

BENJAMIN M. SUTCLIFFE (Oxford, OH, USA)

*PUBLISHING THE RUSSIAN
SOUL? WOMEN'S PROVINCIAL
LITERARY ANTHOLOGIES, 1990-1995¹*

I turned my glance from the author to the ceiling and then to the wall On the wall was an amusing photograph: four women's behinds, tightly wrapped in little white skirts. To me the picture seemed out of place in the smoky, gloomy office. "Is this some sort of masquerade, all buttoned up in an editor's suit?" I wondered, looking more attentively at the man sitting before me. He, slumped back in his chair, continued to talk about village prose: there should be humor, lively dialect, the unique local color of a northern village. . . .

Я перевела взгляд с редактора на потолок, потом на стены. . . . На стене висела забавная фотография – четыре женских зада, обтянутые белыми халатиками. В тоскливом прокуренном кабинете снимок показался мне неуместным. "Уж не маскарад ли застегнутый на все пуговицы костюм редактора?" – подумала я и смотрела на сидящего передо мной мужчину более внимательно. Он, развалившись в кресле, продолжал говорить о деревенской прозе: должен быть юмор, яркий местный диалект, неповторимый колорит северной деревни. . . .²

The opening scene of Tat'ana Meshko's "Grafomanka iz provintsii" (Graphomaniac from the Provinces) outlines the contested cultural terrain this story and its anthology inhabit: a young woman writer from the northwest provinces, an intractable Moscow editor, and the glaring contradictions between how literature "should" describe reality and the actual world the writer and editor inhabit. In the story that follows, the writer is nearly raped

1. The author thanks Helena Goscilo, Nancy Condee, David Birnbaum, and Nancy Glazener (University of Pittsburgh), as well as Mila Ganeva, Nicole Thesz (Miami University), and two anonymous reviewers, who commented on earlier versions of this article.

2. *Mariia. Literaturnyi al'manakh*, vypusk 1, Galina Skvortsova, comp. (Petrozavodsk: Kareliia, 1990), p. 199.

while visiting the capital.³ The would-be rapist editor, who earlier praises village prose, conflates the woman's presumed inability to write with her status as sex object, a link foreshadowed in his choice of photographs. However, in the paragraph above, the male literal and literary gaze is countered by a discerning female viewpoint that renders the editor a puzzling object. Meshko's reader confronts a series of contradictions that shape both this narrative and the nearly forgotten period of literary history that produced it.

From 1990 to 1995 four collections of women's writing appeared in northwestern Russia: *Mariia* (two volumes: one issued in 1990 and the other in 1995), *Zhena, kotoraiia umela letat'* (The Wife Who Could Fly, 1993), and *Russkaia dusha* (Russian Soul, 1995).⁴ These volumes, all but ignored by Russian and Western critics, were published at the same time as a series of similar anthologies in Moscow.⁵ In the West this lack of attention is somewhat understandable – the prose, poetry, and essays from the provincial anthologies have not been translated.⁶

While overlooked by critics, these women's anthologies reflect a crucial aspect of the development of women's prose (*zhenskaia proza*) as a

³ *Ibid.*, p. 209.

⁴ *Mariia, Literaturnyi al'manakh*, Vypusk 2, Galina Skvortsova, comp. (Petrozavodsk: Izdatel'stvo Petrozavodskogo universiteta, 1995); *Zhena, kotoraiia umela letat' : Proza russkikh i finskikh pisatel'nits*, Galina Skvortsova, ed. (Petrozavodsk: INKA, 1993); *Russkaia dusha, Sbornik poëzii i prozy sovremennykh pisatel'nits russkoi provintsii*. FrauenLiteraturGeschichte. Texte und Materialien zur russischen Frauenliteratur 3, G. Skvortsova-Akbulatova, ed. (Wilhelmshorst: Verlag F. K. Göpfert, 1995).

⁵ The anthologies published in Moscow are: *Zhenskaia logika (Women's Logic)*, L. V. Stepanenko and A. V. Fomenko, eds. (Moscow: Sovremennik, 1989); *Ne pomniashchaia zla (She Who Bears No Grudge)*, N. A. Ryl'nikova, ed., Larisa Vaneeva, comp. (Moscow: Moskovskii rabochii, 1990); *Chisten'kaia zhizn' (A Clean Life)*, Anatolii Shavkuta, comp. (Moscow: Molodaia gvardiia, 1990); *Novye amazonki (The New Amazons)*, Svetlana Vasilenko, comp. (Moscow: Moskovskii rabochii, 1991); and *Abstinentki (Women Who Abstain)*, Ol'ga Sokolova, ed. (Moscow: Seriiia andergraund, Gumanitarnyi fond im. A. S. Pushkina, 1991). The appearance of these collections marked a new era in Russian women's writing. In the post-Soviet era appeared *Chego khochet zhenshchina . . . Sbornik zhenskikh rasskazov (What a Woman Wants)* (Moscow: Linor, 1993) and *Bryzgi shampanskogo. Novaia zhenskaia proza. Sbornik rasskazov. (Splashes of Champagne)*, Svetlana Vasilenko, comp. (Moscow: ACT/Olimp, 2002).

