



# Lydia Ginzburg's Prose: Reality in Search of Literature

*Emily Van Buskirk*

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The Russian writer Lydia Ginzburg (1902-90) is best known for her *Notes from the Leningrad Blockade* and for influential critical studies, such as *On Psychological Prose*, investigating the problem of literary character in French and Russian novels and memoirs. Yet she viewed her most vital work to be the extensive prose fragments, composed for the desk drawer, in which she analyzed herself and other members of the Russian intelligentsia through seven traumatic decades of Soviet history. In this book, the first full-length English-language study of the writer, Emily Van Buskirk presents Ginzburg as a figure of previously unrecognized innovation and importance in the literary landscape of the twentieth century.

Based on a decade's work in Ginzburg's archives, the book discusses previously unknown manuscripts and uncovers a wealth of new information about the author's life, focusing on Ginzburg's quest for a new kind of writing adequate to her times. She writes of universal experiences--frustrated love, professional failures, remorse, aging--and explores the modern fragmentation of identity in the context of war, terror, and an oppressive state. Searching for a new concept of the self, and deeming the psychological novel (a beloved academic specialty) inadequate to express this concept, Ginzburg turned to fragmentary narratives that blur the lines between history, autobiography, and fiction.

This full account of Ginzburg's writing career in many genres and emotional registers enables us not only to rethink the experience of Soviet intellectuals, but to arrive at a new understanding of writing and witnessing during a horrific century.

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