

Andrea Zink*

What is good work? Nikolai Leskov's *Zapechatlennyi angel*

<https://doi.org/10.1515/slau-2022-0006>

Summary: In contrast to many other Russian authors of his time, Nikolai Leskov makes a point of investigating economic questions not only in his journalism articles, but also in his literary works. He focuses on social groups that earn their living through work, in particular merchants and craftsmen. Among these are bridge builders and icon painters, as in *Zapechatlennyi angel*. The skilled craftsmanship of the painters is especially emphasised in the angel story, which demonstrates, above all, what Leskov considers to be good work: his expectations include mastery of the material, a good cause for the work, and its use for a social collective. Adequate pay is valued, but profit is not the objective. With these demands, Leskov undermines not only the capitalist growth imperative, but also the image of a Russian tendency towards idleness. In the end we are, as in all of Leskov's economic stories, referred to the merits of literary craftsmanship.

Keywords: work, handcraft, icon painting, storytelling, gift

1 Introduction: Storytelling as handcraft

The story-telling that thrives for a long time in the circle of work [...] is an artisan form of communication, as it were. [...] Thus the traces of the story-teller cling to the story the way the handprints of the potter cling to the clay vessel.

After all, story-telling [...] is by no means a job for the voice alone. Rather, in genuine story-telling the hand plays a part which supports in a hundred ways what is expressed with its gestures trained by work. (Benjamin 1963: 87, 101)¹

¹ The term “Handwerk” has no direct translation into English. It comprises the concepts of craftsmanship, crafts and trade, handcraft, handicraft, and artisanship. As the involvement of “hands” is essential to Benjamin's use of the word, I will also provide the original:

***Corresponding author: Univ.-Prof. Dr. Andrea Zink**, Institut für Slawistik, Innrain 52, A-6020 Innsbruck, E-Mail: andrea.zink@uibk.ac.at

In his essay *The Story-Teller. Reflections on the Works of Nicolai Leskov*, written 1936, Walter Benjamin describes storytelling as grounded in a genuinely human activity, developed in various professions and commonly practised to this day: *Handwerk* (literally “handwork” or “handcraft”, but meaning the craft trades in all of their historical development). He clarifies his theses primarily through the example of Nikolai Leskov and establishes a connection between the lived experiences of the author and his narrative oeuvre. Benjamin makes the point that Leskov had travelled extensively as a businessman before he started to write, aged almost 30. His first published texts, all of them newspaper articles primarily concerned with economic themes,² can be seen as precursors and inspiration for his later stories. In a letter to Aksakov, Leskov himself (1958: 364–365) indicates the chronology of his professional development — «прежде чем быть литератором я был человеком коммерческим»; “before becoming a writer I was a businessman”. He confirms the influence of his commercial career (characterised, among other things, by independent work, mobility, the receipt of a salary of 6000 rubles per year) on his subsequent literary career.³ *Zapechatlennyi angel* perfectly illustrates Benjamin’s reflections on the handcrafted nature of storytelling and its origin in experience, although he does not mention this story specifically in *Der Erzähler*.⁴

Benjamin’s essays on literature, and especially his essay on Leskov, have only received marginal notice in the field of Slavic Studies.⁵ Benjamin also remained one of few to recognise the intensive relationship of Leskov (and of his

“Die Erzählung, wie sie im Kreis des Handwerks [...] lange gedeiht, ist selbst eine gleichsam handwerkliche Form der Mitteilung. [...] So haftet an der Erzählung die Spur des Erzählenden wie die Spur der Töpferhand an der Tonschale.” “Das Erzählen ist [...] keineswegs ein Werk der Stimme allein. In das echte Erzählen wirkt vielmehr die Hand hinein, die mit ihren, in der Arbeit erfahrenen Gebärden, das was laut wird auf hundertfältige Weise stützt.” (Benjamin 1977: 447, 464).

2 Benjamin mentions some titles and topics that at least allow a glimpse of the concrete economic content of the respective articles. (Benjamin 1963: 82; Benjamin 1977: 441) In Leskov 1996 these first articles by the author are now available to read in detail.

3 Cf. the excerpt of this letter from 27.11.1874 in Grossman 1945: 42. If one takes into account that at the time the letter is written, Leskov is earning 1000 rubles per year as a civil servant (cf. Setschkar-eff 1959: 24), it is understandable that for economic reasons he would look back on his commercial activities with satisfaction. On the connection between Leskov’s journalism and literary work, see Kucherskaya 2016. Kucherskaya examines Leskov not only as an author of journalism texts, but also as an attentive reader of newspapers and journals; Leskov draws on these sources in the press for his stories, e.g. for *Ledi Makbet Mtsenskogo uezda*.

4 Benjamin focuses, among other things, on a later handcraft-story of Leskov’s: *Skaz o Tul’skom kosom Levshe i o stal’noi blokhe*, which is closely related to *Zapechatlennyi angel*.

5 Peter Keßler and Cathérine Géry, the latter with a recent major study, are the exception. Cf. Keßler 1983; Géry 2017.

heroes) to the world of work. Inspired by Eichenbaum's formalist analyses, the interest in Slavic studies tended rather to focus on Leskov's linguistic qualities, especially the *skaz*.⁶ In addition, research pays more attention to the thematic spectrum of nation, emancipation, and religion,⁷ which undoubtedly belongs to Leskov's most important repertoire. However, from the very beginning of his writing career, economic as well as practical and professional questions also pre-occupied Leskov as a journalist and author. Although these interests led him to original literary results or "pieces of advice", to quote Benjamin,⁸ they have found little resonance in the field.⁹ Accordingly, *The Sealed Angel* has been analysed predominantly in respect to its religious motifs.¹⁰ In his monograph from 1977, which is still very much worth reading, Hugh McLean had already discovered a different, creative nuance:

In singing the praises of icons in the 1860s and 1870s, even in Russia Leskov was a pioneer. To be sure, there had been several earlier treatises on the subject [...]. All these earlier studies, however, had treated icons exclusively as manifestations of Russian religiosity, as a miraculous survival into modern times of the spirit of medieval Christianity, rather than as works of art. (McLean 1977: 232)

McLean's observation, made almost in passing, will be elaborated in the following analysis. On closer inspection it becomes apparent that in *The Sealed Angel* icon painting is not only presented as art, but decidedly as artisanship or hand-

6 The articles by Boris Eichenbaum are decisive for this direction of research: *Illiuiziia skaza* (1924), *Leskov i sovremennaiia russkaia proza* (1925) and "*Chrezmernyi*" *pisatel'* (1931). Although in respect to *Zapechatlennyi angel* Eichenbaum sees very clearly that Leskov's *skaz* exhibits also professional nuances in addition to social ones (Eichenbaum 1969b: 230), this observation is not connected with the theme of the story. Eichenbaum is primarily concerned – especially in this early formalist phase of his work – with the linguistic effect, the orientation of the narrative towards the word.

