



mensional world. In the world where "Childhood was a garden without end or limit," a child's fantasy is shaped by folklore and other cultural norms.

Tradition itself, the triteness of her protagonists' aspirations, moral values, calculated behaviour, and other cultural banalities which are responsible for their unhappy lives, are often the target of her humorous observations. Thus, what is interesting in Tolstaya's stories, even to the foreign reader, is not so much the unfamiliar and new facts about Soviet life that these stories bring, as the fresh views of the well known, socially accepted and prescribed conventionalities, which although presented against the background of Soviet society, touch us all and make us ponder about similar issues in our own society.

THE PROGRESS OF LOVE

Alice Munro. Canada: Penguin Books, 1987.

Mariam Shaumian

Having been born and raised in Moscow makes it difficult to appreciate the complexity of life in other places, in this case Canada. Brief travels are of little help. At school I began to study the English language. This gave me a chance to gain at least some acquaintance with English-language literature and cinema, including some of the things they never translated

into Russian. Undoubtedly this was — and is — a valuable source for learning something about life abroad.

At first, I was much more fond of detective-romantic themes, such as the novels of James Hadley Chase, and films of the same kind. However, as time went on, I became more interested in writers like John Updike, Irwin Shaw, F. Scott Fitzgerald, E.L. Doctorow, Belle Kaufman, and so on. Some I read in Russian, others in the original. While reading, consciously or unconsciously, I was always looking for comparisons with our Soviet life, something in common.

On the other hand, the contrasts always struck me immediately. Here I would like to stop and discuss the book I have most recently read, Alice Munro's *The Progress of Love*.

I must confess that I am more familiar with this genre in Soviet literature. This style — short stories, social drama, vignettes of life, written by a woman with her own definite and intimate viewpoint on many things — is these days becoming more and more popular in the USSR.

To my mind the majority of questions being raised by women today are more-or-less similar, whether they are being posed by Soviet or Canadian women. However, if I may put it this way, Soviet women haven't yet "grown up" to many of your problems.

This is very closely connected with our difficult and acute economic situation in the Soviet Union. From this comes the problems which most concern us: the shortages of food, vegetables and fruits, huge line-ups, deficiencies in medical care, lack of children's institutions, the inadequacy of our consumer services, and many others. I don't suppose women in Canada worry about: where to buy? How to get? What to put on? What to do laundry and dishes with?

I imagine, you have a different order of questions: How to make ends meet? How to save your nerves?

However, I would like to return to Alice Munro, an author I've just gotten to know but who has deeply excited my interest. After all, my husband is Canadian, and I am certainly not indifferent to how women live in Canada. Who knows, probably this is my own future.

Alice Munro, I notice, often writes for and about single women. For her, most of all, this means divorced women, their

thoughts, their feelings, their concerns, lifestyle and so on. The main themes revolve around relationships between divorced couples, with their children, and others. From my point of view, the author is very sensitive and delicate, capable of looking into peoples' souls, divining their complex emotions, their joys, heartaches, their attachments and antipathies, the whole complicated range of human feelings.

Her treatment of family questions is of considerable interest to me because in my country today these problems seem equally acute. The divorce rate is constantly rising. More and more mothers are left to raise children — sometimes more than one — completely on their own. My impression is that most Canadian family incomes — including those of single mothers — are higher than in our country. In many respects, I think, this is due to a much higher standard of life in general, although I am aware that many Canadians, including mothers and children, live below the poverty line. We also have such problems in our country. At the most recent Congress of Peoples Deputies of the USSR, this question was raised — the problems of the lowest-income groups of our society. For example, many retired people, particularly those living in rural districts, receive between 32-40 roubles per month, a sum which is almost impossible to live on. (The Congress decided to raise this amount to 70 roubles, better, but also difficult to manage with). For the first year of a child's life, a mother who is not working receives just 35 roubles per month from the state, regardless of whether she has other sources of income. All those questions undoubtedly require significant correction.

Judging by what I've heard and read about Canada, you have managed to arrange medical services more effectively than we have, particularly for children. All this lightens the burden for mothers. Besides this, in the case of divorce, the obligations of the man under the law towards his former wife and, particularly, children, seem higher and more clearly determined than in our country. According to our law, the husband's salary is garnisheed at a rate of 25 percent, but salaries are often so low that this comes to very little.

While reading Alice Munro, I also noted that relations between parents and grown

children often differ greatly from general behaviour in our country. In the Soviet Union older parents and their married children, even with families, often still live together. This can be explained not only by our housing problem — though that is very relevant — but also by the fact that we tend to have much closer relationships. The extended family is still very much alive in our society. Mutual assistance and co-operation between the generations is an everyday set of arrangements.

