

THE ARTIST IN N. S. LESKOV'S NATIONAL MYTH

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In this article, we will discuss N. S. Leskov's *The Mountain* ["Gora"], the subtitle of which is "An Egyptian Tale" (the original heading read "Zeno the Goldsmith"), which was based on the Old Russian *Prolog* ("Words on a Goldsmith Where Prayer Moved a Mountain into the Nile River")¹ and was written in 1887–1888². It is the only work by Leskov where the protagonist is an artist (in the literal, high art sense), and not a craftsman — the 'artist' of whatever he does — with a marginal position in relation to the world of art. These are Leskov's "toupee artists", such as the protagonist of the story by the same name from 1888, the gunsmith Lefty ("Lefty", 1882), the tailor ("The Tailor", 1882), the icon painter Sebastian in "The Sealed Angel", (1873) and other characters that demonstrate Leskov's idea of art based on the medieval principle of the artist as the master of a craft.

Research indicates that when Leskov was establishing his "backdrop myths", which were taken from the *Prolog*, he made rather dramatic changes to the original text³, introducing allusions to contemporary life and including references to his own writing [Вольнский]. Nonetheless, neither the intertextual level of "The Mountain", nor its semantic layer, which is related to contemporary life, have been analyzed by Leskov researchers. Our objective here is to shed a modicum of light on Leskov's allusions to contemporary artists (writers) and,

¹ For more on the *Prolog* as a source for *The Mountain* see [Минеева].

² The story was first published in the magazine *Zhivopisnoe obozrenie* in 1890 (№ 1–12).

³ See, for instance [Вольнский]. Also: "In the very first stages of working on 'The Mountain', Leskov invests the Old Russian *Slovo* with new meaning. Unlike its source, the meaning of the story's narrative is deployed in episodes, where the intensity of the 'goldsmith's' faith is fully demonstrated: as with the scene of the temptation of a 'certain woman' and the miracle of 'moving the mountain'. What most impressed Leskov about the 'forger' is the strength of his spirit" [Минеева: 15].

where possible, to reconstruct his ideas on the role of the contemporary artist in his rendering of the national myth⁴.

O. E. Mayorova writes that “Leskov created a world fundamentally removed from the reader that nonetheless does not preclude his identification with the protagonist. In the context of the psychological prose of the time, cannot be read as anything but a daring gesture on his part, a decisive rejection of the artistic language of his era” [Майорова 1994: 61]. It seems that in his only story about an artist, as in several other works, Leskov moves away from the pattern described above.

The fact that Leskov, who believed that Russian literature of the 1880s to be devoid of ideals, was anchoring his story's protagonist in the contemporary artistic and religious situation, can be seen in his letter written to I. E. Repin on February 18, 1889:

Painters are now more capable of giving proper due to ideals than we are, and it is your duty to do so. Paint your “Zaporozhian”, but alongside them, show something like someone interfering with executions. <...> We have our own “Zenos” [Лесков XI: 415].

In his letter to the editor of *Russkie vedomosti* of January 10, 1889, however, Leskov, rather in the spirit of his never-ending obfuscations, writes that:

“Zeno” is about 3rd century Christianity in Egypt. It might be described as a ‘period piece’. Its narrative is taken from apocryphal scripture, which has long since been considered *fabled*. The story's historical background and setting were developed using the research of Ebers and Maspero⁵, as well as other Egyptologists. There is nothing in it that reflects any kind of contemporary events neither in Russia, in Europe, nor anywhere else in the world. It's just a story with an interesting historical narrative. Zeno, the protagonist, is an artist from Alexandria, and the female protagonist, Nefera, is a wealthy widow from Antioch who falls in love with him that he then converts to Christianity. All of the events take place either in the end of the 3rd or the beginning of the 4th century in Alexandria itself, or in Ader, near one of the gorges of the Nile [Ibid.: 241].

Leskov began working on the story in 1887⁶. In the April of the same year, he met Lev Tolstoy, who, in his eyes was, if not the ideal artist, then the closest

⁴ On the characteristics of the artistic expression of the national myth in Leskov, see [Майорова 1997: 25–45; Майорова 1998].