7 As examples one could mention first of all: Gorelov 1988, who focuses on the people, nation, and religion in Leskov, Muller de Morogues 1991, who investigates women's issues in Leskov, and Géry 2015, who presents a study on crime and sexuality based on Leskov's *Lady Macbeth*.

8 Benjamin emphasises the affinity between the narrative and practical wisdom, which manifests itself in the advice of the narrator: "the story-teller is a man who has counsel for his readers." (Benjamin 1963: 83); "Der Erzähler [ist] ein Mann, der dem Hörer Rat weiß." (Benjamin 1977: 442)

9 In his recently published study, Vadim Shneyder (Shneyder 2021: 60–64) briefly discusses Leskov's *Tale of the Cross-Eyed Tula Lefty and the Steel Flea*, in particular the description and the evaluation of the English factories by the *skaz* narrator and the author. In this context see also my article on Leskov's *National Economies*, in which I examine *Lefty* and *Iron Will*. (Zink 2017)

10 This line of reception begins already in 1873, immediately after the publication of *The Sealed Angel*, with Dostoevskii's both enthusiastic and sceptical reaction to the story (Dostoevskii 1980) and continues, for example, up to 2003 (Dukkon 2003).

craft: Leskov focuses on hands in motion, hands in their creative function, working hands. In this context, also icons are primarily and above all the precise work of human hands. Without calling into question the religious significance of the icons, Leskov discounts the thesis of a direct influence of the divine on their creation. Icons originate from the work of pious human hands. This is also true of the angel icon at the centre of the text: «он [ангел] писан в твердые времена благочестивой рукой.» (247)¹¹; “he was painted by a pious hand in times of firm faith.”(70)¹² The painting is flanked by other work executed by hand as craftsmanship, including above all the construction of a bridge. Here the work with heavy materials, stone and metal, is also described in detail.¹³ In addition, the narrative provides a sequence of economic actions and conflicts. To illustrate this, I will begin with a short excursion through the storyline of *The Sealed Angel*.

2 What happens?

A peripatetic working group (artel') of stone masons builds a bridge in a “large city on the Dniepr”, i.e. Kiev.¹⁴ On all their travels, the Russian craftsmen, all Old Believers, carry with them a number of icons, among them an angel icon of the Stroganov school. Their English employers respect this belief and the images connected with it. The angel protects the workers and also guarantees the quality of their works. However, the accountant of the artel', Pimen Ivanov, operates a fraudulent business by exploiting the locals' admiration for the skills of his colleagues. As a consequence of this intrigue, the angel icon is confiscated by municipal officials and has a seal affixed right onto the face of the angel. Invalidated or even

11 The quotations from *Zapechatlennyi angel* are taken from Leskov 1957 and are quoted in the body of the text by page number.

12 The English quotations are taken from Leskov 2014a and are quoted in the body of the text by page number.

13 With his representation of bridge building and icon painting, Leskov emphasises in particular the technical skills of the Russian people, according to Grossman. (Grossman 1945: 169–171.) However, this national reading, which can probably be attributed to the date of publication of Grossman's study at the end of World War II, does not seem to do justice to Leskov's story (especially as Leskov also expresses appreciation for the achievements of the English engineers who supervise the construction). In my opinion, Keßler's approach is more accurate, as he warns against deducing a supposedly limited interest in people in general from Leskov's interest in the Russian national character. (Keßler 1983: 102)

14 For the construction of the Nikolaevsky chain bridge in Kiev (1848–1850), which Leskov himself witnessed in his youth, see Grossman 1945: 160.

“locked”, and in a way desecrated, it is then deposited in the apsis of an Orthodox church.¹⁵

After the loss of their angel, the work of the stone masons does not seem to progress very well. With the support of their employers, they therefore plan to get back the icon and to replace it secretly by a copy. After some disappointing encounters with commercially oriented representatives of the trade, the Old Believers' search for a professional icon painter is successful, and the painter Sevast'ian manages to manufacture an exact reproduction of the icon. In the end the exchange of the two icons does not take place after all, however there is a happy solution. Sevast'ian removes the seal from the real angel, but in contrast the application of a seal to the copy fails miraculously. As a consequence, the members of the *artel'* confess their planned fraud and convert to the Orthodox Church. The building of the bridge can, as the introduction of the enclosed narrative informs us, be concluded successfully. There it says:

Пришли мы для больших работ под большой город [...], чтобы тут большой и ныне весьма славный каменный мост строить. (325)

We came to do big work near a big city [...] to build there a big and now highly famous stone bridge. (50)

Even this condensed storyline reveals two distinctive features:

On the one hand, for much of the time Leskov's *The Sealed Angel* is concerned with good and bad quality work, correct or corrupt business practices, whereby the evaluation of these economic actions still needs to be investigated. In any case religious and national questions, with which research has been intensively occupied so far, are most closely linked to questions of work and economy. Therefore it could be worthwhile to take a new approach and to begin the analysis of the text by engaging with its economic-practical aspect.

