

Introduction

For seven decades, Lydia Ginzburg (1902–90) wrote about the reality of daily life and historical change in Soviet Russia. In fragmentary notes and narratives, she exercised what she saw as the unique possibilities of “in-between” genres (human documents, memoirs, essays, autobiographies) to bring representations of new realms of life and thought into literature. She recorded, with an unmatched degree of insight and lucidity, how her contemporaries shaped their personalities and self-images in response to the Soviet experience. Yet in the English-speaking world, she is still known primarily as a literary scholar (author of the book *On Psychological Prose*, whose English translation was published by Princeton University Press in 1991) and as a “memoirist” of the siege of Leningrad during World War II (her *Notes of a Blockade Person* came out under the title of *Blockade Diary* from Harvill Press in 1995).

Ginzburg saw herself as having two callings: as a scholar, but even more vitally as a prose writer. In the late 1970s, taking stock of fifty years of writing “for the desk drawer,” she lamented: “For more than half a century I’ve carried on a dual conversation—about life and about literature. For half a century I’ve had a double anxiety—when talking about literature, I’m occupied with something other than the main thing; when about life, I’m occupied with something unrealizable.”¹

Ginzburg’s reputation has been steadily growing as new dimensions of her literary activities have become more accessible to the public. In the course of this reappraisal, her image has undergone several transformations: she has been seen as a widely respected literary historian specializing in Russian Romanticism, Mikhail Lermontov, and Alexander Herzen; an important scholar of lyric poetry who weaves together historical, textual, and humanistic analysis²; the creator of an original theory of in-between literature; a perceptive memoirist who wrote about the leading Russian literary figures of the first half of the twentieth century, including Vladimir Mayakovsky, Nikolai Oleinikov, Yuri Tynianov, Anna Akhmatova; and the author of a groundbreaking philosophical and psychological analysis of life in Leningrad during the blockade, based on her personal experience. Only recently has she been gaining recognition as a writer who created a new kind of prose, bringing together self-examination, philosophical and historical reflection, and her own brand of literary social psychology. Scholarship in both English and Russian is beginning to reposition Ginzburg as a complex and intriguing figure who offers a vantage point on the whole of the Soviet era.

Lydia Ginzburg's significance has been hard to estimate until now because, for all of her formidable publications, the whole body of her work was not known, nor was its shape. This book draws upon a decade of close work with her entire corpus, much of which remains unpublished and is available only in her personal archives. My research has led me to put forth a new interpretation of her personal quest for a different kind of writing, one that would be adequate to the times in which she lived. I place at the center of my analysis not her major works (her better-known narratives, essays, and scholarly monographs), but rather the writings (many of them unfinished) that seem least to fit into the standard literary or critical genres. I believe that these little known writings will have the greatest impact on our understandings of modern life and the Soviet experience.

Ginzburg came of age soon after the Revolutions of 1917 as the most talented student of the Russian Formalists. While she practiced (and made her living through) literary scholarship her entire life, her most profound scholarly contributions reached the public only in the 1970s. Her books *On Psychological Prose* (first edition, 1971) and *On the Literary Hero* (1979) deepen our understanding of how self-concepts travel between literature and life, and how literary characters reflect changing notions of human personality. She demonstrates how the aesthetic structures of *promezhutochnaia literatura*, or "in-between literature," mediate between those of everyday life and of the novel, thus contributing both to literary evolution and self-understanding.

Ginzburg began to experiment with in-between prose in 1925, jotting down witticisms, anecdotes, aphorisms, and reflections on her Formalist milieu in "notebooks" (*zapisnye knizhki*). Her project evolved over seven decades of Soviet history, as she wrote essays and sketches "for the desk drawer" (publication, though desired, was impossible and largely unimaginable until the last few years of her life) in which she critically analyzed the life of the Russian intelligentsia, a group whose values she saw as being under constant assault. Living long enough to benefit from the relaxed censorship of the Glasnost era, Ginzburg stunned Russian readers with ever-expanding editions of her strange stories, witty anecdotes, and probing meditations, which combined the genres of autobiography, fiction, and essay. The literary scholar Sergei Kozlov recalls that in the 1980s, he was not alone in feeling that "Ginzburg gave us the language and conceptual apparatus for understanding ourselves and our milieu." One reader he knew said of Ginzburg, "She explained to me my own self."³

Why was Ginzburg so successful in "explaining" the intelligentsia "to itself," even at the end of the Soviet period? For decades, her experiments in self-writing were propelled by two goals that were even more ambitious: (1) to discern a new concept of the self, adequate to the catastrophic twentieth

century, and (2) to arrive at a new literary form that would replace the obsolete (as she saw it) psychological novel. She worked on both of these problems inductively, filling her genre-defying fragments with painstaking self-examination and unsparing analysis of her contemporaries. She could explain the intelligentsia to itself because she had developed strong arguments about the connections between personality and history, and had found forms of expression that enabled her to reveal these connections—not the novel, not long forms of any kind, but fragmentary narratives that negotiate between history and fiction.

During World War II, Ginzburg lamented that literature had largely fallen into a state of arrested development and boring repetition. She diagnosed the root of the problem as a failure to discover “a new fundamental concept of the person” (*novaia printsipial'naia kontseptsiiia cheloveka*).⁴ She discerned a connection between the two interrelated crises—in values and in literature—that permeated her time: both emanated from the absence of a new concept of the self that could express the moral uncertainties amid new historical circumstances, as well as the fragmentation and social conditioning that beset modern identity formation. Wars and revolutions, she wrote, had forever toppled the nineteenth-century ideology of individualism by dispelling the belief in the unconditional value of the unique person, which had ultimately been based on a belief in the existence of divinely ordained absolutes. These events also crushed the dream of positive social change—one had only to look at Stalinist Russia and Nazi Germany to grasp that social evil was ineradicable. From the 1930s through the postwar decades, Ginzburg (in her private writings) urged her contemporaries to put an end to any literary conversation that dwelt on bemoaning the loss of the self-valuable soul in order to reflect on “how ever to survive and endure without losing one’s human image.”⁵ Her concerns run parallel with those of European intellectuals (such as Jean-Paul Sartre) who were also discussing how art must change in response to the total human catastrophe of World War II.

