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A Note about Spelling, Transliteration, and References

When transliterating Russian quotations and titles, we have used the modified Library of Congress System. We make exception for names, particularly those already familiar to the English-speaking reader, such as Osip Mandelstam (rather than Mandel'shtam) and Fyodor Dostoevsky (rather than Fёdor Dostoevskii). We have likewise opted for Lydia (rather than Lidiia) Ginzburg. These changes are preserved and reflected in the index of names.

Because we have created single, composite Works Cited for the volume, articles contain in-text parenthetical references, with the author’s name and publication date in italics (followed by a page number). References to the unpublished materials that are located in Ginzburg’s archive at the Russian National Library are also made using the Ginzburg’s name and date of the materials; in the Works Cited, these materials are distinguished by the label “O.R. R.N.B. 1377,” which refers to the general number of the Ginzburg archive at the Manuscripts Division of the Russian National Library (Otdel’ rukopisei, Rossiiskoi natsional’noi biblioteki). The archive remains to be catalogued.
Illustrations

Fig. 1 Lydia Ginzburg, circa 1989. O.R. R.N.B. 1377, No. 133. Photograph taken for Literaturnoe obozrenie (Literaturnoe obozrenie 1989: 78).

Fig. 2 Lydia Ginzburg, 1980s, in her kitchen at 27 Shvernink Prospect in Leningrad (now Second Murinskii Prospect in St. Petersburg) apt. 20. Photo courtesy of Nina Korolëva.
Acknowledgements

The editors would like to extend our heartfelt thanks to all of the contributors of this volume, with whom we enjoyed engaging dialogues, and whose consistent responsiveness to our queries helped bring the project to completion. Our own research on Lydia Ginzburg and our joint editorial work on several projects have benefitted from the help of a very large number of colleagues, advisers, and friends over the years. We have had occasion to thank many of them recently, and thus will mention only a few here. We would like to extend our sincere gratitude to Alexander Semenovich Kushner, for enabling our research in Lydia Ginzburg’s archive, while generously and graciously granting permission to us to publish from it. We thank Kseniia Kumpan and Irina Paperno for their generous help and advice over the years. We also owe a debt of gratitude to Marina Iur’evna Liubimova and to the staff of the manuscripts division of the Russian National Library for her assistance and for making the continuation of our archival research possible. We wish to thank Andrei Kurilkin for his trust, enthusiasm, and hard work in putting out our previous book, Prokhodiashekie kharaktery; we are grateful to Elena Shumilova for her editorial diligence on the same volume. We extend our deepest gratitude to Andrew Kahn for his inspiring guidance and encouragement, and his faith in this project as series editor at Peter Lang. We also thank our patient editors at the press, especially Hannah Godfrey. We are deeply grateful to the Ludwig Fund and New College for supporting this book. Finally, we are grateful to the anonymous peer reviewers of the book manuscript for their astute and helpful comments.
Introduction

Lydia Ginzburg’s reputation in Russian twentieth-century literature and culture is steadily growing as new dimensions of her literary activities become accessible to the public. In the course of this re-appreciation, her image has undergone several successive transformations: she has been seen as a widely respected, but rarely admired literary historian specializing in Russian Romanticism, Lermontov and Herzen; a creator of an original theory of “intermediary” (“promezhutochnaia”) literature—a genre occupying a sort of a middle ground between fiction and non-fiction; a perceptive memoirist who wrote about leading literary figures of the first half of the century including Mayakovsky, Oleinikov, Tynianov, Akhmatova and others; an author of a groundbreaking philosophical and psychological analysis of life in Leningrad during the blockade based on personal experience; a writer who managed to create her own type of prose bringing together self-examination, philosophical and historical reflection, and a kind of literary social psychology.

For many decades only a close circle of her friends was genuinely aware of her activities, and could begin to guess at the full scope of her work and achievement. In the 1920s, Victor Shklovsky praised her notebooks (Ginzburg 2002: 77, 123), while in the 1930s, Akhmatova said that the description of love in “The Return Home” was so precise that it made one feel uncomfortable (Ginzburg 2002: 307) and Grigory Gukovsky told students that Ginzburg was working on “a great Proustian novel” (Serman 1985: 188). Beginning with the Thaw, Ginzburg was surrounded by a circle of young fans and admirers that included leading scholars and writers of the new generation. However, for the majority of the reading public, her late emergence as one of the leading figures in the Russian literary landscape of the second half of the twentieth century might seem to qualify her for the Guinness Book World Record for late literary beginners. She published her most important scholarly book On Psychological Prose at the age of
Introduction

sixty-nine; the first excerpts from her notebooks appeared when she was celebrating her eightieth birthday; and Notes of a Blockade Person became known to readers when she was eighty-two. The bulk of her prose, essays and notebooks was published in the final years of her life, and posthumously. That tide shows no signs of abating. The discovery of Lydia Ginzburg’s heritage is yet unfinished, and every book that is published leads to new interpretations of her contribution to Russian literature.

***

Lydia Yakovlevna Ginzburg was born in 1902 in Odessa into a wealthy Jewish family, whose prosperity was undermined by the early death in 1910 of her father Yakov Ginzburg, the owner of a brewer’s yeast factory and laboratory and the editor of a trade journal called Vestnik vinokureniiia (The Distiller’s Herald). His business and family responsibilities were inherited by his younger brother Mark who took care of Lydia and her elder brother Victor (b. 1893). Known by the nickname Teapot (Tipot), which became his literary pseudonym, Victor was a playwright. As was typical for an educated Jewish intellectual of her generation, Lydia Ginzburg’s views and tastes were shaped by artistic and political radicalism. She admired Blok and Mayakovsky and was deeply sympathetic to both Russian revolutions of 1917. In 1920 she moved to a Petrograd that was devastated by the pain and starvation of civil war.

Вот случай, один из многих: человек восемнадцати лет, с резкими гуманитарными способностями, с отсутствием всяких других способностей, вообразил, что для воспитания ума, для полного философского развития необходимо заложить естественнонаучную основу. И вот он в теплушке, по фантастическому графику 20-го года, пробирается в Москву—закладывать естественнонаучный фундамент будущей гуманитарной деятельности. Среди еще неизжитой разрухи и голода у него никаких материальных ресурсов и ни единой мысли о том, как же, собственно, практически от заложенного фундамента (на это уйдет, очевидно, несколько лет) переходить потом к освоению профессиональных знаний и что есть при этом … Им казалось тогда, что они мрачные и скептические умы. На самом деле, сами того не понимая, они гигантски верили в жизнь, распахнутую революцией. В этом как раз их историческое право называться людьми 20-х годов. (Ginzburg 2002: 192)
Here’s a case for you, and there are many like it: a person, age eighteen, with keen abilities in the humanities, without any other abilities at all, imagines that in order to educate his mind, to achieve full philosophical development, it was obligatory to establish a foundation in the natural sciences. And so he makes his way, in a heated goods wagon, using the impossible transportation of the 1920s, to Moscow—to establish the natural sciences foundation for a future life in the humanities. Around him are famine and devastation, not yet overcome, and he has no material resources of any kind, and not a single thought about how he, actually, in practice, will transition from this basic foundation (which will likely take a few years to establish) to the acquisition of professional knowledge, and what to eat meanwhile. They thought back then that their minds were gloomy and skeptical. But in fact, without understanding it, they believed enormously in the life that had been flung open by the revolution. In this lies their historical right to be called people of the 20s.

Thus wrote Ginzburg three and a half decades after leaving Odessa, characteristically transforming her autobiographical experience into an abstract case study by shifting her narrative to the third person masculine and changing Petrograd for Moscow. However, there is no doubt that she felt herself to be the offspring of revolutionary upheaval. As was the case with many young people, she started her literary activities by writing poetry and even earned the praise of Nikolai Gumilev (ibid.: 21). However, she stopped early as she finally managed to decide upon a career and a vocation.

In 1922, after having studied chemistry for a year she entered the Institute for the History of Arts, the birthplace of Russian Formalism, where she soon, by her account, would be completely remade through contact with the teachers she called maitres.

Они же, метры, как таковые, в чистом виде, изменили жизнь. […] Если бы не было Эйхенбаума и Тынянова, жизнь была бы другой, то есть я была бы другой, с другими способами и возможностями мыслить, чувствовать, работать, относиться к людям, видеть вещи. (Ginzburg 2002: 56)

The maitres as such, in pure form, changed my life. […] If there had not been Eikhenbaum and Tynianov, my life would have been different, I would have been different, with different abilities and possibilities to think, feel, work, relate to people, see things.
Ginzburg’s first published article appeared in 1926 in the volume *Russian Prose* (*Russkaia proza, 1926*), which contained work by the “Young Formalists” (*mladoformalisty*), as the group of Tynianov’s and Eikhenbaum’s pupils later became known. It included Boris Bukhstab, Viktor Gofman, Nikolai Stepanov and others. The article was devoted to the “Notebooks” (*Zapisnye knizhki*) of Prince Pyotr Viazemsky, a Romantic poet and a friend of Zhukovsky and Pushkin who at the end of his life attempted a major reconstruction of the epoch of his youth in a series of disjointed sketches, notes, and a collection of famous *bons mots*.

While at the Institute, Ginzburg gained entry into the Petrograd literary elite, and soon became acquainted with Anna Akhmatova, Osip Mandelstam, Osip Brik, Vladimir Mayakovsky, Nikolai Zabolotsky, and many others. Working on Viazemsky’s legacy, Ginzburg at the same time started to write her own “Notebooks” in Viazemsky’s manner, that were meant to give a vivid and diverse picture of her time and milieu. From the mid-1920s, Ginzburg’s academic pursuits were related to her own literary plans and ambitions. Though she spent her whole life being and earning a living as a scholar, she always saw her studies in literary history as a projection of the problems that were relevant to her as a writer.

Ginzburg’s affiliation with the Institute as a student, graduate student and a teacher continued until 1930, when it was closed down and the Formalists were decisively silenced. Even before the final catastrophe, relations between the “Young Formalists,” especially Ginzburg and the *maîtres* became strained due partly to the perennial struggle between “fathers and sons,” partly to enormous political pressures and partly to Ginzburg’s own turn to sociological methods. This break with her teachers deeply scarred her (especially in her relationship to Tynianov), and yet she carefully concealed this fact and never let it be known publicly, not even in the later years. While personally remote, she remained close and loyal to them and their intellectual tradition throughout her life, though this decreased her chances for professional success.

Looking back from 1932, Ginzburg realized that by 1928, she already had abandoned her highest hopes of being able to realize her creative ambitions. She articulated three spheres of activity, the subtleties of which she would continue to study and experience for the next half-century: creativity,
professional work, and hackwork (see Ginzburg 2002, 114–15). In 1930–32 she drafted articles on Proust, and on “Writers’ Notebooks,” which she came to realize were unpublishable (see Ginzburg 2002, 414). She tried to make a living in children’s literature. In 1930, she signed a contract for a children’s detective novel Pinkerton’s Agency (Agentstvo Pinkertona), which she wrote and published after some difficulty in 1932.

In 1935, she became a member of the Writers’ Union. Between 1930 and 1950, Ginzburg had many lecturing jobs through which she supplemented the publication fees that were her main source of income. Because she had been a “Young Formalist” (and because she was Jewish), she never was able to become a professor at the important institutions of learning such as the Leningrad State University, despite the fact that she submitted applications. Instead, she lectured at the Workers’ Division at the Institute of the Air Fleet (Rabfak Instituta Grazhdanskogo vozдушного flota) (1930–34), and at the literary circle of the factory “Red Triangle” (1932–?, the end date is not specified in her official “autobiography”; see Ginzburg 2011: 503–5). At the end of the decade she managed to use the approaching centennial of the death of Mikhail Lermontov and defend her candidate’s dissertation at Leningrad State University based on monograph The Creative Path of Lermontov (Tворческий путь Лермонтова) published the same year.

Ginzburg survived the years of the Stalinist terror while living in Leningrad, and many of her friends were arrested and exiled or executed. She was arrested only once, in 1933, and jailed for two weeks in connection with a case being built against her friend Viktor Zhirmunsky (see Ginzburg 2002: 338–41).

The end of Ginzburg’s Sturm und Drang period and the major shift in her social status and professional aspirations led also to her major literary re-orientation. She no longer believed she was a participant in an important historical trend, and instead positioned herself as an observer, sitting at the

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1 The article on Writers’ Notebooks is in the Ginzburg archive (“O zapisknykh knizhkah pisatelei”). The manuscript is undated, but there is a reference to it in one of her Notebooks, in an entry from 1932. Ginzburg 1931–32: 38–39. A draft of roughly 100 pages of the article on Proust from around 1930 has also been preserved in the archive.
margins of history and trying to make sense of its development. Starting in the early 1930s, marginality became the key factor in Ginzburg’s literary identity and self-image. She was marginal as a writer who could not even aspire to publish her work, as a scholar without a regular job in a totalitarian state, as a closeted lesbian in an increasingly homophobic society, as a Jew in a country where slightly veiled anti-Semitism gradually became a part of official ideology, and discrimination on the grounds of national origins hardened into an established practice. Ginzburg wrote about problems of ethnicity in her essay “The Jewish Question” (Evreiskii vopros), about the problems of non-orthodox sexual orientation in the fourth “Conversation About Love” (Chetvertyi razgovor o liubvi), about the problems of literary self-determination in “The State of Literature near the End of the War” (Sostoianie literatury na iskhode voiny) and “Resume of Failures” (Itogi Neudach) also known as “The Loser” (Neudachnik).

Her approach to all these dimensions of her new social role remained the same throughout her life—she was ready to accept her marginal status, but adamantly refused to romanticize it, ready to bear hardships with dignity, but not to search in them for the basis of consolation. Nostalgia for social norms conducive to the kind of ethics she sought substantially defined her position and the structure of her new literary experiments.

From the early 1930s, her interest in notebooks (zapisnye knizhki) as a genre fades significantly. While her notebooks for 1925–30 taken together occupy 816 pages, her notebooks for 1931–35 are half the size—only 376 pages. In 1935 she stops writing them altogether (the last one was written after a long interval in 1943–44). What is more, the notebooks themselves change their nature. In the 1930s we find in them fewer amusing episodes, portraits of great cultural figures, brilliant jokes and witticisms, aphorisms and dialogues, and more mini-essays, fragments, and reflections on social issues and existential problems. It seems that Ginzburg started regarding the notebook entry less as a finished entity and more as raw material for larger generic forms.

Ginzburg’s first “narrative” (later she coined the term “povestovanie” to define this type of intermediary literature), “The Return Home” (Vozvrashchenie domoi) was for its publication dated “1931,” and written between 1929 and 1936. She analyses in it the psychology of love and the emotional
texture of the separation and the meeting of lovers as experienced against a background of different landscapes. It was followed in the late thirties by at least two more narratives analyzing personal experiences of encounters with the deaths of acquaintances, friends and close relatives—“The Thought that Drew a Circle,” (Mysl', opisavshaia krug) and “Delusion of the Will” (Zabluzhdenie voli). Already in late 1980s Ginzburg recorded a dialogue defining her own legacy as a prose writer:

Вот человек написал о любви, о голоде и о смерти.
— О любви и голоде пишут, когда они приходят.
— Да. К сожалению, того же нельзя сказать о смерти.
(Ginzburg 2002: 336)

So there you have it, this person wrote about love, hunger, and death.
— People write about love and hunger when they arrive.
— Yes. Unfortunately, the same can’t be said about death.

By the time she wrote this note Ginzburg had already published or was preparing to publish most of her “narratives.” However, the reading public did not know that they were at an early stage designed as parts of one big unifying work, which Grigory Gukovsky (according to one source) named a major novel. A lifelong admirer of Tolstoy, Ginzburg gave to this novel the title “Home and Peace” (or “Home and the World,” “Dom i mir”; see Van Buskirk 2007, 2008). She envisaged it, in her own words, as approximating “a diary in the form of a novel” (dnevnik po tipu romana, ibid.: 142), which would describe her own generation and social milieu, which she defined elsewhere as “the humanities intelligentsia of the Soviet type and nonofficial mold” (gumanitarnuiu intelligentsia sovetskoi formatsii i nekazennogo obraztsa) (Ginzburg 1933b).

As is clear from her generic definition, Ginzburg intended her magnum opus to be purely non-fictional where the artistic effect is created not by invention, but by selection and composition and by a specific blend of description and reflections on human nature, psychology, ethics and history. She tried to achieve her goals by elaborating sophisticated quasi-scientific methods of analyzing herself and her immediate environment, by sketching and dissecting the characters of people around her and carefully, in a
stenographic manner, recording their conversations. She also developed a specific type of introspection, a sort of self-distancing (‘samootstranenie’) that allowed her to analyze herself as a specimen, as a representative of specific historical trends and tendencies.

Я смею думать, что не копаюсь в глубинах как таковых и вообще не занимаюсь собой. Я ощущаю себя как кусок вырванной с мясом социальной действительности, которую удалось приблизить к глазам, как участок действительности, особенно удобный для наблюдения. (Ginzburg 2002: 99–100)

I venture to think that I’m not digging in the depths as such, and am not occupied with myself. I feel that I am a piece that’s been torn (with threads still hanging) from social reality and which I have managed to bring to my eyes, a strip of reality especially handy for observation.

Ginzburg’s “diary–novel” was never completed, but survived in the form of separate “narratives,” essays, fragments, notes, and drafts. The drafts and sketches she wrote in the 1940s during the horrors of war and blockade could be considered as their continuation, and as the most significant part.

After the Great Terror of the late 1930s, Ginzburg writes of the onset of war as bringing a modicum of psychological relief. She survived the Leningrad Blockade by working as an editor at the Leningrad Radio Committee (in the Literary–Dramatic Section)—as a salaried employee from the beginning of 1942 through May 1943, and then as an adjunct editor (vneshtatnyi redaktor) until the end of the war. The radio was an important source not only of information, but also of hope and strength for all who lived under the siege. For Ginzburg her work in Radio Committee was a short and valuable experience of “social relevance” (sotsial’naia primenimost’)—the chance to feel accepted within an established order of existence. There was also, momentarily, a slight freeing up of the cultural atmosphere, and it appeared that strong ideological restrictions would gradually ease. After the abominable hardships of the first blockade winter, Ginzburg resumed her work with an intensified creative energy.

For a while she had a feeling that the war had finally resolved the enigma of twentieth-century history, throwing retrospective light on the terror and the repressions her generation had endured. Several times in
her drafts she mentions that “only now” could she finally understand the characters she chose for her “narratives” and the meaning of their fate and thus perceive the full dimensions of her initial design: “Now I know who my typical heroes are: they are people of the two wars and the interval between them. [...] Thus, only now has the historical fate of this phantom generation and the symbolism of its fate become comprehensible” (“Теперь я знаю кто это такие мои типовые герои—это люди двух войн и промежутка между ними. [...] Итак, только теперь понятен исторический смысл этого выморочного поколения и символика его судьбы” Ginzburg 2011: 303, 294).

Around 1943–44 Ginzburg wrote what are arguably her two most powerful “narratives”—“The Story about Pity and Cruelty” and “Otter’s Day” (both provisional titles were selected by ourselves on the basis of textological research). The former is a minute description of the blockade death of a close relative and a merciless analysis of the feeling of the survivor’s guilt before the one who was lost. It is likely that for Ginzburg, who had lost her mother in the blockade, “The Story” served as way to deal with the trauma caused by guilt and remorse. Ginzburg never tried to publish it and it seems probable that she did not speak about its existence to anyone. It first appeared in print only in 2011. The second “narrative” is far better known, since much later Ginzburg reworked it as Notes of a Blockade Person—the work that brought her fame as a writer. Both “narratives” focus on the same character whose strangely sounding name most likely is a transliteration of both French l’autre and l’auteur and serves as a denomination of Ginzburg’s alter ego. She often used it in her autobiographical works of the 1930s and 1940s. In the earlier version the text described the daily routine of an ordinary middle-aged member of the intelligentsia during the blockade. Ginzburg used this narrative form to analyze the phenomenology of hunger and the basic structures of social order and human nature that, from her point of view, were not so much destroyed as discovered and revealed by improbable physical and moral suffering. The volume of essays, fragments, deliberations, drafts, character sketches, and records of conversation that were written during these two or three years of endurance and struggle for survival is unparalleled in her literary career.
All these activities nearly came to a halt after the ideological freeze of 1946 and an ensuing anti-formalist and anti-Semitic campaign. Seven years, starting from Andrei Zhdanov’s speech against Akhmatova and Zoshchenko and until Stalin’s death in 1953 marked the absolute nadir in the history of Soviet literature and humanities. It seems that during these years Ginzburg’s last hopes, those that had enabled her to continue writing in the terrible time of the Great Terror and the blockade of Leningrad, were extinguished. In the editions of her prose this period is not represented by a single line.

Her only job came during the anti-cosmopolitan campaign, when her friend Eleazar Meletinsky hired her as an associate professor (dotsent) at the University in Petrozavodsk (Karelo-finskii gosudarstvennyi universitet) (1947–50). It was considered safer in these years to remove oneself from view, and she commuted between Leningrad and Petrozavodsk, where she stayed with Meletinsky (according to one source, sleeping in his bathtub). Meletinsky was arrested in 1949, and Ginzburg was in her words driven out of the university soon after. At the end of 1952, Ginzburg was brought in for questioning in a case against Eikhenbaum, but fortunately the death of Stalin a few months later “saved my life, among countless others” as Ginzburg wrote many years later (Ginzburg 2002: 338–41).

During the Thaw that started after Stalin’s death, Ginzburg’s slow rise began. In 1957 she finally managed to defend and publish her doctoral dissertation, on Herzen’s My Past and Thoughts (begun as early as 1944, when she matriculated into the doctoral program at the Institute of Literature at the Academy of Sciences). In the sixties she wrote and published her book On the Lyric (O lirike) (1964), which finally established her status as a leading scholar. She started to read passages from her notebooks and narratives to a small number of younger admirers, and soon they started to help her type up selections. Among young generations of writers, poets, artists and literary scholars she was revered as a “keeper of the flame,” one of the last survivors of the glorious days of the Russian avant-garde. It is from these younger writers and intellectuals that we can still hear

2 Interview with Kseniia Kumpan, Summer 2003.
reminiscences about Ginzburg today, about her customary hosting rituals (egg and mayonnaise, carafe of vodka), a domestic orderliness atypical for the *intelligentsia*, a conversational style that patiently circled around a thought while acquiring precision, her absolute trustworthiness in keeping secrets and her decency, her mentoring of young poets, and her love of “literary scandal.” Many of them are able to lovingly imitate her slow, nasally manner of pronunciation.³

Meanwhile, in the 1960s and 1970s, Ginzburg published several reminiscences, based on material from her notebooks, on her friends and acquaintances of old such as Eduard Bagritsky, Anna Akhmatova, Yuri Tynianov, and Nikolai Zabolotsky. She also resumed writing and during these years wrote some of her best essays including “About Old Age and Infantilism” (*O starosti i ob infantilisme*), “About Satire and Analysis” (*O satire i ob analize*) and many others. The genre of the “note” (composed now on loose hand-written and then typed pages, rather than tetradi) with its witticisms and *bons mots* reappears as she captures both the younger generation and coevals such as Nadezhda Mandelstam, or elders such as Akhmatova. More typical, however, is the longer philosophical or sociological reflection, with a more marked presence than earlier of the first person singular “I,” perhaps in correspondence to Ginzburg’s rising social status.

³ These qualities were described in several interviews conducted by Emily Van Buskirk with the following younger friends of Ginzburg, in 2003 and 2004, and ongoing: Alexander Kushner, Elena Nevzgliadova, Eleazar Meletinskii, Elena Kumpan, Kseniia Kupan, Al’bin Konechnyi, Galina Murav’eva, Aleksei Mashevskii, Nikolai Kononov, Konstantin Azadovskii, Elena Shvarts, Nina Koroleva, Irena Podol’skaia, Nina Snetkova, Iakov Bogrov, Irina Paperno, John Malmstad, William Todd, Iakov Gordin, Elena Rabinovich, Marietta Tur’ian, and others. Some of the more noteworthy reminiscences include those by Ilya Serman, Victor Erlich, and Irina Paperno in *Canadian-American Slavic Studies* 1985; by Mikhail Gasparov, Andrei Bitov, Aleksandr Chudakov, Boris Gasparov, Alexander Zholkovsky, Alexander Kushner, and Aleksei Mashevsky in *Canadian-American Slavic Studies* 1994 (some of these were earlier published in *Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie*); by Aleksandr Chudakov, Sergei Bocharov, and Andrei Levkin in *Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie* 2001, and by Elena Kumpan and Elena Nevzgliadova in *Zvezda* 2002. See also *Kumpan 2005* and *Lidiia Lotman 2007*. 
(or decreasing marginality). In the same years, Ginzburg took up amateur photography, as another way of observing her milieu. However, it seems clear that the project of the Proustian “diary–novel” was abandoned. As Ginzburg wrote in 1954: “Secret little shoots of the future, leaves which are placed inside the desk, are now nothing more than the traces of fallen plans” (“Таинственные ростки будущего, листы, которые складываются в стол, теперь не более, чем следы павших замыслов” Ginzburg 2002, 193). Her major work was now split into dozens and hundreds of more or less disjointed fragments. Nevertheless, in the sixties Ginzburg was once again trying to get one of the most important of these fragments through censorship.

The publication of Solzhenitsyn’s One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich in 1962 significantly shifted the boundaries of the possible in public discourse about the horrors of the past, giving Ginzburg cause to hope that her blockade narrative could also be published. At the same time she obviously did not want to be perceived merely as Solzhenitsyn’s epigone and thus had to reject the form of “one day in the life of the main character.” In one of the introductions to the new version of “blockade narrative” she wryly remarked: “compositions that lie ripening and decaying in the desk drawer for decades acquire literary predecessors, just as naturally as published literature acquires followers” (“у произведений, десятками лет созревающих и распадающихся в письменных столах, за это время появляются предшественники, столь же естественно, как у печатной литературы преемники” Ginzburg 2011: 453). She rewrote “Otter’s Day” into the text she now planned to entitle simply “Blokada,” where she substituted many voices of witnesses for that of the main character, in this way transforming a personal narrative into a more general description. Still, while she was working on these changes the Thaw came to an end and the publication of her blockade narrative was to be postponed for two more decades.

Literary scholarship—“literaturovedenie” as it was called in the nomenclature of Soviet science (Ginzburg several times mentioned that she hated the word)—became the only sphere of activity available to Ginzburg both as a way to support herself and to acquire some sort of social standing. In one of her essays from the 1970s she complained that for fifty years she had
been carrying on “a twofold conversation—about life and about literature. This twofold anxiety has lasted for half a century—when speaking about literature, it means not doing the most important thing; when about life, it means doing something that is unrealizable.” (“двойной разговор—о жизни и о литературе. Полвека длится двоящееся беспокойство: когда о литературе—значит, занимаюсь не главным делом; когда о жизни—занимаюсь нереализуемым” Ginzburg 2002: 269.) In her monograph On Psychological Prose (O Psikhologicheskoj proze) she tried, as was so typical of her, to find intermediary ground between these two types of discourses. Ginzburg called it “the most intimate among her scholarly books,” exactly because it spoke about “intermediary literature, about the most important questions in life, and the most important writers for me” (ibid.: 303). Some pages of the book came straight out of the laboratory of her notebooks. This discussion was continued in her next book On the Literary Hero (O literaturnom geroe, 1979), in which she demonstrated the fruits of her long-held interest in Western sociology and psychology (see: Todd 1994).

In 1982, Ginzburg’s eightieth birthday was marked by the publication of the collection of her articles and reminiscences including for the first time a small section of her notebooks from the 1920s (see Ginzburg 1982). Less than two years later the Leningrad literary review Neva finally managed to publish the abbreviated version of her blockade narrative under the title The Notes of a Blockade Person (“Zapiski blokadnovo cheloveka”). Characteristically, in a table of contents Ginzburg was introduced as a “new name.”

The first publications of Ginzburg’s prose preceded only slightly the beginning of “perestroika” with the ensuing collapse of barriers imposed by censorship. The sensational success of Notes of a Blockade Person provoked public interest in her work. As a writer, she finally began to reach a wide readership. In 1987 and 1988 she stunned the Russian reading public with two successive essays, “Generation at a Turning Point” (Pokolenie na povorote) and “At One with the Legal Order” (I zaodno s pravoporiadkom), providing an acute socio-psychological analysis of the reasons why the Russian intelligentsia sympathized with the Bolshevik revolution and managed to co-exist with the Stalinist terror. The last years of her life witnessed the publication of three more books with large chunks of previously unpublished prose (Ginzburg 1987, Ginzburg 1989, Ginzburg 1991, the latter
prepared by Ginzburg in the last months of her life and published posthumously). *Notes of a Blockade Person* were translated into English, French, and Dutch (another English translation and a Swedish one appeared in 1990s). Her scholarly acclaim rose as her interests seemed to coincide with widespread interest in the sociology of literature, and with developments in structuralism and in semiotics. In 1987, the Russian government awarded her its “Prize for Science.”

However, even having passed her eighty-fifth birthday Ginzburg could not limit herself to preparing her earlier works for belated publications. She continued writing and reflecting about the past and present. She was also deeply interested in the huge political and cultural changes in the Soviet Union, and acquired her first television, in order better to follow current events. One of her last essays discussing Gorbachev and perestroika still remains unpublished.

Lydia Ginzburg died in July 1990 at the age of eighty-eight from a heart attack followed by a stroke, possibly caused in part by feverish work.

Taking into account the peculiarities of Ginzburg’s biography, it is unsurprising that “Ginzburg studies” is a recent, but rapidly developing field (see for example the bibliography in *Rosengrant 1995*) One can provisionally date its emergence with the edition of the special issue of *Canadian-American Slavic Studies* dedicated to Ginzburg edited by Sarah Pratt that appeared in 1985 immediately following the publication of *Notes of a Blockade Person*. Nine years later, in 1994, the same journal published another Ginzburg issue this time edited by Jane Gary Harris and devoted primarily to her prose. In Russia the explosion of “Ginzburg studies” followed her centennial in 2002 marked by a number of publications including a 750-page volume containing all her previously published and some unpublished prose that became a reference point for any further research (prepared by Alexander Kushner, with the assistance of Denis Ustinov; this volume was republished in 2011), and a special issue of *Zvezda* (2002: issue 3), including more previously unpublished notes (with commentaries) and reminiscences. In the same year, there were two conferences organized by the Russian State University for Humanities (RGGU) and *New Literary Review* (*NLO*). The latter also published a collection of Ginzburg related materials in issue 49 (3: 2001).
During the last decade NLO has become a center of Ginzburg revival, publishing a substantial quantity of Ginzburg-related articles. In 2006 it published the materials of the round table organized by Laurent Thévenot, where Ginzburg was discussed alongside with Yuri Lotman with the perspective of finding common ground between the languages of sociology and literary scholarship (NLO Roundtable 2006). The following year, the same magazine in the editorial article stated that contemporary scholarship should follow the path of Ginzburg, who set a productive precedent of being able to find “the means and forms for describing her epoch, without forgoing either scholarly integrity or the principles of a worldview” (“способы и форматы описания своей эпохи, не поступившись ни научной честностью, ни мировоззренческими принципами [Prokhorova 2007: 16]). Thus Ginzburg is gradually becoming the founding figure of a whole school—an accomplishment she never managed to achieve in her lifetime. Also unimaginable to her would have been her virtual presence, suited to the moveable text of her essays: not only is much of her prose available on the Web; for some she acts as the center of a vibrant internet community (see Paperno 2010: 51–55). However, it is remarkable that scholars who claim Ginzburg as one of their predecessors refer to her “intermediary literature” more frequently than to her academic works.

Gradually, both parts of Ginzburg’s legacy have become more accessible to the reader. Stanislav Savitsky compiled and edited a volume of her early studies in literary history (Ginzburg 2007a), and Emily Van Buskirk and Andrei Zorin prepared an edition of her previously unpublished wartime prose (Ginzburg 2011). We hope that the present volume will also contribute to the understanding of Ginzburg’s legacy and of the unique role she played in Russian literary life of the twentieth century.

The present volume is the first book-shape publication devoted to Ginzburg in any language. We aspired to bring together different aspects of her literary, academic and intellectual heritage and to explore both the diversity and the unity of her creative pursuits. The structure of the book is designed to express both this diversity and this unity.
The book opens with two shorter essays whose authors speak about different aspects of their own personal engagement with the works and personality of Ginzburg. Sergei Kozlov tells the story of the reception of Ginzburg’s prose by the younger generation and of the changes in her reputation provoked by the latest publication of Ginzburg’s previously unknown prose of the 1940s. Alexander Zholkovsky deconstructs Ginzburg’s dress code as a sign of her aversion to bourgeois individualism and of her deep-rooted egalitarianism. By the same token, his personal recollections introduce a refreshing dose of skepticism into the generally reverential spirit of this volume.

In the first of the full-length articles “Lydia Ginzburg on Tolstoy and Lermontov (with Dostoevsky as the Distant Ground),” Caryl Emerson discusses Ginzburg’s perception of three great Russian writers of the nineteenth century, and the reasons for her enduring preference for Tolstoy over Dostoevsky. However, the focus of Emerson’s analysis is less on the history of literature or poetics than on Ginzburg’s system of ethics and her views on human nature. As Emerson demonstrates, Ginzburg believed in regularities governing human behaviour and the “conditionedness” (obuslovnennost’) of psychic impulses, and thus was irritated by the excessive freedom with which Dostoevsky’s heroes act, think and feel, leaping from one state to another as if in airless space. Ginzburg was also skeptical about the ability of ideas to determine lives and remained indifferent to Dostoevsky’s ideological novel, as so powerfully described by Engelgardt and Bakhtin, where the protagonist becomes an embodiment of a philosophical idea. Emerson devotes attention to Ginzburg’s early book on Lermontov, largely neglected by previous scholars, and shows how, in spite of her distrust of Romanticism, Ginzburg managed to appreciate Lermontov’s ability at decisive moments to lift the narrative in Hero of Our Time “out of the realm of free or infinite Romantic irony into the ‘realm of necessity.’”

While Emerson looks at Ginzburg as a literary scholar, Zorin approaches her psychological ideas through comparison with the theoretical models developed in German and American twentieth-century psychology. Ginzburg was an attentive reader of psychological literature,
and what is more in her works she tried to develop a psychological theory of her own, bringing together the theory of human types developed by Eduard Spranger, the individual psychology of Alfred Adler, and the theory of self elaborated by William James. In his analysis Zorin shows that Ginzburg’s psychological thinking was developing along the same lines as American personology of 1930s and 1940s.

Emily Van Buskirk in her “Varieties of Failure: Ginzburg’s Character Analyses from the 1930s and 1940s” complements Andrei Zorin’s analysis of Ginzburg’s psychological theory with a discussion of her literary technique of describing the heroes of her “intermediary literature.” Van Buskirk shows how Ginzburg had created a panorama of the epic collapse of Soviet intelligentsia through her gallery of “passing characters” adapting their behavioral strategies to the changing and equally threatening circumstances of pre-war and war time periods. Special attention here is paid to several specific social types like “nadryvndyi intelligent,” “kham,” the “dystrophic who survived,” and so on.

Andrew Kahn’s contribution, “Lydia Ginzburg’s ‘Lives of the Poets’: Mandelstam in Profile,” brings together Ginzburg’s ideas about Mandelstam’s poetry and her recollection and reconstruction of his personality. Kahn deals with Ginzburg’s idiosyncratic treatment of Romantic stereotypes. At issue this time is the idea of poetic exceptionalism, the perception of a poet as an eternal madman or outcast opposed to the world of ordinary human beings. This vision, significantly reinforced by Modernist art, was unacceptable to Ginzburg throughout her entire literary career. However, she was always an ardent admirer of Mandelstam, himself a belated offspring of this tradition. Through a close reading of Ginzburg’s description of how Mandelstam virtually performed his “Conversations about Dante,” Kahn dissects this paradox and uncovers the literary strategy and technique Ginzburg uses to transform the traditional image of a mad solitary genius into an optimistic description of a poet who overcomes unbearable hardships through devotion and self-sacrifice to his vocation. This theme was always essential to Ginzburg, who also deeply suffered from enforced alienation from her potential reader.

Ginzburg’s prose of 1940s is analyzed by Irina Sandomirskaia and Kirill Kobrin in their contributions. Sandomirskaia in “The Leviathan,
or Language in Besiegement: Lydia Ginzburg’s Prolegomena to Critical Discourse Analysis” discusses the strategies of an individual fighting for survival and facing the omnipotent power of the state. She analyzes the state “Leviathan” with the help of Foucault’s three-pronged model of modern power, with its regimes of repression, discipline, and biopower. Sandomirskaia argues that it is in the sphere of language that the author through his/her being-in-writing tries to wrestle his/her own voice from the power that controls his/her social activity, everyday behavior and physical body.

Kobrin, on the contrary, focuses his attention not on discursive practices, but on the everyday behavior of the person during the blockade as depicted by Ginzburg. In his “To Create a Circle and to Break it (‘Blockade Person’s’ World of Rituals),” he reconstructs and discusses the bodily rituals which the blockade person organizes for himself to give some meaning and order to an existence that has been devastated by incredible suffering and personal losses. Kobrin demonstrates how these seemingly senseless rituals can be meaningful and in fact life-saving, thus providing a more optimistic reading of Ginzburg’s approach to human nature and behavioral strategies.

Ginzburg’s own social strategy and her attempts to forge her new social identity in a changing Soviet reality of the 1930s, after the collapse of Formalist school and in the period of her growing marginalization are discussed in Stanislav Savitsky’s article “Reflection as an Ethical Value (Lydia Ginzburg’s ‘The Thought That Drew a Circle’).” Savitsky shows how Ginzburg tried to interiorize Marxist approaches to history and society and to apply them to the inner world of personality, but was finally driven past Marxism to the intellectual legacy of the French seventeenth- and eighteenth-century rationalists. From this perspective he analyzes Ginzburg’s discussion, in her narratives of the mid- and late 1930s, of attitudes to death as they are developing among non-religious intellectuals living in an atheistic state.

Laurent Thévenot, in his article “At Home and in a Common World, in a Literary and a Scientific Prose: Ginzburg’s ‘Zapiski blokadnogo cheloveka’,” proposes an analysis of Ginzburg’s masterpiece from the point of view of the sociology of “the regimes of engagement” he has elaborated in his works. Thus, Ginzburg’s prose becomes a test case for a sociological
model. Thévenot’s focus is on Ginzburg’s treatment of “limit situations,” which for Ginzburg simultaneously break the usual “regime of engagement” and reaffirm it. Thévenot pays special attention to Ginzburg’s description of the emotional processing of experience—“perezhivanie”—a useful category of the analysis of engagement, which is lacking both in English and French academic language.

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In the second, shorter part of the book we included a selection of translations of some of Ginzburg’s more important prose pieces preceded by an essay by Alyson Tapp who speaks about her experience as a translator of Ginzburg’s prose (for an analysis concerning the experience of translating Ginzburg into Swedish, see Grelz 2001).

The earliest work included in this collection is “The Return Home” (dated 1931 by the author) as far as we know the first large “narrative” (povestovanie), begun by Ginzburg in 1929, and representing the first step in a transition in the early 1930s from the genre of the notebooks to that of longer essays. The analysis of love that she elaborated in this essay was continued in her Conversations about Love. The fourth and most intimate conversation, written in mid-thirties but never published in Ginzburg’s lifetime, tries to find reconciliation with the difficult social conditions of homosexual love, while making of it neither a problem nor an ideology (see Van Buskirk 2007). The first three conversations were written between 1959 and 1962, forming a cycle.

Two essays included in this volume were written during wartime, most likely in 1944. “The Jewish Question” discusses the moral dilemmas that face the Russian “intelligent” of the Jewish origin when official anti-Semitism was on the rise in the Soviet Union. “The State of Literature near the End of the War” is one of the first attempts to describe Soviet literature as a unique socio-cultural phenomenon and to analyze the ways in which the immanent logic of literary development and the striving of individual writers for self-assertion are related to the pressures of ideological control and repression. These essays were unpublished by the author and not prepared for publication, and thus they possess the quality of drafts.
The two last essays “Generation at a Turning Point” and “At One with the Legal Order” are brilliantly polished and are among Ginzburg’s best known. Written in 1979 and 1980, respectively, the two form a pair, and were published during perestroika. They were dedicated to the psychological mechanisms that enabled a significant part of Russian intelligentsia to welcome the Bolshevik revolution and to adapt to the Great terror. Bringing together the recollections of a witness with the analytical apparatus of a social psychologist, these essays stunned readers and acquired the status of required reading for everyone interested in Russian intellectual history of the twentieth century.

Not included among this small set of translations are Ginzburg’s shorter notes and essays that are most characteristic of her zapisnye knizhki from the 1920s, as well as her other “narratives” and her reminiscences (vospominaniia). Though short (sometimes only a sentence long) and in their way inherently incomplete (and constantly cited in the works of literary historians looking for the perfect characterization of their subjects), the notes are perhaps best experienced in a larger selection. Thoroughly rooted in the culture of Ginzburg’s milieu, these notes also seem to require extensive commentary on the context, to communicate their meaning. While these tasks remained outside the scope of the current volume, it is hoped that soon a translation of these notes (those that appeared in their fullest selection in Ginzburg’s lifetime in Chelovek za pis’memnym stolom and posthumously in Zapisnye knizhki. Vospominaniia. Esse) will soon become available to the broadest English-speaking audiences.
PART I

Articles
Lydia Ginzburg’s Victory and Defeat

The recently published volume *Passing Characters* (*Prokhodiashchie kharakte*) has changed our mode of understanding the psychological prose of Lydia Ginzburg—a mode to which we had managed to grow accustomed during the preceding twenty-seven years, and which we treasured dearly. This perception was formed by Lydia Yakovlevna’s own publications between 1982 and 1989, in which she readdressed her old texts to contemporary readers. As a result she began to be perceived as a current, contemporary writer, working in a completely unique genre, conventionally called “in-between prose” (*promezhutochnaia proza*). The impact on readers rendered by her publications from the eighties was exceptional in its strength and, most of all, in its immediacy. I will quote the remark of one of her readers who has since passed away, and who was over the age of fifty at the time of the first publications of Ginzburg’s prose. Recalling the significance of his first readings of Ginzburg’s essays, he said: “She explained to me my own self.” This completely corresponds to the feeling I had, and I think it is very close to what many others have felt then and since. Ginzburg gave us the language and conceptual apparatus for understanding ourselves and our milieu. In an obituary, Marietta Chudakova described the effect of Ginzburg’s texts in the following way: “In the past 10–15 years, with her own hands, with her individual efforts, she raised the level of the country’s spiritual life” (*Chudakova 1990*).

Thus, this understanding of Ginzburg’s prose, which became our custom, was a reception from the point of view of the present, and a reception that was saturated by a maximal vested interest. I would like

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1 Remarks on the occasion of the publication of *Ginzburg 2011* (and its presentation in Moscow in December 2010).
to underscore still two more implicit qualities of this reception. First, it was an undifferentiated one: it included all of Ginzburg’s prose taken as a whole, *en bloc*, without dividing it into separate layers. Although in the publications of the 1980s these separate layers were marked off both in chronological, and in generic respects, neither of these markers played a principal role in our reading of Ginzburg’s texts. What played a principal role was the division between Ginzburg’s scholarship (*literaturovedenie*) and her prose. Her prose was received regardless of all the markers as one large mass, uniform in its quality and in its value. Such a reading, of course, was based on the striking stylistic uniformity of all of Ginzburg’s prosaic creations that were known to us. Galina Danilovna Murav’ëva, a close acquaintance of Ginzburg’s, said that the author found her style already in her earliest notes, or more precisely did not find it, but had it from the very beginning. Emily Van Buskirk quotes a phrase from one of Ginzburg’s friends about the comic dissimilarity between Lydia Yakovlevna and her mother: “A chicken laid an eagle egg” (*Van Buskirk* 2011: 517). In reference to Ginzburg’s style, one wants to continue this metaphor: “it seems the eagle egg immediately hatched an eagle who knew how to fly.” But while our reception of Ginzburg’s prose was so integrated, still it seems to me—although here I am stepping onto the shaky ground of purely subjective sensations—that this reception nonetheless had a “dominant,” and that this *dominant* was actually formed by a completely definite stratum of Ginzburg’s prose. If one recalls the generic separations of the volume *Chelovek za pis’emnym stolom* (*Person at a Writing Table*): 1) essays 2) reminiscences 3) narratives—then it seems to me that the first division of this volume—essays—held the greatest significance. Although we were all stunned by “Notes of a Blockade Person,” too, as well as “Delusion of the Will” and the other narratives, it still seems to me that the most directly important for us were such texts as “About Old Age and Infantilism,” “Generation at a Turning Point,” and “At One with the Legal Order.” Precisely these and texts like them stood at the forefront of our minds.

Ginzburg’s new book (of 2011) forces us to take final leave of this so customary, immediately-interested reception of Lydia Yakovlevna’s texts. First of all, it is not the essay that is the *dominant* of this book. The kind of essay found in this book, and never made known before, is written
with Ginzburg’s habitual analytical strength, but one can hardly say that these essays explain ourselves to ourselves. These essays explain history for us—for example, such objects of history as Soviet literature. In this book there are also portraits of littérateurs and scholars, portraits that are similar to Khodasevich’s sketches in their mercilessness—but, once again, these portraits are engaging most of all in the degree to which one is interested in history, and not one’s own life and soul. But it is not the historical portraits that constitute the book’s dominant, and not the essays. The dominant is formed by two astounding narratives: “A Story of Pity and Cruelty” and “Otter’s Day.”

One cannot say that these two texts revealed a new, previously unheard-of Ginzburg. “A Story of Pity and Cruelty”—is yet another narrative about the death of a close relative, along the lines of “Delusion of the Will.” “Otter’s Day” is the original version of what was later transformed into “Notes of a Blockade Person.” But being unified by common, and meanwhile psychologically concrete characters, a common entourage and clearly defined (although different in two cases) plot skeleton, “A Story of Pity and Cruelty” and “Otter’s Day,” gathered under one cover, confer a new quality. Ginzburg as a storyteller emerges into the foreground of this book.

These two texts in particular allow one to view Ginzburg with a new gaze. This is a view not from the perspective of the present, but from that of history. Ginzburg’s prose legacy appears to us for the first time in its heterogeneity. For the first time one can speak about the early, middle and late periods as about essentially different strata of Ginzburg’s creativity. And most importantly of all—for the first time the central drama of Ginzburg’s entire life becomes sharply visible.

It turns out that “in-between prose,” an idea that Ginzburg quietly but firmly defended in the late period of her creativity, was only a palliative, or one could go even further and call it “bonne mine à mauvais jeu” (khoroshei minoi pri plokhoi igre). It turns out that Ginzburg considered the genre of notebooks “literature for impotents” (Ginzburg 2011: 532), and saw her true calling in the creation of a novel in the spirit of Proust—a novel that presupposed the creation of a particular world. It turns out that she progressed rather far along this path. “Otter’s Day” and “A Story of Pity and Cruelty” compel one to try hard to guess at what this novel could have
resembled in its final form. It turns out that from this point of view life in the blockade was for her not a terrible misfortune, but an exceptional opportunity, which gave her unprecedented experience (*opýt*). And it turns out that in the end she was unable to fulfill her goal.

This historical fiasco of Ginzburg’s is staggering in scale, specifically on the strength of the scope of the results that were achieved. Why did she suffer defeat where more traditional writers—from Bulgakov and Pasternak to Grossman and Solzhenitsyn—each in his own way, achieved their goals? But this kind of analysis is a task for the future. Now, the main thing is that for the first time we can understand completely what stood behind all of Ginzburg’s words, which we knew, about the tragedy of failed realization. One recalls Ginzburg’s fragment about the tragedy of Pushkin’s life (*Ginzburg 2002: 195*). In her opinion, Pushkin’s tragedy did not consist in the fact that he was killed, nor in the fact that he was persecuted, nor in the fact that his friends backed away from him, nor in the fact that his wife did not love him. For Ginzburg, Pushkin’s tragedy was in the fact that the trap that was set for Pushkin did not allow him to concentrate on work. She writes: “We, who can no longer be surprised by the sight of human pain, feel pain because of this tragedy to this day.” I knew all of these statements by Ginzburg about the lack of realization, understood their autobiographical subtext, and nevertheless considered Ginzburg a victor. Now I see her colossal defeat, and feel pain because of this tragedy.
Once upon a time in Moscow in the 1970s, Igor Mel’chuk and I were working at my place and, having discovered that the fridge was empty, decided to have lunch—I actually used the English word “lunch”—at the Prague Café. While I liked the idea as pronouncedly Western, Igor agreed out of necessity and on the strict condition that while walking there and back—about fifty minutes all in all at a good athletic clip—we would continue discussing our lexicographic work. Once there, we were promptly served by “my” waitress, Tamara Ivanovna, but that is not what the story is about.

Seated at one of the tables was a gentleman—no other word would do him justice—of about thirty, wearing a red jacket. I say red only as a first approximation: the coat was of a stylish claret color shot through with a brownish tint, and its breast pocket may have been adorned—here I am not a hundred percent sure—with a polygonal silver star, a sort of medal of olden times. Whether it was the club jacket of some outlandish lodge, a part of some costume, or an idiosyncratic whim of an *artiste* was anybody’s guess.

The impression it produced on the Prague diners was, to judge by the murmur of disapproval coming from all sides, strong. But imagine my astonishment when I realized that the knee-jerk reaction of the shocked Soviet philistines was shared by my progressive older friend and mentor! I will omit the peripeties of the polemic that totally eclipsed, on our way home, the burning issues of structural lexicography. Mel’chuk’s argument boiled down to the idea that one should devote one’s time to things that

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1 My coauthor in the 1960s–1970s Igor Aleksandrovich Mel’chuk (b. 1932), a leading Soviet (and, since his 1977 emigration, Canadian) linguist and human rights activist.
matter, not fanciful inanities; mine, to a hopefully more sophisticated apologia of diversity, which, in our “unwashed Russia” (Lermontov), was, alas, painfully lacking.

The progressive Russian intelligentsia emerged—a hundred or so years ago—from the ranks of the lower clergy, inheriting the latter’s ideological asceticism. Since then, our national consciousness has been dominated by a puritanical functionalism that tends to suppress everything “unnecessary,” which is left to be cultivated secretly and occasionally breaks through in garish forms. The absence of a strong middle class in Russian society is compounded by the corresponding lack, in the famously “broad” Russian soul, of a middle zone between the mutually nurturing extremes of sin and penance. (Ironically, in the 90s, it fell to crimson jackets to emblematize the mafioso “New-Russian” dress-code.)

I, for one, must recognize that, in spite of all my freethinking, I am flesh of the flesh of that selfsame boring mentality and cannot claim to dress much more interestingly than my colleagues. After the presentation of my Erosiped book, the eternally maudit poet Eduard Limonov (who, recently released from prison at the time, came with two bodyguards and gave a nice little speech designed to establish his credentials as an intellectual) told me that it had been a long time since he had seen so many men in dusty suits in one room. As for Limonov himself, he wears exclusively black, but that of course is another matter, haute couture, black on black, worn also by the highbrow Boris Groys, consummately post-modern from head to toe.

Grim uniformity was a staple feature of homo sovieticus and never failed to catch the eye of foreign observers, while the eye of Soviet visitors couldn’t help being offended by the bold diversity of life abroad. Even I, pro-Western “renegade” that I was, had a hard time making sense, once in Vienna on a first leg of my emigration, of that many car makes!

The most striking embodiment of dress-code drabness was, in my experience, Lydia Yakovlevna Ginzburg. On those several occasions that I met

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3 Zholkovskii 2003.
her, she was wearing a light gray (most likely, striped) robe-cassock-overall, collared and pocketed. On her short plump body it looked bell-shaped (the association with Alexander Herzen is not intended, but let’s face it, he was one of her favorites, and the blending, in the title of his journal, Kolokol [The Bell], of the ecclesiastic and the revolutionary is telling); it could also pass for an oversized soldier’s tunic. Her short haircut, popular among the Chernyshevsky line of progressive women students in the 1860s, completed the image of a revolutionary outside age and sex, crystallized by successive periods of nihilism, populism, revolution, purges, the Leningrad siege, and further levelings, to which her recently outed “queerness” may be added. Her silver-gray hair on a huge head, her wrinkled face, and the penetrating glance of her small blue almost lashless eyes made her seem to transcend the boundaries of the human, all too human, and resemble a troll or perhaps a bizarre magical mushroom. (Recently I read somewhere that mushrooms are genetically closer to animals and humans than to plants.)

This homely drabness was—despite the contradiction in terms—quite flamboyant; after all, nobody else dressed like that. To be sure, the utter unprepossessiveness of what Akakii Akakievich’s associates would have been sure to call her kapot [“housecoat”] may have been meant as a deliberately avant-garde gesture of defiance by a disciple of the Formalists and a hardened survivor of the blockade, designed to épater le bourgeois soviétique. But the fact remains that the outfit was orphanage-style gray and always the same and it bore the indelible stamp of the Soviet 1930s in all their honest poverty and loyalty to a one-fits-all institutional solution of human problems. Whence, for instance, the ostentatious asceticism of Anna Akhmatova, and Solzhenitsyn’s soldier’s-tunic-cum-Tolstoyan-blouse, not to mention Stalin’s and Mao’s soldierly garments and the entire foster-home culture pioneered by the two.

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4 To explain passing on to someone else two fancy scarves sent her from London as a present by Salomeia Andronikova-Halpern (and thus violating the taboo on giving away a gift) Akhmatova invoked a historical anecdote about a Spanish queen rejecting a gift of Dutch stockings: “Her minister refused to accept them: ‘The Queen of Spain has no feet.’” Chukovskaya 1977 2: 466.

I realize that my readers may be starting to lose patience with the tactlessness of this snobbish dancing in the graveyard of several generations of sufferers. But the point I want to make is not at all about demoting our heroes of resistance (I learned a great deal from L. Ia., I enjoy quoting Akhmatova, and I matured while reading Solzhenitsyn); it is about ourselves, about the garb we don today. The Gulag/blockade experience tends to reduce everything to the black-and-white, ignoring the rainbow’s (and Joseph’s coat’s) many colors. “Nam by vashi problemy!” (If that were all we had to worry about!), as victimized Soviet intellectuals would counter the “effete” Westerners’ complaints about the predicaments of the human condition.

Also symptomatic is Ginzburg the literary scholar’s focus on historical determinism, cultural institutions, and the individual’s dependence on society (albeit not necessarily of the Marxist hue). This too was characteristic of the Soviet 1930s (which seem ominously on their way back). Then there is her consistent silence—even in notebook entries—about her private life, in particular the problems involved in tabooed sexual orientation and practices.

One could construe (and relate to) these omissions as inevitable products of covert behavior under harsh totalitarian control, but that would still undermine—twist—what has been lauded as a “direct conversation about life” (in the preface of that title to the fullest to date edition of Ginzburg’s non-fiction). External censorship generates internal censorship, which in an intellectual can only lead to the mystification of thought.

Self-censorship is already evident in the pointedly depersonalized third-person masculine perspective through which much of the reasoning

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6 I remember trying (in vain)—in the 1980s, during a discussion of an American colleague’s paper on Ginzburg as a proto-dissident,—to draw attention to L. Ya.’s principled acceptance of the precedence of society over the individual. She could well have been punished for her dissidence by exclusion from extant Soviet scholarly bodies, but that only made her mental allegiance to the idea of social institutions more intense.

7 Kushner 2002 in Ginzburg 2002, 5–8; Kushner’s title uses Ginzburg’s own words (see p. 344 of that same edition).
is conducted in Ginzburg’s autobiographical jottings. This was, of course, justified by—and helped naturalize—the resulting rewardingly original and non-narcissistic tone of near-scientific objectivity. But by the same token it represents a suppression (the Freudian Verdrängung) of everything intimate, special, personal, different,—in keeping with her professed social-historical determinism. An inimitable extraterrestrial pkhents\(^9\) in an orphan’s—or jailbird’s—hand-me-downs tried to edit him/herself into a regularized product of societal norms.

The recently published fragments of Ginzburg’s notes on the subject of “female inversion”\(^10\) corroborate this reading. Ginzburg declares Lesbian love not worth reporting in literature—or, for that matter, in notebooks—for the reason that it basically is no different from other, “normal,” kinds of love. This view, like wearing gray, is, of course, her right as a person and writer, but a determined suppression of the individual element, of one’s “irregularities” that fall outside the limits approved by society is clearly evident here. A strange directness—following guidelines appropriate for a newspaper beleaguered by censorship or a political tract written to ideological order!

Well, Ginzburg could retort, if you find it strange, so be it, no one is forcing you to read on. As her older friend, Anna Akhmatova, put it: Kakaia est’. Zhelaiu vam druguiu (“That’s how I am. I wish you someone different”). But a recently emerged tendency—prompted by Grigory Gukovsky’s remark from circa 1940—would canonize Ginzburg as no less than our Russian Proust.\(^11\) Awkward as it is to object, when it comes to nominating a Russian Proust, a more likely choice would be Ivan Bunin, the Bunin, who incidentally made a point of defending—in his most Proustian work—the value of sheer perceptiveness unburdened by civic-minded stereotypes:

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\(^8\) See in the Appendix to this essay my earlier analysis of one such characteristic entry; cf. Van Buskirk 2006.
\(^9\) The reference is to Andrei Sinyavsky’s 1966 sci-fi short story “Pkhentz,” see Sinyavksy 1985: 468–90; see also my “Vybrannyie mesta. Tsenton” (Zholkovskii 2009).
To write! Yes, I had to write about rooftops, about galoshes, about backs, and not at all in order to “fight tyranny and violence, to defend the oppressed and destitute, to create striking characters, or to draw broad pictures of the public, of contemporary life, its mood and tendencies!” [...] “Social contrasts!” I thought caustically, to spite someone while passing by the bright glow of a shop window ... On Moscow Street I stopped into a cabbies’ tearoom and sat in its hum of voices, crowdedness, and the steamy warmth, watched the meaty, scarlet faces, the reddish beards, the peeling, rusty tray on which there were two white teapots with moist cords joining their tops to their handles ... An observation of the people’s daily life? Not at all—it is just that tray, that moist cord! (Bunin 1994: 191–92)

Promoting Bunin to the rank of a Proust I may have gone a bit too far—given in to our common impulse in the spirit of Dostoevsky’s Pushkin speech and other such patriotic outbursts. A propos of which, here is what Chaadaev, an esteemed friend of Pushkin’s, wrote about Gogol or, rather, his intemperate admirers:

What seems most curious about this case is not Gogol himself [Chaadaev is discussing Selected Passages from Correspondence with Friends—A. Zh.] but what made him what he is. In our proud times, full of pompous national arrogance as they are, how can you expect a writer not to put on airs [...]? The drawbacks of Gogol’s book are not his own doing; they are the doing of those who extol him inordinately, who genuflect before him as the highest manifestation of the original Russian mind, who confer on him all but universal validity [...] [T]he main trouble rests with his admirers [...] But do you know whence this unconditional worship in our Moscow circles? It comes from wanting a writer we could place in the same category as the giants of the human spirit—Homer, Dante, Shakespeare—and above all writers of the present day. I know his admirers intimately, I love and respect them: they are intelligent and good people. But they need at all costs to elevate our modest, God-fearing Russia above all the nations of the world; they wish by all means to assure themselves and everyone else that we destined to be mentors of other peoples. (Chaadaev 1991: 199–201)

To dare write something like that in Russia one needs either a certificate (from the Emperor) that one is officially insane or an American passport. Let me add, though, that unlike Gogol, Ginzburg did not put on airs even when she belatedly became famous, so that Chaadaev’s slings and arrows should in all fairness be rerouted to her overzealous fans.
Appendix: Between Genres

I will start by citing a fragment from Lydia Ginzburg’s *Literature in Search of Reality* that has intrigued me since I first read it:

There are plots that do not lend themselves to prose. It is impossible, for instance, to relate adequately in prose:

A man is already impervious to the warm breath of the world; his reactions are sclerotically rigid, and he knows about his inner states as if second hand. A certain psychological event occurs. Not a very significant one, but it has—as in a shooting gallery—hit the mark and set everything about in convulsive motion. And all of a sudden the man sees his long life. Not with indifference, the way he got used to thinking about it according to Maupassant: life is hardly ever as good or as bad as it seems to us … Not the fabric of life, a tangle of all sorts of things, days on end, each with its own task. He suddenly sees his life plain as a skeleton, resembling a poorly written biography. And now he cries over this irremediable clarity. Over life’s having

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been cold and difficult. He cries over thirty-year-old slights, over pain he does not feel, over the unquenched desire for objects he has long since stopped wanting.

For prose, this experience is insufficiently condensed, with traces of emotional rawness, the soul’s raw material that verse transforms by its own indispensable means.\(^{13}\)

In this penultimate fragment of the “Notes of 1950–1970,” everything is enigmatic, beginning with the genre. Much has been written about the combination of criticism, memoirs and imaginative prose in Ginzburg’s later texts. But this time she has also produced a kind of quasi-poetry, the non-writing of which the reader is invited to witness. This meta-poem in prose boasts a plethora of poetic effects. It resorts to:

1. imagery: “the warm breath of the world”;
2. alliteration: *proSTiu*, *kak oSTov* (lost, as befits poetry, in translation: “plain as a skeleton”);
3. near-rhymes:—*vlACHiny*—*zadACHei*—*plACHet* (lost, too); and
4. verbal play on secondary lexical meanings, a constituent feature of poetic language as defined by Ginzburg’s mentor, Yuri Tynianov; the word *vtire* can be taken to mean either “in a shooting gallery” or, more whimsically, “between dashes,” especially since this phrase is indeed surrounded by dashes, while the next word is *vt ochku*. lit. “period” (unpoetically translated here as “mark”).

In addition, as “real poetry” is wont to, the fragment refers to other texts; it treats not only of life but of literature, which it corrects and rewrites. The only explicit quote is from Guy de Maupassant, but other subtextual voices can be heard. Perhaps, Boris Pasternak: for example, compare Ginzburg’s *dushevnoe syr’e* (“the soul’s raw material”) with his *Všia dushevnaia burda* (“All the emotional junk-brew”; *Lieutenant Schmidt*), and also her *vot on plachet.* (“And now he cries …”) with Pasternak’s *Vnezapno vspomin—it vsiu ee/ I plachet vtikhomolku* (“He suddenly sees all of her/ And falls to crying softly”; “Parting”). Or maybe that *dushevnoe syr’e* comes from

\(^{13}\) *Ginzburg 1987: 333.*
Mandel’shtam’s *Poez. kogda gortan’—syra, dusha—sukha* (“I sing when my larynx is moist, my soul, dry”)? The pain that does not hurt sounds familiar, too—Akhmatovian? The reader has the uneasy feeling of being quizzed ... But all along, despite the grammatical third person, there is a certainty that the lyrical subject is Ginzburg herself, that we are reading a poem of her own: part draft, part interlinear, part auto-review.

The lyrical stage is set from the start by the meditative formula *Est’...* (“There are.”), invoking an entire tradition of such openings. The tradition begins probably with Batyushkov, and it goes by way of Lermontov (*Est’ rechi—znachen’e/ Temno il’ nictozhno* ... [“There are speeches—whose meaning/ Is obscure or insignificant ...”]), Tiutchev and many others, down to Mandelstam (*Est’ tsemmostei nezyblemaia skala* ... [“There is an unshakable scale of values ...”]) and Akhmatova (*Est’ tri epokhi u vospominanii* ... [“There are three epochs in remembering ...”]).

Characteristic of this kind of opening is also the negation that follows it: *EST’... kotorye NE...* (“THERE ARE ... [such] that DO NOT..”). Compare Akhmatova’s famous: *Est’ v blizosti liudei zavetnaia cherta,/ Ee ne pereiti vliublennosti i strasti* (“There is in human intimacy a secret boundary,/ Neither being in love nor passion can cross it.”)

In fact, negative rhetoric pervades the fragment: “do not lend themselves, it is impossible, impervious, not ... significant, not ... the way, life is hardly ever ... (ne byvaet ... ... ni ... ni ...), not the fabric, irremediable, does not feel, unquenched. insufficiently. indispensable.” This, too, is a well-known strategy—poetry likes to speak of what is not. Pushkin’s “The Talisman” and Mandelstam’s recurrent openings to the effect that “I cannot ... see/ hear/ enter ... the famous Phaedra/ the tales of Ossian/ the glass palaces ...” easily come to mind.

Ginzburg’s discourse is full of contradictions. The words “it is impossible to relate” are followed by an actual telling. The pain is not felt, but brings forth tears. The experience is declared insufficiently condensed, yet we find ourselves reading something general, almost abstract. This latter paradox is essential. On the one hand, a certain emotional outburst (“all of a sudden ...”) takes place, the person starts crying, the text reverberates with pain, cold, slights, convulsions. On the other, all this is related in a highly detached manner, as if second-, if not third-hand. Not only is an
objective third-person voice substituted for the speaker’s subjective first person; Lydia Ginzburg pointedly replaces her autobiographical female self with a conventional masculine persona: chelovek, on (“a man [in the sense of ‘person, human being’], he”).

Literature, keen on distancing itself from “raw material,” has evolved techniques of framing and point-of-view. Ginzburg’s short fragment uses manifold framing. The outer frame (the first and last paragraphs) is provided by disquisitions on prose and poetry. Enclosed inside is the picture of a person, who is at first impervious to the outside world, but is then galvanized into convulsive motion. This makes “him” peek deeper still, inside another frame, where he sees his entire “long life.” However, even there there is no “life” proper, but yet another text: a “biography”—and a “poorly written” one at that. In any event, this hopeless, indeed, “irremediable,” text triggers an emotional outburst (foreshadowed and prepared by the first “convulsive motion”). Cutting through the inner boundaries, it fuses the person’s past and present, after which follows the closing of the outer frame.

The three planes are linked not only by their direct emotional impacts but also by an elegant parallelism. The two insets portray the person’s “real-life” hardships: the innermost, the totality of his long lifetime, and the intermediate, the one convulsive moment. The outside frame echoes this with the speaker’s laments about the enormity of the artistic task and confessions of envy for the other literary mode (alas, what I’m writing is mere prose, not poetry!). But this, in turn, is just one more rhetorical figure from poetry’s repertoire.

The abundance of poetic devices does not by itself turn a text into a poem sensu stricto. According to Tynianov, everything hinges on the dominant, or the constructive principle, of the text. What, then, is the fragment’s dominant?

The tension that permeates the text is between its lyrical-poetic nature and its dry, formulaic abstractness, which smacks—especially in a piece treating intimate subjects—of pseudo-science and insensitivity. The fragment is rife with scholarly terms: “adequately, reactions, sclerotically, a certain psychological event, biography, transforms.” To be sure, this discourse mode is naturalized—“motivated,” in Formalist’s terms—by the book’s and
its author’s acknowledged scholarly status. But in the context of the fragment’s very special lyrical tenor and rhetoric, the “scholarly mode” becomes conspicuous—defamiliarized, as it were. It produces the fresh effect of an intellectual-prosaic element invading the emotional confines of poetry.

This, in turn, means that an “extra-poetic,” namely, “scholarly,” discourse finds its way into the text’s poetic atmosphere—in keeping with the general trend toward prosaization in Russian poetry (a poetry, let it be said, that did not have its seventeenth-century metaphysicals, nor flirted with intellectualism until Baratynskii and Tiutchev). The push toward prosaization gained momentum in the twentieth century, assuming two major forms, different to the point of contrast. One strategy, which can be labeled “Futurist,” aimed at a conceptual schematization of the text; the other, “Primitivist,” produced “bad, unskilled writing” (i.e., skaz and its cognates, from Zoshchenko and the Oberiu to Limonov). Khlebnikov and Brodsky managed to combine both. Ginzburg is, of course, closer to the former strategy—that of metaliterary conceptualism, but neither is she alien to the latter: a “poorly written biography” and “insufficiently condensed experience” naturally result in “inadequate” prose.

... The above is but a scholarly declaration of love, a study in envy, an attack of anxiety of influence. Lydia Ginzburg has left us no room for meta-transcending her text, which has it all: a man à la recherche du temps perdu, a character in cerca d’autore, a critic in search of a genre. All one can pretend to is the role of a grateful connoisseur of the findings, which, so un-Picasso-like, have disguised themselves as mere searchings.

Postscript

Lydia Yakovlevna read an early version of this analysis, responded, I incorporated her suggestions and she approved the text as it stands now.
Lydia Ginzburg on Tolstoy and Lermontov
(with Dostoevsky as the Distant Ground)

The story opens on a human document. In his 2001 memoir “Remembering Lydia Yakovlevna,” Sergei Bocharov, doyen of Russian Bakhtin studies, recalled a 1978 exchange of letters with Ginzburg occasioned by his review of her just-published monograph, *On Psychological Prose*. The review was very positive, although it did note that “L. Ginzburg’s theoretical thought is powerfully localized and, as it were, historically determined” (Bocharov 1978: 265). At the time, Bocharov was deep into his second decade restoring to public life Russia’s most original twentieth-century Dostoevsky scholar, Mikhail Bakhtin. Unsurprisingly, he noticed the marginality of that great novelist to Ginzburg’s study. When Dostoevsky’s name did appear it was usually as a negative example, or as a writer off the “main road” of the Russian psychological novel, for the “spiritual experience of the contemporary human being had been discovered” by Tolstoy and Marcel Proust (ibid.: 268). Such a selection of exemplars, Bocharov granted, was the “personal choice of the researcher” and could be disputed. But he then added that Ginzburg’s frequent and friendly use of the term “mechanism” would have so irritated Dostoevsky that to place the great polyphonic novelist “outside the circle” of psychological prose so defined was probably correct (ibid.: 269).

Bocharov’s review raises several questions that this essay will address. Among them are Ginzburg’s bias against Dostoevsky and toward Tolstoy (although in her usage, bias or prejudice [*predrassudok*, “pre-reason”] is an indispensable component to our healthy moral routine and need not be a term of abuse); the faintly Hegelian overtones of a *magistral’* or “main road” for the Russian psychological novel, beginning with Lermontov and peaking with Tolstoy; and finally, the widespread confusion surrounding Ginzburg’s
use of the word “mechanism”—a chilly, hyper-Formalist-sounding term that in fact connotes a wry and vulnerable reflex, embarrassingly warm to the touch. In her response to Bocharov (April 12, 1978), Ginzburg wrote that she considered his review “akin to an arrow released by a very friendly hand” (Bocharov 2001: 313). She assured him that she fully understood what Dostoevsky meant for humanity but “the fact is, the heights and depths of Dost. are not my experience. [...] he is really not my writer” (ibid.: 313). Bocharov was struck by this formulation “ne moi opyt”: not my experience. He associated it with Ginzburg’s critical preference for the “in between” genres of working notebooks, letters, memoirs, and diaries over the more impersonal objective criteria that governed so much literaturovedenie (literary scholarship)—a professional label that Bakhtin also disliked. Bocharov admired Ginzburg’s creative experimental narratives. As far as he knew, “L. Ya. never stopped writing her own prose ‘about life,’ her own ‘prose act’ [proza-postupok]” (ibid.: 313).¹

As Bocharov knew, survivors of the twentieth century’s crueller first half could be classified by small shifts in chronology. Although born only seven years after Bakhtin, Ginzburg belonged to another, wholly Soviet-trained generation. Bakhtin’s mentors had studied neoKantianism in Marburg; his thought was molded by German phenomenology with a barely concealed religious seam. Ginzburg’s mentors, in contrast, were the secular revolutionary Petrograd Formalists; she had raised herself on Vyazemsky, Tolstoy, Belinsky, Herzen, Blok, and a deep love for French literary culture from Montaigne to Proust. Her intuitive mental move was analysis; Bakhtin’s was synthesis. The two had met and conversed casually several times, late in both their lives. According to one memoir, Lydia Yakovlevna was “somewhat surprised” to learn in 1986 that a society of North American

¹ In his early essay K filosofii postupka (Toward a Philosophy of the Act) (1919–21, first published 1986), Bakhtin uses the word postupok [act, action, activity, deed; cf. German Handlung, Handeln] in the context of Kant and German phenomenology, his two primary philosophical inspirations in the 1920s; see Nikiforov, ch. 8 (“First philosophy as Philosophy of Individual postupok”): 181–214. A responsible postupok was always “a structured fragment of life in its wholeness and concreteness” (Nikiforov 2006: 191).
scholars had been founded to study Bakhtin’s work—for she considered his book on Dostoevsky to be Formalist in inspiration, his idea of carnival a passing fad, and his polyphonic method “interesting” when applied to Dostoevsky but simply wrong when “it spread to encompass the novel as a whole” (Baevskii 1994: 268). For all these differences, however, Bakhtin and Ginzburg each considered nineteenth-century literary breakthroughs of massive importance to honest human expression, and most twentieth-century attempts to improve on them unimpressive.2

The term “prose-act,” released from Bocharov’s friendly quiver, is worth a closer look. I suggest that Ginzburg associates it with a special type of vision or courage found in both the arch-Romantic Lermontov and the arch-Realist Tolstoy, two Russian prose writers squarely on her main road. It is not polyphonic, as such acts ideally are for Bakhtin. It insists that you listen to yourself and belong to yourself—your own self, not some other’s self—in the first instance, even if you must devise distancing filters to survive that commitment. Ethical evaluation sits at the center of the prose-act, but as an utterance it admits of no Absolute and refuses to rely, for coherence or authority, on an authoritative Third or the existence of God. (For this reason was Ginzburg so impatient with literary Decadence: fascinated with transgression, it was happy to indulge evil, amorality, and godlessness in a pose of ethical indifference—yet “it could not even manage without the idea of sin.”3) Ginzburg strove to acquire this courage for herself from

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2 For Bakhtin, the dialogic novel peaked with Rabelais and then again with Dostoevsky; he dismissed James Joyce’s *Ulysses* as a clever monologic experiment. In her introductory article to Ginzburg’s Fourth “Conversation about Love,” Van Buskirk notes that Ginzburg remained faithful to Tolstoy and Proust as model novelists “even in her scholarly works of the 1970s,” and criticized internal monologue in Joyce’s *Ulysses* as well as the elimination of the hero altogether in French surrealism and the *nouveau roman* (Van Buskirk 2007: 154).

3 In Ginzburg’s view, this intellectual inconsistency paved the way for Decadence to “enter into contact with dogmatic religion,” which otherwise would seem fundamentally opposed to it. See her opening argument to the third segment of Part III of *On Psychological Prose*, subtitled by the translator “On Ethical Evaluation” (Ginzburg 1977: 385 / 1991: 318). In further citations, the English version has been adjusted where necessary for emphasis, precision, or literalness.
her teachers (Yury Tynianov and Boris Eikhenbaum), from the necessity to overcome her teachers (the painful dissolution of apprentice relations, 1927–29), from the creative laboratories of literary genius (Tolstoy first of all), and from the heights and depths of her own life experience. In all four areas, she would have agreed with the final sentence of Bakhtin’s first publication from 1919 (six paragraphs): “Art and life are not one, but they must become unified in me, in the unity of my responsibility” (Bakhtin 2003: 6).

Why Tolstoy: The Prose-Act as Zakonomernost’ (“Rule-Governedness”) and Obuslovlennost’ (“Conditionedness”)

Responsibility or answerability (otvetstvennost’) is for many an uncomfortable category to apply to aesthetic creativity. When Bakhtin’s early writings on the topic were published long after his mid-career work had become famous, it altered (or should have altered) our notions of dialogism and the carnivalesque. Its impact has nevertheless been muted. Responsibility is so essential to Ginzburg’s understanding of psychological prose, however, and so closely tied to what she called life’s zakonomernost’ (its patterns, non-crisis behavior, dependence upon routine and norms), that its contours must be sketched in. “Literature has always dealt with values and evaluations (and also with anti-values),” she writes in On the Literary Hero, very much in Bakhtin’s spirit. “The ethical principle was for literature an inner principle” (Ginzburg 1979: 131). One good index of this principle for Ginzburg is her reaction to those types of artistic experimentation (such as the Decadents mentioned above) that she considered, to various degrees, “irresponsible.”

Ginzburg wrote little about Soviet-era prose. When Symbolism and Futurism were discredited in the 1930s and replaced with something called “realism,” it was, of course, official Socialist Realism that claimed the day. That doctrine flattened out and restored to binary purity the very psychology that Ginzburg had analyzed so complexly in her treatment of
nineteenth-century literary character. But the socially stable, duty-oriented aspects of this conservative turn must have interested her. Ginzburg was never an advocate of those modernist movements that flourished in (and at) Tolstoy’s wake. Their advocates tended to downgrade Tolstoy in favor of his rival Dostoevsky. And she detected in these post-Realist groups—modernist and post-modernist alike—a special, infectious type of creative irresponsibility originating in an inconsistency. (Ginzburg saw no essential difference between the modernists and those who replaced them, except that the “post-” groups were released from “obligatory novelty” and the need to be always “unprecedented” [Ginzburg 2002: 337].) In what follows I consider four statements, widely separated in time, which help illuminate by negative example the obligations of the prose-act. Together, they suggest why Ginzburg remained throughout her life so passionately devoted to Tolstoy.

The first is a brief essay, “The Avant-garde,” written by Ginzburg during the glasnost euphoria of 1988, two years before her death. It was prompted by the advent in Leningrad of that hilarious crew of drop-out behavior artists, the “Mit’ki,” whose goony antics and manifestos induced Ginzburg to look back at a century of periodic outbreaks of the rebellious, form-breaking impulse. “We are surrounded by the avant-garde,” she writes, “poets, artists, cinematographers […] exhibitions, theoretical declamations. How awkward: this avant-garde, like modernism, has been dragging on for a hundred years” (Ginzburg 2002: 337). The awkwardness she feels is not of the archaicizing, backward-looking Slavophile sort familiar to us from Alexander Solzhenitsyn. Never does she suggest that twentieth century writers should—or could—imitate the style of a Pushkin, Lermontov, Tolstoy, or Chekhov, writers who responded to conditions and pressures particular to their own era. But as Tynianov’s student, she feels comfortable analyzing more general continuities and disjunctions in literary life, and proceeds to seek norm-governed regularity (zakonomernost’) in the breakaway gesture itself.

“The avant-garde at the beginning of the [twentieth] century was a derivative of individualism,” Ginzburg observes; its motto was: “I see the world as it best suits me to see it” (Ginzburg 2002: 337). This was Romantic rebellion, recycled—but with a difference. Romantic individualism had
developed within certain self-consistent limits. An “unconditionally valuable personality” sought objectively “unconditional values” outside itself, “all the way up to the Divine” (ibid.: 337). The Decadent avant-garde destroyed this symmetrical subject-object relation; “objective values were subjected to doubt, but the value of the individual personality was not subject to dispute” (ibid.). That logical disjunction—that I have full rights to distrust all that is not “me,” while trusting unconditionally the self that does the distrusting—was in turn subjected to the unprecedented “social pressures” (mass horrors) of the twentieth century, which gradually removed all sense of intrinsic self-value. “Individualism without supra-individual values and without a self-valuable personality could only end in absurdism,” she claims, or else (as with Albert Camus) in “pleasure derived from the very process of meaningless existence” (ibid.: 338). As a secular philosophical response to the anxieties of modernity, the trajectory that Ginzburg traces so far is unexceptional. But then she takes a Tolstoyan turn. “Our avant-garde today utilizes the absurd as a way out of forms of life they’re fed up with (для ухода от надоевших форм жизни)” (ibid.: 338). Neither bestiality nor crisis but simple boredom appears to motivate the absurd. And this goes against her ethical grain.

Ginzburg’s morality was neither prudish nor conventional, but she was distrustful of chaos or sensationalism invoked as constructive principles. Several of her notes suggest that it is possible to “break out” of a tradition законоемного (in a norm-governed way, purposefully) or развратно (as one debauched or dissipated). Ginzburg defines разврат (depravity) in a curiously abstract manner. It is “a form of baring the device (no bad pun intended)—разврат is pleasure devoid of motivation” (Ginzburg 2002: 375). Her position here is intensely Tolstoyan. To avoid разврат one must command aesthetic taste, commit to a close observation of the body, and be willing to judge behavior on dry formal grounds. Here Ginzburg, expert in three centuries of French literature from La Princesse de Clèves to Proust, was fully at home. Responsible expressions of excess—and especially erotic excess—require distance and discipline. A posthumously published note from the 1920s provides an example of Ginzburg’s sure grasp of the problem. “In his time, Leo Tolstoy was shocked by the description in Une vie of the rosy body of the heroine taking a bath,” she writes. “But let us not waste time
suspecting Tolstoy of literary prudishness (*zhemannost’*)—and besides, he understood and loved Maupassant; what irritated him was the unnecessariness of the erotic detail” (ibid.: 386). The more unmediatedly voyeuristic an image or expression, the more carefully must it be motivated.

Our second statement, an entry from the 1950s-1960s opening on the phrase “The triumph of sunset,” subjects the prose-act to a sterner twentieth-century filter (*Ginzburg* 2002: 196). One faint subtext is Lermontov; another, Tolstoy. If nineteenth-century creative genius could be compared to the sun at high noon, the self-absorbed individual illuminated from within and without, then witnesses to the war-saturated twentieth century were not so naïve. Deep in her entry, Ginzburg embeds a reference to the final famous lines of an 1840 lyric by Lermontov: “... *I zhizn’, kak posmotrish’ s kholodnym vniman’em vokrug,—/ Takaia pustaia i glupaia shutka*” (And life, if one looks about with cold attention—/ is such an empty and stupid joke). Today, Ginzburg writes, “any talk of life being an empty and stupid joke is most untimely. Because our present times offer too many means for putting an end to life, both personal and general” (ibid.: 197). She intimates that “Life as a stupid joke” was a durable theme uniting the best of the Romantics with the master Realists; almost at century’s end, Leo Tolstoy was still writing masterpieces from inside this Lermontovian zone. His quasi-suicidal “Confession” was the product of a man “healthy, titled, with immortal glory, property, family [...] one would think it difficult to depart such a life.” But departure obsessed Tolstoy, who chronicled its most grotesque moments with glee: “Ivan Ilyich is insignificant, but his death is grandiose and slowed down to the maximal degree” (ibid.). What does the future hold for such private indulgence in self-pity and doubt? Except for a “deceptively new repetition” every now and then, Ginzburg in the 1950s predicts “nothing more along this path” in the twentieth century; “conversation about the vanity of life, begun so long ago, came to an end and another conversation began: how to survive and continue to live without losing the human image” (ibid.). The protagonist of this new narrative will no longer be larger and more vigorous than life (as in Tolstoy), and no longer even an individualized object of compassion (as is Akaky Akakievich from Gogol’s “Overcoat”), but simply a generalized “person” (ibid.: 199).
In both these tasks posited for the contemporary prose-act—self-constraint in expression, and a transition from the vanity of individual despair to a quest for mechanisms of survival—Ginzburg seeks inspiration from nineteenth-century precursors. The pool is rich, and the authors or characters she selects as her benchmarks each have identifying tags: Pechorin’s “demonism,” Pierre Bezukhov’s “fluidity” (tekuchest’), Aleksei Karenin’s “disjunction” (nesovpadenie) between public and private; Stavrogin’s “vulgarity” (poshlost’). In our third sample, from Chapter Two of On the Literary Hero (1979), Ginzburg revisits the realism-versus-modernism divide with just such legacy issues in mind. This time she casts the contrast not in terms of zakonomernost’ (rule-bound behavior) versus absurdism, nor of Romantic self-absorption versus the dignity of catastrophic general suffering, but more formally, in terms of the genre in which values are played out through literary personalities. Together with select moments from On Psychological Prose (1977), these pages are her most sustained defense of “Tolstoy over Dostoevsky.” Acknowledging the subordination of Tolstoy in her own century, she attempts to uncover the reasons.

Modernism needs maximalism, Ginzburg notes, both to solve its existential questions and “to free [expression] from all possible norms and prohibitions” (Ginzburg 1979: 79). In such a climate, literary tradition is often rejected as a norm—but tradition survives, productively, as stylization. Stylization tends to “deform reality,” in the formalist sense of bending material into a strange or provocative shape, sound, color, or intensity (ibid.: 81), highlighting the creativity of the artist. Realist writers are innovative in another but no less startling way. The Realist alternative to maximalist stylization is slow-moving, fine-grained, and minimalist as regards playful authorial intervention. Its site is not the device- or toolbox of the author but the consciousness of the character, which is never for a moment spared the distracting stimuli of its surroundings. Ginzburg’s word for the impact of environment on human character is obuslovlennost’ (“conditionedness”).

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4 English has no single word adequate to the Russian obuslovlennost’. Its translation by Judson Rosengrant as “conditionality” or “causal conditionality,” which loses the force of the passive construction, is to my mind confusing, and I will use my own neologism throughout, a literal rendering of the Russian participial noun.
the uninterrupted exposure of an individual to outside pressures and social influences. In her book *On Psychological Prose*, Ginzburg devotes much space to *obuslovlennost'* as a literary technique. In *On the Literary Hero* she explains why this nineteenth-century discovery of maximally fluid multi-faceted conditionedness—a refinement of determinism so subtle that almost nothing can be definitively determined through it—remains so vital for ethical life. And there she also deepens her debate with Dostoevsky, the writer who is “not her experience,” in part because he succeeds in distracting us so pleasurably from Tolstoyan truths.

Tolstoy versus Dostoevsky over the Literary Hero

Tolstoy carried realistic conditionedness to its outermost limit, into “a micro-analysis of the minute impressions and arousals” of his characters (*Ginzburg 1979: 81*). But “it was different with Dostoevsky” (ibid.). Although his “metaphysical understanding of freedom of the will” obliged him to reject determinism in all its forms, he claimed to have portrayed a “certain type of *contemporary person*” inevitable in today’s Russia, a person “determined historically and socially” (ibid.: 83). Such a paradox is typical for the idea-driven novel. Between genuine “historical preconditions (*predposylnki*) and the behavior of Dostoevsky’s hero,” Ginzburg writes, “space has been made for the idea, which he, the hero, bears and embodies” (ibid.: 83). She credits Mikhail Bakhtin and Boris Engel’gardt with investigating the “system behind a novel of ideas” (ibid.), but intimates that neither critic seems fully to appreciate the dire consequences of this system for human behavior. To be sure, Engel’gardt remarks on Dostoevsky’s transformation of a simple “thought” (*mysl’*) into an “idea” (*ideia*): whereas “thoughts” are scenarios that ripen organically inside a person, a synthesis of lived experience, “ideas” are grafted on impersonally and thus, like any template, can be borrowed. Ginzburg hastens to add that an abstract “idea,” inserted into (or extracted from) a character, does not merely take root and flower inside its host. Being so rhetorically coherent, even to the point of
polished monologue, a well worked-out idea does not invite the brake of human conversation. It can spread like a contagion and commit appallingly irresponsible (non-answerable, non-responsive) acts on the outside. “In Dostoevsky’s novels, the events—including the strangest events—are conditioned and shaped by the idea,” Ginzburg remarks (ibid.: 84). This ideational obuslovennost’ differs profoundly from its less articulate “experiential” variant familiar to us from Tolstoy, which is more personalized, more easily interruptible, embarrassed, checked, because it is inherently social and shared. Ginzburg believed that Dostoevsky’s strategy of “conditioning events by ideas rather than by thoughts” had triumphed in her time, reflected in global bloodletting on behalf of ideology.

