

conveyed in translation. By and large, though, the translation is excellent and readable, and pays careful attention to Baratynsky's epistolary style.

JAMES WEST  
*University of Washington*

WOMEN IN TOLSTOY: THE IDEAL AND THE EROTIC. By *Ruth Crego Benson*. Urbana, Chicago, London: University of Illinois Press, 1973. xii, 141 pp. \$6.95.

Tolstoy early concluded that the chief enemy of his own and his heroes' moral aspirations was woman's nature, unless subdued by marriage and motherhood. Later in life he doubted even this solution. No one acquainted with Tolstoy can question the centrality of this theme to both his biography and his works. The special merits of Ruth Crego Benson's essay on the double image of woman in Tolstoy are its lucidity and singleness of aim. In view of the quantity of writing on Anna Karenina, if not Natasha Rostova, the author's statement that "most Tolstoyan critics have written chiefly about his heroes" may raise some question. Nonetheless, an intelligent, sharply focused treatment such as this one is welcome. Using journals, letters, and recollections to establish Tolstoy's mentality—indeed the traditional Christian one, rigorously applied—she studies its expression in Tolstoy's literary work by way of theme, character portrayal, and novelistic structure. Besides the two great novels, the author has chosen five works (*The Cossacks*, *Family Happiness*, the late *Kreutzer Sonata*, "The Devil," and "Father Sergius"), representing the "optimum of thematic relevance and artistic excellence." Interesting is the effort to rescue *Family Happiness* from certain influential, if obtuse, negative critical opinions. Yet the argument that male writers and critics are unlikely to regard "female experience as the legitimate substance of moving literature" suffers in the light of Chekhov's achievement. Nonetheless, the author's own critical analysis is lively and perspicacious.

There are small inaccuracies and oddities. Why are *Fathers and Sons* and *Asya*, not *On the Eve*, used as examples of Turgenev's attitudes toward the "woman question"? And, for all of his distaste for the lady, Tolstoy would have had not George Sand but her heroines dragged through the streets of Petersburg. As for the central subject matter, certainly further development could be given the theme. But need it? The author set out to make a point—energetically, incisively—and most readers will agree she has made it.

JOAN DELANEY GROSSMAN  
*University of California, Berkeley*

OBLOMOV AND HIS CREATOR: THE LIFE AND ART OF IVAN GONCHAROV. By *Milton Ehre*. Studies of the Russian Institute, Columbia University. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1973. xi, 295 pp. \$14.50.

The main purpose of Milton Ehre's book, as defined in the preface, is "to reach beyond the standard clichés of Goncharov criticism to a contemporary reading of his art." The book succeeds splendidly in doing precisely this. It is an outstanding work, certainly one of the best American studies on Russian literature. In cliché-ridden Russian criticism, only Gogol may have fared worse than Goncharov, who did not even benefit from the Symbolist and Formalist respite. André Mazon's and Evgenii Liatsky's books had merit, but they are now obsolete in most respects. More recently, "contemporary readings" of Goncharov's masterpiece have

been attempted, beginning with V. S. Pritchett's brilliant short essay, but Ehre provides us with the first study which is both comprehensive and thoroughly modern.

To quote once more from the preface, "The best of modern literary criticism proceeds from the assumption that the meanings of art are intimately related to their forms, and the assumption guides this book." Ehre does, indeed, use formal analysis on different levels quite extensively, but always as a means for a deeper understanding of Goncharov's "themes and his view of experience." He is highly successful in reading Goncharov's symbolic and emblematic language, beginning, in *Oblomov*, with Ilya Ilyich's famous, and rather obvious, dressing gown, and going on to Olga's lilac branch and her *Casta diva* (incidentally, in translation, "chaste divinity"), to Agafya's "round elbows" (about which Renato Poggioli made some interesting comments), to the broader symbolism of the river and of the sun; none of these, whether accessories or leitmotifs, seem to have eluded Ehre's perceptive interpretations. He is not always quite as convincing in his analyses of sentence structure or rhythm. Goncharov's failure in dealing with Vera's passion in a scene from *The Ravine* has little to do with his using "carefully ordered phrases and clauses of almost equal length." Passion does not necessarily call for wild syntax, and Ehre is well aware of Goncharov's general ineptitude in the depiction of passion. *The Ravine* was admittedly a failure, but here is a passage from Goncharov's masterpiece: "She [Olga], like one demented, threw herself into his [Stolz's] arms, and like a bacchante, in a passionate trance, became still for a moment entwining her arms around his neck." There is nothing especially wrong with syntax here.

