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## Nikolaj Leskov as a Literary Critic. The Case of the Russian Clerical Novel

Nikolaj Leskov is known as a superb stylist, one of the 'most Russian' of Russian writers due to his rich, diverse language and his depiction of almost all social estates (*сословие*) and strata in his literary works. In particular, he is arguably the most famous Russian portraitist of the everyday life of the Orthodox clergy. In his writings, such as *Soborjane* (*The Cathedral Clergy*, 1872), *Na kraju sveta* (*At the Edge of the World*, 1875), *Nekreščenyj pop* (*The Priest who was Never Baptised*, 1877) and *Zajačij remiz* (*The Rabbit Warren*, 1895), he describes both righteous servants of God, like Savelij Tuberozov or Father Savva, as well as greedy, selfish priests, such as Prokop or Markel. Leskov is also known as a journalist, which helped pave his road to fiction. In the early 1860s he published several articles and commentaries in a number of periodicals (e.g., *Torgovaja kabala* [*Commercial Servitude*] in "Ukazatel' ekonomičeskij" and *Zametka o zdanijach* [*A Note on Buildings*] in "Sovremennaja medicina"). He made his debut as a prose writer under the pseudonym 'M. Stebnickij' in 1862, with a short story titled *Pogasšee delo* (*A Case that was Dropped*). Despite this, his journalistic activity remains insufficiently explored: numerous works have been devoted to his essays and articles (McLean 1977: 59-93; Marcadé 1981, Muller de Morogues 1984, Muckle 1984, Sidjakov 1987, Čeremisina 2013, etc.), however notable aspects of his work still need further research. One of these areas is book reviewing, which from the very beginning was a part of his newspaper activity and became even more predominant in the 1870s when he served on the Scholarly Committee of the Ministry of Education.

Leskov worked as a reviewer there from 1874 to 1883, and his main duties consisted of assessing books and brochures published for the common people, recommending them (or not) for primary schools. The result of his work was over 250 reviews, which were read and discussed at committee meetings and eventually recorded in its journal (Čudnova 2016: 537). Thereafter, Leskov revised and published parts of them in such journals as "Pravoslavnoe obozrenie" or "Istoričeskij vestnik"<sup>1</sup>. As Lidija Čudnova points out, the writer dealt

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<sup>1</sup> For example, the review of the book *Makarij, vysokopreosvjaščennejšij mitropolit Moskovskij. Biografičeskij očerk* (*His Eminence Macarius, Metropolitan of Moscow. Biographical sketch*) was published in extenso in "Istoričeskij vestnik" in 1880, while the review of several stories by Aleksandr Pogosskij made a section of the article *Dikie fantazii* (*Wild Fantasies*), published in "Pravoslavnoe obozrenie" in 1877.

with a variety of topics and genres, and often felt overwhelmed with this work. However, book reviewing was a significant source of his income and, more importantly, an outlet for expressing his opinions, mainly about popular education, the importance of reading in children's upbringing, the clergy's role in shaping the spiritual and moral world of Russian peasants, etc. (Čudnova 2016: 538). As he considered conscience-raising to be the main vocation of a writer, he paid special attention to books devoted to spiritual issues and intended for religious education, and even prepared his own compilations of biblical, patristic and prayer texts (Muller de Morogues 1996: 381, Makarevič 2014).

Leskov's book reviews play an exceptional role in his legacy due to several factors. Firstly, they give us important materials to characterise his stance towards numerous social, pedagogical, theological, and historical issues. Secondly, they often contain a straightforward expression of Leskov's opinion on literature, its purpose and function, as well as its expected artistic merits. Thirdly, they allow a closer look at the possible sources of the writer's own literary works, which is especially important due to his inclination towards "literature-centrism" and intertextuality (see Kučerskaja 2016, Fedotova 2018), polemics and dialogue, and his practice of borrowing the plot and images from multiple texts, such as journalistic articles, pamphlets, memoirs, oral stories.

Among Leskov's multiple book reviews, one can find three reviews of literary works specifically focused on clerical life. They are uniquely interesting to researchers of Leskov's work because he speaks both as a literary and social critic, and as a writer. On the one hand, he is acting as a critic, pointing out strong and weak points of the reviewed text, expressing his opinions about its ideas, values, images, and stylistic merits. On the other hand, he is comprehending and exploring the literary works as a writer, fulfilling the needs of his artistic self-determination (Volkova 2015: 5-9). Therefore, these reviews can be perceived and examined as examples of literary reception, illustrating Leskov's three roles: that of a creator, pondering over his own artistic principles and imaginative possibilities; that of a critic; and that of a reader, taking part in creating the literary meaning of the text. Thus, he is simultaneously enriching both the interpreted work and his own artistic experience, as well as participating in a dialogue conducted on several levels: between the writer-critic and the author of the discussed work, the reader and the imaginary opponent. Characteristic of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the discussion usually concerns not only literary issues, but also touches upon the social, historical, and cultural problems important to the critic.

