

EMPEROR OF THE EARTH: MODES OF ECCENTRIC VISION. By *Czesław Miłosz*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977. x, 253 pp. \$8.95.

"Politics is our destiny, a cyclone in the eye of which we are stuck permanently, even if we try to hide from it in the shell of poetry," Miłosz wrote recently in his introduction to Aleksander Wat's *Mój wiek* (1977). This statement could be used as a motto for the collection of essays under review, most of them devoted to Russian literature, and written in the last twenty years, between 1956 and 1974. But the everpresent *homo politicus* does not overshadow the "eccentric vision" of a critic and a poet; on the contrary, his presence sharpens the awareness of certain overwhelming problems which a less conscientious critic might have overlooked. Thus the "eccentric vision" becomes well focused and results in some revealing interpretations of such authors as Shestov, Solov'ev, Dostoevsky, Pasternak, and Solzhenitsyn. Miłosz's wide range of critical interest also encompasses some Western authors, Swedenborg, and Simone Weil; touches upon a forgotten American, Thomas Mayne Reid; and, naturally, goes back to his "native realm" in essays on the Polish writers—Zygmunt Krasiński, Apollo Korzeniowski, Stanisław Brzozowski, and Stanisław Ignacy Witkiewicz (better known as Witkacy). All these writers, states Miłosz, have one thing in common: they "passionately believed that they were called to influence the future" and, like the critic himself, must have been obsessed "with the riddle of Evil active in History." As a result, the book provides a coherent, well-composed, and brilliantly executed discussion of the foremost problem of our century—the political cyclone that shapes our destinies. Miłosz's critical essays should be of great value not only to literary scholars but to a large circle of readers whose interest in philosophy, history, and political science will be stimulated and enriched by them.

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GENERATING THE LITERARY TEXT. By *A. K. Zholkovsky* and *Yu. K. Scheglov*. Translated by *L. M. O'Toole*. Russian Poetics in Translation, vol. 1. Essex, England: Department of Language and Linguistics, University of Essex, 1975. 77 pp. £2.50, paper. Distributed by Holdan Books, 15 No. Parade Avenue, Oxford OX2 6XL, England.

Russian Structuralism as a theory of literature, an offspring of computer linguistics, made its formal debut at the Gorky conference on poetic language in September 1961. Since then, interest in this trend has been widespread among Western scholars. Except for writings by Lotman and Uspenskii, however, works by Russian structuralists have been accessible only to the limited number of literary historians who read Russian.

In the interests of better communication, L. M. O'Toole of the University of Essex has translated two articles by the Moscow scholars Yu. K. Scheglov and A. K. Zholkovsky for the first volume of the series, Russian Poetics in Translation. The first essay, "Towards a 'Theme - (Expression Devices) - Text' Model of Literary Structure" (1971), written by both Scheglov and Zholkovsky, is devoted to questions of generative poetics in general. The second, "A Description of the Structure of Detective Stories" (1968), written by Scheglov alone, is an application of generative analysis to the prose of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle.

Both articles deal with the notion of theme, which the authors try to rehabilitate after years of neglect by the first generation of Formalists. In the process of generating the text, the theme is the most abstract version, followed by the "plot" which utilizes general fictional devices. The final step, the "text," also called "plot-structure" in the second article, could be characterized as theme plus all the devices of expression used by the author. Unfortunately, this brief model does not include either Formalist or Prague Structuralist concepts of the fable—plot relation, or, in terms of Mukařovský:

material, procedure, poetic structure, artifact. Is plot identical with Shklovsky's "fabula" and plot-structure with "siuzhet"? The poetic structure is, after all, more than its text: it stands at the intersection of several phenomenal paths which connect it with the external world and become part of its aesthetic effect. Obviously, more information is needed to clarify the position of the authors.

The translation is lucid and the text is well edited. Unfortunately, the reference numbers to the footnotes are missing in the second article. For the Slavist, it would also have been helpful to have some of the key notions presented in the Russian original.

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NIKOLAI LESKOV: THE MAN AND HIS ART. By *Hugh McLean*. Cambridge, Mass. and London: Harvard University Press, 1977. xvi, 780 pp. \$30.00.

It is very, very rare for a reviewer to have the opportunity of reporting on a work of the sustained scholarly distinction and magisterial authority that characterize Professor Hugh McLean's study of Leskov. Leskov has been poorly served by Russian scholarship and seriously neglected by translators. No doubt, "The Musk-Ox," "Lady Macbeth of the Mtsensk District," *Cathedral Folk*, "The Sealed Angel," "The Enchanted Pilgrim," and "The Lefthander" will be the most familiar items in an account of Leskov's literary career and the works most likely to be known to a non-Russian readership, though, as Professor McLean points out, the translations have been uneven and mostly inadequate. Few, one suspects, except experts or keen students of Leskov will have read many other works and hardly anyone will have read his novels. All that must now be altered.

Of the several reasons for the neglect of Nikolai Leskov both in Soviet Russia and in the non-Russian world the question of religion must be considered among the most prominent. From his childhood he was apparently torn between his mother's ritualistic Orthodoxy and his father's incipient Protestantism and in the course of his career he tended to waver between support for the established church, a commitment that branded him as reactionary in the eyes of many critics, and a kind of Protestantism which eventually brought him into the Tolstoyan fold. Another—and more famous—reason for such neglect was his authorship of an editorial in the *Northern Bee* which implied that the burning of the Apraksin market in St. Petersburg in May 1862 was the work of revolutionary arsonists. Professor McLean points out that Leskov achieved precisely the opposite of what he had intended by such editorial opinion. Still, the mud stuck. He could never, strictly speaking, be "progressive," a deficiency for which he was to pay dearly whenever he sought in later life to place his stories with cautious editors. Another reason is that, for all his efforts, he could never be a novelist—and in a novel-loving age that proved to be a serious disadvantage. Yet another reason was a deeply ingrained nonconformity of the spirit, a tough individuality that made human relationships just as difficult for him as the observance of literary fashions and conventions.

If he did not court popularity, he also did not court modernity. The use of *skaz* and accompanying stylistic features proved a greater impediment to his international success than any other. Writing of Leskov's style (in the particular context of "The Battle-axe," though it could apply to many other stories), Professor McLean remarks with great perspicience: "The reader is forced to change the focus of his eye: he no longer merely perceives the characters and the action through the glass of language, but finds himself admiring the patterns and colors of the glass itself." The style was the man in Leskov's case so implicitly and pervasively that it must necessarily pose a practically insurmountable problem for anyone who attempts to deal with the writer's