knew woman"), even though Italian and other feminists have pointed out the costs of essentialist ideologies of maternity. She also approves his calls for female pacificism before WWII, without noting that these views were in line with Stalinist policies so costly to women in the USSR and western communist parties.

The second component emerges most clearly in her discussion of the theories of nineteenth century biologist, Lydia Kochetkova. For Kochetkova, sexual reproduction was merely a stage on the way to parthenogenesis and nature would inevitably progress toward the higher female form. Outdoing Mary Elman's later version of the adventurous ovum's wild flight into the unknown through the fallopian tube, Kochetkova sees the ovum, richly complete with nutrients, as a last refuge for the impoverished sperm's weaker life force. With "reproduction and development in contradiction," the effective reduction of "the procreation [sic] instinct" allows the new women to restore their "concentrated universal energy" with the result that "the sensitivity and responsiveness of the nervous system increases." In turn, according to Mamonova, as a result of the fine tuning of the nervous system, "feelings of sympathy occupy an ever larger place in the person's soul." Part of the problem here is language, part western feminism's rejection of motherhood. But, there is also a peculiar willingness to try to find direct material causes for "spiritual" effects unmediated by social relations, and a corresponding tendency to reductionism.

In these respects, her outlook is uncongenial to much of western socialist-feminism. And indeed, Mamonova hints at her difficulties with collectivist styles of work and loudly denounces her exclusion from UNESCO forums, her misrepresentation in the mass media, and her inability to fund her project of printing and smuggling feminist books into the USSR. But despite an unfortunate reputation as being difficult to work with, the Mamonova who emerges in these essays is nonetheless a committed feminist, driven by a project, albeit beset by the contradictions of exile and cut off from whatever possibilities for feminist mobilization that new political conditions in the USSR — which, after all, produced this issue of *CWS/cf* — may provide.

TERRIBLE PERFECTION: Women and Russian Literature

Barbara Heldt. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1987.

Diana Greene

The publication of Barbara Heldt's *Terrible Perfection: Women and Russian Literature* is something of an event. Heldt has given us the first application of feminist theory to the history of Russian literature.

Of course, such studies already exist for other literatures, but here as in most aspects, the women's movement of the 1970s has been slower to reach U.S. Slavic Studies than other academic fields. For example, the Modern Language Association — from which Slavicists are noticeably absent — established a Commission on the Status of Women as early as 1969 and a Women's Caucus in 1970. Not surprisingly, at the same time feminist literary criticism within the organization began to flourish and became probably the most fertile and vital approach to Western literature. In classrooms, on conference panels, in articles, and in books feminist scholars began to look at how men and women writers portray women in their works, and to what effect; how the historical differences between being a woman and a man writer might have affected authors' works and audiences' perceptions of them; and why the many excellent women writers being rediscovered had been "forgotten," i.e. who determines literary canons and on what basis. Clearly for these scholars there could be no separation between changing the form of academic life — improving the status of women in the profession — and changing its content — incorporating more than a few token women writers into the canon and legitimizing women's issues as subjects of scholarship and discussion.

The picture in Slavic studies during this time was quite different. In my generally excellent graduate education during the 1970s I never read anything about feminist criticism or Russian women's history. I was very surprised to discover, some years after graduating, that there had been two separate nineteenth-century Russian women's movements and that one could even see their effects in familiar works by Tolstoi, Dostoevskii, Turgenev and some of the Russian symbolists. While more recently a few brave souls in various universities have been offering courses on women in Russian history and Russian literature, as yet feminist criticism rarely appears in Slavic journals. Up to now, at conferences one has been lucky to find as many as two panels on women's issues, although in an apparent concession to the women's movement the program of one recent conference listed the men chairing panels as "chairmen" while carefully designating all the women as "chairpersons."

Recently, however, Slavic studies have begun to change. Two years ago the two largest American Slavic organizations — AATSEEL and AAASS — formed women's caucuses and AAASS established a Commission on the Status of Women. Around the same time, Barbara Heldt's book appeared.

Heldt is a pioneer in the field of Russian feminist studies. In 1978 she became the first to translate into English *A Double Life* (1848), the unconventional novel by the nineteenth-century poet Karolina Pavlova. Heldt's introductory essay put Pavlova's life into a feminist perspective, something totally new in Russian literary criticism.

In *Terrible Perfection* Heldt looks at the history of Russian literature as a whole and presents an intriguing thesis: she notes that unlike other European literatures in which women novelists have a prominent place, in Russian literature men traditionally have dominated prose fiction, including fiction depicting women's most intimate thoughts and feelings. The images of women created by men in Russian prose fiction appear to be very positive, if not idolatrous; Russian literature is famous for its strong women characters such as Tatiana in Pushkin's *Eugene Onegin*, Natasha in Tolstoy's *War and Peace*, Nataliia in Turgenev's *Rudin*, characters often depicted as being too good for the weak male characters who court them. Indeed, Russian men even promoted women's liberation by writing the most famous Russian nineteenth-century feminist novels (Chernyshevskii's *What Is to Be Done?* Herzen's *Who Is to Blame?* Druzhinin's *Polin'ka Saks*).