The first review, titled *Rasskaz prichodskogo svjaščennika* (*A Story by a Parish Priest*), was published anonymously in 1862 in the liberal political and literary newspaper "Severnaja pčela". It considered the short story *Anastas'ja* written by Rev. Alexandr Gumilevskij, a famous priest from St. Petersburg who served in the Church of the Nativity in the district of Peski, not a particularly prestigious one, inhabited mainly by townspeople and craftsmen. Gumilevskij was known for his charity work amongst beggars and street children: he established shelters for the homeless, both adult and juvenile, a vocational school, an almshouse, a small hospital, free Sunday dinners for the poor, etc. He founded the Nativity Brotherhood, aimed at integrating his parishioners by means of their joint activities for the

necessitous. He was also one of the editors of the “Duch Christianina” journal, in which he published articles on the life of the St. Petersburg clergy, the projects and reports of the Nativity Brotherhood, the spiritual life of Russian people, etc.

Although Leskov was a true admirer of Gumilevskij’s activities<sup>2</sup>, the review of his story is rather critical. It commences with the retelling of its plot, with extensive quotes from the story embedded in the text and some awkward expressions highlighted in italics; in several cases he even comments with a bracketed exclamation mark or ‘sic!’. Then follows the evaluation of Gumilevskij’s story. Leskov rates it low from an artistic point of view, mentioning such weaknesses as the presence of straightforward moral instructions and rhetorical passages, his unnatural and mawkish presentation of Russian peasants, and his inability to reproduce their speech and modes of thinking. The Russian peasants seemed too sublime for Leskov, both in their feelings and utterances, and for this reason he assessed the story as being akin to a naïve schoolgirl’s essay on a given topic, presenting no interest to readers other than common folk or parish school pupils (Leskov 1998: 533-534).

However, he underlines a definite merit of the story, which is the character of its protagonist, father Vasilij, ‘a good shepherd’, full of kindness, forbearance, and compassion, who cares about moral education and the eradication of prejudices and superstitions. Apparently, the main reason for writing the story was to present the author’s ideal clergyman as a role model. This manner of portraying the priest formed Leskov’s positive attitude towards the author of the story and his understanding of the pastoral vocation; it raised his hopes for changes in the Church, amongst clergy and in the leading trends of the ecclesiastical press. Yet, the critic’s advice was clear: in terms of writing, Rev. Gumilevskij should focus on journalism. Leskov believed it to be more appropriate to his nature and talent, and more likely to make his writing more successful and convincing. One can clearly see Leskov’s attention to the social context of the discussed work and his pragmatic orientation, striving to reach extratextual goals.

It is worth mentioning that in March 1862, one month before the review was published, Leskov debuted as a fiction writer with his story *Pogasšee delo*, in which he too depicts a rural priest. Leskov’s clergyman, Rev. Iliodor, was also a ‘good shepherd’, fighting against superstition and pagan customs of folk people, and ready to help them even at the price of his own humiliation. Moreover, one might note the presence of the intertextual motif of whether a drunkard is deserving of a Christian funeral in a cemetery, with precisely the same usage of the dialect expression ‘*opivica*’.

The similarity of characters and problems presented in both short stories was probably due to the influence of issues discussed in journals in the early 1860s, such as the role of the clergy in reforming society, the necessity of popular education, the eradication of

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<sup>2</sup> As demonstrated in an article titled *Russkie obščestvennye zametki* (*Russian Public Notes*), published in “Birževaja gazeta” in 1869, just after the priest’s untimely death, where he compares Gumilevskij to Dmitrij Žuravskij, a well-known economist and abolitionist who bought freedom for his serfs (Leskov 2004).

prejudices and remnants of paganism. However, in Leskov's story peasants were depicted very differently, with profound realism and references to their primitive way of thinking, undeveloped feelings, simple utterances, and usage of dialect. Whilst in Gumilevskij's story the main characters, Dmitrij and Anastas'ja, act and speak in a sentimental way, crying and mourning their son who died immediately after birth, in *Pogasšee delo* folk people demonstrate ruthlessness, digging up and throwing away from the cemetery the body of a deceased sexton, considered to be the reason for a severe drought. After this sacrilegious deed, they take part in an even more barbaric act, producing a candle from the sexton's body fat and lighting it in order to summon rain. Their speech is simplistic and primitive, and it contains colloquial expressions and distorted word forms, such as "pobalakat", "izništož", "opivica", "Gospodi Sus-Christos", etc. (Leskov 1862: 139)<sup>3</sup>.