The core of this book centers on an investigation of Ginzburg’s concept of the self in the wake of the crisis of individualism: a self that I call “post-individualist.” In Ginzburg’s words, this is a “consciousness” that “with all of its subjectivity, hardly dares to wonder at its own finitude.”⁶ The term “self” has no equivalent in Russian, and Ginzburg herself does not use it. (Russian does have the reflexive pronoun “oneself,” *sebia*, a close relative to the word “self” in many languages.) “The self” has been glossed by the scholar of autobiography Paul John Eakin as “a comprehensive term for the totality of our subjective experiences” and by intellectual historian Jerrold Seigel as “the particular being any person is.”⁷ While invoking these meanings of subjectivity, experience, and particularity, I also draw on Charles Taylor’s influential

study *Sources of the Self*, where he writes of the “sense of the term where we speak of people as selves, meaning that they are beings of the requisite depth and complexity to have an identity . . . (or to be struggling to find one).”⁸ Ethics and narrative are central to both Ginzburg’s and Taylor’s concepts of selfhood; yet Ginzburg casts more doubt on the stable, permanent identity of the self than Taylor does; she also puts special emphasis on the social dimension (what one might call personality, or compare to William James’s “Social Me”).⁹

A central element of Ginzburg’s theory of the self and of personality structure is that we strive to realize that which we experience as a value, while our sense of values derives from the processes of socialization and interiorization from our milieu. The psychic life of the twentieth-century person consists of isolated moments that fade quickly and are incapable of forming any “lasting association of interpenetrating elements.”¹⁰ This detachment from absolute values should not be mistaken for the self-willed freedom associated with Dostoevsky’s heroes. The main characters that appear in Ginzburg’s documentary prose resemble the fictional heroes of Kafka and Hemingway, who have no time for world-shaking ideas (such as “everything is permitted”) since they are condemned to inhabit “a pressing world of the objective horror of life” (from a 1958 essay published in the late 1980s).¹¹ As she sums it up in her late scholarly work *On the Literary Hero* (1979), the contemporary hero is not defined by ideas, but is instead “governed by the mechanism of socialization, internalization, expectations, prohibitions, the values of his milieu, and his ‘reference group.’”¹²

She makes the ethical potential of a post-individualist self central to her writings, following a long philosophical tradition that links ethics, selfhood, and narrative. Ginzburg, an atheist, salvages elements from the humanistic tradition of the nineteenth century and smuggles them into the heart of the twentieth. She jettisons three-dimensional worlds, elaborate plot structures, and representations of individuated literary heroes from within. These departures separate her from her contemporary Vasily Grossman, who wrote traditional Tolstoyan novels about war and the terror using, on the whole, the techniques of psychological prose. In some ways, Ginzburg is closer to the remarkable chronicler of the Gulag, Varlam Shalamov, who argued that readers who had been through revolutions, wars, and concentration camps had no need for novels. Shalamov rejected “literary stuff” (*literaturshchina*) in his documentary prose, minimizing or excluding descriptions of characters’ physical appearances and backstories.¹³ Ginzburg, too, presents only specific, moment by moment experiences of her fragmentary heroes, and yet, unlike Shalamov, replaces the techniques of fiction with analysis.¹⁴

External, self-distancing analysis is the key procedure in Ginzburg's approach to the post-individualist self, reflecting a sense that in her era "the conflict of the literary hero has once again become an external conflict, just as in pre-psychological times" (again from her 1958 essay, which overlaps with the scholarly work *On the Literary Hero*).¹⁵ Self-distancing unites Ginzburg's aesthetics with her ethics: external analysis assists in the creation of a personality construct to which one can connect discrete actions, in an effort to retain one's human image. Self-distancing also helps explain her departure from traditional autobiography. As Robert Folkenflik has argued, "the idea of the self as other is a condition of the autobiographical narrative."¹⁶ But Ginzburg takes this "othering" to a new level, approaching the self as a casual specimen—not an autonomous entity, but an inextricable part of the social fabric. The observing self is an abstract analyst, gender unspecified, who usually narrates in the third person. The central character, Ginzburg's alter ego, also relates to himself in the third person, and is slightly fictionalized so as to be more historically representative.

Ginzburg's creative works can best be understood in the context of a crisis in individualism and a crisis in the novel, both of which resonated across Europe in the opening decades of the twentieth century. Osip Mandelstam famously argued in "The End of the Novel" (1922) that the individual in the twentieth century lacked the power and even the very sense of time necessary to sustain a full biography, which formed the novel's compositional backbone.¹⁷ Soviet prose writers seeking to represent their new reality had to contend with the legacy of the nineteenth-century Realist novel, the Formalists' demystification of literary devices, and the cultural impact of the Bolshevik Revolution. Some literary schools came to believe that literature could renew itself by turning toward fact and document (what the more radical ideologues from the Left Front of Arts, or LEF, called "the literature of fact").

While I take account of the full scope of Ginzburg's oeuvre, my focus is mainly on the 1930s and 1940s, when she was actively experimenting in multiple directions. At one point, under the influence of the rising interest in the novel in the Soviet 1930s, she saw writers of notebooks as literary "impotents" lacking in "positive ideas." And yet her open "aversion" to the novel's fictionality led her to favor the incompleteness of the jotting and the note. Her dream, articulated in the 1930s, was to create an unnameable genre closest to "a diary in the form of a novel," where she could "fix the flow of life" "without invention or recollection."¹⁸ I treat in detail, and with reference to archival drafts, the narratives that would have become part of this novelistic diary¹⁹: "The Return Home" (1929–36), "Delusion of the Will" (ca. 1934), "The Thought That Drew a Circle" (ca. 1934–36 or 1939), "A Story of Pity and

Cruelty” (ca. 1942–44), “Otter’s Day” (ca. 1943–45), and *Notes of a Blockade Person* (dated by the author “1942–1962–1983”). These works show Ginzburg’s ambition to bridge the novel and personal historiography. She saw both novelists and historians as engaged in “a process of understanding life; that is, a description of facts and an explanation of the connections between them.”²⁰

Ginzburg’s characters belong, like Ginzburg herself, to the humanities intelligentsia raised before the Revolution. The radical historical changes faced by this generation had a way of “estranging” character and making self-images more visible: people outwardly reinvented themselves every decade or so, in order to survive. In the Stalin era, Ginzburg was interested in the central historical plot in each of their lives: as the Soviet State grew increasingly repressive, to what degree could they continue to function as intellectuals? After Stalin’s death, she observes how survivors keep adjusting their public statements and images to capitalize on the opportunities of a more liberal time. She is mindful that individuals have very limited freedom in choosing their paths, and yet she holds them accountable for their behavior.

In analyzing her own path, Ginzburg searches for the typical elements in the historical experience of her generation. I discuss her negotiations between the “individual” and “socio-historically typical” most expansively when analyzing her writings about love, a topic that presented a particular set of literary but also personal challenges. To her closest friends, Ginzburg identified as a lesbian, and same-sex desire was taboo in Soviet/Russian literature and society (as it still is today); this constituted an experience of difference that Ginzburg strongly resisted romanticizing, or representing at all. Yet close study reveals that her writings speak specifically, if indirectly, to same-sex love. Ginzburg gives expression to her own private experiences as a lesbian by inscribing her subject position into the masculine third-person singular, thereby creating implicit dramas of apparently heterosexual desire. Her choice to work with mainstream approaches of describing love produces unusual effects—for instance, it intensifies her critique of “normal” women (those who are not “inverts,” to use her dated terminology). But the fictionalization of gender and sexuality clash with Ginzburg’s ethical pact with the word (words do and should reflect reality and are won through experience and suffering).²¹

The mix of fiction with autobiography also marks my chapter on *Notes of a Blockade Person*, her most popular work (published in English, German, Swedish, French, and Dutch translations). The Leningrad Blockade was a catastrophic experience for its victims, but it ironically gave many people, including Ginzburg, the affirmative feeling of actively participating in a major historical turning point, as the Soviet Union battled to victory over Nazism. For Ginzburg and others, the blockade became a personal test of whether it

was possible to “survive and endure without losing one’s human image.”²² Ginzburg places at the center of *Notes of a Blockade Person* a male hero named N., who is meant to be a typical member of the Leningrad intelligentsia. This apparent move toward fiction is part of her effort to represent the broadest possible historical experience.

