March 1942, “that our sick who are sent to the clinic to get well as a rule come down with diarrhea almost within a day and all of their treatment (*popravka*), all of the abundant food, leads to nothing.”<sup>512</sup> Entry after entry, Zelenskaia repeated this theory, simply stating: “In the hospital they get even sicker.” Although Zelenskaia acknowledged the gravity of hunger and disease in precipitating death, she claimed that it was the clinical environment that delivered the fatal blow to the frail *blokadniki*. Not surprisingly, she offended a good many doctors when she mentioned her theory to them.<sup>513</sup>

A month later in April 1942, Zelenskaia was ordered to participate in the station’s medical inspection commission, selecting workers for medical treatment and curative food (*lechebnoe pitanie*). In the course of carrying out these duties, she further developed her theory about the dangers of the blockade clinic.<sup>514</sup> To support it Zelenskaia penned her own case histories of her dead and dying coworkers, where she refuted the official cause of death and indicated the “real” one. In one case history, she reexamined the death of her friend, coworker, and fellow Party member whom she called “Alek. Aleks.” Zelenskaia conceded that “scurvy and dystrophy took him,” but she insisted:

his time in the hospital ruined him. I superstitiously have begun to fear the hospital atmosphere and according to my theory, this evil consists of the fact that it acts by oppressing man and depriving him of courage and the will to resist, and this, not the disease, leads him to death.<sup>515</sup>

According to her theory, if Alek. Aleks. had remained “in an atmosphere that he had been used to,” he would not have become infected with the dispirited attitude of other patients, who since enrolling in the clinic “become less human, less cordial, and their spirits and interests decrease.”<sup>516</sup> Because those admitted to the hospitals received greater rations, Zelenskaia became convinced that the clinical environment and not hunger was the cause of their deaths. “Curative food does not save the dead,” she affirmed, “the sight of it,” of others eating “was a source of torment as well.”<sup>517</sup> As patients, librarian Aleksandra Liubovskaia and art historian Sergei Makarov confessed in their diaries that mealtimes were agonizing because of this.

Beyond the clinical environment, other diarists blamed doctors for what they perceived to be negligence and cruelty. In their view, the clinic became a mortuary because of the lethal actions taken by the staff. This perspective stands in sharp contrast to official wartime propaganda that celebrated doctors and nurses for caring for their patients as for their own children. Of course, the intimate space of the diary is a natural place for them to air these

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<sup>512</sup> Ibid, entry for 4 March 1942, 66.

<sup>513</sup> Ibid, entry for 4 March 1942, 66ob.

<sup>514</sup> Ibid, entry for 25 April 1942, 77ob-78.

<sup>515</sup> Ibid, entries for 4 March and 5 September 1942, 66ob, 97ob.

<sup>516</sup> Ibid, entry for 5 September 1942, 98.

<sup>517</sup> Ibid, entry for 19 March 1942, 69-70.

Zelenskaia drew these conclusions based on what she observed around her and the limited information available to her. Of course, she did not realize that the increases in food—either in the clinic or through ration increases in spring 1942—were slow in reversing the severe damage done to the body over months of prolonged starvation. She correctly observed that hospital mortality rates increased that spring, but without knowing that the city’s overall death rate had slowed. A greater percentage of Leningraders died in hospitals during the spring because the population had become much smaller and many more hospital beds were available to them (Cherepenina, “Assessing the Scale of Famine and Death,” 49).

grievances. In the diaries I have collected, I found only three journals—those of Liubovskaia, Konopleva, and Likhacheva—that contain any mention that, as Liubovskaia put it, “the hospital administration is very benevolent.”<sup>518</sup> Konopleva and Likhacheva described how doctors worked against the harsh policies regarding ration distribution and labor conscription to save patients. However, most diarists held physicians personally responsible for enforcing such policies that denied them extra food or exemptions from work.<sup>519</sup> Only a doctor’s note could excuse Leningraders from defensive and sanitation labor, and physicians were discouraged from issuing them by labor authorities. Sof’ia Ostrovskaiia’s brother, for instance, was fined for not participating in one cleaning campaign (*subbotnik*) even though he was ill with scurvy, *distrofiia*, and tuberculosis. In her outrage, Ostrovskaiia blamed city authorities for not letting physicians care for the sick: “state doctors do not have the right to give out to the non-working—that is, to dependents—illness certifications. And this category is predominant among our population. What follows? A vicious cycle.”<sup>520</sup> The diaries paint a vivid picture of the *blokadniki* shuffling around a revolving door between work and the hospital.

These legal constraints aside, many diarists still suspected that the doctors, hungry and overworked, had grown apathetic to their patients’ suffering. They accused doctors of various offenses from stealing food (often by adding “dead souls” to their lists of patients) to halfheartedly treating the infirm.<sup>521</sup> Aleksandra Mironova reported one episode where a doctor chased Lilia, an orphan whom she had rescued, out of the overcrowded medical station. When Lilia died two days later, Mironova reported the doctor to the local party committee.<sup>522</sup> At times, even physicians levied such accusations against other doctors. For instance, Anna Likhacheva was enraged by what she deemed to be utter negligence on the part of other medics. “Unfortunately, in February and January,” Likhacheva declared, “to put it frankly, they did not treat *distrofiki* at all, refusing ‘with [the word] no’ medicine, water, food. It was a cruel time. When I brought some drops to the hospital there was not even water for hot-water bottles. Everyone lay dirty, unwashed, and lousy (*vshivye*).”<sup>523</sup> Moreover, she blamed medical staff overseeing her husband Volodia and her son Oleg for precipitating their deaths.

Likhacheva believed that medical care had improved substantially by spring 1942, but others like Irina Zelenskaia and Maria Konopleva saw little change in the clinics where they worked. Zelenskaia observed that the doctors’ over-reliance on *distrofiia* as the universal diagnosis contributed to their dismissive attitude towards patients. In the Lenenergo clinic “Doctors barely look at patients. Everyone mechanically gets a diagnosis—general dystrophy (*obshchaia distrofiia*).”<sup>524</sup> Konopleva developed the same impression her first day in Clinic

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<sup>518</sup> Liubovskaia, entry for 18 July 1942, 185. On this notion of the family-like relations between medics and their patients, see: Kirschenbaum, “Our City, Our Hearths, Our Families,” 841.

<sup>519</sup> Mironova, entry for 15 February 1942, 17ob. This entry appears only in the manuscript version of her diary. The diary of Ol’ga Sinakevich records many episodes of doctors unwilling to sympathize with or care for the *blokadniki*. See: OR RNB f. 163, d. 365, I. A. Vtorovy I O. V. Sinakevich, “Zhili-byli: dnevnikovye zapiski i vypiski iz pisem, v evakuatsii,” entry for 10 September 1942, 10ob-11ob.

<sup>520</sup> Ostrovskaiia, Notebook 2, entry for 4 April 1942, 42-42ob.

<sup>521</sup> Boris Belozarov, “Crime during the Siege, *Life and Death*, 218-19.

<sup>522</sup> Mironova, entry for 25 February 1942, 19.

<sup>523</sup> Likhacheva, entry for 7 June 1942, 686.

<sup>524</sup> Zelenskaia, entry for 6 February 1942, 61ob.



No. 22. Like Zelenskaia's diary, her account is full of “case-history” vignettes, where she intently and individually examined each patient, their symptoms, and—most importantly—the doctors’ reactions. That day, Konopleva became intrigued by one patient who spent hours moaning in the corridor, sitting with her head in her hands and dipping in and out of consciousness. However, the diarist was even more fascinated by the fact that “little attention was paid to this. The doctor approached her, listened to her heart, felt for a pulse and left with a hopeless wave of his hand. And the medical assistant (*sanitarka*) said: 'and why do they drag themselves here to die—they could have taken to their beds at home.’”<sup>525</sup> Their medics’ cursory glances at the patients alarmed Konopleva more than the deathly pallor of the *distrofiki*. “Our attitudes toward death, this great mystery [*taina*] of our existence, has changed radically,” the diarist remarked.<sup>526</sup> Although reproachful in tone, the diarists’ observations point to the larger moral tangle in which blockade doctors were caught. They were pulled in at least three directions—by their professional obligation to heal, by state demands to increase the labor force, and by personal concerns over their own health or that of their family members.

The diarists were not alone in accusing the medical community of negligence. Leningrad doctors were severely reprimanded for it by the Leningrad NKVD and by top officials in the Kremlin. The party mandated that Leningrad doctors reduce the mortality right by a factor of eight, and it removed the head of Leningrad's Health Department in April 1942 as a show of its displeasure.<sup>527</sup> In May 1942, Popkov publicly chastised health care workers for their inattention. “At this meeting of medical workers,” he declared his “dissatisfaction” that the more canteens and health services had been supplied through the efforts of the city's state and party committees, but:

this was not done on the initiative of doctors. I consider that this reflects poorly on our medical establishments, and especially our institutes here in Leningrad [...] Had this matter been raised earlier, had appropriate material assistance been requested, it would have been given sooner. But what was manifested here was some sort of timidity or perhaps unwillingness to work.<sup>528</sup>

Certainly Popkov's claim that more food and resources would have been supplied to Leningraders had the medical community requested them, is dubious at best. After all, city authorities had failed to stockpile adequate food reserves and to properly conceal them from the Luftwaffe, which destroyed them in the first weeks of September 1941. His statement does demonstrate, however, how political elites and ordinary Leningraders shared the same attitudes about the Leningrad medical establishment and held it responsible for much of the massive death toll under siege.

City authorities also investigated individual doctors for wrongdoing. In a series of terrified entries, which were excluded from the published editions of her diary, the poet and writer Vera Inber relayed how the NKVD interrogated her husband about the high mortality rate and appalling conditions at Erisman Hospital. On 3 February 1942, Inber wrote: “The

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<sup>525</sup> Konopleva, entry for 22 May 1942, 72-74.

<sup>526</sup> Ibid, entry for 22 May 1942, 72-74.

<sup>527</sup> Cherepenina, “Assessing the Scale of Famine and Death,” 51.

<sup>528</sup> Quoted in: Ibid, 51.

police came and saw the mountains (in the full sense of the word) of corpses, the piles of filth over the whole area of the hospital, the disassembled fences, and declared that all of this (especially the corpses) were counterrevolutionary and ordered an investigation.” Although he “knew perfectly well the state of affairs at the hospital and [medical] institute,” the regional party committee secretary stood by silently while this “Bolshevik fire” ignited the tempers of the NKVD investigators. “I was beside myself,” Inber exclaimed, and for weeks after that she fully expected her husband to be arrested at any moment. This prospect terrified her more than the horrors of the Blockade: “To perish not from bombs, not from fires, and not even from hunger, but from the cold cogwheels of the administrative machine, what could be more frightening than that?” she remarked.<sup>529</sup> Despite her strong loyalty to Soviet power, this brush with the secret police was a moment of reckoning for Inber.

In sum, the siege diaries describe the state of health care system as nothing short of disastrous. This contrasts sharply with both postwar Soviet and contemporary scholarly presentations of the wartime Leningrad medical community, which laud its research accomplishments and care for soldiers at the Leningrad front, but pay far less attention to the experiences of civilian patients, and rank-and-file doctors and nurses. Whether they blamed the lack of resources, city policies on the distribution of food and medical care, social entitlements and inequalities, or the apathy of doctors and patients, all of the diarists—including medical professionals—described the blockade medical establishment as fundamentally ineffective. This did not prevent them from devoting a great deal of energy to observational research and medical theorization themselves. It is to these activities that I now turn.

## II. Examining the Siege Body: Observation and Theorization

### *The Drive to Investigate and Document*

If the blockade hospital failed as a center of patient care, it succeeded in providing the diarists with ample opportunity to gather data on various afflictions of the human body. The Second World War sparked huge developments in medicine, including new treatments, new fields of research, and new scholarly publications. In frontline hospitals or in laboratories that had been evacuated to the rear, Leningrad medical researchers and clinicians worked productively, studying and treating war injuries—from contusions and infections to blood transfusions—as well as human starvation and hunger-related conditions like vitamin deficiency, hypertension, nervous disorders, and amenorrhea. Inspired reports of their successes were publicized in periodicals like *Izvestiia* in 1944 and 1945 for all Soviet citizens to read.<sup>530</sup> And on 30 June 1944, the regime established the Academy of Medical Sciences of the USSR, a testament to the mounting interest in and achievements of medical science.<sup>531</sup>

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<sup>529</sup> Inber, Notebook 2, entry for 3 February 1942, 49-49ob. This episode was edited out of all published editions of her diary.

<sup>530</sup> A partial list of medical research publications produced in wartime Leningrad in: TsGAIPD, f. 28, op. 2, d.

At the same time that professional researchers were studying the effects of starvation on the body, Leningraders were informally doing the same. Medical journals and books on first-aid, surgery, and home remedies were among the most requested items in the city's libraries, and Leningrad's presses were kept busy printing new pamphlets and manuals on basic medicine.<sup>532</sup> The diarists also attended various scientific lectures and exhibits to learn about everything from fighting dystrophy to sanitation to making their own vitamin supplements from native plants.<sup>533</sup> Indeed, the city's health crisis fostered a spirit of inquiry and enthusiastic curiosity among many *blokadniki*.

Fatigue and poor health did not prevent the diarists from expending considerable time and resources on these investigations. Those with artistic training, such as Ol'ga Matiushina and Aleksandr Nikol'skii, studied the bodies of Leningraders in morgues and cemeteries and sketched them in their diaries. Others recorded these sights from memory. The new medical assistant Natal'ia Uskova even had second thoughts about her decision to study literature. After she accompanied each patient into the operatory, she stayed and watched each treatment with great curiosity. "Letting such an opportunity go would be a sin," she explained, "I stood the entire the surgery by the operation table as though bewitched. They were removing an appendix. It's extremely interesting! I probably made a mistake in my day by not entering a Medical institute, I love medicine, and possibly this is what I am meant to do."<sup>534</sup> Fellow philologist Sof'ia Ostrovskaia declared, with more than a touch of irony, that she was "busy with a research experiment" of her own based on two queries: "can a human being live without bread, without sugar, without fats, without meat, without vegetables, and how will he feel throughout this?"<sup>535</sup> Ostrovskaia, Uskova, and Levina all claimed that they could study anatomy from their bodies.<sup>536</sup>

The diarists were drawn to questions of health, disease, and human physiology because they confronted their own physical limitations on a daily basis. The stakes for better understanding the body and how to treat it were very high and very personal. They also constantly compared their own bodies with those they saw around them, even in passing. As she returned to her dormitory after one shift at the clinic, Sedel'nikova continued to cast discerning glances at the corpses lining her route, mentally registering the numbers of dead, and noting the cause of death. "I walked for three [tram] stops to the hospital and counted ten bodies, which were being led probably to Volkovo Cemetery. On Nevsky and Ligovsky (Prospekts) once again loomed the silhouettes of those whom the world has forsaken. Before,

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5288, Leningradskii Gorodskii Komitet VKP(b), Protokol 169, Zasedaniia Biuro ot 16/V/45, "Spisok nauchnykhtrudov podlezhashikh izdaniiu v 1945," 55-68. There were over 26,000 copies of medical works printed in 1945. See: Dzeniskevich, "Medical Research Institutes during the Siege," 86-122; Sobolev, *Uchenye Leningrada*, 65-66.

<sup>531</sup> The academy was opened in December 1944. For a personal interpretation of how the war drove Soviet medical research, see: Pondoev, *Notes of a Soviet Doctor*, 57, 191, 236.

<sup>532</sup> OR RNB, f. 666, op. L, d. 90, Sadova, "Biblioteka v osazhdennom gorode," 12; OR RNB, f. 1000, op. 2, d. 999, G.A. Ozerova, "Leningradskie knigi perioda blokady (opyt bibliografii mestnoi pechati), 20/VI/1947," 24-25.

<sup>533</sup> On highly attended lectures given at the Botanical Institute and Pushkin Library, see: *Moia Petrogradskaia storona: etikh dnei ne smolknet slava...luchshie raboty uchastnikov konkursa shkol'nikov Petrogradskogo raiona*. ed. L. G. Tarita (Saint Peterburg: Petros, 2002), 16-17, 4, 32.

<sup>534</sup> Uskova, entry for 13 August 1941, 22.

<sup>535</sup> Ostrovskaia, Notebook 1, entry for 3 November 1941, 111.

<sup>536</sup> *Ibid*, entry for 29 December 1941, 37.

I did not pay much attention to these individual cases, but now I have started to apprehend (*vosprinimat'*) everything in a different way, comparing it with myself. [...] I automatically (*nevol'no*) looked at one and then another...the cause of death is the same—hunger and cardiac exhaustion.”<sup>537</sup> In fact, it was difficult for Sedel'nikova to stop analyzing bodies outside of the clinic.

Anna Likhacheva, Ol'ga Peto, and Zinaida Sedel'nikova, who worked in the medical community, undertook this research as a professional duty, and they used their personal journals to record these findings—this was an important function that the diary obtained during the Blockade. Other diarists who were *not* medical professionals were surprised to find themselves adopting the clinical gaze of the medical expert and gleaning insights from their experiences. But the value of the conclusions resides not in their accuracy, but in the insights they offer about how ordinary people made sense of their bodies and the city's health crisis in their own terms. They hint at the range of ideas about the human body, which were circulating throughout the city before authoritative explanations were handed down by the Academy of Medical Sciences and its affiliated research institutes.

The art historian Konopleva was one of these Leningraders who informally recorded her own data on patients that came into Clinic No. 22, where she performed various administrative duties. She herself was surprised by how engrossed she became in these specimens, including one dead worker was brought into the traumatology room. “Recently I have seen hundreds of emaciated people, living and dead, but the body of this woman who had only just died was striking in its exceptional emaciation.” Donning the roles of doctor and social worker, Konopleva interviewed the woman's daughter for information, piecing together a family history and the circumstances of death and made an extensive study of the corpse, noting what symptoms were “characteristic of all *distrofiki*.”<sup>538</sup> Similarly, Irina Zelenskaia, a manager at Lenenergo, also grew more interested in the body in early 1942 when she was required to make more regular inspections of the station's dormitories and clinic. She also had to clear out corpses from the station. As she performed this grueling task, she examined the bodies closely. “One comes across amazing things,” she marveled and confessed that she had “wild desire” to go to Smolensk cemetery to see the bodies and the mass burial process “all with my own eyes.”<sup>539</sup>

In the course of these observations, the diarists developed their own notions of what was healthy, pathological, or abnormal—not only in comparison with the prewar era, but also within the context of the siege. The professional medical community did not have a monopoly on defining wellness and disease. Indeed, as personal diaries clearly indicate, illness came to be defined collectively by professionals and amateurs, doctors and patients, and based on social, political, and moral factors as well as on biological ones. By drawing on biomedical discourse for this purpose, the diarists demanded for themselves an authoritative voice in the conceptualization and institutional treatment of the siege body. They did not simply remain passive recipients of the knowledge produced by elite researchers and the decisions made by policy-makers in Soviet medicine. Rather, they worked within and against

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<sup>537</sup> Sedel'nikova, entry for 22-23 December 1941, 56-57.

<sup>538</sup> Konopleva, Notebook 2, entry for 9 June 1942, 81.

<sup>539</sup> Zelenskaia, entry 18/1/42, 54b-55. There are more examples in: Ibid, entries for 6 February and 14 April 1942, 61ob-62, 75ob-77.

the prevailing medical discourse, critiquing it and contributing to it their own symptomologies, typologies, and pathologies of sickness.

Below, I take a closer look at two siege-related pathologies, *distrofiia* and hunger-related psychosis. These two maladies received the most attention from the diarists, both in their self-examinations and their observational studies of other *blokadniki*.<sup>540</sup>

### *The Anatomy of an Illness: Distrofiia*

“In the winter months, the desire to eat was like a disease; satiety represented the ending of an illness.”<sup>541</sup>

-Lidiia Ginzburg

During the Blockade, hunger came to be regarded not just as a condition of life “inside the ring,” but as a form of disease. Scientists, medical professionals, and everyday Leningraders all contributed to the development of the concept of *alimentarnaia distrofiia* (nutritional dystrophy). *Distrofiia*, as it was commonly known, was a product of the Blockade and of the Great Patriotic War more generally. To this day both the term and the concept are unique to the Russian language and context.<sup>542</sup> Although little more than a euphemism for starvation, the term gave the famine inside Leningrad a medical valence; it emphasized the role of “natural” and biological causes and deemphasized the critical part played by political, military, and bureaucratic factors in creating the famine.

The diarists began using the term in their accounts around the same time as professional academics did, in October and November of 1941. Not yet an official diagnosis, neither group had a clear understanding of what “*distrofiia*” meant. At that time, medical practitioners and researchers gathered through their regional health organizations (*raizdravotdel*) to formally discuss the new hunger-related illnesses that were afflicting the city and for which they had no adequate methods of diagnosis, prognosis, terminology, or treatment. They created a commission to “to work out (*vyrabotka*)” their pathogenesis and symptomology so that they could be addressed more successfully and consistently across the city.<sup>543</sup> What they came to call *distrofiia* was not formalized as a medical disease or included

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<sup>540</sup> Another, less frequently discussed siege-pathology, “Leningrad hypertension,” was studied by Soviet doctors in the 1940s as condition that arose from a combination of malnutrition and severe nervous tension. After the war, this concept disappeared from Soviet and post-Soviet medical studies.

<sup>541</sup> Ginzburg, “Zapiski blokadnogo cheloveka,” *Prokhodiashchee kharaktery*, 357. English translation in: Ginzburg, *Blockade Diary*, 74.

<sup>542</sup> On Soviet views of *distrofiia* as a new and special “Leningrad illness” and “almost experimental pathology,” see: Sobolev, *Uchenye Leningrada*, 68; on *distrofiia* as a bureaucratic and medical euphemism for mass death by famine, see: Cherepenina, “Assessing the Scale of Famine and Death,” 39-40, 67 Note 52.

<sup>543</sup> This decision was announced in a top-secret memorandum to the City Health Department on 4 December

as an official cause of death until the latter half of 1942. Leningrad doctors themselves preferred the term “nutritional emaciation (*istoshchenie*)”. Although there were no major publications on it before 1943, “*distrofiia*” was already widely used “inside the ring.”<sup>544</sup> The diaries, then, are key sources for filling out this clinical picture and for understanding the early development of the concept.

Both the diaries and medical reports from the year 1941-1942 indicate that the *distrofiia* functioned as much as a shorthand for hunger-related deaths as much as for a specific kind of pathology. The diarists often failed to distinguish between the symptoms of dystrophy and those of other hunger-related conditions such as vitamin depletion; they used it as a catchall term to describe severe emaciation or many hunger-related conditions.<sup>545</sup> On her first day at the clinic “during the rounds with the doctors,” Sedel’nikova observed, “I understood that the diagnosis for all the patients is the same, dystrophy of the second or third level, and that the main treatment consists of food three times [daily].”<sup>546</sup> Konopleva, Zelenskaia, and Ostrovskaia also noted that the diagnosis was often given automatically without so much as an examination. In the Lenenergo clinic, Zelenskaia declared, “Doctors barely look at patients. Everyone mechanically gets a diagnosis—general dystrophy (*obshchaia distrofiia*).”<sup>547</sup> Diarist Aleksei Kornilovich called *distrofiia* “the usual Leningrad illness,” and as the director of the Sevkabel factory, he was involved in the treatment of this ubiquitous condition: “at the factory a medical station for *distrofiki* has been organized, but everyone is a *distrofik*. We fatten them up a little bit.”<sup>548</sup>

As they walked by gaunt passersby on the street, in breadlines, or in cafeterias, the diarists identified the “*distrofiki*” and even taught their (potential) readers how to identify the main symptoms or phases of the “disease.” Clinical observations and categorizations flowed

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1941. “*Distrofiia*” is nowhere to be found in the report of 4/XII/41 to the Leningradskii Gorzdravotdel, which is reproduced in: Gladkikh, *Zdravookhranenie i voennaia meditsina*, 28.

<sup>544</sup> The first reports identifying *distrofiia* as the main cause of hospital deaths submitted to the City Health Department in January 1942. According to these, 60 to 70% of civilian deaths in Leningrad hospitals were caused by dystrophy, while only 20 to 25 percent were caused by infectious disease. By contrast, according to this report, no soldiers died from dystrophy. The request that Leningrad use this term in its classifications of death came from Vologda and Perm (Cherepenina, “Assessing the Scale of Famine and Death,” 40, 48, notes 54 and 55).

It took some time for the pathogenesis of these illnesses to be fully observed, formalized and catalogued. One the first publications about *distrofiia* was M.V. Chernovskii’s “The Problems of *Alimentarnaia Distrofiia*” which presented itself as “the only comprehensive work on this topic.” Its opening line underscored the rather ambiguous process by which hunger acquired this label: “the pathological conditions that have been observed in the Winter of 1941-42 among portions of the Leningrad population under conditions of blockade have been given the name of *alimentarnaia distrofiia* or *alimentarnoe istoshchenie*.” This document is reproduced and discussed in: Gladkikh, *Zdravookhranenie i voennaia meditsina*, 29. A list of the leading publications in bioscience during the Blockade is held in: TsGAIPD, f. 25, op. 2, d. 5288. Leningradskii Gorodskii Komitet VKP(b), Protokol 169, Zasedaniia Biuro ot 16/V/45, “Spisok nauchnykh trudov podlezhashikh izdaniiu v 1945,” 55-68.

<sup>545</sup> One exception is scurvy, which tended to appear later in spring and early summer 1942

<sup>546</sup> Sedel’nikova, entry for 18 December 1941, 52. On her rounds three days later, the medical student began her own study of the disease, especially its effect on associated bodily functions such as excretion and digestion (Ibid, entry for 22-23 December 1941), 57-8.

<sup>547</sup> Zelenskaia, entry for 6 February 1942, 61ob.

<sup>548</sup> “Iz Dnevnika Kozlovskogo Alekseia Kornil’evicha,” *Oborona Leningrada 1941-1944*, entry for 18 January 1942, 574-75.

easily from the diarists' discussions of their everyday errands or casual encounters, including one chance meeting that Esfir' Levina had with her friend and physician "S.N." He asked her:

'Do you recognize me?'

'Aren't you a *distrofik*?'

Suspicion in his eyes: 'What could I be if not a *distrofik*?'

All of Leningrad is ill with *distrofiia*. The stronger part of the population is thin, exhausted, but psychologically fine (*na vysote*). *Distrofiia* I- this is not yet an illness, *Distrofiia*- II is already a sickness: they lie around, sluggish, indifferent or mean-under the appropriate routine and food they can be saved. *Distrofiia* III- [this is] the end. An easy death.<sup>549</sup>

The diaries of doctors Ol'ga Peto and Anna Likhacheva are largely devoted to identifying *distrofiia's* symptoms and pathogenesis. But unlike the official records of this condition, their diaries also emphasize the importance of various personal, situational, and cultural factors undergirded *distrofiia*. In this way, their journals reinforce how the notion of *distrofiia* was bound up with many (non-biological) associations.

During the Blockade, Doctor Ol'ga Peto held two different professional positions, and she kept separate diaries or notes (*zapiski*) chronicling her experiences at each one. She worked at the Emergency Medical Station No. 9 and for the system of Children Reception Centers (DPRs), where abandoned children were housed before being evacuated or placed in an orphanage.<sup>550</sup> Peto's job was to search Leningrad's streets and apartments for neglected children and bring them to these centers. It is on this text that I focus. Entitled "Children of the Blockade, Children of Leningrad, 1942-43" (*Deti Blokady, Deti Leningrada, 1942-43*), each dated entry in this account is labeled with the name of a child whom she rescued and the date on which she found them. Peto herself is not the subject of the text; she too rarely used the pronoun "I." Each page is structured into two columns or two distinct, but parallel texts. The left-hand text gives an intimate and affectionate portrait of each child that Peto rescued: his/her appearance, physical condition, and personal background. In the right-hand column, the doctor commented on the first text from a more detached, clinical perspective. Here, Peto drew from the particularities of each child to develop a composite "type" of the "child-*distrofik*" and to identify what she considered to be the defining traits and symptoms of dystrophy in children (*detskaia distrofiia*). It is a hybrid text in form and function, part personal account, part medical case study. As she moves between these narrative strands, Peto's tone fluctuates from emotional to detached, from particularizing to generalizing.

Peto's first entry entitled "January 1943. Galia, 8 Sovetskaia Street, 54" relays how Peto found Galia lying in a heap of dirty laundry in the dark corner of a freezing apartment.

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<sup>549</sup> Levina I, entry for 11 February 1942, 8.

<sup>550</sup> DPR stands for "*detskii priemnik raspredelitel*."

OR RNB f. 1273, d 52. Ol'ga Richardovna Peto: "Skoraia Pomoshch' v dni blokady. Zapiski neskol'kikh vyezdov 9-oi stantsii skoroi pomoshchi"; "Deti Blokady. Deti Leningrada, 1942-1943." These two accounts were given the ambiguous designation of being "notes of a diary-like (*dnevnikovskii*) character" by the library archivists because of their unusual form. A note on the second page of "Deti blokady" ("*perepisano tochno s zapisei*, 1944") indicates that in 1944 the author recopied the text from the original set of notes. This source is hereafter referred to as "Peto."

When she opened the door, the diarist noticed that “the pile of rags stirred. The child was brought to the nearest orphanage. A little creature who appeared about six or seven years old and with a little gray face and enormous eyes.” At this point, Peto broke from her narrative and, broadening the lens of her analysis, noted in the right-hand column: “the characteristic face of a child *distrof*.” Then, re-tightening her focus on Galia, Peto elaborated on the moment when she first spotted Galia: “all the rags were completely wrapped around some object. [...] A girl stood up, silently, indifferently, saying nothing. She neither asked nor answered any questions.” Here again, Peto shifted back to her analytical mode, noting in the right margin: “characteristic indifference.”<sup>551</sup> After a rest and a warm meal at the DPR, Galia finally spoke: “responding to repeated questions in a monotone voice, she quietly answered ‘I am Galia. I am 13 years old,’” to which Peto commented in the margin “this is how all *distrofiki* spoke.”<sup>552</sup> Slowly, Galia told Peto her story: she had no father, her mother left for work a month ago and never returned. A few days later, Galia’s ration card was stolen from her on the street. She survived for a short time on rusks given to her by a generous stranger (*diadia*) but before long, the starving child returned home: “I gathered together all clothes in the room, covered myself up, and lay down to die,” she explained. Peto’s direct quotations of Galia’s (and the other children’s) speech indicates her effort to capture their unique voices and situations. At the same time, Peto’s annotations continually reminded the reader that the girl’s tragic story and her physical and psychological deterioration were typical of a general socio-medical phenomena. Galia’s extraordinary story is rather ordinary among *deti-blokadniki*, but Peto’s marginalia do not minimize her suffering. The main text and the marginal comments work together, allowing the coexistence of both the particular and shared features of her experience.

The children were willing, even eager to tell Peto their story after they were fed. The “golden rule” of the DPR was “to feed them first (and carefully—never give the starving child a lot of food right away). Formalities come later.”<sup>553</sup> A warm meal eventually coaxed another boy, Fania (Feofan), to tell his story. He was just seven when his mother died. While his father stayed in Leningrad and remarried, Fania moved to the suburbs, where his grandparents raised him. Once the siege began, his grandparents “gave the child their last crumb—the boy tearfully explained—I did not take it [at first], but they tricked me, said that they had already eaten. And then they died.” Fania was sent to live with his father’s new family in Leningrad. But while his father was at the front, Fania’s stepmother let him go hungry and occasionally forced him to sleep in the icy stairwell. The neighbors turned a blind eye: “More than once they saw him at night on the cold staircase—she chased the little boy out! The doorman and the office of house management confirmed this! And the residents said nothing.” In her marginalia, Peto emphasized her shock, noting: “they did not help!” Despite the child’s hesitancy, Peto convinced Fania to take her to his stepmother whom Peto described as “a healthy young woman” attending to “stout, lively children.” In the margin, Peto exclaimed: “January 1943!” Even after explaining to Fania’s stepmother that she was an “inspector for the DPR of the UNKVD,” the woman “became noticeably worried and started to explain herself somehow: ‘I do not really know the boy and do not want him (*ne nuzhen*).

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<sup>551</sup> Ibid, 4-4ob.

<sup>552</sup> Ibid, 5-5ob.

<sup>553</sup> Ibid, 11.



Take him.’<sup>554</sup> Peto took Fania to the medical station on Decembrists’ Street (Ulitsa Dekabristov).

The successive entries follow the same pattern. In each entry, Peto the diarist was stunned by each child’s physical deterioration, while Peto the doctor reminded the reader that all *deti-distrofiki* looked this way. In her entry for “Fania (Feofan) January 1943,” Peto was taken aback by the child’s “tiny, gray little face (*lichiko*), dark blue lips and nose. Enormous black, eternally sad eyes. He asked for nothing—only looked melancholy as only a deeply unhappy child can look.”<sup>555</sup> Peto was equally arrested by Vova’s “gray face” and “enormous eyes,” by Mania’s “gray face” and “enormous eyes,” and so on.<sup>556</sup> The same was true for age. Peto knew from experience that it was difficult to guess the ages of *deti-distrofiki* from their appearance. In all ten cases, she incorrectly guessed the children’s ages and by a huge margin. As the physician commented in one of her marginal comments: “*deti-distrofiki* seemed so much younger than they are.”<sup>557</sup> Valia, whom Peto found lying next to the body of her dead mother, appeared to be only four years old, when in fact she was ten; thirteen-year-old Galia appeared to be only six or seven; nine-year-old Mania only five.<sup>558</sup> Peto always presented her guess at each child’s age before she revealed his actual age, recreating this shocking realization for her potential reader. In the process, she drew attention to the contrast between her personal and professional perspectives. Each child’s story is told through these multiple lenses and perspectives.

In sum, this unusual account presents the Blockade as an object of medical study and as a tragic and deeply personal experience. Peto’s diary brings the theoretical and practical aspects of her work together as well as the situational and biological aspects of illness. Two different perspectives find expression in two modes of writing, and, what is more, in the two parallel texts on one page of a notebook.

Doctor Anna Likhacheva’s diary also blends deeply personalized with more abstract reflections on *distrofiia* in order to help refine it as a specific pathology. Unlike Peto, however, Likhacheva did not avoid discussing her own physical deterioration as well as the deaths of her son and husband. She presented them as both personal tragedies and instructive clinical cases, which greatly informed her understanding of *distrofiia*—its symptoms, phases, and treatments. Likhacheva had generally recovered by the time she penned her account, but still she took great pains to record her own medical history while she documented the current cases of her patients. In May 1942 she reflected on later stages of the condition:

I am going through all the stages of starvation (*istoshchenie*) even crossing over into the third. It began just with emaciation and shortness of breath, a slowing down of my mental processes. On 12 December 1941 the dysentery began [...] then everything began to rapidly deteriorate. The darkness, the horrible cold hunger, and inability (*bessilie*) to stand on my feet and wait in line to receive the food coupons owed to me. [This] knocked me down as well

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<sup>554</sup> Ibid, 8-8ob.

<sup>555</sup> Ibid, 7ob.

<sup>556</sup> Ibid, 10, 13ob.

<sup>557</sup> Ibid, 14.

<sup>558</sup> Ibid, 16, 5-6, 14.

as my entire family and ended with the loss of (*zakonchilos' poterei*) my husband and my son.<sup>559</sup>

The themes of personal experience, self-inquiry, and observation research are intimately intertwined in her account. In this entry, Likhacheva moved seamlessly between personal and professional modes as well as between the literary persons of “I,” “you,” and “they” to offer a composite picture of the prototypical *distrofik*:

Wasting away (*iskhudanie*) is then accompanied by swelling, at first very subtly, of the eyelids, the ankles, and then all of this spreads, especially to the legs; it is difficult to walk, joints move with great difficulty. You want to drink, eat, you urinate at night in abundant streams and have the frequent urge to go independently of how much water you have taken in and sometimes paradoxically in opposition to it. You want intensely—to a surprising degree—to salt your bread and pepper your soup, but your tongue's sensitivity is weak; the inside of your mouth is dry, bitter. Your so-called tongue, is stuck in your throat, it is difficult to talk because of the dryness. Apathy begins to take hold, sluggishness, the desire not to move, to doze; you have no strength. But one must move, work, and think; it is impossible to sit at home because of the cold and darkness during the winter evenings, one needs to work, in working you forget.<sup>560</sup>

Likhacheva's personal battle against illness also afforded her many insights about *distrofiia* and how to manage it, which a mere researcher may not have discovered. She was mindful of the psychological symptoms and emotional aspects of hunger. “Judging for myself and by asking others who are being fed, I can give an interesting analysis of those feelings (*oshchushchenii*) that we all felt while eating a normal meal.”<sup>561</sup> From her personal bouts with *distrofiia* and dysentery, Likhacheva recommended that food be served differently in order to alleviate certain psychological symptoms of dystrophy, proposing that rations be divided into multiple, smaller courses in order to prolong the experience of eating. She also emphasized the importance of improving the quality of the food, not just the quantity, in order to alleviate what she felt were the worst symptoms of *distrofiia*: “torturous dizziness and ringing (*shum*) in my ears, such noise in my head, in the very inner part of my ears that I could not sleep because of it. Many people complained of that symptom.”<sup>562</sup> By analyzing her own patient history, Likhacheva identified the range of symptoms that her patients might experience and tried to account for them in treatments she planned. In this way, her journal takes on a distinct instructional feel that colors her discussions of the conceptualization and treatment of *distrofiia*.

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<sup>559</sup> Likhacheva, entry for 16 May 1942, 684-685.

<sup>560</sup> Ibid, entry for 16 May 1942, 685.

<sup>561</sup> Ibid, entry for 16 May 1942, 682.

<sup>562</sup> Ibid, entry for 21 May 1942, 685.

*More than Hunger: Distrofiia as Metaphor*

Peto and Likhacheva emphasized the social and personal factors that shaped *distrofiia*, but, as doctors, neither diarist questioned its existence as a genuine disease. Other diarists, however, used “*distrofiia*” more loosely and metaphorically, emphasizing its cultural, political, and moral associations more than its medical meaning. Although none of the diarists doubted that the majority of Leningraders were dying of hunger, some seemed dubious that they were perishing of *distrofiia per se*. Sofia Ostrovskaia, for instance, stressed that the term itself was arbitrary. Her brother and mother had been diagnosed with *distrofiia* in the winter of 1941-42, but in April 1942 their conditions were discussed in an altogether different manner. She described one house call, when she consulted with the doctor examining her ailing brother. Ostrovskaia noted how the doctor:

replaced ‘*distrofiia*,’ ‘*istoshchenie*’ (emaciation) with other words. She answered my puzzled question [this way]: the words ‘*distrofiia*’ and ‘*istoshchenie*’ are categorically forbidden for use. As it turns out, by order of the powers that be there are no *distrofiki* and no *istoshchennye* in Leningrad. It follows, then, that everyone must work. This moved me and reminded me of a painting by Vereshchagin ‘All quiet on the Shipka’. In connection with this unexpected discovery of the 100 percent health of Leningraders, they are beginning to close the clinics for *distrofiki*, where for ten to fourteen days they gave out extra food, which—it’s true—was surprisingly meager. Since everyone is healthy, who needs extra food?<sup>563</sup>

According to Ostrovskaia, not long after city administrators embraced the term as a permissible explanation for the city’s skyrocketing mortality rate, they forbade its usage. The need to increase the city’s productivity and to paint the city’s medical services in a better light drove them to discourage doctors from the diagnosis just as it led them to close clinics and limit the number of prescriptions and exemptions they issued.<sup>564</sup> *Distrofiia*, these personal accounts suggest, went from being an almost universal condition in Leningrad to an eradicated disease. Hunger was an undeniable reality, but diagnoses and prognoses changed by decree. *Distrofiia* was a political and bureaucratic concept as much as a medical one.

Many diarists recognized that *distrofiia* was a malleable and polysemous notion. It was teeming with meanings, some of which the general population contributed through its common usage of the term.<sup>565</sup> For instance, as the diagnosis of *distrofiia* became increasingly

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<sup>563</sup> Ostrovskaia, Notebook 2, entry for 4 April 1942, 42-43. This reference is to Vereshchagin’s 1878 painting of a hanged man, meant to show the brutality of the Turkish wars.

<sup>564</sup> More examples in: Chernovskii, entry 2 February 1942, 81-82; Likhacheva, entry for 17 June 1942, 687-8. This was the experience of Aleksei Chernovskii, as he sought a place for his son to be treated. After taking him to a children’s clinic on the Fourth Line, a doctor there directed them to the Lenin Hospital, not knowing that it was not operating at the time.

<sup>565</sup> Here my thinking has been informed by Nancy Scheper-Hughes discussion of “*nervos*” among Brazilian sugarcane workers in the settlement of Bom Jesus. Like *distrofiia*, *nervos* was a kind of hunger-related anxiety that developed from conditions of chronic starvation and which the medical establishment recognized and treated as a psychological disorder rather than as a social ill based on poverty and the deprivation of basic human needs.

common during the first siege winter, it became an identity, not just a physical condition. Because virtually everyone was starving under the siege, many diarists reasoned that: “almost all Leningraders have become *distrofiki*.”<sup>566</sup> “The term ‘*distrofiia*,’ has become very widespread (*rasprostranen*): ‘a *distrofik* of the third degree,’ ‘a *distrofiki* needs such and such,” historian Aleksei Chernovskii echoed in his diary.<sup>567</sup> The distinction between *blokadnik* and *distrofik* became blurred. This slippage took place not only inside the city, but also outside of it. A giant red banner that welcomed Leningrad evacuees as they passed over Lake Ladoga proclaimed: “Warm greetings, Leningrad *distrofiki*!”<sup>568</sup> More than a condition of starvation, *distrofiia* represented a way of identifying and belonging to a collective.<sup>569</sup> For those diarists who defined themselves and their fellow *blokadniki* by their shared experience of suffering, “true” *blokadniki* were *distrofiki*.

Others, however, tried to disassociate themselves from the *distrofiki* by defining them as a distinct group. They described the *distrofiki* as sickly and distasteful creatures who had lost many of their human qualities. According to her diary, the doctors in Clinic No. 22 taught Mariia Konopleva how to identify the *distrofiki* by their distinctly inhuman look. As she enumerated the defining features of *distrofiia* for her (potential) reader: “grayish-yellow skin, sunken-in temples, puffy cheeks, languid movements, a stooping walk, dim, senseless eyes. These are all symptoms of the still uncured *distrofiia* that one often sees.” Konopleva explained how the medical staff emphasized the animalistic appearance of the *distrofiki*:

One doctor, looking at one such patient, told me how clear the symptoms of the *distrofiki* are, evidence of man’s affinity ‘with the monkey!’ It is terrible to see these ‘monkey-like’ symptoms on the faces of young people, obviously doomed, as well as on old people...<sup>570</sup>

The writer and translator Sophia Ostrovskaiia also stressed the animalistic and “monkey-like (*obez’ianyie*)” faces of the *distrofiki*. Not unlike an anthropologist who reconstructs human ancestry from bone structure, Ostrovskaiia studied the cranial features of the *distrofiki*: “All *distrofiki* are without difference in sex, age, and race—they very much resemble each other. Apparently, for that reason, suddenly and clearly their skulls break through (*prostupaet*), [one can see] an outline (*risunok*) of a skull under skin the color of wood, dirty wood—at first glance all the skulls are identical,” but an expert eye showed these subtle differences that separated *blokadniki* and *distrofiki*.<sup>571</sup>

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As in the case of *distrofiia*, this move shifted blame away from the political leadership and the disenfranchisement of the poor and onto the individual organism. Moreover, many symptoms of *nervos* were similar to that of dystrophy: discoloration of skin, malnourishment, bloating, behavioral and mood changes: irritation, anger, psychotic delusions, chills and tremors, general weakness, ends in apathy and indifference. See: Nancy Scheper-Hughes. “The Madness of Hunger: Sickness, Delirium, and Human Needs,” *Culture, Medicine, and Psychiatry*, Vol. 12, No. 4 (December 1998): 429-458. 432, 433, 436-440, 444.