⁶ In the late 1980s-1990s a series of translations of anthologized contemporary women's prose and poetry appeared in English: *Balancing Acts: Contemporary Stories by Russian Women*, Helena Goscilo, ed. (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1989); *Women's View* (a special edition of *Glas*, vol. 3, 1992); *Half a Revolution: Contemporary Fiction by Russian Women*, Masha Gessen, ed. and tr. (Pittsburgh: Cleis, 1995); *Lives in Transit: A Collection of Recent Russian Women's Writing*, Helena Goscilo, ed. (Ann Arbor, MI: Ardis, 1995); and *Present Imperfect: Stories by Russian Women*, Ayesha Kagal and Natasha Perova, eds. (Boulder, CO: Westview, 1996). My study examines only the prose and essays in the provincial collections.

discernible and often self-identifying component of Russian culture.⁷ Unfortunately for the authors, their work appeared during *perestroika*, with its economic collapse, reassertion of sexist gender roles, impoverishment of the intelligentsia, and communication breakdown between the “center” (Moscow, Leningrad/St. Petersburg) and the provinces. These social conditions both spurred authors to write while also ensuring that their readership would be limited. Many of these works would have been unprintable before 1985, yet afterwards the increased opportunities coming with relaxed censorship did little good for writers and publishers stymied by the state’s abandonment of the arts. This same disregard, a theme unifying the anthologies, compelled the provincial female writers and editors to create a collective literary identity based on paradoxical formulations of intellectual, regional, and gender commonality.

Before the late 1980s authors’ own perceptions and critics’ assessments reiterated Barbara Heldt’s view of women writers in the nineteenth century: while individual works by women authors existed, these writers did not comprise a distinct category.⁸ In a nuanced analysis of how Russian women’s

7. Labeling this writing is problematic. Literary critic Tat’iana Rovenskaia makes the reasonable point that the term “*zhenskaia proza*” (women’s prose) must be used since it is the most common designator and was often employed by the collection contributors themselves, at least in Moscow. See Tat’iana Rovenskaia, “K voprosu o periodizatsii istorii russkoi zhenskoi literatury 1980-kh--90-kh godov XX veka,” *Zhenshchiny v istorii: vozmozhnost’ byt’ uvidennymi*, vypusk 2 (2002): 293. My analysis views women’s prose as writing by women, who often (but not always) focus on female lives differing from men’s in great part because of gendered inequality. Nina Gabrièlian, publishing the first theoretical article on this subject in a major Russian journal, argues that women’s prose includes any work written by a woman, a formulation the feminist critic Elena Trofimova echoes. See Nina Gabrièlian, “Eva – èto znachit ‘zhizn’”: Problema prostranstva v sovremennoi russkoi zhenskoi proze,” *Voprosy literatury*, nos. 7-8 (1996): 31; Elena Trofimova, “Zhenskaia literatura i knigoizdanie v sovremennoi Rossii,” *Obshchestvennye nauki i sovremennost’*, no. 5 (1998): 147. This seemingly obvious statement posits a set of common styles, themes, and attitudes – critics did not make such an assumption before 1987.

8. Barbara Heldt, *Terrible Perfection: Women and Russian Literature* (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1987), p. 2. In 1991 Irina Sliusareva equivocated by contending that, while women can and do write, to insist on a separate women’s literature invites hostile generalizations from critics. See Irina Sliusareva, “Opravdanie zhiteiskogo: Irina Sliusareva predstavliaet ‘novuiu zhenskuiu prozu,’” *Znamia*, no. 11 (1991): 238. This argument asserted the existence of women’s writing based on the very fact that critics debated its status and merits. Such recognition plus reservation dominated critical assessment of the newly visible female authors appearing in the Moscow and provincial collections. These anthologies shared previously suspect or taboo themes such as infidelity, abortion, violence, poverty, rape, prostitution, ecological disaster, and male and female alcoholism. Common content and increased critical attention (at least to the “central” anthologies) constituted a reinvention of women’s prose after decades of writers such as Vera Panova, who subordinated women’s issues to a vision of women as “female Soviets.”

prose developed, Tat'iana Rovenskaia notes that both Moscow and provincial anthologies played a large role.⁹ The first stage, beginning in 1979 and involving a group in Leningrad (coincidentally, also named *Mariia*), stressed women's themes in literature and criticism. The period of women's anthologies and increased attention to *zhenskaia proza* followed in the late 1980s-early 1990s. The third stage, which began in 1994-1995, encompassed increased contact with foreigners and the end of women's collections in the provinces and to a lesser degree in Moscow.¹⁰ This final period reflected both positive and negative aspects of women's publishing opportunities: there was an increase in the number of venues for individual authors to publish their works and a decrease in the funding available for collective projects.

The rise of women's prose occurred during a period of polarized change. Two opposing tendencies marked the overall gender climate of 1985-1991: critique of traditional roles by some academics on the one hand, and, on the other, the solidification of these very same identities by state and economic causes.¹¹ Nadezhda Azhgikhina also identifies the impact of Gorbachev's observation that society "should liberate women and give them the chance to stay at home."¹² This drive to redefine gender roles (whether in a progressive

9. Aside from authors featured in the provincial collections, Rovenskaia is the only Russian critic to discuss the four anthologies.