On the other hand, the story contains, especially towards its end, a number of surprises and can only partially be explained convincingly with reference to logic or causality. In addition to the strange conversion of the Old Believers, rated as

¹⁵ The sealing of the angel has a prologue in a nearby Jewish town, where the same officials seal the Jewish shops in order to carry out a lucrative inspection. The reaction of the Jewish shopkeepers, who rid themselves of the seals by a ruse, foreshadows the reaction of the Old Believer artisans. Even though they proceed in different ways and pursue different goals, the Jews and Old Believers are shown as acting in parallel in their resistance to the corrupt representatives of the local administration. As a result, both socially marginalised groups are able to continue their work successfully. On Leskov's presentation of Jewish life, see the comprehensive study by Safran 2000.

unbelievable by many interpreters,¹⁶ there are other puzzling events and activities. Eccentricity and excess – criteria that Eichenbaum applies to Leskov's linguistic creativity¹⁷ – can easily be demonstrated to exist in the storyline as well.¹⁸ Instead of supplying us with a solution at the end, Leskov's text generates a number of questions relating to the meaning and purpose of work, which refer not least to the craft of story telling and writing itself. In this context, the literary technique is not only visible in the skaz, but also in the adventurous course of the story, in its gaps, absurdities, subtle connections, and not least in the composition of *The Sealed Angel*.¹⁹

The aim of the following argument is therefore to trace the special *economy* of *Zapechatlennyi angel*. This economy explains Leskov's unique position in the ranks of the Russian realists and his affinity towards trade and manufacture.²⁰ However, it should be noted that he undermines and questions the capitalist or-

16 Many critics interpret the conversion of the Old Believers as a concession made by Leskov to his publisher Katkov, among them Eichenbaum (Eichenbaum 1969a: 340) and Grossman (Grossman 1945: 171); Dostoevskii criticises the representation of the orthodox bishop, whose irresponsible conduct hardly motivates a conversion of the *artel'* members. (Dostoevskii 1980: 56–57) McLean, on the other hand, sees the end of the story as consistent, especially since the conversion is, according to him, prepared by other figures and motivated in that way. (McLean 1977: 237–240) The editors of the *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii* also argue in this direction in their commentary on *Zapechatlennyi angel*. (Leskov 2014b: 377–390)

17 Eichenbaum emphasises these characteristics in his article “*Chrezmernyi pisatel*”, which he had written in honour of Leskov's 100th birthday in 1931. (Eichenbaum: 1969a)

18 Eichenbaum indicates in “*Chrezmernyi pisatel*” that because of Leskov's recourse to Old Church Slavonic elements, the language mosaic of *Zapechatlennyi angel* is even comparable to icon painting. (Eichenbaum 1969a: 339) In contrast, he interprets the plot according to the conventional reading: the unbelievable ending of the story, the conversion of the Old Believers to the Orthodox religion, is deemed a concession by the author towards his publisher Katkov. (Ibid.: 340)

19 In structuralist terms, this relates primarily to the craft of the (implicit) author, rather than to his narrator.

20 It is not by chance that Leskov situates his story in a community of Old Believers. In the 19th century, the Russian Old Believers distinguished themselves as economically successful merchants, and towards the end of the century also as accomplished entrepreneurs. (West & Petrov 1998; Heller 2006) In literature for ex. Mel'nikov-Pecherskii develops this theme in his novels *V lesakh* and *Na gorakh*. Leskov paints a somewhat different picture in *The Sealed Angel*: The success of the Old Believer craftsmen lies less in financially measurable prosperity than in their honest, spiritually fulfilling work. During the course of this activity, however, property can also accumulate, as the narrator reveals already at the beginning of the frame story: «Лука Кирилов [...] у нас самый первый рядчик. Хозяйство у него было стародавнее, еще от отцов заведено [...], а приумножил и создал себе житницу велику и обильну». (Leskov 1957: 323); “Luka Kirilovich is [...] our foremost contractor. His business was from old times, established from his forefathers [...] and he [...] made himself a big and abundant granary”. (48)

ientation towards growth and profit to the same extent as the alleged Russian tendency towards idleness.

3 Metal cutting and bridge building, icon painting and story writing

On the very first pages of the story we are introduced to the manual skill of a blacksmith who manages to shorten steel bolts made in England, without the support of any substantial technical tools.

Нагревать этих болтков было нельзя потому что тем сталь отпускается, а пилить ее никакой инструмент не брал: но на все это наш Марой, ковач, изымел вдруг такое средство, что облепит это место, где надо отсечь, густою колонию из тележного колеса с песковым жвиром, да и сунет всю эту штуку в снег, и еще вокруг солью осыпет, и вертит и крутит; а потом оттуда ее сразу выхватит, да на горячее ковало, и как треснет балдой, так, как восковую свечу, будто ножницами и отстрижет. Англичане все и немцы приходили и на это хитрое Мароево умудрение смотрели, и глядят, глядят, да вдруг рассмеются и заговорят сначала промеж себя по-своему, а потом на нашем языке скажут:

«Так, русс! Твой молодец; твой карош физик понимай!» (328)

To heat up these bolts was impossible, because it softens the steel, and no tool could saw through them: but our blacksmith Maroy suddenly came up with this method: he'd coat the place where it had to be cut with thick axle grease mixed with coarse sand, and then stick the whole thing into the snow, and crumble salt around it, and turn it, spin it; then snatch it out of there all at once, put it on a hot anvil, and give it such a whack with a sledge that it would get cut off like a wax candle with snips. All the Englishmen and Germans came to look at Maroy's cleverness, stared and stared, then suddenly laughed and started talking among themselves first and then said in our language:

“So, Russ! You fine fellow; you goot understand physic!” (52–53)

The work of the blacksmith is described in detail and very much in Leskovian style: within the skaz of a practical, slightly naive storyteller, who is also a member of the *artel*.²¹ This narrator, Mark Aleksandrov, gives us precise instructions

²¹ As Eichenbaum rightly remarks, the scenic function of dialogue can be suspended for the benefit of characterising the narrator. (Eichenbaum 1969: 218) The Englishmen and Germans are not speaking for themselves when they call the “russ” a “karosh fizik”, they are rather being imitated by a narrator who is primarily characterising himself and, in addition, creating many comic side effects.

for steel processing. It seems that if only we had the manual skills of Maroi, we would be able to execute the necessary work ourselves and arrive at the desired result. Maroi's achievement advances the construction of the bridge considerably: shortening the bolts makes it possible to attach the first chains between the stone piers, and the first step towards crossing the Dnieper is made. However, Maroi's clever solution enables not only the construction of the bridge, but also the construction of the story. The labour of the story's characters and the literary techniques of their creator advance hand in hand.²² The quoted passage, in which Maroi operates with tar, sand and salt, with cold, heat and hammer, gives momentum to the bridge construction, which had been faltering. At the same time, it gives the impulse for the intrigue of the accountant Pimen.

In the town, Pimen manages to market the Old Believers' achievements in craftsmanship as miracles. These miracles, according to the accountant, are ultimately brought about by the prayers of the Old Believers and their special contact with "heaven". Pimen subsequently "sells" Old Believer prayers for divine intervention on behalf of ambitious townspeople and the advancement of their careers. With these unusual "commodities, he speculates in the centre of the town. Maroi's achievement is thus linked with an apparently less respectable kind of work: here the objective is profitable deals, prestige, money and speculation. The money that Pimen rakes in goes into his own pocket. However, it does not take long until the fraud is exposed.