From what I read, it seems to me that the generations in Canada are far more torn apart, at least physically if not always spiritually. The characters in Alice Munro's stories have mostly abandoned their homes early in life, left to study or begin working, and then face a similar situation with their own children.

Of course, reading Munro, like other authors who write simply and frankly about life, leads you to analyze and contemplate your own lot. Since two cultures are represented in my own family — Canadian and Soviet — I would like to be able to take the best and kindest features of each. This relates to the family as well as life in general. I hope that, thanks to the steadily widening contacts between people of different countries, many of our women will also have the opportunity to learn something from you, to see things in new ways, and perhaps also to make you reconsider some of your views. Time will tell!

IS THE FUTURE FEMALE?

Lynne Segal. London: Virago, 1987.

Denise Russell

Is the future female? Lynne Segal's answer is 'no' — her vision is for a human future in which the balance between the sexes is equalized. Feminism is needed to reach such a future, but it must be a feminism with a socialist bent, a feminism that is tied down to the social practices of women and men, in and out of the home. She criticizes "cultural feminism" that stands aloof from social practices and glorifies the eternal female.

In the course of developing this critique, Segal provides an informative survey of different strands of current femi-

nist thought and practice.

The weaknesses of cultural feminism in the analyses of sexuality, motherhood and peace are fully explored; in particular, she points out how this direction in feminism can lead to a very reactionary politics. Cultural feminism is represented by authors such as Mary Daly and Dale Spender, who claim that there are essential biological differences between the sexes which have a profound effect on our psychologies. Segal links the French feminist Kristeva and Irigaray in with this trend, and accuses them of "psychic essentialism." I find the latter a confusing and perhaps contradictory notion — in that essentialism usually gets its meaning in relation to some type of biological imperative — and hence her critique of French feminism rather poorly developed. Yet in other feminist debates, (e.g. in Australia, where I teach) it is the French feminists rather than Daly and Spender who are more often set in opposition to socialist feminism. The former attempt what they see as a 'higher-level' challenge — a challenge to the structures of thought that we use to give meaning to ourselves and our lives. This is of course very abstract, usually removed from particular social practices. But many believe that if you don't change underlying conceptions, then oppressive social practices will be perpetuated. As this is a complex, long-term project it's a bit unfair to demand that such a feminism have an effect on social practices here and now. I don't believe that this direction in feminism need be incompatible with the socialist feminism that Segal supports, a feminism which

stresses the social and economic disadvantages of women and seeks to change and improve women's immediate circumstances, not just in the area of paid work and family life, but by providing funding for women's cultural projects, increasing women's safety in the streets or meeting the special needs of particular groups of women.

It is true that women rarely support or work in both alternatives, but this may be due more to opportunity and interest rather than any deep theoretical incompatibility. In attempting to promote an exclusively socialist feminism Segal may be restricting the avenues for liberation. Yet I strongly support her emphasis on chang-

ing social practices, and the need to form close alliances with men on the left involved in struggles against sexual and non-sexual forms of oppression.

In the end it is more a 'reformist socialism' that Segal supports rather than a 'revolutionary' one, in that she advocates involvement in traditional government structures. Some might see this as defeatist and not really socialist, but as we see in our local struggles, the choice often reduces to either doing nothing outside the structures or achieving a little within them. We don't have time to wait for the revolution.

Is the Future Female? gives us an important warning against certain directions in feminist thought and a reminder that there is still much to be done to make the future human.

MOTHERS IN THE FATHERLAND: Women, the Family and Nazi Politics

Claudia Koonz. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1987.

Louise H. Mahood

"The Nazi Revolution will be an entirely male event," Adolf Hitler was fond of saying. While few women were intimately involved in the death-oriented regime, Hitler's policies invaded the private lives of the majority of German women. Claudia Koonz's work has broken the silence of the abuse suffered by women during the Nazi era. Her work is innovative but painful to read. The quality of rigorous feminist scholarship makes her book a worthy addition to our libraries.

Koonz does not relieve women Nazis of their part in Hitler's master plan. She tells stories of how female Nazi guards were more cruel to the women than the male SS guards. Yet, her work does focus on the stories of a few women and the cost of Hitler's policies to all women. Nazism was one reaction to the Weimar Republic.

The Weimar Republic had welcomed women as citizens though not equals in work or wages. The "New Woman" earned her keep but was a target too. To Nazis the "New Woman" was either the "girl" type who seduced men or the "third sex" who competed with them. They blamed this