This reference to Leskov's own short story allows us to presume that in his review of Gumilevskij's work he acted not only as literary critic but also as penman, having the experience of touching on similar issues in a different way. Even at the very beginning of his literary career, he was extremely conscious of the artistic form and the stylistics of his and others' fiction. Despite his strong conviction about the educational role of the writer, he did not accept any compromises in terms of poetic merit, even in the case of pieces with worthy content and noble intentions. This critical strategy differentiates Leskov from representatives of 'Real Criticism', such as Nikolaj Černyševskij or Nikolaj Dobroljubov, even if he shares with them the tendency to treat a literary work as a starting point for discussing contemporary social problems. The attention paid to the literary form of the reviewed text corresponds with features of Leskov's own artistic output, namely with his striving to find appropriate images, words, and expressions to convey his ideas and to depict the represented world and its inhabitants in their diversity. We may interpret this striving as an implementation of principles of verisimilitude at all levels of the text, from the linguistic embodiment to the reliability of the plot. Thus, critical reviews allowed Leskov not only to express his social ideas and creative principles, but also gave him the opportunity to reflect on the intentions, ideas, images, and style, both of his and those of a reviewed text, checking them for their effectiveness and deciding on their coherence with his own writing.

As we know, Leskov continued to portray Orthodox clergymen in his subsequent literary works, such as *Na nožach* (*At Daggers Drawn*, 1871) and *Soborjane*. He considered these priests, especially those from *Soborjane*, to represent the conservative types of churchmen belonging to bygone times, as he put it in a letter to Peter Ščebalskij on 8 June 1871:

As for the lack of good people to replace Tuberozov, Zachary, Achilla and Nikolaj Afanaš'evič, there is nothing to do about it, and however much I would like to please your venerable love for good people, I cannot find them at the current turning point in Russian Church clergy. The types which I have been portrayed by me are conservative

<sup>3</sup> For more details about the story see Łukaszewicz 2016.

ones, but I don't know what the contemporary progressive Church gives us, and I'm afraid of making a mistake [here and afterwards, unless otherwise indicated, the translation is mine, *M.L.*]<sup>4</sup>.

In this letter, Leskov opposed his acquaintance's suggestion to depict new positive priest figures to replace Tuberozov, Benefaktov and Desnicyn. The reason for this was his doubt in the validity of ecclesiastical changes taking place in Russia during the 1860s and 1870s, and his unwillingness to judge or depict their representatives prematurely.

The writer repeated this sentiment six years later, in his extensive review of the novel *Žizn' sel'skogo svjaščennika* (*The Life of a Rural Priest*, 1877) by Fedor Livanov, published in the ecclesiastical monthly "Strannik" in 1877, under the title *Karikaturnyj ideal. Utopija iz cerkovno-bytovoj žizni* (*A Grottesque Ideal. A Utopia from Everyday Church Life*). Excusing himself for commenting on a book about clerical life as the author of *Soborjane*, which may have invited accusations of a conflict of interest, he stated that his chronicle narrated the old days of Russian Orthodox clergymen, whilst Livanov's novel referred to the new generation, which was still being shaped as "rising and bubbling [...] sponge dough":

I have not planned to sketch new types and, honestly speaking, I'm sure that it is still impossible: these types are not developed nor defined yet, and their artistic reproduction cannot give anything solid and integral. Of course, one can witness a very noticeable and long-awaited animation among diocesan clergy in places, but all that is still rising and bubbling, just like sponge dough, and it is tricky to say what will come out of it<sup>5</sup>.

However, as he noted, there had already been two books published with 'a new priest' as a main character: *Izo dnja v den'* (*From Day to Day*) by prince Vladimir Mešerskij (published anonymously) and the aforementioned *Žizn' sel'skogo svjaščennika*.

The underdevelopment of the new generation of clergymen was the declared reason Leskov refused to describe the new clerics in his own fiction, as he considered it to be untimely. In a wider sense, he presented his opinion on literary texts dealing with topical social phenomena, and new human and professional types. He was convinced of the impossibility of capturing the current moment in an appropriate way through a work of

<sup>4</sup> "А что касается до недостатка хороших людей на смену Туберозову, Захарии, Ахилле и Николаю Афанасьевичу, то с этим делать нечего, и сколько бы я ни хотел угодить почтенной любви Вашей к хорошим людям, не могу их обрести на нынешнем переломе в духовенстве русской церкви. Изображенные мною типы суть типы консервативные, а что дает нынешняя прогрессирующая церковь, того я не знаю и боюсь ошибиться" (Leskov 1957c: 328).