Without doubt at this point skilful manual labour is discredited by dishonest business practices. Pimen's manoeuvres lead to the temporary misfortune of the bridge builders. When a promised miracle fails for once, the buyers in the town take revenge by harming the Old Believers: They seal the angel, the icon that in their view constitutes the source of the Old Believers' inspiration and prosperity. However, Pimen's actions do have a purpose with respect to the story's ending. The narrator of the enclosed story already hints at this assessment at the beginning of his elaborations: He places Maroi's and Pimen's achievements on the same level and declares *both* to be necessary trials, divinely imposed punishments on the path of providence.

А между тем такое горе нас ожидало, и устроилось нам, как мы после только уразумели, не людским коварством, а самого одного путеводителя нашего смотрением. [...] вдруг узрели мы, что есть посреди нас два сосуда избрания божия к нашему наказанию. Один из таковых был ковач Марой, а другой счетчик Пимен Иванов. (325–327)

²² This also applies to other stories, e.g. *Levsha* (cf. Zink 2017: 201–206), but especially to the construction of *Zapechatlennyy angel*.

And yet that grief awaited us, and was arranged for us, as we perceived only later, not through people's perfidy, but through the providence of our guide himself. [...] we suddenly perceived that among us were two vessels chosen by God for our punishment. One such was the blacksmith Maroy, and the other the accountant Pimen Ivanovich. (50–52)

It can be stated that fraudulent business practices are not necessarily condemned under Leskov's direction. They play an important role in his work²³ and also continue in the second part of *The Sealed Angel*, albeit in a different way.

In parallel to the first intrigue, the objective is now to regain and to unseal the angel. Again we, the readers, can observe a work process, the creation of icons, at a very close range.²⁴ Once more, this work is connected with a delicate business: the secret exchange of "real" for "fake" commodities. However, the eccentricity of the text — to return once more to Eichenbaum's appropriate term — increases. Already with his interpretation of icon painting as a handcraft, Leskov departs from the received canon. According to their origination legend, icons are by definition "not painted by human hand". They are assumed to originate through intervention of the divine beings who miraculously incarnate themselves in the image, or at least guide the brush of the painters.²⁵ Not so in Leskov's view. In *The Sealed Angel* the icon emerges unmistakably from the work of human hands. One's focus is directed explicitly onto the unusually large hands of the painter Sevast'ian, hardly by chance compared to a working tool, a rake. As Leskov's son Andrej (1981: 271–272) remembers, this character is based on the Petersburg icon painter Racheiskov, with whom Leskov was close friends. He also had large hands.²⁶

Руки у Севастьяна были большущие, как грабли [...]. Яков Яковлевич и говорит:

«Удивляюсь я, братец, как ты такими ручищами можешь рисовать?»

А Севастьян отвечает:

«Отчего же? Чем мои руки несоответственны?»

«Да тебе, – говорит, – что-нибудь мелкое ими не выведешь».

Тот спрашивает:

«Почему?»

«А потому что гибкость состава перстов не позволит».

А Севастьян говорит:

«Это пустяки! Разве персты мои могут мне на что-нибудь позволять или не позволять? Я им господин, а они мне слуги и мне повинуются». (367)

²³ As, for example, in the stories *Obman* (*Deception*), *Obzornoe zerno* (*Choice grain*), and *Ukha bez ryby* (*Fish soup without fish*); cf. the annotation in Leskov 1996: 382.

²⁴ The metal works are also paralleled: the shortening of steel bolts in the first part corresponds to the new manufacture of the icon frame (*oklad*) in the second part.

²⁵ Cf. the chapters "Die orthodoxe Ikone" in Benz 1957: 7–22, and "Die Ikonen" in Tamcke 2004: 66–73.

²⁶ See also McLean 1977: 233.

Sevastian's hands were huge as rakes [...]. Yakov Yakovlevich finally says:
 'I'm surprised, brother, that you can paint with such huge hands.'
 And Sevastian replies:
 'How so? What's unsuitable about my hands?'
 'You can't trace anything small with them,' he says.
 'Why?' the man asks.
 'Because the finger joints aren't flexible enough to allow it.
 But Sevastian says:
 'That's nonsense! How can my fingers allow and not allow me something? I'm their master,
 and they're my servants and obey me.' (90)

This concentration on the human, on handcraft and artistic skill, is further emphasised by the painting *trial* that Sevast'ian has to pass. The English master does not trust that he, with his large "paws", could manufacture the angel copy. All the more so because icons of the Stroganov school, as we learn explicitly from Leskov's text, are famous for their miniatures and their delicate colours, applied in several layers.

Избрал он [...] старенькую самую небольшую досточку пядницу, то есть в одну ручную пядь величины, и начал на ней таланствовать. Прежде всего он ее, разумеется, добре вылевкасил крепким казанским алебастром, так что стал этот левкас гладок и крепок, как слоновья кость, а потом разбил на ней четыре ровные места и в каждом месте обозначил особливую малую икону, да еще их стеснил тем, что промежду них на олифе золотом каймы положил, и стал писать. (368)

He chose [...] a very small, old board of a hand's length in size, and began to exercise his talents upon it. First of all, naturally, he gave it a good priming with sturdy Kazan alabaster, so that the priming came out smooth and hard as ivory, and then he divided it into four equal spaces, and in each space he marked out a separate little icon, and he reduced each of them still more by placing borders of gold leaf between them, and then he started painting. (91)

While here the priming and the division of the panel is in the foreground, at other points in the text the preparation of the paint colours (on the basis of egg and not oil) is mentioned, as well as the varnish (*olifa*), which protects the icon from external influences. (371) Not that the contents of the icon painting are secondary – precisely in this painting trial Sevast'ian distinguishes himself by his creative realisation of a given theme, focusing on biblical motifs (368). Nevertheless with Leskov, quite in the spirit of the Russian formalists, icon painting appears as a technique, as command of the materials.²⁷ The commission of the copy empha-

27 This is valid for Leskov's own linguistic art as well as for the described work processes.

sises this stance in particular. Sevast'ian is supposed to create the new angel in a way that it most closely, *deceptively*, resembles the old one. It is precisely creativity that is *not* needed, rather the point is to duplicate exactly the valuable original, a task that requires masterly skill.²⁸