But the unpublished manuscripts show that Ginzburg also orients her work toward fiction in order to conceal her most powerful and tragic experience in the blockade: the death of her mother from starvation. She treats this fateful episode in a quasi-fictional manner in “A Story of Pity and Cruelty.”²³ This story reveals the hero’s guilt about his aunt’s miserable final weeks and death. In *Notes of a Blockade Person*, Ginzburg alludes cryptically and minimally to this experience, while much more fully re-creating the realities of siege existence (realities that may help to account for the hero’s flawed behavior in “A Story of Pity and Cruelty”). In other words, across separate narratives, Ginzburg performed her work as historian-novelist, explaining the connections between “facts.” In the creation of *Notes of a Blockade Person*, Ginzburg followed a model she knew well from her study of Herzen, who developed out of painful episodes of personal life (a family tragedy, failure, guilt, and remorse) a comprehensive memoir of the history of his time.

I draw parallels between Ginzburg and the authors she studies in *On Psychological Prose* such as Herzen, Tolstoy, and Proust, and yet I also emphasize the many factors that separate her from these models. She made her living as a literary scholar, while writing her prose “for the desk drawer.” Her audience often consisted of a small group of listeners, and her poetics were shaped by the habit of oral delivery. These intimate readings appear to have begun in the late 1920s. They most likely ceased during Stalin’s Terror (a fact that, ironically, may have liberated Ginzburg to write harsher sketches of her contemporaries), and resumed again in the late 1950s or early 1960s, continuing up through the last years of her life. In the final decades, younger friends typed up her essays with an eye to publication; their tastes influenced the composition of Ginzburg’s books. The absence, for so many years, of a broad audience and of the opportunities and pressures of publishing made it difficult for her to create “complete” works. Nevertheless, her genre of the fragmentary essay meant that, before the advent of the word processor, Ginzburg would “cut and paste” sentences, formulations, and essays from her notebooks into works of scholarship, or into longer narratives. Conversely, she was eventually able to publish excerpts of unfinished lengthier narratives as short essays.

Ginzburg once described herself as a person “who has a genuine need to fix his thoughts in words, who has some talent for doing this, and who patently lacks the ability and the desire to *invent*.” She acknowledged that these

qualities would seem to predispose a person to write autobiographically—and yet she declared defiantly, “I’m totally incapable of doing that sort of thing; in part from shyness, which it would be possible to overcome, if this were necessary; in part from considerations which probably shouldn’t be overcome.”²⁴ In some ways, her mode of documentary prose is a product of these two idiosyncratic pressures: to fix thoughts in words, but without writing autobiographically. Thus, while Ginzburg referred to her writings as a “direct conversation about life,”²⁵ they bear a quite indirect and complex relationship to the self. As she wrote in 1928:

It is possible to write about oneself directly: I. It is possible to write semi-indirectly: a substitute character. It is possible to write completely indirectly: about other people and things as I see them. Here begins the essence of *literary reflection*, a “monologuized” view of the world (Proust), which I find probably the closest.²⁶

Ginzburg experimented with direct, indirect, and semi-indirect relationships to the autobiographical “I” (she implies that all three are ways of writing “about oneself”). Most often she wrote and reflected “about other people,” regarding this as a “direct expression” of her life experience.²⁷

It would be extremely difficult to approach Ginzburg’s writings with the goal of constructing a coherent or complete biography. Her self-writings are remarkable for their omissions. There are only vague inklings about her childhood, family, and private life. There is little treatment of her political views (her semifictional blockade writings forming the most notable exception) or of the physical circumstances of her life. Though she was by all accounts a talented wit with a wry sense of humor, she preferred to record the witticisms of those around her. (Ginzburg once explained to her good friend Boris Bukhstab that writers should not be their own Eckermanns, following themselves around with a notebook.²⁸) The unpublished writings discuss in indirect ways some more details of her biography such as her Jewish identity and failed love affairs with women. In part, Ginzburg was constrained because she wanted to publish, at least eventually, but had her doubts that a fully free press would ever come about. For the most part, however, what look like omissions are the result of her notion of the “range of the depictable,”²⁹ which was a product of personal and creative considerations.

She once jotted in her 1928 notebook: “Everything that makes a person different is his own private affair; that which makes him similar is his social duty.”³⁰ Early in life Ginzburg had already adopted a distinctly anti-Romantic stance: rather than cultivate eccentricity, she aimed to experience norms and to stand “on the level of the average person.”³¹ This especially concerned her self-representation in writing. She was eager to write about the typical repre-

sentative of her generation, and yet felt that she diverged from this model in many ways: “As far as I’m concerned, with all of my sound judgment, even I turn out to be in some respects too eccentric a person for literature.”³² Her position was in some ways similar to that of Alexander Pushkin, who despite his participation in certain aspects of Romanticism, was most un-Byronic in separating creativity from everyday life. As Ginzburg explained in a 1988 interview, “Creativity is the most elevated value for Pushkin, a matter of his higher spiritual life. But in everything else—in everyday life, in the family, in society—he wanted to remain like everyone else.”³³ Since her primary output, unlike Pushkin’s, was prose documenting everyday life, she ends up writing of an alter ego who “wanted to remain like everyone else.”

This book’s title is a reversal of one of Ginzburg’s own: *Literature in Search of Reality*, her 1987 book uniting theoretical, scholarly essays and prose writings (memoirs, narratives, and essays) under one cover. Ginzburg believed that authors were always striving for greater “realism” (even as she acknowledged the relativity of the term), and saw “in-between” prose as opening up the borders of what is considered to be worthy of representation. Her prose searches for “reality,” and yet at the same time it reveals how reality makes its own demands on literature, searching for a new, adequate word. This phrase places the accent on incompleteness and unfinalizability (to use Mikhail Bakhtin’s term), on the difficulty of finding a form, whether generic or institutional. It also captures Ginzburg’s sense of self as a “shred of social reality.”

In order to illuminate Ginzburg’s writings on the self after the crisis of individualism, each of the book’s chapters takes a different angle on the connections between self-concepts and literary forms. I explicate the in-betweenness of her prose in terms of subject position (between the first and third person, self and other, author and hero) and genre (autobiography, fiction, history, scholarship).

