CHAPTER II
WAR NOVELS OF HELEN DUNMORE

2.1 INTRODUCTION:

The majority of war novelists have concentrated on how memory and the ambiguities of time affect the meaning and experience of war. A war novel is a novel in which the primary action takes place in a field of armed combat, or in a domestic setting (or home front) where the characters are preoccupied with the preparations for, or recovery from, war. It is sometimes referred to as a military fiction.

The war or military novels, Dunmore wrote are *Zennor in Darkness*, *The Siege* and *The Betrayal*. War novels concerned primarily with a realistic portrayal of combat. They study the effects of war upon an individual psyche. The idea of war, seen as the major focus, is what all militarily-oriented novels apparently have in common but the way it is integrated into the story can be understood as a distinguishing trait of Helen Dunmore. *Zennor in Darkness* is her first war novel and winner of the McKitterick prize. It is a novel about D. H. Lawrence's experiences in Cornwall during the First World War. It is 1917 and war overshadows the haunting beauty of spring in Zennor. Historical facts concerning Lawrence and his eventual expulsion from Zennor by military order are superbly incorporated into an imaginary First World War story. While Dunmore’s later works are set in Leningrad. *The Siege* is shortlisted for the Whitbread Novel Award and *The Betrayal* is long-listed for the Man Booker Prize. The final words of *The Siege*—"No, I shall not wholly die..." (Alexander Pushkin)—respond to the stark threat with which the novel begins: "Re: The future of Leningrad ... The Fuehrer has decided to have Leningrad wiped from the face of the earth". Helen Dunmore writes about the most remarkable and painful episodes in Russian history— the siege of Leningrad. The Oxford Companion states to the World War II:
“In all likelihood, a million or more non-combatants died during the siege of this Soviet City, making it a frightful human disaster by any standard.” Hitler's insane ambition was not to capture the city originally named after its founder Peter the Great, but to destroy it. The Siege is a story, technically, of a blockade. But it is an epic of human suffering, fortitude and endurance in the teeth of starvation, disease and intense cold combined with merciless saturation bombing and shelling. Leningraders suffered ‘a unique fate’. “We are Leningraders- and representing the blockade as a collective struggle- a ‘battle’” (Kirchenbaum 141-144)

The historical materials of Dunmore's novels are mostly given through the narration of its pivotal female characters. The historical materials in the novel are not limited to any historical personages and the past events of the war. *The Siege* and *The Betrayal* rewrite history from the eyes of its main characters, Anna Levin and Andrei both of whom are “victims and losers” of the wars. Dunmore puts the individual memory of her characters as the basis for history instead of objective documents, which challenges its objectivity but makes the ex-centric the center at the same time. The past is reinterpreted from different angles by means of the characters' subjective stories. This brings forth the inevitable role of the narrator in interpreting past events.

Dunmore freely acknowledges her sources of *The Siege*. She imitates a quote from the opening stanza of Pushkin's *Bronze Horseman* for her Leningrad. The motif of an unnatural city that stands on the bones of its builders is superbly incorporated. Dunmore, no doubt, follows a literary tradition of personifying the city begun by Pushkin, but develops the theme in her own artistic skill. Dunmore's *The Siege* is a part of that world, stricken by memory and the question of what it means for a novelist to take on the "flesh of all those other Leningraders who died of hunger in silent, frigid rooms". The novel suggests an effort to establish the sense of collective solidarity. The purpose it provides is “the strongest protection against terror and despair, and the strongest antidotes to traumatic experience”. (Herman 38)
The Betrayal, a sequel to The Siege, sets in 1952 and the last days of Stalin's rule of terror. “Accounts of the consequences of the blockade that touch upon the post-war population have deployed the term ‘Leningraders’ as shorthand for a cohesive community of blockade survivors, embedded in the culture and landscape of the city.” (Siobahn 21) The post-siege Leningrad is described as a ‘city of migrants’. The novel, The Betrayal gives in to a romantic drift, dwelling on love and loss with a survivors understanding that life is at its most beautiful when at its most ordinary. It is a part of an ongoing saga of ordinary people struggling against a city’s beautiful indifference, and clinging on for dear life. It follows Anna and Andrei the young couple from the earlier novel, as they face a dilemma: Andrei, a respected doctor, is asked to treat the seriously ill child of a senior party official. This could be extremely dangerous for Andrei. He is faced with the question of whether to attempt to escape, to flee Leningrad, or to agree to become involved in treating the child.

The Chapter II analyzes the themes in war novels of Dunmore. These novels deal with the themes of horror of war and siege, betrayal, food and starvation, love, fight for survival along with the themes of hunger, cold and deprivation. In short, it analyzes the themes and literary history in the context of social, political and cultural history. The chapter addresses, more specifically, how Helen Dunmore reflects upon the war trauma, which brought equally disastrous consequences for women, men and children and how the wars contributed to the reconfiguration of women's roles.

2.2 HORROR OF WAR AND SIEGE:

The ‘horror of war’ is one of the recurring themes in Helen Dunmore’s war novels. The brutality of war that devastates individuals' lives and the callousness of the authorities are convincingly portrayed in her novels. These novels dwell on the horrible loss of life—a sacrifice to no good end. The war's palpable proximity, to some degree, explains the smaller-scale violence of the novels, yet the war itself is inexplicable in its sheer magnitude and capacity for death, suffering and destruction. These novels capture both the arbitrary nature of war’s destruction and slaughter, and the impossibility
of its reasonable justification. They also confront the waste and cruelty of war.

The overriding theme of *Zennor in Darkness* is the terrible brutality of war. The novel portrays war as it was experienced. The war completely altered mankind’s conception of military conflict with its catastrophic levels of carnage and violence, its battles lasted for months, and its gruesome new technological advancements (machine guns, poison gas, trenches) that made killing easier and more impersonal than ever before. The horrors of that war are at first a distant threat. But eventually the reality of the bestial slaughter overshadows all the lives of the young women. The novel centres on three young women Clare Coyne, her cousin Hannah and friend Peggy, young women growing up in a rural community dominated by ties of family and duty. The war brings strangers to Zennor. Among them, D. H. Lawrence and his German wife Frieda who, hoping to escape the war-fever of London, find themselves the objects of the shifting, dangerous tide of scorn and gossip. Claire lives alone with her father. Her mother who died while she was still very little was from Cornwall, while her father is an outsider, just like Lawrence. He comes from a rich Londoner family and was always seen as an intruder. Claire's maternal grandparents, her aunts, uncles and cousins live close by. The children are a tight-knit community since they were little kids. They are so close that, although it seems logical, nobody suspects Claire and John William to be lovers. Helen Dunmore builds up an evocative picture of the villagers and families who as yet only touched indirectly by the war, and especially the relationship between Clare, a girl on the threshold of life longing to break out of her surroundings, and her widowed father. There are also glimpses into the life of D.H. Lawrence and Frieda Lawrence. D. H. Lawrence is apparently calm and philosophical on the surface although anything but deep inside, Frieda Lawrence appears threatened and resentful of the air of suspicion hanging over them – though it is hardly surprising at such a time that they should be under surveillance.
It is May 1917. As U-boats attack ship after ship on the Cornish coastline, the village is alive with talk of treachery. The sinking of the passengers was a particularly controversial "kill" for the U-boats. Dunmore writes:

“...But the U-boat strikes, then it comes up black-shouldered and streaming with water and lies there watching to be sure of its kill, while men thresh in the oily water, and nobody comes. Next day the waves are full of tins and oil and smashed wood.”
*(Zennor in Darkness 13)*

In a world of call-up, telegrams, suspicions and silent fears, no one is immune. Zennor is a lovely place, with bracing cliff landscapes and sea air, beautifully evoked by Helen Dunmore. But the darkness is never far from their doors. Telegrams arrive with sickening frequency announcing yet another death. Passions flare in brief encounters that only reinforce awareness of the destruction taking place just the other side of the Channel. Clare thinks of the newspaper reports.


Every shade of loss has its own category. The sound of war can be heard from afar. The first young men return from France, some of them are missing limbs, others are shell-shocked like Claire Coyne's cousin John William. Men return wounded in invisible ways. The war is present on every page-in the suspicions of the people, in the fear of all the boys, in the noise the wind blows over from France and in the scarcity of money and food. Dunmore conveys the soft light of the Cornish coast, the beauty of the lovely landscape, the slow pace of life. This softness is mirrored in the way she changes the point of views, blurring the edges, softening the transitions. It feels as if one person’s consciousness and interior monologue is flowing gently into that of another character.
The opening scene of three girls laughing as they slip down the warm sand dunes haunt the readers as they read of soldiers drowning in mud. The contrast between her descriptions of Cornwall, with its foxgloves and young carrots rooting in the granite wilderness, and the fields of battle stripped of all life shows the obscenity of war more than any of Lawrence's prophetic words. The war also means that young men disappear, some return changed forever with physical or mental scars, some never come back at all. The lucky ones desert and disappear. Dunmore writes:

“...So many men are gone, so many are wounded. So many have their minds and spirits destroyed, and news of this leaks from family to neighbour to acquaintance and spills into newsprint. Look at this photograph of wounded veterans. Seven of them. Count the limbs. Between the seven of them they have one leg, and even that one leg lacks a foot.” (118)

The war is full grown, lolling over its attendants, sprawled like a giant child which still won't fend for itself. Hundreds of thousands of men have died. They have died hearing the sound of the guns – wilder than any storm.

The urgency of enforced separations erodes tradition and social codes. What is astonishing in Zennor in Darkness is the combination of beauty and horror. The descriptions of the Cornish coast, its air, light, flora and fauna alternate with passages like this one:

“In Flanders the struggle for the Passchendaele Ridge continues. The poppy-blowing fields are ploughed by German and English guns, and sown with a litter of lost equipment, a seeding of blood and bone. Soon it will be autumn there too, and heavy northern rains will fall. Men will be listed missing, presumed drowned - a new classification for the lists in the newspaper. They are presumed drowned in the mud in which they live and often die. The men who came 'right away to Blighty' with John William will return to Flanders with their new commissions soon. Their training lasts only three months, and then they are wanted back at the Front. Hammond will die on a mission described to him by a senior officer as 'rather a tricky bit of
patrol-work’. His body will not be found. Simcox, a dozen feet to the left of him, will survive.”(293)

The war has taken its toll, hundreds of thousands are dead. Lack of officers makes it possible for someone like John William who isn’t noble, to become an officer. He returns from France for a brief visit before he will join a training camp where he will stay a few months before being sent back to France. Dunmore writes:

“The war wants to crush him, he knows that. And he knows now that he can be crushed as easily as a snail is battered to bits by thrush which does not even want to eat it. He is no good to war. Any military doctor can tell it at a glance.... They would like to pass him “Fit for Non-military Duties”, so that they would have him to play with until he was broken. They want to force him to clean out latrines.”(124)

The novel portrays the mind numbing terror and savagery of war with a relentless focus on the physical and psychological damage that it occasions. It reveals the war's devastating effect on the generation of young men who were forced to fight it. They are subject to constant physical danger. This intense physical threat also turns as an unceasing attack on the nerves. The soldiers are forced to live in appalling conditions—in filthy, waterlogged ditches full of rats and decaying corpses. They frequently go without food, sleep, adequate clothing or sufficient medical care. They are forced moreover, to deal with the frequent, sudden deaths of their close friends and comrades, often in close proximity and in extremely violent fashion. Dunmore portrays the overall effect of these conditions as a crippling overload of panic and despair.

Before William’s return, Claire has befriended D.H. Lawrence. She is fascinated by him and even more so by his attractive German wife, Frieda. D.H. Lawrence dreams of a peaceful life on the land, away from it all – particularly away from London and the metropolitan elite, embittered by the suppression of his last novel (‘The Rainbow’) on the grounds of obscenity. In the course of one argument, Frieda tells him angrily that she feels she is ‘nothing but the Hunwife!’ and that they should laugh in the faces of the locals.
He tells her sharply that they should do no such thing, but “lie as still as hares in the field, and let them forget us.”

Frieda is a von Richthofen, a cousin of the famous Red Baron. Abandoning her marriage, her children and her privileges she must have cost her a lot. No one is happy about their stay in Zennor. Germans are suspected to be spies and people would like to see them gone. Lawrence and his wife are happy in Cornwall. Their dream of a community of like-minded people has been shattered after Katherine Mansfield and her husband have left but still they love Cornwall and their simple life. Lawrence works in the garden, befriends the villagers. It is not easy for Frieda but she likes it well. To the Lawrences, Cornwall means more than just a place to stay. It is a refuge, a shelter. And it is painful to watch their dream being crushed. Lawrence discovers that Claire is talented at drawing and encourages her to pursue a career. She introduces him to John William and Lawrence feels, more so than Claire, that John William hides something. One evening, when the two men walk alone in the balmy Cornish night, John William lets himself go in front of Lawrence, unable to hide the signs of shell-shock any longer.