The Sealed Angel corresponds to the central concerns addressed by Leskov not much later in a journalism piece with the title *O russkoi ikonopisi* (Leskov 1958: 179–187).²⁹ The author deplores the state of contemporary Russian icon painting,³⁰ among other things he calls for better training for icon painters through the distribution of a textbook and the organisation of exhibitions.³¹ In addition, he suggests economic incentives: According to Leskov, the announcement of a competition could contribute to the recovery of icon painting in Russia. He envisages Count Stroganov as a patron, counting him among the best experts on Russian icon painting at the time. (Leskov 1958: 184) In one word: in *O russkoi ikonopisi* Leskov praises icon painting as an art which can be learned, as an artistic form of craftsmanship. In this article, one hears nothing about icon painters leading a holy life,³² and the story is also opaque on this subject. We learn hardly anything about Sevast'ian's past and his circumstances. His personal and professional integrity are not apparent through asceticism, but through his special attitude towards money and towards the use of his art.

Without hesitation Sevast'ian rejects the creation of a product with worldly content when the English construction manager asks for a miniature portrait of his wife, although he is offered the considerable sum of 500 rubles (369). In contrast, he has no qualms at all about the order of a copy, the new painting of the

28 As described in *The Story-Teller*, the perfect narrative emerges „aus der Schichtung vielfacher Nacherzählungen an den Tag”; “the perfect narrative is revealed through the layers of a variety of retellings”. In this the story is similar to works of lacquer or paintings. (Benjamin 1977: 448; Benjamin 1963: 88) This thesis is supported by icon painting itself, along with the many stories about icons, among them Leskov's *Zapechatlennyyi angel*.

29 The literary text was published in January 1873 in Katkov's journal *Russkii vestnik*, followed in May by an article on devil-icons *Ob adopisnykh ikonakh*, and in September by the evaluation of contemporary Russian icon painting *O russkoi ikonopisi*, both first published in *Russkii mir*.

30 In his review of Leskov's *Zapechatlennyyi angel*, Dostoevskii even goes further and expresses his worry about the state of faith among the Russian people. (Dostoevskii 1980: 58–60) So in spite of all polemics, Dostoevskii does agree on many points with Leskov.

31 However, Leskov explicitly rejects the distribution of icons in the form of illustrated volumes. Books of this kind would not popularise icon painting, as, according to the wishes and tastes of the Russian people, the icon should be a hand painted work and not printed: «по желанию и вкусу русского человека, икона непременно должна быть писанная рукою, а не печатная.» (Leskov 1958: 182) He pre-empt's Benjamin's scepticism towards *technical* means of replication, by which the aura of an artwork and its social context are lost. (Benjamin 1974: 436, 441)

32 See Benz 1957: 10.

angel icon. That his mastery is needed for economic reasons does not bother him. Icon painting and practical use – the objective is to restore the working capacity of the stone masons – complement each other in an ideal way. Nothing is said explicitly about a payment for the painter, but since the English prove to be generous throughout the text, they are likely also to have honoured the manufacture of the angel copy with money. This is indicated already in the third chapter: «Занялись мы работой, и пошло все как надо! деньги за расчет у англичан в конторе верные» (326); “We got down to work, and everything went as it ought to! The money counted out by the Englishmen in the office was reliable” (51).³³ Moreover, it does not seem surprising that the sealed angel is a Stroganov icon, meaning it is connected with a school that was founded by a wealthy merchant family. Any kind of financial support, as long as it promotes demanding work and serves a good purpose, makes sense according to Leskov. In his economic tenets, the author remains true to himself even from the very beginning of his career. For example, in an article from 1861 he argues emphatically for the deployment of educated workers (predominantly from the rank of the Raskol’niki) in commerce.³⁴ In particular, he demands adequate remuneration by the employers. Even if an educated employee causes higher wage costs, these would be offset by the quality of the executed work. In his text, Leskov criticises the conservative Russian merchant class: according to him, they protect the members of their own rank, see job seekers primarily as beggars, and thus reinforce Russia’s backwardness.

The dangers threatening the Russian manual craft trades, among them icon painting, are also mentioned in *The Sealed Angel*. In Moscow, the “most glorious queen of the ancient Russian people” (77); «древлего русского общества преславная царица» (354), Mark Aleksandrov witnesses how painting technique is deteriorating and mentions «неаккуратность в художестве» (354); “carelessness in [...] art” (77). He sees how the social ties of the craftsmen and icon painters make way for competitiveness, and how hastily fabricated products conquer the market. The focus is on quick profit and instant fame, deception of clients is the order of the day. This is fundamentally different from the “deceit” of the stone masons, in which also the English building masters participate – wholeheartedly.

³³ Already the sample product is paid for and brings Sevast’ian 200 rubles. (369)

³⁴ Prakticheskaia zametka. Ob ishchushchikh kommercheskikh mest v Rossii. (Leskov 1996: 249–254)

4 The failed exchange

By means of various tricks, the sealed angel is removed from the church during a service and is conveyed from the right to the left side of the Dnieper, where the stone masons live. In order to complete the enterprise successfully, the real icon needs to be detached from its base, the copy attached onto it, and the frame mounted onto the new icon. Finally the real angel, at least this is suggested by the story's turbulent course of action, needs to be unsealed. Sevast'ian executes this "liberation" with great skill by his highly professional use of an iron. In this case as well Leskov describes the work process in great detail.

Это начиналась самая трудная акция распечатления.

Подали изографу шляпу, а он ее сейчас перервал пополам на колене и, покрыв ею запечатленную икону, кричит:

«Давай каленый утюг!» [...]

Михайлица зацепила его и подает на ухвате, а Севастьян обернул ручку тряпкою, поплевал на утюг, да как дернет им по шляпному обрывку!... От разу с этого войлока злой смрад повалил, а изограф еще раз, да еще им трет и враз отхватывает. Рука у него просто как молонья летает, и дым от поярка уже столбом валит, а Севастьян знай печет: одной рукой поярочек помалу поворачивает, а другою – утюгом действует, и все раз от разу неспешнее да сильнее налегает, и вдруг отбросил и утюг и поярок и поднял к свету икону, а печати как не бывало: крепкая строгановская олифа выдержала, и сургуч весь свелся, только чуть как будто красноогненная роса осталась на лице, но зато светлобожественный лик весь виден... (378)

This was the beginning of the most difficult action – the unsealing

They gave the icon painter a hat, he immediately tore it in half on his knee and, covering the sealed icon with it, shouted:

'Give me the hot iron!' [...]

