ELIOT BORENSTEIN. *Men without Women. Masculinity and Revolution in Russian Fiction, 1917-1929.* Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2000. Pp. 346. US $19.95 paper, $59.95 cloth.

The last decades of the twentieth-century enabled various groups, which had been hitherto marginalized, to speak with their own voice and to write their own history. The first and largest among these groups were, quite obviously, women. It does not, then, come as a surprise that a similar development occurred in Russian literary studies: the last quarter of the century saw the appearance of a number of critical works devoted to women as literary characters and as writers. Initially popular primarily among female scholars, the feminist approach to Russian literature became eventually widely accepted, so that at present many North American universities offer feminist courses in Russian literature or cultural studies.

Russian literature proved of special interest to feminist-oriented critics because of the striking contrast between the relatively limited number of women authors and the significant number of world famous female literary characters. Furthermore, the erosion of the Soviet empire weakened the politically oriented interest in its culture, which was the main motivation behind 20th century Western studies of Russia, including its literature. Feminist critical trends coincided at the end of the century both with the collapse of the Soviet Union (and the erosion of Russia's leading role in the world) and with the appearance of a fairly large number of women writers and their growing contribution to Russian literary life. Given the rather minimal impact of Russian feminists (whose numbers were small) on literary studies in the last decades of the USSR, the credit for generating a significant interest in women in Russian literature can presumably go to Western (including North American) critics. It may be safely assumed that the very fact of putting women issues into critical circulation carried some importance for the development of Russian literature.

Another interesting result of the process of "feminization" (or more precisely — of the engendering) of Russian literature and literary studies is the growing awareness that what has been previously described as patriarchal (i.e. essentially male) comes from a specific definition of maleness and does not necessarily represent men in general, controlling and constraining "male" behavior to the exclusion of other types of behavior, such as, for instance, homosexual. Post-feminist critics define "patriarchy" not as the generalized institution of male dominance , as did the feminists in their critiques, but rather as a more traditional and symbolic notion of the "rule of the father," placing greater emphasis on family versus other social relations. And it is this interest in post feminist views of maleness, its cultural construction and socially acceptable variations that is the focus of Eliot Borenstein's book *Men Without Women. Masculinity and Revolution in Russian Fiction, 1917-1929*. An in-depth under-standing of the relations between ideology and practice in the Soviet Union is coupled here with a good grasp of the clash between the

rise of the official line of feminism (or the "women question") characteristic of early Soviet policies and a profoundly male iconography and men-oriented symbolic systems prevailing in the "first communist country in the world."

The second decade of the last century — the literary period here under scrutiny — seems to be particularly appropriate for this kind of study. The beginning of a new, communist era of Russian society with its "refreshing" phraseology and "new" ideology has been traditionally studied from a primarily political point of view. The focus included the phraseology used to promote an interest in the situation of women as well as the establishment and the short life of the *Zhenotdel*. It may be said that Borenstein begins where others have stopped. He understands the impact of communist ideology on the social processes of the time and especially on the erosion of the traditional, family-oriented structures, but he also understands the nature of the long tradition affected by these changes and its persistence. The society whose picture he paints is in fact much less "innovative" or revolutionary than one might have thought. In other words, he argues that the new ideology, despite its stated goal of getting rid of the past, had actually reformulated it, replacing the old, patriarchal structures with ones analogous to them. The family, as a concept based on biological affiliation, was to be replaced by relationships based primarily on common ideology, not blood relations. In his view this is consistent with the communists' attempt to ignore nature and biology and to make them serve human beings. This should not, however, be taken as a complete rupture with tradition. Using as an example Gogol's references to the Cossacks (as an all male community), Borenstein argues that "the aversity to the traditional family was not the sole provenance of political radicals. Though the nature of the Soviet attack on the family was dictated by left-wing ideology, the form of the projected new social relationship is largely indebted to Russian religious tradition" (26). So, for instance, the concept of comradeship, an iconic term of the early Soviet period, is in his book explained as a communist variant of brotherhood, or more precisely, of *pobratimstvo*, which in turn was regarded as a blood-like relationship between men with roots in pre-Christian Russian culture. Comradeship was not to be confused with friendship since the latter is not based on common ideology and goals.

Studying social processes reflected in literary works, Borenstein uses a variety of ideas in, as he himself admits, a consciously eclectic and not always well-coordinated manner. "Said, Remy, and Sedgwick provide a useful vocabulary for discussing the ties among men — filiation, fratriarchy, and homosociality, respectively — while Gray's distinction between comradeship and friendship is crucial for our understanding of the texts in hand. Freud, Levi-Strauss, Sedgwick, and Girard offer useful models for approaching the role played by women in male relationships" (36-37), writes Borenstein, adding that the phenomenon of male oriented utopia should not and cannot be examined outside of its socio-historical context. This is because while the early Soviet masculine utopianism can be — at least in part and in terms of some of its ideas- traced back in history and is not limited to Russia at the turn of the century, it is characteristic of that particular period. Furthermore, he examines it not only as a Soviet phenomenon but also as part of an early twentieth century modernist discourse in general, and sees certain similarities with another -ism ideology, namely fascism, in its approach to masculinity in both iconography and

phraseology. At the same time he provides a specifically Russian literary background to his study by well-chosen references to the Russian literary tradition. Even the very titles of the chapters of his book, to mention just "Dead Fathers and Sons" or "Comrade Myshkin" as most striking examples, provide an intertextual web of literary references.

