

Imagological Stereotypes in Letters and Diaries of Besieged Leningrad

Ekaterina Gurina

Bauman Moscow State Technical University

Abstract

The article deals with the problem of cross-cultural communication and imagological stereotypes that every nation has. It discusses their influence on the assessment of historical events. It analyses “Pryamaya rech” (Direct Speech) - a documentary book created by amateur writers L. Romankov, M. Romankova - engineers and physisits, L. Myasnikova – a surgeon, and the reviews of a historical book written by Boston University assosiate professor of history A. Peri, containing diaries of besieged Leningrad. The Russian belief in such principles as collectivism, generosity, self-restriction, self-control, diligence and conscientiousness is considered by foreign scholars to have been imposed by “Soviet propaganda”. Nevertheless, I argue that they became the result of the Russian nation’s evolutionary development during its long and tragic history. It is these traits of character rather than individualism, found by A. Peri in the diaries, that are more typical for Russian people and that can help to survive in historical catastrophes. I also suppose that Russian classical literature has become part and parcel of foreign hetero -stereotype image of Russia. Several intertextual links of besieged Leningrad diaries to classical Russian literature have been found by A Peri and the authors of foreign reviews.

Keywords: imagological stereotype, siege, documentary book, cross-cultural communication

Introduction

Nowadays cross-cultural communication is discussed very widely. At present various national cultures are regarded as interdependent entities (Holden) rather than different ones (E. T. Hall, R. D. Lewis, G. Hofstede, F. Trompenaars, C. Geertz as quoted in Realo et.al., 2009) The latter viewpoint is based on the 19th century cultural anthropology theory. As far as communication is concerned, it is usually a kind of dialogue between parties. It implies the ability to deliver information as well as to receive and interpret it. During the process of cross-cultural communication, i.e. the communication between different peoples, “the introduction to <...> another

country's culture" is essential for information perception and mutual understanding, though it does not deny the necessity to "study one's own culture" (Mirolyubov, 2012, p. 43). The knowledge of national and world history and culture allows to get an "increment in spiritual realm" (Mirolyubov, 2012, p. 45), obtain cultural identity and get rid of stereotypes.

Methodology

The attributes of imagological or ethno-stereotypes, which are subdivided into auto- and hetero-stereotypes and represent the self in contrast to other nations, can be found as early as in medieval literature (Koroleva, S., 2014), (Papilova, E., 2013). They vary among different countries. It is assumed that "it takes decades to change the content of national stereotypes (Madon et al., 2001)", because "national stereotypes are very stable over time and even significant events in the world political landscape do not radically change their content." (Realo et al., 2009, p. 231) They are 'pictures in our heads' (Lippmann, 1922), they are acquired <...> from<...> gossip, anecdotes, books and films." (Realo et al., 2009 p.231) Nowadays these stereotypes are studied by sociologists and political scientists, linguists and literary critics. For this purpose, the latter apply the tools of a special branch of comparative literature studies called imagology. The information it provides may help to overcome ethnic hatred due to achieving better understanding during the process of cross-national communication. For an ethno-stereotype study, which involves auto- and hetero-ones, personal communication, fiction and poetry cannot be considered the only sources of information. Letters published in books of memoirs and documentary biographies are able to make a substantial contribution to this study too.

Discussion

Cannibalism and crime

One of the most important episodes in Russian history is the siege of Leningrad during the Great Patriotic War which lasted from the 22-d of June 1941 to the 9-th of May 1945. Undoubtedly, it was a part of World War II, nevertheless, it became a special war for the Soviet people. For any resident of the former Soviet Union, the word "blockade" which is translated as a siege recalls such stereotype images as: a tiny piece of bread weighing 125 grams, snow, emaciated people pulling sledges with: buckets of water, relatives or corpses. G. Manaev also adds to this list: cards, light reflectors, animal glue, loudspeakers and cigarettes. (Manaev, 2019) All these images can be found in Russian memoirs and novels about the siege: "The Siege Book" by D. Granin, "Almost three years" by V. Ibner and a lot of other books offered at the site "Livelib" (<https://www.livelib.ru/selection/541930-knigi-o-blokade-leningrada>). However, analyzing some foreign historical works and their reviews, one comes to the conclusion that abroad these 872 war days are associated with absolutely different things: cannibalism, theft, cruelty and corruption. Unfortunately, it is these concepts that correspond to the contemporary western reader's idea of Russia as a

