

## The Siege Swallow

*after Olga Berggolts*

That first spring of the siege  
after the bitterest winter  
chewing leather, glue and paint,  
Leningraders wore a badge

on their breast, a tin swallow  
with a letter in its bill,  
the words they daren't speak:  
I am waiting for a letter.

The ice road had thawed;  
they could only be reached  
from the homeland by wings,  
an aeroplane or a bird.

Messenger of spring, its long  
tail streamers, its glossy blue-black,  
the swallow was a promise  
as they gathered chamomile.

And as they ate the tender grass  
that feathered in the ruins,  
and gnawed on pine branches,  
sucking vitamins from needles,

they were compelled to scratch  
letters below a kerosene lantern.  
'Today we are without Volodia.  
I am going on alone'.

Version of a translation by Daniel Weissbort ('Twentieth Century Russian Poetry', ed John Glad and Daniel Weissbort, University of Iowa Press, 1992).

Anne Ryland's first collection, *Autumnologist*, (Arrowhead Press) was shortlisted for The Forward Prize for Best First Collection in 2006, and her second collection, *The Unmothering Class*, is due to be published by Arrowhead Press in October.