<sup>5</sup> "Я не намечал новых типов и, по совести говоря, убежден, что это еще невозможно: типы эти еще не выработались, не определились, и художественное воспроизведение их не может дать ничего цельного. Конечно, среди епархиального духовенства по местам обнаруживается весьма заметное и давно желанное оживление, но все это пока еще – как тесто на опаре – пузырится и всходит, а мудрено сказать, каково оно выводится" (Leskov 1957b: 188).

fiction which, in his opinion, needed some distance. He regarded topical issues and events as more suitable for journalistic texts, believing literary works of art required a perspective more remote and comprehensive. Leskov often discussed ongoing topics in his publicistic texts first and only after that presented them through creative prose in a more artistic manner. For example, the Old Believers were first examined in several articles, pamphlets and essays, such as *S ljud'mi drevlego blagočest'ja* (*With People of Old Piety*), *O raskol'nikach goroda Rigi* (*About the Old Believers from the City of Riga*, 1863) or *Iskanie škol staroobrjadcami* (*Old Believers' Striving for Schools*, 1869), and only afterwards depicted in the story *Zapečatlenyj angel* (*The Sealed Angel*, 1873).

Yet Leskov's legacy consists of several works of fiction known for using contemporary events, and sometimes even ridiculing recognisable public figures, such as his anti-nihilistic novels *Nekuda* (*No Way Out*, 1864) and *Na nožach* or the story *Smech i gore* (*Laughter and Grief*, 1871). Notwithstanding, in these writings he did not only depict reality, but rather combined the topical subjects with literary reminiscences from various sources: folklore, the Bible, documents, periodicals, fiction, etc. Borrowing from and integrating various materials with his own objectives was, according to Majja Kučerskaja, the foundation of Leskov's artistic method (Kučerskaja 2016: 64). These citations served as a platform for polemicalising with their sources, such as through commentaries, text reduction, paraphrasing, inserting his own words into the quotations, changing compositional structures, modality and temporal organisation, combining different styles and intonations, the transformation of author and recipient figures, etc. (Fedotova 2012: 214-216; Fedotova 2015: 24-28). Thus, despite using elements borrowed from others' works, in no way can Leskov be perceived as a plagiarist. Moreover, his own predilection to combine and rework various literary and real-life materials made him especially attentive to such practices in reviewed texts, which may be seen particularly in his critique of Livanov's novel.

A polemical tone predominates Leskov's review of *Žizn' sel'skogo svjaščennika*. Its author, Fedor Livanov, was born into a clerical family, and studied in the seminary and Kazan' Theological Academy, but went on to choose state service and worked in the Ministry of the Interior. He gained popularity after publishing several volumes of sketches and stories about Old Believers, entitled *Raskol'niki i ostrožniki* (*Schismatics and Convicts*, 1868-1873). However, literary reviewers criticised him for poor stylistic quality, plagiarism, lack of knowledge about Old Believers' history and life conditions, and of the fusion of documentary truth with gossip and slander. In *Žizn' sel'skogo svjaščennika*, his last literary work, Livanov intended to portray the ideal contemporary priest, who was able to overcome ubiquitous oppression and negative patterns of contemporary culture, taking a high place in society. The dominant motif of the novel is the contrast between the old and the new, respectively negative and positive, mercenaries or good shepherds.

In spite of this righteous intention, Livanov's understanding of the pastoral vocation seemed unacceptable for Leskov. The sole title of the review embodied the writer's negative opinion and attitude towards the book: *Karikaturnyj ideal. Utopija iz cerkovno-bytovoj žizni*. In the very first words of the article, Leskov stressed that Livanov's novel attracted

his attention only because of the significance of issues raised therein, as its artistic merits were null. He considered the portrayal of the priest presented in the book to be a wishful creation of the imagination of a passionate, daydreaming seminarian with no idea about the practical methods of improving the clerical estate. Moreover, he spread his false convictions among credulous readers, an action Leskov believed to be decidedly dangerous. Therefore, according to Leskov, the aim of his review was to expose the problematic nature of the rural priest's ideals presented in the novel, which reinforces the pragmatic orientation of the review, to influence and mould reality.

The six subsequent chapters of the article (II–VII) contain a detailed, ironic summary of the novel's plot, combined with sarcastic commentaries on the actions and deeds of its characters, its way of presenting the world, its inconsistencies, its stylistic awkwardness, etc. Leskov is markedly more critical and harsher about Livanov's work than he was in the review of *Anastas'ja* by Gumilevskij. He underlines the inaccuracy of the author's knowledge of what is depicted in his work, such as the customs of ladies of the upper class, the theological seminary's curriculum, and the spiritual condition and needs of the common people. He cites numerous examples of Livanov's failures and absurdities, such as: his depiction of the main character Rev. Aleksandr Almazov's strange writing desk 'topped with a wooden tent'; the presentation of his artificial pastoral visits combined with collecting information about parishioners in a small booklet; the descriptions of a non-existent tradition of 'nihilistic baptism' in wine; and even the author's confusing the seasons, as the young priest and his wife arrive at her parents' house in a sleigh and leave it two days later in a carriage.