country of tycoons and criminals, “as a black -hatted villain” (Crosston, 2018, p.1), as “the world of the thieves” (Galeotti, 2018) and allow D. Benioff to name his book (2008) about besieged Leningrad ‘City of Thieves’. It sounds insulting and before publishing it in this country, its title has been changed into “City”. But the closer the publication is to the war time, the less the discrepancy between Russian and foreign images of the siege is. A. Werth was a British correspondent in the USSR during the war and interviewed Leningrad citizens as soon as the siege was over. Of course, he narrates about hunger and cold, but he does stress people’s fortitude and conscientiousness: “We went on with this blueprint work right through the winter 1941-2. . . It was a blessing for us architects. The best medicine that could have been given us during the famine. The moral effect is when a hungry man knows he's got a useful job of work to do.” (Werth, as quoted in Eyewitnesstohistory) This quote refutes “common belief about the Russian national character shared” in Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia, Finland and Belarus that Russians are “low in<...> conscientiousness” (Realo et.al., 2009 p.245). This “belief” contradicts the witnesses of “blokadniks” – people who lived in besieged Leningrad. They are provided by some contemporary western authors and ought to be taken into consideration: “One woman of fifty-seven years of age, wrote of eighteen day shifts, twelve hours a day hacking at ground “as hard as rock” .<...> Teenage girls <...>were expected to dig and maneuvered concrete blocks using just their hands and a crowbar. People always reported for work either out of patriotic duty or<...> penalty.” (Colley, 2012, p. 10) It is these traits of character that are connected to a siege victim image in Russia, though there were numerous crimes and even 1500 registered cannibalism cases. The blokadniks’ correspondence has been included into the book “Pryamaya rech’ (Direct Speech)” by L. Romankov, M. Romankova, and L. Myasnikova. They survived the siege in their childhood and the information they provide coincides with the facts that can be found in the book “The War Within Diaries from the Siege of Leningrad” written by Boston University associate professor of history A. Peri in 2016. However, its interpretation is slightly different. The book has got positive reviews in “The Guardian” and in the weekly “The Spectator “. “The Guardian’s” assessment of the facts presented in the book, which analyses 125 diaries found by the author in 8 Russian archives or obtained from blokadniks and their relatives, does not diverge much from the traditional one. D. Alberge, a representative of the liberal press, writes about hunger and cold, but pinpoints that the blokadniks’ struggle was their internal battle with themselves rather than a heroic collective resistance to the enemy. She refers the readers to the New Testament as well as to the 2012 film adaptation of L. Tolstoy’s novel “Anna Karenina” made by J. Wright and T. Stoppard, when quoting Aleksandra Liubovskaia’s diary. The woman compares herself with Virgin Mary: “Describing the horror of washing her son, whose skin was covered with scurvy-induced blotches, she recalled Mary cleansing the body of her crucified son.” (Alberge, 2016) The audience recollects both “The Bible” and the episode in “Anna Karenina” when Kitty starts to take care of K. Levin's dying. L. Tolstoy describes “the sick man” who was as skinny as a blokadnik. His underwear “on Kitty’s orders <...> was being