Heldt argues that the flood of such

seemingly flattering and supportive depictions of women — along with the minute analyses of their characters and discussions of "the woman question" by revolutionary-minded male critics — did not, in fact, benefit women. Rather, men, by defining women's reality (in ways which did not necessarily correspond to women's experience) inhibited women's own self-definition and self-expression in prose fiction.

Heldt points out that with few exceptions Russian women characters are not true heroines; events of the plot do not center around them, nor do their authors ever discuss their psychological development. Rather, these women characters who are treated as givens, serve as foils for weak, inadequate, "superfluous" men, men who, nonetheless comprise the true subject of the novels. Russian women characters, Heldt writes, are objectivized by what she calls the "either/or of perfection or doom;" they are depicted either as young, beautiful and morally superior to men, or as the old (or perhaps "fallen"), grotesque women whom the first group will inevitably become. It has not generally been recognized that Russian literature depicts women just as rigidly as other Western literatures. Heldt clearly demonstrates that Russian writers, too, polarize women into "good" and "bad" girls; the only difference is in the nature of the poles.

Russian women writers, Heldt believes, preferred to express themselves in literary forms other than prose fiction, forms in which "the feminine had not yet been defined by men." She finds vigorous women's literary traditions in autobiography and lyric poetry, two genres which allow the writer to name her own reality and define herself in her own terms by addressing the reader directly — rather than through the medium of a narrator. In examining these two female literary traditions Heldt finds women's realities and self-definitions to be very different from those men attribute to them in prose fiction. For example, women in their autobiographies never depict themselves as "slaves of love" but rather emphasize their female friendships, their family responsibilities and their feelings of isolation. Heldt calls for a new understanding of Russian literature that will include, and integrate, both male and female traditions.

The three sections of Heldt's book correspond to her argument. The first surveys the male tradition in prose and its images of women; the second section traces the female tradition in autobiography and the third the female tradition in lyric poetry.

I found the first section on male prose fiction extremely provocative but also the most problematic. While Heldt makes good use of feminist critical theory to discuss female stereotyping and does excellent close readings of individual works, some problems in organization and definition interfere with her argument.

I would have preferred a more rigorously chronological discussion of the evolution of Russian prose fiction, as I sometimes found Heldt's moves back and forth in time to be confusing. For example, in chapter four she interrupts a discussion of late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century writers to describe mid-nineteenth century male-authored feminist novels, and woman-authored "society tales," stories set in the beau monde which describe the stultifying effects on individuals of high society's unwritten but inviolable laws. I also would have liked a systematic discussion of Pushkin, a writer central not only to all aspects of the "male" literary tradition, but as Heldt later discusses in detail, a major influence on the work of the women poets Akhmatova and Tsvetaeva.

I wished that Heldt had given more precise definitions of "misogyny," "pornography" and "voyeurism." Such definitions would have helped in the chapter entitled "Misogyny and the Power of Silence," and in such sentences as "The values of pornography are what Lermontov and his class of males shared" and "The paradox of a male author creating a female character, [is] itself necessarily an act of voyeurism...." Discussion of these terms would have been interesting in the light of recent feminist film scholarship on voyeurism and the current controversy surrounding the definition of pornography.

Finally, I was fascinated by Heldt's parenthetical remarks about a Russian women's prose tradition, a tradition she traces from folk bridal laments (songs mourning the separation of the bride from family and friends as she moves to her new husband's house), to the society tales of the 1830s and 1840s, to the contemporary writing of Nataliia Baranskaia. I would have liked her to develop this idea at length and hope she will do so in the future.

These comments notwithstanding, and although I did not always agree with Heldt's interpretations (such as her feminist reading of Tolstoi's *Kreutzer Sonata*), I found this section very exciting to read. Heldt is the first to systematically address the question of images of women in Russian prose fiction. Her generally accurate analysis will have to form the basis of any future writing on the topic.

In the second two sections, on the Russian women's literary tradition in autobiography and lyric poetry, Heldt is at her best — her arguments elegant and convincing, her writing polished and satisfying. In the autobiography section Heldt uses three "pivotal" autobiographies of women born 40 years apart (Ekaterina Dashkova, Nadezhda Durova, and Nadezhda Sokhanskaia) to discuss three recurrent themes in women's autobiography: public vs. private life, mothers and daughters, and woman as emerging writer. Heldt uses as supporting evidence a wide variety of other Russian women's autobiographies, most unavailable in English and many of which have never been republished since they first appeared in Russian journals.

In the third section Heldt traces the use of the female persona by Russian women poets starting with the late eighteenth-century poet Anna Bunina and ending with the major twentieth-century poet Marina Tsvetaeva. In this section, as in the previous one, Heldt combines a thorough chronological survey of a women's literary tradition with fine close analyses of specific works. Her translations and explications of some particularly dense poems by Akhmatova and Tsvetaeva are a pleasure to read, although some of her arguments would have been easier to follow if she had included the original Russian of these poems as well.

Although Slavicists have lagged behind in feminist scholarship (and consciousness), we can catch up quickly by learning from feminist scholars in other fields. The first step is to ask the right questions: How are women depicted in literature? What is the relationship of gender to genre? Who defines the canon? Barbara Heldt has started the process.