

Title: Barskova's Metamorphoses
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Polina Barskova is a “poet with a history” – Marina Tsvetaeva’s phrase for poets whose careers have an arc, who perennially set new creative tasks for themselves. The poetry Barskova began to publish after emigrating shows marked changes in prosody and tone, and her last two collections, *Priamoe obrashchenie* and *Soobshchenie Ariel'ia*, also see her broaching historical themes, especially the Siege of Leningrad, a subject of her scholarly and critical writings. Her latest poetry – and arguably also her research on St. Petersburg – remains driven by an interest in the personal, if not always the autobiographical. Commenting on her treatment of historical themes, Kirill Korchagin has acutely observed that she urges “subjectivity should be returned to (even recent) history.” This practice has drawn strong objections from some readers, and part of her provocation is to introduce raw sexual and psychological material into historical scenarios, and to treat primary relationships in the context of history. (In this she might be compared to Sylvia Plath, with her use of the Holocaust in her poems to her father in *Ariel*.) Focusing on Barskova’s latest work, an innovative prose poem titled “Proshchatel',” I consider how her direct treatment of sexuality is central to her critical reassessments of the Soviet past.