⁵ Georg Moritz Ebers (1837–1898), a German Egyptologist, researcher, and writer; Gaston Camille Charles Maspero (1846 – June 30, 1916), a French Egyptologist.

⁶ The story wasn't published until 1890 because the censors saw parallels between the image of Christian Patriarch and Metropolitan Philaret Drozdov. See [Барюто: 605].

possible thing. It is well known that Leskov's work of the 1880s has many intersections with Tolstoyan ethics and ideas about Christianity⁷. A good many of Leskov's "backdrop myths" are artistic expressions of Tolstoy's teachings about passive resistance to evil and "simplification"; these were appraised highly by Tolstoy himself and published by Tolstoy's publishing house 'for the people', *Posrednik* ["the middle man"]. Despite all this, when Tolstoy read "The Mountain", his reaction, in accord with his already-formed negative opinion of Leskov's style, was less than glowing. On January 1, 1889, Tolstoy wrote in his diary:

I started reading Leskov's "The Goldsmith" in the company of some society young ladies: Mamonova, Samarina. They make only aesthetic judgments, only considering these elements important. I thought, let the combined force of fine arts come together, as strong as I can imagine it, and express the moral truth of life that makes people responsible instead of the kind that you can only look at or listen; the kind that judges contemporary life and demands change. But if there is a work of art this powerful, it will still not move the Mamonovas, Samarinas, or any their kind. Aren't they bored? Why they don't all end up hanging themselves, I can't understand (quoted from [Опупьская: 144]).

Tolstoy's remarks are evidence that what he found unsatisfactory in the listeners' reactions are emphatically the "aesthetic" elements of Leskov's work, and that he doesn't see depth and literary innovation in the hypertrophied "aestheticism" of Leskov's story.

Leskov himself stressed the difficulty of the composition process for this story, pointing at the somewhat secondary role played by the text's source, the *Prolog*:

This piece <...> is *difficult*, it can only be read by those who understand what it was like to conceive, collect, and compose all of these elements to create something that isn't just decorative, but also ideological and at least partially artistic [Лесков XI: 414–415].

As we've said, the *Prolog* narrative where the goldsmith proves the strength of his Christian faith and turns a certain lost woman on to the true path is transformed by Leskov. The story becomes overgrown with a wealth of details absent from the original that are projected onto the works of the writer himself and his renowned contemporaries.

The image of the protagonist, Zeno the goldsmith, is that of an artist living the early Christian era (a critically important historical moment for Leskov, who had left the contemporary church), whose purpose was making art and serving

⁷ See, for instance [Туниманов].

Christ the Teacher. Zeno also stands out as religiously tolerant, and is, overall, modeled on Lev Tolstoy on the one hand, and on the other — on Leskov himself.

The connection with the real Tolstoy allows us to say that Zeno's general 'ideology', as expressed in his religious convictions, refers to specific texts by Tolstoy — from "The Confessions" (1883–1884), to the tracts "Wherein Lies My Faith?"⁸ and "On Life" (although the latter was still being written at the same time as the story⁹, Leskov was evidently already familiar with its positions; he was also familiar with Tolstoy's thoughts that became the basis of the "Kreutzer Sonata", which the author started working on in 1887). Thus, a line of Zeno's thinking goes back to the well-known fragment of Scripture so important for Tolstoy¹⁰:

Then Zeno, fearful of escalating the tension, briefly said to those standing closest to him that it was his custom to pray in reverent silence, but that he did not judge those who preferred to raise their eyes and arms to the sky, so that the hands of the ones that pray may be pure from self-interest, and their souls free of evil and would rise to the sky full of thoughts of eternity. *Then the fear of the loss of the brief earthly existence passes* and the mountain begins to move... <...> — This is what we need today, *for there to be no fear*, until the mountain moves [Лесков VIII: 378].

We see references to the same source in Tolstoy's thought and in the thoughts of his characters about the fear of death and overcoming it through the realization of the idea of good ("Notes of a Madman", "The Death of Ivan Illych", "On Life", and others)¹¹. For Leskov, as for Tolstoy, the most important thing is that the idea of good must be strived for with the *intellect* and not intuition, by means of *faith*. This complex position is also important for Zeno, who preaches to Nefora, the beautiful woman in love with him:

"I don't want to listen to anyone's thoughts when I don't need to". *"It's impossible to live without reasoning"*. "But why?" "You wouldn't understand". "No, I've understood everything... You're in love with another woman". "You're wrong: I don't love anyone in the way you want me to love you". "So you're a fool!" "No, I'm a Christian" [Ibid.: 320].