The first chapter contains an explication of the concept of post-individualist prose as a pointed departure from nineteenth-century Realism. This is a fragmentary, documentary literature that restricts itself to the realm of “fact,” while being free to range outside the conventions of established genres. The post-individualist person’s primary dilemma is a crisis in values, and Ginzburg treats writing as an ethical act. I concentrate on how writing serves as an “exit from the self,” a process by which the self becomes another, leaving behind the ego. In the second half of the chapter, the focus turns to two of Ginzburg’s narratives (“Delusion of the Will” and “A Story of Pity and Cruelty”), which concern the dilemmas of moral action in response to the death of a loved one. The traumatized subject uses techniques of “self-distancing” to deal with his or her sense of self and of the past by constructing a complete and responsible self-image, embedded within a social milieu,

and then trying to connect it with his or her actions. Ginzburg's techniques of "self-distancing" (what I call *samo-otstranenie* in Russian) are examined side-by-side with Shklovsky's concept of *ostranenie* ("estrangement") and Bakhtin's *vnenakhodimost'* ("outsideness").

In chapter 2, I place Ginzburg's diverse notes and essays at the center of the analysis, examining them in three principal ways. First, I examine their genre, in the context of the crisis of the novel, particularly as the Formalists saw it. Second, I elaborate the specific aesthetics of Ginzburg's notes, by articulating the poetics of the "formula," a precise sentence or phrase that encapsulates or compresses a wealth of impressions. Third, I discuss the flexibility and multiplicity of generic orientations in the notes, as evidenced by their publication and reception history.

Chapter 3 undertakes a treatment of the rhetoric of personal pronouns in Ginzburg's writings on love and sexuality, drawing on Michael Lucey's study of the first person in twentieth-century French literature about love.³⁴ Lucey argues that pronominal usage demands extra attention in matters of literature and sexuality, particularly when same-sex relationships are concerned. Proust creates an abstract "I" in his pseudo-memoir, but Ginzburg chooses a different path, using the third-person masculine singular to articulate her position in between sexual and gender identifications. In my analysis, I bring together questions of genre and narrative, on the one hand, and gender and sexuality, on the other. The chapter divides into two sections, treating writings from two different periods on two kinds of love Ginzburg thought typical of intellectuals: in "First Love," I discuss the unrequited and tragic love depicted in Ginzburg's teenage diaries (1920–23); in "Second Love," I analyze the love that is realized but in the end equally tragic, depicted in drafts related to *Home and the World* (1930s). I examine the models the author sought in literary, psychological, and philosophical texts (Weininger, Kraft-Ebbing, Blok, Shklovsky, Oleinikov, Hemingway, and Proust).

Whereas chapter 3 treats Ginzburg's writing about "the self," chapter 4 focuses on her notes about others—in particular, it examines Ginzburg's character analyses from the 1930s, 1940s, and 1970s, where she tries to explain history through character and character through history. Following the model of two literary landmarks from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries—Herzen's *My Past and Thoughts* (published in installments beginning in 1854), and Mandelstam's *The Noise of Time* (1928)—she tells not life stories, but stories of personality in which history is reflected. At a time when the official doctrine of Socialist Realism and the strict censorship regime had cut off any genuine intercourse between literature and life, Ginzburg's sketches constitute a gallery of portraits of her contemporaries, and a valuable literary history of her social group. They also represent a defense of "true" *intelligentnost'*

(an orientation toward higher cultural and social values, ideals, and willingness to suffer for these) against the easy lamentations and lacerations unleashed and made more socially permissible by oppressive circumstances.

Chapter 5 treats *Notes of a Blockade Person*, a heterogeneous narrative in multiple parts that is not only Ginzburg's most important and famous "single" work, but also her most misinterpreted in terms of its genre—it is often taken for a diary or memoir. I conduct a detailed exploration of the layers of this palimpsest in order to identify more precisely the genre of *Notes*, an undertaking that crystallizes the central features of Ginzburg's writings as I investigate them throughout the book. Her techniques of self-distancing create a third-person narrative about a slightly generalized other, in a well-defined historical situation.

LYDIA GINZBURG: A BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

This tentative biographical sketch of Ginzburg is based on archival materials and interviews, as well as her own writings.³⁵ Any kind of straightforward biographical narrative goes against the grain of her poetics. So too does any biography of Ginzburg that separates her from her generational or historical context. With historical participation as her ultimate measuring stick, she summed up her life in a pessimistic way as lacking a biography.³⁶

Lydia Yakovlevna Ginzburg was born on 18 March (5 March, old style) 1902 in Odessa into a fairly wealthy Jewish family, which had recovered from two bankruptcies. A brief sketch of both parents' backgrounds from Ginzburg's perspective survives thanks to the efforts of her niece, the writer Natalia Sokolova, who left a short biography of her aunt "resembling a family chronicle" in her own Moscow archive.³⁷ Born in 1916, Sokolova was the daughter of Ginzburg's older brother Viktor (1893–1960), a playwright known by his literary pseudonym Tipot.³⁸ Here is the story Ginzburg reportedly told her niece in 1977:

My father died young, I don't remember him at all.³⁹ He was, evidently, a talented person. His was a merchant family, grandfather Moisei was a bankrupted merchant. He had lots of children. Grigory, the oldest, somehow recuperated the former wealth, although, probably, not to its full extent. He had a brick factory, and had his own horses. Their home was in Gorodnia, in the Chernigov Region [Ukraine]. [...] A huge house, practically an estate. As children, Viktor and I loved to go there with Uncle Mark. More than the successful and rather dry Grigory, I liked the somewhat odd bachelor Manuil, who lived with [his] mother, and she was already completely decrepit, moribund.

There were a lot of brothers, all became merchants except Yakov and Mark, who chose science, chemistry [. . .]. Yakov was the brighter of the two, Mark stuck with him and was very devoted. They studied in Switzerland, in Bern, where it was easier to get into institutions of higher learning, and cheaper to live.

A rich young lady from Russia traveled to Bern, Raya Gol'denberg, who perhaps wanted to study just a little bit, or to live freely and amuse herself for a while. Her father, a rich merchant, prevented her from studying, and was against her romance with the "pauper" [*golodranets*] Yakov Ginzburg. But in the end he got his way and became her husband. And then Raya's father went bankrupt (like Yakov's father before him). He was in the wholesale business in the export of grain, his steamship sunk. And of all the children of the poverty-stricken merchant Davyd Gol'denberg, Raya turned out to be the most provided for and best established.⁴⁰

Yakov Ginzburg died young, but left his business in running order, and it provided a moderate income: a laboratory for brewer's yeast. And the faithful Mark, who had never married, dedicated his life to mama and to us, his brother's children, and he stayed with mama until his very death. Father had a few inventions, various patents, and I remember advertisements for "viktolydin" (from the names of his two children), I think it was some kind of disinfectant to be used in production."⁴¹