Hovering behind this critique, I suspect, is Ginzburg’s intuitive conviction (which is also Tolstoy’s) that Bakhtin and Dostoevsky notwithstanding, the “idea as such” does not, and cannot, use a human being to live out its independent life. The idea on its own has neither life nor independence, and mere words cannot extricate it from its compromising “conditions.” It does not pass from mind to mind or from mouth to mouth as an integral—or even as a recognizable—entity that then moves on, cumulatively enriched, to enter further dialogues in other people’s mouths. At every step of the way it will be dragged down, disfigured, and eventually dissolved in the needs of its particular embodied carrier. Having inflamed that carrier, it will not quiet down or evolve into something more benign (as must our more organic, “situational” inflammations of love, laughter, jealousy or grief). In a person whose thoughts have mutated into ideas, the original thought (with its unique genesis, acute personal contexts and edges) can even fade away. But in its pure floating form, the idea survives to infect others, who will assimilate it according to their own needs or moods. The fact that Dostoevsky was a master at describing this dynamic—in full consciousness of its potential horrors—does not, it would appear, excuse his fascination with it, nor his tendency to heroicize a “play of ideas” by investing it with plot suspense and intellectual subtlety. A “person of the idea” listens in that direction first, and to other people only by accident. No responsible prose-act can issue from a place of pure ideas, for it is not answerable to experience.
Ginzburg praises Tolstoy for taking another path. In her analysis of conversation (razgovor) in On Psychological Prose, she intimates that for her, “conversation” is not the same as “dialogue.” In fact, one suspects that after Bakhtin co-opted the latter term for Dostoevsky’s novels, Ginzburg came to distrust it. Dialogue in Dostoevsky, as in its proud predecessor the Socratic dialogue, was rhetorical, full of thick paradoxical content, more appropriate for a verbal exchange of philosophical positions than for ordinary acts of communication. It was Tolstoy who first insisted on listening to how people really talked with one another, extracting out of that agitated, inarticulate, stressful mess a core of realistic material for a literary scene. Ginzburg quotes from Tolstoy’s early fragment “The History of Yesterday” his definition of society conversation (“the silliest of inventions,” in which our intelligence is crippled by our vanity or our egoism) and shows how Tolstoy makes of this wretched convention a showcase of experiential obuslovlennost’, exposing the “hidden impulses concealed in any utterance” (Ginzburg 1977: 347 / 1991: 286). Here Ginzburg is perhaps too trustful. Just as Bakhtin is predisposed to read Dostoevsky too rosily to illustrate his method, so does Ginzburg underestimate (or under-detect) Tolstoy’s sneering intonation in his descriptions of social small talk, his intolerance of all polite formulas, and his eagerness to display his disgust for others and for himself. For Ginzburg, Tolstoy is always the healthy-realistic route, committed to finding an honest way out. Analyzing the vanity and egocentrism of society conversation, Ginzburg concludes not that people are selfish, frightened, lazy, trivial, pleasure-seeking or indifferent to others (as Tolstoy implies), but rather that “in Tolstoy, a person’s word is above all a sign of his unceasing, hidden struggle for self-affirmation” (ibid.):

Page reference to the Rosengrant translation (1991) is cited after the Russian text of Opsikhologicheskoi proze (1977); in consecutive citations, page numbers are provided in that order. In almost every instance, the English version is adjusted for emphasis or literalness. Rosengrant’s translation is smooth and accurate overall, but Ginzburg’s trademark style—a combination of bulky abstract nouns (effortlessly absorbed in Russian scholarly prose) with the occasional pungent, colloquial phrase or verb—is much weakened.
At the end of *On Psychological Prose*, Ginzburg cites at length the compassionate passage from chapter 44 of Tolstoy’s novel *Resurrection*, where the narrator grants the prostitute Katyusha Maslova not only the need but also the right to respect her profession and the particular view of humanity it generates (ibid.: 433–34/358). In a Tolstoyan novel, Ginzburg would insist, every living consciousness makes sense on its own terms, as soon as we find that mesh of “linkages” (*stsepleniiia*) unifying the field. For this reason, it is as inspirational—and perhaps more inspirational—to read Ginzburg on the ethics of Tolstoyan conversation as it is to read the far more suspicious, unforgiving Tolstoy. “Such are the direct, positive forms for defending one’s position in life,” she concludes, “although indirect, negative forms are possible as well” (ibid.: 348/286).

These negative forms cluster at the Dostoevskian pole. They include “inverted forms of self-affirmation (all types of deliberate foolishness, self-abasement, hysterical outburst or laceration [*nadryv*]).” Ginzburg is not concerned with the idea behind the outburst, nor with the truth-value of that idea. Her priorities are Tolstoy’s. Since the idea is provoked by the humiliation and not the other way around, almost anything will serve: “the individual seeks a way out of his inadequacy (*ushcherbnost’*) by creating an aesthetics or an ideology out of the inadequacy” (ibid.). Ginzburg’s prime exhibit is the Underground Man, but “many of Dostoevsky’s other characters” also qualify. And then she adds (lest we overrate the significance of

6 The Russian *samoutverzhdenie* can be rendered “self-assertion” as well as “self-affirmation,” and the former, slightly more aggressive option is not, of course, as rosy.

7 See *Tolstoy 1966*: 201: “People usually imagine that a thief, a murderer, a spy, a prostitute, knowing their occupation to be wrong, must be ashamed of it. But the very opposite is true. People who have been placed by fate and by their own sins or mistakes in a certain position, however incorrect that position may be, adopt a view of life as a whole that makes their position appear to them good and respectable. In order to back up their view of life they instinctively mix only with those who accept their ideas of life and of their place in it.” Interestingly in this Tolstoyan context, Ginzburg specifically excludes prostitutes from her category of “razvrat” [debauchery], defined by her a “sensuous pleasure deprived of motivation”: “It is senseless to call a prostitute a debauched woman,” she writes in her 1925–26 notes; “in prostitution the motivation (that is, money) is foregrounded to first place” (*Ginzburg 2002*: 375).
The Kreutzer Sonata, The Devil, and other tales of obsessed murderers and madmen in Tolstoy’s later prose) that overall, “Tolstoy remained a stranger to phenomena of this kind” (ibid.). She is correct: while hot-blooded killers can be found in both great novelists, Tolstoy’s erring heroes do not, as a rule, become ideological out of a perceived inadequacy, nor do they turn their error into performance art.

Ginzburg, then, invokes Dostoevsky’s heroes largely in their unredeemed, underground phase, when they are deceiving themselves and theatrically in love with the flow of words. Except for those terrifying situations where life-choices add up to an absolute no-exit both emotionally and rationally (Ginzburg’s masterful analysis of Anna Karenina’s pre-death monologue [Ginzburg 1977: 341/1991: 280–81]), Tolstoy’s central heroes are motivated to move toward self-acceptance. Ginzburg sees the reason not in any rosy view of human nature—hardly a Tolstoyan trait—but in two interrelated facts. First, Tolstoy won’t let mere idea-words (“ideology”) achieve anything decisive for the psyche. And second, our behavior is conditioned on so many levels that our moods constantly surprise us with their illogical leaps and dips, making hope irrational even as it is always possible.8 The most reliable stabilizer for such internally generated hope is experience that is externally verifiable, that is, outside-the-personal (vnelichnyi). Such experience dwells in what Ginzburg calls “life in general” or “common life” (obshchaia zhizn’).

This life is not mystical but empirical. It spreads out laterally, toward real others, rather than rising up vertically; Ginzburg’s atheistic worldview resists any grounding of the personality in the sort of divine transcendence that Dostoevsky tolerates. In her analyses, potentially religious moments in Tolstoy are carefully contained. In places they are positively repressed. In On Psychological Prose, for example, Ginzburg claims not only that “realistic

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8 A good example of Tolstoy’s use of a “psychological anachronism”—by which Ginzburg appears to mean the illogical leap of inconsistent causal reasoning—is given at the end of On Psychological Prose: It is one thing for Leo Tolstoy to despair of life after tasting and rejecting all it had to offer, but why, Ginzburg asks, should Konstantin Levin contemplate suicide “after taking only the very first steps on the road of his new and to him fascinating family life?” (Ginzburg 1977: 417 / 1991: 344).
psychologism, both Russian and French [...] was created by minds that had rejected religion or had irrevocably lost the integrity and firmness of their belief”—this is a reasonable hypothesis—but that a quest for God was not essential for Tolstoy, and thus his best works could be read outside that task (ibid. 400–1/330). Ginzburg cannot deny that Tolstoy supplies his dying Ivan Ilyich with a “joyous suffusion of light” in his final moments. But she then confides that in fact “we all read [the story while] internally circumventing, ‘forgetting’ that harmonious end. [...] The Death of Ivan Ilyich remains for us the psychological discovery of nineteenth-century nonreligious consciousness” (ibid. 401/331). Richard Gustafson, our most eminent student of the religious Tolstoy, claims that Ginzburg’s “whole philosophical project is to rewrite Tolstoian from a modern, atheistic point of view” (Gustafson 1994: 212). He notes that Ginzburg’s first publication on Tolstoy (an essay that touched on the “mechanism of self-sacrifice” in War and Peace) appeared in 1944—the third year of the Leningrad Blockade, from within her own godless experience in that city.

Dostoevsky’s cold, elegant, “vertical” ideas that default to God versus Tolstoy’s hot battered thoughts confined to “horizontal” social reality: this arresting, somewhat schematic binary was the product of a mature Ginzburg. The origins of the polarity can be traced to experience far more “inside-the-personal.” Our final angle of vision on the ethical prose-act comes from Ginzburg’s very early diaries (1921–23), when she was scarcely out of her teens. Many of the above prejudices were already in place, but also visible is a more conflicted distribution of affection than the one Bocharov witnessed a half-century later. Ginzburg opens her entry for April 18, 1921 with the observation that the reader of Dostoevsky “walks around with a head craned up toward the sky” but “the reader of Tolstoy looks at the ground”—so “when [that reader] is suddenly shown the sky, the sky above Austerlitz, he experiences the same thing that Prince Andrei experienced” (Ginzburg 1921–23). Exposed to these Tolstoyan devices, however, the young Lydia Yakovlevna found herself deficient in empathy. Tolstoy’s creations were too present, too present-tense. “True, Tolstoy loved all his heroes,” she continues, “but I, the reader, cannot love them at all. [...] As a reader I can love Myshkin, Alyosha Karamazov, Liza from Brothers Karamazov, Liza from Demons—but toward Levin, Pierre Bezukhov, Anna Karenina,
Natasha, Princess Marya, I invariably experience the same feeling of hostile alienation and temporizing that I experience toward real-life people in general.” In a lengthy entry the following year, suffering through a hopelessly unreciprocated love attachment, Ginzburg confessed that Dostoevsky was “schematic and fantastic—but so what, all the same he is horribly truthful.” The hysteria common to his world had “monstrous rights to exist,” at least as much right as humor; and if the great novelist is anywhere at fault, it is in his “inability to be higher than his heroes, as Tolstoy always stands higher than his” (September 28, 1922). Tolstoy, she notes gratefully, “constantly establishes guilt, judges, censures or justifies. But Dostoevsky never judges [...] and that’s the whole problem. He lacks the greatness of mind and purity of taste to lead his madmen into clean water.”

Precisely that quality which Bakhtin, at the end of the decade, will so revere in Dostoevsky, the young Ginzburg considered that novelist’s worst flaw: the reluctance to rise above. The egalitarian polyphonic author walks into his own novels at eye-level with his heroes, refusing to exploit his “surplus” of vision or wisdom. She recalls the “fury” (beshenstvo) with which she first read Stavrogin’s Confession in Demons. That censored chapter displayed all Dostoevsky’s “schematicity,” the “whole unfreedom of his mind” that allowed pious elders to bow down mysteriously in front of moral filth. If Leo Tolstoy had been in that room instead of the foolish bishop Tikhon, Ginzburg notes in her diary, Stavrogin would have encountered not an ambiguous bow but “a gob of spit in his face”; “Stavrogin’s obtuseness and vulgarity (tupost’i poshlost’) would have been exposed.” But then she adds: “Precisely because Dostoevsky so disturbs and insults me is he close to me. Tolstoyan simplicity and harsh irony are accessible to me and dazzle me, but all that is somewhere off in the heights of my soul [...] in the fantastic and hysterical middle level of my soul, I am a person of Dostoevsky.”

Early in life, in her efforts to tame that “fantastic and hysterical middle level of her soul,” Ginzburg chose Tolstoy as her guide. But the relationship of obuslovlennost’ to ideas, and the responsibility of the prose-writer to “lead us out to clean water,” gradually shifted for her as the century wore on. In her youth she loved the Tolstoy who judged; later, she was drawn to the Tolstoy who doubted. What remained stable for Ginzburg (as for
Tolstoy) was the intuition that an idea never quite qualifies as an event in its own right. It is plucked up from the outside and pasted on to our behavior to rationalize (literally) a more basic, often base inner need. That need can usually be traced to some keen disappointment or interpersonal relationship that has gone awry—love, jealousy, resentment, humiliation, fear of rejection or failure. This is in fact a safeguard. Whenever an ideapretends to be a prime mover, a motivation unlinked to personal hurt, human behavior becomes abstract and cruel.

Dostoevsky also knew these truths deeply, of course. But throughout her writerly life, Ginzburg was continually struck by the time invested by Dostoevskian heroes, young and old, in abstract talk about ideas, which so limits their exposure to other environmental and behavioral conditioning. In her 1988 essay “On the Conflict of Freedom and Necessity,” Ginzburg at age eighty-six revisited that passionate debate with herself she had held at nineteen. “Dostoevsky went further than anyone,” she writes. “His novel is a novel of ideas precisely because a person with absolutely no conditionedness at all chooses an idea for himself, by which he is then conditioned in his own behavior. [But] everything changed when the task “How is one to live?” [Tolstoy’s perennial question] was replaced by “How is one to survive?” (Ginzburg 2002: 319).

“Ascetic Citizenship” and the Misery of the World-Historical Novel

What has survived of Ginzburg’s own survival prose—the product of the Blockade years and her firsthand experience of total war—was comprehensively annotated and published in Russian only in 2011, in a volume titled “Passing Characters” (Prokhodiashchie kharaktery). Early discussions of it have reinforced its resonances with Tolstoy’s War and Peace (Voina i mir). That massive nineteenth-century work, whose Russian title hovers between “War and Peace” and “War and the World” (depending on orthography, the
Lydia Ginzburg on Tolstoy and Lermontov

word mir can be rendered either way) became the inspiration for Ginzburg’s own unrealized narrative experiment Dom i mir (Home and the World). It also became the mandatory patriotic standard after 1941, invoked by Ginzburg herself in the opening pages of Notes of a Blockade Person. Her point of contact is Tolstoy’s assertion that “selfish” acts of individuals (the Moscow elite fleeing the city in 1812 just before Napoleon enters it) could take on moral, world-historical significance and perhaps even help win the war. But the debt to Tolstoy is a curious one. The catastrophic starvation, psychic breakdown, and cruelty to family described by Ginzburg from the perspective of her quasi-alter ego “Otter” in her Blockade prose could not be more at odds with the 1812 that Tolstoy describes from the perspective of Natasha Rostova (home) or Pierre Bezukhov (battle front). The profligate and self-absorbed Rostov family becomes more mature, compassionate, and public-spirited as disaster strikes. Pierre, overfed naı̈f burdened with a fortune and an excess of freedom, gets thinner, healthier, and morally cleansed through his experience as a French prisoner of war.

More Tolstoyan in spirit, perhaps, was Ginzburg’s hopeful prediction (wholly misplaced) that the Blockade would prompt a historical “shift in consciousness” in the Russian intelligentsia. At last its alienation would end; its ennui, emptiness, egotistical gestures and silence would be replaced by something akin to civic consciousness, by “ascetic citizenship” and even a “new Spartanism” (Van Buskirk 2010b). Tolstoy had written thrillingly about an elusive “spirit of the people” that only defensive war could make fully manifest; Leningrad, it would appear, was now that site. Literary devices to describe these new, desperately deprived but heroically committed worlds (1812, 1943) would take their cue not from the individual but from the situation.  

9 Alexander Herzen and Marcel Proust were also decisive influences on the Blockade notes. In the mid-1930s, Ginzburg felt keenly her own inability to write a novel (“to create a world”), calling the in-between genres of jottings and diaries derivative, the work of “impotents.” See Van Buskirk 2010a: 286 and Van Buskirk 2007: 155.

10 Regarding the maturation of the intelligentsia, one source for Ginzburg’s hopes that also highlights Tolstoy’s ambitions to rival Hegel in a parallel structure confirming “Reason in History” through very different priorities, is Leo Tolstoy, War and Peace,
It is difficult to measure the degree of irony or self-censorship in this sincere, if grotesque, tribute to *obuslovlennost*, our inescapable collective conditionedness. Andrei Zorin classifies this mental move on Ginzburg’s part as a “reconciliation with reality,” but also as an apology of sorts for the totalitarian state, the Stalinist Leviathan, which requires its citizens to endorse its own maximalist causes and “want what it wants” (Zorin 2010: 35–36). Such a position accords more generally with Hegelian thinking about history, which presumes unstoppable progress towards universal Reason and consigns those who pursue private happiness (achieved, in Hegel’s opinion, by a mere linking-together of personal situations) to the realm of history’s “victims”—the polar opposite of the world-historical hero.11 This framework was as commonplace and unmarked for Ginzburg’s Soviet-bred generation as it was highly marked and offensive to Lev Tolstoy. And thus Zorin concludes, sensibly, that “for all Ginzburg’s orientation toward Tolstoyan psychological analysis, her treatment of the mechanisms of self-sacrifice derives from presumptions belonging to an entirely different worldview” (ibid.: 47). In this resembling her elder contemporary Bakhtin, Ginzburg never lost her fascination with the Hegelian movement of history. But she could not share Tolstoy’s optimism that human nature,

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11 See Hegel 1953, Introduction by Robert S. Hartman on history’s victims and then Hegel himself in defense of the world-historical hero: “Historical personages fare badly in historical literature when served by such psychological valets [who know the habits and merely human needs of their masters and thus degrade their worth]” in Hegel, xxxvii–xxxviii and 43. Tolstoy’s caricatured portrait of Napoleon would certainly be classified by Hegel as the work of a “valet.”
once unencumbered and freed from the distortions of society, would turn
toward the light. For Ginzburg, misery was natural. Ways out of it had to
be constructed.12 Life’s virtues did not emerge spontaneously, as Rousseau’s
disciple Tolstoy so deeply desired us to believe.

Hegel was an unavoidable Soviet “condition,” then, but by tempera-
ment Ginzburg was neither idealist nor utopian. She was too skeptical
to choose the martyr’s way. As Emily Van Buskirk has shown, Ginzburg
linked her Blockade prose with her work on Herzen’s memoirs, another
“in-between genre” that refashions life-stories as a self-respecting path out of
guilt, shame, or anger (Van Buskirk 2010a: 286–89). The strategy Ginzburg
devised to this end somewhat resembled early Formalist “defamiliarization”
(ostranenie), but not as Viktor Shklovsky, in his 1916 essay “Art as Device,”
had defined the term. In that essay, Shklovsky drew on Tolstoy to show
how authors deploy ostranenie to reinvigorate the reader’s appreciation
of the world. In the process, the hero within the text is often diminished,
made foolish or caricatured. As an orthodox Formalist, Shklovsky was not
bothered by this move, since in his view the psychology of characters lay
outside the professional competence of literary study. His ostranenie is a
“mechanism”—not in Ginzburg’s sense of a “defense mechanism” for the
self, but literally as a mechanic’s tool to prod the audience awake, applied
by a clever author to a passive landscape or an inert thing.

Ginzburg’s survivalist variant on the distancing idea, which Van
Buskirk teases out of the Blockade prose, is not Tolstoy’s—nor is it Shk-
lovsky’s. She extrapolates the device from Ginzburg’s 1960s essay “On Satire
and on Analysis,” calling it samootstranenie (self-distancing) and locating it
somewhere between the first and generalized third person, that is, between

12 See Zorin 2010: 48: “Throughout her entire life Ginzburg expressed the deepest dis-
trust toward so-called ‘naturalness’ (estestvennost’) ... As she once formulated it in her
youth, ‘naturalness’ is almost the emptiest of all words that have been dreamed up
by hypocrites. In essence [she declared] all good things are not natural ... Ginzburg
retained faith in the constructive force of organizing and planning, although she was
fully aware how tightly the elemental power of violence and repression is bound up
with that force.”
Externalization is required because analysis, essential for ethical evaluation, must begin with the act that others see (or hear) us do. From within ourselves we are too fluid, or perhaps too stupefied, to pass judgment. The point, Van Buskirk argues, is not to remove pain or evade guilt (neither is within the power of narrative to accomplish) but to focus the lens (ibid.: 269), sharpen the image, get a grip on yourself from the outside. There is a certain theatrical-dramatic aspect to Ginzburg’s behavior-based ethics. But such cautious projection does not result in a full-fledged autonomous double, whether of Dostoevsky’s demon-ridden sort or of Tolstoy’s more saintly variety. Calibrating the optimal distance to facilitate physical survival is not easy. If we look in on ourselves from too far away, alienation (otchuzhděnnost’) is sure to set in, permitting us to consider our acts accidental, temporary, not ours to answer for (ibid.: 270). If we remain wholly within ourselves, however, no stable ethical evaluation of the act is possible. In *On Psychological Prose*, Ginzburg locates the best chance for survival in an alternation between introspection (which understands the act (postupok) as entirely “processes and motives”) and a view of ourselves “from outside, from the side,” where we can apply labels and “unambiguous formulas” in order to arrive at a “name” for the self and the act—exactly what others do to us daily (Ginzburg 1977: 406–7/1991: 334–35).13

*Samootstranenie* enabled Ginzburg to recreate, and thus to record, the Blockade. This mechanism is productive beyond crisis conditions, however. It strengthens, at long last, the hero: not the author (who retains some privacy shield, as Ginzburg desired) nor the readers (whose perceptive faculties are now expected to do more than merely “wake up”). If the beneficiaries of Shklovsky’s highbrow avant-garde ostranenie were author and reader, Ginzburg pinned her hopes for twentieth-century prose on a stronger, more honest and self-aware hero. Since an author conditioned by such extreme circumstances is always at risk and might not survive, she projects a hero who carries core authorial traits. The inner and outer image of this hero

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13 Those familiar with Bakhtin’s early philosophical essays will recognize a move in his thought parallel to Ginzburg’s here: the so-called “I-for-myself” (as opposed to the “I-for-others”) is not graspable as a concrete, aesthetically formed image; we are shaped by the limited views of ourselves that others cast back on us (Bakhtin 1990: 37–47).
can be confronted, worked with, exposed, shamed, explained, judged from outside by its acts. When Bocharov in 2001 referred to the “prose-acts” that Ginzburg was performing on the edges of literary scholarship, he had no access to her most painful and courageous narrative experiments. We now know that a major preoccupation of these texts is the moral efficacy, for the ordinary (non-heroic, non-“world-historical”) personality, of an everyday routine within the context of social norms—even when one’s immediate social and physical world is dissolving or freezing away.

Why do we need routine? In the absence of an Absolute (and for Ginzburg there was none: here she rejects the Hegelian prejudice), no individual person has the strength to start each day ethically from scratch. Personal habit and environmental codes provide the scaffolding (mechanisms, structures, pre-judgments) to which we can default.¹⁴ Thus social convention must not be despised; it provides regulatory norms. In a note from 1929 that she left unpublished, Ginzburg wrote: “A norm is good in that it mechanically communicates to the behavior of the average person a value that the person himself is not in any condition to acquire. […] Departure from the norm is forgiven [only] to those who replace the values in general use with individual ones” (Ginzburg 2002a: 116). But “individual norms” for behavior—an eccentric code for one person—are not easily justified. Ginzburg suggests, wryly, that only great talent, great beauty, great bravery or wealth, and finally evidence of real hardship will “force us to accept eccentricity.”¹⁵ Eccentrics are usually ludicrous. Average people who allow themselves ab- or extra-normal behavior are, on the average, failures.

¹⁴ Although Tolstoy would dismiss the value of social convention and a desire to “belong,” the thesis that good habits are necessary because the mind is not an integrated whole, our mental attention is not constant, and that contingency is more true of the world than systematic order has been perceived as an important part of Tolstoyan ethics ever since Gary Saul Morson’s work on War and Peace (see Morson 1987, chapter 7, “The Aggregate of Self”).

¹⁵ Among such persons are “great poets, very beautiful women, brave men, rich people”—but “one could lessen the scale” and also include “the woman who has been earning her own living since age 15, faced bullets, served a term in prison, worked as a servant while studying at an institute and in the course of the year caring for a dying husband and saving him from death. She too could allow herself ruined nerves and even some self-satisfaction.”
Thus Ginzburg makes the average person conditioned by social norms the starting point in her study of literary character. In a note from 1928 she wrote: “In literature, rarities don’t interest me. In the conventionalized world of eccentrics, geniuses, criminals, saints, madmen and poets (literary ones), I do not feel the stubbornness of the material, the force of resistance that is a necessary condition for aesthetic joy [...] Shades of freakishness and mess in the human material of literature do not satisfy me” (Ginzburg 2002: 60–61). What did satisfy her, and where she felt a sufficiently meaningful resistance, was in a dynamic recognizably from Alexander Herzen, the “intersection of general tendencies” in the fate (fatum) of an individual person. “A person has several fates,” she writes: “intellectual, emotional, professional, and so on; not in everyone are they tightly tied up (uviazany) with one another” (ibid.: 60). This state of non-coordination or “non-tie-up” is the good news, of course, for it improves the chance that not all of our fates will fail at once. This is one reason why we seek a community of outsiders that can look in on us and evaluate us in a nuanced way, from various perspectives. With hard work and some luck, we can add our own self-distanced image to this evaluating group. The “most important thing for a writer is to reflect the emotional charge (pafos) of a norm-governed (zakonomernoi) human fate” (ibid.: 61).

We have now arrived at Ginzburg’s variant on the struggle between freedom and necessity, which in her book On Psychological Prose is played out in the person of our two novelists. If Tolstoyan “intensity” (napriazhenie) results from the microanalysis of every possible external factor that might have an impact on behavior, creating for his characters “a field magnetized by conditionedness” (1977: 317 / 1991: 259), then Dostoevskian intensity is of an entirely different sort. It does not seek causes. It is not explanatory over time. On the contrary, it is concentrated in an absolute present, mysterious and often unmotivated. In an unpublished note from the 1930s, Ginzburg’s alternate term for a prose work by Dostoevsky was a “novel of ideological secrets” or mysteries (tainy) (Ginzburg 1932[?]). The mystery is not in the content of the idea, usually straightforward (greed, jealousy, lust, social injustice, control over mortality by committing suicide, etc.) but rather in its lack of motivation, its inability to weigh consequences or even to register them. “Dostoevsky’s hero is extraordinarily
free in his actions (postupki),” she writes (Ginzburg 1977: 319 / 1991: 260). If Tolstoy’s hero is conditioned in his daily behavior by the nature of his activities, duties, social position, then Dostoevsky’s characters, at least the vital younger ones who carry the plot, all “lack occupations: they do not work, or go to school, or manage households. [...] Raskolnikov is a student who does not study, Rogozhin is a merchant who does not trade, Kirillov is an unemployed engineer, Dmitry Karamazov a former officer, Alyosha a former novice, Ivan a man of indefinite activities. And all of them have unlimited time at their disposal for their ideological escapades (pokhozhdeniia)” (ibid.). The reader is referred to Bakhtin for more about this special idle type of novel of ideas. In Ginzburg’s view, Dostoevsky’s most memorable heroes commit prose-ideas—whereas Tolstoyan heroes, hemmed in by social expectations and tied down to routine, commit prose-acts.

Ideas, of course, can masquerade as acts—and the final portion of this essay discusses Ginzburg’s work on Mikhail Lermontov’s 1840 novel Hero of our Time, whose protagonist Grigory Pechorin proves a fascinating predecessor to both the Tolstoyan and the Dostoevskian hero. Lermontov’s hero is a collective image, “a portrait put together out of the vices of our entire generation” (Lermontov 1981: 184). Thus designed as a generalized “person,” Pechorin invites our scrutiny but not our pity or love; in this he resembles the distanced, composite protagonist that Ginzburg recommends to the twentieth century authors and readers. Paradoxically, Pechorin combines Tolstoy’s hero of spontaneous emotional flow and Dostoevsky’s hero of an idea—but consecutively, as experienced by a single person. “Passions,” Pechorin writes in his Piatigorsk diary (June 3), “are nothing other than ideas in their earliest stage of development” (ibid.: 266). When we meet Pechorin he is already at an advanced stage, calculating, destructively honest, fashionably cold, and surprisingly poor in ideas: he desires only domination over others and the right to contradict himself. (Conventionally Pechorin is viewed as a meaner, more decadent Eugene Onegin, but he is also a concentrated parody avant la lettre on the nineteenth-century novel of ideas.) For the Romantic period, domination and contradiction were neither naughty nor rebellious. They were the norm, and indeed by 1840 were already the cliché, for an advanced Byronic hero. What might have attracted the sober, disciplined, secular Ginzburg—expert in the French
Enlightenment and scholar of Vyazemsky, of the philosophically obsessed first generation of the Russian intelligentsia, of the morally incorrigible truth-seeker Lev Tolstoy—to this masterpiece of Romantic psychological prose by a poet who was restless, rude, pessimistic, politically indifferent, and hostile to philosophy?

Why Lermontov: A Double-Pronged Jubilee, the “Final Mask” of Demonism, and “In-between Storytellers”

Ginzburg’s *kandidatskaya* dissertation of 1939, supervised by Boris Eikhenbaum at Leningrad State University and published in 1940 as *Tvorcheskii put’ Lermontova* (Lermontov’s Creative Path), is a professional curiosity. Lermontov is not one of Ginzburg’s recurring favorites. Although she makes reference to him throughout a half-century of notebooks, the entries are pallid, banal, and in passing: a few lines from “Death of a Poet” (*Ginzburg 2002*: 101); Lermontov as a religious consciousness whose Demon struggled with God (ibid.: 163); Pechorin as a post-Decembrist Onegin and Grushnitsky as his vulgar derivative (ibid.: 436). Ginzburg gives Romantic irony and divided consciousness their due as conventional distancing devices, but Romantic-era prose does not prompt her to inspired analysis. It appears more as a backdrop, the anteroom to Realism, than as a laboratory still productive for us today, as are the writings of Tolstoy and Proust.

This impression is confirmed by several comments edited out of a late note that Ginzburg was preparing for publication, which addresses her path to the dissertation over forty years earlier.16 “I’m rereading Romantic

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16 Note of Nov. 9, 1980, note #48 and #49, courtesy of Emily Van Buskirk. The remarks on Romanticism occur in two paragraphs that precede the excerpt published in *Ginzburg 2002*: 302, bottom two lines beginning “Istoriko-literaturnye raboty ...” My debt to Van Buskirk overall in this essay is very great; not only did she generously share unpublished archival materials, but provided highly professional mentoring of this essay, offering meticulous feedback on two years’ worth of drafts.
Lydia Ginzburg on Tolstoy and Lermontov

literature of various sorts in connection with my foolhardy promise to write an introductory essay to an anthology on the French Romantic novella,” she jotted down in 1980. “What strikes me most of all about Romanticism, which does not transcend its own limits, is its infantilism. It can be talented, interesting, but it’s impossible to read seriously […]” In an adjacent note she added, as if in apology for taking on these literary commissions: “Lermontov too happened by chance (sluchainost’), for the Jubilee was upon us; it seemed like an appropriate occasion (sluchai) to publish a book” (note 49).

A Stalin-era literary Jubilee was indeed an occasion, which for this short-lived Romantic poet was doubled. The year 1939 was the 125th anniversary of Lermontov’s birth; 1941, the centennial of his death. For the classic writers, state commissions were established to oversee (and fund) mammoth print runs, curricular saturation of the targeted writer, commemorative postage stamps, new monuments, an updated Collected Works, and a cleansing of the image for popular consumption. (Tolstoy had been thus “cleansed” and promoted during his massive Centennial in 1928.) Jubilee celebrations were especially dense in the second half of the 1930s. The Pushkin Death centennial in 1937 stressed the fact that both Pushkin and Lermontov had met their end in duels tolerated (if not instigated) by the imperial court. It became the preferred party line that Lermontov’s death at age twenty-six had been closer to murder prompted by the tsar and his evil advisors than to a routine duel of honor.17 What is more, tucked in between these two martyred Russian poets, a campaign was mounted in 1938 to honor the 150th anniversary of Lord Byron’s birth. Byron (also cleansed) was celebrated in Russia as a rebel against bourgeois society, an adventurer

17 For background on these “poetic” jubilees on the brink of the Terror, see Powelstock 2006: 284–88. In the Lermontov debates in the Soviet press during 1938–39, the evolving “official” view increasingly stressed that the duel (during which Lermontov, who wanted to reconcile with Martynov, shot into the air) was a set-up in which Tsar Nicholas himself took an interest. Martynov, for his part, aimed directly at Lermontov’s heart and his bullet was instantly fatal. Competing hypotheses about Lermontov’s duel encouraged passionate discussion of treason and conspiracy, themes compatible with the public rhetoric of those years.
and freedom-fighter who, like Lermontov, had lost his life defiantly in a distant, exotic land.\textsuperscript{18} By the late 1930s, Lermontov’s “Byronism” was a fixed commodity. It was natural that Ginzburg, an independent scholar with uncertain employment, graduate of an ideologically discredited program with no book yet to her name, welcomed the chance to improve her visibility by publishing a dissertation on this literary classic now turned media celebrity. Indeed, if we read her 1944 essay “Neudachnik” (The Loser) as a self-distanced self-portrait, then Ginzburg (the O. or “Otter” of the essay) did break through to a sort of professional status after this book, which had appeared “in connection with a certain Jubilee.”\textsuperscript{19}

The choice of Lermontov was sensible for other reasons, several of which are provided by Stanislav Savitsky in his edition of Ginzburg’s “Prewar works” (Savitskii 2007: 66–71). Lermontov “was a good pretext for participating in the polemics over realism” since “Pushkin and Realism” as a field was already overpopulated (ibid.: 66). Then came that familiar academic consideration, the expertise of one’s thesis advisor: Eikhenbaum, as eminent for his work on Lermontov as on Tolstoy, was editing a new scholarly edition of the poet’s work in the mid-thirties—which to this day remains unsurpassed—and Ginzburg “highly valued his commentary” (ibid.: 67). After the painful break-up of the Institute seminar in 1927, student and teacher were again drawing closer in method. Eikhenbaum had come to consider his own monograph Lermontov: An Essay in Historical-Literary Evaluation (1924) his final strictly Formalist work—and since that time, his scholarship had shifted from a work-centered to a more

\textsuperscript{18} See Clark 2007. Russian Jubilees for foreign nationals were not the rule, of course, but Clark suggests that the approved cult of Byron in the late 1930s, supported by Anatoly Vinogradov’s new sanitized biography, legitimized cosmopolitanism and pan-Europeanism in poetic rebels just in time to incline the Russian people to a de facto alliance with bourgeois England against Hitler.

\textsuperscript{19} “In connection with a certain Jubilee, O. is invited, on the recommendation of an eminent specialist and together with that specialist, to be interviewed on the radio. He was being classified under a professorial rubric” (Ginzburg 2002: 160).
author-centered poetics. Savitsky also emphasizes the diffuse, four-year-long Lermontov Jubilee zone, a chaotic and politically unstable period that nevertheless offered many chances to capitalize on a state-approved personality. He does not mention what to a Russian reader would be obvious: that Lermontov’s duel and death, one hundred years old on July 27, 1941, had been eclipsed by Hitler’s invasion of the Soviet Union five weeks earlier, an event that instantly refocused the government’s centennial priorities. Lermontov was re-glossed as the “Great Russian Poet-Patriot”—and attention reoriented from the specifics of literary genre, biography, and psychology to vague formulas invoking military prowess, front-line service on Russia’s frontiers, and martyrdom on behalf of the Russian people.

Ginzburg’s book on Lermontov, composed in 1938–39, did not have to meet the post-invasion specifications for literary authors and heroes, of course. But 1940 was nevertheless a different era than the 1960s, when Ginzburg’s other books began to appear (all but her second doctorate, a study of Herzen, which had a precarious path into print in the 1950s). Any dissertation in 1940 would have had to incorporate certain mythic formulas. First, Romanticism was destined to give way to something called “Realism.” Second, the Russian intelligentsia began not in the 1840s, with Herzen and his philosophical circles (which Ginzburg knew to be...

20 For a good overview in English of Eikhenbaum’s evolving work on Lermontov, see *Any* 1994: 73–77 and 152–55. The 1924 study, a testimony to Formalist theories of genre formation and the autonomy of literary evolution, emphasized the poet’s genius at borrowing, recombining, and revitalizing Romantic formulas in new contexts. By disrupting the harmonious balance of Pushkin, Lermontov ended the Golden Age of Poetry—but in prose he was the initiator. Eikhenbaum’s work in the 1930s and 1940s reversed this formal emphasis, decoding Lermontov’s intent, exposing his moral indignation, and in general using “the poetic texts to learn about the man” (153).

21 See, for example, the unsigned and almost unreadable heroicized portrait of Lermontov in “Veliki russkii poet-patriot,” *Novy mir* 7–8 (1941), 196–202.

22 The term “Realism” or “realistic style” would have made no sense to Lermontov’s generation; it was applied to literature only in the 1850s, and in a French context (réalisme). For more on the tenacity of historical determinism applied retroactively to literary evolution in Pushkin’s era (the fictive “transition from Romanticism to Realism”), see *Gasparov* 2005: 537–41.
true), but with Pushkin’s generation of the Decembrists. Then, Belinsky’s prolix seventy-five-page “review” of Hero of Our Time (1840) was canonical in all its parts and character tags: Maksim Maksimych was a dobryi prostak (simple kindhearted fellow) of the people; Pechorin might appear to be a soblaznitel’ ot nechego delat’ (seducer out of nothing else to do) but this was a mask, at heart he hoped for more. And Pechorin overall was a zagadka (riddle) rather than a “parody” (as was Pushkin’s Onegin).23 Also canonical to mention was that Belinsky had actually met Lermontov face to face—although it was off limits to recall that during that meeting the urbane, ironic, profoundly non-philosophical Lermontov had dismissed Belinsky’s ecstatic theorizing with comic put-downs and quips. Finally, in the climate of deepening xenophobic nationalism between 1937 and 1939, it was best to underplay Lermontov’s debt to Western literary models. To the conscientious scholar this last constraint was handicap indeed, because Lermontov’s novel is a brilliant patchwork of allusions to contemporary European bestsellers of his time.24

In many ways, Ginzburg’s expertise matched up well with these prerequisites. She was a Belinsky scholar, sympathetic to his awkward persona, his earnest epistolary life, his commitment to the “Realist” mission of Russian literature—and thus better equipped than most to supplement the mandatory pieties with more nuanced insights of her own. She was

23 For these capsule epithets, see Belinsky 1959: 343, 357–59, 388–89. This enormous tract—equal parts plot summary, naïve philosophical reflection, uncannily insightful literary observation, and blather—was designed by Belinsky to guide Russian readers through the intricacies of the approaching Age of Prose.

24 As Priscilla Meyer has shown in her recent path-breaking study How the Russians Read the French, Lermontov was unparalleled among Russian prose writers of the 1830s in his creative adaptation of the French roman d’analyse. Among these novels were Chateaubriand’s René [1805], Constant’s Adolphe [1816], de Musset’s La Confession d’un enfant du siècle [1836], and George Sand’s “L’Orco” [1838]), each of which is embedded or parodied in the five interlocking stories that comprise Hero of Our Time (Meyer 2008: 35–44). French prose fiction had been excerpted and prominently reviewed in the Russian as well as the French-language press in Saint Petersburg in the 1830s. Adolphe was translated into Russian three times, once by Prince Vyazemsky (ibid.: 40). Ginzburg was completely at home in these texts.
also an accomplished specialist in French literature. All the textual back-
stories that make up the pre-history of *Hero of our Time* would have been
intimately familiar to her, in the original and at a level of sophistication far
above the ordinary for a Soviet-trained academic. Since the basic Russian
research on Lermontov’s “French connection” still enjoyed favor at the
time of Ginzburg’s dissertation (Sergei Rodzevich’s pioneering work in
1914, followed by Boris Tomashevsky and V.V. Vinogradov in the 1930s),
we can assume that this topic was not wholly under ban.

In addition to these “conditions” and professional conveniences,
Ginzburg was doubtless drawn to Lermontov because he was a genius at
psychological prose. The narrative texture of his novel, the self-distancing
chilliness and “nestedness” of story-telling in the five chapters of *Hero of
our Time*, must have struck her with its exemplary unsentimentality and
dryness. Literally every personality is seen (or told) first as a “behavior,”
as a figure who is witnessed concretely through some other character’s
eyes. The data-base is built up from the outside. Often the story-teller has
been hurt by the subject of his tale, or is himself in the process of inflicting
hurt on that subject; the humiliation described can be so acute that it
embarrasses even the reader. We feel the devastated dignity of these sub-
jects pushing outward and seeking a point of support. Yet the boundaries
between individual consciousesses are scrupulously observed. In keeping
with Romantic practice, Lermontov uses his multiple storytellers can-
nily, not only to transmit information but also to withhold it (about the
Traveling Narrator the reader knows almost nothing, not even what his
interlocutors know, as in this maddening exchange: “And who are you?”
asked Maksim Maksimych. I told him.” [*Lermontov 1981: 186*]). Except for
a short preface, no authorial persona in Lermontov’s text intervenes with
self-aggrandizing digressions or asides to the reader. Pechorin’s mordant
self-analyses—the stories he writes up in his diary—are so subtle they may
or may not be self-parodies.

These authorial skills were analyzed by Eikhenbaum in his 1924 “Forma-
list” monograph on Lermontov and must have appealed powerfully to
Ginzburg. Before *Hero of Our Time*, Eikhenbaum notes, Russian Roman-
tic prose (Vel’tman, Odoevsky, Marlinsky), as well as Lermontov’s own
uneven unfinished *Princess Ligovskaia* from 1836, exhausted the reader with
a “tiresome play with form” so predictable it had become “ naïve cliché” (naivnyi shablon) (Eikhenbaum 1924: 148 / 1981: 164). Pechorin is freed from such a capricious author. To the extent that he is free, he is responsible and burdened with memory (thus does Pechorin track his contradictory self in his diaries, trying to discern motives unclear even to himself). In 1941, Eikhenbaum was still elaborating his theses on author–hero–reader relations in Lermontov, and he continued to rework them until his death in 1959. 25 Ginzburg was surely steeped in this evolving work. If the samootstranenie of the Blockade Person—perfected four years after the dissertation defense, under conditions undreamt-of in Pechorin’s philosophy—has psychological precedent in any of the fictive characters to whom Ginzburg devoted her scholarly life, then Lermontov’s cerebral, secular, merciless Pechorin would seem at least as vital a contender as the more emotional heroes in Herzen or Tolstoy. Unlike Pierre Bezukhov or Prince Nekhliudov, Grigorii Pechorin was a man of ascetic tastes and morbid self-discipline, as indifferent to death as he was to love. Had he been trapped in the Siege of Leningrad, his diary would have been analytical and ice-cold. Neither erotic nor family love would have warmed it, and no eloquent larger context (such as the Masonic brotherhood that saved Pierre, or the Gospels that inspired Nekhliudov) would have bestowed meaning on its events.

Much could have attracted Ginzburg to this writer and hero, then, however “infantile” Romantic fiction struck her at a riper age. But overall, Ginzburg did not explore the complexities of Hero of Our Time. It is worth asking why. In one unpublished note from 1933 unearthed by Van Buskirk, Ginzburg wrote: “Lermontov is distinguished by his monotony and by the childish naivety of his thought” (Ginzburg 1933)—a view that

25 See Eikhenbaum 1941: 107. In Eikhenbaum’s view, Pechorin is designed to be perceived by the reader without irony, and the author himself (such as he is present) comes to know his creation only gradually as the text proceeds. “This is an absolutely new interrelationship between author and hero, worked out, of course, in a principled way, prompted by the decision to repudiate not only lyrical ‘confessions’ from the author but even the position, say, that was established in ‘Sashka’ [a satire by Aleksandr Polezhaev] on the model of Eugene Onegin.” Eikhenbaum’s final lengthy study on Lermontov (1958) was published posthumously (1961).
might apply to Lermontov’s pellucid lyrics but certainly not to the longer poems or the extraordinary late prose. Savitsky notes that Ginzburg associated Lermontov with her life-long opponents, the Symbolists and Decadents, who (in her view) were narrow, naïve, irresponsible, apolitical, and wholly unlike Pushkin or Vyazemsky. When she compares Lermontov to the older, nobler Pushkin, it is always to the younger poet’s disadvantage. Ginzburg is astonished that a writer conditioned by so much triviality in his daily routine, whose biography suggests an ambitious, passionate, vain and prideful personality, could have produced such a masterpiece. “Oh, those empty letters!,” she writes. “Endless female cousins, interests endlessly accessible to female cousins. And not one thought—even by accident. He must have been monstrously talented to have written ‘Princess Mary’ with all this emptiness” (cited in Savitsky 2007: 70).

Savitsky cryptically suggests that even with such reservations about her subject, Ginzburg must have found this great Russian Romantic poet compelling: “in Lermontov she recognized her own experience” (ibid.: 71). Whether or not a human document, Ginzburg’s book made little stir in academic circles. It is not mentioned in the survey of dozens of Jubilee works on Lermontov published in the journal Novyi mir in the summer

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26 Savitsky 2007: 69. He excerpts from an unpublished 1933 note in which Ginzburg describes Lermontov as typical of the “generation raised by Nicholas I, the purest product of a bureaucratic regime—people with no feeling for social responsibility” (ibid.: 70).

27 Van Buskirk’s full transcript of this 1933 note on Lermontov, plus a revision of it, provides little elaboration. “Lermontov pleased his contemporaries by the stability of his theme. Crudely put, he was always mournful, whereas Pushkin was mournful in his elegies, celebratory in his odes, and joked in his epistles. Pushkin also had his sadness prescribed by genre (U Pushkina byla esche zhanovalia pechal’).” In the revised note, conditioning becomes more severe: “The model person of declining social groups [Pechorin is meant] is usually composed out of traits of negative value ... thus is the exemplary snob of the Decadents brought together with the exemplary Byronic hero of the 1830s. In both cases the interaction of literature and existence [bytia; the original note had byt, everyday life] is powerful and uninterrupted” (Ginzburg 1933).
of 1941. Of course the Ginzburg we know today, official and unofficial, cannot fairly be sought in the template of a Stalin-era dissertation. Still, it is fair (as well as very interesting) to seek her presence in this study—or at least provocative traces of it. Sustained intellectual work always reflects its author’s value system, perhaps more objectively when not swayed by first-order passions.

Ginzburg opens Lermontov’s Creative Path as would a post-Formalist Eikhenbaum, on the “literary environment” (in Russian literaturnyi byt, “everyday literary life”). What were the conditions and pressures that faced any Russian writer in the 1830s? Which works were snapped up, which passed over? The skepticism of Voltaire was no longer in vogue. This decade demanded the gross and the grandiose: crude adventures in prose, “world philosophy in verse,” the shocking effects of the French école frénétique (Ginzburg 1940: 14). Accustomed to the rich confessional trove of the 1840s, Ginzburg is dissatisfied with the paucity of “in between genres” that surround Lermontov in the 1830s: vacuous letters, trivial memoirs, those endless female cousins. In keeping with her thesis on Romantic construction of character, one mask replaces another for both author and hero, the most durable mask being the Byronic. In the spirit of Zhirmunsky’s 1924 work on Pushkin and Byron—and perhaps also as a respectful nod to the English poet’s concurrent Russian Jubilee—Ginzburg organizes Lermontov’s “creative path” around this legacy. Byron’s death in 1824 had unleashed a decade of ungifted Russian imitators and epigones of the British poet. But the precocious, fastidious Lermontov was not of their number. Drawing on a cooler, more disciplined French Byronism, brought to fruition by the great Polish Romantic and friend of Pushkin Adam Mickiewicz, Lermon toggle acquired a “Russian High Romanticism” (ibid.: 34), metaphysical in reach and neoclassical in purity. His next step, barely begun, was to “critically re-evaluate” even that Byronic legacy. This Hegelian progression, so

28 See Ivanov 1941. In fairness to Ginzburg, even were she prominent enough to be reviewed, the works discussed are not in her line: textological discoveries (a new letter or memoir), more damning evidence of a rigged duel, or timely ideological themes by powerful academics (e.g., Political motifs in the work of Lermontov [1939], by the party critic Valerian Kirpotin, who headed the 1941 Lermontov Jubilee Commission).
promising for Russian prose, was cut short by Lermontov’s death, although it had brought him around to Herzen’s skeptical, post-Romantic position at the beginning of the 1840s.

As she does Pushkin earlier and Tolstoy later, Ginzburg portrays Lermontov as a rebel who resisted the dominant ideology of his time, Romanticism, in favor of the more cerebral and norm-governed art of the eighteenth century. Into this framework she fits her mandatory positive discussion of Belinsky’s review of *Hero of our Time*. Belinsky had never been strong on the technicalities of literary form. He inevitably assimilated his subject matter to his own depressions and ecstasies. But Ginzburg displays Belinsky’s intuitive, naïvely untutored judgment in its best possible light. In the 1830s, she reminds us, the Russian poetic genre-system was in disarray, caught between the neoclassical Pushkin and the just-emerging Moscow philosophical poets (ibid.: 99). Many were reading Lermontov as an “elegiac” poet. Belinsky disagreed, insisting that even the childish poems reflect a mature, already tragic worldview.29 Although Belinsky too was “ironic about the elegiac lamentations of eighteen-year-old poets,” Ginzburg writes, “he took the demonism of Lermontov’s youthful works with complete seriousness” (ibid.). It is this Belinskian conviction that dominates her approach to Pechorin.

To open her Chapter Six, on *Hero of Our Time*, Ginzburg notes the major French prototypes for Lermontov’s novel: Chateaubriand, Constant, de Musset (ibid.: 160–62). She pursues none in detail, however, noting only that the atmosphere of the novel is “closest of all to Byron, even though Byron did not write a novel in prose” (ibid.: 164). Nor does she break with the Russian academic-textological tradition of simply noting that a literary borrowing has occurred without suggesting why, through what filters, or to what end the borrowed item enters its new context.30 Instead, prudently

29 “This is no *Ruslan and Liudmila*,” Belinsky had insisted to Botkin in 1842, there is nothing here about “light-winged intoxication or wine or the caprices of Amour,” but instead we have a “leonine nature,” a “terrible and powerful spirit” (cited in *Ginzburg 1840: 100*).

30 For a discussion of the narrowed parameters of Russian scholarship in the absence of such a poetics of the borrower, see *Meyer 2008: 37*. 
for 1939, she pursues questions of influence closer to home. Only two of these Russian themes will be traced. The first is Romantic, the evolution of Pechorin’s “demonism.” The second is a part of the Realist project as Ginzburg defined it: the conquest of an “inner position” on the hero. Both satisfy, after a fashion, the Soviet mandate to progress from imitations of European Romanticism toward some loosely-defined (but morally explicit and nationally distinctive, thus Russian) “realism.” Both the Romantic and Realistic contribute to a variant of psychological self-distancing that Ginzburg would devise for others and then refine for her own prose during the life-and-death years of the Leningrad Blockade.

To begin with Romantic demonism. In her essay “Affirmation and Negation” from the black year 1943, Ginzburg notes that “thoroughgoing negation” (сползное отрицание) had never been typical for Russian literature. Affirmation, however, took many tortured forms. Among the great writers, Lermontov is labeled “one of the most religious consciousnesses,” because his “demon struggles with God” directly (Ginzburg 2002: 163). The sacred extreme of this struggle never interested Ginzburg (nor is she good at it); even were it politic in the 1930s to discuss Lermontov’s work as a theodicy, this is not her theme. But she is nuanced in her discussion of the darker pole. In Lermontov’s narrative poem “The Demon,” she is careful to distinguish demonism (“the meaninglessness and emptiness of self-sufficing freedom”) from satanism (“the justification and preaching of evil as such”) (Ginzburg 1940: 41). This distinction prefigures her bifurcated judgment on the avant-garde forty years later. Demonism is tragic, cerebral, philosophical, and thus capable of evolution; since its vice is too much freedom, it craves obstacles, зако́номерность, rule-governance. Satanism is simply разврат: unmotivated physical and mental debauchery, sensual maximalism for its own sake. Lermontov’s Demon is the first type, deadlocked. He is unhappy; he understands the emptiness of unchallenged power and seeks a way out. But as a psychological type he is static. Although he can desire and seduce the Good (Tamara), when he fails to win her he can only return unchanged—and further debauched—to his prior wretched state. “Compared with ‘The Demon,’” Ginzburg writes, “the relationship between ideas of good and evil in Hero of Our Time is immensely more complex and psychological” (ibid.: 45). Innocent, good, foolish people
continue to suffer within the demonic hero’s radius, of course; they are drawn there and to some extent desire the game. This game has rules, by which the demonic hero constantly tests himself and others. Whereas the Demon in the poem merely rages and despairs, however, Pechorin is (or suggests in his diary that he should be) responsible. As a psychological type he is not static. Deadlocked, yes, but until his death the reader is curious—and Pechorin himself is curious—about possible breakthroughs that would show him the sense of his life. Pechorin is “the last link in the chain of evolution of Lermontov’s demons” (ibid.: 164), a many-layered being who hopes in vain for a situation so dire that it would force the final mask off his face.

Whatever Pechorin might be as a hero of his time, he is not, and cannot be, “sincere.” In On Psychological Prose, Ginzburg notes that the “non-coincidence” between a character’s behavior and his uttered words, his verbal mask, was already dominant in Hero of our Time, “the immediate predecessor of the Russian psychological novel” (Ginzburg 1977: 333 / 1991: 274). Strictly speaking, this non-coincidence was not a lie—as it would later be judged—but still a succession of masks. Ginzburg places Pechorin as hero somewhere between the Romantic stereotype, the Romantic-ironic parody of that stereotype, and the massive sea change of a Tolstoyan consciousness. Pechorin’s “mask of contemptuous coldness,” combined with a “demonism moderated by the habits of polite society,” was a Byronic commonplace. More unusual was Pechorin’s ability to ridicule his own “mundane demonism”—with resignation when observed in himself, “with aversion when reflected in the crooked mirror of Grushnitsky” (ibid.: 333/274). This image of a mundane demonism, the “devil in everyday life” (demon v bytu) who wonders at his own meaningless freedom, figures prominently in the Lermontov book, “not as a symbol, not as a Byronic ideal, but as a fact of Russian life” (Ginzburg 1940: 164).

In Ginzburg’s typology, then, Pechorin is a strange, opaque literary hero, already beyond Romanticism but still too conventionally constructed to qualify as Realistic. We might link him with two later psychological-social types that caused Ginzburg deep anxiety (or rage), each of whom she reconfigured in her own way: Dostoevsky’s Stavrogin from Demons (less caricatured than Ivan Karamazov’s petty devil and thus for Ginzburg more
dangerous) and Tolstoy’s Nekhlyudov from Resurrection. The Dostoevskian hero-type, seductively handsome and well-spoken in the Pechorin mode, is carrier for the melodramatic “confession,” an autobiographical display that arouses those who hear it to sympathy, infatuation, or disgust. We saw how the nineteen-year-old Ginzburg reacted to such set-ups, and how she wished Tolstoy had been in the room to spit in Stavrogin’s face. The Tolstoyan hero-type, analyzed at length at the end of On Psychological Prose, is more difficult to grasp, but more instructive for defining the lens that Ginzburg turns on Tolstoy—and, at a distance, on herself.

Tolstoy’s most ambivalent autobiographical-serial hero is Prince Dmitry Nekhlyudov, the “Repentant Gentry of Our Time” who bears the burden of all that Tolstoy most despised, and most trusted, about his own person. Ginzburg dislikes him intensely. She notes only his failures and lapses, not the brave fact of his striving, much of which he turns into genuine good deeds. What Nekhlyudov confesses in good faith, she takes for hypocrisy; if he makes one moral slip or furtively enjoys one forsworn comfort, he becomes the mechanism allowing us to “adapt evil to a norm of behavior approved by the milieu close to power” (Ginzburg 1977: 436 / 1991: 360–61). Of course Tolstoy ridicules his hero too, parodying the repentant aristocrat in himself while admiring his quest. But Ginzburg’s brilliant dissection of Nekhlyudov as simultaneously “a truth-seeker, an egoist, and an intellectual egoist, accustomed to skimming the cream from his own spiritual sufferings” (ibid.: 439/363) is exceptionally harsh by any standard most of us would apply to Tolstoy’s guilt-stricken Prince who turns pauper to serve convicts.

In her discussion of the difficulties we have extracting “positive heroes” from Tolstoy’s great novels, Ginzburg acutely sees the injustice of Tolstoy’s constructions: what you do in your life need not add up to what you are in the world of the novel: “Pierre Bezukhov led a debauched life in his youth, but that doesn’t hinder him from being a positive hero. Pierre is ‘likeable’. But Nekhlyudov (from Resurrection) is not likeable, he’s even unpleasant, but that also doesn’t hinder him from filling the place that he occupies in the novel, which is to be a positive Tolstoyan hero” (Ginzburg 1977: 414–15 / 1991: 342).
Pechorin and Nekhlyudov are a fascinating contrastive pair. Although both gradually divest themselves of home and goods, they end very differently. Pechorin doubts, obsessively records his doubts in his diaries, discards the diaries, and dies. Nekhlyudov, having escaped his “success” and failed everywhere, is launched, without the support of society or love, into a new life. And here the real problem emerges: Nekhlyudov’s budding spirituality, which in Ginzburg’s view appears to be a worse and weaker trait than Pechorin’s skeptical, diary-keeping Byronism. She resists Tolstoy’s religiosity with a missionary’s zeal. She must work hard to be fair to Resurrection, a “frankly tendentious” novel ending on extensive quotes from the Gospel; the conclusion of that novel must have appalled her. In the culminating moments of any experience or life, Ginzburg held, neither Holy Writ nor the necessity of God should come to the rescue. Pechorin, the “last link” in Lermontov’s Romantic-demonic chain, was a more honest resolution than was the discovery of doctrinal faith. Devoid of hope, he insists on the adequacy of his own resources, even though at every point when he must pass judgment, he “doesn’t know.” In a celebrated passage from “The Fatalist,” Pechorin remarks that his generation can no longer make great sacrifices for humanity or even for personal happiness; our ancestors “plunged from one error to another” while we “move indifferently from doubt to doubt” (Lermontov 1981: 310). This is the empty, honorable endpoint of the demon.

But even this is not Pechorin’s final word. It too is a pose, a rhetorical display. Demonism and display are overcome, albeit temporarily, by an even more self-aware skepticism. “How could one not be a fatalist after this [Vulich’s ‘accidental’ death followed by his own survival]?” Pechorin asks. And then he adds: “But then again, who knows for sure whether or not one is convinced of something? How often what we take for conviction is only the deception of our senses or a misfire of reason (obman chuvstv ili promakh rassudka)” (ibid.: 313). This secular hero, who acknowledges the constant assaults mounted by uncontrollable feelings and reason on our value-bearing self, would appeal to Ginzburg as a direct predecessor of the Tolstoyan personality she understands best—whereas Nekhlyudov, Tolstoy’s own tormented alter-ego, would not.
At one point Ginzburg makes this link explicit. “Passionate quarrels flared up around Pechorin,” she writes (Ginzburg 1940: 177). “Is Pechorin a positive or a negative hero? What is Pechorin—an ideal, or a satire on a generation?” Lermontov’s readers were still seeking “the ideal, symbolic functions of Byronic heroes” (ibid.: 177). But such a model was already inappropriate to a Hero of Our Time. “For Lermontov,” Ginzburg surmised, “it was almost as difficult to answer the question whether Pechorin was good or bad, as it would have been for Tolstoy to answer the question: was, say, Vronsky good or bad” (ibid.).

Our second and final theme—author–hero–reader relations in Hero of our Time and reliable access to the inner person—is something of a thought experiment, designed to bring Ginzburg’s ideas about psychological narrative into Bakhtin’s zone. Lermontov structures his novel as a creeping assault on Pechorin’s image. First he is the third-person “hero” of an oral tale; then he is encountered visually in the second person (by both reader and Traveling Narrator); finally we read his own account of his first-person self in his diary. Ginzburg starts here too. Pechorin as psychological hero is an elaborate construct, the intersection of “in-between storytellers” (promezhutochnye rasskazchiki) (ibid.: 166). Although these storytellers are variants on precise French models (Meyer 2008: 35), Ginzburg does not focus on that fact in her analyses; instead, she follows her own “native” interest in direct discourse, mechanisms of conversation, and overlapping or embedded voice registers. What Bakhtin will later call a “character zone” or “voice zone” Ginzburg here calls a “speech style” (rechevoi stil’) (Ginzburg 1940: 165).

The case of Vronsky is well chosen, for he, like Pechorin, is a “man of honor.” But he lives in a novel, Anna Karenina, which no longer respects this code. Ginzburg sees Vronsky as the product of a conventionalized caste, the imperial Russian military, “a man of strict responsibility and limited but precise generosity” (Ginzburg 1977: 415 / 1991: 342); see also her discussion of Vronsky and his skill at decoding societal obligations (348/422). In On Psychological Prose, Pechorin is mentioned as one prototype for Prince Andrei Bolkonsky, who, anachronistically for the Napoleonic era, has “an element of Pechorin in him (Pechorin too is choked with ‘boundless strength’)” (Ginzburg 1977: 349 / 1991: 288).
Everything we know in *Hero of Our Time* is written or told by an embodied character. Not only each hero, but each episode is built up from the outside, out of the speech-styles of others. None of these styles is objectively verifiable and each is driven by its own needs and perspectives. Since language is a social construct, this character-building is also inherently social and subject to societal conditioning (ibid.: 174). Every moment of consciousness is looked at separately “from the side” (*so storony*), from someone else’s perspective (*Ginzburg 1940: 173*). Ginzburg documents the leakage of one diction into another (characters speaking out of their competence) in cases where one person, quoting a second person about a third in the presence of a fourth, mixes personal interpretation with quasi- or botched quotation and self-deluding recollection (ibid.: 165–66). No omniscient author exists who can cut through this accumulating story-mass. Only in the sequencing of the tales is the author’s mechanical presence felt.

Throughout her study, with some stubbornness, Ginzburg resists Belinsky’s naïve, party-approved “autobiographism”: his collapse of Pechorin into the historical Lermontov and then the reduction of both to a “tragic protesting consciousness” that interacts, in Hegelian fashion, with its environment (*Ginzburg 1940: 184, 178*). Pechorin was certainly alienated—but this alienation, Ginzburg insists, was already a desperate cliché. “It took some boldness,” Ginzburg notes, “for Lermontov to call this much-ridiculed, discredited type a ‘hero of our time’ in 1839” (ibid.: 170). Only Lermontov’s method of presentation and validation was new. We sense Pechorin as a real and slippery living being, not only because we get to know him as a composite of others’ outside views (as we all “get to know” the human world, a device that Tolstoy will perfect in his novels), but also because he immediately doubts his own masks. It is Lermontov’s thorough command of these literary devices, and not (as Belinsky suggests) his personal despair or politically-motivated anger, that enables him to “overcome” Byronism.

In Russian scholarship on European Romanticism, “Byronism” was both a mandatory staple and a handicap in the 1930s. Progressive writers were required to revere it—and then promptly to outgrow it. In her Lermontov book, Ginzburg pays lip service to the socio-political dimension of the Byronic poet as an entitled, self-promoting author. But *Hero of Our Time* is post-Byronic, Ginzburg insists, because it lacks the “basic condition
for ironic self-perception and self-reflection: the author’s ‘I’ duplicated in the hero” (ibid.: 165). Instead, “every measure is taken to hide the author” (ibid.). She holds fast to this position, using Lermontov as rallying-point for the right of an author to build out, but not identify wholly with, empirical experience. “Subjectivity and [empirical] autobiographism may coincide (as example, in Byron), but by no means must they coincide at all costs,” she insists (ibid.: 178). She hints that Romantic poetics, with its deification of the lyrical “I,” is itself an obstacle to acts of separation and authorial privacy; in the Realist period, matters would be easier. Tolstoy constantly made use of autobiographical material, she notes, but “the objectivity of the Tolstoyan method is so obvious that it would never occur to people to seek correlations of the same order as they try to establish between Lermontov and Pechorin” (ibid.). Her dislike of Nekhlyudov hovers defensively behind this comment. In these ruminations, I suggest, we see a mind seeking adequate models for the powerful device of samootstranenie, self-distancing that encourages moral work rather than anaesthetizes it.

What is the “riddle of Pechorin”? Pechorin himself does not have a key to it. Personality in the Romantic period is too fragmented, porous, dependent on its repertory of social masks. In a Pechorin-type hero, Ginzburg might have been moving toward Lermontov’s version of the prose-act: those intersections, usually late in the novel and often withheld from the hero himself, where enough outside perspectives have accumulated to allow readers suddenly to glimpse a character sincerely, without a mask. There are several such breathtaking moments in Hero of Our Time, the most astonishing being Grushnitsky before his death, driven finally to honesty by Pechorin’s relentless and courageous testing of his honor. Grushnitsky begins as a “vulgar variant” (vul’garnaia raznovidnost’) on Pechorin, available to us only via the latter’s diary (Ginzburg 2002: 436). His vanity in the matter of Princess Mary is mercilessly exposed through Pechorin’s predatory eye. Grushnitsky ends at the edge of a cliff, humiliated for having agreed to a rigged duel, forced by Pechorin to admit every slander and lie in which his injured pride had taken refuge. Pechorin risks his life to become author of Grushnitsky’s coming-to-terms with the truth of his own behavior. In keeping with the codes of his era, Pechorin could then take that life. The story is lifted out of the realm of free or infinite Romantic irony and enters the
realm of necessity—and at this point a Realist hero, a finite hero without a mask, becomes possible. As Emily Van Buskirk paraphrases this deeply Tolstoyan dynamic in her discussion of the blockade prose, “Ginzburg had no taste for authors whose heroes possessed an unreal dose of freedom” (Van Buskirk 2008: 109).

Tolstoy was no friend to Romantic poetry, or to Romanticism in general. He was also, as Ginzburg points out, the first great Russian writer not to pass through the Romantic school (Ginzburg 1977: 301–2 / 1991: 246). It is thus of some interest that Tolstoy felt a professional, and even a spiritual, kinship with Lermontov. In 1883, Tolstoy remarked that “Turgenev is a man of letters (literator), Pushkin was one too [...] [but] Lermontov and I are not men of letters.”

This curious comment might refer to the young poet’s precocious disgust for salon culture and the tsarist court, fully shared by Tolstoy (who, shamefully for him, had to mature into such rebellion, whereas Lermontov appears to have been born with it). Or perhaps it refers to the fact that both writers served as lieutenants in the Imperial army, engaging in frontline action while learning their writerly craft on the side. It might be linked to the ample experience of both men living outside urban centers and their talent for describing nature in categories of the Sublime, beyond the corruptions of civilization. But it could refer also to Lermontov’s keen gift for arranging a story so that it “tells itself” naturally, without didacticism or exhibitionism, peaking at those moments where all masks fall off and the truth needs no narrator. Tolstoy, periodically dismayed by his own interventionist voice, thirsted for such efficient moments throughout his life.

I conclude on two paradoxes. Ginzburg is famous for loving Tolstoy. She is less well known for her divided passions about Dostoevsky, and known almost not at all for her readings of Lermontov. Inside each of these three great fictive nineteenth-century worlds, the heroes who most interest her are the ones most subtly “conditioned” by their environments—yet

33 Tolstoy made the comment in August 1883; see G. Rusanov, “Poezdka v Yasnuui Polyanu (24–25 avgusta 1883)” in Tolstovskii ezhegodnik, 1912, p. 69, as cited in Leusheva 1964: 413.
they are usually the rebels, the loners, the protesters against all tyrannies of environment, the excessively self-critical personalities unable to fit into norm-governed routines where others, less alert or gifted, appear to relax and even flourish. Here Tolstoy, the man and the writer, serves as the model. Like no other he acknowledged the force of convention and resisted it.34 He compulsively exposed the norms of upper-class life as a trivial game, but just as compulsively did he portray how, once drawn into play, “nothing was more important for the players than the rules of the game” (ibid.: 422/348). Social life, the human being forced to satisfy primary needs in a social environment, was for Tolstoy the start of everything. “The degree of pressure the environment exerted was determined by what it could give to those living by its laws, and what it could take away. That was reality” (ibid.: 422/348). And reality was not a game.

The second paradox is, as Ginzburg would say with a wry smile, “empirical-autobiographical.” In 2006, the Russian journal Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie published a roundtable discussion devoted to the “life-creativity” (zhiznetvorchestvo) of the semiotician Yuri Lotman (1922–93) and of Lydia Ginzburg, with the subtitle: “cultural codes, social strategies, and literary scenarios” (NLO 2006: 93). Early in the exchange, Andrei Zorin addressed the issue of professional integration. He pointed out that the relations between Lotman and Ginzburg, for all their mutual respect, were nevertheless “somewhat distanced and guarded” (ibid.: 97). “And here is an exceptionally interesting paradox,” Zorin continues. “On the social plane, Lotman was an extremely effective person, who was able to create and sustain one of the most successful institutes active under Soviet conditions. But in his scholarly work he consistently avoided the social sciences. His project, from the very beginning, was limited to the cultural sphere” (ibid.). He preferred to study behavior without the scholarly apparatus of sociology, rituals without invoking anthropology, and personality without

34 “Tolstoy was endowed with an extremely acute sense of the conventional [uslovnoe],” Ginzburg writes in On Psychological Prose. “He tracked down conventionality everywhere, dragging it to the surface wherever it was concealed, and destroying all its customary forms in order to do so” (Ginzburg 1977: 421–22/1991: 347).
the professional input of psychology. “With Ginzburg the starting point was completely different—but her interest in social analysis remained the reverse side of her own marginalized status in society, the position of a completely isolated writer” (ibid.: 98).

The observation rings true. Ginzburg celebrated such concepts as obshchaia zhizn’ (life in general, common life) and “conditionedness” for literary heroes, and as a literary historian she was on intimate terms with the workings of Russian nineteenth-century study circles. But “if we turn to Ginzburg’s texts,” Zorin remarks, “we practically never find the word sotrudnichestvo, collaboration.” Not only was there was no institutional (and often no professional) buffer, but in the prime of her working years, no evidence even of unofficial working groups or circles, of which Russian academic life has so rich a tradition.

Zorin suggests three possible reasons for this radical isolation of Ginzburg’s writing voice: her marginal position as “a Jew in an anti-Semitic country, a lesbian in a homophobic society, and an independent writer in a totalitarian state” (ibid.: 98). All are persuasive reasons, but he still finds the model paradoxical. If we judge Ginzburg not by her theoretical longings but by her own life-norms, an individual “perceives collective values, interiorizes them, but cannot make use of them for constructive interaction with others” (ibid.). Zorin’s observation recalls a comment made early in this essay: that in Ginzburg’s non-polyphonic prose-act, one “belongs to oneself in the first instance.” What does that entail? A respect for outside norms together with an irremediable outsiderliness; the right (or necessity) of confirming one’s own prejudices alongside the right to remain imperious to the prejudices of others.35 Remaining impervious (what Bakhtin calls bezliubost’ or “lovelessness” [Bakhtin 1993: 64]) is the core of Ginzburg’s defense “mechanism,” so warm to the touch. And here we return to Sergei Bocharov’s memoir of Lydia Yakovlevna with which this essay began.

For all that Bocharov had considered On Psychological Prose “powerfully localized” and “historically determined,” Ginzburg herself gave him the impression of a critic-thinker somehow outside time and space.

35 I thank Emily Van Buskirk for this summary thought.
First seriously published only in her seventies and active into her eighties, “she had no civilian old age” (Bocharov 2001: 308). But “if one reads her notes from the 1920s,” Bocharov adds, “in a certain sense it seems that she was never young either” (ibid.: 308). For all the deprivation and terror in between, no huge distance separates Ginzburg of the 1920s from Ginzburg of the 1970s–1980s. Items in space could also float without gravity around her writing desk. In her prose-acts, spatial hierarchies were not decisive. Bocharov remarks that Ginzburg’s anecdotal cameos and scraps of conversation featuring Akhmatova, Blok, Mayakovsky, Shklovsky, Eikhenbaum, never suggested a younger person “looking up.” When Bocharov queried Ginzburg on this point, she replied that in her epoch they “related to the ‘masters’—and to great people in general—without servility” (ibid.: 308). Survival in such a lonely but self-respecting chronotope would become one definition of heroism for the rest of the Soviet twentieth century. That fact too must have drawn Ginzburg irresistibly to Lermontov and Tolstoy.
Ginzburg as Psychologist¹

The formula “X as psychologist” was used widely with respect to writers in literary-historical scholarship during the second half of the nineteenth century. Chekhov’s Nikitin, the teacher of literature in the eponymous story, written in 1889, assigned his students the essay topic “Pushkin as psychologist,” whereupon the well-educated young lady Varia Shelestova attempted to prove to him that Dostoevsky and Saltykov-Shchedrin were psychologists, but in no way could Pushkin be so considered. According to her definition, which reflected the academic consensus even if it was a mild parody, “a psychologist is someone who describes the depths of the human soul” (Chekhov 1977: 314–15).

Ginzburg’s is a different case. She aimed not only to reveal the inner world of her characters, but also to uncover the historical laws and mechanisms that governed their feelings and behavior, and to work out her own original categorial apparatus in order to understand and describe these mechanisms. In one of her sketches from 1934 she wrote about the “uniformity” of the tasks of the “novelist” and of the historian. She continued: “Not only do I not accept in ‘novelistic’ characterization a method inappropriate for history; but—and this is more eccentric—I do not accept in history a method that in infinite abridgment cannot explain character for me” (see Van Buskirk this volume, p. 000).²

¹ I wish to thank Louis Sass, Professor of Clinical Psychology at Rutgers University, for his perceptive and helpful comments on a draft version of this article.

² Throughout this article I make use of unpublished materials from the 1930s, which were shared with me by Emily Van Buskirk, and which she unearthed and studied in the Ginzburg archives, now at the Russian National Library. Van Buskirk treats (in a different way) many of these materials in her dissertation, “Reality in Search of Literature: Lydia Ginzburg’s In-between Prose” (Van Buskirk 2008).
In her last book of literary scholarship, *On the Literary Hero*, Ginzburg wrote about the correspondence between artistic and scientific descriptions and explanations of reality in the realist prose of the nineteenth century. Citing the “textbook” formula of the Goncourt brothers, according to which “a novel solves the same problems and assumes the same obligations as science,” she meanwhile let slip that the issue was not that artistic methods replaced scientific methods, but that

предметом художественного изображения является теперь не только человек в обусловленности самого поведения, но и сам обусловленность, воплощенная, например, в соотношениях человека и среды, в социальных предпосылках становления характера. (*Ginzburg 1979: 69*)

the object of artistic depiction is now not only a person in the conditionedness of his behavior, but conditionedness itself, embodied for example in the correspondence between a person and his milieu, in the social preconditions of a character’s formation.

Like many other statements from Ginzburg’s works of literary scholarship, these words apply equally to the authors about whom she writes and to her own literary work. Throughout her whole life she concerned herself with the conditioned nature of human behavior and consciousness.

Ginzburg was extremely attentive to the mechanisms of social determinism, but she was well aware that these mechanisms worked only in a mediated way, refracted in the individual psyche, and therefore that the problem was not exhausted by the “social preconditions of a character’s formation.” In the book *On Psychological Prose*, which as the author later confessed was her “most intimate book of literary scholarship” (*Ginzburg 2002: 303*), she writes about the relevance of Tolstoy’s devices of psychological analysis for the scientific understanding of the regular workings of the psychic world of the individual:

Литература впитывала поиски науки и в то же время, обгоняя психологию, сама проникала в новые области душевной жизни. [...] В конце XIX—в начале XX века художественные открытия Толстого встретились, с одной стороны, с разработкой учения о подсознательном и бессознательном, с другой—с трактовкой поведения как системы обусловленных рефлексов. (*Ginzburg 1971: 342*)
Literature assimilated the inquiries of science and at the same time entered on its own into new areas of spiritual life, leaving psychology behind. [...] At the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth, the artistic discoveries of Tolstoy were met on the one hand by the elaboration of the doctrine of the subconscious and the unconscious, and on the other, by the interpretation of behavior as a system of conditioned reflexes. (Ginzburg 1991a: 266)

In her notebook (zapisnaia knizhka) from 1934, Ginzburg wrote that she “now needed an approach that would be suitable for understanding the historical process, and for understanding the fate of a distinct person as a social entity” (Ginzburg 2002b: 34). In a self-evident way, the elaboration of such an approach turned out to be impossible without treating a person’s inner life.

The scientific ambitions of Ginzburg-as-psychologist were exceptionally great. In the essay “Method of Examining a Person” from January 1935, Ginzburg wrote:

From the vague mass of elements that make up a person’s spiritual life, those ones are chosen which possess repetitiveness, interconnectedness, and structural significance. Therefore a person as an object of knowledge—even to himself—as compared to an empirical person is always a scheme, obtained by omitting some elements and ordering others.

The ordering consists in finding causes for the repeated manifestations we have observed, and naming these causes the properties, or qualities of the character.

The cognition of a person is a transformation of the person into a structure out of which all of his manifestations can be explained. If there is some manifestation, even a tiny one, which does not fit into the structure, then one must either reject it as fictitious, or reject the structure as erroneous.
What is at issue, thus, is a schematized model of personality; however, this model must have total explanatory power, at least to the extent that any empirical fact can necessitate either rejecting it as erroneous, or alternatively expanding the interpretative framework in a way that accommodates this new element.

Observing herself and those around her, Ginzburg tried to build a psychological model that would possess not only explanatory, but also predictive power. Insofar as the characters of all of her compositions were real people, her prose is, in essence, akin to scholarly investigation rather than fiction. This investigation is based upon empirical material that is closest at hand:

Я смею думать, что не копаюсь в глубинах как таковых и вообще не занимаюсь собой. Я ощущаю себя как кусок вырванной с мясом социальной действительности, которую удалось приблизить к глазам, как участок действительности, особенно удобный для наблюдения. (Ginzburg 2002: 99–100. Cf. Savitskii 2006a: 491–93)

I venture to think that I’m not digging in the depths as such, and am not occupied with myself. I feel that I am a piece that’s been torn (with threads still hanging) from social reality and which I have managed to bring to my eyes, a strip of reality especially handy for observation.

In the “narratives” (povestovaniia) of the 1930s and 1940s, there are a few instances when Ginzburg calls her quasi-autobiographical hero Otter a psychologist. In “Delusion of the Will,” Otter leaves for the countryside in order to “study his psychology” (Ginzburg 2002: 596), and in “The Thought that Drew a Circle,” an interlocutor tells the hero: “After all, I never took up psychology in earnest” (ibid.: 571). In “A Story of Pity and Cruelty,” Otter is astonished by the fact that “he (a psychologist!) did not want to understand” (Ginzburg 2011: 53) the emotional state of his aunt, who was dying in the blockade (See Van Buskirk 2007: 167).

Otter represents a sort of literary alter ego of Ginzburg, one who is purified of empirical fortuities and intimate details, which would obscure his status as a “composite and conventional intelligent” (Ginzburg 2002: 611) of his generation. Thus, the author who is projected into the text is transformed into a man with an orthodox sexual orientation. In a similar
way, a change in the sphere of the hero’s professional pursuits from literary scholarship to psychology was meant to indicate the basic substance of the scholarly interests of its prototype.

We do not exactly know what Otter’s, and his autobiographical prototype’s, special pursuits in psychology entailed. One can conjecture that aside from the obligatory introspection, as well as observations of people in her milieu, she must have studied literature in this area of specialization, to the extent that it was available to her. An interest in the science of psychology was at the time characteristic for the majority of educated specialists in the humanities. As Ilona Svetlikova has convincingly shown, the so-called “anti-psychologism” of Ginzburg’s Formalist teachers was based on the reexamination of the fundamental categories of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century psychological thought comprising for them a basic language of scientific description that could be applied in literary scholarship as well (see Svetlikova 2005).

In her later books On Psychological Prose and On the Literary Hero Ginzburg refers to an extensive array of psychological and social-psychological literature, a significant portion of which had already appeared in the first half of the twentieth century, and demonstrates an exceptionally confident mastery of the categorial apparatus of these sciences. We do not have the exhaustive data that would allow us to make conclusions about precisely when Ginzburg became acquainted with the body of work of this or that thinker, or to define accurately the size and scope of her familiarity with this sphere. However, there is no doubt that her interest in the science of psychology did not arise suddenly in the period of work on her monographs, but rather accompanied her throughout her life.

In 1934, Ginzburg wrote that “a person consists of the interaction of his social function with his biological and inherited traits” (Ginzburg 1934). The principles of psychological analysis she started to elaborate beginning in the 1930s were focused mostly on three issues: (1) the typology of human characters (2) the social values adopted by the individual and the ways these values were realized in his perception of himself, behavior and verbal utterances and (3) the complex, hierarchical and multilayered structure of the inner life of a person.
Andrei Zorin

Significantly oversimplifying, one can say that her thinking about these issues was influenced by three famous psychologists of the period that were most important for her: Eduard Spranger, Alfred Adler, and William James. In this article I will discuss Ginzburg’s use of their psychological theories, as well as the ways in which she elaborated and adapted them to her specific needs.

I will undertake an attempt to reconstruct Ginzburg’s general views about the inner structure of human personality, which in many ways defined both the poetics of her prose and the system of her thought. I also aim to demonstrate how Ginzburg’s own psychological models related to the mainstream of American personality studies, which boisterously developed in the 1930s and 1940s, and assimilated the experience of the leading German and Austrian psychologists, many of whom moved in these years to the United States. In this reconstruction I will rely not only on those scholarly works with which Ginzburg was undoubtedly acquainted, or could have been acquainted, but also on those that definitely remained unknown to her, which allow us to see her analytical approaches in the context of the history of the wider discipline.

This article focuses on German and American personality studies as they were close to Ginzburg’s interests as a writer and a scholar. Her tribute to French psychologists seems less pronounced but also important especially if we consider her analysis of trauma that shows significant parallels to the ideas developed by Pierre Janet and her regular use of the category of “zhiznennyi napor” (“vital force”), most likely a translation of Henri Bergson’s *élan vital*, as a tool of analytical descriptions of her characters (See *Van Buskirk 2007*: 157 and idem 2010: 290).

The place of Ginzburg within Russian and Soviet psychological tradition is a topic for a separate article. The turn of 1920s–1930s when Ginzburg started to become interested in the social sciences was the time when psychology, like many other sciences, was effectively crushed by Stalinist ideologues (See *Joravsky 1989*). During these years and within the same social milieu as Ginzburg Lev Vygotsky who also started his career as literary scholar was creating his “cultural-historical” psychology that was meant to overcome the crisis in contemporary psychological theory by reinterpreting its achievements within a framework of Marxist philosophy. (On parallels between Vygotsky and Ginzburg see *Emerson 2000*). However, Vygotsky’s
seemal works were not published in his lifetime and, even more importantly, under immense ideological pressures of the early thirties he and his disciples were predominantly shifting to the studies of brain damage, evolutionary psychology and the early stages of personal development (see Joravsky 1989: 253–54)—fields that lay outside of the sphere of Ginzburg’s psychological investigations.

At the same time Ginzburg seemed to be much more interested in Vygotsky’s theory of “inner speech.” She quotes Vygotsky and his disciple Aleksei Leontiev in her later books On Psychological Prose and On Literary Hero (Ginzburg 1977: 14, Ginzburg 1979: 161, 209). In these books she refers to other prominent Russian and Soviet psychologists as well and while her references to Pavlov seem mostly defensive (See Joravsky 1989: 448–63 on the strategy of using Pavlov as a rhetorical shield against ideological accusations in post Stalin era psychology) her interest in the works of Dmitry Uznadze and his school on the theory of ‘set conditions’ (ustanovki) and arguably in the definition of character given by Sergei Rubinshtein (Ginzburg 1977: 13–14, Ginzburg 1979: 144–45, 161–63) looks completely genuine. However, it is most likely that she got acquainted with these works only during the Thaw when the major outline of her own psychological ideas was already fully formulated.3

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The problem of a typology of characters concerned Ginzburg during at least half a century. She tries to propose a construction of such a typology in the essay from 1935, and she undertook an extended analysis of the history of the question in the 1979 monograph On the Literary Hero. Ginzburg here underscores the diverse criteria various researchers and scientific schools have used as a basis for building their classifications of human characters. She pauses on the approaches of Ivan P. Pavlov, Alfred Fouiollée, Sigmund Freud, Aleksandr Lazurskii, Vladimir Norakidze, Friedrich Nietzsche and William James. But she allots special attention to the typologies of Carl Jung and Eduard Spranger.

3 Uznadze’s first article on the changes of “set conditions” was published in 1930 in Psikhologia 9. See: Kozulin 1984: 95–98.
Jung, in his book that came out in 1925 called *Psychological Types* (Jung), to which Ginzburg refers, systematically surveyed the history of character classification, and also proposed his own. He distinguished two basic types of people—extroverts and introverts, and within each he designated four groups, depending on their predominant psychic functions: “thinking, feeling, sensing, and intuiting” (*Ginzburg 1979*: 145). In this way his classification delineates eight basic psychological types, four of which, those based on thought and feeling, Jung considered to be rational, and four of which, those based on intuition and sensation, he considered irrational.

It appears that the basic Jungian opposition of extraversion and introversion did not interest Ginzburg. In her attempt at an analogous classification, which she sketched in her notebook from 1934, the criteria of a person’s directedness within or without (decisive for Jung) are not mentioned, although she enumerates three out of the four types that Jung distinguishes on the basis of the ruling psychic functions: intellectual, feeling and sensing (*Ginzburg 1934*). However, on the whole her approaches to character typology are oriented toward Jung to a lesser degree than toward Spranger.

Eduard Spranger (1882–1963) was a follower of Wilhelm Dilthey and Ernst Cassirer and one of the theoreticians of the so-called “psychology of the spirit.” In the monograph *On the Literary Hero* Ginzburg refers to the edition of his book *Forms of Life, Spiritual Psychology and the Ethics of Personality* (*Lebensformen, Geisteswissenschaftliche Psychologie und Ethik der Personlichkeit*), which came out in 1950 in Tubingen. However, the first publication of this work appeared already in 1914 and by 1927 it sustained six publications. In 1928, the English translation appeared, called *Types of Man*. The manuscripts of the 1930s strongly suggest Ginzburg’s familiarity with this work, and a later note she attached to one of her sketches mentions it explicitly. It seems to have exerted a significant influence on

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4 The explicit reference to Spranger is made in a later note (in handwriting of the 1980s) prefacing a 1930s sketch of the character “S.” It is feasible that this later preface, mentioning Spranger as a famous moment in the history of attempts to classify human character, clarifies a relationship that was unmentioned in the thirties. It was usual for Ginzburg not to reveal sources with which she was in dialogue in
the formation of her concepts of psychology and personality. (See Van Buskirk 2008: ch. 3)

In Spranger’s opinion, character type is defined in the first place by an individual’s orientation in values, which depends on the type of his life attitude (Spranger 1928: 104). He singles out six such types of orientation—economic, theoretical, aesthetic, social, political, and religious. Spranger underscored that he was speaking only about ideal types—all of these value orientations are encountered in the consciousness of each person, but a certain one of them usually dominates, subordinating and deforming the others.

In her notebook from 1934, Ginzburg also singled out six types of people, dividing them according to basic “psychic categories” in which they “experience value.” According to Ginzburg,

форма этого переживания—в некоторой степени форма реакции человека на давление бытия.

Люди—эмпирические
чувственные
эмоциональные
активные
идеологические
интеллектуальные (Ginzburg 1934)

the form of this experience is to some degree the form of a person’s reaction to the pressures of existence.

People are:
Empirical
Sensual
Emotional
Active
Ideological
Intellectual

her notebooks (in contradistinction to her scholarship). (Ginzburg, late 1930s “S.”). Spranger’s psychological theory is also discussed in Voloshinov’s “Marxism and the Philosophy of Language” (Voloshinov 1986: 32) which Ginzburg read attentively in 1930 (See: Ginzburg 2002: 411).
It is interesting to compare this scheme with the classifications of Spranger and Jung. It is clear that her “intellectual” person completely coincides with Jung’s “thinking” type and Spranger’s “theoretical” type. In Ginzburg’s list this type is named last, probably out of compositional considerations. Insofar as the characteristics Ginzburg attributes to this type are almost completely oriented towards self-description, one can presume that she consciously or unconsciously reserved a conversation about herself for the final part of her reflections:

Интеллектуальные люди— те, которым нужны не вещи, а концепции вещей. [...] Полное удовлетворение в непрерывном осознании и истолковании действительности, тождественное фиксации словом. Это не только удовлетворение; это высший труд, требующий всех жертв и сил наказывающий ленивца никогда не утихающим раскаянием. (Ginzburg 1934)

Intellectual people are those who need not things, but concepts of things [...] Complete satisfaction in the uninterrupted cognition and interpretation of reality, which is identical to fixing it in a word. This is not only satisfaction; it is the utmost work, which demands every kind of sacrifice and strength, and punishes the idler with unceasing remorse.

Remarkably, this self-characterization in the form of a scientific description entered with only minor changes into the monograph *On the Literary Hero* (Ginzburg 1979: 148). More than four decades did not introduce any substantial changes to her approach to this problem.

The type that Ginzburg calls “active” most clearly recalls the one that Spranger called “political.” However, whereas for Spranger this type was defined chiefly by its Nietzschean yearning for power, Ginzburg was inclined to reconceptualize it, by considering as its basis the thirst for unmediated influence on the surrounding world.

Separate from the political type, Spranger distinguished a social type, for whom serving other people was the highest value, and a religious type, oriented toward the subjection of human life to ideals on a transcendental order (Spranger 1928: 172, 181). For Ginzburg, a convinced atheist, both of these types blend into one, which she calls “ideological,” although the issue for her is not so much ideology as such, as it is the ability to acquire a higher value “in the experience of an idea.” In Ginzburg’s words, only
“stylistic prejudice did not allow” her to use “a word ruined by the intelligentsia: people of ideas (ideinye liudi).”