⁸ This tract was printed in Moscow in 1884 in a separate edition, but never saw the light of day, forbidden by the censors.

⁹ Tolstoy's "On Life" was printed in 1888 by Mamontov's typographical studio, but forbidden and destroyed by the censors.

¹⁰ See: "There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear; for fear has torment, and he that fears has not been made perfect in love" (John 4: 18).

¹¹ On the theme of the 'fear of life' in Tolstoy's work see our article [Pild].

These quotations demonstrate that in this story, Leskov emphasizes a *common source* (common to him and Tolstoy) for his ideas on external religious expression (reducing it to a minimum), and the development of religious feeling in the soul (reason and not feeling must rule). The common source is *Protestant doctrine*, which Leskov was drawn to beginning in the 1870s¹².

The identification of Leskov himself with the artist is evidenced not only by Zeno's ideology, but also his behavior and lifestyle, which are clearly juxtaposed with the life strategy of Tolstoy and his relationship to aesthetics. Leskov and Zeno are united, first of all, in their position in art, which is especially marked by the compositional structure of the story (in the beginning, Leskov writes that Zeno is a goldsmith, and it is not until the fourth section that the reader finds out that the protagonist is also an architect and a sculptor [Лесков VIII: 308]). This is normal for the era the story is set in, the 3rd and 4th centuries A. D. As in the 19th century, in the story, 'craft' is considered 'lower' than 'great' or 'high' art, from which Leskov himself was excluded by contemporary literary critics, in part because of his dedication to literary 'trinkets' and the 'limitations' of his aesthetic capabilities ("the only thing he can write are descriptions of everyday life"). According to B. M. Eikhenbaum,

Leskov <...> is a subtle master, a clever literary 'icon painter'. It's better to not even call him a 'master' (this word is rather ruined by aestheticism), but an 'artful' craftsman — like his characters Lefty, or Leputan the tailor, or Sebastian the icon painter in "The Sealed Angel", or the 'connoisseur' Ivan Severyanich from "The Charmed Wanderer". It's no accident that all of these characters are described with unwavering attention and love. He is the lonely craftsman immersed in his literary craft, wise to all of the secrets of the mosaic of wordsmithing. Here are the origins of his pride, and how wounded he is, confronted with ideologues. The pose of a wounded but proud writer was not something he was forced into, but rather, it was chosen by him and characteristic of his nature. With it, he safeguarded his right to make art on his own terms [Эйхенбаум: 346].

An example of autobiographical projections (or a background of allusions to the author's own life) possibly includes the comparison of Zeno to an actor and of his prayer to a spectacle ([Лесков VIII: 348]; this is what Nefora and some others among the citizens of Alexandria believe, but not the narrator).

The descriptions of Leskov as a play actor, "in costume" were introduced into critical literature by Dostoevsky (see his piece in the *A Writer's Diary* from 1873, "The Costumed Man" [Достоевский 1994: 93–107])¹³.

¹² See, for instance [Muckle].

¹³ On the literary relationship between Dostoevsky and Leskov see [Пульхритудова].

Finally, adapting the smith or the goldsmith from the *Prolog* is important for Leskov because it presents the opportunity to make a connection to Lefty, another one of his characters. The obvious link between Lefty and folk demonology was written about by A. M. Panchenko, who pointed out a number of elements of Lefty's physical description — from his left-handedness to his cross-eyes — that fit the bill. From the perspective of the so-called mass consciousness, the scholar demonstrated that Levsha belongs not only to the earthly but also to the *other* world [Панченко]. The gunsmith and the goldsmith both *forge metals*, which, according to folk tradition, is potentially related to sorcery and the demonic world (see [Ibid.]). Zeno blinds himself, poking one of his eyes out when Nefora attempts to seduce him, thereby coming to physically resemble Levsha with his anomalous vision. In the opinion of the narrator and characters unaware of the reasons behind Zeno's blinding, they believe he has 'gone crooked' [*okrivet*]: "It was forgotten how, for some unknown reason and out of the blue, the artist and goldsmith Zeno, a handsome man well-known in Alexandria, had 'gone crooked', losing one of his eyes" [Лесков VIII: 324].