It is remarkable that Ginzburg does not remember her father, Yakov Ginzburg, who died of a heart attack at the age of forty-five in December 1909, when she was seven years old. His business and family responsibilities were, as she notes, inherited by her uncle Mark, to whom she refers elsewhere as her stepfather.⁴² Raya's light-heartedness is a trait Sokolova emphasizes, contrasting it with her Aunt Lydia's firm, decisive character and championing of reason, and repeats one of the witticisms of their friends: "a hen laid an eagle's egg."⁴³

In pre-Revolutionary Odessa, the Ginzburgs owned two houses (parts of which they rented out) and employed maids as well as a German tutor.⁴⁴ Lydia Ginzburg's youthful diaries show that she read widely in Russian, German, and French (later, she read in English; her multilingualism did not extend to Yiddish or Ukrainian⁴⁵). Together with her brother, she was involved in a semi-domestic theater troupe named Krot.⁴⁶ In the summer, the Ginzburgs rented dachas, a practice that continued into the mid- and late 1920s, when many Leningrad-based scholars (some of them originally from Odessa: Boris Eikhenbaum, Viktor Zhirmunsky, Grigory Gukovsky, Boris Tomashovsky, Boris Bukhstab, and others) came for extended visits. Ginzburg enjoyed sports: she was a sailor, tennis player, and an especially fine swimmer.

As a child she was a member of an outdoor scouting club and, as Natalia Sokolova reports, suffered a nearly fatal accident sometime between 1913 and 1915: her group set up a campfire over a hidden unexploded shell that went off just as Ginzburg was bending over it. She recovered after a month-long hospitalization (according to Sokolova, she had been unconscious and near death), but one or both of her eyes were permanently traumatized, easily tearing in her adulthood.⁴⁷

Ginzburg's was a highly secularized Jewish family, some of whose members (but not Lydia Yakovlevna herself) converted to Protestantism, thus making university admissions easier (or even possible) for them.⁴⁸ Though she never set foot inside a synagogue as a child, she sometimes attended church on Sundays with her German governess, who instructed her to recite "The Lord's Prayer" at bedtime.⁴⁹ By the time she turned 17 (in March 1919), Ginzburg had become an atheist, and remained one for the rest of her life.⁵⁰ Never defining herself through her Jewish identity, she also never concealed it, deciding that "the only thing worse than Jewish nationalists are Jewish anti-Semites."⁵¹

Lydia Ginzburg's views and tastes were shaped by artistic and political radicalism, as was typical for an educated Jewish intellectual of her generation. She admired Blok and Mayakovsky and was sympathetic to both Russian Revolutions of 1917. She wrote of being eager to give up her shameful material advantages, to sacrifice on behalf of "the people" (*narod*). She recalls being most enthralled after the February Revolution, when as a fifteen-year-old she paraded around Odessa with a red ribbon pinned to her dress (only to be rebuked by her schoolmistress).⁵² After October, she began to lose her enthusiasm. In Odessa, there were ominous signs of the coming powerlessness of the individual at the hands of the state: sailors strutting about with "gun-cartridge belts dangling from their necks," who "went around the city in packs and entered any home they pleased. This inspired a feeling of helplessness, alienation."⁵³

Ginzburg grew up with a fondness and longing for St. Petersburg, the imperial capital since the beginning of the eighteenth century, and the backdrop for the Bolshevik Revolution. She idealized its granite-bound coldness and literary traditions, and fostered hopes that a great new life would begin to take shape for her there.⁵⁴ She begins a new diary with this entry:

Thursday. 19 July 1920. Yesterday for the first time in my life, alone, without relatives, I left Odessa for Petersburg. The strangest thing is that from childhood I pictured it just this way—finishing eighth grade and going to "Piter" to study. And despite the "time" [that is, the Revolution and Civil War] it happened just so.⁵⁵

Full of excitement as an offspring of Revolutionary upheaval, she arrived in a Petrograd that was devastated by famine, economic hardship, and the consequences of the Civil War.⁵⁶ At first, she studied chemistry, proving to be a miserable student (by her own account).⁵⁷ Three and a half decades later, she wrote about this move, characteristically transforming her autobiographical experience into an abstract case study by shifting her narrative to the third-person masculine and replacing Petrograd with Moscow.

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 in the meantime. 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.⁵⁸

With a sense of a boundless future ahead, she began to sit in on classes with Alexander Vvedensky, the famous neo-Kantian philosopher who taught at Petrograd State University (formerly St. Petersburg University).⁵⁹ As was the case with many young people, she started her literary activities by writing poetry and even earned the praise of Nikolai Gumilyov.⁶⁰ Yet, even while Ginzburg describes her first year in Petrograd as a multifaceted “lesson”—“the poets’ workshop, the poetic soirees, the museums, the city”—she nevertheless sums up all her accomplishments as having a “strangely negative character.”⁶¹ She remained obsessed by an unrequited love (see chapter 3), and failed to gain entry into literary circles. After her application to the university was rejected, Ginzburg returned to Odessa in summer 1921. Yet she remained determined to leave behind the “unserious” city of her youth in order to realize her talents.⁶² One thinks of the statement by Eikhenbaum several years later, on a visit to Odessa as Ginzburg records it: “I don’t understand,—Eikhenbaum said to me pensively,—how you could leave behind the sea, sun, acacias and so on and come to the north with such reserves of good sense. If I had been born in Odessa, it’s likely that nothing good would ever have come of me.”⁶³

In October 1922, Ginzburg was admitted to the Institute for the History of the Arts, and moved back to Petrograd. Friends from Odessa who had already established themselves there helped with her admission.⁶⁴ She lived as a poor student (in a city where the population itself was, on the whole, deeply impoverished), staying with family friends or subletting rooms for short amounts of time⁶⁵; her uncle Mark occasionally sent money.

Ginzburg named spring 1923, when Yuri Tynianov praised her very first seminar presentation, as the moment when she fully and seriously committed herself to a literary path.⁶⁶ Receiving confirmation of her talents from such a brilliant scholar was both exhilarating and frightening.⁶⁷ In her diary, she notes, “I have found an occupation that I like and which suits me, one that I can succeed at, and which might be my future; I have become convinced (at last, *objectively*) that creative forces reside within me, perhaps even significant ones—in any case, the kind that you won’t find lying around on the street.” On the other hand, now that it had become a reality instead of a dream, her future seemed destined to fall short of what she had imagined in her teenage years: “I believed that I would become a new extraordinary person, in the new extraordinary conditions.” (Lest we think that this was a utopian “Soviet New Person,” Ginzburg specifies that “what was new would have been external, for other people; while for me, this person was my own familiar ideal person that I carried inside myself.”) “But now,” she continues, “I am more and more firmly convinced that that person and those conditions will never be.” She continues to see herself as “a person who is morally confused, a person who is cut off from the main road of private life.”⁶⁸

Yet Ginzburg put aside her doubts and entered a new creative and professional life. At the Institute for the History of the Arts, the birthplace of Russian Formalism, she was by her own account completely remade through contact with the teachers she called *maitres*.