10. Rovenskaia, "K voprosu," pp. 294-309.

11. A number of factors questioned traditional gender roles: surveys dealing with marriage and sexuality; increased numbers of articles relating to women's issues; the 1990 creation of the Moscow Center for Gender Studies; the publication of past and recent women's literature; media coverage of feminists such as Ol'ga Lipovskaia; and the appearance of a small number of women's and feminist organizations. See Helena Gosילו, *Dehexing Sex: Russian Womanhood during and after Glasnost* (Ann Arbor: Univ. of Michigan Press, 1996), p. 12; *Gendernye issledovaniia v Rossii i SNG: Kto est' kto: Spravochnik*, Zoia Khotkina, ed. (Moscow: Tsentr dokumentatsii "Zhenskii arkhiv," 2000), p. viii. In 1988 Lipovskaia began publishing *Zhenskoe chtenie* (Women's Studies), a Leningrad-based periodical with articles by Russian feminists and translations of prominent Westerners such as Adrienne Rich. In addition to *Zhenskoe chtenie*, the Moscow-based journal *Preobrazhenie* (Transfiguration) appeared in 1993. These developments had less of an impact outside the center, although the Naberezhnye Chelny organization *Femina* remains one of several active provincial women's groups established during *perestroika*. See Sarah Henderson, "Femina," in *Encyclopedia of Russian Women's Movements*, Norma C. Noonan and Carol Nechemias, eds. (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2001), pp. 249-51.

12. Nadezhda Azhgikhina, "Zhenshchina kak ob"ekt i sub"ekt v sovremennoi rossiiskoi literature," *Sila slova-2: Novyi evropeiskii poriadok: Prava cheloveka, polozhenie zhenshin, i gendernaia tsenzura*, Nadezhda Azhgikhina, comp. (Moscow: Zhenskii mir i Èslan, 2000), p. 60. Whether intended as edict or suggestion, this formulation emboldened those who subscribed to an essentialist interpretation of female roles (Nadezhda Azhgikhina, interviewed by Benjamin Sutcliffe, Moscow, May 11, 2003); Natal'ia Startseva, "Damy s sobakami i bez," *Literaturnaia gazeta*, no. 30 (1988): 4. *Perestroika's* dramatic cultural changes precipitated a search for a stabilizing constant, which many Russians harnessed to a conservative interpretation of "proper" gender roles. See Tat'iana Klimenkova, "Perestroika kak gendernaia problema," in *Gender*

or conservative direction) resonates in the anthologies' depictions of working women robbed of their "natural" femininity, whether by callous husbands, the difficulties of everyday life, or the late-*perestroika* spread of pornography.¹³

After 1991 women's prose and literature as a whole dramatically changed. The economic and cultural shifts accompanying the end of the USSR (1991) marginalized high culture and the role of the intelligentsia.¹⁴ At the same time, there was a growing rift between the center and provinces due to closure of unprofitable local industry, impoverished local authorities, and the end of the publication and distribution system unifying the USSR.¹⁵

This background of accelerated social change gave women's writing an aura of crisis complementing authors' depictions of economic and social criticism. When the first volume of *Mariia* discusses how the anthology's appearance has been made possible by the "warming of the social and political climate," there is a fearful hesitancy in this description.¹⁶ The eponymous poem that prefaces *Mariia*, with its protagonist fleeing the 1990 Baku pogrom, thrusts the reader into an era of fear and instability. While pre-1985 women's writing associated crisis with individual experiences presumably shared by other women, the anthologies' editors warn of the destruction of Russian culture as a whole.

***Mariia* and the female provincial voice: Claiming identity**

Restructuring in Russian Studies, Marianne Liljeström, Eila Mäntysaari, and Arya Rosenholm, eds., Slavica Tamperensia, no. 11 (Tampere: [Univ. of Tampere], 1993), pp. 156-57).

13. *Perestroika's* new freedom of the press also permitted dramatically increased sexual exploitation of women's bodies in advertising and pornography (Goscilo, *Dehexing Sex*, pp. 13-15). Publicizing prostitution, the USSR's first beauty pageants, and photo models caused readers to reorient their image of women: previously seen as full (if flawed) participants in society, women in the late 1980s became linked to a small number of roles: prostitute, mother, pin-up star, and so forth (Azhgikhina, "Zhenshchina kak ob"ekt i sub"ekt," pp. 60-61).

14. Stephen Lovell argues that two crucial trends marked literature from 1986 to 1995. First, "the figure of the Russian reader became thoroughly demythologized," moving from rhetorical emblem ("the most avid readers in the world") to a mere "socio-economic reality." At the same time the book trade was exposed to a market hungry for the Western-style mass genres often marginalized during the Soviet era. See Stephen Lovell, *The Russian Reading Revolution: Print Culture in the Soviet and Post-Soviet Eras* (New York: St. Martin's, 2000), p. 158. The year 1993 was fatal for high-culture authors as overstocking and nonpayment became commonplace (Vladimir Korobov, "So Many Books, Yet So Few, or the New Publishing Crisis," Marian Schwartz, tr., Deming Brown, ed., *Russian Social Science Review*, no. 1 [1997]: 84). Russian intellectuals in both the center and provinces felt excluded and cheated by the mass culture that had gained prominence after the late-1980s relaxation of censorship.

15. Oleg Tikhonov, "Verim: chitatel' ostanetsia s nami," *Sever*, no. 1 (1998): 2; Vladimir Sudakov, "Ne slysha drug druga (poëticheskoe pole severnoi Rossii)," *ibid.*, no. 6 (1997): 112.