There is a clash of two different cultures – the unquestioning villagers, accepting that the young and able-bodied men among them have a patriotic duty towards King and country, and the radical, fiercely pacifist young chap from the outside world. Clare lacks the inbuilt prejudices of her father and his generation. Far from shunning Lawrence, she finds him interesting. Even she invites him into her house one day as she is keen to make friends and understand his point of view. Naturally, when Mr Coyne returns, he is anything but pleased, greets him brusquely and tells her afterwards that ‘that man’ is not to darken his doors again. The characters, like the Cornish landscape, are all brought to life and portrayed vividly. The beauty of the Cornish landscape and the life in this coastal community are examined in poetic and metaphoric detail.

“He points at the small lump of sea-pinks stirring in the sea-breeze at the edge of the cliff. How can you look at that without
wanting to draw it as if it’s alive? See how long it is! Think how the roots must grip down deep into the turf, to keep it here through the gales. And it has a little frail flower bobbing right on the edge of the cliff. See how the stem gives way to the breeze. I should think it’d lay itself down flat before the gales; but it would spring up again, as soon as the sun shone. Don’t you admire it? Isn’t there something courageous about it? Look how fine it is, all the time stirring in the wind so it shan’t get knocked to pieces. (59-60)

The boats are reaching with full of living sharp-eyed men. They are doing their duty. What a world this war has made, where everyone is doing his duty, or what he conceives to be his duty. The U-boats are prowling along the coastline, sinking ship after ship on the Western Approaches, leaving the British authorities helpless and raging with the pent-up secret of their helplessness. The war brings disease like blue cholera. And the people were so fearful that they ran away, leaving the sick on the ground to die alone. A man would leave his wife, and a wife would leave her husband. The whole country was bent down with bad news. There were midnight funerals with hearses going through the streets at midnight to keep the disease from spreading. The boats come back not knowing what they brought with them and spread cholera to the people so that a man in a perfect health could eat his breakfast, say goodbye to his wife, go out to his work, and be dead by nightfall.

Millions of soldiers fought on all sides and the casualties are enormous, mostly because of the more efficient weapons (like artillery and machine guns) that are used in large quantities. Although the First World War led to the development of air forces, tanks, and new tactics (like the Rolling barrage and Crossfire), much of the action took place in the trenches, where thousands died for each square metre of land gained. The effects of gas warfare proved long-lasting, both on the bodies of its victims (many of whom, having survived the war, continued to suffer in later life) and on the minds of a later generation of war leaders (Second World War) who, having seen the effects of gas warfare in the Great War, were reluctant to use it for fear that
the enemy would retaliate and might have better weaponry. The story focuses on how the First World War redefined the relationship of the State to the individual, and permanently altered the social fabric: for example the impacts of the Defence of the Realm Act of 1914 and of the Military Service Act of 1916 cannot be overestimated. Dunmore uses the political focus to examine the nature of history and to explore the ways in which individuals as well as nations deal with their past.

I saw how the city was dying...
Petersburg, created by Peter, and immortalized by Pushkin, the dear, strict, and dreadful city - was dying. (Gippius 13)

The ‘horror of war and siege’ is one of the rumbling themes in *The siege*. The novel is as much about implementing Hitler’s racist ideology as it is about military strategy. It is a Slavic city whose population valued its significant cultural heritage, one that is the envy of much of the western world. Hitler needed to destroy that culture in addition to destroying its people in order to remove all traces of what he considered an inferior, degenerate race. While researching *The Siege*, Helen became fascinated by the way in which Stalin exploited different ideologies for his own ends. When necessary, Stalin found it useful to call upon deep felt patriotic and religious beliefs to support the battle against fascism. Citizens and members of the Red Army were encouraged to think that it was the elemental body of Russia rather than communism that they were defending. Stalin was astute enough to see that nationalistic pride was needed to stop Hitler erasing the Soviet identity, rather than political ideology. Anna, the central character is surprised to ‘hear herself talking of the Motherland’ and meaning it, and her father, who has suffered under the oppressive Soviet regime, does not hesitate to join the People’s Volunteers on the Luga line when Leningrad is in danger. Dunmore is not a didactic writer, and she sees a clear distinction between herself and military historians such as Anthony Beevor, but using a small cast of characters - essentially one family - she depicts the deprivations of Leningrad
and the determination of its people so vividly that the reality of the siege is inescapable and unforgettable. The novel begins with a description of a Russian high summer in which war and the German invasion are but rumours. People are talking of the war,

“...They have bombed Kiev,' gasps Darya Alexandrovna, words tumbling out of her mouth like betrayed secrets. ...Bombs and shells, dropping on everywhere.” (The Siege 40)

Hitler wanted to annihilate Leningrad. Leningrad (which has since reverted to its original name of St Petersburg) did not have any great military significance, but it was an important target for the Germans because of its symbolic value. It had been the country's capital during the time of the Tsars and was the birthplace of the Russian Revolution. For Hitler, the Eastern European Slavic races had no value other than as slaves: he described them as a rabbit family who would never proceed beyond the family association if not forced to do so by a ruling class. This led to the decision to eradicate Soviet civilians, their towns and villages, and their culture wherever possible. Helen Dunmore quotes from a secret directive dated 29 September 1941 at the beginning of her The Siege:

“The Fuehrer has decided to have Leningrad wiped from the face of the earth. The further existence of this large town is of no interest once Soviet Russia is overthrown...The intention is to close in on the city and blast it to the ground by bombardments of artillery of all calibers and by continuous air attacks. Requests that the city may be handed over, arising from the situation within, will be turned down, for the problem of the survival of the population and of supplying it with food is one which cannot and should not be solved by us. In this war for existence, we have no interest in keeping even part of this great city's population...”

The siege of Leningrad in particular left a deep mark on the collective memory of Russia, owing to the excessive number of civilians killed and the terrible sufferings of the people especially during the endless first winter.
Told mostly through the perspective of 23-year-old Anna, the novel accounts the daily battle for survival undertaken by Anna and her family. Anna’s father, wounded in battle, is slowly dying while her five-year-old brother battles hunger and asthma. Anna never lets risk stop her from finding food or wood for her family. She stands in line in the Leningrad winter for a few slices of bread, gets robbed for her firewood and sneaks into the countryside to dig up her family’s vegetable garden. Yes, Anna was brave, but more than that, she was intent on survival. It is this hope that carries her family through the winter. Woven through Anna’s narrative are side stories that illuminate the hunger and cold. Dunmore tells the story of “Food Czar” Pavlov, the Party Leader in charge of Leningrad’s food allocation. Pavlov obsessively recalculates the numbers to determine how he was going to feed some many people with such little food. Through his numbers, the readers learn what Pavlov comes to realize: there isn’t enough food to keep all of Leningrad alive. Dunmore also references little Tanya Savicheva who wrote notes about the starvation and death of each family member, until only she was left. There is also Eugenvia, a red-headed woman who kept herself alive with her cunning and broad curves. It’s these little sidebars that add to Anna’s story of cold, hunger and survival.

Leningrad, equal to Paris or Venice in its architectural splendours and cultural activity, is both a setting and a character within the book. Before the German assault it is described as:

“Floating, lyrical, miraculous Petersburg made out of nothing by a Tsar who wanted everything and didn’t care what it cost. Peter’s window on Europe, through which light shines. Here is beauty built on bones, classical façades that cradled revolution, summers that lie in the cup of winter.” (107)

Leningrad was a city that considered itself superior to the rest of the Soviet Union, more outward looking and westernized. Its people ‘dealt in finished products. They are high up in the chain that leads from raw earth to luxury goods’. The outsider, Anna’s lover Andrei, has always felt equivocal about the
city, seeing the political dangers that lie there. Nostalgic for his home region of Siberia he says:

“Siberia’s more than a place; it’s a spirit which can’t be translated anywhere else. People talk more openly there. They’re not so scared... Siberia becomes the only place where you can really breathe.”(82)

He says of Leningraders, ‘Wherever they are, no matter how beautiful it is, no matter how happy they are, they’re always pining to be back.’(82) German aeroplanes are dropping leaflets, not bombs:

“Leningrad is already defeated. Our victory is inevitable, and resistance will only make things worse for you. Your armies are withdrawing to Moscow, abandoning you. The defeat of Leningrad is inevitable…” (105)

The city is still undamaged by the enemy action, but not untouched. Everywhere there are armed men, moving steadily through the city. Day by day news mixes with rumours. The Finns are coming east, taking advantage of the German advance to grab back the territory they lost during the Winter War. The Germans are sending agents into Leningrad, infiltrating. A new map of the city is emerging, which has nothing to do with homes, shops, schools, parks or restaurants. It is to do with patrols at every crossroads with mined bridges, with sight lines, steel tank barriers, pillboxes and the artillery positions. *Was it this that Peter had in mind when he built?* When the effects of the siege begin to be felt, the glory and tradition of the city counts as nothing as the supplies run out and the support system collapses:

“The entire city is a stone island now, and has got to depend upon its own resources. But you can’t eat stone or the magical prospect of the Neva at dawn. Nor can you derive calories from apartment buildings, armaments factories, icons or munitions work. The history of Leningrad, Petrograd, and St Petersbourg may stretch back to the moment Peter put his iron mark on the marshes of the Neva, but you can’t eat history.” (148)

Anna is among many in the city who do not have time to think of an impending war as their lives are already full of responsibilities. She says:
“I've got Kolya to think of, and the nursery children, and I've got to find a way of keeping rabbits out of the lettuces, and pickling enough cabbage for winter, and keeping Dad from getting too depressed, and Kolya's grown out of his shoes again, and he needs vitamins... I can't, I simply can't think about everything else on top of that.” (33-34)

While Leningrad lay under siege, other German troops were engaged in the advance towards Moscow. A large-scale counter-attack was launched by the Soviets in December 1941 when the Germans were in reach of the city.

“No bombs yet, though the city is braced for them. BRACED TO RESIST THE ONSLAUGHT OF GERMAN AGGRESSION WITH HEROIC FORTITUDE,' announces Leningradskaya Pravda. But the sky and earth remain in the same relations as ever, braced or naked. The city is still undamaged by enemy action, but not untouched.”(107)

The Germans had recovered by the spring of 1942, but, unwilling to resume the attack on Moscow, focused instead on the southern regions of the country. Army Group South, which had already conquered the Ukraine, pushed on into the Caucasus, capturing Soviet oil fields, in a summer offensive code-named Case Blue. Hitler ordered the group to be divided in two with Army Group South (B) moving east to Stalingrad, a major industrial city located on the river Volga.

“Day by day, news mixes with rumours. The Finns are coming east, taking advantage of the German advance to grab back the territory they lost during the Winter War. They've been waiting for this, those bastards. It's a pincer movement, Finns from the north, Germans from the south and west. Just what they've always wanted... They are going to encircle us.” (109)

As winter takes its grip, "Slowly, the city sinks down, like a great ship sinking in an ice-field", (109) and the characters themselves seem buried under the thickening snow, with all sense of time, beyond the difference between night and day, lost to them. They are limited to their bodies, to their senses, and these too begin to shut down. In this bitter cold, not all will survive, but their struggle and their tragedy will ultimately bear hope for a new beginning.
Helen Dunmore brilliantly shows war as seen through the eyes of ordinary people while bravely extending her range.

“A ring of siege grips the city. Nothing comes in, nothing goes out. And in the suburbs, within sight, the Germans have dug themselves in. There they stay ...There they squat in the outskirts of Leningrad, like wolves at the mouth of a cave. They pour shells on to the city, but they do not advance any farther. This is blockade.” (153)

By narrowing the focus down to a small family group, Dunmore centres the grim realities of war-time Russia. The story moves around the major characters: the selfless and indomitable Anna Levin, Anna’s father Mikhail, a writer whose work is no longer favoured by the Russian commissars of literature (‘No, we can't have this kind of stuff’) because he fails to confirm to Stalin's legendary 1935 dictum ‘Life has become better, comrades, life has become more cheerful’, Mikhail’s old mistress, the equally-out-of-official-favour Marina, Kolya, Anna’s baby-brother and Andrei, the medical student who becomes Ann’s lover and who keeps himself sane during the lunacy of war by practicing cool, detached diagnosis while dreaming of his native Siberia. The background is populated by a stream of beautifully delineated minor characters- Fedya, the strapping Stakhnovite worker at the Kirov steelworks reduced to shambling wreck of a man by malnutrition and overwork, Zina, his wife, distractedly nursing her three-day dead baby, red-headed Evgenia who trades sexual favours for a few grammas of bread while her mother prays on her knees, and Pavlov, the ‘food czar, whose endless columns of figures tell him that Leningrad will ultimately survive the first desperate winter of siege because the death rate is rising faster than the supplies being brought in against the odds along the ice road created on the frozen Lake Ladoga.