Leskov was especially ironic about Rev. Aleksandr Almazov and his wife Vera, who, from the very beginning of the review, are presented as completely detached from the realities of clergy life. Almazov is portrayed as one who lacks personality and resembles a puppet, acting involuntarily, in accordance with the author's plans. In the first chapters he is also fully subordinated to the will of his bride, which gives rise to Leskov's malicious comments:

However, it is not surprising that she has changed so many places, as she is so perky. The theologian fell in love with her [...] and she "got shorter with him and decided to *develop him*" [...] "Almazov, who was twenty-three, grew up in one year as he would not have grown in three years with the routine isolation of the seminary life". Boarding school girl turned out to be so powerful that she managed to correct the theologian's "stupidity of seminary teaching"<sup>6</sup>.

The main drawback of the protagonist's pastoral activity in Livanov's novel was, in Leskov's opinion, his unrealistic, utopian character. After arriving to Bykovo village, Rev.

<sup>6</sup> "Впрочем, не удивительно, что она переменяла так много мест: очень уже она бойка. Богослов влюбился в нее [...] и она 'решилась, сблизившись с ним короче, *развить его*'... [...] 'Алмазов, имея двадцать три года, вырос в год так, как не вырос бы в три года при рутинной замкнутости семинарской жизни'. Так многомошна оказалась эта институтка, поправившая над богословом 'тупость семинарского учения'" (Leskov 1957b: 191-192).

Almazov immediately introduces new principles: no drinking or familiarity with peasants, no obeying the expectations of influential and rich countrymen, and no flattering the local noblemen. His first sermon became a declaration of his views and touched upon contemporary issues but, as Leskov noted, it was too complicated and abstract to be understood by peasants. Although unknown to Leskov, this was likely due to the fact that Livanov plagiarized the sermon, copying it without any references to the original text, which was a collection of talks by Ioann (Sokolov), the bishop of Smolensk. This shameful practice was discovered by another reviewer, Aleksandr Vadkovskij, who compared both sermons in detail (Vadkovskij 1878: 111-122).

As mentioned before, Almazov's pastoral methods were recognised by Leskov as unnatural and resembling those used by nihilists (collecting, noting down and analysing information about parishioners). At the same time, the priest seemed overwhelmed with a morbid tendency to see nihilistic and emancipatory influences everywhere around him, which, in Leskov's opinion, was not realistic. For example, Almazov considered the peasant leaving his wife for another woman to be a manifestation of women's emancipation as influenced by modern ideas, whereas the reviewer underlined its traditional character and called it "an old sin".

The most utopian feature of the priest's activity was his amazing success. Almazov achieved excellent pastoral results: he founded a rural school, a small hospital, a handicraft workshop, an almshouse and a village bank. He became a delegate of the *zemstvo* (local government) and a rural dean, and managed to transform primitive, heavily drinking peasants into faithful Christians in three years, despite his lack of any knowledge of popular traditions and people's needs. Moreover, his success story was based on two elements unlikely to be available to ordinary clergymen: money (received as the dowry of his noble wife) and connections with high-ranking officials, both ecclesiastical and secular. Without these, 'the ideal priest' would have been a much simpler character, which, ironically, is what Leskov would have considered to be a better option. This opinion is presented in his own literary works (such as *Meloči archierejskoj žizni* [*Trifles from the Life of Archbishops*, 1878]) through his preference for clergymen who have simple and good hearts, even in combination with minor human flaws, rather than those representing a lifeless, heartless, and artificial ideal. Arguably, Leskov's best literary portrayals of priests present them as men living with their peculiarities, struggling with their own nature, and confronting moral dilemmas. Such priests are, for instance, the three main characters of *Soborjane*: the Cossack-like deacon Achilla Desnicyn, who furtively goes hunting and wears spurs under his cassock; Rev. Savelij Tuberozov, who smokes a pipe, plays cards and happens to drink too much alcohol; and Rev. Zacharia Benefaktov, a good-hearted and humble person, but with limited thinking. The array of Leskov's non-ideal clergymen is much vaster, which makes his doubts about the credibility of Almazov's character even more legitimate.

Whilst Almazov's flat, unnatural character annoyed Leskov, what outraged him was the priest's strict and arrogant attitude towards the people around him, such as the peasants, parochial clerics, other priests, Old Believers, nihilists and freethinkers, as well as his



cooperation with police and state administration structures. For example, he refuses the Christian funeral of a lecherous landowner, and because of his prayers a schismatic priest and a nihilist are arrested and imprisoned. This intermingling of secular and ecclesiastical interests, which Leskov called “a jerky hunt for nihilists, together with gendarmes and prosecutors”<sup>7</sup>, was unacceptable for the reviewer, who strongly supported the freedom of conscience. In both his journalistic and literary works, he underlines that the only way to ‘conquer’ sectarian movements, Old Believers or nihilists, is through Church-led self-improvement and self-reformation, so that non-believers might be drawn to the congregation by the power of its love and virtuous life. This idea was expressed, for instance, in the cycle of essays titled *Iskanie škol staroobryjadcami*, and in the article *O svodnyh brakach i drugich nemoščach* (*About Old Believers’ Marriages and other Infirmities* published in “Grażdanin” in 1875). In the story *Na kraju sveta*, Leskov portrays a strange missionary, Rev. Kiriak, who refuses to participate in the official Orthodox mission in Siberia because of its violent reputation. Yet, his good-heartedness and forgiveness helped convert several nomads who decided to be baptised “in the name of Kiriak’s God” (Leskov 1957a: 515).