<sup>566</sup> Skriabina, entry for 10 December, 1941, 170.

<sup>567</sup> Chernovskii, entry for 8 April 1942, 133.

<sup>568</sup> This is discussed in: Granin and Adamovich, *Blokadnaia Kniga*, 326.

<sup>569</sup> An insightful discussion of this concept appears in: Nancy Scheper-Hughes and Margaret Lock. “Speaking ‘Truth’ to Illness: Metaphors, Reification, and a Pedagogy for Patients.” *Medical Anthropology Quarterly*, Vol. 17, No. 5 (November 1986), 139.

<sup>570</sup> Konopleva, Notebook 3, entry for 18 October 1942, 28-29.

<sup>571</sup> Ostrovskaiia, Notebook 2, entry for 2, 4 July 1942, 65-65ob, 70.

Despite the fact that hunger and starvation were very widespread, as the population began to recover in the spring, the *distrofik* became progressively stigmatized as a lesser form of human. As new, norms of health and hygiene were established, Leningraders who did meet these standards were resented as deviants. Esfir' Levina, Sof'ia Ostrovskaiia, and Irina Zelenskaia were among the diarists who noted a growing contempt for the *distrofiki*. Architect Esfir' Levina divided the city population into two categories, the recovering and the dying or—as she put it—“the cruel” and “the weak.”<sup>572</sup> By summer 1942, Ostrovskaiia observed, “a foundational mass of the population” showed a marked improvement and so “they look at the *distrofiki* coldly, even without curiosity, with disgust and malice (beasts after all do not love sick beasts). They do not forgive them: because they have not gotten well on time or because they have not died on time. The faces of the *distrofiki*, therefore, are guilty.”<sup>573</sup> In Ostrovskaiia's view, the *blokadniki* began to blame the *distrofiki* for their condition as though they refused either to die or to get well. As they grew healthier, Leningraders did not like to look upon the *distrofiki* and be reminded of the tenuous state of their own recovery or to suffer pangs of survivors' guilt.

Irina Zelenskaia shamefully admitted to her aversion toward the *distrofiki* whom she saw as less than (or a lesser kind of) human. “You feel somehow hardened and losing human feeling.” Yet she noted, “strangely, I am still kind toward people [...] where a human spirit lives.”<sup>574</sup> By the summer of 1942, the public had come to detest the sight of people who had either “improbably thin legs and fingers, or just the opposite [had] swollen pillars” for appendages. Zelenskaia claimed that her (perhaps unfound) resentments were shared by the public, noting: “People have become agitated and evil. If before the tram-riding public did not stand out in its meekness, then now it is simply cruel, and skirmishes blaze up from this or that or because of some trifle. Yes, nerves here are like that. You feel this way yourself.”<sup>575</sup> In this way, Zelenskaia's diary pointed to the paradox of humanness under siege. How was it to be defined—by physical or by moral criteria? Ironically, as she demonstrated, those who maintained a more human appearance had lost their ability to regard others humanely.

The diarists not only used ‘*distrofik*’ pejoratively, they came to apply it to people, objects, and situations from outside of the world of the siege. They deemphasized the element

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<sup>572</sup> Levina I, entry for 3 June 1942, 22-23. As figures marked for death and so ostracized from society, this formulation of the “*distrofik*” as a figure of the living dead is similar to the “Musselmann” described by Primo Levi, Bruno Bettelheim, and others. Regarding his fellow prisoners, Levi marked that life and death were difficult to discern: “One hesitates to call them living, one hesitates to call their death death.” See: Levi, *Survival in Auschwitz*, trans. Stuart Woolf (New York: Collier Books, 1986), 98. I would like to thank Irina Paperno for drawing this point to my attention.

<sup>573</sup> Ostrovskaiia, Notebook 2, entry for 4 July 1942, 70.

<sup>574</sup> Zelenskaia, entry for 10 December 1941, 40-40b. 4/VII/42.

<sup>575</sup> *Ibid.*, entry for 22 August 1942, 96.

The diarists' discussion of the causes and treatments of *distrofiia* speaks to a larger tension within Soviet medicine about the attribution of health and illness, which rested on the Marxist dialectic between the role of environmental conditions and human consciousness. In the 1920s, the Commissariat of Health stressed environmental conditions, but with the First Five Year Plan the pendulum shifted back to emphasize the importance of individual will and consciousness in determining health or sickness. Tricia Starks has argued that this shift was precipitated by the explosion of urban ills that accompanied rapid industrialization, which could not be criticized as unhealthy without also criticizing the state. Keith Livers has cautioned, however, that Stalinism was highly inconsistent in its attribution of illness: good health was credited to the socialist environment and viewed through a naturalist lens, whereas poor health was read as a sign of a personal lack of consciousness. See: Starks, *The Body Soviet*, 8, 205; Livers, *Constructing the Stalinist Body*, 42.

of hunger, removing “*alimentarnaia*” from “*distrofiia*.” Lidiia Ginzburg, for instance, came to describe *distrofiia* not as an affliction unique to the siege, but a condition that afflicted writers and artists of the twentieth century who hungered to express themselves freely, but who lived in a world of impoverished (“dystrophic”) language and creative constraints. In her analysis of Lidiia Ginzburg’s writings, the literary scholar Irina Sandomirskaya has argued that Ginzburg’s understanding of the 20<sup>th</sup>-century writer is a figure “always already besieged: the faceless object of biopolitical and ideological manipulation.” Both Ginzburg and Sandomirskaya regarded the *distrofik* metaphorically, “as an allegory that represents the decline and survival of writing under the threefold pressure of economic necessity, political terror, and total mobilization.”<sup>576</sup> To overcome *distrofiia* was to regain wholeness and authenticity.

By contrast, others applied the term more broadly and loosely to describe both people and things. The schoolteacher and diarist Aleksandr Vinokurov, for instance, explained how “*distrofiia*” became a derogatory term that one could apply to virtually any aspect of life.

The words ‘*distrofiia*’ and ‘*distrofik*’ were not known before to the citizens of Leningrad, but now you can hear them everywhere: in the offices, in the lines, in the streetcars. These words are used both with purpose and without purpose and are losing their original meanings and acquiring new ones. For example, they compare a slow moving streetcar not to the turtle now, but to a *distrofik*. Several years ago in order to insult somebody you'd call this person ‘*kolkhoznik*,’ (collective farm worker) but now a new pejorative term emerged—‘*distrofik*.’<sup>577</sup>

As this comparison to the collective farmers suggests, the *distrofik* came to represent a kind of underclass of blockade society, which bore many of the stigmas and associations of those who were considered slow, poor, haggard, and not necessarily hungry.

Another conceptualization of *distrofiia*, which emerged from these metaphorical understandings of the concept, was moral dystrophy (*moral’naia distrofiia*). Moral dystrophy, however, was even more polysemic a concept than nutritional dystrophy, and siege diarists, survivors, and scholars have applied it in a variety of ways. During the war, this term generally referred the power of the mind and spirit to determine survival, suggesting that internal factors, like apathy or depression, were the ultimate causes of death. Some regarded the *moral’nye distrofiki* as individuals who had grown completely indifferent to their own fate, who had “lost heart” or contracted “a malaise of the will.” Others tended to characterize *moral’nye distrofiki* as overly emotional people whose tendency to panic or despair doomed

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<sup>576</sup> Irina Sandomirskaya, “Biopolitics of Besiegement: Writing, Sacrifice and Bare Life in Lidiia Ginzburg’s *Notebooks*,” *Baltic Worlds* (Centre for Baltic and East European Studies at Södertörn University, Stockholm) (1 August 2010) 15.

Polina Barskova discusses how among the city’s artists and intellectuals the body of the *distrofik* indeed acquired a moral connotation as something unaesthetic, distasteful and to be despised. It was a constant reminder of the grim reality and one’s possible fate. See; Polina Barskova, “The Corpse, the Corpulent, and the Other,” 361-386.

<sup>577</sup> “Diary of A. I. Vinokurov,” *Blokadnye dnevniki i dokumenty* (Saint Petersburg: Evropeiskii Dom, 2007), 258. During the war, the NKVD arrested Vinokurov and seized his diary as evidence of counterrevolutionary thought.

them to death.<sup>578</sup> Both interpretations of this metaphoric ailment emphasize the link between emotional weakness and almost certain death.

In February 1942, Esfir' Levina observed that Leningraders, including her fellow architects, diagnosed themselves with *moral'naia distrofiia* as an excuse for all kinds of spiritual and social lapses.

A new term: '*moral'naia distrofiia*'—many people use it as a screen (*shirma*) for justifying filth and laziness. It is hard to find the line between suffering and speculation in this atmosphere. Voslinskii came to work in tatters, soot on his face, sobbing loudly, smearing dirty tears. Rubanenko yelled at him 'aren't you ashamed of yourself;' he stopped crying and then whined, asking to be taken home. For the second month the workers have been given medical certifications (*biulleten'*) on their service workers' cards. Many of them have been excused from work.<sup>579</sup>

The following months, Levina reworked her understanding of moral dystrophy, at times seeing it as laziness or apathy, not necessarily a result of hunger. "It is difficult to distinguish between the *distrofiki* (moral ones) and [those with] actual emaciation," she remarked.<sup>580</sup> Like Ostrovskaia and Zelenskaia, Levina resented these springtime *moral'nye distrofiki* as somehow responsible for their own condition, afflicted by an inner failing and spiritual weakness.

This concept evolved further still after the war. In *A Book of the Blockade*, Granin and Adamovich advanced another understanding of moral dystrophy, adapting it to describe an emotional weakness afflicting survivors who refused to speak about their experiences (especially any of their own moral shortcomings) or members of the younger generations who expressed doubt or disinterest in survivors' testimonies.<sup>581</sup> In short, Leningraders' understandings of moral dystrophy were highly individualized and varied based on their personal experiences and perspectives.

The problem of "losing heart" was central to Irina Zelenskaia's diary project. It provided the basis of the theories she developed on death, survival, and the mind under siege. Although she did not use the term "moral dystrophy," she used similar metaphors, noting, for instance, that anguish and anxiety "atrophied" the fiber of one's character just as starvation atrophied muscle fiber.<sup>582</sup> According to her thinking, people died because of moral weakness rather than physical ones.

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<sup>578</sup> Recently, Lisa Kirschenbaum has argued that moral dystrophy, burying memories of starvation, played an important role in Leningraders' coping strategies during the postwar era. Kirschenbaum argued that they avoided coming to terms with emaciation largely because it contradicted "the 'heroic' narratives told by the state. Instead, following the direction of the state, they emphasized war wounds that brought them closer to "soldiers under enemy fire," rather than starvation victims. Unlike the postwar accounts she mentioned, the diaries focus extensively on starvation. See: Kirschenbaum, "The Alienated Body," 225-226, 231. On moral dystrophy as a "malaise of the will" (*osobaia blokadnaia bolezn' voli*) see: Ginzburg, "Otsepenenie (priznaniia utselevshego distrofika)," *Prokhodiashchie kharaktery*, 437

<sup>579</sup> Levina I, entry for 26 February 1942, 11-12.

<sup>580</sup> Ibid, entry for 21 April 1942, 19.

<sup>581</sup> Granin and Adamovich, *Blokadnaia Kniga*, 18. This discussion appears in a section entitled: "doubting voices."

<sup>582</sup> Zelenskaia, entry for 7 December 1941, 38ob-39.

Without discounting the importance of eating “until full, often, and—when you can manage it—regularly,” Zelenskaia argued that nourishing the spirit was more critical to survival than feeding the stomach. Zelenskaia began to formulate this theory from the very start of the siege (before the famine) as she watched Leningraders lose their nerve during bombardment or while in line to buy food.<sup>583</sup> By comparing her own mental health with those around her, Zelenskaia became “deeply convinced that one can be saved only by internal energy.”<sup>584</sup> “Why do some people live and some die when all [are] unhealthy?,” Zelenskaia asked in March 1942, “the whole difference is only that some fight and gather together their strength and others, under the pretense of presently escaping, consider themselves to be sick, lie down, and after that they already can consider themselves doomed and many never get up again.”<sup>585</sup> Her account suggests that moral, rather than nutritional, dystrophy was the chief cause of mass death in the city. For Zelenskaia, vitality was a state of mind.

On her daily rounds at Lenenergo, Zelenskaia monitored her coworkers for what she called “moral demobilization” (*moral'no demobilizuiutsia*).<sup>586</sup> During the first winter, when the plant was barely operational, this observational work eclipsed her professional duties. As Zelenskaia explained in November 1941: “curiosity about tomorrow is one of the stimuli sustaining my life. Today I saw so many people crushed by life (*razdavlennykh zhizn'iu liudei*), which sets me apart from them. I feel my full strength and vigor and am ready to fight for myself, for my future, my children's, our future.”<sup>587</sup> During her visits to the Lenenergo clinic and to other hospitals, the diarist played the part of a pathologist, recording her analyses of various patients. Many of her reports were made about dead Leningraders and thus written purely for intellectual, not pragmatic, reasons. Consider Zelenskaia’s highly detailed, stage-by-stage account of the death of Mina Gertselevna, a close friend and coworker. Officially, Mina died of asthma and cardiac complications, but Zelenskaia insisted that she in fact perished from shattered nerves, which weakened her to such a degree that two *proximate* factors, asthma and a heart condition, were able to defeat her.<sup>588</sup> According to her, the medical conditions that were assigned as causes of death were only aftereffects of her coworker’s earlier spiritual acquiescence. The diarist generalized from Mina’s case to the collective:

I have noticed this with a lot of people and with Mina Gertselevna it was especially noticeable because it was manifested not only in illness, but in spiritual depression, in conversations about death, and some kind of haggardness and sharpening of the lines in her face, and then already much later this was joined by a heart condition.<sup>589</sup>

Zelenskaia took these case histories very seriously and even pitched her theories about the “real” causes of death to others. On 18 January 1942, Zelenskaia wrote heatedly about

<sup>583</sup> Ibid, entry for 11 October 1941, 22ob.

<sup>584</sup> Ibid, entry for 22 November 1941, 35.

<sup>585</sup> Ibid, entry for 1 March 1942, 64-66.

<sup>586</sup> Ibid, entry for 7 December 1941, 38ob.

<sup>587</sup> Ibid, entry for 22 November 1941, 33ob.

<sup>588</sup> Ibid, entry for 24 May 1942 82.

<sup>589</sup> Ibid, entry for 24 May 1942, 82ob.



how a debate she had with a friend “on the subject of hunger,” noting that it created “unexpected antagonism” between them. “He still explains everything in terms of physical reasons. I have re-situated the center of the problem to man’s inner, willful makeup (*na vnutrenniuiu volevuiu ustanovku cheloveka*), and we cannot find a common ground or ways of relating these reasons for the countless number of deaths,” she remarked.<sup>590</sup> She also took physicians to task on the page for what she considered to be faulty diagnoses.<sup>591</sup> In this way, while her work in the clinic increased her exposure to current medical theories, it only strengthened her prior conviction that hunger was necessary, but insufficient to explain the mass scale of death in the city. The (in)accuracy of Zelenskaia's theories aside, she had a strong personal incentive to believe that Leningraders control her own fate through behaviors and attitudes. In a way, then, her theories of moral dystrophy and of survival might be read as expressions of hope framed as biomedical findings.

### *Siege Psychoses*

Zelenskaia was not alone in emphasizing the psychological causes behind the mass death inside Leningrad. During the Blockade, diarists and medical researchers alike became absorbed in examining the psychological effects of wartime trauma and starvation.<sup>592</sup> Outside Leningrad, the Soviet medical community acknowledged, but reticent to popularize

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<sup>590</sup> Ibid, entry for 18 January 1942. Some official studies of mental strain and illness created by the Blockade claimed that activity and morale could stave off death from hunger, As V.M. Miasishchev explained in his essay “Mental Disorders in Nutritional Dystrophy:” “the experience of the siege has shown us that [...] it was those who gave way to the urge to rest who died.” See: Dzeniskevich, “Medical Research Institutes during the Siege,” and Magaeva, “Physiological and Psychosomatic Prerequisites,” in *Life and Death*, 106, 138.

<sup>591</sup> Zelenskaia, entry for 12 May 1942 80.

On one occasion, Zelenskaia explored the medical theories of an army surgeon who had recently been transferred to the city, who proposed that hunger weakened the heart muscle to such a degree that “the slightest nervous blow” could lead to “cardiac arrest and infectious disease.” “The explanation fascinated me,” Zelenskaia continued, “It is just too bad that this reached me third hand.” In broad terms, this theory gelled with Zelenskaia’s own view that external pressures merely aggravated internal weaknesses within the *blokadnik*. Weeks later, Zelenskaia became further convinced of her conclusions during a conversation she had with a coworker “about the reasons for the Leningrad death rate.” From this exchange, Zelenskaia noted “another interesting phenomenon: exceptionally low incident rate of the normal winter illnesses” such as typhus, influenza, and pneumonia despite their weakened immune systems. This led Zelenskaia to reject the army doctor’s theory that a general weakening caused by emaciation made Leningraders susceptible to disease (Ibid, entry for 12 May 1942, 80ob).

<sup>592</sup> Dzeniskevich, “Medical Research Institutes during the Siege,” and Magaeva: “Physiological and Psychosomatic Prerequisites for Survival and Recovery,” *Life and Death*, 105-06, 129, 131-132; Chernovskii, “The Problems of Alimentarnaia Distrofiia,” *Zdravookhranenie i voennaia meditsina*, 30.

Already in 1942 B.E. Maksimov, a psychiatrist at Leningrad’s V.M. Bekhterev State Psycho-Neurological Institute, emphasized that “the siege increased the *frequency* and above all the acuteness of mental disease,” which could in turn alter “the entire neuropsychic organization of both the individual and the entire social group” of *blokadniki*. Moreover, in “The Problems of Alimentarnaia Distrofiia,” M.V. Chernovskii mentioned the frequency of psychological, including psychotic, symptoms. “After eight or nine months of monitoring the effects of malnutrition,” he wrote, “one witnessed significant damage to both the endocrine and nervous systems, which played a role in either vegetative nervous functioning (*vegetativnoi*) or in “nervous-psychic (*nervopsikhicheskii*)” factors.

the connection between war and mental illness quite so openly. Although the war brought about a sharp increase in trauma-related psychopathology, there was great skepticism in medical and military circles, which “confirmed the conventional wisdom that the war did not create new forms of psychosis.”<sup>593</sup> Inside Leningrad, doctors and patients were less hesitant to discuss the psychological deterioration of the *blokadniki*. As with dystrophy, the diarists worked in parallel to professional scientists in this regard. They drew on concepts and terms from psychopathology as they attempted to place their personal anxieties into a broader, socio-medical framework. The diarists discussed at length two new forms of psychosis (*psikhoz*), which emerged in the city in direct response to the Blockade: bomb psychosis and hunger psychosis. Unlike *distrofiia*, neither of these concepts gained broad recognition by the medical community, especially outside of Leningrad, and were rarely mentioned in the postwar period. Despite these silences, the journals illuminate that these popularly conceptualized psychopathologies significantly informed Leningraders’ understandings of the Blockade and its assault on the mind. Moreover, these accounts reinforce the ways in which psychopathology is a cultural, not just a scientific, phenomenon shaped both by the professional researchers and the impressions of the general public.

### *Bomb Psychosis*

The notion of “bomb psychosis” was formulated by everyday Leningraders and not by professional psychologists although they generally observed the effects of trauma and anxiety on the besieged population. The diarists referred to “bomb psychosis” frequently during the first months of the war, when the bombardment of the city was especially intense, but it was eclipsed by “hunger psychosis” that winter. The journals demonstrate a fairly large consensus that the Nazis intended bombardment to be primarily a psychological weapon designed to destroy Leningraders’ mental stability as much as the city itself.<sup>594</sup> While each individual explosive was limited in the physical damage it created, it incurred unlimited psychological damage on the whole city. Liubovskaia called these “psychological bombs (*psikhologicheskie bomby*).” Other diarists referred to the bombardment as a coded message or sinister language that the Germans used to taunt the *blokadniki*. As Zelenskaia put it, the shells and bombs were cruel “German jokes” and “the pauses” between them were meant “to fool” residents, lulling

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<sup>593</sup> The conceptualization of wartime mental illness remained quite narrow and mostly focused on the concept of trauma—either from combat experience, coping with amputations and wounds, or infectious disease. Military historian Amnon Sella has argued that there was great suspicion surrounding psychological disorders based on emotional factors and not these overt physiological or situational ones as a way to get out of military service. Some resolutions were reached regarding definition and clinical treatment of disorders, but there was still disagreement over its cause. In Leningrad, the Health department recorded that 9% of combatant deaths in Leningrad hospitals were caused by ‘psychiatric’ causes, but provided no figures for civilian deaths. See: Sella, *The Value of Human Life*, 48-50.

<sup>594</sup> “They told me that the Germans only dropped ‘psychological’ bombs,” she observed in her account. Several examples of this formulation appear in: Liubovskaia, entries for 6 November, 1941, 2 December 1941, 5, 16 January 1942, and 10 July 1942, 21, 41, 53, 165.

them into a false state of security.<sup>595</sup> “The Germans ‘psyche us out’ (*psikhovali’ nas* (sic)),” Aleksandra Zagorskaia commented.<sup>596</sup> Indeed, the Germans designed and timed their bombing and shelling of the city in order to maximize their disruption of life inside. On 15 September 1941, for example, artillery fire lasted for over eighteen hours, and sometimes there were as many as twelve air raids a day.<sup>597</sup>

The diarists defined bomb psychosis in a variety of ways based on their personal experiences of trauma and anxiety, and the uniqueness of their formulations are in turn illustrative of their own emotional and perceptual states. The librarian and philologist Aleksandra Liubovskaia described bomb psychosis as an anxious condition rooted in the misperception of where and when the shells would detonate. Perhaps Liubovskaia felt this way because she was almost entirely deaf, so she had an especially difficult time judging the trajectory of the bombs. Speaking both for herself and others, Liubovskaia claimed that every *blokadnik* felt the shell was directly headed for them, regardless of its actual direction: “no matter where it ends up, it seems as if it were falling right on your head.”<sup>598</sup> Liubovskaia admitted that she and her children often suffered from this delusion, noting how certain they were that one explosive had detonated near their apartment, but “as we found out the next day, the psychological bomb fell two kilometers from our building.”<sup>599</sup> Although she was deaf, Liubovskaia could certainly “feel the bombs” reverberate as they were dropped. “You cannot help feeling that you are living directly on the front and that right before your nose shells explode with such intensity as if this were artillery fire preparing an infantry attack (*artpodgotovka*) and hand-to-hand combat right there on the Mars Field.”<sup>600</sup> Such unexploded shells fell right in the courtyard of their apartment building and across from the factory where she and her son worked. “Everyone is alarmed. It is a delightful thing (*veselen'koe delo*) to sit atop an unexploded bomb. But I sit calmly. For some reason I don’t think about the danger.”<sup>601</sup> The diarist lived in constant anxiety but also resignation that these shells might detonate at any moment. Bomb psychosis, this tense emotional state of living, if not in fear than in anticipation of it, encapsulated the siege experience.

The literary scholar Lidiia Ginzburg echoed Liubovskaia’s formulation in her retrospective “notes” on the Blockade, noting that the fear produced by aerial attacks rearranged the perceptive worlds of the *blokadniki* and even altered their general understandings of time and space, cause and effect. “Man thinks that everything will happen in order,” Ginzburg observed, “there will be a whistle, then an explosion, which he’ll see from the side, then something will happen to him.” Instead, bombs often fell without warning and landed in unexpected places and at unexpected moments. All of this gave the *blokadnik* “a mad sensation of things being overturned,” of being “turned inside out.”<sup>602</sup> The bombing

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<sup>595</sup> Zelenskaia, entry for 1 May 1943, 122.

<sup>596</sup> Zagorskaia, entry for 28 January 1942, 12.

<sup>597</sup> Adamovich and Granin, *Leningrad under Siege*, xvii.

<sup>598</sup> Liubovskaia, entry is entitled “6 November, 138<sup>th</sup> Day of War,” 4. For a similar view, see: Kniazev, entry for 29 September 1941, 65.

<sup>599</sup> Liubovskaia, entry for 6 November, 1941, 4.

<sup>600</sup> Ibid, entry for 4 March 1942, 112.

<sup>601</sup> Ibid, entry for 19 November 1941, 13.

<sup>602</sup> Ginzburg, “Otrezki blokadnogo dnia,” *Prokhodiashchie kharaktery*, 441. English in: Ginzburg, *Blockade Diary*, 108.

assaulted not just the Leningrader's body, but his overall understanding of reality, of the connection between sights, sounds, and spaces.

Other diarists understood bomb psychosis as a problem of sensory hyperactivity rather than of perceptual misjudgment. The art historian Mariia Konopleva reflected that Leningraders not only misjudged the trajectory of bombs and shells, they also imagined explosives and even air-raid sirens that did not exist. Konopleva argued that the Germans deliberately created such delusional impressions by bombing at night and thereby depriving the *blokadniki* of sleep and filling them with fear and anxiety.<sup>603</sup>

References to bomb psychosis decreased when the winter set in and it became too cold for the German pilots to fly. Hunger eclipsed air raids as the more immediate danger. Artillery fire continued, but as Liubovskaia put it, “the shooting has ceased to act upon the psyche of the people. We are used to it.”<sup>604</sup> In her unusual, novellesque diary, Ol’ga Matiushina described these “psychological flights” had “train[ed] the nerves of Leningraders” so that they no longer reacted.<sup>605</sup> It became abnormal, then, to fear the bombings. Lidiia Ginzburg offered a sociological explanation for this, suggesting that there were new social pressures that discouraged outward displays of fear of death. Ginzburg constructed a typical exchange between Leningraders, one rebuking the other for being afraid: “What are you getting so worked up for? You’re a Leningradka, aren’t you? Leningraders are supposed to keep calm.”<sup>606</sup> Such social pressures effectively “cured” residences of bombing psychosis. Indifference to the bombs became a new norm of behavior, so much so that the Leningrader identity became bound up with this muted emotionality.

For other diarists, however, bomb psychosis faded more slowly. Liubovskaia claimed that Leningraders were growing immune to it, but she wasn’t. For her, hunger psychosis never fully supplanted bombing psychosis, and she noted how “if just one splinter” fell nearby, her anxiety would refocus on bombing.<sup>607</sup> Some diarists were tormented by the *absence* of bombs. For Sof’ia Ostrovskaia, for instance, the eerie stillness and the constant anticipation of bombardment provoked greater anxiety than the air raids themselves. This created a constant nervous strain in the body of the *blokadnik*. “Oh, if only we knew nothing more of bombs or shells, and most importantly, did not await them. I live with [my] nervous system strained to the maximum. The needle, it seems, has landed on its highest point.”<sup>608</sup> In sum, by drawing on their own experiences of fear and anxiety, the diarists contributed the notions of abnormal, pathological behavior and to creation of new behavioral norms. Their particular notion of bomb psychosis grew out of their struggles to make sense of the perceptual and emotional restructuring they underwent “inside the ring.”

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<sup>603</sup> Konopleva, Notebook 1, entries for 13, 14 November 1941, 168-169.

<sup>604</sup> Liubovskaia, entry for 2 December 1941, 21.

<sup>605</sup> Matiushina, Diary, 76.

<sup>606</sup> Ginzburg, “Zapiski blokadnogo cheloveka,” *Prokhodiashchie kharaktery*, 344. English in: Ginzburg, *Blockade Diary*, 54.

<sup>607</sup> Liubovskaia, entry for 4 March 1942, 112.

<sup>608</sup> Ostrovskaia, Notebook 1, entry for 24 January 1942, 140.

## *Hunger Psychosis*

For most diarists, their anxiety about starvation trumped their fears of either bombardment during the winter of 1941-1942. The diarists referred to the acute emotional stress produced by prolonged hunger by a variety of names including: “hunger (or starvation) psychosis” (*golodnyi psikhoz*) or “psychotic hunger” (*psychicheskii golod*), or “starvation trauma” (*golodnaia travma*). Others referred to it more vaguely as a “malnourished haze” (*tuman distrofii*) or the “mists of malnutrition.”<sup>609</sup> This range of names and descriptions hints at the various ways the diarists conceptualized the affliction.

Hunger psychosis was studied by medical professionals and by many diarists. The medical community’s formulation of it was much narrower in focus—at least according to official documentation.<sup>610</sup> The first uses of the term “starvation psychosis” by a medical researcher appear as early as January 1942, but in general this label was rarely used. Perhaps this was because, judging from these professional publications, the name seemed to misrepresent the phenomenon. Instead, researchers referred to general psychotic symptoms from hunger as well as from eating toxic plants or roots, industrial poisoning, food poisoning, sleep-deprivation, and poor sanitation. In 1942-1943, the research community acknowledged that hunger forced the body’s vital organs to atrophy and its nervous and endocrine systems to malfunction, but they asserted that hunger did not *directly* cause psychosis and that the incidence of psychotic episodes was not directly correlated to the severity of nutritional dystrophy.<sup>611</sup>

By contrast, the diarists used the term liberally and without trepidation to describe what they viewed as an obvious and widespread phenomenon. Even young children were in the habit of making diagnoses of hunger psychosis. Teacher and orphanage assistant Aleksandra Mironova described how one of her former students, Tolia, voluntarily came to the children’s home with his sister and asked to be admitted, explaining: “mama has hunger psychosis.” No doubt Mironova understood their anguish, noting that her own brother was suffering from “hunger psychosis.”<sup>612</sup> Similarly, fourteen-year-old Dima Afanas’ev applied the term to himself when he began to obsessively read and copy out recipes from Elena Malakhovets’ cookbook *Povarennaia Kniga*. “Mama said that it is a type of psychosis. Nevertheless I decided that I will finish this work. After all, I am doing it for myself.”<sup>613</sup>

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<sup>609</sup> Ginzburg, “Zapiski blokadnogo cheloveka,” *Prokhodiashchie kharaktery*, 349, 358.

<sup>610</sup> One of the first usages of this term by a medical professional was by Prof. V.M. Myasishchev at the Leningrad Neurological Institute. In his wartime paper, “Mental Disorders in Nutritional Dystrophy under Siege Conditions,” V.M. Myasishchev identified numerous links between emaciation and psychopathy and the symptomology for mental disturbances for each stage of dystrophy. The combined effects of starvation, trauma, sleep deprivation, vitamin deficiency, muscular tension, hypothermia, war wounds, and infections together elicited “marked changes in organs, especially the alimentary canal, liver, heart, and endocrine glands... [and] are a source of abnormal activity and morphological changes in the brain.” For a discussion of the Leningrad medical communities research on hunger-related psychosis, see: Dzeniskevich, “Medical Research Institutes during the Siege,” 105-106.

<sup>611</sup> Magaeva, “Physiological and Psychosomatic Prerequisites,” and Dzeniskevich, “Medical Research Institutes during the Siege,” *Life and Death*, 136, 105-106.

<sup>612</sup> Mironova, entries for 27 December 1941 and 15 February 1942, 14-14ob, 17ob.

<sup>613</sup> Afanas’ev, entries for 29 May and 18 June 1942, 39-40.

The medical student Zinaida Sedel'nikova based her understanding of hunger psychosis both upon clinical observation and self-evaluation. In her account, personal reflections often blend smoothly with epidemiological insights. Although one could not read about hunger psychosis in any medical textbook, her studies still facilitated her understanding of this affliction, in a way. In her entry for 24 December 1941, Sedel'nikova explained that she was trying to read about human pathology when a flood of delusional thoughts about food overcame her. "It is sad," the diarist observed of her studied, "that this task has given way to hallucinations. I study pathology of the liver, but I [think of] how it, the liver, crackles in a skillet... even my head begins to whirl from the smell."<sup>614</sup> What began as a theoretical lesson became a disturbing and personalized lesson in human pathology. Later, Sedel'nikova continued to blend her personal transformation and her medical education, using her meager bread ration as a chance to study the body's digestive system. "I pinch off a crumb, suck on it, in a moment it melts in a bunch of saliva and is swallowed, but I accompany this with the thought: 'well, already my stomach juices have thrown themselves (*nabrosili*) on this crumb because the rumbling has grown stronger...' and still more it gnaws at the pit of the stomach..."<sup>615</sup> Sedel'nikova consciously and deliberately analyzed the physiological and pathological aspects of every sensation, thought, and delusion she had about food. Her understanding of hunger psychosis stemmed from her studies both of medicine and of herself.

Most diarists had far less scientific understanding of the psychological damage that could be inflicted by hunger, but were equally keen observers. As she watched her father suffer through hunger psychosis, eighteen-year-old Nina Mervol'f, a dramaturgy student at the Leningrad Theatrical Conservatory, noted the same self-effacing delusions as Sedel'nikova:

Right now Papa is causing particular concern. He has been diagnosed with third-stage dystrophy, the cachectic kind (I don't know what that means, but they say that it is the worst kind of dystrophy, from which it is impossible to recover, even through healthy food). He is really just terrible. He is completely withered, his face is yellow and puffy, and his eyes are glazed. And above all he is completely changed through and through; he has become deranged. All day he lies around covered in a fur coat to his head, totally unhappy with everything. Or he begins to cry or scream from hunger and says that he will eat puppies, that he is prepared to eat himself. His voice just rings in my ears, "Give me something to chew on! Give me something to chew on!" [...] Sometimes he starts saying all sorts of absurd things: "Where is my body? I don't know what happened to me. I don't understand what's going on with me. Where is my body?" It is very difficult to look at him, and at the same time irritating to [do so].

This is not Papa, it is simply not him—this is dirty, lice-infested, half-insane person, almost not even a person. [...] the former Papa was a fun, cheerful, talented, unique individual, active, agile, hardworking.<sup>616</sup>

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<sup>614</sup> Sedel'nikova, entry for 24 December 1941, 58.

<sup>615</sup> Sedel'nikova, entry for 6 January 1942, 63.

<sup>616</sup> Mervol'f, entry for 28 May 1942, 78-79.

In this episode, starvation's dual assault both on mind and the body is conceptualized and expressed quite literally. Although Mervol'f saw her father's cries as "absurd," delusional ravings, they spoke, directly and forcefully, to the experience of cachexia. Just as the body was forced to feed off of its own muscles and tissue to remain alive, Mervol'f's father, in his delusional haze, expressed the same cachetic desire to devour himself in order to save himself. But hunger was already far ahead of him in achieving this, as the *blokadnik* noted, in terror, that he could not feel or even find his body. During this episode of hunger psychosis, as described by his daughter, the Leningrader experienced the unimaginable ordeal of being devoured alive.

Like Mervol'f, the philologist Uskova, was terrified by these hunger-induced delusions, which she struggled with herself. Weak from malnutrition and scurvy, Uskova listened to a joyous Ukrainian folk song on the radio and suddenly found herself hallucinating: "in my head a wild image arose." Uskova continued:

Cold, air, brittle and blue, pink smoke arises from pipes and to this happy little song, crinkling and ringing their little bones, skeletons are jumping around on a cemetery and laying down, row by row, in the trenches. What is this, hallucinations? I fall into a kind of oblivion for a while and again a voice on the radio: "The enemy will be destroyed, victory will be with us." I am taken by a strange feeling, strange and scary. Slowly my head grows more and more. And now it is of such a size that it fills the entire room. "In fear, I scream: "Turn on the light, quickly, my head will burst any moment now." In the light, these apparitions disappear. Am I losing my mind?<sup>617</sup>

As Uskova's poignant description demonstrates, the diaries provide an intimate look not only at the experience of hunger, but the experience of madness. The concept of hunger psychosis highlights particularly well the idea that Blockade transfigured the human body—recall Uskova's impression that her head was swelling to an enormous size—and rendered its sensory and perceptive systems totally unreliable. As this episode suggests, Uskova has lost both her grasp on reality as well as basic control over her own body.

In the postwar period, scientists and medical historians have confirmed that there were physiological and biochemical bases for such psychotic responses to starvation. Hallucinations and delusions often stemmed from protein deficiencies induced by starvation. As the body stripped its muscles for much-needed protein, it caused many essential organs to atrophy and thus disrupted interactions between those organs and the body's homeostatic functions. This pathological situation was compounded by the body's intense demand for food, which altered the signals sent from interceptors in the gastrointestinal tract and other systems of grossly undernourished, atrophied organs. As doctor and former *blokadnitsa* Svetlana Magaeva explained, this condition "led in some instances to the development of so-called dystrophic psychoses with delusions and hallucinations connected with food."<sup>618</sup>

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<sup>617</sup> Uskova, entry for 24 March 1942, 53.

<sup>618</sup> Magaeva, "Physiological and Psychosomatic Prerequisites for Survival and Recovery," 136.

For Aleksandra Liubovskaia, “torturous hunger psychosis”<sup>619</sup> was created not a delusional or obsessive relationship to food (as it was for Sedel’nikova, Afanas’ev, Mervol’f, and others), but an inability to satiate the body, regardless of how much one ate.<sup>620</sup> As Magaeva explained, physiologically this stemmed from an alteration in the signals sent between the body’s gastrointestinal tract and the brain. The diarists who only observed, but did not understand this process, found it maddening that, no matter how much they ate, they could never feel full.<sup>621</sup> Liubovskaia gave herself regular “check-ups” to gauge the escalation or dissipation of this psychological affliction. She recorded her symptoms in her diary and even prescribed treatments—in the form of food or activities—for herself. In May 1942, Liubovskaia was diagnosed with Level II dystrophy and given a prescription for three weeks of “curative food.” She was thrilled by this news and felt herself growing stronger from this extra nourishment.<sup>622</sup> A rare, optimistic entry appears in June 1942, where finally, the diarist proudly noted, “Today, I am [feeling] perfectly energetic (*bodraia*). Besides that, there is a noticeable decrease in ‘hunger psychosis’. Since winter and spring, the organism has somewhat replenished its exhausted reserves of fats, proteins, carbohydrates, and other elements. It is necessary only to maintain this condition in order not to waste away again.”<sup>623</sup>

In an interview he gave in June 2003, Liubovskaia’s son Igor’ Aleksandrovich echoed his mother’s view that hunger psychosis was fundamentally a feeling of insatiability.<sup>624</sup> For this reason, he explained, this affliction preyed upon Leningraders long after the worst days of the siege were over and was one of the more tragic and frustrating aspects of that period, which was an improvement in other ways. According to Liubovskii, after a year of ingesting foreign substances and trying to convince oneself that that this was food, the body could no longer recognize or process real food, nor could it extract its nutrients. “The digestive system completely broke down,” Liubovskii reasoned, “it could not accept anything; everything it accepted seemed of no use, and not digestible.” The condition had a staying power that outlived the Blockade itself. “Later after the Blockade was already over, in the course of even a rather long period of time, half a year even, a year, there was the feeling that you had not eaten, not at all, that you were hungry. This really was what has been called hunger psychosis.”<sup>625</sup>

The Liubovskii family’s descriptions of hunger psychosis also challenge conventional periodization of the Blockade, which assumes a clear divide between the winter of 1941-42 and the spring and summer of 1942. They were not the only ones to challenge this. That June, the same time that Liubovskaia optimistically noted a remission in her hunger psychosis, diarist Irina Zelenskaia remarked upon its onset. She drew on medical metaphors to describe not only her own deteriorating health, but also the general situation of the city and front,

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<sup>619</sup> Liubovskaia, entry for 5 January 1942, 41.

<sup>620</sup> While some *distrofiki* were unable to satisfy the sensations of hunger, others had the opposite reaction and developed an aversion to food, “indicating profound disorders of psychosomatic and somatopsychic interrelations and disturbed formation of food motivation.” On the range of bodily responses, see: Magaeva, “Physiological and Psychosomatic Prerequisites,” 136.

<sup>621</sup> Liubovskaia, entry for 16 January 1942, 53.

<sup>622</sup> Ibid, entry for 15 May 1942, 150.

<sup>623</sup> Ibid, entry for 10 June 1942, 165-166.

<sup>624</sup> Liubovskii Interview, 1. This interview was conducted by Tat’iana Voronina and European University as part of an oral history project on Blockade survivors. I thank Voronina for sharing the text of this interview with me.

<sup>625</sup> Ibid, 2.



gravely observing: “the symptoms so far are not favorable.” Although she was receiving extra food (*spetseda*) that summer, her hunger pangs were worse than they had been that winter.<sup>626</sup>

Yesterday, when they sat us down before one bowl of soup, of limited quantity, I experienced a curious presence of psychotic hunger (*psychicheskogo goloda*) because of the fear that hunger would return, and would lead [me] to physically destroy everything edible. This is what just happened, and worst of all, again I ate my bread ration for the next day. But this was only a one-time panic, today I am already better, although the balance is made up only by invaluable grass, which I boil [...] I have already been having it for a week and already feel better and now there is nothing to panic about.<sup>627</sup>

Despite the assured tone of her entry, this was not Zelenskaia’s last attack of “psychotic hunger.” Just the thought of the second siege winter, which promised to be another “incommunicable nightmare (*neperedavaemyi koshmar*),” induced another episode of “psychotic hunger.”<sup>628</sup>

Their criticisms of biomedicine notwithstanding, they looked to this paradigm in order to explain physiological, emotional, and cognitive symptoms. As they struggled to survive “inside the ring,” the diarists drew heavily on medical concepts and terms even when they had only a vague sense of what they meant. Psychopathology provided the diarists with a critical framework through which to analyze the physical and emotional transformations that they witnessed in themselves and others.

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The Second World War inaugurated new phases in the development of health care and biomedical research in the Soviet Union. During and after the war, the regime praised Leningrad’s wartime medical establishment for its great success in both these curative and research domains. The Institute of Party History, which launched the diary writing campaign, produced numerous volumes celebrating Leningrad’s Academy of Sciences for developing new treatments and medicines for the front and still managing to publish several major scientific tomes during the Blockade.<sup>629</sup> As one of the Institute of Party History’s celebratory volumes, *Heroic Leningrad: 1917-1941* (1943), proclaimed: “In the difficult days of the Blockade, creative scientific thought (*mysl'*) of Leningrad medics worked tirelessly, developing much in the area of healing war wounds,” fighting bacteria, and so on. They lectured, published, and continued to write and defend dissertations “in this compressed ring

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<sup>626</sup> Zelenskaia, entry for 13 June 1942, 85ob-86ob.

<sup>627</sup> Ibid, entry for 13 June 1942, 87.

<sup>628</sup> Ibid, entry for 17 August 1942, 95-96.

<sup>629</sup> These included Vorob’ev’s five-volume atlas of the human body and the *Great Medical Encyclopedia*, which the Leningrad branch of Medgiz published in 1943 (Seigerst, *Medicine and Health in the Soviet Union*, 282).

of the Blockade.”<sup>630</sup> Soviet-era commendations of Leningrad’s medicine community have tended to emphasize its service to the front in military hospitals or in laboratories, and pay far less attention to the problem of emaciation.<sup>631</sup> In fact, the official press helped to conceal the famine inside Leningrad from the rest of the Soviet Union until late 1942 after the worst period was over, but they provided in-depth coverage about Leningraders who were killed or injured by enemy fire. As Lisa Kirschenbaum has argued, the bodies of the emaciated raised more questions about the partial responsibility of the Soviet state—its failure to secure sufficient food reserves or to effectively distribute food inside the besieged city.<sup>632</sup>

Interestingly, recent scholarly studies of wartime medicine in Leningrad have followed suit in both respects: they have been equally positive in their assessment of the medical establishment and have focused on its treatment of injured and diseased bodies over emaciated ones.<sup>633</sup> While they acknowledge the severe shortages and constant interruptions that beset the city’s hospitals and laboratories, scholars generally agree with the regime that Leningrad doctors ultimately passed the great test that the war presented.