The coils of Soviet life are losing their strength. Hunger means hunger, terror means terror, enemy means enemy. Everything gets clearer day by day, as siege and winter eat into their lives. There is only the dark, besieged, freezing city, and the German outside, dug into their winter
positions. Those on the lowest ration-level can’t live for a long. Because of mounting hunger, the body-fat of the people has gone. They drop dead from hypothermia, heart failure, exhaustion, and all those diseases that have a thousand names but come to the same thing: starvation. “Deaths reported from dystrophy and other starvation-related disease…” (250) Leningrad is still under siege. The Germans are still advancing deep into Russia. Intelligence suggests that a new German offensive on Leningrad is planned, and meanwhile the blockade continues to grip. Dunmore writes:

“Things will get better. They’ve got to. The blockade will be lifted. Our forces will take back Mga and the Moscow railway will re-open. The circle of siege will break.” (254)

Dunmore reveals the tangle of suffering, war, and base emotions to produce a story woven with love, hope, and desire. It is a celebration of widely revered human values, made especially poignant in light of the tragedy of World War II. She is at her best when portraying a horrifying scene in lyrical tones, whether it is a dead man’s face covered by scintillating frost or a starving family consuming a pot of jam with drunken bliss. She wisely chooses to keep the war just beyond the novel’s fringes, having it lay siege to her story without ever invading the action. Only occasionally she indulges in commonplaces, most notably with the kindhearted whore Evgenia and the steely-eyed bureaucrat in charge of rationing the city’s dwindling food, Pavlov. The novel draws us deep into the Levin’s family struggle to stay alive during this terrible winter. It is a story about war and the wounds it inflicts on people’s lives. Dunmore uses most effectively a technique of changing narrators, where the narration slips from Anna to Marina or occasionally to Andrei or an outside character, the only deliberate exception being the boy, Kolya. The effect is one that Dunmore describes as “modulating consciousness”, or the slippage created in the narrator’s voice as it moves from character to character, offering the reader a different slant on the same event.
The ‘horror of war’ appears in *The Betrayal* in a wide variety of forms. *The Betrayal* is about people who have, with great difficulty, survived a war and now must adapt to post-war life. It is about the weariness that the war has left behind. Helen Dunmore transports the readers to another port city, Leningrad, and made to sink deep into the oppressive heart of it. The novel opens in 1952 in the months leading up to Stalin’s death; while the atmosphere in the city is fractionally less paranoid than during the purges and executions of the Great Terror, its citizenry remains watchful, overwound.

‘Life has become better, comrades, life has become more cheerful’. The monstrous absurdity of Stalin’s 1935 statement to his people has been exposed not only in *The Siege* but in *The Betrayal* also. The aged dictator, Josef Stalin is still alive, making life more cheerful for millions of his comrades by having them arrested on whimsical charges and either shot or sent to gulag. As the story develops, Dunmore builds the Soviet milieu as it is lived by the masses, as Andrei and Anna try to do: its communal apartments, its sharing of kitchens and bathrooms, its toilets overflowing its petty squabbles, its whispers, the way a sudden silence will descend on the dinner table as a car stops in the street outside at night. This is a kind of world in which the citizenship keeps its head down. The goal each day is to stay anonymous, to be just one of the crowds, mere figures in the landscape, huddled against the cold. They climb the stairs silently to their apartments, weary, but safe, pretending not to know how quickly home can be “cracked, open like an egg”. Anybody can be out of favour in the blink of an eye. And everyone knows just whose eye it is that blinks. People are living under a tyrannical dictatorship.

Andrei and Anna’s veneer of calm and happiness begins to splinter when he is forced to treat the seriously ill child, Gorya. He is a child of a powerful figure, Volkov, One of those names that is spoken only in whisper. The favour of such a man is as random and potentially lethal as the cancer that brought the child to hospital in the first place. A single act of kindness on Andrei’s part sets in motion a series of terrible events. Andrei is well aware
he has stepped into a noose: The question is not whether, but when and how tightly that noose will be drawn. Dunmore writes:

“Andrei believes that children want to know far more than we think they do. They get less frightened that way. He has known children close to death who have understood it in a strangely matter-of-fact way, but have suffered because their parents, in grief and terror, refused to acknowledge what was happening.”

( *The Betrayal* 5)

At first Volkov is purely a source of fear. But when Volkov and Andrei meet, he finds both the embodiment of terror and the parent of a sick child. Their encounters have an intensity which takes the novel to some of its darkest places. Andrei is suspended from his medical practice. The police arrest Brodskya. Shortly thereafter, in the night Andrei hears police boots on the stairs. The officers raid their home, breaking furniture, emptying pickle jars into the sink and confiscating their English dictionary. He is tortured to get him sign a confession.

In one of *The Betrayal’s* most effective and affecting scenes, Anna was seen, after a brutal encounter with the secret police, leaning over her sink in despair. But at the same time nothing that “the tap has a crust of dirt around the bottom. You can’t see it from above... she must clean more thoroughly”. (25) In March 1953, Stalin’s death is announced. Beria, head of the NKVD sets up an investigation into the “Doctors’ Plot” and exonerates those doctors. In the following years, thousands of prisoners make their way back to the Soviet Union- one of them is Andrei. Helen Dunmore does an excellent job detailing the constant fear of the people, their haunting memories of Hitler’s siege of Leningrad, the years of Stalin’s terror and Andrei’s experience as a political prisoner.

Helen Dunmore, instead of glorifying the war, put the war offstage. In all these three compelling novels, military operations and the German enemy remain largely in the background as the focus is upon the characters who struggle to support the family. In an interview with “The Observer”, Helen Dunmore said about *The Siege*: ‘It’s not an overview of the siege, it’s an inner
view.’ At the end of each novel there is no great triumph of political action or great principle, but there is the personal triumph of remaining untainted by the madness of war, and of staying true to love and friendship. It is true that horror of war, and its obvious counterpart in normal civilian life, can dismay people profoundly for a moment of clarifying awareness. But then they are quickly taken for granted, as though each separate instance were not a cry to them to set all other concerns aside and put things right.

2.3 FIGHT FOR SURVIVAL:

Dunmore considers the effects of large-scale destruction upon society. When men are forced to fight for survival, society breaks down. The description of the panic in all her war novels is frightening because it is realistic. But amongst the chaos, Dunmore portrays individual acts of kindness and bravery. ‘Fight to survive’ is another major theme in Helen Dunmore’s war novels.

_Zennor in Darkness_ is Dunmore’s debut novel. In it she explores the effects of war on a civilian population. She goes back to Cornwall in 1917, to the mid-point of World War I. The setting in 1917 is excellent. Like the men in trenches, the country is bogged down in a seemingly unending war effort with no certainty of victory. Life is getting harder from day to day. Food is becoming scarce, thanks mainly to the German U-boots, patrolling the Cornish coast, sinking the merchant fleet at will. Parents who obtained exemption from the military for their older sons are beginning to understand that their younger ones are no longer safe. The educated understand how they have failed the younger generation:

“Oxford’s empty now. All the young men are in France, buried or still breathing, turning up their faces to the sun to feel its warmth. Ranks of schoolboys come up behind to replace them. We have not been able to give our sons anything. Not even one golden year. Gashed and splattered....” _Zennor in Darkness 28_

Even so, they resent the outsider Lawrence telling them what they already know. Lawrence wants only to live in peace with his wife.
“But it’s not enough anymore to have few wants and try to hide away from the war in the hollow of an empty landscape. There aren’t any empty landscapes, though you think there are when you first arrive, full of pure naivety and hope. It won’t work. Ordinary tins are dangerous. They must not show a light, they must not tar their chimney, they must not have curtain of different colours hanging in the same window … A block of salt in a bag may be a spy’s camera …” (126)

He is not the only outsider living in this closed community. Clare Coyne, half-Cornish (on her long-dead mother’s side) lives with her non-Cornish father. He lives in a self-imposed state of isolation while she is more integrated with her aunts and her cousins. This family provides the microcosm Dunmore needs to explore the traditional World War I experience: the boys at the front, the girls in waiting, the return on leave of a shell-shocked soldier and the bad things that result. This side of the novel is not original but it is told with great humanity and complicated by the friendship that forms between Clare and Lawrence; a friendship that is first encouraged by her father, and then misinterpreted once trouble arrives at Clare’s door. The misinterpretation of the betrayal of Lawrence at the end discloses two Morales. 1) Beware the fellow outsider and 2) daughters are more easily protected than sons.

The war is ravaging across the water in France but in a part of Cornwall, the effects of it are far-reaching. Many young men have not come back, their bodies buried where they lay. Some are lucky, like John William who have survived and been commissioned to be an officer, return back but with darkness in their souls from what they have seen. There are others Lawrence and Frieda. Lawrence cannot go to war due to ill health but their marriage causes upset amongst the locals; she left her husband and gave up her children to be with the man she loves, but worse than that she is German and related to Baron Richthofen. Suddenly where you come from is very important in Zennor.
Cornwall cannot hide them any longer as rumours are rife that by purely hanging out the washing she is using this as a signal to passing German U-Boats. But there are some locals who do not seem to treat them as an interest to be avoided, a couple with a differing view of the world and the insular life of Cornwall. One of those is Clare Coyne who is a young girl, looking after her widowed father, struggling to make ends meet with no money and a lack of food as well as trying to live her own life. When her cousin John William returns prior to taking up his commission life changes forever and the effects of war are felt most keenly by all around.

Dunmore's novels focus on past events and historical personages which history chooses not to include. The excluded events are, here, foregrounded. Their stories are retold and alternative histories are composed. Dunmore has also handled the experiences and descriptions of war well. There is the use of real life people; Lawrence is actually the controversial writer. D.H. Lawrence was an interesting tool but one that did not really come off. World War I sees two refugees from the English Midlands arrive in a close-knit rural Cornish community to form the nucleus of a self-sufficient artistic colony (a dream destined never to be realized).

“Here they were, hundreds of miles from London’s tumour of officialdom. Here it was nearly all sea. Little dots of people on rock; a huddle of grey farm buildings wherever the land folded in to make shelter for them, then miles and miles of sea, stretching sheer to America.”(22)

At last, it seemed, D.H. Lawrence and his wife Frieda had escaped the vilification which followed the publication of Lady Chatterley's Lover. But the villagers were jumpy. They thought who this man with his jolly red beard and a wife who spoke with a strong German accent was. Hostile eyes watched them suspiciously. Only Clare, herself the possessor of alien genes and a talent for drawing, is attracted to them - and is to be influenced by them at a critical point in her development, in a way that will change her life.
The war is not going well. After three years, it is bloated and invalidism. And each month it grows trickier to handle. Generals shift and scramble and make stratagems and bury their mistakes. U-boats nose impudently all along the Western Approaches, drowning men, sinking ships full of supplies while bread queues lengthen. Rusty, split tins of food are washed up on the beaches. Dunmore writes:

“Three ships sunk between Land’s End and St. Ives a couple of months ago. And in January farmers had to watch from the cliffs above Zennor as a Norwegian vessel wallowed and her crew drowned in front of their eyes. Lords and politicians quietly panic inside the fastnesses of the War Office.”(118)

As a sergeant, William was always careful. In a shell explosion, everything was shattered. Everywhere there were pieces of equipment the men had abandoned in retreat, or when they had been killed. People had to walk on duck-boards over the shell-hole. The holes filled up with water. Men drowned in them. Wounded men, unable to get their mouths out of the mud, were drowning. But even in the middle of all this, William was careful of himself and his men. Dunmore writes:

“In Flanders the struggle for the Passchendaele Ridge continues. The poppy-blowing fields are ploughed by German and English guns, and sown with a litter of lost equipment, a seeding of blood and bone. Soon it will be autumn there too, and heavy northern rains will fall. Men will be listed missing, presumed drowned - a new classification for the lists in the newspaper. They are presumed drowned in the mud in which they live and often die. The men who came ‘right away to Blighty’ with John William will return to Flanders with their new commissions soon. Their training lasts only three months, and then they are wanted back at the Front. Hammond will die on a mission described to him by a senior officer as ‘rather a tricky bit of patrol-work’. His body will not be found. Simcox, a dozen feet to the left of him, will survive.”(124)

Zennor is a tiny town near St. Ives in Cornwall where D. H. Lawrence leased a secluded cottage in 1916 and 1917. The Darkness is of course the First World
War, which claimed the young men of the county, brought German U-Boats to their shores, and set the suspicious villagers against Lawrence and his strange pacifist ways, and his German wife Frieda von Richthofen (a distant cousin of the celebrated Red Baron). Clare Coyne and her widowed father Francis, an impoverished younger son of minor Catholic aristocracy straddles the gap between two worlds. Francis’s wife is a former lady's maid. She died of TB while Clare was still an infant. She left Clare to be brought up mainly by her extended family in this Cornish town-people of good heart but a different class and religion from her father. But while Francis Coyne lives in isolation on dwindling investments and writing a book on local botany, Clare leads a full life among her relatives and friends, developing her talents as an artist and eventually striking up a friendship with Lawrences.