16. *Mariia*, 1990, p. 5.

The 1990 volume of *Mariia*, the first and in many ways most interesting of the provincial literary anthologies, opens by asserting primacy and regional allegiance:

Before you is the country's first women's literary almanac. It is based on works discussed at meetings in 1989-1990 of women writers and critics in Petrozavodsk and Kostomuksha in the northwestern part of the USSR.

Перед вами – первый в стране женский литературный альманах. Основу его составили произведения, обсуждавшиеся на совещаниях женщин-литераторов Северо-Запада РСФСР в 1989-1990 годах в Петрозаводске и Костомукше.¹⁷

Uniqueness blends with geographical precision and pride in two provincial cities being the first sites of an important endeavor. However, there is no mention of the Moscow-based women's collection (*Zhenskaia logika*) that had appeared a year earlier, nor any discussion of the two collections that were published in the capital in 1990: *Ne pomniashchaia zla* and *Chisten'kaia zhizn'*. This lapse illustrates the isolation faced by women writers outside Moscow/Leningrad, a condition exaggerated by the late-perestroika breakdown in book supply and distribution, paper shortages, and reduced budgets at local publishers.¹⁸ The Russian intelligentsia, however, has long scorned material obstacles, and *Mariia* is no exception as it implies that women's voices will triumph over the drab economic situation.

The introduction to the first volume connects literature, policymaking, and women's survival, implying that women's writing must first and foremost reflect life and its problems:

[T]he voice of the greater half of the country's population is practically unheard when deciding how to solve the most important problems, chief among them the problem of survival.

[Г]олос большей половины населения страны практически не слышен при решении важнейших проблем, главная из них – проблема выживания.¹⁹

17. *Ibid.*

18. *Ibid.*, p. 6.

19. *Ibid.*, p. 5.

The provincial anthology positions itself as a voice for women during times of crisis. Mariia Domaseva cites this passage in her introduction to the 1995 volume, noting that the state's interests are so far removed from women's that, she implies, it even condones human trafficking.²⁰ Unlike in previous eras, the anthology now connects these grievances directly to state neglect. For the editors and contributors of *Mariia*, the anthology provides an otherwise-absent venue for voicing women's thoughts and grievances.²¹

The collections provided material support as well as an arena for discussion. Both volumes of *Mariia* make explicit a primary purpose of the collections: paying authors who could not support themselves even before *perestroika*.²² There is an underlying metaphysical dimension to this need, as the editors note when complaining that women's writing, like high culture per se, is being excluded from contemporary society. *Glasnost*, they argue, leads to "lack of spirituality (bezdukhovnost'), the commercialization of life, when the main figure in the sanctuary of art has become the tradesman (torgovets)."²³ In 1995 Domaseva retrospectively characterized *perestroika* as a cultural apocalypse: ". . . all at once there was the collapse of the Writers, Artists, and Composers Unions, through which the state had previously provided material aid," leaving the creative professions demoralized and impoverished.²⁴ Women's prose, this commentary implies, is an integral part of the "sanctuary" of high culture besieged by the crass materialism of the market economy. The positive financial support provided by *Mariia* thus contrasts with the corrupting influence of for-profit publications.

Mariia appeared as a result of several 1989 women's literary conferences in Karelia, which also eventually produced *Zhena, kotoraiia umela letat'*, *Russkaia dusha*, and the local television show *Komnata dlia sestry Shekspira* (A Room for Shakespeare's Sister, 1992).²⁵ This gathering resembles the

20. *Mariia*, 1995, p. 4.

21. The introduction to the post-Soviet anthology *Russkaia dusha* even more dramatically states the need for women's expression. Recalling Elena Gan's formulation that a woman can either write or lose her mind, the editors observe that many contemporary women writers face this choice (*Russkaia dusha*, p. 6). This link between sharing experience and psychic stability, a mainstay of U. S. feminist critics Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, posits that women's literature, expression, and mental health are inextricably connected.

22. *Mariia*, 1990, p. 6; *Mariia*, 1995, p. 4.

23. *Mariia*, 1990, p. 5.

24. *Mariia*, 1995, pp. 3-4. However, she also acknowledges that the state had often used women's organizations to further its own agenda. This recognition separates Domaseva from those suffering from uncritical post-Soviet nostalgia, with its longing for the comfort of the Brezhnev and even Stalin years (*Mariia*, 1995, p. 5).

25. Irina Savkina, "Zhenskaia proza – bez kavychek," *Literaturnaia uchëba*, no. 3 (1997):

72. Several factors supported these women's anthologies in Karelia: generous local authorities

event in Moscow to which Svetlana Vasilenko ascribes the creation of *Ne pomniashchaia zla* and *Novye amazonki*: a 1988 meeting between Vasilenko and the writer Larisa Vasil'eva, where both authors realized that women were being excluded from literary projects.²⁶ In both cases women, barred from the established cultural space of the “thick” journal, create anthologies as their own arena. This arena reacted against consciousness of female authors’ literary and, in the case of *Mariia*, geographical marginality. Such awareness is one of the defining moments of contemporary women’s prose: unlike earlier authors (Natal’ia Baranskaia, I. Grekova), the creators of *Mariia* and *Ne pomniashchaia zla* recognized “their” prose as fundamentally different, if only because of scorn by male-dominated publishers.