The obvious allusion to "Lefty" appears while the author is sarcastically 'teetering' between two points of view without revealing his unequivocal position. If we take into account that Zeno is genetically related to the texts of Tolstoy, the hint at the possibility of Zeno's demonic nature correspond with the juxtaposition of the author of *Anna Karenina* with demonic characters which began appearing in literature as early as the 1880s¹⁴.

Lefty and Zeno are also tied by their preoccupations with "inherently valuable" art, despite the apparent religiousness of both characters. We recall that in "Lefty", the steel flea stops dancing when they shoe it in Tula armor (thus, it becomes "useless" and Lefty's craftsmanship futile, at least from the perspective of outsiders). In "The Mountain", Zeno is surrounded by a world of beautiful things he has created himself. He creates them not in order to make money (for that, he fills custom orders), but simply in order to be surrounded by beauty. His studio is beautiful, and he also has a wonderful garden:

It was a very large and high-ceilinged square room without windows. Soft light flowed into it through violet mica, which made everything seem like it was swirling in an ethereal gauze. In the middle room, a bronze ibis adorned a polished porphyry stone, a stream of fresh water flowing out of its beak. The walls were bracketed by columns and evenly painted a reddish brown, which stood in sharp contrast to the white marble and stucco figures of people and animals [Ibid.: 308]; Zeno, like the majority of the artists of that distant era, knew more than just how to be

¹⁴ See our article [Пилья].

a goldsmith. <...> Zeno was also an architect, a founder, a plasterer, a sculptor, and in all of these, he was a master and an expert, a lover of all elegant things, which it was easy to tell from his house, where Nefora now stood, exhaling its freshness and sweet fragrance, which emanated from brightly enameled tubs where golden musk bloomed, permeating the air with its scent. Among all these works of art filling the sanctuary stood the artist himself [Лесков VIII: 308].

This emphasis on the aesthetic component in the text may be obliquely directed at Tolstoy (it's not for nothing that the story inspired an outburst of displeasure) and maximally affiliates the author and his protagonist. The author's relationship to Zeno is made even more clear in the finale, when, upon performing his feat, Zeno tells the Christian patriarch that:

I remembered the words of Amasis: the bowstring is weak until you lay an arrow against it and draw it back. When you need it tense, it will tense and strike hard; but if you pull at it, holding it in constant tension, it will grow thin and weakens. I am afraid of wasting what was granted to me by the heavens [Ibid.: 389].

Zeno's words addressed at the Christian patriarch and the central metaphor of this passage (the bowstring in a state of constant tension) may contain a hidden reproach directed at Tolstoy. The author of the story believes that a constant onslaught, Tolstoy's ceaseless offensive on literature, society, the Church, and his teaching on simplification and nonresistance will, in the end, weaken the position of the writer:

I was tormented by his position on "nonresistance to evil". Scoundrels find this to their advantage and fools lament, seeing in this the "destruction of the meaning of life" (Their preoccupation flares up defiantly). But for a long time, I didn't understand this myself: what is this about? How, really? So if a drunken soldier rapes an underage girl (which happened in a botanic garden in Kiev) I'm supposed to stand by and watch, "not resisting evil", instead of pulling away the victim and throwing off the rapist? (From a letter to Suvorin, October 8, 1886, [Лесков XI: 323])¹⁵.

Finally, with Zeno, Leskov places a special emphasis on the importance of religious tolerance, with the character's rejection of the exclusive significance of belonging to any specific faith¹⁶, which, in combination with other aspects of Zeno's

¹⁵ See also Leskov's 1886 article, "О рожне. Увет сынам противления": "You cannot make too many demands on everyone that can only be satisfied with perfect love" [О литературе].