Leskov also disapproved of the image of Almazov’s wife which, in his view, could lure simple clergymen’s spouses away from their everyday responsibilities. He devoted a long passage to his opinion on women from the clerical estate, including their social position, character, and mores, as well as their representation in literature. In his opinion, adequate depictions of women proved difficult because of their inner spiritual wealth, not easily visible to others and connected to their ability to find fulfilment in the home and family life. Leskov expressed his warmth for such humble ‘*matushkas*’, describing them with feeling and pathos similar to that found in his own literary works, such as *Na nožach*, *Soborjane* or *Zachudalyj rod* (*A Decrepit Clan*):

... the husband, reassured by her, will calmly perform his difficult service, finding rest and approving words of compassion at home; her children will grow up cared for, well-bred and in good health; her household will be bright and clean, and all who know her will call her ‘*matushka*’ with a sense of true reverence<sup>8</sup>.

The depiction of the loving and tender wife may be paralleled with excerpts from *Soborjane*, from Rev. Savelij Tuberozov’s diary, where the priest notes down manifestations of their idyllic relationship: quiet tea-drinking, flowers presented to each other, greeting the morning sun together, as well as material care, such as the soft-boiled eggs and clean handkerchief Natal’ja Nikolaevna prepares for her husband in the evening. Clerical marriage

<sup>7</sup> “с судорожным метанием за нигилистами, в союзе духовенства с жандармами и прокуратурою” (Leskov 1957b: 231).

<sup>8</sup> “... успокоенный ею муж будет спокойно совершать свое трудное служение, находя дома отдых и одобряющее слово участия, ее дети будут расти досмотренными, в добром правиле и добром здоровье; ее дом будет светел и чист, и все знающие ее станут называть ее ‘матушкой’ с чувством истинного почтения” (Leskov 1957b: 226).

was discussed by Leskov in many more journalistic and literary works, such as *Vyčegodskaja Diana (Popad'ja-ochotnica)* (*Diana of Vychegda [Popadya the Huntress]*), *Dvorjanskij bunt v Dobrynskom prichode* (*Rebellion among the Gentry in the Parish of Dobryn*), and *O pogrebenii damy pod altarem* (*About a Lady Buried under the Altar*).

In addition to discrediting Livanov's vision of priesthood, Leskov was highly critical about the style, which he demonstrates with lengthy quotations, the use of italics, bracketed exclamation marks or 'sic!' to underline clichés, awkward expressions, incorrectly used words. He also adds sarcastic commentaries to make his opinion even more explicit and to stress his distance from Livanov's point of view, for example:

Here the seminarian's dreams start to turn into "fantasies" (18): "I make general orders, give general *fair benefits* (?), set up farms, saving banks, workshops, while she with her pretty head, in simple dress, lifting it over her slender small leg, goes through the mud to a peasant school, to a rural hospital, to a miserable countryman, comforting everyone... She is adored, looked at as an angel, an *apparition* (sic!)"<sup>9</sup>.

Or:

... the author notes [...] that the archimandrite "during a fire, forgetting his rank, came to the conflagration *as a simple Christian*" [sic!]. Why can an archimandrite "come as a simple Christian" only "forgetting his rank"? Probably it is just "a slip of the tongue"<sup>10</sup>.

Such polemical discussion was Leskov's usual strategy when dealing with "others' word[s]", and it allowed him to transform the original meaning of the text by putting it in a new context (Fedotova 2015: 28). Two points of view are thus overlaid, although the reviewer's opinion clearly dominates. The use of ironic questions and sarcastic comments leaves the last word to the author of the review, subordinating the quoted text to his discursive position.

Another important point of the stylistic commentaries made by Leskov, especially intriguing due to his own predilection for intertextual borrowing, is his critical approach to the appropriation methods used herein by Livanov. As mentioned earlier, Livanov was notorious for plagiarism, and in *Žizn' sel'skogo svjaščennika* one can find several excerpts copied *in extenso* from various sources: sermons of Ioann (Sokolov), the bishop of Smo-

<sup>9</sup> "Тут и начинают 'фантазироваться' семинарские мечтания (18): 'я делаю общие распоряжения, даю общие *справедливые пособия* (?), завожу фермы, сберегательные кассы, мастерские, и она с своею хорошенькою головкой, в простом платье, поднимая его над стройной ножкой, идет по грязи в крестьянскую школу, в сельскую больницу, к несчастному мужику и везде утешает... Ее обожают, на нее смотрят как на ангела, на *привидение* (sic!)" (Leskov 1957b: 192).