Despite such assertions of alterity, northwest Russia’s women’s anthologies inherited the traditions of post-Stalinist literary culture. Two trends shaped the form and content of the volumes: 1. the antagonistic styles of city prose, *drugaia proza* (different prose), and village prose; 2. *samizdat* (underground) anthologies. *Gorodskaiia proza* (city prose), the major style of official Soviet writing from the late 1960s-mid 1980s, used characters’ personal lives as indices of Soviet urban experience.²⁷ In the tellingly titled “Kak ia ne stala pisatel’nitsei” (How I Didn’t Become a Writer), Mar’ia Leena Raunio uses the objective language and documentary impulse inherited from city prose to describe her failed career:

Work, family, keeping house, a poet husband who needs to have the “right environment” created for him in the crowded space of our small

(*Mariia*, 1990 and 1995), financing by neighboring Finnish organizations (*Zhena, kotoraiia umela letat’*), and support from German Slavists (*Zhena, kotoraiia umela letat’*, *Russkaia dusha*). While the second two categories are an example of like-minded Western groups subsidizing women’s writing, *Mariia*’s funding also brought together two unlikely partners: a Petrozavodsk construction company (Kondopoga) and the Women’s Union of the Republic of Karelia (*Mariia*, 1995, p. 2).

26. Svetlana Vasilenko, “‘Novye amazonki’ (Ob istorii pervoi literaturnoi zhenskoi pisatel’skoi gruppy. Postsovetskoe vremia),” in *Zhenshchina: Svoboda slova i svoboda tvorchestva. Sbornik statei*. Valentina Kizilo, ed., Svetlana Vasilenko, comp. (Moscow: Èslan, 2001), pp. 80-82.

27. These portrayals, operating through accrual of facts, reduced scope, and quasi-direct narratorial discourse, centered on the politically inert realm of the quotidian and thus were palatable despite discussion of shortages, overcrowding, and quiet desperation. See David Lowe, *Russian Writing since 1953: A Critical Survey* (New York: Ungar, 1987), p. 43. Previous women authors, such as Baranskaia and Grekova, had chosen to operate within the staid style of *gorodskaiia proza* and the closely related trend of *literatura byta* (prose of everyday life) popularized by Iurii Trifonov. See Nicholas Zekulin, “Soviet Russian Women’s Literature in the Early 1980s,” in *Fruits of Her Plume: Essays on Contemporary Russian Women’s Culture*, Helena Goscilo, ed. (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 1993), p. 36.

single room heated by the stove (they say that some people manage to write in the bathroom; I am not going to talk about the kitchen, since we didn't have such a thing). Then children, my husband's university studies, divorce and my mother's illness, which lasted for years as she died slowly and painfully at home on my hands. Who is not familiar with these scenes?

Работа, семья, ведение хозяйства, муж-поэт, которому надо "создавать условия" в тесноте единственной комнатки с печным отоплением (говорят, кто-то умудряется писать в ванной или туалете, о кухне уж не говорю – ничего этого у нас не было). Потом дети, учеба мужа в университете, развод и растянувшаяся на годы болезнь матери, которая умирала долго и мучительно дома, на моих руках. Кому незнакомы эти картины?²⁸

This grim description combines *gorodskaiia proza*'s focus on everyday life and the crushing poverty unmentionable before the late 1980s. By making writing dependent on a specifically female *byt* (childcare, a dependent husband) Raunio undermines a crucial myth of the Russian intelligentsia and the genesis of *Mariia*: intellect triumphs over difficult material circumstances.

The 1980s trend *drugaia* (or *novaia*) *proza* (different or new prose) was a second influence on the collections, e.g., Rada Polishchuk in *Mariia* (1990), Nina Gorlanova and Lidiia Iusipova in *Russkaia dusha*.²⁹ Village prose (*derevenskaia proza*), another contributing style, seems like a more "natural" choice for anthologies concerned with connections between women and the countryside. Indeed, *Mariia* notes that a guiding concern of its first issue is

28. *Mariia*, 1990, p. 269.

29. In Moscow and Leningrad Liudmila Petrushevskaia and Tat'iana Tolstaia were among the most visible writers of *drugaia proza*, a catch-all term applied to innovative fiction distinguishing itself from the legacies of Socialist Realism as well as city and village prose. *Drugaia proza*'s lack of pathos and its distance from verisimilitude marked 1980s literature in several ways. The fiction of this era, whether by men or women, refused to honor stereotypes created by previous authors, challenged the hypocritical standards of Soviet morality, and pursued stylistic innovation. See Oleg Dark, "Mir mozhet byt' liuboi," *Druz'ba narodov*, no. 6 (1990): 223; Rovenskaia, "K voprosu o periodizatsii," p. 292). Critics later applied these attributes to women's prose through the age-old principle of guilt by association. Denying the ties between women's prose and realism, however, dehistoricizes its development, particularly the earlier documentary impulse of Baranskaia and Grekova, which helped legitimate women's issues through works such as *Nedelia kak nedelia* (*A Week Like Any Other*, 1969) and *Damskii master* (*Ladies' Hairdresser*, 1962).