¹⁶ "This was happening at the time when, in Alexandria, many people of different faiths lived side by side, all tightly intertwined and closely associated in business, each of them meanwhile believing his faith to be the most correct and the best, not respecting and disparaging the faiths of others" [Лесков VIII: 303]; See also Zeno's speech to Nefora, "You love people indiscriminately, regardless of their religion or origins; you are always ready to serve them. You and I are kindred spirits, you

worldview, allow us to speak about the autobiographical projection of the artists on the author of the story.

The image of the heroine, the beauty Nefora, who, like Pushkin's Cleopatra, assays to sell her love, (the connection between this story and Pushkin's "Egyptian Nights" is apparent from the epigraph, "This is an entirely ancient anecdote. In our day, this story would be as impossible as the construction of the pyramids, or the Roman spectacles — the games with gladiators and animals")¹⁷, is directed simultaneously toward a dialogue with Tolstoy (Tolstoy's criticism of sensual love can be found in many of his works, beginning with *Anna Karenina*, which Leskov regarded highly overall), Dostoevsky, and with Leskov's own works, especially the ones with female protagonists possessed by passion. These include, first and foremost, *Lady Macbeth of the Mtsensk District* (1864), *The Life of a Peasant Woman* (1863), and *The Amazon* (1866). In all of these, passion is an emotional state that rouses the heroines from spiritual stagnation and pushes them toward more brilliant, full-blooded existences (it may be that "full-bloodedness" is expressed in destructive acts, as in *Lady Macbeth*, but it is also manifested in altruism toward a beloved person or finding the feeling of the sublime in oneself, as in *The Amazon* and *The Life*.)

In "The Mountain", the heroine's passion for the artist leads not only to the enlightenment of her feelings and their transformation into Christian ("higher") love toward Zeno, but to Zeno's own Christian feat. Pagans inimical to the Christian faith demand that Christians move a mountain as proof of their faith (if the mountain moves, then the Nile will overrun its banks and water the fields devastated by a long drought). The enemies of the new religion believe that the protracted drought and diseases that have descended on the population have been caused by the Christians. The ruler forces the Christians to pray in order to defile their religion, and all of the citizens of Alexandria, regardless of their religion, were convinced that the mountain would not move. The mountain does indeed end up moving, but the reasons behind this are believed to be twofold: the miracle could have happened as a result of Zeno's prayer, but it could have also happened that it was just the time for the rains to come. The important result of the Christian artist's appeal to God, the firmness of his spirit and faith in Christ, is the pagan Nefora's conversion to Christ's teaching, which she promises to follow even if Zeno is sent to the quarries. The heroine's passion develops into a deep and multifaceted feeling that corresponds with Chris-

are my sister, my friend..." [Лесков VIII: 381]. By the 1870s, Leskov had already begun to support the idea of uniting the churches. For more on this see [Майорова 1998].

¹⁷ On Pushkin context in "The Mountain" see [Федотова].

tian teaching but at the same time does not cease to be *passion*. What didn't happen in Dostoevsky's *The Idiot* happens here. While Prince Myshkin was unable to reconcile his worldly feelings for Aglaya and his love-pity for Nastasia Fillipovna, Zeno accomplished this (although he is in love with one woman and not two). Thus, Leskov is entering a dialogue not only with Tolstoy, but also with Dostoevsky. One of the central episodes of the tale, when Zeno blinds himself, alludes to *The Idiot*:

Rogozhin's eyes started sparkling and a crazed smile contorted his features. His right arm rose into the air and *something flashed in it*; it didn't occur to the Prince to get in its way. He only remembered that he screamed something like, "Parfyon, I don't believe you!" <...> then it was as though the skies opened in front of him and his soul was filled with an incredible *inner light* [Достоевский 1989: 236].

Compare with:

Zeno felt as though the sea was crashing in his ears, and *as though* a flame *had flashed* in front of his eyes. He was being drawn into her embrace like reeds are drawn down under the breath of storm winds, but suddenly, it was as though the helmsman appeared on the stern among the waves and storm. Zeno saw him, pushed away Nefora's passionate hands, charged at the table, and now Nefora *saw something seemingly flash* between herself and Zeno <...> *something like a knife* and a bloody flame, and there Zeno was, standing with his hands behind him holding onto the table, swaying on his feet. Blood was running down his face and the hilt of a knife sticking out of his eye socket [Лесков VIII: 321].