Like Spranger, Ginzburg constructs a strict hierarchy among the types she sets out. Following her predecessor, who proposed the religious type as the highest, she does not hide her admiration for people whom she calls “ideological.” In addition, inside this one category, Ginzburg clearly distinguishes two varieties:

Основная задача человека—перенесение внутреннего центра во вне себя. […] Любовь и искусство не защищают от релятивизма. Только полная идеологичность прикрепляет человека к ценностям независимым от колебания его непрочного сознания. (Ginzburg 1934)

A person’s basic objective is to transfer his inner center to outside of himself […] Love and art do not protect a person from relativism. Only complete ideologicity binds a person to values that are independent from the vacillation of his fragile consciousness.

It is probable that the “complete ideologicity” about which Ginzburg speaks fully corresponds to Spranger’s “religious values,” and that her lowest levels of “communion with externally posited values” cover that which he called a “social type.” In this way, having combined two of Spranger’s types in a single category, Ginzburg essentially preserved the differentiation Spranger introduced. A decade later, in the sketch “Behavior,” which entered into the notebook “1943,” she now wrote definitely about a “religious consciousness that was not necessarily directed toward god” (Ginzburg 2011: 105–6) and attempted to describe the possible secular forms of this consciousness. Meanwhile, Ginzburg bases the hierarchical superiority of idea-related values not so much on their objective significance, but rather on their impact on the subjective world of an individual personality.

Only a person who has learned to become familiar with this circle of values is fully protected from the desperate horror that inevitably accompanies relativism, which is inherent in people whose values are closed off within their own individuality, and who bear an “immanent” character. Ginzburg contemplates “people with an immanent consciousness,” deprived of “unconditional, externally-posted values” on the first pages of “Delusion of the Will” (Zabluzhdenie voli) (Ginzburg 2002: 563–64). It is worth
noting that this term can also be found in Spranger’s work (Spranger 1928: 213), although in Ginzburg’s analysis its role is significantly greater.

Of all of the “immanent” psychological types, Spranger considered the “economic” type the lowest (ibid.: 65). Ginzburg calls this type “empirical.” Such renaming was largely connected with the fact that for Ginzburg, who actively attempted in the first half of the 1930s to interiorize Marxist teachings,5 Spranger’s critical relationship to economic utilitarianism was in many ways unacceptable. The most meaningful trait in people of “empirical” orientation for Ginzburg was not so much outright practical-mindedness, as “an inability to produce values,” a complete submission to “the unconsciously adopted everyday norm.” Practicality, which demands a systematicity inaccessible to “the empiricist,” is supplanted in this case by elementary self-interest.

In Spranger’s classification, an “aesthetic” type was also identified, who was oriented toward intensive experience of life’s impressions as an end in itself. However, Ginzburg rejects this definition, probably because she understood the essence of “the aesthetic” more broadly than Spranger, or at least in a different way. “The intensive experience of pleasure as such” comprised for her the essence of the “sensual” type, from which, following Jung, she distinguished the emotional type.

The contrast between the sensual and emotional too clearly led to associations with the romantic-erotic sphere, and therefore Ginzburg expressly underscored that she was speaking about an orientation in values. Many people are capable of being sensual in the erotic sphere, but it is more distinguishing of individual differences “whether a person is sensual in his relationship to food, to nature, to art, to work and to leisure.” In exactly the same way, emotional people, in contrast to others, not only “love emotionally,” but also “work emotionally, read emotionally, and emotionally go to the hairdresser.” More than forty years later in the book On the Literary Hero Ginzburg reproduced these considerations nearly verbatim (see Ginzburg 1979: 147–48).

5 About the “interiorization” and “adaptation” with regard to the relationships of the Soviet intelligentsia to the reigning ideology, see: Toddes 2002.
A person’s characterological type, according to Ginzburg, can be hidden from the superficial observer and also from himself, but succumbs to definition through such “peripheral” qualities. Ginzburg demonstrates this on the example of the character of Grigory Gukovsky, one of her oldest and closest friends, and a companion from the circle of young formalists:

... эмоциональный человек—Гр<иша>. У него это от дикой возбудимости и от полной непоспособности регулировать раз возникшее возбуждение. Поэтому его эмоции кратки, они приближаются к состоянию аффекта. Он думает, что он идеологичен; на самом деле он просто как человек сильного ума и интеллектуальных интересов—способен возбуждаться от идей, как от всего прочего: от солнца и травы, от танцев, от карьеры, от еды, когда он не разбирая хватает с тарелок. Он не идеологичен, потому что идеи, возбуждая его, не управляют его жизнью. Но у него, вплоть до легкости самообольщения—все качества проповедника. 

There was a time when he had a strong effect on me, through (as it seemed to me then) his ability to sublimate and ideologize things. Now I understand that what I took to be the soaring of ideas were actually flights of an unbridled temperament.

The meaning, for Ginzburg, of Spranger’s ideas resided in the fact that they suggested to her ways of carrying out social and cultural analysis of individual psycho-physiological preferences and tendencies. The category of value turns out to be the point of intersection of all of these factors, and the mechanism that secures the possibility of their interaction. A “life value” for Ginzburg is on the one hand social in its very
nature, but on the other hand, according to the way in which it is experienced, one can distinguish “typical structures of a person.” This train of thought was also largely suggested to Ginzburg by Spranger, who, referring to the philosophy of Max Scheler, connected characterological types not with dominant psychic functions (as Jung did, for example), but with a person’s valutional orientation:

The individual soul must be thought of as a meaningful content of functions in which different value tendencies are correlated in the unity of consciousness. These value attitudes are determined by specific normative laws of value. (Spranger 1928: 15–16)

The hierarchy of values, which a personality adopts, and which forms its ethical system, is predetermined by society and history. As Spranger writes, “collective value judgments and modes of behavior are not forms of whim, accident or tyranny,” but on the contrary it is only they that determine the meaningful context for the valutional structure of a personality “especially within its historically unique appearance” (ibid.: 267; see also: 273–78). Collective morality can be perceived by an individual as a purely external pressure, but can also become the content of a personality’s inner life. In this way concrete historical conditions are superimposed upon the initial psychophysical organization of an individual. Spranger illustrates his typology with examples from the biographies of famous people from the past, to show how the valutional structures of their personalities were manifest and revealed in the epochs when they happened to live.

However, as one of the founders of Soviet psychology, S.L. Rubinstein, noted already in the 1920s in a work that at the time remained unpublished, for Spranger “historical content was merely transformed into the filling of an extra-historical, age-old, categorial form” (Rubinstein 2002). For Ginzburg, who was attempting to assimilate the Marxist method, and more importantly, who had received schooling in Tynianov’s historicism, such an approach was, to be sure, extremely abstract. Therefore, she re-describes the types identified by Spranger, making the definitions more precise with respect to her epoch and the social group that was the object of her observations. Ginzburg herself defines this group as “the humanities intelligentsia of a Soviet type and non-official mold” (гуманитарную интеллигенцию советской формации и неказенного образца) (Ginzburg 1933).
The results of the analysis she undertook turned out to be utterly devastating. For Ginzburg social conditions at once form and select appropriate characters (see: ibid.), but at the same time it becomes clear that people who belong to the majority of types identified by her turn out to be incapable of passing through history’s selection process:

Ясно, что у нас сейчас неподходящие условия для процветания чувственного типа—п.ч. это требует быта приспособленного для непосредственных удовольствий; эмоционального типа, п.ч. эмоции лишены у нас общественной значимости, какую они имели хотя бы в 40-ых годах 19-ого века. Наша действительность мало благоприятствует и интеллектуальному типу, который разрастается в условиях высокой дилетантской культуры и дозволенного индивидуализма. (Ginzburg 1934).

At the moment our conditions are ill-suited for the flourishing of the sensual type—because this demands a daily life (byt) that is adapted for unmediated pleasures; ill-suited for the flourishing of the emotional type, because emotions are deprived, for us, of the social significance they had at least for people of the 1840s. Our reality does little to favor the intellectual type, which develops in conditions of a culture of high dilettantism, and when individualism is permitted.

If one adds that people of an “empirical” type, according to Ginzburg, are doomed “in an epoch of social upheavals, when the scale of values is not given but guessed; when goods become more inaccessible as they become more material” (ibid.), then it turns out that the only people who are in demand in this time are, in her opinion, people of two types: “active” and ideological. It is hardly possible to say that the historical process confirmed Ginzburg’s assessment—as the terror intensified, people with ideological kind of constitution were destroyed with particular zeal.

The category of value turns out to be the basic instrument of Ginzburg’s psychological analysis precisely because it allowed her to combine with the the individual—which includes what is conditioned by the psychophysiological mechanism of a particular person—what is determined by society and history. However, Spranger’s somewhat mechanistic typology, in essence, made no attempt to answer the question of precisely how social values and normative value judgments are interiorized, or to address the nature of a person’s inner mechanism for adapting to those demands and conditions which history places before her.
Meanwhile Ginzburg had to answer these questions, not in the form of a philosophical or psychological tract, but in prose constructed from her observations of herself and those around her. As she herself wrote, she had to proceed “from the understanding of enormous mass movements up to ever-smaller group formations; and all the way up to the single individual person” (Ginzburg 1933–35; see also: idem 2002a). Accordingly, she was moving from abstract typology to concrete everyday behavior, emotional experience and verbal utterance.

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We do not know exactly when Ginzburg managed to seek out the scholarly instrumentation corresponding to her tasks. In the partially published note from 1934, she relates that B., or Boris Bukhstab, told her about German sociologists, who were studying “various Triebe. Machttrieb, Unterordnungstrieb, and other things, which one does not know what to do with” (Ginzburg 1934a). Ginzburg undoubtedly knew that the category of Trieb (drive) became one of the central tools of psychological research after Freud. The attempts to “trace social impulses to personal ones” (ibid.) were foreign to her. However, her notes, and chiefly, the techniques of her psychological analysis of the war years seem to betray an acquaintance with a psychological theory that suited her needs to the highest degree.

In the sketches and notebooks of 1943–45, Ginzburg often returns to the thought about how:

Человек утверждает себя в объективных, всеобщих ценностях и в то же время, присваивая себе эти объективные и всеобщие ценности, созидает из них свою собственную ценность, автоценность—предел человеческих волеустреваний (негативное понятие неполноценности давно уже бытует в науке). (Ginzburg 2011: 202)

A person asserts himself in objective, universal values and at the same time, adapting for himself these objective and universal values, creates from them his own value, self-value (автосенность)—the limit of the will-drive (voleustremlenie) (the negative understanding of inferiority has long existed in science.
The thought about “avtotsennost” as the limit of human goals, the notion of self-assertion as the basic driving mechanism of human behavior, together with the reference to “inferiority” as long having existed in science distinctly recall the basic categories of the “individual psychology” of Alfred Adler. In all of psychological science of the twentieth century Adler is, without a doubt, one of the scholars closest to her.

In the first decade of the 1900s, Alfred Adler was one of the closest associates of Freud and was even elected as president of the Viennese Psychoanalytic Society. However, already in 1911 their scientific paths had separated forever, and through the course of a quarter century Adler was occupied with building his own psychological theory, which was almost completely opposite to Freud’s. (For a list of oppositions that existed between the psychological theories of Freud and Adler, see Adler 1964: 4–5). From Adler’s point of view, a person’s individuality is defined not so much by the past—traumas, suppressed in the subconscious, as by the future—by that ideal image of self (Persönlichkeitsideal), to which a person attempts to conform, and which designates that which Ginzburg called “personal will-drive.” The students and researchers of Adler, H. and L. Ansbacher defined the difference between how Freud and Adler approached this question as an opposition of motivation by pushes, and motivation by pulls (ibid.: 5). H. Ellenberger defined it as the opposition of causal and teleological orientations (Ellenberger 1976: 627). As Adler wrote:

> The fictional abstract ideal is the point of origin for the formation and differentiation of the given psychological resources into preparatory attitudes, readinesses, and character traits. The individual than wears the character traits demanded by his fictional goal just as the character mask (persona) of the ancient actor had to fit the finale of the tragedy.

> In every case, the point of the self-ideal (Persönlichkeitsideal) posited beyond reality remains effective. This is evidenced by the direction of the attention, of the interests, and the tendencies all of which select according to points of view given in advance. (Adler 1964: 94)

In his concept of a “fictional final goal,” toward which a person orients himself, Adler was drawing on the ideas of the philosopher Hans Vaihinger as laid out in his book *The Philosophy of As If*, published in 1911, the year of
Adler’s break with Freud. According to Vaihinger, a person in his activity, whether it be art, science, politics, or something else, is guided by constructions, the fictional quality of which he undoubtedly consciously knows, but without which he cannot get by in his worldview and in practice. Literary heroes and plots belong among these fictions, as well as scientific abstractions, symbols, juridical personifications and so on. Adler’s Persönlichkeitsideal was one of such “fictions.”

Beyond any doubt, Freud also drew on the proposition that a person’s notions of himself have a mostly fictional character. However, in his theory these fictions play a predominantly defensive role, and should be unmasked by the psychoanalyst interested in the hidden truths of his personality. For Adler, the kind of idealized concept of the self that Ginzburg called “avtotsennost” is the factor that organizes personality.

The quotation from Adler introduced above is taken from his first post-Freudian book *The Neurotic Character*, which came out in 1912 and immediately acquired broad popularity (*Adler 1912*: 46, 40–41). Fragments from it were partially translated into Russian (see *Adler 1913*). Adler was rather closely connected to the Russian Social Democrats, who were among his clients. Through his wife Raisa Epshtein, a native of Smolensk and an ardent socialist, he must have been well-acquainted with Trotsky and his family (see *Ellenberger 1976*: 589. See also *Trotsky 2007*: 220, 277). Ginzburg could have been informed about his ideas rather early, although we do not have any direct evidence of this.

Adler’s name is mentioned neither in Ginzburg’s notes, nor in her research. Nevertheless, in 1976 she gave the following recommendation to Irina Paperno, who was then working on a book about Chernyshevsky:

... в первую очередь, посмотреть работы Адлера (он-то и выдумал «комплекс неполноценности»), который в анализе доминирующими сделал социальные мотивы. Он отверг заранее заданные сексуальную и бытовую ситуацию детства. (see *Zorin 2011*: 533–34)\(^6\)

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\(^6\) Letter from March 14, 1976, from the personal archives of Irina Paperno. I would like to express my sincere gratitude to Paperno for permission to cite this fragment.
... in the first place, look at the works of Adler (he is the one who thought up “inferiority complex”), who made social motives into the dominant factors of his analysis. He rejected ahead of time the sexual and domestic situations of childhood.

It must be said that Ginzburg, at least in this letter, underestimates the role that Adler assigns to childhood impressions. In her own psychological constructs, childhood essentially does not play a noticeable role and does not become an object of independent analysis—she is developing a psychology of the adult. Meanwhile, Adler did not at all “reject [...] the situation of childhood,” but reinterpreted its significance in terms of power and inferiority issues. He considered that it was precisely in childhood that the “inferiority complex” took shape, which played a significant role in the formation of his personality.

However, Ginzburg is interested predominately not in this complex in itself, but in the ways of compensating for it through the yearning for superiority, which, according to Adler, comprises the archetypal form (Urform) of a person’s development (see Adler 1964: 101–25).

Ginzburg calls this behavioral motive “self-assertion” and pays incomparably more attention to it than to the inferiority complex itself, on the background of which the compensatory mechanism of self-assertion begins to act. To some degree, this perspective can be explained by the character of her observations of people around her. Psychological consultations, in the course of which the psychotherapist can concern herself with the detailed reconstruction of a client’s childhood impressions did not lie within the range of analytical instruments available to her, whereas the ritual battles for self-assertion played out in front of her eyes practically without interruption.

In a note written during the war years, which she then called “The Synonymy of Self-Assertion,” Ginzburg observed that:

Из всех человеческих вожделений устремление к власти, к господству имеет самую богатую и дифференцированную синонимику: властолюбие, честолюбие, самолюбие, тщеславие, гордость, надменность, высокомерие, самолюбование, самовлюбленность, себялюбие.
Of all of the human desires, the yearning for power or for dominance has the richest and most differentiated synonymy: lust for power, ambition, self-esteem, vanity, pride, arrogance, haughtiness, self-admiration, self-love, egoism.

Understandably, all of these are not identical, but rather different categories of self-assertion, but their very differentiation is intriguing.

Ginzburg took special interest in the manifestations and interplay of various categories of self-assertion. The relations between the intelligentsia milieu and government power provided her with exceptionally rich material, in part through the perception of signs and symbols of social status. In her notebook labeled “1943” she observes that even in conditions of hunger, the size of a blockade ration was important for many Leningraders not only from the point of view of physical survival, but also because it was a crude and obvious indicator (in grams of bread and cereal) of the degree of a person’s social recognition. In the sketch “Intellectual Egoists who have Stopped Thinking,” she analyses in detail the experiences of the freethinking “intelligent” who received a not especially prestigious medal, and then was not invited to the ultra-high-status banquet. The awarded medal disallowed a person from finding superiority in his ability to disregard official success, but on the other hand, the limited scope of this success did not permit him to be proud of it in front of colleagues who have achieved more.

In the essay “The State of Literature near the End of the War,” Ginzburg writes about the aspiration, which suddenly seized hold of the most official and successful writers, to “speak just a little of the truth.”

There is an interesting parallel between this utterance and the opinion of the American psychologist William McDougall, who considered the yearning for self-regard to be the basic motive of human behavior: “Self-respect, self-esteem, self-love, pride, ambition are the names of distinctive types of self regard. Selfishness, egoism, egotism, vanity, conceit, humility, megalomania, swelled head, bumptiousness, pushfullness, masterfulness, aggressiveness, these are some of the qualities of personality determined in the main by the composition and the working of this sentiment” (McDougall 1933: 233).
... они наслаждаются превосходством над прочими своими собратьями, которые не хотят совмещать выражение жизненного опыта с выполнением директив, но ограничиваются одним выполнением директив. Но они не знают при этом, что, в сущности, эти прочие собратья — уже фикция, нечто вроде гипотетического дурака, с которым они напрасно спорят. Что потребность некого действительного разговора о действительности стала уже типовой и всеобщей, и только поэтому каждый из них в отдельности пришел к этой потребности. [...] 

Самое печальное для каждого из них (чего каждый старается не понимать и не замечать) — это то, что презирать, в сущности, некого и не над кем испытывать чувство превосходства. Потому что каждый собрат по профессии точно так же хочет того же самого, и точно так же хочет чувствовать себя выше других и испытывать к ним чувство презрения. (Ginzburg 2011: 104–5; see this volume, p. 000)

... they take pleasure in their superiority over their other colleagues, who do not want to combine an expression of their life experience with the fulfillment of directives, instead limiting themselves to fulfilling the directives. But they do not know that, in essence, these other colleagues are already a fiction—something similar to a hypothetical fool, with whom they argue in vain. They do not know that the need for saying something about reality has already become typical and universal, and only for this reason has each one of them separately arrived at this same need. [...] 

The saddest thing for them to realize (and each of them tries not to understand or notice it) is that there is essentially no one to despise and no one over whom to lord one's superiority. Because each colleague in the profession wants exactly the same thing in exactly the same way, and each wants to feel better than everyone else, and to be in a position to scorn the others.

In the thoughts about the yearning for superiority as the main driving instinct in human behavior one can glean a Nietzschean substrate. Ginzburg herself admitted to this rather unwillingly (see for example Ginzburg 2002: 310), but Adler referred to Nietzsche as the source of many of his ideas definitely and explicitly (see Adler 1964: 111, 244). The will to power, which animates a person beginning in childhood, he names using a fully Nietzschean-sounding term “Machtziel” (ibid.: 113). However, already in his early works Adler was inclined to oppose to this innate will a social instinct, which bridled the will to superiority and imparted to it socially acceptable forms. In the 1920s and 1930s the social tendencies in Adler's theories gain even more expression. He is now disposed to examine the yearning for superiority itself, with the exception of those cases acquiring
a pathological character, as a form of interiorization by the individual of the higher rights and values of social reality. The superiority for which a person strives is set by norms and is defined by acknowledgment by the referential social group.

Adler emphasized that a person’s psychological life could not be examined at all outside of those social groups into which he is incorporated, from the family to the state. “We refuse to recognize and examine an isolated human being,” he wrote in 1926 (Adler 1964: 2). In his 1927 work Understanding Human Nature, which is considered to be the fullest exposition of his ideas, he even asserted that “we must regard the inherent rules of the game of a group as they emerge within the limited organization of the human body and its achievements as an absolute truth” (ibid.: 228). Therefore every person in one way or another belongs to life in common, or communal life (Gemeinschaftsleben) and is endowed with the feeling of community (Gemeinschaftsgefühl), which consists in a person’s individual perception of those principles which govern the mutual relations between people (see Ellenberger 1976: 608–11).

In view of the general validity of social interest, no one can carry out an action without justifying himself somehow with regard to this feeling. From this is derived the human trait of producing reasons or at least excuses for everything one thinks and does. (Adler 1964: 140)

Ginzburg’s train of thought was similar to the highest degree. Her main theme over the course of several decades was the critique of egoism and individualism, which do not allow a person to feel as though he is an organic part of life in common, with its suprapersonal values. In her notes, the formulations “isolated consciousness,” “isolated soul,” “isolated person” (Ginzburg 2011: 150, 212, and elsewhere) are ways of designating a consciousness that is unable to sense that value is an effect of the common bond, and is therefore doomed to perceive the world as chaotic and hostile. At the same time, no kind of individualism is capable of breaking this common bond or removing a person outside of its borders; it merely deprives the inevitable sacrifices of inner justifiability and sense:
Труды и муки, смертная угроза и сама смерть—это условие, железное условие личной реализации всеобщих ценностей; потенциально они существуют в общем сознании, практически реализуются—единичным. Этические нигилисты не понимают законов жизни и основного из них: человек—хотит он того или не хочет—непрерывно оценивает все сущее с точки зрения общей и внеположной данному человеку. И это независимо от степени его эгоизма, от механики его собственного поведения. [...]

Когда ценности не безусловны, когда человек их не в силах обосновать, они все же работают как система иллюзий. Столь мощных (они ведь условие, вне которого социальная жизнь должна была бы прекратиться), что даже умы, понимающие иллюзорность иллюзий, продолжают жить по их законам. [...] Релятивистам жизнь предстала как непрочная связь ценностей, относительных и условных, понимаемых, собственно, как правила игры. Но, покуда игра идет, для играющих нет ничего, что было бы обязательнее ее правил.

Игры есть игры для взрослых только когда им присуща беспощадная серьезность. Относительные ценности приобретают реальность в меру давления среды, выносившей их в своем сознании. Заведомые пустяки становились атрибутом чести, заведомые условности оплачивались дуэлями или пулей в лоб. (Ginzburg 2002: 252)

Troubles and torments, the threat of death and death itself—all of these are a condition, an iron condition for the personal fulfillment of universal values; they exist as potentialities in the common consciousness, and they are realized as practicalities in the singular consciousness. Ethical nihilists do not understand the laws of life, or the most fundamental of them: a person—whether he wants to or not—uninterruptedly evaluates every living thing from the point of view of the common and of the what is externally posited for the given person. And this happens independently of the degree of his egoism, of the mechanics of his own behavior. [...] When values are not unconditional, when a person does not have the power to establish their foundation, they still work as a system of illusions. They are so powerful (after all they are the condition without which social life would have to stop altogether) that even minds that understand the illusory nature of the illusions continue to live according to their laws. [...] For relativists, life appeared as a fragile connection of values, which were relative and conditional, understood in reality as rules of the game. But as long as the game keeps going, there is nothing more obligatory than its rules.

Games are truly games for adults only when they possess a ruthless seriousness. Relative values acquire reality in accordance with the amount of pressure from the milieu, which carries them in its consciousness. Flagrant trifes can become an attribute of honor, and flagrant conventions can be paid for by duels or bullets in the head.
This fragment from the essay “On Satire and on Analysis,” written in the 1960s, differs from Adler’s constructions not only because of its literary luster. (Ellenberger considered Adler’s bland writing style to be one of the causes for his relatively lesser popularity compared to Freud or Jung. See Ellenberger 1976: 648.) The restrained pathos of Ginzburg’s reflections unmistakably reveals what she would have called the “submerged (podvodnyi) theme,” i.e. the presence, in opinions that lay claim to general significance, of biographical circumstances and personal interest.

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Adler’s theory defined the will to superiority and the social instinct as the main motivational forces behind human behavior. However, he remained less pronounced about the ways these forces interact within a human self and the ways in which the social nature of the individual is reflected in the multilayered structure of the self, which was always the sphere of Ginzburg’s special interests. Analyzing her approach to this set of questions it is important to remember that among the authors who exerted the greatest influence on the formation of Ginzburg’s views of human individuality, besides Spranger and Adler, was the founder of American psychology, William James.

There are references to the Russian translation of James’s The Principles of Psychology, published in 1922, in Ginzburg’s monographs On Psychological Prose and On the Literary Hero, and in her notes of the 1960s and 1980s. Meanwhile, in every case Ginzburg treats those statements by James where he speaks about the complex structures and manifold nature of personality.

In the tenth chapter of his classic book, which received the title The Consciousness of Self, James submits the very process of introspection to analysis, having separated the thinking, feeling, and experiencing “I” from the “Me,” which is the object and content of those thoughts, feelings, and experiences (see Myers 1986: 344–62). The “Me,” in its turn, exists in the form of the “Material Self,” the “Social Self,” and the “Spiritual Self.” On the whole James defined “the man’s Self” as “the sum total of all that he CAN call his” (James 1890 I: 291 cited in Ginzburg 2011: 447; idem 2002: 286).
Each level of the Self is also multiple, and complexly organized. “The innermost part of the material Self” consists of a person’s body. Beyond that, here are also included the home, property, and even the nearest people, first of all the members of the family.

The “Spiritual Self” turns out to be just as internally differentiated, consisting of “psychic faculties or dispositions” (James 1890 I: 296). Various levels and forms of selfhood, coexisting in one person, enter into multiple conflicts with one another, such that a person must organize them hierarchically and sacrifice certain elements of himself for others in order to achieve even elementary orientation in life (see ibid.: 310, 314; see also Ginzburg 1979: 145).

The distinction James implements, which divides the self-observing personality into an “I” and a “Me,” the subject and object of self-observation, was reflected in Ginzburg’s techniques of self-objectification or “self-distancing” (samoo-otstranenie), to use the expression of Emily Van Buskirk (see Van Buskirk 2006). Other aspects of the analysis of the category of self undertaken by James were also reflected in her writing practice in important ways. Thus in “Otter’s Day,” James’s thought about the difference between a person’s self and his body receives an original development. A whole section of this narrative, called “The Body,” is devoted to a person’s consciousness which has become alienated from its bodily container, transforming it from an attribute of individuality to an object in the surrounding world, which provokes physical suffering.
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The body’s alienation progressed in tandem with emaciation. And finally everything was doubled in a strange way. His emaciated body seemed to be a shell belonging to the category of things from the hostile world—and the soul, the will, the consciousness were situated inside, approximately in the pit of the stomach.

The consciousness (the conscious will) moves the body, drags it on itself. In the period of the greatest emaciation all of this acquired complete clarity. The automatism of movements, their reflexivity, their original intertwining with psychic impulses—all of this disappeared. The conscious will had to take everything upon itself. It turned out, for example, that a vertical position was not at all characteristic of the body, that to stay in this position it had to support itself in a particular way. The conscious will had to move the body, painstakingly following its every motion.

The very process of self-observation becomes an object of authorial reflection, in the course of which the “I” fixes the disjunction—which has become apparent through the loss of the automatism of movements—between the element of “the conscious will” and the alienated, doubling “Material Self.” The elements that compose this Material Self, from domestic utensils and clothing to legs or gums escape the control of the Spiritual Self, flowing out into the external, hostile world. We should note that, as James remarked, “certain parts of the body seem more intimately ours than the rest” (James 1890 I: 292). Even more explicitly Ginzburg expressed this Jamesian approach to selfhood in an unpublished fragment describing the character of one of her wartime colleagues:

Говорить о себе значит говорить о вещах, входящих в сферу реализации данного человека. И это от отвлечённейших предметов политики, науки и т.д. до подробностей собственных половых актов или еды. Чем ограниченнее социальное объективное применение человека, тем теснее сфера его я. В данном случае сфера достигла предельной тесноты, к которой вообще предрасполагает блокадная ситуация. (Ginzburg 1943–44)

When a given person speaks about himself, he speaks about those things that enter into his sphere of self-actualization. And this extends to the most abstract subjects of politics, science, etc., up to the details of his own sexual acts, or food. The more limited the socially objective relevance of a person, the narrower the sphere of his “I.” In the given case, the sphere has reached a maximum narrowness, to which the blockade situation generally predisposes a person.
It would be possible to expand on this series of parallels. But for Ginzburg, James’s most important thought was his concept of the multiplicities of a person’s “Social Self,” which are defined by a number of referential groups of significance to him. “A man’s Social Self,” according to James, is the recognition which he gets from his mates. [...] Properly speaking, a man has as many social selves as there are individuals who recognize him and carry an image of him in their mind. To wound any one of these his images is to wound him. But as the individuals who carry the images fall naturally into classes, we may practically say that he has as many different social selves as there are distinct groups of persons about whose opinion he cares. He generally shows a different side of himself to each of these different groups. (ibid.: 294–95; cited in Ginzburg 1971: 16)

This idea opened the path for an understanding of a person’s self-concept as a reflection of social norms and of expectations of the milieu, and at the same time allowed for an acute historicization of the structure of human personality.

The sociologist and psychologist George Herbert Mead proposed a similar interpretation of James’s ideas of the “I” and the “Me.” Mead’s theoretical models are developed in the most detail in his posthumously published work Mind, Self and Society (Mead 1967, first published in 1934). On the opening pages of On the Literary Hero, Ginzburg sympathetically refers to Mead’s idea about how a person “takes part in a symbolic system of roles” and “continuously examines himself [...] from the point of view of a group consciousness (the generalized other)” (Ginzburg 1979: 6). Once again it is difficult to say exactly when Ginzburg grew acquainted with Mead’s research. It is possible that the parallels in their approaches can be explained by the confluence in the direction of their thought and in their initial purposes, which they adopted from James, but it is significant that precisely the work of Mead shows how James’s psychological ideas could be developed in the direction of sociology.

In Mead’s words, “the individual enters in as such into his own experience only as an object, never as a subject; and he can enter as an object only on the basis of social and interactions [...] in an organized social environment” (Mead 1967: 225). Undoubtedly, many aspects of this kind of experience are accessible only to a given concrete individual, but he can
only become conscious of them when looking at himself through the eyes of the “generalized other,” without which he could neither “be self conscious” nor “have self at all” (ibid.). Ginzburg’s sketch “Résumé of Failures” written in January 1944, one of the most intimate compositions in her literary legacy, might serve as an illustration of these theses.

The structure of the personality of the narrator is built here at the intersection of different facets of his social existence. The author’s “Me” is in inner conflict, inasmuch as the models of the “generalized other,” which significant referential groups posit for the conscious awareness of individual experience are in sharp disagreement. On the one hand, the narrator believes he is a genuine writer, and this sense of self is supported by the “recognition by a few people (‘the best people’) [...], who know and understand and utter the highest praise.” On the other hand, beyond the borders of this microsphere, his literary creations do not exist at all, and the stature of his other professional occupations is extremely low. “He has neither a social status, nor even a reliable or sufficient salary.” A third significant layer is comprised by an imaginary future readership, for whose sake “single copies of manuscripts” were preserved through the “blockade winter.” But the thought of belated, or even posthumous recognition is agonizing because it is hopeless and probably meaningless. The narrator “feels humiliated by the half-suppressed, half-concealed possibilities and by the external position of a petty professional” (Ginzburg 2011: 166–67). The life experience of the narrator, as a projection of the author’s personality that has been preserved for a future reader, has been formed and defined by his social practices and relationships in which he finds himself with other people (see also Zorin 2005: 63–66).

Through the notions of the social sphere and historical situation, Ginzburg connected her understanding of personality as a unique and multi-layered structure with her characteristically deterministic approach to life and people. In one of her later notes 1979, she emphasized that:

В одной и той же социальной среде формируются разные исторические характеристики—в зависимости от ситуации, от личных данных, от случайностей. Но этот набор формаций не безграничен. Личные психологические свойства укладывались в несколько разновидностей, образуя стойкую типологию. (Ginzburg 2002: 281; see this volume, p. 000)
In one and the same social milieu, different historical characters are formed—depending on the situation, on personal qualities, on chance. But this set of types is not unlimited. Personal psychological qualities fell into a set number of classes, which formed a stable typology.

The rigidity of deterministic models seems here to some degree to have been shattered by “chance.” In another place, Ginzburg even leaves a space, in truth quite limited, for personal choice, noting that “a person cannot invent for himself nonexistent forms of behavior, but can only choose his historical character from models that have been prepared by history” (ibid.: 351). Thus, a point was discovered, where psychology entered into interaction with sociology, history and ethics, and science, which reveals the laws of psychic organization and a person’s social behavior, entered into interaction with prose, which describes the person’s experiences and acts.

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As the comparison with Mead’s ideas amply shows, these thoughts of Ginzburg’s lay completely in the mainstream of European and American psychological science of that time. In the book *On the Literary Hero*, Ginzburg makes reference to Kurt Lewin’s volume in English from 1935, and also to “a number of psychologists and scholars of personality who emerged beginning in the 1930s” (*Ginzburg 1979*: 116, 147). But precisely when and to what extent she became acquainted with the work of scholars that was in harmony with hers is not clear. It is completely possible that it is, rather, an issue of similarity of approaches, sources and of the direction of their explorations.

At the end of the 1920s, the classic Gestalt psychologist Kurt Lewin worked out a concept to transition from an “Aristotelian” to a “Galilean manner of thought.” If the former, according to Lewin, was oriented toward statistical generalization and was interested in the average and typical, then the essence of the latter was in the fullness of the unique. Meanwhile the individual case turns out to be no less regular than the typical one; it simply represents the resulting vector of the interaction of various laws. Lewin urged a move from the “abstract average” to the “full concreteness of a particular situation,” a move that makes behavior more predictable since both person and environment are now taken into account (*Lewin 1935*: 31).
In the 1930s Lewin moved from Nazi Germany to the United States, where his theoretical works came out in English under the title *The Dynamic Theory of Personality*. His ideas turned out to be in harmony with the moods of many prominent American psychologists, who spoke out against both the Behaviorist interpretations of human conduct, which, in the final analysis, reduced it to the model of “stimulus-reaction,” and also the psychoanalytic tradition, which sought the root of human personality in the unconquered traumas of his distant past. According to the opinion of one of the founders of the new theory of personality Gordon Allport, human behavior is conditioned not by the anachronistic influence of motives that lie in the subject’s past, but rather by the active structures of personality, which define his uniqueness (see *Allport 1968*).

Yet the assertion of the uniqueness of the individual personality was not at all a return to the ideas of Dilthey’s descriptive psychology, which supposed that empathy (*Einfühlung*) was the basic method of apprehending the inner life of a person. Uniqueness is here understood as a specific constellation of repeated elements, which in the terminology of different scientists are called traits, features, dispositions, attitudes, etc. On the basis of such approaches, Allport carried out a number of empirical investigations in the realm of expressive behavior and social attitudes of personality (see the general summary of his research in *Allport 1938*).

Allport was a direct student of Spranger’s, and he undertook an attempt to translate Spranger’s typological models of human character into the language of experimental psychology. Already in 1931, together with the British psychologist Philip Vernon, Allport produced a special test, which would allow for the empirical revelation of a person’s valuational orientations. This test, which received the name SOV (Study of Values) was completely based on Spranger’s typology of characters. Adjusted in the 1950s and 1960s by Gardner Lindzey, it is used in career counseling to this day.

As was mentioned above, in the book *On the Literary Hero*, Ginzburg writes about scholars of personalities of the 1930s. The rise of the very word “personality” is customarily connected with the publication in 1938 of the volume *Explorations in Personality: a Clinical and Experimental Study of Fifty Men of College Age*, which was released under the editorship of Henry A. Murray. Like Allport, Murray proceeded from the analysis of personality to the description of concrete individuals and cases—the
work he prepared ends with an extended case study. However, in contrast to Allport, who proposed that individuality was based on a set of dispositions of personality, of unique combinations of traits and character qualities, Murray transferred the accent to dynamic characteristics—needs and motivations, which would appear and disappear as a person passed from one life episode to another. As a student and researcher of Murray Dan P. McAdams underscores, “Along with Kurt Lewin Murray described an interactionist approach to psychology wherein internal variables interact with environmental variables to produce human behavior” (Murray 2008: xvii). According to Murray, “the history of the organism is the organism” (ibid.: 39), because a person’s individuality is defined by his becoming conscious of his own biography, of the story he tells about his own past. It is noteworthy that Murray considered, as a subject of personality studies, not only living people but also historical actors, as well as literary and mythological personages (see McAdams 1994: 604–5).

It is unlikely that Ginzburg could have known in the prewar years about Allport’s or Murray’s research. Nevertheless, in her own psychological explorations in the same time period, a similar shift happens. In her “narratives” and notes of the war years, there are fewer references to a stable character and more to unique everyday conflicts and situations. “The contemporary understanding—not the person, but the situation,” she wrote in the drafts related to “Otter’s Day” (Ginzburg 2011: 294; see also: Van Buskirk 2010a, 2010b).

Later, in her post-war notes, Ginzburg expounded a more developed understanding of the correspondence of these categories. According to her definition, character is a “devised principle of connection” which “is placed from outside on the aggregate of a person’s ever-renewing psychic manifestations” (Ginzburg 2002: 311). Meanwhile when one looks from the inside, this connection, which has been established by an outside observer, appears largely as an accidental aggregate of diverse situations:

Вот, например,—скандалист, склочник; извне это не подлежит сомнению. Но изнутри он знает, что всякий раз у него были основания для скандала, и совсем разные. К каждому скандалу он пришел каким-то для него убедительным путем. В одном случае он протестовал против несправедливости, в другом—не выдержали нервы, в третьем—возмутило хамство, в четвертом—он терпеть не может этого типа. И будто все это одно и то же, и все называется склока. (ibid.: 255)
Here, for example, is a troublemaker, a squabbler; from outside this is not subject to doubt. But from the inside he knows that each time he had grounds to make a scandal, and they were different every time. He arrived at every scandal by some path that was for him convincing. In one case he protested against injustice, in another, his nerves gave way, in the third, he was outraged by offensive behavior (khamstvo), and in the fourth—he cannot stand this jerk. And as if there were no difference, everything is called a squabble.

It must be said that Ginzburg’s reflections are completely confirmed by the results of the latest experiments, which have revealed the stable phenomenon, which has received the name fundamental attribution error, which is representative of:

a general tendency of people to overemphasize traits and underemphasize situations when explaining the causes for other people’s behaviors. According to this view when people are asked to explain why the other person does what he or she does, they are likely to invoke a general personality trait: [...] When asked to invoke their own behavior on the other hand people are more likely to invoke the specific situation. (McAdams 1994: 362)

The transfer of accents from characters to the situation gave Ginzburg the ability to move from general descriptions of personages in her narratives to the unmediated depiction of their behavior and experiences. However, the method for analyzing what Lewin would call “the full concreteness of a particular situation,” which she aimed to draw up, did not allow for reliance on a writer’s intuition. On the contrary, Ginzburg needed a strong theoretical model, and preferably one that had passed through a practical verification.

In Ginzburg’s opinion, the essence of “a person’s social existence” is in “an exchange, owing to which a common value becomes a personal value, experienced with all the intensity of a personal aspiration (voleustremlenie).” However, “self-value” (avtotsennost’), which has arisen from “personally experienced common values” firmly demands “realization” (realizatsiia) (Ginzburg 2011: 133)—in Ginzburg’s psychological language, this concept is one of the most crucial.

Once again the direction of Ginzburg’s thought fully coincided with the development of the American psychological thought. Analyzing
different drives that had been identified by psychologists from the beginning of the twentieth century, one of the founders of Gestalt theory, Kurt Goldstein, wrote that their satisfaction, in the final analysis, was summoned in order to guarantee the possibility of “realization” of the main and, in essence, single genuine drive. Correspondingly, in the idea of the “drive” as such, whether it is hunger, sex, or power, there is nothing unnecessary, but rather what is concerned are needs, which can prevent self-actualization if they go for a long time being unrealized—if you suffer a long period of hunger, you need to liberate yourself from this feeling, which destroys your self-actualization:

We can say an organism is governed by the tendency to actualize, as much as possible, its individual capacities, its nature in the world. This nature is what we call the psycho-somatic constitution, and as far as considered during a certain phase, it is the individual “pattern,” the “character” which the respective constitution has attained in the course of experience. This tendency to actualize its nature, to actualize “itself,” is the basic drive, the only drive by which the life of the organism is preserved. (Goldstein 1939: 196; see also: 201–5)

Ginzburg’s analysis follows the same path as this approach. Already in the note from 1934 she underscored that a people “are cast into motion by the primary human need to realize the maximum of their capabilities—as social beings. A person is actualized socially, finds a ‘place,’ while perceiving and producing that which he experiences as a value” (Ginzburg 1934). In the war years she writes about a person’s striving to “develop to the limit all of the capacities that have been placed in him” as “an initial precondition” to life (Ginzburg 2011: 202).

Goldstein arrived at his conclusions by building on observations of cases of clinical pathology, on the strength of which the basic motive force of human development was unsettled. Ginzburg’s clinical experience was defined by her blockade observations. As she wrote in one of her blockade sketches:

Человек самоутверждается всегда, за исключением тех случаев, когда страдание или страх настолько сильны, что оставляют ему только волю к избавлению от страдания и страха. Это мы видели, хотя и в сфере голода и насыщения человек находил возможность реализации. Но самая проблема
реализации, её необходимость была приглушена. Для многих это даже служило удобным предлогом к внутренней праздности. Но теперь приходится снова самоопределяться при крайне трудных условиях, когда утрачены все заменители и фикции. (Ginzburg 2011: 60)

A person asserts himself always, with the exception of those cases when suffering or fear are so strong that they leave him with only the will for deliverance from suffering and fear. We witnessed this—a person would find a possibility for realization even if in the sphere of hunger and satiety. But the very problem, the necessity of realization were muted. For many this even served as a convenient pretext for internal idleness. But now it is time to define oneself again in extremely difficult conditions, when all of the surrogates and fictions have been lost.

The fragment that contains this argument was, probably, written in 1943, after the worst blockade winters had passed. In the same year, an article was published by one of the most eminent psychologists of the twentieth century, Abraham Maslow, with the explication of his theory of the hierarchy of human needs, which he subsequently developed in a whole cycle of monographs, laying down the origins of so-called “humanistic psychology” (Hjelle and Ziegler 1971: 364–68).

As Maslow asserted, human needs are arranged hierarchically and can be explained visually through the shape of a pyramid. When the needs of a lower order remain unsatisfied, a person grows to be fully fixated on them, and only to the extent that he gratifies them does he become free to cross into the needs of a higher level. The lowest needs in this model are physiological. On the next level the need for safety is situated, above that the need for love and belonging, then the need for self-esteem, and finally, the highest need turns out to be the need for self-actualization. Meanwhile, in speaking about the need for self-esteem, Maslow refers to Adler, and when about the need for self-actualization, to Goldstein (Maslow 1943: 382).

Maslow focuses his analysis of needs of a lower, physiological order on the example of hunger. He emphasizes that:

For the man who is extremely and dangerously hungry, no other interests exist but food. He dreams food, he remembers food, he thinks about food, he emotes only about food, he perceives only food and he wants only food. The more subtle determinants that ordinarily fuse with the physiological drives in organizing even feeding,
drinking or sexual behavior, may now be so completely overwhelmed as to allow us to speak at this time (but only at this time) of pure hunger drive and behavior, with the one unqualified aim of relief.

Another peculiar characteristic of the human organism when it is dominated by a certain need is that the whole philosophy of the future tends also to change. For our chronically and extremely hungry man, Utopia can be defined very simply as a place where there is plenty of food. He tends to think that, if only he is guaranteed food for the rest of his life, he will be perfectly happy and will never want anything more. Life itself tends to be defined in terms of eating. Anything else will be defined as unimportant. [...]

The average American citizen is experiencing appetite rather than hunger when he says “I am hungry.” He is apt to experience sheer life-and-death hunger only by accident and then only a few times through his entire life. (Maslow 1943: 374–75)

Most likely, Ginzburg had never read Maslow, while for obvious reasons the psychology of hunger occupies the center of Ginzburg’s attention. She writes about obsession with hunger, about the fixation on food, about the reduction of dreams about the future to the picture of an unlimited (or even limited—with one extra portion) quantity of bread and cereal, when not only other physiological needs (about which Maslow writes), but even other varieties of food remain beyond the limits of what can be imagined, and therefore desired. Ginzburg pays attention also to the impassable barrier between the person who pronounces the phrase “I am hungry” in normal life, and the victim of blockade dystrophy, for whom it signifies “suffering and despair, and not at all an appetite for dinner” (Ginzburg 2011: 357; see also 271). It is evident that not a single American psychologist could imagine, in his worst nightmares, this measure of competence in these questions.

Meanwhile, a completely different model of personality from that Maslow proposed can be built from Ginzburg’s observations of herself and her comrades in misfortune. One must say that Maslow himself made a number of important qualifications to his scheme of human needs. First of all he acknowledged that motivations produced by needs and drives in no way explain all of human behavior. People are capable of unmotivated, expressive behavior (that which simply reflects their qualities), and moreover, in each concrete moment a person, as a rule, is moved by a different group of needs. Secondly, to cross to another level requires not complete,
but only a basic satisfaction of the lower needs. Even more important is the fact that Maslow proposed that in individual cases, hierarchical levels of needs could change places or even be completely absent from a person’s inner world. Also important is the fact that some people are able to sacrifice lower needs in the name of higher ones (Maslow 1943).

And yet such examples composed special cases for Maslow, needing special explanation rather than shaking the foundations of his theories. Meanwhile, Ginzburg was interested mostly if not solely in the complex cases in which a multi-leveled structure of personality and diverse types of determinations were realized. Thus, she spent much time contemplating the causes of the nearly complete absence in blockaded Leningrad of the physical fear of death (see Ginzburg 2011: 130–31). According to Maslow’s theory, this phenomenon can be explained by all-pervasive hunger and total exhaustion—in his model, the physiological needs are more basic then the need for safety. Ginzburg rather minutely describes precisely these fundamental mechanisms, but at the same time remarks on the effects of motivations of a different order—the very capacity not only to demonstrate, but to experience fear is blocked by the need for self-assertion, the inability to show oneself as a coward in the eyes of others, and also by the potential for “social realization” of people who consciously conceive of themselves as inhabitants of a besieged city (ibid.).

Moreover, the need for self-assertion could be realized even in the experience of hunger, in relation to the miniscule ration of bread, which did not always guarantee even elementary survival:

Одни делили еду и распределяли, другие съедали сразу все, что возможно было съесть. Они склонны были возводить невоздержанность в принцип, утверждая, что вместо постоянной неудовлетворенности от постоянного недоедания лучше от времени до времени добиваться сытости. Делившие и распределявшие гордились своей выдержкой и разумностью и презирали неделивших за распущенность и мужицкое отношение к еде. Неделившие гордились этим, часто подавая свою гордость сквозь фальшивую самокритику,—как выражением душевной широты, некоторого удальства и дерзания. Они презирали неделивших, как богемный прожигатель жизни презирал мелкого сквалыгу рантье. Это была вечная дискуссия между буршем и филистером. (ibid.: 250)
There were some who divided and redistributed food, and others who immediately ate up everything it was possible to eat. They were inclined to raise intemperance to a principle, asserting that instead of constant dissatisfaction from constant undernourishment, it was better from time to time to achieve satiety. Those who divided and redistributed their food were proud of their restraint and reasonableness and despised those who did not divide it for their dissoluteness and churlish (мужицкое) relationship to food. Those who did not divide were proud of it; they often advertised their pride through false self-criticism,—as an expression of breadth of soul, of a certain gallantry and daring. They despised those who did not divide, like the bohemian reveler despised the petty miserly rentier. This was the eternal discussion between the bursch and the philistine.

In exactly the same way a person could guarantee “realization” through caring for a loved one, through the practical manifestations of love and responsibility for a person located nearby, even when these feelings were stifled by hunger and irritation. Ginzburg writes about families in which nearly hating and cursing one another, people shared their last piece of bread. She tells in detail of how the presence of an aunt in her hero’s life, a person he could not bear but whom he was obliged to take care of, served for him as a “condition of realization.” Without her, “the solitude, the emptiness in which he lived would have become absolute, boundless” (ibid.).

Ginzburg would agree with Maslow’s central principle of hierarchy and of the transferal of needs from the lower levels to the higher ones. However, instead of a clearly constructed pyramid, she draws a more complex figure in which the most diverse needs and aspirations of a person turn into means for self-assertion, which seeks realization by attaching to socially recognized values. Therefore, if Maslow proposed that only a small number of people, capable of achieving a higher level of development, were able to completely sense and satisfy the need for self-actualization (see Maslow 1987: 22), then for Ginzburg “realization” represented the universal condition for a person’s existence, which was defined by his social nature. In her words:

Здесь множество психологических вариаций, от практики эгоистов и честолюбцев до религиозного экстаза самоотвержения. Но замечательно, что никакой экстаз самопожертвования не снимает необходимости в личном переживании ценности. Индус, бросающийся под колесницу своего бога, хочет, чтобы колесница раздавила именно его; его не устраивает, если она раздавит кого-нибудь другого. (Ginzburg 2011: 202)
There are a lot of psychological variations here, from the practice of egoists and ambitious people to the ecstasy of self-denial. But it is curious that no kind of ecstasy of self-sacrifice can remove the necessity for personal experience of value. A Hindu who throws himself under the carriage of his god wants the carriage to crush precisely him; it will not suit him if it hits someone else.

The possibility of being crushed by a god’s carriage lends meaning to the existence of a believer, insofar as here resides social recognition of the act of self-sacrifice and at the same time a realization of one’s “self-value” (автотсенность). Meanwhile, the sacrifice Ginzburg herself attempted to make to her time was, in essence, denied. In the essay “Resumé of Failures,” which went into the notebook “1943,” she writes about the fact that “life in common” “allows one (and even then not everyone), to die for it but in all else remains impenetrable” (ibid.: 169). In sketches for her blockade narrative “Otter’s Day,” Ginzburg broadened this evaluation to the whole sphere of intelligent-fellow-travelers, who:

Хотели быть специалистами, повергающими к стопам чувства, мудрые и выраженные по собственному методу. […] От них этого не приняли. Крушенье труда и творчества. Тоже социальное опустошение, ибо свой труд и творчество они мыслили как участие в культуре страны, коллектива. (ibid.: 292)

… wanted to be specialists, casting at the feet of the authorities feelings that were wise and expressed according to their own method. […] This was not accepted from them [by the authorities]. The collapse of work and creativity. Also social ruin, because they thought of their work and creativity as participation in the culture of the country, of the collective.

The “realization” of a whole social group essentially failed and Ginzburg as a writer was mostly interested in the adaptive strategies of various individual representatives of this group in the drama of historical non-realization. And precisely with this point one can identify the basic difference between Ginzburg and many psychologists of her time whose work contains parallels to hers.

The theories of personality of that period were oriented first of all towards clinical practice. The majority of leading psychologists were at the same time practicing, quite successfully, as therapists and psychiatrists.
Accordingly, at the center of their attention was the delimitation of the norm and of pathology, and the development of practical recommendations. As paradoxical as it may sound, this type of approach to the material was not completely foreign to Ginzburg. In “A Story of Pity and Cruelty,” her autobiographical personage tries, with the help of a painstaking and ruthless self-analysis to overcome the trauma of guilt and remorse provoked by the death of a relative (see Van Buskirk 2011: 514–16).

And yet it is evident that the focus of Ginzburg’s interests was located in the realm of literary creation. Where psychologists discerned deviations needing to be corrected, or a system of conscious and unconscious ruses preventing a person from accepting life and herself as is, she perceived routine forms of behavior and experience requiring artistic comprehension and description. One might say that the failures and problems of human self-assertion and realization comprised the norm for her. In any case, examples to the contrary are practically unrepresented in her prose.

In this regard, the attention Ginzburg devotes to everyday conversation in her psychological analysis is remarkable. In Adler’s opinion, the words a person pronounces only obscure the genuine essence of his personality: “If we want to understand a person we have to close our ears. We have only to look. In this way we can see as in a pantomime” (Adler 1964: 18). The psychologist basically attempts to glean the essence of an individual by looking beyond the external, assumed manifestations of personality. Meanwhile, for Ginzburg the essence of the matter is precisely in these external manifestations. She is in the first place interested in “eternal mechanisms of conversation—those wellsprings of self-assertion, which under the name of vanity have been studied by great interpreters of the human heart, from La Rochefoucauld to Tolstoy” (Ginzburg 2011: 399). In her book On the Literary Hero she gave a more detailed explanation for the meaning which she imparts to everyday conversation:

Разговор, как и всякое поведение дестерминирован, но закономерности эти скрыты от разговаривающих. Им кажется, что они совершают акт, почти независимый от сопротивления объективного мира, тяготеющего над каждым поступком. Любовь и тщеславие, надежда и злоба в разговоре находят реализацию, порой призрачную [...]

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Conversation, like any behavior, is determined, but its laws are hidden from the speakers. It seems to them that they are performing an act that is almost independent from the resistance of the outside world, which weighs upon every act. Love and vainglory, hope and anger find realization in conversation, sometimes of a phantom nature […]

A person asserts his values, objectifying them in a word, and meanwhile asserts himself. The self-assertion of an individual is accomplished in his behavior, including in his speech behavior. A word that is pronounced in this realm is one of the strongest means.

By bringing particular social values into a sphere of personal self-assertion, an individual, according to Ginzburg, creates his “self-value.” But this self-value can never be realized to the full extent. Therefore Adler’s Selbstpersönlichkeitsideal, the fictitious goal of human aspirations, corresponds in Ginzburg’s model of personality to diverse categories. Together with self-value, she writes about the “self-concept” (avtokontseptsia), which represents the adaptation of self-value to a person’s real life circumstances and includes in it a set of “justificatory concepts.”

Thus she tells the story of her colleague, whose “decadent demonism,” unrealizable in Soviet conditions, “transformed itself into cynicism and a conscious lack of principles.” What helped him to grow reconciled with this transformation was “the self-concept of a failure, a seasoned hack-worker who had buried his talent” and “was consoled by a justificatory concept of the situation (you can’t survive otherwise!)” (Ginzburg 2011: 74–75).

In English-language psychology, the notion of “self-concept” analogous to Ginzburg’s avto-kontseptsia is frequently associated with Carl Rogers (See Hjelle and Ziegler 1971: 408–10; McAdams 1994: 457). On the whole, his psychological theory with its organicism, optimism, individualism, and indeterminism was completely foreign to Ginzburg; however, taken on its

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8 For more detail on Ginzburg’s approach to speech behavior see Zorin 2005: 53–58.
own, the understanding of the self-concept that Rogers proposed reveals a whole set of noteworthy parallels with her constructions. According to Rogers, the feeling of self-worth, the self-image particular to a person, and his concept of his ideal self enter into the composition of the “self-concept” (Rogers 1951: 497–509). However, the complicated structure of the self-concept is defined by the opposition between the drive for self-actualization, which is fundamental for a person, and the system of external evaluations, incentives and prohibitions, all of which he has interiorized, and with which he must correlate his own actions.

One can hardly doubt that to a significant degree this commonality of research orientations was connected with shared sources. Thus Prescott Lecky, who was Rogers’s teacher at Columbia University and who exerted a decisive influence on the formation of his concepts, in turn experienced the very strong influence of Adler, with whom he had worked in Vienna (see Merenda 2010: 648). However, this very serious convergence between Rogers’ and Ginzburg’s analysis looks all the more interesting when one realizes that Rogers’ work was published beginning in the mid-1940s (see Rogers 1947, idem 1951), at a time when all of Ginzburg’s analytical instruments, including her central idea of the self-concept, were already completely developed.

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The science Ginzburg tried to create would have been outside any institution, and would have played an auxiliary role in the realization of her literary plans. Nonetheless, her investigations in the 1930s and 1940s were located, in essence, at the cutting edge of the most advanced psychological thought of her time. Ginzburg succeeded in formulating an original social-psychological theory, in working out her analytical categories and in setting up a unique social-historical experiment on herself, her loved ones, and acquaintances, meant to corroborate this theory. The contours of this enormous project are only now beginning to show through in her narratives, sketches, notes, and drafts.
In her book *On Psychological Prose*, Lydia Ginzburg articulates a realm of dynamic interaction between literature and life, which occurs through the modeling of personality: in daily life, people understand themselves and others through “creative constructs,” carrying out the aesthetic work of “selection, correlation, and symbolic interpretation of psychic elements.” These processes through which we project and interpret self-images resemble the creative acts authors perform when designing literary characters or lyric personae. Not only are these phenomena similar, they are symbiotic, since a personality “shapes itself, both internally and externally, by means of

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**Shklovsky:**— All my hopes in your literary fame are riding on your someday growing old, angry, and then writing what you actually think about people.

**I:**—You’d be disappointed. Because when I write seriously, I write good things about people. Because I exchange wit for understanding.

**Shklovsky:** In that case, try not to write seriously.
images, many of which have already passed through literature” (Ginzburg 1991a: 11, 14; Ginzburg 1977: 16, 20). In novels, these images have a more intricate aesthetic structure than in everyday life. In _promezhutochnaia literatura_ or in-between literature (memoirs, diaries, letters, essays, confessions, etc.), personality constructs tend to possess an intermediate degree of aesthetic structuration, between that of life and of belles-lettres. According to Ginzburg, writers of in-between prose such as Jean-Jacques Rousseau, the Duc de Saint-Simon, and Alexander Herzen, while depicting themselves and their contemporaries, pioneered new conceptions of the self, which later entered into canonical literary genres such as the novel.

Ginzburg envisions an individual’s self-construction (both the internal process and external projection) as historically and socially conditioned through and through, but also as a set of willed acts. A person chooses, with various degrees of conscious awareness, which qualities to invest into an image, and which to conceal, based on the requirements of “his milieu, his time, his actual situation, and his own abilities and potentialities” (Ginzburg 1991a: 15; idem 1977: 21). External circumstances impose “rules of the game” and limit choice. In the essay “Generation at a Turning Point” (1979, published 1986), Ginzburg describes how historical personalities took shape and diverged after the Revolution: “In one and the same social milieu, different historical characters are formed—depending on the situation, on personal qualities, on chance. But this set of possible formations is not unlimited. Personal psychological qualities fell into several varieties, which formed a stable typology” (p. 000, italics added). The creative process of self-invention generally results in imperfectly fitting models and a residue of discordant elements that are pushed aside, but not entirely excluded from consciousness (Ginzburg 1991a: 15; idem 1977: 20). It is feasible that an individual living through dramatic historical times, or transitioning from one milieu to another, might change her image by reactivating formerly suppressed qualities, or suppressing those that were earlier manifest (changes occur in less dramatic time horizons as well, for example between the workplace and home).

Ginzburg elaborates her theory of personality formation while discussing French and Russian traditions of “psychological prose” in her most personal book of literary scholarship, which was published (successfully
making it past the censors) in 1971.\(^1\) However, even my small introduction should indicate that she had larger ambitions and interests as an essayistic writer engaged in social-psychological and historical analysis. For decades, Ginzburg had been developing these ideas while writing notes and essays “for the desk drawer.” The writings, especially from the 1930s onward, formed an attempt to understand how individuals (her contemporaries) crafted themselves in response to external demands and changing situations. In an environment where sociology did not exist as an academic discipline, and psychology was largely restricted to Pavlovian reflexology, Ginzburg improvised a far-reaching methodology.\(^2\) She learned from the writers she admired most (chief among them Marcel Proust, Herzen and Lev Tolstoy), while using skills acquired as a young Formalist, such as how to identify dominants and functions to describe literature as a complex system and dynamic historical phenomenon. Her analytical approach was influenced by social psychologists and philosophers popular in pre-Revolutionary and early Soviet Russia, many of whom fell out of favor in the thirties. Her conceptual vocabulary includes Freudian concepts such as repression and sublimation, George Herbert Mead’s notion of the “generalized other,”

¹ Lydia Ginzburg differentiated between On Psychological Prose and her previous books of literary scholarship by calling it her first “book,” in an unpublished note from 1974, written at age seventy-two (before the publication of her essays/prose, and also before On the Literary Hero): “All the same On Psychological Prose is the only book of mine which I genuinely like. Because it is my only book. And On Lyric—that is still literary scholarship. Good scholarship, but nonetheless. That which I do not want. And it [scholarship] won’t leave me be; it must be that it won’t let go of me—as long as I am able to work.” Ginzburg 1970s-80s. All translations from Lydia Ginzburg’s prose (narratives, notes, drafts) are my own. I use Judson Rosengrant’s translation of On Psychological Prose (Princeton, 1991).

² Sociology did not develop as a discipline in Russia until the 1960s. Before the Revolution, it was part of the discipline of philosophy. After the Revolution, it gradually became replaced by historical materialism, the equivalent of Marxist sociology. Sociology was criticized for its bourgeois origins, and for being too abstract and metaphysical. From the mid-1930s to the mid-1950s, sociology was nonexistent as an independent academic discipline, though ethnography and anthropology continued in some form. See Weinberg 2004: 1–10. See also Todd 1985. On psychology, see Luriia 2001 and Joravsky 1989.
concepts of “will” influenced by Friedrich Nietzsche (“will to power” or a “will to pleasure”), an idea of the weak or strong “life force,” similar to Henri Bergson’s creative “vital impulse” (élan vital) as an essential part of character (not only among artists); the universal drive to self-assertion, found in the theory of Alfred Adler, as well as the novels of Tolstoy; and a constellation of typologies based on the chief ways in which a person experiences value (emotionally, sensually, intellectually, etc.) inspired by Eduard Spranger’s Lebensformen (1928).3

In the thirties, when Ginzburg moved away from the notebooks (originally inspired by Pushkin’s contemporary Pyotr Viazemsky) to more sociologically or analytically oriented work, Soviet society was closed, intensely hierarchical, rigid, and authoritarian.4 Always looking to understand how social values are layered upon the individual, Ginzburg asks how various qualities “fall in” to a set of available identities, whether professional (e.g. pedagogue, actor, administrator, litterateur, etc.) or personal (e.g. wife, husband, mother, romantic partner, rival). She analyzes why people project images of, say, the decadent, the “strained intellectual,” or the “Don Juan.” Her interests as a writer-researcher consistently track the dilemmas confronting herself and her milieu. In essays from the early thirties, when she is charting her course out of a failed profession (caused by the Marxist rout of Formalism and closure of the Institute for the History of Arts) and failed love affairs (having reached the age, she wrote, where unrequited love would have made her ridiculous), she studies how members of the humanities intelligentsia, the so-called “fellow travelers” (poputchiki) of the 1920s, decide

3 For a concise treatment of Ginzburg’s relationship to many of these influences, see Zorin 2005. For an expanded survey of the convergences and comparisons between Ginzburg’s theories and those of German and American social psychologists, including Eduard Spranger, Alfred Adler, William James, George Herbert Mead, Kurt Lewin, Gordon Allport, Henry Murray, Kurt Goldstein, Abraham Maslow, and Carl Rogers, see Zorin’s article in this volume (pp. 000–000). He argues that Ginzburg was on the cutting edge of socio-psychological theory being developed by her contemporaries in the thirties and forties, even if she may not have been directly aware of them. On Bergson’s influence on Russian modernism, see Fink 1999. On Nietzsche, see Rosenthal 1994.

4 On the functioning of hierarchies in Stalinist culture, see for example Fitzpatrick 1999.
whether to join the dominant “legal order” (pravoporiadok) under Stalin; she observes how women make choices between career and family, and how unmarried women, sometimes closeted lesbians, escape perceptions of sexual humiliation. In the catastrophically devastating Leningrad blockade (where she survived the hunger, cold and bombings but lost her mother, as well as several friends), she analyzes how people reinvent new self-images after narrowly escaping starvation, death, and emotional trauma.

The book *On Psychological Prose* does not treat Socialist Realism, nor the question of what happens to self-construction when an obstruction or distortion prevents the flow of certain personality models between literature and life. As Ginzburg discusses in “The State of Literature at the End of the War” (this volume, p. 000), a unique and unprecedented situation arose in the Soviet Union: writers were prevented not only by actual censors, but by their own “inner” censors from letting their experiences enter into a work. This silencing severed the meaningful connections between literature and life. The full consequences of censorship and the doctrine of Socialist Realism are inherently unknowable, though they have been productively studied. More elusive are questions on a secondary level: what was the significance of this distortion of the literary process for everyday life? If we follow Ginzburg’s theories of in-between literature and of society, which she was articulating in this period, many questions arise. Were there socially acceptable self-images that circulated, but could not enter into literature (at least that which was published or intended for publication)? Did the absence of a freely evolving literature, or a literature adequately reflecting reality, mean that there was also a paucity of personality constructs to choose as models? Did models from literary history or other realms of life come to fill the vacuum, and if so, how?

This chapter attempts an initial approach to these questions through a discussion of Lydia Ginzburg’s notes from the archives (some still unpublished, others appearing recently) written in the 1930s and 1940s. Filled with analyses of characters and speech, and focused on questions of self-construction, they allow for a rare glance into the social history of Soviet Russia—in the microcosm of one Leningrad intelligentsia milieu—during Stalinism and in wartime. The most notable and unusual feature of these personality constructs is their origins in failure, a fact that may owe itself
to Ginzburg’s obsessions, as well as to the harsh difficulties posed by Soviet society. Her subjects have suffered tragic fates: they have forfeited material wealth and social status after the Revolution; during the Blockade, they have suddenly and dramatically lost their beauty and sexual attractiveness; they have shed self-images undesirable in Stalinist Russia, such as that of “decadent.” Again and again, Ginzburg analyzes people for whom “a different fate was prepared” before history made its turn. To express the plight of a generation, she quotes Anna Akhmatova: “like a river,/ I was diverted by the severe epoch” (fifth “The Northern Elegy” [1945], in Ginzburg’s “Generation at a Turning Point,” this volume, p. 000). Historical changes have afforded Ginzburg the insight that: “There are not only people who are born-again and resurrected, but there are also people who die again, and die repeatedly” (Ginzburg 2011: 74). Nevertheless, paradoxically, her notes testify to the resiliency of people in their ability to reinvent and reassert themselves after every symbolic death.

The notes from the 1930s (at least those extant) contain little or no mention of collectivization, the orchestrated famine in Ukraine, mass arrests, purges, or State policies outside of the less lethal of those that directly shaped (“redirected”) the daily life of the Leningrad intelligentsia, such as for example the functioning of literary institutions (Writers’ Union, the University), or the organization of cemeteries and death rituals. During the relative cultural freedoms of wartime, Ginzburg reflects openly on the war’s progress, both on a grand historical scale and as it relates to matters of life and death in besieged Leningrad (the distribution of food and housing, transportation, censorship and directives concerning literature). And yet she addresses totalitarianism and absolute state power only obliquely, for example in the passages on the Leviathan discussed here by Irina Sandomirskia; she refers to Stalin only once, in a coded way (as “st,” in “The State of Literature near the End of the War,” this volume, p. 000).

5 All of these waves of terror and mass extermination are in fact mentioned in some of Ginzburg’s later essays, for example “At One with the Legal Order” (1980, see this volume, p. 000), where there is an attempted explanation for their absence from the earlier notes.
The catastrophes of Stalinism and of the war manifest themselves profoundly, if subtly, in the studies of her contemporaries’ confrontation of personal and professional failures. Ginzburg’s notes give evidence of what Alexander Zholtkovsky has termed the “power-ridden cultural atmosphere” of Stalinism. In his provocative piece on Anna Akhmatova, he argues that the poet adopted the strategies of a “despot” to survive totalitarian times, crafting a self-image as the “obverse of Stalinism,” with an “amalgam of fear, defensiveness, and domineering” (Zholtkovsky 2000: 64–65). Ginzburg, after her first meeting with Akhmatova in 1927 (they would become close acquaintances), paints her “magnificence” (velichie), differently: “She comports herself like an ex-princess at a bourgeois resort” (Ginzburg 2002a: 44). Significantly, the young scholar interprets the poet’s self-image as a remnant of an earlier epoch (or perhaps two epochs). She sees Akhmatova as a “historical personality” who remained relatively unchanged after the Revolution (and was under no obligation to understand the new personalities), even if new contexts shaped the meaning of her role and behavior. And yet Ginzburg indubitably senses Akhmatova’s power: “when a living person is a grave, and a monument, and an abused shadow, it is fine to bow to her as low as possible” (ibid.: 388). Later, in the summer of 1945, Ginzburg remarks that Akhmatova advertises her moral superiority by ceaselessly reminding others that her “prosperity” comes from a victory over the state, which has retreated before her spiritual strength (Ginzburg 2011: 139), an observation much in line with Zholtkovsky’s portrayal.

Like Akhmatova, Ginzburg’s characters must find ways to master their fates and prevail over the formidable obstacles in their way. The strategies they employ to assert themselves and strengthen their social standing, as they adapt to the conditions of Stalinism, are subtle and varied. Most of Ginzburg’s subjects in the 1920s and 1940s were less important

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6 For more observations on Ginzburg’s Akhmatova, see Andrew Kahn’s contrast in this volume of the sketches Ginzburg writes of Akhmatova and Mandelshtam, as stasis versus motion, p. 000.

7 Though published in two different sections of the 2002 book, these fragments come from the same original note, made in 1927, after Ginzburg’s first meeting with Akhmatova. Ginzburg 1927a (ZK II): 88.
as cultural figures than those who appear in her notebooks of the 1920s (in part because many of her illustrious friends had either fallen victim to the purges or were later evacuated from the blockaded city). Her own mode of being does not fit along any of those Zholkovsky summarizes as belonging to such luminaries as Mandelstam, Pasternak, Eisenstein, and Mayakovsky (e.g. enthusiasm, defiance, submission, exile, suicide). When writing in 1980, Ginzburg described the typical historical behavior of her generation as a combination of adaptability (motivated by “a dual mechanism: the evasion of suffering and the pursuit of pleasure”), justification, and indifference (see this volume, p. 000). Her strategy in the thirties and forties seems to have combined acceptance, withdrawal, cynicism, and patience. Her strongest survival tool was her analytical mind, which she used, as an observer, to dissect the strategies of others. The notes discussed here must have carried a dual role for Ginzburg: part coping mechanism, part etudes toward a future novel. I interpret them here for their insights into the psychology of their objects, yet they are equally revealing of the author’s personal fixations.

Adding to our understanding of life in Leningrad in the years of Stalinism, an examination of the varieties of failure will meanwhile allow me to deduce four crucial paradoxes in Ginzburg’s representation of this society. The first two paradoxes have already been suggested above: 1) Ginzburg’s subjects are strong and determined to prevail, even if they have self-images of failure; 2) they are overwhelmingly self-willed individuals, even though they must choose their identities from a limited set of historically determined identities. The second two paradoxes are related to Ginzburg’s identity and her modes of writing: 3) she places exclusive emphasis on visible,

8 Certain outlines for the unfinished work “Dom i mir” (Home and the World) suggest that Akhmatova would have been one of the characters there. It is not inconceivable that Ginzburg wrote more sketches of Akhmatova, which did not survive. Ginzburg 1930s Dom i mir.

9 She writes in “At One with the Legal Order”: “In my case the justifying mechanism was less developed than the others; it was hindered by an inherent analytical propensity. The indifference mechanism, on the other hand, worked without a hitch.” See this volume, p. 000.
social forms of existence, while the most essential part of her own identity (and existence), that of being a writer, had to remain hidden—a situation that finds a parallel in relation to her closeted sexuality;\(^4\) Ginzburg’s representation of everyday life allows for no interaction that is not infused with self-assertion. People are engaged in a Hobbesian battle with one another.\(^1\) Meanwhile, her prose is built on self-distancing and the avoidance of self-assertion in every way, in a post-religious ethics partially indebted to Vladimir Solovёv’s *Justification of the Good*.\(^12\) Her work allows one to perceive a difference (not posited or verbalized by her theories) between social life and its writing, based on the nature of interestedness or implication in power struggle. The impersonality and the attempted generalization of her self-image, especially in her works designated as *povestvovaniia* (narratives), erase the represented self in order to remove it as much as possible from the battlefield of power.

Before examining particular self-images, it will be useful to make some observations about the peculiarities of Ginzburg’s near-sociological sketches. Her essays, for all of their avoidance of direct autobiographical enunciation, were intensely personal, and never far from self-analysis. That she tended in the 1930s and 1940s to analyze failures (despite having many acquaintances who experienced success at least temporarily, such as Grigory Gukovsky, Olga Berggol’ts, Konstantin Simonov, and others) speaks to her struggle with the public expression of her own failed social realization, in the professional and intimate spheres. One might detect an underlying, enduring concern with the impossible task of “how to be a

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10 On importance of hidden over visible as a feature of individuation in Soviet society, see Kharkhordin’s treatment of dissimulation in *Kharkhordin 1999: 270–78*. On Ginzburg’s sexuality, see *Van Buskirk 2007*. And on being-in-writing, see Sandomirskaia, this volume, p. 000.

11 See Sandomirskaia in this volume, p. 000. Also see Andrei Zorin’s comments in *NLO Roundtable 2006: 93–121*.

12 See *Van Buskirk 2006* (on self-distancing as an ethical act), *2008* (for more on selfhood and ethics, and on the “exit from self” and its relationship to Solovёv) and *2010* (on the relationship between self-distancing and the genre of the narrative/ *povestvovanie*).
failed writer” (to modify her teacher Boris Eikhenbaum’s famous research question on the topic of “Literary Everyday Life”). Another particularity is that Ginzburg analyzes women more than men, which may be because she had greater access to their speech (especially in the Leningrad blockade, where women far outnumbered men, due both to higher male mortality rates in siege conditions and to the fact that more men were sent to the front), but also because she sought to study alternate versions of herself. She judged harshly those who did not realize themselves through intellectual or creative work, and took a special interest in people whose “complexes” were related to failed erotic self-realization.

Most broadly, Ginzburg studied members of the intelligentsia, a fact that helps explain her bias towards perceiving self-conceptions as consciously and intentionally made. For she postulates that intellectuals (or intelligenty, a special kind of intellectual with a traditional role in shaping society and examining moral issues) exhibit a higher degree of self-conscious artistry than others when constructing their self-images. Here is her rough articulation of the idea of autokontseptsia (self-conception) from a 1936 notebook:

A person (especially an intelligent) is an ideological creature. He can exist fragmentarily and haphazardly, but he must think of himself in a web of connected elements; these connections form a self-conception. The self-conception is a conscious awareness and aesthetic organization of the empirical chaos of psychic life. The aesthetic organization gives a person that which he needs so much—a sense of his own value. A person adorns himself psychologically with strength, if he is strong; if not, he adorns himself with his weaknesses; in any case he takes what is his [he prevails].
Here, the self-concept appears as an aesthetic decoration or superstructure, a way of beautifying life. In her notebook “The Word” (Slovo), from besieged Leningrad, Ginzburg writes similarly about the construction of a self-conception above one’s physical and psychological qualities as a way to “experience (perezhivat’) one’s value,” as well as for the sake of “beauty and interest” (Ginzburg 2011: 70–71). Strong self-images act as armor in an embattled social sphere, allowing people to “claim what’s theirs” (this is how these characters are destined to “succeed”). The stakes are high: the self-concepts analyzed here are formed in a “time lacking in stable daily life” (bezbytnoe vremia), without a culture of leisure.13

In framing self-construction as an aesthetic process, Ginzburg may be overplaying the fictional or symbolic aspect of self-images at the expense of real pain and suffering experienced by individuals. This was a tendency of which she was self-critically aware. Her alter ego Otter (whose strange name seems to designate other, or author) makes this mistake in conceptualizing his “aunt” in “<A Story of Pity and Cruelty>.” In this slightly fictionalized analysis of the relationship between Ginzburg and her mother in the Blockade, Otter errs in his logic by believing his aunt capable only of false emotion: “The aberration consisted in the fact that his aunt was not a genuine person and that all of her reactions in life were just playful fictions (igrovye fiktsii)” (Ginzburg 2011: 38). He had approached their interactions as a game, acting out his own cruel role by borrowing vulgar phrases from the lowest lexical levels of the street, words that struck him as unreal and alien (“ne svoi, ne usamdelishnye slova” ibid.: 40). Similar to Tolstoy’s Pozdnyshev—who shocks himself with his vulgar and spiteful words, thinks his wife capable only of deceptive fictions, and suddenly notices her humanity upon viewing her corpse—Otter tragically conceives of his aunt as a real person only after her death.

13 The high stakes may explain why Ginzburg, while similar to Erving Goffman in describing life in terms of a game or as drama, does not at all suggest that the acting out of a role could constitute what the latter calls the “bureaucratization” of self, which is uncomfortable for the fluid subject (Goffman 1997: 101–2).
In the sketches of her acquaintances, Ginzburg describes their self-images as fictional personae invented for the sake of a game. In the extremely harsh and deadly environment of the Leningrad blockade during the winter of 1941–42 and immediately following, she notes a decrease in the fictitiousness and aesthetic structuration of personality formations. It seems that certain concepts that circulated in the 1930s temporarily disappeared in the blockade. In these circumstances, as we shall see, possessing the semblance of a psychology required extreme effort, as it meant overcoming the body’s tendency towards emaciation, silence, and death.

Nadryv

The first two images I shall analyze are concentrated in sketches from the mid to late 1930s. The “nadryv” is the self-image of a failure pr excellence, and a concept in opposition to which Ginzburg defined herself. In one note from 1927, she indicates in a self-deprecatingly humorous way that nadryv was part of her repertoire: “If Veta [Dolukhanova—EVB] were to see these lines, she would probably say that this is just another instance of my Russian-Jewish nadryv” (Ginzburg 2002a: 386). In a notebook entry from 1930, she comments that the “intellectual with nadryv” was a type common in the milieu of her youth, and was characterized by “depths of the soul, extreme interest in auto-psychologizing, misfires of the psychic apparatus, which are immediately aestheticized” (ibid.: 82).14 The new epoch, fortunately in her opinion, was teaching her contemporaries a contrary lesson: “respect for health of the body and soul, health that delivers results; an interest in the common good [interes k obschemu]; perception of life in its social dimensions […] professionalism, an unsqueamishness in relation to work that pays by the hour or to rough drafts; a slight squeamishness in relation to depths of the soul, and to self-absorption and aestheticism” (ibid.: 82).
V arieties of  Failure

83). Soviet ideology emphasized human civilization’s mastery of nature and its chaos, whether through large-scale industrial, infrastructural, and agricultural projects, or programs of personal transformation directed at the human body and psyche. The consciousness of the New Man would be forged through overcoming weakness, illness, and irrationality (with the help of the word). Mikhail Zoshchenko, in a more resolute and tragic way than Ginzburg, welcomed the turn towards an ideology of health as a way to overcome his own complexes. As Keith Livers has shown, Zoshchenko strove in the thirties to exorcise his “multiple fears, phobias, and anxieties” by undertaking “a progressive rationalization of the human organism” in tune with “Stalinist culture’s program of social hygiene and ideological purification” (Livers 2004: 91–152).

Nadryv, a Russian word defying simple translation, and rendered most effectively as “lacerations” (Dostoevsky 1976), is most immediately associated with Fyodor Dostoevsky’s The Brothers Karamazov. Alternative renderings include “ruptures,” “harrowings,” or “hysterias,” as translator David McDuff writes, and the word’s origins are in the French déchirement, meaning “breaking, tearing, and straining beneath an intolerable weight of mental, emotional and spiritual suffering.”

Robert Belknap compares nadryv in The Brothers Karamazov to buffoonery: “Both embody perversity, willfulness, self-consciousness, self-dramatization, and absurdity.” But as he notes, the difference lies in the presence of laughter versus pain. Through its association with Dostoevsky, nadryv contains its own parody, as a sincere outburst or an inauthentic travesty of one.

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15 In his discussion, Keith Livers refers, among many others, to Katerina Clark’s discussion of nature versus culture in The Soviet Novel and Jochen Hellbeck’s treatment of Soviet subjectivity in Revolution on My Mind.
16 McDuff’s footnote is quoted in Levontina and Zalizniak 2001: 304.
17 He writes that whereas “the buffoon makes himself laughable in order to make others so,” the nadryv “causes a person to hurt himself in order to hurt others, or, perversely, to hurt others in order to hurt himself.” Belknap 1967: 46.
18 The linguists Irina Levontina and Anna Zalizniak (who use a cognitive approach to language, aiming to describe emotions through language, following Anna Wierzbicka) write that nadryv has two opposite meanings “an uncontrolled emotional outburst or an expression of forced and inauthentic emotions. In the first case one shows one’s
The cognitive linguist Irina Levontina correlates the rise of nadryv with that of the class of raznochintsy in the 1860s. If Pushkin and other members of the Arzamas society (1810s) idealized restraint in verbal expression and resolved questions of honor through duels, Vissarion Belinsky and Nikolai Chernyhevsky, on the other hand, strove to lay bare the ugliest stains on their souls in letters resembling Rousseau’s Confessions. After Dostoevsky’s novels, according to Levontina, this mode of being died out in a self-parody. However, she supports this argument with examples from Viktor Erofeev (1947–), Sergei Dovlatov (1941–90), and Joseph Brodsky (1940–96), members of the sixties generation who wrote in the late Soviet and post-Soviet period (the second two in emigration). If one is to believe Ginzburg, the nadryv had certain popularity, at least as a self-concept (if not as a literary style) in both post-Symbolist and post-Revolutionary times. While we possess scant evidence of Ginzburg’s own image as understood by her contemporaries in the thirties and forties, it is clear that she strove for health, control, and restraint, what one might call sderzhannost’. Irony and humor accompany her type, as she describes it in relation to both Pushkin and her contemporary, the poet Nikolai Oleinikov: “Oleinikov was formed in the twenties, when there existed (alongside others) a type called the “diffident person” (tip zastenchivogo cheloveka) who was afraid of lofty phraseology, whether official-bureaucratic, or the vestiges of how the intelligentsia spoke ([frazeologii] perezhitochno-intelligentskoj) [...] A taboo was placed on any direct expression of the sublime, when it wasn’t balanced by laughter” (Ginzburg 2002a: 493). One could compare this attitude to a fundamental element of Acmeist poetics, which Ginzburg terms “profiltrovannost,” i.e. the filtering or purification of feeling into plain words, an aesthetics one finds in Anna Akhmatova, Nikolai Gumilëv, and Osip Mandelstam (ibid.: 388).19

19 Ginzburg aligns the aesthetics of the symbolists (particularly in a passage on Blok and Bely) with “nadryv,” whereas the aesthetics of acmeism are the opposite—about

deeply hidden intimate feelings with a frightening frankness, that exposes the things which are supposed to be most personal ... In the second case one goes even further. One is so deeply involved in introspection that one finds in one’s soul something that does not exist. That is why with nadryv extremely exaggerated, distorted, or even imaginary feelings are expressed. In this case nadryv verges on falseness or grotesque” (Levontina and Zalizniak 2001: 303–4).
In 1936, Ginzburg sketches a character K., who can be deciphered as Rina (Ekaterina) Zelënaia. In my discussion of this and other characters, I will preserve Ginzburg’s use of initials, since at times she intended this stylistic choice not only to preserve anonymity, but also to reserve the rights of quasi-fictionality. K. is a figure whom Ginzburg describes in private diaries and encoded passages as the object of her most intense and devastating passion, the cause of an unrequited love that nearly destroyed her (approximately from age nineteen to twenty-three, from 1921 to 1925). By 1936, the infatuation had long passed, producing a sketch that is cold, sardonic, and condescending. Ginzburg begins with a long quotation of an Encyclopedic Dictionary entry on “hysteria,” which she believes to fit K. perfectly (toch’ v toch’). The entry lists among traits and “ethical defects” an inability to contain passing impulses, an unaccommodating nature, a desire to be the focus of others’ attentions, mendacity and eccentric behavior. Ginzburg elaborates on the character of the hysteric (which she detaches from gender) in her analysis of K. as childlike, egotistical, and narcissistic, as a person in her “natural state” who lacks even the minimum ability to restrain her selfish urges. She believes K.’s character developed its proclivity for unrestrained Bohemian living through her “uncultured and disorganized” upbringing in a “time lacking in stable daily life” (v bezbytnoe vremia). But the most fateful circumstance was her choice of the acting profession, filtering emotions through and making them dry. This is how Ginzburg and Akhmatova come together, stylistically. See Levontina 257, footnote. Also see Ginzburg 2002a: 386–88.

Ginzburg had an aversion to “invention” (vydunka): she was more likely to reach fictionality through omission and selection than through the addition of wholly fictional characters. She wrote in drafts related to “Zametki o proze,” circa 1934: “Invented [vydumannye] people and situations […] fill me with a certain disgust” (Ginzburg 1934a). On the significance of proper names in in-between prose making what Dorrit Cohn calls “the distinction of fiction,” see Ginzburg 1979: 11–12.

These dates can be extrapolated from “Stadii liubvi” (Ginzburg 2002b), as well as from her youthful diaries and poems, which are in the archives (O.R. R.N.B. 1377).

The Russian word “byt” is not directly synonymous with everyday life. It signifies everyday routine, the domestic sphere, and stagnation, as opposed to “bytie” (spiritual being, transcendence), and it became a target for both Symbolists and revolutionar-
“the profession of women and hystericsex—with the single exception of those truly great people of the theater.” K.’s “sexual narcissism” grows into “social narcissism,” as she forms an addiction to the immediate satisfaction derived from occupying center stage. Ginzburg writes, “Professions have a deep correspondence to character (which does not hinder a profession from breaking a character or a character from adapting to a profession).”

After her role in the popular film *Podkidysh* (1939), Rina Zelenaia would find success and fame, most of all for her mimicry of children’s voices. But in 1936, Ginzburg pities her situation: K. lacks a real home (she lives in one room with her mother and sister, her dependents), husband, and true friends. Her voice is half-wrecked (*na polovinu sorvannyi golos*)—a fitting physical manifestation of *nadryv*—as a result of her vocal acrobatics in every performance, whether for friends or in the theater. She has not raised her profession to the level of true creative work (this also satisfies Levontina’s description of *nadryv*): “In her professional life K. rushed around, served [sluzhila], got tired, earned money—and never worked [nikogda ne rabotala]” (*Ginzburg 1936*). K. is a personal and professional failure who has taken the easiest road to value through the self-image of *nadryv*:

Надрывы—это суррогат нравственной ценности и род самооправдания. [...] Невротики охотно украшаются надрывами. Термин этот нуждается в уточнении, но во всяком случае в это понятие входит элемент сознательного разглядывания и педализации страдания. Надрыв—эстетическая надстройка, воздвигаемая невротиком над своей неудачей. Истерия особенно опасна тем,

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23 Ginzburg added to her 1936 draft a much later footnote—probably made in the 1980s, judging from the handwriting—correcting her error in seeing K’s career as doomed: “This turned out not to be true (i.e. it was just a phase. Later she worked and achieved success)” (*Ginzburg 1936*).

24 Levontina and Zalizniak write about a relationship between *nadryv* and the verb “nadryvat’sia,” meaning, “to do something with a great effort.” But this effort occurs not in the context of work, they tell us, but rather of “shouting, crying, and especially coughing” (*Levontina and Zalizniak 2001: 303*).
Ginzburg’s preliminary concept of nadryv, a gaping at one’s own suffering, lines up with the definitions discussed above. What is different is the idea that a person forms an enduring self-image of nadryv, an aesthetic structure, which is meant to substitute for some other value. K., in Ginzburg’s reckoning, suffers most because of her unbridled will (raznuzdannia volia)—composed of the will to influence (volia k vozdeistviu) and will to power (volia k mogushchestvu). Meanwhile, she lacks a will to self-constraint or self-compulsion (volia k samoprinuzdeniu). Though loved and admired, K. does not love in return; therefore she heartlessly and selfishly mistreats others, and is not committed to her career in any higher sense. Ginzburg writes that K.’s absolute egoism has not been sublimated, resulting in emptiness. Relying on Dostoevsky’s legacy, she is able to advertise and magnify her distress through the self-concept of the hysteric, which carries the value of suffering.

In the blockade, Ginzburg refines the concept of nadryv while examining another “failure,” G.B., a.k.a. Galina Bitner, an editor (and Ginzburg’s supervisor) at the Leningrad Radio. Ginzburg redefines nadryv as “a condition and behavior that arise out of the experience of lacking correspondence...
between one’s own value and the possibility of realizing this value” (Ginzburg 1943–44). Returning to the root of the word, one could say that an outburst literally emerges from the gap between potential and actual achievements. And as Ginzburg argues, the nadryv is a mechanism for broadcasting, through a show of suffering, one’s potential, unrealized value.