Ultimately the novel is about the difficulty to know another person. Either because as they are strangers, or because they are close. Like in real life, in many instances a stranger understands another character better than his own family, while at the same time, the community projects fear on the outsider. War brings out bad things in essentially good people and destroys its own agents. The conflict of innocence and experience is contrasted through sex and war. The novel is about the effects of war upon people, places and society. In the Cornish coastal village of Zennor many of the local landowners and farmers have sons who are exempt from fighting, but for one proud local family the Treveal’s. The novel describes the struggles of growing up, falling in love, and trying to exist in this period.

The idea of ‘Fight for survival’ is central in The Siege. In June 1941, Leningraders stroll through a clement evening, under transparent lime-leaves like “a baby’s skin”. In May 1942, a decimated population shuffles out into rubble just cleared of corpses, glad of dandelions and nettles for salad. The city’s weak and hapless, the very young and the old, are annihilated. The rest having consumed their own body fat, are walking skeletons. The people of Leningrad are forced to retreat into their rooms and into themselves as the familiar, bustling world of the city swiftly shuts down around them. They are
not exceptional people but they are caught up in exceptional circumstances, and the reader is invited to identify with them, sharing their suffering. The effects of starvation and cold experienced by the characters are acute, and, subsequently, the sensual pleasures of a brief moment of heat from a stove or of the tasting of a spoonful of precious cloudberry jam take on a powerful intensity. It is in such domestic moments that the drama lies rather than on the battlefields. Much of Helen’s previous fiction had a thriller or mystery element, with a plot leading to some form of revelation or resolution. In this novel the structure is less conventional. Helen has said: ‘I think the plot is more to do with patterns between people in this novel. There are repetitions, there are changes, and people are realigning themselves all the way.’

Anna is the practical one; her father, a writer is a dreamer, eternally watching and waiting to be taken away as he has fallen out of favour with the government. As things worse, Anna is forced to search for food, ending up in strange and dangerous circumstances. Mikhail is injured and is looked after by his former flame, Marina. Fortunately for Anna, there is one bright spot in her life: Andrei, a medical student. The novel explores how they survive the siege.

“The whole city is going into disguise, and its people are going into disguise with it, carrying pickaxes, spades and entrenching tools over their shoulders, smearing their faces with sweat and dirt, clodding their boots with mud. They have taken trams and trains out of the city, to work on its defences. They sleep in hay, boil water for tea over twig fires, and bandage their blistered city hands with rags. Students, school children, women, old men: they’re all here, digging for their lives.” (The Siege 49)

Another crucial character in this novel is that of Leningrad, one of the world’s most remarkable cities and a showpiece for Russian art and culture.

“Suddenly and sharply, it’s obvious that cities only exist because everyone agrees to let them exist... The city doesn’t ask for details, as long as the food keeps coming in. Leningrad mobilizes countryside, villages and towns for hundreds of kilometers around. Thousands of peasants who will never see the city
spend their whole lives working to provide its food. Its web of trade relationships curls into millions of lives...” (146)

Dunmore writes, "Being dead is normal". People die in the streets, in their beds; whole families are frozen, "bodies piled up by the Karpovka canal, or outside the cemeteries". The powerful characters like Anna Levin, Kolya (her child-brother) and Andrei (her lover) are struggling for the complex bonds of familiar relationships. If Anna is the focal individual, Leningrad itself is the central character. Anna represents all that is noble and enduring in the human race. And Leningrad itself is “floating, lyrical, miraculous Petersburg, made out of nothing by a Tsar who wanted everything and didn’t care what it cost”. (147) Leningraders’ struggle with death becomes the daily existence. They learn to survive the devastation and mass starvation that the siege brings. In the worst days of winter, Anna falls in love with a doctor, Andrei, who returns her passion, creating an oasis of emotional privacy within the hell of war.

The besieged people of Leningrad face shells, starvation, and the Russian winter. Thousands will starve or freeze before the spring, but Dunmore shuns the moral numbness of numbers. She compels us to live inside the skin of Anna Levin. Dunmore conveys the sourness of Anna’s hunger, her anguish over whether to eat an onion immediately or save it to sprout so that her five-year-old brother, Kolya, may the precious vitamins have in the shoots. Anna’s mother died when Kolya was born. Anna must also feed her ailing father, the writer Mikhail, who has fallen out of favour with the government. As winter closes in, his one-time mistress, the faded, gallant actress, Marina, joins their household, bringing her precious hoard of cloudberry jam. Andrei, who loves Anna, stumbles home from brutal days at the hospital to help huddle Kolya against the interminable icy nights. Anna is a true heroine - tender in love, passionate in art, unyielding in her will to survive. The novel is a profoundly moving celebration of love, life, and survival.
The novel is about the human will to survive, to love and to look for meaning in life. It retains the sensuousness that distinguishes her other novels. As the reader felt the heat of the summer sun in Talking to the Dead, and the chill damp of the marshes in Your Blue Eyed Boy, here the readers shiver through a frozen winter (“The scorching frost goes down into her lungs like a knife”) and grab, with Dunmore’s characters, at the smallest crumbs of physical comfort (“The bread feels as warm as life in the room’s glacial midnight”).

The Siege deals with emotional survival too. On one level it is a love story and on the other, it examines the painful, damaging relationships. Dunmore superbly integrated the dark complexities that lie beneath the surface of people’s lives, and their struggle to resolve them. Her previous novels have dealt with incest, prostitution and the death of children.

A city of civilized individuals found themselves besieged, the food running out, the vicious winter cold setting in. Still people are struggling for survive. Anna, the heroine, is practical and resourceful and looks after her father and younger brother without false heroism but with total pragmatism. Her daily life becomes simply a struggle not to die of cold or hunger and precious heirlooms, furniture and even books, become mere fuel or a devalued currency, and the bigger questions of life and love seem like luxurious irrelevancies, but Anna’s relationship with Andrei in these dire circumstances is a cause of happiness and cautious hope, without this becoming overly sentimental.

Dunmore is practical and human at every stage, from the problem of the scarcity of soap before a first date to the stinking breath of the darker stages of starvation. Anna, nevertheless, is a typical Dunmore heroine, deeply and sensually fascinated by the mysteries of the natural world. But she is forced by the deprivations of wartime to become almost animal in her defense of her family. The grim relish with which Dunmore describes the eating of dogs, wallpaper paste and old briefcase leather electrifies the reader with savage and enthralling observations of ordinary people in extremis. It is
a novel of about human endurance in the most vicious of all vicious circles; one in which “people are eating rats and rats are eating people”.

It is the winter of 1941. St. Petersburg has been surrounded by the Nazis, all its supply routes cut off. The city wastes away, excruciatingly. Helen Dunmore writes of its fight for survival with a visceral power. Yet this is by no means only a horror story, for she finds poetry and a sort of beauty in the bits of warmth and nourishment her characters scrounge up --- a piece of leather boiled to make tea, an encyclopedia that, burned, gives an hour more of heat, two jam jars hoarded in a pair of boots. In the summer before the war --- a life that, for all its shortages and repression, looks like paradise lost. At the Levins’ country house, or dacha, they grow vegetables, read Shakespeare and Pushkin, make sketches, and catch fish. When Marina talks about the world situation in terms of Hitler’s spreading power, Anna responds silently of her domestic responsibilities. “I simply can’t think about everything else on top of that.” Aloud she says, “We’re at peace. We have a pact with them.” (33-34)

Then the Nazis bomb Kiev, descend on St. Petersburg, and everything changes. This juxtaposition --- the abstractions of politics and war on the one hand, the concrete details of daily life on the other --- underlies the entire novel. Andrei, the man Anna loves, is as empirical as she says:

“He believes in what he can see and touch and smell what he has held in his own hands. Andrei...did not see ‘desperate counter-attacks’ or ‘valiant resistance’...What he saw was men without weapons, fighting with their bare hands, snatching up spades, pitchforks and the rifles of the dead.”(79-80)

Anna is a believable mixture of vulnerability and strength. She constantly tries to keep her emotions and imagination in check in order to concentrate on what needs to be done here and now. Anna has taken on the burden of supporting her family, despite her youth, and has set aside her own ambitions. When she is first encountered in the novel, before the war begins, she is tempted to daydream about what her life might have been like if she had continued her studies. She forces herself to resist such thoughts and to get on with her many responsibilities: looking after Kolya, working on the
land at the family dacha outside the city, drying mushrooms, making jams and jellies, pickling, sorting potatoes, giving lessons to the local children at a nearby farm, carrying food back to the Leningrad apartment on her battered bike, working as an assistant in a city nursery.

Anna inwardly resents Marina’s arrival at her home. Though she does not voice her frustration, she copes with her. She has already managed to get the family through two winters using the produce from the dacha. Now, suffering from malnutrition, she has to gauge what energy she can risk expending on her searches for food and fuel as the others are even more dependent upon her than before. She spends hours, weak from hunger, queuing for bread, negotiating with stall owners, hacking away at the ice to find water, digging out scraps of wood in a bombed building, fighting off more ruthless people who would snatch what she finds away from her. When she collects the last of the dacha food at the beginning of the siege, she destroys what she cannot carry so it will not fall into the hands of the Germans. In this, she demonstrates the traditional Russian response to invasion and shows how, in her small way, she is forming part of what will become ‘the tide of history’. Helen is fascinated by the way in which history comes from thousands of personal actions and decisions rather than the ‘great deeds’ of rulers.

Marina and Andrei join the Levin household for the duration of the siege. And all four adults devote themselves to Kolya, determined that he will not die before he has even had a chance to grow up. The possibility of premature death is never far away: The scene in which Anna sketches her next-door neighbour’s dead infant --- she shows him as a round and beautiful newborn --- is among the most touching in the book.

“How many times have you said you’re starving when really you’re just a little hungry? I can recall my mother telling me, when I would announce as a child that I was “famished”, that I had no idea what starving meant.” (92)
Helen Dunmore describes what it is to be truly hungry and the worry that comes from not knowing how you will feed your family. Dunmore alternates effectively between the particular fate of this tender little community and the larger picture, narrated by a more remote and ironic voice. Thus people witness St. Petersburg’s bombed-out food warehouses collapsing amid the smell of burned sugar; the supply trucks, targets for Nazi planes, struggling across the frozen lake; the arrival from Moscow of a "food czar," Pavlov --- the supreme realist, the man of numbers, the bureaucrat who sets the bread ration so low that he knows people will die. Pavlov is not a villain. He simply has no other choice.

Anna is not only mother to Kolya but the breadwinner for the whole family. When news comes of the rapid advance of the Germans Anna and her father are in the country. By the time they get back to the city most of the available food has gone from the shops as people rushed out to stockpile. The nursery where Anna works is closed down as many mothers make the difficult decision to evacuate their children but Anna and her father decide to keep Kolya with them in the city. When Marina, an old friend of her father’s, arrives asking if she may stay with the family, Anna joins her in a makeshift camp on the edge of the city, digging the trenches. But when the temperature drops and winter really sets in the ground becomes too hard to dig and Anna returns to the city to find her once cheerful little brother pale and hollow-cheeked while her father’s health is deteriorating rapidly. Outside, the dead are piling up on the street, hidden under snowdrifts. The ground is too hard to bury them but even if it wasn’t, no one has the strength. To Anna and her family it is difficult to survive the winter. There is another factor that doubles the survival chances of those who have survived so far. There are fewer mouths to feed now.

