

**Poetry After Leningrad: Polina Barskova and Sergei Zav'ialov  
Re-Imagine the Blockade**

Stephanie Sandler  
Cambridge, MA.

For a volume of essays meant to honor John Malmstad, I find myself writing about a topic close to his scholarly interests: Petersburg / Leningrad poetry. John's magisterial translation, which he did together with Robert Maguire, of Andrei Belyi's novel *Petersburg* would be proof enough. But there is also his extensive writing about a quintessential Petersburg poet, Mikhail Kuzmin, culminating in the splendid literary biography co-authored with Nikolai Bogomolov. These works show his profound intellectual commitments to the place. John's friendships with literary scholars, exemplified by these joint writing projects, are powerful, too, including several of Petersburg's leading critics. These friendships testify to the ways in which loyalties to places and to persons can be sustained across great distances.

I write of two poets born in Petersburg who have written of their city across considerable distances. There is a lively debate among contemporary poets and critics about the vitality of current writing – some argue that poetry thrives in Petersburg and elsewhere, others read the decline in readership as proving that the tradition is imperiled, still others think that the whole idea of Russian poetry is weak, threatened by other art forms and by the seemingly disastrous effects of free verse. Yet when we think about Petersburg poetry, aesthetic disputes may matter less than the diaspora of the last two decades. Can there be a poetry of place when poets increasingly live elsewhere? How can the "Petersburg theme" thrive?

With the tercentenary celebration of the city in 2003, Petersburg myths commanded fresh cultural attention. One of these myths, the conflict of old with new, is particularly salient for the poems I will discuss. As the reconstructions and refurbishing of old buildings in the post-Soviet era has demonstrated concretely, sustaining any version of the Petersburg tradition involves the work

of recovery.<sup>1</sup> How one values old or new is especially complex in Petersburg: stasis would seem the enemy of cultural innovation, yet here, the onslaught of revolutionary change and the disastrous consequences of Stalin's fierce hatred of Leningrad made a virtue of aesthetic conservatism. Several leading poets in the city very late into the twentieth century prided themselves on their virtuoso use of traditional poetic forms, and derided the waves of free verse that, in their view, threatened to ruin Russian verse.<sup>2</sup>

Aesthetic conservatism is not universal among Petersburg poets, however.<sup>3</sup> Quite radical innovations in poetic practice can be built on deep knowledge of the poetic tradition and that, too, may be an emerging aspect of "Petersburg poetry." This essay looks at the work of two poets who exemplify that trend: Sergei Zav'ialov (b. 1958) and Polina Barskova (b. 1976).<sup>4</sup> Both studied classics, have shown great facility with traditional verse forms, and have shed all inhibitions in exploring alternative ways of building poetic cycles, particularly in their most recent books. That they have done so in new poems that thematically touch on the World War II Siege of Leningrad seems more than a coincidence.<sup>5</sup> Two things interest me in the work of Zav'ialov and Barskova: first,

1 Among the best recent studies of the Petersburg tradition is Julie A. Buckler. *Mapping St. Petersburg: Imperial Text and Cityshape* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2005). See also Helena Goscilo and Stephen M. Norris, eds. *Preserving Petersburg: History, Memory, Nostalgia* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008).

2 Surely it is no coincidence that the two most vociferous defenses of meter and rhyme that were visited on me during a 2007 trip to Russia came from the poetry editor of *Zvezda* (Aleksei Purin), and one of the city's foremost poets, Elena Shvarts, who has sadly since then died.

3 One of the most influential practitioners of free verse in Russian remains the Petersburg poet Arkady Dragomoshchenko (b. 1946), and perhaps still greater influence has now gone to Aleksandr Skidan (b. 1965), who has acknowledged his debts to Dragomoshchenko, and who now plays a leading editorial role at *Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie*.

4 A third text belongs with the work of these two poets, by virtue of its date of publication, resistance to traditional classifications of poetry, prose, and document, and authorship by a poet who has also left Russia: Igor' Vishnevetskii, "Leningrad: povest'," *Novyi mir*, no. 8 (2010). I exclude it for reasons of space, with real regret.

5 There is no fixed relationship between this topic and the forms poets have used in exploring it, nor is the topic limited to the two poets treated here. Shvarts, for ex-

the documentary impulse, something they display in quite different ways but in both cases with striking consequences for formal innovation; second, and not unrelated, a phenomenological turn in their creation of the history of the Blockade. For both poets, to document the experience of the Siege is to imagine its sights, sounds, and tactile memories. In those sensory impressions, we may hope to uncover the experiential nature of life under Siege, and the subjectivities it produced.