The diaries provide a very different perspective on wartime medicine in Leningrad, particularly the treatment and experience of famine victims during the first year of the Blockade. As they watched the health crisis in the city unfold, or became patients, nurses, and administrators participating in the system, the diarists grew deeply critical of the medical establishment—its methods, policies, and practitioners. The journals, however, capture much more than the diarists’ reactions to wartime medicine. They reveal how frequently and extensively ordinary Leningraders, many of whom had no special knowledge or experience in the world of medicine, tried to explain their suffering in terms of the biomedical paradigm. Biomedicine furnished the diarists with key concepts and terms as well as with a narrative mode, the case history, for articulating their analyses. By wielding the idiom of health and illness and applying these categories to themselves and others, the diarists were not passive recipients of labels and behavioral norms prescribed by scientific elites.

As doctors, patients, and observers, the diarists privately developed their own medical concepts, theories, and terms under siege. In their formulations of nutritional dystrophy, moral dystrophy, bomb psychosis, and hunger psychosis, the diarists emphasized the importance of personal and social circumstances, effectively placing the famine—which had

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<sup>630</sup> A. Volkova, “Leningrad: a city at the frontline of scholarship, culture, and art,” *Geroicheskie Leningrad, 1917-1942*, ed. S.I. Avvakumov (Leningrad: Gospolitizdat, 1943), 170-1.

<sup>631</sup> See the discussions in: N. Grashchenkov and Y. Lisitsyn, *Achievements in Soviet Medicine* (Moscow: Foreign publishing House, 1960); Sobolov, *Uchenye Leningrada v gody Velikoi Otechestvennoi Voyny*.

<sup>632</sup> Lisa Kirschenbaum, “‘The Alienated Body’” 225-226, 231; Cherepenina, “Assessing the Scale of the Famine and Death,” 51.

<sup>633</sup> Soviet and post-Soviet studies emphasize combatants and cite the same official statistics as evidence, that roughly 90 percent of soldiers were healed and 70 percent were returned to their units for further service. In regard to the civilian population, scholars have tended to emphasize the lack of major epidemics as a positive sign of the strength of the health care system. This was indeed a triumph compared to the First World War and the Civil War, but at the same time, the victory of the Soviet medical system should not be overstated, especially based on this point. In Leningrad, of course, hunger, not disease or injury, was by far the biggest killer. Historical and sociological studies of the Soviet medical establishment that adopt this positive view and emphasize disease include: Siegerist, *Medicine and Health in the Soviet Union*, 286-288; Field, *Doctor and Patient*, 23-24; Hyde, *The Soviet Medical Service*, 120-124, 251; Sella, *Value of Human Life*, 51-54, 77. A more critical view of the Soviet medical establishment, but focusing on the period of late socialism, can be found in: Michael Ryan, *Doctors and the State of the Soviet Union* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1990).

been abstracted and “naturalized” by the term *distrofia*—into historical, cultural and experiential contexts. In the process, these accounts also demonstrate how illness functions a metaphor and a marker of identity, and how it is imbued with meanings that extended far beyond the realm of epidemiology.

Five:

The Transformation of the Social Body:  
the Role of Food in reshaping Blockade Society

During the first year of the Blockade, the spaces and opportunities for social interaction were severely circumscribed. Yet, there were a few places in the diarists' "small radius," where they encountered their fellow *blokadniki* with some regularity. The food lines and cafeterias were the most common venues for interaction, but bathhouses and markets played an important role as well. These spaces occupied prominent places in the lives and diaries of Leningraders because they were connected to tasks essential to survival: finding food and fighting off disease. In addition, most of these locales were preceded by long lines or surrounded by crowds, which gave the diarists ample time to interact with or observe other *blokadniki*. Moreover, because they all had long been fixtures of prewar life, these venues provided clues about the transformation of Leningrad society, about the new types of social behaviors, dynamics, and groupings that were developing under siege. While they stood in line, ate alongside colleagues in the cafeteria, bought food at the market, or washed at the bathhouse, the diarists studied their fellow *blokadniki* curiously.

In this economy of scarcity, access to food was the chief factor that determined one's social position "inside the ring." The system of wartime food distribution, then, formed the foundation upon which the new social order was based, and queues, canteens, markets, and bathhouses revealed the social groupings and hierarchies that comprised it. Inside these spaces, the diarists compared themselves to other *blokadniki* and discovered significant disparities between their ration categories, portion sizes, privileges, social positions, and bodies. Scholars of the Soviet home front during WWII have noted that the war was a time of great social mobility for the people across the USSR.<sup>634</sup> This was certainly true in Leningrad, where access to food created new elites and endowed existing social types with new associations and characteristics.

Regardless of their ration category or social background, the diarists were intensely critical of this new social hierarchy and the food distribution system that created it. Some objected to the system in principle, others to its execution. But almost all of the diarists raised questions about the tensions between equality and privilege in Soviet socialism and between its various (often conflicting) ideal principles of distribution such as "he who does not work, does not eat," and "first come, first served," "each according to his need," and so on.

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<sup>634</sup> John Barber and Mark Harrison, for instance, characterized the war as a time "of mass population movements and social mobility" for the Soviet people (Barber and Harrison, *The Soviet Home Front, 1941-1945: A Social and Economic History of the USSR in World War II* (New York: Longman, 1991), 94). For a general overview of the various uses of social privilege during the siege, see: Bidlack, "Survival Strategies," 90-100.

This chapter examines the diarists' views of the new food-based social system emerging in Leningrad, which were mostly inspired and framed by four settings: the line, the cafeteria, the bathhouse and the market. In Part One, I briefly survey the diarists' overall preoccupation with social observation, which extended to spaces and themes beyond those I discuss here. I understand this strong tendency within the diary narratives as a kind of ethnographic impulse to observe and document social phenomena. Part Two, the bulk of the chapter, explores the diarists' experiences in these four spaces and their analyses of the specific dynamics, behaviors, and social types that they associated with each setting.

## I. The Ethnographic Impulse

To keep a diary of besieged Leningrad was to chronicle the strange new society emerging there. At least that is how many diarists described their diary practice. Several likened themselves to a particular figure, who also found himself struggling to survive on an intriguing *terra incognita*: "to some extent all of us are Robinson Crusoe," schoolteacher Aleksandr Vinokurov proclaimed, identifying and naming a host of phenomena peculiar to the world of "the ring." "Time goes by very slowly in that there is no light and the radio does not work, I sit like Robinson Crusoe on an island," radio worker Arkadii Lepkovich echoed. Lepkovich was eager and nervous to discover how his experiences living in isolation would unfold, noting: "Well, Robinson returned to life, but I don't know what will happen next."<sup>635</sup>

The diarists surveyed the social terrain of blockaded Leningrad through a variety of approaches. The historian Georgii Kniazev openly proclaimed this as part of his mission as a diarist. "I am performing my duty as a chronicler of everyday life. I stare into each face every pair of eyes of those that I encounter. I am trying to notice everything, write down everything that I can see within my own small world." Mindful of his future readers, Kniazev recorded siege-specific terms and conversations "for the language specialist" and described the crowds of Leningraders on the street "for the stage producer."<sup>636</sup> Irina Zelenskaia preferred to survey the city by strolling or "making (*ob'ezd*) the rounds about Leningrad."<sup>637</sup> Those with artistic backgrounds, like Aleksandr Nikol'skii and Tat'iana Glebova, sketched street and indoor scenes in their journals.<sup>638</sup> Using another tactic, the librarian and translator Aleksandra Liubovskaia inspected posted advertisements and announcements for clues about the severity of the famine, the shape of informal social networks, and the market values for various goods.<sup>639</sup> And although schools failed to provide them with sufficient academic stimulation, they offered young Leningraders, like Dima Afanas'ev and Elena Mukhina, an important site

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<sup>635</sup> Lepkovich, entry for 3 January 1942, 14.

<sup>636</sup> Kniazev, entry for 4 February 1942, 175.

<sup>637</sup> Zelenskaia, entry for 6 September 1941, 12.

<sup>638</sup> A chief example of this appears in: Tatiana Glebova's cycle *In the Canteen (Leningrad Besieged)* in: Glebova "Risovat' kak letopisets (strantitsy leningradskogo dnevnika)," *Iskusstvo Leningrada* 2 (1990), 28.

<sup>639</sup> Zelenskaia, entry for 9 January 1942, 50ob. Numerous instances of this appear in Liubovskaia's diary such as her entries for: 27, 31 December 1941, 7, 30 January and 3 February 1942, 33, 71, 74-75.

to observe new social codes emerging in their classmates' behavior, conversations, and schoolyard games.<sup>640</sup>

The diaries of Esfir' Levina and Nina Klishevich provide two of the richest examples of this ethnographic impulse. As an architect, Levina was inclined to provide detailed descriptions of how Leningrad's space and structures were changing. In series entries entitled "the look of the city," the diarist conducted virtual tours of the blockaded city, and along the way she compiled for her potential reader snapshots of typical blockade life.<sup>641</sup> Her entry for 1 February 1942 captures the strong investigative spirit of Levina's diary practice:

Scenes from Everyday Life (*zhanrovye kartinki*).

1. A woman entered [our] courtyard in a fur coat and hat, sat down in the middle of the courtyard and busied herself with a particularly personal activity. It was a clear day, but she did not look for a secluded spot.
2. A funeral procession of the dead passed in front of the Finland station: a horse-led cart and a wreath was laid on the coffin, the splendid corpse was not taken to the place of burial because the horse died. The coffin lay on the snow until evening, then disappeared—obviously for fuel.
3. The night after defending her thesis (*diplom*) engineer Nina Minina sewed patches onto a ball gown for her neighbor— a bakery worker who helped her with four large potatoes.
4. A man walked along the street, leaned on a post and said 'how tired I am. The next day he lay at the pole— dogs had snapped off his nose. The moral: there are merciless dogs in the city— eat them quickly or they will eat you.
5. Yesterday Polina Borisovna Pal' buried two brothers. The public responds: 'she buried them, she must be rich (*bogachka*).'<sup>642</sup>

These sketches introduced the diary's potential reader to the world of the Blockade as it had developed by mid-winter. The short snapshots have little in common except for the incongruity of the events they describe. They suggest how misplaced actions, associations, reactions had become normal: a well-dressed woman defecates in broad daylight, a funeral now symbolizes lavishness (not reverence), a coffin represents fuel. Social and natural hierarchies were in flux: accomplished academics performed menial tasks for their new social superiors, food service workers, and animals were asserting their dominance over humans.

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<sup>640</sup> Afanas'ev, entries for 12 May, 13 June 1942, 38-40; Mukhina, entries for 16, 22 October and 7, 9, 17 December 1941, 50ob-51ob, 56ob, 59-72.

<sup>641</sup> Levina I, entry for 12 January 1941, 1.

<sup>642</sup> Ibid, entry for 1 February 1942, 5-6.

Together, these “everyday scenes” signal to the reader how dramatically prewar social norms and conventions had changed.

Levina carried her diary with her to work and on her errands, and she recorded rumors or snatches of conversation she heard about the city—not because they reflected factual information, she explained, but because they revealed “important tendenc[ies] of imagination (*tendentsiia vymysla*).”<sup>643</sup> She passed the time by trying to categorize passersby based on their appearance and the objects that they carried.<sup>644</sup> For instance, while aboard a newly running tram in autumn 1942, Levina scribbled in her notebook: “cleaning: scraps, shovels and sleds, gardens: shovels, stolen buckets, watering cans, fuel, axes and saws. We know where to and from where a person is going.” If they carried a shovel or a knapsack, they were headed to the gardens, an axe—then to a damaged building, splinters of wood—they were coming from a ruined building.<sup>645</sup> This guessing game was a favorite pastime of the eighteen-year-old theater student Nina Klishevich, who tried to identify certain social types that had been produced by blockade society. One instance of this appears in her entry for 13 June 1943:

Several Leningrad types (*Leningradskie tipy*):

1. A twenty-year-old guy walking along the street, carrying a circular saw, a log, sand, and a few boards in the right shoulder and in the left hand held a book in front of his face, which he was reading as he walked. Dressed entirely in old and shabby [clothes].
2. A woman in felt boots and a tight dirty skirt, her stomach swollen from [eating] grass. On the left shoulder she had several boards or log and placed on top of the log she had a jar with sweet water, 5 rubles a glass. Somewhere in the middle between the jar and the log hung a gasmask from which an aerated pipe and a bottle of soymilk stuck out. In the other hand—a net bag with bread, a pot for kasha with vegetarian cabbage soup inside. Above these items were some sprats. Also, sticking out of the net bag many splinters of wood to heat the stove (*burzuihka*)...and on her face a smile because she was managing not to spill anything (*i nichego ne vylivaetsia*). She marched along in a lively way.
3. Well-dressed, with hair done up to be wavy, and manicured, heavily made-up, in very high heels—a blockade wife (*blokadnaia zhena*).

The remaining population consists of Leningraders, military men, and ordinary (*obyknovennye*) people.<sup>646</sup>

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<sup>643</sup> Ibid, entry for 5 March 1942, 13.

<sup>644</sup> Zelenskaia, entry for 22 November 1941, 33ob; Levina I, entry for 5 March 1942, 13.

<sup>645</sup> Levina I, entries for 27 January, 27 September, 8 October 1942, 4-5, 30, 32.

<sup>646</sup> GMMBOL, f. RDF, op. 1L, d. 490, “Blokadnyi dnevnik Niny Nikolaevny Erokhanoi, entry for 13 June 1943, 56-57. This source is hereafter referred to as “Erokhana.”

Who were these social types? Klishevich did not specify, she simply recorded this social data. The reader is forced to play her game of categorizing people based on their actions and appearances. One might surmise that the first figure is the *intelligent* who threw himself into practical tasks—such as cooking and carpentry—with the zeal of a scholar undertaking a new research project. This was a type often described by Lidiia Ginzburg based on her colleagues at the Writers Union.<sup>647</sup> The second type, the women overloaded with items for sale might be considered a peddler or even a speculator, proudly carrying her wares to the market. Certainly, she represents the thriving market for goods, which I discuss below. Overly sexualized in appearance, the third figure might be a woman of questionable morals “kept” by either a speculator or food service worker. Like the peddler or speculator (type 2), “the blockade wife” was widely discussed by the diarists and occupied a specific place in the new food-based social order to which I now turn.

## II. A Social Structure based on Food

Under siege, food was the hub around which most experiences, activities, and relationships revolved. As Nina Klishevich observed, food brokered introductions and mediated interactions.

When two strangers meet and do not really talk, then they [talk about] the weather. It was always this way everywhere, but now in Leningrad there is something else: ‘What kind of card do you have?’ ‘You are on what kind of ration?’ ‘Where do you eat?’ ‘Got enough bread?’<sup>648</sup>

Unlike other Soviet cities that had greater access to goods and local produce during the war, Leningrad—as the head of the food supply Dmitri Pavlov put it—“the sole means of receiving food was through the ration card.”<sup>649</sup> The official food distribution system was based on rationing, and there were two locations where Leningraders could redeem their ration coupons: food stores and cafeterias. Leningraders were free to redeem their coupons at various shops until December 1941, when city authorities assigned them to specific shops based on their residence.<sup>650</sup> By contrast, canteens mostly were associated with institutions—such as schools, institutes, factories, hospitals, or party organizations—and those who had

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<sup>647</sup> On the “cooking mania” that afflicted intellectuals, see: Ginzburg, “Zapiski blokadnogo cheloveka,” *Prokhodiashchie kharaktery*, 355-357.

<sup>648</sup> Erokhana, entry for 26 January 1944, 61.

I found the discussion of the relationship between rationing and social hierarchy to be especially useful in: Elena Osokina, *Our Daily Bread: Socialist Distribution and the Art of Survival in Stalin’s Russia, 1927-1941*, ed. Kate Transchel (New York: M.E. Sharpe, 2001), xv, 69, 83, 197.

<sup>649</sup> Pavlov, *Leningrad 1941*, 69. Of course, Pavlov may have meant to imply by this comment that there were also no illegal means of obtaining food, which of course was not the case.

<sup>650</sup> Stephanie P. Steiner, “The Food Distribution System during the Siege of Leningrad, 1941-1944,” (Masters Thesis, San Jose State University, 1993), 55-56, 60-63



affiliations with them could register to eat there. Of course, privilege and favoritism played strong roles in determining how one obtained permission to frequent certain shops and cafeterias. The diarists I mention below include both those who benefited from this system and who suffered under it. Access to a canteen was necessary, but by no means sufficient for survival. Like the food stores, they were preceded by long lines and regularly ran out of provisions.<sup>651</sup> Most canteens gave out watery soup and, on better days, a small portion of kasha or porridge as a second course. Portions and policies regarding the “costs” of food fluctuated. Sometimes food at the canteen was given “for free” and at other times, including the first siege winter, the patrons had to pay for their portions using ration coupons.<sup>652</sup>

Once inside a shop or canteen, the amount of food that the *blokadniki* received depended mostly on their ration category. The categories were determined by employment. The largest category of civilian ration, Category I, generally went to workers doing heavy labor, especially in war-related industries. Service workers received smaller, Category II rations, and those who were unemployed—students, children, housewives, invalids, pensioners, and so on—received the smallest rations, Category III, because they were dependent on, not contributing to, society.<sup>653</sup> Leningraders with social connections, however, often were assigned better ration categories regardless of their employment or given coupons for supplemental food.

#### “Who’s Last?” *The Psychology of a Line:*

The point of entry for the cafeterias, food stores, and bathhouses was the line. During the first year of the siege, Leningraders typically awoke before dawn to stand in line long before the food deliveries were made. They waited for many hours, sometimes for several days at a time, without knowing what goods (if any) the store had to distribute and if they had the proper ration coupons to pay for them. Lines were so pervasive that, as the diarists Elena Skriabina, Nikolai Punin, and Mariia Konopleva observed, they penetrated even into death: corpses had to wait in long lines at the cemeteries to be buried.<sup>654</sup>

From the journals, the line emerges as a peculiar type of collective body that took on a life of its own. The diarists likened the queue to a “many-headed monster”<sup>655</sup> or a “long tapeworm.”<sup>656</sup> The diarists approached it as a kind of microcosm of blockade society and

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<sup>651</sup> In his study of food supply during WWII, Aleksandr Liubimov discusses the increased significance of the canteen in sustaining the Soviet populace. See: Liubimov, *Torgovlia i snabzhenie v gody Velikoi Otechestvennoi Voiny* (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo “Ekonomika,” 1968), 112-123.

<sup>652</sup> Pavlov, *Leningrad 1941*, 74.

<sup>653</sup> On 1 February 1942, Category I was subdivided to favor those laborers working in war-related industries including steel, gas, chemicals, transportation, and construction. There were also some small gradations within ration categories. See: Barber and Harrison, *The Soviet Home Front*, 80-81, Osokina, *Our Daily Bread*, 202; Moskoff, *The Bread of Affliction*, 138-140.

<sup>654</sup> Skriabina, entry for 27 February, 42, 93; Konopleva, Notebook 2, entry for 25 December 1941, 12-13; Punin, entries for 25 September, 20 November 1941, 99, 101.

<sup>655</sup> Kochina, entry for 13 January 1942, 184. Also see: Ibid, entry for 30 March 1942, 204-5.

<sup>656</sup> Ibid, entry for 4 December 1941, 167-168. English translation from: Kochina, *Blockade Diary*, 49.

tried to assess the overall state of the city by studying the *blokadniki* assembled there. Irina Zelenskaia, for instance, scanned the faces and bodies of queued up Lenenergo workers—“a procession of half-corpses”—in order to gauge the severity of the famine. Others compared the numbers of men and women in lines for clues about citywide demographic shifts. This was especially true of lines for the bathhouses.<sup>657</sup> The diarists also scribbled notes about these *blokadniki* as they waited with them. Although several commented that the lines were “eerily silent” during the first siege winter, diarists jotted down the brief exchanges they overheard around them.<sup>658</sup> Most of these conversations were sorrowful stories about lost loved ones, gossip about theft among food service workers, or commentary on the latest news broadcasts.<sup>659</sup> A typical description of line conversation appears in Esfir’ Levina’s entry for 16 January 1942:

I am returning to the bakery, am standing in line. A group of women count their dead, some fellow suggests ‘and you will follow them if you are going to stand [in line]. Buy from me 300 grams for 90 rubles- it's really cheap.’ The policeman talks about Popkov’s speech.<sup>660</sup>

Conversations were sparse in these winter lines because Leningraders were unable to concentrate on anything but the prospect of obtaining their rations. Similarly, Lidiia Ginzburg was intrigued by line activity—or inactivity—and described what she saw as the distinguishing features of the blockade line in her retrospective *Notes of a Blockade Person*: “Gripped by one all-consuming passion,” Ginzburg wrote, “they hardly uttered a word: with manic impatience they stared ahead over the next man’s shoulder at the bread.”<sup>661</sup> Those in the line were doomed to be idle, unable to focus on anything other than food and how many people in front of him kept him from reaching it.

In spite of the silence, the diarists looked for subtler signs that might reveal what they called “the psychology of the line (*psikhologiia ocheredi*).” For Ginzburg, “the psychology of a queue is based on a tense, wearing anxiety to reach the end, an inward urging-forward of empty time.”<sup>662</sup> According to others, the psychology of the line was rooted in intrapersonal comparison and competition. Scholars of queue behavior have argued that one of the primary activities of line-waiting is self-evaluation through social comparison. A queue, sociologist Leon Mann writes, represents a social pecking order, where status is defined by one’s physical position rather than by more typical factors such as gender, class or

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<sup>657</sup> Lesin, entry for 28 June 1942, 15; Savinkov, entry for 30 May 1942, 39ob-40.

<sup>658</sup> This phrase is drawn from: Ginzburg, “Zapiski blokadnogo cheloveka,” *Prokhodiashchie kharaktery*, 335.

<sup>659</sup> Levina I, entry for 16 January 1942, 2. Additional examples in: Kochina, entry for 9 January 1942, 181; Inber, entry for 25 December 1941, *Pochti tri goda* (Moscow: “Sovetskaia Rossiia” 1968), 44. This entry does not appear in the manuscript of her diaries.

<sup>660</sup> Levina I, entry for 16 January 1942. This refers to Popov’s speech of 13 Jan 1942, where he stated: “All the worst is behind us. Ahead of us lies the liberation of Leningrad and the deliverance of the Leningraders from death by starvation.”

<sup>661</sup> Ginzburg, “Zapiski blokadnogo cheloveka,” 339. I have modified the English translation in: Ginzburg, *Blockade Diary*, 46.

<sup>662</sup> *Ibid.*, 333-335. I have modified the English translation in: Ginzburg, *Blockade Diary*, 38-40. On waiting in line as a form of imprisonment, see: Richard C. Larson, “The Psychology of Queuing,” *Operations Research*, Vol. 35, No. 6 (Nov.-Dec., 1987), 897

education.<sup>663</sup> The queue operates on the principle of “first come, first served,” and from the perspective of an individual in line, there are only two social groups: the people in front and the people behind. Everyone “in front” became a relatively privileged member of this social system. Those standing behind, having lower status, are supposed to obey those standing in front—their calls to move back, keep quiet, stop shoving, and so on.

The diarists reflected on their place within this social system by comparing themselves to both groups. This process could lead either to feelings of self-pity or self-enhancement depending on the direction of the comparison. Most of the diarists “compared upwardly” to those in front of them, which social psychologists have argued is typical of individuals in crisis situations.<sup>664</sup> The diarists regarded those in front as members of a chosen elite destined to enjoy a warm bath or to obtain the “bread of their salvation.” As chemist Elena Kochina remarked: “The [line] manager, like the ‘gatekeeper of paradise,’ (*vratar’ raia*) counted off the ‘faithful souls’ letting them inside ten at a time. I stood and gazed mindlessly at this ‘procedure.’”<sup>665</sup> Most line-waiters resented the “privileged” few at the front. As Esfir’ Levina observed: “The psychology of a line (*psikhologiia ocheredi*): they are envious of the one in front and desire for ‘all sorts of misfortunes’ for them so that they would leave the line. They are a little scornful of those behind,” feeling somehow superior.<sup>666</sup>

According to the diaries, these long stretches of standing together in line did not foster sociability, but rather antagonism, as Leningraders vied to improve their place in line. Sixteen-year-old Iura Riabinkin called the line “a crush of people” with whom he had to “fight hand-to-hand combat” to keep his place.<sup>667</sup> Levina was among those who cheated to improve her place in line. Food stores occasionally used lists of names or ticketed numbers in order to keep the order of the patrons in line straight. The ticket system, Levina explained, was easily manipulated. “At home, I prepare hundreds of numbers and give them out on the street before the store opens, keeping for myself a place in the first hundred. Every hour—there is a check (*proverka*), rivals find themselves; they also came with numbers, and arguments take place over whose numbers are real.”<sup>668</sup> Librarian Mariia Konopleva noted other tricks that were used to move people from their place in line, such as spreading false rumors about large deliveries to other stores or sounding fake air-raid sirens to coax people out of line.

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<sup>663</sup> On the line as “a miniature social system,” see: Leon Mann, “Queue Culture: The Waiting Line as a Social System,” *The American Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 75, No. 3 (Nov., 1969): 340-354.

Social comparison theory (in gross, that we compare ourselves to others as a form of self-evaluation) was classically formulated by and attributed to: Leon Festinger, “A Theory of Social Comparison Processes,” *Human Relations*, Vol. 7 (1954): 117-40.

<sup>664</sup> Festinger found that people tend to compare to person just ahead of them, calling this the “unidirectional drive upwards.” Research into how and why threatened people tend to compare downward as a way of coping has been conducted by: J. V. Wood et al., “Social Comparison in Adjustment to Breast Cancer,” *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, Vol. 49 (1985): 1169-83 On social comparisons in line, particularly to those behind as a source of comfort. see: Rongrong Zhou and Dilip Soman, “Looking Back: Exploring the Psychology of Queuing and the Effect of the Number of People Behind” *The Journal of Consumer Research*, Vol. 24, No. 4 (March 2003), 518.

<sup>665</sup> Kochina, entry for 4 December 1941, 167-168. English translation from: Kochina, *Blockade Diary*, 49.

<sup>666</sup> Levina I, entry for 3 February 1942, 6.

<sup>667</sup> Riabinkin, entry for 9-10 November 1941, 104.

<sup>668</sup> Levina I, entry for 3 February 1942, 6.

The diarists documented how others took a more congenial tactic and formed temporary alliances in order to improve their position or experience in line. They described various instances when two people agreed to save places, take turns waiting, or cooperate in other ways. Some *blokadniki* tried emotional appeals, sharing stories about their sick relatives for instance, or otherwise trying to win the trust (and place) of the person in front. In her fictional stories, Matiushina described how children standing in line were tricked into giving up their ration cards or their place to kindly strangers who promised to hold them “for safe keeping.” Levina put it this way: “Sympathy and antipathy take form and lead to small trickery, helping ‘our [allies] (*svoi*)’, watching out that the rest do not do the same.”<sup>669</sup> As the famine dragged on, the public became impervious to the sob stories of those around them. Levina wondered if this stoicism was a source of pride or shame, a national character trait or a new quality specific to the siege situation. “In general the public is self-restrained—nothing moves you. When one says that her husband is dying and her children lie there swollen, another answers that her husband has already died and of her three kids, two have died. Where does this self-restraint (*sderzhannost*’) come from— from Russian endurance, discipline, or hope?”<sup>670</sup> Kochina echoed this point, noting how when people passed out or died in line, Leningraders did not stir from their places.<sup>671</sup> Nor did they intervene in the disputes of others. When her bread was snatched from her hands in line, Kochina fought desperately to get it back. After she had managed to do so, the thief lashed out at the bystanders, who dodged his blows disinterestedly and kept their eyes on the bread counter.<sup>672</sup>

Kochina became so accustomed to social strife in line that it was with genuine shock that she described a moment when a complete stranger gave the diarist her place in line. Kochina had hurried from line to line all day in search of food to feed her baby. By the time she arrived at one particular bakery, the queue was so long that there was little point in entering it. Kochina stood near the front, watching the lucky few be admitted to the shop.

I don’t know what was written on my face, but suddenly an old woman in the line asked me softly: ‘when is it your turn?’ I answered that I wasn’t in line, and that to take a place in line now was useless since there wouldn’t be enough macaroni for everyone anyway. And I added, unexpectedly for myself, that I had a small child at home that I didn’t know how to feed. She said nothing. But when the door opened and they started counting off a new party of ‘fortunates,’ she said loudly: ‘Why aren’t you paying attention! After all, you were standing behind me!’ and shoved me toward the door. She herself stayed on the street, since I was the tenth person. I was so stunned that when the macaroni (800 grams for two months) appeared in my hands, which were trembling with excitement, I still couldn’t believe that what had happened was real.<sup>673</sup>

<sup>669</sup> Ibid, entry for 3 February 1942, 6.

<sup>670</sup> Ibid, entry for 3 February 1942, 6.

<sup>671</sup> Kochina, entry for 27 January 1942, 191. English translation in: Kochina, *Blockade Diary*, 84.

<sup>672</sup> Ibid, entry for 13 January 1942, 184.

<sup>673</sup> Ibid, entry for 4 December 1941, 168. I modified the translation in: Kochina, *Blockade Diary*, 49.

Kochina described the incident as a kind of marvel, the exception that reinforces the general rule of queue behavior. Such incidents of altruism between strangers frequently appear in interviews and memoirs, but this is the only episode I found in the diaries.<sup>674</sup>

The diarists *did* report moments when a more cooperative spirit seized those waiting in line, which generally occurred when individual and collective interests aligned—in other words, when cooperation helped the group obtain its bread faster. At such moments, the queue dynamic shifted from antagonism to solidarity as Leningraders acted together to protect their shared interests. As Lidiia Ginzburg put it, “a queue is a compulsory agglomeration of people, irritated with one another, yet at the same time concentrating on a single common circle of interests and aims. Hence the mixture of rivalry, hostility, and collective feeling, the instant readiness to close ranks against the common enemy—the law-breaker.”<sup>675</sup> In addition to preventing line-jumpers, Leningraders came together in January 1942 when the city pipes froze and, as a result, the bakeries had no water with which to make bread. The diarist Elena Kochina and the memoirist Sofia Gotkhardt noted how agreeably Leningraders worked together to supply the bakeries with water. “Thousands of Leningraders who were still in no condition to move came out of their dens,” Kochina observed, “forming a living conveyer (*zhivoi konveier*) from the Neva to the bakery, they handed buckets of water to one another with hands numb from the cold. The bread got baked!”<sup>676</sup>

In her recollections of the Blockade, Gotkhardt claimed that these cooperative moments were both material and psychological in nature. Over the course of three days waiting in line, she and her fellow Leningraders not only developed a system of holding places, they worked to buoy the spirit of the queue by suggesting hopeful explanations for the delay: “there was no bread because the flour was wet and they were drying it, the bread was already baked but they could not deliver it because there was no gasoline and so on, in this spirit.”<sup>677</sup> This talk was mutually beneficial: by keeping hope alive for others, Leningraders reassured themselves that the bread would actually come. According to this logic, the mere presence of other people who were determined to wait encouraged them to remain in line. Gotkhardt explained this mindset: “For some reason, many people thought that if there was a line, then they had to deliver the bread. Alas, I thought this, too.”<sup>678</sup> In light of this, Gotkhardt believed that “the line was a collective of hope. And when people did not hang on and the line started to thin out, this was weakness and hope dwindled.”<sup>679</sup>

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<sup>674</sup> See the personal accounts in Granin and Adamovich’s *Blokadnaia kniga* described in the section entitled “everyone had a savior,” 113-125.

<sup>675</sup> Ginzburg, “Zapiski blokadnogo cheloveka,” 336. I modified the translation in: Ginzburg, *Blockade Diary*, 42.

<sup>676</sup> Kochina, entry for 25 January 1942, 191. English translation in: Kochina, *Blockade Diary*, 83.

<sup>677</sup> *Dve sud’by v Velikoi Otechestvennoi Voiny* (Moscow: Gumanitarnaia Akademiia, 2006), 47-48.

Perhaps because she was writing with the benefit of hindsight, from the perspective of one who survived the lines and the siege, Gotkhardt tended to look upon this aspect of line psychology with kind eyes, and she tended to emphasize acts of kindness and altruism much more than the diarists did. Looking back on those hungry times, the more positive moments between people in line stood out for Gotkhardt: “I also recall that there was the solidarity of the line (*splochnost’ ocheredi*). If someone, having grown numb, could not hang in there and left for home to warm up, they [the others] always gave him back his spot in line (*ego v zaniatuiu im ochered’ vseгда vpuskai*). I can’t recall a case when someone said ‘You weren’t waiting here.’ Moreover, under such conditions people behaved themselves appropriately (*dostoino*).”

<sup>678</sup> *Dve Sud’by*, 47-48.

<sup>679</sup> *Ibid*, 47-48.

Another, related aspect of line psychology, which the diarists recognized in their own behavior was the compulsion to queue up even when there was little hope of ever reaching the front. The fourteen-year-old Dima Afanas'ev and the historian Georgii Kniazev admitted that it was “not intelligent economy” to spend so much time in line, but it created the illusion of being active, which, as Afanas'ev noted, was perhaps foolish, but far less depressing than staying at home, idle.<sup>680</sup> Lidiia Ginzburg explained this phenomenon in terms of psychopathology. She understood it to be a symptom of “starvation mania,” of the obsessive desire to find food. During the spring and summer of 1942, she claimed, the lines remained very long despite the improved food supply because of this compulsion to queue up. “It was psychologically impossible” to resist waiting in line, so *blokadniki* joined in and “withstood all of the agonies of an hours-long line” even though they knew that “by ten or eleven in the morning the shop would be empty.”<sup>681</sup>

Most diarists focused their attention on the wintertime lines, but Lidiia Ginzburg was fascinated by the social interactions that distinguished the springtime lines. While the winter lines were relatively quiet, because of the improved food and weather, in the spring of 1942 the line “began to converse.”<sup>682</sup> A philologist by training, Ginzburg used the time she spent in line to develop some of her theories about language and self-expression as a form of self-assertion. In the spring, she observed how Leningraders used conversation not only to improve their physical position in line, but also their social position. “Above all, a conversation with one’s fellow man is a most powerful medium of self-assertion, a declaration of one’s personal value. Utterance achieves realization and a social existence—this is one of the basic laws of behavior.”<sup>683</sup> The act of conversing—it did not matter about what—was a way to affirming one’s presence and social status. Workers joined together and asserted themselves over dependents by chatting about their larger rations; housewives chided intellectuals by displaying their knowledge of how to cook various foodstuffs—“‘what you’ve never cook them?’”—and so on.<sup>684</sup>

In this way, the line emerges from the diarists’ experiences and analyses as a condensed versions of the social order, where the complex processes of social comparison, expression, and assertion were concentrated. The line was a temporary, unstable hierarchy that was reshuffled every time a new queue was formed. Yet, this did not prevent the diarists from drawing conclusions about the nature of collective psychology, including the tendencies toward social comparison, competition, and self-assertion through language.

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<sup>680</sup> Afanas'ev, entry for 11 November 1941, 23; Kniazev, entry for 8 February 1942, 171.

<sup>681</sup> Ginzburg, “Zapiski blokadnogo cheloveka,” *Prokhodiashchie kharaktery*, 333-336. English translation in: Ginzburg, *Blockade Diary*, 38-40.

<sup>682</sup> Ibid, 335. English translation in: Ginzburg, *Blockade Diary*, 40. On this theme, see: Larson, “The Psychology of Queuing,” 897.

<sup>683</sup> Ginzburg, “Zapiski blokadnogo cheloveka,” 335-339. English translation in: Ginzburg, *Blockade Diary*, 41. In her recent dissertation, Emily Van Buskirk gives a wonderful, detailed analysis of Ginzburg’s theory of language as a form of self-assertion, including the language used by the *blokadniki*. See: Van Buskirk, “Reality in Search of Literature,” 288-290.

<sup>684</sup> Ginzburg, “Zapiski blokadnogo cheloveka,” 337-338. English translation in: Ginzburg, *Blockade Diary*, 42-43.

The canteen offered different opportunities for social comparison and observation than the line. The hierarchy of the line lasted only as long as the line did, but the experience of sitting for long periods of time in the canteen, side-by-side with other diners, afforded the diarists with opportunity to observe those around them and to gauge the size of other patrons' portions. Because portion size was based on ration category, this cafeteria revealed a hierarchy that was more permanent, institutionalized.

During the winter of 1941-1942, the diarists noted how muted social interactions were in cafeterias as well as lines, but they still strove to monitor the conversations, however sparse, and behaviors of those around them.<sup>685</sup> They noted how slowly Leningraders ate their portions, trying to make them last longer.<sup>686</sup> The diarists were not the only ones eyeing them, the diners watched each other closely. As Levina explained, they conversed through looks and glances as well as words. "They eat their neighbor's plate with their eyes, 'are you going to eat that bit later?,' 'and how do you allocate your bread? I have come to the belief that it is necessary to eat 200 grams in the morning,'" Levina observed, recording such typical exchanges.<sup>687</sup> Such interactions, even if brief, were not always welcome. From studying her fellow diners in the Architects Union, Levina discovered that they generally preferred solitude and avoided interacting with others while eating. This interfered with the usual springtime patterns of friendship and romance: "women sit separately from men (from those who have dystrophic eyes) who eye them as they eat. *Distrofiia* is preventing romance and love this spring (a very unusual spring) even though life has become more tolerable."<sup>688</sup>

Along with conversation, other prewar courtesies seemed to fade. Lidiia Ginzburg, Aleksandra Liubovskaia, and Esfir' Levina, all commented on the decline in table manners as a disturbing sign that Leningraders had been brutalized, dehumanized by the Blockade. One could pick out those patrons closest to death by their inability to control their emotions; hunger led to callousness, overreactions, and outbursts of anger or rudeness at the table. To demonstrate this phenomenon, Ginzburg created two composite types from the many patrons she saw in the Writer's Union canteen: "A" and "B." At the smallest "trifle," "A" fell into despair" and rushed about creating disturbances in the dining room, while "B" could not resist licking the dirty dishes of his fellow patrons. Ginzburg explained that neither "A" nor "B" lived long after this.<sup>689</sup> By contrast, the radio worker Arkadii Lepkovich took pride in the coarse manner of the *blokadniki*, reading it as a sign of their heroic adaptation to the conditions of war. "The people have matured," he observed in December 1941, "and they have become unaccustomed to the politeness of the peacetime life, such a people is frightening and ruthless to the enemy."<sup>690</sup>

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<sup>685</sup> Zelenskaia, entries for 18 November and 12, 23 December 1941, 33ob, 42ob, 46ob-47.

<sup>686</sup> Levina I, entry for 5 August 1942, 28; Zelenskaia, entry for 13 November 1941; Gal'ko, entry for 28 November 1941, 513.

<sup>687</sup> Levina I, entry for 14 April 1942, 18.

<sup>688</sup> Ibid, entry for 5 August 1942, 28.

<sup>689</sup> Ginzburg, "Zapiski blokadnogo cheloveka," *Prokhodiashchie kharaktery*, 345.

<sup>690</sup> Lepkovich, entry for 13 December 1941, 6ob-7.

When the patrons gradually began to recover from emaciation in late 1942, they had to be taught how to regain their former civility and self-restraint at the table.<sup>691</sup> Levina observed how the leaders at the Architects' Union tried to improve its workers in their outward appearance and their manners as though trying to restore their basic humanity.

Life is starting to be restored and the leaders of the Architects' Union are starting to teach their members: 'blow your nose into a cloth, and do not wipe your fingers on the tablecloth, do not lick the plate with your tongue.' In normal times, such remarks would be deemed offensive, but now are being obeyed. They are teaching people to live as one teaches invalids how to walk.<sup>692</sup>

Yet Levina's response to this new emphasis on manners was critical. She observed that this emphasis on superficial manners and order in the workplace seemed to trivialize the enormous suffering Leningraders had undergone, or the great progress they were making, physically and psychologically: "the real, small steps of development are not considered to be worthy of respect. On the other hand, [some] harshness is necessary."<sup>693</sup> In this way, for Levina, the space of the canteen revealed new insights about the dynamics between the leadership and the masses and about the establishment of taboos regarding the apparent brutalization of Leningraders under siege.

Levina was not alone in her critical response to the social and political world reflected in the canteen. When the diarists inspected their fellow patrons' plates, most became enraged by the inequalities that they perceived between patrons. Regardless of their ration category, the diarists felt that they were being slighted: either they objected to legal forms of privilege based on the ration system or to illegal corruption of that system. Their observations in the canteen often flowed into critiques of the policies of food distribution, as the diarists questioned the city's management of provisions, the commitment to socialist values, such as of equality and communalism, and the presence of class enemies under siege. Their journals point to a specific set of beneficiaries whom they suspected were thriving under this system. They were: food service personnel, speculators, party officials, and workers with category I ration cards.

### *New Elites: Food Service Workers*

Because they had close access to food, food service personnel quickly became elites in blockade society and the main targets of the diarists' umbrage. Indeed, as Richard Bidlack has shown, workers in this industry had a 10-20 percent lower rate of starvation than the general public, although the diarists' *perceptions* of the inequalities between them were much greater.<sup>694</sup> Even those diarists who benefited from personal connections to such workers constantly suspected these workers of under-measuring their portions, playing favorites,

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<sup>691</sup> Liubovskaia, 17 May 1942, 153.

<sup>692</sup> Levina I, entry for 17 October 1942, 31.

<sup>693</sup> Ibid, entry for 17 October 1942, 31.

<sup>694</sup> Bidlack, "Workers at War," 24.



reselling stolen food in the black market, and generally feeding themselves and their families at the expense of the *blokadniki*. The diarists leveled these accusations against food service workers at all levels of authority –from bakery assistants, to truck drivers and delivery personnel, to cafeteria directors, to city bureaucrats.<sup>695</sup> Ivan Savinkov was among the better fed of my diarists. He managed a shop floor at the Molotov Factory, held a Category I ration card, received doctors' certificates for additional food, and occasionally was given extras from the cafeteria director, a friend of his.<sup>696</sup> Still, Savinkov regularly wrote of the injustices of this system and used his diary to outline what he saw as an elaborate conspiracy between cooks, servers, suppliers, managers, and bureaucrats, who now comprised the upper echelon of Leningrad society. "It is an interestingly organized affair," he remarked scornfully,

whoever has a server (*bufetchitsy*) has a [illegible] staff member to carry food out of the cafeteria; the guards work together because they want to eat—this is the first small party of swindlers. The second is much larger: this is the acting assistant, the head cook, and the shopkeepers. Here, there is a much bigger game consisting of acts of damage, loss, evaporation, and concession; under the guise of filling the mess tins, terrible self-provisioning (*samosnabzhenie*) is taking place.<sup>697</sup>

Here, Savinkov alluded to two rings of this conspiracy, one connected to the act of serving food and another, more large-scale, network of thieves stealing from kitchens and storehouses before the food ever made its way to cafeteria patrons. Even young children were keenly aware that their parents' proximity to the food service created great disparities between them. In July 1942, Esfir' Levina recorded one conversation that she overheard between three little boys who stood on the street and compared their bodies, until the "winner" proudly proclaimed: " 'I am looking better than all of you because my dad [works] at a bread factory.' "<sup>698</sup>

From the diaries, these bakery and cafeteria workers emerge as a kind of nouveau riche that thrived off of stealing from hungry Leningraders, pinching from their rations and then reselling the food for valuables on the black market. When Elena Kochina confronted a food worker for under-weighting her ration, she was surprised that he made no attempt to defend himself. In her mind, this systematic theft of those with access to food justified her husband's regular acts of theft: "Well, after all, the salespeople are really robbing us blind. In return for bread they have everything they want. Almost all of them, without any shame at all, wear gold and expensive furs. Some of them even work behind the counter in luxurious sable and sealskin coats."<sup>699</sup>

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<sup>695</sup> For an example of other diarists who benefited, see: Afanas'ev, entries for 7 November, 23 December 1941 and 3 January 1942, 23, 25, 26. A strong, personal critique of the system also appears in: "The Diary of B. Kapranov," *Budni Podviga*, (Saint Petersburg: LIK, 2007), 42.