changed” and his body became visible: “The long, white frame of his back, with enormous protruding shoulder blades, the ribs and vertebrae sticking out, was bare”. (Tolstoy, 2013, p. 494). It was a “frightening body” for Levin, but not for Kitty who “obviously did not think about herself <...>; she thought about him [Nikolai]” (Tolstoy, 2013, p. 495, 496). However, in the novel Kitty avoided looking at Nikolay’s naked body, respected his feelings, understood that he” found it embarrassing and unpleasant to be naked in front of her” (Tolstoy, 2013, p. 494) But nowadays the attitude towards nakedness has changed. T. Stoppard and J. Wright violate the historical truth for the sake of modern trends. They recoup on poor sick Nikolai turning Maria Nikolaevna and Kitty into indifferent nurses paying no attention to the patient’s weak protests and the harm that they do to his soul: “Nikolai lies naked in clean sheets. Masha hauls him up into a sitting position. Kitty puts a nightshirt over his head. Nikolai protests feebly”. But everything becomes clean around him:” Nikolai lies quietly in a neat bed in the neat room, with medicine and water jug, etc., tidily by the bed.” (Stoppard, 2012, p. 157) Unfortunately, today Americans and Europeans are very reasonable. They care much more about washing their hair rather than cleansing their sins. However, L. Tolstoy who tried to be reasonable too, comes to the conclusion that reason does not help when people die. Quoting Matthew, he calls Kitty and Maria Nikolaevna “babes” and K. Levin “the imprudent” (Tolstoy, 2013, p.496), because K. Levin “could not help knowing that he was more intelligent than his wife” (Tolstoy, 2013, p. 496) and tried to “believe in reason” (Stoppard, 2012, p.194), but death makes him admit that he “did not know a hundredth part of what his wife <...> knew about it” (Tolstoy, 2013, p.496) Kitty and Agafia know that people must not be afraid of death, if their lives are righteous. But people are sinful. And as D. Alberge underlines, suffering is the path to salvation. In her review she stresses the significance of the Leningraders’ sacrifice, drawing a parallel between Aleksandra Liubovskaia family’s lot, Nikolai’s death and Jesus Christ’s predestination, who “loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood” (Revelation 1:5), who died for our sins. “The wages of sin is death” (Romans 6:23) and “without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins” (9:22, NRSV). By 1941 the city had been gripped by sin. As for Colley, describing Saint-Petersburg, he also mentions L. Tolstoy, saying that Saint-Petersburg “was the city of Tolstoy” (Colley, 2012, p.5) and appealing to the foreign stereotype image of Russia as the homeland of Tolstoy and Dostoevsky’s “the holy” literature. Nevertheless, speaking about Saint-Petersburg, he does not mention Dostoevsky’s gloomy city which was full of evil and can remind us besieged Leningrad. This image contradicts to Tolstoy’s city of “high culture “and” French-speaking Russian aristocrats” (Colley, 2012, p.5) especially scrupulous about the issues of decency and honor. But eventually Saint-Petersburg became “the cradle of revolution” (Colley, 2012, p.6) Sin had taken possession of its people. They forgot about conscience and God, got used to writing denunciations out of jealousy, greed and fear. The result of that was that “30000 Leningraders were arrested, exiled, or executed, labelled as enemies of the people” (Colley, 2012, p.6). These victims were the price to be paid for being possessed by sin. But they were not enough to be

forgiven for those sins and “ for the sins of the whole world” (1 John 2:1-2, New Revised Standard Version).Leningraders were made to pay “over one million” (Colley, 2012, p.3) human death toll to try to save the world from “oblivion through death with no hope beyond the grave” (Aust, 2009). D. Alberge argues in her review that in spite of the terrible accidents and atrocities that took place during the siege A. Peri feels deep respect towards the Leningraders.