“No one speaks of it, but the truth is that Leningrad’s population is down to half of what it was. ‘Of course, they’ve evacuated thousands over the ice-road- hundreds of thousands’, people say to one another, and this is true. They know, and do not say, how many more death has taken.” (283)
Dunmore comes to a symbolic Soviet poster child, the red-haired, tireless factory girl and part-time prostitute Evgenia (who appears conveniently to rescue Anna). The siege does make something precious and, yes, heroic out of the people who survived the winter of 1941. The novel is a lyrical and deeply moving celebration of love, life and survival. It is a very remarkable novel in every way - style, content and excellence of composition. It conveys the tragedy of the city of Leningrad, vividly, and its people especially the Levin family lovingly and bravely held together for survival during the first winter, through the love and strength of Anna.

In *The Betrayal*, the city's inhabitants, bombed and blockaded by German forces, struggled to survive the merciless winter of 1941-42. Survival is not merely an effort to stay alive, but a struggle to remain humane. *The Betrayal* chronicles life in Leningrad ten years after the infamous siege. The city itself affects and shapes the characters' lives on both a physical and a spiritual level. Anna quotes:

> Our city is like that...We love it, but it doesn't love us. We're like children who cling to the skirts of a beautiful, preoccupied mother."(*The Betrayal* 261)

*The Betrayal* uses pared back descriptions and also rely on dialogue and moments of high drama to create a gripping and emotionally charged plot that is nonetheless interspersed with moments of reflection and tranquility. Against the tense backdrop of life under an oppressive dictatorship, the novel dwells on the beauty of the ordinariness of the couple's domestic life as well as the challenges they face at work, picking up with great vividness the hopes and fears that they experience individually and their attempts to find comfort in their shared home life. The novel focuses on Anna's thoughts, her feelings towards her family and the way that the past and her experiences in the siege, kept breaking through into her new life. It also concentrates on Anna's memories of her relationship with her father, a writer who had fallen out of favour under Lenin's regime, and his beloved Marina. The past (personal past and the more historical past) is expressed as real as the present and still has a
great deal of power over the lives. Anna believes that it is not a question of remembering or forgetting. The past is alive. It claims what is its own. The novel gives the sensation of time passing, the seasons flowing on and spring coming again, despite what happens in human life. The city of Leningrad is also indifferent to the characters, ‘a beautiful, preoccupied mother’, beloved by them but with its own life that continues despite their individual problems. Helen Dunmore places individual lives within a strong feeling of the wide scope of history and the natural world.

The novel created suspense and tension, and a sense of how it would have been to live in a world of paranoia and persecution, how the characters felt spied upon and could not speak their mind freely, even to friends. At the end, there is the merge of fact and fiction, and the novel’s story of individual lives with the official recorded version of history. The characters in the novel find themselves in danger because of their unwillingness to believe that the worst will happen. Thirty-three year old Anna is, now, a nursery teacher. Andrei is a young rheumatologist and pediatrician working in Leningrad hospital just after the terrible siege. Both are building a life while looking after Anna’s 16 year old brother, Kolya. They are expecting a child of their own. But the past hovers around everything they do and feel. They still hoard food in jars “for emergencies” and they keep their heads down and to themselves “just in case”. Anna and Andrei are committed to their work but they keep their attention on family matters and pleasures of ordinary day-to-day matters and survival.

‘We survived before, says Anna, ‘we got through,’ ‘so we can again’ (The Betrayal 16). Anna and Andrei plan a family, a new generation who will “only know about hunger from books”- except books have been burned and Leningrad’s writers, artists and musicians imprisoned. The Levin family bury manuscripts in their dacha’s compost heap- may be one day there will be new growth, a new life. Anna is very much immersed in the physical world too- in her work with children, in her relationship with Andrei, in her household needs, in her love of the dacha and the garden she grows there. She
takes pleasure in “the feel of a dress in which nothing has happened yet, so that for a moment you believe that anything might be possible.”

The description of a chicken stew, a piece of hoard green cotton being made into a ball gown, a little cherry tree wrapped in muslin—all show their fight for survival and love for life. kolya is seen as chopping wood, uprooting potatoes and watering little lilacs on the plot next to the dacha. Andrei is inspired by haunting memories of the scented air of the taiga with its smells of resin and the tang of the wild berries. Even Anna and Andrei’s sex life is brilliant, ‘the place where they are always together and always safe’.

Despite continual pressures, Anna attempts to maintain normality for her family. She struggles to protect her younger brother who is struggling like herself, to overcome the memories and effects of starvation during the siege. She is fostering Kolya’s talent as a pianist and composer. There are intense pressures in their little two rooms flat where the neighbours are ever ready to denounce any sign of anti-social activity. It is a struggle to provide nourishing soups, make dresses and to soften with her feminine creativity, Andrei’s life. She is also desperate to conceive the child that she knows Andrei would deeply love them to have.

The man who haunted her father’s nights is still alive. Thousands—millions—perish around him, but Stalin appears immortal. The war has ended but for Andrei and Anna there is a new fear; Stalin’s Ministry for State Security. They live in a world of trepidation and caution, doing their best not to be noticed by anyone who can do them harm. Andrei is now a respected physician, but when he is asked to treat the seriously ill son of a senior secret police officer, their carefully constructed world is threatened. The themes of sickness, decay and new life are interlaced with a plot that reveals the terrible consequences of political idealism that has gone too far, and the destruction it brings to the lives of innocent people.

By the time, Andrei is accused of being a ‘murderer in white coat’ part of an alleged conspiracy to systematically kill off high level government
officials. Anna and Andrei are sent into tailspin of worry and prepare for the worst. Now Anna is most of the way through a pregnancy, a conception that happened after an evening at the hospital ball that was the highest point of their life. Now her child will be born without a father, and once again she’ll left alone with a child. “Her hair is parted by icy fingers. Her skin crawls. Her heart points in her throat...” (6).

Anna has moved to safety at their dacha with her brother. There she gives birth to her daughter and names her Nadezhda. The novel focuses light on the enduring courage of Anna. At the end, Dunmore portrays nurturing kindness of Kostya, the elderly doctor and neighbour at the dacha who spreads the integrity of her personal warmth by simple gestures like lighting the iron stove and reassuring Anna with her own skilful infant care.

*The Betrayal* is a moving story about two young people trying to live an ordinary life in an extraordinary circumstances. Dunmore portraits their daily lives at work and at home. The novel gives in to a romantic drift, dwelling on love and loss with a survivors understanding that life is at its most beautiful when at its most ordinary. The novel is not just the sequel of *The Siege* but a part of an ongoing saga of ordinary people struggling against a city’s beautiful indifference, and clinging on for dear life. Dunmore’s war and military novels are matter-of-fact and brutal. She does not let anyone escape the impact of starvation and fear on the mind and body. And yet still, the survival is possible; that the characters do it that thousands of others have done it, that time and time again people manage to overcome the most desperate of circumstances. Her novels reveal the miracle of the human ability to endure.

2.4 THE THEME OF BETRAYAL:

Helen Dunmore’s compelling three war novels are passionate stories of love, betrayal and self-discovery in wartime. These novels contain the theme of betrayal; both betrayal by the state and the betrayal which occurs
between people during times when there is premium on information and denunciation.

In *Zennor in Darkness*, when D H Lawrence and his wife Frieda lived in Zennor in 1917, the local Cornish villagers were suspicious of them, partly because Frieda was German, partly because Lawrence spoke fiercely against the war. As the war progresses, attitudes harden and the bigotry of the local people towards the outsiders becomes harder to bear. The hypocrisy of the villagers is exposed; they rig the draft boards to protect their own loved ones, and then express their great patriotism by crying at Red Cross concerts and harassing and persecuting the Lawrences. As U-boats attack ship after ship on the Cornish coastline, the village is alive with talk of treachery. Strangers are treated with suspicion, and newspapers are full of spy-fever. Into this turmoil come DH Lawrence and his German wife Frieda, hoping to escape the war-fever that grips London. They befriend Clare Coyne, a young artist, struggling to console her beloved cousin John William who is on leave from the trenches and suffering from shell shock. Yet the dark tide of gossip and innuendo means that Zennor is neither a place of recovery nor of escape. Not Clare Coyne, a young artist, nor Clare’s beloved cousin John William, is on leave from the trenches and shell-shocked. By listening Frieda’s German accent while reading aloud letters from her German mother and singing strange-vowelled Hebridean songs, neighbours spy. Dunmore writes:

“They listen and murmur and murmuring spreads as quickly as flowers of gorse opening to the touch of the sun. The farmers around Zennor pass on the news. Newspaper columns tell them that it is their patriotic duty to watch, to inform, to spy for spies.” (*Zennor in Darkness* 17)

The spy-fever brews like the unseasonal heat of May. Dunmore succeeds in capturing many of Lawrence’s well documented characteristics: Frieda’s unconventional power and deep sadness at the loss of her children (who she had left behind when she ran away from respectability to be with Lawrence); his vitality and surprising domesticity. Through their characters, Dunmore is
able to describe the social tensions and gross hypocrisy of wartime society beyond rural Cornwall:

“Lords and ministers look eastwards to Russia, where revolution is breaking like a wave on the heels of hunger and war. The menu at the Ritz still offers five courses larded with cream. And those who can afford it must eat up all the caviar, because the poor would never swallow those clotted, salty, unfamiliar globules. To eat caviar is to perform a service to one’s country.” (18)

Basically, the novel is about Clare’s interaction with her family, D.H.Lawrence, and all the other drama that goes hand in hand with war and coming of age. Clare Coyne is a beautiful young woman who lives alone with her father and is close with nearby family, including her beloved cousin John William. John William just happens to be visiting home while on leave from the violent trenches. Adding spice to this ensemble is D.H. Lawrence and his bold German wife Frida, both of whom have settled in the village. Clare’s coming-of-age as a young woman, she is introduced to love, violence, sex, friendships, humanity, and various bohemian arts. Dunmore’s characters are vulnerable and just humane. There are the inner monologues of many characters but mainly Clare, which reveals these private thoughts.

The war brings strangers to Zennor, among them DH Lawrence and his German wife, Frieda. Lawrence and Frieda also provide an alternative set of values to those of submission to narrow expectations, family loyalty and obedience to the church. It is through Lawrence that Clare learns to develop beyond simply harnessing her artistic talent to reproducing endless botany studies for her father. Lawrence encourages Clare to look at the world, to strive for more than neatness and accuracy in her water colours of flowers, and attempt to draw the strength and beauty of what is within. Set during the outbreak of WW1 it mixes fact (D H Lawrence comes to Cornwall where he is accused of being a spy) with fiction (a young girl’s brief love affair with her cousin and its aftermath) in a tangible and totally believable blend. From the
outset these are not dim, dusty, historical stereotypes: these are real people, of flesh and bone, and you come to care for them.

The farmers murmur about free labour at Lower Tregerthen when they come into Zennor church town on a Sunday morning. They know everything that goes on and now they are bitter with losing their own sons to the war. This bold, sculpted landscape is a watching landscape. A human being is a dab of movement in it, visible miles off in the fields. Absolutely spied-upon. Dunmore writes:

“Your neighbour may be listening, stone-still in the lane below your cottage, and you will never see him. But he will hear every word you say as you sit talking to your wife near an open window. He will listen to Frieda’s German voice reading aloud letters from her German mother. He will hear them singing strange-vowelled Hebridean songs from the new collection a friend has sent them. He will spy on their rages and their reconciliations.” (16)

“They are all spying on me!” Frieda screams out.

“This hateful spying everywhere. Because I am German they must hide in ditches and under our windows to hear what I am saying. Fools nothing but fools. We should laugh in their faces.” (122)

War betrays the innocence and simplicity of villagers. The villagers are betrayed by Military orders. The villagers being spies betray Lawrences. And John William, scarifying his personal happiness fought the battle. But at the end, being a shell-shocked shoots himself through the heart. His altruism betrays him. Dunmore writes:

“All the same it was lucky he could not foresee the heart-stopping spray of his brains and bone over the whitewashed walls of the hut, or the way he spoiled the clean laundry for eight men. And someone had to pick it all up, and all clean it away.” (269)
Dunmore is one of the few writers who can evoke characters from the past and make them as real as your next door neighbour or the girl down the street. It is this talent which has created a wonderful heart-piercing story. Her talent for constructing situations and places is also spot-on; you can almost smell the sea-salt and feel the spray on your face during beach scenes.