<sup>696</sup> Savinkov, entries for 25 February 1942, 24.

<sup>697</sup> Ibid, entry for 22 September 1942, 59. Additional examples can be found in: Riabinkin, entries for 9-10 November 1941, 102-103; Uskova, entry for 10 January 1942, 46.

<sup>698</sup> Levina I, entry for 21 July 1942, 27.

<sup>699</sup> Kochina, entry for 23 November, 1941, 166. English translation from: Kochina, *Blockade Diary*, 47. Also see: Ibid, 22 December 1941, 176.

One of the more egregious stories of food service workers flaunting their privileges appears in Elena Kochina's diary. In April 1942, she was riding an evacuation convoy with her husband Dima and her daughter Lena. "Our neighbors in the car present a homogeneous mixture: everybody looks alike—old people and children." But in this sea of emaciated faces, "only one young fellow and a girl stand out."

Both are robust and red-cheeked. They quickly sniffed one another out and got together. The guy jabbars on without stopping. Words fly out of his mouth, quickly running into one another. The result is a kind of leapfrog (*naskokivaia drug na druga*) that's impossible to make out. But the girl evidently understands him perfectly. Throwing her head back, she scatters laughter throughout the car. Together, they raise quite a hullabaloo.

'Somehow you don't look like you went hungry,' Dima said tauntingly. 'I didn't go hungry,' the kid answered simply, and added garrulously, 'My father works in Leningrad in supply. During the Blockade we ate better than before the war. We had everything.' 'Then why are you being evacuated?' 'I was bored in Leningrad. There wasn't anyone around to have a few laughs or go dancing with.' [The girl] also spoke quite readily: 'I work in the supply department at Lake Ladoga. We ate whole boxes of butter and chocolate.' She said boastfully, 'Of course, before the war I didn't see that.' I felt indignation rising in me. Neither of them could begin to comprehend their tactlessness, telling this to the very people they had robbed. I looked at the others, but they listened with indifference, evidently finding it all very natural.<sup>700</sup>

In addition to their tactlessness, Kochina was clearly struck by the youths' distinct physicality, manner, and style of speech, which marked them as members of a particular social group. They gravitated towards each other and ignored all the other passengers until Dima Kochin broke into their conversation with his questions. Their language—peculiar in its speed, energetic delivery, and mirth—was incomprehensible to Kochina. This pair testified to social mobility under siege: neither enjoyed great status or wealth in the prewar period, but their occupations allowed them to live better "inside the ring" than they ever had previously.

Even those diarists who became involved in the food service accused such workers of corruption. A rich example of this appears in the diary of Irina Zelenskaia, who went from eating in the Lenenergo cafeteria to overseeing food distribution in it. But before she assumed this post in late September 1941, she strongly voiced her complaints about the food regulation at the station, calling lunch there "a joke" (*ostrota*) and condemning the build-up of red tape and bad faith on the part of the cafeteria organizers, which prevented food from actually reaching the deserving workers, including herself. "We live from soup to soup once a day; by the way we never get full portion at the canteen. For our own 250 people 200 soups are given out, and not every day, and 80-100 second courses because of the fact that there are always horrible thieves."<sup>701</sup> Her suspicions were heightened in spring 1942, when ration

<sup>700</sup> Ibid, entry for 5 April 1942, 206. English translation from: Kochina, *Blockade Diary*, 106-107.

<sup>701</sup> Zelenskaia, entries for 22 September and 3 December 1941, 18, 37ob-38ob.

sizes and food supplies had increased and yet the Lenenergo workers still did not receive their full ration. Like many diarists, rather than question official food norms as misleading or unrealistic, she blamed to the staff who transported, cooked, and served food for this mismatch:

In general, the food is rather decent if you don't count that it is necessary to make up the deficiencies of winter. And then, of course, on the way to the eater an awful lot [of food] presses itself into the hands of the cafeteria storehouse workers, not overseen by any kind of workers' inspection. But were it not for this, things would be completely good. [...] The consumer grumbles, but remains fearful of the speculators. The interests of the cafeteria workers, of course, always prevail and our fearful myth remains a myth.<sup>702</sup>

Including herself as one of these mistreated patrons, Zelenskaia explained how their complaints were treated as little more than conjecture. Although the city imposed the harshest penalty for stealing food, execution, most diarists felt that their complaints fell on deaf ears. They were at the mercy of these new elites, created by the centralization of food distribution, who had the power to save whom they wanted and condemn others to death.

### *Wives (and Husbands) of the Cafeteria*

Within this new privileged class, once group, distinct in appearance and personality, stood out to the diarists. These were the so-called “wives of the cafeteria” or “wives of the Blockade,” euphemistic labels to describe Leningraders who traded sexual favors for food. The diarists pointed out to their potential readers how to spot this group amidst the crowds of “numerous walking skeletons” that inhabited “the ring.” “Your eye,” Zelenskaia remarked, “using a special sense, fishes out the healthy blooming faces:”

These are mostly young women and, if they are not in military uniforms, then of course one can suspect them of being ‘wives (illegible) of the cafeteria’, the only stratum of the population that has preserved its normal appearance, although without much honor for themselves.<sup>703</sup>

While military workers were understood to have food privileges, these women were considered to be living parasitically off of the civilian population. At the same time that Zelenskaia detested these women, she admitted, “you are just happy to see fresh, healthy young faces, like these young ladies,” rather than the distasteful, emaciated visages of the *distrofiki*.<sup>704</sup> Nina Klishevich, as I mentioned above, was even more specific in her description of these women. In her generalized composite of this “social type,” she depicted

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<sup>702</sup> Ibid, entry for 21 May 1942, 81ob-82.

<sup>703</sup> Ibid, entry for 22 August 1942, 96.

<sup>704</sup> Ibid, entry for 22 August 1942, 96.

the “Blockade wife” as heavily made up and overtly sexual in their appearance, making them a stark contrast to the androgynous *blokadnitsy*.<sup>705</sup>

This figure was typically gendered female, but some male diarists, like Ivan Savinkov, reversed the usual stereotypes of the female prostitute and male patron and noted that the city’s men were also tempted to sell themselves to women in food service. Savinkov called them “the new Leningrad female aristocrats (*aristokratki*)” or “the aristocrats of the stove (*aristokratki ot plity*).” Moreover, in another reversal, Savinkov described these women, rather than their male partners, as grotesquely over-sexualized. In his eyes, they were gluttonous and hedonistic, consuming the stolen food, valuables, and men they possessed without discretion or restraint:

Comparatively speaking, the workers connected to food can be separated out from all the rest of the people, who only live on ration cards. This is first and foremost a fat, well-nourished carcass (*tusha*), dolled up in silk, velvet, stylish boots, and shoes. There is gold in their ears, heaps of it on their fingers piles, and of course a watch, stolen, and depending on its grandeur, golden or plain. When this type of ‘*aristokratka*’ chats with us, it is necessary for her to look at the watch, shaking her wrist for a long time and keeping it at eye level. Such an assured, insolent conversation—she thinks, that for a plate of soup she can buy you for a night. And the conversation is only about food, about theft, [about] how much and how someone steals.

Such an ‘aristocrat of the stove’ does not want a lowly engineer as her lover (*druga serdtsa*). ‘My supervising engineer is proud of this. And so we enter into slavery under the cook, he [a *blokadnik*] goes in order not to die or freeze during winter. Such an acquaintanceship guarantees you food, firewood, and definitely a featherbed with a ‘fat lady in it’ (*zhirnoi baboi*). Even a new term has emerged to explain this: ‘blockade acquaintanceship’ (*blokadnoe znakomstvo*). Sailors and definitely commanders hold the ‘aristocrat of the stove’ in high esteem. Yes, this evil family will be damned for [each] plate of soup. I do not want to sell myself and therefore it is obvious that I am a *distrofik* and I have been ill for nine months of 1942 and in bed for five of them. Oh war! What are you doing to people!’<sup>706</sup>

Although Esfir’ Levina suggested that romantic feelings had died between starving Leningraders in the canteen, Zelenskaia’s and Savinkov’s accounts suggest that sex played an important role in operation of the blockade economy and the establishment of a new social hierarchy. Savinkov underscored the elite aspect of these transactions, which excluded junior engineers, like himself: the “aristocrats” partnered with elites or military personnel, but they had little to be gained by choosing him. He was considered unworthy even for this.

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<sup>705</sup> Erokhana, entry for 13 June 1943, 57.

<sup>706</sup> Savinkov, entry for 22 September 1942, 59-59ob.

## *Speculators*

Another “type” who thrived off of the food distribution system were the speculators. Already a stock figure of “an enemy of the people,” speculators were even more vilified in the journals than cooks or bakery attendants. In fact, these groups of food service workers and speculators overlapped as the former sold stolen food on the black markets for money, jewels, and other finery. The budding philologist Nata’lia Uskova claimed that she could understand how food workers might take bread if they were starving, but she had no sympathy for those who grew rich from stealing food and trading it at an inflated cost. Uskova came to draw this distinction when she witnessed “the trial” of three food workers at *Dom Krasnoi Armii* who were accused of theft. She witnessed these proceedings while visiting her husband who was temporarily stationed there. He was an actor performing for troops at the front. According to Uskova, the three food workers were “obviously undernourished, pale people” and had stolen because they were hungry. When she learned that they would either be executed or sent to the front as punishment, she was overcome with sympathy for them. She directed her rage at the food distribution system for making an example out of these workers, but turning a blind eye to speculators. “And this at the time when, without following any laws, the black market exists, where those who have been fixed up with cushy positions (*kormushki*), sell and exchange groceries for things (!) They ought to be shot without trial. But these three are not speculators and not ordinary thieves, but people whose moral compasses have moved because of hunger. For them this trial alone is shame and disgrace for life.”<sup>707</sup>

The diarists reviled profiteering as one of the most morally reprehensible crimes of the Blockade, and they viewed speculators as class enemies as well as traitors. “For whom is life easy in the city?” Arkadii Lepkovich asked, stepping over corpses on his way to work, “only the dead and the swindlers, those who have no duties to the people of the motherland.” “The parasite-speculators (*parazity-spekulianty*) are growing rich on the poverty of the people. These are also enemies like the fascists, only they have weapons in their hands, while these [people] line their pockets with hunger and cold” the party official Gal’ko proclaimed.<sup>708</sup> Still with an ill wife at home, Gal’ko used the market regularly and begrudgingly paid super inflated prices of foodstuffs, which he recorded, angrily, in his diary. The sight of well-dressed, well-fed Leningraders at the markets reinforced the sense of social hierarchy and injustice that the diarists developed in line or at the canteen.

Of course, the black market had been a necessary and permanent fixture of the Soviet economy since the revolution, but it boomed during the Blockade. Before the war, the *kolkhoznye rynki* functioned as centers of small-scale commerce and private enterprise; by law only licensed individuals, typically collective farmers, were permitted to sell produce and handicrafts. During the Blockade, as the city was cut off from the hinterlands where most of these farmers resided, the flow of locally-grown food into the city slowed substantially.

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<sup>707</sup> Uskova, entry for 10 January 1942, 45-46.

<sup>708</sup> Lepkovich, entry for 23 December 1941, 10b-11; Gal’ko, entry for 18 January 42, 517. Also see: Kniazev, entry for 3 February 1942, 167-168. Kniazev’s neighbor, the wife of an engineer for the defense industry, was a skilled speculator. “She confines herself to the choicest items: underwear, shoes, table-linen, towels, and in exchange for such things, she gives, for instance, one kilo of bread for a large, well-kept carpet; a handful of millet and a few pieces of sugar for a lamp; 500 grams of rice for a pair of shoes...[...] amongst those of us who are starving in Leningrad, there are some well-fed people too!”

Although Leningrad authorities debated closing down these and other markets that had since appeared, they acknowledged that they were necessary to facilitate the circulation of goods throughout the city. As a result, they allowed a certain amount of private exchange in goods, but continued to monitor markets, checking to see that those selling goods for money were licensed to do so.<sup>709</sup> Moreover, they remained deeply mindful about speculating and printed lists of monthly arrests (along with stern condemnations) of speculators in *Leningradskaia Pravda*.<sup>710</sup> In this way, black market activity piggybacked on top of the *kolkhoznye rynki* as well as took place in new, improvised spaces.

Because of the demand for goods, commerce, both legal and illegal, boomed during the siege. As the librarian and archivist Mariia Konopleva noted, as the city grew empty during the first siege winter, only the Nikol'skii Market and Haymarket remained vital.<sup>711</sup> Diarists on Vasil'evksy Island, like Dima Afanas'ev, visited the bustling Andreevsky market daily, buying or just browsing in order to mollify their hunger.<sup>712</sup> As Esfir' Levina put it in spring 1942: "the city is one big market."<sup>713</sup> The diarists learned to recognize the impromptu street markets that sprung up across the city and how to distinguish them from ordinary crowds of people. In January 1942, Ivan Savinkov discovered an illegal market that had formed in the Molotov factory on the shop floor under his jurisdiction. "Alright, this is how we will survive," he remarked.<sup>714</sup>

Despite their hatred of the speculators, starvation lured all of my diarists to the markets. Elena Kochina likened the market to a "whirlpool," adding: "The crowd sucked me in and began to turn me around, driving me along its numerous channels."<sup>715</sup> The market was irresistible if not unavoidable. Even those devoted party members, such as Leonid Gal'ko, Irina Zelenskaia, and Elizaveta Sokolova, bought and sold goods there and openly admitted to these small infractions, justifying them as entirely necessary.<sup>716</sup> There was a clear double standard, therefore, in how the diarists judged the morality of the market and its speculators. Although they regularly bought and sometimes illegally sold goods there, they never admitted any affinity with these entrepreneurs. They insisted that the speculators were "parasitic," opportunistic, or even "evil" "class enemies." They upheld Soviet moral codes about private trade at unregulated prices with their words, but not their deeds.

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<sup>709</sup> Official documents from the commerce department of the city's executive committee are reproduced in: Dzeniskevich, *Leningrad v osade, 196-197*. For a scholarly treatment, see: V. L. Penkevich, "Rynok v osazhdennom Leningrade," *Zhizn' i byt' blokadnogo Leningrada* (Saint Petersburg: Nestor-Istoriia, 2010): 122-163. During the winter months of 1942, the NKVD worked to uncover these illegal networks. A report for January 1942 notes that the NKVD arrested 657 people for speculation. Compare this to eight arrests for cannibalism, four for murder, and six for theft. Official records of these police activities have been published in: Lomagin: *V Tiskakh goloda*, 180, 192-196.

<sup>710</sup> Diarists discussions of this phenomenon can be found in: Chernovskii, entry for 13 January 1942, 60-62; Nikulin, entry for 11 January 1942, 13.

<sup>711</sup> Konopleva, Notebook 3, entries 28, 31 July 1942, 11-12.

<sup>712</sup> Afanas'ev, entry for 12 January 1942, 26-27.

<sup>713</sup> Levina I, entry for 6 February 1942, 7.

<sup>714</sup> Savinkov, entry for 16 January 1942, 17ob.

<sup>715</sup> Kochina, entry for 30 December 1941, 178-179. English translation from: Kochina, *Blockade Diary*, 67.

<sup>716</sup> Sokolova, entries for 1, 3, 4 January 1942, 36ob-37ob.

## *The Proletariat Triumphant*

The illegal activities of food service workers and speculators aside, the ration system provided a legal framework for social stratification by feeding industrial laborers roughly twice as much as the rest of the population. Since the revolution, proletarians had been slated for special privileges by the regime founded in their name, but during the Blockade, this system became even more pronounced as the work of Leningrad's factories became essential to the war effort. For Leningraders, work—or more accurately, holding a workers' (*rabochii*) ration card—meant the difference between life and death. Not only did card-carrying workers receive larger rations, they had access to their institutions' canteen as well additional food reserves that they received from the front and Kronshtadt. During the first year of the war, the death rate for workers at the city's power plants and at the Kirov Works, for instance, was between ten and twenty percent lower than for average Leningraders.<sup>717</sup>

Because such privileging of workers fell in line with the regime's ideological ideals, the ration system was often praised in the official press as the triumph of socialist values in blockaded Leningrad. In *Leningrad in the Days of the Blockade*, Aleksander Fadeev proclaimed that the ration system along with the state-run economy, centralized distribution of resources, the privileging of the working classes, and the premium placed on productivity—"each according to his labor"—all marked besieged Leningrad as a perfect city-commune, a model to be emulated in peacetime.<sup>718</sup> Those who did manual labor, especially in industries serving the war effort, needed more calories to stay productive. Similarly, in the early months of the war, party workers and diarists Anisim Nikulin and Irina Zelenskaia applauded the ration system for its favoritism toward able-bodied workers, deeming it to be "necessary," "logical," or good for "discipline."<sup>719</sup> A Category II worker, Zelenskaia acknowledged that this system of "supporting all those who were able-bodied" and "not feeding those who are dying" was "cruel" but "acceptable" in light of the circumstances.<sup>720</sup>

However logical the ration system seemed in theory, the diarists objected to its execution. They were particularly dubious of how fairly ration categories were assigned and the prominence of favoritism. Several organizational factors may have fed these suspicions. First, the ration system operated chaotically and inconsistently in the first months of the war, when ten different agencies issued rations in slightly different ways.<sup>721</sup> Second, the regime was hesitant to keep adjusting food norms every time that there were sharp dips in supply, which meant that Leningraders regularly received less than they were officially promised.<sup>722</sup> Third, their sense of injustice was fuelled by the rumor mills and by the vicious sensation of

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<sup>717</sup> Bidlack, "Workers at War," 20-21, 24-25. Bidlack notes that there is little data indicating the death rates at other factories. He also argues that the death rate at factories would have been even lower if the majority of those casualties had not been men who died in much higher numbers during the first siege winter.

<sup>718</sup> Fadeev, *Leningrad v dni blokady*, 143-44.

<sup>719</sup> TsGAIPD, f. 4000, op. 11, d. 80: "Dnevnik, 10/I/1942-7/IV/1942, 26/VI/-16/VII/ 1941 i drugie materialy Anisima Prokofevicha Nikulina," entry for 1-19 July 1941. This source is hereafter referred to as "Nikulin."

<sup>720</sup> Zelenskaia entry for 19 March 1942, 70.

<sup>721</sup> In the first months of the war, Leningrad authorities had to depend on Moscow central office for decisions regarding food distribution; moreover the state issued over 1000 special coupons that could be used to purchase food without ration cards. See: Steiner, "The Food Distribution System during the Siege of Leningrad," 45-49.

<sup>722</sup> Barber and Harrison, *The Home Front*, 81; Osokina, *Our Daily Bread*, 151.

hunger, which made most Leningraders suspicious that everyone around them was receiving more.

The category of “worker” (*rabochii*) was the most hotly contested because they received the largest civilian rations. In the prewar period, a combination of factors—class origins, level of education, political or military service, and occupation—might all be considered evidence of proletarian status. But during the siege, “worker” acquired a very specific meaning and was applied to a specific group: only those who had a category I ration card were “workers.” And this new group excluded many Leningraders who previously had been considered (or considered themselves) to be workers, including people in light industry or the service sector. In the winter of 1941-1942, only thirty-four percent of Leningraders received workers’ rations.<sup>723</sup> Most everyone who worked, was designated a “service worker” (*sluzhashchii*) and received a Category II ration. During the worst months of the siege, they “earned” only half as much as a “worker” and the same amount as those who did not work at all. To confuse matters more, some Leningraders in leadership positions ate as workers, but did not perform comparable labor.<sup>724</sup> Because of the disparity between these prewar and wartime usages of the term, the Blockade prompted the diarists to reconsider what it meant to be a “worker.” Was it to be defined by labor, by values, or by ration category?

The diarists voiced three main objections to the new, ration-based definition of worker. First, it devalued the work done by Category II (service) workers. Second, Category I workers did not seem to work all that much, especially during the worst period of the famine, when their rations were almost twice as large. Third, even when conditions became more conducive to work, they still did not demonstrate the discipline and the commitment to labor that they were supposed to embody. Some diarists evoked older notions of proletarian values and qualities to claim that the (Category I) workers were not necessarily worthy of the designation and that (Category II) service workers deserved greater recognition and were worth feeding.

Intellectuals often complained that the ration system undervalued those who did non-manual labor. As she sat in the cafeteria at the Architects’ Union, Esfir’ Levina fumed that, while they were given watery soup, “at the factories there were meat dishes” being served.<sup>725</sup> Moreover, at the canteen, the “engineers” were fed substantially more than the “architects” even when the differences in their jobs and their utility for the front were negligible.<sup>726</sup> Some service workers petitioned for Category I rations on the grounds that the state had failed to acknowledge their professional contribution. Georgii Kniazev, the Director of Archives in the Soviet Academy of Sciences and Vice Chairman of the Academy’s History Committee, was one who requested that he be considered for a workers’ ration card on the grounds of the importance of his position. This would put him in a par “with the cleaning lady and boiler attendant.”<sup>727</sup>

In addition, many diarists claimed that Category I workers seemed to do little work. When the war first began, Leningrad’s industrial output increased dramatically due as labor

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<sup>723</sup> Pavlov, *Leningrad 1941*, 77.

<sup>724</sup> Bidlack, “Workers at War,” 23. Bidlack mentions, with caution, that not all who received workers’ rations were workers.

<sup>725</sup> Levina, entry for 7 February 1942, 204.

<sup>726</sup> Levina, archival, 3/VIII/42, 25.

<sup>727</sup> Kniazev, entry for 3 January 1942, 164.



authorities greatly extended the workday and raised production quotas. But around November 1941, industrial output began to fall because of the lack of electricity. The industrial sector virtually came to a halt during most of the winter when there were too few resources, fuel, raw materials, and too little manpower to sustain them.<sup>728</sup> The city soviet closed down 270 factories that winter. During the six months or so that the industrial sector was inoperative, workers still received Category I ration cards, although they were not supposed to.<sup>729</sup> Many stopped attending work and those who did occupied themselves with heating or repairing the shop floors and not their regular duties.<sup>730</sup>

Aleksandra Liubovskaia, a librarian and translator (and carrier of a Category II card) worked in a milling factory on the Petrograd Side. She described a typical workday in December 1941 this way:

No one is seriously working. The head of the department, it is true, punctually comes to work at 8 am and literally sits with his hands folded on the table for about an hour and then leaves. Twice we have seen him at the end of the workday. [...] Others sit for two hours at our tables and then go to lunch. With this their working day ends because they leave for home early.<sup>731</sup>

Unable to work without sufficient supplies or electrical power, the plant workers crowded into the library to read newspapers, study maps, and discuss the war, turning the reading room into “some kind of a club” for the factory workers.<sup>732</sup> In short, work became essentially a place to eat. This was also how Natal’ia Uskova, a philology student who took a job in a munitions factory in order to get a Category I ration, described the plant where she was “working” in March 1942: “Right now it’s not working because of the lack of electric energy. But all who have remained alive come to the office like it’s their duty [...] The big motivation is the cafeteria. From 1 to 2 o’clock it’s lunch, but the line on the stairwell towards the second floor already forms at 12 o’clock. Here they feed us every day, despite the fact that the factory is not working.”<sup>733</sup>

The Institute of Party History specifically recruited workers to keep diaries of their heroic wartime labor, but many journals in this collection, including those of Ivan Savinkov and Irina Zelenskaia, mostly attest to inactivity in factories and plants. Savinkov claimed that little work was done in the Molotov Factory between September 1941 and January 1943, due to shortages, deaths, and evacuation.<sup>734</sup> But what Savinkov found more upsetting—as did many diarist who received Category II rations—was that his fellow Category I workers lacked proletarian values of discipline and self-sacrifice. He described the shop floor and especially canteen as places of discord, where they fought each other for every bowl of soup: “who

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<sup>728</sup> Bidlack, “Workers at War,” 16-23, 29. Other scholars, including David Glantz, have a more optimistic view and claim that factory production was substantial at least through the end of December 1941. See: Glantz, *The Siege of Leningrad*, 79-80.

<sup>729</sup> Bidlack, “Workers and War,” 20-23.

<sup>730</sup> Ibid, 21-22. Bidlack notes that attendance requirements remained lax through September 1942.

<sup>731</sup> Liubovskaia, entry for 16 November 1941, 11-12

<sup>732</sup> Liubovskaia, Epilogue, 200.

<sup>733</sup> Uskova, entry for 15 March 1942, 49-50.

<sup>734</sup> Savinkov, entry for 14 October 1941, 5.

would believe that my engineering work would be reduced to this?" he marveled.<sup>735</sup> In February and March 1942 Savinkov reported a string of murders, thefts, and fights between workers in his brigade, which lowered morale and productivity to new depths.<sup>736</sup>

Zelenskaia shared Savinkov's concerns both about worker inactivity and lack of discipline. She felt "undeservedly wronged" by the ration system, insisting that little that separated her, a service worker, from the manual laborers who were fed twice as much in the canteen.<sup>737</sup> "We work or do nothing to the same extent," she exclaimed, "I am feeling like a victim of injustice. These horrors weaken one's will and what is worse, one's principles (*printsipial'nost*)." <sup>738</sup> In summer 1942, when Lenenergo should have been fully operational, disparaging remarks about the workers' lack of discipline began to multiply in her account. Work at the station started two hours late and lasted only five hours total. Even though many employees, including the diarist, were living at the factory, they overslept. And when city authorities declared that the 1 May and 2 May would be mandatory workdays, the diarist remarked that "it is true that with our doubtful discipline instead of two working days we have five non-working days."<sup>739</sup>

Zelenskaia's censure of the plant workers grew more vehement as she took up her new post of overseeing food distribution at the station. Now she came to level the same accusations against the workers that she had against the food service personnel earlier of being undisciplined and deceitful and sabotaging the system.<sup>740</sup> In the canteen, Zelenskaia claimed she was "surrounded by swindlers," both plant workers and upper management, each trying to get an extra plate of soup, swiping cards, and stealing what they could.<sup>741</sup> Where were the "heroes"? What happened to the "inner strength" of the Soviet people?<sup>742</sup> Another sign of their lack of discipline and inner strength, Zelenskaia noted, was that the workers had lost interest in the party mission. She and the other members of the Lenenergo party committee had little success in drawing out the same passion from workers' about the war as they could about food: "we have been unable to organize something like the canteen in the red corner. The workers themselves talk less about these external conditions but always talk about whether or not there will be food."<sup>743</sup>

The daily battle that Zelenskaia fought against these throngs of hungry workers eclipsed the war in her mind. In October, one month into her position, she described the canteen as a "battle" (*bor'ba*) or a "siege" (*osada*), where she was on the defensive, surrounded and outnumbered.<sup>744</sup> It became like a microcosm of the Blockade itself. An "onslaught" of "blows pour onto me," she despaired, "I practically have to engage in hand-to-hand fighting."<sup>745</sup> In the course of this, she felt herself growing increasingly distant from and

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<sup>735</sup> During the height of the famine, 50-60 percent of workers were absent on average (Glantz, *The Siege of Leningrad*, 81).

<sup>736</sup> Savinkov, entries for 15 February, 27, 30 March, 24 September 1942, 22, 28-28ob, 59ob-60.

<sup>737</sup> Zelenskaia, entry for 9 October 1942 102-103.

<sup>738</sup> *Ibid*, entry for 9 April 1942, 73.

<sup>739</sup> *Ibid*, entry for 2 May 1942, 78ob.

<sup>740</sup> *Ibid*, entry for 24 September 1942, 18ob-19.

<sup>741</sup> *Ibid*, entry for 18 November 1941, 33ob.

<sup>742</sup> *Ibid*, entry for 11 October 1941, 22ob.

<sup>743</sup> *Ibid*, entry for 27 September 1941, 20.

<sup>744</sup> Zelenskaia, entries for 24 October 1941, 25; 1 November 1941, 26.

<sup>745</sup> *Ibid*, entry for 23 December 1942, 46ob-47.

hostile towards the workers at the plant. “The people are becoming my personal enemies,” she proclaimed, “my work could make you a misanthrope.”<sup>746</sup>

Zelenskaia’s journal presents the canteen as a site of a class war in particular. A recent party member and enthusiastic agitator, Zelenskaia was deeply injured by the plant workers’ accusations that she was some kind of class enemy because she did not feed them adequately. They wielded Soviet slogans against her, threatening: “ ‘right now they are squeezing us, but there will come a time when we shall squeeze them.’ But who is considered ‘they’ and who is considered ‘we’? The bosses? The communists?” she asked in disbelief.<sup>747</sup> She did not fit into either category. The categories of “us” and “them” were in great flux.

In sum, the siege had created rifts in the old class structure by fostering the development of new elites and of new criteria for who was truly proletarian. The cafeteria setting in particular was responsible for fomenting Zelenskaia’s emerging doubts about the social order and the food distribution system that structured it.

### *The Challenge to Party Privilege*

If Category I workers did not seem to do a significant amount of manual labor, then party workers did even less. Yet, they were often, secretly, given Category I cards because of their political importance and during the first half of 1942, their survival rate was fifteen percent higher than that of the general public. From working with classified NKVD records, Nikita Lomagin has discovered that there was a clear difference in how party members fared versus the general population; the disparity grew even more dramatic at the highest levels of the party. For instance, only 72 out of 2,000 NKVD officials died of starvation during the Blockade compared to almost half of the general population.<sup>748</sup>

Objections to party privilege came from diarists both inside and outside the organization. Diarists outside of the party questioned these privileges in principle, while those inside criticized their faulty execution. Just as she criticized the cafeteria patrons for not embodying true proletarian values, Zelenskaia launched similar accusations against the upper management and party elite at the Lenenergo plant. They ate twice as much as she did, but were far less committed to their professional and political duties. She described them as “sluggish, indifferent, and uninspired people.” As they were preparing for a second siege winter, Zelenskaia predicted how the workday would go: “we will get the classic picture: the management will secure as much comfort for themselves as possible, while the rest will do what they can (*kto vo chto*).”<sup>749</sup> The diarist spoke up about this lack of productivity and lackluster attitude at one meeting of the station’s party committee, but her complaints fell on deaf ears. To add insult to injury, Zelenskaia was given the task of waking up the secretary of

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<sup>746</sup> Ibid, entry for 23, 24 September 1941, 18ob.

<sup>747</sup> Ibid, entry for 1 November 1941, 26-26ob.

<sup>748</sup> Bidlack, “Workers at War,” 26; Lomagin gave these figures during a presentation at the ASEES annual convention in November 2010 on a panel entitled “The Bread of Affliction: Rationing and Survival during the Great Patriotic War - Leningrad and Beyond.”

<sup>749</sup> Zelenskaia entry for 5 September 1942, 98.

Lenenergo's party organization at 7:55 in the morning so that the workday began on time. As she sat next to the secretary in the canteen, she noted how his idleness was rewarded with a larger, thicker bowl of soup.<sup>750</sup>

Unlike Zelenskaia, Ivan Savinkov received a Category I ration and was not in the party, yet he also wrote regularly that members of the party organization were poor workers who shirked their duties. Although they were supposed to be model workers, Savinkov claimed that the *komsomol* and party members had the lowest level of moral and discipline, and they often abandoned their posts at the factory, which "killed the initiative to work." When one worker and *komsomol* member left "with great pretense," Savinkov flew into a rage, reflecting on his own sacrifices for the shop floor: "Here's the reward (*oplata*) [you] get for sleepless nights, for selfless work, for the fact that you did not leave the shop floor for five months. [...] I, on the contrary, demand more severe requirements for party members and Komsomol members, including more discipline, but they are just the opposite, they demand amnesty for their position. They need to go." Their willingness to abandon the plant, he noted, marked a reversal in Soviet priorities: "Now, the personal is taking precedent over the societal."<sup>751</sup>

A more unusual critique of the party appears in the diary of Elizaveta Sokolova, the interim director of the Institute of Party History, which was responsible for the diary-writing campaign. Sokolova worked to get these privileges expanded to include herself and her staff, arguing that their work was essential to the lifeblood of the party. Yet her efforts to obtain this from local officials led the diarist to adopt an increasingly critical view of the party organization. As the wartime director, one of Elizaveta Sokolova's main concerns was to secure enough food for her coworkers both by improving their ration category—as intellectual workers, they held Category II cards—and by getting them registered at a "special (*osobaia*) cafeteria" for party workers.

To earn these perks for her workers, Sokolova battled constantly with party elites, including the city party committee's secretary of provisions and its director of the city's cafe and restaurant union. The diarist described how each administrator passed the buck or admonished her for requesting that they illegally "release a special supply of food" to help her staff.<sup>752</sup> "Until nine in the evening yesterday I had to make telephone calls in order to obtain a decision of the higher party organs. It requires a lot of nerve to overcome various bureaucratic loopholes," Sokolova observed.<sup>753</sup> She achieved most of what she needed through persistence. Eventually, Sokolova pressured the secretary of the city's party committee, Ivanov and, with his support, the other officials acquiesced. "There's diplomacy for you- to put it mildly," I thought.<sup>754</sup> Over time, Sokolova grew more skilled in manipulating the party hierarchy. The battle over cafeteria registration was an important event in Sokolova's siege education about the city's political elite.

Throughout November and December of 1941 Sokolova continued to fight with Smolny to obtain Category I status for the Institute's employees.<sup>755</sup> Despite the fact that their

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<sup>750</sup> Ibid, entry for 17 August 1942, 95-96.

<sup>751</sup> Savinkov, entry 25 October 1941, 8-9. The question mark in parentheses appears in original.

<sup>752</sup> Sokolova, entries for 27 October, 1 November 1941 23-25ob.

<sup>753</sup> Ibid, entry for 1 November 1941, 25ob.

<sup>754</sup> Ibid, entry for 1 November 1941, 25ob.

<sup>755</sup> Ibid, entry for 28 November 1941, 32ob.

labor indeed fell into the category of service, not manual labor, Sokolova argued that because of their importance to the party, they were more important to keep alive. When one Smolny official objected “that it is forbidden to do that, that in Leningrad there is only bread for two days and that half a thousand people die from hunger everyday,” she countered that she would not ask for the ration categories to be manipulated if it were not already being done: “‘If you did not to give [them] to anyone,’ I said, ‘then we would not claim [them], but because you give them to local party committee (*raikom*) workers, and we [thought it] possible that you could also support us.’” From this exchange there unfolded a frank discussion about the legitimacy of party privilege during the Blockade. According to Sokolova, the official (N. D. Shumilov), responded by accusing her of being self-interested rather than party-minded:

‘Well, there she goes again, [asking] everything for herself,’ Shumilov said discontentedly, “workers in the district party committee (*raikom*) are our foundational cadres, and if we do not given them [cards] then who will carry out the party work? We will have no one to rely on.’ ‘But,’ I said, ‘our workers also carry out great party work for the masses according to the line of the party *raikom* [...] the *raikom* values our work and it is surprising and outrageous that you cannot help us to arrange category one [cards] for us.’<sup>756</sup>

In this way, Sokolova and Shumilov accused the other of acting against the interests of the collective and party. Ultimately, by casting doubt on Shumilov’s party devotion, Sokolova succeeded in obtaining Category I cards for her workers. This scene also reiterates the great deal of flexibility or (as the diarist called them) “loopholes” in how ration categories were assigned. Clearly concerned about the addressing their worthiness of this privilege, when Sokolova announced the news to her staff, she requested that they all behave like model party workers in the city party committee (*gorkom*) canteen lest there was any doubt that they were entitled to receive this perk.<sup>757</sup>

The diarist worked tirelessly behind the scenes to obtain these benefits for her workers. However, publicly she denied that there was any inequality or unfairness in the ration system. When other Leningraders questioned the system’s equity, she adamantly defended it to them and to the potential reader of her diary. For example, soon after Sokolova’s frank discussion with Shumilov, she recorded a long confrontation she had with a woman who accused her of being a well-fed elite.<sup>758</sup> The scene erupted in a bomb shelter, when Sokolova admonished the woman next to her for complaining. Here is a snippet of the conversation that the diarist recorded:

Her: ‘Well, if you were hungry yourself, you would understand.’

Me: ‘And who is this ‘you.’?’

Her: ‘The one who establishes the laws, who is not afraid of starving, like we service workers [are].’

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<sup>756</sup> Ibid, entry for 24 December 1941, 35.

<sup>757</sup> Ibid, entry for 24 December 1941 35- 35ob.

<sup>758</sup> Ibid, entry for 28 November 1941, 30.

Me: ‘You are talking foolishness, citizenness. [...] I started to explain to her that an individual person can survive and needs to endure and not to fall into despair and not to yell that this is bad and that is bad.’

Her: ‘What is bad is that they do not yell. What we need is for everyone to yell, but everyone stays silent, and they make such laws that give you 100 grams of bread. Probably everyone has reserves and so they are quiet, but I cannot [be silent], I am dying from hunger!’ [...]

[Me:] Why are you whining? What, that others have it better or something? The distribution of goods applies to everyone equally (*Vse ved’ odinakovo snabzhaiutsia*). It is better to stop and be quiet. Everyone has had enough! [...] Good people (*khorošhii narod*),’ I thought about those around me, ‘Ready without complaint to tolerate all kinds of deprivations if only to not let the enemy into the city.’<sup>759</sup>

This is just one moment in the diary where Sokolova supported the ration system, arguing that one could survive on it as long as they do not lose heart or “fall into despair.”<sup>760</sup> She also maintained the fiction that the rules regarding the assignment of ration categories “applied to everyone equally” when her previous entries demonstrate her intimate knowledge of how they could be manipulated. This contradiction did not seem to occur to Sokolova. Still, after making this passionate plea for the system, the diarist left the shelter and sped to the cafeteria, where to her dismay she was given only soup and two portions of kasha. “And this is a special canteen (*stolovaia osobogo tipa*)!,” she exclaimed, wondering how much less was given out at ordinary canteens.<sup>761</sup>

Over time, Sokolova’s criticisms of the Leningrad party organization grow stronger. She battled with the party over a variety of issues from evacuation to political education to discipline. The diarist made it a point to expose these members by writing their full names into her text. “Yes, Yes, all the communists are really showing themselves (*svoe litso*) and at this menacing time the bravery and dedication of the party is being revealed,” she remarked.<sup>762</sup> However, as the diary reveals, the longest and most significant of these battles was her struggle to obtain food privileges. For the diarist, it was a moment of great disillusionment in the local party organization.

In sum, the cafeteria was a key place where the diarists witnessed the disparities between Leningraders. Regardless of their ration categories, the diarists were consumed with frustration over the discovery that others were receiving more food than they were, either legally or illegally. From the perspective of the diarist in line, there were only two real social categories: the fortunates in front and the unfortunates behind. The cafeteria, however,

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<sup>759</sup> Ibid, entry for 28 November 1941, 31-32.

<sup>760</sup> Ibid, entry for 28 November 1941, 32-32ob. She also wrote at length about how her husband, a political officer, refused to demobilize because he feared starving once he lost his military ration (Ibid, entries for 7 November and 24 December 1941, 27ob-28, 34).

<sup>761</sup> Sokolova, 28/XI/41, 32ob.

<sup>762</sup> Sokolova was in charge of compiling the lists of employees for evacuation, but she regarded all those who left, either from the Institute or the party, as deserters, abandoning the city. She also denounced the *raikom* secretary for being late to meetings and admonished *gorkom* and *raikom* leaders for their pessimistic view of the city’s fate. Examples can be found in: Sokolova, 16, 22 August and 3, 30 November 1941, 2-5ob, 8ob-9, 25ob-26, 32ob-33.

showcased a host of social types and elites, some of whom were new to Leningrad, like food service personnel, and some who had long enjoyed official privileges, including industrial workers and party members. Perhaps more than anywhere else, social distinctions were displayed in the bathhouse. There, new social elites were exposed by their healthy bodies, which clearly stood out from the sea of emaciated figures around them.

### Social Difference Laid Bare: the Bathhouse

Along with the breadlines, markets, and cafeterias, the bathhouse emerged as a key arena for studying the siege's transformative effect on society.<sup>763</sup> Communal bathing has long served a function of community building in Russia, but in the isolating conditions of the first siege winter 1941-42, such activities acquired new urgency. During the winter of 1941-42, most Leningraders remained confined to their apartments. When they began to emerge from their solitude in spring 1942, the bathhouse provided them with a space not only for communing with the public, but for learning about the public.<sup>764</sup>

In their observations of the blockade bania, key points of reference for the diarists were the stories penned by humorist and writer Mikhail Zoshchenko in the 1920s about various mishaps in the bathhouse. Zoshchenko presented the bania as a window onto everyday life in the Soviet Union. All the familiar social types—from bureaucrats and zealous party men to careerists and lackey—pass through the doors of Zoshchenko's bathhouse, and through the obstacles they encounter there, the reader gets a sense of the social dynamics, types, and tensions of Soviet society in the twenties. Like Zoshchenko, the diarists depicted the (besieged) bania as a microcosm, an emblem of the typical, everyday, and essential aspects of the blockade experience.

In the breadlines, privilege was judged based on one's position in the queue; in the canteens it was measured by ration size and access to extra food. In the bathhouse, the social order was even more obvious: it became inscribed on the bodies of the bathers. Diarist Esfir' Levina, for instance, darkly joked that a trip to the bania was a great "anatomy lesson," where the peculiar physiognomy of the *blokadnik-distrofik* was displayed in plain view.<sup>765</sup> On a typical trip to the bathhouse, most diarists were impressed by the similarities of the bodies they saw—all had been devastated by hunger. Distinctions of gender, age, or education were washed away. From this view, the blockade seemed to be a great equalizing force. But there

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<sup>763</sup> Previous discussions of the blockade bania, consisting of two key articles—one by Lisa Kirschenbaum and one by Polina Barskova—use a variety of sources including official propaganda, retrospective accounts, and artists' depictions. They also explore a variety of themes—survivors' guilt, sense memory, the blurred line between soldier and civilian, and the notions of the aesthetic and the "anesthetic" siege body. Lisa Kirschenbaum, "'The Alienated Body,'" 221-34; Barskova "The Corpse, the Corpulent, and the Other," 370-386.

<sup>764</sup> For a very enlightening discussion of the various ways that the bathhouse has figured in Russian and Soviet history—including as a place for soldiers and veterans to display the scars of sacrifice after the war—see: Ethan Pollock, "Real Men go to the Bania: Postwar Soviet Masculinities in the Bathhouse," *Kritika*, Vol. 11, No. 1 (Winter 2010): 46-70.

