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Review of: Pomnit' po-nashemu: sotsrealisticheskii istorizm i blokada Leningrada

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Alexander Vatlin's *Agents of Terror*, ably translated by Seth Bernstein, shows how NKVD officers in the Moscow suburb of Kuntsevo implemented the deadly massacre. Working under the pressure of daily quotas for interrogations and 'socialist competitions' between branches for the highest number of arrests, confessions, etc., agents resorted to extraordinary shortcuts. They wrote up 'confessions' even before meeting arrestees, then beat the latter until they signed. In the 'family method', officers saved time and effort by arresting entire families at once. Another device was 'staff witnesses', who regularly provided 'evidence' for multiple cases.

Vatlin finds that the Kuntsevo NKVD cycled through three types of charges. From the summer of 1937 until early 1938 agents tended to charge arrestees with 'counterrevolutionary agitation'. In the spring of 1938 NKVD chief Ezhov mandated 'the spy turn', as officers investigated suspects for links with foreign intelligence services. The spy turn overlapped with a final phase, the arrests of elderly citizens who had belonged to non-Bolshevik political parties during the revolutionary years. This came about simply because the NKVD ran out of other criteria for arrests.

Vatlin's book complements Harris's in its emphasis on widening circles of fear. NKVD officers worked frantically in dread that they themselves might be arrested if they did not meet quotas; neighbours denounced neighbours out of terror that they might themselves be denounced.

Agents of Terror does not quite deliver on the promise of its subtitle — 'Ordinary Men and Extraordinary Violence in Stalin's Secret Police'. The investigation files on which it is based do not allow a detailed psychological portrait of perpetrators, of the sort that Hannah Arendt undertook of Adolf Eichmann. It is, however, the most detailed account of NKVD investigation procedures we are likely to see coming out of Russian archives for decades to come. Since its writing the Russian Federation has re-classified NKVD operational files. The only pre-war operational files now accessible are in Ukrainian archives.

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Voronina, Tat'iana. *Pomnit' po-nashemu: Sotsrealisticheskii istorizm i blokada Leningrada*. Biblioteka-zhurnala 'neprikosovennyi zapas'. Novoe Literaturnoe Obozrenie, Moscow, 2018. 273 pp. Notes. R312.00.

TAT'IANA VORONINA'S *Pomnit' po-nashemu* brings new evidence and a fresh perspective to bear on how and why the master-narrative of the Leningrad Blockade has endured to shape public attitudes and political discourse in both the Soviet Union and the Russian Federation. Voronina has long been a scholar

of the Blockade and an authority on historical memory. She began recording oral histories with siege survivors in the early 2000s. *Pomnit' po-nashemu* showcases her expertise in using such sources. She masterfully demonstrates how individual stories become enveloped in collectively-formulated concepts while remaining personally meaningful.

Spanning the years 1941 to 2006, this remarkably succinct book uses a combination of historical, anthropological and literary methods to argue that the master-narrative or myth of the siege has its roots in Socialist Realism. This phenomenon began during the war years, when professional writers well-versed in Socialist-Realist aesthetics deliberately incorporated them into their novels, poems and articles. The post-war repression of Leningrad's wartime leadership silenced discussions of the siege during the late 1940s and early 1950s, but when this moratorium lifted under Khrushchev's Thaw, historians, politicians and survivors continued to recount the blockade by drawing — deliberately or unwittingly — on structural features and textual devices from Socialist Realism, which now seemed self-evident (p. 199). At the same time, the myth of the Blockade has not been static. Voronina demonstrates how it evolved, especially during the Thaw, perestroika and Soviet collapse. However, even as the political landscape shifted and censorship was lifted, the master-narrative endured.

Voronina's conceptualization of Socialist Realism is based on the morphology outlined by Katerina Clark in *The Soviet Novel* (Chicago, IL, 1981). Among the mode's defining traits is the positive hero, who overcomes formidable obstacles to achieve a socially significant feat. The hero struggles, but his struggle is always meaningful and it proves his steadfast commitment to his mission. In Socialist-Realist accounts of the Blockade, the hero might be a soldier, party official, or civilian who willingly and 'wholeheartedly' sacrifices himself to defeat the besiegers (p. 160). Heroism — not trauma or victimization — comprises the core of historical memory about the siege. This explains why, Voronina argues, the Blockade 'never became the "Soviet Holocaust"' (p. 16), even though nearly a million civilians perished during it.

The ten chapters of *Pomnit' po-nashemu* are divided into three sections, each one commendable for its distinct methodology. Part one focuses on literature, part two on historiography and part three on activism. Voronina shows how these three fields of memory are bound together by shared paradigms of storytelling. In part one, Voronina begins by elucidating the Socialist-Realist features of the urtexts of the Blockade myth, crafted by Ol'ga Berggol'ts, Nikolai Tikhonov, Vera Inber and others. This first chapter provides a foundation of Voronina's argument and is well-executed but is less original than the remaining chapters in part one. They offer innovative analysis of less-studied blockade literature from the Thaw and perestroika and of the new authors — especially mid-level officers and workers — who contributed

memoirs to the siege canon (p. 66). While works from both eras more candidly relayed the horrific conditions of the Blockade and criticized city leaders, their presentation of the heroic Soviet people and of the victory as a triumph of Soviet humanism over fascist barbarism remained consistent with wartime accounts (p. 68). In part two, Voronina draws on Hayden White's *Metahistory* (Baltimore, MD, 1973) to demonstrate 'the dependency of historical texts on literary forms', and delves into historical scholarship from the Soviet and post-Soviet eras, which 'turned out to be written like socialist-realist novels' (p. 149). Even when new evidence came to light, historians 'did not attempt to dispute it [the master-narrative] and only added to it with new subject matters' and evidence (p. 149). For instance, historians framed new forensic data about the death toll (p. 178) as lives willingly, meaningfully sacrificed.

The book's most powerful material appears in part three on siege survivors' organizations, which have successfully lobbied the Soviet and post-Soviet states for material benefits. Presenting themselves not as civilian victims but as veterans who heroically defended the city, they have leveraged the Socialist-Realist elements of the siege story to their advantage (pp. 264–65). 'Earlier heroism was determined by the usefulness and significance of actions aimed at saving the city', Voronina observes, but through survivors' efforts, 'lawmakers began to understand heroism as the very fact of being in a blockade' (p. 265). Activists therefore joined professional writers, historians and memoirists to become co-creators of the Blockade myth. This insight is the capstone to a fascinating study about the interplay of personal experience and public discourse in the politics of memory. I only regret that the book's analysis ends in 2006, leaving readers to wonder about the applicability of Voronina's argument to the resurgence of the war cult in Russia today.

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Bellezza, Simone Attilio. *The Shore of Expectations: A Cultural Study of the 'Shistdesiatnyky'*. CIUS Press, Edmonton, AL and Toronto, ON, 2019. xxiii + 357 pp. Notes. Bibliography. Index. \$34.95: £26.99 (paperback).

WHAT we know about the post-Stalinist 'Thaw' remains heavily weighted towards Russia and its metropolitan centres. Increasingly, though, scholars have turned towards other parts of the Soviet Union, comparing and contrasting the dynamics of Russian cultural liberalization and crackdown with those in Central Asia, the Baltics and other republics. Simone Attilio Bellezza's study of the *shistdesiatnyky* — a key post-Stalinist Ukrainian cultural and political movement — is a valuable addition to the scholarship on the Thaw and