Mikhailitsa picked it up with tongs and gave it to him, and Sevastian wrapped the handle with a cloth, spat on the iron and passed it quickly over the scrap of hat! ... An evil stench arose from the felt at once, and the icon painter did it again, and pressed and snatched it away. His hand flew like lightning, and a column of smoke already rose from the felt, but Sevastian went on scorching: with one hand he turned the felt a little, with the other he worked the iron, and each time more slowly and pressing harder, and suddenly he set both the iron and the felt aside and held the icon up to the light, and it was as if the seal had never been: the strong Stroganov varnish had held out, and the sealing wax was all gone, only a sort of fiery red dew was left on the image, but the whole brightly divine face was visible... (100–101)

But time is running out! This urgency is also felt by the reader. The new angel must be returned *before* the end of the church service and placed in exactly the same position at which the original is now missing. The pace of the action is extremely fast. Both with the Old Believers and with Leskov everything seems to be getting out of hand, so that we also, the readers, no longer think about the moti-

vations and reasons for the actions. In addition, the characters are forced by external circumstances to act swiftly and spontaneously. An unexpected thaw has set off the ice-drift on the river, so crossing the Dnieper by boat, as had been planned, is no longer possible. Finally the leader of the *artel*, Luka Kirilov, sets about bringing the enterprise to a close despite all dangers. He balances across the river on the bridge's chains and delivers – both icons, the old one as well as the new one.

But why two angels? The original plan had been an exchange. The original was supposed to stay in the living quarters of the Old Believers, the copy – and only the copy – was supposed to be taken to the church in its place. One might speculate that possibly Luka does not trust the copy to exert any protective power. Crossing the river is risky, so as a precaution, he takes along both angels. However, this hypothetical reasoning contradicts the promise that Luka gave the English construction supervisor already in advance of the planned action.

«Мы, Яков Яковлевич, не того духа люди, чтоб обманывать благодетелей. Я возьму икону и вам обе назад принесу, и настоящую и подделок.» (374)

'We're not the sort of people who deceive their benefactors, Yakov Yakovlevich. I'll take the icon and bring both back to you, the real one and the copy.' (97)

Iakov (James) Iakovlevich supports the Old Believers with advice and deeds, he plays a central role in the exchange, and he is involved as guard in the church. But what is he supposed to do now with two icons? He has no use for two icons. Only *one* is supposed to be located in the church. The promise, as well as the action that finally realises the promise, cannot be grasped at all by the laws of benefit, business, exchange, nor by the laws of fraud. On the contrary, the transfer of the icons contradicts even *the exchange as such*. The exchange quite obviously is turned into a present, a gift. And in my view, this is where the key to Leskov's evaluation of work is to be found.³⁵

Derrida's provision, according to which the gift, in order to be a gift, must not be apparent as one, can be said largely to apply to *The Sealed Angel*.³⁶ We hardly notice the gift, the unnecessary abundance of angels. Neither do we notice that even the rushed unsealing of the angel was not necessary. Why did Sevast'ian

³⁵ This aspect is supported by the narrator's many references to the connection between icon painting and the gifts of God. For example, a devout viewer of an icon might receive the gift of piety and be presented with further gifts that lie beyond the realm of money and worldly fame. (Leskov 1957: 351–352; Leskov 2014: 74–75)

³⁶ Derrida 1994: 14: "*At the limit, the gift as gift ought not appear as gift: either to the donee or to the donor. It cannot be gift as gift except by not being present as gift.*" (Italics in the original)

need to hurry at all? He could have got to work with the iron in peace and quiet many hours, even days, later, had not the author himself intended to get the original under way *together with its copy*. This concealed character of the gift is reflected not least in the available research on the story.

The illogic of the story line is mostly not noticed at all. For example McLean expresses his fascination for the final scene of the text, in which Luka balances across the river with “the icon”.³⁷ Also Grimstad, who recently presented a profound monograph on the topic of Leskov's oeuvre, speaks of “the icon”, which has found its way across the Dnieper.³⁸ In both studies the conveyance of *the copy* is mentioned. However, Gorelov notices that *two* icons are brought across the Dnieper and sees this as a sign of impending religious-national unification.³⁹ The commentators of the *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii* argue in a similar direction. (Leskov 2014b: 384–390) In this approach, the copy tends to be seen as secondary, and only the transfer of *the original* as crucial. All of the commentators disregard the element of gratitude towards the English employers, which (also) motivates Luka Kirilov's feat.

That the sealing of the copy finally fails, does not make much of a difference anymore. The missing seal is at first interpreted as a miracle and motivates the conversion of the stone masons. But above all, it conceals the preceding deformation of the exchange, the virtually un-economic actions of the bridge builders. These actions are based on their gratitude towards their English employer and benefactor – and maybe also towards the angel.⁴⁰ As the narrator recounts this flow of events irrespective of their connections and contradictions, he has been

37 “In the finale, Luka Kirillov [...] carrying the icon, must cross the Dnepr on a stormy night, balancing himself on a high chain.” (McLean 1977: 235)

38 “The tale culminates with the leader of the schismatics crossing the river Dnieper on a stormy night, icon in hand and balancing himself on a chain [...]. When the duplicate is brought to the church, the seal [...] has vanished.” (Grimstad 2007: 144)

39 «картина перехода Луки Кирилова с двумя иконами на груди через ревущий новогодишний Днепр [...] приобретает на фоне [...] народно-культурных ассоциации [...] характер куда более грандиозный». (Gorelov 1986: 158)

40 A divine being, maybe the angel himself, is secretly involved in this gift, he accompanies Luka Kirilov across the Dnieper, leading him by both hands or holding him under both arms:

«не знаю, как перебег и не упал... точно меня кто под обе руки нес.» (Leskov 1957: 382); “don't know how I didn't fall as I ran... it was as if somebody held me up under both arms.” (104) Although discreetly placed, in this text passage the hand motif is confirmed in its central relevance. This is also true for the beginning of *The Sealed Angel*, with its subtle emphasis on the Russian verb *rukovodstvovat'*. Mark Aleksandrov begins his story with the assertion that he saw the angel and was led by him: «вы видели, что ли, ангела, и он вас водил? – Да-с, я его видел, и он меня руководствовал.» (322); “you saw an angel and he led you [...]? Yes, sir, I saw him, and he guided me.” (47)

rightly compared to a chronicler.⁴¹ And yet, his presentation of the “adventurous” ending of the enclosed narrative could also be described as a successful and carefully considered diversionary tactic by the *author*.