In G.B.’s case, the primary value whose realization has been obstructed is that of her “femininity” or womanhood—which had earlier been promoted by her beauty and sex appeal (zhenshchina krasivaia i seksapil’naia). Ginzburg writes that, as a weak, submissive, and dependent character, G.B. pleases men only temporarily, before being inevitably jilted. At the young age of sixteen, she married into an unhappy and childless union. As a typical historical phenomenon, Ginzburg places G.B. into two categories: (1) the déclassé bourgeois intelligentsia; (2) women who fail in the family and are subsequently unable to adapt to professional self-fulfillment because of weak impulses and an absence of specific talents. Like many women in this position, according to Ginzburg—who clearly identifies with what she defines as the more typically masculine manner of self-realization—G.B. (since she has failed at family) has two choices for “ersatz-realization”: to get a job (sluzhit’) or to study. She entered graduate school, only to be expelled for acting and speaking like a “lady,” a behavior that provoked the powers-that-be into failing her on a political exam.

A “hysterical narcissist” (one may notice that Ginzburg consistently links the hysteric with nadryv), G.B. builds a self-concept around failure precisely because she has full confidence in her “feminine value.”25 Ginzburg argues here that nadryv is “affirmation through denial.” As the hero from Dostoevsky’s “Notes from Underground” teaches us, overt self-humiliation amplifies one’s significance, by making obvious the lack of correspondence between what one deserves and one’s actual fate.26 G.B.’s nadryv manifests

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25 For a feminist treatment of Ginzburg’s analysis of Bitner (who is disguised as “P.V.” in part 2 of Zapiski blokadnogo cheloveka), see Sandomirskaia 2011.

26 In her book On Psychological Prose, Ginzburg uses the hero of Notes from Underground as an example of “self-affirmation of the inverted type” [oprokinutai forma samoutverzhdenia]. It is significant that she associates nadryv with Dostoevsky’s
itself in lamentations, sometimes adorned by the speech habits of the *intelligentsia* (acquired in her youth), but often laying bare primitive concerns: the fulfillment of appetites, whether sexual or nutritional. In the blockade, interests in food and bodily comforts acquire general significance, and thus her self-image develops in the direction of greater self-exposure. Ginzburg imagines G.B. justifying her self-concept thusly: “life has brought me, an educated woman (a graduate student) to the point of speaking like a whore.” Her *nadryv* is therefore partly naïve, partly conscious. G.B. is able to delight doubly: “in the satisfaction of the primitive impulses” (to speak openly about sex and food), and “in the experience of her own self-conception.”

*Khamstvo*

Like *nadryv*, *khamstvo* is a Russian behavioral concept that does not lend itself to a one-word translation into English. Though our focus here will be on the 1930s, the later reflections on *khamstvo* by Sergei Dovlatov, Russian émigré writer who lived in New York City, can help us understand this phenomenon (which he considered to be virtually absent from American society):

Хамство тем и отличается от грубости, наглости и нахальства, что оно непобедимо, что с ним невозможно бороться, что перед ним можно только отступить [...] хамство есть не что иное, как грубость, наглость, нахальство, вместе взятые, но при этом—умноженные на безнаказанность [...] Именно безнаказанностью своей хамство и убивает вас наповал, вам нечего ему противопоставить, кроме собственного унижения, потому что хамство—это всегда «сверху вниз,” это всегда «от сильного—слабому,” потому что хамство—это беспомощность одного и безнаказанность другого, потому что хамство—это неравенство. (*Dovlatov 1999: 324–25*)

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**Khamstvo** differs from rudeness, insolence and impudence in that it is unconquerable, in that it is impossible to do battle with, that faced with it all you can do is retreat [...] it is none other than rudeness, insolence, and impudence all in one, but meanwhile—multiplied by impunity [...] Precisely with its impunity, *khamstvo* kills you on spot, you cannot oppose it with anything except your own humiliation, because *khamstvo* is always “from the top down,” it is always “from the strong to the weak,” because *khamstvo* is the helplessness of one and the impunity of the other, because *khamstvo* is inequality.

*Khamstvo*, which one might translate as “offensive boldness,” or “selfish impunity,”\(^\text{27}\) is built from the noun *kham* (boor, heel, tyke, swine)—originally referring to one of Noah’s sons. The biblical reference has little in common with the contemporary usage—which has also produced a verb, *khamit‘* (to act rudely, with impunity). While the *kham* is a powerful figure, many thinkers have seen this behavior as emerging from weakness. The word belongs to a winged phrase “the approaching *kham*,” thanks to Dmitry Merezhkovsky’s widely read essay of that name (“Griadushchii kham,” *Merezhkovsky 1911* (1906)). The symbolist and Christian thinker defined *khamstvo* as the worst of all possible slavish behavior, i.e. the philistinism that (following Herzen) he saw as common to the petty bourgeois and to positivists in Europe and Asia.\(^\text{28}\) Iuri Lotman, in a television lecture from 1989, aligned “*khamstvo*” with “the psychology of a slave [...] the psychology of a person who has been humiliated, who therefore does not respect himself and tries to compensate his lacking self-respect by humiliating others” (Lotman 2003: 473). Both the slave and the occupier are prone to abandon cultural constraints in search of an easy freedom, exercised in “rudeness, hooliganism [...] insulting others.” Lotman opposes *khamstvo*, as a widespread twentieth-century phenomenon, to *intelligentnost‘*, whose characteristics are “civility, psychological sensitivity, the ability to suffer not only from physical pain” (ibid.: 472).

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\(^{27}\) I would like to thank Rebecca Frumkina for pointing me to Dovlatov, for the definition of “offensive boldness,” and for helpful email correspondence on the subject in January 2011.

\(^{28}\) Unlike Herzen, Merezhkovsky believed the savior must be the “approaching Christ,” who would be at home in a religious community fostered by the “heart and conscience” of the Russian intelligentsia. See *Merezhkovsky 1911*: 31, 36).
The *kham* assumes a position of such superiority and invincibility that the natural response, if it is to be a vocal one, is none other than *nadryv*, since “you cannot oppose it with anything except your own humiliation.” *Khamstvo*, in its contemporary meaning, is more or less a post-Revolutionary phenomenon, having become a way of life during the era of great social transformations, of shortages and poverty administered by an indifferent or cruel bureaucracy, of ideological lies, and high stakes. It seems to combine in a particularly toxic mix with communist ideology, if the latter becomes a tool for abusing one’s personal enemies, neighbors, family members, or colleagues. Yet it may also be used simply for the pleasure of experiencing the power of one’s position.

One finds examples of the *kham* in the satirical stories of Mikhail Zoshchenko from the NEP era and later, as well as the works of Mikhail Bulgakov. These *khams* are men and women, private citizens and public officials, who insult the dignity of other human beings with their selfish impudence. *Khamstvo* is not exclusive to communist ideology or bureaucracy. In Zoshchenko’s story “Khamstvo,” the behavior arises out of a combination of selfishness, ignorance, and cultural misunderstanding: a Soviet citizen travels to various hotels in Italy without tipping—himself acting as a *kham* while accusing the vengeful hotel staff of the same. One might think also of the rude “lady aristocrat” in Zoshchenko’s eponymous story (“Aristokratka” in Russian), who haughtily disregards her companion’s limited budget while gorging on cakes at a theater buffet, before scorning him altogether. In “The Bathhouse,” customers hog multiple tubs in order to wash themselves and their laundry (splashing dirty water far and wide, thus thwarting the attempts of other bathers to get clean), and threaten to punch the narrator to defend their “property”; the attendant, a slightly

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29 If one understands a *kham* as a petty tyrant, who might be found among the peasants and lower social classes, one finds examples in the plays of Anton Chekhov, from the turn of the twentieth century. In *The Cherry Orchard*, for example, the young servant Yasha is a consistent *kham*, with a sneer and an insult for everyone, especially his inferiors. Though a lackey, he thinks of himself highly, since he has traveled abroad. To the eighty-seven-year-old servant Firs’s touching speech about his mortality and health, Yasha replies, “How you weary me, Grandad! [Yawns.] I wish you’d go away and die soon.” (Chekhov 1959: 378)
lesser *kham*, denies the narrator a right to his belongings upon exit, in order to observe nonsensical bureaucratic form. In “The Grimace of NEP,” train passengers excuse a young man’s impudent rudeness towards his elderly mother only after they understand the family relationship (previously, they had been ready to condemn him for disobeying labor laws against exploiting seniors) (*Zoshchenko 1994*: 170–73, 278–80, 400–2). Shifts in social norms seemed to give free reign to *khamstvo*.

What relationship might *khamstvo* have to a person’s own failure, and who would consciously choose this model as a self-image? As Ginzburg writes elsewhere, “the individual does not say to himself, ‘I am a scoundrel, a toady, a troublemaker, an envious person’” (*Ginzburg 1991a*: 335, *idem* 1977: 406)—this is either a judgment we make about others, or a self-judgment, which can be achieved through self-distancing, usually as a method of self-improvement (but sometimes to make oneself seem more “meaningful”). Perhaps *khamstvo* might divest of failure a person who is significantly pragmatic and captivating as to consider him or herself an “interesting teacher” or a benevolent ruler or bureaucrat. Most often, *kham* is the label bestowed by the injured party, in writing or in speech: if punishment is impossible, one can use words as a weapon.

The Soviet-styled Romantic poet, Vladimir Mayakovsky, constituted a prominent model of the *kham*, possibly popularizing and elevating this image in a way similar to Dostoevsky’s *nadryv*. Whether or not he used the

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30 The scholars of rhetoric Svetlana and Georgii Khazagerov have written of *khamstvo* (and its depiction in Zoshchenko) as a product of the first stage of a “de-humanitarianization” in the Stalinist subject who lacks Christian morality, national roots, and the cultural forms of the *intelligent*, and therefore displays “short-sighted pragmatism” (Khazagerovs 2005). The Khazagerovs write that the *kham* becomes someone who possesses “an unheard of blatant utilitarianism in combination with an inhuman lack of concern. Short-sighted pragmatism—this is the oxymoron that can designate the main quality of this character” (they note the overlap with Lombroso’s definition of criminality). Khazagerovs 2005.

31 As Ginzburg writes while quoting from Shklovsky’s *Zoo*, “Words avenge” (*Slova mstiat*): “and that means—you say that “it [my love, let’s say-EVB] is meaningless” to you, and I will describe how you say this, I will describe, if I want to, how you open your mouth and what you are thinking when you say it” (*Ginzburg 2002a*: 149).
word in reference to himself, many recognized his image as a *kham*. Writing in 1927, the poet and critic Vladislav Khodasevich criticized Mayakovsky’s *khamstvo*, which he painted as a harmful version of the “cretinism” and “romanticism” of the *zaum* poets (among whom, incidentally, Mayakovsky did not belong): “[Mayakovsky] was the first to make vulgarity and rudeness not the material, but the very meaning of poetry. [...] He filled the zero, empty meaning of *zaum* [transsense] poetry with a new content: horsey, swinish, ‘simple, like mooing.’ A *kham* stood in place of a cretin. And the *kham* became ‘the voice of the masses’” (*Khodasevich* 1996: 162).

Alexander Zholkovsky, in part launching from Khodasevich, has portrayed Mayakovsky the myth as an “extremist—avant-gardist—terrorist.” Zholkovsky explicates themes such as violence and misogyny that make Mayakovsky’s poetry far from moral or pure. “M.”—as Zholkovsky refers to the poet, to indicate that he is speaking more of the myth than of the historical person—is a *kham* who hates children, the elderly, nature, the city, “normal life,” who uses coarse imagery and disrespects literary tradition (*Zholkovsky* 2005: 208–9).

The larger-than-life, screaming proletarian poet ended up turning the strength and violence of his ego against itself, committing suicide in 1930. After his death, Ginzburg recorded a note, in which Shklovsky remarks: “Everyone around [Mayakovsky] wrote in their diaries that he was an unsympathetic person. And you wanted to write an article about him as a wonderful poet, but ended up not writing it. I didn’t write one either. But maybe that’s what Volodya needed?” (*Ginzburg* 2002a: 80). Perhaps, in part, Mayakovsky’s *khamstvo* was a response to the pain of feeling unloved.

To be an effective *kham* requires a position of power or authority. It is a suitable self-concept for those who have lost stature in the past, and then risen again (sufficiently to oppress others with impunity) in professional or social hierarchies. In Ginzburg’s record and analysis of the Writers’ Meeting that took place in Leningrad from August 6–7, 1943, she characterizes the

32 For example, in the poem “Homeward!” (*Domoi!*), he writes: “He who is constantly lucid is stupid,” or in “My attitude to that one” (*Moe k etomy otnoshenie*) “He likes everything, that cursed one … I declare nation-wide: I am very unhappy, I would up and beat his ugly mug” (quoted in *Zholkovsky* 2005: 209).
poet Aleksandr Efimovich Reshetov as a kham. He has: “a years-long condition of being wounded (he did not succeed at becoming an administrative leader) in combination with organic khamstvo. Thanks to his marriage to a prominent literary bureaucrat, he’s found himself in a peculiar ( unofficial) position, on the strength of which he can play dirty tricks on anyone” (Ginzburg 2011: 87).33 Reshetov, as Ginzburg describes him, is a poet who conforms exactly to the official line. Vera Inber, a poet who is more senior and slightly more independent (yet still publishable), suggests to him at the meeting that the time for ultra-militant war poetry (the refrain “Beat the enemy!”) has passed. Reshetov, who poses as the “fine young fellow” of folktales (dobry molodets), boosts his macho image with the ideology of patriotism, which is on the rise. Ginzburg detects strains of racism in Reshetov’s comment that Inber does not understand truly Russian feelings, together with his passing remark about her “languishing voice” (govorit s ‘tomnym golosom’) (the official, massive anti-Semitic campaigns were still a few years off). He implies that she is a “rotten intellectual woman and a Jewish woman” (kak gniloji intelligentka ... kak evreika) (ibid.: 88). His impudent style, in Ginzburg’s opinion, recalls that of the 1920s proletarian poet’s organization (RAPP, 1928–32), which might have taken its style from Mayakovsky.

In roughly the same period as she wrote the sketch of K., that is, in the years of high Stalinism and Terror, Ginzburg analyzed “S.” The initial refers to Selli Dolukhanova (1901–74), Ginzburg’s neighbor inside her communal apartment and the older sister of Veta, a close friend (Veta, it seems, was a one-time love interest, during Ginzburg’s years at the Institute for the History of Arts). The Dolukhanova sisters hailed from a wealthy Armenian family in Tbilisi. In the sketch, Ginzburg imagines a counterfactual biography for Selli, a life for which she was destined, had the epoch not diverted it: “High society life (svetskaia zhizn’) with all of the fictitious yet complex activity it presupposed; all sorts of other activities, such as studying in the conservatory, pleasant because optional; marriage, without the unpleasant aspects caused by poverty, i.e. without taking place

33 Reshetov’s wife was Tatiana Georgievna Paisurova, who headed the cultural section of the Leningrad City Committee VKP(b).
in one single room (half for the wife, half for the husband), in general without the necessity of being cramped” (Ginzburg Late 1930s). It was an “empty” life, but it would have been compensated for and lightened by the sheer multitude of pleasant and distracting “fictions” usually found in “everyday life.”

Instead of this enjoyable existence, S., who is nearing forty (pod sorok, meaning that this sketch may have even been composed as late as 1940), has “achieved loneliness and cold,” and predicts for herself a gloomy, solitary old age. In Ginzburg’s schema of personality types, S. is sensual but not in the realm of erotic love, and in possession of an active, strong life force.³⁴ Marriage is an unrealistic prospect for her due to “absolute egoism,” whereas a casual flirt is also out of the question, “since in our time people have neither the time, nor the money, nor the taste, habit, or ability” for such a thing. In Ginzburg’s view, sexual independence has come easily to S. because of her “frigidity.”³⁵ Economic independence has required more effort. S., who has become a teacher, has formed a self-conception as a “female toiler who sprouted from a society woman” (obraz truzhenitsy, prorastaiushchei iz svetskoi zhenschiny). Teaching is a successfully (if haphazardly) found profession, which allows her to satisfy her “thirst for power,” her “feminine” impulses to be the center of attention and attraction, her verbal gifts, “clear practical mind,” and her tendency toward khamstvo. As a pedagogue and “interesting woman,” Ginzburg writes, S. can permit herself to “yell, interrupt others, and bang her fist on the table,” while being

³⁴ For a discussion of Ginzburg’s essay from 1933 on six personality types based on their experience of value (empirical, sensual, emotional, intellectual, active, and ideological) see my dissertation (Van Buskirk 2008, ch. 3). See also Zorin’s analysis in this volume.

³⁵ Ginzburg writes a note that seems to contradict this portrait in her 1936 notebook (which I believe to predate this sketch of S.). She writes of drinking vodka with S., who opens up about her difficult relationship with a man who turned out to be impotent. The note ends: “This story surprised me, since I considered that S. was an interesting woman because she lived without love and even without affairs—on the order of some kind of eccentricity. My mistake confirms a methodological premise for me: every person, independent from outward appearance, lives approximately according to the laws of nature” (Ginzburg 1936).
liked by her students and understood as “something exotic.” S.’s *khamstvo* is linked to her practicality and directness. Ginzburg finds in S. a redeeming quality: she does not tolerate falsehood, whether for the sake of ideology, literariness, or pettiness.

As self-concepts, both *khamstvo* and *nadryv* would seem to flourish in unequal, hierarchical societies, such as those of pre-Revolutionary and Stalinist Russia. Interestingly, for the women she analyzes, Ginzburg finds the roots of these personalities in the relationship between pre-Revolutionary upbringings (or class identities) and new Soviet realities. For instance S.’s self-image as a *kham*, in Ginzburg’s account, results from having being raised with a sense of privileged entitlement (unconscious or conscious), a seeming predestination to be a “master” of life (*khoziain zhizni*), only to be subsequently crushed by reality, where both a comfortable marriage and joyful, easy life prove impossible. S., unconventionally, channels her aristocratic style and verbal flair into this *khamstvo*, adapting her image to her workplace environment. On the example of S. and others, it becomes obvious to an observer how self-identification changes across biographical time in response to external, historical pressures.

Though Ginzburg does not hint at the Terror, her sketch contains vague references to a bleak social environment: S. has a gloomy outlook on social reality, because she has been prevented from living life hedonistically:

*Не понимая основного жизненного закона, не понимая собственной эгоистической пустоты, обрекающей его на бесценностное бытие, оно [мышление] перекладывает вину на обстоятельства и озлобляется на обстоятельства. Гедонистической жизни не может быть, следовательно жизнь ужасна, все обман, лучше бы собственно умереть. В этой интенсивной и жадной натура—злоба и мрачность тоже очень интенсивные, и они особенно резко выступают именно на фоне этой психики, явно приспособленной для легкого и веселого прохождения по жизни. Особенную злобу вызывает у нее вид чужого счастья, вид беспечных и веселящихся людей. Она считает, что это ошибка, недомыслье или вульгарность, дурной тон. Она всем организмом ощущает, что ей должно было быть хорошо, что она предназначена и приспособлена к тому, чтобы ей было хорошо. И понять, что ей плохо она может только исходя из того, что всем плохо, что хорошо не может быть принципиально, и люди, воображающие, что им хорошо глупо заблуждаются или стоят на неком низшем уровне развития. (Ginzburg Late 1930s)*
Not understanding the basic law of life, not understanding her own egoistic emptiness, which condemns it to a valueless existence, her way of thinking is to transfer blame to the circumstances and grow angry at the circumstances. There can be no hedonistic life, and therefore life is horrible, everything is a lie, it would be better to die. In this intense and greedy nature, spite and gloominess are also very intense, and they emerge with special acuteness on the background of a psyche that is manifestly adapted for a light and merry passage through life. The sight of others’ happiness evokes particular spite, the sight of carefree and merry-making people. She considers this a mistake, an act of thoughtlessness or vulgarity, bad tone. She senses with her whole organism that she should have a good life, that she is predestined and suited for having a good life. And she can only understand that things are bad for her if they are bad for everybody, if nothing can be good in principle, and if people who imagine that they have it good are stupidly deluded or stand on a lower level of development.

Ginzburg’s critique takes on an especially macabre, almost perverse quality for contemporary readers, considering that she was writing her sketch during the Terror (one might sense Ginzburg’s own abilities to adapt to the circumstances, discussed in her essay “At One with the Legal Order”). Moreover, Selli’s sister Veta Dolukhanova fell victim to the repressions in this very time period (arrested on February 4, 1938, then executed on June 28, 1938 in Leningrad). Despite S.’s dismal outlook, Ginzburg writes of how her positive sense of life and strong will find “loopholes” (or ways of being expressed) in three primary areas: smaller pleasures (concerts, etc.), verbal brilliance (which runs in the family), and a strong work ethic.

We see in the example of S. how khamstvo can be combined with the positive self-image of a person who is practical, captivating, and who speaks the difficult truth. We also observe that even if khamstvo is a Soviet phenomenon (an assertion Ginzburg does not explicitly make), it can grow out of the confrontation between a pre-revolutionary past and the difficult present of the 1930s. An orientation towards the past can also be found in Ginzburg’s notion of Mayakovsky. In August 1989, she critiqued Zholkovsky’s article on the proletarian poet for its failure to account for the fact that “Mayakovsky is a romantic, with all of the basic signs—a hypertrophy of the lyric I, the conflict between the poet and the crowd, the opposition of higher love to base desires. Mayakovsky is the romantic model in its kham variety [eto romanticheskaia model’ v khamskoi ee raznovidnosti]”
(Ginzburg 2002a, 427). M.’s may be a Romantic’s pose of loneliness and separation from the crowd, with a Soviet-era spin, where the abject poet on stage hurls insults at the audience.36

Passing Characters

In the blockade, Ginzburg observes how Leningraders rapidly transition among different self-concepts, while adapting to new bodies, social positions, and environments. In her notes from 1942–43, she depicts people who have narrowly escaped death from hunger, cold and bombs, and who have lost their previous identities together with their spouses, jobs, and habitual outer appearances.37 She writes “Now people have to define themselves anew in the most difficult circumstances, when all fictions and surrogates [zameniteli i fiktsii] have been lost” (Ginzburg 2011: 60).38 The construction of a self-image is, in a sense, the search new fictions, the most banal of which still promises to adorn or beautify one’s life. In this section I will treat, in brief, the image of the “dystrophic” and two small subsets of this, the “fatalist” and “troglodyte.” What separates these blockade-era images

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36 In this, she was siding with Roman Jakobson’s characterization of the poet (which Zholkovsky quotes in his article) from “A Generation that Squandered its Poets.”

37 The Blockade produced a life estrangement: towards one’s body, the city, and to language. Ginzburg uses the devices of estrangement in her blockade prose, Notes of a Blockade Person. See Van Buskirk 2006. In the words of Shklovsky, “Habitualization devours works, clothes, furniture, one’s wife, and the fear of war.” (Shklovsky’s 1917 essay “Art as Device” in Lemon and Reis 1965).

38 The siege diarist Sofiia Ostrovskaia describes the process of recovering one’s identity in a more literal way: “one sees fewer and fewer of those terrifying dystrophics: they’ve died out—or they’re recovering and, instead of naked skulls, they’re again beginning to wear a face.” (“Жутких дистрофиков встречается все меньше: вымерли—или поправляются и, вместо обнажающегося черепа, вновь начинают носить лицо.”) Ostrovskaia 2006: 178. An edition of Ostrovskaia’s blockade diaries is currently being prepared for publication with Novoc literaturnoc obozrenie by Polina Barskova and T.S. Pozdniakova.
from those of the 1930s is their universality and minimalism, as faint hints at reemerging personality structures.

“The Dystrophic who Survived”

The term “dystrophy” (distrofiia) was coined by Leningrad’s medical community to refer to starvation as a deathly disease consisting of three stages, and was adopted broadly by Leningraders. Meant to refer to the condition of the body, the term extended to indicate the psychological sufferings and moral shortcomings associated with starving people: “moral dystrophy.” As Ginzburg writes of the character A.O., “He came to know intimately everything that dystrophics knew—waiting for death, lethal indifference, lethal egoism” (Ginzburg 2011: 75). “Moral dystrophy” was an ambivalent identity, considered by many blokadniki to be a voluntary and avoidable disease. The architect and blockade diarist Esfir’ Levina writes, “There’s a new term: moral dystrophy. Many use it as a cover, to justify dirt and laziness. It’s difficult to find the border between suffering and speculation based on the circumstances” (Levina 2008: 159).

Ginzburg writes of N.K., who herself had avoided dystrophy: “She does not even understand moral dystrophy. She never, in the worst times, understood that brutality (ozverenie) when people would hide a piece of food even from loved ones. Towards dystrophics she feels pity and involuntary hatred, the mild hatred of a good person” (Ginzburg 2011: 69).

39 The euphemistic term diverted responsibility from the state for the death of the citizenry. For a discussion of dystrophy, see Sandomirskaja (p. 000), who refers to Chernorutskii 1947. See also Simmons and Perlina 2002: xxx and 225–26, nn. 56–57.

40 As another exemplary usage of this term, the diarist Liubov’ Shaporina writes of how she reacted to stories of cannibalism with the idea “to start an album dedicated to those of my friends and acquaintances who have lived through these two years here and did not dystrophy morally [moral’no ne distrofirovali]” (entry from July 17, 1943 in Shaporina 2011: 402–3).
Ginzburg uses the phrase “dystrophic who survived” (утелевший дистрофик) to refer to an identity common in the latter part of the blockade (and shared by her alter-ego). The phrase corresponds to a transitional or liminal status—one has survived “whole” (the root of утелевший), while remaining attached to the symptoms and suffering of the “dystrophic” past. One example is the character Nina V—ts, who our research has found to be Nina L’vovna Voronets, a one-time actress who lost her theatrical work in the thirties due to her noble descent. She is now merely “one of many office workers, emaciated and no longer young.” According to Ginzburg’s theories, Nina is an emotional and aesthetic type, whose earlier basis for self-realization was her feminine attractiveness. When this asset suddenly disappears, leaving little time for adjustment, she struggles to latch onto a new psychology. Ginzburg writes:

Словом, у нее нет психического состояния. Осталась одна дистрофия, и то в виде остатков. И вот за эти остатки она хватается как за единственное содержание жизни и возможность реализации. Это оправдательное понятие для пустоты и для преждевременного женского крушения. Это крушение смягчается тем, что оно болезнь—значит, может быть, и нечто временное?—и притом всеобщая болезнь. Это крушение сублимируется тем, что оно социальная трагедия. (ibid.: 60–61)

(In short, she has no psychic state. Only dystrophy remains, and only in the form of remnants. And now she tries to hold on to these remnants as if they were the only content of life and the possibility of realization. It is a concept that serves to justify emptiness and a premature feminine ruin. This ruin is mitigated by the fact that it is an illness, which means—maybe something temporary? And moreover, a universal illness. This ruin is sublimated by the fact that it is a social tragedy.)

In the situation of the blockade, one has to struggle to overcome one’s existence as a mere survival animal before achieving any psychological state whatsoever. The self-image of the “dystrophic who survived” often accompanies the first step of reentry into society. Nina’s utterances, as Ginzburg records (or reconstructs) them, center around her losses, and

41 The semi-autobiographical fragment called “Otsepenenie” (“Torpor”) is subtitled “Confessions of a Recovered Dystrophic.”
thus accentuate her belonging to the common tragedy. For instance, she used to “live for” the Hermitage, but now brags about her indifference to art, in order to broadcast just how much she has lost. She speaks of how she cannot take care of her appearance, expressing amazement that some women will now pay extraordinary prices—two kilos of bread—for stockings with a seam. Nina’s knowledge that her fate is common satisfies the selfish goal of elevating her imagined value.

Nina’s sister, “Tata,” a lesbian (as Ginzburg designates with the abbreviation “gm” for “gomoseksual”), is an intellectual type, and exercises her self-image by synthesizing general conclusions and aesthetically crafting her utterances. She tells colorful stories (replete with metaphors, generalizations, paradoxes, humor) of how she survived bombings, where the underlying theme is that she is an incompletely recovered human being, a “dystrophic.” Her reactions are no longer “normal,” moreover she is not ready to perceive art, though she has already started to read books. A third woman, T. (Roboli), had a pre-war image as a “Don Juan.” Ginzburg discusses with B. (her friend Boris Bukhstab) how T.’s image as a “gentleman,” her super-erotic charge, lends her an exoticism that produces a uniquely powerful affect on women. Before the war, “Don Juanism” was a compensatory model explaining the failure to achieve loftier goals: “family splendor” or success in literary affairs: “Don Juanism served for her whole life as a justificatory concept for intellectual vacuity and fruitlessness. That was in the past, and in the present—dystrophy.” While she occupies a respectable administrative position in the National Library during the blockade, T. uses dystrophy as an excuse for her romantic failures, as well as for her inability to write books.43

42 One wonders about the influence of Zinaida Gippius on the number of female Don Juans Ginzburg identifies in her milieu. See Presto 2008 on Gippius as “female dandy.” See also Matich 2005. Matich’s discussion of Gippius draws connections to a Dostoevsky character known for nadryv, Natas’ia Filipovna.

43 T.’s story takes unexpected turns through the course of Ginzburg’s notes. She suffers a greater catastrophe: Tatyana Roboli was hit by a bomb on December 1943, which she survived, but after which one of her legs was amputated. Surprisingly, as Ginzburg realizes on a hospital visit after the amputation, this tragedy served as the catalyst for
A final “dystrophic who survived” is A.O., who belongs to the smaller number of male subjects Ginzburg analyzes. Blockade men in general, she writes, sooner or later fall prey to an inferiority complex because of their absence from the front. In response they either adopt the pose of nadryv or redouble their search for a justificatory concept. What helps in the latter move is “exceptional self-satisfaction” or a position with responsibility, power, and command (which as we have seen with the example of Reshetov, can end in khamstvo). Ginzburg postulates that men’s turn away from nadryv towards the end of the blockade is a sign of the rising “common will.”

A.O. stands for Arsenii Ostrovskii, a literary scholar who had studied at the Institute with Ginzburg, became an editor at Biblioteka Poeta in 1931, and worked at the Radio Station during the Blockade.44 A passive type according to Ginzburg (with a diffuse will, despite his strong desires and capacity for pleasure, in Ginzburg 2011: 74), he demonstrates the classic predicament of Soviet intellectuals: they had to mold new self-images every ten years in order to survive. In A.O.’s case, his 1920s self-image had been that of a “small everyday decadent” ([byl] malenkim byтовым декадентом), a poet who projected “spiritual bankruptcy and a touch of demonism.” He was a “decadent with nadryv”—wrote poetry, fragments, and had “confused relations with women” (zaputannyе otnosheniia s zhenshchinami). In the 1930s, A.O. worked at a publishing house, the type of place where the apparat prevented almost all culturally meaningful activity. He forged a new self-conception as a cynic and failure who had “buried his talent,” finding comfort in the widespread belief that there was no other way to survive (“you can’t survive otherwise!”). Meanwhile, he tried to erect his own private niche (while in his job “conceding to the terrible world and acting by its evil laws”) where he was a card-player, book collector, gourmand, and poet.

a new romance, which developed with a female member of the hospital staff. This new highpoint (even higher because unexpected) returns her self-image specifically through catastrophe. She avoids pity, instead being loved. At least this is a peredyshka before any further hardships, Ginzburg writes. (Ginzburg 2011: 121–28)

There is a short bio of Arsenii Ostrovskii in Bakhtin, V. 1985, 263–64. There Ostrovskii writes that he signed up as an opolchenets at the beginning of the war, but that in September 1941 he was summoned out of the army in order to work at the Izdatel’stvo pisatelei, much of whose staff had perished in a bombing of Gostinyi dvor.
The third metamorphosis was ushered in by the war: he spent these years starving in the Blockade, intensely fearing death. At the time of Ginzburg’s note, A.O. was a dystrophic whose personal image consisted of appearing to possess a deep “psychology,” an “inner life”:

Он сугубый интеллигент и сугубый истерик и потому он и сейчас, несомненно, имеет свою надрывную автоконцепцию (неудачник, сломленный и т.д.), которая позволяет ему и сейчас числить себя среди избранных, наделенных внутренней жизнью, имеющих «психологию.” (Ginzburg 2011: 75)

He is an utter intelligent and an utter hysteric and therefore even now, no doubt, he has his self-conception of nervous strain [nadryv] (a failure, a broken person, etc.), which allows him even now to count himself among the chosen, among those who are endowed with an inner life, who have a “psychology.”

Ginzburg next argues that this self-image of a failure, which would allow for membership into the elite intelligentsia, does not completely work for A.O., since it is socially unacceptable for a forty-five-year-old head-of-household. In order to hide his degradation, he cultivates his reputation as an eccentric, as someone collects books at the expense of food (even if he sinks, as a still recovering dystrophic, to accepting soy-oil cakes [shroty] from others in the Writers’ cafeteria, who thereby feel superior).

Attitudes towards Death: Fatalist and Troglodyte

The self-image of the “fatalist” exemplifies peoples’ tendency to transform inevitabilities into self-conceptions that afford them a sense of the beauty and value of their position.45 Ginzburg interviews several of her companions about their attitudes towards death and discovers that they have different

45 She writes, after an “interview” with Nina Papernaia: “Beyond this biological life-affirmation, intelligents occasionally, when it is their lot—construct self-conceptions of troglodytism, fatalism, etc., to make things beautiful and interesting” (Ginzburg 2011: 71).
ways of making sense of, or making self-images of, their lack of fear. For instance, Nina Papernaia, a person with a “large life force” takes pleasure in revealing she is a “fatalist” (an image popularized in Russian culture by Lermontov’s *A Hero of Our Time*)—she does not fear air raids, since she cannot control her end, which will inevitably come. The fact that a war situation and massive death would produce fatalists is no surprise, and one can find evidence of this self-image in several siege diaries.46

The rarer self-image constructed under death’s shadow is the “trog-lodyte.” This position, the opposite of fatalism yet also designed to defeat the fear of death, is demonstrated by N.K., who boasts that her instincts are so highly developed that she senses her time is not now. N.K. (Natalia Pavlovna Kolpakova, 1902–94), is an intellectual, one of Ginzburg’s former classmates from the Institute, who during the blockade worked at the Leningrad State University and then at the library (Volodarskii Raikom VKP(b)) and Writers’ Union. Ginzburg concludes of her position: “All of this is the raising-up of one’s qualities into a self-conception, into superstructures of value over a biologically indubitable fact—people with a large, greedy life force and ability for resistance often do not fear death at all, and vice versa” (*Ginzburg 2011*: 70).

Ginzburg tears down the constructions intellectuals place over “biologically indubitable facts.” In these stark circumstances of the blockade, even a “psychical state” seems to be a hard-won attribute. She refers to “psychology” (in quotation marks) as a quality that some intelligents project in order to elevate themselves in the eyes of others. It does not matter how basic or simple the self-image: the importance is that it exists for one’s elevation, thus doing “work” in situations of everyday life.

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46 See, for instance, the diary of Anna Likhacheva, who writes that “Life during those months made fatalists of us all” (*Simmons and Perlina 2002*: 61), or Liubov’ Shaporina, “Everyone’s used to it, all have become fatalists and pay no attention to the din and to the impending danger” (June 4, 1941; *Shaporina 2011*: 327).
Conclusion

Ginzburg’s character sketches from the 1930s and 1940s followed Shklovsky’s instruction for his friend’s literary success: to write candidly about others. Yet they formed part of Ginzburg’s ongoing obsession with failure, including her own, and by the end of her life they remained unpublished. My analysis of these sketches has aimed to uncover personality models that were in circulation, even if they were prevented from entering the published literary works of the times. Many of the failures inherent in the life of the intelligentsia of her generation (and the images meant to compensate for failure) appeared to Ginzburg as products of clashes between the personality models inherited from pre-revolutionary times and those formed under the pressures of the new epoch, which reversed (using Akhmatova’s metaphor of the river) or blocked their drives for self-realization on professional, social, sexual, and physiological bases. It was these dramatic changes that made conceptions especially visible and perhaps added to Ginzburg’s sense of their fictitiousness, and of the strength of the individual will.

The self-images of the *nadryv* and *kham* appear in Ginzburg’s notes from various decades, but most prominently in the thirties. While the type of the post-Revolutionary *kham* appears widely in Zoshchenko’s NEP-era stories, and *nadryv* traces back to Dostoevsky (and to the decadent times of Ginzburg’s youth), both images seem at home in the hierarchical and power-ridden atmosphere of Stalinism. Without mentioning the purges directly, Ginzburg alludes to the atmosphere of doom even in her own and her contemporaries’ resistance to it in their ability to build images to transform their positions of helplessness and failure. Whereas the *nadryv* advertises this failure through nervous lacerations, making others suffer from sympathy or pity, the *kham* uses a higher position in order to abuse her power and take advantage or humiliate others, who suffer from a lack of recourse.

One finds these images in the blockade as well, though there were also concepts of the *utselevshii distrofik*, *fatalist*, and *troglodit* (especially
which had a more direct relationship to starvation and death. Not only are these concepts less complex as aesthetic structures, they are also less dependent on rigid hierarchy: the distrofik garners value by belonging to a general tragedy. The images of dystrophic, fatalist, and troglodyte originate in a person’s relationship to the body its mortality, though they become the bases of social positions (as a justificatory mechanism, especially for men who have not gone to the front, or women who have failed to realize themselves in career or family). The images, and Ginzburg’s writing about them, speak to the lifting of taboos in the blockade, in the realm of literature and public speech (the “mini-thaw” and the decreasing importance of the NKVD, though it still operated), as well as in those topics perceived as worthy in the culture of the intelligentsia.

I have mentioned Ginzburg’s personal obsession with frustrated self-realization, which may have grown from her sense of herself as a failure in the creative and romantic-erotic spheres (cf. essay “Résumé of Failure,” from January 1944). In light of this concern, and the notion of writing as revenge or revanche, one can postulate an “interestedness” of these sketches in the social battlefield, at least as a defense mechanism by an injured party (the author). Otherwise, one might look at these writings as a substitute self-realization, full of bitterness towards oneself and towards one’s less self-conscious contemporaries. They constitute a defense of “true” intelligentsia against the easy lamentations and lacerations unleashed and made socially permissible by oppressive circumstances. Similarly, I mentioned that the distillation of the self-image into a single word may often have been a product of Ginzburg’s analytical process, rather than a word any of her subjects would consciously utter of themselves. Ginzburg’s own tendency to arrive at a single word, even as she knew that it hid greater complexities (and even as her sketches do not have this aim of producing one-word summaries, but are many-sided and layered, regarding the self as a fluid and complex arrangement of elements), may have been related to her failed project of writing some kind of larger work—a novel or a historical narrative—in these decades. Her sketches produced characters with identifiable dominants and self-images not only because she was trying to become a self-styled literary sociologist and psychological essayist, but because she was trying to become a novelist. On January 26, 1934, Ginzburg wrote:
At this point in time the work of a historian and the work of a “novelist” (a conventional name for a person who conceptualizes reality in a given way) to some degree must be uniform. Both are a process of understanding life; that is, a description of facts and an explanation of the connections between them. Moreover, they explain the same facts, just taken on different scales. Not only do I not accept in “novelistic” characterization a method inappropriate for history; but—and this is more eccentric—I do not accept in history a method that in infinite abridgment cannot explain character for me. (Ginzburg 1933–35: 37–38)

Ginzburg’s project to understand history through character, and character through history, helps explain why she turned in these years away from the notebook project concerned with capturing the witticisms and depicting captivating personalities such as Akhmatova, Mayakovsky, Shklovsky, and Mandelstam, and toward her communal apartment neighbors, fellow workers at the Leningrad Radio, or strangers with whom she sat and stood in bomb shelters and bread lines. Just as her portraits of poets are relied upon by literary historians for their keen perception and grasp of essential hidden and visible elements, so too her generalizations about personality models have historical value to those interested in the self-understandings of the inhabitants of Leningrad during the dark decades of the twentieth century.

Another portion of this note, about Marxist methodology, was published by Denis Ustinov: “The question is whether you can use Marxism, or begin with Marxism, and arrive at concrete things that are small in size. From the examination/understanding of enormous mass movements to ever-smaller group formations, and all the way up to the individual person. A pure historian, especially an economic historian can for a time make do with large numbers. But I am now in need of a method that would be of use for understanding the historical process and for understanding the fate of a single individual as a social entity” (Ginzburg 2002b: 34).
Lydia Ginzburg’s “Lives of the Poets”: Mandelstam in Profile

This chapter will examine the image of Osip Mandelstam in Lydia Ginzburg’s essays and notes. As a distinguished scholar of Russian poetry, Ginzburg requires no introduction. But a consensus is clearly emerging that she is equally, if not more, noteworthy as a memoirist. Her observations about contemporary poets occupy a prominent place in those more personal writings, especially her “notebooks.” Her holistic portraits of the poets she knew or saw, including Vladimir Mayakovsky, Nikolai Zabolotsky, Nikolai Oleinikov, Nikolai Tikhonov, Alexander Kushner, and Elena Shvarts, have few rivals for their vivid attention to the creative profile of each of the poets in whom she takes an interest. Her descriptions of Osip Mandelstam constitute a portrait that occupies both a special place in her own writing as well as the larger corpus of reminiscences about him.

Both Ginzburg’s “notebooks” and scholarly essays attest to an unswerving and lifelong admiration for Mandelstam, most likely beginning around 1928 when she read Stikhotvorenia and lasting to her final years. Approximately forty notes treat Mandelstam, ranging from fragmentary entries of no more than a single line to profiles of several pages in extent. Quantitatively the number of references is comparable to those accorded other contemporary poets such as Vladimir Mayakovsky and Boris Pasternak, and exceeds her jottings about Nikolai Zabolotsky whom she met and admired. Among older poets only Pushkin attracts such unflagging interest.

1 I would like to thank Grisha Freidin for his helpful comments and insights.
2 Throughout this article the term “notebooks” refers to the material that Ginzburg herself called “essays” when she published the bulk of her notes in Chelovek za pis’emnym stolom, now posthumously collected in Zapisnye knizhki. Vospominaniia. Esse (Ginzburg 2002).
The references to Mandelstam cluster strongly in the notes penned in the 1920s and 1930s, whereupon he fades from view—unsurprising in light of his fate and posthumous status—until a strong resurgence of interest in the 1980s when his critical fortunes and centrality to the canon were newly conceivable.

Across the long span of her scholarly and belletristic writings, Ginzburg consistently declined to follow the Romantic perception of the poet as a figure aloof from the crowd. Her subjective reaction to poetic personalities and appreciation of individual genius—a word used very rarely in her studies—is by and large a matter for her “notebooks.” All the extraneous factors of personal circumstance that could be adduced in producing literary biography contributed little to her analytical method when it came to writing the scholarly history of poetic movements and describing the place of particular writers. Ginzburg’s thoroughgoing introductory essay to the Biblioteka poeta edition of poets of the period of 1820 to 1830 captures her method of contextualizing individuals within their environment. The essay is also noteworthy because it demonstrates her approach to the discourses of Romanticism, which is marked by uncommon restraint on the subject of personality (Ginzburg 1972: 5–66). Her understanding of behavior and literary performance focuses on the role of the individual within a system defined sociologically more than psychologically.  

Her critical habit of mind is in part the legacy of both Eikhenbaum and Tynianov, combining ideas about behavior developed by the former with the latter’s description of the inter-relation of individual talent and the literary system. Yet throughout that essay, and in other published works of a similar kind, Ginzburg goes beyond the Formalist legacy and puts to work the method of analysis she evolved in the 1920s and 1930s. Her keywords are “process” (protsess), “cultural awareness” (kulturnoe soznanie), “outlook” (miroponimanie), system (sistema), and “aesthetic consciousness” (esteticheskoe soznanie). When discussing the lives of poets, she studiously confines her information to the factual; and when discussing a movement

3 Ginzburg in the “notebooks” helpfully sketches the origins and applications of the sociological method in a page entitled “Literary sociology” (Ginzburg 2002: 31).
like Sentimentalism, as she does in the Biblioteka poeta essay, her attention moves to the inter-relation of individual performance and group values. Her portraits, therefore, motivate artistic decisions according to rules of genre and aesthetic values adopted by individuals within their intellectual and social sphere; her descriptions of individual behavior, though not cast in semiotic language, pay attention to the self-definition of writers as a function of class and social norms. When Ginzburg undertakes explicitly autobiographical or biographical modes, she meditates on the relation between numerous aspects of appearance and states of mind and feeling. But such intensive study from the inside out constitutes a separate type of investigation where either she herself or her intimates attract her close observation.

To some degree, these values also shape her profiles of poets “live” as portrayed in the “notebooks.” However, personal acquaintance with poets proved to be of a different dimension from the academic study of poetry. Ginzburg’s reluctance to engage in psychological speculation about individual genius, and to resort to biographical circumstance as a mode of literary explanation, remains steadfast. But the opportunity of seeing poets up close moved her to record personal details of appearance, manner, voice and attitude. Readers of her academic studies will rarely have a sense of the appearance of the authors under discussion whereas readers of her “notebooks” experience the bodily presence and impact of the individual when Ginzburg has had the chance to see them at close quarters. As she says disarmingly, “I’m not ashamed of my interest in the great” when given the chance to glimpse Pasternak (about whom she actually reports nothing on this occasion) (Ginzburg 2002: 38). The “notebooks” give us a Eduard Bagritsky of “bohemian” excess, a sullen Mayakovsky who is restless and taciturn until moved to poetic outburst, an Oleinikov as “clever as a monkey,” and a three-dimensional Akhmatova. Alexander Blok and Pasternak, by contrast, remain contemporary giants, the subjects of literary commentary who elude a personal profile, falling rather into the category of poets observed mostly from a literary perspective as they appear to her through the printed word. It is not overstatement to suggest that among the great number of people captured in real life by Ginzburg, Mandelstam together with Shklovsky ranks among the most vivid. Apart from its
intrinsic interest as a portrait, Ginzburg’s Mandelstam is unusual because it represents a unique instance where her analysis of a poet’s behavior and manner of living flows into and corroborates her un stinting admiration for his genius. In other words, the terms of her portrait approach the Romantic appreciation of genius as a sacred gift.

Before turning to Mandelstam as he appears in the memoirs, it will be helpful to begin with a short characterization of Ginzburg’s scholarly writings about his poetry. The two sets of “professional” and “personal” discourses are entirely complementary in their compatible but different approaches to describing the poet and his art. Her longest critical discussion is the essay “The Poetics of Osip Mandelstam” ("Poetika Osipa Mandel’shtama"). As the product of her deep familiarity with his entire oeuvre, this critical summa remains one of the best introductions to his work and serves as an outstanding example of her gifts as an essayist. Written in 1966, the essay draws conclusions about the evolution of Mandelstam’s poetry that now look prescient. While closely attuned to the formal properties of poetry, she was, above all, drawn to the specific cognitive aspects of verse and in her writings considered how poets think through images ("poeziia—osobyi sposob khudozhtesvennogo poznaniiia"), and was particularly sensitive to the semantic potential of metaphor. Her observations about the “intense interrelationship of his ideas” and poems continue to merit attention because she promotes the view that Mandelstam is a dynamic poet whose work is interpretatively irreducible to a single system. While she implicitly admits the utility of intertextual and subtextual readings (something about which she will be more explicit in remarks she penned in the late 1980s), she clearly felt that his poetic body—particularly of the Voronezh period from 1934—was too varied and rich to lend itself to

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4 For an English translation, see Ginzburg 1975: 284–312.
6 Eikhenbaum is said to have noted that Ginzburg’s thinking (myshlenie) depended to an extraordinary degree on language. As cited in Savitskii 2006: 142; by contrast, anecdotal evidence records that Shklovsky, apparently hoping to provoke Ginzburg into writing more of the literary “notes” that he admired, playfully mocked her philological work. See Razumova and Sverdllov 2005: 47.
explication by just one set method. Her remarks stand out for their valuable pragmatism on how to interpret a poet whose difficulty she recognizes but crucially does not overestimate.

In sum, everything she writes about Mandelstam aims to open him up to readers rather than to close him down as hermetic and inaccessible. The goal of her close attention to language, a feature of her method that was noted by contemporaries, was to unfold the semantic content of poetry contained within the image-systems she traces through a poet’s œuvre, of which Mandelstam proves to be the richest example. Her approach in discussing Mandelstam draws on the academic lessons she learned from OPOYaz, inherently sharing Mandelstam’s own sense of affinity with the philological orientation of that group. Yet unlike her Formalist teachers who figure so prominently in her diaries, as a practical critic Ginzburg takes a looser view of the relationship between individual writers and the literary system than Tynianov would have adopted, and tends to follow the individual poet’s performance rather than the movement; nor is art for her ever only about device, a fact that sets her apart from Viktor Shklovsky. While her focus on the internal dynamics of the text suggests an analogy between Ginzburg in this mode and the New Critics, she combines this attentiveness of texture and internal logic with a capacity to look beyond to the poet’s context and aesthetic movements—in this case Acmeism. However, because she regards poetry for the most part as objectified personal statement, rather than a direct expression of biography, she discusses texts as linguistic events. In explicating how poems are put together and how they make sense she tends to confine herself to philological goals without treating questions of reader-response. In effect, this means that while working in the genre of the scholarly essay she refrains from much subjective comment and speaks in the objectifying omniscient scholarly narrator’s voice. This tacit limitation in her interpretative model seems remarkable coming from a critic renowned for the depth of her studies of the representation of psychology in prose. It is all the more striking

8 On this see Toddes 1985: 78–103.
9 On the organic model of literary history, with particular reference to these two thinkers, see Steiner 1984: 72–79.
when set in contrast to her “notebooks” where psychological insights, although subtle and often implied, abound. In general, Ginzburg in that genre devotes greater consideration to the impact of Soviet reality and literary politics on the psychology of authorship. It is out of this situation that she formulates a description of the cultural value of writing in which Mandelstam’s behavior comes to look like a touchstone.

Collections of anecdotal material and diaries leave no doubt that Osip Mandelstam’s personality was larger than life and left few people indifferent. He was, of course, the subject of his widow’s justly celebrated and invaluable memoirs. Numerous other contemporaries provide eyewitness glimpses of the poet at various stages of his life and with different degrees of sympathy, from the candid (if biased) account of Emma Gershtein to Anna Akhmatova’s deeply affectionate diary entries. The discourse of the charismatic poet has been an influential paradigm in the image of Russian culture as well as in literary study. In scholarship it has generally combined the discourse of mythopoetics, once popular in the 1970s and 1980s, with theories of poetic inspiration mostly applied to poets of the late eighteenth century and Pushkin period that derive from semiotic studies of the rituals of power and kingship. The authority of the prophet that Pushkin invoked, borrowed from French examples of poetic messianism, added gravity and substance to the idea that poets are spiritually privileged and visionary figures, a position that became more established in the last third of the nineteenth century. There is no question that certain writers such as Blok perpetuated this vocabulary of poetic authority—and had it conferred on him. While the image has been productive in criticism, a skeptical analysis is long overdue concerning the paradigm’s pattern of usage in relation to the cultural conditions and the individual “cult” status of writers.

10 For rich collections of contemporary accounts of the poet, see the individual memoirs printed in Lasunskii 1990 and Nechiporuk and Kreid 1995.
Here I simply wish to observe that Mandelstam was not universally viewed by his peers and by the public as a iurodivyi figure.

While the term “charismatic” is now regularly applied to Mandelstam, denoting a hierophantic combination of otherworldliness, genius and popular appeal, few eyewitness accounts speak in such terms of the young poet, and when they do so the perception suggests a reflex carried over from the Symbolist movement. Perceptions of charisma are unquestionably subjective, reflecting degrees of individual taste, credulity and enthusiasm and also to some immeasurable degree implicated in a feedback loop of popular or critical opinion, the context in which the quasi-religious idea of a certain writer as “charismatic” might stick. Consider two contrasting examples of this rhetoric in response to Mandelstam’s public appearances in the 1930s. Of a reading Mandelstam gave on November 10, 1932, Nikolai Khardzhiev left a famous account, calling the poet’s performance a “magnificent spectacle” (zrelishche velichestvennoe) by a “silver-bearded patriarch” (sedoborodyi patriarch) who bewitched the crowd “like a shaman” (shamanil). Pasternak reacted in rather different terms, appreciating a newfound “freedom” in Mandelstam’s poetry and likening his experimentalism to that of Khlebnikov. The comparison implicitly, but only implicitly, suggests that Mandelstam is charismatic by association with another tragic and unearthly figure (Loks 1993: 46). On April 3, 1933, less than a year later, Lev Gornung attended a Moscow reading Mandelstam gave of some of his most recent poems. He characterizes Mandelstam’s performance in entirely rational terms as calm and serious, punctuated by a somewhat dense and impromptu talk the poet gave on his ideas about art and realism (the venue was an artists’ club). Gornung records Mandelstam’s sober and even business-like rapport with members of the audience during a question and answer session. Although appreciative of the poet, they exhibited no signs of awe, and the memoirist’s language has no connotations of the hieratic (Gornung 1990: 32–33).

Mandelstam’s reputation as a “charismatic figure,” therefore, hardly appears before Ginzburg’s own impressions of him from the 1930s and arose in connection with his increasingly marginalized status at the end

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12 Mandestam: 2007: 122. It deserves to be noted that Nadezhda Mandelstam reproduced these comments in her memoirs.
of NEP. Her notebook observations about Mandelstam can be divided into three types of anecdote or commentary that (1) treat Mandelstam as the source of witticisms and quips; (2) provide remarkable descriptions of the poet in action; and (3) create an ethical example with implications for the definition of poetic identity.

Let us proceed to discuss the profile in these terms, bearing in mind that all three categories contribute to a unified and psychologically self-consistent portrait of an individual. The first, and smallest group, gathers brief exchanges that put on display Mandelstam’s gift for verbal wit or a quip. One purpose of these micro-anecdotes is to establish a basic vitality to Mandelstam’s character. The point is not trivial because nowhere in her descriptions of him, even before 1933 when an already arduous life became a matter of sheer survival, does Ginzburg portray him as a victim. If anything, Mandelstam remains robustly resilient and independent, exuding what she refers to positively as “boldness” (derzost), an attribute of great or unusually talented people in her anthropological outlook (Ginzburg 2002: 112). Many memoirists of the period, of whom Emma Gershtein would be a prominent example, had mixed emotions about the Mandelstams. While admiration bordering on reverence marked Gershtein’s first acquaintance with Mandelstam, his sometimes irascible behavior and pre-mature ageing eventually provoked pity and fear. Although she continued to admire his poems, her account becomes increasingly concerned with the oddities of his manner. Her reaction seems typical among views from the period. In this respect, Ginzburg’s profile of the poet is different. There is clearly a real distance between Ginzburg’s approach and the dominant note of tragedy that other writers strike even before Mrs. Mandelstam’s account made his tragedy seem ineluctable. For instance, the great drama of the slap in the face that Mandelstam administers to A.N. Tolstoy, also discussed by Gershtein, provides the famous opening of Mrs. Mandelstam’s first volume of memoirs. In Ginzburg’s unpublished notes the assault is presented not as

13 The “charismatic” argument has been made by Gregory Freidin (Freidin 1987, ch. 1); and recently restated by Stephanie Sandler (Sandler 2008: 610).
14 On the importance of wit to Ginzburg and her esteem for good conversation, see Paperno 1985: 178–86; and Carden 1994: 146–56.
15 See, especially, Gershtein 1986: 9–78.
the direct result of some specific provocation, but exceptionally expresses a principled and permanent dislike of a person whose values offend the poet: “Tolstoy, well, is the sort whom one always wants to smash in the kisser” (ibid.: 419). For Ginzburg, Mandelstam’s “derzost” goes together with his extreme alertness to life around him, and his vitality. Similarly, humor has for Ginzburg a particular shape. While verbal timing, what she calls the “space left between words” (prostranstvo, ostavlennoe mezhdu slovom i slovom), is critical, the true impact of humor is felt when it defamiliarizes one’s sense of reality (“sdvinut’ deistvitel’nost’ s mesta”) (ibid.: 119). Mandelstam provides a multifaceted example of the phenomenon in an exchange that Ginzburg placed at the beginning of a sequence of pages grouped under the rubric “Poets”:

Two weeks ago Mandelstam rang Boris Mikhailovich [Eikhenbaum] at one in the morning to inform him as follows:

—We have a new Poet!
—?
—Konstantin Vaginov!
B.M. asked timidly: “Is it possible that you genuinely consider him better than Tikhonov?”
Mandelstam burst out into demonic laughter and replied scornfully: “It’s a good thing that the telephone girl isn’t listening in on you!”
So there you have it, literary history in the making, the history of literature in pictures.
Telephone calls have the obvious capacity to disrupt routine. Defamiliarization results from the circumstances under which the call is made, and the urgency with which Mandelstam delivers a message that could have waited until more sociable hours. Yet at the same time Eikhenbaum appears unfussed at the disturbance because he genuinely wishes to hear the news. Within their circle the appearance of a new poet is accorded unusual importance both night and day. But Mandelstam ironically disparages Eikhenbaum’s seeming preference for Tikhonov by implying that even the telephone operators on the line have sufficient literary taste to see the obvious. At the same time, an element of literary allusion may also be at work here since the story seems to echo Nikolai Nekrasov’s famous announcement to Belinsky that Dostoevsky’s *Poor Folk* heralded the appearance of a new Gogol. Both interlocutors seem to be playing with the notion of literature as an indispensable foundation of Russian and Soviet national- ism, recuperating the civilizing mission of the intelligentsia, and proving the vitality of literature in a pragmatic epoch.

At the same time, the anecdote relates to a further theme that develops over the course of the “notebooks.” Ginzburg is perpetually attentive in both her notes and scholarly work not only to the ups and downs of literary reputation, but to the mechanisms of their creation. The various processes by which careers are made and fame created include not only the orthodox literary history of academic publications, but to a large extent the sub-culture of informal exchanges and gossip that define the intellectual activity of her milieu. An entry of 1934 records a brief conversation with Shklovsky that treats this issue directly. As he reportedly says to her, “My complete hope for your literary fame lies in the fact that you will one day get old and cranky and will then write about people what you think about them.” Throughout the “notebooks,” and starting from an earlier date, Ginzburg continually records what others are already thinking about one another and often in the form of such anecdotes. While Vaginov is the

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16 See Frank 1976: 137. I am grateful to Andrei Zorin for drawing my attention to the parallel.

17 On milieu as a factor in Formalist theory, see Any 1994: 106–8.
pretext for the exchange of the anecdote quoted above, the exchange is also revealing about Mandelstam. The part Mandelstam plays here links up to a larger pattern of behavior that emerges across the many other references to him. On the basis of these descriptions we reach the conclusion that at any moment of the day Mandelstam remains completely imbued with poetic energy, his mental being entirely focused on the subject of poetry as well as its composition. At times this enthusiasm and utter sublimation of the self in art gives the impression that Mandelstam is more than eccentric and has become desocialized. Yet for Ginzburg this organic unity of the man and art constitutes a fundamental positive feature of his portrait. Apart from the clear admiration she feels for his poems, the ethos of an existence perpetually plugged into these values explains why he remains throughout an exemplary poet.

This takes us to a second category of entries that treat the question of the poet’s special creative status more explicitly. Once again Ginzburg prefers demonstration to analysis because characters reveal themselves best in action and in speech. Poetry and poets are distinguished from verse and versifiers in Ginzburg’s diaries by a unique energy and capacity to open new perspectives. Pasternak is “unable to produce second-rate work” (не умеет хальтурит’), Tikhonov’s speech is marked by its liveliness and frantic energy (“zhivoi, “sumbornoe”), Khlebnikov’s depth is a form of mystery (“одни концы спрятаны”), Mayakovsky is like a coiled spring, generally tense (napriazhennyi), and Zabolotsky exudes the “strength of genuine poetic madness” (какая сила подлинно поэтического безумия) (ibid.: 17, 21, 43, 45, and 71).18 This energy is not the expression of the poet’s feelings or a diary of biographical events although ultimately it does project personality. Biography is not deemed to be especially vital as a source of the material for poetic art, and for the greatest poets, like Pushkin and Mandelstam, the life, in the tradition of Baudelaire, “becomes witness to the poet’s art, not the art to the life.”19 The principle of poetic authenticity depends on

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18 Sergei Esenin seems to be the conspicuous example of a popular poet who in her estimation is not much more than a versifier.

the phenomenalization of the poetic voice, and this is what Ginzburg’s reader witnesses in the second more extensive category of remarks about Mandelstam. Two set pieces describe the experience of being in Mandelstam’s company and hearing him read.

In an early entry in her diaries Ginzburg identifies the importance she ascribes to encounters with poets. She is clear that the value of these meetings does not lie exclusively in the opportunity to ask practitioners of verbal art to elucidate and speak about contemporary tastes. Such occasions also offer invaluable chances to experience the “special weight of the living word of the writer” (udel’nyi ves zhivogo slova pisatelia) or the “mechanism of his theoretical utterance” (mekhanika ego teoreticheskogo vyskazyvaniia), as will be the case when she describes Mandelstam in full flow in discussion of Dante. The demonstration of poetic authenticity by Mandelstam inspires some of Ginzburg’s finest pages, which are full of her eye for detail, personal idiosyncrasy, and the rhythms of speech. The essence of the poet’s art is in the complex and sometimes bewildering flow of speech marked for its non-prosaic qualities: his expository style is marked by metaphor, non-referentiality, musicality, obliqueness and indirectness. Mental movement is the result and the key: the capacity of the poet’s own movements, gestural as well as verbal, to evoke a similar dynamic in the mind of the reader constitutes proof of poetic authenticity. In the course of the diaries figures such as Tikhonov and Mandelstam who are endowed with such a talent, even to varying degrees, will prove to be examples of a garbled speech or “kosnoizzychie” that authenticates their position as genuine poets. As Tynianov says in an entry recorded within the cycle of remarks grouped under the rubric “Poetry,” he only recognized those poems that “compelled him to move in some sort of new semantic tracks. That he moves this way with Mandelstam and Pasternak” (ibid.: 17). For Ginzburg the proof of their identity is a matter of reader-response and lies entirely in their capacity to elicit from the reader the excitement and energy to follow their indirect style. As she says, “you follow his speech with the feeling of a hunter” (za ego rech’iu sledish’ s chuvstvom okhotnika).

In her article on Kamen’ (Stone) Ginzburg singled out the “materiality” (veshchesvennost’) of Mandelstam’s poetry as both a feature of his Acmeist orientation and a product of his visual sense. But her view of his poetry
evolves to keep pace with Mandelstam’s changing ideas about poetic language as articulated in his essays. In an entry that dates to 1926 she acknowledges approvingly Mandelstam’s theory that the poetic word condenses time and space into itself because it possesses the capacity to subsume an entire tradition of connotation: the poetic word is “four-dimensional” because it signifies the real object, a position that is consistent with the nominalism of *Kamen’,* and surpasses literal mimesis by activating in the reader’s mind extra-dimensions of meaning that are trans-historical. For Ginzburg Mandelstam’s readings are an event not only for the histrionic pleasure but because they seem to open that fourth-dimension before one’s own very eyes and ears:

В стихотворении, он говорил, замкнуто пространство, как в карете бирллинга ... размеры этого пространства не существенны ... но существенно соотношение этого пространства (его микроскопичность) с пространством реальным. Поэтическое пространство и поэтическая вещь четырехмерны—нехорошо, когда в стихи попадают трехмерные вещи внешнего мира, то есть когда стихи описывают ... (ibid.: 15)

In a poem, he said, space is enclosed as in the carat of a diamond ... the proportions of this space are not essential ... but the relation of this space (its microscopic size) to real space is essential. Poetic space and the poetic thing are four-dimensional. It is no good when three-dimensional objects from the external world fall into poems, that is, when poems describe ...

The most remarkable portrait of Mandelstam is entered under 1933. It synthesizes into a unified portrait of the poet scattered observations about the impact his appearances have on how she understands his poetics. She accepts Mandelstam’s own view that poetry should be “an event” (*sobytie*) at least partly because his own performance combines spontaneity, verbal depth, great speed and brilliance. His own capacity to galvanize the imagination so that the listener’s response to the auditory signals of his words seems to open new linguistic combinations and poetic associations is proof of his own poetic theory at work. The passage is perhaps unique in Ginzburg’s diary entries about poets for its concentration on the physical appearance and mannerisms of its subject, and for forging a connection between this performance and the creative profile of the writer.
Mandelstam gave a reading at Anna Andreevna’s of “Conversation about Dante.” Mandelstam is short, slight with a narrow forehead, a small curved nose. The pointy lower part of his face has an unkempt and practically grey beard, and his intense gaze seems not to notice trivialities. He speaks, clenching his toothless mouth, in a sing-song fashion with an unexpected intonational exquisiteness of the Russian speech. He is brimming with rhythms and similarly full of ideas and beautiful words. As he reads he sways and waves his arms; he takes breaths pleasurably to the rhythm of the words and with the physiology of the corypheus behind whom performs the dancing chorus. He has a funny walk, his spine too straight and steps on tip toes as if to elevate himself.

The profile of 1933 is structured according to a set of contrasts treating appearance and social demeanor, on the one hand, and creative talent, on the other. Two sets of considerations about public behavior come together in the passage. They concern the general expectations about the unusual behavior of the poet who almost by definition lives outside the norms of average society. Accordingly, Mandelstam conformed to the standard expectations that a poet be otherworldly and eccentric. However, no student of the Formalists could ever settle for a merely conventional reproduction of a type. The object of her pen-portrait is to make the subject come to life on the page, and to capture the fluidity and dynamism of her encounter with a supremely creative individual. This would be impossible if she were working strictly within a typological norm such as the Romantic stereotype of the poet genius. The challenge that faces Ginzburg is to confirm a conception of how poets behave. But the portrait will only succeed if it goes beyond an
automatic perception of the type by recording a personality in full flight.\textsuperscript{20} Few other poets ever behave both more unusually, and therefore also more stereotypically, than Mandelstam. Seeing the interconnection of type and individual requires a special attentiveness on the part of Ginzburg’s narrator who makes effective use of an alienation technique to suggest two perspectives on the same person. The use of defamiliarization depends on a gap between two viewpoints, one standard and the other disruptive and original. Ginzburg applies a subtle technique of focalization in order to create an ironic space between two conclusions: the first, that the poet is “mad,” a standard and long-held association; the second, that in fact his creativity is healthy and life-affirming. Each of these viewpoints shapes the narrative.\textsuperscript{21}

Мандельштам слывет сумасшедшим и действительно кажется сумасшедшим среди людей, привыкших скрывать или подтасовывать свои импульсы. Для него, вероятно, не существует расстояния между импульсом и поступком,—расстояния, которое составляет сущность европейского уклада. А.А. говорит: «Оsip—это ящик с сюрпризами.” Должно быть, он очень разный. И в состоянии скандала, должно быть, он натуральнее. Но благопристойный Мандельштам, каким он особенно старается быть у А.А.,—нелеп. Ему не совладать с простейшими аксессуарами нашей цивилизации. Его воротничок и галстук—сами по себе. Что касается штанов, слишком коротких, из тонкой коричневой ткани в полоску, то таких штанов не бывает. Эту штуку жене выдали на платье. (ibid.: 120)

Mandelstam has the reputation of being crazy and really does seem mad among people who are accustomed to hide or dissemble their impulses. For him, probably, there is no distance between an impulse and an act—the distance that comprises the essence of European comportment. A.A. says: “Osip is a jack-in-the-box of surprises.” It must be the case that he is changeable. And it must be that he is most at ease in a state of scandal. But the well-mannered Mandelstam, as he tries to be especially when visiting A.A., is awkward. He isn’t capable of mastering the simplest practicalities of our civilization. His collar and tie seem to live independently [from his body, A.K.]. As for his trousers, which are too short and made from a sheer brown woven fabric with a stripe, they are not really trousers. His wife was given this material for a dress.

\textsuperscript{20} On the complex issue of Ginzburg’s theory of personality formation, see in this volume Van Buskirk, pp. 000–000.
\textsuperscript{21} On Ginzburg’s use of framing and viewpoint to distance literature from life, see briefly Zholkovsky 1994: 159 and in this volume, p. 000, as well as Van Buskirk, p. 000 ff.
The passage contains the voice of Ginzburg’s own autobiographical narrator usually expressed in the first-person plural, or as here, in an omniscient voice. When she resorts to the first-person plural the effect resembles that of the third-person limited narration which is the default mode. Certain conclusions are attributed to another implied viewpoint that might be called “society” or a “normative narrator” who formulates stereotypical opinions. This viewpoint on Mandelstam attaches to impersonal third-person constructions like “shvet,” “veroiatno,” “dolzhno byt’,” which imply that any normal person would on the basis of the details given in this account describe Mandelstam as mad or at least deeply abnormal. While the narrator representing Ginzburg’s evaluation undoubtedly recognizes that this conclusion is possible, this speaker reaches the opposite and surprising conclusion that Mandelstam’s behavior constitutes a “spectacle that gives grounds for optimism.” We can virtually hear the irony with which this second voice uses a word like “civilization” as attributed to bourgeois trappings like collars and neckties. The question therefore concerns what qualities redeem Mandelstam from belonging to a mere type.

The dominant of this description, which pushes it beyond the bounds of a normal profile, is its emphasis on the extreme nature of Mandelstam’s oddness as a physical and social subject.

His regular gestures are strikingly impractical. In the strange politeness of his right-angled bows, in the awkward handshake that grasps your fingers into a ball, in the melodious tenderness of his intonation when he asks you for a match—there is a rhythmic and cheerful clowning. His command of ordinary speech is a little...
bohemian, a little vulgar. Such as when during the reading he glanced about and asked, “Am I rattling along too quickly?” But all you have to do is touch on an important topic and the portals to elevated speech swing open forcefully. He waves his hands about, his eyes express his complete detachment from his seat, his interlocutor and the unfinished sandwich on his saucer. He speaks in the language of his poems obscurely (tongue-tied with uhms and the filler word “this …”), constantly interrupting his speech, magnificently, shamelessly. Yet he nonetheless never fails to be crafty and make jokes.

Mandelstam manages to fulfill and disrupt both sets of sometimes contradictory expectations by being both conventionally a poet and therefore unconventional in his social habitus, and at the same time sensitive to norms that he aspires to satisfy which remain in the final analysis beyond his competence. We expect poets to be unkempt, odd in their social manner (“strannaia vezhlivost”), idiosyncratic in speech (“on govori slovami svoikh stikhov kosnoiazychno …”), eccentric in their gestures and appearance. Readers also expect them to be effortlessly talented, brimming with poetry which as their idiom is an all-consuming compulsion. This leads to a description of the musical principle that organizes his physical gestures, and suggests an essentialist definition of the poet and his differences from ordinary people.

With her eye for effective artistic description, Ginzburg relished contradictions, and the dominant note she strikes in her description is surprise caused by two sets of disparities that are relative and absolute in nature. What strikes her from the start is the disparity between Mandelstam’s slight physical stature and commanding concentration on his performance, and between his disorderly appearance and exquisite control of the Russian language. This disparity is relative because the outbursts of stunning eloquence far exceed the expectations induced by his shabby appearance. The disparity is also absolute because Mandelstam exhibits an overwhelming musicality that momentarily transcends his time and place and puts the listener immediately in touch with the classical tradition. Reading aloud proves to be more than just a recitation of a text: the rhythm of the language courses through the body of the poet who is a conduit for a surplus energy that animates him. Through the performance the toothless, bedraggled figure acquires a new stature while he reads and conjures for Ginzburg the image of the choral leader of Greek tragedy.
The listener who is mesmerized by the recital continues to maintain an analytical and dual perspective on her own impressions. We see her capacity to stand outside her own observing self in the next paragraph, which juxtaposes opinions about Mandelstam attributed to people in general, Anna Akhmatova, and the narrator. The aim of the portrait is to uncover the essential character of the man and describe the feature of his personality that characterizes the manifold oddness of his behavior which consists of an awkward set of disjointed postures and exaggerated reflexes. The paragraph names the principal impression as “the unexpected,” an effect we have already experienced in the first part of the description. For some—Ginzburg’s narrator attributes this position to a larger community that can simply be referred to as “they” via third-personal plural verbs—this incapacity to behave according to social norms denotes madness. Akhmatova, however, takes the eccentricity in stride and with affectionate acceptance by referring to him as a “jack-in-the-box of surprises.” The narrator focuses initially on his clothing and then on his body language. Mandelstam’s odd appearance is in part a function of his dress which is jumbled. It is a measure of Ginzburg’s tact that she simply does not describe him as impoverished, which is an obvious implication here. But disorderly dress seems only to reflect a deeper incapacity to fit in that is an organic part of his personality. The musical impulse that transforms the poet in the first paragraph here figures as a rift between attempts at conscious deportment and a disruptive spontaneous energy. Everything about the poetic performance is determined by strict aesthetic choice (that is the meaning of “izyskannost”) whereas Mandelstam is unable to exercise any such self-consciousness with respect to his own actions. This becomes clearer and easier to visualize with the description of his gestures in the beginning of the third paragraph. The narrator takes pains to assert his politeness, and to make clear that the problem does not lie in a fundamental lack of courtesy. But the odd angle at which Mandelstam makes his bows conveys the odd angle at which he stands to society and the world until the frame of reference shifts from everyday behavior to the context of poetry in which his ease once again becomes overpowering and exalted (“raspakhvaiutsia vkhody v vysokuiu rech”). By not producing snippets of his actual words—and the absence of actual quotation here is noteworthy as though she somehow
feared detaching the words from the performance—the narrator implies that the power of the performance lies not even in the words themselves, however striking, but in the spectacle of watching angular gestures transformed into hypnotic dance-like movements, garbled phrases smoothed out into effortless eloquence, self-consciousness turned into complete self-possession. The performance itself is the work of art precisely because of its transformational effect on the poet who in his everyday existence is marked for embarrassment and through art becomes unselfconsciously admirable and admirably unselfconscious ("grandiozno, besstydno").

He is a spectacle that affirms optimism. We see a person who wishes money and recognition and is upset because his poems are not published. But we see how insignificant this disappointment is by comparison with the sense of his creative fulfillment in combination with the sense of his creative inexhaustibility. We see the very best thing possible: the actualized value of a man who inhabits the world of his work completely. He has removed himself to this world by any means possible, and what he left behind turned out to be hodgepodge: scandals, popular courts. People have sacrificed to activity their life, health, freedom, career, property. Mandelstam's state of foolishness is a sacrifice of the everyday appearance of a person. This means that not a single particle of the straining of his will is lost outside poetic labor. Poetic labor requires a state in which the poet compels himself; without this ceaseless self-compulsion he quickly becomes course and trivial. Everything has gone into this area, and in real life he remains an eccentric, a "madman" whose wishes are unregulated.
He is full of rhythms, thoughts and words that move. He does his business on the move, shameless and indifferent to viewers. It was terrible, as though you were catching a glimpse of a biologically specific process of creation.

This description of Mandelstam places him in the category of Pushkin’s Mozart or Schiller’s naïve poet, the typology that privileges the poet as a child of nature imbued with an artless musicality. Yet insofar as this description characterizes a reading of “The Conversation about Dante” the effect of spontaneity is surprising. After all, the essay itself, one of Mandelstam’s densest and most theoretical compositions about rhetorical and philosophical aspects of poetic creation such as metaphor, as a work of meta-poetry is self-referential and self-conscious. The description of the reading on its own has dramatic impact, but when we consider how artless the poet seems when reciting even his elaborate study of poetic language this perception redoubles the force of Ginzburg’s argument that the poet is at his most inspired and most intelligent when engaged in the production of work about poetry. Ginzburg carefully discriminates between what she calls “tvorcheskaia realizovannost’” as a state of creative satisfaction achieved in the process of writing poetry and the fulfillment of professional goals that comes with publishing. To an extent, the phrase and its definition summarize for the reader the quality that the entire portrait of Mandelstam intends to convey: namely, that the mark of a true poet is an unstinting capacity to produce new effects, and that however alien his appearance and impracticality his verbal logic has a great coherence.

Similarly, her analysis resolves the tension between wildness and politeness in his appearance. To the extent that the terms of the poet’s behavior are generally familiar topoi they are culturally overdetermined to correspond to a picture of the asocial genius. Yet, by contrast, Mandelstam also proves surprisingly sensitive to what the social psychologist Erving Goffman called the “central axis of situational regulation” according to which individuals modify their behavior and adapt their dress to suit the formality and informality of occasions.22 However awkward his bowing and despite the ludicrous clothing to which he has been reduced, it is clear

that Mandelstam makes an effort to fit into the social gathering. This is a way of both acknowledging the old-world etiquette and spoofing it at the same time, which is what “fools” (“iurodivye”) do, to emphasize that they are not of this world. The fact that he is a poet gives him, in Ginzburg’s eyes, both special license to behave and appear as he wishes and, above all, normalizes his behavior. By the end of the passage, the charge that Mandelstam is mad simply cannot stick. If anything, he combines the usual and expected eccentricity of the great poet with an unusual sense of propriety that against the demonstration of his best intentions remains nonetheless grotesque because the rituals of socialization seem either incompletely assimilated or do not come naturally to him. It does, however, take an observer as sociologically astute and literarily sensitive as Ginzburg to convey the true complexity of this figure.

No other poet, however admired, elicits quite the same degree of fixation and detail in the “notebooks.” Two poles of poetic personality seem to crystallize in Akhmatova and Mandelstam. Akhmatova, whose poetry the elderly Ginzburg will admit to esteeming rather than loving, is perhaps the writer most often mentioned in her notebooks and casts a long shadow for her dignity, acerbic self-irony and integrity.

Ахматова явно берет на себя ответственность за эпоху, за память умерших и славу живущих. Кто не склонен благоговеть, тому естественно радражаться,— это дело исторического вкуса. Ахматова сидит в очень спокойной позе и смотрит на нас прищурившись,— это потому, что наша культура ей не столько непонятна, сколько не нужна. Не стоит спорить о том, нужна ли она нашей культуре, поскольку она является какой-то составной ее частью. Она для нас исторический факт ...

Akhmatova clearly takes upon herself responsibility for her epoch, for the memory of the dead and the glory of the living. Anyone not inclined to worship before her will obviously feel annoyed—this is a matter of taste for the historical. Akhmatova sits in a very calm pose and screws up her eyes to look at us—this is less because our culture is unintelligible to her than it is because she has no use for it. There is no point in arguing about whether she is necessary to our culture because she is already constitutes a fundamental part. She is for us a historic fact ...
If movement dominates the portrait of Mandelstam, stasis shapes Akhmatova’s persona. Notwithstanding the unqualified admiration, this difference translates directly into the intuitive evaluation and appreciation of poets. Nothing in the rest of the diaries will gainsay the profile in courage that Ginzburg sketches of Akhmatova, and at various points Ginzburg will write of Akhmatova, who was her friend of many years, as a model for the women of her generation. Yet whereas Ginzburg will continue to revisit and modify the image of other poets in response to their publications and behavior, especially Pasternak and Mayakovsky whose characterizations are more human and three-dimensional, Akhmatova’s portrait will scarcely develop in any new directions. The degree to which her persona was manufactured is reflected in a body language that is stylized: “she had worked out a theatrical system of gestures through which she represented herself as a poet, as a cultural phenomenon” (“u nee vyrabotannaia teatralizovannaia sistema zhestov, kotorymi ona predstavitel’stvuet, kak poet, kak iavlenie kul’tury”). Even more important, from the perspective of Ginzburg’s value-system in which poetic naïveté seems the acme of authenticity, is the observation that the persona Akhmatova projects bears little resemblance to the maladroit and domestically helpless woman visible only to friends and intimates. By contrast, Mandelstam as portrayed in the “notebooks” seems to have no biography or persona outside his verbal personality. If Akhmatova instills admiration from the outside, Mandelstam elicits an intuitive response. The word that frequently occurs with respect to Mandelstam is “ošchushchenie.” It is his unique sense of presence that confirms the conclusions about his unique gifts and inspiration that Ginzburg reached analytically in her articles about his poetics. No other poet, apart from Pasternak very occasionally, achieves the fusion of musicality and language that creates in the listener and reader a movement that seems analogous to the poet’s own creative process. Ginzburg calls this process in which the subjectivities of both writer and reader become synchronized an “ordering of our consciousness” (“rasporiazhenie [sic] nashim soznaniem”) (ibid.: 96). To art of such power she assigns an existential quality since its effect goes beyond pleasure and has the power “to enhance or to hinder life,” the most extreme description of reader-response that can be envisaged.
Any attempt to talk about characterization in Ginzburg’s writings must address the relationship of the individual to type. Like other students of Eikhenbaum from the mid- to late 1920s, Ginzburg regarded the behavior (if not creative work) of writers as inextricably linked to their literary and intellectual environment. Her scholarship accords seminal importance to literary models of personality; and her memoirs constitute an ongoing attempt to describe generational mentalities and the way in which “individual consciousness is historically, socially predetermined” (Harris 2003: 21). Throughout the “notebooks,” the degree of contextualization and relativization of individual to group seems to vary according to the intellectual labor or personality type of the individual Ginzburg describes. The three groups of greatest interest to her are private individuals who are explored for their emotional histories and the way they act in the world, adjust to power structures and hierarchies; the “humanities intelligentsia” of scholars, prose writers, translators, teachers; and, lastly, poets. This classification controls the amount of biographical information that shapes her accounts. Because the history of the private self is the history of emotions, she talks about incidents and the feelings they provoke, and this is most pronounced when the history of her emotions and relationships provide her material and make her the autobiographical subject. Similarly, there is much biographical information, filtered through anecdote, about scholars. It is because scholars are a product of their academic and professional environment that she contextualizes her accounts of her teachers and individuals with reference to debates, intrigues and literary politics. Most poets, too, can be accommodated in this method. But Mandelstam stands apart. Even in writing about the creative psychology of contemporary poets she tends to keep biographical information and even the influence of the literary environment outside her characterization, emphasizing instead highly individual behavior rather than motivation. Richard Gustafson finds her theory of lyric somewhat deficient precisely because Ginzburg marginalizes the importance of the “biographic element in the esthetic moment.” Leaving aside evaluations of her theory it is important to recognize that this tendency is not accidental and distinguishes Ginzburg’s treatment of poets as a creative type. In this respect her vignettes about Mandelstam stand in helpful juxtaposition to the interest Ginzburg takes in her own self-
fashioning and the development of her personality (Gustafson 1985: 138). While poets and intellectuals are shown admiring one another, ultimately the memoirs suggest that they perform as two different species because they possess different degrees of self-consciousness and self-determination.

Even poetic profiles are not, of course, totally immune from their larger political context. The questions that arise are what curbs on freedom are tolerable before the poet becomes creatively disabled, and to what extent can an individual consciously adapt and succeed. Circumstances inevitably take a toll on creative psychology and on a writer’s message and style, but adaptation is a function of the poet’s highly specific psychology and choices (where they exist). As Ginzburg asserts, “a writer is a person who is incapable of living a life if he does not write.” The issue is no less than one of creative (and sometimes biological) survival, and the question of how writers adapt and protect their talent recurs at least two further points in the “notebooks” where Mandelstam is once again invoked as an example. A number of entries for 1932 directly represent the worsening circumstances brought about by class warfare and antagonism to bourgeois professionals, the choice weapons in Stalin’s revolution from above, that devastated the literary and academic world.23 Her most frank assessment of the situation acknowledges that “it is impossible for a literary professional [literator] to live a healthy practical life,” and the question that interests her most is how easily such people will let themselves go and “go to pieces” (“Mozhno opustit’sia. Opuskat’ia soblazitel’no i legko”). Through case-studies, Ginzburg ponders the question of who will succumb to the pressure and either capitulate to the new values or resist. Intermittently Ginzburg will adduce this context when discussing literary works such as Pasternak’s Second Birth (“Vtoroe rozhdenie”). In her view, that collection inescapably reflects how Pasternak, at least before their liquidation on April 28, 1932, positioned himself between hostile factions in RAPP as he attempted to remain true to his basic philosophical principles and yet not appear to be a reactionary. Ginzburg’s essay “What is a line?” (“Chto takoe liniia?”) examines a set of interrelated issues concerning the behavior of individuals, and most especially writers, in adverse circumstances. All decisions come down to

23 On Ginzburg’s biography in this period, see briefly Harris 2003: 8–9.
the choice between individual integrity, on the one hand, according to which writers remain true to their talent and conscience and follow the Pushkinian line of being their own highest judge; or, on the other hand, the capacity for what Ginzburg disparagingly terms an “intellectual utilitarianism” that grants material rewards to individuals who for the sake of status accommodate external demands, fulfilling the principle of art on political demand (“sotszakaz”) that she discusses elsewhere. In the 1940s Ginzburg will reformulate the opposition in terms of a theory of egotism that pits the (implicitly unhealthy) egotist whose sole interest as an atomized individual is reward or survival with the (implicitly admirable) egotist whose need to create reflects a more liberal belief in the essential role of self-fulfilled individuals within a healthy, well-functioning society. For Ginzburg, creative work is by definition social and therefore inevitably takes the egotist out his shell.

At what point individuals cross the line—and indeed whether they cross the line—between the self-interested and selfless commitment to art becomes the measure of their capacity to become fully themselves by realizing their talent. For the latter type, at least in some cases, there may be no actual choice. In writing about herself, she expresses an inner compulsion to adhere to individually cherished values and the right to self-expression. Although Ginzburg does not here use Kantian language, this position amounts to a moral imperative that has an almost organic force: “If a person is able to write and in fact is unable to do anything else, then he will write even if life around him shouts that he writes to no purpose and for no one.” If an intelligent, like Ginzburg, finds it hard to survive (at least in the spiritual sense) without the opportunity for continual self-reflection, poets seem existentially obliged to do anything it takes to write, whatever the moral position of compromise or resistance they are forced to adopt. Without passing comment on Pasternak, she categorizes him as an example of the intellectual or member of the intelligentsia who attempts to accommodate himself to change. In this respect he embodies one strategy for not falling apart.  

24 For a detailed account of the context in which Ginzburg perceived Pasternak’s vicissitudes amidst the volatile literary politics, see Fleishman 2005, esp. chapter 6.
tion and represents the *intelligent* “in a state of self-defence” and remains for her the purest example of the poet in his natural state of creativity as driven by his own inner, psychological imperative.

Again, it is essential to observe that Ginzburg does not see Mandelstam as a victim. Her portrait takes cognizance of the fact that by his own lights he made a sincere effort to fit in because his values were those of the pre-revolutionary intelligentsia who felt a sincere, and longstanding, commitment to bridging the gap between the educated elite and the people. She observes that “Mandelstam—the late Mandelstam—was convinced that the contemporary poet was not one who lorded it over people [*kto vysitsia nad liud’mi*], or stood apart, or distanced himself... But he was one out of all, one who understood on behalf of all. And from all the types of fates possible his fate was the most typical.” There is a parallel between this ethical posture, and its tragic outcome, and the earlier description of Mandelstam’s social manner. We saw earlier that the poet attempted to conform to social convention and cut a normal appearance. The result was impossibly comic and awkward because ultimately he was organically incapable of playing the part. Similarly, Mandelstam attempted to understand the literary politics of his time and carve out a socially useful niche. In a second late entry in the memoirs, contained in the notes written in the 1970s and 1980s, she notes that the aggrieved stance of “The Fourth Prose” was the reaction of a rejected and insulted individual who only intermittently achieved a *modus vivendi* with the Soviet establishment. But once again he was destined to fail because, unlike other figures, Mandelstam could not consciously alter his creative psychology, that essential and inalienable poetic impulse that proved to be beyond his control: “In his poetry Mandelstam did not permit compromises (*ustupok*), his poetry was strongly protected, but his outlook on the world was in the highest degree subjected to historical trends” (ibid.: 274, 289). We see from this, even more conclusively than before, that there are poets to different degrees in Ginzburg. What differentiates one class from another is apparently not just a matter of literary accomplishment or textual prowess.

For the most part I would suggest that the studies of individuals provided by her memoirs are too diverse and personalities too mercurial to give proof of a single conclusion about the impact of social context on creative
psychologies. Her micro-histories often reflect the pressure of history and sociological considerations, providing a tangible sense of the impact of larger changes in the culture and political structures on classes and individual lives. She uses her notes and memoirs, as Jane Gary Harris rightly observes, to study the evolving psychological map of the post-revolutionary intelligentsia, and to explore psychosocial description of individuals under the pressure of their environment. To that extent her informal history of the mentality of the intelligentsia must be reflexive and include her own values even though she excludes overt autobiography. Her interest in working out questions of existential and moral survival takes the form of observing and empirically working out what the social behavior of the intelligentsia should be in resisting or accommodating the overwhelming social dislocations that grow even more intense after the end of NEP.

In this connection, the example of Mandelstam was particularly compelling and something of an exception. In his case, and more than would be true of Pasternak, the character of the poet seems determined by a hyperbolic linguistic capacity that channels all his energy and self-awareness into the production of poetic images. Consider, for instance, the early entry in her notes for 1933 concerning poverty. On the one hand, the descriptions of his behavior and maladroit appropriation of the conventions of politeness affiliate him with the stereotype of the unworldly poet genius. Yet, on the other, as a sign of his ethical stature she prefaces her discussion with an epigraph from Mandelstam: “Hard poverty will thumb its nose at me” (Strogii kukish mne pokazhet nishcheta). She invokes Mandelstam here in passing not only because his own poverty and marginality create empathy, but because she clearly finds the defiance and resolution of his attitude memorable and encouraging. She deliberately employs the language of “moral choice”—“I choose poverty” (Ia vybiraui nishchetu)—in order to emphasize the degree of personal determination she exercises, just

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25 This conclusion is consistent with Stanislav Savitsky’s argument in this volume that “life of the 1930s could not be understood merely as a system of total ideological pressure” and that an account had to consider the “social experience of people who witnessed the formation of a new society,” p. 000.
like Mandelstam who recognizes that the material deprivation of his own position will be severe. To the extent that both she and Mandelstam represent the disillusion that people of the 1920s experienced they represent an example of the group identity that Ginzburg aims to describe. But the impression of a common and shared experience accumulates through individual and private acts of judgment and decision, rather than deriving from a superstructure or emerging from a substructure or from being the product of an “analytical machine.”