The new history of the Siege has been explored influentially in film, in ways that should frame any turn to these poets. The documentary impulse as well as a radical revision of conventional cinematic form is apparent in Aleksandr Sokurov's 2008 film *Читаем блокадную книгу*, the entire content of which comprises actors and ordinary citizens reading from the book of eyewitness accounts assembled by Ales' Adamovich and Daniil Granin, *Блокадная книга* (first edition, 1979); and Sergei Loznitsa's 2005 film *Блокада*, in which 52 minutes of silent footage gets ambient street sounds added in by the filmmaker. In Sokurov's film, our attention is fixed on words, the narrative accounts of those who experienced starvation, loss, shock, and horror. Very sparsely, the filmmaker edits in some documentary images from the period, but his film is mostly devoid of visual stimulation. One reader from the book simply replaces another, the studio background with its rainy rear window and radio recording apparatus are also mostly in view. The camera angle changes, we see different framings of the readers, but a kind of visual claustrophobia is firmly established, recreating in a way the blockaded mentality of the Siege itself. Loznitsa inverts the balance between sight and sound: his footage privileges sight, although in such a bleak landscape that much is patterned as repetition. The filmmaker edited in the sounds of snow crunching beneath feet or air sirens, and here too the actual variety is severely limited. His work feels bereft of ornamentation or added commentary (there is no voiceover). Both Sokurov and Loznitsa create the aesthetic experience of unadorned cinema, of truth as if unvarnished, of material so emotionally powerful and ethically charged that attention-commanding aesthetic framing would seem superfluous, if not a form of betrayal.

ample, wrote a remarkable trio of poems, "Portret blokady cherez zhanr, natiurmort, i peizazh." Elena Shvarts. *Dikopis' poslednego vremeni: Novaya kniga stikhotvorennii* (St. Petersburg: Pushkinskii fond, 2001), pp. 46–48.

Polina Barskova has reviewed both these films,<sup>6</sup> and she is writing a book about the alternative histories of the Blockade opened up by dramatically increased archival access as well as further interviews with survivors. Three articles are already published from this vast, impressive project, and we can see that one of her strongest contributions will be to theorize and reinterpret the ethical anxieties surrounding what she terms Siege aesthetics. In "The Spectacle of the Besieged City," she traces the ways in which observers (which is to say those who were living through the Blockade) "attempt to tame the horror by formulating it as a spectacle: the unrepresentable is shielded and therefore tempered by the terminology of beauty."<sup>7</sup> In a second article, she has deepened the study of paradoxical aesthetic reactions to the horrors of the Siege by analyzing the sharpened sensory apparatus of those living in a city of darkness, and a third essay studies the books read and valued during the Blockade (how one read in an environment deprived of light is itself part of the story).<sup>8</sup> Barskova emphasizes that the radical deprivation of sensory stimulation, not least in the context of hunger and loss, created a new kind of subject, one who read Tolstoy with different insights, and one who saw the city with different eyes.

Her poems about the Blockade, I would argue, do the work of scholarship, too, but by other means. There is a strong documentary impulse at work; it is not dominant, but at some points, it is foregrounded. In the cycle "Справочник ленинградских писателей-фронтовиков 1941–1945," for example, the word "справочник" in the title points toward information, facts. Each section of the long poem belongs to an individual by identifying initials, a practice found elsewhere in Barskova's Blockade poems but made more prominent here. But the poem balances concrete facts with sensory impressions, in ways that make the latter seem more important. In the poem "О.Б. Голос," we read:

6 Polina Barskova, "A Loud Reading," Review of Sokurov, *Chitaem blokadnuu knigu*, *KinoKultura*, no. 28 (2010); [untitled], Review of Sergei Loznitsa, *Blokada*, *KinoKultura*, no. 24 (2009).

7 Polina Barskova, "The Spectacle of the Besieged City: Repurposing Cultural Memory in Leningrad, 1941–1944," *Slavic Review* 69, no. 2 (Summer 2010), pp. 327–355, quotation from p. 330.

8 Polina Barskova, "Chernyi svet: problema temnoty v blokadnom Leningrade," *Neprikosnovennyi zapas* 2, no. 70 (2010), <http://magazines.russ.ru/nz/2010/2/ba13.html>; and Barskova, "Ves knigi: strategii chteniia v blokadnom Leningrade," *Neprikosnovennyi zapas* 6, no. 68 (2009), <http://magazines.russ.ru/nz/2010/2/ba13.html>.

15 января жирный ледяной туман, стужа.  
Ты оставляешь в больнице  
Юного нежеланного мужа  
Умирать  
И запыхався пытая  
Тащишься на улицу Ракова  
Мимо янтарных трупов и бирюзовых трупов  
(«ах, какой художник всё это рисовал!»)<sup>9</sup>

The sequence of this stanza follows a format Barskova has probably internalized from reading so many diaries or memoirs: first the date, then the weather, then a street location, then some specific iconic image from the Siege, most often a dead or dying body. These sparse lines offer a terribly telescoped view of Blockade experience – cold, mortal disease, corpses in the street. The jewel-like description of the dead, their colors of amber and turquoise, reprises that gesture of aestheticism that Barskova traces in her scholarship. But she does not convey this as her observation: rather, she attributes it to someone living in the besieged city by the parenthetical quotation. In that gesture, which also appears as if an act of documentation, the longing for an artist's appreciation of the sights evokes equal parts irony and tenderness toward the dead.