“the horrible state of the environment, poisoned water and food,” along with the metaphorical toxins of pornography and heavy metal.³⁰

What is missing from this list of woes is another traditional target of village prose: *drugaiia proza* and its shocking themes and styles. Preservation of traditional rural life, conservative gender mores, and concern over the costs of modernity have marked village prose since its beginning in the late 1950s. These themes also limit the images of country life acknowledged by publishers, as suggested by the editor in Meshko’s story. Indeed, during the early 1990s ideological battles between “traditional” writing (city and village prose) and new writing (*drugaiia proza*), the introduction to *Mariia* is a rare neutral zone. The editors nonchalantly observe that “The collection presents not only traditional (traditsionnaia) but also “different” (*drugaiia*) literature.”³¹ This coexistence implies that economic necessity subsumes ideological differences – the contributors tacitly agreed to forego literary hostilities in favor of being published. A more hopeful interpretation would add that the common goal of voicing women’s experiences rendered other issues secondary.

The Soviet underground literary tradition also shaped the provincial collections. The idea to anthologize women’s writing may have derived from the 1970s *samizdat* tradition, which had produced Tat’iana Mamonova’s edited anthology *Zhenshchina i Rossiia* (Woman and Russia).³² There had, of course, been earlier unofficial collections of both men’s and women’s writing in the USSR. The best known, *Tarusskie stranitsy* (Pages from Tarusa, 1961) used the omnibus format of the anthology and a provincial publishing house to publish new and previously banned prose, poetry, and drama.³³ *Tarusskie stranitsy*, Mamonova’s group, and *Mariia* used the collection to compensate for exclusion from the “thick” journals, whether this barring stemmed from ideological or economic causes.

Post-Soviet anthologies: Alterity and collective identity

When the Russian-Finnish anthology *Zhena, kotoraiia umela letat’* appeared in 1993 its preface opened with a striking image of female

30. *Mariia*, 1990, p. 5.

31. *Mariia*, 1990, p. 6. Little research has been done on the connection between village prose and women’s writing. For a tentative discussion, see Helena Gosciolo’s “Coming a Long Way, Baby: A Quarter-Century of Russian Women’s Fiction,” *The Harriman Institute Forum*, no. 1 (1992): 8-9. In great part this oversight is due to Moscow/St. Petersburg publishers and journals assuming provincial writers to be both marginal and second-rate. Western scholars, for their part, have also been reluctant to investigate the writing of either men or women beyond the center.

32. Rovenskaia, “K voprosu o periodizatsii,” p. 293.

33. *Tarusskie stranitsy*, V. Koblikov, ed., N. Otten, comp. (Kaluga: Kaluzhskoe knizhnoe izdatel’stvo, 1961).

storytellers from the “time of the Amazons,” who preserved “the memory of secret women’s organizations, united against men and their power.”³⁴ This provocative comparison evokes an unacknowledged literary female tradition plus a putative foe (“men and their power”), both mainstays of a feminist imagery absent from the first volume of *Mariia* and critiqued in the second.³⁵ Mythic women-warriors also recall the introduction to Vasilenko’s explicitly feminist *Novye amazonki*: “For reasons connected to the irregular life in the field of combat, the Amazon did not come out from under Gogol’s overcoat. Everyone else did, but not her.”³⁶ Revising Fëdor Dostoevskii’s formulation about the Gogolian roots of modern Russian literature, Vasilenko and the editors reject an “alien” past while implying the importance of this same disdained legacy. Literary tradition legitimates its opponents, who gain stature by association through alterity.

Russkaia dusha – the second post-Soviet anthology from northwest Russia – less originally depicts the “nature” of women. Elena Markova, one of the contributors, enumerates ideologically conservative *derevenshchiki* (Viktor Astafëv, Vasiliï Belov, Valentin Rasputin, and so forth) as the volume’s intellectual predecessors, while asserting that this collection appeared with neither “manifestoes nor programs.”³⁷ Reiterating the names of such “voices” of the provinces takes on a ritual significance that ironically recalls the Soviet invocation of Marx, Engels, and Lenin, a trio justly ridiculed by village prose.

The provincial anthologies offer significantly different treatments of a central concern of village prose: the relationship between humans and the natural world. Elena Germakovskaia’s “Mashka” is a clichéd but touching story of a woman’s increasing identification with her cow when the latter gives birth.³⁸ Such parallel images of motherhood and nurturing link the narrative with other women’s writing such as Vasilenko’s “Khriusha” (Piggy), which underscores the organic connection between all living things.

34. *Zhena, kotoraiia umela letat'*, p. 3.

35. *Mariia*, 1995, pp. 5-6. In the 1995 volume Domaseva characterizes “feminism” as something alien to national tradition, despite the efforts of many Russian feminists and northwest Russia’s proximity to Scandinavia. She suggests that such failure comes from isolation and mistrust of “-isms,” making the reasonable claim that a phrase such as “women helping women” or “women’s solidarity” might have been more successful (*Mariia*, 1995, pp. 6-7).

36. Vasilenko, *Novye amazonki*, p. 4.

37. *Russkaia dusha*, p. 11. Markova does not explore how these nationalist authors could inspire a publication issued in Germany and funded mostly by Frank Göpfert, the most active European supporter of Russian women’s literature. Such a sponsor would presumably disagree with a *derevenshchik* such as Rasputin, who warns that women are losing their “traditional” femininity in the modern world. See Valentin Rasputin, “Cherchez la femme,” *Nash sovremennik*, no. 3 (1990): 168.

