decides to organize her co-workers in the upbeat ending of the story. "At the Shirtwaist Factory" recounts a similar theme: women stitchers eating lunch at the factory spend their time reading novels and dream books or listening to a co-worker explain Marxism, rather than using their collective strength to achieve change. The story's impatient heroine delivers an object lesson to her colleagues when she persuades the novel-reader to come with her to a manager's office where she demands the employment of a second "checker" to speed up the punching of the time cards; on behalf of her 250 sister workers, the heroine stands up to the manager and wins, thus conveying the message that female helplessness and romantic notions of male chivalry are no substitute for straightforward, business-like negotiations.

As the editor notes, these stories do not lend themselves to any one clear-cut interpretation; some stress women's secondary status in the labour market and most do not dispute the importance of marriage and family for women workers. A few portray women as active in shaping their own destinies, particularly through labour organization. All the stories convey some sense of the tensions between waged work and femininity and offer readers a chance to reflect on their own life situations. As historical fiction these stories do not always clearly reflect the realities of the labour market for women in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, nor were they meant to. They were written to convey various ideological messages to readers and reflect their authors' visions of the social relations between the classes and between the sexes. As a reader, I would have liked more reflection from the editor on the authors themselves; few are clearly identified or placed in any context. If we are to understand the stories and their potential impact, we need to have some discussion of the authors' ideological underpinnings and assumptions. Did male authors portray women workers differently than women authors? From this collection it seems they did, with some of the women authors granting women workers more potential for activism. The selection of the stories is also critical; what criteria did the editor use for choosing these particular stories? While they roughly reflect the views of the K of L, the IWW and the AF of L, the editor's interpretation of these groups leads the reader to think that the more radical labour organizations offered less potential to women workers than the American Federation of Labor, an ironic conclusion given the recognized reluctance of this organization to commit its resources to unionizing women.

What this suggests is the need for a more careful selection and reading of the fiction, as well as a more detailed comparison between the fictional representations and the historical realities of labour organizations. Fiction, after all, is not a simple mirror reflection of social attitudes and behaviour, but rather encodes meanings that authors create. With more knowledge about the particular authors who wrote the stories the reader could better assess those meanings and place them in the appropriate historical context of class, ethnicity and gender, conceptual frameworks which aid in the understanding not only of history, but of fiction as well.

ON THE GOLDEN PORCH

Tatyana Tolstaya. New York: Alfred A. Knopf. Inc., 1989. (Translated by Antonina W. Bouis.)

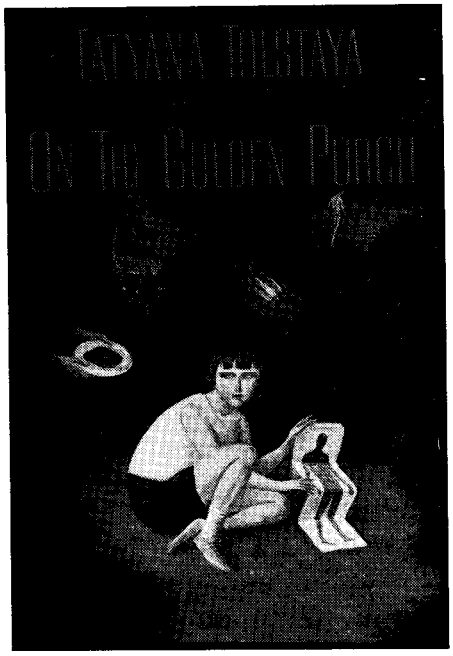
Anna Matzov

This collection of stories was first published in Russian only two years ago. Reading Tatyana Tolstaya's stories in the original language makes one curious how the translator will manage to convey her style to the foreign reader, since so much

of the humour and her ironic tone employ the special features of the Russian language itself. Although much of it is lost in the translation, and some witty references to Russian literature and culture will possibly be missed by the English reader, this collection of stories still manages to capture the reader and land him/her in an animated world where summer comes "laughing and rumbling, waving a motley flag," and "the blue plate of self-important kasha" is "so pleased with itself;" depression takes you by the hand and sits with you for hours "holding hands," and time moves in more than one direction. Complaint is replaced by laughter, boredom is avoided by constant surprise of the unpredictable; and with this formula the differences cease to exist between men and women, Tolstaya's country and the rest of the world. One is just delighted to follow her into the land where fantasy and reality balance together in an atmosphere of sunlight even when it is a "rainy day" in the story. Thus, in Tolstaya's world the two modes of existence, the imaginary and the realistic, are both legitimate partners of one reality.

Although the stories are placed in contemporary Russia, they do not reflect any of the major political or historical issues of today. There is also nothing in them about problems of motherhood, working women, family difficulties or other issues Soviet women authors write about. Although there are a few contemporary details like contact lenses, artificial lashes, plastic ear-rings, and communal apartments, these do not play a major role in the plot, and most of the stories could convey the same message coming from a different era.

With a sensitive grasp of human psychology, resorting to humour rather than preaching, to myth and allegory rather than rhetoric, Tolstaya exposes different cultural cliches in a very entertaining and original manner. Seen from outside and not from within there are no rounded characters and most stories are structured around a single obsession which dominates the character's life: a dream of finding a lost mother ("Sweet Dreams, Son"), or a belief that happiness in a woman's life depends on obtaining an extra bedroom ("Fire and Dust"). Yet the creative associations, abrupt transitions and ironic style manage to create the illusion of a densely populated and vibrant three-di-



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