Those emotions also mark another large Blockade poem, "Сделанность (Ленинградские картины)," which emphasizes the visual arts. The term "сделанность" was Pavel Filonov's, designating the distinguishing feature of art as the intensity of work that creates it. It marked a commitment to bringing to art the experiences of the senses and also of the soul, as he would have put it. To cover the canvas by means of only tiny brush strokes, as he did, was to create artwork by a repeatedly tiny gesture that sought to perfect itself over and over. Filonov is in fact the subject of "Сделанность." His presence in the poem is estranged: he is named as "художник Ph," the last two letters written in Latin

9 Posted to her blog, <http://pbarskova.livejournal.com/2010/05/06/> and printed in *Vozdukh* 3 (2010), p. 9. The version in *Vozdukh* includes for the first time the full cycle, in order (pp. 8–13). For a line-by-line reading of this poem, emphasizing the reliance on specific documents and the manipulation of rhythmic variations, see Rostislav Klubkov, "Pal'to Molchanova (O stikhotvorenii Poliny Barskovoi, O.B. Golos'," *Setevaia slovesnost'*, December 23, 2010, <http://www.netslova.ru/klubkov/barskova.html>.

script.<sup>10</sup> Barskova here heightens the aesthetic effect of her use of initials. Anyone who knows English will move fairly easily from the "Ph" designation to the "F" sound, but the added step slightly removes Filonov the person from this poem about the artist. Filonov is identified fully in the note that ends the poem cycle, pointing to the possibility that he was obscured in the poem, but making him more present retrospectively. Filonov, his sister Evdokia and his beloved student, Tatiana Glebova, are named in full, their birth and death dates given in the note.<sup>11</sup> They are identified as the poet's "co-authors," as is the Armenian poet Sayat Nova, whose eight Russian poems are mentioned as well.<sup>12</sup> Naming is one of the poem's ongoing tensions, as is explained in the "Разъяснительное вступление": it ends by exclaiming that the painter always called his wife "Дочка." Her name, Ekaterina Semenovna, appears in the poem as well: Ph is first shown carrying her nearly weightless body across the city, and across the Karpovka River, to their apartment.

The Karpovka, a small Petersburg river that runs across Petrogradskaia storona, is mentioned several times in the poem, a nod toward the specificity of Leningrad topography. It is a river about which Barskova has written: it "envelops a locale in which the antithetical extremes of urban society have long met and mixed."<sup>13</sup> Her essay on the Karpovka focuses on the earlier period of

10 Polina Barskova. *Priamoe upravlenie: Kniga stikhotvoreniĭ* (St. Petersburg: Pushkinskii fond, 2010), pp 66–71, quoted here from p. 66; subsequent quotations from the poem are all from this text.

11 They are both named as sisters, an effect of their having the same last name, and their doubling of each other's voices structures the "Epilog – dialog" near the poem's end. Both voices react to the artist's death. The fuller naming of these people occurs in the *NLO* version of the poem – see <http://magazines.russ.ru/nlo/2010/102/ba1.html>. In the book publication, Barskova shortens the note, p. 71.

12 Barskova wrote a short account of Sergei Paradjanov's film about Sayat Nova, *Tsvet granata* (1969) for a film encyclopedia forthcoming from *NLO*, and she gave a paper on the film at a conference on "The Cinema of Sergei Paradjanov," Harvard University, November 8–9, 2007: "Weaving as Writing: Co-creation of the Metaphor in 'The Color of Pomegranates.'"

13 "The Fluid Margins: Flâneurs of the Karpovka River," *Petersburg / Petersburg: Novel and City, 1900–1921*, ed. Olga Matich (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2010), p. 284. See also the web project associated with this book, where Barskova's contribution is "Karpovka: The Unquiet Little River of St. Petersburg Modernism," [http://stpetersburg.berkeley.edu/polina/polina\\_intro.html](http://stpetersburg.berkeley.edu/polina/polina_intro.html). In the web version, one

the 1920s, a time of intensifying modernity which the area seemed to incarnate for Blok, Kuzmin, and others, including the artist Dmitrii Mitrokhin, whose artwork she features. The poem about Filonov has that remembered cultural landscape as its background, but rather than the flânerie celebrated in the earlier period, we see the artist performing a different kind of promenade: he walks through the city during the terrible last months of 1941, carrying his wife in his arms and thinking the monologue of soothing words that Barskova writes for him. It begins as if a lullaby, "Мое дитяtko притомилось намучилось," but its words are those of a man benumbed. He says "Рядом с тобой я похож на восковую куклу аляповато сделанную," that last word a painful echo of his own motto of "сделанность," not because he believes himself a glorious work of art, but because of his own sense of feeling artificial, a wax dummy. The poem includes an image of Filonov's death, and he is again described with a metaphor that substitutes the shape of a human body for a living person:

Сам он лежит на столе, покрытый белым  
с перевязанной белым головой.  
Худой как мумия.