The lives of the poets in Ginzburg are not a topic for explicit auto-biographical essay writing. Ginzburg’s first-person narrator does not intrude, but this is scarcely surprising from a writer who devises the complex narratological deflections, including re-naming and re-gendering, that we see in works such as “Den’ Ottera.” But the special quality of admiration implied and felt in the cumulative profile of Mandelstam is so individual as to stand outside her usual method and paradigm. The degree of admiration and attention suggests a sense of camaraderie and identification felt on Ginzburg’s part for a fellow beleaguered and marginal figure at pains, like her, to maintain a creative identity and powerless to resist the set of historical circumstances that pushed them both to the margins of the literary establishment and, most painfully, to the outskirts of the new Soviet utopia for which both Ginzburg and Mandelstam had high hopes. Given her aspiration to develop a type of psychological description that had predictive power, we can also surmise that she may have wondered whether Mandelstam held the key to her own future.

I would suggest that from around 1930 her fascination with Mandelstam changed emphasis, shifting from a delight in the poetry to an admiration that objectifies him into a transcendent figure of poetic creativity. At

27 See Kobrin 2006: esp. 70–75.
28 See Kahn 2011: 7.
29 In this volume, see Andrei Zorin, “Ginzburg as Psychologist,” p. 000.
30 On her understanding of her changed circumstances around 1932, see the introduction to the present volume, pp. 000–000, and Caryl Emerson, “Ginzburg on Lermontov and Tolstoy,” p. 000.
the highest level, which is where she places Mandelstam, the definition of who is a poet becomes an ineluctable compound of ethical and existential elements that channel the life into art. The rarest writer of all turns out to be the poet who cannot stop writing even to save his life because the end of creativity would have meant a separate death. To paraphrase Caryl Emerson on Ginzburg’s view of Pechorin, Mandelstam is a strangely transparent poetic hero who requires no Romantic irony on himself. The greatest proof of art as an inflexible principle of being, corroborating his widow’s assertion that Mandelstam “lived without looking in the mirror,” was his incapacity to betray the life of art that made him great in the first place. That proved to be the tragic artlessness of his life.

31 Emerson, “Ginzburg on Lermontov,” p. 000.
The Leviathan, or Language in Besiegement: Lydia Ginzburg’s Prolegomena to Critical Discourse Analysis

Introduction: The Leviathan, a Malignant Governmentality

An allegory of the omnipotent state, the Leviathan occurs only in a few short fragments in Lidiiia Ginzburg’s notebooks. However, the Leviathan is an epigraphic figure, and this is why it is with this allegory that I want to start my analysis of Ginzburg’s critique of language and power. Importantly, the allegory of the Leviathan appears in Ginzburg’s notes from 1943–44 and in the context of her reflections on the experiences of surviving in, and living on after, the unprecedented human catastrophe of the siege of Leningrad. Ginzburg describes her time as the “era of great experiences [or: experiments, in Russian opyty.—I.S.] and tests” (Ginzburg 2002: 729), which started in 1914: the era of world wars with their “maximum non-freedom” (predel’naia nesvoboda) (ibid.) and the “absolute non-freedoms” imposed by the all-powerful state, the Leviathan (ibid.: 728). The siege of Leningrad, according to Ginzburg, is not an exception from such a history, but a culmination of the “non-freedoms” of Soviet and, more broadly, European modernity of the twentieth century. All of these events/experiences produced a generation that “became history’s experimental material. And history burned it and disembowelled it and minced it into a bloody mess” (“оказалось экспериментальным материалом истории. И история жгла и потрошила его и превращала в кровавую кашу”) (Ginzburg 2011: 294; this fragment also discussed in Zorin 2010: 39).
In the siege of Leningrad, various dimensions of “non-freedom”—total mobilization and total war, state terror, and mass death—culminate, converge, and confirm one another. In the struggle for survival amidst destruction, repression, and starvation, Ginzburg tries to understand the Leviathan, the omnipotent state that sanctions and orchestrates these disasters. It emerges as a complex aggregate of different technologies of modern power involving various aspects of life and, hence, producing different overlapping regimes of “non-freedoms.” According to Ginzburg, the subject is involved in the workings of the Leviathan in many ways. Moreover, as exemplified by the experience of the civilian in the siege, the individual depends on the Leviathan for elementary survival. This complexity makes Ginzburg’s political critique more challenging than the trivial understanding of “non-freedom” as a mere deprivation of rights. The situation of power in the siege as analyzed by Ginzburg can be well elucidated by making reference to Michel Foucault’s three-pronged model of modern power with its regimes of repression, discipline, and biopower. The siege combined in itself, firstly, direct repression of citizens’ rights due to the imposition of the state of siege (Foucault’s sovereign power); secondly, the disciplining of the individual bodies of civilians in military training and in the draconian regimes of military production (Foucault’s disciplinary power); and thirdly, the administration of civilian life in conditions of severe and prolonged starvation through centralized control over food rationing and distribution of medical services among the dying population (Foucault’s biopower) (Foucault 2004: 239–64). In my reading of Ginzburg, I will primarily concentrate on the latter two, with a special emphasis on biopower as least understood in Soviet contexts. Matters of life and death in the siege, as Ginzburg’s witness account shows, are deeply politicized, and the power to administer and distribute life and death constitute the foundation of the Leviathan’s omnipotence. These three vectors of power, each in their own way, contribute to the destruction of the human, so that all subjectivity is summed up in the allegory of distrofik, a patient of starvation disease\(^1\) in the terminal stage overpowered by total indifference:

\(^1\) *Alimentarnaiia distrofia* is a term for pathology and death caused by starvation. The term was invented in besieged Leningrad but widely used later as explanation of the cause of death in famine and hard labor in the GULAG. The respective medical...
Ле́виафан употребляет в свою пользу человека, внутренне не идущего навстречу и потому превращаемого в раба, т.е. в существо, лишенное общих ценностей и личной инициативы. Символической ясности и гиперболического предела все это достигало в данных условиях [блокады]. Несвобода проникала во все проявления человека, вплоть до мельчайших; притом вне всякой регламентации, которая узаконивает и идеологизирует несвободу. Пассивность (безинициативность) гиперболически подчеркнута тем, что на человека давит и обрушивается все происходящее, но сам он не участвует ни в чем, пока Ле́виафан не протянет щупальца, чтобы схватить его и употребить в свою пользу… Психика раба, т.е. человека, у которого нет ценностей, который сам для себя не представляет ценности, которого ничто не касается и который управляется прямоиейно-эгоистическими, близлежащими вожделениями, в данных условиях [блокады] также гиперболически проявились. […] Ее основные

nomenclature, semiotics, diagnostics, pathology, and therapy were thoroughly developed by medical research and medical statistics in Leningrad during the siege (Chernorutskii 1947). The resulting profound medicalization of the social disaster of the siege produced a narrative fully encoded in biodeterministic terms and categories. The story of the siege thus became narratable in the professional jargon of very special medical disciplines, the mass death of the population explainable as medical fact. On the one hand, such a code efficiently suppressed the social and political implications of the siege. On the other, medical nomenclatures and statistics produced by hospitals, as impenetrable for the layman and as classified as they were, still turned out to be the only language in which the catastrophe of Leningrad could be discussed at all, for instance, at medical conferences, in strictly professional and heavily terminologized, but still public discussions. The most detailed and informed introduction to all medical aspects of alimentary dystrophy as researched during the siege can be found in the book edited by the head of the Leningrad medical service professor Mikhail Vasilievich Chernorutskii (Chernorutskii 1947). This publication summarized the experience of doctors, pathologists, and other medical personnel in fighting mass death in famine throughout the time of the siege and with those limited resources that were available for the saving of life. The book was published in 1947 and almost immediately banned from public circulation. Another interesting monograph indicating the scope and depth of medical research carried out on victims of starvation is Miasishchev 1945. For a social history of the mass starvation and medical services in Leningrad, see Barber and Dzeniskevich 2001. For a summary of Leningrad’s wartime research and the present-day assessment of its relevance for general problems of therapy and questions of human survival in extreme circumstances, see Simonenko, V.S., Magaeva, S.V., Simonenko, M.G., Pakhomova, Iu. V. 2003: especially 137–43. For a critical perspective on alimentary dystrophy as a construction of knowledge/power, see Sandomirskaia 2010: 306–27.
The Leviathan puts into its own service a person who internally refuses to meet it halfway and therefore is transformed into a slave, i.e. into a creature devoid of common values and personal initiative. All this has achieved a symbolic clarity and a hyperbolic limit in the given circumstances [of the siege.—I.S.]. Non-freedom penetrates all human manifestations, including the tiniest ones; all this in the absence of any normalization that could justify and ideologize non-freedom. Passivity (lack of initiative) is hyperbolized by the fact that the individual is being pressured and overwhelmed by everything that happens around, but he himself does not partake of anything until the Leviathan extends his tentacles to grasp him and make use of him. [...] The psychology of a slave, i.e., an individual who has no values, who does not even represent a value to himself, whom nothing concerns, and who is steered by straightforwardly egoistic, immediate cravings, in the given conditions [of the siege.—I.S.] has also become hyperbolically clear. [...] Its fundamental features are a beastly tenacity in the achievement of the smallest egoistic goals and the loss of all non-material values, including the awareness of one’s own value, which leads to a strange combination of miserly perseverance with indifference towards one’s own life and death.

Thus, if read through Foucault’s three-pronged structure of modern power, the Leviathan’s repressive dimension reveals itself in the erasure of legal norms and values; its disciplining power resides in its methods of “making use” of the individual for the purposes of the state; its biopower, in the reduction of all life to the struggle for survival and the ensuing surrender by the individual to the state of all concern about his own life or death. It is important to note, again, that all three forms of the Leviathan’s alienating “non-freedoms” converge and appear in a clarified manner in the military, social and political circumstances of the siege.

The three powers all make themselves visible in the way in which the individual subject uses language. Whether vis-à-vis the repressive power of the NKVD, the disciplinary power of ideological censorship, or the regulative power assigning the subject a daily ration of 200 grams of bread, all these confrontations are reflected in discursive strategies. Writing and conversation, each in their own way, are more than a means of communication.
and expression. As Ginzburg argues, they are a vital living environment without which life itself would not be possible (I will return to this thesis by Ginzburg later on). Thus, all politics of language under the rule of the Leviathan in a sense become a kind of biopolitics, since the power of the Leviathan seeks to “invest life through and through.” Ginzburg’s power is intrinsically a linguistic phenomenon: a complex aggregate of discourses, discursive practices, techniques of (self-)censorship, circumlocution, and silences. Due to its linguistic complexity, Ginzburg’s Leviathan is different from the standard understanding of totalitarianism where repression coerces its subjects into total identity. Ginzburg emphasizes differentiation between the Leviathan’s various regimes of alienation, adaptation, and resistance. She speaks of the Leviathan’s subjects not as “victims” but as “wards” (podopechnye), and thus implies a patron-client relationship between the omnipotent system and its subject, a reciprocity of some sort. She emphasizes the unwilling and morally corrupting, but still undeniable participation of the governed in the processes of their own government. There seems to be something that unites the Leviathan and its “ward” into a shared understanding of political and historical necessity, a perverse governmentality. Ginzburg emphasizes in the Leviathan a certain open-

2 See Lomagin 2005 on the NKVD’s techniques of collecting and classifying both written and oral utterances among the citizens (censoring of mail, denunciations, and secret agents’ reports about conversations in public). Control over public speech appears to be the key to securing society. Especially during the siege the secret police’s methods of analyzing public discourse for “counter-revolutionary attitudes” dramatically expanded and differentiated; the paranoid urge to guard the city against spies, saboteurs, and traitors (based on Stalin’s theory of class struggle under socialism) seems to have given a veritable boost to the institutions and technologies of terror. Comparing pre- and post-war repressions, a friend of Ginzburg observed, “before it was a lottery, now it is a queue” (Ginzburg 2002: 285).

3 These are Foucault’s words: “... a power whose highest function was perhaps no longer to kill, but to invest life through and through” (Foucault 1998: 139).

4 Governmentality is another concept of Michel Foucault’s by which he meant a historically specific form of rationality of government. Originally developed to explain Liberalism as “an art of government,” the concept was further expanded to include all other forms of suppression, merger, and exchange of function between the state and
ness to a certain discursive difference, a structure of strategic possibilities in making (or not making) statements:

The Leviathan can have different kinds of wards: those thinking in conformity, those thinking in dissent, or those not thinking at all [...] A coincidence in interests (between the Leviathan and the “ward.”—I.S.) is possible, either by conscious intention, or by chance. Also possible is resistance, whether conscious or spontaneous.

However, there is a limit beyond which the Leviathan stops being probabilistic and its “ward” loses the possibility of being either this or that: a limit at which both the Leviathan’s power and the suffering of the “ward” become absolute. This limit emerges when power radically reduces humanness exclusively to a suffering corporeality:

A special, and theoretically significant variety of social psychology is produced by a combination of absolute power with the absolute egoism of the person subjected to such power. They are mechanically adjusted to each other and at the same time are for each other mutually impenetrable. [...] For who could be more egoistic than the eternal galley slave chained to his galley? He is deprived of all objective content of life, and all that is left of him is his suffering body.
It can be assumed from this very compact fragment that the limit of the absolute (as with all limits, it is not practically achievable but still dominates the process) lies where language gives up and various discourses—conformity, dissent, coincidence, resistance—fall behind the horizon of silence, immense “egoistic” suffering in privation and loneliness. The Leviathan and his absolute galley slave do not communicate: they are only mechanically fitted, priterty, to one another; they are “mutually impenetrable.”

In her notes, Ginzburg reflects on the relationship between the Leviathan and its subject on two simultaneous and mutually determining levels, in “a double conversation” (dvoinoi razgovor, ibid.: 269) and under the sign of a “dual anxiety” (dvoinashcheesia bespokoistvo, ibid.): “a conversation about literature” and “a conversation about life” (ibid.). In what follows, I will reflect on Ginzburg’s analysis of discursive strategies, including technologies of writing, strategies of professional conversation, and everyday talk in the conditions of Stalinist institutionalization in the 1930s (the extermination of literature), and later on during the siege of Leningrad (the extermination of life).

Disciplining Writing

Literaturovedenie: “An extremely unpleasant word”

When describing the process of Stalinization in literature, Ginzburg does not concentrate on the ideology but on the practices of institutionalization: the gradual emergence of strategies and institutional codes of talking,

Because of the autobiographical character of Ginzburg’s notes, one might question whether her observations are relevant with regards to the whole of her class and generation. Hence, a question could also arise of whether her theory of the Leviathan is not a mere circumlocution of individual experience. In my present reading of Ginzburg, I do not differentiate between more and less autobiographical fragments. Ginzburg’s introspection is not a purpose in itself, but a tool designed to obtain structures, and thus make subjective experiences available to generalization.
techniques of writing, and respective norms. These latter are not mechanically imposed by the violence of the state, but evolve in the interaction between the structures of power and the strategies of its subject. In the end, these strategies sum up into “an unprecedented mutual immolation and self-immolation (vzaimo- i samosozhzhenie) among scholars and men of letters “ (Ginzburg 2002: 104). What does Ginzburg’s “immolation” imply in terms of technologies of power? In her notes starting from the late 1920s and up until the end of her life (and the end of the system) in 1990, Ginzburg dedicates herself to the project of recording and analyzing the everyday reality of the institutionalization of Soviet literary production and literary scholarship.

Lydia Ginzburg inherited her uncompromising criteria of scholarly work as a junior member of the Russian Formalist school, a student of the legendary “great teachers,” Tynianov, Shklovsky, and Eikhenbaum. Already at the end of her apprenticeship she was questioning Formalist theory in ways similar to those used by later interpreters who subjected it to criticism (Jameson 1972): the mechanistic fetishism of technique (priem), the resulting postulate of the immanence of literature and its genres; the implied subjugation of agency in writing to the mechanics of textual production; and ensuing a-historicism.6 However, due to the same all-engrossing con-

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6 On the a-historical pathos of Formalism as a form of avant-garde milleniarism, see Clark 1995: 29–53. Ginzburg reflects on the crisis of the Formalist idea of immanence as early as the late 1920s:

Она (литература) не могла развиваться сама из себя, требовались внешние толчки и скрещивания с другими рядами. Боюсь, что мы паразиты, которым для того, чтобы не умереть от недостатка пищи (или от скуки), необходимо питаться либо социологией (эйхенбаумовский «литературный быт» и проч.), либо лингвистикой (Виноградов и проч.), либо текущей литературой. Для тех, кто ощущает себя не историками или теоретиками литературы по преимуществу, но шире того—литераторами, профессионалами слова—отсутствие последнего рода связей и импульсов—губительно.

It (literature) could not develop out of itself, it needed external impulses and cross-breedings with other series. I am afraid that we are parasites who, in order to
centration on technique, early Formalism was also the first to formulate a theory of literature. A concern for theory, once instilled by her teachers, never left Ginzburg, who was convinced of the necessity of conscientious and honest theoretical work. This was her ideal of professional quality that she felt was later betrayed by Soviet literary studies, literaturovedenie.

In her notebook entries from the 1970s–1980s (e.g., Ginzburg 2002: 263–320), summing up Soviet literaturovedenie’s rise and decline, Ginzburg repeatedly returns to a retrospective analysis of how the discipline established and became a unitary language to govern Soviet literary production, literary knowledge, and literary institutions. Given her criteria of scholarly and writerly honesty, literaturovedenie is “an ersatz of literature [...] an extremely unpleasant word” (ibid.: 169–70); “there is something sanctimonious [khanzheskoie] in it,” (ibid.: 269). The rise of literaturovedenie during the 1930s marks the end of literary theory, but also a severe crisis of escape dying from a lack of nourishment (or boredom) need to feed on sociology (Eichenbaum’s “literary everyday life,” etc.) or on linguistics (Vinogradov and others), or on contemporary literature. For those who identify themselves not as predominantly literary historians or theorists, but, more broadly, as authors, as professionals of discourse, the absence of those latter connections and impulses is fatal. (Ginzburg 2002: 36, notes from the 1920–1930s)

Ginzburg’s later criticism of the egoism of immanent consciousness (which she construes as the psychological and aesthetic precondition of the Leviathan) retains some features of her critique of the Formalist theory of immanence in literature. In the quote above, she seems to imply that immanence might be acceptable for literary scholarship but “fatal” for the practice of writing because it is incompatible with the writer’s ethics and politics. On the criticism of this theory by the young Formalists Ginzburg and Boris Bukhshtab, see Savitskii 2008: 8–37. However, the Formalists themselves, the “great teachers,” were not united in the understanding of literature as a technique indifferent to social and temporal aspects. Ginzburg sets apart Boris Eikhenbaum’s search for a sociology of literature and Yuri Tynianov’s historicity as opposed to Shklovsky’s mechanicism. Thus, as distinct from the constructivist Shklovsky, “theoreticism is as characteristic of Tynianov’s scholarly constitution as historicity” (Ginzburg 2002: 454).

7 Eagleton 1996: ix.
8 Quotations date to the 1940s and 1978, respectively.
literature itself, the object of literaturovedenie’s concerns. Literaturovedenie first attacks and then exterminates theory in a series of anti-Formalist purges. For this early period of institutionalization with its militant critical rhetoric and “revolutionary ethic” of brutal aggression against colleagues, there is no difference between attacking a text and attacking a human life; as early as 1929, Ginzburg notices that in the USSR, “people get banned just like books” (“запрещают [...] людей так же, как запрещают книги”) (ibid.: 79). In a note from the 1970s, she reminisces: “In the 1920s, there was no such word (literaturovedenie) [...] it appeared much later, exactly at that time when what it stood for started to draw to its end” (“В 20-х годах слова этого (литературоведение) не было [...] Оно появилось гораздо позже, как раз тогда, когда начало кончаться то, что оно означает” (ibid.: 269f). As distinct from literary theory, Ginzburg’s construction of literaturovedenie appears not as a method of knowing things, but primarily as a system of gradually centralizing institutional bodies, solidifying institutional speech practices, regimes of public speaking and writing, with respective norms of inclusion and exclusion. And indeed, the word itself suggests to a Russian speaker a combination of knowledge with manipulative power and administrative will.9 The authority of literaturovedenie stems from its strictly administrative, regulative, and manipulative approach to creative writing, hermeneutic, and critical knowledge.

Over the span of the life of her generation, Ginzburg followed the evolution of literaturovedenie, its discursive practices, its institutions, its role-playing patterns, and the way it was administering violence to dominate both literature itself and the methods of literary scholarship. Herself an insignificant free-lancer struggling against a ban on profession, Ginzburg occupied a strategic position for observation inside its institutions, which observation she complemented with an introspective analysis of experiences of thinking and writing from under the institutional umbrella of

9 A folk etymology based on the homonymy of vedat’ “to know” (hence literaturovedenie, prirodovedenie “science of nature,” obschestvovedenie “science of society,” iazykovvedenie “science of language,” etc.) and vedat’chem (“to exercise administrative power”; cf. zaveduiushchii “administrative manager,” vedomstvo “administrative agency,” or nakhodit’sia v vedenii “to be subject to sb’s administrative authority”).
literaturovedenie’s normative codes. Both in a critical self-searching reflection and in the interpretation of the motives and objectives of others, she sought to elucidate the microphysics of power in the complex assemblage of Soviet literary production, the invention and reproduction of procedures, routines, and regimes in the administration of the literary process, the perfection of techniques to fabricate literary products, and the strategies of individual survival under literaturovedenie’s administrative violence. Administration of literature extinguishes both the original enthusiasm of scholarly apprenticeship and the will to knowledge of the 1920s. In the aftermath of the institutional violence of the 1930s, and especially in the 1950s, when the institutional structures achieved perfection, the “conversation about literature” stagnates “in an all-pervading, never-ending boredom” (“в невылазной, все затопившей на этом участке скуке”) (ibid.: 269).

Pisatel’: A Being-towards-Writing

How is this institutional constructivism experienced by an individual? What is the background of experience against which literaturovedenie makes its appearance? Ginzburg gives a very concise definition of writing as human experience: the writer is a creature that “cannot experience life (perezhivat’ zhizn’) if he does not write” (ibid.: 147). Or: “a human being who only by means of an act of writing can experience life.” (ibid.: 196). Or: “A true (nastoiashchii) writer has no possibility of taking a rest: he must experience life without an interruption” (ibid.: 57). Thus, it is perezhivanie zhizni, not writing as such, that constitutes the writer. And another definition: the writer is “a human being who writes because he does not know any other way to relate to reality (deistvitel’nost’)” (ibid.: 111).10

10 The Russian word deistvitel’nost’ means “reality” with connotations of authenticity of experience, validity and action; life, thus, and the experiencing of life can be understood as a valid, authentic reality gained in action. Ginzburg means not any writer, but a true writer—nastoiashchii pisatel’, a “real” one. This is opposed, apparently, to the hack-writer and a functionary (whom I discuss further) who are not nastoiashchie
In this phenomenological approach to writing, life is not accompanied by writing, nor is it reflected or described in it, but it makes its very appearance in writing. The task of the writer is to make life happen and become real in an act of writing. Being a writer is therefore primarily and fundamentally being-towards-writing. Only through writing can a writer make both life and self deistvitel’nyi, i.e. both authentic and valid. It is therefore not unexpected nor quite undeserved that “people get banned like books.” For Ginzburg’s generation of “people at writing desks,” at the theater of the Soviet literary struggle, the writer’s life with its imperative of living through, by means of, and towards writing is a bet in a game against the order of discourse.

This situation, the imperative of writing vs. discursive games, has its roots in the genealogy of the writer. From introspection and from the observations of her circle in the 1930s, Ginzburg notes that the need to adapt to institutionalization does not abolish the inner craving of a life-towards-writing, and even makes it worse as it diminishes and undergoes malignant transformations under disciplinary power. In many fragments from the 1930s she describes how not writing gives her a feeling of somatic discomfort. A literary theorist, a literary scholar (literaturoved), a bureaucrat in the literary establishment, a critic, a publishing functionary, an editor, or a contributing author—all of those personae are variations and modifications of the same species, that same pisatel’ who cannot live a life if he does not write. That is why writing is entirely transfused by, and held together as a whole through the dynamic of ruthless internal antagonsisms. All members in the species of “people at writing desks,” they share a genealogy in creative writing, every one representing a mutation of the

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11 The phrase “person at a writing desk,” which is used as the title of Ginzburg’s 1989 book (Chelovek za pis’mennym stolom: Esse. Iz vospominanii. Chetyre povestovaniia), already occurs in her notes as early as the end of the 1920s (Ginzburg 2002: 71).

12 See, e.g., the fragment Pereutomlenie (Fatigue) in her notes from the 1920s–1930s, ibid.: 138–40.
originary persona of a “failed author” (*neudavshiisia pisatel’*), a nucleus of writerly desires “sitting inside” the professional. In institutional speech practices, the subject sublimes the discontents of the internal “failed author.” And indeed,

“Our scholarship was created by [...] people of the symbolist-futurist epoch, the writers of bad poetry; dilettantes who combined elements of poetic workmanship [...] with a psychological capacity to suppress this [poetic] experience, to subjugate it to the interests of pure research and generalization.

“Failed, bad poets,” the Formalists convert these “symbolist-futurist” creative cravings into literary-theoretical efforts. After the Formalist theorists are defeated and associations of literary producers and critics come to take over, occasional commissions to produce criticism, popularization, and teaching come to substitute the longing of the “failed writer” for “true authorship” which longing receives partial compensation in professional work of teaching or journalism. Still later, with the solidification of official literaturovedenie, literary professionalism merges with literaturovedenie’s disciplining practices and the internal “failed writer” finds himself ultimately included, subordinated and contributing, either by speaking out or by keeping silent, in the practices of literary management. However, the writer’s existential necessity of living a life by means of, through, and in writing, the necessity of the making-valid and making-real of the self in writing, still does not diminish, and the imperative of being-towards-

13 On the role of “failures” in the formation of Ginzburg’s characters, see Emily Van Buskirk’s essay in this volume.

14 “Shklovsky maintains that every decent literary scholar, if need be, must be able to write a novel [...] There is a failed author sitting inside every Formalist” (“Шкловский утверждает, что каждый порядочный литературовед должен, в случае надобности, уметь написать роман [...] В каждом формалисте сидит неудавшийся писатель”) (ibid.: 35).
writing does not give way. “If I found myself on an uninhabited island, I would probably start writing on the sand,” Ginzburg declares to a friend in 1935. The friend replies: “You are writing on the sand” (ibid.: 126).

By being a writer, and yearning to be a “true” one, the subject exposes himself directly to the vital threats presented by his time, in an immediate confrontation “face to face with bare existence, with the sensation of life as such, with a pure passage of life” (“лицом к лицу с гольм существованием, с чувством жизни как таковой, с чистым протеканием жизни”) (ibid.: 145) “in a world where everything that moves (for example, war) threatens him (man) with extermination, while everything stable and quiet threatens with emptiness” (“в мире, где все движущееся (например, война) угрожает ему уничтожением, а все стабильное и спокойное угрожает пустотой”) (ibid.: 144). This epochal frame of reference reveals a further complication in the politics of writing that is inherent in the essential imperative of being-towards-writing. This is the writer’s function as “the writer, and in the same person the most perfect reader of his time” (“писатель, он же совершеннейший читатель своего времени”) (ibid.: 35), the keeper of the hermeneutic key to contemporary history and society. What the writer writes is indivisible from his “reading his time.” The being of such a writer/reader becomes historical and political through and through.

In this complicated constellation of indivisibility between biology, biography, and history, writing emerges as an arena and a medium of biopolitics and biopower. In the era of total war and total terror, by force of the imperative living-towards-writing, writing expands its realm to encompass all existence, including matters of life and death. (Self-)sacrifice (Ginzburg’s “immolation”) becomes a condition sine qua non for creating a cultural value.

Культура—факт социальный, и она замещает категорию удовольствия категорией ценности. А понятие ценности предполагает расплату. [...] Свобода, родина, наука, искусство, любовь, семья, честь—все это очень опасные вещи. Жертва тут просто условие пользования.

15 From Zametki o proze (Notes on Prose) from the 1930s, where Ginzburg sums up the decay of all modern “literary systems,” not only Soviet Russian culture but European modern culture in general.
Culture is a social fact, it replaces the category of pleasure with that of value. And the category of value presupposes retribution [...] Freedom, homeland, science, art, love, family, honour—all these are very dangerous things. Here, sacrifice is simply a condition of usage. (ibid.: 732)

Living-towards-writing becomes a (self)-sacrificial act, because such is the condition of culture and the price for being its “user.” In 1923, speaking on behalf of Ginzburg’s teachers, Viktor Shklovsky praised romantic self-immolation in the “last fire” of revolution. Later on, describing the infernal frozenness of Leningrad in the siege of 1941–44, Ginzburg would contrast it to the fever of reading and writing in the revolutionary holocaust of the siege of Petrograd in 1918/19, where, as Shklovsky wrote, the city smoulders like

... угольная куча под дождем. [...] Голодный писатель писал. [...] Мы собирались и сидели в пальто, у печи, в которой горели книги. [...] И мы говорили о ритме, и о словесной форме, и изредка о весне, увидеть которую казалось так трудным. [...] В городе, истощенном до тла, было тепло и жар горячечного больного. Город был болен великой болезнью—революцией. [...] Немногие знали, что они горят, но они горели. [...] Старая жизнь кончилась, и мы в пустыне.

... a heap of coal burns under the rain. [...] A hungry writer was writing. [...] We would get together and sit in our coats around a stove in which books burned. [...] We would be talking about rhythm and verbal form, and once in a while about spring, which it seemed so hard to perceive [...] Burnt out with exhaustion, the city was hot like a sick man in fever. The city was suffering from the great sickness: revolution. [...] Not many people knew that they were burning, but they burnt. [...] The old life is over, we are in a desert [...] (Shklovskii 1923: 33–35)

In Shklovsky’s allegory of fire, Petrograd ascends from death in starvation to a resurrection in the desert of the future, an epic allegory of revolutionary ostranenie.¹⁶ From her point of view in the 1930s, Ginzburg confirms Shklovsky’s radical imperative as she draws an equation between living and writing/reading, but she resolutely rejects his pathos of a rejuvenating sacrificial purification. Between the two fateful besiegements: that

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¹⁶ On Ginzburg’s critical view of ostranenie as an ethical principle, see Van Buskirk 2006: 261–81.
of Petrograd and that of Leningrad, the human condition has radically changed in character; the revolutionary holocaust has given way to the Leviathan’s technological reconstruction, the project of purification to that of militarization, industrialization and collectivization (including institutional technologies in the world of letters). In the aftermath of the revolutionary fire, it is not the “fire” itself any more that threatens, and it is not the “fire” that the writer needs “to survive, and live through a lifetime without losing a human likeness” (“выжить и [...] прожить, не потеряв образа человеческого”) (Ginzburg 2002: 198). In the reality of the technological reconstruction, one needs to survive and retain “a human likeness” in the operation and exploitation of the technologies of war and police control, in the machinery of regulative, administrative, and normalizing discourses.

Speech Strategies in the Practices of Institutionalization

“Screaming” vs. “Small Voices”

In the process of invention, installation, and population of the system of institutions of Stalinist literature and literary scholarship, the violence of the devastating revolutionary fire as described by Shklovsky seems to have been tamed and put to practical utilization, both from above and from below, in the unprecedented activity of vertical mobility that opened up due to state commissions in the construction of the ideological apparatus. Ginzburg follows the process by registering events in records of private talk, in accounts of official public speeches, and in relating “difficult conversations” (тяжелые разговоры, ibid.: 89) between friends. Former literary theorists, sociologists of literature, and literary historians now,

17 Importantly, Shklovsky entitled his essay “Peterburg v blokade,” even though technically the situation was not caused by siege, but by a collapse of trade. I thank Andrei Zorin for this observation.
under increasing ideological pressure in the field, are forced to search for new institutionalization, new identities, and new modes of agency for themselves. They actively look for career opportunities and describe their activities as attempts of “talking to their own time” (ibid.); they try to counter the violence that “their own time” directs at them by responding to it \textit{vpolgolosa}, “in small voices”:

Исторические романы и детские книги—для многих сейчас способ писать вполголоса. Самоограничение этих жанров успокаивает писателя, не договорившего свое отношение к миру. (ibid.: 79)

Historical novels and children’s books—these are for many a way of writing in a small voice \textit{(vpolgolosa)}. The self-restrictions inherent in these genres pacify the writer who failed to speak out in full his relation towards the world.

Еще недавно вы встречали человека, который радостно сообщал: а меня, знаете ли, напечатали! Прошедшей зимой все мы встречали людей унылых или растерянных, которые тихим голосом говорили: подумайте, моих таки две статьи напечатали. Так первая еще ничего, пожалуй, пройдет незамеченной. А вот на вторую непременно обратят внимание. (ibid.)

Not so long ago you would meet a person who would announce happily: you know, they have published me. Last winter, all of us saw despondent and confused people who would be saying in a low voice: Can you believe it, two of my articles are in print. The first one might probably pass unnoticed. But the second one is certain to attract attention.

The voice of the institution, on the contrary, is very loud. Ginzburg describes its verbal violence as screaming \textit{(krik)}: a party functionary barking commands, colleagues hysterically yelling criticisms at meetings and in book reviews, students voting against former teachers; former friends joining their “small voices” to the screaming of institutional activists. Time itself is screaming at the writer, the time’s “most perfect reader”:

Вчера все и всюду говорили о выступлении Марра. Марр, по-видимому, очень кричал. (ibid.: 95)

Yesterday, everybody and everywhere was discussing Marr’s speech. Marr seems to have screamed very much.
Как человек деспотический и с необузданым temperamentом, Гр., вероятно, испытывает особое наслаждение от возможности говорить самые страшные слова и кричать на друзей и на людей, к которым он хорошо относится. (ibid.: 89)

As a person with a despotic and unruly temper, Gr., probably, finds special delight in the possibility of saying most fearful words and screaming at his friends and people he likes.

Икс кричит, что теперь он должен быть жесток до конца, он должен поставить точку над i, сжечь свои корабли, проклять все, чему поклонялся, и пр. В результате Икс помогает Малахову травить Эйхенбаума, приняв позу человека, который имеет силу воли и дерзость мысли не щадить вскормивших его учителей. (ibid.: 106)

“X” screams that now he must be cruel to the end, he must dot his i’s, burn his bridges, curse everything he used to worship, and so on. As a result, “X” helps Malakhov [a literary functionary—I.S.] in harassing Eikhenbaum and assumes the pose of someone who possesses enough willpower and intellectual courage to expose the teachers who once fostered him.

Время—это не все, что кричит на нас. (ibid.)

Our time is not all that screams at us.

И если человек может писать и при этом не может ничего другого, то он будет писать, хотя бы вся жизнь вокруг кричала ему, что ему писать незачем и не для кого. (ibid.: 150)

If a person knows how to write and at the same time does not know how to do anything else, then he will write, even though all of life around him were screaming to him that there is no purpose in his writing, and no one to write for.

Screaming is a hysterical symptom but equally a technique of institution building, a concentrate of the will to power; screaming consolidates people around and towards power: “those who used to have power, those who have power, and those who only wish to have power” (“власть имевшие, власть имущие и только еще хотящие иметь” (ibid.: 358).
Sometime in the 1970s, at a tedious meeting, Ginzburg is listening to the routine speeches and observes oratory manners, noting how official speech varies depending on the generation of the speaker. The time of writing, the 1970s, is still relatively “vegetarian” (as Akhmatova referred to the post-Stalinist 1960s), and the screaming of the 1930s is no longer predominant: krik has diversified and undergone a number of transformations. A chain of speakers, medium-level literary functionaries, take turns making ritual utterances as prescribed by the routines; listening to them, Ginzburg sorts out stylistic variations in their oral performances depending on their professional histories in the screaming institutions of the past. This yields three larger classes of functionaries: “the scoundrels, the semi-scoundrels, and the semi-decent agents” (merzavtsy, pulumerzavtsy i poluporiadochnyie) (ibid.: 280). The scoundrels were those who “were willing to do what they did”; semi-scoundrels “were not willing and therefore did somewhat less” (ibid.: 346); the classification does not include the “decent ones” that “basically have not been preserved” (ne sokhranilis’, ibid.). Each category in its special way, all of them (except the extinct “decent ones”) have taken advantage of those career opportunities that offered themselves due to the many years of repression and war. Such mobility demands a high social competence in general and speech skills in particular. And again, Ginzburg emphasizes differences, the variation of motives, purposes, and strategies in speech production. Retrospectively, from the 1970s,

One could count several varieties of functionaries. There were some who honestly coincided [with the official line—I.S.], there were self-suggestible [i.e., willing to succumb to the hypnotic influence of the official rhetoric—I.S.] individuals, there were cynics, or those who succumbed to resignation. Some were seeking to avoid saying the maximum of what the sameness of opinions forced them to say. These gradations depended on how talented or worthless one was, on basic social skills, and on the social situation. Even on skills of verbal expression. (ibid.: 293)
Back to the 1970s meeting. A former militant activist of proletarian literature from the generation of the 1920s, or a “learned Hegelian,” a remnant of the philosophic community, here represents the oldest and the most vulnerable strata: those, as Ginzburg notes, who came to the practices of *krik* because they sincerely believed in the Stalinist state and contributed to the state’s progress with their “symbolist-futurist” competence and combative ardour. Among the speakers, a former Komsomol activist, a graduate of a provincial teacher-training college, or an energetic social climber from the worker or peasant milieu represent a younger generation who once received their share of literacy and career opportunities already from the hands of Soviet power and thanks to the purges of the 1930s. These individuals are dedicated to and inflamed by Stalin’s concept of class struggle. Still others, former NKVD officers or army politruks of different levels, came to regulate the literary process around 1937 and during the war. These ones “scream” to emphasize Soviet patriotism and heroism. A still younger, post-war generation of functionaries learn a new genre of institutional discourse, no longer literally screaming and with a more subtle mixture of threats and justifications emphasizing the priorities of the cold war: ideological competition with America, a more flexible orthodoxy with “a contemporary scientific-statistic coloration.”

Did “speaking in small voices” really represent a choice vis-à-vis institutional “screaming,” as widely proliferating and as variegated as Ginzburg records it? It is obvious that an ethical dilemma appears, but still “writers write, even when writing is for them difficult, agonizing, or disgusting” (“пишущие пишут, даже когда писать им трудно, мучительно или противно”) (ibid.: 148). Later on, Ginzburg asks herself if it was worthwhile at all, for the “semi-decent” ones like herself and her comrades in literature, to fight for the preservation of writing at any price, even at the price of retaining a shaky position of a modest “semi-decent” actor among the screaming of the “scoundrels” and the “semi-scoundrels.” She would return to this question again and again, reconstructing the details of the institutional logic which coerced the writer to alienate himself from his
own self in being-towards-writing, to make (often unwilling) choices probably offered by self-delusion:

Среди иступленного раболепия последних сталинских лет [...] казалось, что остался один язык, на котором все говорит. Что он наша данность и нет ничего, кроме него. Мы резко ощущали поэтому отклонения о его законов, переживали смелость и радость своего сохраненного слова, не замечая, как всеобщий язык проникает и располагается в нашем слове. (ibid.: 294)

Amidst the ecstatic servility of the last Stalinist years, [...] we believed that there was only one language left in which everything was speaking. That it was the only given reality, and apart from it there was nothing. Therefore we were acutely sensitive to deviations from its laws and enjoyed the courage and happiness of our own speech that we had preserved, without noticing how the common language infiltrated and made itself comfortable inside our own word.

Once institutionalized through the practices of screaming, the “small voice” gradually succumbs to self-alienation, and professional talk of the actors subsides; “screaming” gives way to a peculiar institutional silence: already well-established “semi-decent” members of the “screaming” institutions, successfully “preserved” speakers in “small voices” suppress all private discussion of their professional occupation (a strong contrast to the fire of professional talk in the starved Petrograd of the Formalist revolution), and their professional writing is stored in professional monographs of literaturovedenie that many of them simply fear to open and no one ever reads:

Есть две-три полки, которые я ненавижу. Там, спрессованные гладкими корешками, стоят страшные книги—коля, забитые в гроб блистательной и трудолюбивой советской истории литературы. [...] Книги-паразиты, книги враги—это кое-что объясняет в психике литературоведов, играющих в шахматы, коллекционирующих пластинки, говорящих о чем угодно—только не об этом. (..О)блазь ведомственной скучки и склоки, погибших замыслов и неувядаемых обид; это место, где он [профессионал- I.S.] врал и унижался, где он предавал, где его предавали, где стыдно. (ibid.: 204)

I have a couple of bookshelves that I hate. On them, pressed together with untouched smooth book backs, there stand fearful books, poles hammered into the coffin of magnificent and industrious Soviet literary history [...] Books that are parasites and enemies—this explains something in the psychology of literary scholars who play
chess, collect music records, and speak about anything on earth, except this [...] a realm of administrative boredom and squabble, of dead creative plans and unfading resentments; it is a place where he [the professional—I.S.] lied and demeaned himself, where he betrayed and was betrayed by others, where he is ashamed.

“Profession” vs. Khaltura

In an introspective fragment, Ginzburg formulates the “professional’s” motto: “I have no time to think because I am inserting commas in other people’s compositions” (“У меня нет времени думать, потому что я расставляю запятые в чужих сочинениях”) (ibid.: 204).

The institutional silence that Ginzburg registers in the 1950s finds its roots in the very beginning of institutional construction, when as early as 1928, according to her records, writing gives up the project of critique and engages itself into the work of self-disciplining and self-censorship: “The gay times of laying bare the technique (veselye vremena obnazheniia priema) have passed [...] Now it is time to hide the technique as far as possible” (ibid.: 54).

The “only given” language has a mechanism which systematically produces alienation of names from things, a semantics in which language itself, in the process of its invention and establishment through “screaming,” creates an emptiness between the meanings of ordinary words and the new world they are used to denote; “words empty like invalid banknotes, no longer justified by creative effort, sufferings, or social collisions” (ibid.: 125).

It is this empty space between the language and the world that institutional “screaming” and “small voices” fill up with their interpretations. Confronted with a hysterically yelling unitary language, individual writing elaborates counter-strategies: techniques of accommodating to the general krik. This is achieved in a process of the writer’s self-ostranenie equally from the object of description and from the text thus produced: “Writing abilities find quite a wide application if only they are directed at things that do not concern (ne volnuiut) the writer” (ibid.: 108). The result is a self-generating, self-reproducing writing, a process involving almost no participation by the writer himself: “Words roll around producing words and
cannot stop. Words flow from words, and thus to infinity, until they reach some primary words which have long lost any connection with the things they denote” (C)ово раскатывается словами и не может остановиться. Слова истекают из слов, и так до бесконечности, до каких-то первичных слов, давно потерявших связь с реальностью) (ibid.: 126).

In the 1930s, the revolution of the Formalist “gay science” gives way to a new mode of constructive work, which Ginzburg denotes as “profession.” It is aligned with the new agenda of post-revolutionary technical/industrial reconstruction and institution building. It creates a certain demand for the writer and the theorist in the capacity of qualified specialists. Both demand and supply respond to criteria of utility: technical skills and practical competence in the production of texts, and a readiness to be “screamed” at in exchange for remuneration. While “true writing” is experiencing of life (perezhivanie zhizni), the exercise of writing by a “professional” amounts to a technique, a calculable strategy. Self-generating, self-sustaining textual production on a professional basis needs an operator, not a creator; it requires no deistvitel’nost’, but merely compatibility between producer and production technology. That is why the literary operator lives under the constant fear that he can easily be replaced by another, more economical, less complicated operator with a greater performance capacity and a higher tolerance of “screaming”: “if one and the same operation is equally successfully performed by a complex machine and by a simple machine, it is more advisable to use a simple one” (ibid.: 122). Complexity hinders efficiency. In a note from the 1930s, using a two-dimensional system of coordinates with invested desire vs. invested skills on one axis, and creativity vs. automatization in the exercise of writing on the other, Ginzburg obtains a classification of “cultural activities” which consists of four elements:

1. Творчество—на душевном подъеме и для себя. 2. Творческая работа—всерьез и для печати. 3. Профессиональная работа—добросовестное выполнение редакционных заданий. 4. Халтура—многоликая и самозарождающаяся.

In this hierarchy, inspired and fully implemented creative work (1) is impossible to implement, because “as a social activity (it is) fully prohibited” (ibid.). Still preserved as a private effort, creative work, however, does not satisfy since it “only interferes with the other ones. It [...] permeates any other activity with anxiety and offends the writer's creative conscience” (ibid.). Other “cultural activities,” (2) through (4), are determined by various modes of institutional life (academic or editorial work on commission from literary or scholarly publishers, journalism, and hackwork, \(khaltura\)). The standards of quality in professional work (3) can be met and guaranteed by the experience of “earnest creativity for print” (2), which experience also bridles the uncontrollable expansion of \(khaltura\) (4). \(Khaltura\), however, is difficult to isolate, and its self-generating capacity and variety threaten all other “cultural activities” with corruption. In producing \(khaltura\), the operator of writing is free from any responsibility for his creation as long as he is efficient in following the prescribed routines. “The state is responsible for the ideology, history is responsible for the material, and literary genres are responsible for the manner of writing (...) Himself, he is only responsible for the agility of his movements” (ibid.: 110).19

For a writer in Ginzburg’s phenomenological meaning of the word, practicing \(khaltura\) means “terrible, irreparably devastating depravity” (“страшный, непоправимо опустошающий разврат” (ibid.: 131). “Professionals” are efficient in calculating their own manipulations and thus prepare the entire field of writing to be gradually flooded by the cancerously proliferating \(khaltura\), because this latter is also based on calculation

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19 Cf. a definition of \(khalturschbik\) (hack writer, Routinier) as observed by Walter Benjamin in the bourgeois society, as technologically equipped and as willing to use the technology of writing in adapting them to the interests of the “ruling classes”: “[...] The bourgeois apparatus of [literary] production and publication can assimilate astonishing quantities of revolutionary themes—indeed, can propagate them without calling its own existence, and the existence of the class that owns it, seriously into question. This remains true as it is supplied by hack writers, even is they are revolutionary hacks. I define ‘hack writer’ (Routinier) as a writer who abstains in principle from alienating the productive apparatus from the ruling class by improving it in ways serving the interests of socialism.” (Benjamin 1999/1934: 774).
and manipulation but is no longer concerned with professional quality. On the other hand, the institutionalization itself of “cultural activities” seeks total control over writing, and thus encourages writers to routinize and automatize writing. As a result, *khaltura* tends to dominate all institutional writing, and institutional life eventually implodes into complete professional silence (in the 1950s, already producing books that are “parasites and enemies” which no one reads). Writing on a purely technological basis as in *khaltura* reduces life by shrinking it to a restricted repertoire of calculable strategies. It thus fully eradicates the ethical imperative of being-towards-writing which, as we remember, constitutes the writer as a living human being.

As a result, the community of writers splits into two categories: those who write and those who get published (“pechataiushchiesia,” Ginzburg 2011: 101). In the remarkable fragment “The State of Literature at the End of the War” (1943–44), Ginzburg sketches literature as obtained through the technologies of *khaltura*, providing a brief account of its structural poetics—or, one could say, structural ethics (ibid.: 100–1, this volume, pp. 000–000). The “conditions” of such a literature are as easy to formulate as they are impossible to implement in writing: (1) everyone is good; (2) everyone is happy (все благополучны); (3) everything is good (ibid.: 100). The literature in question thus represents an elementary calculus of good and evil, a set of tautological statements describing the Manichean morals of this impossible world. The goodness of everyone belonging to the “system” is opposed to the “badness” of those outside it. This immobile universe is supposed to be driven forth by pseudo-conflicts, equally tautological, when the total goodness of everything and everyone seems to be interrupted by some kind of negativity. However in the final analysis, the interruption only confirms the goodness of the positive, and thus expands, rather than undermines, the totality of everything and everyone that are good and happy. “Any shortcomings of the good stem from their virtues” (ibid.); “... the negative turns out to be a function, or the reverse side, of the positive that is invariably presupposed” (ibid.: 82). Thus, it is permissible for a Soviet woman to be a *femme fatale* as long as she patriotically waits for the return of a hero from war (as in the poems by Konstantin Simonov). It is acceptable for a scholar (a positive character) to be absent-
minded and helpless in everyday life (a minor negative trait), for the Soviet youth to be light-minded, for boys to be mischievous, and so on, as long as their heroic Sovietness, i.e., their absolute goodness, is presupposed. It is also permissible for the party organizers, busy as they are organizing, to be brusque and rude (ibid.: 100; cf. Emily Van Buskirk’s analysis of the *kham* in this volume). Even hardships and death are good:

> Справедливость—восстанавливается; личные несчастья снимаются в процессе служения общему делу; самая смерть не мешает осуществлению этого самого общего дела, а иногда способствует ему. (ibid.: 100)

Justice is restored; personal misfortunes are alleviated in the process of serving the common cause; death itself cannot prevent the main goal from being accomplished, and sometimes even promotes it. (see this volume, p. 000)

Ginzburg ironically describes such pseudo-dialectical pseudo-conflicts with pseudo-Hegelian terms (*neschast’ia snimaiutsia, sniatie, Aufhebung*). This multilevel assemblage of tautologies in its circular structure corresponds to the structure of the siege, with its total closure, its absolute, self-cannibalizing concentration on the self and its demonization of the Other: “Everything that has already been included in the given system is good. Evil can only result from a hostile system (external or internal enemies).”20 The outcome of the ethical and aesthetic besiegement in total goodness is that “the problem of choice and moral hierarchy— the fundamental problem of human behavior, one of the fundamental problems of world culture— is completely removed” (ibid.).

As happens with tautology, “this literature found itself facing a wall.” Its isolation is finally broken up, and the horrifying reality comes through the blockade of goodness. “The war changed all,” Ginzburg laconically sums up (ibid.: 101).

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20 On besiegement as tautology, and on tautology as the cannibalization of the self, see Sandomirskaia 2010.
Speech and Biopower in Besiegement

In his analysis of technologies of modern power, Foucault clearly distinguishes the technologies and purposes of disciplinary power (as described above) from biopower. This latter relies on qualitatively different routines (regulating instead of disciplining) and is applied not to man as producer of labor but to population as a collective bearer of all life. To translate Ginzburg’s narrative into Foucauldian terms, the technologies of institutional discipline target the individual speaker/writer and seek to subject being-towards-writing, to be “kept under surveillance, trained, used, and, if need be, punished” (Foucault 2004: 242). Biopower addresses its object on an entirely different level and through different technologies. Biopower transforms individuals into a formless mass of “population” and politics into biopolitics: “administration of bodies and the calculated management of life” (Foucault 1998: 140).

In Ginzburg’s account,21 a biopolitical turn occurs with the onset of the siege of Leningrad which becomes the turning point that changes the politics of language by radicalizing the most fundamental conditions of being. Here, confrontation with the disciplining power of a screaming institution becomes a lesser evil as compared to the absolute evil of the death of hundreds of thousand abandoned to total starvation under the blows of the advancing enemy. Now, it is not only the “decent” ones that cannot preserve their lives, but also successful institutional game players, the semi-decent, semi-scoundrels, and scoundrels are fully exposed to hunger, cold, and police violence.22 Power seems to have practically reached its

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21 My analysis is based on Zapiski blokadnogo cheloveka, Vokrug “Zapisok blokadnogo cheloveka”, and other war-time notes (Ginzburg 2002 and partly Ginzburg 2011). On the history of Zapiski, see Van Buskirk and Zorin 2011.

22 The NKVD had a separate secret-political department whose purpose was to securitize the intelligentsia, the workers of art and literature. The intelligentsia were considered to be the most powerful source of “counter-revolutionary attitudes” in Leningrad, and the recruitment of informers and agents provocateurs and ensuing arrests among them was especially active (Lomagin 2005: 234–40).
limit in the total nakedness of human being, in the bare life of a population starved to death, in the denuding effects of hunger multiplied by the draconic practices of total mobilization and total surveillance. Amidst the anomy produced by the panic of the first year of the siege, all institutions give way, and the individual finds himself as if experiencing nothing but “a strange hanging and dangling in an airless space” (“странное висение и раскачивание в безвоздушном пространстве”) (Ginzburg 2002: 173). The system of social coercion collapses and opens into an abyss. There also appears a new and vitally significant difference: between the administrative violence of the Leviathan and the absolute violence of the siege, between the social evil of malignant institutionalization and the absolute evil of mass death. While the “screaming” institution denies the writing subject his life-towards-writing, the siege denies anybody any possibility of survival. The individual strategic manoeuvre, already narrowed down to bad choices between semi-decency and semi-scoundrelship, is now exhausted and reduced to incessant search for “лазейки наименьшего зла” (loopholes of lesser evil) (ibid.: 727). Forced to search for loopholes, the subject is condemned to an equally incessant activity toward everyday survival: Ginzburg’s “egoism” of a destitute man reduced to the basic needs of satisfying hunger. This is how the Leviathan achieves the maximum of its malignancy, “a combination of absolute power with the absolute egoism of the human subjected to this power” (ibid.: 728).

In Ginzburg’s account, the unspeakable catastrophe of Leningrad is followed by a social rehabilitation, a controversial process to which she gives much thought at the end of the siege period, when her “conversation about life” assumes openly political-philosophical forms.23 In her scenario of the fall and rebirth of Leningrad, at the limit of disappearance under the blows of absolute violence, the human being, “frightfully naked,” rejects his slavish egoism and starts on a coerced but necessary search after a new communality. The “common cause” of Leningrad starts with “a bitter and futile yearning for a purification in a commonality, in some system of

23 “Notes from the 1940s” (Ginzburg 2002: 151–86); Ginzburg’s notes on the Leviathan (in Ginzburg 2011, especially 297–98) date back to 1943–44.
relations” (“горькая и тщетная жажда очищения во всеобщем, в некоей системе связей”) (ibid.: 730), which Ginzburg interprets as a sign of the recuperation of the social from the “absolute slavery” of the Leviathan. This yearning for a new society, however, is “bitter and futile,” and whether it is possible to achieve at all, remains a question. Thus, in a narrative about the everyday experiences of the siege, Ginzburg also sketches a critical theory of power. As we will see, conversation plays the key role in the recovery of the social.

“Unending Conversations” amidst “Unrelenting Social Evil”

As portrayed in her sketches of everyday life, the rapidly evaporating social life of the dying city nevertheless brims with violence, abuse, and competition among fellow survivors. The conversations in the siege (the predominant object of her attention, especially in the second part of her Blockade Diary [Ginzburg 2002: 659–723]) are utterly a-, anti-, and counter-dialogical, if one assumes dialogue in Cassirer’s, Buber’s, or Bakhtin’s senses of the word.24 Still, Ginzburg, the semi-decent survivor of the administrative violence of literaturovedenie and the “frightfully naked” object of the absolute violence of the siege, is firmly convinced that the social is capable of defending itself by interrupting, in an action of will, its own tendency towards implosion. A strategy of regaining the social opens up when she takes a closer look at the microphysics of power as it (microphysics) reveals itself in the dynamic of everyday talk in besieged Leningrad. The task is “to open up the mechanism of everyday conversation [...] people engaged in vain chatter (prazdno boltaiushchie), boasting, and gossiping and at the same time carrying out the tasks of war” (Ginzburg 2002: 659).25

24 On anti-dialogism in Ginzburg’s construction of the social as “a lesser evil,” see Zorin 2005: 45–68, where Ginzburg’s reconstruction of everyday conversation in besiegement is analyzed in terms of Adler’s psychoanalysis as individual struggle for power.

25 Note that prazdno boltaiushchie in this quotation is a citation from a poem by Nikolai Nekrasov (Rytsar’ na chas, 1862), whose protagonist pleads to be saved from the vanity of “petty intentions and petty passions” (melkikh pomysлов, melkikh strastei)
One could say that in Lydia Ginzburg’s account, the siege actually happens in the violence of talk and its repression. Conversation becomes the only medium through which the unspeakable sufferings of the siege can become at least partly intelligible. In the information blockade that the authorities imposed on Leningrad, the horror of besiegement receives at least a share of understanding; talk translates besiegement into the terms of its meager, naked communality: a translation of the absolutely impossible into “a lesser evil” of something practically achievable, a minimum of action in a speech act. During the disastrous winter of 1941/42, when people were dying out by up to tens of thousand daily and Leningrad was left to its own devices resisting war and mass death, the starved and frozen food queues were “eerily silent” (zhutko molchali) (Ginzburg 2002: 435). The silence of the hungry queue marks the death of the social. The queue is merely a monotonous order of ordinal numbers: communality succumbs to it under the pressure of necessity as life is exposed in all its nakedness to a pure passage of time uninterrupted by even the least human intervention. For Ginzburg, the a-social human condition of the siege with its “strange hanging and dangling in an airless space” is a vacuum without weight and gravitation, without ground to stand on, without air to breathe. The substitute for gravitation, time, and breathing air is language: it immediately fills up the vacuum of being.

 entrevated by those who “chatter in vain and stain their hands in blood” (prazdno boltaiushchikh, obagriaiushchikh ruki v krovi). By quoting the lines from Nekrasov, Ginzburg emphasizes the connection between “vain chattering” in the everyday life of Leningrad and the violence of power (Nekrasov’s blood-stained hands).

26 For more on conversation in Ginzburg, see Grelz 2001.
Talk has a powerful constructive potential in the overcoming of the vacuum of besiegement. It produces “a particular reality (deistvitel’nost’), and the person himself creates and destroys the objects that populate it” (ibid.). The deistvitel’nost’ of the talk (things and selves made real and valid by an act of speech, deistvie) is creative and constructive; it is “free,” but still an “ersatz” for action (ibid.).

Разговор—макет страстей и эмоций; любовь и тщеславие, надежда и злоба находят в нем призрачное осуществление. В разговоре [...] берутся неприступные барьеры, достигаются цели, которые в мире поступков стоят многих лет, неудач и усилий. (ibid.)

Talk is a model of passions and emotions; love and vanity, hope and anger find their spectral implementation in conversation. In talk [...] one takes impregnable barriers and achieves goals that in the world of actions cost many years, many failures, and much effort.

Such talk is “an obscure prototype of art” (ibid.), a variety of absurdist theater. Ginzburg describes, for instance, two mothers in a bread queue whiling away the time of waiting in conversation about their children. One child has already died of hunger while the other, a precocious product of starvation, hides his tiny portion of bread from his mother in fear that she might steal his share of survival. The speech act (boasting) stands in stark contrast to the horrifying content (ibid.: 638–39). Risking her life in the streets during an air raid, a woman comes to a seamstress to order a dress remade and stands almost under shelling to talk fashions (ibid.: 642–44). Housewives compete in the excellence of cooking inedible substances such as nettles and rotten fish (ibid.: 637). A woman discloses a secret of how to use a handful of cereal to make enough porridge to feed a starving family (ibid.). There is a bizarre, monstrous incongruity between the manner of talk, its clichés and stereotyped roles and the immensity of the subject of conversation which is the subject of life and death; an incommensurability between the petty vanities of the speakers and the tragic dimensions of the circumstances, “eternal women’s talk based on new and terrifying material” (ibid.: 638). Trivial conversation in unthinkable and unspeakable circumstances weaves its spectral imagined realities amidst the frozen
landscape of Dante’s Inferno (ibid.: 619). Talk creates ephemeral worlds, which are manipulated by equally ephemeral subjects, with ad hoc roles, statuses, and hierarchies that receive a momentary, ephemeral existence in conversation.

However, it is in this transparent materiality of verbal challenges and gratifications that power appears in all the complexity of its microphysics. The enunciation, albeit “spectral,” “realizes itself and receives a social being.” In acts of boasting, advising, consulting, informing, reproaching, etc., talk constructs a significant difference, a dynamic tension between the speakers. Self-assertion is sought in the affirmation of the significant value of difference, while difference is established and maintained in a game of stereotypical conversational roles. In the excruciating sameness of the queue, difference is desirable and longed for. Conversation, therefore, petty as it might sound, is filled with micro-wars for micro-power, its micro-victories and micro-defeats.

Out of the maze of these ephemeral acts of power, there arises an unspoken code of norms and prohibitions, a silent convention to keep to the surface of things, to protect other people and the fragile fictional reality of talk, since

Люди, плетущие […] свой нескончаемый разговор,—прошли большими страданиями. Они видели ужас, смерть близких, на фронте и в городе, свою смерть, стоявшую рядом. Они узнали заброшенность, одиночество. Они принимали жертвы и приносили жертвы—бесполезные жертвы, которые уже не могли ни спасти другого, ни уберечь от раскаяния. (ibid.: 700)

В своем диалоге с ближним человек утверждает себя прямо и косвенно, лобовыми и обходными путями—от прямолинейного хвастовства и наивного разговора о себе и своих делах, до тайного любования своими суждениями о науке, искусстве, политике, своим остроумием и краноречием, своей властью над вниманием слушателя. (ibid.)

In a dialogue with a fellow man, a person asserts himself directly and indirectly, point-blank and in oblique ways—from straightforward boasting to a naive narration about oneself and one’s own affairs, to a secret admiration of one’s own opinions about science, art, and politics, of one’s wit and eloquence, one’s power over the attention of the listener.
The people who [...] are weaving their unending conversation have walked along the road of great suffering. They have seen horrors, the death of family members both at the front and in the city, and their own death that was standing very close by. They have learnt the experiences of abandonment and loneliness. They accepted sacrifices and made sacrifices themselves—those useless sacrifices that could neither rescue the other, nor save the self from remorse.

After Stalingrad and Kursk, as the grip of isolation in cold and starvation eases up, the symbolic body of Leningrad, fuelled by the microphysical events at the bottom, starts regaining its dynamic. It now becomes possible to make a step towards restoration: to create a narrative about the disaster and thus to transform the unthinkable/unspeakable of the Leningrad catastrophe into something intelligible and suitable for remembrance. This narrative comes in the form of a discourse about “us” and our “common cause,” in which the memory of dehumanization in starvation, police terror, the coerced sacrifices and betrayals of the siege are carefully suppressed. The salutary “us” serves to replace the defeated, denuded, “egoistic” “I.” Ginzburg’s rejection of “egoism” expresses itself linguistically as she carefully avoids speaking in the first person singular: instead, she manipulates a falsified masculine “he,” or an initial of an unspecified male’s name, N., or a genderless and faceless “one,” chelovek.

The construction of “us” happens in the work of reading and listening. During the siege, people formulate their experiences and judgments in the reading of War and Peace (ibid.: 611). They passionately listen to the Leningrad radio. When the siege is almost broken, the radio broadcasts the official, centrally generated narrative of the Great Patriotic war: a narrative that denies Leningrad its tragic experiences, and especially its memory of having being abandoned in crisis. But even this cynically sterilized story is useful for the weaving of a spectral texture of a “common cause,”27 since “it is only in the language of war that what pertains to the people (nar-odnoe) momentarily concurs with what pertains to the newspaper (gazet-noe)” (ibid.: 645). The war brings about a temporary “rapprochement

27 This analysis of the internal forces driving forth the “common cause” is contained in Ginzburg’s noteworthy fragment Leningradskaia situatsiia (“The Leningrad Situation”) from the 1940s.
between private wills and the will of the state (сближение частных и государственных хотений)” (ibid.: 285). The language of the newspaper is sanctioned by the highest authority and imposed by the secret police with the specific purpose of disempowering Leningrad in its newly acquired collective agency by eradicating Leningrad’s own memory of the siege.28 However reluctantly, Leningrad appropriates its message for the construction of the collective self: the Leningraders

отбрасывают, вытесняют из своего поведения все, что в нем было от внутреннего малодушия, колебаний, уклонов, раздражения и оставляют ту схему действия, свод результатов, которая попадает в печать, в списки награжденных и т.п.

reject and suppress everything that in their behaviour (during the siege—I.S.) was produced by internal spinelessness, vacillation, deviations, irritation, and leave only that scheme, that concordance of results that is accepted by the press, in the lists of awards, and so on. (ibid.: 184)

Thus, in an attempt at avoiding the greater evil of oblivion and languagelessness, Leningrad agrees to the “lesser evil” and chooses to identify with the falsified epic, the order of discourse that is imperatively imposed onto its fragile social body from the outside. Leningrad’s “us” uses the authority of the Stalinist narrative in order to find a way of living on—but also to protect itself against explosive potential of its own memory. At the end of the siege when the language of the newspaper had half-heartedly acknowledged Leningrad’s role in defending the city, the survivors

устраняют из сознания, что многие оставались в городе по внешним, случайным или личным причинам, что боились и отчаивались, что месяцы интересовались только едой, что были злы, безжалостны или равнодушны, что прошли через самые унизительные и темные психологические состояния. Они стирают в своем сознании побуждения и состояния и оставляют чистое действие, результат—оборону Ленинграда, беспримерное общее дело, в котором они действительно участвовали [...] Казавшееся принудительным оказалось в конечном счете внутренне подтвержденным, актом общей воли. Это приобретенная ценность, которая останется.

... eliminate from their memory the fact that they hesitated, that many of them had
stayed in the city for external, insignificant, or personal reasons, that they feared and
despaired, that for many months they were only interested in food, that they were
cruel, pitiless or indifferent, that they passed through the darkest and most humili-
ating psychological states. They erase in their consciousness intentions and states
and leave pure action, the result: an unprecedented common cause of the defence
of Leningrad [...] What then appeared as coercion in the final analysis turned out
to be an internally confirmed act of common will. This is an acquired value that will
endure. (ibid.: 185)

Alongside the unprecedented destruction, the experience of the siege,
Ginzburg insists, has another, constructive aspect to it: by subjecting the
individual to total alienation in war, repression, and extreme starvation, it
produced “a group-related self concept.” The desperate “egoistic” loneliness
of the Leviathan’s galley slave gives way to

социальная, групповая автоконцепция [...] абстрактная, но верная. Идеальное
представление о себе самом как члене коллектива. И это представление обязывает.
От него, как бы в обратном порядке, развиваются подлинно сверхличные
побуждения. Это навсегда заработанная ценность. (ibid.: 184)

... a social, group-related self-concept [...] abstract but true. An ideal conception of
the self as part of a collective. And this conception is ethically obligating. Out of it,
as if in a reverse order, there develop genuinely supra-personal intentions. This is a
value earned for eternity.

However, even though socially salutary and “a value earned for eter-
nity,” the “group-related concept” promises no redemption, nor delivery
or absolution. It takes its origins in “social evil,” which flourished amid
the mass death during the siege, and would not be able to prevent “a new
debauch (razgul) of social evil” (ibid.: 726). Soon after the victory in the
war, and quite ruthlessly, the Leviathan responded to Leningrad’s “group-
related self-concept” by crashing and disseminating it (the post-war repres-
sions against Leningrad culminated in the destruction of the Museum of
the Defence and the Siege of Leningrad in 1953). The end of a besiegement
should not be mistaken for the end of history, Ginzburg warns her reader.
In this sense, the Soviet situation is no different from its larger context of
European modernity. The tragic apex of all Modern history, Leningrad
in besiegement, constitutes no exception but confirms its logic under the sign of “unrelenting social evil and a spectral individual consciousness” (ibid.: 730).

The Genealogy of Ginzburg’s Leviathan

Why did Ginzburg so provocatively choose the Leviathan to allegorically represent her construction of power? In those few but seminal fragments of her notes that relate to the Leviathan, was she seeking to express the monstrous nature of the power machines of the twentieth century by giving them the name of the apocalyptic beast? Or did she seek to situate her reflections in a more informed and universal context by alluding to the work of the seventeenth-century political philosopher, the father of European political theory Thomas Hobbes, and his legendary treatise “Leviathan, or The Matter, Forme and Power of a Common-Wealth, Ecclesiasticall and Civill” (1651)? I would argue that it was the latter, with a correction for Ginzburg’s tragic but also ironic attitude both towards contemporary history and to predecessors in political thought.

The figure of the Leviathan appears in Ginzburg’s notes dating to the time of the Leningrad siege, 1943–45 (Ginzburg 2011: 569); however, she mentions it again in a fragment (in Ginzburg 2002) that is not dated, but attributable to the late 1960s or early 1970, as she mentions the Leviathanic experiences of his Soviet “egoistic” slaves in the same context as Maoism and the Vietnam War.29 The image of the Leviathan, therefore, does not

29 As revealed by the latest archival research, the Leviathan appears in the drafts for the theoretical section of “Zapiski blokadnogo cheloveka,” which Andrei Zorin and Emily Van Buskirk date to 1943–45. It is also known that Ginzburg began working on her dissertation on Herzen in December 1944, and that she published an article on Herzen in 1945. It is feasible that she encountered Hobbes’s Leviathan in Herzen, but earlier. E-mail communication from Emily Van Buskirk, January 7, 2011. On the Herzen subtext in Ginzburg’s autobiographical prose, see Van Buskirk 2011: 525–30.
only apply to the horrors of the war, nor only to Stalinist politics, but has a broader relevance, describing both Soviet and global experiences of twentieth-century modernity. It is also possible that Ginzburg’s thinking on the Leviathan was not provoked by the reading of Hobbes but, indirectly, by her interpretation of Alexander Herzen. At the end of the war, she was employed editing and writing commentaries for the collected works of Alexander Herzen, specifically his Letters on the Study of Nature (Pisma ob izuchenii prirody, 1845–46), which appeared in the second volume of the nine-volume collection published by Goslitizdat in 1955. It is in these Letters that one finds Herzen’s reference to Hobbes and a commentary on Hobbes’ Leviathan.

Ginzburg’s reception of Herzen’s writings was enthusiastic but also highly polemical, especially where it concerns Herzen’s concept of socialism. One cannot deny that Herzen’s thought and politics, and especially his ethics as an intellectual, had a decisive influence on her (Pratt 2001: 387–401; Paperno 2004: 102–28). At the same time, she firmly negated Herzen’s central principles as inapplicable to the political and aesthetic experiences of the Soviet intelligentsia. Her relationship to Herzen is marked by what Heine called “toothache in the heart,” a love full of irony. It is with special bitterness that she attacks Herzen’s apology on behalf of human egoism, as the right to individual emancipation, importantly, in fragments reflecting on the genesis of the Leviathan. It would not be an exaggeration to say that Ginzburg’s “blockade man” is a response to Herzen with his belief in Schiller’s “beautiful soul” and his faith in a possibility of harmony between an individual and the society. To Herzen’s praise of individual emancipation, she replies in Hobbesian tones:

31 Ginzburg is quoting from chapter XX of Heinrich Heine’s Ideen. Das Buch Le Grand (1826) which is included in Part 2 of Reisebilder. Ginzburg mentions “toothache in the heart” in the unpublished sections of her essay “On Satire and Analysis,” as quoted in Van Buskirk 2006: 263.
An egoistic man resembles a savage [...] When a system of values collapses, the cultured man finds himself in a condition of secondary ferality. When everyday life collapses, he develops a caveman’s manners, a caveman’s attitude towards fire, food, and clothes. An egoistic man wanders blindly among phenomena that are either aggressively, or indifferently hostile, and looks for loopholes of the lesser evil for himself.

To the Schillerian concept of the “beautiful soul,” she replies: “A man being tested and exterminated by catastrophes has no strength (нев силах) to believe in beauty and the absolute value of the individual soul” (ibid.: 730).

It is remarkable that for Herzen, Hobbes’s teaching is unacceptable on aesthetic grounds. In Herzen’s most well known commentary on Hobbes, the latter is acknowledged as a writer comparable to Shakespeare in the


On the continuity between Ginzburg and Herzen and the way Ginzburg builds her thinking on Herzen’s categories and her writing on his writing practices, see Pratt 2001: 387–401. In my reading, I am emphasizing Ginzburg’s critique of Herzen, and her revision of, rather than affinity with, his tradition of Russian democratic intelligentsia. Such an approach yields new perspectives on Ginzburg’s role as intermediate between the nineteenth- and the twentieth-century Russian intellectuals. Thus, in light of Ginzburg’s negation of Herzen’s individualism, Sarah Pratt’s description of her as “a poet of humanity” (пoет гуманности, as Belinskii once characterized Herzen) becomes questionable. I believe that Ginzburg is post-humanist rather than a humanist, but such an analysis should be the subject of a separate study. This suggests that Ginzburg’s relationship to Herzen is that of critical interpretation rather than identification as argued by Irina Paperno in her article “Советский опыт, автобиографическое письмо и историческое сознание: Ginzburg, Gertsen, Hegel” (Paperno 2004: 102–28).
depth of his tragic vision, but also a cruel and cynical one (Gertsen 1954: 310). These latter qualities, in Herzen’s eyes, invalidate Hobbes’ ethical and political principles. His justification of absolutism is a false teaching: even though a talented author, Hobbes is blinded by the tragedies of his time, he is:

... человек страшный в своей безбоязненной последовательности; учение этого мыслителя [...] мрачно и сурово [...] печальный зритель страшных переворотов, он понял только черную сторону событий; для него люди были врожденными врагами, из эгоистической пользы соединившимися в общества [...] На этом основании его уста не дрогнули, с мужеством цинизма, в глаза своему отечеству, Англии, высказать, что он в одном деспотизме находит условие гражданского благоустройства. Гоббс испугал своих современников, его имя наводило ужас на них. (Gertsen 1954: 268)

... a man who was terrifying in his fearless consequence; this thinker’s teaching [...] is frightening and grim [...] a melancholy spectator of terrifying revolutions, he only understood the dark side of events; for him people were born enemies who joined in societies for egoistical reasons [...] On these grounds, his lips did not falter to declare, with all courage of cynicism, as he stared his fatherland, England, in the face, that it is only in despotism that he sees a condition of civil amelioration. Hobbes terrified his contemporaries, his name alone struck them with horror. (quoted in Partridge 1993: 127, translation slightly modified.)

One can assume that it was the reading of Hobbes as suggested by Herzen that gave rise to Ginzburg’s provocative way of pointing out the challenges of her time, understanding its technologies of power by applying figures of thought from the seventeenth-century philosopher. As is known, Hobbes sees absolute power as the only measure against the “natural state” of man in which men are immersed in a self-destructive “war of every man against every man,” the rule of every man’s absolute right to do “any thing,” “a right to every thing”;34 “To this war of every man against every man, this also is consequent; that nothing can be unjust. The notions of right and wrong, justice and injustice, have there no place” (ibid.: 85). Hobbes’s Leviathan comes to relieve the mankind from its “natural condition.”

Importantly, the subjection to the Leviathan in Hobbes is achieved by a covenant; even if absolute power arrives in the figure of a conqueror, the subject still agrees to transfer his rights to the sovereign, and retains the right to disobey in case the sovereign requires that he commit an act of self-destruction (ibid.: 93). Thus, Hobbes’s subject is a co-creator of the Leviathan, in a manner comparable to Ginzburg’s distrofik as this latter chooses to take part in the “common cause” of the restoration of the Stalinist regime in the devastated Leningrad in the name of social stability. This contract is signed by the blockade man, at least temporarily, in spite of the fact that the regime returns to the devastated Leningrad and represses the memory and experiences of the survivors by overwhelming them with its imperial “language of the newspaper” and by enforcing on them a falsified history of their own very recent tragic past.

While Hobbes’ Leviathan is a work of artifice, a man-like machine, Ginzburg’s is a complicated aggregate of discourses. It embraces not only the technologies of state violence that operate in terror and war, but also bureaucratic routines that regulate and administer life and death, as well as those speech practices that the subject mobilizes in order to adapt to state violence, to create a symbolic capital for himself, or simply to survive. Thus, while life is reduced to survival, creative action is reduced to khaltura. An utter poverty of intention and activity is also mentioned by Hobbes as an implication of the “war of every man against every man,” the life of man, “solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short” (ibid.: 84). Ginzburg’s “scoundrels, semi-scoundrels, and semi-decent ones” sign a Hobbesian contract for obedience in exchange for security—and this is how the “epochal (epokhal’nye) phenomena: khaltura and adaptation” (Ginzburg 2002: 247) come into operation in the workings of the totalities of war, terror, and the state.

Conclusion: Ginzburg as Challenge

All this is worthwhile noting (and further reflecting upon) because, by following Hobbesian figures of thought (as full of irony as they are) in Lydia Ginzburg’s own discourse, one can understand her original contribution
to twentieth-century political thought and the difference between her
construction of total power technologies of the twentieth century and
the standard theories of totalitarianism. This main difference lies in the
exceptional role that in her model is played by language and discourse,
whether in the official language of medical science, propaganda, and his-
toriography, or in the adaptational practices of knowledge experts, as in
literaturovedenie, or in the everyday power games of petty conversations
at the very bottom of the Leviathanic hierarchy.

My purpose in this project of re-reading Ginzburg’s notes was to draw
attention to her construction of a social critique through a self-invented
sui generis form of critical discourse analysis. As if to anticipate the current
linguistic and phenomenological turns in social thought, Ginzburg places
the focus of critical attention at the intersection of power, language, and
body, thus presenting her version of Soviet cultural history in a way that
seriously challenges already established narratives.

Firstly, she questions the structure of the “totalitarian” state, society,
and language as monolithic wholes tending towards total eradication of
internal difference. Ginzburg’s Leviathan is porous; it contains loopholes
always leaving some space for individual maneuver. Above, I was illus-
trating how Ginzburg reconstructs the repertoire of such maneuvers in
her analysis of institutional speech (“screaming”) and writing (khaltura)
during the period of solidification of the Stalinist order of discourse. The
subject of such a Leviathan is never free from a certain freedom of choice
and, hence, never free from moral responsibility for the choices he makes.
Ginzburg’s Leviathan thus presupposes quite a complex picture of bottom-
to-top politics.

Secondly, Ginzburg’s Leviathan is not one, but at least three modes
of power, a complicated assemblage of power technologies, including: (a)
repression through police violence in the purges; (b) disciplinary power
exerted through the administration of institutions, as exemplified by the
institutionalization of literature and literary scholarship; and (c) biopower,
i.e., manipulation of the population through the selective distribution of
vital resources, as practiced during the siege of Leningrad. The “wards” of
Ginzburg’s Leviathan are presented with the never-ending necessity of
making decisions and choices, whether for the sake of surviving within
an institution (e.g. using “small voices” to adapt to “screaming”), or when
dealing with trivial everyday chores when they assume life-and-death dimensions (e.g., feeding the starving family on a handful of cereal). In confrontation with each of these three power forms, the subject develops specific strategies, all of them, importantly, reflecting on the individual politics of language.

Thirdly, Ginzburg’s version of critical discourse analysis is not restricted to the critique of a “system.” In the practices of “screaming,” one finds friends screaming at friends, and colleagues at colleagues. In the housewives’ conversations in the queues, it is fellow-sufferers trying to achieve a symbolic domination over other fellow-sufferers. In the post-siege reconstruction of the self, the individuals radically revise personal narratives and choose to manipulate, post-factum, their own and each other’s memory and ethics in response to a crudely falsified narrative of the past and the future. Ginzburg’s power (which practically coincides with what she means by “social evil”) is neither vertical, nor static, but all-proliferating, multi-directional, variegated, and incessantly changing with circumstances. Its horizontal arrangement (resulting from individual choices), as well as its historical transformations, invite further elucidation and critical reflection.
To Create a Circle and to Break It (“Blockade Person’s” World of Rituals)

Interesting to consider: what would be the result of the adoption, in modern Russian literature, of a system combining the methods of Tolstoy, Proust and Shklovsky [...].

— LYDIA GINZBURG

The blockade of Leningrad by German and Finnish troops began on August 31, 1941. The Soviet Army broke through the blockade for the first time on January 18, 1943, and the siege of the city was finally lifted on January 27, 1944. The blockade lasted nearly 900 days and killed—by various estimates—between 400,000 and a million people. The blockade is one of the most important events of the Great Patriotic War (1941–45) as well as of the memory about the war. Dozens of books (including the renowned Blockade Book by Ales’ Adamovich and Daniil Granin) have been dedicated to the tragedy of the city and its inhabitants. Many accounts by survivors and victims have been published in the Soviet Union and Russia; one of the colorful examples is “Blockade Writing” by Leningrad orientalist Alexander Boldyrev. “Notes of a Blockade Person” by Lydia Ginzburg (including the additional “Addenda to Notes of a Blockade Person”) is among the most considerable books about the blockade.  

3 First book publication: Ginzburg 1989. The Moscow publishing house “Novoe Izdatel’sto” has just published a full edition of Ginzburg’s “blockade prose” including some previously unknown texts (Ginzburg 2011).
is unique not only because of its strong personal testimony, but above all because of its fine social and psychological analysis of the mechanisms of peoples’ behavior and survival in the besieged city. “Blockade prose” constitutes a very important part of Ginzburg’s oeuvre.

It is necessary, in advance, to elaborate on one significant circumstance concerning the following text. The author of this essay has tried to exclude from discussion the traditional historical aspects of the blockade—with the exception of certain facets of literary history. The author undertook an examination of Ginzburg’s “blockade prose” and an analysis of the mind behind this prose. The peculiar thing about such analysis is that its object is not only the “consciousness of the ‘blockade person’ Lydia Ginzburg”4—the object is also the analysis of the reflections on this consciousness made by Lydia Ginzburg herself. Thus the “blockade consciousness,” the “blockade mind” has been analyzed as something separate and special, as something that became the object of outside observation and inner introspection at the same time. This observation and introspection lasted not only during the blockade years, but also long after the war. In this sense we might speak about this “history” as a “history of consciousness,” “history of mind.” It should also be remembered that Lydia Ginzburg’s special type of consciousness is strictly determined by the history of the twentieth century and by her belonging to the generation of the “people of the 1920s.” This is a very rare phenomenon of the consciousness of the “people of the 1920s” carried to its logical conclusion and receiving a definite reflection.5

4 It would be important to note that speaking about her hero as a “standard intellectual (intelligent)” Ginzburg meant her own conception of intelligentsia based on the analysis of her own consciousness and social behavior. Until the point of the “Notes of a Blockade Person” where she writes about the “breaking of the circle,” the “blockade person” means the “author,” Lydia Ginzburg. In her diaries and essays Ginzburg always spoke of herself as a typical representative of a certain social group and generation. Moreover her subtle psychological analysis is based on the Marxist idea of the socially conditioned consciousness. That is why in this text we often compare Ginzburg to the half-anonymous “blockade person”.

5 For an examination of some aspects of this problem see: Kobrin 2006.
In the following text I am trying to trace and analyze the story of the genesis, development and crisis of the “blockade man’s” “private rituals.” These rituals were meant to maintain his biological existence—although by nature rituals are social. They had the same significance for the mind of “blockade man” as for his biological survival. To be precise, while turning into the “blockade routine” with its social and everyday automatism, the rituals counteracted one’s individual, physical suffering (or the poignancy of this suffering). So the biological (physical) level of human life was replaced by a social and cultural one. Throughout a person’s life, as Ginzburg put it, “a switching took place between physiological values and social ones” (Ginzburg 2002: 721). Lydia Ginzburg tackles this subject with all the power of her analytical mind—after all, the problems of such “replacing” and “changing” are the focal points of her writings.

In some cases I will read Ginzburg’s “Notes of a Blockade Person” and “Addenda to Notes of a Blockade Person” through the prism of Tolstoy’s War and Peace. “Notes of a Blockade Person” begins with the phrase “During the war years, people used to read War and Peace avidly, comparing their own behavior with it (not the other way round—no one doubted the adequacy of Tolstoy’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” (Ginzburg 1995: 3). But what is this “proper feeling” that the “blockade person” tried to follow? I think in this case it is the feeling of the limits of human suffering, the realization that these limits are endlessly receding into the distance. This is the truth that Pierre Bezukhov realized being in French captivity: “And now during these last three weeks of the march he had learned still another new, consolatory truth—that there is nothing in the world that is terrible. He had earned that, as there is no condition in which man can be happy and entirely free, so there is no condition in which he need be unhappy and not free” (Tolstoy 1997: 1168). “Blockade person” exists in the situation of extreme misery and the

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6 All quotations from the Part 1 of “Notes of a Blockade Person” and from “Addenda to Notes of a Blockade Person” are made from Ginzburg 1995.
absence of freedom, although he does not consider this situation to be final and irrevocable. Building up a system of serial actions, “blockade person” instinctively extends the limits of physical suffering. This system helps to upgrade him from the power of the “biological” or the “physiological” level of human life to a social sphere. “Blockade person” pays for this with incredible physical and moral efforts, but for him this is the only possible way to escape death—after all, death is a phenomenon of a “biological” and “physical” order. Obviously the “social” level is not free, but “blockade person” incarnates his own freedom in the only possible way: he doesn’t die. The social sphere appropriates this result and the survival of “blockade person” becomes his best contribution to the victory over Hitler. This is another important Tolstoyan theme in “Notes of a Blockade Person.”

Let us try to formulate this theme. Tolstoy reduced the “people’s war” and the “patriotic enthusiasm” of the “Patriotic War” against Napoleon (1812) to a great quantity of separate behavioral phenomena which themselves represent various social, professional, class and gender levels of everyday life. Every one of these models is an established system of social rituals. Pierre Bezukhov’s behavior looks very strange, singular and unprecedented against this background. Pierre wages war against Napoleon face to face whereas “ordinary” Nikolai Rostov, for instance, takes part in the common cause of expelling the invaders even when he is having a good time at the ball in a provincial town. This ball itself is an act of the common unconscious resistance to Napoleon, and Nikolai—as a participant in Russian life and society—does not reflect on this: he just knows it. Tolstoy insists: “Only unconscious action bears fruit, and he who plays a part in a historic event never understands its significance. If he tries to realize it his efforts are fruitless” (Tolstoy 1997: 1039). Lydia Ginzburg tries to uncover the mechanism of these unconscious actions.

Everything is predetermined in Tolstoy’s philosophy. An innumerable quantity of petty causes generates the same inevitable effect—the expulsion of Napoleon from Russia. It is not clear how the mechanism of this causal relationship works in Tolstoy’s conception. The only thing we can assume is that according to Tolstoy, historical effects precede the causes; moreover, an effect is the precondition of its causes (to be precise: an effect is the condition of our thinking about some events as of historical causes).
Lydia Ginzburg disagrees with Tolstoy on this point. Obviously, like Tolstoy she reduces the “people's war,” the “feat of the inhabitants of the besieged Leningrad” to the totality of innumerable deeds of the people who are busy with their survival. “Social rituals” become the driving gears that force these petty wheels to turn in the proper way (“proper” for the state war mechanism). Creating these or some other rituals (or recreating the pre-war rituals in a transformed state), taking part in their everyday functioning (up to the complete automatism of the “blockade routine”), “blockade person” forces out physical suffering, the “biological, physiological level” from his mind—and thus defeats Hitler. This picture falls short of the reflecting person who is analyzing himself as a social type from the position of an outside observer. The narrator, speaking about himself in the third person, narrates only when his hero (i.e. himself) is alive. The narration could be stopped only at the moment of the hero-narrator’s death. While the narrator is still alive he is writing and analyzing. I analyze, therefore, I exist. But this next level of freedom is accessible only to a few. The presence of this “reflecting few” (or just “reflecting X”) as a narrator—and at the same time as a character—is the significant difference between Tolstoy and Ginzburg’s approaches.