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.⁶⁹

She recalls much later how the experiences of teaching and publishing gave her group a temporary feeling “that we were becoming actors in a new branch of culture that was just beginning.”⁷⁰ She describes Formalism as “a current which seemed to be in opposition to the epoch, but in reality was generated by the epoch.”⁷¹ However short-lived these experiences turned out to be, Ginzburg believed they determined her future trajectory. Joining an avant-garde movement in literature and scholarship produced a thrill of innovation, discovery, and social participation.

In 1924, a select group of students began to meet in a “house” seminar run by Eikhenbaum and Tynianov, choosing as their main topic nineteenth-century Russian prose. Together this group of pupils, later known as the “Young Formalists” (*mladoformalisty*: they included Boris Bukhstab, Viktor Gofman, and Nikolai Stepanov), produced a volume of articles called *Russian Prose (Russkaia proza)*.⁷² This 1926 volume contained Ginzburg’s first article, devoted to the “Notebooks” (*Zapisnye knizhki*) of Prince Pyotr Vyazemsky, 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 *bon mots*. In the same year, Ginzburg completed her course of study at the Institute and became a research fellow and teaching assistant there.⁷³

While at the Institute, Ginzburg finally 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 Vyazemsky’s legacy, Ginzburg at the same time started to write her own “Notebooks” in Vyazemsky’s manner, which were meant to give a vivid and diverse picture of her time and milieu. From the mid-1920s on, Ginzburg’s academic pursuits were related to her own literary plans and ambitions. Though she spent her whole life as a scholar and earned her living at it, she always saw her studies in literary history as a projection of the problems that were relevant to her as a writer.

The end of the 1920s saw the crisis and rout of the Formalist School by Marxist ideologues, leading to the closure of the Institute and the decisive silencing of the Formalists in 1930.⁷⁴ Even before then, in 1928, Ginzburg was removed from the roster of full-time graduate students at Leningrad State University (where she had begun to study under Eikhenbaum) for her “insufficient use of Marxist methods.”⁷⁵ In December 1929, Ginzburg was attacked at the Institute by a Marxist ideologue from Moscow, Sergei Malakhov, for an article on the poetry of Venevitinov.⁷⁶ In Ginzburg’s words, Malakhov, who planned to publish his accusations of her “militant idealism” in *Red Virgin Soil (Krasnaia nov’)*, had a mission to “wipe her off the face of the earth.”⁷⁷ Ginzburg was wounded by Malakhov’s public pillorying, and by the rumors spread about it by another Marxist (Yakov Nazarenko), but this was nothing compared to her outrage at the fact that her teachers had not been present to help defend her (and she believed they knew in advance about the offensive). She exchanged a series of letters with Eikhenbaum and Tynianov in which she ended her apprenticeship to them, and after which Tynianov withdrew his article from a planned collection, evidently refusing to be published in the same book as Ginzburg.

Even before the final catastrophe, relations between the Young Formalists, especially Ginzburg and the *mâitres* had become strained due to the perennial struggle between “fathers and sons,” to enormous political pressures, and to Ginzburg’s own turn to sociological methods.⁷⁸ This break with her teachers (especially with Tynianov) deeply scarred her, and yet she carefully concealed it and never let it be known publicly, not even in later years. Although personally remote, she remained loyal to them and close to their intellectual tradition throughout her life, even at the risk of damaging her own professional prospects.⁷⁹

Looking back from 1932, Ginzburg realized that by 1928 she had already 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.⁸⁰ In 1930–32, she drafted articles on Proust and on “Writers’ Notebooks,” which she came to realize were unpublishable.⁸¹ She tried to make a living in children’s literature. In 1930, she signed a contract for a children’s detective novel, *The Pinkerton Agency* (*Agentstvo Pinkertona*), which she published after some difficulties in early 1933.⁸²

In these years (and up until 1970), Ginzburg lived in the center of Leningrad, having officially registered in an apartment on Griboedov Canal (right behind Kazan Cathedral) in 1928. It was a communal apartment in which she had one large room: her neighbors included her intellectual collocutor Grigory Gukovsky, his brother Matvei, and Selli Dolukhanova, the sister of one of her Institute classmates.⁸³ In 1931, she brought her family nearer—moving her mother and uncle Mark from Odessa (thus helping to rescue them from the coming Ukrainian famine of 1932–33).⁸⁴ Ginzburg erected a dividing wall, creating a small room for her mother, who lived there until her death in the Leningrad Blockade in 1942. Meanwhile, she helped set up a sunny one-room apartment for her uncle in a Leningrad suburb, Detskoe selo (formerly Tsarskoe selo and later, the town called Pushkin); he resided there until his death in 1934.

In 1935, Ginzburg became a member of the Writers’ Union, as part of a massive membership drive following the organization’s 1934 founding. Between 1930 and 1950, she had many lecturing jobs through which she supplemented the publication fees that were her main source of income, which remained meager. Because she had been a Young Formalist (and because she was Jewish), her applications for a professorship at prestigious institutions of learning such as Leningrad State University were invariably rejected. Instead, she lectured at the Workers’ Division at the Institute of the Air Fleet (*Rabfak Instituta Grazhdanskogo vozdushnogo flota*) (1930–34), and at the literary cir-

cle of the “Red Triangle” Factory (1932–?).⁸⁵ At the end of the decade, she was able to take advantage of the approaching centennial of the death of Mikhail Lermontov in 1941 to defend her candidate’s dissertation at Leningrad State University based on the monograph *The Creative Path of Lermontov* (*Tvorcheskii put’ Lermontova*) published the same year (1940).⁸⁶

Ginzburg survived the years of the Stalinist Terror while living in Leningrad, although many of her friends were arrested and exiled or executed. She herself was arrested only once, in 1933, and jailed for two weeks in connection with a case that was being built against her friend Viktor Zhirmunsky.⁸⁷ Ginzburg describes the 1930s as a time that was psychologically more complicated and morally more difficult than the 1920s. On the one hand, there was enthusiasm about building a new society, which produced a tortured desire among the intelligentsia to join in and “Labor in common with all / At one with the legal order” (“Труда со всеми сообща / И заодно с правопорядком”).⁸⁸ On the other hand, there were the horrors of collectivization, famine, arrests, and the Gulag; these demanded survival strategies of “adjustment, rationalization, indifference.”⁸⁹ Ginzburg counts herself among those less “enchanted” (*zavorozhemye*) by Soviet ideology in the Stalin era; she attributed this to the fact that her ambitions were intellectual, rather than social or professional.⁹⁰

The end of Ginzburg’s Sturm und Drang period and the major shift in her social status and professional aspirations contributed to her literary reorientation. She no longer believed she was a participant in a central cultural trend, and increasingly positioned herself as an observer trying to make sense of history’s development. Given her distance from the “common cause,” intellectually and socially, she came to know the kind of isolation that is not a pose but rather is “practical, literal, and, what is more, threatens to take away one’s piece of bread.”⁹¹ Starting in the early 1930s, failure, solitude, and marginality became key factors 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 private lesbian in an increasingly homophobic society, as a Jew in a country where anti-Semitism, only slightly veiled, had gradually become part of official ideology, and discrimination on the grounds of national origins hardened into an established practice. Her approach to all these dimensions of her new social role remained the same throughout her life—she was ready to accept a marginal status, but adamantly refused to romanticize it. She was ready to bear hardships with dignity, but not to search for any consolation in them. Nostalgia for social norms conducive to the kind of ethics she sought defined her position and the structure of her new literary experiments.

