Other scientists disagree. Arnold Schecter, an epidemiologist at the State University of New York, argues that the government's studies lacked adequate controls and failed to quantify the amount of TCDD (the most toxic compound in dioxin) to which the subjects were exposed. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) classifies TCDD as a "probable human carcinogen." In addition, many cancers have 15-year latency periods; the carcinogenic effects may still turn up. Schecter and a Canadian researcher have found dioxins in the fat tissues of both Americans and Canadians. These findings, they note, are "unexpected and may be of public health significance." They speculate that humans are being exposed to TCDD through "the food chain" or the incineration of industrial wastes.

Schecter has also compared the fat samples of nine people living in North Vietnam and 15 people living in South Vietnam (where the U.S. sprayed Agent Orange, a dioxin-rich herbicide, from 1962 to 1970 during the Vietnam War). The North Vietnamese showed no exceptional contamination; but the South Vietnamese had levels of TCDD two to three times higher than those found in residents of North America.

Dioxin in the environment justifies concern, says Rawls, but not panic. S. Fachetti, who studied a 1976 dioxin accident in Seveso, Italy, found no "bioaccumulation" of the toxin in plants grown in contaminated soil near the stricken city. David Firestone, a U.S. Food and Drug Administration chemist, notes that fish sampled from Lake Huron between 1979 and 1983 indicate that TCDD contamination has declined. Moreover, the EPA is now cleaning up the remaining hot spots across the nation with mobile incineration systems.

ARTS & LETTERS

Women in Greek Myths

"Women in Greek Myth" by Mary R. Lefkowitz, in *The American Scholar* (Spring 1985), 1811 Q St. N.W., Washington, D.C. 20009.

In ancient Greece, myths often played a role in society similar to that of Old Testament parables in later years. They were tales with lessons about daily life.

Psychologists (and lately, feminists) have observed that the notion that "a woman [should be] passive and subject to control by the men in her family [is] expressed in virtually every Greek myth," notes Lefkowitz, professor of humanities at Wellesley College. Many stories about goddesses revolved around their unions with males, in which "a patriarchal order [was] established." The Greek view of celibacy, virginity, and freedom often showed women trapped in marriage with philandering, untrustworthy males.

Moreover, "since the Greek myth glorified the role of mother, it also tended to condemn to infamy those who in some way rebelled against it," says Lefkowitz. "A confirmed moral virgin who resisted the ad-

The Greek heroine Medea, depicted here with her two sons in an 1838 painting by Eugène Delacroix. Deserted by her husband, Jason, she revenged herself by murdering both her children and her husband's mistress.

vances of a god might be punished simply by metamorphosis into a tree or flower. But women who consciously denied their femininity, like the Amazons, or ones who killed their husbands and fathers, like the women of Lemnos, were regarded as enemies and monsters."

Yet, Lefkowitz argues, to draw only that picture is to distort the Greek image of women. Not only did many female mythic figures possess "a capacity for understanding . . . initiative and intelligence" that is not found in the women of the Bible, but much of Greek mythology was devoted to "the problems of human existence from a woman's point of view." In Euripides' play *Medea*, for example, Medea herself laments that "when a man is bored with his family, he can go out and put an end to his heartache, but a woman must stay behind, inside the house, and 'look toward him alone.'"

In *The Shield of Heracles* (attributed to the author Hesiod, circa 800 B.C.), Heracles' mother, Alcmena, would yield to the great god Zeus and bear his child only when deceived into thinking she had been faithful to her husband. A clever beauty, she starred in the epic as a courageous heroine. "The moral superiority of women like Alcmena is significant," says Lefkowitz, adding that, in Greek eyes, a "race of heroes cannot exist without women of heroic caliber."

Stressing that the Greek concept of womanhood was, in fact, rather

complex, Lefkowitz gleans two lessons from the ancients. First, "as far as the Greeks were concerned, the human condition—not gender—causes problems that both men and women are bound to experience." And second, the modern notion that the ambitious career woman "can 'have it all' without divine intervention" is itself an illusion.

Modern Soviet Literature

"Out of the Drawer and Into the West" by Fernanda Eberstadt, in *Commentary* (July 1985), 165 East 56th St., New York, N.Y. 10022.

During the 1960s and '70s, several prominent Soviet novelists, fearing persecution by authorities, kept their fiction in "the desk drawer"—to be read secretly and smuggled abroad. Only recently have many of those manuscripts been published in the West.

Despite the delays, contends Eberstadt, an American novelist, Westerners now have "a more comprehensive view of the state of culture and creative life in the Soviet Union than has been available . . . since the early '60s."

Eberstadt argues that most of the recent Soviet authors fall into three categories. First, there are "communists-with-a-bad-conscience" who did not expose Soviet atrocities until after Josef Stalin's death in 1953. A pre-eminent example is Yuri Trifonov (1925–81), whose novellas (collected in *The Long Goodbye* [trans. 1978] and *Another Life/The House on the Embankment* [1983]) describe the lives of middle-aged Moscow professionals. "[They] get caught in traffic jams," notes Eberstadt, " . . . their wives nag them about getting their son into an elite school, they are snubbed in the street by a more successful colleague." In Trifonov's *The Old Man* (1984), about a Bolshevik "coming to terms with his life's service to a monstrous cause," she writes, "one sees at last the black skies of [Soviet] socialism."

The second group, Eberstadt contends, is the "hedonists," who became literary cult figures during the Khrushchev "thaw" of the early 1960s. Vassily Aksyonov, best known for his epic *The Burn* (1984), wrote of "political prisoners in Magadan in the late '40s . . . the cultural reawakening that swept the Soviet Union after Stalin's death, the subsequent crackdown on the arts . . . and the invasion of Czechoslovakia." However, Eberstadt finds the book a "lazy" distortion of the period, and filled with anti-U.S. sentiments to boot.

Finally, there are "the heroes," anti-communists who are equally disdainful of the West's materialism and moral decay. Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn's *The Gulag Archipelago* (1974) revealed atrocities in Soviet prisons. Vladimir Kornilov's *Building a Prison* (1885) tells the story of a discouraged old Russian whose children immigrate to America, and conveys, in Eberstadt's opinion, "the erosion of self-worth" experienced in totalitarian societies. And Vladimir Maximov's latest novel, *Ark for the Uncalled* (1985), is about two young Russians who serve as soldiers in the Kurile Islands after World War II, and whose lives are destroyed by Stalinist brutalities.