Form comprises both style and structure, and Ehre's analyses of structure in Goncharov's novels are masterful. He rightly insists on the returns, on the circular structures and substructures. And it is highly significant that formal analysis—the discovery of the circular structure of *Oblomov*—has led to the discovery of what may be regarded as the novel's central theme: the theme of return, of the recovery of time, culminating in the splendid passage in part 4, chapter 9, in which Oblomov's total recall is triggered by the sound of a snapping thread; this is our hero's triumph over time—a triumph, indeed, "paradoxical" or "parodic," but also a striking anticipation of the celebrated "temps retrouvé." Time in all its aspects and functions is, of course, of enormous importance in Goncharov's work, especially in *Oblomov*, and Ehre's examination, both structural and thematic, of time and the ages of man, of the cycles of the day and of the year, or of the flux of "geological time," is thorough and highly perceptive.

I find myself in disagreement with Ehre in only a few instances. One of them is "Oblomov's Dream," which I find difficult to read as a dream at all. The famous chapter seems to me much more realistic and objective in manner than the wonderful, Beckett-like (*vide* Ehre's epigraph from *Godot*), introductory "slow movement." "The Dream," I feel, is no more than a flashback in disguise: just as in *Dead Souls*, of which "The Dream" often echoes the tone and the cadences, the hero falls asleep to allow the narrator to present his *Vorgeschichte*, except that Gogol uses the narrator's overt intrusion rather than the artifice of a dream. In more general terms, I have some reservations about Oblomov's "two worlds—the world of dreams and the world of things," and I fail to see how his childish and vacuous fantasies "contribute a serious dimension to the comedy." In my reading they are within the comedy, whether Oblomov daydreams about defeating Napoleon or about a Manilov-like existence in a reformed Oblomovka. In the latter fantasy,

incidentally, Oblomov sees himself reclining in a meadow and being served food by a servant girl with "bare, round, and soft elbows" (part 1, chap. 8), a curious prefiguration of bliss later attained, but also an idyll that is rather pedestrian.

Ehre's book is comprehensive; it deals not only with the entire body of Goncharov's work, fictional and nonfictional (only eighty pages are actually devoted to *Oblomov*), but also offers quite extensive studies of his life, artistic personality, and creative method. The book seeks to bring all this together—avoiding, however, both the "biographical fallacy" and the *Leben und Schaffen* formula. A synthesis is attempted, toward the end of the book, in a short chapter entitled "Goncharov and His Trilogy." Ehre is fully aware of the complexities, ironies, and contradictions pertaining to both art and life, and wisely refrains from offering any single formula that would define both the Man and the Artifact.

Certain themes, however, would seem to invite some further effort toward synthesis and definition. One of them is the theme of passion and fear of passion in its numerous recurrences—thus Oblomov's terror when he observes an awakening of desire in his "casta diva," and his panicky "disengagement"; his contentment in his retreat to widow Pshenitsyna's house and to childhood (his landlady, and later his wife, is motherly, she brings him food, and she is passive: she stands "motionless, like a horse on which a collar is being put" when Ilya Ilyich ventures his first kiss—on the nape of her neck); the curious, if extraliterary, fact that Goncharov graced her with a name and patronymic almost identical with those of his mother; and Stolz's recovery of his childhood and discovery, in Olga, of a replica of his mother.

Ehre is certainly aware of the inferences that can be made, but he prefers to discuss Oblomov's emotions and predicaments using Goncharov's symbolically poetic language and his imagery. (It is curious, incidentally, that the static idyll and the threat of awakening passion are symbolized as Summer and Autumn. Wouldn't one rather expect Spring and Summer?) This treatment hardly provides any valid explanations, but then real-life causality does not apply to the world of the literary artifact. And it is not here suggested that Ehre should have attempted to "reduce" Oblomov (or his creator) to an unsublimated Oedipus complex, a castration fear, or whatever. The reader, after all, can "do it himself" if he so chooses. The book provides all the materials, and many will find the temptation quite strong.

LEON STILMAN  
Columbia University

RUSSIAN SYMBOLISM: A STUDY OF VYACHESLAV IVANOV AND THE RUSSIAN SYMBOLIST AESTHETIC. By *James West*. London: Methuen, 1970. vii, 250 pp. \$9.50, cloth. \$4.50, paper. Distributed by Barnes & Noble, New York.

One of the most bedeviled aspects of the enormous legacy of Symbolism to modern Russian literature remains the problem of Symbolist aesthetics. We badly need a book like *The Symbolist Movement* by Anna Balakian or *The Symbolist Aesthetic in France* by Andrew G. Lehmann to do for the Russian writers what these two scholars have done for the French. Despite the impressive range of the book under review, the need remains.

Chapter 1 offers a "brief and selective survey of the aesthetic theories which were the common heritage of the Russian symbolists and their detractors." Chapter