5 Ending: the frame

But this is not yet the end of the story. Just as the enclosed narrative follows the artisanal achievements and economic activities of the characters, so does the frame. The angel icon is encased in a so-called *basmennyi oklad*. But the story with the same name also possesses an oklad. In this literary encasement, in the frame, the failed sealing of the wrong angel is finally explained to us in a realistic way. We learn from Mark Aleksandrov that the seal of the angel was only attached to a piece of paper that slipped during the difficult transport across the Dnieper – precisely under the oklad.⁴² Correspondingly the miracle is also hidden in the *literary* frame. The narrator destroys it as such by exposing the human influence behind it – assuming that we believe his argumentation and do not secretly prefer the miraculous. In any case, this retrospective interpretation of the enclosed narrative is to be understood as a meta-poetic reference to the work of the author. The story of the sealed angel with all of its gaps and pitfalls is finally transformed into a question of *literary craftsmanship*. Now the focus of the readers might be directed towards the layering of realistic story and legend with which Leskov attempts, according to Benjamin, to revive the practical knowledge of former times in a (dawning) era of rational thinking and fleeting information. (Benjamin 1963: 84–85; Benjamin 1977: 443–445) In this evaluation one has to agree with Benjamin, and Leskov’s unique position among Russian realists illustrates this analysis. However, Benjamin may have paid too little attention to Leskov’s humour and therefore also the ambivalence of Leskov’s narration.⁴³ We can hardly speak of *one* piece of advice which the author wants to give us with his angel story. If at all, it is a *bundle* of advice, conveyed with a knowing wink.

⁴¹ Cf. Benjamin in *The Story-Teller / Der Erzähler* (Benjamin 1963: 90–91; Benjamin 1977: 451–452) and the interpretation of this essay by Eggers 2008: 141–142; in addition Eichenbaum 1969a: 339, Eichenbaum 1969b: 223, 241 and Géry 2017: 44–45.

⁴² This “deceit” in respect to protecting the copy from the seal is initiated by Yakov Yakovlevich’s wife. The positive role that both characters play in the story, and especially in the transformation of the exchange into a gift, is not to be underestimated. For example, Yakov Yakovlevich does not oppose Luka Kirilov’s announcement that he will bring both icons.

⁴³ This nuance is elaborated especially by Géry. In her study, in contrast to the moral interpretation by Benjamin, she emphasises the ambivalence of *skaz* – as a “dispositif de leurre” – and states that this inherent ambiguity makes Leskov a modern, currently relevant author. (Géry 2017: 14, 242)

On this note, I would like to answer – provisionally – the question asked in the title of this article. “What is good work?” Good work, according to Leskov, is a good command of the materials. It is based on experience and grows out of the worker’s spiritual harmony with his activity and his product; both the blacksmith Maroi and the painter Sevast’ian serve as vivid examples in this respect.

In addition, good work requires a good cause. Business that is oriented exclusively towards profit can discredit individuals and even entire occupational groups. However, for Leskov the harmful influence of capitalist actions and thought are limited. It seems as if these intrigues, as illustrated by the character of Pimen and some fashionable Moscow painters, only serve to highlight the passionate actions and successful works of the painters and stone masons. Adequate payment for work – as practised by the English – is valued explicitly. In addition, Leskov himself enjoyed the success of his story. The publication of *Zapechatlennyyi angel* earned him esteem with the tsar’s family and led to new commissions for the Petersburg icon painter Racheiskov, who had been the model for the character of Sevast’ian (McLean 1977: 233). In addition, the author indicates a purpose that is not that easily measurable, at least not with money or fame. A good story, i.e. a work of literature that is both technically convincing and sincere, would seem also always to be a gift, a unilateral present from the author to his readers. It is of no particular use to us, but it could make us happy – and maybe also a bit wiser. It is hardly a coincidence that both the frame story⁴⁴ and the enclosed narrative are set during Christmas time. «Дело было о святках, накануне Васильева вечера» (320); “It happened during Christmas time, on the eve of St. Basil’s” (45), is the first sentence of *The Sealed Angel*, and the exchange activity begins during the capricious weather at Christmas time in Kiev: «на дворе стояло Спасово рождество» (370); “Christmas was at the door” (93). *The Sealed Angel* is one of the classic Christmas tales,⁴⁵ whose essence it is, as Sarygina states for Leskov’s *Sviatochnye rasskazy* of the 1880s, to reconcile people with each other. (Sarygina 2017: 46)⁴⁶ Giving, which can also include fraud (Sarygina 2017: 44), plays a prominent part in this respect.

⁴⁴ The frame story recurs to the core scene of hospitality, which is sometimes seen as a central model of literature. (Simon 2011, 2015) Mark Aleksandrov presents his story as a *gift* to the innkeeper who has offered him entry into his lodgings, as a way of thanking him for providing shelter on a cold night. Implicitly meta-referentially, Leskov indicates *his* gift to us, the story *Zapechatlennyyi angel*, to which we can offer entry into our own world through our reading.

⁴⁵ In the edition Leskov, Nikolai Semenovich. 1874. *Zapechatlennyyi angel*. Rozhdestvenskie rasskazy. Monasheskie ostrova na Ladozhskom ozere. Putevye zametki N. S. Leskova. Sankt Peterburg the story has the subtitle “Rozhdestvenskii rasskaz”. See the commentary in Leskov 1957: 541.

⁴⁶ This is valid to the same degree for Dickens’s Christmas stories (Dickens 2003), which made not only the author famous but also the genre popular among the public.