In the same period, her interest in notebooks (*zapisnye knizhki*) as a genre faded significantly. While her notebooks for 1925–30 occupy 816 pages, her notebooks for 1931–35 are only half that size—376 pages. In 1935, she stopped writing them altogether (the last one was written after a long interval in 1943–44). What is more, the notebooks themselves change in 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. Ginzburg may have begun to view some of these essays and fragments less as finished entities and more as *études* for larger generic forms.

Ginzburg's first "narrative" (she later coined the term *povestvovanie* to define this type of intermediary literature), "The Return Home" (*Vozvrashchenie domoi*), was written between 1929 and 1936 and dated 1931 for publication.⁹² In it, she analyzes the psychology of love and the emotional texture of the meeting and separation of lovers as experienced against a background of different landscapes. It was followed in the late 1930s by at least two more narratives analyzing her personal experiences of the deaths of acquaintances, friends, and close relatives ("The Thought That Drew a Circle" and "Delusion of the Will"). In the late 1980s, Ginzburg would record a dialogue defining her own legacy as a prose writer:

- So there you have it, this person wrote about love, hunger, and death.
—People write about love and hunger when they arrive [happen].
—Yes. Unfortunately, the same can't be said about death.⁹³

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 at an early stage they had been designed as parts of one large unified work, which Grigory Gukovsky had greeted as a major novel.⁹⁴ A lifelong admirer of Tolstoy, Ginzburg gave to this quasi-novel the title *Home and Peace*, or more accurately *Home and the World* (*Dom i mir*).⁹⁵ She envisaged it as something like a diary-novel that would describe her own generation and social milieu, defined elsewhere in her notebooks as "the humanities intelligentsia of the Soviet type and nonofficial mold" (*gumanitarnaia intelligentsia sovetskoi formatsii i nekazennogo obraztsa*).⁹⁶

As is clear from her definition of its genre, Ginzburg intended her magnum opus to be purely nonfictional, where the artistic effect would be 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 meticulous quasi-scientific methods of analyzing herself and her immediate environment, by

sketching and dissecting the characters of people around her and carefully recording their conversations in a stenographic manner. She used techniques of self-distancing in order to treat herself as a specimen, a representative of specific historical trends and tendencies. 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 the war and the blockade could be considered as the continuation of her earlier pieces and the most significant part of her work in this genre.

Ginzburg writes of the onset of World War II as bringing a modicum of psychological respite after the Great Terror of the late 1930s. 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 on the Radio Committee was a valuable experience of "social relevance" (*sotsial'naia primenimost'*)—a chance to feel accepted, even for a short period, 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 appalling 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 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."⁹⁷

Around 1942–45, Ginzburg wrote what are arguably her two most powerful narratives—"The Story of Pity and Cruelty" and "Otter's Day."⁹⁸ The former is a minute description of the blockade death of a close relative and a merciless analysis of the survivor's guilty feelings toward the one who was lost. The second narrative is what Ginzburg much later reworked as *Notes of a Blockade Person*. Both narratives focus on the same character, Ginzburg's alter ego, whose strange-sounding name, Otter, is most likely a transliteration from the French of both *l'autre* and *l'auteur*. She often used it in her autobiographical works of the 1930s and 1940s. Ginzburg analyzes the phenomenol-

ogy of hunger and the basic structures of human nature and the social order that, from her point of view, were not so much destroyed as discovered and revealed by improbable physical and moral suffering. The sheer volume of essays, fragments, deliberations, drafts, character sketches, and records of conversations that she wrote 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 the ensuing anti-Formalist and anti-Semitic campaigns. Seven years, from Andrei Zhdanov's speech against Anna Akhmatova and Mikhail Zoshchenko in 1946 and until Stalin's death in 1953, marked the nadir in the history of Soviet literature and humanities. Because of the new wave of purges following the war, Ginzburg wrote, people began to resign themselves to the fact that the brutality would be never-ending.⁹⁹ It seems that during these years, her last hopes, those that had enabled her to keep writing in the horrific time of the Great Terror and the Leningrad Blockade, were extinguished. In the editions of her prose, this entire period is not represented by a single line.¹⁰⁰ Meanwhile, Ginzburg worked on her doctoral dissertation, on Alexander Herzen's *My Past and Thoughts*, with which she faced tremendous difficulties.¹⁰¹ One of her indirectly autobiographical essays from 1954 profiles an anonymous character who has been struggling for several years to publish his book. Only now that the situation has become less lethal (after Stalin's death) can he allow himself to process the humiliation and pain of those years, when his voice would unwillingly take on a supplicating tone, when friends would avoid talking to him, when he lived in mortifying fear of every phone call and visit with the publishers. She writes of how a person begins to fear "the very process of humiliation" even more than its verdicts or consequences, which included the very real possibility of death.¹⁰²

Ginzburg's only regular academic 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 deemed 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).¹⁰³ Eleazar Meletinsky was arrested in 1949, and Ginzburg was (in her own words) driven out of the university soon after.¹⁰⁴ At the end of 1952, she was brought in for questioning in a case against Eikhenbaum, but fortunately the death of Stalin a few months afterward (on 5 March 1953) "saved my life, among countless others," as she wrote many years later.¹⁰⁵

During the Thaw 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* (a book she had described as plagued by a deep-

seated lack of freedom).¹⁰⁶ In the 1960s, she wrote and published her book *On the Lyric (O lirike)* (1964), which finally established her status as a leading scholar.