It's no accident that this 'dialogue' with two literary authorities of his day appears in Leskov's tale. Leskov believe that his *Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk*, published in 1864 in Dostoevsky's journal *Epoch*, had created a literary trend where female heroines were endowed with a certain Shakespearean psychological profile ("crude" passions). Among contemporary popular fiction writers, Leskov paid special attention to the heirs of this fabula-psychological line (he saw, for instance, A. S. Suvorin as being among them) and his imitators:

<...> Boborykin's *By the Stove* is a remake of *Lady Macbeth of the Mtsensky District*. Really! Do me a favor and skim this *Stove* and you'll see that this is *my fabula*, even if it is significantly distorted. They didn't *recognize* this at the *Vestnik Evropy* and Burenin didn't, either. Can this really be permitted? I think that you, Stasyulevich, would be very surprised to learn that you've published a "trend follower" and "preferred the copy to the original" (from a letter to Suvorin dated April 15, 1888 [Лесков XI: 378]).

The structure of the fabula in "The Mountain" is also tied to Leskov's art and contemporary literary world. When characterizing Leskov's plots, critics of his

time pointed to the lack of fabula as such, writing that Leskov “stitched together” discrete fragments (“anecdotes”) that were not linked by any logical connection¹⁸. In order to counter this mostly justified accusation and respond to another criticism, which was more relevant to him in the 1880s¹⁹, Leskov created a dynamic narrative that moves through the work from start to finish.

The fabula of “The Mountain” is a successive realization of the tale’s conclusion (the anecdote or ‘incident’, as it says in the epigraph, is the story of Nefora’s “deal” that leads to Zeno blinding himself). It develops, growing to its climax (Nefora consenting to believe in Zeno’s Teacher and to live in accordance to Christian law) and has a happy ending: Nefora and Zeno become husband and wife. The close relationship between this late work and his early texts is demonstrated by Leskov through similarities with events that occur in his earlier pieces. An example is the drought (or some other natural disaster) irrevocably leading to an epidemic and/or unexplained disappearances (which may not be real), rumors (‘legends’ or ‘inventions’ in Leskov’s terminology) based on folk superstitions, and the vengeance (i. e. crimes) of superstitious characters. Instances of such a chain of events can be found in “The Nonfatal Golovan” (1880), “The Bogeyman” (1885), and later, “The Vale of Tears” (1892), among others. Constructing the fabula on this framework, Leskov strives to show the unity and coherence of his art over the course of decades and thus to deflect the accusations of imitating Tolstoy, drawing attention to the originality of his prose. For this same reason, as we see it, he includes allusions to *Lady Macbeth of the Mtsensk District*.

On the one hand, the writer is marking the works that are particularly valuable to him and which he believes have most widely influenced the contemporary literary process (*Lady Macbeth*), and at the same time, he is highlighting an important feature of his poetics: framing the process of the creation of folk art in the contemporary context. As N. L. Sukhachev and V. A. Tunimanov demonstrated in their “The Development of Legends in Leskov”, the writer did not reproduce folkloric or other text sources related to folklore in his stories, and neither did he stylize them; instead, he reconstructed the process of the

¹⁸ See: “His organic genre, the writing most typical of him, is the chronicle, constructed by stitching together a series of adventures and events that the hero himself relates to curious listeners (“The Enchanted Wanderer”, “Laughter and Grief”, “The Rabbit Warren”, and others). It’s reminiscent of old adventure novels, which lack narratives that run through them. The central element of this genre is the anecdote (particularly the verbal anecdote), which is a kind of atom in the universe of Leskov’s art” [Эйхенбаум: 445].

¹⁹ Most literary criticism devoted to Leskov in the 1880s and 1890s points to the ideological and thematic disjunction (the lack of unity) between his early and late works.

formation of folk art in modernity [Сухачев, Туниманов]. According to Leskov, the adaptation and reinterpretation of “folk invention”, redirecting it toward ethical “ideals”, created the possibility of changing mass consciousness. Leskov would contrapose his texts against, for instance, the “literary recycling” of the untalented writers that sided with “folk mythology” and pandered to “folk passions” in order to gain popularity. Thus, in a review of a story by the “soldier writer” Andrey Fomich Pogossky, published in the November 1877 issue of *Pravoslavnoe obozrenie*, Leskov writes that:

This literature, which our soldier was *directed* to write as soon as he was made literate, has no power to do anything but replicate his lowest passions and avert his gaze from the works that would lead him in a different direction. This *aversion* from good reading, we daresay with woe, is practically the reason why this terrible direction found support even from places where it least befitted to expect it... [Лесков XI: 242].