As for J. Mirsky, who writes for the Conservative Party weekly magazine “The Spectator”, he avoids analyzing the events making into account the sinful nature of man and follows the tradition to blame the Soviet ideology that failed to prevent people from cannibalism, theft, cruelty and corruption that took place in the city, from plunging into “the political, social, familial and personal nightmares” (Myrsky, 2016) when “ parents [were] eat[ing] their dead children, or vice versa” and people were “ steal[ing] the ration cards of those who “dropped dead” (Myrsky, 2016) in ques. His words “I wouldn’t have ever believed” (Myrsky, 2016) demonstrate that the journalist sees the English as a nation possessing special endurance and upbringing, incapable of mistakes and mean deeds, impeccable and unerring. This auto-stereotype is opposed to the old hetero-stereotype image of Russians as “barbarians at the gate “ (Koroleva, 2014) who are prone to numerous vices. For example, describing the siege, the author tries to impress the audience speaking about sexual harassment in that city: “Those in charge of food supplies, and of dishing out the meagre rations, often stole food for themselves - you could tell by looking at them - or exchanged it for sexual favors. So, when you saw a plump, pretty girl with lovely hair and color, you always knew why she looked so good.” (Myrsky, 2016) Addressing intellectual readers, he draws parallels between the siege of Leningrad and the siege of Troy described by Homer in the Iliad: “Stand aside, Homer. I doubt whether even the author of the Iliad could have matched Alexis Peri’s account of the 872-day siege which Leningrad endured after Hitler’s army encircled the city in September 1941.” (Myrsky, 2016) Demonstrating excellent knowledge of classical literature, referring to Tolstoy and to the hetero-stereotype image of “holy” Russian literature, the author nevertheless makes a blunder dealing with the Soviet history. He claims that Stalin escaped from Moscow during the war: “In Stalin’s Moscow all this [the siege] was supposed to be a glorious second Fatherland War, like the one Tolstoy created in “War and Peace”, this time led by Stalin (who had fled Moscow when Hitler invaded) ” (Myrsky, 2016). However, his error, which, unfortunately, is not obvious to foreign audience, makes Russian readers doubt that they can trust the information provided in the article. For example, the author arrives at the conclusion: in those days, Russian classical literature with its high ideals had an opposite effect on the people. The audience is referred to the novel “War and Peace” by L. Tolstoy as well as to its 2016 BBC film adaptation. In diaries Leningraders compared their life during the siege and Tolstoy characters’ life during the war with Napoleon: “But when the Leningrad blokadniki read Tolstoy they experienced not inspiration but puzzlement. The Rostovs weren’t

starving; they could leave Moscow with cartloads of belongings, and few of the major characters died" (Myrsky, 2016). It made people feel discouraged.

Collectivism vs. individualism

In their reviews the journalists draw the reader's attention to different narration points in A. Peri's book and interpret them inequally. One of the imagological images of Russia is a dissident - "a person who publicly disagrees with and criticizes their government" (Cambridge dictionary) J. Myrsky pinpoints that although *blokadni* did not oppose the party's line frankly, the diaries testify that their thoughts were in conflict with the propaganda that demanded heroism and faith in victory from the citizens: "Peri contends that while the diarists were rarely subversive or anti-Soviet, what they generally recorded was despair, pain and terror. Their insights and reflections fell outside the Party line of heroism and hope." (Myrsky, 2016) "The Guardian" also holds it that most of the diaries lack any heroic motive. They are very self-centered, full of despair and depression. People were worried not about collective, but individual problems which they were facing and striving to solve at those times and were able to entrust to their diaries only. The explanation of this fact that the journalists offer to their readers does not take into account that individualism is less typical for Russians than for any other European nation due to their Orthodox conciseness. Unlike community spirit, self-dependence has never been considered to be one of the main Russian traits of character. Isolation could never help in Russia. The foreign interpretation of the siege is influenced by the western critical attitude towards this country which has always been viewed on either as "a barbarian at the gate" or a negligent "student". Moreover, every episode of Soviet history is assessed in terms of one more imagological stereotype - "Soviet propaganda". The access to western radio stations is considered to be important even during the war as only they are thought to be able to guarantee the freedom of speech: "It was not until the era of glasnost in the mid-1980s that the Ukraine famine and the starvation in Leningrad emerged from their smothering in propaganda." (Darori, 2018) This point of view can hardly be considered well-grounded. The author defines the famine of the 30-ies as "the Ukraine" one in spite of the fact that it took place in Russia too. He writes: "Isolation increased with the lack of outside news. Anyone who listened to a foreign radio station, when the electricity was working, risked execution. Cautious citizens did not dare mention the blockade or the siege. The correct phrase was "the battle" or "the defense" of Leningrad. Bulletins from the Soviet Information Bureau and reports in *Leningradskaya Pravda* revealed little, so rumors ran unchecked" (Darori, 2018). This statement is disproved by Marina Romankova's letter published in her book "Pryamaya rech" (Direct speech). She is 10 years old and demonstrates her excellent knowledge of the current international affairs to her aunt: "I want to tell you important news: Japan declared war on America and England. Two air attacks and one sea attack have already been made on the Hawaiian Islands" (Romankov, Romankova&Myasnikova, 2019, p. 37)

Of course, it goes without saying that letters usually differed greatly from diaries. When writing a letter, people usually became their own censors as they tried "not to give extra work of cutting out <...> lines to military censorship" (Romankov, Romankova&Myasnikova, 2019, p. 35). However, the "medical nightmare" described by Myrsky does not correlate with the real blokadnik letters. According to N. Davidenkov, it is better to view the war and Leningrad siege as a "historical catastrophe" which the citizens "have got into".