<sup>765</sup> Levina I, entry for 25 March 1942, 15.

were a few times when this homogeneous picture was shattered by the presence of outsiders, with healthy bodies—incarnations of the inequalities that characterized blockade society.

The blockade bania was very different from its prewar incarnation. Like most municipal services, the bathhouses shut down during the worst days of the winter 1941-42. Of the sixty-two banias operating in 1941 only a handful were open in the winter and spring of 1942. Just because a bathhouse was operating did not guarantee one's admission: like food, tickets to the bathhouse were distributed disproportionately to elites, top workers, and members of certain collectives. Irina Zelenskaia, for example, was one of these privileged few who enjoyed a hot bath everyday at the Lenenergo station, while her children had to wait in long lines to be admitted to the bania.<sup>766</sup>

With its medical facilities and supplies drastically reduced, the bathhouse became a public health necessity, one of the few safeguards against the rising tide of death. Although the harsh winter prevented epidemics from breaking out, by spring the population became concerned about the spread of contagious diseases as sanitary services had completely broken down, and the streets were littered with garbage, human waste, and corpses. The ritual of bathing may have eased their minds about infection, but its hygienic effects were limited. The few bathhouses that opened were undersupplied and understaffed. In most wartime bathhouses, only one bathing class was open, and men and women bathed together. Moreover, enemy bombardment and periodic freezes destroyed the city's water and sewage pipelines, which meant that many bathhouses had no running water.

The washroom exposed the deathly state of the *blokadniki* through their emaciated forms and through their inability to wash themselves, to wield buckets and hoses. "Yes," Ivan Savinkov wrote after a bath in late January 1942, "I wanted to describe the scene in the bania, horrible, only skeletons, but not people. What will become of us?"<sup>767</sup> Even though men and women mingled together in the washrooms, my diarists were struck by the seemingly identical appearance of the bathers. In recounting her son Igor's first trip to the bania in March 1942, diarist and librarian Aleksandra Liubovskaia emphasized both the physical deterioration of the bathers and their uniformity, adopting her son's horror and surprise as her own.

At 5 o'clock on 1 March Iura/Igor<sup>768</sup> decided to go to the bania [...] the closest working bania from us is located on Il'ichevskii Sidestreet. Enormous line. Only one class is operating, the general [one] for men and women. Somehow no one paid attention to this. All the bathers, men and women, were so identical (*nastol'ko odinakovy*) that you wished to stand out from them immediately. Everyone is shriveled, their breasts sunken in, stomachs enormous, and instead of arms and legs [there are] just bones poking out through wrinkles, like an elephant's skin...<sup>769</sup>

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<sup>766</sup> Zelenskaia, entry for 10 December 1941, 40.

<sup>767</sup> Savinkov, entry for 26 January 1942, 19.

<sup>768</sup> The diary also refers to Igor' by the pseudonym 'Iura.'

<sup>769</sup> Liubovskaia, entry for 1 March 1942, 106, 109. I found the following discussions of the body as a physical manifestation of social status (or social skin) to be useful for my analysis: Nancy Scheper-Hughes and Margaret Lock, "The Mindful Body," 6-41; Bryan S. Turner, *The Body and Society: Explorations in Social Theory* (Series: Theory, Culture, and Society Vol. 46) (London: Sage Publications, Ltd., 1996), 112.



Even more than confronting one's own emaciated body, Igor' was alarmed by the extent to which his own disfigured body matched those of other bathers, most of whom were women. He feared losing his identity and "wished to distinguish" himself from this sea of skeletons. Indeed, some were victims of the homogenization. The diarist Nikolai Aleksandrovich Bergardt, for instance, was arrested while he was in the bathhouse for being a spy, then promptly released. It seems that one of the other bathers, a young woman, mistook him for the wrong man. Bergardt confessed that this frightening "incident at the bania" was "worse than the incident that M. Zoshchenko wrote about."<sup>770</sup>

In June of 1942, Liubovskaia and her son, Igor'—both deathly ill with dystrophy and scurvy—evacuated from Leningrad. A trip to the bania had been required both for them to leave the city and to be admitted to the hospital in Yaroslavl'.<sup>771</sup> It was outside of Leningrad that Liubovskaia experienced the blockade bania first-hand: its bathers were exclusively Leningrad refugees. Like Igor', Liubovskaia was struck by her own inability to decipher the age, gender, or any distinguishing traits among the bathers and attendants: "Everyone, women and men, bathe together. One old man came towards me (but perhaps he was not an old man!) and held out a washrag."<sup>772</sup> Interestingly, intermixed with her horror at the site of these bodies was the suggestion that this open nakedness indicated a certain naturalness. It was a reminder of their common humanity. The siege distorted man's physical form and yet the atmosphere of the washroom conjured up for her the image of man in his primordial state before "the Fall."

Oh, holy shamelessness (*sviatoe besстыdstvo*), without dirty thoughts, without the notion of sex (*pola*)! This is what sickness and suffering do! I wash Igor'. Automatically tears rush to my eyes. My poor, dear boy! How thin he is. Only bones are left. A sunken-in stomach, ribs jutting out sharply, and over all of this dark, blemished skin covered with small scurvy-induced blotches. My heart is so, so heavy!<sup>773</sup>

The sacred feel of this scene is strengthened by Liubovskaia's description of washing Igor', which recalls Mary recovering and cleansing the body of her dead son. Liubovskaia's dual vision of the washroom as both horrific and yet not shameful, natural, encapsulates a fundamental tension at the heart of the siege experience: the constant blurring of the extraordinary and the ordinary. In evacuation, Leningraders continued to bear this tension on their bodies. The destructive power of the siege and the brotherhood of victimization it fostered established a kind of spiritual affinity between the bathers.<sup>774</sup>

Liubovskaia was just one of several diarists who, through the lens of the bania, pointed to the uniformity of the Leningraders under siege. The siege body itself, androgynous

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<sup>770</sup> TsGAIPD, f. 4000, op. 11 d. 11: Bergardt, N.A., "dnevnik," Notebook One, entry for 4 August 1941, 24-27.

<sup>771</sup> Liubovskaia, entries for 10, 16 July 1942, 173, 183.

<sup>772</sup> Ibid, entry for 16 July 1942, 183.

<sup>773</sup> Ibid, entry for 16 July 1942, 183. Similar imagery of washing as a form of resurrection, of restoring life to the dying, appears in Irina Zelenskaia's discussions of the bania (Zelenskaia, entry for 6 February 1942, 61-61ob).

<sup>774</sup> Harrison Salisbury presented a similar snapshot of the bania, though without the religious overtones, describing how men and women bathed together in a way "that seemed perfectly natural. They passed the soap back and forth, gossiped, soaked themselves, enjoyed the water and the warmth. There was no sign of sexual feeling on either side" (Salisbury, *900 Days*, 379).

and amorphous, imposed a new kind of social equality among those trapped inside the city. Viewed from inside the bania, the Blockade was a horrible equalizer.

There were moments when this unity of *distrofik* bodies was broken by the exposure of other, healthy bodies. They were abhorrent reminder of unequal victimization during the siege. At these times, the bania accentuated the social hierarchy that existed in blockade society. A powerful example of such a realization appears in famed Leningrad poet, Ol'ga Berggol'ts' work, *Daytime Stars*, which is not a diary, but resembles one in its structure, feel and autobiographical aspects. Berggol'ts describes a revelatory trip to the bania this way:

...I had a look at women. Their dark female figures covered with rough skin . . . though actually they were not really female anymore. These were black, bluish pale shadows deprived of their female charms that once were idolized by humanity as its favorite delight. Humanity's mother, humanity's lover, female beauty: what has become of you? [...] And suddenly a woman came. She was smooth, white, glimmering with golden peach fluff. Her breasts were round, tight with almost erect shamelessly pink nipples. Her skin was like from Kustodiev's paintings—its color unbearable when seen next to the brown, blue and spotted bodies. We wouldn't be more frightened if a skeleton would enter that room. Oh, how scary she was!—scary with her normal, impeccably healthy, eternal female flesh. How all this could have managed to survive?

She was nauseating, repulsive, disgusting—with her round breasts, created so that a man could press and squeeze them panting in lust, with her thighs created for fornication—for that sort of thing that could not be now, that once was natural, but became now impossible, shameful, forbidden. Insulted by this blasphemy, women whispered behind her back: healthy! rosy! fat! Quiet indignation of disgust was reaching her: "slut!" And a terrifying bony woman approached her, gave her a slight smack on her but and said: "Hey, beauty—don't come here, we might eat you!" She ignited squeamishness as if she had leprosy, nobody wanted to touch her silky skin. The woman screamed, threw away her basin and ran away out of the room.<sup>775</sup>

Like Liubovskaia, Berggol'ts also drew on biblical imagery, but to emphasize the shameful of the *healthy* body in the blockade bathhouse as an abomination, not of human nature, but of that *distrofik* form, which became naturalized, normalized by the siege. This figure—healthy, clearly female, and attractive—became an outcast in Leningrad society. She was no victim, no *distrofik*, no *blokadnitsa*. The reference to her as not only feminine, but sexually profane, a "slut", perhaps a "wife of the cafeteria," further marks her as a fallen woman. This episode draws attention to the fact that privilege not only survived, but thrived inside "the ring." In this way, the woman—purportedly the figure of normalcy—was not only an affront to blockade society, but to socialist society as well. Ironically, when viewed from inside this bathhouse, the Nazi assault on the city of Lenin led to a strange triumph of certain socialist ideals among the bathers, namely, social solidarity against the privileged classes.

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<sup>775</sup> Ol'ga Berggol'ts, "Dnevnye zvezdy," *Vstrecha* (Moscow: Russkaia Kniga, 2000), 201-2.

Like Berggol'ts, diarists ranging from the medical student Zinaida Sedel'nikova to the artist Nikolai Byl'ev portrayed the bathhouse as a place of social distinction. They also defined the *blokadnik*, the typical bather, by highlighting its opposite. For them, however, the counterpoint was not the privileged *Leningradka*, but creatures from another, privileged universe, from "the mainland," soldiers and militia members, whose rations were twice what most civilians. At times, those stationed nearby the city returned to use its bathhouses. These moments of contact between the *blokadniki* and Leningraders often were fraught with tension. In November 1941, Sedel'nikova described one episode in the bania as a parody of the siege, where she and her fellow bathers—despite a brave show of resistance—were suddenly invaded by an onslaught of red army men.<sup>776</sup> After finally being ousted, Sedel'nikova noted, she and the other ladies "were full of surprise, indignation, and laughter. The only thing we lacked was Zoshchenko."<sup>777</sup>

Byl'ev's visit to the bathhouse in January 1942 was under much more dire conditions and although it shares none of the humor of Sedel'nikova's, its portrayal of the dynamics between genders and between insiders and outsiders is even more productive when read in conjunction with the medical student's account. Now it is Byl'ev who unwittingly plays the role of the intruder into a washroom full of women from the "mainland."

Women were washing, bony, angular. Their breasts hang down like little empty bags I stood in the doorway in the sheepskin coat and ear-flap hat—nobody paid any attention to me. Next to this one, I've noticed another steam-room, it's empty. I enter and undress. Suddenly I hear loud voices. The door opens, and a gaggle of robust girls enter in their hats and sheepskin coats. They notice me and begin giggling: "Come here, little chicken, we will wash you now!" These are militia women sent to Leningrad from the mainland. The second steam room was prepared for them. They make a striking contrast to what I've just seen behind the wall. I gaze at their full breasts, torsos, arms as if at some kind of marvel. As if I found myself in Rubens's paintings.<sup>778</sup>

As Polina Barskova has argued, by entering this washroom Byl'ev stumbled across a critical conceptual divide: the barrier -- not between male and female, but between the siege and the outside world. These disturbingly healthy and feminized women from the mainland appeared beautiful yet grotesque, almost too human. They themselves drew attention to this fact by calling Byl'ev a "little chicken." The girls giggled at his presence in their section of the bathhouse, not understanding that distinctions of gender and class were moot in the city. As outsiders, they belong to a different world marked by different conceptualizations of sex and class. Regardless of whether they saw inequality or equality in the bathhouse, all of the

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<sup>776</sup> Sedel'nikova, entry for 5 September 1941, 17-18.

<sup>777</sup> Ibid, entry for 5 September 1941, 17-18.

For a general discussion of the bathhouse as a gendered (female) space, see: Nancy Condee, "The Second Fantasy Mother; or All Baths and Women's Baths," *Russia, Women and Culture*, ed. Helena Goscilo and Beth Holmgren (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1996), 3-30.

<sup>778</sup> Nikolai Byl'ev, "Iz dnevnika," *Khudozhniki goroda-fronta*, 337. This passage is also discussed in Polina Barskova's article that argues that, during the Blockade, every body type—from emaciated to plump—was seen from a specific vantage point as an enemy, as abhorrent, such that no type effectively functioned "as anesthetic" in: Barskova, "The Corpse, the Corpulent, and the Other," 370-386.

diarists clearly presented themselves as insiders, as true *blokadniki*, and the privileged as transgressors.

When bathhouses were slowly reopened in 1943 and 1944, local authorities celebrated this as a sign that civilization and culture (*kul'turnost'*) was returning to Leningrad and that Leningraders had triumphed over the inhuman conditions imposed upon them by the Nazis. <sup>779</sup> But for the diarists, the bathhouse showcased the horrors of the siege, not their disappearance. Whether they saw disparities or uniformities, inequality or equality in the bathhouse, these diarists presented the cross section of people bathing there not as exceptional, but representative of blockade society as a whole. Their readings of the bania suggest certain readings of blockade life, and the social dynamics, types, and inequalities that characterized it.

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As they went about their days standing in line, eating in canteens, bathing, and haggling at the market, diarists formulated their own understandings of the new social order of besieged Leningrad. Although the diarists' discussions of the food distribution system and the hierarchy it fostered were not confined to lines, canteens, markets and bathhouses, their visits to these spaces, which formed the backbone of the daily life and daily struggle for physical survival under the blockade, prompted the diarists to make assessments about the unique evolution of social psychology, as well as societal norms, conventions, and distinctions inside the ring. In these four settings, or institutions, of the blockade life the diarists witnessed food-based privileges in action. The diary—a narrative form that takes upon itself the task of recording daily routines—became a medium in which their visions of the new social system and of social psychology received clear expression.

These privileges gave rise to the development of new elites (and class enemies), while it imbued old social categories such as “worker,” “speculator,” and “party member” with new meanings. They belied much of the party's rhetoric about equality under socialism, the heroic work of the city's food administration, and the shared nature suffering during the Blockade. In the many entries that the diaries devoted to uncovering the reasons for mass starvation inside the city, they almost always presented it as an internal failing. They faulted organs and individuals inside Leningrad much more than they ever blamed the Nazis or even the general circumstances of the war. At the Lenenergo cafeteria, as Irina Zelenskaia and her coworkers tried to defend herself from the patrons' accusations, they tried to explain that the Germans were to blame for the shortages. One local party member retorted in disbelief: “ ‘what does the war have to do with it?’ ”<sup>780</sup> For Leningraders, internal enemies—from their own bodies to local authorities and elites—loomed very large. Social stratification was one phenomenon

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<sup>779</sup> The symbolism of the bathhouses' reopening is discussed in: Kirschenbaum, “The Alienated Body,” 221-34. This view is supported by several diarists who commented on the popular notion that the reopening of the banias in the Spring was part of the city's rebirth (Savinkov, entries for 16 May 1942, 31; Krakov, entries for 29 January and 21 May 1942, 9, 18-19).

<sup>780</sup> Zelenskaia, entry for 1 November 1941, 26ob.

that the diarists tended to blame on the misguided or corrupt policies of their own system much more than on the circumstances of war.

Six:

“A Great Time Machine:”

Living, Writing, and Reading History

In December 1942 Aleksei Tolstoi urged the Soviet people to take up a new weapon, one that would give them a decisive edge over their German enemy: history. “The admirable force of the Russian people's historical resistance,” Tolstoi declared, was the only force “great enough to withstand the German-Fascist armies.” But until Soviet citizens became better students of history, its potency could not be wielded successfully: There is no denying it, [we] do not know ourselves well enough. That is a pity, for to know one's own history, one's own good qualities and faults and to be aware of one's own possibilities, means being twice as strong and ten times more resolute.”<sup>781</sup> Indeed, as Aleksei Tolstoi suggested, the call to remember and celebrate Russia's glorious past was a critical part of the Soviet regime's strategy for inspiring and mobilizing its people. History, one *Pravda* article declared, was “a mighty fighting weapon, forged and honed in the past for the great battles of the present and the future.”<sup>782</sup> Shortly after the invasion, Soviet citizens were flooded with a deluge of journalism, fiction, scholarship, and political discourse dedicated to historical themes. This growing historicist consciousness stemmed from both official prompting and from the brutal experience of the war. The devastating first months of the war were a historical revelation for the Soviet people. They cast doubt upon the regime's understanding of the “laws of history,” and its predictions about socialism's triumph over capitalism.

This chapter looks at how Soviet citizens in Leningrad reconsidered moments in Russia's past in light of both their experiences under siege and this public discussion of history. The wartime diaries kept by the *blokadniki* show that the tasks of reconsidering and rewriting the past were critical in shaping how they understood and endured the war. Even while struggling to survive in the extreme conditions of the siege, the diarists devoted a great deal of energy to reflecting on narratives of the Russian and Soviet past and trying to situate the Blockade within them.

This chapter is divided into three parts discussing three factors that I argue were critical in shaping the diarists' engagement with history. First, approaching history very broadly as the study of change over time, I demonstrate how the peculiar conditions of the

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<sup>781</sup> A. Tolstoi, “Nesokrushimaia krepost',” 30 December 1942, *Stat'i: 1942-1943* (Moscow: Gosudarstvennaia Khudozhestvennaia Literatura, 1944), 43.

<sup>782</sup> Quoted in: David Brandenberger, “The ‘Short Course’ to Modernity: Stalinist History Textbooks, Mass Culture, and the Foundation of Popular Russian National Identity, 1934-1956,” (Ph.D. Diss. Harvard University, 2000), 83-4.

Blockade accentuated Leningraders' historicist consciousness. Cut off from the "mainland," the uncertainty and opacity of blockade life fostered either a sense of historical return or ahistorical timelessness. In this way, the siege hampered one of the diary's basic functions as a way to account for the days. The tedium and primitive nature of siege life also radically altered Leningraders' conceptualizations of space and time. The paradox of living in a moment of profound historical transformation and yet being unable to distinguish between the days spent "inside the ring" in a meaningful way fuelled these investigations of the past.

Second, by approaching history as a narrative practice, I look at the diarists' struggles to chronicle history. Two questions lay at the heart of these difficulties. The first was how to write a history of the present without hindsight, outside perspective, or even sufficient information about how events were to unfold. The second concern pertained to locating the boundary between the personal and the historical: to what degree should private impressions and experiences enter into the historical record, and how should those experiences be rendered into a historical narrative? Because of the diarists' dual roles as makers and writers of history, any presumed lines between participant and observer, subject and object, historical actor and historical scholar were blurred. In this section, I look at some of the narrative and conceptual challenges besetting the diarists as they endeavored to write a history of their present moment.

Third, I examine how the diarists reconsidered three particular historical moments, which were promoted by Soviet writers and propagandists as analogues to current events. These were: the War of 1812, the Civil War of 1918-1921, and the Crimean War of 1854-56.<sup>783</sup> The diarists took these analogies seriously and interpreted them in their own ways based on their personal experiences under siege. With no apparent intention to contradict official historical narratives, the diaries responded to the analogies with speculation, skepticism, and questioning, rather than simple acceptance, to the historical lessons stressed by the regime. Over the course of the war, and as conditions shifted inside the city, their understandings of these events also changed. As a result, the journals give us insight into how Leningraders' historical consciousness was shifting as they struggled to integrate past and present events in narrative. I focus on diary entries written during 1941 and 1942 when the official historical line—which shifted greatly during the war—was most unclear and a Soviet victory most tenuous. During these years, Leningraders' understandings of the past were evolving at the same time that official narratives of the war and Blockade were still being scripted. These entries were written during a period of relative freedom from a hard-line historical orthodoxy, and they represent the diarists' early attempts to make sense of the past as they came to terms with a shocking new present.

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<sup>783</sup> Of course, these were not the only historical parallels suggested by the regime or the diarists, but by far they appear most frequently in the diaries. Other, less common points of reference include the Paris Commune, various medieval sieges of Rus', Russia and the siege of Syracuse in 212 BCE.

## I. Living History

The diarists' investigative turn toward the past was facilitated by the circumstances of the Blockade, especially the anachronistic quality of siege warfare and the primitive conditions of everyday life. Both elements helped to create the impression that time was reversing itself "inside the ring." A predominantly ancient and medieval style of warfare, siegecraft is often referred to as "tactical stagnation," the direct opposite of the blitzkrieg.<sup>784</sup> It is a protracted, indecisive, and costly form of fighting that tends to favor the defenders over the attackers.<sup>785</sup> Historians and historical actors alike—including Hitler's own generals—have remarked that such an antiquated style of warfare was a strange choice for Hitler. In his comparative study of modern sieges, J. Bowyer Bell has argued that, at the time of the Blockade, siegecraft was indeed "a military anachronism," but after the Nazis had been forced into sieges at Leningrad, Sevastopol', and finally Stalingrad, it became an unavoidable reality for the remainder of the war.<sup>786</sup> Due to the conflicting accounts given by army personnel on both sides, scholars still debate whether the siege of Leningrad was forced upon the German troops by Soviet military resistance or was adopted deliberately by the German high command as a way to avoid heavy losses in street-fighting as well as the responsibility of feeding Leningraders once the city had fallen.<sup>787</sup> Planned or not, even those who predicted the approaching battle between Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union did not foresee that the symbolically charged battle for "the city of Lenin" would take place without a single German soldier marching into it.

The particulars of this debate aside, the diarists had been bracing themselves for an invasion and their surprised remarks at the ensuing siege suggest that they too regarded it as a somewhat of historic relic. Many reconsidered their own situation in light of the medieval sieges of Kiev, Yaroslavl', and Novgorod. This turn towards the past was noted by acclaimed war correspondents such as Vsevolod Vishnevskii as a source of strength and pride: "All consider themselves," Vishnevskii wrote, "to be part of the garrison in accordance with the old Russian tradition of sieges."<sup>788</sup> But given the brutality wrought inside these cities as well as their ultimate demise of all three, the reappearance of siege warfare filled the diarists with foreboding. The translator and writer Sof'ia Ostrovskaiia captured this sentiment in her diary, observing: "one does not escape from a besieged city. That is what the Talmud says."<sup>789</sup>

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<sup>784</sup> Christopher Duffy, *Siege Warfare: The Fortress in the Early Modern World, 1494-1660* (New York: Routledge, 1996), 81.

<sup>785</sup> For a lucid summary explaining siegecraft's predominance in this era, see: Charles Carlton, "Sieges during the British Civil Wars," *Situazioni d'Assedio/Cities under Siege: Conference Proceedings*, eds. Carle, Lucia and Antoinette Fauve-Chamoux, (Montalcino: Pagnin E. Martinelli, Editori, 1999), 241-246.

<sup>786</sup> J. Bowyer Bell, *Besieged: Seven Cities under Siege* (New York: Chilton Books, 1966), 123, 161, 280-285. Bell argues that siegecraft enjoyed a revival during WWII, and he likens this implementation of the siege to the Nazi's strategy of aerial "siege" in London.

<sup>787</sup> Bruce Allen Watson, *Sieges: A Comparative Study* (London: Praeger, 1993), 6-7. For instance, Glantz argues that the siege was planned by the Germans, but other military historians, including J. Bowyer Bell, contends that the Nazis were forced to lay siege to the city after being able to advance any further in the ground. See: Glantz, *The Siege of Leningrad*, 224; Bell, *Besieged*, 123.

<sup>788</sup> Vsevolod Vishnevskii, "Routine Defense Work" in Nikolai Tikhonov, *The Defense of Leningrad: Eye-Witness Accounts of the Siege* (London: Hutchinson and Co., 1943), 30.

<sup>789</sup> Ostrovskaiia, Notebook 2, entry for 11 July 1942, 74ob.



Irina Zelenskaia, a manager at Lenenergo, likened Leningrad to a city of the Middle Ages wracked by plague—typically the biggest killer in besieged cities.<sup>790</sup> The diarist, reconsidered, however: “I don’t know if you can compare this to a medieval plague. Probably it is worse because in the middle ages there weren’t these multi-million populations that live in today’s enormous cities.”<sup>791</sup>

The severe famine and terrible living conditions in Leningrad transformed the city into an archaic version of itself. The primitivization of life also fed the diarists’ preoccupation with history. Daily life inside the city became reoriented entirely around the hunt for food, firewood, and water. The lack of basic necessities, the difficulty of maintaining one’s health and hygiene, and the incessant darkness prompted many diarists to classify their existence as pre-modern or even “prehistoric.”<sup>792</sup> Likewise, Ivan Savinkov remarked in his journal: “We have been transformed into cave men (*peshchernyi zhitel’*) and where? In the center of the city of Lenin.”<sup>793</sup> This same imagery marks the pages of numerous diaries including that of sixth-grader Dima Afanas’ev, who described the wait for some reprieve from winter this way: “we are waiting like cave dwellers (*peshchernye liudi*),” to see the sun.<sup>794</sup>

When spring finally arrived, it revealed how the once modern metropolis now resembled a city of a bygone era. Famine, heavy bombing of the outer manufacturing regions, and a defunct transit system drastically reduced Leningrad’s size, population, and industrial output, and it left the city’s infrastructure in shambles. Local efforts to increase food supply transformed the city into a great patchwork of rural and urban: rough kitchen gardens sprung up across the crumbling cityscape. The demise of transportation meant that all distances had to be traversed on foot. In the absence of mechanized vehicles, people walked right down the center of the street just as they had done centuries ago. As Lidiia Ginzburg later observed in her *Notes*, “we have once again obtained what was lost to modern man: the reality of city distances, long ago swallowed up by trams, buses, cars and taxis.”<sup>795</sup> City structures were threatened not only by enemy bombs and shells, but by Leningraders themselves who, in their search for firewood, disassembled any remaining wooden buildings. As artist Ol’ga Matiushina observed in her diary-novella: “Everyone in the city has begun to haul boards from wherever they can. Very soon sheds and fences disappeared. The city became an enormous country village. It is possible to walk freely between buildings, not entering the street.”<sup>796</sup> In this way, the siege radically altered Leningraders’ perceptions of space, especially accepted notions of near and far, rural and urban, inside and outside.

In this environment, nineteenth-century methods of housework, hygiene, and first-aid became more relevant than those relying on modern medicine and technology. According to the testimonies of Leningrad librarians, patrons frequently requested antiquarian and historically-themed works for practical information on various questions, including: how to build stoves, how wild grasses and roots could be prepared and eaten, how medical materials

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<sup>790</sup> Duffy, *Siege Warfare*, 254.

<sup>791</sup> Zelenskaia, entry for 23 March 1942, 71. Additional references to this theme appear in: *Ibid*, entries for 15 January 1942, 12 April 1942, 53ob, 74ob.

<sup>792</sup> Skriabina, entry for 5 September 1941, 31. Skriabina commented: “We have returned to prehistoric times: life has been reduced to one thing—the hunt for food.”

<sup>793</sup> Savinkov, entry for 5 February 1942, 15.

<sup>794</sup> Afanas’ev, entry for 20 January 1942, 27; Savinkov, entry for 5 January 1942, 15.

<sup>795</sup> Ginzburg, “Zapiski blokadnogo cheloveka,” 325; English translation in: Ginzburg *Blockade Diary*, 26

<sup>796</sup> Matiushina, *Diary*, 143.

could be created from basic household items, and so on. To meet readers' demands, Leningrad's wartime presses published survival guides in unprecedented numbers. Two 100,000 print runs of Freidlin's survival series, were printed in the hundreds of thousands, at rates matching those of the siege's other most popular work, *War and Peace*.<sup>797</sup> Over time, the Institute of Party History's pamphlets on Russian military history came to be infused with more and more practical information about safety and sanitation.<sup>798</sup> In this way, a new hybrid genre, the historical survival guide, was born "inside the ring," where thinking historically often meant the difference between life and death.

Perhaps more alarming than the city's spatial reorganization and its physical deterioration was Leningrad's cultural decline. The diaries' rather bleak view of the Soviet Union's fallen "cultural capital" sets them apart from memoirs of the Blockade, which tend to emphasize events like Shostakovich's Seventh Symphony as emblematic of culture's triumph over the destructive power of war. By contrast, the diarists tended to follow the official line and evoke—sometimes sincerely, sometimes sarcastically—the Marxian view that material conditions determined cultural production. The fight for survival had trumped intellectual and ideological convictions, as sixteen year-old diarist Iura Riabinkin put it, "idealism was reduced to material concerns."<sup>799</sup> Similarly, as she observed the effects of malnutrition of her students who fainted and collapsed with hunger, School director Glafira Korneeva noted, not without irony, that the siege finally proved Marx's tenet "that 'being defines consciousness."<sup>800</sup> "When will people return to basic conditions of the so-called cultured life of the city?" Ostrovskaia despaired in February 1942, and she mocked Popkov's promise that the mass cleaning campaign of spring 1942 would "return it to culture. So far this is also not apparent. We will wait!"<sup>801</sup>

Other diarists, especially those who were critics of the Soviet regime, embraced this historical return as a restoration of lost freedoms. Even though material conditions indeed had transformed the *blokadnik* into a sort of Neolithic man, the Soviet state denied him the benefits of what novelist and wartime correspondent Vasilii Grossman called "the caveman's principle of personal freedom."<sup>802</sup> He was free from societal norms, laws, and conventions. Theatrical director Aleksandr Dymov called the Blockade "a fantasy time machine," which "hurled" *blokadniki* back two centuries "to the early 18<sup>th</sup> century, in the sense of cultural level. Although," Dymov admitted, "it was actually far better in the early 18<sup>th</sup> century." At this time, Saint Petersburg was a brand new city, and the imperial authorities there were—according to the diarist—far less effective at curbing free expression than its Soviet successor.<sup>803</sup>

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<sup>797</sup> RNB, OR, f. 1000, op. 2, d. 999: Ozerova, Galina Aleksandrovna, "Leningradskie knigi perioda blokady (opyt bibliografii mestnoi pechati), doklad (20/VI/1947), 57. This file contains both Ozerova's commentary about the kinds of texts published during the siege as well as lists of all the titles published by all official presses inside Leningrad for the war years. These lists also indicate how many copies of each work were printed.

<sup>798</sup> Ozerova, "Leningradskie knigi perioda blokady," 20-21.

<sup>799</sup> This entry for 1 December 1941 from Riabinkin's diary appears only in *Blokadnaia kniga*, 357.

<sup>800</sup> Korneeva, entry for 29 September 1942, 42-3.

<sup>801</sup> Ostrovskaia, Notebook 2, entry for 1 February 1942, 2-2ob.

<sup>802</sup> Grossman, *Life and Fate*. trans. and intro. Robert Chandler (New York: New York Review of Books, 1985), 846.

<sup>803</sup> Dymov, entry for 25 November 1942, 303.

Along with reconfiguring Leningraders' sense of city spaces and distances, the tedium and monotony of blockade life seemed to resist time's forward march, flouting Bolshevik notions of progressive history. According to the diaries, time now moved in circles, in reverse, or was at a standstill—in any state but moving forward. During the worst months of the Blockade, schools and factories closed, routines vanished, and the long, dark days and nights melded together. This apparent collapse of time not only thwarted the diarists' efforts to write a linear narrative of the siege, it hinted at the terrifying prospect that the future would be basically the same as the present. Sitting in a bomb-shelter, eighteen-year-old diarist Nina Klishevich scribbled a short verse encapsulating this frightful temporal disorientation:

When will this torture end? I no longer believe that there will be an end.  
That is, it is not that I don't believe it, it is that I cannot imagine it, I don't  
feel it.

It seems to me that now this life will always be, without end.<sup>804</sup>

The diarists' sense of ahistorical timelessness, of being unmoored in time, was confirmed by some of the Blockade's most prominent public voices, including Vera Inber and Ol'ga Berggol'ts, two poets who earned widespread acclaim and official approval because of their wartime writings. In her diary of the siege, Inber proposed a new set of equivalences, where one month "inside the ring" equaled one year "on the mainland."<sup>805</sup> In her autobiographical novel *Daytime Stars*, Berggol'ts described the perceived end of chronological time as a fantastical and ironic reflection of socialism's eschatological outlook. "You may not believe this," Berggol'ts wrote of October 1941, "but I know what it is like when time stops; time stopped that day—it was all compressed into a bundle of light inside me, all time, all of existence. And the barriers between life and death, between past, present, and future came merrily crashing down."<sup>806</sup> This "collapsing sense of time" inside encircled Leningrad lends further credence to the image of the ring—which has no discernable beginning or ending—as a powerful emblem of the blockade experience.<sup>807</sup>

The disappearance of reliable, mechanized timekeepers contributed to Leningraders' fluctuating and increasingly pre-modern conceptions of space and time. The diarists actively worked against this temporal disorientation by measuring the passage of time in new ways—through biorhythms, seasonal changes, or personal markers. Some quantified "siege time" by the number of air raids or bombs dropped, or periodized it by changes in ration size or by

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<sup>804</sup> Erokhana, entry for 14 November 1941, 29.

<sup>805</sup> Inber, entry for 17 February 1942, *Pochti tri goda*, 75. This entry, as such, does not appear in the manuscript of her diaries.

<sup>806</sup> Berggol'ts, *Dnevnye Zvezdy* (Leningrad: Sovetskii Pisatel', 1960), 151. The English translation is from: Katharine Hodgson, *Written with the Bayonet: Soviet Russian Poetry of World War II* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1996), 245.

<sup>807</sup> This struggle to grapple with a "collapsing sense of time" also appears in diaries of the Holocaust such as the well-known diary of the linguist Viktor Klemperer, who wrote: "One is overwhelmed by the present, time is not divide up. Everything seems to have occurred an eternity ago. Everyone lets himself wait interminable; there's no yesterday, no tomorrow, only an eternity." Klemperer, *I Shall Bear Witness: The Diary of the Nazi Years 1933-1941, Volume II* (New York: Random House, 1998), 57. This aspect of Klemperer's work was drawn to my attention by: Amos Goldberg, *Holocaust Diaries as 'Life-Stories'*, 16-17. Goldberg explores the links between "the collapse of narrative time" and the construction of narrative identity.

deaths in the family. Ironically, while many standard measures of time fell into disuse, the ten-day week (*dekada*), which revolutionaries in France and the Soviet Union both had tried (and failed) to institute, finally gained wide acceptance under siege. This is because many ration coupons could be redeemed only at the start of a new ten-day cycle. As Leningraders struggled to stretch their food reserves to last from *dekada-to-dekada*, they discussed the future in ten-day segments.

The diary itself was one of the main weapons against this perceived temporal disorder. Derived from the word ‘day,’ the diary’s oldest use was as a timekeeper or a way to account for the days. Some *blokadniki*, like Mariia Konopleva, openly explained that they kept journals primarily so that they could keep track of the date and month.<sup>808</sup> People of all eras have kept diaries as memory aids, and Leningraders wrote and reread their accounts as aids to understanding the present and very recent past. The Informburo’s reports of the latest news (ironically called “*Poslednii chas*”) were notoriously cryptic and uninformative, often repeating that: “nothing of note has occurred” (*bez sushchestvennykh peremen*). As a result, the diarists turned to their journals as more accurate source of news and reread their accounts regularly in order to discern any changes that had been obscured by the monotony of daily life “inside the ring.” Ivan Savinkov, for instance, was intent on periodizing the siege in the hope that he could anticipate when the decisive break in the German lines would occur. A typical example can be found in his entry for 12 December 1942, when he declared: “I would like to compare [today] with December eighteenth of last year.” And after consulting his entries for the previous year, he concluded: “that means that life in the country has improved, and this is a sign that Russia will be victorious over Germany.”<sup>809</sup> At the opposite end of the political spectrum, regional health inspector Leonid Gal’ko used his diary for a similar purpose, comparing 27 December in 1941 and 1942.<sup>810</sup> Both accounts, then, fulfilled the functions of calendar and historical chronicle, showcasing the diarist’s own attempts to formulate news ways to mark and analyze the passage of time inside the siege.

For eleven-year-old Nikolai Ivanovich Vasil’ev, the task of reformulating new time markers was inseparable from his diary project as a whole. He inscribed his fourteen-page text directly on a calendar form, where he mostly noted down the deaths of virtually all his family members until Vasil’ev was left quite alone in the city. Each page of the calendar was imprinted with inspirational quotes by Stalin and Lenin and reminded the user of important events that occurred on that date in the past. Just below this text Vasil’ev wrote his entries, his own version of “on this day in history,” which juxtaposed life inside and outside “the ring.” After every entry, Vasil’ev authorized the authenticity of his account by signing his name, so that his own prose and the quotations of Lenin often appear on the page as parallel citations. While the calendar reports the births and deaths of great men of history—Goethe, Beethoven, Stalin, Whitman, and Newton—the diary inscribes the deaths of small people—Vasil’ev’s mother, father, and brother—into the annals of history. For instance, just above the printed reminder that today “Chekhov was born” Vasil’ev scrawled: “Lesha (my brother)

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<sup>808</sup> Numerous examples of this appear in: Konopleva, Notebook 1, entries for 31 October, 6-8, 30 November, 1 December 1941, 85-86, 154-155, 187-188; Notebook 3, entries for 26-27 October, 30-31.

<sup>809</sup> Savinkov, entry for 12 December 1942, 70. Additional examples of his attempt at periodization can be found in: *Ibid*, 2 October 1942, 61ob.

<sup>810</sup> Gal’ko, entry for 27 December 1942, 533.

died.”<sup>811</sup> At times, Vasil’ev forced these two historical narratives to intersect. He amended the calendar’s claim that “Leningrad is the city of great victories and honors,” noting “Leningrad is the city of the Great October Revolution, city of honor. But something happened to it. Life has died. It is as if (*butto*) (sic) the city were empty [...] Everything is as if (*butto*) it were dead.”<sup>812</sup> His journal bears the marks of a schoolboy—crude handwriting, many misspellings, and almost a total lack of punctuation—but as diarist Vasil’ev played the historian, linking his own life to historical time and amending the official historical narrative with his own experiences inside “the ring.” In this way, the blockade diaries provide a clear example of the close relationship between calendars, chronicles, and histories.

In their effort to account for the days spent “inside the ring,” the diarists were aided by official chroniclers of the Blockade, who penned their own calendar-like works. These texts were meant to boost Leningraders’ morale by pointing out important shifts and improvements that had occurred during the 900 days. A principal example is Nikolai Tikhonov’s “Leningrad Year,” written concurrently with the Blockade and published in monthly installments in *Red Star*, the Red Army newspaper. Like a calendar, Tikhonov’s “Leningrad Year” attempts to graft interminable Leningrad time back onto linear, chronological time by identifying major developments in the city and on its front. It begins in May 1942, after the worst period of the siege was over, which suggests that signs of progress were easier to identify than during the first siege winter. Even so, the author himself intimated that his attempts to make sense of siege time were of limited success. In his entry for November 1942, for instance, Tikhonov admitted: “If one were to write a daily chronicle (*den’ za dnem letopis’*) of the city, it would seem that November differs very little from October. The monotonous autumn takes the place of a monotonous summer and even the war does not produce any particularly tragic impressions. In reality, however, this is not so.”<sup>813</sup> Even under improved conditions, he noted, the passage of time in Leningrad continued to be experienced and perceived differently. Springtime in Leningrad, he explained, did not coincide with “the calendar spring,” and so on.<sup>814</sup>

In sum, the dramatic alterations to the perception of time and space under siege left many diarists disoriented. One critical way that they worked to regain their hold on the present was by comparing and contrasting it the past—be it last month, year, or century—by writing and rereading their accounts. Judging from their journals, this was a creative engagement that proved to be critical to survival, both physically and intellectually. Unmoored by the peculiar conditions of the siege, the diarists looked for ways to anchor themselves to the history of their city and country, to see themselves in the shadows of the past.

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<sup>811</sup> GMMBOL F. RDF, op. 1L, d. 329, Nikolai Ivanovich Vasil’ev, “dnevnik,” entry 29/1/42, 10.

<sup>812</sup> Vasil’ev, entry for 2 February, 1942, 12. Further examples of his commentary on the printed text appear in: *Ibid*, entry for 10 January 1942, 8.

<sup>813</sup> Tikhonov, *Leningradskii god*, 64.

<sup>814</sup> *Ibid*, 81.

## II. How does Life write the Book?<sup>815</sup>

Most of the blockade diarists took up the practice of diary writing with some kind of historical objective in mind. Some wrote to keep track of time, others to communicate with their children or future descendants, still others to chronicle the events of the Blockade for posterity. Moreover, the diarists were aware that they were witnessing a unique event in the history of their city and that their accounts might serve as evidence for future readers interested in the Blockade. “I felt myself to be Herodotus,” the art historian Georgii Lebedev observed in his diary, “with that kind of responsibility.”<sup>816</sup> The librarian and art historian Mariia Konopleva took this sense of duty one step further and strove to record as much “historically useful” information as she could on the Blockade. In 1943, Konopleva sent her diary to editors at the state literary publisher (*goslitizdat*) and urged them to publish her diary, declaring that its value resided in the fact that she wrote almost everyday for three years and amassed 180 pages of data on “the conditions of everyday life in blockaded Leningrad. I considered it necessary to note not just facts, but also the ‘rumors’ that existed (*zhili*) then and that Leningraders took in thirstily during that time when there was no newspapers, radio, and telephones and pos did not work.”<sup>817</sup> This sense of ethnographical and historical mission comes through clearly in virtually all of the diaries, including those that were part of and separate from the party’s official diary collection.

Scholars of Russian history and literature have demonstrated that Russia is home a particularly strong strain of historicism that runs through many of the intelligentsia’s autobiographical and public writings since the mid-nineteenth century.<sup>818</sup> Members of the Soviet intelligentsia drew on this tradition in their own writings and ideological exchanges of the 1920s and 1930s.<sup>819</sup> They argued strongly for the interconnectedness of personal, political, and historical development and encouraged the Soviet people to see themselves as “conscious historical subjects.”<sup>820</sup> As Jochen Hellbeck has argued, during the 1930s, the regime upheld the diary as an instrument that would help the Soviet people to cultivate this historicist and revolutionary consciousness.<sup>821</sup> Still, Hellbeck observed that this historicism

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<sup>815</sup> Here I borrow the title of Thomas Lahusen’s rich study of one man’s autobiographical writings about his experiences at a forced labor camp in Siberia. See: Thomas Lahusen. *How Life Writes the Book: Real Socialism and Socialist Realism in Stalin’s Russia* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997).

<sup>816</sup> “Iz dnevnika G.E. Lebedeva,” *Russkii Muzei-evakuatsiia, blokada, vosstanovlenie. Iz vospominanii muzeinogo rabotnika*, ed. P.K. Baltun (Moscow: “Iskusstvo,” 1981), entry for 10 January 1943, 120-121.

<sup>817</sup> The note making this request was made on 9 July 1943 and appears on the first page of Konopleva’s diary.

<sup>818</sup> For an insightful discussion of this tradition, see: Irina Paperno, *Stories of the Soviet Experience: Memoirs, Diaries, Dreams* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2009), 9-10.

<sup>819</sup> Jochen Hellbeck and Igal Halfin have both studied the continuation of this historicist consciousness into the Soviet period. Hellbeck has demonstrated a strong tendency among diarists of the 1930s to view their lives in terms of larger historical developments. Halfin has argued for the importance of historicist themes, especially the view of history as redemptive and progressive, in Soviet discourse and practices of introspection in the 1920s. See: Hellbeck, *Revolution on My Mind*; Halfin, *Terror in My Soul*.

