

Lives in Transit: Contemporary Russian Women's Writing

Helena Goscilo, Editor

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Helena Goscilo, Chair and Professor in the Department of Slavic and East European Languages and Literatures at Ohio State University, has edited a remarkably satiating, intelligent anthology featuring short stories by twenty-three of Russia's eminent and emerging women fiction writers as well as selections from six poets, several of whom are translated into English for the first time. Through stories that were mostly penned during the 1980s, *Lives in Transit* examines challenges wrought by household concerns, love, sexuality, and other traditionally "feminine" topics in settings that range from apartments in Leningrad and Moscow to a rural abortion clinic. Male and female narrators with divergent backgrounds and varying degrees of ingenuity, aplomb, and resilience confront modernity and its sometimes harsh conditions—including violence and poverty—with occasional encounters with quiet heroism.

In "Sergusha," by Alla Kalinina, and "Vera Perova," by Nadezhda Kozhevnikova, the workplace bristles as a proving ground, the former for an ingenue who seeks her employer's attention, and the latter for the titular character determined to be known for her own achievements rather than for beauty and its privileges; in the fabular "Wicked Girls," by Nina Sadur, a magical occurrence puzzles a couple, while in Tatiana Nabatnikova's realistic "A Bus Driver Named Astap," an athlete is raped by her team's driver; both stories expertly play with themes of menace, power, and the absence of power; in "Going After Goat Antelopes," by Svetlana Vasilenko, and "Where Did the Streetcar Go," by Irina Polianskaia, unreliable narrators create versions of another character's circumstances that intrigue with psychological implications; and in Liudmila Ulitskaia's "Gulia," and "Slowly the Old Woman ...," by Nina Katerli, aging women attempt to maintain their dignity in spite of their diminishing means.

Other stories deserving of special mention include Dina Rubina's "The Blackthorn," featuring the son of divorced parents who wrestles between loyalties in a rich narration that shuttles between the delights of childhood and increasing doubts; "First Try," by Viktoria Tokareva, a portrait of a bold, imposing character whose final illness robs her of the charms she had relied upon; and "Uncle Khor and Koriakin," by Galina Shcherbakova, an account of two unrelated men caring for a daughter after her mother's death. For women's studies, fiction, translation, libraries, and personal collections, *Lives in Transit* is an essential choice. Goscilo's sharp sense for drawing powerful voices together in ways that dialogue with each other results in a provocative work.

KAREN RIGBY (Spring 2013)

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