

Russia of the Streets

Satirical Stories of Nikolai Leskov, translated from the Russian and edited by William B. Edgerton (Pegasus. 411 pp. Hardbound, \$7.50. Paperback, \$2.95), contains fourteen tales by a nineteenth-century writer who used puns, malapropisms, and other linguistic devices to expose the foibles of his compatriots. Irwin Weil teaches Russian literature at Northwestern University.

By IRWIN WEIL

MANY GOOD RUSSIAN WRITERS have suffered a common stumbling block to fame: they lived at the same time as Tolstoy and Dostoevsky. So it was with Nikolai Leskov (1831-95). Obstacles to his renown came from another quarter: righteous revolutionaries for several generations denounced his work as retrograde. Fortunately, Maxim Gorky, a revolutionary of superior literary discrimination, gave support to this master of the succulent Russian idiom heard in railway cars, churches, taverns, and lowly places in the Tsar's broad realm. But Leskov's unusual linguistic effects—the translation of which offers nightmarish problems—have prevented his recognition abroad (excluding from consideration the atypical *Lady Macbeth of the Mtsensk District*). The present collection is the most extensive Western attempt to render Leskov's work into English.

For the reader who wants to see old Russia (imbedded in layers of irony and puns by a devilishly sharp observer) this is an invaluable book. Leskov does not deal with the soul-stretching passions of his literary contemporaries, although his themes show his admiration for Tolstoy. Perversely and mischievously, Leskov exposes certain petty elements of the Russian character. Add to these the Russian's almost automatic defensiveness against the internal enemy (those who are not "Orthodox folk") and the external, foreign enemy (the technologically advanced and comfortable English will never understand the virtue or the talent of the vodka-saturated albeit mistreated craftsman from the city of Tula) and you have the Russian people, minus their soaring geniuses, before you. It is hard for a man of decency and vision to avoid preaching to them; it is equally hard for a man with even half a heart to resist their vitality and charm.

Professor William Edgerton of Indiana University is an extremely able specialist who has long studied Nikolai Leskov. He has examined documents and worked with specialists in the Soviet Union, and many of his wry comments indicate their bemused reactions to an American treating this most Russian of



Russian writers. Keeping to a rather English type of understatement, Edgerton has deftly and laconically inserted a great deal of useful information. My only adverse reaction (aside from an inclination to argue with such statements as "the kind of unobtrusive standard literary style that is assumed to be characteristic of the mainstream of nineteenth-century Russian realism") is to Professor Edgerton's own characteristic calm and precision, which contrast so sharply with the text. Is this a subtle dig at Leskov's characters, at the Russian temperament, at the earlier poet Viazemsky's "Russian God of the bumpy, tortuous road"? The reader aches for just one wild, impulsive, even petty remark.

The translation is meticulous. Both Edgerton and Hugh McLean, who translated two of the stories, have used English equivalents for almost all of Leskov's special words and phrases, puns, and other linguistic tricks; only occasionally have they surrendered to explanatory footnotes (badly and confusingly placed by the publisher). Their courage and straightforwardness are admirable, the more so since previous translators have taken refuge in conventional paraphrases instead of trying to equal the original. Edgerton and McLean have achieved a considerable measure of success. The irony of *khrapiát v kakóm-to ozloblénnii* is nicely caught by the pseudo-Shakespearean "were giving forth snores full of sound and fury." The archaic flavor of the reductive *da zasnút' iáko zhe i próchie chelovétsy* is suggested by the redundant preposition in "and go to sleep like unto other men." Even the rhythm of the lines is vaguely similar.

To say that the translations are far from perfect is by no means a criticism of the translators. They have made a significant step forward in the art of translating Russian prose, and others can build on their efforts and on the information in this book.

The Courage Seeker

The Other Man's Shoes, by Abraham Rothberg (Simon & Schuster. 507 pp. \$6.95), concerns a journalist's search for the motives of an American soldier in Saigon who had deliberately killed himself to save the former's life. Peter Wolfe teaches English at the University of Missouri in St. Louis.

By PETER WOLFE

ABRAHAM ROTHBERG IS A SERIOUS, committed writer who must be taken seriously. He asks deep questions and then goes about answering them with vigor and intelligence. His powerful imagination, intellectual depth, and driving style bring to life the dizzy experience of American city life in the late 1960s. *The Other Man's Shoes* is so rich a novel that it seems unfair to ask more of it. Yet we do.

The book is not easily summarized. It has a complex plot with many characters, both living and dead, and sometimes the dead arouse more interest than their survivors. Complementing the fast-moving story is a web of intellectual jokes, word games, and learned puns, several of which turn on T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*. The protagonist (named Elliott Sanders) is as much a seeker as the composite narrator of Eliot's poem; the various allusions to chess, like the "Game of Chess" section of *The Waste Land*, spell out the deathlike nature of modern urban life.