Betrayal is a continual theme in The Siege. Anna is a woman who resists social pressures and preserves her personal integrity. People who are part of the political system, like Anna’s neighbour, are suspicious of her because she is ‘the daughter of a member of the intelligentsia, and a dodgy one at that’, but she is also looked down upon by her father because she is employed as a lowly nursery assistant. Helen admires Anna because she has made a life for herself, despite the restrictions imposed on her, and she resists being patronized by others. Anna’s mother Vera died following the birth of her son, Kolya, but her influence remains. Vera came from a generation of women, Helen says, who were ‘intensely idealistic’, eager to take their place in the wider world. In his diary, her husband Mikhail writes: ‘To hear Vera talking about healthcare in the community was like watching the sun come up.’ In some ways she could be warm and tender – she ‘glowed with life’ at work for ‘there she had her team, her responsibilities, her patients’ – but she was not an easy mother for Anna: ‘She praised Anna for what she did, rather than for what she was’. Vera had wanted to free Anna through education, but with her death ‘instead of freeing her daughter, she put a child into her arms’. Later, during the siege, Anna says to herself: ‘Maybe I haven’t fulfilled my potential, Mammy, but watch how I’ll keep us alive’ and Kolya comes to symbolize the possibility of hope and of a future. Anna is of a different generation to her mother: Helen describes her as being ‘very vital and tough’ having grown up in the Soviet Union of the 1920s and 30s with all its hardships.

The system in the city has broken down completely and ‘Like a body that cannot stop believing in an amputated, ghostly limb, so the city continues to believe in its supply chains long after they have been severed’. Leningrad
did not grow organically but came into being through the act of will of its founder, Peter the Great, and the blood of his workers. Its citizens are fiercely loyal to it and have a reputation for thinking themselves a cut above the rest of the Soviet Union – something that annoys Andrei, who is from Siberia. Now, it is their loyalty and passion for their city that gives them the will to resist:

Slowly, the city sinks down, like a great ship sinking in an ice-field... The ship is poised, ready to dive into the blackness of death. Only its people keep on stubbornly living, as if they don’t know that it’s all over for them. (The Siege 25)

People say there are dozens of German agents in Leningrad, who have slipped through the suburbs into the heart of the city. They’re Russian-speakers. They spread propaganda and report back on the Leningrad defences and the state of morale. They help the German gunners to correct their sights on to key targets.

“A big, pale-haired guy in a vest, with muscled shoulders, lean out of an upper window. He thought he heard something. He thought he caught movement. The Germans are sending agents into Leningrad, infiltrating.” (127)

Being dead is normal and it is normal for a dead man to stay in the next room until he is covered with a pall of frost. The characters face one obstacle after another. It is hard to imagine how anyone could have survived under such extreme conditions, and yet people did. It is their hope and love for one another that sustained them through some of the most horrific situations. Fellow citizens are sometimes as dangerous as the enemy. Dunmore’s writing vividly explored this in the following passage:

“The woman with the burzhuiki is tucked away, standing in the shadow of a wall. As Evgenia and Anna approach she glances round, darting her head this way and that with a strange, inhuman movement. ‘Looking for her bloke. Her minder. She got set on the other day when she wouldn’t sell for a kilo of bread.’ ‘Do you come here a lot?’ ‘I’m here most days,’ says Evgenia. ‘Here, Galya, this is a friend of mine. She wants a stove, and a stove-pipe. She doesn’t want any of your rubbish either.’
‘Stoves and stove-pipes are sold separately,’ chants the woman, staring at Anna with flat, expressionless eyes. Then she retracts her head into the folds of her scarf. She’s a lizard, that’s what she is, Anna realizes. Lizards are cold-blooded. ‘Not to me and my friends they aren’t,’ says Evgenia. ‘These burzhui are like gold-dust these days.’ ‘You could, but it wouldn’t do you any good,’ says Evgenia quietly. ‘What are you saying? Are you threatening me? …We can’t always be running off to the authorities, or our lives won’t be worth living. Did you know, Anna, they aren’t bothering with arrests or trials or any of that stuff now? Anyone who looks like a speculator, they just get shot. Stopped on the street, open your bag, and if you’ve got stuff in there you shouldn’t have, that’s it, you’re a speculator. No more questions: bang. …Galya’s head darts out of its collar. She looks as if she’s going to hiss like a lizard. ‘Watch what you’re saying,’ she mutters, almost inaudibly. ‘I know what I’m saying,’ says Evgenia, ‘and so do you. You mind what I say, Galya. Bang!’ (166-168)

The novel, The Betrayal is a moving story about fear, loss, love and honesty among the demented lies of Stalin’s last days. It dramatizes an almost intolerable tension between private life and the demands of a totalitarian state. The year is 1952. Leningrad and its population are recovering from war. The novel portrays betrayal on many levels. Neighbours inform one another and the workplace is a voluntary spies. Dunmore’s heroine Anna Levin, in The Siege, reflected: ‘These are hard times. You can’t trust anyone, not even yourself’. The sentiment was true not only of that grim novel, but of its sequel, The Betrayal, whose horrors are more sinister. Among the city’s forlorn children, Anna is familiar as a daughter of dissident writer. Her lover, Andrei is a medical student and her younger brother is Kolya. The characters aged ten years with Dunmore. Politically it is a chaotic time. There is a febrile atmosphere, a constant fear of what might happen. And Dunmore likes the notion of how these people, who have already been tested by extremes, would cope (www.contemporary writers. Com. Helen Dunmore) The Betrayal opens with the sentence: It’s a fresh June morning with a trace of humidity, but Russov is sweating. The son of a secret police officer has been admitted to
Andrei’s hospital, and his colleague Russov, determined to hand the case on. ‘No one makes a better enemy, than a man who has had to beg for your help,’ Andrei realizes when Russov pleads him for the treatment of a young patient; Andrei is betrayed by a colleague who forces him into a highly dangerous relationship with a senior secret police officer, Volkov. Volkov, who has dealt out death and exile to thousands, is powerless in the face of his child’s serious illness. He feels betrayed by his own mortality.

Volkov accuses Andrei betraying his trust by amputating his child’s leg, an operation that did no good, as the boy is now dying of cancer. Andrei sacrifices his personal happiness because he wants to help his patient, but his altruism betrays him.

The historical “betrayal” was in West’s supposed abandonment of Soviet States to the mercy of Stalin. But this novel is laden with possibilities for personal betrayal--- the strange intimacy that develops between Andrei and Volkov, his nemesis and interrogator, a torturer, a murderer but also the father of a sick child.

Dunmore explores love and trust of every degree, between mother and child, brother and sister, friends and colleagues and, of course, lovers. The way in which the state and its henchmen threaten these relationships is shocking. This is, in fact, the ultimate betrayal. In the background there is always a central betrayal which is that of an entire people by a totalitarian dictatorship. The novel brings to life the terrors of Stalinist Russia. It exposes the daily stresses and fears of life lived under the watchful eyes of resentful neighbors and envious co-workers. Foreshadowing Stalin’s “Doctors’ Plot,” accusations that doctors were plotting to poison the Soviet leadership, Andrei is blamed for the child’s cancer and reviled for his defense of the Jewish surgeon whose efforts failed to prevent its spread. Dunmore is very apt in choosing the title, *The Betrayal* and sets a society where “trust no one” was a creed to live by. Helen Dunmore is successful in creating an atmosphere of stifling suspicion - the spy novel atmosphere.
2.5 THE THEME OF FOOD AND STARVATION:

Food (more especially the lack of it) is one of the major themes of Helen Dunmore’s war novels. Her books are often described as sensuous, filled with exquisite descriptions of food, plants and gardens, clothing, furnishings, and buildings. These carefully selected details recreate the worlds her characters inhabit, and also help to form their personalities. The realism of the senses is at the heart of Dunmore’s war novels. To quote Helen Dunmore,

“One of my chief aims in writing fiction is to give a sense of the present, palpable moment, uncoloured by hindsight. In Zennor in Darkness, the characters do not know that they are living through the First World War: there has been no second. They don’t know that there will be an Armistice next November. They don’t know, either, that the U-boat campaign on the Western Approaches has had a devastating effect upon food supplies in Britain, and is causing huge anxiety at the highest levels; nor do they know how this anxiety may affect their own lives. They certainly don’t know that Germany will be defeated, and must not ever seem like people whose present is coloured by certainty about the future.” (Dunmore 32)

Elsewhere Dunmore takes this further by stating that it is “far better to follow Tolstoy’s example, as he lets his characters stumble around the battlefield without knowing either exactly where they are or what is happening. Instead they see everything feelingly, every fibre of their bodies engaged, their minds sometimes hectic, sometimes lucid, sometimes overwhelmed. They are defined by characteristic and often instinctive acts.” (Dunmore Helen, 2008)

In Zennor in Darkness food shortages are reaching crisis-point as U-boats down the incoming merchant ships. At last the government has been galvanized into action, and voluntary rationing is being introduced. At last land is being ploughed up to grow desperately needed food. Dunmore writes:

U-boats prowl, bread queues breed, allotmenteers dig up the railway embankments. If there is no food, will there be revolution here too? What if the soldiers at the front get letters
from their dear ones at home saying: We are hungry. We are starving. You must help us. (Zennor in Darkness 23)

Lawrence hopes that he and his wife may get through the war through cheap rural living. He grows vegetables because he has no money to buy them, but also because it delights him to see bright sparks of life coming out of the earth. He plans to make their household self-sufficient in fresh food. There is a bad air-raid in London, one of the worst of the war. In Zennor the talk is of U-boats, not aeroplanes.

“Everyone is asking what Jellicoe’s going to do about the latest sinkings. It can’t go on like this, with the Germans stealing in under our very noses. Those U-boats do just as they like. They pick off our supply-ships one by one.”(222)

The newspapers are full of General Plumer’s triumph at the Messines Ridge. It’s better to write about the million tons of TNT it took to blow up the ridge than of the 600,000 tons of shipping lost to the U-boats every month.

People are battling for food. This is a story of individual governments struggling to feed civilians and troops with limited resources. Eating potatoes instead of bread, for instance, could save the lives of soldiers. The government introduced rationing. Still civilians and soldiers are starving. Death by starvation is a gradual decline. The most compelling sections are those detailing food’s role in military strategy. The entire battle is for supremacy of a quest for food. The war is described as a battle for food, a battle for the basis of life, for the raw materials the earth offers. During war, at least millions of people died because of terrible starvation, mal-nutrition and its associated diseases.

Dunmore’s The Siege animates the senses in order to feel them shutting down. Its early pages are full of intensely observed sensory details, filtered through the consciousness of its central character, 23-year-old Anna Levin. When she visits the dacha of her father’s former lover, she notices the warm, resinous and sleepy air, an acrid smell of fox and, inside the house, its dry, unopened smell. The character does not know what is coming, but the
nervous does, and she prepares readers for later privations with a page describing eating two fresh trout, with their salty, delicate crust of scales. Tasting things is enough in itself. Leningrad’s main food warehouse is bombed by the Germans and the acrid smell of burning sugar fills the air. Afterwards soot and food-grease coat the city’s window ledges. If they lift a hank of their own hair they can smell the stink of burnt fat.

Along with cold and hunger, numbness overshadows the characters. It is a kind of insensate blankness in their minds. Pavlov, in charge of the city’s civil administration through the siege, gives the proper perspective on the unfolding of history. As winter takes its grip slowly, the city sinks down, like a great ship sinking in an ice-field. And the characters themselves seem buried under the thickening snow, with all sense of time, beyond the difference between night and day, lost to them. They are limited to their bodies, to their senses, and these too begin to shut down. The opening paragraph of *The Siege* describes the glow of a long June evening before the German invasion, alights on vividly green lime leaves.

The “blue-tinged face” of one woman desperately bartering for food proclaims her “a goner”. In a food queue the woman ahead of Anna is clad in a heavy fox-fur hat and coat, the accoutrements of affluence; but when she turns, her face seems full of old candle-grease. “Everything makes you blink and look twice.” (32) The novel is minutely attentive to flesh, Anna anxiously inspecting the still living body of her brother – the thickening hairs on his arms and legs, the skin yellowish, tight over prominent bones of his forehead and nose. Anna’s sick father has a “thread of pulse” that unexpectedly “jumps in his wrist”, but his skin is darkening, growing dusky around mouth and nose.