Translated from German by Aileen Rambow

References

- Benjamin, Walter. 1977. Der Erzähler. Betrachtungen zum Werk Nikolai Lesskows. In *Gesammelte Schriften*. Vol. 2.2, 438–465. Frankfurt: Suhrkamp.
- Benjamin, Walter. 1974. Das Kunstwerk im Zeitalter seiner technischen Reproduzierbarkeit. In *Gesammelte Schriften*. Vol. 1.2, 431–469. Frankfurt: Suhrkamp.
- Benjamin, Walter. 1963. The Story-Teller. Reflections on the Works of Nicolai Leskov. In *Chicago Review* 16 (1). 80–101.
- Benz, Ernst. 1957. *Geist und Leben der Ostkirche*. Hamburg: Rowohlt.
- Derrida, Jacques. 1994. *Given Time: I. Counterfeit Money*. Transl. by Peggy Kamuf. Chicago & London: University of Chicago Press.
- Dickens, Charles. 2003. A Christmas Carol. In *A Christmas Carol and Other Christmas Writings*, 27–118. London: Penguin 2003.
- Dostoevskii, Fedor Mikhailovich. 1980. Smiatennyi vid. In *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii v tridcati tomakh*. T. 21, 54–60. Leningrad: Nauka.
- Dukkon, Ágnes. 2003. Iskustvo i religiia v povesti “Zapechatlennyi angel” N. S. Leskova. In *Studia Slavica Hungarica* 48 (1–3). 33–40.
- Eggers, Michael. 2008. Aufklärerische Metaphysik. Walter Benjamin zu Nikolaj Lesskov und Johann Peter Hebel. In *Arcadia: Internationale Zeitschrift für Literaturwissenschaft* 43 (1).
- Eichenbaum, Boris. 1969a. “Chrezmernyi” pisatel’. In *O proze. Sbornik statei*, 327–345. Leningrad: Khudozhestvennaia literatura.
- Eichenbaum, Boris. 1969b. Leskov i sovremennaia russkaia proza. 1925. In Striedter, Jurij (ed.) *Texte der russischen Formalisten*. Vol. 1, 208–242. München: Fink.
- Géry, Cathérine. 2017. *Leskov, le conteur. Réflexions sur Nikolai Leskov, Walter Benjamin et Boris Eichenbaum*. Paris: Classiques Garnier.
- Géry, Cathérine. 2015. *Crime et sexualité dans la culture russe: à propos de la nouvelle de Nikolai Leskov “Lady Macbeth du district de Mtsensk” et de ses adaptations*. Paris: Honoré Champion.
- Gorelov, Aleksandr Aleksandrovich. 1988. *N.S. Leskov i narodnaia kul’tura*. Leningrad: Nauka.
- Gorelov, Aleksandr Aleksandrovich. 1986. Patrioticheskaia legenda N.S. Leskova. In *Russkaia literatura. Istoriko-literaturnyi zhurnal* 1986 (4). 153–165.
- Grimstad, Knut Andreas. 2007. *Styling Russia. Multiculture in the Prose of Nikolai Leskov*. Bergen: Univ. Dept. of Foreign Languages.
- Grossman, Leonid. 1945. *N.S. Leskov: Zhizn’, tvorchestvo, poetika*. Moskva: OGIZ.
- Heller, Klaus. 2006. *Geschichte des modernen Unternehmertums in Russland bis 1917*. Virtuelle Fachbibliothek Osteuropa. Digitales Handbuch zur Geschichte und Kultur Osteuropas 17. <https://epub.ub.uni-muenchen.de/760/> [Access: 24.05.2021].
- Keßler, Peter. 1983. Walter Benjamin über Nikolaj Leskov. In *Zeitschrift für Slawistik* 28 (1). 95–103.
- Kucherskaya, Mayya. 2016. Journalist, Reader and Writer: Investigating Leskov’s Creative Method. In *Scando-Slavica* 62 (1). 58–78.
- Leskov, Andrej. 1981. *Zhizn’ Nikolaia Leskova, po ego lichnym, semeinym i nesemeinym zapisiam i pamiatiam*. Tula: Priokskoe knizhnoe izdatel’svo.

- Leskov, Nikolai. 2014a. *The Enchanted Wanderer and Other Stories*. Transl. by Richard Pevear and Larissa Volkhonsky. London: Vintage.
- Leskov, Nikolai Semenovich. 2014b. *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii v tridsati tomakh*. T. 12. Moskva: Knizhnyi klub knigovek.
- Leskov, Nikolai Semenovich. 1996. *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii v tridsati tomakh*. T. 1. Moskva: Terra.
- Leskov, Nikolai Semenovich. 1958. *Sobranie sochinenii v odinnadtsati tomakh*. T.10 (Vospominaniia, stat'i, ocherki). Moskva: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel'stvo khudozhestvennoi literatury.
- Leskov, Nikolai Semenovich. 1957. *Sobranie sochinenii v odinnadtsati tomakh*. T. 4. Moskva: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel'stvo khudozhestvennoi literatury.
- McLean, Hugh. 1977 *Nikolai Leskov. The Man and His Art*. Cambridge, MA & London: Harvard University Press.
- Muller de Morogues, Inès. 1991. "Le problème féminin" et les portraits des femmes dans l'oeuvre de Nikolaj Leskov. Bern: Peter Lang.
- Safran, Gabriella. 2000. Ethnography, Judaism, and the Art of Nikolai Leskov. In *The Russian Review* 59 (2). 235–252.
- Setschkareff, Vsevolod. 1959. *N. S. Leskov. Sein Leben und Werk*. Wiesbaden: Harrasowitz.
- Shneyder, Vadim. 2021. *Russia's Capitalist Realism: Tolstoy, Dostoevsky, and Chekhov*. Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press.
- Simon, Ralf. 2015. *Erzähltheorie, Gastsemantik, Philosophie der Zeit (McTaggart)*. Erlangen: Werhahn.
- Simon, Ralf. 2011. Auf der Schwelle verharren. Zu einem Erzählmuster der Moderne. In Fountoulakis, Evi & Boris Previšić, *Der Gast als Fremder. Narrative Alterität in der Literatur*, 179–192. Bielefeld: transcript.
- Starygina, Natal'ja Nikolaevna. 2017. Darenie: Ot ustoichivovo Rozhdestvenskogo motiva k skvoznomu motivu v sviatochnykh rasskazakh N. S. Leskova. In *Problemy istoricheskoi poetiki* 15 (4). 38–58.
- Tamcke, Martin. 2004. *Das orthodoxe Christentum*. München: Beck.
- West, James L. & Jurii A. Petrov (eds.). 1998. *Merchant Moscow. Images of Russia's Vanished Bourgeoisie*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Zink, Andrea. 2017. Nikolai Leskov's National Economies. An Investigation of Work and Commerce. In *Zeitschrift für Slawistik* 62 (2). 199–225.