38. *Zhena, kotoraiia umela letat'*, pp. 250-51.

The drunken swineherd Valentin in Lidiia Iusipova's "Cherez ruchi" (Crossing the Creek) irrevocably destroys this bond. After thinking all day about the "Leader" (Stalin) and pretending his faithful dog is a Chekist, Valentin feeds sausage to his pigs, noting that "Meat swallows up meat."³⁹ The symbiosis between human and nature is violated via the metaphoric cannibalism of Stalinism. Iusipova's work suggests that village prose is no longer a viable aesthetic in a world permitting such transgression.

Varying depictions of rural life are secondary in importance to the unifying image of these anthologies: the enduring trope of Russia as mother.⁴⁰ This symbol is reworked via the female trinity province/woman/Russia, whose religious overtones color the names of two anthologies (*Mariia*, *Russkaia dusha*). This pairing, a clear legacy of village prose and longstanding ambivalence over urbanization, is not new within women's writing.⁴¹

A more utopian variant on this theme posits that now, as in past crises, the rhetorically and grammatically feminine "provinces" (provintsiia) can solve the dilemmas of the Russian people and the entire world.⁴² Mariia Domsaeva makes the slightly less messianic assertion that there is something true in the lines of the Petrozavodsk poet Elena Soini, who observes that "Russia preserves itself through the provinces and through the love of a Russian woman."⁴³

The provinces are both salvation and a metaphorical community, with assumed common interests stemming from the "greater half of the population" and conveyed through literary anthologies. These anthologies serve as a surrogate collective to replace the cultural space of Soviet discourse, an arena significantly discredited by the early 1990s. Likewise, the generational ties strained by social change can be repaired through the collections: in this "Time of Troubles" (smutnye vremena) there is a special need for advice from the older generation who, like the grandmother in fairy tales, points to the right path.⁴⁴

39. *Mariia*, 1990, p. 157.

40. Goscilo, *Dehexing Sex*, pp. 32-33.

41. Vasilenko, while not discussing connections to the provinces, describes female expression as central. Explaining that the first name for *Ne pomniashchaia zla* was to be "The Great Silent Woman Has Spoken" (Velikaia nemaia zagovorila), she clarifies that this phrase signals the beginning of women's literature, which will end millennia of female silence (Vasilenko, "Novye amazonki," p. 85). The provincial anthologies make a similar link between women's expression and hopes for a new era in Russian culture.

42. *Russkaia dusha*, p. 11.

43. *Mariia*, 1995, p. 7.

44. *Russkaia dusha*, p. 22.

Such communication is necessary due to women's shared experiences, whose literary representation for Markova constitutes a "Women's Book" uniting discrete yet interconnected narratives and the individual lives they depict.⁴⁵ Female authors identify themselves through gender or react to others' identifications, suggesting that women's anthologies are a collective identity, "a 'summative' (*summarnaia*) personality on the path towards forming its own cultural tradition."⁴⁶

The cultural wellspring of northwestern Russia is the symbolic focal point for the anthologies' collective identity. The region's image, however, is more complicated than one might expect from Markova's generalizations. In Galina Skvortsova's "Russkaia dusha" (Russian Soul), the American Michael has an affair with married Ol'ga Kazanova, who in turn discovers the Westerner with a buxom younger woman.⁴⁷ This detail is especially galling to Ol'ga, who, as the narrator disapprovingly relates, fed her child from a

45. *Zhena, kotoraiia umela letat'*, p. 404.

46. Tat'iana Rovenskaia, "Vinovata li ia . . . ? Ili fenomenu gendernoi viny (na materiale zhenskoi prozy 80-kh--nachalo 90-kh godov)," *Gendernye issledovaniia*, no. 3 (1999): 215. Beginning in perestroika critics responded to women's writing as a communal phenomenon, judging it as a presumably unified whole. Irina Savkina woefully summarizes the general critical response:

Все критические статьи начинаются по-разному . . . кроме тех, что посвящены женской литературе. Последнее, как правило, открываются размышлениями, достойно ли делить литературу по половому признаку, существует ли вообще пресловутая женская проза. (*Zhena, kotoraiia umela letat'*, p. 389)

All critical articles begin in different ways . . . except those devoted to women's literature. The latter, as a rule, open by considering whether it is worthwhile to divide literature by sex, whether this notorious women's prose actually exists.

The emphasis on collective identity is one way in which women authors attempt to compensate for lack of a well-documented past. Russian women's writing is marked by alienation and no sense of a stable identity: *glasnost'* women authors did not assume that previous female writers might be awaiting rediscovery. See Rosalind Marsh, "Introduction: New Perspectives on Women and Gender in Russian Literature," in *Gender and Russian Literature*, Rosalind Marsh, trans. and ed., (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1996), pp. 2-4; Catriona Kelly, "Missing Links: Russian Women Writers as Critics of Women Writers," in *Russian Writers on Russian Writers*, Faith Wigzell, ed., (Oxford and Providence: Berg, 1994), p. 68. This supposition posits a lack of tradition that, according to U. S. feminist Elaine Showalter, makes women's writing derivative in the eyes of critics and the authors themselves – it is a perpetual newcomer and must constantly reinvent its identity (Elaine Showalter, *A Literature of Their Own: British Women Novelists from Brontë to Lessing* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1977), pp. 11-12). The introduction to *Russkaia dusha*, with its discussion of women's writing in Karelia from the 1940s-1990s, is one of the few exceptions to this sense of literary amnesia (p. 7).

