



# Written in the Dark: Five Poets in the Siege of Leningrad

By Editor Polina Barskova

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Poetry. This anthology presents a group of writers and a literary phenomenon that has been unknown even to Russian readers for 70 years, obfuscated by historical amnesia. Gennady Gor, Pavel Zaltsman, Dmitry Maksimov, Sergey Rudakov, and Vladimir Sterligov wrote these works in 1942, during the most severe winter of the Nazi Siege of Leningrad (1941-1944). In striking contrast to state-sanctioned, heroic "Blockade" poetry in which the stoic body of the exemplary citizen triumphs over death, the poems gathered here show the Siege individual (*blokadnik*) as a weak and desperate incarnation of Job. These poets wrote *in situ* about the famine, disease, madness, cannibalism, and prostitution around them—subjects so tabooed in those most-Soviet times that they would never think of publishing. Moreover, the formal ambition and macabre avant-gardism of this uncanny body of work match its horrific content, giving birth to a "poor" language which alone could reflect the depth of suffering and psychological destruction experienced by victims of that historical disaster.

Polina Barskova, a Russian- language poet and scholar of the Siege, edited this volume from archival materials, and provided guidance to the translators of the poems: Anand Dibble, Ben Felker-Quinn, Ainsley Morse, Eugene Ostashevsky, Rebekah Smith, Charles Swank, Jason Wagner, and Matvei Yankelevich.

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### **Editorial Review**

#### **About the Author**

In her homeland of Russia, Polina Barskova is considered a prodigy, one of the most accomplished and daring of the younger poets. Born in 1976 in Leningrad—now called St. Petersburg, as before—she began publishing poems in journals at age nine and released the first of her six books as a teenager. She came to the United States at the age of twenty to pursue a Ph.D. at the University of California, Berkeley, having already earned a graduate degree in classical literature at the state university in St. Petersburg. Barskova now lives in Massachusetts and teaches at Hampshire College.

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