Direct speech

Since the advent of political and economic reforms in Russia, lots of amateur authors have published their books. The grandchildren of the famous Soviet physicist N. Davidenkov: M. Romankova, L. Romankov, L. Myasnikova have compiled a documentary book "Pryamayarech", ("Direct Speech"). It contains about 60 letters of their relatives from besieged Leningrad to their aunt, an assistant professor of Moscow State Technical School named after N.E. Bauman I. Voshchinina, evacuated to Chelyabinsk. She was a very charming person, was acquainted with poetess A. Akhmatova and ballerina G. Ulanova, so her nephew and nieces hope that "at least <...> children, grandchildren and their friends" will read this book, find out their family story and it will "give them something in order to understand the complexity and diversity of the world." (Romankov, Romankova&Myasnikova, 2019, p. 6). Though its introduction and conclusion may seem to be too academic, the letters let us hear the speech of Russian intelligentsia and make this book interesting and easy to read.

The head of the family N. Davidenkov was born in a noble family in Riga at the end of the 70ies of the 19th century. K. Levin's son Mitya whose birth is described by L. Tolstoy in "Anna Karenina" could have been his coeval. Lots of those who belonged to that generation immigrated, were shot or died in the camps after the revolution. N. Davidenkov belonged to those who were lucky enough to avoid repression. He did a lot for the development of science and engineering in this country. His work was highly appreciated by the government especially during the war. Having spent his childhood in Smolensk, he later moved to St. Petersburg, where he studied and then lived and worked almost all his life. He stayed in the city when the war began. He and his family wrote letters to his wife's niece, dear Irinochka, from besieged Leningrad. I. Voshinina belonged to a noble family, was nee Rot and the granddaughter of the governor of Kiev. Her father left Russia with the White Army. Her step father (her father's brother) was executed. That's why she had to change her surname and spend her childhood in the Davidenkovs family. They brought her up like their own child. In 1941 she and her husband, who was a valuable specialist, had two Ph. D degrees in Science, were evacuated, but she kept correspondence with the Davidenkovs and sent them food as often and as much as she could. One cannot find in them any trace of the slightest despair, so typical for Leningrad diaries, probably, because there was a military censorship. Nevertheless, they are very sincere and sometimes full of

humor. Even in such a difficult situation, the Davidenkovs are able to joke. Typical Russian “openness” (Realo et.al., 2009) and “collective” (Myrsky, 2016) spirit were their recipe of survival. It is contrary to Peri’s call for individualism: “‘The best way to survive was to draw an even tighter ring around oneself.’ (Myrsky, 2016) According to A. Peri, “collective solidarity is fine for socialist ideology, but it’s really isolation that people experience[d]” (Alberge, 2016) during the siege. The letters demonstrate that the Russian saying: “Do not have a hundred of rubles, but have a hundred of friends” happened to be true. Isolation, the lack of support led to death inevitably, while freinship saved people. N. Davidenkov writes: “Petya and I have friends - former students who help a little here and there” (Romankov, Romankova&Myasnikova, 2019, p. 38). Perhaps this spirit of collectivism, which A. Peri does not believe in, can explain “how such a miracle happened that almost all of us survived” (Romankov, Romankova&Myasnikova, 2019, p. 6)

