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[Darkling](#)

by Anna Rabinowitz

Dorset, VT: Tupelo Press, 2001

Paperback, 85 pages, \$14.95



[David Kozubei](#)

Several decades ago, George Barker wrote:

By being sorry for myself I began
And now am sorry for the rest of man.

[Darkling](#) begins as a welling-up of memories and justifications, of the relationship between a daughter (the speaker of the poems) and her mother. The mother has been dead for some time. Like a river, the memories broaden out, to include a brother, and her parents' origins and immigration to the U.S.A.

Then comes a tour de force preceded by the word *premises*, which widens the theme, as if the river (my analogy, not the poet's) is trying out different ways it can go into the past, where the immigrants came from. Other sections narrow back to the mother and daughter theme, and then widen back to the relatives (and others) that the immigrants left behind, and who will be shards and sherds in the oncoming Holocaust in Europe. These, along with the relationship between the mother and father, and the increasing encroachment of the Holocaust in the rest of the poem, are the themes that play like the flames of a fire with each other. Incandescent Imagination sets fire to the paucity of individual facts which survived the Holocaust.

The tone is unremittingly elegiac, like Górecki's Holocaust music. It is not an easy read, but only as hard as it has to be, and those who read it will come away in some way better persons for a time at least, and with the knowledge that they have done something important. As for the poet, she has created a technique which enables her to put the full range of her life interests into her poem—not a common fate even among good writers.

Of the many devices that enhance this poem, mention must be made that, without distortion or intrusion, it includes a device used by some poets in Scotland, England, and America in the seventeenth century (and in some other literatures at other times). This device uses the first letter of

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each line in a poem to form a vertical phrase or sentence. In this poem, a reader can make up all of Thomas Hardy's poem *The Darkling Thrush*, which is about a bedraggled thrush singing its heart out in the growing dusk of a desolate winter's day.

Because this is a short review, it cannot be the long, exploratory result of persistent meditation over a period of years that this poem deserves, like all great work, although I have already read it several times. Charles Reznikoff's long impersonal poem *Holocaust* and the very personal [Darkling](#) are the ineradicable Twin Towers of Holocaust poetry in English. (Nor should Jerome Rothenberg's *Khurbn* be forgotten.)

Anna Rabinowitz's first book, *At the Site of Inside Out*, won the Juniper Prize. Other honors include a fellowship from the National Endowment for the Arts. She edits and publishes *American Letters & Commentary*.

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