<sup>10</sup> "... автор отмечает [...] что этот архимандрит 'во время одного пожара, забывши свой сан, явился на пожарище *простым христианином*' [sic!]. Почему архимандрит может 'явиться простым христианином' только 'забывши свой сан'?.. Это, вероятно, так, 'с языка сорвалось' (Leskov 1957b: 195).

lensk, the novel *Bariton* (*The Baritone*, 1857) by Nadežda Chvoščinskaja, and *Semejnaja chronika* (*Family Chronicle*, 1856) by Sergej Aksakov (Łukaszewicz 2009: 167). Leskov did not notice these borrowings, but he did pay attention to other forms of appropriation from various sources. For example, he criticised Livanov's habit of naming his characters after historical figures, which, in his opinion, demonstrated the author's flippant disregard for these figures, especially when describing them as suspicious and shady. Livanov's nonchalance is further revealed by introducing into his novel a literary character taken from another writer's work, namely Vlas from Nikolaj Nekrasov's poem *Vlas*, and rewriting the story for his own purposes. Leskov considered such literary behaviour to be improper, unacceptable even, which raises the question of the border between intertextual play with another writer's text and copyright infringement, especially complicated in the case of legal protection of fictional characters (Feldman 1990).

The review *Karikaturnyj ideal* combines Leskov's interest in popular literature with his attention to religious and ecclesiastical topics. On the one hand, the writer criticises the literary merits of the novel, pointing out compositional inconsistencies and stylistic flaws; on the other hand, he highlights unacceptable actions of the priest, his disrespectful relationship with parishioners, and hostile attitude towards Old Believers. This combination of literary criticism and social journalism was typical of 19<sup>th</sup> century reviewers, but in Leskov's case, much more attention was paid to the literary and particularly the linguistic aspects of the text. Moreover, as Elizaveta Pulchritudova suggests, the review may be perceived as the reaction of a writer who defends his vision of the world and his understanding of an issue; the extremely sharp tone might have been due to Livanov's use of the thematic material of *Soborjane*, incorporating it into another value system, as well as by Leskov's wish to separate himself from vulgar anti-nihilism (Pulchritudova 1983: 150, 173-174). However, in the 1870s there were several other literary texts about clergy published, such as *Iz kulka v rogožku* (*Out of the Frying Pan into the Fire*, 1872) by N. Preobraženskij, *Po selam i zacholust'jam* (*In the Villages and Countryside*, 1875) by Grigorij Nedetovskij (published under a pseudonym 'O. Zabytyj'), *Vpered ne ugadaeš* (*You can't Guess what's Next*, 1873) and *Dožil* (*He Lived to*, 1874) by I. Severov. Therefore, Leskov could not consider Livanov to be the only follower and imitator of his chronicle. Consequently, in my opinion, it was rather Livanov's vision of an idealised priest, unacceptable for Leskov, that provoked the latter's reaction in the form of a highly critical review. Thus, *Karikaturnyj ideal* should be perceived more as a discussion about the vocation of the Russian Orthodox clergy, rather than just literary polemics. This is confirmed by Leskov concluding the article with his hope that Livanov's novel would not gain popularity among clergymen and repeating that the objective of the review was to demonstrate the falsehood of "this boring but not harmless utopia" (Leskov 1957b: 234). Alas, Leskov's hope was not fulfilled, as *Žizn' sel'skogo svjaščennika* went on to be widely read by Russian parish clergy (Vadkovskij 1878: 95).

The third review under consideration is a short note about *Zapiski sel'skogo svjaščennika* (*The Notes of a Rural Priest*) by Rev. Aleksandr Rozanov. The note was published anonymously in the bibliography section of the newspaper "Novosti i Birževaja gazeta" in

1882. The author of the reviewed book was a parish priest from the Saratov diocese, who presented in his work all the stages of a clergyman's life, from seminary graduation to retirement. The book contained criticism of the Russian clergy's everyday life and their relationship with bishops and secular society, and it was very popular among both clerical and secular readers. In his review, Leskov noted the significance and appeal of the text, both for lovers of memoirs and for those interested in the clergy's everyday life, customs, and activities. Its author was highly praised for his talent, wit, quick eye, as well as his knowledge of the clerical community and its needs. Leskov also noted the writer's journalistic flair and willingness not only to discuss problems relating to parish priests, but also to suggest ways of improving their living conditions and social status. Yet Leskov rated such topicality as excessive and inappropriate in a memoir, for it reduced the appeal to readers, rendering the text biased and boring. Moreover, the reviewer noted that Rozanov's polemical fervour increased in the second edition of *The Notes of a Rural Priest*, which resulted in the introduction of longer and more numerous general considerations and controversies around most acute ecclesio-social issues. Nevertheless, Leskov deemed the book to be worthy of reading, especially the parts presenting everyday scenes from clerical life with simple narration focused on the presentation of events and rendering the expressions of characters without too many deliberations. The reviewer concludes his bibliographical note with a lengthy quote from *The Notes of a Rural Priest*, describing a "splendid scene" of an episcopal visitation and a dialogue between the bishop and the poorly educated rural clergymen:

The bishop visiting the diocese comes to the narrator's parish. After the usual meeting [...] he calls the clergy for a talk.