Adults and children during the siege

The characters of the book are both adults and children. Their common peculiar feature is that they are all ready- to- help persons. Thanks God, the firewood for that winter had been bought by the family before the war in May. If it had been done as usual in September, it would have been too late. Besides that, their neighbors were decent people and nobody tried to steal it. The family understood what a blessing it was. That’s why instead of eating somebody, they shared what they possessed with other people. They offered hot water to their numerous guests and let their neighbors warm up in their flat. Besides kindness and generosity, it was their diligence, hardworking, an ability to cope with their instincts , to organize their life properly that helped them to survive: “It's so good that you found a job for yourself, - writes N. Davidenkov to I. Voshinina, - it helps to live and endure hardships and anxieties, even hunger: when you work, you forget about hunger. ”(Romankov, Romankova&Myasnikova, 2019, p. 65) In their letters dating back to the terrible winter of 1942 when the famine and cold were the worst, they still attempt to make jokes: “As you can see, we are OK, although we are actually starving, but not very much and even less than many of the others. Your mother has become like a young lady, and the aunt too. But she has found out the great pleasure of eating when the stomach is empty. Our dreams are about cuisine and food.” (Romankov, Romankova&Myasnikova, 2019, p. 48) “Sometimes we manage to buy tiles of animal glue for 25-50 rubles and make the filler out of it. It is fragrant.” (Romankov, Romankova&Myasnikova, 2019, p. 50)

The style of the letters is amazing, taking into consideration the conditions under which the authors lived at that time. Sometimes there is a feeling that they do not speak about evacuation but about a tour: “Here we have received a wonderful New Year's gift from you - a telegram that your trip has finally ended safely! ... I hope you will describe in detail the whole trip.” (Romankov, Romankova&Myasnikova, 2019, p.

39) I. Voshchinina lived more than 100 years, and she kept these letters from besieged Leningrad all her life. These 60 letters give us an opportunity not only to find out what was happening at that hard period of Russian history, but to hear the eyewitnesses voices and enjoy their 19-th century old-fashioned, but elegant style that was still in use among Russian intelligentsia in the middle of the 20th century, who, nevertheless, had already stopped "French-speaking" being afraid of prosecution. The letter topics are not diverse. There are only 6 of them: 1. food and meals, 2. work that provides them food, 3. household chores, 4. illnesses and cold, 5. evacuation, 6. incidents in their life, with food being the main one. Politics is discussed very rarely and delicately. Their daily meager menu is reported in almost every letter, and, as one can see above, with subtle humor. The illnesses caused by the cold and hunger were inevitable and numerous: bowel disorder - "23 r. Per day!", pleurisy, flu, a urinary canal polyp, a full range of childhood diseases - whooping cough, scarlet fever, chickenpox, smallpox, milk tooth. The military censorship made them write about their friends' deaths choosing words very carefully too: "Borechka (Vorobyov) selflessly worked for his INSTITUTE <...> has been deprived of the opportunity to be useful to the state" (Romankov, Romankova&Myasnikova, 2019, p. 72) - which means that the rector was shot on charges of panic. The narration about their daily routine is quite understandable. The winter of 1941-1942 was very severe. The temperature dropped below minus 30C. Transport, water supply, sewage, central heating did not work, electricity was cut off. They stood in lines for bread, went for water with buckets, took out "their buckets of shit to the scrapheap". Their chance to survive was close to nothing. However, they refused to waste their time on going to the bomb shelter, which they called the "Petushkovs", and continued their scientific research the dim gas lamp light. They were working on the recipe of soy milk which helped to save children from hunger, writing and books, even managed to get a doctoral degree. And even their grandchildren, being four years old, studied a lot. They "learned how to write, to add and subtract to five by themselves" (Romankov, Romankova&Myasnikova, 2019, p. 54). The daughter of L. Myasnikova's former Ph.D. student devoted her essay in Switzerland to the analysis of the Davidenkov's siege experience. She writes to L. Myasnikova: "My German teacher <...> was especially interested in your grandmother, how she was able to organize the family in order to survive, namely, that the children had to be busy (writing, cleaning) and that they had to eat their rations strictly in time. It turns out that her mother, when she was little, also survived the war. Unfortunately, the war traumatized her mother mentally. Frau Schroedter said that if her mother had had such a grandmother at that moment, then perhaps she would have survived the war easier." (Tervoort, 2019) The adults in the Davidenkovs family cared about their children very much and were very attentive to them and put down their wise remarks. Lelia, who was 4 years old, asked: "Mom, what is a dependent, is it a person or a thing?" A dependent is a person who does not work. In besieged Leningrad, dependents as well as children received the least ration of bread-only 125 g per day. Since life was so difficult, both children and adults tried to enjoy trivia. The restart of sewage and running water in the summer of 1942 was a