The looming spectacle of a city where the dead lie in the streets, where wrapped corpses are pulled on sleds, haunts this moment in the poem, and it seems a verbal realization of images that dominate the iconography of the Blockade in art and in film.<sup>14</sup>

The idea of a stroll through the city is present in two more sections of the poem, both spoken by Filonov but in speech acts that are linguistically decomposing, falling to pieces. In "Вид сверху," words break off into fragments that are made comprehensible by repeating echoes. The opening lines, "Милая Екатерина Семеновна! / Жаль что ты обезножела!" are quickly transformed:

image, used for the House of Artists on Literatorov St., shows a memorial plaque to Filonov.

14 Barskova's scholarship includes work on visual artists' representations of the besieged city. See for example Barskova, "Spectacle of the Besieged City," p. 329, where she reproduces such an image by B.P. Svetlitskii. These images are also important in Loznitsa's "Blokada."

Жаль что ты обезно  
Сно  
Виденья острее.

His wife cannot come up to the rooftops to see the city in its terrible beauty, but his reaction is initially one of stuttering, a breakdown in language itself. Words return to him, first so that he can catalogue the sights that transfix his own eyes:

Ты мой Панечка, взгляда не отводи  
От паралитических вод Карповки под радужным снегом  
От прелестных расслабленных тел, заключенных в ледовые кубы.

The sights of the city stun the artist into descriptions of what he sees, reporting as if “Дочка” were not just unable to walk, but also unable to see. The syntactic parallelisms now become full-blown repetitions, words said twice as if in self-consolation:

На Стремянной углу и Марата я видел одну  
На Стремянной углу и Марата я видел одну.  
С ослепительно ясным лицом, в ослепительно платье зеленом.  
Я смотрел на нее и не слеп. Я смотрел на нее и смотрел.  
(как подобает влюбленным,  
охваченным страстью – смотреть)

Екатерина Семеновна, смерть отступает под натиском взгляда.  
Я смотрел на нее через праздничный радужный лед.

In the next line, the artist says that he looked but was not dazzled to the point of blindness. These lines all seem poised at the sharp balancing point between seeing and not being able to look, between looking fixedly at what is emotionally impossible to absorb and looking so fiercely that one feels it as if a passion. The artist Ph fears not moving through the darkened and freezing city, but rather that he as an artist would grow blind to its sights.

In the next part of the poem, “Прогулка,” he speaks as if inviting Ekaterina Semenovna out for a walk, but in a language compromised by the sights the city would now offer her. Grammatical errors mark his language, as if in replication of the transgressions of the city itself. The statues of the Summer Gardens are

transformed into a single image of Kronos gnawing away at his children, a grotesque reimagining of the Blockade's terrible episodes of cannibalism, and he begins to speak as if he were the old Countess in Pushkin's “Queen of Spades,” a profligate who has gambled away all wealth. Ekaterina Semenovna was twenty years his senior, so it is as if she, too, has turned into the old Countess. When she covers her face at the end of the poem, the aging face becomes that of the city itself.

Barskova's “Сделанность” stands out among her Siege poems for its dramatic use of voice. More than in any other poem, she imagines the city's inhabitants' speaking, thus she gives voice to both those who lived to write their own memoirs, like the artist Tatiana Glebova, and those who perished during the Siege. Her approach to recreating their perspectives is less narrative or psychological – thus less focused on the facts, the truths of documents – than it is phenomenological. Filonov is imagined by means of how he would have seen the city, not just by the skimpy biographical facts presented here (the arrest of his sons, the collapse of his wife, the loyal act of preserving his work later performed by his sister – these facts are present, in their way, but they rehearse what is already known, building the platform on which the transformations of visual aesthetics can be studied and re-experienced). Barskova's scholarship claims that the deprivations and losses of the Blockade created a new subject, and the poetry uses the traditions and innovations of the lyric to give voice to that experience of perdition.