<sup>820</sup> This is drawn from: Hellbeck, “Working, Struggling, Becoming, Stalin-Era Autobiographical Texts,” *Russian Review*, Vol. 60, No. 3 (July, 2001),” 341, 349.

<sup>821</sup> As Hellbeck explained, “the decisive quality of the New Man,” was consciousness or “the ability to see the laws of history and comprehend one’s potential as a subject of historical action” (Hellbeck, *Revolution on My Mind*, 17-18).

did not necessarily mean a preoccupation with the past, arguing that many diaries of the twenties and thirties “barely exhibit a sense of, let alone a longing for the past, and their reflections on the present are embedded in an almost exclusive orientation toward the future.”<sup>822</sup> The vast majority of the blockade diaries I have studied, however, initiated this dialogue with the past in order to better understand the extraordinary and horrific present conditions of their lives.

During the Blockade, the Leningrad party organization further encouraged this historicist mindset by convincing city residents to keep diaries. When he first proposed this campaign, Secretary Efremov argued that unofficial, personal documents were needed to counterbalance future official histories that might gloss over or “correct” the intimate aspects of the siege experience. As Efremov explained to his fellow members of the Kirov district party committee on 26 November 1941,

we live in an epoch that will be studied by historians and that will be the basis upon of which our mistakes, such as they were, will be corrected, our work will be reconstructed, etc. etc. In any case, we live in an interesting period of human history that ought not to pass into the future without leaving a trace (*bessledno*).<sup>823</sup>

By calling on its citizens to chronicle the siege, the party gave new authority to them and to the place of intimate experience in history. However, neither the party nor the Institute offered any specific guidelines as to how Leningraders should take up this task, except to suggest vaguely that they document “historical episodes that characterize our epoch” in general and to convey the “historic atmosphere” inside the city.<sup>824</sup>

Given this uncertainty, there is a striking amount of variety in how the diarists—both those who participated in this campaign and those who wrote independently—approached this task. Their accounts vary widely in scope and focus: some concentrated on reporting international war news, others on military developments on the eastern front, and others still confined themselves to events taking place inside the city or in their own lives. Some writers placed a premium on the collection of raw data—facts and figures—and others on personal impressions and emotional experiences. In general, the diarists appeared to be conflicted about what method was best. They sometimes shifted between several approaches and frequently apologized to their future readers for the digressions and inconsistencies in the shape of their narratives.

Many diarists were concerned with how to display the authenticity of their accounts and the relevance of their stories to the overall history of the Blockade. Nearly all of the diarists that I have studied expressed a desire that their account be “historically useful,” but they were unsure of what counted as historical material. The diarists grappled with three challenges in particular. First, how were they to write a history of the present, that is, history without sufficient information about current (let alone future) events, the benefits of hindsight, and or a detached point of view? During the siege the diarists were cut off,

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<sup>822</sup> Hellbeck, “The Diary between History and Literature: A Historian’s Critical Response,” *The Russian Review*, Vol. 63, No. 4 (Oct., 2004), 622.

<sup>823</sup> TsGAIPD, f. 4000, op. 10, d. 776, 26/XI/41, 2.

<sup>824</sup> *Ibid*, 7, 16.

sometimes inadvertently, sometimes deliberately, from reliable information sources.<sup>825</sup> Moreover, as both makers and writers of history, the diarists embodied this tension between the perspective of the scholar and of the participant. They were driven both impulses both to ethnography and to historiography, which at times appeared to be a source of confusion for the diarists. Second, the extraordinary and unique nature of the Blockade seemed to push the limits of representation, even for professionals of considerable literary talent. How could the diarists convey the seemingly indescribable hardships of blockade life? Third, the diarists were unsure what balance to strike between recording personal incidents and shared experiences. On the one hand, individual and world-historical conflicts became closely intertwined during the war, but on the other hand, Soviet ideology and culture had always privileged the collective over the individual. Personal experiences might be dismissed as subjective or self-indulgent.<sup>826</sup>

These were the same difficulties that professional writers reporting on the war faced. In a November 1943 article he wrote for *Red Star*, the war correspondent Ilia Ehrenburg summed up all three of these challenges to conveying the experience of war: “War is complex, obscure, and dense, like an impenetrable forest. It does not resemble its descriptions; it is both more simple and more complicated. It is felt, but not always understood by its participants, and it is understood, but not felt by later investigators.” Ehrenburg noted that the historian “correctly evaluat[es] the significance” of events, but he “dress[es] up” past events rather than presenting them as they really were. By contrast, “the participants of the war, they know what the war looks like [...] but it is difficult for the participants of the war to appreciate the historical significance of what was taking place: the great achievements of the present day are enough for them.”<sup>827</sup> The diarists too confronted some of these fundamental questions about the practice and purpose of history.

To demonstrate how the diarists grappled with these methodological and narrational questions, I take a detailed look at just a few diarists. The first was Anisim Prokof'evich Nikulin. Nikulin was so vexed by these concerns that he wrote almost as much about his search for a proper method of diary writing as he did about the siege itself. During the war, Nikulin worked for his local party organization and for the anti-aircraft defense of the October district.<sup>828</sup> Nikulin felt obliged to keep a diary because of his political commitments, but he often seemed to regret this decision. “I am not used to observations,” he confessed, and he found this work “a bit boring.” He tried to ease his burden with a little alcohol. “In the course of [making] observations two times I stopped by pubs even though I don't like them. Drank a bit too much.”<sup>829</sup> Nikulin's diary is filled with apologetic statements, not only for his distaste

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<sup>825</sup> Even diarists who had better access to information, such as Elizaveta Sokolova who ran the Institute of Party History during the Blockade, complained that they did not have enough information to keep an accurate account (Sokolova, entries for 5, 18, 20, 22, 28 August, 16 September, 11 October, and 1, 23 November 1941, 1-13ob, 18ob, 22, 25).

<sup>826</sup> The founders of the official diary writing campaign discussed this problem at length, but never arrived at a resolution (TsGAIPD, f. 4000, op. 10, d. 776, 11-18).

<sup>827</sup> Ehrenburg, “The Soul of Russia” (11 November 1943) *In One Newspaper: A Chronicle of Unforgettable Years*, trans. Anatol Kagan (New York: Sphinx Press, 1983), 355.

<sup>828</sup> Nikulin, 6, 7b-8b. This entry is undated, but written in 1941 after 23 August.

<sup>829</sup> *Ibid.*, entry for 1-10 July 1941, 2.



for observational work, but also because he recorded them haphazardly, without a clear vision or narrative in mind.

Yes, excuse me, reader, perhaps after some time I myself will find that (my) notes are useless, not needed by anyone, of no value; I know that one should not write like this. After all, I am only making notes without any kind of plan, without (careful) selection (*otbor*) of facts, unsystematically. All the events that now enter my observations [...] might be useful, from the notes one can make excerpts and extract certain facts.<sup>830</sup>

Nikulin's statement of regret speaks directly to one of the tensions between writing a diary and writing history: the diary is supposed to be written spontaneously and concurrently with events, and it resists a coherent or unifying structure—like the kind that Nikulin felt he ought to have. In addition to apologizing for his lack of organization, Nikulin also asked his potential reader to pardon his limited literary skills. At times, he worried that this prevented him from conveying the complexity of life inside the blockaded city.

I am no writer and my pen will not be able to capture all of reality (*vse to real'noe*). My limited thoughts will not be able to write with enough color (*kraski*) to depict reality in the besieged city of Lenin. This is why I will not try to cross over to the artist's brush (*ne pytaius' poka perekhodit' k kisti*) in order to create a picture on a big canvas. I note down what I experience myself, what I see and observe.<sup>831</sup>

Doubtful of his literary talents, Nikulin resolved to record only direct personal experiences and observations rather than try to capture the collective experience. Still, he was unsure how to strike the “correct” balance between reporting personal stories and shared experiences. Whenever he mentioned private concerns, about his family or his declining health, Nikulin did so apologetically. He prefaced mentions of his family or of his deteriorating health with apologies and, it seems, requests that he might delve into the personal: “Please excuse me, whoever might look over my notes some day, if that happens at some point, but I want to say one word about myself. In the past few days I have become catastrophically thin. There is almost nothing on my ribs, only skin and bones remain,” he observed solemnly.<sup>832</sup>

This entry of January 1943 was one “true” entry of Nikulin's account. In light of these difficulties, Nikulin began to avoid writing, leaving very large gaps between his entries. Nikulin continued to pen a few, retrospective reflections, and instead inserted various documents— telegrams, announcements, speeches, his own work reports—that might perform the task of historical recordkeeping for him.<sup>833</sup> In his search for a method, Nikulin struggled

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<sup>830</sup> Ibid, entry for 13 January 1942, 16ob-17.

<sup>831</sup> Nikulin, 21ob. This is an undated fragment, but may be part of an entry for 15-18 January 1942.

<sup>832</sup> Nikulin: entry for 15-18 January 1942, 20-20ob. He discusses his wife and daughter in: Ibid, undated entry, 10-11, 19-20 January 1942, 20-21.

<sup>833</sup> Nikulin, undated fragments and documents, 24-60.

to synthesize various and competing analytical lenses: past and present, individual and collective, public and private. He self-consciously and perhaps unsuccessfully wrestled with the diary as a record that is both personal and historical.

One might suspect that Nikulin struggled with keeping a historical chronicle because of his inexperience with or his limited understanding of historiography. However, professional historians who kept diaries—both as part of and independently from the party’s official campaign—struggled with the same set of methodological and textual issues. The accounts of historians Aleksei Alekseevich Chernovskii and Georgii Aleksandrovich Kniazev represent different understandings of the diary’s utility to historical research. Like Nikulin, these two professionals often second-guessed or adjusted their approaches to diary writing over the course of the Blockade as their sense of what was historically significant evolved.

Georgii Kniazev was the director of archives at the Leningrad Academy of Sciences, author of *The History of the USSR’s Academy of Sciences (Istoriia Akademii Nauk SSSR)*. Highly honored for his contributions, he was a recipient of the Order of Lenin and the Order of the Red Banner of Labor. In addition to his diary, which he kept independently of the Institute of Party History’s campaign, Kniazev was busy with another historical project during the siege. He was commissioned by the prominent historian I. I. Mints at the Academy of Sciences to build an archive of materials and “gather all possible sources related to the Second World War” included interviews of leaders and written sources.<sup>834</sup>

Kniazev may have intended to include his private diary in this archive, but he never indicated this in the diary itself. Instead, he presented it as a personal project, which he undertook for the sake of private reflection as much as for historical documentation. “I cannot help but write,” he admitted.<sup>835</sup> The title of his diary, *A Half-Century in the Life of a Middle-Ranking Russian Intellectual*, captures the intimate and yet wide-reaching aspirations of his work.<sup>836</sup> Just a few days after the war and the diary practice began, Kniazev explained that he preferred to document personal and intimate incidents from his life so that future readers might understand how ordinary people experienced this extraordinary historical event:

Who am I writing for? For you, my faraway friend, a member of some future communist society, to whom war will seem as alien and fundamentally repugnant as cannibalism now seems to us. Yet there once were people, our ancestors, who happily devoured one another! [...] if they do reach you, my faraway friend, these pages of mine—perhaps in scorched fragments—you will live through with me what your unfortunate predecessor lived through [...] In the official documents that will have been preserved for you, you will find the material for a scientific treatise, but in my notes you will find the beating pulse of the life of one

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<sup>834</sup> Anatole G. Mazour, *The Writing of History in the Soviet Union* (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 1971), 354.

<sup>835</sup> Kniazev, entry for 25 June 1941, 4-5.

<sup>836</sup> Granin and Adamovich, *Leningrad under Siege*, 2; Granin and Adamovich, *Blokadnaia kniga*, 234, 290, 337. A different title for Kniazev’s diary project and personal archive, *Histories of My Time*, is mentioned in *Blokadnaia kniga*. Granin and Adamovich’s two coauthored works on Kniazev, *Blokadnaia kniga* (1977, 1982, 1994) and *Leningrad under Siege* (2007) differ in some of the details they provide about his life and work. My analysis and my citations are based on the latter, more recent publication, but I note when and how the two accounts differ. A manuscript of Kniazev’s diary is housed in the archives of the Saint Petersburg branch of the Academy of Sciences, but it was restricted from public access at the time of my research.

insignificant man, who, within his own small world, lived out a life that was big, boundless, complex, tragic, and full of contradictions.<sup>837</sup>

In anticipation that this war would be unique, monumental, and would preclude all future wars, Kniazev felt compelled to record his experiences so that future readers might have some sense of the ordeal. At this time, he felt no obligation to convey or speak for the collective experience, but rather to describe the intimacies of his own “insignificant” life at this extraordinary time.

However, there were moments, especially during the first siege winter, when Kniazev expressed doubt about his approach. First, he was concerned about choosing such a narrow focus and confessed he was unsure of how much to report on personal experiences or general information about the city and front. Second, Kniazev worried about the disparities between his lived experiences and his expressions of them. Like Nikulin, Kniazev feared that he lacked the talent or the perspective to adequately capture this tumultuous time on paper. Beset by these frustrations, in November 1941, Kniazev began to question whether he should continue with this tedious and unsatisfying practice at all. He lacked information and perspective—both essential to a historian’s craft:

Shall I take my notes any further? They are taking on the extremely monotonous aspect of a catalogue of the destruction caused by enemy air raids. As a contemporary, I cannot get a real grip on events and my ambit is too restricted to permit a full and varied description of them. I am trying to broaden my horizons to include general information, gleaned from newspapers, but do I need to do this? I don’t really take upon myself the role of historian or war correspondent, or something of the sort, when I write these jottings. Then again –should I be writing about myself, about my own experiences? I might seem to be showing off: ‘look at our hero, stoically and courageously enduring all these ordeals?’ Indeed, I do endure them stoically, but I endure them from a dialectical standpoint, and there is much that is contradictory...<sup>838</sup>

As Kniazev’s account suggests, at the heart of these challenges to writing the story of the siege was a question of identity: what was the role of a diarist? Although he had resolved to highlight the personal and intimate in history, Kniazev worried that this goal might be misconstrued as conceit or self-absorption.

Subsequent entries suggest that Kniazev tried to compromise between the two extremes of summarizing the news reports on the one hand and only reporting intimate, direct experiences on the other. By December 1941, Kniazev resolved to document “everyday life within my small radius”—the space between his home, office, and local bakery—rather than events at the front or societal phenomena inside the larger “ring.” These were the domain of others, journalists and historians.<sup>839</sup>

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<sup>837</sup> Kniazev, entry for 25 June 1941, 5.

<sup>838</sup> Ibid, entry for 17 November, 1941, 86.

<sup>839</sup> Ibid, entry for 12-13 December 1941, 88.

That January, Kniazev once again embraced a more personal, intuitive approach to chronicling the siege, allowing himself to spontaneously freewheel on the page without worrying about the utility of these notions to future readers. “It is only here, in these pages that I allow myself free rein. I am completely myself here,” he declared.<sup>840</sup> Although he had been frustrated with the diary form, now Kniazev embraced its flexible, inchoate structure for facilitating his self-expression. He reiterated this point a month later in February 1942, juxtaposing his free-flowing notes to the more coherent, but deliberately crafted memoir:

At precisely this moment, I am writing down everything that I see that I think, and experience. Immediately, spontaneously, without worrying about any contradictions, long-windedness, or repetitions. Because such is real life. And what will be written alter on, in the form of memoirs, will be a far cry from what we are living through now. [...] Naturally my notes will need careful editing. But what I have wanted to achieve so far has been to convey at least a part of my thoughts and experiences, even if my writing lacks system and consistency of style. There is some justification for my haste.<sup>841</sup>

The remaining entries of Kniazev’s account maintained this intimate tone and focus. However, there were several small moments of doubt, when the historian continued to questioned whether such a personal diary would be historically useful. Later that same month, for instance, Kniazev again wondered: “should I continue with my notes, now that my own small radius has become more restricted?” but ultimately “I made up my mind to do so.” Still a bit wary of the future utility of his notes, Kniazev consistently cautioned his future reader: “My faraway friend, when reading these notes, will discard or skip whatever he finds uninteresting or unnecessary. And I can’t tell exactly what will be needed and what will not.”<sup>842</sup> His trepidation and uncertainty lingered to the very end.

Chernovskii adopted a very different approach to the task of diary writing than Kniazev in part because of his very specific understanding of history. Aleksei Chernovskii was a professional historian and a senior staff member at the Museum of the History of Leningrad. Unlike Kniazev’s journal, Chernovskii’s account was part of the party’s official diary collection. At the museum, Chernovskii also participated in the process of drafting an official history of the Blockade, where the siege figured as the lynchpin of the city’s special revolutionary destiny. Chernovskii lectured and curated exhibitions on war-torn Petrograd and Leningrad, and he composed a series of articles on this subject.<sup>843</sup>

Chernovskii viewed history as a much less personal enterprise than Kniazev, and Chernovskii continually struggled to restrain and censor himself on the page. To create a “historically useful” diary, Chernovskii filled his account with excerpts from official announcements, charts, hand-drawn maps, and other raw data from which the reader could piece together the facts of blockade life. He regularly quoted radio broadcasts, political

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<sup>840</sup> Ibid, entry for 31 January 1942, 167.

<sup>841</sup> Ibid, entry for 22 February 1942, 178.

<sup>842</sup> Ibid, entry for 4 February 1942, 169.

<sup>843</sup> Chernovskii, entry for 19 February 1942, 100. Somewhat surprisngly, Chernovskii wrote very sparingly about his historical writings and projects for the Museum, but some of them are disussed in his entries for, 21, 23 February 1942, 101.

speeches, and the conversations of his coworkers verbatim. In this way, he did try to record personal stories and experiences, just not his own. Judging from his account, Chernovskii considered such outside sources and perspectives to be of greater importance than his own experiences and opinions. Like a good historian, Chernovskii was very careful to always report the sources of any information he received second-hand and putting the last names of his coworkers, friends, and other informants in parentheses after each bit of information such that they resemble in-text citations. His account reads less like a private and more like a documentary record of the siege.

Chernovskii avoided discussing personal affairs despite the strong temptation to do so. Judging from the text, he seemed to feel that the historical value of his diary was inversely related to the amount of personal content it contained, and despite the inherently intimate nature of the diary project, resisted submitting his own story as historical evidence. By contrast, rather than allow himself to freewheel on the page, Chernovskii proudly admitted to making “many important omissions” about his personal life, except at times when he felt it matched the collective experience and thus reflected the “typical” aspects of this most extraordinary event.

In keeping this diary as an authentic (*podlinnyi*) document of a great historical epoch, as material for historians of Leningrad, I meticulously avoid registering personal experiences as best I can, and, if I pause [to discuss] in detail some minor facts on my family, on food and so on, then it is only because I consider it part of the typical picture, reflecting the unique conditions of life in our city. I think that keeping these daily notes will be useful in the future.<sup>844</sup>

Despite his intentions, as he and his family grew weak and ill from hunger, Chernovskii could not help but discuss their struggles and to voice his despair about how to feed his children. When he did indulge in private confessions, the historian was quick either to chastise himself or to find professional justification for the lapse. At times, he devoted as much text to denoting all the things he must not mention as to his permitted topics of discussion. “Right now it is very important not to be occupied with analyzing my physical condition,” he wrote. “Hunger, the swollenness of my stomach, the taste in my mouth, the weakness of my legs, my thinness, and so on. In general, I need to devote myself to news, hope, expectations, and to an inevitably improved future.”<sup>845</sup>

For Chernovskii, historical work, whether at the museum or in his diary, was critical to survival. It not only distracted him from the constant feeling of hunger, it buoyed his spirits and gave him hope. This internal struggle to censor himself remains a key point of tension in the diary down to the very last entry. Chernovskii began it with the declaration: “I will not talk anymore about my illness, this is not the place,” but then he proceeded “just to note,” some observations about his own condition, which ultimately make up the entirety of the entry.<sup>846</sup>

Kniazev’s and Chernovskii’s diaries are indeed valuable sources of historical information. They both are replete with discoveries and insights about the Blockade

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<sup>844</sup> Chernovskii entry for 27 February 1942, 109.

<sup>845</sup> Ibid, entry for 11 December 1941, 42.

<sup>846</sup> Ibid, entry for 9 April 1942, 133-134.

experience. Chernovskii's account is a particularly rich source of hand-drawn maps that chart the Nazi's assault on various sites in the city. But above all, these two sources are revealing for their authors' conflicted discussions of methodology—methods of writing history and of writing a diary. As a form, the diary captures these fluctuations and reversals in their thinking. Together with Nikulin's apologetic, angst-ridden journal, Kniazev's and Chernovskii's diaries demonstrate, if not the successful implementation of a historical approach, then the process of developing it, the rationales behind it, and the difficulty of adhering to it.

### III. Waging the "Historical Front"

Whether or not they participated in the official diary writing campaign or took up their practice of their own volition, the *blokadniki* were exposed to a wide variety of texts encouraging them to think historically about their present moment. After the Nazi invasion, the regime's ideologues, historians, journalists, and poets rushed to interpret the historical significance of the war, pointing both to the Marxist-Leninist laws of history and the Russian people's history of thwarting foreign invaders as evidence of the coming victory. During the chaotic and devastating first years of fighting, however, there was little consensus about how this new historical narrative. The disputes between and among Soviet academicians, writers, and agitators over the "historical front" have been well documented by historians and literary scholars, especially David Brandenberger and Katharine Hodgson.<sup>847</sup> As they demonstrated, the great uncertainty about how the fighting would progress kept the official historical line hazy during the first years of the war. This created a certain amount of inconsistency, but also flexibility and freedom in how the war initially was presented to the public. Building on existing trends towards nationalism, russocentrism, and the cult of the individual hero, Soviet literary and scholarly voices alike stressed uncontroversial themes such as the heroism of the Russian people and its glorious history of ousting foreign aggressors, the barbarism of the German fascists, and the certainty of victory.<sup>848</sup> But apart from these commonalities, wartime

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<sup>847</sup> I owe an intellectual debt to both authors, especially the following works: Katharine Hodgson, *Written with the Bayonet*; David Brandenberger, *National Bolshevism: Stalinist Mass Culture and the Formation of Modern Russian National Identity, 1931-1956* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002); Brandenberger and Kevin M.F. Platt, eds. *Epic Revisionism: Russian History and Literature as Stalinist Propaganda* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2006). For an overview on the patriotic and nationalistic literature produced about the Blockade during the war, see: Aileen G. Rambow, "The Siege of Leningrad: Wartime Literature and Ideological Change," *The People's War*, 154-170.

Other studies that have been useful include: Anatole G. Mazour, *The Writing of History in the Soviet Union* (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 1971); *Rewriting History in Soviet Russia: The Politics of Revisionist Historiography, 1956-1974*, ed. Robert D. Marwick (New York: Palgrave, 2001); George Enteen, "Soviet Historiography and the Problem of Myth," *Worldmaking*, ed. William Pencak (New York: Peter Lang, 1996), 321-34. C.E. Black, "History and Politics in the Soviet Union," *Rewriting Russian History: Soviet Interpretations of Russia's Past* (New York: Praeger, 1956); K.F. Shtepa, *Soviet Historians and the Soviet State* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1962); John Barber, *Soviet Historians in Crisis, 1928-1932* (New York: Holmes and Meier Pub., Inc, 1981).

<sup>848</sup> Hodgson, *Written with the Bayonet*, 58, 108; Brandenberger "The 'Short Course'," 183-4, 177, 198.

writings—official and unofficial—varied widely in their specifics.<sup>849</sup> Finally in 1944, the Central Committee summoned historians, journalists, and propagandists to a conference hoping, as Georgii Malenkov explained, “to develop a set of principle positions for all historians,” but no resolution was reached. The historical line did not crystallize until the end of the war.<sup>850</sup>

Despite its haziness, a striking feature of wartime historiography and propaganda was that they glorified Russia’s pre-revolutionary past to an unprecedented degree. In Leningrad, as in the rest of the Soviet Union, a flood of official references, exhibitions, and publications encouraged Leningraders to see themselves and their situation in the shadows of the past. As Lisa Kirschenbaum demonstrated, Leningrad officials devoted many of the city’s meager resources toward honoring military heroes who had vanquished foreign invaders such as Alexander Nevsky, Mikhail Kutuzov, and Alexander Suvorov. Suvorov became the subject of Leningrad composer Boris Asafyev’s new suite, and Eisenstein’s film “Alexander Nevsky,” which had been banned after the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact, was re-released in 1941 and widely shown, even in the city’s bomb shelters. Leningrad’s Russian Museum and the Museum of the Revolution mounted exhibitions such as “The Great Patriotic War,” “The Heroism of the Great Russian People.”<sup>851</sup> Traces of the tsarist era reappeared on the cityscape itself as Leningraders began referring to some of its most prominent thoroughfares and squares by their pre-Soviet names.<sup>852</sup> In addition to celebrating imperial military heroes, party cells, hospitals, and libraries across Leningrad organized lecture series honoring the city’s history, from its art and architecture to its revolutionary legacy. Some of the scholars who led these gatherings admitted (in their diaries) that they participated even when the event’s topic lay outside the realm of their professional expertise because they were promised extra food.<sup>853</sup>

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See: D. L. Brandenberger and A. M. Dubrovsky, “‘The People Need a Tsar’: The Emergence of National Bolshevism as Stalinist Ideology, 1931- 1941,” *Europe-Asia Studies*, Vol. 50, No. 5 (Jul., 1998), 882); Brandenberger, *Epic Revisionism*, 51, 11; 233; Maurice Friedberg, *Russian Classics in Soviet Jackets*, 35. Brandenberger explained that one reason for the “unstable” and uneven qualities of wartime propaganda was that “party ideologists and court historians in the collective race to ‘publish or perish’ after the German invasion” (Brandenberger, “The ‘Short Course’,” 203).

<sup>849</sup> Hodgson, *Written with the Bayonet*, 58; Brandenberger, *National Bolshevism*, 115-116, 121-127.

The challenge was to anticipate and strike the right balances between the emotional and the historical; between triumphant patriotism and solemnity at the War’s human costs; between a class-based, internationalist perspective and a militaristic nationalism, which contradicted the regime’s earlier stance on imperialism. As Brandenberger has shown, the nationalist-internationalist debate was particularly divisive among historians.

<sup>850</sup> Brandenberger “The ‘Short Course’,” 183, 187-190, 207, 198-203; Brandenberger *National Bolshevism*, 115-116, 126-132.

In postwar literary and historical circles, the unification of the historical line was symbolized by three events: Stalin’s toast to the Russian people in May 1945, the return of Socialist Realism, which was proclaimed by Nikolai Tikhonov at the Plenum of Writers Union that same month, and the replacement of *Istoricheskii Zhurnal* with *Voprosy Istorii*.

<sup>851</sup> Brandenberger, “‘The Short Course,’” 178-179, 228, 181-182, 184, 231-232, 243; Kirschenbaum, *The Legacy of the Siege*, 47-49, 80-82, 87.

<sup>852</sup> The name changes were initiated by the residents and later became official in January 1944 when the Party acknowledged that these names and places “were closely linked to the history and the special character of the city” (TsGAIPD, f. 25, op. 2, d. 4895, Leningradskii Gorodskoi Komitet VKP(b), Osobyi Sektor III chast’. Protokol No. 92: “Zasedaniia biuro ot 5/I/44,” “O Vosstanovlenii prezhnikh istoricheskikh naimenovannii riada ulits, prospektov, naberezhnykh, i ploshchadei goroda,” 3).

<sup>853</sup> This included the specialist in Iranian culture, A.N. Boldr’ev. He also gave lectures on Peter I and the founding of the navy, Admiral Ushakov, Sevastopol’, and the defense of Russian cities in the 13<sup>th</sup> century. See:

In 1943 a new, more rigorous historical curriculum was instituted in Leningrad's primary and secondary schools and extended across the Soviet Union.

The diarists not only witnessed and participated in these public events, they also critically engaged with Russian history through private reading. Ilia Ehrenburg was one of many voices to hail the popularity of reading history during the war: "In war, history revealed itself to us, and the pages of books came to life; the heroes of the past went from the textbooks into the dugouts."<sup>854</sup> Tikhonov, Fadeev, and Ehrenburg characterized the *blokadniki* as voracious readers, and the diaries indeed indicate that Leningraders scoured the city's libraries, bookstores, and kiosks for historical works that might offer insight into how the present conflict would unfold.<sup>855</sup>

It remains unclear how available books were inside the city, as the data on Leningrad's wartime press is incomplete.<sup>856</sup> On the one hand, once Leningrad was cut off, books that had been produced by its presses could not be delivered elsewhere and remained in the city. This fact, combined with the huge circulation of used books traded for food, gave the impression of an abundance of reading material in the city. On the other hand, during the first year of the Blockade the flow of new works into Leningrad grinded to a halt, and the city's book production fell sharply. At the same time, the city suffered staggering literary casualties, as many private and public collections were damaged, stolen, sold, or burned as fuel.

Even though publication rates declined, works of history and historical fiction were printed in relatively high numbers compared to other genres.<sup>857</sup> The available data on print runs does suggest that publishers strove to make such materials available to Leningraders. Among the most printed books inside "the ring," were E.V. Tarle's works on the Napoleonic and Crimean Wars: *Nakhimov, Napoleon*, and *The Defense of Sevastopol'* as well as his tracts *Two Great Fatherland Wars* and *Fatherland War, 1812*, which were slated for printing as early as July 1941.<sup>858</sup> Other histories such as Borodin's *Dmitrii Donskoi*, Sergeev-Tsenskii's *The Ordeal of Sevastopol'*, K. Osipov's *Suvorov*, and V. Konchanov's *Mikhail Kutuzov* were also reproduced in large numbers.<sup>859</sup> As for historical fiction, classics by Pushkin, Lermontov, and Leo Tolstoi enjoyed renewed popularity, especially *War and Peace*.<sup>860</sup>

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Boldr'ev, entry 5/VII/42, *Osadnaia Zapis': blokadnyi dnevniki*, eds. V.S. Garbuzova and I.M. Steblin-Kamenskii (Saint Petersburg: Evropeiskii Dom, 1998), 121, also see: 76-7, 80, 83, 90, 121.

<sup>854</sup> Ehrenburg, "Light in the Dugout" (10 November 1942), *In One Newspaper*, 230.

<sup>855</sup> For example, see: Tikhonov, *Leningradskii god*, 58-61; Fadeev, *Leningrad v dni blokady*, 25-26.

<sup>856</sup> In 1943 the Institute of Party History claimed that 16 million copies of 756 new books and pamphlets were published in just the first year of the siege, but post-Soviet figures suggest around 1,500 works (about 23 million copies) were printed during the whole Blockade, most of them after the worst months were over. Given the city's conditions, even lower estimates of Leningrad's literary output are remarkable. The Institute's rather high figures are found in: *Geroicheskii Leningrad*, 172-3. The post-Soviet estimate is from: *Knigi nepobezhdennogo Leningrada: Katalog knig izdannykh v Leningrade v gody Velikoi Otechestvennoi Voiny, I*, (Saint Petersburg, Izdatel'stvo N. F.Kupriianova, 1999), 9. For additional figures, see: Friedberg, *Soviet Classics*, 38.

<sup>857</sup> Ozerova, "Leningradskie knigi perioda blokady," 13-30. This source lists the all of works published by Leningrad's major publishers during the siege as well as the print runs.

<sup>858</sup> 110,000 copies were ordered of each of these works written by E.V. Tarle: "Dve otechestvennye voiny" (1941), "Otechestvennaia voina 1812 i razgrom imperii Napoleona." See: *Knigi nepobezhdennogo Leningrada*, 87.

<sup>859</sup> Brandenberger, "The 'Short Course,'" 220-223; Ozerova, "Leningradskie knigi perioda blokady," 55, 65.

<sup>860</sup> Ozerova, "Leningradskie knigi perioda blokady," 46-54; Friedberg, *Russian Classics*, 132, 118, 39-40.

One librarian's impressions of the popularity of this and other works during the siege can be found in: OR RNB, f. 666, op. 2, d. 90: Sadovy, A.I., E.A., i M.A. Sadova, Mariia Aleksandrovna "Biblioteka v osazhdennogorode



Although the epic already graced the shelves of most personal and public libraries, 100,000 new copies were printed in the besieged city alone.<sup>861</sup> This literary production was largely motivated by propagandistic goals of shaping popular attitudes toward the war, but as these personal accounts illustrate, Leningraders' intense reading practices were not limited to propaganda editions and were prompted by a variety of interests and aims.

Despite the sizeable scholarly literature on the production of historically themed texts and events, far less is known about how they were received. David Brandenberger has argued that, in general, "Russians adopted the language of the official Soviet wartime line" and "seem to have responded positively" to it. As evidence of the public's general approval, Brandenberger presents several *public* texts that contain readers' responses. These include articles, letters to the editor, published diaries, and recollections, which were mostly composed during the *later* years of the war.<sup>862</sup> Their particular form and focus notwithstanding, the blockade diaries suggest a more ambivalent picture at least during the first years of the war. They demonstrate that Leningraders worked critically and creatively with the historical analogies and images suggested by official publications, rousing questions and insights that sometimes conflicted with official views. The regime's policy—as reflected in the choice of publications and print runs—to cultivate greater interest in history opened the door to a multitude of interpretations, and from their unusual position "inside the ring," Leningraders who wrote diaries expressed different views on Russia's past.

### *Searching for Precedents to the Blockade*

A short time into the siege, Leningraders were acutely aware that they were experiencing an event of monumental, world historical importance. They worked to pinpoint precisely in what ways the Blockade was unique by comparing the siege to other momentous events in the Russian and Soviet past. As I mentioned, official publications encouraged this train of thought, but it is also likely that many Leningraders came to it on their own. As Lisa Kirschenbaum observed, "it is essential to keep in mind that people who found themselves in the midst of [these] 'unprecedented' events had a habit of searching for precedents, for frameworks, of understanding."<sup>863</sup> In memoirs and postwar literature, scholars and survivors mention a range of historical themes that informed Leningraders' understanding of the siege, but the diaries repeatedly point to three moments, which were also very prominent in the official press: the Napoleonic Invasion of 1812, Petrograd during the Civil War of 1918-21, and the siege of Sevastopol' in 1854. Ultimately, however, in their accounts, the diarists' considerations of 1812, 1854, and 1918 seemed to bring the Blockade's incomparable, unprecedented, and unique features into sharper focus.

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(1941-42). *Vospominaniia*. 1944," 11, 28.

<sup>861</sup> Ozerova, "Leningradskie knigi perioda blokady," 54-55.

<sup>862</sup> Brandenberger, "The 'Short Course,'" 262, 327, 244; Brandenberger, *National Bolshevism*, 172-177.

<sup>863</sup> Kirschenbaum *The Legacy of the Siege*, 29.

## *Two Great Fatherland Wars?*

Almost from the moment they first learned of the Nazi attack, the Soviet people were introduced to the idea that this invasion represented a continuation of Russia's "great fatherland war"—the name given to the war with Napoleon—against the hostility of the West.<sup>864</sup> Even though it was not directly connected to the city's history, the diarists regarded 1812 as the central historical touchstone for understanding the Nazi invasion. They referred to it more frequently than to any other historical event, although they almost never used the epithet "second fatherland war" in their accounts.<sup>865</sup> The official press generally evoked 1812 as a symbol of victory and of the heroism of the Russian people, but in their consideration of it, the diarists also focused on the human costs, military defeats, and devastation of the fighting. For many, an immediate point of contention was that many key battles of 1812, including Borodino, were lost, and that Moscow was given up to the enemy. How then might these moments strengthen Leningraders' resolve never to surrender? In the wartime press, Aleksei Tolstoi and Ilia Ehrenburg and, in academia, historian E.V. Tarle worked to recast Borodino and Moscow as, if not military, than moral victories of the Russian people, downplaying or justifying the failure of Borodino and the abandonment of Moscow.<sup>866</sup>

Some diarists were quick to note, however, that the examples of Borodino and Moscow in 1812 contradicted their regime's mandate that they stand firm against the enemy at all costs: "not one step back from our city of Lenin (*ni shagu nazad, za nami gorod Lenina*)." Former *Leningradskaia Pravda* writer Ksaverii Naumovich Sel'tser was one of several diarists who expressed his confusion over this. He drew attention to the disparity between official promises and the reality of war by evoking this historical analogy. "Hard to understand what is going on here!" Sel'tser exclaimed in his entry for 16 October 1941:

[I am] simply saying that if we, according to the announcement by the Informburo, will be resisting the Fascists for many more days, covering the battlefield with their corpses, seizing mountains of tanks and other weaponry, then why have we not only *not* thrown off the enemy, *not* chased him off, but

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<sup>864</sup> This epithet, "the great fatherland war (*velikaia otechestvennaia voina*)," which echoed the name for the Napoleon's invasion, was used by Molotov in his radio address of 21 June 1941, and it appeared in June-1941 *Pravda* article entitled "The Great Patriotic War of the Soviet People."

Lisa Kirschenbaum, John Barber, and David Brandenburger have noted how the regime worked extensively to convince citizens that this war was the second, and final act of the Soviet Union's battle against the imperialist, capitalist west. See: Kirschenbaum, *The Legacy of the Siege*, 28-30; Barber, "The Image of Stalin in Soviet Propaganda and Public Opinion during WWII," *World War II and the Soviet People*, eds. John Garrad and Carol Garrad (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 1993), 41; David Brandenburger, *National Bolshevism*, 43-62.

<sup>865</sup> One of the only usages of this term I have found was in the diary of Aleksandra Zagorskaia and her entries for 31 December 1941 and 14 February 1942, 10, 14-140b.

<sup>866</sup> A. Tolstoi, *The Making of Russia*, 34-37; Ehrenburg, "Vtoroi Den' Borodina," (24 January 1942), *Voina. 1941-1945* (Moscow: "Agentstvo KRPA Olimp" i "Asrtel", 2004), 187. Ehrenburg suggested that legacy of this victory was so powerful and threatening that it compelled the Nazis to disarm it by committing new atrocities on the same site. "They wanted to obliterate the memory of 1812 because 130 years after Borodino once again heroes can be seen—in different greatcoats, but with Russian hearts."

retreat and retreat? It is just incomprehensible! Among the people the words 'betrayal' and 'treason' are circulating. Everything has a limit. Even Kutuzov retreated to a certain degree...or—I don't want to believe this—do our commanders want to copy (*povtorit'*) Kutuzov and give even Moscow to the enemy?!...<sup>867</sup>

Perhaps the official press meant for 1812 literally to serve as a model for 1941, not just a symbol of victory? As Sel'tser's puzzlement indicated that, depending on how literally one read this analogy, the 1812-1941 pairing yielded very different conclusions. The analogy raised questions for him about notions of heroism, wartime morality, and surrender through the actions of Kutuzov. Did Kutuzov's greatness lie in his decision to take a stand at Borodino for instance, or his willingness to retreat in order to save lives?

In Leningrad, Kutuzov was especially honored among imperial war heroes. After being resurrected in the press, in 1943 a new exhibit was opened next to Kutuzov's tomb in Kazan Cathedral, where he was visited by more than 12,000 *blokadniki*.<sup>868</sup> As Sel'tser's comment suggests, he was as remembered for retreats as for victories, which the diarist implied was understandable ("Everyone has a limit. Even Kutuzov retreated") and yet the analogy was troubling, suggesting that retreat from a major city like Leningrad was an option. During the war, professional historians also faced this tension between the regime's present mandates and past models of heroism. Reversing his prior position, Tarle presented Kutuzov's order of retreat as brave and honorable, both humanistically and strategically because he put the welfare of the troops first.<sup>869</sup> The diarists were also mindful of the great human costs of that war. For some, like Elizaveta Sokolova, the date 1812 immediately conjured up images of the devastation of the Russian people. For this reason, Sokolova—the wartime director of Leningrad's Institute of Party History, which helped to popularize the analogy of the two great fatherland wars—prayed for "no repeat of 1812."<sup>870</sup>

Similarly, in order to describe the human costs of the Blockade, fourteen-year-old Dima Afanas'ev drew on the 1812-1941 parallel, but in a very unorthodox way. He likened Leningraders to the hungry, devastated, and defeated France's Grand Armée. In spring 1942, Afanas'ev observed that "under the sunny light" Leningraders "looked rather frightening: gaunt, yellow, with drooping eyes, dirty, all bundled up, like soldiers of the Napoleonic army in 1812, only dressed differently."<sup>871</sup> To him, the heroic defenders of the city of Lenin resembled a defeated, enemy army—only without uniforms. Judging from the overall tone of

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<sup>867</sup> Italics are mine. Diary of Ksaverii Naumovich Sel'tser, entry for 16 October 1941 in: Sergei Glazerov, *Ot Nenavisti k primereniiu* (Saint Petersburg: "Ostrov," 2006), 45. This source is hereafter referred to as "Sel'tser." Similarly, in her memoir Liudmila Leonidovna El'iashova struggled with the same difficulties over Kutuzov's decision to give up Moscow: "He pitied the soldiers. And our commanders? But were we ourselves ready to give up Leningrad?" See: El'iashova, *Moi blokadnyi universitet* (Saint Petersburg: "Izmailovskii," 2005), 98.

<sup>868</sup> Brandenberger, "The 'Short Course,'" 228.

<sup>869</sup> Tarle called Kutuzov "the personification of the great victory of the people over their enemies." See: Tarle, *How Mikhail Kutuzov beat Napoleon* (London: Soviet War News, 1944), 9, 15. This was a special edition of Tarle's scholarship, drawn from his larger study *Nashestvie Napoleona na Rossiiu, 1812* (1938) and translated for a foreign audience. Unlike Tarle's *Napoleon* (1936), this later study characterizes Napoleon's wars as acts of imperialism and places a greater emphasis on the heroism of Kutuzov and the resistance of the Russian people to the invading army.

<sup>870</sup> Sokolova, "dnevnik," entry for 26 October 1941, 23.

<sup>871</sup> Afanas'ev, entry for 22 March 1942, 34. In his manuscript, Afanas'ev wrote "1912" instead of "1812."

the text, it seems likely that Afanas'ev did not intend this comment to be politically subversive. Still, however unintentionally, his application of the 1812-1941 pairing demonstrated how earnestly and creatively Leningraders engaged with these analogies, drawing insights that the agents of the regime did not anticipate when proposing them.