The next major Tolstoyan theme of “Notes of a Blockade Person” is “defamiliarization.” According to Viktor Shklovsky, “defamiliarization” leads the thing (or the “object”) out of its habitual series to make it possible for the reader to experience its artfulness and to see it as something new. This experience of seeing something habitual anew is dreadful for the “blockade person” because of the poignancy and freshness of the suffering that accompanies this process. War and the blockade removed nearly all things from their habitual series, from their usual context and thus they ceased to obey the human will. “Blockade person” has to experience every one of the once habitual things anew. This climax of defamiliarization leads

7 A striking example of non-reflective “blockade person” is Alexander Boldyrev (see n. 2). Incidentally, he is mentioned in “Notes of a Blockade Person”: “Boldyrev (the orientalist) is coming in” (Ginzburg 1995: 713).

to the destruction of the body (because these ceaseless new efforts exhaust the dystrophic person) as well as to the destruction of the mind, which fails to control the world full of old things experienced as new ones. To avoid destruction, “blockade person” “ritualizes” his life as much as possible and then “routinizes” it.9 Things either return to their habitual series or they are made into new ones. “Blockade person” could survive only by defeating defamiliarization. At this point let us return for a moment to the subject of “history”—the history of culture, the history of literature. Analyzing “Notes of a Blockade Person” through Tolstoy (who provided basic literary material for the “theory of defamiliarization” of Russian Formalism), one finds in it an act of inner dialogue and dispute with one of her main Formalist teachers, Viktor Shklovsky that never stopped for Ginzburg.10

In the very beginning of “Notes of a Blockade Person” Lydia Ginzburg writes: “Tolstoy had said the last word as regards courage, about people doing their bit in a people’s war. He also spoke of how those caught up in this common round continued playing their part involuntarily, while ostensibly busy solving problems affecting their own lives. The people of besieged Leningrad worked (while they could) and saved (if they could) both themselves and their loved ones from dying of hunger” (Ginzburg 1995: 3). Declaring “War and Peace” to be the basis for “Notes of a Blockade Person” Ginzburg interprets Tolstoy’s conception of the “people’s war” in a way that is necessary for her own narration about the blockade (in some sense arrogating to Tolstoy her own Hegelianism). Tolstoy’s “common cause,” its direction and course are the result of myriad private actions. Every such action constitutes an execution of various everyday social rituals. Tolstoy specialized in scrupulous examination and analysis of the mechanism of the transformation of myriad private ritualized actions into the common cause. Defamiliarization becomes the main tool of such analysis in War and Peace—because it dissects or even de-ritualizes the ritual. “Notes of a Blockade Person” solves this problem in a different way. Firstly, Ginzburg challenges herself with another problem. Defining her book as “something of this is related here” (Ginzburg 1995: 3) she creates an opposition to the

9 “Ritualization” here is the main mode of “routinization”.
10 For two very important papers on this subject: Ustinov 2001 and Savitsky 2006.
book which intends to fill “everything” and which is called “Война и мир” (“War and the World” in old Russian orthography). “Notes of a Blockade Person” depicts only the rituals of “blockade person’s” private (partly social) life and the way he (specifically this “N.”) owes his survival to them. The connection of this world of private survival with the common cause is very simple. The enemy wants to kill all the inhabitants of besieged Leningrad—and among them to kill N. He does not die and thus makes a contribution to the victory over the enemy: “And in the final reckoning that was also essential to the war effort, because a living city barred a path of an enemy who wanted to kill it” (ibid.). In the “Notes of a Blockade Person” the war is private, individual and it takes place just on the level of everyday life, not as in Tolstoy’s epos. Actually, it is “something” against “everything.”

This approach entirely corresponds to the character of warfare as it was transformed in the twentieth century (and also to changing attitudes towards war). Tolstoy did not write that the main aim of Napoleon and his “great army” was “to kill Russians,” or moreover “to annihilate all Russians.” Similarly, the very idea of Kutuzov’s “people’s war” was not “to annihilate the enemy” but “to expel the invaders.” Only Andrei Bolkonski speaks about the destruction of the French: “One thing I would do if I had the power ... I would not take prisoners ... Not take prisoners ... That by itself would quite change the whole war ... Take no prisoners, but kill and be killed!” (Tolstoy 1997: 857). Here Tolstoy foresees not only the “total wars” of the twentieth century but also one of the typical reactions of the intellectuals to this kind of war.11 Becoming total (i.e. freely extending its influence upon all spheres of human life), twentieth-century warfare changed conscious attitudes towards war. This attitude is reduced from religious and political levels, from the sophisticated “art of war” to the primitive formula

11 The best example of this reaction is Ilya Ehrenburg’s slogan “Kill the German!” during the Great Patriotic War, 1941–45. It has to be said that Tolstoy shows examples of such attitudes to the war in social groups that are inferior to the aristocracy and Russian gentry. Moreover the very phenomenon which he called “the people’s war” is a spontaneous reaction of Russian society as a whole, “мир” to Napoleon’s invasion. There is no doubt that being spontaneous, this reaction is unconscious—even in the case of Pierre Bezukhov. The only character who understands the changing nature of the war is Andrei Bolkonski.
of “to kill and not be killed.” “Total war” (and totalitarian regimes) atomizes a person, cruelly destroys his habitual social ties and conventions and demands from him a very simple thing—to kill the enemy and to avoid the possibility of being killed for as long as possible. Despite the fact that he is part of gigantic military, political, social and economic structures, the participant in a “total war” is in fact isolated and estranged from the course of the “Big War.” There is no strategy, no politics at the point where he is situated—just death.

Thus “blockade person” has to protect himself from death by sending it to the enemy. Lydia Ginzburg unambiguously apprehends the war as an attempt to kill her and her loved ones. By surviving in a besieged city, her hero wins the war; “The dressmaker wrings her hands, while the customer is busy constructing her own image, and both talk longingly of roondas and ladies who had no use for hands. And yet they were not in conflict with what was going on around them. They might personally complain and shy away from it all, but their criteria and values were historically correct. They know it has to be this way, because any other way is impossible. Their criterion: Hitler is a villain, the Germans are the enemy and have to be annihilated” (Ginzburg 1995: 54). This kind of argumentation is repeated in “Addenda to Notes of a Blockade Person”: “The actual bearers of the greatest evil, taking upon themselves its theoretical basis, are standing outside the gates. We all want to kill them; we want to kill them as many as possible, without going into the details of their human existence at all” (ibid.: 83–84, translation slightly modified). The “total war” gave rise to a “personal war,” a tête-à-tête war. This is how Pierre Bezukhov wanted to wage war with Napoleon, but in the nineteenth century this was perceived as nonsense (as were Andrei Bolkonski’s bloodthirsty appeals).12 Interestingly, these cases of radical individualism appeared in the twentieth century at the height of the two most dreadful European collectivist projects—communism and Nazism. Perhaps this individualism is a consequence of these projects, but also a reaction to them.

12 It is important to note here that this method of waging war is the only acceptable one for Tolstoy. For the writer the war is about killing and survival—and not about “politics,” “strategies,” etc.
“Notes of a Blockade Person” begins with the description of how war intrudes on peaceful everyday life. The news about the war made meaningless all the rituals and mechanisms of this life. Public transport is still functioning, the magazines are still paying their writers, but in this newborn perspective (or perhaps in this newborn teleology) none of these things makes sense. At this point Ginzburg contradicts Tolstoy again. In War and Peace the war does not contradict everyday life until the moment people meet it directly. Tolstoy discusses this idea: “Among the innumerable categories applicable to the phenomena of human life one may discriminate between those in which substance prevails and those in which form prevails. To the latter—as distinguished from village, country, provincial, or even Moscow life—we may allot Petersburg life, and especially the life of its salons. That life of salons is unchanging.” (Tolstoy 1997: 781). The war does not affect Petersburg’s aristocratic life—nor is Moscow’s aristocracy affected by it until the day the enemy approaches the city. Moreover, Tolstoy contradicts himself when he depicts the provincial nobleman’s life in Voronezh (during Nikolai Rostov’s stay there) in the following way: “Provincial life in 1812 went on very much as usual, but with this difference, that it was livelier in the towns in consequence of the arrival of many wealthy families from Moscow” (ibid.). In the twentieth century, modern technology became the most effective tool for the total penetration of war into remote areas. With this technology war destroys habitual everyday life even before air forces begin to bomb the cities. War came to the inhabitants of Leningrad (as well as the inhabitants of Gorky, Sverdlovsk, Vladivostok) through the radio loudspeakers: “A new reality came into being, unprecedented, but still resembling the former one more than seemed possible” (Ginzburg 1995: 6). The trams are still working, the salaries are being paid, but the reality is already new. This is the reality of consciousness, which only afterwards becomes the physical reality of bombings, hunger, the reality of the immediate proximity of death. Coming through the loudspeaker, the war makes meaningless all rituals of peaceful life and then easily destroys this life with bombs and hunger. “A hostile world of death” approaches closely and “blockade person” struggles with it in the small space of his private life. In her book Lydia Ginzburg analyzes the mechanisms of this struggle as well as the connections of this private mechanisms with the world of the “Big War.”
First of all, Ginzburg outlines the picture of the mechanism of “social mutual responsibility” connecting a single person with the common cause of war. After that she discusses the functioning of this mechanism in various everyday contexts—for instance, inside a family. The family and all of everyday life was that same private space where “blockade person” struggled with “a hostile world of death” fraught with chaos and extermination. Moreover, the enemy penetrated much further: “A hostile world was on the offensive and pushing its outposts forward. The closest of these outposts had suddenly turned out to be one’s own body” (ibid.: 8). “Blockade person’s” body becomes the focal point of the war. But before we begin to analyze what was happening with the body that has become “an outpost of a hostile world,” let us try to identify the main enemy of “blockade person.”

Nominally, this enemy is the German army but “blockade person” does not meet the army face to face. He deals with the consequences of its activity. The enemy is not personified; besieging Leningrad, the enemy only creates this hostile world which pushes its outpost inside the “blockade person’s” body. And on this level of understanding of the war everything is seen in a different way. The enemy is either death coming in a form of a bomb or a shell, or, much more unbearable, the enemy is death revealed through the absence of usual things, human strength, friends and relatives. The enemy is the exhaustion of one’s own body and its environment. Exactly in the “situation of exhaustion,” the situation where things and people disappear, in the situation of shortages of everything, a system of new rituals appears. On the one hand, these new rituals ought to save and make rational everything that remains in a besieged city and inside the body of the “blockade person.” On the other hand, they must fill the emptiness that has arisen because of this exhaustion and life’s reduction to the simplest physiological functions. The result is the duality of these rituals: on the one hand they complicate life to prevent its reduction to primitive forms and to the biological, physiological level (and then to death). On the other hand, they help to preserve vitality and therefore life (nothing superfluous remains). This is a complication with Occam’s razor. From this point of view one part of “Notes of a Blockade Person” is especially interesting: in April 1942 when the city disinterred its tramlines after the dreadful winter N. could not get used to the trams for a long time: “In
actual fact, his ossified way of existence simply rejected the new factor” (ibid.: 48–49). Then by making an effort, he became a stickler for tramway travel: “His rationalizing reflection was that this was because it involved the least expenditure of physical effort. If truth be told, there was another more important factor—it was too grim to contemplate the space separating him from his destination, a space he would have to cover step by step with his own body, in an agony of haste. It was easier to wait ... The tram journey was one of the best, most uplifting moments of the day. This was man outwitting hostile chaos” (ibid.: 49).

Obviously a hostile chaos was outwitted not by just a “man” but mainly by his mind. During the first distressing months of the siege most of the intellectuals who survived were those who tried to make a rational system amidst the catastrophically impoverished life—unlike the experienced housewives, those professionals of housekeeping: “Especially those same intellectuals who had all their lives feared to lay a finger on a besom or a frying pan, thinking it would cast doubt on their manhood” (ibid.: 71). “During the period of greatest exhaustion everything became clear: the mind was hauling the body along with it” (ibid.: 9). At this point let us begin the discussion of the main obstacles that this heroic “blockade person’s” mind encountered.

The main weapon of exhaustion was the disappearance of automatism, i.e. ritualized motions, sensations, thoughts: “The automatism of movement, its reflex nature, its age-old correlation with the mental impulse—all that was gone” (ibid.: 9). “Blockade person” turned out to be in a situation of defamiliarization; exhaustion was the dreadful outcome of the realization of Shklovsky’s theories. Therefore, “to survive” meant the return of automatism and this was possible only with the help of a new ritualization. Defamiliarization is not dangerous as a literary device, but it is disastrous in “real life.” Social mechanisms based on everyday rituals (which in turn became routine) divert a person from thinking about death in all its manifestations. Following Pascal and his idea of abstraction, Lydia Ginzburg in another essay “The Thought that Described a Circle” characterizes a funeral ritual as a method of dealing not only with the “impossible idea of non-existence” but also with the “still lasting material existence of a dead body.” (Ginzburg 2002: 544). For “blockade person,” the existence
of his exhausted but still living body was much more poignant than the abstract idea of “non-existence,” which went from being “impossible” to nearly “inevitable.”

The main process that happened in “blockade person’s” life was the alienation of his own body: “A whole series of foul processes is going on inside the alienated body—a degeneration, a drying out, a swelling up, not like a good old-fashioned illness, because it being carried out seemingly moribund material” (Ginzburg 1995: 10). The body is “moribund material,” alienated from the mind and left on its own. Left alone, the body amazes, surprises, shocks the “blockade person” who is reduced to his mind. The mind sees the body as though for the first time and simply does not understand its metamorphosis: “For a long time people didn’t know whether they were swelling up or putting on weight” (ibid.). The unbearable sight of his own alienated, strange, odd body scares “blockade person”: “Suddenly a person starts to be aware that his gums are swelling. He feels them with his tongue, terrified, then prods them with his finger. He can’t leave them alone, especially at night. He lies there with an intense feeling of something hardened and slippery, its painlessness especially fearful: a layer of non-living tissue in his mouth” (ibid.). On this level the destruction of a mentality, which leads to the destruction of the mind, begins. The collapse of behavioral automatism (which itself is the result of the situation of exhaustion) leads to the alienation of the body from the mind, so the mind perceives the body so sharply that both entities suffer from disastrous effects.

The body hidden from the mind’s view returns to notify of its ruin. The clothes in which the winter “blockade person” sleeps serve as a metaphor for this process: “For months on end people—the greater part of the citizens—used to sleep without undressing. They lost sight of their body. It disappeared into an abyss, immured in clothing, and there in the depths it changed and degenerated. A person knew it was turning into something horrible … The most vital people washed themselves sometimes and changed their underclothes. Then an encounter with the body could not be avoided. They would examine it with grim curiosity, conquering their desire to remain ignorant. It was unfamiliar, with new hollows and angles every time, bruised
and rough” (ibid.: 10–11). Thus the outposts of the hostile world appeared to “blockade person” in the form of his own body. In addition to the body, things from the past life in peacetime are alienated from “blockade person’s” mind. Those things lost any sense since they were dropped from the rituals of social life and everyday routine: “That winter in the enveloping chaos it seemed that the vase and even the bookshelves—were something in the nature of Pogankiny Palaty or the ruins of the Colosseum, in that now they never have any practical significance again (that’s why it cost him no pang to break them apart and chop them up)” (ibid.: 11). And this is not surprising because the meaning of things is in their participation in life—in a life put in order by the mind. And a mind in turn is a part of this life. Social rituals and the routine caused by them are the only social and cultural tools capable of putting chaotic life in order. Social ritual is generated by the mind (in contrast to conditioned and unconditioned reflexes) and it is the mind that prompts the ritual’s mechanism to set itself free from an endless and exhausting process of recognition of new things and actions. The mind as an inspector is present even in the most automatized and routinized activity. The mind receives an alarm if there is any error, any instance of alienation, if any thing is dropped from its habitual series. The alienation of things and of the body from the mind as a result of the collapse of the automatism of everyday life reduces a person to the biological level, which is the level of a body “on its own.” Meanwhile, the mind, besieged by “new,” sudden, fearful things and processes, is perishing. That is why the exhaustion of “blockade person” has nothing in common with the religious practice of mortification of the flesh. In the latter case there is no collapse of the mechanism connecting body and mind; on the contrary, the exhaustion of the body takes place under the full control of the mind. Moreover, in “mortification of the flesh,” ritual turns the exhausted body into the sign or symbol of something greater. In the case of “blockade person,” no new meaning appears.

13 As Boldyrev put it: “Then I took a bath at home and had been shocked to see myself naked” (Boldyrev 1998: 37).
14 At this point I’ll venture to step aside from the A. Myers’ translation and just transcribe the Russian name “Поганкины Палаты.” In Russian literature and culture “Поганкины Палаты” does not mean “Palace.” It means “ruins,” “mess” etc.
The result of the disappearance of automatism and the collapse of the connection between mind and body is an increase in the role of muscular efforts. The less automatism there is, the more efforts are needed, and the more efforts there are, the more powerful is the exhaustion: “There was no peace whatever that winter. Even during the night. One might have thought that the body would relax at night. But it seemed that the struggle for warmth continued even in sleep. It wasn’t always because people were cold—they piled too many things on themselves for that. But this was the reason why the body continued to struggle. The bedclothes weighed heavily, and what was worse, they kept slipping and crawling off in all directions. To hold onto the pile, you had to apply barely noticeable but eventually fatiguing muscular efforts” (ibid.: 13). Continual efforts bring the disappearance of relief; body and mind are always “turned on”: “All of which is to say that neither body nor nerves were fully rested” (ibid.: 13). Another reason why the blockade was more than ordinary torture was that the continual exertion of body and mind, as well as the absence of relief, exacerbated the exhaustion and breakdown caused by the starvation. “Blockade person” wasted more efforts than a man in ordinary life who, due to his participation in automatic routines and everyday social rituals, did not waste efforts to such an extent (and, of course, rested).

The “blockade world” is the world of disintegrating (and already disintegrated) ties. To stop this process of shocking disintegration, of destruction of the mind, of reduction of the body to a “biological level,” “blockade person” creates (partly recreates) his own rituals that bring his alienated body and material possessions back under his control: “And the automatic gesture with which N. wound up his alarm and put it on the chair next to his sofa (this clock hadn’t worked during the winter, the mechanism was frozen) belonged altogether to the former life. [...] Without fail, once you got up you had to go to the window. The age-old unchanging morning gesture of renewing your links with the world … In this morning hour of renewing relationships, the world stood clearly revealed in its dual function—hostile and protective” (ibid.: 12–13).

The “world of the nexus,” the world of social rituals, of patterns, of automatism, is the world of normal human life. A morning view from the window—this return of the ritual of peaceful life happened in spring of
1942, after N. survived the winter (the most horrible winter of the blockade). But only those who created new rituals in inhuman conditions lived through the winter. Any circumstances of “blockade life,” even the most perilous and miserable, could become a place where new rituals would begin; we can even speak about the ritualization of the most necessary things, for instance, going to an air-raid shelter during bombardment: “There was something soothing by now in the ritual repetition of the procedure. The order of the elements included the nervous clicking of the loudspeaker, the search for galoshes in the dark, the drowsy dampness of the cellar, the rolled cigarette smoked by the door, the slow return home (the slower the better, in case the siren went again)” (ibid.: 29). There were other—absolutely unbearable—rituals; Ginzburg wrote about them in another text during the blockade, “The Story of Pity and Cruelty.”

“The Story of Pity and Cruelty” cannot be considered a draft for “Notes of a Blockade Person.” It is an independent piece of prose which was not included by the author into the final version of the “Notes.” Nevertheless, there is a place in “Notes of a Blockade Person” strictly pointing out Ginzburg’s intention to make “The Story” part of it in some form. Ginzburg tells the story of some O. who was trying to save his sister from death by starvation and exhaustion. In a dozen lines Ginzburg paints the sociopsychological drama of dystrophy and ends it with these words: “This is blockade story of O., the story of pity and cruelty.” The hero’s name in “The Story” is Otter, so it is obvious that this is the place where some version of this text could have been situated in “Notes of a Blockade Person.”

In any case, the first drafts to “Notes of a Blockade Person,” as well as to “The Story of Pity and Cruelty,” were made at approximately the same time—in 1942–43. “The Story” was finished before the end of the war, while work on the “Notes” lasted for more than forty years. Thus the former text could be considered to be a more firsthand testimony of

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15 This manuscript was found by Emily Van Buskirk. All quotations from this text are made from the paper Van Buskirk 2006. As this article was being revised, “Novoe Izdatel’stvo” was preparing the first publication of “The Story of Pity and Cruelty” in a full edition of Lydia Ginzburg’s “blockade prose” (Ginzburg 2011). The “Story” was written, it appears, in 1943 or 1944.
Ginzburg’s “blockade reflectivity.” This is very important because in addition, “The Story of Pity and Cruelty” is a narration about the struggle of “blockade person” with disintegration, chaos, death, which are embodied not in his own body but in the body of his close relative. In particular, the horrible tension and unbearable heaviness of Otter’s relations with his aunt are created from this circumstance—16—the line, the battle-front of this struggle physically passes between two people tied by blood relations. The result is that all this additional psychological machinery participates in the confrontation with the world of collapsing ties (“additional” because this struggle is outside “blockade person”). Lydia Ginzburg describes and explains the origin and the functioning of everyday life of the two firmly bound and mortally fighting humans, and she does this in dreadful detail. She depicts everything, all these rituals of meals, cleanings, and arguments. Nevertheless, when the aunt dies, Otter is distressed not only because of her death but also because of the disappearance of the rituals that arose during the blockade year.17 Most of these rituals were disgusting, but they made up the content of his life. And now, after her death, Otter’s life is empty. He has to start again—and to do this in the conditions of the blockade exhaustion.

One more important ritual restoring both the connection between the mind and the body (and between man and things) and the social ties between people, between man and the state, man and the “common cause of war,” is reporting for work to the office, or even demonstrating a special pass at the entrance checkpoint: “Going out to work has its charm. In spite of little victories and achievements at home, home is a place of chaos and isolation. In the morning before tiredness doesn’t overcome him he would like to break away into the world ... Here, from the showing of the permit, the feeling of his social responsibility begins” (Ginzburg 2002: 660). Social responsibility builds “blockade person” into a pre-existing nexus and automatically replaces many of the collapsed ties and connections.

16 Behind the “aunt” is hidden Lydia Ginzburg’s mother, Raisa Davidovna Ginzburg, who died at the end of 1942.
17 I intentionally put aside the moral aspects of the situation and Otter’s belated remorse for all the squabbles with his late aunt.
But the main rituals of dystrophic “blockade person” were the rituals concerned with food. The hero of “Notes of a Blockade Person” positively apprehends the iron system of food distribution (also the rituals surrounding this system)—not merely because this system preserves his physical existence. The system is *functioning*, it looks like a mechanism, it works automatically, impersonally—so “blockade person” can depend on it. The system exists *indifferently*, apart from his knowing about it. This is because the hell of the blockade is also the hell of subjectivity, the hell of perpetual uncontrolled discoveries of things familiar from the past. The hell of the blockade is a quiet uprising of these things against the order of which they had recently been a part. This is why Ginzburg writes: “Nevertheless, people waited eagerly—not for morning because morning in the sense of light came much later—no, they were waiting for an excuse to get up, as the start of a new day drew nearer, that is, six o’clock, when the shops and bakeries opened. Which is not to say that people always set off for the bread shop at six. On the contrary, many tried to spin out the bread-collecting business (as far as their strength permitted). But six o’clock was a consoling frontier bringing the awareness of new possibilities” (Ginzburg 1995: 14). The adjective “consoling” is used here not only because of “new possibilities,” but also because of the “frontier.”

Lydia Ginzburg describes in great detail a typical spring day of “blockade person” with its machinery of survival. This is a description of a new mechanism and its new rituals (“new”—in comparison with the rituals of the pre-war life). A day opens with chopping firewood and going downstairs to the basement to fetch some water: “A typical siege day would begin with a man going out into the kitchen or onto the dark staircase to chop the daily ration of splinters and small pieces of wood for the little stove. [...] Then he would still have to fetch water from the frozen cellar” (ibid.: 15). These are very painful procedures—not merely physically, but psychologically: “The resistance of every object had to be overcome through one’s own will and body without the intervention of technical aids” (ibid.). This reasoning leads us to the Russian Formalists who claimed that an art form or a piece of literature is the result of overcoming the “resistance of the material.”18 Here—in the conditions of the blockade—the form of life

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18 See V. Shklovsky’s early theoretical manifesto “Art as Device”: *Shklovsky 1990*. 
(including its social form) is collapsing from this resistance: people on all fours go downstairs to the basement to fetch water: “An icy layer covered the steps of the communal laundry, and people came down this declivity on their haunches. And went back upstairs placing the bucket in front of them, looking for a suitable lodging point in the ice” (ibid.: 15). The resistance of things exhausts “blockade person” and makes him sick: “A man would descend the stairs with empty buckets and through the shattered window in front of him lay the narrowing expanse of the yard which he would have to negotiate with full buckets. This abrupt awareness of space, its physical reality, brought on a feeling of despondency” (ibid.). This is nostalgia for the previous world, the world of order, for “blockade person’s” lost paradise where all the machinery worked without fail and all the things were a part of the system: “A waterpipe is a human concept, a linkage of things which overcomes chaos, a sacred organization, a centralization” (ibid.). This world no longer exists, things fall out of the mind’s control, the linkage is destroyed and “blockade person” has to experience these things anew. “Blockade person” “discovers” with fear that things that had once been habitual,19 and this is a fear of defamiliarization: “Head thrown back, you measure the height before you. In the far distance there is a ceiling with a sort of alabaster moulding. […] It turns out the staircases actually are suspended in the air (if you look closely it’s really frightening), held in place by some invisible interior connection with the house” (ibid.). The main part of this quotation is “if you look closely it’s really frightening.” Looking closely you uproot a thing from its habitual nexus, you do not “recognize” it, so every minor thing is fraught with horror. The aim that can be achieved in literature (in Shklovsky’s opinion) by “defamiliarization,” in besieged Leningrad was achieved by destruction—not merely by destruction of ties, connections, linkages, but by real, physical destruction.

19 With the same fear “blockade person” has discovered that habitual metaphors were also materializing: “What could people know about solitude and abandonment who kept repeating the empty phrase: ‘I live as if in a desert’? What did they know about life without the telephone, about life in the city where space had been monstrously extended by 35 degree frosts and the absence of trams” (“The Story of Pity and Cruelty”; cf.: Van Buskirk 2006).
of the bodies, the buildings and the city: “The everyday routes went past houses which had been bombed in different ways. There were sections of houses which kept reminding you of Meyerhold’s theatre sets. [...] The house sections illustrated the storeys, the thin strata of floor and ceiling. You begin to realize with astonishment that as you sit at home in your room you are suspended in space, with other people similarly suspended over your head and beneath your feet. [...] Unobservant people suddenly saw what constituted their city” (ibid.: 24).  

“Blockade person” is surrounded by the chaos of separate things, by a world of phenomena. A man of the Western rationalistic tradition tries to tie these things together with a system, to overcome this chaos with new order, with new rituals, with new automatism. For Ginzburg automatism is the acme of rationalistic capacities of the “Western self”: “the main thing was to rationalize his domestic routine. To find an automatism of movement in place of convulsive movements. Automatism was a correctly solved problem and the exactness of the solution was felt by both the muscles and the mind” (Ginzburg 1995: 22). The next step of this process is social. This

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20 As has been pointed out by Andrei Zorin (Zorin 2003), the connection between the birth of Russian formalism and World War I has been traced in: Tihanov 2005; and Ginzburg 2001. See also: Kalinin 2005.

21 Struggling against this reduction to the “biological level of life,” against the chaos of death, “blockade person” tried to erect a rational system over it. “Blockade person” won when this system—through the mechanisms of rituals—took him out of the situation of alienation from things and the body. In this case he could recover sufficiently to participate in social life. But there were two types of “rational system”: one (more complicated) based on the system of rituals leading to a new routine and new automatism, and another, attempting simply to make “blockade everyday life” function as rationally as possible. In the second case a man could not subdue things because he has been intensely analyzing every one of them trying to place it into the most rational connection with another. This effort—which took a lot of mental energy—sometimes led to paranoia, to dystrophic mania: “Intellectuals, especially, got carried away with rationalization, as they filled up their empty mental apparatus with new material. T., an out-and-out scholar, who had been unable out of principle to pour himself a cup of tea, now sat for hours, engrossed in reckoning up and allotting his coupons. [...] The siege cooking mania took hold of the most unlikely people. [...] The more meagre the raw material involved, the closer it approached mania” (Ginzburg 1995: 70–71).
is the social network of things and people. This happened in the spring of 1942 after the most dreadful “blockade winter”: “It was good and right that the city should be proud of well-swept street, while bombed-out houses stood along both sides; that was the social network of things continuing and returning” (ibid.: 23–24).

A creation of new rituals took place in “blockade person’s” coordinates of time and space. And these coordinates differ sharply from the pre-war time. First of all, in “blockade person’s” case, time is almost completely replaced by space. There is space, not time, between the expeditions to a frozen cellar, to a bread-shop, to a canteen, and it is very hard for “blockade person” to traverse this space: “Throughout the day, there are many more spaces still to traverse—chiefly the one separating you from dinner. [...] Lunch itself also represents the conquest of space; small spaces agonizingly crammed with queues” (ibid.: 16). And time seems to disappear—in the besieged city separated from the outside world by enemies. Time seems to have been pumped out of Leningrad and the inhabitants live in a vacuum of time.22 Even in the situations where time is necessarily present (for instance, in queues of bread-shops), it is replaced by space. Hours are replaced by the meters of slow, step-by-step advances in the blockade queues. Time moves “blockade person” through spatial co-ordinates of a queue turning itself into space: “But all at once you thought that even if this lasted another five hours, or six, or seven—time would still be passing and would certainly pass over these five or six hours—however full those hours might be with agonies of immobility for the individual person—therefore time itself would bear him towards his goal” (ibid.: 38). The personal time of “blockade person” turns into the common time of the queue which is estimated not by the hours but by the meters left before the counter where a shop assistant is slicing bread. As a result, time that is being estimated by space measurements becomes “empty” and a man moving inside the queue pushes out this emptiness like a piston in a syringe. Thus another “blockade person’s”

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22 That’s why “a recovery” of “blockade person” is directly related to the returning of time into his life: “The sense of lost time, that was the start of recovery. The start of recovery was when it seemed to be too long to wait forty minutes in a queue for a cup of wishy-washy coffee with saccharine” (ibid.: 21–22).
vacuum arises—not only “a time vacuum” but also a psychological one. That is why he could not read while standing in line: “The psychology of the queue is based on a tense, wearing anxiety to reach the end, an inward urging-forward of empty time; this weariness excludes anything else that might relieve it. The mental state of a person standing in a long queue is usually not fitted for any other occupation” (ibid.: 40). The only occupation “blockade person” has adapted to fill this vacuum is conversation: “Man abhors a vacuum. The immediate filling-up of a vacuum is one of the basic functions of the word” (ibid.). Thus conversation became one more (completely social) ritual of the “blockade person.” In conversation “blockade person” saw his existential, psychological and social needs (first of all, the need for self-affirmation) fulfilled—and meanwhile, pre-war social experiences, habits and linkages came to light. Analyzing these conversations in the queue, Lydia Ginzburg distinguishes a “blockade level” and a “pre-war level” and observes how deeply these two levels are intertwined. But let us remember—such conversations differ from the other rituals of the “blockade person” because they are doubly contrived—knowingly and unknowingly.

Let us imagine a graphical picture of the day of the “blockade person.” The sluggish, irregular lines of his traversing through space lead to a short moment of lunch (or dinner), to a moment when time is “turned on.” After all, starvation is the tool that turns off time for “blockade person”: “Because hunger is a permanent state, it can’t be switched off. It was constantly present and always made its presence felt (not invariably in a desire to eat); the most desperate and tormenting thing of all during the process of eating was when food drew to an end with awful rapidity without bringing satiety” (ibid.: 36). Most important is the very moment of eating (mockingly brief) for which “blockade person” is battling. He resorts to all possible tricks to prolong this moment. The first of these tricks is to change the process of hasty eating into a ritual, because the main trait of a ritual is that it “creates” its own time. Any ritual in human society—from a religious to an everyday one—dips its participants into “another time”: otherwise it is not a real ritual. The next step of its automation and its transformation into a routine weakens the “other time” of ritual, and time gradually “evaporates.” Automatism ought to “kill” the time assigned for some action, to remove
this action from the field of consciousness and—therefore—to remove it from time. In the world of “blockade person” the only things deserving attention are cooking and eating. “Blockade person” opposes the special time of his private culinary rituals to the exhausting, empty, common space of the blockade. That is the reason Ginzburg dedicates pages from “Notes of a Blockade Person” to “blockade cookery.”

The most emotional places of this analytical book are about manipulations of food. To have lunch, for “blockade person,” is to “turn on” private time and to feed himself with it—as he is feeding himself with his miserable helping. He tries to force out the permanent starvation with the time of his poor and sophisticated culinary ritual: “just eating was too simple, left too little trace. Blockade cookery resembled art—it conferred tangibility on things” (ibid.: 71). Here again Lydia Ginzburg has a point of agreement with Shklovsky: in blockade life “defamiliarization” is fatal (in contrast to art) but this does not mean that art (as well as “defamiliarization”) is completely excluded from it. There is a moment when all of art’s potential is “turned on,” and it is the moment of cooking. “Art” in “Notes of a Blockade Person” is the art of blockade cookery. This sort of cookery ought to do what all other art forms should do (according to Shklovsky)—stop the moment of perception, delay it, make a thing the thing: “Elementary materials were transformed into dishes. These efforts at cookery were motivated by the thought that it was tastier or more filling that way. But it wasn’t that, it was the pleasure of fiddling about, the enriching of the lingering, protracted process” (ibid.: 71). The meaning of blockade culinary—“every product had to cease being itself” (ibid.). This culinary resourcefulness of “blockade person” was inexhaustible: sprats put through the mincer with a pat of butter (ibid.: 44), soup from nettles and goosefoot (ibid.), kasha from bread, bread from kasha, flat cakes and kasha from greens, cutlets from herring, stewed salad leaves and so on.

23 We are speaking, obviously, about the process of domestic cookery that begins with lighting a little stove. This ritual—including the heating of food brought from a canteen, the cooking of some new dishes and so on—postponed the very moment of eating. In a canteen “blockade person” was separated from food by common space of the queue which he had to traverse; at home he was separated from it by his private time which he could extend.
The more effort “blockade person” expends on cookery, the stronger his disappointment: he could not stop the moment, and his gastronomic manipulations with ersatz food are no more than the ersatz art: “After everything that N., from the moment he awoke, had done for this breakfast, after he had seated himself with a certain solemnity at the table, having first wiped it with a cloth, he ate everything in absent-minded haste though he knew that now his food should be appreciated and savoured. He wanted to say, but couldn’t ‘Verweile doch! Du bist so schon!’” (ibid.: 74). But the process that failed as art promoted—as ritual—the main victory of “blockade person.” “Blockade person” had survived.

This disappointment because of the “absent-minded haste” in which N. ate his thoroughly prepared breakfast raises a question of the aims of “blockade person,” of the continuity of these aims, of his personal teleology. At this point let us return to one of Tolstoy’s main problems—the transformation of myriad phenomena, of various deeds and actions into some common motion. “Notes of a Blockade Person” is not about some “motion of people” or “motion of nation.” Its concern is with the motion of one separate man. How does the totality of his innumerable motives and acts result in a specific vector that determines his behavior? If we may speak about teleology in the case of “blockade person”—how does the very movement from one point to another (from one aim to another) take place?

In the 1930s Lydia Ginzburg wrote a lot about “the continuity of scientific interests”;24 in “Notes of a Blockade Person” she talks about the problem of maintaining continuous interest in life, about the continuity of transitioning from one distressing effort to another. We could define the spaces between these efforts as “interstices,” but Ginzburg talks strictly about “continuity of efforts”: “there was no peace [...] even during the night” (ibid.: 13). She defines the very life of “blockade person” as “the endlessly renewed achievement of endlessly shattered goals” (ibid.: 17).25 The ruinous

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24 For example, see Ginzburg’s note of 1931: “Wild freedom is the indisputable symptom of cessation of that continuity of interests, which is the foundation of the consciousness of a man who has a relationship to science” (Ginzburg 2002: 99).

25 This maxim could be illustrated exactly by the story of the disappointment by the culmination of the blockade culinary ritual.
mechanism of life is interchangeable with the sum of consistent separate efforts. Just as “blockade person” loosens the connection with the world of things, his actions have loose connections between themselves. It is very strange for an exhausted man but the efforts themselves to renew the actions were not extremely difficult because they “forced out suffering”: “It is the suppression of one sort of suffering by another, it is crazed driving urgency of the wretched, which explains [...] why people can live in isolation, in a convict prison, in the last degree of poverty or humiliation, while their fellow men in cozy cottages put a bullet through their temple for no apparent reason” (ibid.). It is very important that the suffering which had been forced out is a physical, biological one, and the suffering which did the forcing out (an expedition to fetch water in a cellar, a queue in a canteen etc.) had a ritualized and socialized nature. At this point—where the old (transformed) rituals are returning and the new “blockade” rituals are being created—the forming of the new socially conditioned mechanism of life takes place. This mechanism forces out the chaos of the “biological level” from “blockade person’s” consciousness, saves him from the evil of reduction to the lowermost levels, promotes his survival and finally leads him to common victory: “The aims, interests and impulses of suffering give rise to whole series of fixed actions, constantly self-renewing and no longer burdensome to the will. But the will is powerless to disrupt this sequence in order to introduce some new gesture unfortified by suffering” (ibid.: 18).

The limited nature of this system (we shall define it, after Lydia Ginzburg, as a “regimen”) has roots in the very source of its origin (as well as in the very source of its strength): the system rejects everything unnecessary, any elements not conditioned by suffering. Thus, in fact, “blockade person’s” ritual turns into routine, into automatism—just to exclude the will from the process of sustenance.

“Thus was the circle of the winter siege day laid down. During the breathing space too, this movement, circular and indissoluble still goes on, gradually subsiding. People bear this movement within them, like a wound” (ibid.). Ginzburg defines this siege regimen as “a circle,” or vice versa, she calls the process of “running in circles” a “regular routine”: “Our running in circles takes on the nature of a regular routine to some extent” (ibid.). The conditioning by suffering, the necessity of suppressing physical
To Create a Circle and to Break It

suffering through recurring rituals (and then—through the automatism of everyday actions), the necessity to set up a new linkage between “blockade person” and things (and also between things themselves)—all create “a regular routine,” “a regimen.” This is a regular routine that the hero of “Notes of a Blockade Person” so hopelessly has dreamed of before the war.26 At this point in our discussion, the term “regimen” obtains medical connotations. We could even discuss the blockade as a dreadful illness that affected Leningrad and its inhabitants, and the “regimen” as a system of measures that had been taken against this illness.27 But there is one serious difference. A doctor would prescribe to an ordinary patient a ready-made regimen, while “blockade person” partly creates the regimen himself. The creation of this regimen and then the following of its rules is very tiresome for the exhausted man (as tiresome as any other deed) and he begins to dream of liberation, of a real, “normal,” “pre-siege” illness. And this dream is another symptom of the “blockade person’s” illness, a symptom of the blockade: “I was stricken with a peculiar siege malaise of the will. And the only longed for, feasible way out was into an ordinary, human illness, like in the old days” (ibid.: 100–1).

“The regimen” permitted “blockade person” to survive and thereby to participate in the common cause of victory. Time and time again Ginzburg reveals the work of the mechanism (which had been analyzed by Tolstoy for the first time) of combining a common aim with private life. But gradually Tolstoy’s problematic is replaced by Proust’s; the supreme justification of “the regimen” is itself a task to testify, to reflect on, to describe: “A regimen

26 “For many people a regimen, a work routine was always an unattainable dream. The effort to set their life in order just wouldn’t come. Now life has been swept clear of any kind of idle chatter, all those substitutes and mystifications, lovers’ misunderstandings or the demands of a second or third profession, the exhausting vanity which drove people on to where they shouldn’t be at all […] We, who had lost so much time, had suddenly been given time, empty, but not free” (Ginzburg 1995: 18).

27 In Ginzburg there is a surprising comparison of the bread-shop with an out-patient’s clinic: “Nowadays, this is rather reminiscent of the pitiless cleanliness of an out-patient’s clinic; in taking care of you they make you feel angry and fearful by the implacability of their procedures” (ibid.: 37).
exists for some purpose. N. was no stranger to the dystrophic idea of restoring his strength, an idea which had been motivating all sorts of things—in particular the total subordination of time to the three stages of eating. But he was asking by now: What point is there in restoring my strength? [...] By the painful effort of a will used to monotonous series of gestures, somewhere, at some point, he had to widen the sphere and insert an action into it. If a man can write, shouldn't he write about that and what had preceded it? Somewhere, let's say after his domestic chores, there should be an hour or more when he could write [...] Then all the other particles of the day would come alive and tend towards that hour of the day, shaping themselves hierarchically around it” (ibid.: 19–20). Teleology appears here as a justification of the lower by the higher and this is one of the most important principles of Lydia Ginzburg’s philosophy.28 This happens in spite of the fact that this mechanism (invented by “blockade person”) of blockade life, which withstands chaos and death, was exposed through its very closeness to this chaos and death: “Now, however, the cause and effect connection of impulses and actions had been crudely exposed and screwed into place” (Ginzburg 1995: 18).29 “A device is exposed” (according to Shklovsky and to Russian formalists), but Ginzburg’s case makes a big distinction: “the exposing of a device” does not impede the narration, does not “estrang[e] things” to experience their making once more, or even to recreate them. Reflection is destined to bring a new hierarchy of the senses into the life of “blockade person”; it is more than just reflection, it becomes an action, writing.

28 See the first attempt of extended analysis of Ginzburg’s ethics in Van Buskirk 2006.
29 A lot has been excluded from this exposed connection of impulses and actions. For instance, imagination—because it is necessary to imagine death (death is a thing beyond the reach of experience) before beginning to be afraid of it: “in order to conceive of an instant transition from a room and a person to a chaos of brick, metal and flesh, and above all, non-existence—this is a work of imagination beyond the capacity of many” (Ginzburg 1995: 31). At this point the social mechanism is forcing out a biological, emotional fear of death: “Not to think about mortal danger, when actually heading for it, is sometimes easier than to go to work without thinking about the official reprimand you have received” (ibid.: 32).
Here a question arises: what was the level of the analysis in the first drafts of “Notes of a Blockade Person”? There are three dates under the first part of “Notes of a Blockade Person”: “1942–1962–1983.” The last of them is intelligible: as she was permitted to publish the text (the first part of “Notes of a Blockade Person” was published in the literary magazine Neva in 1984), Ginzburg prepared it for publication (and also for an encounter with Soviet censorship). The second part of “Notes” opens with an introduction that refers to the publication of the first part. “Addenda to Notes of a Blockade Person” followed the “Notes” and eventually the original text was supplemented three times. The chronology of the three parts of Ginzburg’s “blockade prose” and the history of their creation is a work for the textual critics and the historians of literature, but I will pay attention only to one very important circumstance for our discussion.

It seems that the description in Ginzburg’s “blockade prose” did not precede the analysis, but rather that the two processes were simultaneous. There are a lot of reasons to claim this. Firstly, the very principle of Ginzburg’s notes and essays from the 1930s to the 1980s was, as she put it, “the observing mind.” Secondly, the fact that all the “blockade conversations,” constituting the second part of “Notes of a Blockade Person” (published later), were obviously written down forthwith. Thirdly, let us not forget that “Notes of a Blockade Person” and “The Story of Pity and Cruelty” were written simultaneously and the latter is the best example of the description of the terrible blockade family drama and at the same time a superfine analysis of this drama. So I think there is no reason to claim that Lydia Ginzburg was describing “blockade experience” in 1942 and only decades later analyzed it. Thus Lydia Ginzburg’s accomplishment consists not merely in her “description” but also in her analysis, reflection. Many “blockade diaries” have survived, but the immediate analysis of human behavior in a “limit situation” of the blockade is unique.

30 About this, see Van Buskirk 2006, also Van Buskirk and Zorin 2011, esp. 545–56.
31 It is not inconceivable that behind the date “1962” stands the possibility of publishing, which appeared in this year and forced Ginzburg to return to her blockade notes. About the history of this text see: Van Buskirk and Zorin 2011: 545–56.
An analysis, a reflection (as well as a description of the things happening) in the conditions of the “blockade regimen” is an achievement that is hard to put into the iron system of routine actions conditioned by suffering. This “achievement” is also conditioned—but in another way and by other reasons. That is why it creates the new hierarchy of a blockade day, confirms the existence of common linkage, restores the connection with transpersonal values and, thereby, gives “blockade person” a freedom: “Those who write, whether they will it or no, enter into a dialogue with what is outside the self. Because those who have written die, but what they have written remains behind, without asking their permission. [...] Those who have written die, whereas what has been written remains. To write about a circle is to break the circle. A deed whichever way you look at it. In the abyss of lost time, something found” (Ginzburg 1995: 76–77). The first part of “Notes of a Blockade Person” begins with Tolstoy but ends with Proust. “Blockade person” did the thing that was demanded by the “common cause of war” from him—he survived by creating the rituals of everyday life, by automatically performing these rituals, by forcing out physical suffering, by forcing out the chaos of the biological level, by suppressing death. He had created a “regimen” with its rigorous discipline, its cause-and-effect conditioning, its teleology and continually recom- mencing efforts of will: thus he created a circle. And then—disappointed by the mere fact of “surviving”—he broke the circle with new efforts of will and mind. “Blockade person” has analyzed his tragic experience. He has achieved victory.

32 “The circle has to close [...] The flow of existence is determined by weariness, the exhaustion of the ritual gestures of the day. [...] The circle drearily seeks its non-existent end” (Ginzburg 1995: 109).
Reflection as an Ethical Value (Lydia Ginzburg’s “The Thought that Drew a Circle”)

Notwithstanding the huge number of published memoirs and documents, it is still difficult to reconstruct the circumstances under which writers and intellectuals who lived in the USSR in the 1930s and did not wholly share the prevailing ideology tried, nonetheless, to take part in cultural and creative life of the period. Far from being orthodox Marxists or adherents of Socialist Realism, they were still involved in ideological, institutional and social activities within the framework of the Soviet system. Some of them saw their contacts with the totalitarian state as an existential intellectual experience. Such was the case of Lydia Ginzburg, for whom the attempts to become a part of Soviet literary scene at the beginning of 1930s were at the same time a search for new ethical and aesthetic values that would make possible the literary representation of life in the Soviet Union.

In the article that follows I will try to reconstruct the episodes of her investigation during which she elaborated her specific system of realist aesthetics that could serve as an alternative to Socialist Realism even while she developed it in essays and fragmentary prose, and not in the genre of the novel. Such a reconstruction will enable us to describe Ginzburg’s reading of La Rochefoucauld and Proust as a search a literary form most appropriate for this sort of new realist aesthetics.
Rejection of Marxism and an Unsuccessful Literary Debut

In her essay “The Stages of Love” (1934), Lydia Ginzburg wrote:

Вопрос о том, можно ли марксизмом или от марксизма идя доходить до небольших по объему конкретностей. От рассмотрения огромных массовых движений до все умывающихся групповых формаций; и вплоть до отдельного человека. Чистый историк, особенно историк-экономист, может до времени обходиться большими числами. А мне сейчас нужен подход, который годился бы для понимания исторического процесса и для понимания судьбы отдельного человека, как человека социального. (Ginzburg 2002b)

The question is whether one can use Marxism, or start from Marxism and eventually reach the level of small, concrete phenomena. From an examination of enormous mass movements to ever-smaller group formations; and all the way up to a single person. A pure historian, especially an economic historian can from time to time make do with large numbers. But now I need an approach that would be suited for understanding the historical process and for understanding the fate of a single person as a social one.

In her reflection, Ginzburg poses the question of whether the Marxist method was suitable for understanding the experience of the Soviet person, whether the social existence of an individual remained a relevant element when analyzing political, social and economic processes. The excerpt is taken from a text written in conjunction with longer narratives on which Ginzburg worked in the middle of the 1930s.1 In the 1980s, the author edited and published three large narratives from the texts created in these years (“The Return Home,” “The Thought that Drew a Circle,” and “Delusion of the Will”; see Ginzburg 2002). Today we know that in addition to these, there exist a number of notes and short texts written in the 1930s and later, which were left unpublished in Ginzburg’s lifetime. In my essay I use some of these materials because they can help us achieve a greater understanding of her work.

1 On the relationship between “The Stages of Love” and the narratives that would have been grouped into Home and Peace, see Van Buskirk 2007.
The hero of Ginzburg’s essays and narratives is a representative of intelligentsia who hoped to reconcile a general sympathy towards revolutionary ideas with aesthetic tastes that had formed in the epoch of Symbolism and Futurism. Much later, in the 1979 essay “Generation at a Turning Point,” she wrote about the conflict between leftist ideology and the modernist/avant-garde tradition (Ginzburg 2002: 276–84; see this volume, p. 000). The Marxist method could hardly have been helpful for an intellectual with this kind of twofold background, who was looking for new existential and moral values. It is not surprising that in her essay “The Stages of Love,” Ginzburg expresses doubt about the use of Marxism in her literary experiments. She could not find her place in the ideological context of the 1930s. At this point she had to keep her essay writing separate from her official literary career, in which she was merely a hack writer or a historian of literature. During the first and second five years plans (piatiletki), Ginzburg lived three parallel lives. In the early 1930s she wrote and published an adventure novel for children, *The Pinkerton Agency* (Ginzburg 1932). In the mid-1930s, as a philologist, she continued to study the connections between social biographies and stylistic peculiarities in the works of Alexander Pushkin, Pyotr Viazemsky and Vladimir Benediktov, deepening her interest in late Romanticism, which started with her early research on these authors in the 1920s (Ginzburg 1926; idem 1927; idem 1929). At the same time Ginzburg wrote the above-mentioned essays and narratives without any hope of publishing them in the near term.

The beginning of the Ginzburg’s literary career coincided with the marginalization of her literary position because of ideological pressures. She was far from ignoring the current political and social situation, and moreover she planned to write about it. At the same time, beginning in the second half of the 1920s, her favorite authors without a doubt became Marcel Proust, Lev Tolstoy and Pyotr Viazemsky. Working as an independent writer on the fringes of Soviet literature, Ginzburg found it necessary to define clearly her professional situation. In 1932, after her unsuccessful debut with “The Pinkerton Agency,” she wrote:
Становится все яснее: писать для печати нельзя—можно только халтурить. Несомненны только две вещи: бескорыстное творчество и халтура. [...] Наша сложная постройка из видов промежуточных между творчеством и халтуру—не оказалась ли она порочной? [...] 

Выбор темы в наши дни одна из труднейших проблем литературного дела. [...] Определенные идеологические комплексы стали уже жанровым качеством печатной литературы нашего времени. [...] Идеология должна сразу быть в теме, двигаться с темой вместе; идеология должна обладать сюжетообразующей силой. [...] Выбирая [...] тему, помните, что вещь должна быть честной,—честной, как преподавание русского языка в вечерней школе для взрослых. Выбирайте тему, достаточно близкую для того, чтобы можно было писать, и достаточно далекую для того, чтобы можно было печатать.

Пожалуй, я буду присматривать тему—чтобы без лжи, без халтуры, без скучки. Но никогда я не соблазнюсь жанром авантюристов—годными для печати травести главного внутреннего опыта. (Ginzburg 2002: 112; see also ibid.: 115)

Ginzburg wants to divide her literary work into two spheres: the first one is hack writing, while the second is a serious literary project involving the description of new Soviet forms of social life. This program, an alternative to Socialist Realism, was realized in the essays written in the 1930s and published in the 1980s. Ginzburg first declared her ideological position in the conclusion of the essay “The Return Home,” which may be perceived as a manifesto concerning the necessity of working together with members of Soviet society and of participating in its life (Savitskii 2009). Two other
Reflection as an Ethical Value

narratives “The Thought that Drew a Circle” and “Delusion of the Will” represent the formation of an author who would be able to make historical observations and analyses of Soviet life. The new author needed a new consciousness to perceive socialist reality authentically. In search for this new observation system Ginzburg had to reevaluate under these new conditions the tradition in whose context she had started her literary career. After the numerous publications in the 1930s of diaries, memoirs and notebooks of the Symbolists, she continued her polemic with the Formalists, begun in the late 1920s (Savitskii 2006). Now, against a background of the intense development of the new Soviet culture, Symbolism and Futurism seemed to her a unified cultural project that had finally come to an end.

Can Symbolism and Futurism Represent Soviet Reality?

“The Thought that Drew a Circle” starts with the death of Mikhail Kuzmin, one of the most prominent representatives of prerevolutionary culture, which Ginzburg now considered an object of critique. She writes: “His past, which had died so many times, died yet again,” this time “nonsensically and bitterly” (нелепо и гор’ко) (Ginzburg 2002: 543). In the 1910s and early 1920s she had been formed as a writer under the influence of Symbolism, Acmeism and Futurism (Savitskii 2007a). In the second half of the 1930s, this literary background, in her view, did not correspond to the contemporary situation:

До нас она дошла под видом формализма,—эта культура, в которой слова отражают слова, а ценности произвольны. [...] Ахматова, Шкловский и др. оставили нам проклятое наследство—самовитое слово, которым невозможно ныне писать ничего, кроме исторических романов. (Ginzburg 2002a: 118)

(It reached us in the shape of formalism—this culture in which word reflects word, and values are arbitrary. [...] Akhmatova, Shklovsky and others left us with a cursed heritage—the self-same word, with which it is impossible to write anything now other than historical novels.)
Since the mid-1920s, “historical novels” had been written by Yury Tynianov. Ginzburg stressed her critical attitude towards them a few times: after the publication of *The Death of Vazir-Mukhtar*, then later, upon taking part in a discussion of *Lieutenant Kизhe* at the State Institute of the History of Arts, and afterwards when *The Wax Effigy* was printed (*Ginzburg 1992: 165*). Ginzburg thought that in the 1930s, to use the pure aesthetic language of *samovitoe slovo* (the self-same word) meant to ignore social reality. She was looking for a literary form that would embody a shift from the prerevolutionary modernist literature to the descriptions of new Soviet forms of social life. For example, she was interested in the experience of Knut Hamsun, who in his novel *August* (1930) attempted to reject symbolist poetics and to create a social novel about the problems of everyday life. In her review of *August*, Ginzburg considered this a skillfully written text, but ultimately an unsuccessful and even naïve work (*metodologicheskuiu udachu i v to zhe vremia proval*) (*Ginzburg 1933*).

She was emphatic that it was nearly impossible to perceive life in the 1930s in the context of symbolist aesthetics, in part because the Symbolists, in her view, did not want to take part in history or politics, to say nothing of the divergence between of the prerevolutionary spiritual or experimental attitude towards literature and the Soviet poetics of social or ideological literary representation. She united Symbolism and Futurism, in the cultural and ideological sphere (*kul’turo-mirovoozzrencheskiiu sferu*), and defined them as “Russian modernism” (*russkii modernizm*). This tradition “always contained in it social irresponsibility and an understanding of art as a separate part of life, where social relevance was possible for those who could not, and moreover did not want to find it in other spheres” (*Ginzburg 2002a: 121*; see also idem 1992: 176). She also suggested that against a background of the intense development of a socialist society, not only “Russian modernism” but also Christian ethics, and the ethical concepts of Immanuel Kant and Georg Hegel were no longer relevant:

Мы же дети времени, склонного отрицать не только абсолюты классического идеализма, не только бессмертную душу положительных религий, но и самодовлеющую душу индивидуалистов, незаконно обойденную бессмертием. (*Ginzburg 2002: 562*)
After all, we are children of the time that is inclined to refute not only the absolutes of classical idealism, not only the immortal soul of positive religions, but even the self-sufficient soul of the individualists, which illegally avoided immortality.

Existential and historical experience, together with atheism, turned these ethical ideologies into speculative systems isolated from Soviet life. Ginzburg in 1934 firmly and conclusively rejected Symbolism and individualism because, in her view, both had lost contact with social reality. She planned to start a new literary project:

New social forces have risen up. A principally new ideological sphere has formed, which is defined rather imprecisely as Marxism. And none of this has been expressed at all in art. Russian modernism insistently continues. [...] Modernism must come to an end. [...] All of this [the social irresponsibility of the intelligentsia] came to an end with the world war. Human consciousness was reborn. Some went into politics, others acquired a passive, but avid curiosity about what politics was doing to them. Why the hell do we need modernism now, in a world that is choosing between communism and reactionism!
Contemporary literature can have only one task—to express human fate as socially conditioned. And to express this to an unprecedented degree of understanding. Modernism—with all of its parts/divisions—has no place here. The naturalistic-psychological novel is important. But here one has to overcome the coarse fiction of the objectivity of what is being depicted, which is characteristic of naturalism. Objectivity of the sensations, the thought process of people who sit down in a chair and then get up [...] Proust is important to this literature that is sought—only in external signals is he close to aesthetic modernism. In fact he has deep connections to rationalism of the seventeenth–eighteenth centuries. He is personally interested in Saint-Simon and in Madame de Sévigné.

When she elaborates her project of a literary description of the new Soviet social reality, Ginzburg argues that the life of the 1930s could not be understood merely as a system of total ideological pressure. In her view, the social experience of people who witnessed the formation of a new society represented life in the USSR more authentically than the official ideology. The new realistic literature had to represent the individual’s existential experience in a collectivist society, the relationship between the private person and the social milieu, where people had to renounce their prerevolutionary habits and follow new rules of communal living. Realism here was a further development of the experimental, psychological, and realistic writing of Marcel Proust in his novel À la recherche du temps perdu (Carden 1985). Yet the Proustian autobiographism and his idea of reconstructing the author’s identity through remembrance remained irrelevant for Ginzburg’s description of collectivist society (Savitskii 2006; Savitskii 2008). In her critique of Symbolism and Futurism, and in her search for a new realistic method, she turned to Marcel Proust’s analysis of the crucial problems of social and psychological behavior:

в книге о жизни должен быть принцип связи, в котором реализуется эмоциональность движущейся судьбы и обобщенность последнего творческого понимания. [...] Материя этой интеллектуальной переработки жизни—эмоциональная. Но это эмоциональность тем, составивших первооснову прустовского мира,—время и смерть, память, любовь и ревность, творчество, неутолимая жажда и вечно возвращающееся желание. Экзистенциальные темы у Пруста не замкнуты. Они выходят в монументальный ряд предметов его анализа—характеров, отношений, социальных ситуаций. (Ginzburg 2002: 141)
In a book about life there must be a principle of connection, in which the emotionality of advancing fate and the generalizing nature of the final creative understanding are realized. [...] The material of this intellectual processing of life is emotional. But this is the emotionality of themes which comprise the fundamental basis of the Proustian world,—time and death, memory, love and jealousy, creativity, unquenchable thirst and eternally returning desire. Proust’s existential themes are not closed. They initiate the monumental series of objects of his analysis—characters, relationships, social situations.

A Study of Death in Search for New Values

Ginzburg posed the “ultimate questions” of ethical and existential philosophy, the problem of the existential limits of the human being. In so doing she hoped to reveal the ethical values of people living in the USSR. She wished to study what death meant for inhabitants of the young Soviet republic. On the one hand, such a theme could have been expected in the throes of the Red Terror and of the intense transformations of society. On the other hand, such an ultimate problem in the philosophy of ethics allowed Ginzburg to see Soviet existential values in relation to what her favorite writers Montaigne, Pascal, La Rochefoucauld, Saint-Simon and Proust thought about the finitude of human existence.

The death of Mikhail Kuzmin, with which the narrative “The Thought that Drew a Circle” begins, was not only a symbol of the end of the old Russia but also “with one of the strong points [odnim iz opornyh punktov] in a series of impressions which, ever growing, led directly to [...] the theme of the understanding of death—as necessary for the understanding, and maybe for the justification, of life” (Ginzburg 2002: 543). Ginzburg aimed to find new values which could help atheists overcome the fear of death. What did she and the Soviet people believe in now after the end of “Russian modernism”? Those Soviet people she knew were hardly orthodox believers or symbolist mystics. Surely, they also were not fanatical communists. In this case, what were the values of these people living in the new society?
The reflection on death opens with an analysis of the death of Ginzburg’s friend, Natalia Rykova (in the text as “N.V.” for Natalia Viktorovna), who was the first wife of Grigorii Gukovskii. After Rykova’s burial, the narrator is struck by the absurdity of the theatricalized funeral ritual, as well as by the incongruence between the materiality of dead body and its lifelessness. She is atheist, and hence neither the motionless cold body of the dead nor the official words and actions before the coffin give her any sense of the meaning of death. The next step in this research is a “field study” similar to work of social anthropologist. The author started talking with friends about death, urging them to speak about their attitudes. She also questioned people she encountered in public places, be it simply in a shop, or at the hairdresser’s, where she discusses an absurd note in a newspaper about a certain Professor London who promised to make human life twice as long. Most people avoided discussing fear of death seriously. Soon the narrator reaches the conclusion that emotional people are afraid of physical destruction, while intellectuals are afraid of the state of unconsciousness. In her opinion, the only way to overcome the fear of death, for an atheist in such a situation, was to possess the will to social self-realization or “vital force” (zhiznennyi napor) (Ginzburg 2002: 554).

Immortality as Collective Historical Memory

In the mid-1930s, the Soviet state was in the process of creating a new cultural pantheon. Some Russian intellectuals and especially writers (Pushkin, Lomonosov, Lermontov) now were represented by state propaganda as great national heroes. Exactly in this period the Leningrad cemetery at Alexander Nevsky’s monastery was reconstructed as a “necropolis.” After the restoration, there remained in it only the tombs of famous Russian writers, musicians, artists, politicians and philosophers. Observing this transformation of the cemetery, Ginzburg analyzes the new Soviet attitude toward the rituals surrounding death and burial. She finds that Soviet
culture has abolished neither traditional superstitions, nor fear of death. At the atheistic cemetery located near the cathedral one could see, instead of Christian crosses and monuments, obelisks with stars. Yet even these atheistic tombs were decorated with portraits of the deceased, icons and banal epitaphs, which had been used traditionally in prerevolutionary Russia. Whatever paradoxes of the Soviet reality are here discovered by the narrator, exactly one of the epitaphs was perceived by her as a perfect formulation of the method for overcoming the fear of death. It is a text written on the tomb of the famous linguist Nikolai Marr, buried in the Nikol’skoe cemetery in 1934:

На черном мраморе высечены слова: «Человек, умирая индивидуально, соматической смертью, не умирает общественно. Переливаясь своим поведением, делами и творчеством в живое окружение общества, он продолжает жить в тех, кто остается в живых, если жил при жизни и не был мертв. И коллектив живой воскрешает мертвых.» (*Ginzburg 2002: 560*)

The words are carved in the black marble: “A man who dies individually of a somatic death does not die socially. Overflowing into the living social environment with his behavior, with deeds and creativity, he continues to live in those who remain living, as long as he lived, and was not dead, during his lifetime. And the living collective resurrects the dead.”

To Ginzburg, “social immortality” did not seem to be a positivist idea but rather an authentic “inexplicable and indispensable precondition of social life [...] Our consciousness contains the history and culture of generations that have disappeared, and on the strength of insuperable analogies we think of ourselves in other peoples’ consciousnesses, in the infinite chain of people, things and actions, in objective reality, which returns to us our own image” (ibid.).

On the one hand, cultural memory, the existence in space of historical and existential experience, reconciled the Soviet world with the intellectual experience of previous epochs. Accordingly, Soviet ideological space is placed into a broad cultural context. On the other hand, the resurrection of a writer or scholar with the help of collective knowledge was a form of participation in social life, “*truda so vsemi sobshcha/ I zaodno*
s pravoporiadkom” (“working together one and all/ at one with the legal order,” the quotation from Boris Pasternak’s poem “More than a Century Ago—not Yesterday” (Stolet’e s lishnim—ne vchera), the necessity of which was declared in the end of the essay “The Return Home”:

The essence of life [...] is in being able to lift the greatest weight that is within your powers. It is the fundamental problem of organizing work. For the creators, the world was never valuable only in itself. But they remained in the world, it was for them a sensory joy, an experience, respite.

Ginzburg’s hero demonstrates an optimistic attitude towards social life and creative experience in the communal Soviet society. Her apology for labor is quite typical for this ideological context. Unlike the socialists of the nineteenth century or Lev Tolstoy, who as nobles or members of the bourgeoisie had been isolated from the peasants’ or workers’ world, the intelligentsia of the 1930s lived immediately together with them in communal apartments. At the end of the decade, Ginzburg analyzes in her notebooks the socialist views of Dostoevsky, Herzen and Belinsky relative to their social status and activities. She quotes the excerpt from Dostoevsky’s “Notes from the House of the Dead” where the author reflects on the social abyss between the nobles and “the people”:

<Они <благородные> разделены с простонародьем глубочайшею бездной, и это замечается вполне только тогда, когда благородный вдруг сам, силою внешних обстоятельств, действительно, на деле лишится прежних прав своих и обратится в простонародье [...]”2.

Герцен в детстве был хоть и полу-, но все же барчонком, следовательно, с дворовыми общался в качестве «благодетеля.” [...] Но юный Белинский, нищий, больной, выброшенный из университета на улицу, ни для кого не был барином, несмотря на свое формальное дворянство. [...] для молодого

2 See Dostoevsky 1972.
“They [the nobles] are divided from the simple folk by a very deep abyss, and this can becomes apparent completely only when the noble person suddenly, by the strength of external circumstances, is himself truly and in actual fact deprived of his prior rights and is transformed into simple folk [...]”

Herzen in his childhood was even if only halfway, all the same a lordling, and consequently, he related to the house-serfs in the capacity of a “benefactor.” [...] But the young Belinsky, poverty-stricken, sick, thrown out of the university and onto the street, was not a lord for anyone, despite his formally noble status. [...] for the young Belinsky—not for nothing enchanted by the Premukhin idyll—culture, including everyday culture, was still a noble affair. Henceforward he knew how to conquer in himself this complex,—not only with reason, but also with democratic intuition.

In the 1930s, Ginzburg associated her involvement in the communal Soviet milieu with the social experience of Dostoevsky and Belinsky, as they had been closer to the people’s life than Herzen or Tolstoy had been. She could not consider culture as a hermetic space for the happy few, for to her it was an experience open to representatives of all social strata. This point of view was characteristic of a writer who sought a transition from the modernist literary tradition to the description of new Soviet forms of social life. She shared Marr’s belief in “social immortality” and declared that she needed activities that would help her exist “in an infinite chain of people, things and actions,” comprised of a unity of historical, social and existential experiences. To Ginzburg, biography was always engaged in a historical situation. And literature was to reveal this unity. She thought that each person should live “as if his actions were destined for an infinite historical series” (ibid.: 610).
The Soviet Man in the Context of La Rochefoucauld’s Social Psychology

After analyzing impressions of her friend’s death and Soviet funereal rituals the narrator of “The Thought Drew a Circle” turns to the mechanism of “creative understanding.” In order to live and to work in Soviet society independently from its ideological and political restrictions, it was necessary to take the position of an estranged or distanced observer of social and psychological life (see Van Buskirk 2006). First Ginzburg in her narrative defines clearly her object of observation. Although in the late 1920s she read with admiration “The Aesthetic Fragments” by Gustav Špet and Mikhail Bakhtin’s (Valentin Voloshinov’s) social philosophy of language where the analysis of social reality was linked to the practices of distanced observation, now Ginzburg turned to La Rochefoucauld. Following Proust and Tolstoy in their interest in the moralist philosophy of the seventeenth century, she found La Rochefoucauld’s understanding of human psychology very helpful for her description of the Soviet individual. According to Ginzburg, La Rochefoucauld had discovered that the question of fear or courage in the face of death depended on the fluid psychological moods. His observation had been based on the representation of the soul as a multileveled system consisting of uncontrolled unconscious sensations that are externally manifest. Ginzburg believed that the French philosopher had described, “three hundred years before psychoanalysis, before the theory of the subconscious and unconscious, the mechanism of distraction and repression (отвлечение и вытеснение)” (Ginzburg 2002: 563). She used this old-fashioned psychological theory as a productive model, and an alternative to contemporary ones. And she applied the method of observing the interaction of different levels of psychological life to the Soviet individual:

Психическое устройство многоэтажно. Внизу шевелится хаос. В верхнем этаже нередко самозащитная надстройка сознательной лжи и подтасовки для публики. А в промежутке—смена прояснений и затемнений для себя самого. (late 1930s; Ginzburg 2002: 132)
The psychological mechanism has many levels. At the bottom, chaos stirs. On the top level, there is commonly a self-defense structure of conscious lies and fact-rigging for the public. And in the middle is a shift between clarification and obfuscation for one’s own self.

An analogous dissimilarity of psychic life is described by Proust in *Le Temps retrouvé*. Ginzburg’s fifth notebook (1929–31) opens with a quotation from the final part of his novel where the author depicts the social and psychic structure of human being:

Il y avait en moi un personnage qui savait, plus ou moins bien regarder, mais c’était un personnage intermittent, ne reprenant vie que quand se manifestait quelque essence générale, commune à plusieurs choses, qui faisaient sa nourriture et sa joie. Alors le personnage regardait et écoutait, mais à une certaine profondeur seulement, de sorte que l’observation n’en profitait pas. Comme un géomètre, qui dépeignant les choses de leur qualité sensible ne voit que leur substratum linéaire, ce que racontait les gens m’échappait, car ce que m’intéressait, c’était non ce qu’ils voulaient dire, mais la manière dont ils le disaient, en tant qu’elle était révélatrice de leur caractères ou de leur ridicules ; ou plutôt c’était un objet qui avait toujours été plus particulièrement le but de ma recherche parce qu’il me donnait un plaisir spécifique, le point qui était commun à un être et à un autre [... ] ce qu’il [l’esprit] poursuivait [...] était situé à mi-profondeur, au-delà de l’apparence elle-même, dans une zone un peu plus en retrait. (*Proust 1986: 83; Ginzburg 1929–31*)

In her narratives and essays, Ginzburg describes how the social roles of a Soviet person could coincide with his or her genuine intentions or could be in conflict with them. She also depicts how people evaluate the correspondence between their wishes and the social masks they wore. She was interested in the analysis of ambitions, in the study of how ambitions are represented and evaluated by individuals, and the conditions under which they could be realized (*Zorin 2006*). She insisted that the reality of the 1930s should not be reduced to ideology or to collective mythologies. To her, the mechanisms of this social psychology could not be seen with the help of Marxism, nor Špet’s or Bakhtin’s phenomenology. In her experience, it was La Rochefoucauld’s maxims and aphorisms that aided one in witnessing and understanding what happened in the USSR. Moreover, Ginzburg thought that his philosophical prose could also help one
to analyze historical behavior. In her essays she used La Rochefoucauld’s concept of “ressorts” (“vnutrennye pruzhiny”, springs) (Ginzburg 2002: 220, 294, 310), which refers to the social and psychological forces that directed human actions and deeds. Besides the alternative perception of Soviet life, this neorationalist conception of social psychology, despite its anti-historicism, also helped one see the 1930s in the context of cultural history which, according to Marr, guaranteed “social immortality.” Ginzburg believed that historical behavior functioned through socio-psychological ambitions, sometimes unconscious, compared to the inner power of La Rochefoucauld’s springs.

Belief in Reflection: Proust helps Ginzburg Understand Soviet Historical Experience

The narrator of “The Thought that Drew a Circle” understood the mechanism for representing the social theater of the Socialist world during solitary walks in the winter park of Old Peterhof (Staryi Peterhof) (Ginzburg 1929–31). In the former residence of the Romanov dynasty, the Bolsheviks organized a museum and resort. In the off-season, there were very few visitors. The narrator was searching for exactly such a deserted place. She spent time taking walks in the snowy lifeless garden, and once on a promenade she saw in this absurd landscape that the very process of reflection, the work of consciousness, creates cultural and historical reality:

... принцип деятельности (творчества) в том, что я становлюсь вне себя находящимся. [...] мы делаем еще один шаг на пути объективации, колеблющийся шаг в историческое сознание. Творчество переживает творца [...] (Ginzburg 2002: 569).

... the principle of (creative) activity consists in the fact that I become located outside of myself [...] we take one more step on the path of objectivization, a hesitant step towards historical consciousness. Creativity outlives the creator. [...]
Ginzburg stated that literary work consisted of reflection on the understanding of social and psychological life. The distance between the observer and his/her observations ensured a clear view of reality. To her, historical consciousness is inextricably linked to the Proustian understanding of consciousness:

Мне дороги не вещи, а концепции вещей, процессы осознания (вот почему для меня самый важный писатель—Пруст). Все неосознанное для меня бессмысленно. Бессмысленно наслаждаться стихами, не понимая, чем и почему они хороши. [...] Отсюда прямой ход: от вещи к мысли, от мысли к слову [...] (1930; ibid.: 413).

What is dear to me are not things, but concepts of things, processes of cognition (this is why the most important writer for me is Proust). Everything that has not been cognized is meaningless to me. It is meaningless to enjoy poetry without understanding how and why it is good [...] there is a direct path: from a thing to a thought, from a thought to a word [...] 

Ginzburg believed in the intellectual possibilities provided by the reflection. In her essay “The Thought that Drew a Circle,” the conscious description of reality, its reflective filling with meaning were understood as the work of “creative memory”:

Творческая память для Пруста формообразующее начало не только искусства, но и жизни—потока, непрестанно ускользающего в щель между прошлым и настоящим. У Бергсона бессознательная память объемлет всю полноту пережитого и включается в мировую связь. Достаточно было, сохранив гегемонию памяти, лишить ее этой связности, чтобы получилось катастрофическое жизнеощущение Пруста. В отличие от органической памяти интеллектуальная память фрагментарна, и все ею не сбереженное, все невосстановимые куски жизни мучат тогда, как ноет колено целиком ампутированной ноги. В трудной борьбе с забвением творческая память превращает прошедшее в настоящее, переживаемое вечно. (ibid.: 569–70).

The creative memory for Proust is the form-giving beginning not only of art, but also of life—the stream, which is incessantly slipping into the crack between the past and the present. For Bergson, the unconscious memory embraces the whole fullness of experience, and includes it in the universal connection. It was sufficient to preserve this hegemony of memory while depriving it of this connectivity in order
to arrive at the catastrophic sense of life in Proust. In contrast to organic memory, intellectual memory is fragmentary, and everything that is not saved by it, all of the irreplaceable pieces of life torment you, as when the knee of a fully amputated leg aches. In the difficult battle with forgetting, creative memory transforms the past into the present, experienced eternally.

“Creative memory,” or consciousness, for Ginzburg, meant the perception of Soviet reality as social and psychological, set against the background of cultural history, which produced an estranged observation on the experience of a Socialist society. Although Proust’s novel *À la recherche du temps perdu* was written in a literary situation completely different from the Soviet one, it helped Ginzburg to find the analytical method for representing social reality. She was certain that reflection could be freed from ideological pressure and could overcome death through the conscious comprehension of contemporary life as a historical experience:

Творящий работает на внеположную социальную действительность, даже не понимая ее объективности, в силу неутомимой воли к осуществлению своих возможностей в созидании и труде. [...] Для человека этого типа жизнь равна осознанию жизни и все неосознанное, как все забытое, падает в пропасть небытия. Единство сознания—для него это связь материалов творческой памяти в ее непрестанной борьбе со смертью, изнутри норовящей урвать еще и еще кусок действительности. (ibid.: 581)

The one who creates works with externally posited social reality, even if he does not understand its objective quality, on the strength of an unquenchable will to realize his abilities in creativity and work. [...] For a person of this type, life is equal to the becoming conscious of life, and everything that is not made conscious, like everything forgotten, falls into the chasm of nonexistence. Unity of consciousness—for him this is the connection between materials of the creative memory which strives, in its incessant battle with death, to grab hold of more and more pieces of reality.

The essay “The Thought that Described a Circle” is constructed through several repetitions; in the text the theme of death recurs again and again. Death is analyzed gradually, through the personal experiences of the narrator, through cultural representations of author’s friends and contemporaries and finally, through historical generalizations. Such repetitions are not tautological. The analysis returns to the problem of death
on different intellectual levels. The thought that returns to itself or, as the essay’s title says, “The Thought that Drew a Circle,” is the classical philosophical definition of reflection. Reflection in this text plays the role of a method of judgment, creates the literary form, and establishes the ethical value that helps overcome the fear of death.
Laurent Thévenot

At Home and in a Common World, in a Literary and a Scientific Prose: Ginzburg’s “Zapiski blokadnogo cheloveka”

Lydia Ginzburg’s “Notes of a Blockade Person” capture the attention of the sociologist in more ways than one. In this singular work, the author pairs a prose of remarkable literary quality with a scientific project of analysis documenting human behavior. Contrary to expectations evoked by translations of the title that include the term “diary” (or “journal,” in the French translation), the “Notes” (zapiski) do not avail themselves of this genre. Although her experience of the siege supplies her the material that she elaborates in this work, Ginzburg intends to produce neither

1 This work would not have been possible without the collaboration of Olga Koveneva, by reason of her double qualification in translation (Koveneva 2008) and in sociology (Koveneva 2011). This gaze cast on the Zapiski is situated in a collective Franco-Russian research program that sparked reciprocal looks between Russia and France: “Des liens du proche aux lieux du public ; une perspective franco-russe” [“From close attachments to public exposure, a Franco-Russian perspective”] (Thévenot 2005). Expanding on Andrei Zorin’s presentation of his research on Lydia Ginzburg within the NLO “Bath Readings” (Zorin 2005) we proposed the organization of a round table on Yuri Lotman, Lydia Ginzburg and the social sciences. This round table reconvened, around NLO director Irina Prokhorova, Alexander Dmitriev, Boris Dubin, Sergei Kozlov, Ilya Kukulin, Abram Reitblat, Emily Van Buskirk, and Andrei Zorin (NLO Roundtable 2006: 93–121). My gratitude also goes to Joe Bourghol for the translation of this chapter in English, and to the invaluable additional expertise of Emily Van Buskirk on Lydia Ginzburg.

an autobiographical record nor memoirs. As underscored by Emily Van Buskirk, Ginzburg “specifies that to express the ‘law-governed’ (zakonomernoe) and the universal, it was necessary to avoid two things: the typical (ne tipicheskoe) and the personal (ne nepovtorimo lichnoe)” (Van Buskirk 2006: 262). Ginzburg is inspired by a quest for universal, even scientific, knowledge. She treats the extreme trials of communal survival as revelations of fundamental determinants of social conduct. Because of its scientific aim and its subject, one is inclined to approach the material of the Notes (Zapiski) from the viewpoint of interactive sociology, particularly that of Erving Goffman, who coupled a remarkably refined ethnographic description of public behaviors with an intense exploration of literary texts.

Nevertheless, Ginzburg diverges from Goffman on more than one point. First of all, she extends the range of these behaviors to include the most intimate of familiar gestures, covering, thereby, very unequal scales, from country and world seized by historical events of the largest import down to the intimacy of domestic life. Secondly, she displays a constant concern for political and ethical questions. Lastly, she maintains a relationship to literature very different from Goffman’s. When she convenes literary authors such as the Tolstoy of War and Peace or the Remarque of All Quiet on the Western Front, she does not seek an inventory of everyday scenes from which to cull illustrations but rather ways of representing a human community in action. Moreover, unlike sociologists in general, she produces a work of literature, using varied forms and styles to realize a project situated between literature and social science. She renders the most intimate and unavowed emotions: “So painful, so fearful was it to touch one another, that in propinquity, at close quarters, it was hard to distinguish love from hatred—towards those one couldn’t leave” (Ginzburg 1995: 7; Russian original in Ginzburg 2002: 614). She undertakes a quasi-ergonomic account of a technical act: “Sawing was a particularly infallible test of movement. Once he had found a smooth rhythm, without pressing, the teeth no longer jammed and caught individually, but suddenly blended together and it was no longer the man wielding the saw but the saw drawing the effortless hand after it” (Ginzburg 1995: 22; idem 2002: 623). She adopts a most abstract sociological idiom: “Moreover, the individual was subsumed into the group, into the typical reactions of the various strata...
of the population” (Ginzburg 1995: 59; idem 2002: 647). She sets in scene and dialogue the theatrical encounters of persons:

— До чего я устала. Прошлую-то ночь не спала совсем. А с шести опять рабочий день. Ой, не могу стоять больше. Пойдем на лестнице посидим. Есть у тебя газета?
— Какая газета?
— Подстилить.
— Чего подстилать, садись.
— Нет, так— как же это садиться?
— Собранье-то у вас провели?
— Нет еще. Эх, я думаю иногда, знаешь: что сейчас надо— трамвай пускать надо. Аварии исправлять надо. А остальное …
— Так ведь ты и трамвай не пустишь, и ничего. Если народ не будет мобилизован, в готовности. Если не поговорить с людьми. (Ginzburg 2002: 642)

“I’m dog tired. I didn’t sleep a wink last night. And up again at six for work. Oh, I can’t stand up any longer. Let’s go on the staircase and have a sit down. Have you got a newspaper?”

“What for?”

“To spread out, sit down.”

“What do you need that for, just sit down.”

“Have you had your meeting yet?”

“Not yet. Oh, sometimes I think, you know: what we should do now— get the trams going. Get them repaired. And let the rest …”

“You can’t get the trams going on your own, and nothing else either. If the people aren’t mobilized and prepared. If you don’t do a little talking with people.” (Ginzburg 1995: 51–52, modified slightly)

I shall propose a view of Ginzburg’s work from the perspective of the sociological approach that we have developed in France, which distinguishes itself from interactionism on more than one count and meets some of Ginzburg’s concerns.

While issuing from a “pragmatic turn” attentive to action, this approach develops a “political and moral sociology” that analyzes the place, within this action, of legitimate public evaluations according to diverse conceptions of the common good and of ways these conceptions are “put to the reality test” (Boltanski and Thévenot 2000, 2006 [1991]). We drew a parallel between political philosophies of the common good and an ordinary
sense of the just and unjust, and built on it a “grammar of orders of worth” which are most legitimate for “aggrandizing” persons and things so that they qualified for public judgments.

In a subsequent development, I proposed replacing the simple opposition between the public and the private with an analysis of different levels of engagement with the world and with others, from the most publicly common to the most personally familiar (Thévenot 1990, 2002, 2006, 2007, 2011). These “engagements” ensure basic capacities that are needed to sustain the confident maintenance of the self, owing to mutually supporting dispositions of human beings and their environment. These dispositions enable a person to cope with trying experiences when confronted with reality.

With this last development, I considered literature not as a repository of scenes of daily life but as a locus where are depicted, with different literary styles, the diverse relationships of the person with her surrounding world, according to different engagements. The modes of rendering an account of the human engagement within an action, and of the way to cope with trying adversity, borrow from writings styles that differ from one regime to the next, ranging from the formality of the public realm and its “political cant” to the sensual expression of intimate feelings and bodily emotions (Thévenot 2006a). In literature are thus deposited representations not of raw behaviors but of stylized forms of relationships to the world that are thereby made communicable by means of this formatting. Literature promotes their learning, offering the reader the recognition of engagements necessary to life with others. The social sciences themselves contribute to the consolidation of these formats since, in contrast to the natural sciences, their apprehension rests on “the arts of doing” (Thévenot 2004). Most often, however, the social sciences remain much more limited than literature in the gamut of relationships to the world to which they give form.

The gaze that I will cast on the “Notes” is oblique in two ways. It is, to begin with, cast by a sociologist onto a literary author, in the interest of comparing the ways each gives form to human engagements. Moreover, it is cast by a French sociologist proceeding by detour through Russia, in the interest of reflecting on the modalities of constructing a community and of living together. The Russian reader, or literary specialist, ought well to excuse the flaws that result from this oblique look. The indulgence will be
encouraged by the inverse move performed by Ginzburg, from literature toward the social sciences. Her deft circulation between the textuality of literature and that of analysis, whether it be sociological, historical, political or philosophical, is exemplary of the Russian literary tradition and of its philology. It is not surprising that this tradition would have favored the blossoming of an author such as Yuri Lotman, theoretician of the correspondence between the “grammar” of culture and literary language. We will therefore encounter him on our way, along with the enterprise of Andrei Zorin pertaining to the “transformation of ideological constructions created by literature into an ideological rhetoric” of the State in Russia of the eighteenth and nineteenth-centuries (Zorin 2001: 27).

The first part of the article is devoted to the relationship between literature and social, political or moral analysis—that matters much to the author of the “Notes,” as well as to other Russian authors in the background—and sheds light on literature’s contribution to a certain mode of community building. In the second part, the common ground between literature and the social sciences is specified under the aegis of the modeling of human behaviors and of their trying moments (perezhivanie), a concern shared by the literary Russian authors considered here and the proponents of a pragmatic sociology. The third part addresses the architecture of living together, from the most common to the intimate, which is addressed in Ginzburg’s writing as well as in the sociology of the plurality of regimes of engagement. The conclusion returns to what concerns the analysis proper of limit situations in which the regimes of confidence, which allow us to rely on what ourselves and others do, come undone.

Literature and Social, Political, and Moral Analysis

The first paragraphs of the Notes introduce already the questions that will occupy us in the three parts of our article, all the while positioning the work under the auspices of Tolstoy. For a Russian, nothing could be more natural. Nevertheless, I will put to profitable use the estrangement of the
sociologist come from elsewhere to ponder the way *War and Peace* is here summoned.\(^3\) It seems to me exemplary of the situation and personal usage of common places—here literary—within a model of the construction of the community wherein they constitute the operators of the creation of commonality. In line with Franco-Russian research, I was brought to situate the role of a grammar of personal affinities to common places within a construction of the common thing, a grammar which is not unique to the Russian space but that finds itself therein particularly developed, refined, and valued. I wanted to break with the current simplicity of the identification of “communitarianism”—most often, in opposition to liberalism—which places no stress but on the homogenization of a collective holism. The insistence on the common is made therefore at the expense of the examination of the construction of commonality, which remains always to be actively recontextualized, and of the bond maintained between the most personal and the most common. It appeared to me that this bond extended through “common places,” an expression to be understood without the pejorative nuance as in clichés, but that the bond occurred through a personal and situated appropriation of these common places. Far from being a simple recognition among persons by reference to something known to all, further still from a citation allowing a recognition within an elite in Pierre Bourdieu’s sense of distinction, it is the personal relation of appropriation between the person and the common place that is in play. The

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3 This operation of deliberate *estrangement* is at the heart of our approach that takes a detour through foreign lands, and issues from a foreign perspective, to discover in return what the country’s native had been blind to, enriching all the more the categories of analysis that allow the comparison (*Thévenot and Lamont 2000*). One can relate this approach to the *ostranenie* advocated by the formalist Viktor Shklovsky (*Shklovsky 1990*) who was Ginzburg’s teacher. On the relations between Ginzburg’s and Shklovsky’s conceptions and uses of *ostranenie*, see: *Kobrin* (in this volume) and *Van Buskirk 2006*. Studying Russian writings from the forties to the seventies—whether censored or not—dedicated to the Great Patriotic War, Ilya Kukulin highlighted the uncovering of “uncontrolled feelings” devoid of simple “causal relationships,” insisting on the different modalities of *estrangement* (including Brecht’s) required for the attainment of a certain distance of observation despite the daily nightmare (*Kukulin 2005*).
relation is not one of fusion, nor of confusion, but of person-to-person affinities with respect to the common place. It meets the test of appropriation, or communication in the larger sense. It is thus that Ginzburg opens her work, not with a quotation from *War and Peace*, but with a description of the personal connection that she actively establishes with the common place—or more precisely with the reservoir of common places—that is this work of art, a connection dominated by her questioning the accuracy of her appropriation: “During the war years, people used to read *War and Peace* avidly, comparing their own behavior with it (not the other way around—no one doubted the adequacy of Tolstoy’s response to life). The reader would say to himself: right, I’ve got the proper feeling about this” (Ginzburg 1995: 3; idem 2002: 611).

This common place extracted from literature is integral to personal existence, the writer offering a model so that everyone might be able to ponder his own behaviors and the trials he encounters. The second paragraph of “Notes” indicates the “modeling” specific to the author of *War and Peace*, who plays the role of analyst. Ginzburg concentrates on the highest level of commonality, not that of kinship or friendship but of the “common cause” (obshchee delo) and the call to do what it is to be done, with the courage (muzhestvo) to “take part in the common deed” (as is said: “nado delo delat’”). She situates relative to the most common the most personal level, that of the person who is seized (zakhvachennyi) by this common cause to the point of achieving it in an unintentional manner (neproizvol’no) even though he attends to his own vital tasks (svoikh sobstvennykh zhiznennykh zadach). Thus Ginzburg writes: “Tolstoy had said the last word as regards courage, as regards the person who takes part in the common cause in the people’s war. He also spoke of how those seized by this common cause continued playing their part involuntarily, while ostensibly busy solving their own vital tasks” (Ginzburg 1995: 3, modified here; idem 2002: 611).

The French translation, sadly a translation from the English rather than the original Russian, transcribes this last expression as “their private problems” (Ginzburg 1998: 11). Inherent in the opposition between private and public, a liberal construction of the community is suggested, which rigorously separates two spaces. The term “private” is a bearer of this liberal
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The Modeling of Human Behaviors in Literature and the Social Sciences: The Side of the Code and the Side of the Trying Engagement

The introductory reference to Tolstoy conjoins writer and analyst. As shown by Andrei Zorin, Ginzburg draws inspiration from this author by recognizing his triumph, “within his practice of writing, of refuting the aesthetic incompatibility of representation and reasoning” (*Ginzburg 1971*: 329, quoted in *Zorin 2005*: 47). But Zorin adds that Ginzburg began her notebook writings and her research about the work of Prince Viazemsky almost simultaneously (in the mid-twenties). She therefore took into account the critique addressed by the latter toward the author of *War and Peace* of his having counted too much on his imagination, the Count drafting a whole other account from his notes, even fragmentary, of witness to mores and the everyday (*byt i nravy*) (*Zorin 2005*: 47). Similarly, Ginzburg does not take recourse in imaginary characters but works the material furnished by her experience and that of her besieged compatriots. Zorin concludes that

4 On the relationship between problems of translation and the semantic spaces of evaluation connoted by corresponding terms, see *Koveneva 2007, 2009a, 2011.*
it was a matter of “writing a new version of *War and Peace* corresponding to the character of scientific thought and the historical experience of the 20th century person” (ibid.: 48).