Flesh is the final reality. Anna dreams of fat women at a steam bath, snorting with contentment, their heads small above mountains of breast, belly, buttock and thigh. Hunger and cold bring a hallucinatory quality to perceptions, a sudden and impossible snatch of the scent of coffee from a ventilation shaft as the senses flicker. When taste is reactivated, it is a kind of
ecstasy. They get hold of a jar of raspberry jam and the narrative switches into the second person to dramatize the reanimation of the senses. The taste of the jam syrup slides over tongue and throat suddenly gives warm feel. This sense is so primary that when, with the coming of summer, Anna and Andrei become lovers once more, they are told that “they tasted each other again”. Taste is the final reality.

Food (more especially the lack of it) is one of the over-powering themes of The Siege. The story opens in the summer of 1941 with the city's inhabitants working brutally hard to shore up defenses against the invading Germans. As the noose tightens and winter comes, their only connection to the outside world is via the frozen-over Lake Ladoga; each slice of bread and each stick of kindling becomes more precious than gold. Anna, the main support for her brother, her father, and his aging mistress, observes her own fearful starvation but hangs on grimly. They grow their own food, preserve jams, and tend flowers. As the army approaches, countryside living becomes more dangerous. Anna and her family join others in migrating to the city, where food supplies are believed to be more plentiful. Once there, they find shops have been looted and most goods are available only on the black market. Prices have skyrocketed and Anna would have run out of money. Anna told Marina that she didn’t have to spend all the money on them. And she clearly stated that “We are not going to be able to eat money” “Money's is not going to mean anything soon” (The Siege 103).

Anna does most of the cooking in the verandah: "She chops onions, kneads pastry for meat pies, peels potatoes, and prepares sausage. She even makes jam outside, on the little oil-stove" (4). All through each summer Anna builds up stores for the winter. In exchange for honey, jars of goose-fat, and goat's cheese, she gives grammar and handwriting lessons to the Sokolov children at the farm. She dries mushrooms, and makes jams and jellies from the fruit she and Kolya collected- Lingonberries, blueberries, raspberries, blackberries, and wild strawberries. She buys a drink made from fermented
birch sap, which is packed with vitamins and said to be particularly good for asthmatic children like Kolya.

The siege of Leningrad lasted around two and half years and saw the deaths of more than one million civilians from starvation. Very few supplies were able to get into the city and as well as this the civilians also had to put up with being shelled on a daily basis. By December 1941, rations in the city were at starvation level. Manual workers and essential technicians were allowed 255g of bread and 49g of meat a day; the rest of the population received only 130g of bread and 14g of meat. Without a ration card it was impossible to get food, except on the black market. In this novel, Helen Dunmore writes that ration cards are not like gold but they are so far above gold that they can’t even make the comparison. All the animals in the city had been eaten, including domestic pets, horses and rats, and there were rumours that people were resorting to cannibalism. Helen describes her characters eating a guinea pig from the hospital laboratory and boiling leather to make soup. Weakened by malnutrition, people had little resistance to the cold of an abnormally harsh winter or to diseases. Books and furniture were burnt when the fuel stocks ran out and medical supplies were soon used up. During December 1941, it is estimated that 52,000 died (normally the average total for a year) and in January 1942 there were a further 148,000 deaths. Often bodies lay where they fell in the street, frozen beneath the snow, and with the thaw of spring came the threat of epidemics spreading from thousands of rotting corpses. Some bodies were buried in mass graves, blasted out of the rock-hard earth. Years of food shortages, rations and queuing have had the odd, contrary effect of making them less likely to panic when times get tough.

“All those millions of mouth. Lips open, teeth bite and grind, salivary glands flood mouths with rich saliva to moisten the food and begin its digestion. The mouths of Leningrad continue to open and swallow. The gummy toothless mouths mamble black bread dipped in tea. Ravenous seventeen-year-old boys, still growing, cram their mouths with anything they can find” (The Siege 147).
Parts of the book contain commentary from Pavlov; the nutritionist who tries over and over to make the figures work and ultimately decides the amount of rations each person can have. Pavlov knows the city is in short on food and looks for ways to find some type of food to provide the people in an attempt to hold in life for a couple of more ways. Pavlov comes with a solution that slaughter house by-products, edible barks, fungi, berries, peat, brewer's malt, domestic pets, zoo animals, edible wild plants, wall paper paste and leather pieces should begin to be consumed during urgent matters. Food becomes a major issue due to the blockade. The fact that zoo animals will be used in urgent time is enough evidence that there is a serious need of food. Helen Dunmore describes food as if it were artwork.

The Germans are alerting their rolling-stock to fit Russian railway lines. An iron ring squeezes around the besieged city, slowly throttling it. The German army cut all land connections into the city, disrupting energy, water, fuel, and food supplies. The result was a famine of epic proportions. With each passing week, the German army tightens its grip on the city. The basics of daily living go from being scarce, to completely unavailable. Food is rationed, and people resort to violence to get hold of additional ration cards. The rations are gradually reduced as officials calculate and recalculate how long supplies will last. Hunger claims one life after another. Winter approaches, and there is no energy for heat, no water for bathing or drinking. And yet Anna works tirelessly to provide for the group, sacrificing portions of her own ration for Kolya and bundling him up in clothes and blankets each day. She scrapes together funds to buy a wood stove, and scavenges for wood while also burning books and furniture. She never gives up, even as her own body weakens. The bond between Anna and Andrei shifts from one of passion, to one of intense commitment to survival. Once the worst of the siege takes hold, the only thing on anyone's mind is food and survival. These thoughts occupy the minds of the characters throughout much of the book, there are no thoughts for the future or who they think is winning this battle, the conversations and commentary is focused on the hunger, cold and
rumours of where firewood can be found. Helen Dunmore conveyed the physical and mental effects of extreme hunger and cold in such a powerful way:

“You wake yourself, snuffling around in the bedclothes. A load of blankets and coats weighs you down, but you're still cold. Your feet are numb and your breath comes short. The cold settles in your back and makes your spine hurt. You must breathe gently. You must not be restless. Every movement destroys energy which you no longer possess” (191).

And she also brought strong emotion to the story, such as the moment when Anna reflects on how she used to take things for granted:

“It’s her father’s breathing, back in the apartment that keeps her pinned here. All her life he’s been breathing. Why didn’t she count those breaths when she had the chance? Why didn’t she stop and listen, on just one of those bad-tempered mornings when she was late for work and Kolya was whinging that he didn’t want his porridge because he always had porridge every single day? She’d never once stopped to bless the fact that her father still breathed. She certainly never stopped to bless the everyday porridge” (231).

The novel covers the summer before the blockade and the worst part of its first winter, a selective concentration that leaves the larger narrative implicit. The continued references to taste and texture of food in the novel drew the readers closer to the characters, allowing them to share their hunger, their desperation and their weary determination to live. The salted trout is a feast, but so are the guinea pig and the wallpaper paste soup. The novel minutely describes physical surroundings and privations. It paints an overpowering picture of the suffering that accompanies starvation. It is a time when the people of Leningrad are overwhelmed by the fear of Stalin and his secret police and also the rumours that the Germans are coming to take over the city. Eventually, the Germans surround the city cutting off the food supply and escape routes. Over six thousand people were killed in Leningrad that winter, mainly from starvation. The book depicts the day to day hardships that one
family endures dealing with hunger and the harsh winter. It explores how the war and lack of food affect both the human body as well as the effect on society as a whole. There's no food, no fuel, no power, no sewage system, no running water, no public transport, a constant threat of shelling, famine and disease, and the coming of one of the harshest Russian winters in living memory.

The common people and average workers of a society are important to the survival of the society because they are the farmers and factory workers that are responsible for producing all of the goods and services that are needed. In The Siege most of the main characters are these common people. Characters like Anna who is a nursery assistant that is responsible for taking care of her family. Also Andrei, a doctor in training, who helps take care of the sick. They are the people who keep day to day life going. Once the Germans surrounded Leningrad they cut off the food supply and electricity. The Germans bombed warehouses full of food and ‘Thousands of tons of sugar, flour, fats and meat vanish overnight’ (132). The food rations given to these people were as little as a couple of pieces of bread a day (191). The common people of Leningrad began to starve and freeze and most were no longer able to do their jobs. People become so weak from malnutrition and lack of food that many are hardly able to walk to the bakery to receive their rations of bread. Hundreds of thousands of people end up dying because of starvation. As the bodies of people start to waste away, they are unable to contribute to society any longer. Without the common people, the base of society is knocked out. The body cannot stand without its feet.

Soldiers are crucial to society. And when that society is threatened by another country, their job is to protect the people and keep their way of life safe. The soldiers tried to defend Leningrad from the Germans but they were not strong enough and did not have the resources. There were not enough rifles. The Germans outmatched the Russian soldiers and wounded and killed them until Leningrad was left almost defenseless. There is the smell of
gangrene in stomach wounds, the glistening, blue-purple slide of intestines. With all of the soldiers dying, Leningrad society was once again weakened.

There are many important advisors and people in charge who make decisions that can have many effects on a society. Pavlov was the advisor to figure out how much food was available and decide how much food people should get. He was in charge of deciding how big or small the rations should be. His job is to figure out the arithmetic. ‘There is this much food, and it is not being replaced. If no further supplies come into the city, how long will it last?’ (147). When he figured out how much food there was he had to cut the rations to make sure they would last. He knew the small rations would not keep everyone alive, but he knew it would be more devastating if he kept the rations bigger and they ran out of food completely. Given the small amount of food and the massive amount of mouths to feed, Pavlov had to cut the rations and this had again weakened Leningrad’s people. The body cannot function without enough food in the stomach.

The leader or person in charge of a country has a great control over the society as a whole. In *The Siege* Stalin is the leader in charge. Stalin is not good for the society because of the fear he has put into the people. People are afraid of saying or doing anything that might be against Stalin because someone might turn them in. People, who get turned in, get taken away in vans by a secret police to be questioned. Some never get brought back.

“You hear the van doors clang and the sweat of relief soaks you, shamefully. Some other poor bastard is in that van this time” (02).

Stalin has also put censorship on the country. Anna’s father Mikhail is a censored writer who afraid something bad could happen to him if certain writings of his are found. ‘This I should not be writing down. How can a man with children be so criminally irresponsible?’(45).This quote is a response to what he has written in his own private diary so he keeps the writings under the floorboards covered by a rug. Marina Petrovna is a censored actress who can no longer work because of the fear of what might happen to her. Stalin
has put fear in the people he rules over. He runs the country in a way that negatively impacts the people.

The siege of Leningrad is fought less with bullets and bombs and more with depriving humans of their physiological needs. Hundreds of thousands of people died that winter of 1941 because they did not have enough food or appropriate shelter they needed. Their bodies start to waste away from malnutrition and hunger until they are no longer able to effectively contribute to society. The common people are starving, soldiers overpower, advisors hand no supplies, and the leader is a monster. The body cannot operate without its feet, hands, stomach, and head. Therefore the society of Leningrad could no longer effectively function. Late in the book, there is the description of total joy generated by the exposure of a carefully hoarded cache of raspberry and cloudberry jam which reawakens in Anna memories of:

“little savoury pasties packed with jelly and rich meat. Blini with red caviar and white sour cream chocolate Eskimos, glistening, rich with cream and sugar, scented with vanilla, sliding across the tongue”(267).

Dunmore writes superbly about food, the mundanities of its preparation and its emotional role, and in her war novels it is, naturally, the vital centre of the narrative.

Food is one of the major themes of *The Betrayal*. The strength of *The Betrayal* is its gripping combination of events (food queues, military patrols, children “processed” for evacuation) with harrowing domestic details: boiling a leather case for broth slurping wallpaper for its vitamins, burning family furniture and books to avoid freezing to death. The story is told through the eyes of one family who are struggling to survive physically and psychologically through this period. It the story of Levin family’s battle against starvation as the encircling Nazi armies and the approaching Russian winter slowly squeeze the life out of the great imperial city of St.Petersburg.
2.6 THE THEME OF LOVE:

The idea of love functions in Dunmore’s war novels to inform and develop the concepts of healing, changing, and regrowth. The theme of family love acquires, within this world of famine, a sacramental quality: care of a child-brother, a father, expresses the intrinsic bonds of human nature. Dunmore ‘likes the subtle, layered revelation of character’ and her novels always begin with characters: ‘I’m feeling my way into their lives’. These are typically mothers, lovers, and children, and there is a persistent theme of hidden family secrets and lies returning from the past to haunt the present.