Sergei Zav'ialov comes to writing his poem about the Blockade from precisely this perspective – what is it that poetry can now say, he seems always to be asking. Like Barskova, he has published a number of essays. His concern is principally contemporary Russian poetry, including that of Petersburg.<sup>15</sup> And, like Barskova, he has a background in classics. He taught ancient language and culture in several institutes before he left Petersburg in 2004, and reworking

<sup>15</sup> Zav'ialov has written of the precipitous decline in Petersburg poetry in the 1990s, in fact, in a piece memorializing and praising Krivulin. See Zav'ialov, “Tishina i gospodstvo bessmertii,” *Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie*, no. 52 (2001). One can also see his views of the generations of Petersburg writers in his review of Stanislav Savitskii's book *Andergraund (Istoriia i mify leningradskoi neofitsial'noi literatury)*, (Moscow: NLO, 2002); see Zav'ialov, “Mify literaturnoi epokhi,” *Druzhba narodov*, no. 4 (2003).

classical forms as well as a nearly constant dialogue with classical texts marks his poetry, particularly in the book *Оды и эподы* (1994). Work with classical texts may be what turned him first to translation, although his published translations are principally from Finnish and Latvian.<sup>16</sup>

Zav'ialov has a strong, sometimes brusque voice as a critic and seems to take pleasure in polemic. A certain bracing clarity informs his work, which can include some forms of political clarity, as in the paragraphs that open an article about Russian poetry in the twenty-first century:

Эпохальные события эпохальны вовсе не своим романтическим флером, удачно оттеняющим крепко сколоченные слова, вроде пассажа Маяковского о трамваях, переезжающих через Троицкий мост из капитализма в социализм, а тем, что они, даже лишенные напрочь какой бы то ни было риторики, действительно эпохальны для каждого трамвайного пассажира.

Поэтому проводить границы исторических периодов относительно просто: вот первое советское правительство конфискует у людей всякую собственность вообще, вот мужчин мобилизуют для того, чтобы убить на фронте, вот выживших в лагерях выпускают оттуда со справкой о реабилитации, вот первое несоветское правительство конфискует накопившуюся за советское время собственность с помощью инфляции и приватизации.<sup>17</sup>

Zav'ialov goes on to blast the generation of poets who came to poetry in the post-Soviet period for their easy social conformity; he seems appalled that they have quietly embodied the very trait which poets of the generation before them, epitomized by Brodsky, fiercely resisted. He has little to say that is kind about poets whose talent he acknowledges (Daniila Davydov, Iaroslav Mogutin, Dmitrii Vodennikov, Elena Fanailova among them) but whose capacity for

16 Of particular interest is the cycle "Perevody s russkogo" (2001–2002), included in Sergei Zav'ialov. *Melika* (Moscow: Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie, 2003), pp. 140–149. That volume also contains some of his translations, pp. 150–159.

17 Sergei Zav'ialov, "Kto oni eti liudi v chernykh plashchakh? Russkaia poeziiia v nachale XXI veka," *Toronto Slavic Quarterly*, no. 8 (Spring 2004), <http://www.utoronto.ca/tsq/08/zaviyalov08.shtml>.

chronicling a world of commercial consumption and sexual gratification seems to him to be so much wasted effort.<sup>18</sup>

Against that background, we might want to read Zav'ialov's Blockade poetry as a deeply ethical gesture, and of course one could argue that it would be impossible to write on this topic without taking a strong ethical stance. In characterizing the poem, Zav'ialov himself has emphasized the childhood trauma of the war: he wrote of the Blockade, he suggests, as if compelled to do so.<sup>19</sup> But his poem about the Blockade is perhaps most striking for its aesthetic characteristics, which take the notion of the documentary to perhaps an extreme state. Other works of documentary poetry have become important, perhaps especially in American culture, and in reviewing one such book (by C.D. Wright), Dan Chiasson has listed the "refractive" techniques that such work uses: "collage, extensive quotation, multiplicity of voice and tone, found material, and, often, a non-authorial, disinterested stance."<sup>20</sup> All of these are evident in Zav'ialov's poem, and I emphasize the connections to American poetry not to deny his connections to a Petersburg tradition so much as to point out how much his work is in tune with contemporary poetry elsewhere. Marjorie Perloff has characterized poetry "in the new century" as showing a profoundly "unoriginal genius."<sup>21</sup> Her book by that title focuses not on metaphor or rhyme or rhythm or allegory as the fundamental rhetorical trait of the new poetry's poetry, but on citation. The

18 His perspective may have changed since 2004, especially given the ways in which some of the poets he mentions have evolved. See, for example, the work of Elena Fanailova (to be fair: her work shows powerful social and political insights earlier), and see also her own praise for Polina Barskova's Blockade poems as a point of resistance against the backdrop of "total petroleum glamour" (in *Vozdukh* 3, 2010, p. 7).

19 Elena Fanailova, "Poet Sergei Zav'ialov – o teme voyny v sovremennom iskusstve," December 28, 2010, <http://www.svobodanews.ru/content/article/2261206.html>.

20 Dan Chiasson, "Southern Discomfort: C.D. Wright's 'One with Others,'" *The New Yorker*, January 3, 2011, p. 70. Chiasson argues that Wright's turn to poetry to document moments from the early Civil Rights movement is a clever way around the obstacles posed by more insistently representations forms of writing. The same is surely true of the Blockade.

21 Marjorie Perloff, *Unoriginal Genius: Poetry by Other Means in the New Century* (University of Chicago Press, 2010).

command to "Make it new!" is banished, leaving behind a wake of repetition and reformulation.