Another diarist, Ivan Savinkov, tried to apply specific military and diplomatic circumstances of the 1812 war to the situation in 1941. A worker and brigade leader (foreman) at the Molotov Factory, Savinkov used 1812 to predict how the war would unfold, frequently referencing the historians Ernst HERNI and E.V. Tarle: "Everything is repeating itself. All that Napoleon did, Hitler is doing."<sup>872</sup> Savinkov applied his understanding of the Third Coalition to the Soviet Union's relationship to her allies, and based on this, he predicted that England, not Russia, would prove the most decisive of the belligerents. Perhaps mindful of Tilsit, when Russia left England alone to face Napoleon, Savinkov warned that Hitler would meet the same fate as the self-proclaimed French emperor, addressing him directly: "it is not you, Napoleon, but nevertheless England will win the war."<sup>873</sup> Subsequently, much of Savinkov's diary details his disappointment when his predictions about the current war, based on 1812, failed to come true. Whereas Napoleon's men had begun to retreat in October 1812, in October 1941 Hitler's troops were taking Soviet territory in leaps and bounds. England's delay in opening a second front left Savinkov puzzled over why the historically destined roles of Russia and England were reversed and now the Soviet Union was left alone to fight Hitler. Of course, grievances over the delayed second front were common among Soviet citizens, but for Savinkov it flew in the face of their historical destiny based on his understanding of 1812. The diarist commented on it again in October 1942, almost exactly a year later; he was incredulous at the delay of British troops, but still tried to hold to the model of 1812, adjusting to the new situation: "Why is history repeating itself again? For the second time Russia is fighting with all of Europe? [...] Again, England, together with our Russians, will win the second war."<sup>874</sup>

October 1812 was a key reference point for other Leningraders as they considered the great fatherland wars in light of each other. Mariia Sergeevna Konopleva, a librarian at the Russian Museum, used 1812 as a reference point for assessing the evacuation procedures for Soviet children. By October 1812, Muscovites were already evacuated and the Grand Armée was in retreat. "What will it be like by October 1941?" Answering her own question, Konopleva dismayed: "Matters turned out to be otherwise. Many of those who left in the first days of the war have already returned, especially a lot of mothers and children have returned. This evacuation was badly organized; truly it was not organized at all," and because of false information about front movements, children often were taken straight into harm's way. In this way, the 1812-1941 parallel framed Konopleva's expectations and criticisms of Leningrad authorities' management of the population.<sup>875</sup>

In July 1941, Mariia Konopleva was commissioned by official censors to gather literature and illustrations from the Hermitage Library for a wartime exhibition and a film production of "The Great Fatherland War of 1812," which would feature scenes from Leo

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<sup>872</sup> Savinkov, entries for 7 October 1941, 16 April and 21 September 1942, 6ob, 31ob, 58ob.

<sup>873</sup> Ibid, entry for 23 October 1941, 8ob.

<sup>874</sup> Ibid, entry for 9 September 1942, 56.

<sup>875</sup> Konopleva, Notebook 1, entry for 31 June 1941, 36.

Tolstoi's *War and Peace*.<sup>876</sup> Because of this project or personal interest, Konopleva sat down and began "to reread with great attention" Tolstoi's novel. A few were versed in the historical literature on 1812 as well as Savinkov, but the majority of the diarists (and probably of Soviet citizens) based their image of the Napoleonic Wars on the novel. As such, many of their meditations on the 1812-1941 pairing stemmed from how they read *War and Peace*.

In spite of certain ideological reservations, throughout the 1930s the party heralded Tolstoi's *War and Peace* as a literary masterpiece and a testament to the heroism of the Russian people in war.<sup>877</sup> The celebration of the novel and its power to inspire reached new heights during World War II. Just three weeks after the Nazi invasion, four reissues of Tolstoi's works were marked for release.<sup>878</sup> Because soldiers had little time to read, *Pravda* printed 150,000 copies of Part Four of the novel, which tells of heroic peasants attacking French soldiers, and the state publishing house produced 100,000 copies of just the sections of the novel on Borodino and a reprint of pages on the battle of Schöngraben.<sup>879</sup> The celebration of *War and Peace* was especially strong "inside the ring." During the war, Leningrad's branch of Goslitizdat produced over 100,000 copies of *War and Peace*, making Leo Tolstoi one of the most published authors in the besieged city.<sup>880</sup> As the diarists observed, the novel also appeared in several new formats, including a portable, one-volume edition.<sup>881</sup> In his popular journalistic accounts of the Blockade, Aleksandr Fadeev reinforced the idea that *War and Peace* was a sacred text for the *blokadniki*.<sup>882</sup> The most famous articulation of this phenomenon comes from Lidiia Ginzburg, who was at odds with the Soviet regime for most of her life, from her retrospective *Notes of a Blockade Person*. In the opening lines, Ginzburg observed:

During the war years, people used to read *War and Peace* avidly, comparing their own behavior with it (and not the other way around—no one doubted the accuracy of Tolstoi's response to life). The reader would say to himself: right, I've got the proper feeling about this. So then this is how it should be. Whoever had energy enough to read, used to read *War and Peace* avidly in besieged Leningrad.<sup>883</sup>

According to Ginzburg, Leningraders reread the novel in order to make sense of their own situation "inside the ring," never doubting the congruence between the experiences and feelings of the characters and their own. The diaries I have collected suggest that the

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<sup>876</sup> Konopleva, entry for 4 July 1941, 11-12.

<sup>877</sup> For a discussion of the regime's efforts to guide the public's reading of the novel towards its revolutionary merits. See: William Nickell, "Tolstoi in 1928: In the Mirror of Revolution," *Epic Revisionism*, 18, 24, 31.

<sup>878</sup> Friedberg, *Russian Classics*, 2, 9.

<sup>879</sup> *Ibid.*, 37-38, 57, 80; Nickell, "Tolstoi in 1928," 22-23.

<sup>880</sup> The high figures for the printing of this work are listed in: Ozerova, "Leningradskie knigi perioda blokady," 55, 21; *Knigi nepobezhdennogo Leningrada*, 88.

In 1941 15,000 copies of Tolstoi's *War Stories (Voennye Rasskazy)* were printed. As Maurice Friedberg has noted, *War and Peace* as well as Tolstoi's "Khadzhi Murat" and "Stories of Sevastopol" were already being reissued in 1939, but this number swelled in 1941 (Friedberg, *Russian Classics*, 37; *Knigi nepobezhdennogo Leningrada*, 140).

<sup>881</sup> Krakov, entry for 15 December 1942, 44.

<sup>882</sup> Fadeev, *Leningrad v dni blokady*, 25-26.

<sup>883</sup> Ginzburg, "Zapiski blokadnogo cheloveka," 311. English translation in: Ginzburg, *Blockade Diary*, 3.

*blokadniki* were intrigued by Leo Tolstoi's insights, but rereading the novel provided them as many questions as insights about their situation.

At times, the diarists seemed to closely identify with Tolstoi's characters as they grappled with war, at other times the Volkonskys, Rostovs, and Bezukhovs seemed alien to them. Some soviet observers (and contemporary scholars) suggested that readers connected with Tolstoi's characters—in the words of writer B.V. Druzhinin—as “old friends,” but the diarists held a more ambivalent attitude of them.<sup>884</sup> As she reread *War and Peace*, architect Esfir' Levina now lingered over the moments when the characters revealed their naïveté about war, such as when Pierre foolishly wears white onto the battlefield. “I am rereading *War and Peace*. Pierre Bezukhov is on the Borodino battlefield, in a caftan and white hat. They ask him ‘Are you the doctor?’ –No, not a doctor.’ And he moves on. I think about Sevastopol', Stalingrad and it seems that all people at that time were children. Leaving Moscow to escape the French, the Rostov family loaded up 28 carts. I think about the hundreds of thousands of people on the endless roads of our motherland,” and presumably with few possessions in tow.<sup>885</sup> As with Konopleva, the theme of evacuation drew Levina toward the 1812-1941 analogy. In comparison to Soviet models of heroism, Pierre and the Rostovs seemed far cries from her battle hardened, steely compatriots. As she pointed out, nowhere was this more apparent than in the country's besieged cities. In this way, the novel did provide some comfort to Levina by suggesting to her that the Russian people had evolved, that Soviet people were more prepared to withstand the enemy's assault, and that 1941 would not repeat 1812.

The art critic Georgii Efremovich Lebedev also compared his predicament to that of Leo Tolstoi's heroes, writing about them with fondness and longing. Unlike Levina, Lebedev focused more on the characters in military service. Although he did not seem to identify with these fictional personages any more than she, Lebedev *wished* that he could. How much better it would be to be a part of this familiar, fictionalized world than trapped “inside the ring.”

I am rereading *War and Peace*. Captain Tushin, of course, remains unharmed. Nikolai Rostov, of course, will continue to be occupied with the affairs of his squadron. The buzz of bullets and the cruel thrashings—these are only episodes from which the one and the other emerge whole and unharmed. It is quite another situation for a person who is not a character of literary creation. The plot of his life is still not rounded off (*zakruglena*). The hero is not sure of anything. The novel cannot be written. At the current moment, for example, when I write these lines I don't know what could happen in half-an-hour, in an hour, in the course of a day. Danger hangs over my head constantly. My diary could be broken off, unfinished.<sup>886</sup>

Although Lebedev wrote this entry in May 1942, after the worst days of the siege were over, he was still plagued by the constant uncertainty of his situation. Even at Borodino, the characters' suffering and angst paled in comparison to his tenuous existence “inside the ring.”

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<sup>884</sup> This source is quoted in: Brandenberger, “The ‘Short Course,’” 253.

<sup>885</sup> Levina I, entry for 9 October 1942, 30.

<sup>886</sup> “Iz dnevnik G.E. Lebedeva,” entry for 2 May 1942, 124.

Their fates (however tragic) were known, their stories already written. For Lebedev, this fact alone made their two worlds seem disparate. As the diarist suggested, in many ways his real life and life on the page became fused, coextensive, and mutually constitutive. He longed to finish that chapter of his life on the Blockade and to know the outcome of his struggles. For the diarist, *War and Peace* was both a source of comfort and a reminder of the tenuous nature of his present situation. In sum, the diarists did indeed treat the novel as a reference point for “checking” their own experiences of war, but they were as struck by the differences between 1812 and 1941—and between fiction and real life—as by the similarities

### *Starving Petrograd, Starving Leningrad:*

Across the Soviet Union, 1812 was regarded as a sacred touchstone and historical counterpart to 1941, but in Leningrad specifically, city residents were reminded of another moment, the Civil War of 1918-1921. Party authorities tried to boost morale in Leningrad by playing up this association and emphasizing the heroic legacy of revolutionary Petrograd. Unlike 1812, Leningraders did not need a Leo Tolstoi to capture the experience of the Civil War; many experienced it themselves and remembered it vividly. Nor did they need much official prompting toward this comparison: in many ways the circumstances of blockaded Petrograd and the resulting famine seemed quite similar.<sup>887</sup> As early as August 1941, party pamphlets began appearing *en masse* reminding Leningraders of the triumph of Bolshevism, the defeat of Germany, and the central role played by the people of Petrograd, who refused to surrender during the Civil War. (It was carefully forgotten that, when White General Iudenich reached Pulkovo, Lenin himself spoke of deserting the city.<sup>888</sup>) The Institute of Party History also prepared a series of historical essays “On our City’s Military Tradition,” which brought encircled Petrograd and besieged Leningrad together. The individual essays boasted such titles as: “To Defend Petrograd to the Death (*grud’iu*),” “The Failure of the German Occupation of the Pskov Region (1918),” “Petrograd Workers on the Front of the Civil War.”<sup>889</sup> Even two years later, official voices still promised that, if Leningraders showed equal courage and heroism, then “1943 might become 1918.”<sup>890</sup> Despite its special relevance to Leningrad, these pamphlets and talks had the same take-home message as the official discussions of 1812: heroism, sacrifice, patriotism, and the Russian people’s unrivaled ability to outlast and defy foreign invaders.

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<sup>887</sup> In October 1919, the city was blockaded and almost completely encircled by White forces. The ring around Petrograd would have been complete if the Whites had not failed to sever the last remaining railway line between Moscow and Petrograd at Tosno. See: W. Bruce Lincoln, *Red Victory: A History of the Russian Civil War* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1989), 296-7; Evan Mawdsley, *The Russian Civil War* (Boston: Allen and Unwin, Inc., 1987), 200-202.

<sup>888</sup> Lincoln, *Red Victory*, 295-298.

<sup>889</sup> Ozerova, “Leningradskie knigi perioda blokady,” 20.

<sup>890</sup> Ehrenburg’s untitled article, published on 14 January 1943 is reproduced in: *In One Newspaper*, 253. Ehrenberg often repeated this metaphor in his wartime writings. “At present the Germans are recalling last winter. It is necessary to deepen their memories. Why should we not remind them of 1918?” He claimed that letters from Germany written in Spring 1942 concerned about a second front, asking: “‘Surely, we will not have to fight on two fronts?’ ‘What will happen if the British should land, and the Americans with them? Could 1918 not somehow happen again?’” (Ibid, article for 28 July 1942, 180).

Based on their accounts, Leningraders' memories of the Civil War were conflicted and could shift rapidly. Their visions of that time were bound up with numerous personal and political factors—from memories of youth to the mythos of the Revolution to recollections of material hardships. Although it is difficult to generalize about these entries, for the most part, the diarists who felt nostalgic about the Civil War expressed these sentiments in the first months of the siege. As conditions worsened in Leningrad, they came to resent the comparison between the two blockades, both for their differences and their similarities.

Initially, many diarists felt inspired by their memories of the Civil War, whether or not they actually lived in Petrograd at the time. The stories and images they held of the Civil War set their expectations for what the present war would be like and for a victory. Devoted party members in particular believed the Civil War had prepared them to overcome current hardships and obstacles. Elizaveta Sokolova, the wartime leader of Leningrad's Institute of Party History, drew on those early years of fighting to inspire her husband as he left for the front in September 1941: "If at any time you feel afraid during battle, remember that you already were in two wars—the imperial war and the civil war and you remained alive [;] in the third war and you will not perish! I have faith (*nadeius* ' ) in your gumption and your experience."<sup>891</sup> Aleksandra Zagorskaia, a manager at the 'Krasnyi Futliarshchik' plant, drew solace from the city's architecture, especially the structures that had endured since the imperial period despite the Nazis' assaults on them. On an errand that carried her to the Kirov district, Zagorskaia was inspired by the fortitude of the Narva Arch, first built in 1814 to greet Russian soldiers returning victorious from the Napoleonic Wars—a kind of architectural rebuttal to the Arc de Triomphe. "Now, as it was then in the days of 1917-1918," Zagorskaia insisted, the gate "stood strong, undefeated." Bringing 1812 and 1918 together, she reflected:

I recalled the first workers' strikes on the Peterhof Highway (now Stachek Street) with policemen, when the workers of Putilovskii Factory together with the workers of all of Piter overthrew the autocracy. Like now, the Narvskiaia pickets stand up with the pride of defending our city from the fascist hordes. On Novosivkov Street stands a grey, three-storey building, where I was born, where I spent my childhood, youth, and where I lived through the February and October Socialist Revolutions. How much time has passed. I am already forty-one now, but when I drove through this area today, it seemed that it was not so long ago!<sup>892</sup>

Born in 1900, Zagorskaia underscored the parallels between her own personal development and the maturation of the Bolshevik regime. Her historical vision blended together images of 1812 with memories of 1918 and nostalgia for her childhood. Throughout the siege, Zagorskaia's inspired vision of the Civil War and her belief in the city's defiant resistance rarely wavered. In most other diaries, such fond visions of 1918 appeared mostly in entries from the first months of the war.

As the Blockade wore on, most diarists discarded their romanticized views of the Civil as a naïve and childish. This included diarists who were too young to have lived during the Civil War, but who nevertheless developed childhood fantasies of what it must have been

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<sup>891</sup> Sokolova, entry for 18 September 1941, 14.

<sup>892</sup> Zagorskaia, entry for 14 February 1942, 14-14ob.



like. Sixteen-year old Maia Bubnova, for instance, noted how 1941 shattered their idealized image of 1918. In November 1941 Bubnova recalled how she and her friend Zoia, both devoted *komsomolki*, used to envy the Civil Warriors, and “imagined it (war) as a romantic world without these practical inevitabilities, which exist now.” In light of her current situation, Bubnova admitted that the “heroic fairytale” of 1918-1921 that she had learned in her youth was misguided and misleading.<sup>893</sup>

Whether positive or negative, most diarists’ memories of the Civil War centered around material conditions inside the city. The diarists focused more on the blockade of Petrograd than on the Civil War as a whole, referring to both by the year “1919,” while the official press (more focused on the military conflict) generally used “1918.” For Petrograders/Leningraders, the Civil War first and foremost meant the struggle for material resources, especially during the winter of 1919-20. Concrete objects frequently triggered their memories of it—the *burzhuika* stove, the *koptilki* (wick) lamps, and so on. The site of Leningraders sitting inside and bundled up in “felt boots, ear-flapped hats, wadded jackets, greatcoats” conjured for Georgii Lebedev “a still frame from the blissful (*blazhennaia*) memory of 1919-1920.”<sup>894</sup> “Thoughts carry me back to recollect the analogous deprivations from 1919-20,” the librarian Aleksandra Liubovskaia noted in her diary, “when we sat without candles or kerosene and only the meager illumination from the *burzhuika* around which sat all of the family or a collective of workers.”<sup>895</sup>

Many diarists framed their discussions of the material deprivations during 1919-20 in the form of lessons. Survival depended on how well they recalled the tactics and skills they used during the Civil War. Irina Zelenskaia, a manager at the Lenenergo plant, remarked that she and her coworkers agreed: “the hunger and desperation of 1919-1920” had “taught [them] so much,” and their “hope of victory” resided in this.<sup>896</sup> In war-torn Petrograd they had learned how to make *burzhuiki*, how to cope with breadlines, black market speculation, starvation rations, and winter without heating. They learned strategies for saving and savoring food, although most pointed out that the quantity and quality of bread was far better in 1919 than in 1941.<sup>897</sup> In some cases, these skills were not retrieved from memory. Leningraders learned them from literature on the Civil War, which they found in the city libraries. According to the wartime account of one city librarian, patrons asked for materials “published during the years 1919-1920” and that answered their concerns on such practical topics as “first-aid,” “edible native plants,” “street-fighting,” and so on.<sup>898</sup>

The Civil War faltered as a source of inspiration as the food situation inside Leningrad grew worse. Suddenly certain “advantageous” aspects of the Civil War featured more prominently in the diarists’ recollections. As Leningraders, they were much more limited in their ability to cope with shortages that were far more severe and longer lasting. In January 1942, Liubovskaia trudged through the frozen city towards to Neva river “to get some water,”

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<sup>893</sup> TsGAIPD, f. 4000, op. 11, d. 18, l. 17, Maia Bubnova, “Dnevnik,” entry for November 1941, 4ob-5ob. No specific date is given for this entry, but it was probably after written after 22 December 41.

<sup>894</sup> “Iz dnevnik G.E. Lebedeva,” entry for 10 January 1943, 120-121.

<sup>895</sup> Liubovskaia, entry for 25 February 1942, 102.

<sup>896</sup> Zelenskaia, entry for 25 November 1941, 35ob.

<sup>897</sup> Examples can be found in: Ostrovskaiia, Notebook 1, entry for 27 November 41, 122; Notebook 2, entry for 24 April 1942, 54-54ob.

<sup>898</sup> OR RNB, f. 666, op. 2, d. 90: Sadova, Mariia Aleksandrovna, “Biblioteka v osazhdennom gorode (1941-42). Vospominaniia (1944),” 12.

when she “observed the enormous lines at the bakery [...] automatically one recalls a drawing from the cover of the journal *Ogonëk* in 1918—‘the modern circles of Dante’s hell’—a long, winding line, cutting off somewhere far away. But in 1942 the situation is incomparably worse,” she continued, “if only because in the blockaded city it is impossible to leave, and at moments like 1918 all who wanted to could leave and go to any Russian city. Moreover, it was possible to buy something to eat.”<sup>899</sup> They could not flee to the city’s rural outskirts or trade with local farmers for food—the two key strategies used by Petrograders.<sup>900</sup> The memory of 1919 only sharpened Liubovskaia’s vision of the unprecedented material hardships inside Leningrad, the likes of which were “such that no one has ever experienced in the whole history of Leningrad.”<sup>901</sup> For this reason, victory in 1921-22 did not necessarily inspire confidence for another victory in 1941.

Hunger was the by far the most common theme of the diaries and the 1918-1941 analogy reinforced how uniquely dire their current situation was. The diaries are full of brief declarations that, compared to the famine in Leningrad, “hunger in ’19 was not real” or that “hunger now is much worse than in ’18.”<sup>902</sup> As Lisa Kirschenbaum has shown, some members of intelligentsia recalled the famine during the Civil War as an ascetic experience that was destructive and creative, cleansing, and inspiring—a kind of internalization of dualities that had long characterized Petersburg and its legacy.<sup>903</sup> This perspective does not appear in the diaries of workers and of those who had little education. However, in their journals, some *intelligenty* did draw on this theme, but often to emphasize the dissimilarity between 1918 and 1941. The writer and translator Sof’ia Ostrovskaia, for instance, insisted that the ascetic aesthetic of 1918 did not apply to “real” hunger, and she scolded Petrograd/Leningrad intellectuals for entertaining such a fantasy.

Hunger? Hunger. Real? Real. I knew hunger during the Civil War (for our house—the end of 1918 through the spring of 1922) and hunger in the epoch of collectivization and the epoch of Torgsin. But this was not hunger—not in one of these epochs. Real hunger has come now. Already its teeth (*oskal*) are terrible. [...] now hunger is performing in an orchestra accompanied by artillery and aerial bombardment. We must no longer be hungry romantically (*romanticheskii golodat’*) as Anna Akhmatova was in 1919, lying on a couch and loving the rose that she had bought with her last bit of money. We have even been robbed of the romance that adorns death for [the sake of] posterity, criticism, or delighting oneself: hungry people [...] sit on various (even dangerous) floors [of buildings] because at that exact moment that the V.T. [air

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<sup>899</sup> Liubovskaia, entry for 27 January 1942, 69.

<sup>900</sup> Lincoln, *Red Victory*, 71-72, 62. As Lincoln explained in his monograph on the Civil War, “So vast was the flight from Petrograd during the Civil War that seven out of every ten men and women who had lived there in 1917 no longer remained in the summer of 1920.”

<sup>901</sup> Liubovskaia, entry for 27 January 1942, 68.

<sup>902</sup> Mervol’f, entry for 14 January 1942, 20.

<sup>903</sup> Drawing from the accounts of notable intellectuals and artists, Kirschenbaum demonstrates how they looked upon the suffering of the Civil War with affection. For Shlovskiy, Mandelstam and others it was a cleansing and spiritual experience or as a moment of great expressive freedom. See: Kirschenbaum, *The Legacy of the Leningrad Blockade*, 28.

raid] is happening they are making soup or drinking tea, or savoring their damp, hard bread. Here, these are our roses! Here, this is our adornment!<sup>904</sup>

For Ostrovskaia, the Blockade stood out from the Civil War, terror, collectivization, and other tragedies of the Soviet era in the magnitude of its devastation. She scoffed at the suggestion of parallels between “starving Petrograd”<sup>905</sup> and starving Leningrad. Under conditions of “real hunger,” it was impossible to find beauty, either in living or dying. The only “adornments” of siege life were the brief joys of savoring of one’s soup, tea, or meager bread ration.

The comparison between hunger in Petrograd and Leningrad also raised social questions for the diarists. How did breadlines, cafeterias, street corners, and cemeteries in 1918 compare to those in 1941? For Ostrovskaia, Leningrad’s burial grounds showcased the differences. The proliferation of mass graves was a jarring reminder of the huge loss of life inside Leningrad compared to Petrograd. Even more telling were the roles that those graves played in relations between living Leningraders: “in 1919 someone still dug graves—now all gravediggers demand 2 kilos of bread for digging. Who can afford to pay such with invaluable currency?”<sup>906</sup> “And here is something else,” she added, the speculators in Petrograd were “benevolent” (*prekrasnodushnye*) compared to 1941. In fact, the city as a whole had a much more humane character than it did under the morally superior system of socialism. Ostrovskaia summed it up this way: “Here is the difference: In ‘19 the streets were strewn with the bodies of dying horses. People walked by, they stopped and were taken aback. In ‘41-’42 the bodies of dying people are scattered about. People walk right by, not stopping and unsurprised.”<sup>907</sup> Ostrovskaia was struck by how the extreme conditions of the Blockade had eroded city residents’ moral concern for others. For her, Petrograders and Leningraders clearly stood apart from each other in this regard.

By contrast, others saw in such public spaces grim continuities between the Civil War and blockaded Leningrad, especially in terms of social tensions. The regime’s correspondents and scholars hoped that the 1918-1941 parallel would remind Leningraders of Bolshevism’s triumph over a hostile west, and they took care to emphasize the international composition of the Whites forces and the German invasion during the Civil War.<sup>908</sup> Still, as the diarists were well aware, 1918 was also a civil conflict; it was a reminder of social strife between Russians and between them a weak Bolshevik state. Ksaverii Sel’tser, pointed out the inappropriateness of the 1918-1941 pairing in this regard. “The analogue of 1919 does not work today,” the former journalist wrote in his diary, “With whom did we do battle then? With our own men, with actual agitators of counterrevolution, with our white guardsmen. Whereas now our affair is with a horde, unfortunately, armed to the teeth with the most modern technology and led by real generals, who obviously understand their task well.”<sup>909</sup> As Sel’tser suggested, the analogy glossed over the “civil” aspects of the war and exaggerated the similarities between the two wars and their respective enemies. The Nazis stood apart from “the Whites” in their composition, motivation for fighting, and in the sophistication of their weaponry. By calling

<sup>904</sup> Ostrovskaia, Notebook 1, entry for 27 November 1941, 116-116ob.

<sup>905</sup> This phrase is drawn from Aleksei Tolstoi’s *1918*, part of his Stalin-prize winning trilogy on the Revolution and Civil War.

<sup>906</sup> Ostrovskaia, Notebook 1, entry for 22 December 1941, 131.

<sup>907</sup> Ibid, Notebook 1, entry for 24 January 1942, 140.

<sup>908</sup> Kirschenbaum, *The Legacy of the Siege*, 77.

<sup>909</sup> Sel’tser, entry for 28 October 1941, 46.

them a “horde” the diarist implied that they were driven as much by sheer domination and conquest as by their hatred for socialism.

While Sel'tser stressed the difference between these two external enemies, others observed similarities in the internal enemies of Petrograd and Leningrad. They used the framework of civil war to describe the social tensions brewing inside Leningrad. Mariia Konopleva, for example, recalled 1918 as she confronted less heroic images of human weakness, greed, and panic among city residents. Already in the first weeks of the siege, remarked that not only had *burzhuiki* returned, but also the fighting for food and the “disorganization of life.”<sup>910</sup> On 8 September 1941, she angrily wrote of the new atmosphere of the workers' canteen and how she had had to eat standing up, without a fork, and vying for space with a hostile crowd of coworkers. The diarist fumed, “recalling the years 1919-1920: how quickly in the days of war our cafeterias sunk to this level! The same, good old familiar dried fish (*vobla*) [...] the same old greedy crowd!”<sup>911</sup> The Civil War now figured in Konopleva's account not as a struggle between workers and class enemies—be they Whites or grain-hoarding kulaks—but as a struggle *between* workers for resources.

Other diarists also harkened back to 1918 when they sensed that political dissent and anti-Bolshevik sentiment was growing the city. Those who were devoted to the party were especially critical of city authorities for responding weakly to the threats of war. Irina Zelenskaia—a Party representative and manager at Lenenergo—declared the regime's preparations and safety exercises to be a sham, “as in 1918” they were “all for the sake of administrative order and the observation of military decorum.”<sup>912</sup> According to Elizaveta Sokolova, of the Institute of Party History, the problem was not simply that Leningraders did not trust the regime, but that the regime did not trust them and denied them the supplies and information that they needed to protect themselves. At least during the Civil War, she claimed, Lenin took the people into his trust and appealed to them for help. By contrast, “now the enemy stands at the doors of Leningrad, but the communists do not know what to do to them. No one has weapons, even hunting rifles and they are confiscated. Among the people rumors about the government are beginning to spread.”<sup>913</sup>

This same view of growing mistrust between Leningraders and city authorities appears in the diary of Leningradka and writer Lidiia Osipova, who was vehemently anti-Bolshevik and later worked as a Nazi agitator in the *prigorod* region. Like Sokolova and Zelenskaia, Osipova described these tensions as marking a kind of return to the Civil War era. As she dug trenches and prepared fortifications alongside other Leningraders, Osipova recorded snippets of their conversations: “Skeptics insist that this Egyptian toil (*egipetskie raboty*) have been created especially so that the population does not take it into their heads that the history of Petrograd during the First World War is repeating itself. The government does not trust the people and is fighting uprisings.”<sup>914</sup> According to Osipova, the conscripted laborers suspected that these defensive measures were a ruse intended to persuade them that, unlike in 1918, city authorities would protect them. Of course, as an opponent of the regime, Osipova

<sup>910</sup> Konopleva, Notebook 1, entries for 28 August and 9, 10 September 1941, 66-69.

<sup>911</sup> Ibid, Notebook 1, entries for 7, 9 September and 7, 8 November 1941 66-67, 161-162. *Vobla* became a symbol of the Petrograd famine in part thanks to a wartime poem by Nikolai Tikhonov.

<sup>912</sup> Zelenskaia, entry for 14 April 1942, 75b-76b.

<sup>913</sup> Sokolova, entry for 19 August 1941, 7, also see 13ob.

<sup>914</sup> The diary of Osipova is reproduced in: Nikita Lomagin, *Neizvestnaia Blokada, II* (Saint Petersburg: “Neva,” 2002), 441-474. See: Osipova, entries for 20 June 1942 and 11 November 1941, 450-451, 463.

may have been inclined to listen for criticisms of the regime, but it is significant that her portrayal of public discontent rests upon a critical view of both 1918 and 1941, explaining the latter in terms of the former.

Months later, in the winter of 1942, the sight of these labor brigades also turned twenty-one-year-old student Nina Mervol'f toward thoughts of 1918. Unlike Osipova, Mervol'f had a more romantic view of the Civil War era (perhaps because she was too young to experience it), and so she saw the demoralization of city workers as a point of contrast between 1918 and 1941. The whole city, she claimed, shared her outrage at the regime's mandate that they perform such demanding labor without being fed. There was nothing of the *esprit de corps* that she associated with defending blockaded Petrograd:

Everything here in Leningrad is so horrid, such an absurd organization, bungling up everything (*takoe golovotiapstvo vo vsem*). There is nothing of the spirit of the '18 era. I think and I know that everyone has boiled over with rage, that there is absolutely nothing of that original romanticism, of brutal fighting and with it the honorable and morally pure spirit that there was in '18, under the first, real Bolsheviks, during the time of Lenin, Sverdlov, Dzerzhinskii, during the time of the Cheka and the state news agency's "windows" [of propaganda posters] (*okna ROSTA*.) Everything is completely different.<sup>915</sup>

Mervol'f's scathing criticisms of Leningrad authorities and her belief that such resentments were citywide were based heavily on her romanticized vision of the "real Bolsheviks" of 1918. Mervol'f and Osipova had opposite views of Petrograd and of the early Bolshevik regime, but they framed their observations of tensions "inside the ring" through this historical analogy. In this way, their accounts reveal how heavily personal memories and public depictions of the Civil War years came to inform Leningraders' visions of 1941 and vice versa. In particular, 1918 raised questions about the level of trust between city residents and authorities, about the ability of the municipal leaders to provide them with sufficient resources, and about who the enemy was—foreign or domestic.

### *Sevastopol', a City of Sieges*

The Crimean War has often been called "the forgotten war," and in light of its humiliating defeat, it is easy to see why such a memory lapse occurred on the Russian side. Even high-ranking officers in Vasilii Grossman's *Life and Fate* are incredulous to learn that Leo Tolstoi did not fight in the Napoleonic Wars himself, not thinking of the Crimean conflict.<sup>916</sup> With the Nazi invasion, however, this forgotten war also was resurrected in the Soviet press and in the popular imagination, albeit not to the same degree as either 1812 or

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<sup>915</sup> Mervol'f, entry for 9 February 1942, 32.

<sup>916</sup> Grossman, *Life and Fate*, 239-240.

1918. Just as the encirclement of Petrograd stood as the emblematic moment of the Civil War, the siege of Sevastopol' was used as a shorthand for the years 1854-1856. If anything rivaled Petrograd/Leningrad in the Soviet imagination as a besieged city, it was certainly Sevastopol'. The Crimean city had been besieged in 1854 and would be besieged twice during WWII. This fact provided a solid foundation for pairing Sevastopol' and Leningrad together as sister cities. The association between the 1854 and 1941 sieges was as closely drawn as that between the blockades of Petrograd and Leningrad. For example, in his journalistic accounts of the "the second defense of Sevastopol'," Leonid Sobolev was fond of heralding the present-day residents and soldiers of the city-fortress as "the great-grandchildren of Admiral Nakhimov's marines."<sup>917</sup> The heroic triad of Kornilov, Nakhimov, and Istomin joined Nevsky, Suvorov, and Kutuzov in the regime's new pantheon of heroes, and once again they were celebrated in wartime radio shows, pamphlets, and histories.

Almost the exact same language and imagery used to hail the *blokadniki* was applied to *Sevastopol'tsy*: their resolute, unwavering discipline, their devotion to the city, their endurance of extreme deprivations and difficulties, and their success in stalling the German army and frustrating its military plans.<sup>918</sup> According to Ehrenburg, Leningraders and Sevastopol'tsy shared a similar purview, set of circumstances, and terminology; both referred to the rest of the Soviet Union as the "mainland" (*bol'shaia zemlia*), for instance.<sup>919</sup> Tikhonov's writings also fostered an affinity between the two cities, often with the goal of reassuring Leningraders that their batteries or defenses were superior to that of the Crimean city. Interestingly, however, when addressing the *blokadniki* Tikhonov neglected to specify whether he was referring to Sevastopol' in 1854 or 1941.<sup>920</sup>

The political purchase of this glorious association between besieged Sevastopol' and Leningrad was confounded by the obvious fact that the Crimean city fell in 1855 and in 1942. In their wartime publications on Sevastopol', historians and propagandists went to extraordinary rhetorical lengths to depict the Crimean defeat as a great moral victory. In a collection of articles on the siege of Sevastopol' between November 1941 and July 1942, a kind of Soviet version of Tolstoi's *Sevastopol' Sketches*, prominent correspondents including Ehrenburg, A. Tolstoi, Turovskii, and Sobolev, laid the "foundation for the new epic Sevastopol'" as the city-fortress, the "hard nut" that the Germans would regret taking.<sup>921</sup> Although the city fell after eight months, Leonid Sobolev explained, "Sevastopol will remain an unconquerable city. Sevastopol is unconquerable because its achievements, courage, and endurance have long since risen high above any narrow territorial or geographic conception.

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<sup>917</sup> Leonid Sobolev, "In the Old Fort," *Sevastopol': November 1941-July 1942: Articles, Stories, and Eye-Witness Accounts by Soviet War-Correspondents* (New York: Hutchinson and Co, Ltd, 1943), 61. This was a special collection of articles about the siege of Sevastopol' prepared for a foreign audience. Sobolev's wartime articles and stories, including those on Sevastopol', have been compiled in: Sobolev, *Morskaia Dusha: Rasskazy* (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe Izdatel'stvo Literaturny, 1942).

<sup>918</sup> Vice-admiral F.S. Oktiabrskii, "Defense of Sevastopol'", *Sevastopol'*, 70. Ehrenburg, "Sevastopol'", *Voyna*, 243-246.

Ehrenburg wrote that the Germans will take the city, "but they forgot about one thing. Sevastopol' is not just a city. Sevastopol' is the honor of Russia."

<sup>919</sup> Ehrenburg, "Sevastopol'", article of 30 June 1942, *Voyna*, 244, see also: 549-550.

<sup>920</sup> Tikhonov, *Leningradskii god*, 23.

<sup>921</sup> Sobolev, "Stranitsy iz sevastopol'skogo dnevnika," *Svet pobedy: stat'i i ocherki voennykh let* (Moscow: Sovetskaia Rossiia, 1968), 148-158.

[...] far from being a victory, on the contrary it is a grave set-back for the German Army.”<sup>922</sup> The exemplary valiance and resistance of troops and civilians there made it a model to emulate. The journalist’s declaration of victory was corroborated by the inside military perspective of Vice-Admiral F.S. Oktiabrskii, who composed his own triumphant piece on the historic “Defense of Sevastopol’,” claiming that the surrendering of the city did not detract from the victorious struggle there.<sup>923</sup>

As with 1812, Leningrad publishers and the blockade diaries point to E.V. Tarle and Leo Tolstoi as the twin authorities on 1854.<sup>924</sup> In June 1941, barely a week into the war, the city’s branch of Goslitizdat ordered 150,000 new copies of Tolstoi’s *Sevastopol’ Sketches* to be printed, and passages from these stories were broadcast to the city residents over loudspeakers.<sup>925</sup> Although Tarle was most known for drawing connections for his readers between the “two great fatherland wars” of 1812 and 1941, he was also the key author of the “myth of Sevastopol’,” as “the city of Russian glory” during the war. Tarle’s two-volume, Stalin-prize winning history, *The Crimean War*, published during WWII, and made direct linkages between 1854 and 1941 as two unjust, imperialist wars initiated by the west. The sacred bond between Sevastopol’ and Leningrad was enhanced by the fact that Volume One was first printed inside Leningrad during the notorious winter of 1941-1942. The workers’ perseverance in accomplishing this task came to symbolize the importance of the Crimean city to the *blokadniki*.<sup>926</sup> Tarle was presented with a souvenir copy of his work along with a note that proudly declared: “This book was edited and published in besieged Leningrad during the harsh winter of 1941-42. The hungry and suffering workers turned the presses by hand, as there was no electricity, a few workers would fall by their machines, being worn out from a lack of food,” but they persisted until the work was done.<sup>927</sup>

The siege diarists accepted this official suggestion that Petrograd/Leningrad and Sevastopol’ shared a special affinity as cities of siege. They carefully monitored the progress of the fighting in Sevastopol’ by reading these celebrated works, reviewing daily news reports, and drawing their own comparisons between 1854 and 1941. Diarist A.N. Boldr’ev added to this discussion by giving public lectures on the defense of Sevastopol’ in exchange for extra rations.<sup>928</sup> In their discussions of Sevastopol’, the diarists tended not to distinguish between the city’s two sieges either, treating them as two acts of the same drama. *Blokadniki*, such as diarist Aleksandr Matveevich Vyianov, closely followed news reports of the Nazi assault on Sevastopol’ and reread historical accounts of the battles of the Alma and Sevastopol’ in 1854 in order to discern any parallel causes of the city’s demise. As he served on watch duty at the district party committee’s headquarters, Vyianov was especially

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<sup>922</sup> Sobolev, “Yard by Yard,” *Sevastopol’*, 57-58.

<sup>923</sup> “Although we evacuated Sevastopol’, we were victorious in this unparalleled struggle” (Oktyabrskii, “The Defense of Sevastopol’,” *Sevastopol’*, 66).

<sup>924</sup> The popularity of these works was not limited to besieged cities like Leningrad. According to *Literatura i Iskusstvo* report on 3 February 1944, which listed the “typical” books read by Red Army men, Tolstoi’s *Sevastopol’ Rasskazy* held an especially prominent place (Friedberg, *Russian Classics*, 157).

<sup>925</sup> Brandenberger, “The ‘Short Course,’” 227, note 81; Salisbury, *The 900 Days*, 386.

<sup>926</sup> E.V. Tarle, *Krymskaia Voina* (Leningrad: Institut Istorii AN SSSR, 1941); *Knigi nepobezhdennogo Leningrada*, 87.

<sup>927</sup> Quoted in: Brandenberger, “The ‘Short Course,’” 251.

<sup>928</sup> Boldr’ev, entry for 19 April 1942, 90.

influenced by S.N. Sergeev-Tsenskiĭ's Stalin-prize-winning novel *The Ordeal of Sevastopol'* (*Sevastopol'skaia Strada*)

on the question of who was to blame for the defeat, and wondering if Sergeev-Tsenskiĭ's stress on the incompetence of the imperial commanding corps—as “swindlers” who had “lost their edge”—held true for either Sevastopol' or Leningrad in 1941.<sup>929</sup>

Despite the inspiring stories penned by Tolstoi, Tarle, and others, the Leningrad diarists tended to look upon Sevastopol' as a frightening sign of events to come. Compared to 1812 and 1918, 1854 was the most terrifying analogy because it referred to a tragedy that was still unfolding before them. Because the Crimean city fell to the enemy both times, the 1854-1941 analogy filled Leningraders with a sense of foreboding, not patriotism. Diary entries from the month of July 1942, when Sevastopol' fell, demonstrate how widely it was assumed that Leningrad was destined to share the same terrible fate. As Ostrovskaia put it in her entry for 4 July: “The fall of Sevastopol' reduced still further the spirit of the hungry people of this besieged city. The conversations are the same everywhere: Leningrad is awaiting the same fate as Sevastopol', and soon it will be the same for us; we are doomed.”<sup>930</sup>

With Sevastopol' as a model, other diarists used the Crimean city to calculate exactly how long Leningrad might withstand the enemy. Poet and journalist Vera Inber—originally from Odessa—believed strongly that the fates of the cities were intertwined, so that the destiny of one could be predicted by the other. She recalled that in Sevastopol', new measures of time were used: in 1854, one month was counted as a year. Similarly, in 1941-42, some war correspondents stationed in Sevastopol' proposed that each day be counted as a whole year.<sup>931</sup> When contemplating her own evacuation from Leningrad in February 1942, Inber noted in her diary that a whole new system for quantifying time was needed to gauge the magnitude of the first six months she had spent “inside the ring”: “Leningrad...how to leave it? Six years have been spent here, if one counts a month for a year, as was done during the defense of Sevastopol' in the Crimean War, not this one. No, it must be counted more here.”<sup>932</sup> In the end, after working with this analogy, Inber concluded that the siege of Leningrad was unique, even in how time should be quantified there.

Whether measured in number of months besieged or casualties, factory worker Ivan Savinkov regarded Sevastopol' as a predictive model for Leningrad. For instance, in the eighth month of the Blockade, Ivan Savinkov reflected: “Sevastopol' held on for a nine-month siege (sic), how many months can we hang on?”<sup>933</sup> Informburo's scant reports did not supply him with enough concrete information about *Leningrad* to make a full comparison with the defense of Sevastopol'. Still, he plunged ahead with this goal anyway, leaving blanks where missing details could be filled in later. None of the blanks, including this one, were filled: “The Germans have 300,000 [in Sevastopol'], but we have \_\_\_\_ of this number. And this sends my mind thinking that about the same number of people died for Sevastopol' as did in the Napoleonic army, but for Leningrad a whole million need to die. Eh, life is only worth a

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<sup>929</sup> Vyianov, entry for 13 February 1942, 16. Sergeev-Tsenskiĭ's novel *Sevastopol'skaia Strada* was written between 1937-1939 and received the Stalin prize in 1941.

<sup>930</sup> Ostrovskaia, Notebook 2, entry for 4 July 1942, 69.

<sup>931</sup> Eugene Petrov, “Under Fire,” *Sevastopol'*, 60.

<sup>932</sup> Inber, Notebook 2, entry for 18 February 1942, 9ob-10. Note that in the published version of her diary, this entry is dated as: 17 February 1942.

<sup>933</sup> Savinkov, entry for 23 April 1942, 33.



kopek,” he remarked and promptly gave up his attempts at calculation.<sup>934</sup> Here, Savinkov brought 1812, 1854, and 1941 together in his calculations and blended together the two sieges of Sevastopol’. Even without knowing this figure, Savinkov seemed sure that casualties somehow *needed* to be at least three times worse in Leningrad. Was this because Leningrad was doomed to a more tragic fate or destined to hold out longer than the Crimean city? Either way, it is clear that diarist believed the two cities and their projected losses were closely related. Sevastopol’ provides a strong example of how diarists like Savinkov took up the celebrated affinity between cities very seriously and literally often to arrive at conclusions and speculations that were opposite of what the regime had intended.