She connected with other people of her generation such as Nadezhda Mandelstam, and began spending summers with her and the Meletinskiis in Tarusa (where Mandelstam introduced her to Varlam Shalamov)¹⁰⁷ and Peredelkino. She started reading passages from her notebooks and narratives to a small number of younger admirers, and they soon began to help her type up selections with an eye to future publication. Among these 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.¹⁰⁸ It is from these younger writers and intellectuals that we can still hear reminiscences about Ginzburg today, about her customary hosting rituals (eggs and mayonnaise, a carafe of vodka), a domestic orderliness atypical for the intelligentsia, a conversational style that patiently circled around a thought while acquiring ever more precision, her absolute trustworthiness in keeping secrets, her decency, her mentoring of young poets, and her love of “literary scandal.” Many of these friends are able to lovingly imitate her slow, nasal manner of pronunciation.¹⁰⁹

In the 1960s and 1970s, Ginzburg published several reminiscences, based on material from her notebooks, about her friends and acquaintances of old: 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 infantil’nosti”), “On Satire and Analysis” (“O satire i ob analize”), and many others. The genre of the “note” with its witticisms and *bon mots* reappears (composed now on loose pages, handwritten and then typed, rather than in *tetrad*), as she captures the lives and personalities of 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 response to Ginzburg’s rising social status (or decreasing marginality). In these same years, Ginzburg took up amateur photography, as another way of observing and recording her milieu.¹¹⁰ However, it seems clear that the project of the Proustian “diary-novel” had been 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.”¹¹¹ What was to have been her major work was now split into dozens and hundreds of more or less disjointed fragments. Nevertheless, in the 1960s 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 one of Solzhenitsyn's epigones and thus had to reject the format of "one day in the life of *x*." In one of the introductions to the new version of her 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 successors."¹¹² She rewrote "Otter's Day" into the text she now planned to title simply "Blokada," replacing her main character with the many voices of witnesses, and thus transforming a personal narrative into a more general description. But while she was working on these changes, the Thaw came to an end. The publication of her blockade narrative was 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)—was now the only sphere of activity available to Ginzburg as a way both to support herself and to acquire some sort of social standing. In her monograph *On Psychological Prose (O psikhologicheskoi proze, 1971)*, she tried, as was so typical of her, to find some intermediary ground between the "two-fold conversation—about life and about literature" that she had been carrying on for fifty years. Ginzburg called it "the most intimate among her scholarly books," precisely because it spoke about "in-between literature, about the most important questions in life, and the most important writers for me."¹¹³ There is another gap in her "notes" from 1966–73, which appears related to her intensive work on this book; as she once explained: "While my last book was being prepared and written, everything else was put aside for a few years, including these notes."¹¹⁴ At the same time, some pages of the book came straight out of the laboratory of her earlier notes and essays. The scholarly discussion of intermediary literature was continued in her next book *On the Literary Hero (O literaturnom geroe, 1979)*, which shows the fruits of her long-standing interest in Western sociology and psychology.¹¹⁵

In 1970, Ginzburg's work and living environment changed: the conversion of her apartment building into the Railway Ticket Office forced her to move out, and her friends helped her secure a one-room apartment of her own, the first noncommunal space she lived in during her whole adult life.¹¹⁶ While Ginzburg had been worried about moving to the outskirts of the city (telling Lidia Lotman, "It's not Petersburg, not Leningrad. It's a different city!"), she reportedly grew accustomed to her apartment and enjoyed taking long walks in the nearby parks.¹¹⁷ The walls of her apartment were decorated with avant-

garde art from the 1920s, works by David Burluk, Mikhail Matiushin, Dmitry Mitrokhin, Alexander Tyshler (a portrait of Anna Akhmatova in which the poet had “corrected” her nose¹¹⁸), Vasily Chekrigin, Alexandra Ekster, and others (gifts from her friend the art collector Nikolai Khardzhiev).

In spring 1982, on the occasion of her eightieth birthday, her friends and colleagues organized a jubilee at the House of Writers (*Dom pisatelei*) with speeches in her honor, followed by a dinner at the European Hotel (*Evropeiskaia*). Her notes for her speech point out how her interests, which were in fact those of her whole lifetime, were again in fashion. For instance, she talks about how as Tynianov’s student, she was influenced by historicism; by her personal disposition, the early Formalists’ practice of “immanent analysis did not attract” her. Already in the 1930s she was making “conscious attempts to join historical and structural approaches,” which she identifies as one of the “basic problems of contemporary literary criticism.” She also talks about her proximity to developments seeking to explore the “intersections of literary scholarship and psychology, social psychology.” She specifies her interest in “the problem of historical character, the forms of historical behavior. The semiotics of personality.”¹¹⁹ Despite the proximity of her interests to Yuri Lotman and the Tartu School, she was never embraced by them, a situation, as friends reported, that left her feeling wounded.¹²⁰

Ginzburg had pessimistically concluded in 1980 that she had begun the final, “unhistorical” period of her life. She had no inkling that her reputation was about to undergo a second renaissance, even more significant than her rise as a scholar in the Thaw. The year 1982 marks the first publication of a small selection of her notes in *Novyi mir*. In the same year, she published more notes in a book of articles and reminiscences, *About the Old and the New* (*O starom i novom*).¹²¹ Less than two years later, the Leningrad literary review *Neva* finally managed to publish the abbreviated version of her blockade narrative under the title *Notes of a Blockade Person* (*Zapiski blokadnogo cheloveka*): in the table of contents, Ginzburg was introduced as a “new name.”

The sensational success of *Notes of a Blockade Person* stimulated public interest in her work. As a writer, she finally began to reach a wide readership. The policies of *perestroika* and the ensuing collapse of the barriers imposed by censorship made possible further publications. 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 sociopsychological analysis of the reasons why the Russian intelligentsia sympathized with the Bolshevik Revolution and managed to coexist with the Stalinist Terror. The last years of her life witnessed the publication of three more books with

ever-growing quantities of previously unpublished prose; the final volume was prepared by Ginzburg in the last months of her life and published posthumously.¹²² In 1988, Ginzburg was awarded the State Prize in Literature and Arts for her books *On the Literary Hero* and *Literature in Search of Reality* (among the dozen or so laureates that year were the director Aleksei German, the poet David Samoilov, and the writer Anatoly Pristavkin).¹²³ 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.

However, even having passed her eighty-fifth birthday Ginzburg could not limit herself to preparing her earlier works for belated publication. As she had said at her birthday celebration three years earlier,

It's pleasant to tell a person whose jubilee it is that they are young—irrespective of age—and that they have everything ahead of them. I understand that this custom is a mere convention and don't flatter myself. Whatever else is true, it is still good that the desire to express myself in written form has still not deserted me.¹²⁴

Ginzburg continued writing and reflecting about the past and present in the final years of her life. 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 discusses Gorbachev and perestroika.¹²⁵

Ginzburg's feverish activity may have put a strain on her health. Her doctor, Yakov Yurievich Bogrov, reported to me that around 1975 and 1980, she suffered two small strokes, but made an impressive recovery. (These strokes may account for the shakiness of Ginzburg's handwriting in the 1980s manuscripts.) In 1986, she wrote to Natalia Sokolova (who was then occupied with Tipot's archive and trying to collect letters between her aunt and her father):

I'll certainly search for your father's letters (I can't say whether successfully). I couldn't start doing this yet, because I've been ill. Overexertion and as a result, brain spasms. I'm only now returning to myself. I can't at all get used to the fact that at my age, one has to do everything judiciously—and that includes working. I had to interrupt my reading of my book proofs.¹²⁶

In July 1990, according to Dr. Bogrov, Lydia Ginzburg suffered a minor heart attack followed by a major stroke; she died a few days later on 15 July, at the age of eighty-eight. She was buried in a modest grave in the cemetery at Komarovo, where Anna Akhmatova and many other poets, prose writers, and scholars of Leningrad/Petersburg whom she had known are laid to rest.