Such is the fundamental rhetorical gesture of Zav'ialov's "Рождественский пост," published in 2010 in *Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie* and in his book *Rechi*. The structuring logic of the poem is the calendar, and each of its seven parts begins with a date. The seven days could themselves make a week, but they are stretched out over a nearly six-week period, beginning with November 29, 1941 (thus presenting to us some of the most terrible weeks of the Blockade). The first entry, which is to say, the first poem, begins with a familiar gesture: it establishes the weather.

*Погода:*

Температура воздуха в Ленинграде минус 9–11 градусов;  
облачно, пройдет кратковременный снег;  
ветер переменных направлений, 3–7 метров в секунду;  
атмосферное давление 762 мм ртутного столба;  
относительная влажность 96%.<sup>22</sup>

Each of the seven days / parts of this poem thus begin with a summary of the temperature, the degree of cloudiness, the wind speed and direction, the atmospheric pressure and humidity. It is a rehearsed weather report, a presentation of seemingly emotionless information, of measurements and percentages that stand in for some crucial facts about life during those nearly six weeks in the besieged city. By the time the temperature is –30 Celsius in January, 1942, readers have a visceral reminder of the inhuman circumstances in which Leningraders were living. No statement, no metaphor, no flight of language could make that more palpable, and yet the weather report serves as an indirect, discursively distant rendering of how cold permeated bodies moving through the streets of the city in the winter of 1941–42.

Their sense of cold was no less intense than their hunger, and again the poet finds an unexpected way to convey the facts of week after week of starvation. The title of the poem prepares us for what comes as the second heading in each

<sup>22</sup> Sergei Zav'ialov, *Rechi* (Moscow: Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie, 2010), pp. 62–89, quoted from p. 62. Quotations will come from this text, which differs in lineation from the version that appears in *Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie*, 102 (2010), pp. 232–42.

of the poem's seven sections, a list of the Church's rules for the first week of the Nativity Fast. Again, I cite from the poem's first section:

*Первая неделя Рождественского поста:*

Старый стиль 16 ноября. Память:

Апостола и евангелиста Матфея.

Праведного Фулвиана, князя Египетского.

Монастырский уставъ:

Сегодня, а также въ воскресеньи,

вторникъ и четвергъ – разрышается рыба.

Въ понедельникъ – горячая пища безъ масла.

Въ среду и пятницу – сухоядение.

The announcement of monastic regulations regarding consumption of fish or the prohibition on oils and fats could make a mockery of the scarcity of anything at all edible in Leningrad on Saturday, November 29, 1941, but Zav'ialov's citation of these rules, which precedes a lengthy listing of the rationing of food, sounds solemn rather than ironic. Religious rules about food remind us of the symbolic uses to which food may be put, and these words, especially coming before the list of coupons, weights, and dates of distribution, remove food from the realm of physical nourishment into a world of spiritual meaning. In that sense, the gesture has a function similar to Filonov's aesthetic insistence on representing the experience of the soul as well as the material world. Zav'ialov suggests as well that the political uses to which food was put – the use of food deprivation as a military weapon, in other words – was strangely parallel to the religious determinations of food's symbolic value.

One notes a further detail about the fasting rules, compared with the much longer accounting of rationing practices for each week, which will come next, and that is a matter of orthography. By using pre-Revolutionary orthography for this passage (a practice repeated each time the poem revisits the monastic rules), Zav'ialov again does something political. It is an archaizing gesture, in one sense, connoting resistance to (early Soviet) change and an affirmation of an alternative set of values. Zav'ialov used the old orthography to similar ends in some of his earliest poetry publications, in fact.<sup>23</sup> His earlier work performs

<sup>23</sup> As noted by Aleksandr Skidan in "Obratnaia perspektiva," his introduction to Zav'ialov, *Melika*, p. 6.

an association with the poetic modes of ancient Rome and Greece, as noted above.<sup>24</sup>

Zav'ialov demonstrates the paradoxical attitude toward cultural preservation and radical innovation that fundamentally marks Petersburg culture with special intensity in "Рождественский пост." In the poems (in *Мелика*, 2003) associated with ancient models, by comparison, we find classical forms: epigraphs, odes, threnody. The Blockade poem, like all the poems in the volume *Речи*, breaks with that pattern, as befits a book whose title points toward more discursive, prosaic verbal forms, unlike the melodic lyric pieces of *Мелика*.

One last point about "Рождественский пост," having to do with the creation of distinctive voices, a trait also found in Polina Barskova's poem. To create or recreate such voices may become an ethically charged act, giving individual life to those who perished, honoring their individuality even if in the muted rhetorical fashion found in Barskova's poems, where initials were used rather than names. The act of saying the names of the dead is a traditional, marked form of honoring, found in religious rituals and more recently on public monuments, best exemplified by Maya Lin's Vietnam Memorial in Washington, D.C. Neither Zav'ialov nor Barskova moves in that direction, and yet the memorializing gesture of the poems is quite intense.