Savinkov, like so many other diarists I have mentioned, tried to integrate the regime’s suggested parallels of 1812, 1854, and 1918 together in the hopes of learning—from the defeats and victories—how the Soviet people could emerge victorious against a stellar German army. One unifying factor, which they distilled from this composite picture, was the theme of Russia’s national character. On this point, they often echoed official voices that the main hope for victory resided in the strength of the people’s character. Several remarkable examples of this can be found in the diary of Georgii A. Kulagin, a senior mechanic at Leningrad’s metallurgical factory. It should be noted that—unlike the other diaries I have presented here—Kulagin’s work was published in the Soviet Union, in 1978, and it bears clear signs of editing. In both diaristic and memoiristic portions of the text, Kulagin recounted historical debates that broke out spontaneously on the shop floor among workers. One particular dispute centered around the national characters of the French, Russians, and Germans. It opened the diarist’s eyes to the notion that Russian’s defining trait was his ability to withstand incredible suffering without surrendering. As he explained, this was the chief lesson of 1812, 1854, and 1918 together, and it would be the moral of the present war. Kulagin quoted one of his most respected coworkers, Nikita Sergeevich, whom he consulted on this matter. Nikita Sergeevich articulated this sentiment most succinctly: “‘There is a true Russian quality,’ Nikita said, ‘steadfastness (*stoikost’*). We simply stand [firm]. That is how it was at Borodino and in Sevastopol’, and that is how is now, here in Leningrad. Why, to do this is surprisingly simple, mundane (*obydenno*) [...] [but] in this there is something noble and heroic. No kind of enemy can break such a people.’”<sup>935</sup> Based on this historical record, the diarist concluded that Leningraders’ best hope was to hold their city at all costs. No matter how much they questioned the decisions of leaders and the actions of their countrymen, past and present, most Leningraders had little choice but to trust in this notion as the main lesson of their history.

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History—both studying and writing about the past—played a critical role in how the blockade diarists understood and survived the war. The diaries tell a story of great enthusiasm, but also skepticism, about history, its methods and its reigning narratives. During

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<sup>934</sup> Ibid, entry for 4 July 1942, 45.

<sup>935</sup> G.A. Kulagin, *Dnevnik i Pamiat’* (Leningrad: Lenizdat, 1978), entry for 11 April 1942, 189-190.

the siege, the diarists looked to the past in order to make sense of their present circumstances. Their historicist consciousness was piqued by the peculiar circumstances of the Blockade, which radically altered their perceptions of time. An archaic, protracted style of warfare, the siege itself seemed to many observers like a throwback from a bygone era. As they helped to prepare their city and their homes against this assault, the diarists recalled epic and tragic sieges from Russia's distant past, bracing themselves for the events to come. Especially during the first winter, life in the city came to revolve around the hunt for food, shelter, and warmth. These primitive conditions further encouraged the diarists' preoccupation with the past. They began to compare their brutalized, isolated existence to prehistoric times, and they turned to their diaries in order to make sense of their predicament and the sense of historical return that it fostered.

In addition to these situational factors, the diarists' habits of reading and writing led them to view their individual lives in historical terms. Through the practice of diary writing, Leningraders attempted to graft their own experiences onto historical time. Moreover, they frequently reread their own accounts in order to get a sense of how the circumstances of their lives and their predicament had progressed. The diarists also expressed a keen interest in reading historical studies and historical fiction, especially classics like *War and Peace*, for inspiration, information, and guidance about the experience of living through war. And despite the fact that the diarists varied greatly in terms of their knowledge and perspective of the past, they all focused on three key moments in particular, 1812, 1854, and 1918, as they worked to situate the Blockade vis-à-vis the Russian and Soviet past. This was by no means coincidental, for Soviet propagandists and scholars bombarded the Soviet people with references to these three events as key moments in Russia's heroic struggle against the west.

By suggesting these historical analogies, the regime not only encouraged this historicist mindset, it also inadvertently invited scrutiny of its (selective) reading of past events. The diarists did not come to these analogies with a subversive agenda or with deliberate skepticism, but even so they brought many nuances and ambiguities of these complex events to the fore. Ultimately, most diarists seemed dissatisfied with these analogies, which mostly alerted them to what they believed were the unique and incomparable aspects of Blockade. "Nothing parallel exists in world events," Irina Zelenskaia concluded in her account. The siege had no proper analogue.<sup>936</sup> The particularities of these three moments aside, the diaries illustrate just how extensively the diarists drew on personal memories, impressions, and a (more or less precise) knowledge of history in order to narrate, make sense of and cope with the trauma of the Blockade. The journals provide insight into ordinary people's awareness of the past and the wide array of perspectives that characterized their thought.

With no discernable beginning or ending, a "ring" seems to defy historicization. By trying to place the Blockade in a historical context, the diarists worked to obtain insight and perspective on their own lives. History, both reading and writing about it, offered the diarists with a possible way to break out of the intellectual confines of that "ring." In this way, through the diarists' narratives and interpretations of history, we glimpse a drive not only toward understanding, but toward a kind of liberation.

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<sup>936</sup> Zelenskaia, entry for 18 December 1942, 44-45ob.

## Minds Under Siege:

### Concluding Remarks

Berta Abramovna Zlotnikova had just completed the tenth grade when the war began. She had aspired to a career in the arts, but within a week of the German invasion, the eighteen-year-old reluctantly settled into a factory job. Miserable and bored, she tried a number of jobs during the first years of the Blockade, working as a propagandist, a hospital assistant, a state-farm worker, and a pioneer troop leader.<sup>937</sup> Such a range of experiences—which took her in and out of blockaded Leningrad—would certainly have told a fascinating story, but in her diary, Zlotnikova hardly mentioned work and rarely commented on the terrible conditions of blockade life. Instead, the diary documents her emotional deterioration under siege. Overwrought by frustration and despair, Zlotnikova poured onto the page her many disappointments regarding her lost youth, dashed dreams, and bleak future. Left without any means of creative inspiration, personal fulfillment, or companionship, the diarist grew concerned that her identity and even her very humanity were fading. With life reduced to the hunt for food, “I am turning into an animal,” she wrote over and over in her entries between October 1941 and November 1942.<sup>938</sup>

Then, as conditions inside the city were improving in mid-1942, a dramatic change occurred. The diarist made no mention of what events—either in her personal life or in the life of the city—might have precipitated this shift, but radical changes in the structure and style of her journal testify to some extraordinary shift. Rather than meditate on the grim realities of her life “inside the ring,” Zlotnikova regained her vitality by cultivating a life of the mind. She occupied herself with what she deemed to be the core philosophical and existential problems raised by the siege, and she wrote at length on such themes as love, freedom, happiness, and human nature. She engaged with these age-old themes with new vigor and urgency. At the same time, the diarist broke from the conventional forms of diary writing that had colored her previous entries and turned her journal into a philosophical investigation structured by aphorisms and insights rather than dated entries.

Zlotnikova’s reflections on freedom are especially telling of the personal and intellectual shift she had undergone. Zlotnikova removed blame from any polity or power for creating Leningraders’ suffering “inside the ring.” The true enemy, she declared, was within, and so it was from within that the *blokadniki* must liberate themselves:

Only the mind can set a person free. The less thoughtful a human life is, the less free it is. You asked, what pathway leads to freedom? For this you must learn to distinguish good from evil, but not based on the demands of the crowd (*ukazanie tolpy*).

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<sup>937</sup> TsGAIPD, f. 4000, op. 11, d. 39, Berta Zlotnikova, “dnevnik,” 16-16ob. This information is drawn from the autobiography at the end of her diary.

<sup>938</sup> *Ibid.*, entries for 1 October 1941 through 4 November 1942, 3-7ob.

Become attached to this famous idea, almost like a pillar that is fastened into the ground. Man measures his freedom by the length of his tether, but much greater freedom will be enjoyed by those who attach themselves to the idea of universal good (*blago dlia vsekh*). [...] freedom cannot be given to a person. Every man, and he alone, can free himself.<sup>939</sup>

For Zlotnikova, every individual was responsible for his own imprisonment and his own freedom. Those who gauged liberty by external means, by the freedom of mobility—or, as the diarist put it, the length of his/her tether—would never find true freedom. True liberty was immaterial and came from living a moral, socially responsible, and truthful life. Freedom could only be obtained, Zlotnikova explained, “in the quest for truth.”<sup>940</sup>

This notion of inner freedom is an old one, of course, but when one considers the circumstances under which Zlotnikova came to embrace it, the idea seems fresh and even radical. After being immobilized physically, emotionally, intellectually for over a year, the diarist began to break free from these barriers—in her mind and on the page—by focusing on the transformative power of thought. In this way, she strove to overcome two of the greatest obstacles facing Leningraders: captivity and death by starvation. “Whoever thinks only about the happiness of peace, whoever is submerged in his thoughts is happy [...] he will break the chains of death and toss them aside forever,” she proclaimed.<sup>941</sup> Zlotnikova’s diary continues in this way through the difficult second siege winter. As she faced these new material deprivations and hardships, she continued to gather bits of wisdom about how to achieve happiness, freedom, and fulfillment independently of external reality. Her reflections draw on a number of philosophical and religious traditions, but she never referenced God, a specific leader, or doctrine to follow nor did the pioneer leader mention Soviet ideology. Instead, she stressed disobedience to any law or ideology other than that of love, and insisted that: “you must be your own savior.”<sup>942</sup>

The diary records Zlotnikova’s journey along this path of personal development and self-liberation. It is a testament not only to the transformative power of thought, but of writing, of giving voice and coherence to one’s convictions. Her entries repeat the same insights over and over, suggesting that her diary practice was just that—a way to practice this mode of thinking on a daily basis. However, the final entries hint at how Zlotnikova began applying her newfound wisdom to the study of her fellow *blokadniki*. These social observations along with her mission of liberation became her main reasons for living. “It is difficult, but interesting to live at this moment in time. I want only one thing: for my legs to become steely so that all day long, every hour, I could be a witness to and a participant in the

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<sup>939</sup> Ibid, entry for 7 November 1942, 10-10ob.

Another example of a highly philosophical diary is the account of Iura Riabinkin, who noted that he could not resist letting his notes take a philosophical bent: “I have written about many things in this diary, At first my notes were of a descriptive nature, then they took a philosophical turn. Each day that I live though provides a page or even two” (Riabinkin, entry for 9 December, 135-136).

<sup>940</sup> Ibid, 12.

<sup>941</sup> Ibid, 12-12ob. These undated sections were written sometime between 7 and 15 November 1942.

<sup>942</sup> Ibid, 12ob.

course of history,” she proclaimed.<sup>943</sup> From her observations, Zlotnikova surmised that the chief reason for Leningraders’ suffering was their misguided obsession with their material conditions, food, and physically escaping the Blockade. By contrast, during the difficult days of the second siege winter, she insisted that self-denial was the only way to find true self-fulfillment. Playing with the themes of hunger and fullness, she remarked: “If you want to live yourself,” she explained, “you must live for others. The person who is really empty is the one who is full of himself.”<sup>944</sup>

In many respects, Zlotnikova’s account seems extraordinary, and it is. But when considered together with other siege diaries, it becomes clear that many of the journal’s striking features—its unconventional structure, its strong interpretive and philosophical tone, its tendency toward abstraction—are common to many other accounts. These diaries are survival narratives, but of a particular sort. They tell the story of how individuals living in extremis attempted to endure unthinkable hardships by maintaining not only their physical, but also their intellectual vitality. Zlotnikova’s account captures the way in which Leningraders struggled, deliberately and relentlessly, to break free from the “self-siege” imposed upon them by the uncertainty, isolation, and opacity of blockade life. Zlotnikova’s meditations on freedom and love might seem peripheral to the daily struggle to survive, but they allowed her to break free from the elliptical patterns of thought that characterized life “inside the ring.” Such philosophical explorations gave meaning and purpose to the seemingly inexplicable tragedy of the Blockade.<sup>945</sup> In order to effectively fight for life, the young diarist had to reconsider what it meant to live. After all, it was apathy—a lack of creativity, concern, or directed thought—that Leningraders widely considered to be *the* hallmark symptom of *distrofiia*, a telltale sign of death. Moreover, her writing practice can be seen not just as reflections on freedom, but the practice of freedom. By choosing to adopt this particular life philosophy, Zlotnikova was exercising what Viktor Frankl called “the last of the human freedoms:” the freedom to choose one’s attitude in response to one’s plight.<sup>946</sup>

Like many of the diarists I have discussed, Zlotnikova came to approach the Blockade not just as a set of trials to endure, but also as an object of study, and these studies nourished her hunger for intellectual stimulation and a sense of purpose. The Blockade was a moment of great crisis, but also of great opportunity for creative and intellectual inquiry. On some level, all the diarists understood that the circumstances of war—the stand-off between two opposing armies, the entrenchment of the front, the difficulty of supplying and transporting goods—created the dire circumstances in which they found themselves. Yet, they rarely discussed this (perhaps too obvious) fact. Nor did they accept it as an adequate explanation of their predicament. Instead, the diarists probed for a deeper understanding of the blockade experience. They placed their society under a critical microscope and, from their unique vantage point “inside the ring,” reconsidered many of the fundamental assumptions about their bodies, identities, relationships, society, and historical destinies—that had seemed self-evident before the war. In the process, they critically engaged with Soviet understandings of corporeality and self-transformation, the role of the family, class structure, social privilege,

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<sup>943</sup> See *Ibid*, entries for 15, 16 November 1942, 13-14ob.

<sup>944</sup> *Ibid*, entry for 7 November, 1942, 9-9ob.

<sup>945</sup> *Ibid*, entry for 15 November 1942, 13ob-14ob.

<sup>946</sup> Frankl, *From Death Camp to Existentialism*, xi.

and the laws of history. And as a result, they shed light on some of the tensions, ambiguities, and ironies that characterized Soviet life. In addition, the diarists looked to various concepts in biomedicine, literature, ethnography, history, and (in the case of Zlotnikova) philosophy to frame their experiences under siege. Interestingly, the diaries also bear some of the formal and stylistic elements of the various narrative modes associated with these methods of inquiry—medical case studies, novels and stories, ethnographic field notes, historiography, and aphorisms. Not only are they replete with insights, the diaries are also unique in style and form.

But above all, the diaries speak to the universal more than to the particular. The Blockade changed the way that the diarists apprehended themselves, their society, and human nature more generally. Their very personal struggles with hunger, illness, and starvation eventually led the diarists question everything from the human organism to the nature of human morality. The ordeal of experiencing this most horrific and extraordinary event led the diarists to make universal claims about the adaptability of the human form, the malleability of human instincts, the problematics of selfhood, the nature of human relationships, man's competing impulses to cooperation and competition, the powers of human endurance and resilience, and so on.

Of course, the siege diarists, and the claims they posited, in no way represent Leningraders as a whole. They comprise just 120 voices out of several millions who resided in Leningrad when the war began. In spite of this, the diarists consistently articulated their thoughts in universal terms, and they recorded their insights on behalf of a collective much bigger than even the city's population. In writing about their own "small radius," they evoked and rediscovered mankind as a whole.

## Appendix

The following is a list of diaries that I gathered from archives or private sources. The full bibliographical information for the twenty-some published diaries cited in this study is provided in the footnotes.

1. Afanas'ev, Dmitri Vladimirovich, "dnevnik." Text courtesy of the diarist's wife, Natal'ia Aleksandrovna Afanas'eva. Fourteen-year-old schoolboy. Diary contains colored sketches and paintings done by the diarist, who worked an artist and set designer in Leningrad theaters after the war. Excerpts of this diary have been published in: Tamara Staleva, "Odin god i odin mesiat: Dnevnik Dimy Afanas'eva (1928-1988)," *Vechnyi Deti Blokady: dokumental'nye ocherki* (Moscow: The Author, 1995).
2. Bergardt, Nikolai Aleksandrovich, "dnevnik: 1/VI/41-8/IX/41." TsGAIPD f. 4000, op. 11, d. 1807. Two Notebooks. Diarist worked with the city party committee and helped to oversee the evacuation process during the first months of the war.
3. Bardovskii, Aleksandr Aleksandrovich, "dnevnik: 22/VI/41-3/I/42." TsGAIPD 4000, op. 11, d. 7. A schoolteacher specializing in literature at Middle School No. 156 and a graduate student at Leningrad State University. Diary consists of oversized, irregular sheets.
4. Basalaev, Innokentii Memnonovich, "memuarnye materialy ego 'zapiski,' 1926-1961." OR RNB f. 1076 d. 16
5. Borichevskii, Ivan Adamovich, "o dnevnike I.A. Borichevskogo. Zametka avtora, 21/VIII/41." OR RNB f. 1448 d. 9.
6. Borovnikova, Aleksandra Nikiforovna, "dnevnik." TsGAIPD f. 4000, op. 11, d. 15. Diarist worked as engineer and machinist.
7. Budnova, Maia Aleksandrovna. "dnevnik: 1/X/41- 10/IX/43." TsGAIPD f. 4000, op. 11, d. 18. Schoolgirl in the 8<sup>th</sup> class and in the komsomol organization in Middle School No. 221. Some excerpts of this diary have been published in: "Iz dnevnika Maii Bubnovoi," *Leningradtsy v dni blokady* (Leningrad: Lenizdat, 1947).
8. Chepurko, Margarita Sergeevna (née Malkova), "dnevnik, 1943." GMMOBL f. RDF, op. 1L, d. 10. Schoolgirl. Text includes memoirs, drawings, and self-portraits.
9. Chernovskii, Aleksei Alekseevich, "dnevnik. V Leningrade, 1941-1942." TsGAIPD f. 4000, op. 11, d. 119. Historian and senior employee at the Museum of the History of the City of Leningrad. Diary contains larger number of hand-drawn maps, newspaper

clippings, or recopied news and radio reports.

10. Enman, Natal'ia Aleksandrovna. "dnevnik," and "vospominaniia o 1941-42 iz dnevnika." TsGAIPD f. 4000, op. 10, d. 1396. A senior academic employee and archivist at the Kirov Museum. Text includes a memoir and autobiography.
11. Erokhana, Nina Nikolaevna (née Klishevich), "dnevnik." GMMOBL f. RDF, op. 1L, d. 490. Eighteen-year-old schoolgirl. Diary was first co-written with her uncle, Boris Nikolaevich, but is missing these pages. The author explains that she destroyed much of her diary in 1945. Text consists of two notebooks, pictures, and personal papers. File includes a copy notification announcing that she received the medal "for the defense of Leningrad" in 1985.
12. Evdokilov, Aleksei Fedorovich, "dnevnik." GMMOBL f. RDF, op. 1R, d. 30. Worked for the people's militia and volunteer emergency corps. Text contains newspaper clippings. Excerpts of this diary have been published in: *Budni Podviga: 8 sentiabria 1941- 27 ianvaria 1944: blokadnaia zhizn' leningradstev v dnevnikakh, risunkakh, dokumentakh*, ed. V.M. David (Saint Petersburg: Informatsionno-izdatel'skoe agentstvo "LIK", 2007).
13. Freman, Max Aleksandrovich, "iz zapisnoi knizhki (30-40 gg.)." RNB f. 709, d. 302.
14. Frumberg, Aleksei Mikhailovich, "dnevnik, 1943." TsGAIPD f. 4000, op. 11, d. 114. Secretary of the party organization in Voskov Factory.
15. Gakkel', Iakov Modestovich, "zapisnye knizhki, 1934-44," OR RNB f. 1005, d. 26. Diary includes letters.
16. Gesel', Gel'fer Aizikovich, "dnevnik: 6/1/42-14/VIII/42." TsGAIPD f. 4000, op. 11, d. 24. Worked as a repairman and machinist in shop floor No. 3 in the Stalin factory in Krasnogvardeiskii district (*raion*).
17. Gorbunova, Nina Georg'evna, "dnevnik 22/VI/41- 11/V/43." TsGAIPD f. 4000, 11, 27. Director of Orphanage No. 58.
18. Grishkevich, A. P. "zapisi iz bloknota: IX/41-1/V/43." TsGAIPD f. 4000, op. 11, d. 28. Worked in the print department of the city part committee.
19. Grizova-Rudykovskaia, Tatiana Leonidovna (née Rudykovskaia), "dnevnik: I/42-VIII/44, II/46." GMMOBL f. RDF, op. 1R, d. 1, punkt 7. Nine-year-old schoolgirl. Diary includes menus, poems, school compositions, and inventories of the family's food reserves.
20. Ianovich, Tat'iana L'vovna, "dnevnik: 1941-44." TsGAIPD f. 4000, op. 11, d. 122.
21. Ianushevich, Zoia Vasil'evna, "dnevnik, 7/XI/41-1/I/42." GMMOBL f. RDF, op. 1R, d. 91. This text is hybrid in form, epistolary and diaristic.



22. Ivleva, Valentina Mikhailovna, "dnevnik, 1941-42." GMMOBL f. RDF, op. 1L, d. 431. Schoolteacher. Text includes recollections and letters.
23. Inber, Vera Mikhailovna, "dnevnik, poemy, i blok noty." OR RNB f. 312, dd. 44-46: Notebook 1: 22/VII/41-25/I/42, Notebook 2: 26/I/42-3/X/42; Notebook 3: 6/X/42-8/VIII/43; d. 47: "dnevnik voennykh let: 13/II/42-30/IX/42, 2/VIII/44;" d. 50: "dnevnik voennykh let: 28/VIII/42-30/I/44;" d. 12: "glavy iz ee leningradskogo dnevnika: 4/XII/43-21/III/44." Professional poet and author. Text contains poems, drafts of compositions, personal financial accounts. The author reassembled and edited the text from these various manuscripts for two published editions of her diary. See: Inber, *Pochti tri goda: Leningradskii dnevnik* (Moscow: Sovetskii pisatel', 1946). This text was reworked and republished in 1968.
24. Iushekhonov, Aleksei Gavrilovich, "Vypiski iz dnevnika: 42/III/43-13/VI/43." TsGAIPD f. 4000, op. 11, d. 96. Worked at the "Russian Diesel Engine" factory. Text covers events in Leningrad and in the city suburbs.
25. Ivanov, Vsevolod. "Otryvok iz tyly: blokada." OR RNB f. 1000, op. 2, d. 515.
26. Kalinin, Vladimir Vasil'evch, "v kol'tse blokady. Chernovaia rukopis' dnevnika leningradtsa, 1941-44." Text courtesy of the blockade scholar Tamara Staleva, who acquired it from the author's granddaughter. Diarist was an employee of the Hermitage. Parts of Kalinin's story are discussed in: P. K. Baltun, *Russkii Muzei: evakuatsiia, blokada, vosstanovlenie* (Leningrad: Izobrazitel'noe Iskusstvo, 1981).
27. Kapitonova, Vera Mikhailovna, "dnevnik: 1942-1943." TsGAIPD f. 4000, op. 11, d. 41. Worked in the propaganda and agitation department for Moskovskii district.
28. Kedrov, Aleksandr Tikhonovich, "dnevnik: 3/IX/41-22/VI/45." TsGAIPD f. 4000, op. 11, d. 44. Worked as acting director of Factory No. 224 in Sverdlovsk region.
29. Ketov, Aleksandr Dmitrievich, "dnevnik: 1/II/43-19/II/46." MNM k.p. 6512, f. 1, d. 655. Artist and designer at the Theater of Musical Comedy.
30. Klykov, Vladimir Andreevich, "dnevnik: 22/VI/41-14/I/44." TsGAIPD f. 4000, op. 11, d. 45. Railway worker.
31. Kogan, Lev Rudol'fovich, "Dnevnik 1942. Leningrad: 1/II-30/IV/42." OR RNB. f. 1035, d. 1. Dramaturg. Text includes many news reports.
32. Kok, Gerorgii Mikhailovich, "dnevnik: XII/42-I/42." TsGAIPD f. 4000, op. 11, d. 48. Head of the planning department at the city's factory for radio technology.
33. Kolbantseva, Rogneda Viktorovna, "dnevnik: 26/V/41-2/VI/43." GMMOBL f. RDF, op.

- 1L, d. 215. Schoolgirl. Text includes letters, an account of an occupation experience, and newspaper clippings.
34. Koltunov, Iosif Grigorevich, "poemy," and "iz dnevnika, 1944-45." OR RNB f. 552, d. 39: A.G. Ostrovsii.
35. Komsomol'skaia organizatsiia zavoda 'Sevkabel', Sverdlovskogo raiona, "dnevnik raboty komsomol'skoi organizatsii, 1/VII -18/X/1941." TsGAIPD f. 4000, op. 11, d. 130. This collectively-authored diary was reviewed by the writers' superiors and includes corrections and comments in red pencil.
36. Kononova, Elena, "Osazhdennyi gorod Leningrad, 21/I/42." OR RNB. Diary was not yet catalogued into the library collection at the time of use. Large sections of the text were cut out by the author.
37. Konopleva, Mariia Sergeevna, "V blokirovannom Leningrade: zapiski, 1941-43." OR RNB f. 368, d. 1. Notebook 1: 22/VI/41-5/XII/41; Notebook 2: 6/XII/41-3/VII/42; Notebook 3: 4/VII/42-19/I/43. Archivist and librarian at the Russian Museum. Secretarial worker in Clinic No. 22. Text includes letters. Diary was written in a calendar, but the diarist's dates and those printed on the diary do not correspond.
38. Korneeva, Glafira Nikolaevna, "dnevnik: 21/VII/41-13/X/42." TsGAIPD f. 4000, op. 11, d. 51. Director of school No. 3 in Sverdlovsk region. School and Orphanage Inspector for RONO.
39. Kozlovskii, Aleksei Kornil'evich, "dnevnik: 21/V/41-21/IV/42." TsGAIPD f. 4000, op. 11, d. 46. A director of high-tension lines at Lenenergo and of the Sevkabel' factory.
40. Krakov, M.M., "dnevnik: XI/41-14/III/42," TsGAIPD, f. 4000, op. 11, d. 52; "dnevnik, 15/IV/42-29/X/42;" f. 4000, op. 11, d. 55. Senior Engineer at Factory No. 10 (NKEP). Krakov deposited two notebooks with overlapping dates, but the entries they contain are entirely different. Both texts contain a large number of charts and figures monitoring prices for food and goods, shifts in food norms, etc.
41. Kropacheva, Mariia Viacheslavovna, "kak my rabotaem: dnevnikovye zapiski: 29/VII/42-I/43." OR RNB f. 1000, op. 2, d. 676. Schoolteacher and volunteer for the civil defense. Portions of this diary have been published in: Cynthia Simmons and Nina Perlina: *Writing the Siege of Leningrad: Women's Diaries, Memoirs, and Documentary Prose* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2002), 53-57.
42. Kurbanov, M.M., "zapisnaia knizhka, 1941." OR RNB f. 406, dd. 237, 239.
43. Larionov, Leonid Vasil'evich, "Dnevnik. Vakhtennyi zhurnal po tsentral'nomu voennomorskому muzeiu: 7/IX/41-26/XI/41." OR RNB f. 422, d. 44. Employee at Naval Museum, Leningrad. Text includes personal entries and a logbook for the museum.

44. Lebedev, G. E, "dnevnik." Diary courtesy of Tamara Staleva, who received the diary from the author. Diarist was an actor who performed at the front and in the city during the Blockade. Part of his story is documented in: *Bez antrakta: akteri goroda Lenina v gody blokady* (Leningrad: Lenizdat, 1970).
45. Lebedev, Viktor Vladimirovich, "dnevnik." Diary courtesy of Tamara Staleva, who received the diary from the author. Diarist was an architect and academic.
46. Lepkovich, Arkadii, "dnevnik: 1/XII/41-20/IX/1942." TsGAIPD f. 4000, op. 11, d. 85. Worked at the broadcast center for Leningrad radio.
47. Lesin, Boris Apollonovich, "dnevnik: 25/IV/42-10/V/43." TsGAIPD f. 4000, op. 11, d. 61. Professional writer and editor for the newspaper of the October railway "Stalinets."
48. Levina, Esfir' Gustanovna. "dnevnik." TsGAIPD f. 4000, op. 11, d. 57. Architect. The author wrote and published another text, labeled as a diary. See: Levina, "Pis'ma k drugu," *Leningradtsy v dni blokady* (Leningrad: Lenizdat, 1947). The two diaries are quite different except for several identical entries.
49. Liubovskaia: Aleksandra Pavlovna, "Leningrad, 1941-1942: Zapiski zhitelia blokadnogo goroda. Risunki: I.A. Liubovskogo." Text courtesy of the author's son, Igor' Liubovskii. Diarist was a technical translator and librarian at the Frezerovshchik factory. Text contains recollections, drawings, figures, floor plans, and excerpts from news clippings.
50. Lukin, Vladimir Andreevich and Tamara Petrovna Nekliudova, "dnevnik." GMMOBL f. RDF, op. 1L, d. 238. Lukin was a professional actor. Lukin's diary covers the dates: 12/IX/41-16/X/41, and his wife's diary: 25/VI/41-12/XI/41.
51. Makarov, Vladimir Kuz'mich, "dnevnik." OR RNB f. 1135, dd. 54-55. Notebook 1: 2/X/42-2/V/44; Notebook 2: 1944-1945. Makarov was an art and architectural historian and an employee at the Russian Museum. Text includes letters, addresses and contacts, accounting records. Correspondence between Makarov and his wife can be found in: OR RNB, f. 1135, d. 475: Makarov, VK. "Pis'ma (84) Zinaide Pavlovne Annenkovoii. 3/XII/41-30/V/45.
52. Malysheva, Vasilisa Petrovna, "Iz dnevnika: 22/VII- 17/VIII/42." TsGAIPD f. 4000, op. 11, d. 65. Worked as editor at the Molotov Factory, then as an editor at Leningrad's radio committee and a representative for the soviet in Sverdlovsk district.
53. Mantul, Vladimir Grigor'evich, "dnevnik: 23/VI/41-13/I/42." TsGAIPD f. 4000, op. 11, d. 67. Includes autobiography. Diarist worked as a grinder at the Stalin Factory, and due to illness died seven days after writing his final diary entry.
54. Matiushina, Ol'ga Konstantinovna, "dnevnik: 23/VI/41-1/V/42." Ts GAIPD f. 4000, op.

- 11, d. 68. Professional painter and writer.
55. Matus, Kseniia Markianovna, “dnevnik: 16/IX/41 to 19/IV/44.” MNM k.p. 4153. f. 2, d. 2804. Professional musician. Played oboe in the Leningrad Symphony. An interview with the diarist appears in: Simmons and Perlina, *Writing the Siege of Leningrad*, 147-155.
56. Mervol’f, Nina Rudal’fovna, “dnevnik.” MNM, k.p. 6580, f. 2, d. 5579. Eighteen-year-old student studying theater. Diary contains letters, family pictures, and poems.
57. Mikhaileva-Kasotkina, Nadezhda Leonidovna: “vypiski iz dnevnika: 1941-1944,” TsGAIPD f. 8921 op. 1, d. 196. Diary contains recollections. The diarist’s story has been partially documented in: *Zhenshchina i voina: o roli zhenshchin v oborone leningrada: 1941-44* (Saint Petersburg: Izdatel’stvo Sankt-Peterburgskogo Universiteta, 2006).
58. Mironova, Aleksandra Nikolaevna, “Dnevnik: 15/VI/41-1/VII/44.” TsGAIPD f. 4000, op. 11, d. 71. A teacher of history at Middle School No. 10 in Sverdlovsk region. She also worked in additional schools and orphanages. Excerpts of this diary have been published in: E.F. Dagin, ed., *Oborona L-a 1941-1944: Vospominaniia i dnevniki uchastnikov* (Leningrad: Izdatel’stvo: ‘Nauka,’ 1968).
59. Mironova, Evgeniia Ivanovna, “dnevnik voennykh let: 1941-45” and “dni voiny: iz frontovo dnevnika.” GMMOBL f. RDF, op. 1L, d. 449. Two Notebooks. Text contains recollections and letters.
60. Molodezhnikov, Viktor Dmitrevich. “dnevnik.” MNM 6, k.p 2489, f. zhit., d. 186. Worked in metallurgical factory during the Blockade.
61. Molchanov, Anatolii Vladimirovich, “dnevnik.” Text courtesy of the author. Molchanov was a schoolboy in the third class in 1943/44. The diary is his school notebook and includes his assignments, subjects, records of his illness, and drawings.
62. Mukhina, Elena, “dnevnik.” TsGAIPD f. 4000, op. 11, d. 72. Sixteen-year-old schoolgirl. Diary contains sketches, drawings, poems, compositions, and a novella.
63. Nikol’skii, Aleksandr Sergeevich. “Dnevnik o zhizni v blokade. Leningrad. 1941-7/IV/1942,” and “Fragmentsy dnevnika. Dekabr’ 1941.” OR RNB, f. 1037, d. 900-901. Text contains autobiography, drawings, lithographs, which were later published in several collections by the author.
64. Nikitin, Fyodor Mikhailovich, “dnevnik.” MNM k.p. 6920, f. 1, d. 5580. Professional actor at the Kommissarzhevskaya Theater, who during the war volunteered as an agitator for the Leningrad House of the Red Army (*Dom krasnoi armii*). Recipient of various medals including the Order of the Red Star and of the Red Banner. Text includes letters.
65. Nikulin, Anisim Prokof’evich, “dnevniki i drugie materialy: 26/VI/41-16/VII/41 i

- 10/I/1942- 7/IV/1942.” A party member and representative for Oktiabr’skii region. Recipient of the medal “for the defense of Leningrad.” Diary text supplemented by numerous documents from newspapers, official announcements, party proceedings, etc. Text also includes an autobiography.
66. Osipova, Natal’ia Petrovna, “dnevnik: 30/VI/41-5/VIII/42.” TsGAIPD f. 4000, op. 11, d. 89. A statistician in the planning dept of shop floor No. 4 in the Molotov Factory. Text includes an autobiography.
67. Ostroumova-Lebedeva, Anna Petrovna. “Dnevnik. Leningrad.” Leningrad.” OR RNB f. 1015, d. 57: 12/VI/41-22/II/42; d. 58: 8/III/42-5/II/43; d. 59: 7/II/43-26/I/44; d. 60: 27/I/44-20/VII/45; d. 61: 20/VII/45-1/VIII/46 (Leningrad); d. 36: “Tetrad’ ezhdnevnykh poskhodov.” Professional painter and artist. Portions of her diary, heavily reworked from the original manuscripts, have been published in: Ostroumova-Lebedeva, *Avtobiograficheskie zapiski, Tom I-III* (Moscow: Centrpoligraf, 2003). English excerpts appear in: Simmons and Perlina, *Writing the Siege of Leningrad*, 25-32.
68. Ostrovskaia, Sof’ia Kazimirovna, “dnevinki.” OR RNB f. 1448, dd. 9-12. A professional writer and editor. During the war, she worked for the Literature Department of *Leningradskaia Pravda*. Notebook 1: 22/IV/37-29/I/42; Notebook 2: 7/II/42-23/X/42; Notebook 3: 11/XI/42-9/XI/43.
69. Otdel’ propagandy i agitatsii RK VKP (b) Moskovskogo raiona, “dnevnik (podlinniki): 10/XI/42- 25/III/43.” TsGAIPD f. 4000, op. 11, d. 124. This is a collectively-authored diary, which is penned by a number of authors. The diary was inspected by the authors’ superiors and is marked in red underlining.
70. Perel’man, Irma Oznasovna, “dnevinki: 5/X/38-20/VI/42 i 20/VI/42-12/XII/53,” and “vpechatleniia o muzike.” MNM k.p. 6517, f. 5, d. 668. Notebooks include letters as well as reports on all musical performances attended by the author during the war years.
71. Peshel’, Petr Vasil’evich, “Iz dnevnika Leningraditsa v period blokady goroda, 19/III/41-20/I/43.” TsGAIPD f. 4000, op. 11, d. 92. Mechanic at NKEP electrical station No. 10.
72. Peterson, Valia, “dnevnik: 9/X/41-6/I/42.” OR RNB f. 4000, op. 11, d. 86. Schoolgirl in 7<sup>th</sup> class at Middle School No. 239.
73. Peto, Ol’ga Richardovna. “Deti blokady. Deti Leningrada, 1942-43” and “Skoraia pomoshch’ v dni blokady. Zapiski neskol’kikh vyezdov 9-oi stantsii skoroi pomoshchi.” OR RNB. f. 1273, d. 52. Medical doctor who rescued abandoned children and served in the emergency medical services. Both texts were recopied by the author in 1944.
74. Petrova, Tat’iana Andreevna, “dnevnik.” TsGAIPD f. 4000, op. 11, d. 91. Inspector for the city party committee.

75. Polzikova-Rubets, Ksenia Vladimirovna. "Dnevnik: 31/XII/41-31/XII/42." TSGAIPD f. 4000, op. 11, d. 94. Schoolteacher at Middle School No. 239. Archive also contains her memoirs: TsGAIPD, f. 4000, op. 10, d. 343: "239-aia shkola oktiabr'skogo raiona g. leningrada: v dni otechestvennoi voiny. vospominaniia." Two, very different published additions of this diary have been produced: Polzikova-Rubets, *Oni uchilis' v Leningrade: dnevnik uchitel'nitsy* (Leningrad: Gosudarstvennoe Izdatel'stvo Detskoi Literatury, 1954); *Dnevnik uchielia blokadnoi shkoly, 1941-1946* (Saint Petersburg: "Tema," 2000).
76. Rabinovich, Mikhail Borisovich, "dnevnik." GMMOBL f. RDF, op 1L, d. 51. A teacher at Leningrad State University and during the war served in the Sixth Division of the People's Militia.
77. Rozman, B. Iu., "dnevnik." Diary courtesy of Tamara Staleva, who received the diary from the author's nephew. Diarist was a chemist and academic. Diary contains numerous charts and graphs detailing the prices for clothing and for food.
78. Ryzhikov, Mikhail Ivanovich, "dnevnik." GMMOBL f. RDF, op. 1L, d. 352. M.I. Ryzhikov worked on medical train VSP No. 109 and then served at the front, where he died in October 1943.
79. Samarin, Petr Mikhailovich, "dnevnik." GMMOBL RDF op. 1L, d. 338. Factory worker. Diary includes newspaper clippings and ration cards.
80. Savinkov, Ivan Alekseevich, "dnevnik, 1941-45." TsGAIPD, f. 4000, op. 11, d. 99. Worked as an engineer and shop floor manager in the Molotov Factory (No. 9).
81. Semenov, Sergei Aleksandrovich, "otryvki iz dnevnika." OR RNB f. 685, d. 16: 14/VII/41-28/VIII/41; d. 30: "zapisnaia knizhka ego, Noiabr' 1941"; d. 32: "zapisnaia knizhka, Dekiabr' 1941." Text includes personal accounting records, letters, and miscellaneous notes.
82. Sinakevich, Ol'ga Viktorovna, "dnevnik, 1942-44." OR RNB f. 163, d. 311. Four Notebooks, which were recopied by the author in 1943. OR RNB f. 163, d. 356-58: "Zhilybyli: dnevnikovye zapiski iz pisem, v evakuatsii." This text was recopied by the author in 1947. Professional writer and poet. Text contains poems and letters, ration cards, train tickets, evacuation documents, watercolors, sketches, and floor plans.
83. Shaporina, Liubov' Vasil'evna, "dnevnik Leningrada 22/IX/44- 1/VI/45," OR RNB f. 1086, d. 11. Hospital nurse and artist. Excerpts of this diary have been published in: Simmons and Perlina: *Writing the Siege of Leningrad*, 21-24.
84. Shpak, Aleksandr Illarionovich, "dnevnik: 1/I/42-28/VI/42." TsGAIPD f. 4000, op. 11, d. 120. Head of Glavneftesnaba for Leningrad Oblast, SNK, SSSR.
85. Sinishchin, Aleksandr Dmitrievich. "Album of friendly caricatures of N. Sinishchina"

- MNM k.p. 6513, f. 3 d. 2318. Short writings and illustrations of employees at the main branch of the Leningrad Public Library.
86. Sokolova, Elizaveta Aleksandrovna, "dnevnik." TsGAIPD f. 4000, op. 11, d. 109. Interim director at the Institute of Party History.
87. Timofeev, Vasilii Egorovich, "dnevnik: 22/VI/41 to 23/I/42." TsGAIPD f. 4000, op. 11, d. 113. Director of the Kollinskii bread factory. Diary includes an extensive autobiography.
88. Umanskaia, Anna Stepanovna (née Kechek), "Dnevnik: 20/I/38-23/XII/47." OR RNB f. 1273, d. 72. Schoolgirl. Diary contains drawings and sketches.
89. Uskova, Natal'ia Borisovna, "dnvenik, 30/VI/41-28/VII/42." MNM k.p. 6518, f. 1, d. 5577. A graduate student in philology. Diary includes letters, recollections, and a short play written by the diarist and her husband, Vladimir Gregor'vich Uskov, about their wartime experiences.
90. Vasil'evich, Nikolai Ivanovich, "dnevnik: 2/I/42-4/IV/42." GMMOBL f. RDF, op. 1L, d. 329. Eleven-year-old schoolboy. Diary is written on a calendar. This file includes articles and photos of the author as an adult, when he was working as a professional actor.
91. Veisberg, Iuliia Lazarovna. "dnevnik. Otryvki, 1941." OR RNB f. 639 d. 95.
92. Vinogradova, Praskovia Fedorovna, "dnevnik: 22/VI/41-6/XI/41." TsGAIPD f. 4000, op. 11, d. 23.
93. Vladimirov, Vasilii and Boris, "delo o blokadnoi sem'e Vladimirovykh, pochti polnost'iu pogubshei v gody blokady i voiny, 1939-1942." GMMOBL f. RDF, op. 1L, d. 385. This file contains a diary was initially kept by V. Vladimirov and then continued by his brother, B. Vladimirov, after his death. Both authors were students and factory workers.
94. Vyianov, Aleksandr Matveevich, "dnevnik: 21/VI/41-3/XII/42." TsGAIPD f. 4000, op. 11, d. 19. Diarist worked as a political instructor for the party committee on Vasil'evsky Island as well as an assistant to the Leningrad military prosecutor. Diary includes letters, minutes of meetings, and work-related documents.
95. Zabolotskaia, Lidiia Korlovna, "dnevnik: 23/VIII/42-6/VII/43." TsGAIPD f. 4000, op. 11, d. 30. A school inspector for Department of Education in the Sverdlovsk district. Text includes an autobiography.
96. Zagorskaia, Aleksandra Pavlovna, "dnevnik: 22/VI/41-3/XII/43." TsGAIPD, f. 4000, op. 11, d. 33. Member of directorial staff of the artel "Krasnyi Fuliarschik" in Fruzenskii district. Text includes recopied letters.
97. Zelenskaia, Irina Dmitrievna, "dnevnik: 7/VII/41- 6/V/43." TsGAIPD f. 4000, op. 11, d.

35. A statistician and economist by training, during the war, Zelenskaia worked as the head of the planning department at Electrical Station No. 7 until 1943, when she began working to help the families of veterans in Sverdlovsk district. Portions of this diary have been published in: *'Ia ne sdamsia do poslednogo': zapiski iz blokadnogo Leningrada*, ed. V. M. Kolval'chuk et al. (Saint Petersburg: "Nestor-Istoriia," 2010).
98. Zinov'eva, N.B. "zapisnaia knizhka." TsGAIPD f. 4000, op. 11, d. 37. Secretary of the party organization for Factory No. 756.
99. Zlotnikova, Berta Abramovna, "dnevnik." TsGAIPD, f. 4000, op. 11, d. 39. Eighteen-year-old diarist, worked in various occupations including factory labor and as a leader in the pioneer organization. Diary includes aphorisms and an autobiography.
100. Zveinek, Asia, "dnevniki: 1938-1941." OR RNB f. 1000, op. 2, d. 504. A student at Leningrad State University.