Elliott is the only son of a famous journalist who died a hero's death in World War II while working for the French underground. A reporter himself, Elliott nearly retraces his father's footsteps, the crucial difference being that he has little of his father's courage or commitment. After ten years abroad, Elliott visits San Francisco in search of information about the American soldier who, several weeks before in Saigon, had thrown himself on a hand grenade, thereby saving Elliott's life. He establishes his own complex relationships with

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SR Goes to the Movies

Arthur Knight

A Very Prime Miss Brodie

THERE IS a neat and very basic difference between an actor and a star. An actor is one who can assume all manner of roles and bring them credibly alive. A star, on the other hand, plays only one role—himself—but does it very well. Actually, it is not only difficult but dangerous for a star to change his image. Cary Grant, one of the great stars of our time, tried it once or twice, and the results were almost disastrous. The public wants to know that when it pays its money to see a Cary Grant movie, it will see the witty, urbane, sophisticated Cary Grant, not an ersatz Cockney (*None But the Lonely Heart*) or a hirsute beachcomber (*Father Goose*). Few stars can afford to be actors and, conversely, few actors can manage to be stars. Rapidly edging into those rarefied ranks, however, is Britain's willowy, titian-haired beauty, Maggie Smith. While her every role has been radically dissimilar—the demure secretary who stole *The V.I.P.'s* out from under the expensive noses of the Burtons, a sterling Desdemona to Olivier's Othello, a hilariously dim-witted mate to Robert Morley in *Hot Millions*—she has been making giant strides toward proving to both the studios and her audiences that she is at once a formidable actress and a star. *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* should complete the process.

It is, of course, one of the few great and complex contemporary roles. For those who never read Muriel Spark's

novel nor saw Jay Presson Allen's play adaptation of it (Mrs. Allen has also done the excellent screenplay), Miss Jean Brodie is a passionate spinster teaching in a conservative school for girls in Edinburgh. Seemingly very prim and proper, she carries on affairs with two of the teachers at the school—both male, it seems necessary to add these days—and evinces an increasingly ardent attachment to Mussolini and Generalissimo Franco (the period is the mid-Thirties). Self-deluding and self-deluded, she tries to shape her girls into her own image of herself, even to the point of sending one of her young charges off to Spain to fight for Franco. One of the film's finest ironies lies in Miss Brodie's belated discovery that the girl's brother was fighting on the side of the Loyalists.

Gradually, as the children grow older, they begin to see through the poses and pretenses of their mentor. They understand that her passion for a schoolmaster with inherited money is simulated, that she has switched off her affections for an art teacher who is married and Catholic. One girl even understands that her ardor for fascism has deep, twisted, psychological roots. And, also gradually, the children force Miss Brodie—and the audience—into a greater awareness of herself. The façade of good manners begins to crack, the pretensions are stripped away; ultimately, the good, kind, considerate Miss Brodie is revealed for what she really is—a monster.

To play such a role, to give it both substance and sympathy, is a major achievement for any actress. Maggie Smith does more: She makes the character so utterly human that one comprehends all the weaknesses and delusions, all the stupid romanticism and the snobbish self-gratifications that contribute to the Fascist mentality. Her Miss Brodie is so winsome and appealing, so devoted to the teaching profession, that anyone would unhesitatingly place his offspring in her care—and live to regret the consequences. Celia Johnson, too long absent from the screen, superbly plays the headmistress of the school, well aware of what those consequences might be. Robert Johnson and Gordon Jackson are no less impressive as Miss Brodie's enthralled swains. And teen-aged Pamela Franklin, her fresh beauty barely disguised by horn-rimmed glasses, lends both depth and enchantment to her role of the "dependable" student who ultimately brings Miss Brodie to heel.

Miss Franklin is also present in *Sinful Davey*, which is about as much as one can say in favor of this oddly misbegotten film. John Huston seems to have directed it as if not quite certain whether the world was ready for another *Tom Jones*, but willing to have a go at it nevertheless. Davey (John Hurt) is a youthful highwayman following in his father's roistering footsteps, while his own are dogged by the simple, loving Annie (Pamela Franklin), eager to bring him to redemption. The picaresque script bumps them all over the countryside, and somewhat belatedly into the presence of a benignly daft duke (Robert Morley), who thoroughly enjoys Davey's taking ways. Unfortunately, the urbane Mr. Morley is the only one in the cast with the style and sense of self-mockery to whip some cream into Huston's jest; coming toward the end of the film, however, his performance merely serves to emphasize how singularly unstylish and unwitty the film had been up to that point. But the wild Irish landscapes (standing in for early nineteenth-century England and Scotland), and the dewy innocence of the charming Miss Franklin are both refreshing to watch.

Yesterday

By Edwin Honig

DARLING, I thought of you today on the elevator going down so fast I had no time to face the door before being banged to a stop on the bottom floor. My brain wedged like a brick between my shoulders.

That's how it was when we began—impact was all. Mere living, the smash of tumultuous kissings in depots, airports, rent-a-car garages. And breathing, one hot war to the death, in geysers of unsquelched desire. Apart, sunk to the eyeballs in gloom. Together next day, a swarming of minds, a clashing of jack-knifing bodies. Limp with watching, the world lay down like a puppy and whimpered for weeks in the dark while we threshed out our love like a pair of King-Kongs.

Which reminds me, my dear, where've you been? I haven't laid eyes on you for days.

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washing diapers by hand.

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