Barskova's poems instead designate persons by initials, a gesture that suggests a definite person whose identity is partly concealed for some reason, perhaps to protect an individual's privacy, perhaps to allow that one person to stand in for many others who had similar experiences. It is a kind of naming that suggests accuracy in scholarship, and in poetry it also has potential rhythmic benefits, limiting the act of naming to a single syllable, or two syllables when there are two initials, so that the names attract no attention on their own, create no verbal or sound distractions. Zav'ialov goes a step further, relying on the grammatical category designed for this purpose, pronouns. He includes voices, in other words, but no persons are named as speaking, only я, ты, он, она, вы, они, мы – always in that order, with marked similarities in the function of each "person" across the seven poems. The final choral "мы" returns to Church language, presenting words sung at the morning service and given

24 For example, see "Каденции" (1986), "Эпиграфы" (1993-95), "Horatii paraphrases. Carmina praeusta frigore / Парафразы Горация. Стихи опаленные холодом («Отмороженные» стихи) / (1998); all are included in Zav'ialov. *Melika*.

in the old orthography. The penultimate section, reserved for the third-person plural utterance, is always a prose report from the front. Until the final poem, the first-person voice gives a listing of foods that in some future moment will all be kept separately in a special cupboard (in one poem, fruits, in another, various grains). The "он" voice speaks in clinical terms about starvation, giving statistics for certain after-effects of malnutrition, about the look of starved bodies in the morgue, leading to a final report about cannibalism. Perhaps most poignant of all is the "ты" voice that speaks in the singular, feminine, replicating the intimate, domestic speech within families. For example:

Ты сказала:  
Котя приходил и говорит:  
Сделай ты мне, Шура, винегрет.  
Котя, ну из чего же я тебе сделаю винегрет?

Or, in a later passage:

Ты сказала:  
Лёша у меня слег, и Шурик такой скучный,  
а я всё бегом, всё бегом.

These utterances sound all the more frail and human, perhaps more vulnerable next to the slightly complaining utterances of the similarly domestic voice of a woman:

Она сказала:  
Нет, они все только жрут. Где они всё это достали?  
Это же настоящее вредительство.

Она сказала:  
Что же он всё жрал-то?  
Все равно у него был понос, ничего уж не держалось.

In achieving this vividly differentiated multivoicedness, Zav'ialov would seem to have strayed far from the kind of citationality his lists of rationing or fasting rules would embody, but in fact he has reproduced something of the oxymoronic shifting discourses found in Blockade diaries themselves (and

presumably of people's daily lives).<sup>25</sup> He is writing history not by creating a coherent narrative of events, but by juxtaposing the competing renditions of events with which Leningrad citizens would have lived.

One thing that Zav'ialov's form achieves with breathtaking directness is a sense of the dailiness of Blockade life. In some ways this is inherent in his quasi-diary form, but the effect is magnified many times over by the juxtaposition of discourses. Official military reports, food rationing measurements, descriptions of bodies in the morgue, snippets of conversation, even the statements from monastic requirements for the Christmas Fast take a linguistic snapshot of each day's lived experience. These are the words with which consciousness worked. In that sense his project is also fundamentally phenomenological. People who tried to understand what was happening to them had at their disposal several linguistic registers. We can almost hear them turning over the possibilities in their minds, comparing the usefulness and truth value of one set of terms as opposed to another. Which tells you more about life on Saturday, December 27, 1941: a weather report? A weary reproach? The words sung at morning services? The way in which none of these discourses is privileged, the way in which Zav'ialov has them repeat again and again, tells us that only in their aggregate does Blockade experience reside. One might counter that there is always a hierarchy of discourses, that the discourse of religion, for example, stands inherently above that of the weather report. Zav'ialov's repeating structure actually pushes back against such privileging, but the use of the old orthography and the way in which the church calendar and morning service frame each day's entry do suggest subtle differences. Even to include the language of the church is to insist that the yearnings of the spirit were yet a part of Blockade life, indeed to claim that the everyday-ness of life – the expenditure of energy on the demanding business of getting food, keeping warm, carting off the dead – was not all that life was. Amid the quotidian, there was just possibly the ecstatic.<sup>26</sup> By that term, I do not

25 In a review of this poem and of Vishnevetskii's "Leningrad," Polina Barskova makes this point, adding that one can even think of examples of diaries from the Siege that have this quality of shifting discourse. See Polina Barskova, "Vizit v gorod: aktual'noe iskusstvo i blokadnyi arkhiv," *OpenSpace.ru*, September 21, 2010, <http://www.openspace.ru/literature/events/details/17912/page2/>.