**Model and Code: From the Analyst’s Approach to the Person Engaged in the Appropriate Action**

The task of the writer coincides with the sociologist’s when the two propound representative models of human behavior. A first genre of modeling categorizes types, roles, rituals or social codes, not to mention social practices understood in the sense of a code to which group membership demands conformity. The semiotic approach of Yuri Lotman, so exemplary of the entanglement between literature and analysis, is based on this notion of a code of conduct. Lotman relates codification to the arts that contribute to it: theater, painting, literature. One recalls how Lotman cites the passage in *War and Peace*, where Count Paul Suchtelen, wounded during the battle of Austerlitz, recites a line from *The Cid* of Corneille, or when Napoleon ordered a painting of this battle for the palace of Tuileries (*Lotman & Ouspenski* 1990: 179). With respect to Gogol’s Khlestakov, Lotman sees in the theater the unfolding, through scene and roles, of a “semiotics of rank” (*chin*) deployed in the Russian society, which has “high semiotic-ity.” From this semiotics results “an estrangement of action in relation to results,” which renders possible the “khlestakovian mystification” (ibid.: 193, 223). Considering the learning of new codes of conduct required of the Russian nobility in the epoch of Peter the Great, Lotman distinguishes the code of solemn or ritual behavior—external to daily practice—which one “learns like a foreign language” by “following rules, a grammar,” from the habitual behavior which, like the “mother tongue,” does not appear in its codification except to the outside observer (ibid.: 247). Let us note that the extreme detachment of the code with regard to any trial or reality test (detachment of “activity relative to results”) is congruent with the fact that Lotman is not interested in the implementation of the code, in its pragmatic realization.
One can situate this model of codification within the Formalist tradition, by relating it to their concern not to remain anchored within the psychology of old literature but to substitute for it an analysis of the artistic activity itself, then applied to the world. The estrangement borrowed from the Formalist method would thus set forth the revelation of the code from the perspective of the stranger. Ginzburg was formed in this Formalist tradition. She sees in the Formalist method the unacknowledged double of the sociological or historical method (Ginzburg 2002: 295 quoted in Zorin 2005: 48). In any case, unlike Lotman, she pays great attention to the reality test. She says to approach the everyday (byt) as “a principle of connectedness that we project onto things and phenomena that make up the inhabited environment” (Ginzburg 2002: 311, cited in Zorin 2005: 48, n. 3). This understanding from the standpoint of inhabited connectedness is very near to our approach of the familiar engagement as the relationship of the person to his close surroundings. Within the notion of a “regime of engagement,” however, that relationship is oriented toward the quest to guarantee a certain good, here that of being “at ease” or comfortable within personalized habitats and practices. Whatever is made of this difference from Lotman, the analysis of Ginzburg and that of a pragmatic sociology of engagement converge in their mutual divergence from the simple model of the code as that to which one must conform.

Test, testing, and perezhivanie

Let us note that numerous sociologists are troubled by the rigidity and conformity associated with the categories of analysis related to the code or to the norm. Two research strategies have responded to this problem. The

5 Zorin defended this thesis during the roundtable mentioned in note 1 (NLO Roundtable 2006: 93–121). At the same occasion, Alexander Dmitriev confirmed that there is no model for implementation of the code in Lotman, in contrast to Ginzburg. He remarked further that Tolstoy manages a level below the code, which is that of flux.

6 On similarities and differences between the uses of “vie quotidienne” [everyday life] and the Formalists’ reference to byt, see Zenkin 2001.
first consists in tinkering (*bricoler*) with the category of code to the end of injecting it with individuality. The result is a mixture lacking analytical coherence and molding a representation of the agent in the image of this patchwork, occupied with the individual "*bricolage*" of the code. This strategy is unsatisfactory because it lacks the conventional character of the code and weakens its exigencies and benefits within the *bricolage*. At the same time, it accounts poorly for the action that underlies the convention, in search for the guarantee brought about by this latter. The second strategy proposes an escape from this crisis, not by disqualifying the collective convention or by injecting in with a dose of individuality but by reconsidering more deeply the relationship of action to convention, that which I have called “the appropriate action” (*l'action qui convient*) (*Thévenot* 1990, 2006). In a first stage, we moved from sociological (or semiotic) codification to the sociology of social codification understood as an activity required by life with others and issuing through investments in forms of generalization, and not only through control and discipline. In a second stage, I considered the appropriate action from the starting point of the notion of engagement and its double side. The one side puts forth the guarantee of a certain good that fuels the engagement and enables its social recognition. The other is that of doubt about the guarantee, the trying doubt notably aroused by the encounter with an unexpected adversity. These trying moments, manifested in the emotions that signal them, are at the center of the method of observation employed by a pragmatic sociology that thus extends its inquiry beneath verbal utterances. This extension is particularly useful when the inquiry leaves the most public of engagements to move toward a regime of close familiarity. Through the act of observation, repeated by virtue of video recordings, the advocate of a pragmatic sociology seizes not only on the repetition of the gesture within the widely privileged notions of rite or routine, but on the gesture’s thrust that strives, sidesteps or misses and, in so doing, reveals the engagement from the starting point of a moved and emotional body. The notion of code cannot grasp such a dynamics of engagement, and neither does it apprehend the

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7 For an expose analyzing this double side of the convention that develops a pragmatism of reflexivity, see: *Thévenot* 2009, 2011.
pursuit of the guarantee of a certain good. One observes anew an interesting convergence, around the testing and the trying, between Ginzburg’s analysis and the one developed within a pragmatic sociology attentive to these regimes of engagement.8

This trying movement marked by emotion may be connected to the notion of “perezhivanie,” which took on particular importance in the Formalists’ treatment of the “materials” of life, and which Ginzburg uses abundantly in her writing. The term widely designates in Russian a trying moment combined with the effort to surmount the adversity, anxiety, and emotion that accompany it. Zorin points out that, according to Ginzburg, the “reproduction of the nuances of the trying experiences of heroes” (vospriyazdenie mel’chaishe niuansirovannykh perezhivanii geroev) characterizes Tolstoy’s method in its remarkable capacity to conjoin “analysis and representation” (analitiku i izobrazhenie). In French and in English, the word “experience” accounts poorly for the conjunction of all these traits, notably of emotion in the anxious movement toward the overcoming of difficulty. The notion of “experience” is very important in the pragmatic philosophy of John Dewey, but it addresses the adaptation to the surrounding world without emphasizing the trying character associated with the evils and goods obtained in overcoming the test of reality. The pragmatism of “perezhivanie” is not that of “ispytanie.” Let us note that Ginzburg utilizes the first notion to cover registers of very unequal scope, from the most intimate everyday to large events. It is through this difference of registers that we will pursue our alignment of her approach with that of a pragmatic sociology attentive to the plurality of engagement regimes, from the confidence in one’s familiar to the guarantee of the most common or most public.

Goffman draws inspiration from two universes regulated by codes, one of rites and one of theatrical staging. He is attentive to the implementation of the code from the standpoint of the faux-pas and the resulting discomfort, although he does not consider the trial of reality in its different modalities. To him, the trial is principally where the individual is threatened to lose face in public.
Ginzburg posits the necessity of varied scales in the apprehension of social life. In a text cited by Zorin, she questions the capacity of Marxism to do so:

Вопрос о том, можно ли марксизмом или от марксизма идя доходить до небольших по объему конкретностей. От рассмотрения огромных массовых движений до все умельчающихся групповых формаций; и вплоть до отдельного человека. Чистый историк, особенно историк-экономист, может до времени обходиться большими числами. А мне сейчас нужен подход, который годился бы для понимания исторического процесса и для понимания судьбы отдельного человека, как человека социального.

The question is whether one can use Marxism, or start from Marxism and eventually reach the level of small, concrete phenomena. From an examination of enormous mass movements to ever-smaller group formations; and all the way up to a particular person. A pure historian, especially an economic historian can from time to time make do with large numbers. But now I need an approach that would be suited for understanding the historical process and for understanding the fate of a single person as a social one. (Ginzburg 2002a: 34)

Let us underscore that at the smallest scale, beneath large mass movements and even small groups, the apprehended person is said to be “particular” (отдельный), but also “social.” In this third part, we will consider this analysis along the lines of the variable geometry of life with others, in light of the architecture of engagements.

The vocabulary of scale or focal distance, as well as the distinction of “macro/micro,” tends to reduce, to a problem of dimensions, what in fact gives rise to a political questioning of the community. How to give an account of an “architecture of community” while being attentive to very unequal levels of constructing commonality down to that of the person who must maintain a kind of community with herself from one moment to another? The notion of engagement is destined to respond to this question in opening itself to a gamut of regimes that are more or less conducive to the commonality. The engagement participates in the guarantee of a
certain good, and the dynamics of the regime uphold the realization of this guarantee, which encounters a trying adversity. Ginzburg makes equal reference to a notion of guarantee, and not solely to scale as evoked in the last citation, when she distinguishes degrees (stupen'). Let us examine these different levels of guarantee in the “Notes.”

Engagement in the Common Cause and the Guarantee of the Common Good: The Dissociation of the Common Cause and of the Intensely Personal

We have already encountered an initial formulation of the difference between “the common cause” and “its own vital tasks,” underscoring that the opposition of the terms public and private was not adjusted to the construction of commonality to which Ginzburg refers. In another passage, Ginzburg deploys this construction from the starting point of the notion of “mutual social guarantee” (vzaimnaia sotsial’naia poruka) in opposing it to a western construction, which, as often, is reduced to a notion of “individualism” clarifying little the exigencies of participation in the community which go with it (Thévenot 2011a). In the work of Erich Maria Remarque whose title, All Quiet on the Western Front, echoes the information bulletin published the day of the death of the hero in battle, Ginzburg sees an individualistic pacifism expressed toward the West by people who “did not want to understand that social life is a mutual social guarantee (without which, it is but domination and violence)” (Ginzburg 1995: 6; modified slightly; idem 2002: 613). She characterizes this guarantee of the common from the starting point of the construction of the “any one of us,” which is expressed also in death: “we knew that on the day when any one of us was killed by a Hitlerite shrapnel, it would be announced somewhere that: ‘Under enemy shelling, Leningrad carried on with its normal working and business life.’ Moreover, everybody here would say: We have surrounded Kharkov, we have taken Orel” (“Мы же знали, что про тот день, когда любого из нас убьет гитлеровским осколком,—где-нибудь будет сказано: «Ленинград под вражескими снарядами жил своей обычной трудовой и деловой жизнью.” Зато каждый здесь говорил: мы окружаем Харьков, мы взяли Орел,” Ginzburg 1995: 7, slightly modified; idem 2002: 613).
Ginzburg observes that, under the conditions of the siege, this composition of the common is undone. The author stages this dissociation of the “historically important” and the “intensely personal” through the personal connection to the public voice. This voice makes itself heard through the loudspeaker, a device particularly important in Soviet life for the public enunciation of the formality of the common: “Later, people began listening to the loudspeaker in a different fashion, more as a routine. That combination of the intensely personal (the loudspeaker prophesying each one’s fate) and the epochally important, withered away. [...] People felt now that their fate depended not on the newsreader’s formulae, but on factors a great deal smaller in scale and closer at hand” (“Потом репродуктор стали слушать иначе. Обыденнее. Выветрилось это сочетание крайне личного (каждому репродуктор вещает судьбу) с исторически событийным и эпохальным. [...] Людям казалось теперь, что судьба их решается не формулами диктора, но фактами гораздо более дробными и близлежащими,” Ginzburg 1995: 6; idem 2002: 613).

Engagement in the Familiar Guaranteeing Personal Comfort

On the most elementary level of the architecture of commonality, the familiar engagement aims at guaranteeing personal ease based on confidence in a personally accommodated environment. Ginzburg shows us how this familiar accommodation is endangered and supplanted. The family and the closest are torn apart, from love to hate. The ease of the familiar engagement is affected by the unbearable.

In following the social guarantee beneath the level of what is most common, all the way to “the first degree of closeness,” that of the family, Ginzburg mercilessly relates the vicissitudes of this primordial guarantee. Thought “to make sacrifice easier,” the familial intimacy of relatives is a source of torments: “In the circumstances of the siege, the first and closest degree of the social guarantee was the family, the cell of blood and existence [byt, domestic life] with its inexorable demand for sacrifice. People say: the ties of love and blood make sacrifice easier. No, it’s much more complicated than that. So painful, so fearful was it to touch one another, that in propinquity, at close quarters, it was hard to distinguish love from
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hatred—towards those one couldn’t leave” (“В обстоятельствах блокады первой, близлежащей ступенью социальной поруки была семья, ячейка крови и быта с ее непреложными требованиями жертвы. Скажут: связи любви и крови облегчают жертву. Нет, это гораздо сложнее. Так болезненны, так страшны были прикосновения людей друг к другу, что в близости, в тесноте уже трудно было отличить любовь от ненависти к тем, от кого нельзя уйти” Ginzburg 1995: 7; idem 2002: 614).

Having chosen to treat the engagement of a material world ahead of considering the mutual extensions with others, I can better contemplate the consequences of the incursion of other people into one’s familiar environment. Thus one understands that the care given to another person demands an attention to the familiar surroundings of this other, and not only to the needs and desires she would express. Familial intimacy requires also this precautionary attention, whose absence produces embarrassment at the very least. Only the mutuality of the loving engagement yields this care without effort. The attack on familiar surroundings by invading others—made at a distance by a sound or a smell—is at the origin of familial evils manifested through the emotion of uneasiness that can rise all the way to disgust. The discomfort felt in intimacy does not always find expression within a critical verbalization and can fester to the point of a violent explosion. Without speaking of the forced cohabitation of which one often complains by reason of the invasion of the intimate, comparative inquiries devoted to cohabitation have made evident these troubles of intimate engagement and the very lively rises in temper, even the violence that they incite (Breviglieri, Pattaroni and Stavo-Debauge 2004). In his development of a sociology of closeness, Marc Breviglieri has treated this negative emotion by analyzing the category of the “unbearable” (Breviglieri 2009).

The limit situation of the siege prevents mutual extensions of the familiar in a company that forms literally through the sharing of bread (as suggested by the word “company” itself, which, derived from the Latin companio, combines the roots com (with or together) and pan (bread) to yield: he who eats his bread with). To nourish one’s self becomes “an intimate and cruel business” and is accompanied by an “inhuman expression” (“[x said to y: ] ‘Food is a private matter nowadays.’ Meanwhile x’s face wore and odd inhuman expression. Yes, food had become an intimate and
cruel business” [Ginzburg 1995: 65; idem 2002: 651]). In a veiled autobiographical passage, the author bluntly describes a meal of O. with his sister, O. balancing between the brutal reproach of the “sacrifices he had made and continued to make for her sake” and the recognition of a “touch of humanity” (оттенок человечности) (Ginzburg 1995: 68; idem 2002: 653) bestowed by her presence.

Beneath the familiar that is arranged by many, with varying amounts of happiness, the most personally familiar also collapses within the intimacy of the body in the grip of the immediate environment that ceases to be accommodated. In remarkable pages that ought to be cited in their entirety had they not been already known, Ginzburg writes about how the reserve of confidence in habit, which is what remains in the absence of others, slips away. In the limit situation of the starved and broken body, it is no longer possible to construct a familiar trust in built-in habits, in routines and “automatics.” Ginzburg sheds light on the collapse of the familiar that must be erected on the body and its conditioned reflexes: “The automatism of movement, its reflex nature, its age-old correlation with the mental impulse—all that was gone” (Ginzburg 1995: 9; idem, 2002: 615).

**Engagement in a Plan that Guarantees Individual Autonomy**

Between engagements in the common cause that implicate the common good and the engagement within the familiar that maintains the good of a wholly personal comfort, it is worthwhile to distinguish a regime of engagement in a plan that assures the good of individual autonomy. Better suited to communication than the familiar engagement, thanks to the format of a plan or project communicable by ordinary language designating normal actions, this engagement in a plan sustains the individual’s assurance of her capacity to exercise a will. Its weight varies according to the grammars of commonality and the place that each allots to engagements of smaller scale. The bedrock of this regime of the plan is indispensable to the liberal construction of the public that rises from the base of an individual responsibility expressed by a choice, a consent, a preference, an interest. But this regime of the plan does not occupy such a place within the grammar of personal
affinities to common places. In effect, this latter grammar governs a kind of commonality that is more hospitable to the plurality of close familiar attachments, and not to the plurality of autonomous individuals. It allows the plan to be readily disqualified from the standpoint of the comfort of a close familiar, which is put forth as simpler and more human.9

Ginzburg shows us the will coming to the rescue of the failing familiar, in an inversion of their ordinary relations. Rather than the person being able to take a rest from the voluntary engagement in a plan by counting on the ease of his familiar habituation, it is the conscious will that must take back the deficient body to render it a functional instrument: “the mind was hauling the body along with it [...] The conscious will had to hold the body under control, otherwise it would slither away as if it were falling down a cliff. The will had to lift it up and sit it down or lead it from object to object” (Ginzburg 1995: 9; idem 2002: 615).

For all that, this conscious will does not deploy itself within the guarantee of autonomy in the engagement in a plan because the functional disposition of the world, upon which the assurance of the individual to realize his will depends, falters. The journey by tramway is a rare moment in which this assurance is rediscovered without effort of will, thanks to a docile machine that makes it seem that man has conquered hostile chaos (“The tram journey was one of the best, most uplifting moments of the day. This was man outwitting hostile chaos. Amid all the recalcitrant things

9 According to the grammar of personal affinities to common places, the outsider is the least connected of all and lacks this comfort. This lack allows the inversion of the superiority of the plan and of its methodical capacities in relation to the simple familiar, a superiority often attributed to a foreigner more enterprising than one whose will is weak (slabovol’nyi). The inversion is remarkably staged in An Iron Will, where Nikolai Leskov depicts the living hell of the German foreigner no matter how solidly armed with this plan’s regimen and sharp instruments. One of the narrative’s protagonists gives history’s final word: “Well then, they are made of iron, so be it, whereas we are simple dough, dough that is soft, raw, not thoroughly baked,—well, but you would do well to recall that you can’t cut a mass of dough with an axe, and you might even lose the axe there too.” “Ну, железные они, так и железные, а мы тесто простое, мягкое, сырое, непропеченное тесто,—ну, а вы бы вспомнили, что и тесто в массе топором не разрубишь, а, пожалуй, еще и топор там потеряешь” (Leskov 1973: 400).
that go slipping out of our control, all the things that have to be moved and lifted using our own muscles or willpower—all of a sudden one obedient thing, mechanical power at your service” ([Ginzburg 1995: 49; idem 2002: 640]).

The engagement of that which Ginzburg calls an “act” (postupok) requires the “widening of the circle” of “monotonous gestures” to which the will applies itself though “painful effort”: “By the painful effort of a will used to a monotonous series of gestures, somewhere, at some point, he had to widen the circle and insert an action into it” ([Ginzburg 1995: 19–20; slightly modified; idem 2002: 621]). The author illustrates this act by writing which, while lasting for no more than an hour per day, allows the establishment of a hierarchy covering all the other fragments of the day (“Somewhere, let’s say after his domestic chores, there should be an hour or more when he could write (the rotating movement of malnourished life [distroficheskoi zhizni] would not yield more). Then all the other particles of the day would come alive and tend towards that hour of the day, shaping themselves hierarchically around it” ([Ginzburg 1995: 20; idem 2002: 622])). But writing is also what produces the work itself, surpassing the limited regime of the plan to open up oneself to the public.10 In the last page of the work, Ginzburg distinguishes the activity bound within the circle of “reaction” (reaktsia), and the “act” (postupok) (“That’s the way it is with people whose activities are not actions but reactions” ([Ginzburg 1995: 76; idem 2002: 658]) that presupposes the “recognition of common bonds” (“priznanie obshchikh sviazei”). The author reissues on this occasion her charge against a worldly figure pervaded with blind egocentricity, deprived of contact and confined to the absurd (“though egocentrics go on and on and always will (on a world scale) about self-deception, the absurd and the impossibility of contact” [ibid.]).11

10 Work should then be understood with Hannah Arendt’s distinction between work, which contributes to “erect a world” and labor, which is only needed for life ([Arendt 1958: 136]).

11 In this volume, Emily Van Buskirk’s chapter on “Varieties of Failure: Ginzburg’s Character Analyses from the 1930s and 1940s” illuminates Ginzburg’s characterization of courses of self-deception by lack of acts projecting the self in a plan such as
The Expression through Writing of the Differences among Regimes of Engagement

By ending this third part (devoted to the architecture of living together) with the topic of writing, I would like to highlight, in addition to the variety of the literary fabric, which has been illustrated since the introduction, the art with which this diverse fabric maps onto the changes of regimes. The extreme contrast of “changes of register” (perekliuchenia) is underscored by the author: just after having narrowly missed death, people surrender themselves to idle chatter over the latest gossip and the places wherefrom to obtain stockings (chulki) (Ginzburg 1995: 26; idem 2002: 632). In order to appreciate the way in which writing renders the changes of engagement, it suffices to reread the last excerpt cited in the introduction in light of the differentiation of these regimes. Following a misunderstanding directed toward the engagement of the thing that is the newspaper (for the project of reading it, or for getting at ease by sitting more comfortably over it on the ground), the conversation glides over the level of professional planning (meetings) before rising to the highest level of the common cause, via the trams and the civic mobilization required for their return to service. The language of the familiar is substituted by Soviet language (“If the people aren’t mobilized and prepared,” “Если народ не будет мобилизован, в готовности”). But the brutality of the renewed changing of the level of language is diminished by the prefix “po” that suggests more informal conversations (“If you don’t do a little talking with people” (“Если не поговорить с людьми” [Ginzburg 2002: 642]).

writing. Nadryv, “affirmation through denial” according to Ginzburg, offers a possible aestheticizing of this self-deception (p. 000). It might also help a person cope with the incongruity of the generalized public significance and exposure, during the blockade, of highly intimate concerns for food and bodily comforts. One of the sketched characters, G.B., might thus express nadryv in the following way: “life has brought me, an educated woman (a graduate student) to the point of speaking like a whore” (p. 000).

I am indebted to Olga Koveneva for having brought this passage to my attention.

Ginzburg’s supple integration of the different levels of engagement and corresponding languages forms a contrast with other kinds of uses, critical, ironic or tragic, of these differences, in Pasternak, Bulgakov and Platonov (Thévenot, 2006a).
Conclusion: That which is Made Visible by Limit Situations

What do situations as extreme as those chosen by Ginzburg to be the material for her work bring specifically to the project of the analysis of human behaviors? In expressing herself on the topic, the author evokes “limit situations” that would lead to “everything having to change” as stated by the Existentialists (“Есть ситуации—экзистенциалисты называют их пограничными,—когда, казалось бы, все должно измениться” [Ginzburg 2002: 635]). But that serves to underline that “in reality eternal motors continue their great work,” a discovery she attributes to Tolstoy (“На самом деле вечные двигатели продолжают свою великую работу (это открыл Толстой)” [ibid.]). What changes in such situations is the transformation of the hidden or vague into the explicit and manifest (“скрытое становится явным, приблизительное—буквальным, все становится сгущенным, проявленным” [ibid.]). Here, one can find the idea that the trying moment and the effort to exit from it (perezhivanie) are the favorable conditions to bring frameworks of behaviors into light, an idea exploited as much in Ginzburg’s approach as in the pragmatic sociology of engagements.

In conclusion, I would like to return to the contribution of these limit situations to the understanding of what is implied by these engagement regimes and which appears in these situations by default. The engagement aims for the realization of a kind of good (without necessarily always being a common good) that constitutes a source of confidence in what we ourselves do and what others do. The human constructions that shape these

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14 On these issues, see Kirill Kobrin’s contribution to this volume, “To Create a Circle and To Break It. (‘Blockade Person’s’ World Of Rituals).” Although “by nature rituals are social,” as he remarks (p. 000), he uses extensively the notion to designate the “blockade person’s” “private rituals,” as they maintain his biological existence, including personal routines or habitual gestures that I relate to familiar engagement. Among the ten occurrences of the term “ритуал” (ritual) in Zapiski, most designate public collective activities (procedures during air raid sirens, meetings and bureaucratic acts) that are “rituals” in the ethnological sense, while only two refer to personal routine gestures, such as rolling one’s cigarette.
regimes of engagement rest on natural foundations. They lean on dispositions offered by the activity of the human brain, and this on many levels of its biological life, whether it be animated by habit, design, or the threat of others. The situations considered by Ginzburg are often “limit” in the sense that the possibility of building confidence in biological life is lacking. At the same time, the gap between the elaboration of the regime of engagement and biological conduct appears, a gap that questions all radical naturalistic reductionism.

The most intimate confidence in the familiar cannot be built on a close family circle that has ceased to be convenient. Nor on the habituation of the body to the environment when habit can no longer be borne by the failing body and must be supplemented by the conscious will. This conscious will fully occupied in governing small gestures deprived of automatism does not find at hand a world of functionalities on which the agent depends to ensure his individual autonomy. Ultimately the mutual guarantee of the most common is no longer maintained when the vital need prevails, particularly that of feeding one’s self. But the failures also bring to the fore efforts of rebuilding these regimes of confidence that Ginzburg’s pen orchestrates, such as in the civility of the line for food, the energy of conversations, even in the imagined refinements of the kitchen. The effort of enlarging or aggrandizing needed to make commonality is always reinitiated and Ginzburg analyzes it from the starting point of the sublimation, which enables pride, according to La Rochefoucauld. However, the constructions of social esteem through which persons qualify for the common good (public orders of worth) are also threatened by collapse. In place of social recognitions differentiated and related to a common good, all evaluations are then reduced to nature, to nourishment.
PART 2

Narratives and Essays by Lydia Ginzburg
Alyson Tapp

Ginzburg’s “Rational Impressionism”:
A Translator’s Note on “The Return Home”

In 1933, at the home of Anna Akhmatova, Lydia Ginzburg listened to Osip Mandelstam read aloud his newest prose work “Conversation about Dante,” an essay in praise of the language, rhythm and metaphor of Italy’s greatest poet, and simultaneously a commentary on its writer’s own poetic principles. Mandelstam’s reading of *The Divine Comedy* also becomes a great hymn to the poetry of walking: “Both the *Inferno* and, in particular, the *Purgatorio* glorify the human gait, the measure and rhythm of walking, the footstep and its form. The step, linked with breathing and saturated with thought, Dante understood as the beginning of prosody.” Ginzburg’s “The Return Home,” written between 1929 and ‘34 but unpublished until the last decade of her life, offers, in turn, a sustained meditation on the shapes and movements of thought that are inseparable from the experience of physical motion. The sensory experience of the body is revealed, again and again, in the waters of the Black Sea, on the mountain roads of the Caucasus, on the long birch-lined roads of the north, and on the Neva’s embankments, as indissoluble from the intellectual and analytical

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1 For Ginzburg’s account of this evening, see Ginzburg 2002: 119—20.

2 Mandelstam 2003a: 400. Karin Grelz, the Swedish translator of Ginzburg’s “Zapiski blokadnogo cheloveka” finds in that work too an affinity to Mandelstam, both in the form of intertextual allusion and, more broadly, in a notion of cultural memory lodged in the text which imparts to it a vital and organic existence. Grelz 2001: 402—3.

3 When Ginzburg published “Vozvrashchenie domoi” in *Literatura v poiskakh real’nosti*, she appended the date 1929. Emily Van Buskirk’s archival research suggests she wrote parts of it between 1929 and 1934 or possibly even 1936: pieces of the text appear in her 1931—32 and 1934 note books, and one part is the same as something she wrote in a 1936 sketch (although it may have been part of “Vozvrashchenie domoi” first).
movement of thought. The work possesses qualities of an experiment, as well, perhaps, as those of an exercise: the young writer tries out a style and a method. And although Ginzburg’s piece does not announce its meditations on a revered poet in quite the same way as Mandelstam’s, one writer stands out as participating in the special conversation of kinship—in this instance, Marcel Proust.

In a noteworthy statement from the 1920s on the necessity of the phrase, of analytical verbal structures, for the consummation of experience, Ginzburg wrote, “When I see a beautiful landscape without possessing a formula for it, I experience a sense of irrelevance in the scene, in the same way as if I were sitting chewing sunflower seeds on a bench in a dusty park.” (Ginzburg 2002: 74). In the presentation of the landscapes of the Crimea and the Caucasus in the first part of “The Return Home” we see this principle at work. Thus the mountains of the Caucasus are apprehended not for their beauty, but for the intensity with which physiological and intellectual experience collide as the writer grasps their scale and dimensions. The practice is not just Ginzburg’s own or that of her indeterminate authorial-narrative persona; in her discussion of Proust in On Psychological Prose, she attributes the very same practice to the young Marcel. Her analysis there serves well as an appended commentary on this piece of Ginzburg’s own experimental prose:

The flowering hawthorn is undoubtedly beautiful in its pink and white magnificence, but for the young Marcel its beauty is agonizing and empty, since he has not yet discovered its symbolism, its intellectual equivalent. Everything that arises in the course of the narrative, everything that is drawn into it by way of association and analogy, sometimes close at hand and sometimes of the most unexpected and remote variety, is step by step subjected to this Proustian intellectual transformation. (Ginzburg 1991a: 307)

Typically poised between genres and defying simple classification, “The Return Home” might be described most generally in the same terms Ginzburg applied to Proust’s monumental work, as a “lyrical and investigatory monologue.” (Ginzburg 1991a: 306). In one characterization of her own work, made towards the end of her life, Ginzburg claims the same hybridity of lyricism and analysis for herself, and the response she cites to “The
Ginzburg’s “Rational Impressionism”

“Return Home” suggests that she too considered that piece to be specially emblematic of certain strivings and tendencies of her writing:

I have always imagined my prose to myself as a cross between the analytical and the lyrical (rational impressionism, someone who heard “The Return Home” once said). If you get rid of the rational, you end up with drivel. If you get rid of the emotion, you end up with academicism. But how to preserve this divergent unity of opposing principles? (Ginzburg 2002: 317–18)

The lyricism of “The Return Home” comes less from the quality of its descriptions of landscape (which sometimes verge on the dogged), and is felt more in the lyricism of logic, both sensorial and intellectual, which orders its memories and reflections in place of narrative chronology. The plot of the work is indeterminate, but its material is time, which, like the handful of sea-water the protagonist might scoop up, is the most abstract and neutral of substances, able, though, to take on all manner of shades and shapes, as does the great mass of the mass, and able to buoy up the individual—the desiring, feeling, writing, individual—who keeps afloat in it by an act of will. The title, “The Return Home,” does not label the simple narrative event one might expect; both the “returns” and the “homes” of the title are multiple. Instead “The Return Home” draws a number of different temporal figures, which are investigated for their rhythms, shapes and place in the individual’s experience.

There is a return to the landscapes and houses of the south, which begins as if in imitation of Proust’s opening analysis of the transitional states of consciousness between sleep and waking. Familiar from childhood, these places appear suspended between memory and present experience—memory held by the body and elicited, in Proustian fashion, by the particular way the afternoon light falls through the shutters. Then there is the peculiar power of acquired identities to produce their own returns home: when the narrator visits a northern village, the new concreteness of experience meets a memory of itself that had been gained only in the abstract, through the internalization of and identification with cultural mythologies. Thus the “return” to this place wakens a memory drawn not from individual experience, but from the reserve of the collectively held experience of the intelligentsia. And finally, from meditations on the ways
in which a return shapes time by both wakening memory and arousing expectation, there springs, through the logic of association and analogy, an incisive, unspiring analysis of the dynamics of expectation in sustaining erotic attachments.

Each of these subjectively molded versions of time reaches also towards the universal and impersonal, and all are placed inside the powerfully resistant natural shape of calendar time which binds all who live by it with its transitions from night to morning and day to evening. The somewhat formless, heterogeneous text adheres to one kind of order by beginning with morning awakening and ending with evening repose. This frame, however, is drawn not by the hours of a specific day, but by generalized ideas relating to the moods and rhythms of morning and evening and the ways they are felt in the activities of creative work, leisure and love.

Some of the most practical problems of translation inevitably intersect with the most marked features of the text. Given the idiosyncrasy of the temporal orientation of the text, I have followed the fluidity of verb tenses used by Ginzburg, even where logical consistency might suggest doing otherwise. Russian, with its greater resources of impersonal constructions and pronouns is better able to sustain the often ambiguous suspension of the narrator’s account between his direct participation and distanced observation, between personal recollection and hypothetical or general statement—an orientation which may shift in the course of a single paragraph. Take, say, the rower first observed on the distant horizon, then embodied and brought close as the wood of the boat presses into his back, leaving us uncertain as to whether the narrator is feeling, recollecting or imagining these sensations. Similarly, with the use of reflexive verbs and the instrumental case, Russian grammar is more deftly able to promote the inanimate to the subject of the sentence and create effects—slight and bold—of personification. Such is the case, for example, with the descriptions of Leningrad at the end of the piece, which appear as if faintly permeated with the imagined presence of the writer. Moreover, in these final descriptions of the city, we feel in the writer a certain return to self, as the rhythms of body and mind fall into line. Here, where “[t]he asphalt and the long rows of houses help the body find the rhythm of its pace, the rhythm of its breathing, and the rhythm of its swinging arms,” the gap between the
experiencing and writing self has narrowed, and the return to Leningrad proves, perhaps, to be the ultimate return home of the piece.

Translated prose must settle not just into the words, but into the rhythms of its new language’s idiom, syntax and cadences. Ginzburg’s prose possesses some rhythms of its own, which seem sometimes indicative of certain habits and styles of thought. The incisiveness to which the protagonist’s sought-for verbal formula so aspires is occasionally caught in a brisk, near-paradoxical phrase: the birch trees passing the train window “в однообразной пестроте” (“in their variegated monotony”); plants growing “в тесноте и независимости” (“in cramped freedom”). The more common intonational rhythm of the text is heard in those phrases which look to establish generalized laws of behavior, and which frequently possess the ring of a mathematical formula or a law of physics: “Инерция—двигательная сила, противоположная ожиданию, но эквивалентная ему в динамике душевной жизни” (“Inertia is a motive force inverse to expectation, but equivalent to it in the dynamics of psychic life”); “Существует предел, близ которого разрушается эротический эквивалент,—предмет осуществимого желания” (“There exists a limit, close to which the erotic equivalent—the object of realizable desire—is destroyed”). Sometimes, this terse language mingles with markers of informal, conversational speech: “Хорошо было бы тишину приблизить к спокойствию” (“It would be good to bring stillness nearer to tranquillity”).

This style is in part responsible for the particular emotional tenor of the text and its consequent orientation to a reader. The translator’s point of view has been brought to bear most insightfully on this idiosyncrasy of Ginzburg’s prose by Karin Grelz, who gave the Swedish voice to “Notes from the Leningrad Blockade,” and distinguished a mechanism by which that text is itself “besieged,” or characterized by a certain “closedness” (intensified still further in translation where links to the cultural context undergo more severing) (Grelz 2001: 401–5). Indeed, although the sense of the individual who speaks in “The Return Home” is strong and consistent, the narrative voice sounds as if enclosed by a curious silence. The universalizing force and analytical language of its formulations excludes any uncertainty, and this denial of intellectual or cognitive uncertainty becomes the equivalent of silencing the voice of individual vulnerability,
or anaesthetizing the pain of individual hurt. The text contains a strong elegiac current in the meditations on love, memory, mortality and the passage of time, but it is the voices of poets that are left to speak most directly for the elegiac sensibility—in the cited lines of Zhukovsky and Blok, and in the flicker across the text of Akhmatova, “in the movement of a hand picking up gloves.”

There is a temptation for the translator to seek in the text such moments which might become metaphors for her own interaction with it in the activity of translation. “The Return Home,” in particular, seems to readily invite this, for the activity of translation seems to double the original cognitive activity in the text. For one, the process of translating this piece frequently demanded that verbal, intellectual understanding be blended with an apprehension of the physically concrete, requiring that one translate as much from a visually conjured scene as from an understanding of the words. Ginzburg’s summation of Proust’s method yields here another apt comment on “The Return Home”: “The authorial meditations of Proust are a continuous translation of everything that he encounters into the language of the new meanings he has discovered” (*Ginzburg 1991a*: 308). Translation (between languages) is, in a sense, a variation on the activity of “close reading”—where now the closeness involves doubling the text’s original search for the “intellectual equivalent” that brings (“translates”) the objects it approaches into the cognitive experience of the protagonist.

In the end, the organization and meaning of “The Return Home” derive from the integrity of the semi-autobiographical authorial image presented through the protagonist. The constancy of the authorial image makes itself strongly felt in this text in the keenness of attention that we sense must precede the verbal rendering of its landscapes. And in these formulas, we see not just the hillsides, roads and skies they describe, but feel the intensity of the writer’s search for the formula that will fix them at the furthest reaching point of understanding. Here too we feel time—not narrative time—but a peculiar sense of the time of writing pressed onto the text, the urgency and seriousness with which this task of writing needs to fill the present.

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4 The line is faintly reminiscent, especially in this context, of Akhmatova’s “Pesnia poslednei vstrechi” (“Song of the Final Parting,” 1911).
In winter the transition from sleep to waking is completely different from in summer. The process is slowed down, perceptible in its every aspect. It is most perceptible of all at that moment when your legs are already lowered onto the floor—into the cold world of the day—but your back, covered by a blanket, remains in safety, still far behind ... Meanwhile, in summer, the same transition is simple. Naked people emerge, scarcely perceiving it themselves, from under the sheets out onto the verandah; they are thinking, just then, of something else. The best experience of each day, perhaps, the least beset with gloom, is when, for the first time, you step out onto the porch, into the gentle morning chill, into the sunlight that mingles with the leaves’ dappled shade.

It was a small, square garden in the Crimea, where drought had scorched the earth and the plant life. All sorts of weeds grew there—tall and strewn out—and a few unusually small fruit trees with twisted trunks and glossy leaves. Between the trees a green can for washing one’s hands hung from a plank that had been driven into the ground. Next to the garden was an empty, open yard, from which you could see the mountains, a sliver of sea, a sliver of village. The houses here were fairly large, coated with clay or plastered, white, and even white with blue trim. By the house there was a dark yellow haystack and some kind of clay-covered farming shed. The spaces between things were not filled in with greenery, so things appeared not to be standing or growing, but arranged by somebody on the surface ... It was as if an enormous hand might pick up the house or the haystack—like an object—and move it somewhere else. The sense of this all being a model is strange to a person if he meanwhile recalls a wooden village of the north. Buildings might also be divided into the organic and the inorganic. The organic building is a wooden, unplastered dwelling that ages, darkens, shrinks, decays, grows over with moss, oozes resin, is reborn in striking, fragrant yellow-pink and white patches.
The Ukrainian village is picturesque. Picturesqueness is the characteristic of a thing that one may look at without thinking. The northern village is expressive. Here, as in art, the condition of expressivity lies in the unity of material. The izba\(^1\) attests to its own nature as well as to that of its owner—with the slope of its roof, the disintegrating step on its porch, its broken window stuffed up with a yellow pillow, its spiky, uneven bundles of straw in the barn, its infinite details and features of dissimilarity held in accord, a wooden and gray unity.

A wooden structure is organic even in its reaction to light. The corner of a yellow stone house caught in a ray of sunset appears just the same yellow, only lighter and sharper. But the izbas and the pines are set aflame by the sunset—they turn dark pink ... Soon they will fade away.

In the Crimea, physical objects, though, are not so essential; they would be strange to live with, but are interesting to look at.

Of all things here, the principal one, of course, is the sea. Those who walk along the shore love it when the sea is some color other than its own. At the hours of sunrise and sunset it is light blue, pink and green; the surf can be dark yellow and turbid; before a storm it can be grey, smooth and streaked with deep blue and crimson. I prefer the sea in the broad and pallid glitter of the sun as it climbs to reach its highest point, the morning sea-colored sea that you cannot compare to anything or call by another name (in general, making many comparisons is unhelpful) ...

The sea is an enormous mass of water, that same water that you can scoop up in your hand, where it stays, for a few moments, cupped in your palm—colorless and having nothing in common with the sea (whereas snow that I pick up in my hand is the same snow that covers the path in front of me). The greater the neutrality of the material, the more unexpected and broader are its expressive possibilities. Any landscape—depending on the season, time of day, weather, on a host of smaller and more incidental factors—expresses a variety of ideas. Take, say, a house on a hill surrounded by trees. At night it signifies something different from in the midday sun, but the fundamental elements of this spectacle are stable; they do not allow its more peculiar, particular aspects to stray too far from one another.

\(^1\) A traditional Russian log house, found in the countryside.
House, village, haystack, hill—they combine into a landscape. In a river landscape, water is only one of the combined elements, together with the clay banks, water lilies and bushes. But the nocturnal sea and the sea at midday—these are phenomena of a different order, precisely because there is no combination of material elements in the seascape; because what we can scoop up in our hand is just colorless and abstract water. Rather the seascape consists of color, noise, smell, infinity, and motion.

The sea, for us, is almost always just surface. We do not conceive of its bottom, or its depth; in short, we do not conceive of it as a pit filled with water, but just as a surface—and a surface of what, exactly, who knows ...

On some days the water is a light blue-gray, without shadow or sheen, as if it had been slicked over, ironed out, or had a dull film of grease stretched over it. Beneath the film, real, cold water might even be churning away. The sea marks time, one great unified mass, rising up, and right away falling back down again. It is dead swell. So smooth and coalescent—the water seems as if it has perished. When it is like this, the sea reminds one of death, of seasickness, and of salted fish. Rowing is loathsome. A person rows with arms which have become disconnected from his body. Moving the oars becomes more and more tedious, and suddenly you stop understanding the meaning of your disgust—what is it?—the fear of seasickness, or the sickness itself, filling your mouth with saliva and heart with unthinkable languor ...

But the sea-colored sea, its waves short and robust, helps one find the formula for health and the formula for overcoming fear. Health is the courage of an organism that lives even though it knows of the possible and inevitable adversities that will befall it, including its own death.

On the unbroken horizon, there is a shine, still whole, unworked upon by the ripples. It’s as if it flows out from there, gradually breaking up and narrowing into the ripple; a canoe cuts across the waves. An oarsman clings to the horizon, leaving a wake behind him. Rumpled, torn on its shining surface, the water moves forward in a disorderly fashion. It comes at a person with wind, salt, power. Back and heels are pressed into the wood, the stomach is taut; water that’s found its way in sloshes around on the bottom of the kayak. This in no way resembles traveling by steamship, sailboat, or even rowboat. Most likely, it more resembles horseback riding.
The swell churns. Funny to think that it floats—this trifling thing made of three planks, with its weather-beaten sides, its leakiness, the hole ripped in the plywood casing of its bow. You can place the double-ended paddle diagonally across the boat, comfortably lean your elbows on it, rest your leg—bent at the knee—against the side, stretch the other one out along the damp bottom of the boat and, screwing up your eyes, look at the waves, while three terribly battered planks heave, sway and drift and turn onto their side ...

This is health—the unbridled courage of a body that no longer believes in the squall, the depth, in cramp or a betrayed heart. Finding a formula for health on dry land—that's the thing.

A good swimmer possesses a feel for a second, not entirely comprehensible existence in water (in a deep spot he can stand, lie, sit), and he is as far removed from the thought of drowning as any normal person is from the thought of falling through the ground. At first there is repulsion at the cold and wet, resistance, a brief exertion of effort, and then—the water’s caresses, washing away the earthly dust, sweat and fear. A swimmer does not lay down his weightless body, but reclines on his back, more or less as one might on a chaise longue. He sees the sky, which is without color, and to the right—the dry gray and pink tones of the low mountains. He likes the fact that he can see all this—from this perspective in particular—by virtue of his own effort. Not even by effort—the effort is imperceptible; rather, by virtue of his own desire to be supported by the water’s surface. In fact, he exists now solely by virtue of his own will. That is especially evident when you swim against short and robust waves, which come systematically buffeting at your mouth and chin. Some conception of depth does, of course, enter into the swimmer’s satisfaction, but only very abstractly. Depth is poorly apprehended—is the sea really a pit filled with water? Reclined on his back, he looks down at his snaky, streaming, elongated legs. They look more like a pale reflection of legs. They stretch out below into the depth, and, for a moment, the depth becomes concrete. And for a moment, almost the same as on land, there arises the nauseating feeling of uncertainty.

Shutters—southern shutters familiar from childhood—pulled to, as was the custom after lunch. Your body—burned by the sun, washed by
the waters, salted with sea-salt, swept by the wind—lies on the cool sheet. It’s here, in this shady room, in the swiftly and thickly descending haze of an afternoon nap, that separate sensations all concentrate at once into the long-held experience of a pleasantly heavy body, fresh from the outdoors. Your back burns, and there’s coolness under your knees. The salt has made your hair clump together in icicles; flakes of colorless skin peel easily off your shoulders. Your lips are rough, and there’s the taste of sea-water in your mouth, bitter and dissipating, like memory. And in fact, it seems that all this is just a memory of the already betrayed sensuous concreteness of the world.

Into the mountains: the pass on the Sukhumi Military Road disappoints one’s expectations of height. A constantly enclosed space rises as does the traveler. The traveler knows he is up high, but never sees height. In general, knowing is important in the mountains. Knowledge surprises and inspires reverence, whereas the unaccustomed eye cannot differentiate a large mountain from a small one.

Some impression of the height is given by the bodies heading away from the viewer, straight up the mountain, and filling the space directly above him. Now and then relatively small objects appear: a house, a cliff, a pine tree (if the viewer stands at the bottom)—but not the 4,000-meter mountain, foreshortened by perspective, tempered by gently sloping flanks, surrounded by infinitude. Dissatisfaction with the mountains for not having attained their full height, with the idly vacant space, reaches the point of nervous irritation.

But something else is quite enthralling: every movement up, down, to one side, produces new foreshortenings and turns, changed relationships between one’s knowledge of things and the look of things. I remember the view of the Greater Caucasus from Teberda, the mountain ridge so white it looked brittle, as if it might crack. Once, a cloud stood between me and the Caucasian range. The cloud was undoubtedly a two-humped camel, yet at the same time, puffed out its breast and arched its neck like a swan. It ran into the crest, but did not get caught, in that way clouds do in the mountains when their cotton stuffing rips and tears off. It remained at a distance, and the distance between the cloud and the ridge was visible through the cloud. It was an intellectual jolt: a sudden and new experience of space.
You are told: this object is small, that one is large, one is close by, the other is dozens of kilometers away ... Thought strains in the ceaseless battle between knowledge and impression. The gently sloping descent into the valley, and from the valley the climb up again into the mountains. The traveler descends, looking up at the ascent. Thus begins an inward motion, like being on a swing; the complex and delightful impression of height spreading out beneath your legs, height that comes easily, surmounted by consciousness.

What is most powerful in the mountains is the new understanding of categories of distance, size, height, descent, ascent; their instantiation in some kind of particular experience—physiological, muscular, and, at the same time, an experience which pervades their meaning with an unprecedented clarity.

When the mountain is close, the distance between tree-trunks is visible. The trees, as is proper, grow upward, and therefore at an angle with the slope. Because of this it seems that trees, perhaps not even real ones, have been stuck, on purpose, all over, into the mountain. If the mountain is far away, only the treetops remain, disappearing behind one another. Then there is a cover of prodigious vegetation—dense, layered, curly, without trunks or branches, bearing little resemblance to undergrowth, resembling rather some peculiar leafy matter, the mountain’s second material. The most distant ranges seem to be grown over with grass—but in fact it’s pine trees.

You go along the forest path, and enormous pine trees, surprisingly pure in form, gauge the height. The bases of them are lower than the path; they intersect with it, measuring height upward and downward, so that the height marked by them is, at the same time, depth.

Changeable distances and sizes. A singularly unique experience of space—simultaneously bodily and intellectual. And over on the other side of the valley grass alternates with leafy matter breaking the surface and slopes stuck all over with artificial trees—but it’s all pine trees.

The sea remained on our right. We went along the ridge that stretched and narrowed far ahead of us amid the lower Crimean hills. I love these gently sloping inclines that cover the earth and lead right into the sky. The sun was setting behind our backs. To the west, the hills stood in four uneven rows. The closest row still possessed physical form, the color of
earth, vegetation and clay. The rows behind it were more abstract: ranging from dull blue to the appearance of smoke and cloud. The bare, glaring white disc of the sun sank below the hills. On the parched ridge large rocks with rust-colored patches are roughly sunk into the ground and the earth is strewn with small sharp stones. Everything is so scorched that the individual blades of grass stand apart from each other on the ground. There is some kind of starry-patterned grass, similar to moss, and then there are simply stalks, burned at the root into straw. Broken strawy stems stand one by one so that in the low sun each casts its own separate shadow. The sea is on the right; from this height it appears to be all one color. On the left is the small, neighboring ridge, solid, bare, made up of thick, lateral folds. In the sun it appears dark pink, fleshy, with deeply sunken shadows, blackness spilling out of the uneven channels between the folds. The sinking sun quickly yellows; now it is surrounded by a flickering orange field of light. The sun burns behind us as we ascend, stepping on the scorched earth, over the blue scree and straw-like grasses.

The sea, from this height, is motionless—with motionless dabs of white—traces of the currents and winds. Beyond the edge of the ridge, to the left, three small bays open out. At the edge of each bay there lies a cliff, like a promontory. Three cliffs have arched their backs and thrust their sharp points into the water. Behind us the sun—wild orange, casting no rays—has withdrawn behind the dark hill, and the sky in front of us turned pink and blue. The wind quickly turns cold. The flaming red blaze on the grass died out. The neighboring ridge had completely transformed. The fleshy pink folds have hardened. Shadows dispersed, and corners, arid scars, whitish craters and furrows of gypsum that had before been engulfed in shadow and light now emerged. Now the sky was unnaturally soft—above the dry, dark land.

“How is it you can like this?”

“I like these things when they give expression to my consciousness ... some state of consciousness ...”

“So what does it express?”

“Emptiness, say. No, don’t start thinking—emptiness still unconquered, still taking exertion to overcome. But exertion shared by nobody. And what about you? You like myrtle and oleander? ... In short, that’s no
different from emptiness and the unshared struggle with emptiness ...

Look, we seem to have stayed long enough for the moon.”

“Yes, please let’s go away from here.”

I possess an unshakable indifference to myrtle and oleander. In the Caucasus there are aquiline noses and felt cloaks, perpetual snow, gorges, dark blue mountain torrents and pine trees that have fallen into their flow. For me, it turns out, the Caucasus—not the Caucasus of collective farms and construction projects, but the tourists’ Caucasus—is a spectacle. It is like a superior stage set for somebody who is indifferent to the theatre. How surely each culture consolidates the separate elements of its existence! Thus it is that the Caucasus remains forever bound up with Romanticism. It is not just that a person of genius is required to describe the Caucasus anew, but rather that this person of genius is not even necessary. If there were a need to write differently about the Caucasus, Tolstoy would have done so. But Tolstoy only replaced the Caucasus with the people of the Caucasus, the psychical life of the people there.

The Russian village has never been a spectacle, let alone a gratifying one. To this day there are notions contained in the village that are of integral importance to our worldview, to our aesthetic thought and to our sense of our native land and nature. Or, to be more precise, to that feeling for the land, that physical desire for the land that one experiences looking out of a train window at the impossibly flat Russian plains.

The old village is a form of existence from times past, but it is not obsolete in our cultural consciousness, where it lives on by virtue of its connection to the culture of the intelligentsia. And here one should keep a strict eye on oneself, for it is immoral to remain an aesthete in matters of social import.

For one who grew up in the south, in the city and at the dacha, the village represented a return home, albeit a somewhat impoverished one, because the real ability to discern the signs of one’s native land is acquired in early childhood, when one is so small that everything done on the ground is visible.

We had names at our disposal, and it was a journey that was the reverse of the one taken by humankind as it came to know the world. In place of the process of naming things came the process of finding things to fit to
names. Thus words came to life in three dimensions: road, cottage, barn, rye, haystack, sickle. We pulled flax, we tried to bring in the harvest in spite of our cut fingers, and there was a pressing need to test, by the most practical, the most physical means, certain combinations of words: to ride in a cart, sleep in a hayloft, sit on the zavalinka, to drink kvas in the fields ... 

Sochi ... the southern night—smelling of flowers and the sea. Southern nights—frogs, cicadas, malarial mosquitoes, stars and cypress trees. You think about cypresses and stars while you are looking at them; and while you are looking at them, you think about only them. But if you are walking across a field towards a red, yellow and green sunset, you can look at the izbas, haystacks and lame horses in the sunset and think about the saddest and happiest things in life.

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The window frames a tight composition of green and red roofs, an area of waste ground and a white barracks-like building by the pond. The return began here. Rooftops and unusually thin pine trees with a ruffled plumage of branches meet the edge of the sky. Sorrow was beginning—a long faded sorrow that did not disturb one’s work.

It is a village on the outskirts of Moscow, already gravitating toward the suburbs, but still preserving features of a dacha settlement. Dry, northern dachas; an architectural absurdity in which there’s something Alpine, something of Pskov, and even something gothic, an economy of building materials and a great craving for illusions. Its basis is the izba, but the izba has lost its objective reality; the undulating corrugated surface of proud round logs gives way to flat boards with chinks between them. The house—vertically elongated and narrow—giving it a gaunt look—consists of two interlocking timber frames with two steep-pitched roofs placed at the perpendicular, and under one of the roofs, a small mezzanine juts out like a unicorn’s horn. A sun porch is built on to one side of the house—its windows divided into small panes; another sun porch, the same, only smaller, sits above the lower one. Dozens of these strange constructions stand along the side of the road.

2 The bank of earth by the cottage walls.
3 A fermented cold drink, made from rye bread.
But after the mountain roads that seem to end with every turn, after the road that is swallowed by the rising land, so that in the solid leafy depth it appears only occasionally in scattered yellow patches—after this, here, once more, is a true, long road. It inspires the desire to walk, an aimless greed, rationally inexplicable in a person who knows that beyond the fir wood there will be a flat field, beyond the field, perhaps some waste ground, separated from the road by a ditch, sparsely lined with birch trees, then fir wood, village, field, a pond, the former estate-owner’s house, the cemetery, field, fir wood ...

One begins to understand this in full through its opposite, in the south. A Ukrainian settlement is organized according to the principle of an oasis. The steppe is all around; on the other side of the lath fence white dust as deep as sand covers the road. But inside the lath fence, with its uniform and charming pattern, is a hut enveloped by greenery. This is farmed, cultivated vegetation; thus it is planted separately in an orderly fashion, but because of the density in such a small space, to the eye it appears a tangled mass; one thing begins where another has not yet quite ended. Small bushy trees, stately sunflowers, the crude flowers of potato plants, the narrow drooping leaves of corn all jumbled together in the cramped freedom of the domestic oasis around the perpetually regenerating huts. How different this looks to the indelible signs of time and tribulation that furrow the walls of the izba. How different it looks to the izba that stands, exposed, on the village road between two birch trees and the strips of vegetable gardens, and a wind blowing parallel to the earth pulls at the birch tree leaves.

There, in Ukraine, the traveler enters the circumference of a settlement, sometimes a very wide circle, dotted with cottages, trees and haystacks. The area is intersected by several—fairly indistinct—roads, seemingly bearing little relationship to the landscape.

Due to the ceaseless complex motion of objects, the composition of the circle changes. The traveler crosses from circle to circle. Or rather, new circles are constantly surrounding him. At first there is a gentle slope; beyond that, the iron and straw roofs of the haphazardly placed Ukrainian houses. Ahead there are ploughed hills; on the right, an uneven crest of green—on the very horizon; on the left, small masses of bushes, and behind them too, the distant crest. Everything closes in on itself, following
the curve of the circle’s edge. Inside—meadows with grazed grass, crops of
different colors, trees misshapen by the wind.

I strain to understand the process of motion. Here is a tree by the
road; it moves quickly, gaining in size. On the left soft bushes retreat with
the same speed, but the blue hut, for some reason, does not move until
you have drawn up level with it; then it turns the corner and makes room
for trees which had not yet entered the field of vision. Young poplar trees
with whitish-green bark stand on a small hill, and through their trunks, like
through the bars of a grill, there pass hills, clouds and pieces of blue sky.

I continue walking on the gentle slope. Behind, the village spreads out
still more widely. The field of sunflowers (so beautiful that it seems they
were planted specifically for their beauty) lying there on the left suddenly
moves toward the road. A little further, and the field of sunflowers will
become part of a new circle’s boundary. Ahead, instead of the hills slipping
away downwards, a new row of huts has risen up. The track has made a
sharp right, and the piece of meadow with the cone-shaped haystack does
an about turn and appears on the right hand side. The traveler is enclosed
in a new circle, again with cottages, trees and haystacks.

The road in northern Russia both leads and divides. Something lies
on the right, something lies on the left (the fir wood, the field, the village
cut in two by the road), something remains behind, something awaits us
ahead. Even if it is a road running between pine trees and dachas in the
depths of some miserable country woods, it is already a temptation, a con-
stant incitement to walk and to not stop. As it enters the forest the road
becomes a clearing and discovers the sky, and it complicates its meaning
as it comes to incorporate height. No longer just the earth, but also the
air (the path cut by the avenue or clearing is needed to be able to see the
air) begins to participate in the agitation, in the desire to walk and in the
vague promises to the traveler.

“Our Russian road,
Our Russian fogs,
Our rustles ‘mid the oats ...”—said Blok.⁴

The material elements of long roads vanish in the pure sensation of movement; bodily movement which has changed the course of thought.

Aside from illness, fatigue and sloth, there also exists indifference. There is a defensive indifference—to the unessential in the presence of the essential; there is also general indifference, suicidal indifference. Beware—indifference as a form of protection might inadvertently spell one’s end.

Indifference is sometimes distinguished by literalness. A person is no longer certain what sense there is in eating a grape, or smoking, or going to the movies. But let indifference remain here, by the waste ground and the wretched pines of the Moscow outskirts. So that it doesn’t take grip of the land, or the wind, or the white, unyielding roads of the south that lead from cliff to cliff, or the roads of the north—monotonous and always headed somewhere—that lead from thought to thought. If indifference deadens the skin to the point of its inability to feel the land and the wind, then let’s keep the road and the wind as the best conditions for the movement of thought.

What does a person fear—death, illness, mental deterioration, poverty, loneliness, remorse, perhaps? ... Perhaps the cessation of desires, destroyed by the attempts that collapsed in on him. And then, working his way through everything that has died in him, through paralyzed tenderness and paralyzed spite, he arrives at the formula for salvation: I desire to desire to write.

The desiring is the most difficult of all. But in order to write—aside from the ability to write—one needs the most basic things: health and diligence.

“Laziness is your fundamental attribute.”

“Utter rubbish! Go and ask people ... I sit at my desk for twelve hours at a time.”

“There’s nothing to ask. You’re lazy ... lazy ... and all the wrong in you stems from laziness.”

In order to understand that in a person, one must know him when one is at one’s most rancorous.

Spiritual laziness is a secret vice, having nothing in common with ordinary laziness. It is an unconscious aversion to that extreme exertion of consciousness by which man reaches his highest limits. Inspiration is
probably an act of overcoming that laziness and fear. Laziness and indifference guard against overly destructive efforts.

Twelve hours at the writing desk—perhaps it’s just an excuse for idleness. Professional failures, honoraria, love—all this, perhaps, is just an excuse; especially failed love, which forces one to acquire imagination and reason. As for the daily literary labor, in excess it leads to a state in which an animalistic lack of consciousness is shamefully confused with an overworked mind. There is only one measure to take against lack of consciousness—to follow your thoughts through to the end.

People for whom partings are a great source of suffering may also, of course, love to travel, but there is always some fear retained around the paraphernalia of the railroad. The dark platform and the black rails in their earthen beds. Beyond the tracks, under the signal lamps, blind windowless constructions and the gaping dark windows of carriages set aside for repair. The wind is smoky and metallic. The small, colored signal lights, the bustle of the railroad men in their jackets and smocks. From the platform the upper bunks are visible in the windows of the unreserved carriages. On the luggage rack, opposite the window, there are bags, green trunks, black suitcases. One can imagine to oneself only too clearly the flashing checkers of light and shade of the third class carriage; the slippery surfaces of the wooden benches, the large triangular shadows cast by the upper bunks. The motionless air—and its snores. The feet of a man lying on his stomach dangle from above and the corner of a blanket hangs down wearily. On the bottom bunk, the open mouth of somebody sleeping. The passenger on the side berth has not bedded down. The bread squeaks as he cuts it with his jack-knife. The details of a stranger’s body and dress reveal themselves in forced physical proximity. The striped curtain flaps in the open window of the first class carriage. On the table there is a flask with a glass stopper, two bottles of Narzan mineral water, and something else, covered with a napkin. The narrow illuminated box waits so that the person who has leaned out towards the dark station that stands at the crossing where railroad tracks run in all directions may hastily return to its protection; it clearly wants to offer a contrast, a safe hearth, or a promise of domesticity in the clattering night that speeds by.
On the platform, with my back to the artless illusions of the first class carriage, I keep track of the words and lines that enter by themselves into consciousness ... Something pushed and dragged her, and the candle, by the light of which Anna had been reading the book filled with deceptions and grief, was at once extinguished. Or:

“The cars rolled by in their familiar way ...”
Or still better:

“The dull anguish of distance and iron wheels,
Blowing its heartrending whistle ...”

The railroad landscape is broken into parallel planes. On the first plane the trees speed by; the bushes blend into one another; the telegraph poles break loose from the edge of the window and smoothly slide away. As the first plane retreats, from behind it, the objects on the next plane advance, and behind it, the third, the fourth ... the railroad landscape is dominated by a rotational motion. Small segments of the first plane fly into the frame of the window and slowly pass across the larger space of the horizon. Sometimes, buildings or bushes on the second plane stand close and parallel to the first row of buildings or bushes. And as they meet, with a start, each row peels off in a different direction. Round clumps of trees turn on their axes with surprising precision. The empty plain lies the same as ever through the window; but alternates constantly with stretches of different soils, and crops. The color of the earth is both taut and fluid.

Through the window-pane—spotted with drops of rain—lies the railroad landscape. The rising and falling telegraph wires travel through the sky. Bushes and damp railway sleepers speed past the window. Far back, the curved semi-circle of the land moves slowly along with the movement of the train. And if you put the two movements together, you can see, it seems, the turning of the earth.

5 An abridged, slight misquotation from the end of Book 7 of Tolstoy’s *Anna Karenina*, where Anna commits suicide by falling under the train.
Through the spotted glass—as there have been many times already—there are signs of the return. Forest vegetation in various shades of green—black, blue, gray, yellow, reddish-brown and, finally, green; the shimmer of speckled white birch trees in their variegated monotony. Or the lusterless bushes growing single file along the track. Or beyond the breaks in the bushes—a water-logged hollow with tussocks and tufts of grass, also grayish-brown, reddish-brown, green. One might very well be afraid.

The forest vegetation and marsh vegetation on this stretch of track are just as much an integral part of the route as the clatter under the floor of the carriage, the telegraph wires that rear up and fall in the corner of the window and the dark tatters of smoke in the wires. There is no wind, and the smoke does not remain above the train in a thick, curling plume; it falls away from the wires and drifts off into the leaves.

What is it that a person is afraid of? The un-whitewashed ceiling of his room? A visit to friends? The domestic help? The manuscripts on the desk? The giro-check from the housing-rent co-operative or conversations at the publishing house? He may live with these things unendingly; but having to resume living with them—then the soul dies a little.

The signal post at the small station has been closed for a long time. The plaster-covered station building. Inside are the ticket windows and the smooth, dreary benches. To the side, there is a square enclosed by railings, crowded with carts, farmers, chomping horses. A thin girl, bent at the knees, with her free arm stretched out, is hauling a bucket that is far too heavy for her. A long wooden building (the stationmaster’s?) with curtains and pots of flowers—which do, in fact, exist in real life, although we think of them as an outmoded literary detail. A gray frame for a swing; a hammock between two aspen trees and a girl with her high heels caught up in the mesh of the hammock; above the hammock, two lads in t-shirts and jackets. In the evenings, for a long time people walk back and forth in front of the station. One side of the station is all dusty; amid the dry clods of earth there is a wide road and timbered buildings displaying signs: “General Store,” “Post Office,” matted hay sitting on carts. On the other side, beyond the railroad tracks—a sudden absence of buildings ... Bare fields, the infinity of the earth, and the rails—the infinity of the road.
When a person returns from being away, he returns to his house, his work, his love. I shall tell of one person’s return—let us call him Y.

The meeting was preceded by fear. A young wine has the same effect—it brings you to your knees, but leaves your head clear. There is a kind of dark, physical fear, which finds its way into your knees, fingertips, stomach—and bears no relation to your train of thoughts. Your thoughts go on as usual; only impressions from the outside intrude into your consciousness.

The street, the bus and the staircase pass by unnoticed. Fear gathers itself into one brief thought: perhaps something has happened ... For this reason, the opening door, her hair (somehow the most notable thing of all), the smile at him and the voice saying his name were all a great and startling relief. The fear subsided. It subsided still more quickly when her body was held in his arms and his lips pressed onto whatever fell under them—her hair, her collar. Then came the moment, as the two of them were looking at one another, that the necessity to start talking came upon them. They hurriedly used any old words without any idea of which words, in fact, were actually fitting for the occasion.

“And I was waiting for you at home ...”
“I didn’t know what time it got in ...”
“But all those trains arrive in the morning. Let me see you ... No, I thought it would be worse.”
“I’d already lost ...”
“I found all your letters and your telegram here. How could I have possibly answered?”
“I didn’t know anything ...”

A meaningless and nervous conversation, its sense lay in the creation, hand-in-hand, of a domestic bond of small particulars and lives.

This is it: the sense of a reprieve. The pleasure of subsided fear.

If it were possible to work without resting, many of us would not object to solitude. But it is impossible to relax alone, because solitude (so long as it does not produce lethargy) produces that complex, higher state of consciousness in which it is impossible to entirely cease the processes of cognition and creation. Neither mutual understanding, nor good company,
nor visiting friends can dispel solitude ... It is dispelled only by the presence of the person toward whom one’s expectations of happiness are directed, whether they are realizable or not—it makes no difference.

Y liked sending telegrams (it meant he was not alone in that city) or the domesticity of the shared lunch or going shopping; or especially the use of all those phrases with we, my, we'll make do, I strongly object—with their responsibility and maturity.

But now, simultaneously with the relief, with the uttered words, he remembered how they had parted. He had looked at her then, committing it all to memory, because he is mistrustful and, when parting, does not have faith in a future meeting. He embraced her by the stove, and it frightened him how long it was before his arms met with any obstacle. Apparently, the body occupies an insignificant space at the center of the empty circle of an embrace. When his arms finally met, the sense of the fragility of things became horribly clear. He recognized it; it was the same feeling that accompanied everything, encroaching on all other feelings—be it the sense of age, responsibility or the sense of calm. It formulated itself pointedly in the nightly question: will we meet again? That is, will we able to meet and will we desire to meet?

He recalled this, noting with unease the similarity between the scenes of parting and meeting. With each passing month it became more clear why the beginning of this love was akin to surprise or to heartache.

“I don't expect anything more for myself ... I don't know if my feeling has diminished. It’s worse than diminished—it’s become disinterested.”

“Why worse?”

“Because it’s more like indifference. Only its fading anguish distinguishes it from indifference. And that’s not enough. A vital feeling should be distinguished from indifference by another thing too, expectation.”

This was the latest in a succession of Y’s returns. It differed substantially from the previous.

He wrote then, in his diary: “Love, doubtless, consists of three illusions: the illusions of eternity, irreplaceability and inexhaustibility. There is no love without them, though other (often strong) impulses may act in their place: libidinous drive, vanity, habit.
“Love, like severe pain, is necessarily accompanied by the impossibility of imagining the end of that love or pain. Because to imagine its end means at that moment to put an end to it. The illusion of eternity is created in this way. The illusion of irreplaceability lies in the certainty that the beloved is, if not the very best, then the only one possible. But the prime illusion of the three lies in the unremitting nature of expectation, in the conviction that the beloved is an inexhaustible force that delivers happiness. All the world’s phenomena are subject to the creative action of this force: the movies, pastries, pink sunsets ... There is no need to list them all off. Lovers go to the theater, take trips outside the city, read books together. This undying desire filters all reality through love, or actualizes love in various materials.

“Erotic expectation is the expectation of happiness, that is to say, a spiritual state, absolute and indivisible, and which does not permit the question “what for?” nor “what next?” Erotic values are objects in relation to which and by means of which expectation actualizes itself—always at the same time and to the same ends. In love, desire is equal to expectation; expectation, moreover, with the calculated possibility of its fulfilment. There is unrequited love, but no such thing as unrequitable love—that is a transitory or insufferable state. If such love does not kill a person, then he kills love with whatever it takes: his will, work, debauchery, inattentiveness. If nothing of this kind occurs, it means the failure has found his erotic equivalent, the object of realizable desire. Depending on circumstances, temperament and imagination, these equivalents may be very varied, and to different degrees removed from the natural aims of happy love. A person may desire, or have been forced to desire, only to kiss his beloved or only to touch her arms, to meet her for a walk, to look at her portrait, or only to talk about her, or only to think about her.

“Any of these actions, if it becomes that in which expectation is lodged, will become a source of satisfaction, albeit lamentable in its conditionality. Schiller and Zhukovsky wrote about this:

‘There he sat—as morning brightly shined,
Or evening dimmed,
In expectation, he passionately pined,
As there he sat alone.
His woeful soul
One happiness alone
There might own.
He waited—till at the window of his love
A knock was heard,
Till his beauty there appeared,
Till from up on high,
The dear loved face
Bent to the valley
With mild angel grace.

Sated, he laid him down,
His sleep sweetened
By the hope: tomorrow it will happen again!
The seasons passed ...

For him—one thing alone,
To wait, as he had waited,
Till at the window of his love,
A knock is heard.7

As long as his beloved did not enter a nunnery, Knight Toggenburg simply wants to marry her. Thus the substitution of equivalents, which move ever further away from the original goal, turns out to be incredibly arousing. The unobtainable grows in magnitude; and expectation, torturous and abstract, lies with all its might in the narrow sphere of existence that is still materially accessible—in a touch, in a word, in a letter. In love, to each comes what he deserves ... and sometimes even what he has been unconsciously or secretly striving for.

7 Vasily Zhukovsky translated Friedrich Schiller’s “Ritter Toggenburg” (“Knight Toggenburg,” 1797) as “Rytsar’ Togenburg” (1818).
There exists a limit, close to which the erotic equivalent—the object of realizable desire is destroyed. The limit is different for people of different sexual types and in different circumstances. Some still reward themselves by walking their beloved home from the theatre, but would not find any pleasure in hiding between the trees and accompanying her on the walk unseen. Others begin to weary once nothing remains for them to do other than look at a lighted window. It is difficult to determine the limit in advance. But everyone loses their sense of expectation somewhere.

“But,” Y wrote in his diary, “I needed an ordinary intimacy in this relationship, never mind equivalents. When I need something, I get weak. Thus arises the delusion that you can make me bend without any misgivings. In fact, you can only bend me to the point defined as the equilibrium between desire and attainment; moreover, I keep this formula to myself. All you have to do is bend me too far, and I become completely wooden, dry and hollow, and always very polite, and there’s nothing you can grab me with.”

She: “I’ve had enough of all the people around me being over thirty. There’s something unpleasant about them.”

Y: “I’ll tell you what’s unpleasant about them. People over thirty want to be loved. A person is unbearable from thirty to forty. Up to the age of thirty, you see, we can’t take care of ourselves. Only fatuous egoists can do this when they are young.”

“What about after forty?”

“Well, over forty people readily make allowances. But us, thirty year olds, thirty-five year olds, we have some kind of sense of irrecoverable plenitude, a maximum level that it’s a shame to undersell.”

“And that’s unpleasant?”

“Yes. For instance, when our happy love ended, you suggested that now my unhappy love was beginning. That’s not true. I wasted all my talent for hopeless love in my youth ... you divined this history. You even said once what nonsense it was to love someone who had an unhappy love, and you explained this very reasonably: unhappy meant real. ‘It’s been many years. What is there left of you?’ you said to me. ... Yes, everything that came later might have been just the semblance of failed love. The semblance emerged because I am able to restrict the extent of my erotic demands while
preserving their intensity. I always loved you—on condition of reciprocity. Towards the end it might have been a strange reciprocity—based, say, on your spiritual laziness. When you’ve said to me again recently that you’re thoroughly indifferent to me, I’ve not believed it. It is incomprehensible, but I did not believe it. I thought it was nervous laceration. Then ... Do you remember the conversation at the dacha? Then you said: ‘Your feelings are like a boomerang—they always return to your own self.’ And again you said, for the umpteenth time, that you were indifferent to me. And somehow that did it ... everything that had been unclear and pressing down on me suddenly, with a sense of relief, became clear. And at once, in the middle of the conversation, for the first time I believed it. I stopped waiting.”

“I don’t understand. Waiting for what?”

“Waiting for happiness, waiting for rest. Waiting for you.”

It is common knowledge that lovers—like children, primitive people and poets—make up words. Their conversation is a dialect with its own rules of usage and sphere of meanings, not only because they have their own interests, memories and habits, understandable only to them, but above all, because love mysteriously transforms the word of the beloved into a something valuable. And the more serendipity, foreignness, solecism there is in the word, the more likely it is that love will understand it as inimitably particular, the uniquely precise expression of inimitable correspondences. And fix it in its dialect.

But here’s how they spoke over lunch when Y returned this time from being away:

*She:* “I don’t have it in me to eat anything canned after that journey when we were so delayed. It became repulsive; I ate pike-perch the whole way. There was no restaurant car, and so we starved the whole way.”

*Y:* “I thought you wouldn’t find anything after I got off at Kiev; I put that can on the ledge under the table. By the way, my crazy relative waited for me until five in the morning, sitting in the station. The thing is, if he’d come out onto the platform he would have found me. But he was afraid of missing me, he didn’t know which number carriage I was in, and he stood by the exit. Then he looked in the station buffet.”

“But he managed to meet you in the morning?”
“No. It would have been too much for him to hold out till half past nine ... I went straight to his place.”

“And the guy who was on the top bunk, I don’t know why but he was met in Leningrad by two frightful old women.”

“And what did they do with him?”

“Nothing. They all left together.”

“A car was meant to be there to meet him.”

“Well apparently it wasn’t. We were ten hours late.”

“You can’t take any more pike-perch. And for me it’s these cutlets ... She made a monstrous number of them. Yesterday I had cutlets for breakfast and lunch, and for breakfast and lunch today ...”

“They’re good.”

“Do you want some more?”

Everyone who has loved and stopped loving knows the harrowing encounters with objects and words which not long ago used to hold promises and produce stirrings within, and now had become one-dimensional and depressingly equal only to themselves.

The inexhaustibility hypothesis, the most important of all the hypotheses of love, is not applicable to one-dimensional objects. The content and scope of any direct, unsymbolic pleasure is conceivable in advance. Therefore one may desire and demand it, but one must not expect it with that special sense of expectation that reaches deep inside.

Expectation is destroyed much more slowly than love, than the illusion of inexhaustibility that lends it its strength. What does a person wait for?—a knock at the door, a smile as the door opens, the feeling of fear subsiding ... He waits pointlessly, knowing how long the smile and the relief last for.

Diary: “Inertia is a motive force inverse to expectation, but equivalent to it in the dynamics of psychic life. The most minute signs of unactualized emotions are given to us not only in the sight of a departing train, but in the movement of a hand picking up gloves, or in the weight of a coat, when fur, touching the lips of the person holding it out at the door, arouses sorrow which once seemed inconsolable. The mind still apprehends the structure of emotions according to a model. And far on the periphery familiar contractions of the nerves promptly and unmistakably reproduce
the attachment. These conditioned reflexes of attachment and sorrow are acquired through a long habit of feeling and through a mania of thought directed for years toward a single point. Even a person who has long been calm, maniacally cherishes his old misfortunes. He cherishes the altered state of consciousness, free from the cold norm of impartiality, from the cheerless norm of vanity and he cherishes the upset equilibrium ... and so great is the stability of this impossible equilibrium, that it survives years, sorrow, and, what is more surprising, it survives the passion that made it possible.

Silence in a person’s life (light footsteps in the hallway do not deliver one from such silence) is the same thing as unhurriedness in a person’s life. The world does not summon him anywhere. Indifference is like the oppressive air in a room, silence, poverty or the lack of appetite.

For example, a person has no money. He is given potatoes without butter and he sits at the table, feeling, with a certain surprise and pleasure, that it’s all the same to him whether he eats ham or potatoes, whether they come with butter or without. On his plate is an unpleasant looking whitish-green mashed mass. He gingerly presses it with his fork and the crumbling, caving-in walls of dry potato squeeze through the fork’s teeth. Children with no table manners do such things; they seem interesting in childhood.

It is unclear whether one may live without relaxing. If we do not relax, it is often not because we don’t have time, but because we don’t have any reason to relax, other than fatigue. That is an inadequate reason. If relaxation is only the cessation of work, if, in comparison to work, it is devoid of any new positive content, then fatigue won’t go anywhere. It only temporarily departs from the muscles and eyelids; and is driven deep inside, closer to the heart, and there, deep inside, prevents the heart from beating.

It would be good to bring stillness nearer to tranquility. At present languor is taut with expectation. What if this is the last time he will await a knock at the outer door, another knock, a voice, tearing into the silent languor? Expectation is meaningless, or has a too limited a meaning—because to all intents and purposes it is directed toward the knock, the opening door and the infinitesimal relief, the smile of meaningless relief.
The accidental falls away, squeezed out by objective laws of determination until man and man’s thought remain in their pure form. That, in essence, is the plot of Robinson Crusoe. Robinson must live life in its pure form—and he does not perish. Defoe tells of how he does not perish. And what would have become of Robinson if he had not had Friday—that is, the illusion that he was not alone in the world?

Nothing except their association comes from the association of two people who have lost the capacity to love; and if it turns out to be strangely steadfast, then it is strictly according to the principle of an uninhabited island encounter. Each of them finds the other not an irreplaceable object of value but a convenient accident and a means of exercising their dwindled spiritual capacities. One of them needs to while away the time, the other needs leisure. And he twitches and nervously defends his leisure, all invested in a single person. And at times, from nerves, he hates and even loves the owner of his leisure. And although they don’t pass the time at all well with one another, like all weak people, they fear time and thus cannot stop passing it.

These ties, founded on the psychic helplessness of the heroes sustain years of spite and boredom, to then dissolve in an instant under new conditions of life.

Y: “And so I am enacting the plot of Robinson Crusoe in my own life... A person is left to face the world one on one—and is saved.”

She: “In any case, it’s a very boring plot. Because the whole time Robinson does what had been done before for a long time without him.”

“Ah ... indeed ... I hadn’t thought of that.”

“Have I spoiled the plot for you?”

“Yes. I’ll get revenge on you. The thing is, you’re Friday.”

“Why Friday?”

“Friday is necessary so that Robinson might imagine that he’s not alone on the earth.”

“So I can be Friday for you and somebody else for myself. Is it really such an insult to be Friday?”

“Hmm, well, he’s Ethiopian or something...”

“Don’t be embarrassed now.”
“Actually ... How did that not occur to me ... Everything that Robinson does has already been done before ...”
“Even as a child I really didn’t like it.”

_Diary_: “You remember—the impossibly long day at the small station. The dust-filled wind and the sky directly above the suitcases. A foul lunch in the cafeteria with tin knives that knocked dully against the plates. The strongest feeling of all was the feeling of astonishment at this hard knot of most banal actions that had survived intact in an otherwise unraveled life ... Do you remember the conversation we had on the tree stumps, similar to the one at lunch in its incomprehensible banality ... That feeling of suspended, dragging time, which the obviousness of a quarrel, death and the third warning bell all give us. It is the present, still going on—although, in fact, now it is no more, because the obviousness of its end has altered it beyond recognition. And that which goes on regardless fills us with meaningless astonishment.”

Across the canal, the Mars Field, the Fontanka—to the Neva. The city also has its own lightness, its ways of calling forth an even pace that it doesn’t ever want to cease. The asphalt and the long rows of houses help the body find the rhythm of its pace, the rhythm of its breathing, and the rhythm of its swinging arms. When the faintly tinted sky suddenly reveals itself between the houses, far at the end of a street, the traveler experiences the sense of the road. He experiences the obscure necessity to walk—and to walk to the end—more painfully and stirringly than he ever had in the forest clearings. Whatever the traveler says about this, he knows in his soul that he is meant to walk not in the forest or the fields, but in the city.

Breathing is at its most even on the Neva, where the sprawling city suddenly breaks off. The Fontanka curves its gray embankment. At the end is the squat arch of the bridge, and three empty ovals look out onto the Neva. A small motor boat passes through the left hand oval. The granite and salt water with its red and iridescent deposits on the embankment walls makes the Fontanka sparkle in the sun. Trees and clouds cast shadows on the water. Large black, blue and gray flecks of vegetation, sky and cloud float into the slow swirl of the gelatinous ovals. By the Summer Garden leaves fall into the water. Mottled fallen leaves cover the dark reflection
of the leaves on the trees. Visible above the arch of the bridge are the tops of buildings which, in this city, come together such that no better way could be imaginable.

This is most evident by Palace Bridge. A bus turns, careening toward the university. You can get off at the corner and be in the midst of beautiful things. The enormous sky, the Neva and granite, pollarded trees in the public gardens, the low pediment of the Bourse, the spire of the St Peter and St Paul fortress struck blindingly by the sun, the crude and imposing moldings on the Rostral Columns, Neptune standing astride ... the dirty plaster and green bronze on the columns’ red torsos ... this wide bend of flowing black asphalt leading from the bridge; the double flow of asphalt toward the embankment and toward the Bourse marked by rails and the ribbed tracks of passing cars. The wide surfaces of the sky, the water and the asphalt, and between the asphalt and the sky there is a green policeman in white gloves controlling the traffic with square-shaped gestures.

This city is not just a social whole; it also exists in and of itself, like a fact of nature or of art. But in some other mode, it turns out that with its surfaces and sweeping curves, its water, stone and trees, it is closely related to one’s ability for thought, to willfulness, to a person’s lifting of his own weight, to the movement of fate which needs to be wrung out hard until it becomes teleological.

What of it then, if on a sunny day the return home acquires a shade of optimism? And won’t the barely original scheme prevail—of an individualist caught in his own web, saved by creativity and work that belongs to the common cause?

For now, I answer: What I want most of all is that this barely original scheme does indeed triumph.

The two braided metal posts in the middle of Palace Bridge always strongly elicit one and the same memory. First the long summer sunset of unnaturally sumptuous colors. Then, lasting still longer, after the sun has set, viscous and soft colors—milky pink and watery blue. Gradually everything becomes washed out, uniform, unfeasibly clear. Everything except the narrow afterglow of sunset which remains the last visible source of light until morning. The streetlights burn lifelessly on the bridges and on the Mars Field. A single star has risen above Suvorov’s helmet. Cars
roll across Troitsky Bridge, heading for the late glow of sunset. The last streetcars are running. They have their own yellow light, distinct from the nighttime lighting. They go over the bridge, their top halves illuminated and transparent, in the grill of the half-lowered windows bearing away the empty sky and the small heads of the passengers.

For the third night, I walk the streets hungrily, just to understand the raising of the bridge. The square remains behind, and the open bridge unhurriedly rises to meet it. This strange procedure, carried out in the impenetrable darkness of the hour between two and three, is made known in the white night. The bridge comes to a halt like a wall; if you approach from the side, it stands with its two stumps rampant. The tram wire pole is flung back in the form of a cross at a right angle to the uppermost edge, above the expanse of water and sky.

The night is not deserted. In the gardens lovers sit close together (closer than light permits) and the homeless doze, hanging their heads on their hands, bags and suitcases. Shadowy fishing rods protrude from the bank. On a white night you will meet, without fail, a man who is wandering here because some unhappiness has befallen him. On a granite bench, a girl with no hat, wearing a jacket over the top of a print dress flicks through the pages of a book. She is obviously preparing for an exam, paying no attention to the white night and the sun rising behind the Alexander Column.

And amid the people who love, lament, fish, read, doggedly wait for night to pass in this outlandish light, the feeling of life stretches tauter and tauter.

In his youth, a person who has suffered a misfortune says: “Oh, well ... at this rate I should run away from the world.” At thirty you begin to understand that you cannot run away from certain things, and running away from others irredeemably constricts your consciousness. The point of life lies not in lifting the greatest possible weight, but in lifting the greatest possible weight according to one’s strength. This is the fundamental problem of the organization of labor. For those who are creative, the world has never been valuable in and of itself. But they remain in the world; for them it is sensuous delight, experience, leisure. None of them have spurned experience, and as far as I know, few have spurned leisure (be it family, hunting, cards).
There are eternal formulae that do not demand replacement. Thus a person works in the day and relaxes in the evening. He lifts his own weight all day long so that come nightfall he might throw it down at the threshold. Nobody has yet come up with anything better. For day is not a fiction of the calendar. Each day ends at the boundary of night and sleep, like an act with its own denouement.

This we know: if the spectator is promised a favorable outcome, then he calmly watches the unfolding catastrophe and horror as if it were all unreal. This is the “happy end”—and nothing compares with its optimistic, consoling power.

Does a person need much at nightfall?—so that his muscles and nerves might unwind, so that his thought might relax, so that the idle warmth from the boiling kettle might rise up into his face. So that sorrow, put aside until morning, might find a new unit of time.

Y: “I can’t bear it when you leave me at night.”
“I can’t always ...”

“No ... When you leave in the morning, in the afternoon—there I don’t argue. It’s perfectly obvious that the day has its business, and one needs to go about one’s business. But it’s unnatural to leave in the evening. It’s painfully incomprehensible ...”

Most likely, to those who find meaning in transient and disparate feelings, it makes no difference at what hour they experience joy. But rational and sentimental people understand the absurdity of the daytime rendezvous which ends in parting. Madmen arrange their own grief that never fails to snap shut on them.

Evening mechanically promotes the task of relaxation. A person stands indecisively in the middle of the room; he perhaps even thinks, shall I go round and see so-and-so? And when this thought fills him with the corresponding repulsion, he lays down to rest on the sofa. He has stopped work and is waiting for the onset of that qualitatively different state of being. But nothing of the kind is perceptible.
Instead boredom comes upon him—the fruit of unsuccessful leisure. The time he is wasting finally reaches his consciousness. He hears the noise of time rushing in his temples like blood; time flowing, like breath ... Then the person gets up in fright and searches for that cast off weight of daytime, in order to quickly lift it back onto himself.

1931

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8 This is the date Ginzburg appended to the final publication during her lifetime, in *Person at a Writer's Desk* (*Chelovek za pis'mennym stolom*, 1989). In *Literature in Search of Reality* (*Literatura v poiskakh real’nosti*, 1987), she had attached the date 1929. Emily Van Buskirk’s archival research suggests that Ginzburg’s work on parts of this narrative extended from 1929 to 1936.
Lydia Ginzburg
(translated by Alyson Tapp and Emily Van Buskirk)

“Conversations about Love”:¹
A Fictional Record of Authentic Confessions

Conversation with N.

—So you’re separated and you’ve got your solitude. What more do you want? Are you bored already?

—Hmm, solitude ... It is not good for the man to be alone² ... that’s just the way it is. The family, as we well know, is one means of the division of labor. It’s too much to bear all that life contains on your own, to remember everything that goes on, to answer for everything life throws at you. A person must know that there are some domains of life—of his own life—in which he has the right not to make decisions. Even if it’s just deciding what’s for dinner tomorrow.

Lialia’s someone you knew well. She had all sorts of talents. But anything she did was always done badly. Surprisingly badly. There’s interest in the process of doing things, in things themselves, and then there’s an interest

¹ The first three conversations were first published with notes from the 1950s and 1960s in the journal Daugava (Ginzburg 1989a: 101–2) and subsequently in Chelovek za pis’memnym stolom (Ginzburg 1989: 258–60) and the posthumous collection (Ginzburg 2002: 247–49). Their typescripts in the archive (folder of Ginzburg’s notes from the 1950s and 1960s) carry the following dates: March 1959 (first conversation), August 1960 (second conversation), May 1962 (third conversation). The fourth conversation was drafted much earlier, in the 1930s. See Ginzburg 2007 and Van Buskirk 2007.

² A quotation from Genesis 2: 18.
in those remote ends to which things might be employed—and herein lies the essence of two epochal phenomena: hackwork and compromise. But that’s just an aside. And so on the domestic front, everything she touched, everything that happened near me, turned out badly, or didn’t turn out at all; but that was never so very important—what was important was that somebody else looked after all the chores; most importantly, I didn’t have to look after them either.

Gradually we cut all the ties there were between us—domestic, erotic, intellectual, even the ties of habit. She lost my love, and of course, her love for me was gone too, but she still retained her power over me. Because beneath my spite, my (quite sincere) indifference, she sensed a deeply lurking weakness, a hidden tangle of not yet entirely eliminated expectations. This incensed me, this obsession—these expectations of who knows what, from a woman who was no longer needed. Then I understood ... I was held captive by the foolish expectation that somebody—she, that is (there was nobody else)—would one day do something for me, take upon herself a part of my life. That there would be something I wouldn’t have to decide; what to do, say, with that old coat that’s been hanging uselessly in the hall for two years.