_Zennor In Darkness_ really belongs to Clare Coyne and her shell-shocked lover John William, who is too obsessed with the friends who have died to escape the horror of the trenches. This is a tender and moving story of the magic and sorrow of first love. The best scenes in the book are those in which Clare recalls childish sexual play on the beach, or follows her lover off into the moonlight to make love for the first time at the edge of a cliff. Clare Coyne, daughter of a poor but aristocratic Catholic father and a working-class Cornish mother, loves her cousin John William, a working-class Cornish boy who longs to become a doctor, but becomes badly shell-shocked after terrible experiences at the Front. John William returns to his home at St Ives for a brief period of leave, and it is then that Clare realizes how strong her feelings are for him. But in wartime, no lovers are entirely safe.

Clare Coyne is attracted to the Lawrences, excited by their friendship and eager to learn about their world of ideas. The Lawrences views on art and sexuality change Clare’s life. She is deeply in love with her cousin, John William, but the social upheaval of war has changed her life, making her ambitious for a life beyond the domestic. She still keeps house for her father, but both father and daughter lead secret lives. Clare Coyne is a most appealing heroine and Dunmore depicts her situation, caught between the cosy but sometimes prosaic life of her maternal relatives, and the academic abstractions of her father’s life, very well. Her rapidly developing love for her cousin is also extremely convincing. She is looking after her widowed father.
She is struggling to make ends meet with no money and a lack of food as well as trying to live her own life. When her cousin John William returns prior to taking up his commission, life changes forever and the effects of war are felt most keenly by all around.

The theme of love is at the core of *The Siege*. At the brutal times everything is tested. And yet Dunmore’s inspiring story shows that even then, the triumph of the human heart is that love need not fall away. Anna has always felt that she has been on her own, though never alone. When Anna meets her lover, Andrei, she finally finds someone who can understand her. Both have huge responsibilities although they are young. Both yearn for life and for colour and do not know if they will ever have them again. Andrei’s passion for knowledge means that he is excited by the opportunity the siege gives him to observe at first hand the effects of starvation. However, although this enthusiasm may at first make him appear heartless, he is essentially compassionate and optimistic. He continues to be devoted to his patients even though he has little with which to treat them and his own health is failing. He does not give way to despair but remains committed to their care. Andrei only believes what he has personally seen and felt, the reality and not the propaganda. Before she met him, Anna felt she was ‘living with tangled people, and their tangled stories’. She is a little unnerved when she realizes that Andrei is not like that. He says: ‘I love you; I want to be with you, come with me.’ Anna ‘hasn’t grown up with such words’ but she comes to appreciate his directness, honesty and engagement with the immediate present, which matches her own. Dunmore writes:

“He is unbuttoning her jacket. Her breasts are squashed by the tight, ugly blouse she’s wearing the ugly jacket. He undoes the buttons of the blouse, and there is the warm, deep crack between her breasts... She kisses him, arching her back so that her breast fills his hand. Then she says, Marina, Kolya and my father are all within three metres of us. They can even hear us breathing” (*The Siege* 140).
The older couple is less practical than Anna and Andrei. Mikhail is a man of words rather than action. He keeps on writing, despite the knowledge that he will never be published and that his life is at risk should he be discovered, because writing gives him his identity. In his secret diary he records his thoughts during the early days of the attack when it becomes clear that the Germans want to eliminate the people of Leningrad. He is initially excited by the chance to do something and to be of use. But his renewed interest in the world around him and the sense of purpose that resistance brings soon fades when he is injured defending the city. Back in the apartment, 'he doesn't want to talk, or eat, or move. The process began years ago, when Vera died and they stopped publishing his books, is now completing it' (24). All Mikhail wants now is to drift, to let go, to cease to feel. In his final days, as he wastes away, he is haunted by ghosts of the past, which seem more real than his living family.

Marina is also lost in the past, because she finds the present so different from what she has been used to. She was once an acclaimed actress, enjoying the excitement and hope that came with the early days of the revolution, but, like Mikhail, she fell out of favour with party officials and became invisible: ‘fame vanished between one day and the next’. She had gone to ground at her dacha and hoped to be forgotten, but was aware that if she made a false move they could remember her at any time. She and Mikhail have been pushed to the sidelines until the war brings them back to the centre of things. She has, however, a greater sense of self-preservation than Mikhail, trying to bully him into life. She says,

“It’s about time someone was hard on you. I’m not going to let you lie here and give up. You aren’t dead yet. You haven’t lost your children. You haven’t been arrested... You could get up. You could be better. You just don’t want to. You refuse to heal yourself.” (40)

She brings food from her dacha to the apartment and gives what energy she can to protecting the family unit, despite being an outsider. She gives up her ring to exchange at the market; she looks after Kolya and Mikhail while Anna
scours the city for supplies; she keeps back two jars of jam to bring a brief moment of pleasure in the midst of the hardship; she dissolves the papier-mâché fort she once made for Kolya so they might make a kind of soup from the wallpaper paste it contains; she is angry when Anna gives some precious sugar to the dying baby of a neighbour, thinking it has been wasted. However, she says of herself and Mikhail ‘Other people have lives, but we just keep on having emotions’ and, ultimately, she lacks the strength of will to survive.

Interweaving two love affairs in two generations, *The Siege* draws us deep into the Levin’s family struggle to stay alive during this terrible winter. Amid the turmoil of the siege, two people enter the Levins’ frozen home and bring a kind of romance where before there was only bare survival. A sensitive young doctor becomes Anna’s devoted partner, and her father is allowed a transcendent final episode with a mysterious woman from his past. Anna’s abundant creativity is put to use ferreting out food and fuel for her helpless family, and her drawing skills are called on to sketch a neighbour’s starved baby so that the grieving mother might remember her lost child. Even Anna’s love affair with a young doctor is overwhelmed by the rude dictates of survival, which force the couple to forgo lovemaking for a simple sharing of body heat. The year is 1941 and the Germans have laid siege to Leningrad, burning the city’s only food reserves, and their steely blockade has the people living on rations of two slices of bread a day. Death has reared its ugly head everywhere, and starvation has made people ruthless toward one another in their desperate battle for survival. In the chaos of it all, Anna has found love for the first time with a tender doctor who despite their dire circumstances dares to hope and dream of a future for them both. Dunmore portraits the daily lives at work and at home. The love story of a young couple during the siege of Leningrad is a very moving account of life under the harshest of conditions. The novel ends with the three survivors of this ordeal - but things will never be ‘normal’ for them.

*The Betrayal* is a powerful and stirring novel of ordinary people in the grip of a terrible and sinister regime, and an evocative tale of a love that will
not be silenced. Andrei and Anna are in their mid-thirties. He is a children’s doctor while she works in a nursery. They were born shortly after the Revolution of 1917 and came to adulthood during the Great Terror of the 1930s. They lived through the Siege of Leningrad. Like many Leningraders, they hoped for better things after the struggle and sacrifices of the war, and were bitterly disappointed. They have experienced extremes, and yet they are alive and together. They haven’t been able to have a child, although they are effectively parents to Anna’s much younger brother. They can’t talk about their infertility. But their relationship and the small, vulnerable, intimate space of home is of supreme importance to them both. Celebrating the simple things in the life that has known true horrors, Andrei wants

“to live out an ordinary, valuable life” (14). “He recognizes it already as one of those moments that has the power to change everything” (The Betrayal 5).

Looking back at Andrei’s conversation with Russov in the hospital courtyard, his dire imagines turn into reality. Despite his very concrete misgivings, Andrei takes on the case of Volkov’s son. Stalin’s rule and emphasis on society and "collectivism" has entered the human psyche. One of Dunmore’s strengths throughout the novel is to rise above stereotypes in depicting these people. The role of the neighbours; the Maleviches, and the principal at Anna’s nursery school, Larissa Nicolayevna Morozova are sympathized. In dealings with Andrei at the hospital, Volkov as a desperate father shows only his paternal anguish.

The scene of Andrei’s arrest vividly brings the terrifying outside world into Anna and Andrei’s most intimate, private life, ripping apart the life they have carefully cobbled together. The tiny domestic details speak of intrusion and violence, of the cruel indifference of the police state. The novel speaks of kindness, of humanity slipped into the dreary fabric of everyday conformity. Andrei meets Volkov at the Lubyanka prison. He meets two very different Volkovs - one before the phone call that will change Volkov’s life and one after. The complex nature of Volkov’s character and his relationship with
Andrei is amazing. Andrei’s understanding of the situation is worth considering: “Andrei can’t help feeling something - not warmth, not sympathy, but a kind of recognition perhaps” (290). Volkov, at first, is purely a source of fear, as rumours fly around the hospital that a senior secret police officer is bringing his child in for tests. But when Volkov and Andrei meet, Volkov is both the embodiment of terror and the parent of a sick child. Their encounters have an intensity which takes the novel to some of its darkest places. Finally, Volkov is alone.

The redemptive nature of love lies at the heart of the narrative, buoying Andrei and Anna forward as they struggle to survive the daily grind. There are other instances throughout the novel where love is parental, familial, and romantic - bravely pushes forth shoots of hope and compassion among the grim circumstances of life. Anna has been scarred by her past as well as shaped by it. She certainly has practical strength and a degree of stoicism, but she also has a great love of life. She notices everything - even though she has suppressed her life as an artist she cannot suppress her own powers of observation. She has very much immersed in the physical world too - in her work with children, in her relationship with Andrei, in her constant battle to ‘get hold of’ what her household needs, in her love of the dacha and the garden she grows there. She can take unpromising ingredients and make something tasty of them, just as she can make a ball-dress out of an old length of cotton. She relishes treats of any kind - especially because these are rather rare. She likes being in the world although she also has a streak of melancholy, and a very sharp, ironic sense of humour.

Anna’s memories about the siege inevitably relate back to her father and her questions about her relationship with him. Even ten years after his death she is still defending herself against him, still trying to please him. Andrei’s arrest leads her to a better understanding of her father, and ultimately a closer relationship with their uneasy shared past. Anna believes that it is not a question of remembering or of forgetting. The past is alive. It claims what is its own. Anna buries her father’s writing, “We didn’t choose any
of this”? (124) It is very realistic to think that they could have avoided the whole situation.

Anna’s younger brother, Kolya, lives with her and Andrei as a “son.” There is a great difference between their two generations in the way they view life, Russian society, the future. Anna’s childhood friend, Julia, plays an interesting role in the novel. Her life seems to be one of ease with a husband whose work is approved by Stalin himself. Yet, what is it that sets her apart from being a Malevich or a Morozova? When Volkov says about his dying son, “Gorya is better off out of this shit,” it’s hard not to disagree. Yet Anna and Andrei’s baby becomes, in many ways, a reminder of the simple joys of being human and a symbol of a better future. Anna’s unborn child takes control of Anna’s actions, honing her instinct for survival. On leaving her home to head out to the dacha to join Kolya, Anna reflects on everything the apartment has meant to her over the years: as her home that she shares with Andrei and Kolya; her childhood home, the one she lived in during the siege, the one where her father died. She realizes that she is part of that apartment’s life, but never the whole of it. Dunmore ended the novel moving from the individual story to the story of a nation.

Dunmore’s war fictions are ambitious and realistic historical novels of the World War I, World War II, and siege of Leningrad. These novels brilliantly show the epic struggle of ordinary people to survive in a time of violence and terror. Instead of glorifying war, Dunmore put the war off stage. Her portrayal of the hunger of the siege, gradual freezing of everything and the cessation of things are vividly presented. There is the sense that the water stopped running, trams stopped running and families and individuals retreated deep into themselves. She focuses on the quality of isolation and fear, the terror of dying alone and nobody even knowing. Dunmore’s familiar poetic observation is blended carefully with documentary realism. These novels work as the powerful domestic tragedy set in the midst of the wider human tragedy. Helen Dunmore places individual lives within a strong feeling of the wide scope of history and the natural world.
Far from being peripheral to the frontline, all citizens are engaged in the Soviet war effort. This is real war: starvation, privation, bombing; seeing cities destroyed and children die in front of their eyes. The horror of war, the siege, betrayal, fight to survive, hunger, starvation, deprivation, fear and terror of Stalin's Russia and tender love are some of the themes reflected in Helen Dunmore's war and military novels. Atlantic Monthly praises Dunmore's writing, "Dunmore's novel transforms abruptly..., and shifting from a quiet idyll into a study of survival under the most extreme hardship....Dunmore is at her best when portraying a horrifying scene in lyrical tones...[A] novel that avoids consoling truisms to explore the stories of the forgotten dead."