26 My terms come from an inspiring book about modernist poetry, painting, and philosophy: Jennifer Anna Gosetti-Ferencei. *The Ecstatic Quotidian: Phenomenological*

mean to point only to something like the hunger-induced delirium that besieged Leningraders may have felt, but rather something more consciousness-shaking: those moments when flashes of insight into the nature of being come into the mind, when numbed sensitivities are rubbed to a state of raw receptivity. This ecstasy is latent in daily life, we might say, but barely perceptible; when daily life is itself an experience of crisis, as Zav'ialov's seven-day sequence shows so well even at the level of discourse, then otherwise hidden phenomena of mind can be seen afresh.

When Barskova shows us how someone might perceive the strange aesthetic pleasures during the Blockade, she is revealing a similar flash of ecstasy. Her Blockade poems do not raise the same questions about hierarchy of discourses as Zav'ialov's work, in part because he has produced a single, major text with many inner complexities, whereas she is writing individual poems, some longer and more complex, like "Сделанность" and "Справочник ленинградских писателей-фронтовиков 1941–1945," others shorter or pointedly simple. Her work on the Blockade is ongoing, and we cannot know the final shape of this project at this moment; what seems apparent is her determination to intermix poems on this topic into her other work, and thus to absorb the lessons of her work on the Siege across the entire breadth of her work as a poet, not just in poems on this topic.<sup>27</sup>

Both Barskova and Zav'ialov have taken on a central topic within the Petersburg myth and turned it to rather subversive ends. They have rejected the language of obligation that was true of official narratives of the Blockade, and in their strong readings of the Blockade they have run afoul of some critics, and perhaps of guardians of the official myths of Petersburg as well.<sup>28</sup> It is not that they reject out of hand the ethical imperatives of writing the history of the Blockade – on the contrary, their accounts are unflinching, and their judgments true, if largely implicit. But something is substituted for the discourse of official

*Sightings in Modern Art and Literature* (University Park, Pa.: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2007).

27 Barskova has confirmed to me that in her new book of poetry the Siege poems will not be in a separate section. I take this occasion to thank her for discussing these poems with me.

28 For a representative if rather flat-footed attack, see Vadim Levental', "Vospaleniia i izverzhen'ia," *Sol'* (September 27, 2010), <http://www.saltt.ru/node/4617>.

history and heroic duty (both the duty to be in Leningrad, to defend the city, and the subsequent duty to remember that sacrifice), and that is the discourse of experience itself. A phenomenological turn is at the center of both these poets' representations of the Blockade, in different but equally powerful ways. In that turn, they are engaged in a kind of poetry writing that connects them to others within the Petersburg tradition (perhaps most surprisingly, to the explicitly phenomenological poetry of Dragomoshchenko, Skidan, and others), and thus to broader trends in contemporary poetry.<sup>29</sup> Far from their native city, they are renewing its traditions, even as they rewrite its history.

### Проблема «мелодики стиха» (Интонационная теория стиха)

Елена Невзглядова  
Санкт-Петербург

Проблема мелодики стиха привлекла внимание в начале прошлого века.<sup>1</sup> Ученые, впервые поднявшие проблему, полагали, что мелодика – главный композиционный фактор и что она вписана в текст. Но объяснения того, чем детерминирована мелодия стихотворной речи и какую роль она играет в ее конструкции, оказались неубедительны для каждого из последователей.<sup>2</sup> Ошибка ученых заключалась в отождествлении мелодики с интонацией, тогда как мелодика является лишь одним из ее компонентов. Не мелодика вписана в текст, а стиховая асемантическая пауза, завершающая каждую стихотворную строку. Эта пауза не похожа ни на один из видов, известных прозаической речи. Она иррациональна, или асемантична.<sup>3</sup> Благодаря ей в стихотворной речи возникает неведомая прозаической речи интонация – *интонация неадресованности*.<sup>4</sup>

Ритмические акценты в отличие от фразовых в стихе не выделяют смысл. Замещая фразовые ударения либо совмещаясь с ними, они создают особое унифицированное звучание, выражающее неадресованность: фразовые акценты служат адресации речи, а ритмические, чисто музыкальные, ее отвергают. Таким образом, то, что в старину называли мелодикой, а по существу, интонация – это не декламативная манера, а структурный признак стихотворной речи, тот речевой элемент, который образует стих.

1 Прежде всего следует назвать работы Сиверса (Eduard Sievers. *Rhythmisch-melodische Studien*), имевшие широкое отражение в русской научной литературе.

2 См., например, критику Эйхенбаумовской «Мелодики лирического стиха»: В.М. Жирмунский, «Мелодика стиха», *Мысль* (Петроград), 1922, № 3.

3 См.: Л.К. Цеplitis. *Анализ речевой интонации* (Рига, 1977).

4 Е.В. Невзглядова. *О стихе* (С.-Петербург, 2005), стр. 17.

29 I argue for the importance of this phenomenological trend in contemporary poetry more fully in my work in progress, *Breaking Down the Walls: Russian Poetry Since 1972*.