47. *Russkaia dusha*, pp. 172, 176.

bottle to preserve the shape of her breasts.⁴⁸ The affair between Ol'ga's younger rival and Michael stresses several patterns in post-Soviet culture, provincial women's prose, and Russian literature as a whole: older men and younger women, the unfaithful wife as doomed (e.g., Anna Karenina), and predacious foreigners exploiting Russian women. None too subtly emphasizing the third issue, the narrator alludes to a dream where Michael sells Ol'ga.⁴⁹

Ol'ga's symbolic first name ("holy"), last name (related to the city of Kazan', with its famous icon of the Virgin Mary), and nickname ("Russian Soul") act as a folkloric trebling, reiterating her "Russianness." However, this identity is thoroughly corrupt: both she and her husband are unfaithful and the bottle-feeding implies that Ol'ga has broken one of Russian culture's central maternal taboos: placing physical appearance above her child's health. In one of the anthology's introductory articles Markova biting notes that this choice shows that Ol'ga has changed from mother to courtesan.⁵⁰ Her last name (Kazanova) also suggests "Casanova," reiterating bifurcation between traditional (viz., chaste) Russian femininity and the morally suspect women led astray by the West.

Markova's retrograde commentary complicates the idea of the "Russian soul," a problem lost on those (including Skvortsova) who chose this title for an anthology lauding provincial female identity. Markova's discussion also warns against "xenophilia," suggesting a clear distinction between Russian/pure and alien/impure, a simplistic formulation that "Russkaia dusha" challenges.⁵¹ The carnal Kazanova supports Rovenskaia's assertion that Russo-Soviet ideology operates on women through their bodies – a truism extending to the sometimes essentialist dicta of provincial women's prose as it uses "natural" gender roles as a unifying principle.⁵²

The end of the provincial anthologies: New markets, new individualism

No new anthologies of provincial women's writing have appeared since 1995 and, indeed, only Vasilenko's collection *Bryzgi shampanskogo* (Splashes of Champagne, 2002) has been issued in Moscow. Publishing factors and a shift from collective to individual identity suggest that the brief era of the women's anthology has ended. On an economic level, Russia's disastrous 1998 default bankrupted many potential local sponsors. Likewise,

48. *Ibid.*, p. 174.

49. *Ibid.*, pp. 173-74.

50. *Ibid.*, p. 18.

51. *Ibid.*

52. Tat'iana Rovenskaia, "Zhenskaia proza serediny 1980-kh--nachala 1990-kh godov. (Problematika, mental'nost', identifikatsiia)," *Kandidatskaia dissertatsiia* (Moskovskii gosudarstvennyi universitet, 2000), p. 191.

the standard of living in the provinces remains much lower than in the center, a disparity that has increased even after the post-default “recovery.”⁵³ This more modest disposable income in turn influences book sales, especially those of local authors.

Rovenskaia, discussing the development of women’s prose, notes that its third stage (beginning in the mid-1990s) came with increased contact with foreigners, more formal discussion of gender, and a shift from collective to individual publications.⁵⁴ This shift is in many ways positive: “thick” journals published more women authors, thus reopening the traditional road to reaching readers among the intelligentsia.⁵⁵ In the late 1990s many of Russia’s largest publishers (notably prestigious Vagrius) began publishing more women authors. Vagrius and the popular Èksmo publishing houses issued the prose of Vasilenko, Liudmila Ulitskaia, Galina Shcherbakova, and Liudmila Petrushevskaiia, a milestone that for supporters posits this literature’s cultural value (and profitability). Vagrius’s series *Zhenskii pocherk: Nastoiashchaia zhenskaia proza* (Women’s Handwriting: Real Women’s Prose) featured Vasilenko, Ulitskaia, Shcherbakova and a small number of provincial writers (e.g., Nina Gorlanova, Ol’ga Slavnikova) alongside translations of Joyce Carol Oates and Iris Murdoch.⁵⁶

The late 1990s expansion of publishing venues for individual authors from both the provinces and center facilitated a shift from collective to individual literary identity. Such a change occurred within the context of women’s prose becoming a central part of Russian culture. This legitimacy, however, would not have been possible without the controversy surrounding literary anthologies, whether from the center or provinces. Northwestern Russia’s four collections are a microcosm of contemporary women’s literature, with

53. Radwan Shaban, *et al.*, *Reducing Poverty through Growth and Social Policy Reform in Russia* (Washington, DC: World Bank, 2006), p. 109.

54. Rovenskaia, “K voprosu o periodizatsii”: 308-09.

55. *Ibid.*, p. 309.

56. Vagrius carefully separated the series from other, presumably less worthy types of writing by women: “This is not ‘women’s novels’ in a middle-brow sense. This is real literature” (Knizhnye serii izdatel’stva VAGRIUS, <http://www.vagrius.ru/series/>).

their complexities and contradictions providing a valuable insight into this undervalued portion of literary history.

Miami University