great present for them: "A very happy thing has recently taken place: since May 20, the sewage has been working, and since May 23, the running water has been in operation, you do not need to go to the fire hydrant to get water. This is a very, very big relief." (Romankov, Romankova&Myasnikova, 2019, p. 76). Being rather pragmatic, Marina, who is ten, takes care of her garden on the balcony. She plants "lettuce seedlings, <...> onions and dill" (Romankov, Romankova&Myasnikova, 2019, p. 73) there. She tries to teach her aunt in Chelyabinsk: "I am very sad that you don't visit your garden because "the garden is life," from our point of view." (Romankov, Romankova&Myasnikova, 2019, p. 78) As a child, Marina is more optimistic than the grownups. She believes that Germans will be defeated and tries to support her depressed aunt: "Do not Cry! See you some day. After all, this terrible, bloody war will not last for centuries." (Romankov, Romankova&Myasnikova, 2019, p. 52) When spring comes, N. Davidenkov is delighted by the beauty of nature: "It is the middle of spring, the weather is wonderful, the trees are turning green, and the city looks so peaceful, as if there were no war." (Romankov, Romankova&Myasnikova, 2019, p. 64) "Now in Leningrad, there is beautiful, fresh, lush greenery, everything is clean and quiet, the whole city has been turned into kitchen gardens " (Romankov, Romankova&Myasnikova, 2019, p. 68) The life is getting better and it is important "to be as careful as possible so as not to fall into the number of "extra victims." (Romankov, Romankova&Myasnikova, 2019, p. 78)

In "Anna Karenina " L. Tolstoy, who was always proud of his ancestry, stresses how important good manners can be. He describes Kitty's feelings at the ball, when she finds out that Vronsky is in love with Anna: "Only the strict school of upbringing she had gone through supported her and made her do what was demanded of her" (Tolstoy, 2013, p. 81) Belonging to the nobility, N. Davidenkov and his wife possessed excellent manners and self-control and managed to bring up their children and grandchildren in the same way. It is the ability to cope with instincts, wishes and vices that made it possible for them to survive. In the letters to I. Voshinina there are complaints about their housekeeper Marusya (a former peasant) who was unable and unwilling to control her feeling of hunger. : "Marusia is very annoying, she grabs and eats everything that has been left somewhere, put into storage or forgotten; it is impossible to persuade her to stop it, and you have to keep everything locked up " (Romankov, Romankova&Myasnikova, 2019, p. 74) When she went away, they felt a relief. The Davidenkovs bought scales to share food equally and even to get an opportunity to feed their son, who lived at his wife's place and "they [did] not leave much [for him] in his family" (Romankov, Romankova&Myasnikova, 2019, p. 42). The Davidenkovs were not greedy. When the parcel with bread that I. Voshinina had sent them was stolen they treated the accident philosophical: "Your package, unfortunately, has not reached its destination: at such a time as now, food orders are not delivered!" (Romankov, Romankova&Myasnikova, 2019, p.38) Everyday issues prevail in their letters, but one can find a lot of philosophical motives in the correspondence too: "Do not spoil your life and think less about us. Remember that

this is a historical catastrophe and nothing can be influenced by us anymore.” (Romankov, Romankova&Myasnikova, 2019, p. 765)

The perception of everything that is happening as a historical catastrophe, similar to the one they had endured during the revolution, the understanding that everything, except love and care should someday come to an end, helps this family not to live in isolation, to stay together and not to perish.

Conclusion

The rules for survival in historical catastrophes have been obtained by Russian people in the course of history. They are: collectivism, generosity, self-restriction, self-control, diligence and conscientiousness. They are able to share their experience with the rest of the world, because “it is important not to forget history. It is important to listen to those who survived the tragic time and record their memories.” (Tervoort. A., Myasnikova. L., personal communication, September 18, 2019) Knowledge of history may be crucial for cross-cultural communication, but negative imagological stereotypes, such as Russia is a country of thieves, Russians are barbarians, cannibals and criminals can become a serious obstacle in it.

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