With all of the literariness of “The Mountain”²⁰, like other stories by Leskov — including “Lefty”, “The Enchanted Wanderer”, “The Sealed Angel”, — it features the perspective of an ‘educated’ narrator alongside the perspective of the ‘masses’²¹.

Thus, the conceptual basis and allusions in the story both speak to the fact that the image of the artist in “The Mountain” has a complicated relationship to the contemporary literary world and the image of Leskov himself. As Leskov sees it, the artist Zeno is ‘half-stranger’-‘half familiar’ to the people he shares his faith with (the Christians), while also being misunderstood by the majority (‘the masses’), who are fairly unanimous in the belief that the artist really has performed a miracle and moved a mountain. The majority have no idea why Zeno ended up missing one eye and the narrator seems to hint at his pos-

²⁰ Writing about “Pamphalon the Minstrel”, another story from the same period that is also set in Egypt, in a letter to A. S. Suvorin from March 14, 1887, Leskov discusses its typological similarity with the style of Flaubert’s *The Temptation of St. Anthony*. “I read over my Pantolon <sic!> and compared it to the corresponding scenes from the ancient world. None of it is written in the contemporary, living idiom. I am not talking about the quality of the language, but really, the structure of the rhetoric. It is *antiquitized* in the same way in *The Temptation of St. Anthony*, and in *Agrippia*, as well as in your *Medea*. You may not like it, but different language, such as in Tolstoy’s *The Prisoner of the Caucasus*, would have been inappropriate” [Лесков VIII: 585]. However, by then, Turgenev’s “The Song of Triumphant Love”, in part influenced by Flaubert’s stylizations, had already been published. This story had an inarguable effect on the stylistics of Leskov’s tale, which is bound to be of interest to its future scholars.

²¹ Above, we already discussed that the verb used to describe Zeno’s self-blinding — *okrivet’* — clearly does not belong to the narrator reflecting instead the perspective of the ‘collective consciousness’.

sible ties to the demonic world. Only a small portion of the works that Zeno creates find any use (the jewelry he makes on custom order), and his inner world is only witnessed by Nefora, the only person who truly loves him.

On an intertextual level, the story that we have been analyzing and which depicts (albeit piecemeal) the most important constants of the artistic world that the author lives in, is testament to the fact that Leskov's journey (as well as Tolstoy's), is, in many ways, the same as the path followed by Zeno. The masses don't understand him and neither do his colleagues, and this position leads him to the 'ends of the Earth'. According to Leskov, an artist never fully belongs to his nation nor the human community at large. He merely "carves out" an idea without ultimately reaching it himself, and thus is always on the boundary between two spaces — 'his own' and that of 'others'. In "Lefty", this kind of liminal existence was attributed to the Russian master Lefty and his state of slavery, in contrast with the English gunsmiths (masters), who, unlike him, had relative freedom. In "The Mountain", the artist's mythology is unfettered from a strict national framework and becomes extra-national. The most important property of the artist who highly values the rarified beauty of the earthly realm is his capacity to perform a Christian feat while demonstrating utmost tolerance for other faiths.

In the 1860s, in constructing his national myth, Leskov places spiritual order²² in the center of the national and religious edifice, as property that is the most internally liberated, independent, and coherent in its worldview. In the 1880s, this central role is given to religious freedom²³, independence, and religious tolerance, which he believes that, first and foremost, *artists* must defend before their contemporaries (including writers), whose image of the world is characterized by narrower social, religious, and aesthetic views.

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²² See [Майорова 1997].

²³ Leskov characters who resemble Zeno in this include the protagonists of other stories with Egyptian themes written in the 1880s including the minstrel Pamphalon in the eponymous 1887 story and Aza ("Beautiful Aza", 1888).

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