That unnecessary woman proved to be the most necessary of all, because only she served as the guarantor of my non-solitude, or rather, the illusion, or the pure abstraction, if you will, of my non-solitude—as a life shared.

Conversation with N.N.

—What is it you’re after? For things to be how they were before?
—No. Oh, no. How could I want to have the past back again? I shudder when I think of it ...
—Or do you want to have it returned to you somehow renewed?
—Renewed? ... Tainted with all those compromises, unforgivable insults, conversations about money, petty rudeness and lies ... That sort of thing is beyond restoration.
—What is it that so torments you, then? Something seems to be bothering you all the time. Is it that you want something that might have been?
—No, I don’t. Because with me, as I am, there couldn’t have been any other way. No other way.
—So why then …?
—It’s not that I want the impossible. There’s nothing special in wanting the impossible. Everyone’s after the impossible. I want the a-logical. I want none other than her—but a completely different her—to be with me—but a completely different me. And that a-logical vision torments like the most sober reality.

Conversation with N.N.N.

—Yes, I honestly think that in the life of the standard intellectual in our generation there are three typical loves, three dramas. This theory, like all, so to speak, humanist theories is an approximation. They are not laws, only tendencies. I did say our generation … That is, we who acquired the age-old culture of love in our happy childhood and carried it into an altogether different age of catastrophe. How things will fare with future generations is unclear; among other things, they never have free time, which is essential for a culture of love.
—So these three typical dramas …
—Two of them follow classic formulae: first love and last love. I’m proposing to introduce one more level: second love.
—Hmm, why second exactly?
—That’s not the point. It could be the third or fourth love. In the same way, incidentally, as first love is far from always being the first. It’s a qualitative concept. A concept of genre. The classic first love of an intellectual is grand, unrequited, unrealized (secretly it does not want to be realized). In the land of love there will never be anything more searing for us than youthful anguish, nothing more fatal than that first pain; it must crush a still untouched heart, and the heart desperately resists. The stronger the tooth is rooted, the more unbearable is the toothache. Then
come the anaesthesia of fatigue, expended patience, empty goodbyes ... But the second love—that’s when a person retrieves his losses. It must, without fail, be happy, mutual, realized. In Proust this is done most accurately. Gilberte and Albertine are first and second love respectively. A real person understands that unrequited love is beautiful the first time, but laughable the second time. Remember Heine:

Glaub nicht, das ich mich erschiesse,
Wie schlimm auch die Sachen stehn!
Das alles, meine Süße,
Ich mir schon einmal geschehn.³

Second love is the love of a person who wants to be loved and who will not agree to anything less.

—And then what?

—Then the drama of the second love begins (it may, however, be repeated). There is no longer this unalloyed, crystalline pain, but the drama of happy love is somehow more oppressive than that of unhappy love. By virtue of the fact that unhappiness does not enter into its aesthetic, into its ideological agenda. It is completed in two moves. First the person loses their beloved, then they lose the love, exchanging melancholy for boredom.

—And if they lose the love first ...
—Well, then it isn’t a drama. At least not a drama of happy love.
—But is the drama really necessary?
—Pretty much. So long as love doesn’t cross over into the family (which has its own successes and blunders). I’m speaking, though, about us, about the past. The inevitability of drama probably lay in the fact that, for some reason, we preserved a certain kind of leisure for quite a long time. And leisure, which spawned scholarship and art, also spawned emotional catastrophe—from the eighteenth century onward, at any rate.

—And how about the third typical drama?
—The third one ... May this love pass us by ... The one that is both bliss and hopelessness ...⁴

³ “Don’t think that I will shoot myself, however bad things are. All this, my dear, has happened to me once before”.

⁴ These closing words echo the final line of F.I. Tiutchev’s poem “Last Love” (“Posledniaia liubov’, 1851–54”).
Conversation with N.N.N.N.

—You, for example, are writing a novel ...
—Not exactly ...
—Well then, let’s say, want to write a novel ... If I wrote a novel, I would try to avoid false problems.
—False problems ...
—Yes, solving problems that are not problems. For us, this is currently one of the most irritating qualities of Western literature (other than first-rate literature). First of all, we were brought up on the most problematic of all problem novels—the Russian nineteenth-century novel. Second, the Russian intelligentsia has had a difficult life, and we have learned to judge the scale of things. For the contemporary person love does exist as a problem, of course. But literature often starts from the wrong end. We haven’t yet finished up with adultery, and we’re already plunging into homosexuality.
—And that’s not a problem?
—A problem always means there’s choice. Have you ever heard about the problem of deafness or rheumatism? Naturally, there exist the clinical problems of treating deafness or rheumatism. But this, after all, is something altogether different. However, homosexuality is not a disease. Its organic forms ... Let’s set aside adolescence, temporary situations, custom and fashion, erotic curiosity, hysteria ... Its organic forms yield neither to a cure, nor to coercion. External or internal pressures lead only to debilitating neuroses. The disease begins with the attempt to heal. By itself, it is not a disease—it’s a matter of one’s constitution; it is almost always purely psychic, and therefore allows for ambivalence.

There was a period in my life when I took a special interest in all of this. I collected observations. I know what you’re thinking right now, by the way. You’re thinking that somehow or other, this interest is suspicious. Don’t make gestures in protest ... But you are mistaken. I could provide explanations ... capable of dispelling your surprise. But properly speaking ...
—Properly speaking, what business is it of mine ...
—Exactly, it’s none of your business. So, I have seen how a person begins the process of self-understanding. It is irreversible. Most often it starts rather late; at age 17, 18, and later. Until then the person managed
not to understand, not to consolidate this sensation of something strange that began long ago. Relationships, feelings, the most obvious impulses can exist for an incredibly long time in the consciousness without being named, identified, or while existing under other names. The defense mechanisms of suppression work without a hitch. But then he begins to understand. Suddenly in himself, in a being who used to be so familiar and unfrightening, something foreign, something impossible is discovered. The curtain falls. Later he will forget this instantaneous, irreversible vision of his fate, only to recall it again many years hence, when everything that he has built comes crashing down.

I don’t know what these boys and girls do now. In my time they took Kraft-Ebbing out of the library. They read this thick, rather boring book—with pain, passion, and a kind of terrible ecstasy at the spectacle of the gaping abyss. The way they read this book—they’ll never read anything else—not Faust, not Proust, not “The Bronze Horseman.”

—So, they fell into despair?

—Many of them did. But it was more hopeless for those who did not despair, for those who acquired an ideology. It is very hard to stop a person who is seeking a defense for and an affirmation of his psychic qualities.

Picture yourself this ill-fated child, with eyes that are red from crying and from nighttime reading of Kraft-Ebbing, the child who has suddenly envisioned himself as special, tragic, in essence, one of the elect. Boys did not have to go far for an ideology. It’s just one step from Kraft-Ebbing to Plato. It was more difficult for girls to appropriate formulas. Come what may, they had received the gift of the highest subject position and with it, the only genuine love, love for a woman: willed, creative, and speaking the language of all of world culture.

—Very well … you don’t approve of this ideology. But in the end, if it can’t be fixed … If a person can’t rid himself of his psychological complexes, then he should at least have the right to sublimate them ...

5 The volume being referred to is Psychopathia Sexualis, popular in Russia at the turn of the century and published in multiple translations between 1887 and 1919. About Kraft-Ebbing’s reception in Russia see Bershtein 1999.
—Very possibly. In general, who’s to say what a person does or does not have a right to do. It depends on your point of view. But society, and the state undoubtedly have the right to take issue with this ideology, this temptation. Society cannot help but oppose the sublimation of chaos, suffering, emptiness. And please do not wheel out the eternal argument about antiquity. In Athens, the family was cut off from emotional, spiritual, and social life. And they could permit themselves this—to raise their hetaera and boys to the level of the norm. Whatever they needed. Social order does not at all require what is biologically natural. It requires what is regulated, what is subject to social regimentation.

Contemporary society is designed for average people. Phenomena that by their very nature lack an average level cannot be tolerated in it. I am not after all speaking about the legitimacy of police interference ... but about how a category of people, some of whom are certainly debauched, while others are certainly unhappy, will never attain social equality.

Some debauchery is base. But let’s take debauchery in the best sense of the word—as the emancipation of erotic means. Debauchery requires variety, love is uniform. So uniform that it continues to declare itself using words that were probably composed by Adam and Eve. Within the bounds of debauchery, there are hardly any differences between normal and abnormal people. The difference is not important here. I knew a woman who assured me that she and her husband had no children, not out of a lack of desire to do so, but essentially, and above all, because her husband could in no way summon himself to have recourse to the corresponding method ... He had no interest in it. So there you have an example from the life of normal people.

Inverts can have a peaceful existence if they are thoughtless and debauched. Or, to put it more mildly, if they are formalists in love, believing in the reality of the moment, and separating the means from the ends (in art, after all, formalism is also the emancipation of the means). But woe to the rational and the sentimental—there is a type that combines a dry clarity of mind with hurt feelings. Woe be to those who, in contrast to the formalists in love, I would call symbolists ...
—And all of this is merely a semblance?6

—Yes, yes. Only the symbolism of the coupling of two opposite poles. After all, this is the original, uniform essence of love; the only one necessary, and the only one inaccessible to them. Thus begins the catastrophe. Especially for women who are struck by the need for a man’s love; sometimes, as if to spite you, the most patriarchal—and, I would say—respectable kind.

—Imagine that you could influence one such person, who was just embarking on life. What should one do—advise him to become debauched so as not to be unhappy?

—In any case, not to fear ruining oneself with formalism. Anything is better than the futile tenderness of these people—it is unfortunate that they are inclined to be tender. Meanwhile, like all freaks, they are inborn ego-centrists and analytical types; you cannot make of them people of action and people of the deed. But I would tell him: “Here is an entire world for you. You can obtain pleasure, if you need pleasure. And you will be loved—no worse than others. Only remember this: all contracts with you are written on sand.”7

—Well, you’ve arrived at a kind of mystical doom … Isn’t this the mark of Cain?

—Not mystical at all. Unfortunately, it is derived impeccably from social and psychological data. Practice has shown that love as such—love in pure form—is a passing condition. It must be attached to other material, not only in order to become durable, but simply in order to become bearable. Great love, which never changes—is a rarest exception: it is just as possible and just as improbable for a normal person as it is for an abnormal one. One cannot count on these kinds of circumstances. There are lots of different things that can unite a man and woman for life. But two inverts are united primarily by love that is alienated from everything, love that is not secured by anything: children, family, formalized daily routine, social

6 Inexact quotation from Boris Pasternak’s poem “Marburg” (1915).
7 The last sentence possibly contains a reference to a conversation with Grigory Gukovsky, recorded by Ginzburg in 1935: “If I landed on an uninhabited island, it’s likely I would start to write on the sand.’ ‘Even so, you are writing on the sand,’ Grisha said” (Ginzburg 2002: 126).
recognizes recognition, duties and obligations. But love, if it cannot be transformed into anything else, does not stay in place; it crumbles from its own self-centeredness. All of this relates in particular to female inversion.

—Why, exactly, to the female kind?

—Because a normal woman, especially, needs these everyday forms of domestic life, and to this day often needs forms that are organized, defined by the social status of her partner. Perhaps you are familiar with the fact that in female homosexual relationships, one side is, as a rule, normal. If you do not take into consideration hysteria and the like. Female passive inversion practically does not exist; in any case, it is not at all characteristic of these relationships. And there is no one, not a single normal woman who could endure à la longue this unalloyed love, which lacks the power to disperse itself, to escape from itself by feeding other life functions.

One of my friends (there was a time when I was following her fate) told me—and, by the way, she was loved by many—she told me: “It begins in many different ways—with passion, friendship, surprise, compassion, sensual attraction, erotic curiosity ... but it always ends the same way—the man she leaves with. And, god is my witness, they are right, even if this man is a considerable rogue, and bad in bed.”

Have you grasped my thought?

—Yes. So you insist that this is not a problem?

—Exactly, exactly. And not even a theme. Well, maybe it is a theme for a humanistic novel about the mercilessness of society. But I am indifferent towards such novels. In part because, in this case, more merciless than society are the regular patterns of these relations themselves. As far as the psychological novel is concerned ... If I wrote a psychological novel, I would put aside this theme. This substitute, dubious theme of a special love, which is as if unlike any others.

—But what about Proust?

—But it is precisely Proust who, together with Freud—from opposite ends—demonstrated that there is only one love, that deviant love only magnifies the features of natural feeling. Note that Proust works on this theme as a special one when he is the observer of a milieu (Sodom and Gomorrah), when he’s concerned with the social characterization of Charles and others who are fatally at the mercy of crooks. But the social plane
here is not equal to the emotional one, in which Charlus’s love for Morel does not at all differ from Swann’s love for Odette, from the narrator’s love for Albertine; who moreover has been transposed from Albert. This is the same solipsistic love that is born out of the disconnected consciousness of egoists. It is unquenchable, and its real hopelessness sets in with possession—after all with possession a person stops deceiving himself about the fact that he is unhappy for accidental and fixable reasons. Proust—he knew that there is only one love.

You think that they shed tears over The Songs of Bilitis or Kuzmin’s poetry? If they need to cry, they will cry over the gypsy romances, over Heine’s Buch der Lieder or the eighth chapter of Eugene Onegin, over Blok:

With my own hand I have removed from the table
Your face, in its simple frame ...

Because it is written about them too. No one cries over what doesn’t concern himself.

Later Note on the Fourth Conversation

Probably, self-definition among the youth happens more simply now. After all, this is a conversation with a person from a generation that still inherited the habit of reflection and the aesthetics of insurmountable internal contradictions.

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8 The Chansons de Bilitis (1894), a collection of sensual Sapphic poetry in prose, were first published as “translations from the Greek,” but in fact were authored by the French Parnassian poet and novelist Pierre Louÿs.

9 The last two lines from Alexander Blok’s poem “About valor, heroic deeds, and glory” (“О doblestiakh, о podvigakh, о slave ...” (1908).

10 Most likely, this note was added in the 1960s.
N.’s account: Sitting at this table, among these peculiar lamentations, so ancient and yet so topical, I felt suffocated and troubled. Especially troubled because of a person I had not seen before. His out-turned lips and the skin that hung in folds at his temples, his witticisms and shifting fingers weighed down heavily upon me. It was all inimically foreign, but because of how this foreignness touched me so painfully, I could not fail to understand that somewhere, on a deep level, it was agonizingly familiar. Agonizingly familiar in its power over me; in its power to stand between me and what was close to me, to tear me from the familiar and to deprive me of a full-fledged existence beside it; in its power to drag me along into the sphere of humiliation.

There are three typical paths that members of the intelligentsia follow when navigating this question. The first type accepts this essence as fundamental, as constitutive of their person, with, if not all, then at least some of the consequences that follow. Once they have done this, then it inevitably

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1 The title of this essay (in Russian, Evreiskii vopros) does not appear in the manuscript (which, while it does not carry a date, appears to have been written in 1944), though it is physically on the manuscript page in the handwriting of Nikolai Kononov, who entered the title during his work with the author on Pretvorenie opyta circa 1990, where this essay did not, in the end, appear (according to Kononov, it was destined to be published separately, perhaps, as he recalls, in the journal Vsemirnoe slovo). The title appears cryptically (as Evr. vopros) in the author’s 1960s inventory of essays from her 1943–46 notebook (a notebook designated by her as “1943”). The absence of a title in the original, together with the near-absence of the word evrei (Jew) in this essay give rise to a certain awkwardness in the text that I have tried to maintain in this translation. Ginzburg’s intense and bold analysis of a topic is accompanied by a reluctance to mention the subject directly (it happens only a few times near the end of the essay). This essay was left as a rough draft by the author and was published for the first time in Ginzburg 2011: 191–94.
becomes a sphere of self-realization. Various initial conditions lead to this declaration: ideological traditions or simply family ones; serious trauma (the complex spoken of by Boris Bukhstab); strongly developed psychological or physical characteristics; sometimes the intense development of these same features in friends or loved ones, especially if they share the same day-to-day existence, etc.

Lamentation plays an exceptional role in the speech habits of this type—exaggerated to every degree, of course,—a person can even go searching maniacally for insults. This also becomes an indispensable and highly abused self-justificatory concept.

The other types cannot fathom how it is that these people are not ashamed, how they can root about in their own humiliation. But for them there is nothing to be ashamed of, precisely because that which has been unjustly devalued appears to them as an unconditional value (something that members of the other type cannot inwardly believe). After all, it does not seem strange if some ex-somebody of the elite laments his status in the republic; it would not seem strange if our intelligentsia did this. But we experience infinite humiliation in this case because we don’t believe, we instinctively discard the value of what has been devalued in the given connection.

The second variety is made up of those people who deny this essence in themselves. And they want to draw radical practical conclusions from this denial. The concrete ways in which this desire is manifest are extremely diverse—from attempts at full concealment to countless degrees of dissociation in trivial matters. The fundamental fallaciousness of this position lies in the fact that the people in whose name they deny this quality in themselves resolutely do not wish to take this denial into consideration. And nothing can be done about this. Therefore these people who try so hard to avoid humiliation fall prey to a double humiliation. They are humiliated by their insuperable belonging to the given sphere, especially humiliated because their denial announces, for all to hear, that they have recognized this sphere as particularly humiliating; and they are humiliated because their attempts at concealment have failed, have been exposed, denied. In these attempts they are downright laughable. Thus, this position is completely untenable from a practical standpoint.
The third position is the position of people with an inner denial, but who have precisely taken into account the practical unsoundness of the previous position. This third position is N.’s own. This type sees the forced non-confluence—incomplete merger—with their spiritual homeland, with the culture they consciously accept and affirm, as an unfortunate accident of birth which, nevertheless, cannot be evaded or even concealed, but rather must be borne in a completely forthright and honest way—for only this can deliver them from double humiliation. Therefore, they consent to accept the misfortune in the inconsistency, the contradiction of their position, in their forced belonging to an alien sphere; but they do not consent to accept this belonging as humiliating. Alien, yes—but not lower. That is, in their soul, of course, they cannot help but consider it lower, rather, cannot but feel it as such (because it is more than anything an emotional tinge), but they conceal this out of pride. On the whole, proud concealment of their genuine experiences of value is one of the characteristic traits of this position. After all, in their inner aspirations and consequently in their experiences of value, these people are very close to the preceding group. The difference is in their manner of behavior.

They do not conceal and do not disguise, but they have their methods of deception and self-deception. They dig in their heels, they want so badly not to be dragged into the gaping abyss of humiliation that they evade, avoid, dispel from consciousness—sometimes with extreme naïveté. What takes place is something opposite to the system of lamentations, but just as artificial in the sense of its selection and evaluation of facts (disagreements concerning this with the P’s.). So very badly does a person not want this burden to hang overhead and drag him into the abyss of humiliation that he desperately struggles against these facts. Herein lies the weakness of this position. For stubborn repression can yield results that are analogous to stubborn concealment—that is, to double humiliation. A humiliation that a person wanted to avoid, but failed to avoid because his milieu did not recognize his right to do so—is doubled.

It is difficult for them to escape this, for it is difficult to abstain from repression. After all, people of the first group suffer because of something that they acknowledge as their inner essence; it is a sphere of self-realization for them and, consequently, within the bounds of this sphere they have
learned to compensate themselves in one way or another. But it is too insulting to suffer and to bear responsibility for an “unfortunate coincidence.” And at this point, people with a healthy spiritual capacity for resistance experience an irresistible need for repression. A person maintains many different illusions along this path—the last of which, the most intimate, is this: I personally am such that this concerns me minimally. This is an ethically slippery illusion, and people usually conceal it out of pride; after all there is an element here of: “thanks, brothers, for forgiving me for this.” People of the third position understand all of the fictionality and falsity of similar ways out. For the most reasonable among them, this formula mainly expresses the difference between an actual, acknowledged, everyday accountability, which the second group tries in vain to evade,—and the spiritual, ideological accountability which they deny.

Yes, the fascists can tear me to pieces as a Jew, I bear this in mind (people often have to bear real responsibility for the accidental), but there is no one who can foist this set of problems on me as my own, as something that is in my blood. Inwardly, this doesn’t concern me. My set of problems is that of the Russian intelligentsia in its latest phase.

This is precisely N.’s personal (private) position, and it is very clearly expressed in him. The physical and even psychological characteristics (the cast of mind) are very strongly manifest, and this should have enveloped him in the corresponding atmosphere, carried with him at all times. But with his set of problems, his tastes, predilections, mental habits, interests,—he is so far outside of this, so much a Russian intelligent, that this atmosphere somehow does not materialize around him. And maybe this consciousness of his (decidedly devoid of any folkloristic or other Russian markers), in fact, gets communicated somehow to his milieu. His formula is the following: I accept everything to which pride and propriety bind me; I understand that when circumstances dictate, I will have to bear all of the unpleasantness that stems from this “unpleasant coincidence,” and that faced with this obligation I should not bury my head in the sand (one has to struggle against one’s childish craving for repression)—but my responsibility ends here. Inwardly, there is nothing that I, the bearer of the historical problems of the Russian intelligentsia (a heavy burden) can do about this. One ideological burden is enough. And here I complain without shame or embarrassment. These
are lofty complaints. This does not concern me, or rather, it concerns me
to the extent that I carry all of the weight of external, real responsibility,
and do not evade it. In this way a person bears responsibility for a mistake,
as when he has been mistaken for someone else, for example. If there is
absolutely no way to correct this confusion, then a person has to bear the
consequences with decency. Emotionally, this is a sphere of misfortune and
humiliation for me, but I conceal and will continue to conceal this out of
pride, out of decency, out of respect for those for whom this is a sphere of
realization. And I allow myself, within the bounds of propriety, to distance
myself from this sphere, to reduce to the most minimal role possible the
pressure it exerts on my life.

Such is the formula. But, of course, this is not the final word on the
matter. That is, one cannot make such a clean break. A connection exists that
is altogether dark, deep, blood-borne. After all, no other moral humiliation
contains such agonizing depth. It is a thing from which one can never, ever
separate oneself. Hence the horrifying painfulness of all reactions. Hence
also the animosity towards the sphere of one’s own humiliation; the genuine
spitefulness of conversations conducted within one’s milieu, the prevalence
of the repulsive phenomenon of Jewish anti-Semitism. They hate in others
those traits that lie upon themselves as the stamp of inferiority.

This is one line, one manifestation (negative) of a deep connection,
perhaps denied by the consciousness. Along with it goes a positive mani-
festation. Even the most indifferent people experience pride—thereby rec-
ognizing their unconscious belonging to this connection, along with their
conscious belonging to another culture and historical connection—when
listening to stories about positive traits. Moreover they derive the most sat-
sisfaction not from hearing about such qualities as the mind, giftedness, etc.
This is customary, and does not contradict the Jewish inferiority complex;
in fact it traditionally enters into this complex. N. is indifferent to news
about the decoration of a Jewish person for scientific achievements, etc.
But any bit of news about the decoration of a Jew for military achievements
gives him deep satisfaction. As if one small portion of a burden eternally
hanging over him had been lifted.
The State of Literature near the End of the War\textsuperscript{1}

The rules of this literature: 1. Everyone is good. In other words, everyone who enters into the given system is good, and everyone who does not is bad. Any shortcomings of the good stem from their virtues (the absent-mindedness or helplessness of a scholar, the mischievousness of children, the frivolity of youth, the rudeness of the management, and so on). 2) Everyone is successful. Nothing truly bad can happen to a person. Justice is restored; personal misfortunes are alleviated in the process of serving the common cause; death itself cannot prevent the main goal from being accomplished, and sometimes even promotes it. Everything that has already been included in the given system is good. Evil can only result from a hostile system (external or internal enemies). 3) Everything is good. Everything that can possibly be included in the given system is good. Therefore the problem of choice and moral hierarchy— the fundamental problem of human behavior, one of the fundamental problems of world culture— is completely removed. Elements of hierarchy, choice, or renunciation threaten to violate the premise of the absolute value of the whole system that has been adopted. These elements are in themselves a temptation, just as temptation would arise in choosing albeit between only two candidates, since each is alleged to be unconditionally good, to the extent that a better one simply could not exist. Where low-level organizations are concerned, this is not necessarily the case, since people are evaluated from a practical standpoint, rather than in their capacity as symbolic, governmental values. Thus, the problem of choice is removed, and what prevails is a combination of the incompatible, so characteristic for philistine thinking. Let a person be both a scholar and well-dressed, profound and cheerful, valorous and

\textsuperscript{1} What is presented here is the first half of a draft essay written in 1944, and published in its entirety in Ginzburg 2011: 100–13.
devoted to family life, and so on and so forth. Two virtues are better than one, three are better than two, etc.; after all, it is a simple calculation. The more values, the better. Adorn yourself with everything that could possibly adorn the self.

But for “character” to take shape and plot to develop, a writer constructs temporary barriers in the form of hindrances (which are surmounted), shortcomings (which are rectified), delusions (which are dispelled), such that, in the course of the action, all problems are removed in the very same instance. But, as often happens, this auxiliary system of temporary hindrances has taken on a dynamic and dialectic of its own, and has introduced its own temptations.

At one time, temporary obstacles were constructed using material from hostile systems, which clashed with the given one (revolution, civil war, war communism); then, they were mainly constructed out of the remnants of hostile and foreign systems, which contaminated the given system, and so on. Creating obstacles became more and more difficult as the requirement intensified for the painful processes of development to be completed, and for prosperity to be stabilized (happiness—<equals?> life). There was a period when the situation grew unbelievably paradoxical. Things happened, the most horrible of all things to happen since the revolution (st<alin?>), but they were completely shut out from the printed field of consciousness. Included into this field—a completely simulated one—was the formula of prosperity, and this rule was there for everyone to follow. Obstacles, which an author needs for reasons of plot and technique, had to be specially fabricated, laboriously spun out of thin air.

In the end. For writers, or rather for those who deserve to be called not “writers” but “those who are published,” the connection between reality and writing was entirely severed. Writing was a realm of completely fictitious formulations and materials, and every time they stepped into this realm, they excluded their life experience. They had to leave out everything they lived for, were interested in, were afraid or desirous of, everything they thought and spoke about at the table. Even the most conscientious of them (i.e. young ones who had never worked otherwise) thought of this as completely natural. Writing was a separate (professional) sphere to which their real life experience simply bore no relation.
Let it be said: no kind of formal censorship ever hindered or could help a genuine writer express the spirit of the time. Pushkin lacked the right to write about the Decembrists, but he wrote about that which could not exist without the Decembrists and without which the Decembrists could not exist. He wrote about the conditions, consequences, or about the milieu and atmosphere of Decembrism. In this way, the link that had been removed by formal censorship could be replaced by subtle understanding, since the whole chain of things that had historically conditioned these phenomena had not been broken. This kind of relationship is all one needs in order to express authentic and vital features of reality. In order to achieve a literary reality that is a complete simulacrum, isolated from real experience, it was necessary to add internal censorship to the formal kind. According to the principle “everyone is his own censor.”

Gradually it grew more difficult to construct plot hurdles and temporary fictions of misfortune. This whole literature hit up against a wall. Then the war came and changed the situation. A moment of collision occurred with extraordinary force—between one’s own system and a system that was alien, hostile, the source of all evil. Now, there was an unlimited quantity of evil, of obstacles, of the negative. But one had to handle these things with care. There are no restrictions on the depiction of evil or torments inflicted by the enemy on a peaceful population. But there are strict limits to the depiction of the horrors of war as such. Here the task is not only to avoid everything that could sap people’s courage and initiative, but also to ensure that only one system, the enemy’s, bore responsibility for the suffering of the peaceful population. Both systems are responsible for war. War is evil when it is aggression, but when it is the self-defense of a people—it is a value. When the event is concretely portrayed, the two parts of war get interwoven—but in order for them to be distinguishable in this mess, they are fictitiously painted in two different colors. Everything that belongs to the positive system cannot be evil, and for that matter cannot cause absolute suffering, suffering that is not alleviated in the very same instance. Suffering is alleviated either by a happy ending, or by heroic enthusiasm which overcomes it. In any case, the horrors are solely apportioned to the enemy system. In movies and in the press, we depict only the corpses of the enemy, torn to pieces and crushed by the wheels of tanks.
But meanwhile, we underestimate the dangerous power of associations, analogies, and subtle hints.

Literature of the West, in which there is no premise of mandatory optimism and universal happiness in the first instance, has followed different paths. And this applies not only to pacifist literature, but also to heroic literature (other than the primitively patriotic kind). There, horror is allowed on one’s own side too; horror even raises the value of the heroic act. Because it is relieved in other instances—historical or religious. In pacifist literature, of course, the horror is not at all mitigated.

Lately, even in our country, the inadequacy of fictitiously optimistic solutions in the first instance has come more and more clearly into view. Writers have begun dimly groping about for the possibility of enlisting the other instances to the cause of propaganda. In particular they have begun circling around the idea of immortality, let’s say, social immortality. This process is very symptomatic and still very indistinct.

Apart from this, the question of obstacles that issue from a hostile source, and of temporary obstacles arising from the inside, is ever more pointedly posed. And here it is not just a matter of the technical demands for constructing a work of literature, but also the needs for self-realization experienced alike by those who write and those others who are published.

You cannot understand anything about a person or a person’s behavior if you reduce this behavior to interestedness in material goods, to greed in the strict sense of the word. Material goods are a decisive factor only when a person suffers from acute material deprivation. In other cases, impulses of ambition, vainglory, and self-assertion prevail; the need to experience one’s own power, superiority. To experience one’s own value. For this, even the greediest, most mediocre, and most egotistical person can willingly forego many comforts and pleasures.

All of this applies especially to artists, to writers (including those who are published) with their habitual need for success and for unmediated,

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2 In an essay from 1943, Ginzburg writes of the “three instances” in which affirmation or negation are possible in literature: 1) everyday life 2) history 3) the higher meaning of life. See *Ginzburg 2002: 161–65 and idem 2011: 149–52 and 471–75.*
tangible evidence of this success, a need which has already come to resemble the need for certain habitual physiological stimulation. And in order to experience their own value, because of their membership in this profession, they must see themselves as creative to a certain degree. They cannot get along without illusions that elevate.

There was a time when, in this regard, everything came together for them in a satisfying and normal way. In those days when the demand for misfortunes to happen in the plot, the demand for an inauspicious beginning, was decided naturally using the material of revolution and of the pre-revolutionary epoch, of civil war, war communism, of the period where everything was being built (the theme of remnants of the old system), and so on—in those days the problem of a writer’s self-worth was also solved rather painlessly. Writers back then were divided into one-hundred-percent-supporters and fellow-travelers. Both groups wanted to experience a feeling of superiority. The fellow-travelers experienced this feeling since they considered themselves to be cultured, educated, inwardly free, occupied with complex problems. The hundred-percent-supporters experienced a feeling of superiority since they considered themselves to be wielders of power and bearers of the spirit of the time. They were on guard and brought everyone to reason and despised the rotten intelligentsia. Both groups were satisfied with the situation.

As the years went by, however, the situation grew more complicated. In line with the development of uniform thinking in Russia, the category of fellow-travelers as such completely ceased to exist. What came to replace them was another category of people, extremely limited in numbers, people with their own particular fates and methods of self-assertion: those who write (not for publication). The gradual extinction of fellow-travelers was accomplished in parallel with the growing force of barriers to constructing plots with unhappy endings (I have spoken about this above). In accordance with the perfection of uniform thinking, in accordance with the extinction

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3 An allusion to the parodic “Project for the introduction of uniform thinking in Russia” (1863) of Koz'ma Prutkov, which was the pseudonym of the mid-nineteenth-century writers A.K. Tolstoy and the Zhemchuzhnikov brothers.
of fellow-traveling as a phenomenon, those who had been one-hundred-percent-supporters felt their rights to superiority dwindling and becoming shaky. Ultimately, everyone turned out to be, more or less, one-hundred-percent-supporters. In any case, everyone was in the same situation. Everyone endeavored to say the same thing, and they said it with a differing degree of mistakes, aberrations, accidental deviations. There was no one left to bring to reason, except oneself. Today my neighbor errs, and I put his brains in order, tomorrow I will err, and he will put mine in order. It ceased to be a matter of principal, and everyone grew bored. In order to enliven one’s sense of self-worth, in order to feel like an ideological figure as before, one had to seek out some kind of new position. Before, reality had presented itself to them as material for polemical activity. Moreover, they knew ahead of time that they would prevail in their polemical activity, since they had the “army and navy” backing them up, as Shklovsky used to say. And so, reality ceased to be material for polemical activity for them, and then they had to begin to search for a new position in relation to it, a position that would guarantee, as before, their experience of self-worth. Then they began to want to actually say something about this reality. Either to write about what they had seen and experienced in reality, according to their own understanding, or about what would actually interest or touch the reader. Of course, they wanted to do all of this to the smallest permissible degree, a degree compatible with publishing and with their prosperity, but still … This was a critical moment; especially critical, because this moment coincided with the situation where happiness in literature was inversely proportional to the horror of reality. One cannot know how this critical moment would have been resolved if the war had not changed the material, and introduced a multiplicity of new possibilities for affirmation and negation. But behind all of these possibilities (after all, everyone senses them as to some extent temporary), a demand that has once arisen continues to ripen. On the other hand, the present moment

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4 In one of Ginzburg’s notes we read: “During one of the debates of the twenties, Shklovsky told his opponent: ‘You have the entire army and navy on your side, and we are just four people. So what are you worried about?’” (Ginzburg 2002: 327).
intensifies this demand, because it delivered genuine life experience to a
great many people, it heightened their human value, and now they want
to realize this value.

Gradually and from different impulses, there formed a feeble effort
to speak a little ounce of the truth. They have been corrupted by publish-
ing, privilege, awards, and do not in any case want to part with all of this.
Therefore they think that it is possible to speak just a little bit of the truth,
that one can combine the expression of life experience with the fulfillment
of directives. A characteristic case of the philistine’s combination of the
incompatible. They want all of this to end with a successful appearance in
print, but it pleases them when beforehand, some kind of nonsense tran-
spires surrounding what they have written. When certain unintelligent
bureaucrats in the lower apparat are horrified and create difficulties, and
the higher levels of authority who, on the contrary, understand everything
and look at things open-mindedly, turn out to be on their side in the end
and give the order from above. This is the ideal course of events, and it
has classical precedents (A History of the Russian State, The Government
Inspector).\footnote{The emperor Alexander I granted Nikolai Karamzin, in his capacity as official his-
tographe... from criticism.} Meanwhile they take pleasure in the possibility of experiencing
a sense of superiority, first of all over the unintelligent bureaucrats, who
receive a blow from above; this feeling of superiority completely repays the
nervous strain they have to go through before this blow is given and dealt
(sometimes it happens with great delay, after passing through many levels
of authority); secondly, they take pleasure in their superiority over their
other colleagues, who do not want to combine an expression of their life
experience with the fulfillment of directives, instead limiting themselves to
fulfilling the directives. But they do not know that, in essence, these other
colleagues are already a fiction—something similar to a hypothetical fool,
with whom they argue in vain. They do not know that the need for real
conversation about reality has already become typical and universal, and
only for this reason has each one of them separately arrived at this same need. There are exceptions, of course; there are exceptions among those who are already completely talentless and illiterate; among the especially lazy, or cynical, or those who have become utter hacks, among those who have grown old or have gorged themselves on achievements and successes to the point of stupefaction. But this is the exception. What is typical for the present literary moment is the indecisive striving to speak about reality. For a quiet dialogue, the kind that will not scare away prosperity.

The saddest thing for them to realize (and each of them tries not to understand or notice it) is that there is essentially no one to despise, no one who can feel superior and no one over whom to lord one’s superiority. Because each colleague in the profession wants exactly the same thing in exactly the same way, and each wants to feel better than everyone else, and to be in a position to scorn the others.

In the whole mass of current material, certain spheres have been distinguished as the most fitting for realizing their needs. One of these spheres is the theme of Leningrad. The special quality of this theme is the fact that it is to a high degree heroic-patriotic, and in this sense it has been tested. Together with this, it is a theme that is semi-civilian, and therefore provides the opportunity to operate with much more varied, less standard collisions. And, finally, it is a theme concerning the enemy’s crimes, thus it broadly includes the portrayal of the negative, the beginning of all ill. But this is where the complications begin. Since the events do not take place on occupied territory, whatever happens is still included in the sphere of affirmation. Consequently, evil must be confined. In any case, it must be clearly sublated in the very same instance. On this basis, a battle unfolded between the approved writers and the organs of ideological control. A battle in which both sides sometimes demonstrate much stubbornness. You cannot understand the twists and turns of this struggle without understanding the psychological function that belonging to the category of defenders of Leningrad, or simply belonging to the category of those who have remained in Leningrad, has acquired.

This category has by itself become an inexhaustible source of the experience of self-worth, a source of pride, of self-justificatory concepts and especially of a feeling of superiority over those who have left the city. Each
person has almost naively and almost earnestly forgotten a great deal—they
have forgotten how they hesitated about whether to leave or not to leave,
how many of them stayed because of very personal and accidental causes,
how at times they regretted staying behind, how they avoided working on
the city’s defenses, how they lost their human image and performed the
strangest cruel and dishonest acts, how they thought exclusively about
food, and were indifferent to everything else. They remember not with
a memory burdened by details, but with some kind of summary feeling,
that they remained, that they suffered, that they were patient, that they
did not fear death, that they continued to work and to participate in the
course of life. And this is true. None of them interrupted the course of
life. They enabled its continuation by saving themselves, their loved ones,
by continuing their everyday work, which had they dropped, they would
have died. This is the truth. Only that which was in fact the instinct for
self-preservation and a vague manifestation of the common will for vic-
tory—now seems to them to be much more purified and conscious. And it
presents itself to them with an admixture of that heroic sense of self which
they did not have before.

The specific Leningrad experience of self-worth has found a curious
expression in our literature about Leningrad. Moreover, in writers, rather
shameless profiteering on other peoples’ and even their own sufferings
somehow gets combined with a sincere need to realize in writing that which
they feel to be their most elevated and difficult life experience.

Their premises are the following: the problem of the third instance
(of the higher meaning of life), in essence, does not exist for them. In the
second instance (historical) everything, of course, turns out well. But they
want it to be permitted for them to say that they suffered, and to a certain
degree to show what transpired, to show what they endured, to demonstrate
the heroic aspects of what they experienced. For them, it is a question of
realization. And precisely because they were allowed to show this little piece,
they already have a hard time refraining from progressing little by little in
this direction. Meanwhile, of course, they agree to remove tragedy in the
very same instance, having shown that for a person of the given sphere (in
this resides the privilege of this sphere) there are no unsolvable questions
and no insurmountable hurdles.
“There lived two Pugachëvs. There was the magnanimous and daring Pugachëv, the peasants’ tsar …” wrote Marina Tsvetaeva in the article “Pushkin and Pugachëv” (published in 1937). She was referring to the good Pugachëv of “The Captain’s Daughter.” One also finds in Pushkin the evil Pugachëv of “The History of Pugachëv”: “There was the base Pugachëv, the faint-hearted villain—Pushkin is right when presenting him as lofty and daring, for a delusion that exalts us is dearer than the multitudes of base truths …”

Pushkin did not care much for Pugachëv the peasants’ tsar. But he understood the historical inevitability of Pugachëv, and in “The Captain’s Daughter” he enhanced this with the poetry of folklore and legend, which he was powerless to resist. This poetry is absent from “The History of Pugachëv”; it can be found only in the materials Pushkin collected while making it: oral histories, popular legends, songs.

But the subject here is not Pushkin—it is Tsvetaeva. Pushkin thought in categories that were different to those of the intelligentsia. Tsvetaeva has an intelligent’s way of thinking, with a very strong infusion of romanticism that she maintained in pure form from her childhood infatuation with “Orlënok”¹ right up until her later enthusiasm for politics.

¹ The French play by Edmond Rostand, L’Aiglon, about the life of Napoleon’s son, whose nickname was “eaglet” (in French, aiglon, in Russian, orlënok). The main role was created by/for Sarah Bernhardt, who played it on tour in Russia. Tsvetaeva is said to have seen Bernhardt in the December 1908 performance in Moscow (where Tsvetaeva had planned to shoot herself, but the gun misfired) and again in Paris, in 1912. Tsvetaeva went through a period of infatuation with Napoleon and his son. Shveitser 2002: 68–70, 81–2, 102.
Pugachëv is good because he is a noble brigand. Pugachëv of “The History” is evil not because he is a murderer, but because he does not live up to the behavioral norm of the noble brigand. The bad Pugachëv “out of fear let his beloved woman and an innocent baby be torn to pieces, his best friend drown, his most faithful comrade-in-arms be strangled, while he, in reply to a bloody blow on the face, dropped down on his knees.” Stenka Razin, who drowned his beloved woman very romantically and with his own hands, is presented as an example for him.

Pugachëv’s sins are enumerated; the rest is no longer so important. And, above all, the rest does not provoke the question: how can it be that we are on his side? Of course we, intelligents, humanists, we are against cruelty (even unavoidable cruelty), but on the whole we are for the peasants’ tsar.

The critic Efim Dobin also has a liking for Pugachëv—he wrote about this in his book A Story of Nine Plots, intended for teenagers. He explicates Grinëv's dream: “The traveler with the black beard will turn out to be Pugachëv, and everything will come true: the axes swinging every which way, the heaps of dead bodies, the pools of blood. The dreadful peasant with the black beard will at the same time come to be Grinëv’s best man. Petrusha’s mother speaks this herself (the reader vaguely senses in her the distant, dim image of Mother Russia). The mother commands her son to kiss the peasant’s hand and to ask his blessing. And the ‘dreadful peasant’ is affectionate and himself wants to bless the hero. Even when the bloody events have been foretold, the only possible way to salvation has been indicated: to accept the peasant’s blessing.”

There it is again, without hesitation, without question. Why did the simplest things not come into play—Tsvetaeva’s empathy, Dobin’s magnanimity, Dobin’s fear? This calls for astonishment, but I am not astonished. All of us were this way—at the age of fifteen. Well, what about it, at fifteen ...

... ... ... ... ... ... like a river,
Were diverted by the severe epoch.  

2 Anna Akhmatova, Fifth “Northern Elegy” (1945).
But young people are astonished, and pose questions that were not posed in our time. In this realm the boundary between generations is more distinct than ever. It is not part of their emotional experience. They did not live through the anticipation, the dream of revolution, that feeling of a life that, having suddenly broken into a run, was flung open, that feeling I had when, at age fifteen, in March 1917, I walked the streets of Odessa (with a red ribbon), streets jammed with thronging and rejoicing crowds. I went to school with the red ribbon pinned on too, and the schoolmistress in charge of conduct (schoolmistresses had not yet disappeared) tentatively issued me a reprimand, to which I turned a deaf ear.

You cannot explain it to those who did not experience it, for the reason that in general you cannot explain an emotion. A person who has never loved cannot understand what love is—why, that is, people behave the way they do in this condition.

Many great Russian cultural figures did not want revolution, condemned revolution. But disagreement with the established order was the experience of Russian culture as a whole. All thinking people were against this order, one way or another—the Slavophiles, Dostoevsky, Vladimir Solovyov. Only Konstantin Leontiev was for. That is why he—with his aestheticism—is in effect very un-Russian.

The Russian intelligent discovered within himself a ready-made complex of dissent, an unshakable heritage and value, present from the first glimmerings of consciousness. Only later was there talk of how to combine this asset with other values, even those that were antithetical. A person is subject to different spirits of his epoch simultaneously; their simultaneous internalization takes place within him. Thus, the mixture of populist [narodniki] traditions, even those of the People’s Will (the terrorist organization), with avant-gardism, with modernism, gave birth in the beginning of the twentieth century to a new kind of intelligent, which would have horrified the sincere populists of the 1870s. In Klim Samgin Gorky depicted this type with precision.

The epochal tendencies came from different spheres, but there was common ground. What they had in common was the idea of the infinite expansion of personality (lichnost’). The revolution would subsequently constrict this personality, but as to how and by what means—it was still
possible not to worry about that. The whole Russian avant-garde got a whiff of the revolution beforehand. The Symbolists caught a glimpse of it in 1905 (some of them earlier still, in their youth). The post-Symbolists ...

One cannot understand Mandelstam of the 1920s without the stories he recounted in *The Noise of Time* about reading the Erfurt Program while at the gymnasium, about the populist spirit in the family of his friend Boris Sinani. Pasternak speaks about the populist ideal that takes root in childhood in the narrative poem “The Year Nineteen Hundred and Five”:

> It happened yesterday,
> And had we been born thirty years sooner,
> We could have approached from the yard,
> And, in the kerosene haze of lamps,
> Among the glimmering of retorts,
> We would have found
> That those lab assistants
> Were our mothers
> Or
> Our mothers’ friends. ³

Women laboratory assistants made bombs for terrorist acts. It might seem that Akhmatova was removed from this, but she told me with a shade of pleasure about how her mother, in her youth, had acquaintances in the People’s Will. “My mother loved to speak about some circle or other. Later it became clear that this circle was the People’s Will. Mother was very proud of the fact that she had somehow given Vera Figner one of her blouses—it was needed for a disguise ...” Exactly as in Pasternak: “Mothers’ friends ...” These threads stretched out, connecting people who would seem most unlikely, and not just to reformers of some sort, but directly to the bombers.

In 1915 Mayakovsky wrote:

> So that flags would flutter in the fever of gunfire,
> Like at every decent celebration,

³ Boris Pasternak, the section “Fathers” (1925) from the *poema* “The Year Nineteen Hundred and Five”.
Generation at a Turning Point

Raise higher, [oh] lampposts,
The bloodied carcasses of grain merchants.⁴

Mayakovsky, who considered Blok an effete intelligent, did not know the lines of Blok’s 1907 draft:

And we will lift them on a pitchfork,
We will swing their bodies in a noose,
To break the veins on their necks,
To make the cursed blood flow.

Thus, among the blizzards one finds in Blok’s poetry of the 1900s, the good Pugachëv loomed very distinctly.

The adolescence or early youth of my generation coincides with the eve of the revolution. Again a similar kit available for the forging of a disposition: egocentrism, elitism, psychological fads, poems by the new poets—all of it is good. Pugachëv is also good, but Sofiia Perovskaia still better because, unlike Pugachëv, there’s the beauty of sacrifice. It is sacrifice of oneself. Well, and what about sacrificing others? What about innocent people? This also entered into the mix.

The bomb Rysakov threw did not kill the tsar (that was the next bomb, thrown by Grinevitsky) but, meanwhile, it killed a boy with a basket who happened to be around. A novella could be written about this boy. About how he got out of bed in the morning on March first, what he did at home. How they sent him out with a basket—was it to deliver something or to do some shopping? How he thought it interesting to see the tsar’s procession go by. People took notice of Alexander II, of Grinevitsky, the “March Firsters” who were hanged, but no one has noticed the boy with the basket. Meanwhile he constitutes the very moral center of the event—the dreadful symbol of history’s costs. Many of us, to one degree or another, subsequently became history’s collateral damage.

The boy with the basket calls into question our youthful sympathies for the People’s Will. But the paradox lies in the fact that as sympathizers we were much more moral—both in everyday life and in our political

⁴ Vladimir Mayakovsky, from the poem “A Cloud in Trousers” (1914–15).
dreams—than later, when we began to understand, and understanding turned into a mixture of indifference and fear. We were more moral in the actual lived experience of the hierarchy of values, in the experience of sacrificing the lower for the higher, wherein lies the essence of the ethical act.

Having had our start in material prosperity, we did not know how to value its possibilities. And that is why the teenagers of 1917 did not notice, as it were, the transition from prosperity to absolute destitution (with all of my psychological skepticism and my habit of tracking down hidden motives, I speak firmly: did not notice), did not pay attention. Our heads were filled with other things entirely. And even among the older generation I don’t remember any conversations about this. It was considered unseemly, “bourgeois.” A historical cataclysm had arrived, a universal one (the bankruptcy of a single family would have been experienced in a completely different way). And people were raised from the cradle to be ashamed of their material advantages. It wasn’t that they had themselves forsaken these advantages, but now if history came to take them away—one could not complain about history when it had brought an end to something evil.

Collectively, the intelligentsia as a class had its own particular impulse to participate in the cause of the people’s liberation: the possibility of social self-realization or even real power. But each individual personally, internally, performed an ethical act when joining in the cause of helping his deprived brother. We shall repay our debt to the brother we deprived!—who will, perhaps, annihilate us and our culture together. This theme, Herzen’s theme (in From the Other Shore), the theme of the Russian intelligentsia, rings out incessantly in Blok. It comes to the surface in Mandelstam, too:

I have forsaken my cup at the feast of my fathers
For the thundering valor of approaching centuries ...  

The ponderous Briusov said all of this point-blank:

Cs

5 Osip Mandelstam, “For the thundering valor of approaching centuries” (March 17–28, 1931; 1935).
But I greet you, who will annihilate me,  
With a salutatory hymn ...  
(“The Approaching Huns”)⁶

Even if there be a single root of individual self-assertion, that root yields fruits of diverse tastes. Egoistic self-assertion and altruistic self-assertion are different experiences. Readiness for sacrifice is a special emotion, not unlike love, because it can be directed only to the outside. Imperiousness, victimhood, and dogmatism are the building blocks for a typology of people of the revolution. It stands to reason that teenagers of the 1910s selected the sacrificial type for their political dreams.

The formula was simple: the people are suffering (people as an abstract concept), and therefore it is necessary to take up the sword. Later, they were to die from the sword, whether they had taken it up or not—those who had been fifteen-year-olds included. What is this—chance, or the accountability of fifteen-year-olds who had taken up the sword in spirit?

Thus, in my head (I take myself as a typical phenomenon) before the revolution there reigned a blend of modernism, individualism, Tolstoy’s articles about vegetarianism (the description of the slaughterhouse was piercing), Sofiia Perovskaia ... Pugachëv was not my hero, but somehow it went without saying that he was right too.

In the months of the February revolution, childish maximalism was activated naturally. On past the despicable Cadets [Constitutional Democrats], past Kerensky (I disliked that he went around “kissing everybody”), things got carried away more and more to the left. Thus there was nothing to dispute: the soldiers had to bring the war to an end and go take the land.

After the revolution, the psychological map had changed. A transposition of constituent parts took place. The nexus where the values of individualism and modernism intersected with love for the people splintered into two interlinking and contravening centers. What had once seemed to be liberation and expansion suddenly appeared as a prohibition. One of my earliest perceptions was of the sailors draped with gun-cartridge belts. They went around the city in packs and entered any apartment they pleased. This

inspired a feeling of helplessness, alienation. The individualistic element was defined more abruptly, more consciously, it automatically stood up to defend itself. This was not a rejection of the revolution, but a rough draft of the fate that it begot—and that was dialectically opposed to it.

The monumental processes that stratified the young intelligentsia of the 1910s are reflected in these psychological micro-processes. In one and the same social milieu, different historical characters are formed—depending on the situation, on personal qualities, on chance. But this set of possible formations is not unlimited. Personal psychological qualities fell into several classes, which formed a stable typology. This typology is based upon varying relationships between a vital connection to the old world and traditional repulsion from it (both reactions were present from one’s earliest youth).

From the same milieu, sometimes from the same family, some joined the komsomol, others emigrated or went into the opposition. Still others remained in a syncretic state; this is a very important and widespread type, which then developed into the “fellow traveler.” This is the person who became the fundamental personage of the epoch of hesitations, overtures and retreats, the intelligent’s epoch of the twenties, and to some extent the thirties. Different initial positions were then still at large, and were still taking on multiple meanings. But the main thing amidst that ferment was to find a point of compatibility. Different social-psychological mechanisms contributed to compatibility. There were probably three basic ones.

The first of them is the inborn tradition of the Russian revolution, that evaluative point of reference, over which everything subsequently accumulated.

The second mechanism is the desire to live and act, with all of its conscious and unconscious subterfuges. At the time there were many talents and strengths, and strength wanted to manifest itself. In order to live, you had to find justification. Most urgently of all, you had to justify the person who contained everyone in himself and expressed everything by himself [i.e. Stalin]. This justification demanded the state of enchantment. Enchantment allowed you to live, even elevated your vitality, and therefore it was genuine, sincere—both on the part of the masses and of the most sophisticated intellectuals. The young Hegel, having seen Napoleon, said that he saw the
Absolute Spirit riding into the city on a white horse. I recall a conversation with Boris Mikhailovich Engel’gardt. In the very same Hegelian style he spoke about the world-historical genius that cut across our lives in the 1930s (he admitted that this did not make life any easier). When Stalin called Pasternak on the phone to speak of Mandelstam, who was under arrest, it was hard for Pasternak to concentrate on the topic. He wanted to say and hear something about the meaning of life and death. People found fault with Pasternak, but one has to remember: the telephone line connected him at that moment with world-historical energy.

Enchantment grew together with the intensity of the desire to live and act. One could visibly measure this by the reactions of Grigory Aleksandrovich Gukovsky: he was shatteringly active, and his thought—very strong—was aroused the way passion is aroused. One also came across those who were not enchanted. The majority of these were people with a weak life force, who had no need for concepts justifying the opportunity to act. On the contrary, they needed justificatory concepts in order to excuse their own inactivity—having confirmed that to act was in any case impossible. I possessed a strong drive, but only the intellectual kind,—therefore I count myself among the unenchanted.

The smaller the amount of pressure applied in a given moment to a given social group, the easier compatibility would come. Those who remained outside of where the pressure could be felt thought that it did not concern them, that it concerned other people who were occupied with completely different affairs. Before 1927–28, which was when there was a shift in the area where pressure was exerted, many among the intelligentsia thought in this way. Once, in 1927, B.’s distraught mother suddenly called me in order to say that B. was arrested.7 I remember that my basic feeling at the time was surprise—to the point where it was impossible to believe. How could it be?

7 B. here refers to Boris Bukhstab, a lifelong close friend of Ginzburg’s, starting from their years together as students at the Institute for the History of Arts. He was arrested on February 8, 1928 (Ginzburg’s date here is incorrect) for suspected membership in an “illegal anti-Soviet organization.” He was released on March 24, 1928. Bukhstab was arrested for another short period in 1933.
The third basic mechanism that promoted compatibility was the feeling of the end of the old world. I am speaking not about those considerations that yield to logic (that goes without saying), but about the deep experience of the end, and of the irreversible approach of a new world, unlike anything that had been before (the short years of NEP [The New Economic Policy] hampered this experience, but did not eradicate it). It was a difficult world (and yet it contained a kind of lightness of things laid bare), but it was the only indisputable entity—a reality in which one had to live differently from how people lived before, and from how, outside of that reality, people lived now.

Men and women of this world dressed differently, got together and split up—among other things that were now called by different names. Not the gymnasium but the school, not a soldier but a Red Army man. The French Revolution also sensed this necessity: “Here they gave nicknames to the months, like cats.”8 Neither the French nor we thought that these names would ever return. That we would see weddings, passports, or the white pinafores of schoolgirls again.

The typical participant in the historical process currently under discussion was not in the least bit monolithic. He approved and refuted in turn, rejected and was reconciled. It is only possible to understand the life and literature of those years, and the behavior of the great literary figures, if you remember that a person is not a static configuration (and even more, not a uniform entity) assembled from contradictory parts. A person is a configuration with changing attitudes, and in response to these varying attitudes, he crosses from one sphere of values to another, trying everywhere to find self-realization.

People measure the reality of their being using various measures: the measure of the abstract ideal of the rational and the just, the measure of their group interests and desires, the pragmatic measure of actual necessity and possibility, the measure of their tastes, cultural and moral habits and predilections. Judgments about real being are born on each of these coexisting levels.

8 Osip Mandelstam, “Paris” (1923).
This was the case with Pushkin in the 1830s. He was given, simultaneously: an abstract enlightenment ideal, acquired in his youth, of the rational; a concrete, and just as unattainable, ideal of class-based parliamentarianism (in the English manner); authoritarianism under Nicholas I (after the downfall of the Decembrists) in all its irrefutable reality; a (vain) hope that the rudiments of culture and reasonable governance in this system would develop; a disgust for the dull and coarse forms of this reality.

There are epochs when the levels come together, in balance. But there are moments of sharp historical rupture between the necessity and the ideal, between ideals and interests, between the pragmatics of behavior and moral preferences.

In poetry and prose, in diaries, in letters, people of the 1920s piled up incompatible things. But make no mistake, do not expect to find here simply lies. Rather, try to unravel the great entwinement of the instinct for self-preservation and habits of the intelligentsia, of scientific-historical thought and of fear.

There is an incomparable poetic document of the time—Pasternak’s “Sublime Malady.” In it you’ll find everything under the sun about the intelligentsia and revolution, without any desire whatsoever to tie up loose ends. That is why it has such a magical effect. The intelligentsia and revolution is Blok’s theme. But Blok distributes his valuational accents firmly: truth is always on the side of the revolution, and on the side of the intelligentsia is the original sin of privilege in front of a deprived brother. Pasternak does not distribute the accents; rather, they are placed on both sides.

“Sublime Malady” is a point of intersection for all the levels of the old-intelligentsia consciousness that have spilled over and become events and facts of life. The self-abnegation of the intelligentsia:

I grow ever more ashamed
That in the age of such shadows
One sublime malady
Is still called a song.
The (group) self-affirmation of the intelligentsia:

We were music in the ice.
I am speaking about the whole milieu,
With which I’ve had in mind
To leave the stage, and will leave it.

This is lyric self-affirmation and self-abnegation—a gaze at the poet from within his own self. But inherent in “Sublime Malady” is a sliding point of psychological reference. That which was visible from within is compressed into an image visible from without, an image no longer of the poet alone, but of a person in general leaving the stage, exiting his “milieu.”

And back there, in the glow of legends
Fool, hero, intelligent ...
... and back there, in the glow of legends
The idealist-intelligent
Printed and penned placards
About the joy of his own decline.

A lyrical point of view is transformed into a historical one. The foolishness of this person is a high-historical foolishness. Without “foolishness” he would not have been a hero; in any case, he would not have been an intelligent.

“Sublime Malady” is the epitome of a composition of the 1920s, when people not only thought historically, but felt and experienced life historically.

The poetic movement broadens out from the poet, the intelligent, and the fool to envelop all of existence, which, however, is in turn stratified into planes. The cruel and flat features of a shallow everyday life, but also here in the poem is Lenin’s conversation with history at a short distance: the epic breach into history:

A Trojan epos is born ...⁹

Young people are arrogant. In light of the future (which has already become the past) everything is clear to them; sometimes it even seems to them: fool, hero, intelligent—and maybe just a fool? But in all times, social life as such exists (not in the perspective of the future), and, in itself, can be productive or unproductive.

The Russian intelligentsia that “left the stage” is a type of culture with many conflicting variations (from the revolutionary democrats to the liberal barristers). In the perspective of the future, it was mistaken, just as all of the cultures known to us have been mistaken from the perspective of the future (after all we do not reproach antiquity for its polytheism, but we admire the representations of its gods).

The Russian intelligentsia is a culture that is productive in its speculation, it art, its lofty moral experiences. It could not have done its deed without a creative mind and without historical foolishness.

In the poignant oxymorons of “Sublime Malady” there lies inscribed a person of the very same milieu that learned decadent poetry by heart, that worshipped Sofiia Petrovskaya and conceded that Pugachëv was right too.

1979
In the 1920s positions could be plotted with clarity. On one side was the opposition, varied in its forms—at its most moderate even fairly openly expressed, at times even making its way into print. It included the innocent opposition of the Formalists: politically loyal, yet insisting that in scholarship there can be freedom of opinion. On the other side was absolute belief that the best possible world had come, that present evils were merely subsidiary, transitory—for the only evil lay in the remnants of former times.

In the 1940s there was war and the wartime rapprochement between the wishes of individuals and the state. When this rapprochement was not quite total, the inadequacy was suppressed internally, skirted round. Then with the purges of 1946–53, there was a growing fear, and among the intelligentsia, a feeling of impending doom. It arose out of the sense of repeatability (we never expected a repetition [of the 1930s]), out of horror in the face of a recognizable and consequently immutable model. Somebody said back then: “Before it was a lottery; now it’s a queue; your turn will come eventually.” Meanwhile, though, we carried on living and adapting ourselves to life. The 1940s were psychologically simpler than the 1930s.

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1 The initials in the dedication refer to Galina Murav’ëva (information from Emily Van Buskirk’s phone interview with Murav’ëva in January 2006). Murav’ëva (b. 1942) serves as a representative of the younger generation that expresses naïve wonderment at the intelligentsia’s desire to participate in the Stalinist order of the 1930s, and failure to speak out against its horrors.
In the 1930s there was collectivization, the Ukrainian famine, trials, the year 1937—and what’s more, all this was accompanied not by depression, but by excitement, drama, a desire for participation and for glorification. The intelligentsia made this desire known with the writers’ expedition to the White Sea-Baltic Canal and with the writers’ congress of 1934 and the speeches made there by Pasternak, Zabolotsky, Olesha, and others.

The present generation keeps wondering: how could it all have been possible? It was made possible both by historical conditions, and by the universal laws that govern the social being’s behavior. Numbering among the fundamental laws are: the ability to adapt to one’s circumstances; the justification of necessity (including evil) when resistance is impossible; a person’s indifference to that which does not concern him.

Up to a certain limit (there are limits to adaptation) a person devises a way of life to conform to the circumstances in which he finds himself. He does this by way of a dual mechanism: the evasion of suffering and the pursuit of pleasure (both carnal and wholly spiritual)—the pleasure which is available to him in the given circumstances. Tolstoy showed how this happened in war. Of the same order are the movies, concerts and lectures in besieged Leningrad (especially when there was more food to be had)—while fifteen kilometres away the Germans held their positions and fired.

People mistakenly imagine calamitous epochs of the past as filled only with calamity. They consist of much else besides—of that which comprises life in general, albeit set against a particular backdrop. The 1930s were filled not with strife and fear alone, but also with a great number of gifted and motivated individuals, both those inherited from the past and—still more—those spurred into activity by the Revolution, and raised to prominence by the 1920s.

Some of them were relatively well-to-do (by our standards). Stalin created an elite not only in the ranks of state functionaries, but also among writers, scientists, professors, etc. Professors were not prohibited from holding more than one post, and many routinely received three salaries. The elite was conceived as the underpinning of power, but it was the first victim, precisely because it was always within reach.

The 1930s saw the Leningrad philological faculty in all its glory (in the second half of the 1930s there were Eikhenbaum, Tomashevsky, Zhirmunsky,
Gukovsky ...) or the great Leningrad ballet with its warring factions of fans—one side for Ulanova and the other side for Dudinskaya.

The terrible backdrop did not leave one’s consciousness. The very same people who, in the morning, had received news of the loss of their loved ones in the Terror, then attended the ballet, were entertained as guests, played cards and relaxed at the dacha. Those same people who went cold, awaiting arrest, at the sound of every night-time ring of the doorbell. While one is still safe, one shields oneself, distracts oneself: don’t look a gift horse in the mouth.

The summer vacation offered a special means of distraction. There was even a kind of illusion that departure for the summer delivered one from the zone of surveillance. It was a simple-minded illusion. In the summer of ’37 many of my Leningrad acquaintances visited splendid Zatulen’e, near Luga. There we savored the delights of forest lakes and the river Oredezh with its meadows and red clay banks. We went boating, we went on walks, and even S., whose sister was under arrest and awaiting sentencing, actively participated.² This was possible, psychologically speaking, because it had become a typical scenario. 

In the summer of ’38 the Zhirmunskiis, the Gukovskiis and I stayed in the countryside in the Poltava region. The memory of the famine was still recent there, and we had left devastation behind us in Leningrad. We spent the time most pleasantly. We would go off in boats and set ashore on some uninhabited island. We went to the city of Poltava for a few days and had all sorts of amusing exploits along the way. And all the while, as we so enjoyed ourselves, conscience never once intruded. Probably because we knew something might happen to any one of us at any moment. Just like in war.

The adaptive mechanism—the double mechanism of distraction from suffering and attraction to pleasure—could not function without a person’s inherent indifference to that which does not concern him. What does and

² This initial may refer to Selli Dolukhanova, whose sister Veta (Ginzburg’s friend from the Institute of the History of Arts) was arrested on February 4, 1938, and then executed on June 28, 1938, in Leningrad.
does not concern him? That is a variable and flexible category. William James considered that man’s personality was equivalent to the field of his interests. That field could expand and contract. It would appear that remote objects can enter into the field of the individual’s concerns, but for this to happen, there needs to be an impulse, a stimulus. Man is concerned by that which acts directly on his emotions, on his nerves—by suffering, for instance, which he witnesses. The average city-dweller cannot slaughter a chicken, but he can happily sit down and dig in—the suffering of the roast chicken does not concern him. A vegetarian refuses to eat chicken because for him, this abstinence is an ideological act—it is incorporated into his personality.

Along with that which exerts a direct, emotional influence on him, a person is also concerned by those things which become the material of his self-actualization; that for which he assumes responsibility, and in which he might effect a change. This is both the key to man’s (frequently self-sacrificial) participation in all manner of social causes and the key to the indifference of the irresponsible.

A person is concerned by that upon which his milieu focuses his attention. These days the mass media serve to direct that attention, and public opinion has always performed this work. Nobody talks about those things that you don’t talk about.

The fight against famine in the 1890s, in which Tolstoy and Chekhov participated, even became a fashionable occupation for bored society ladies of the day (Chekhov portrayed this phenomenon). And this, incidentally, is no bad thing, for fashion converts the energy of social experience into something tangible. As for us in the 1930s, only indistinct and suppressed rumors about the Ukrainian famine reached us. We held no responsibility and could help in no way whatsoever; it did not enter into our field of attention. Consequently, we were indifferent, and occupied ourselves with that which did concern us.

There was no social attention directed toward this fact, nor toward collectivization (more suppressed rumors), nor the arrests all the while that they were occurring somewhere else and had not yet become any direct threat to the social strata to which the indifferent belonged.
We are surprised now at personal writings of those times—with their exclusive concentration on the affairs of our particular group and sincere lack of interest in anything else. It does not follow from this that they are of no historical import. In a limited way they too comprise one possible sketch of the period.

The present generation is puzzled: how could life have run its course given everything which happened in that life? But somewhere in the world there’s always something happening, and it doesn’t deter anyone else from living their life. Presently, that something is not just anywhere in the world, but specifically in Afghanistan. People talk about it a little, but it does not affect their way of life. And people today consider that entirely natural.

Adaptation and indifference go hand in hand. And together with them goes the justification of adaptation. The social being does not solely seek pleasure (the term is inadequate) and protect himself from suffering—his pleasures and, in part, even his sufferings, must take on the form of values. The individual realization of universal values is the regulator of social behavior. In order for this self-actualization to occur—for which man experiences an insuperable demand—one needs to reconcile oneself with the existing order, as long as self-actualization does not consist in resistance to the existing order. Moreover, in order to feel adequate one needs to justify both oneself and that to which one has reconciled oneself.

Pushkin wrote the lines in his “Stanzas”:

The beginning of Peter’s glorious days
Were darkened by revolts and executions

about five months after the execution of the Decembrists. He allowed himself to write this.

Pushkin’s “Stanzas” date from 22nd December 1826, but by the beginning of January 1827, “In the Depths of Siberian Mines ...” [a warm embrace of the Decembrists and their cause] had been addressed to the Decembrists. That is to say, the two [contradictory] poems were composed almost

3 The Soviet War in Afghanistan (1979–89) had begun in the months prior to Ginzburg’s writing this essay.
simultaneously. This is an enduring model for many reconciliations and justifications. They do not take a grip of consciousness in its entirety, but leave room for quite different, even opposing, impulses and reactions, born of different contact with the same reality, different value systems. For a person realizes himself inside differing value systems simultaneously. The logical “consequentiality” (as Herzen would say) of behavior depends upon their degree of congruence (or incongruence).

A person simultaneously finds himself amid the currents of different realities. The nexus of ideas, emotions and symbols connected to the Decembrists remained a reality for Pushkin, while also receding into the past. There was not only compassion, but also heroic symbolism. The other, contemporary, reality was that of Tsar Nicholas I, with whom one was motivated to be reconciled out of political, national and personal circumstances.

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As soon as you start fixing your attention on something it starts coming at you from all sides. There came a deluge of different kinds of testimonies. First, there was Chudakova’s book about Zoshchenko, then Otten sent me his on Krymov, then the Mandelstam materials.\(^4\) The strength of Chudakova’s book is its understanding of the times. All is revealed through the relationship to language; Zoshchenko’s portrayal of the language of his contemporaries reveals the process of break-down occurring in the 1930s.

In the 1920s the representation of this language in Zoshchenko’s work portrayed a spiritual ignoramus. In the second half of the 1930s the speech of this very same person became an indicator of a standard mentality. Zoshchenko abolished the distance between the speech of the character and that of the author, whereas in the past, in the 1920s, the distance implied by the author’s mockery of the narrator had comprised the very essence of his former manner of writing.

What took place was the intelligentsia’s relinquishment of its spiritual privilege (which is quite in keeping with the traditions of the Russian

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\(^4\) Ginzburg was involved in the posthumous publication of Mandelstam’s poetry, and with the fate of his archive, through her friendship with Nadezhda Yakovlevna Mandelstam, Irina Semenko (a poetry scholar) and others.
intelligentsia). But there is a most fundamental difference here. To the Populists [narodniki], to the native-soil conservatives [pochvenniki] in general, the peasant stood as a bearer of his own brand of folk and religious culture, an emanation from the mystical Soil. In the 1930s, in contrast, the proposed model was not of the enigmatic peasant [muzhik], but of the barely literate city dweller with his own ideas about life. This was a sacrificial offering—not, any longer, of material wellbeing, but of one’s language, and, consequently, mind and spirit. The Populists, in the 1870s, selflessly denied themselves for the weak, the oppressed, but here, in the 1930s, conversely, people were denying themselves in the name of life’s masters; times were different.

In the 1930s, the notion of simplicity took hold of Zoshchenko, Zabolotsky, Pasternak. Mandelstam made no concessions in his verses; his poetry was firmly defended, but his outlook was subject to epochal trends to the utmost degree. Kuzin, in his memoirs about Mandelstam’s life in the early 1930s, speaks of this craving for unison, and of how, immediately, attraction was replaced by repulsion. Mandelstam subsisted in this way, in a terrain where opposing impulses issuing from different value systems criss-crossed with one another. Essentially, these impulses issued from what was, for the twentieth-century Russian intelligentsia, the two principal sources of values, marked by tremendous discord: from the nexus of modernism, individualism and elitism in intellectual life, and from the nexus of populist traditions and commitment to social justice for all.

I came across a curious body of material on Mandelstam’s work at the end of the 20s in the communist youth newspaper “Moscow Komsomol” (internal reviews, responses to their authors). I don’t know if he was writing what he truly thought in relation to a specific matter, but he really rejoiced in joining in, in “Labor in common with all / At one with the legal order.”

Particularly remarkable is his editorial letter to Comrade Kochin, the author of the rural novel, “Lasses.” The letter was written in language in

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5 This line is from Pasternak’s 1931 poem “More than a Century Ago—not Yesterday” (“Stolet’e s lishnim—ne vchera”), itself a take on Pushkin’s 1826 “Stanzas” (“Stansy”).
common usage, and with the familiar form of address, in the Komsomol style. He discussed the novel with utter seriousness and instructed Kochin (the son of a peasant) to write about the village in such a way that there be no condescending distance between the author and his subject. And a bit earlier than those conversations with Kuzin, at the end of the 1920s, in his “Fourth Prose” Mandelstam had portrayed his work in the newspaper from the opposite point of view. “Fourth Prose” is the zenith of rejection and injury, the stabilization of this extreme at a certain point. Negative stimuli have been brought into play in this case, while tomorrow different ones may come into force. What is responsible for them is the unfeigned will to belong, the will to break open the locked door that blocks one from participation in the currently existing society. It turns out that I can act the same as anyone, and, most importantly, they take me seriously.

N., also an outcast, was taken on to work at the Radio committee during the war. He told me about the inexhaustible pleasure he felt each time he produced his pass to enter the building and another special pass to enter the studio. Each time was an experience of recognition, of reconnection with one’s fellow men.6

It is possible, of course, to fashion a position and a pose out of being an outcast. That is all well and good only on the abstract level of a romantic game. But it is terrible when being cast out becomes practical, literal, and, what is more, threatens to take away one’s piece of bread. But not by bread alone ... One also needs social recognition, at least on the level of a literary contributor for a newspaper.

But on another level, in his poetry, where there were no compromises, Mandelstam gave profound expression to all of this:

“[Just look] how I walk and talk ...”

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6 “N.” may well refer to the author, who worked at the Leningrad Radio in its Literary-Dramatic Division during the war. The experiences and emotions described here correspond to those of the heroes of Ginzburg’s blockade texts (most famously, N. of Notes of a Blockade Person) who are to a large extent autobiographically based.
How I knew how to talk with comrade Kochin in the language of the winners, of the Bolsheviks, and people heard and understood me. That is a victory over those who make outcasts of others, a victory of which one must be proud, just as Pushkin was proud of his successes in high society.

A person wants, of course, to be better than others, but this is not enough for him. The main thing is not to be worse than others; only this, and not any awareness of his own genius, will save him from an inferiority complex.

I’m a man of the age of the Moscow Clothes Co-Op. Look how badly my jacket fits.7

The Moscow Clothes Co-Op is a place where tailoring is done for the masses, for poor people, and the sewing is bad. Where people speak in simplified language. But this is the language of all those for whom the poet speaks in his own language; thus a poet also has the right to be one of the masses.

Pasternak insisted particularly stubbornly on this principle. Alexander Gladkov’s memoirs on Pasternak speak of this: “B.L. [Pasternak] says that in the months of the war at Peredelkino, and, earlier, in Moscow, he was in an excellent mood because events placed him among the general ranks and he became ‘like everyone else’; he kept watch on the roof at the house in Lavrushinsky and at the dacha he slept next to the anti-aircraft gun.”

In the same memoirs he tells of how at the communal apartment in Chistopol Pasternak had asked the neighbors to turn off their booming gramophone for a few hours and give him the chance to work. Afterwards

7 “Midnight in Moscow” (1931). The full stanza from which these lines are taken reads:

“It's about time you knew, I too am a man of my time.
I live in the age of the Moscow Clothes Co-Op.
Look how badly my jacket fits;
how I walk and talk.
If you tried to tear me from the age,
I swear you’d break your neck”.
(Mandelstam 2003b: 46)
he didn’t work, “but paced from corner to corner, berating himself for his inexcusable egotism in placing his work—perhaps needed by no-one—above these people’s requirements for leisure ...”

How to measure the degree of right and wrong in this belittlement in the eyes of the communal apartment neighbors? How to find traces of a sense of superiority in belittlement? A sense of superiority lies hidden in the formula: I too want to be simple and equal (a great poet knows his worth).

Once, way back, in his “Sublime Malady”—Pasternak blurted out:

All my life I wanted to be like others,
But in its beauty the age
Is stronger than my whining
And wants to be like me.

The greatest people are, after a fashion, democratic—if not in their convictions, then in their instincts. They know that they can withstand equality. They have the strength (and set a high value on this strength) to fulfil the demands put upon all people—Pushkin let himself be killed for the sake of these demands ... It is a combination of intellectualism with mediocrity that enables the feeling of elitism.

In his reminiscences of Pasternak V.V. Ivanov describes how disappointed and hurt Pasternak was at the government’s en masse decoration of writers which did not include him. He even asked on the telephone for someone to put in a good word for him. What is surprising here is not that he was hurt. Who among us is without the sin of weakness and vanity? What’s surprising is that he did not hide this fact, was not ashamed at laying bare his disappointment. This was not simply Pasternak’s spontaneous infantilism. It was also the pursuit of equality: let everyone know that I too, just like everyone else (or everyone else of a certain rank) want a government decoration.

In his poetry it spelled the public renunciation of his gift of incredible word and image combinations, of the wonder that was “My Sister, Life,” where everything doubles for and illuminates everything else. Pasternak
had a unique calling for this frenzied chaos. But in the end, with the same inevitability, the two-fold Pasternakian complex made itself known: equality in life and simplicity in poetry. It was in this regard that at some point the paths of Pasternak and Zoshchenko intersected.

Krymov represents a different cross-section: first and foremost a different generation. Krymov was also from an intelligentsia family, but he was one of those who unreservedly entered the Komsomol straight away—in order to atone for the original sin. These people had no doublethink and no doublespeak. They believed in the new world and in the adage “you can’t make an omelette without breaking eggs.” This was an all-accommodating formula.

Otten relates the story of a novella begun by Krymov; its plot involved a wife who denounces her beloved saboteur husband and emerges from this experience enlightened and purified, having made amends for her own bourgeois-bureaucratic origins. But all those around Krymov (his wife, friends) recoiled from this idea, and Krymov abandoned it. For the most part, however, because it was too much like an overly sensational detective story.

Krymov fought bravely and of his own free will. And died bravely.

There is a deluge of testimonies on bygone years. Take Gladkov’s posthumously published book on Meyerhold. He was besotted with Meyerhold, entirely absorbed in his theater for years. The theater had closed, Meyerhold had been executed, and by 1940 Gladkov was already writing a light-hearted play about a female hussar in 1812. A patriotic comedy with heroics and cross-dressing calculated to win official approval. And all this wasn’t hackwork, but enthusiasm. Subjectively speaking, this was creativity.

The life drive. And there is no socially obligatory behavioral norm which might stand in its way. The reference group is of just the same composition, uniformly made up of the new men. Mournful fidelity to the past would have meant a hungry existence, or perhaps non-existence ...

8 With Akhmatova it happened in precisely the opposite way. She had a calling for precision, and in the end gave up precision for poetic riddles. To a great poet is given something that only he can do. But at times he starts doing—and doing well—something that others too could do. [Author’s note]
For a gifted person it is necessary—essential—to experience the state of creativity. And creativity is the giving of form to one’s understanding of life, therefore, it is truthful—a testament to this is the classic symbiosis where lies and sycophancy accompany a lack of talent.

Talented people—as artists and as people—therefore intensely sought or created within themselves segments of compatibility. Speaking from within such a segment, one might say: and I’m of the same opinion. And express this opinion with some deviation from the officially prescribed standard, in seemingly different words.

The techniques for attaining compatibility had many different gradations. There was wholly honest identification and, at the other end of the spectrum, cynical identification (“you can never have too much of a good thing”) as well as the search within oneself for fitting segments of personality, although other, unfitting ones, remained. So it is that reactions change—depending on whether one or the other of the value systems that coexist in the individual’s consciousness was activated. It’s as if the moving ray of a projector picks out first one, then another segment of consciousness.

Various mechanisms aided the intellectual [intelligent] in creating segments of compatibility. One of the most powerful among them is the populist legacy, an idea of social justice assimilated among one’s earliest childhood notions. I have already discussed this in my essay “Generation at a Turning Point.”

What can I say about my own individual case? In essence, that one should not have any illusions; nobody got off unscathed.

The individual case is interesting here, because it is also a typical case, one variety of the epochal person.

All functioning members of society were subject to the aforementioned mechanisms: adaptation, justification, indifference. It’s just that in some, the mechanisms worked irregularly and with interruptions of ordinary decency. In my case the justifying mechanism was less developed than the others; it was hindered by an inherent analytical propensity. The indifference mechanism, on the other hand, worked without a hitch.

As far as adaptation is concerned, a difference undoubtedly existed between socially active individuals. Is it only quantitative, or in some cases did quantity translate into quality? If it does, then it is in the sense that
apart from compatibility there was something else—a surplus, sometimes extensive and important, unattached to the segment of compatibility.

The young reader is out of practice (a positive fact) in separating these elements. Therefore he will not, for instance, accept G.⁹ who was outspoken and coarse in manifesting his compatibility. Even if we allow that moral uprightness is to the contemporary reader’s credit, still it deprives him of interaction with a mind [i.e. Gukovsky’s] of great wealth and strength. G. felt an overwhelming need for self-actualization and every time he readily got involved with what was topical and current at the given moment. In language that is simple but expresses the crux of the matter this is called following the fashion. Fashion is always very serious; it is the crystallization of social relevance. G. was highly talented, and therefore discerned the interesting aspect of anything he became involved with. Such was his involvement with the symbolist culture (including religious experience), with formalism, with Marxism. X had gone through an alternation of roughly the same hypostases.

It is surprising that an adult thinking person was capable of now believing in god, now ceasing to believe—without any particular spiritual exertion. But it happened exactly in this way. Both belief and unbelief were governed by a direct relation to the possibilities for self-actualization. Up until a certain historical period faith could be a form of ideological activity. And from a certain moment onward it could be only a sacrifice; that was when people started to pick and choose.

I remember how, in 1926, at a service for the dead, X crossed himself. He was over thirty then—the age of conscious choices. The transition from disgruntled orthodoxy to dialectical and historical materialism did not happen in the same way as the transition from belief to unbelief in the nineteenth century. It simply became clear that one could no longer function in Soviet society with belief (as one still could in the 1920s) or one could only function in the capacity of an outcast from society. The proclivity for self-sacrifice requires specific historical conditions, and requires

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⁹ The initial refers to Grigory Gukovsky (1902–50), a literary scholar who was a good friend of Ginzburg’s beginning in the 1920s.
a milieu that has been established and aligned to exert influence on its members in a particular way. Such conditions did not then exist. From Russian Orthodoxy people arrived straight at the alternative of Marxism. G. applied his talents to Marxism and achieved excellent results. X was, by temperament, a positivist and in terms of original cultural practice a person of the symbolist circle (an unnatural yet solid combination). In Marxism, his results were naïve, but conscientious.

One can enumerate several types of socially active individuals. There were those in honest accord with the ruling order, those who were prone to self-delusion, there were cynics or those who abandoned themselves to resignation. Some endeavored not to express the maximum that the compatibility of opinions incited one to. The gradations depended on the degrees of talent or talentlessness, on basic social skills, on the social situation. Even on the ability to express oneself. G. said to me ironically, in part enviously: “Well, with your elegance of style you manage to pull off the job with grace.” Do I? I say to you: have no illusions—nobody got away unscathed.

I am searching the past for examples of my own kind. It’s probably the type who, to all appearances, stood by their own opinions within the boundaries of the possible. Those boundaries expanded and contracted. At the turn of the 1940s to the 1950s they contracted to the point of excluding any surplus—without which my type did not function—with the result that we were for a long time simply excluded from participating in the social sphere.

What are the distinguishing features of this type? Creative ability and the need for its realization. And thanks to this need, the willingness to make do without material comforts or a place in the social hierarchy. Talent wants to manifest itself—from here stems the combination of the abundance of thought and the striving to create segments of compatibility with the existing order. Sociology was one such field where this compatibility could be attained. Marxism was attractive to an analytical mind, one that liked to break things down into categories. I remember how “The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte” appealed to me precisely because of the strength of its analytical grasp, its demonstration of the hidden springs of historical motion.
Where was the falsehood? At which boundary does one search for its beginning? It was not in the methodological principle, nor in the general understanding of things, but in some kind of intonation that breaks through to the surface, in a hurried display of compatibility, in the use people made of the occasion or the moment to declare “I think so too.” Exactly like that. Here is a text; there are interesting and freely conceived thoughts in it. But periodically the text induces a shudder, a reminder of one’s agreement with the dominant order. Reminders not of things that were untrue, but that, in a given context, were unnecessary.

It is most difficult of all for me now to reread my book on Alexander Herzen’s *My Past and Thoughts*. It was written in the years (the turn of the fifties) when literary scholarship (like literature) for the most part consisted of nothing but pronouncements of fidelity to the ruling order. There were ideas in this book—so it seemed to be free (it failed to be approved for publication for six years); but the unfreedom was a deep-seated unfreedom of self-evident unscrutinized givens. There was a certain fundamental set of conceptions about the revolution, about equitable social organization, that one had imbibed during one’s earliest socialization and that had not been revised since one’s youth.

“The main idea of the chapter ‘Venezia la bella’ is the idea that the Italian nationalist movement was sapped of any authentic (popular, social) content as it was assimilated to the general European bourgeois order. Disappointment in the Italian bourgeois-nationalist movement leads to the skeptical and, of course, mistaken idea that, at the given stage of history, reaction is the only real force of the capitalistic western world.”

Whether this is true or not, it is dead discursive tissue blighting the living flesh of the book. In the thirties this mechanism had already existed, but was still working in healthy verbal tissue. Amid the frenzied obsequiousness of Stalin’s last years, it seemed that we were clean. It seemed that way not only to us, but also to editors, who did not publish work by our kind, or did so through gritted teeth. And now it is hard to reread this. This kind of wasted intellectual effort is a torment.

10 See Ginzburg 1957: 359.
It seemed then that there remained only one official language in which everything was said. It seemed that it was, for us, an absolute given and there was nothing else besides it. Therefore we acutely felt the deviations from its laws, experiencing boldness and delight in preserved words of our own, without noticing how the universal language penetrated and dwelt in our own speech. Yes, nobody got away unscathed.

Hegel made a distinction between historical and unhistorical periods in the life of nations. In the life of individuals there are also historical and unhistorical periods. A person may be unaware of the different periods, or may be aware of them precisely in historical categories. Historicism is in fact the awareness of an eventful, unfolding social life in all its dynamic forms (it is its propensity to assume form that brings history nearer to art)—from the most all-encompassing structures of social relations to specific details of mores, everyday life, or everyday settings. The crystallization and depositing of these material and immaterial forms of unfolding life is what comprises culture.

The relatedness of individual existence to history is ever-present but variable. It is possible for there to be an obscure link that is subjectively imperceptible, objectively unexpressed. Take the ossified existence of some social strata that are untouched by cataclysms (barely thinkable in our times). It is possible that the link be evident, but not active, when an individual and his stratum are subject to the effect of the spirit and events of the times. And finally, there is an active link—that of a participant in the action or movement, who, no matter how you look at it, is responsible for the event, though this responsibility comes in various senses and degrees.

My generation and my circle went through different phases—always under great pressure from the times. Adolescence and early youth were about a passive connection to the enormous events of world war and revolution. The 1920s, for me, were the Institute of the History of the Arts, joining in a cultural-historical movement which was supposedly in opposition to the epoch but was in fact born of it.

In its broadest sense (much broader than the OPOYaZ members and their students), the OPOYaZ movement was a part of the anti-symbolist reaction to the culture of the beginning of the century (from the Futurists and Acmeists to the Oberiuts). Like all anti-symbolist reactions, Formalism
studied and learned a lot from the symbolists. As a dogma Formalism collapsed swiftly, and essentially from the inside, but as a catalyst its work carried on into the future. Formalism is also characteristic of the epoch in as much as, with its tendency to analytical explication, it is the unacknowledged double of historical and sociological analysis.\(^{11}\) It was both their antithesis and double—which, at the time of great cultural shift, were somehow compatible.

The historical period which one experiences personally in all its details, teaches one to remember a lot which is not understood by those who never experienced an active historical existence. From the experience of the 1920s, we all knew the taste of “coming to life in action” (odeistvotvorenie, as Herzen put it), albeit in truncated form. From our little corner, we had already taught somebody something, published work, put together edited volumes. It seemed to us then—and not for long—that we were the vanguard of a new stage of culture. Instead, in the 1930s and 1940s, we came to belong to the epoch of Stalinism and the war, with everything that that entailed.

From the mid-1950s some of our type became active figures in the Thaw, in the capacity of elders, keepers of the flame who were surrounded by the enlivened youth. One of the signs of this enlivening was the turbulent flood of poetry, in which everyone—also not for long—suddenly believed. This period brought historical self-consciousness, albeit an extremely fragile one, to both young and old. The renaissance did not gather strength and dissolved; young people did not mature and along the way we lost interest in one another.

It seems that my final period has begun—my unhistorical period. In his book *Biography and Culture*, Vinokur defines biography as “the life of an individual in history.” Could you make a biography from the alternation between passive experience of inordinate historical pressures and half-illusory active participation? Well, yes, but only a biography very much against the subject’s own will.

1980

\(^{11}\) I do not mean the clumsy attempts at uniting them. [Author’s note]
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<td>“S.” Notebook (tetrad’) sketch of S., 16 pages.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1940</td>
<td><em>Tvorcheskii put' Lermontova</em></td>
<td>(Leningrad: Kudozhestvennaia literatura).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1943–44</td>
<td>O.R.R.N.B. 1377</td>
<td>Blue notebook (tetrad’) (“Svetoch”—12 listov, 10 kopeks) with sketch of “G.B.” or Galina Bitner.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1945</td>
<td>‘Byloe i dumy’ Gertsena</td>
<td>(Leningrad: Khudozhestvennaia literatura).</td>
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<tr>
<td>1964</td>
<td><em>O lirike</em></td>
<td>(Leningrad: Sovetskii pisatel’).</td>
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<td>1971</td>
<td><em>O psikhologicheskoi proze</em></td>
<td>(Leningrad: Sovetskii pisatel’).</td>
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<td>1974</td>
<td><em>O lirike</em>, 2nd ed</td>
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<td>1979</td>
<td><em>O literatumnom geroe</em></td>
<td>(Leningrad: Sovetskii pisatel’).</td>
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<td>1982</td>
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<tr>
<td>1987</td>
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<tr>
<td>1989</td>
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