Literary texts chosen by the author for special scrutiny belong to "the particular strain of Russian literature" in which, as Borenstein says, women were either barely present or reduced to bodiless "abstracts." In fact, it would be difficult to come with a better description of the character of the works analyzed in this study. Basically the number of texts discussed in detail is very small and consists of *Red Cavalry* by Isaac Babel, *Envy* by Yuri Olesha and Andrei Platonov's *Chevengur* with a number of occasional references to other literary works, the latter being mostly by the same authors. Borenstein makes no attempt to deal with a wider spectrum of works written in the period to which his analytical categories could not be applied meaningfully, and it is enough to mention Zamyatin or Bulgakov (with his unforgettable Margarita) to make the point. Similarly, there is no room in his book for a discussion of the poetic form of female persona or for that matter, of the works of Akhmatova and Tsvetayeva. Instead it largely follows the attitude toward women formulated in Blok's poetry — from fascination to estrangement.

Borenstein claims that there were two sexual revolutions in early Soviet Russia and his study is concerned primarily with the second one, which, deeply rooted in Russian radicalism and intellectual history, argued in favour of revolutionary ascetism. What interests him is thus not so much what women were able to contribute to literature and culture of the period (or the discussions surrounding them) but rather how male oriented literature was in fact reinterpreting and using for its own purposes the myth of the Eternal feminine and, in the process, transforming women "into abstracts." And it goes without saying that the texts he chose for his study are meant not only to exemplify his ideas but also to prove his points. But they are also more than mere examples. While the literary texts discussed in the book were written in a reaction to the communist revolution, the authors whose works are analyzed did not enjoy for long the regime's benevolent attitude, and the idea of society presented in their works did not survive even the first years of Stalin's rule, not to mention the years after the imposition of Socialist Realism. Thus Borenstein's study is devoted to literature which bears witness to the enthusiasm and freedom of ideological trends of the first years after the Soviet revolution and provides readers with examples of quasi-communist literary utopias which later were viewed with rather serious consequences as counterrevolutionary.

The book is based on the author's doctoral dissertation and, being subject to the scrutiny of an examination committee, displays the caution typical of doctoral dissertations; this means that it contains few assumptions that can be questioned — and it is usually the bolder kind of assumptions that lead to the most interesting discussions. Nevertheless, well written and amply informed, replete with insight and based on a good grasp of Russian literary and social discourses, Borenstein's book provides a much needed companion to a number of recently published

feminist-oriented studies of Soviet and post-Soviet Russian literature. (BO_ENA KARWOWSKA, UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA)

CLAUDIA MOSCOVICI. *From Sex Objects to Sexual Subjects*. New York: Routledge, 1996. Pp. 190. US $70.00 hardcover, $20.95 paper.

Claudia Moscovici's *From Sex Objects to Sexual Subjects* is relatively brief as critical texts go (ninety-eight pages, including notes), but the issues she raises are weighty, and her treatment of them interesting and insightful. At first glance, Moscovici's volume might appear to hint at a historical progression in subjectivity, with the title's opening suggestion of "from … to." Her treatment of the issue in her introduction and five essays is not a linear, historical progession *per se*, however; the essays actually engage in a relatively ahistorical comparison and contrast of Enlightenment, Kantian, Habermassian, and contemporary feminist philosophical thinking about the basic concept of subjectivity. In her own words, the "five interrelated yet relatively independent essays" share a unifying concern with "some of the ways in which Enlightenment and postmodernist theories constantly negotiate the boundaries and tensions between universality and particularist socio-political paradigms in their definitions of the subject and, relatedly, in their construction of public and private spheres" (4).

That general focus is further refined in light of the gender emphasis also implied by Moscovici's title. Within her argument, the project of critiquing subjectivity "means openly redefining the subject in a manner that does not reduce either men or women to the status of objects, but enables both to function as sexual subjects who share political, social, and cultural power in the context of truly, and not only formally or nominally, democratic societies" (5). To that end, the essays emphasize and analyze the subjectivity of women, as defined by philosophical, political, and sociological methods and writings from both sexes and multiple historical periods.

The book as a whole is structured according to an organizational pattern related to these theoretical foundations. Following the introduction, the text's five chapters move back and forth between Enlightenment and contemporary thinking and thinkers, both within themselves and across essay boundaries as well. Thus, Chapter One addresses contemporary, postmodern thinking on subjectivity as that concept is raised, either directly or indirectly, by Rousseau and Diderot primarily; Chapter Two, subjectivity discussed by Irigaray; Three, Habermas (along with Nancy Fraser and a bit of Judith Butler); Four, Bourdieu and Pollock on Kant. Chapter Five serves as a culminating discussion of subjectivity in relation to "The (Im)possible Future of Democracy," as its subtitle declares.

Moscovici sees this progression as a series of widening circles that move outward from micro to macrostructures as each theorist and theory is taken up. But given the relative independence of each essay from the others, it is possible to simply read the essays as separate pieces, without worrying overmuch about the essential progression of the text as a whole. The theoretical issues, in short, are sufficient to unite the chapters and to provide