– Tell me, deacon [...] what is it in the tenth commandment: "Neither shalt thou covet... his field, or his manservant". What is it: his field?

– Er... er... So that we don't covet the field.

[...]

– Fool, fool, fool! [...] Why do you have such fools? – the bishops addresses the narrator.

– If, your Eminence – he answers – you did not deign to visit us, we all would be plowing right now. They all struggle day after day for a piece of bread. There is no time to think about books<sup>11</sup>.

<sup>11</sup> "Приезжает в приход к рассказчику обозревающий епархию архиерей. После обычной встречи [...] призывает к себе причт.

– Скажи-ка мне, дьякон [...] что это такое в десятой заповеди: 'Не пожелай... ни села его, ни раба его'... Что такое: ни села?

– А... а... Чтобы мы не желали села. [...]

– Дурак, дурак, дурак! [...] Отчего они у тебя все дураки? – обращается преосвященный к рассказчику.

– Если бы, ваше преосвященство, – отвечает тот, – не изволили к нам ныне приехать, то мы ныне все пахали бы. Все они бьются изо дня в день из-за куска хлеба. О книге-то некогда и подумать" (Leskov 1883: 3).

Leskov leaves the citation without any comment, letting the text speak for itself, both in terms of style and problems presented therein.

In this short, one-column review, Leskov focused on the literary values of the text, paying almost no attention to its ideological tenor. Such prioritising was perhaps due to the brevity of his article, but one might also suppose it reflects his sympathy for Rev. Rozanov's views. There are no points of ideological dispute, so Leskov turns to the artistic merits of the text, an area where he can point out several flaws, in order to satisfy his polemical nature. As in prior reviews, he is highly attentive to the style of the reviewed work, criticising its journalistic character, excessive tendentiousness and the turning of literary text into a mere vehicle for expressing the author's social or ecclesio-social views.

In conclusion, the polemical and intertextual character of Leskov's literary criticism should be underlined, as well as that of his journalistic texts, and literary output as a whole. As Anna Fedotova noted, the writer constructed his own literary position through the reception of "others' word[s]", so that the stylistic and sense-bearing peculiarities of his works are defined by his striving to enter into a dialogue with contemporary and preceding authors. The reception may take various forms, such as polemics, consent, play, and mystification, usually intertwined with each other and thus creating a polylogue. The pre-text is transformed by methods of reduction, the use of hyperbole, and changes in linguistic forms and intonation, and, as a result, acquires a new meaning (Fedotova 2018: 295-297).

The polemical heat is noticeable in the literary reviews considered in this paper. Their author consistently finds shortcomings in the works of fiction he discusses, either in their ideological ambition or on a literary level. Leskov's reviews reveal both his stance toward ecclesiastical issues as well as his artistic principles. He believed that pastoral care consisted of having a close relationship with parishioners, demonstrating love, kindness and compassion towards them, and striving for their spiritual enlightenment and a mutual understanding. He expressed this opinion not only in the reviews analysed in this paper, but also in several other journal articles, such as *Ob učastii naroda v cerkovnyh delach* (*On the Participation of People in Church Matters*, published in "Severnaja pčela" in 1862), *O svodnyh brakach i drugich nemoščach*, *Ob aristokratizme duchovnyh* (*On Clergymen's Aristocratism*, in "Novosti i Birževaja gazeta" 1884) and many others. His ecclesiological vision was close to Aleksej Chomjakov's ideas of the Church being a free unity of both clergy and laity, connected to each other by bonds of love (Kozłowski 1988: 79). This is why he did not accept Livanov's vision of a priest demonstrating his superiority over parishioners.

As for literary issues, Leskov appreciated verisimilitude and realism, both in representation of the world and in rendering characters' ways of thinking and speaking. In his reviews and critical texts, he very clearly distinguishes between journalistic and literary styles, even if in his writing practice one can find plenty of works which merge these together into one complex, polystylistic and heterogenous unity. He expected literary texts to be entertaining for readers, although at the same time he was deeply convinced that they should serve the good and the truth. This was the way he often wrote his own novels and stories: portraying clergymen as 'good shepherds' with kind and loving hearts, introduc-

ing vivid characters, and using swift narration. Moreover, even Leskov's journalistic texts tend to be entertaining and enjoyable to read, as he consciously plays with style, making it more complicated and sophisticated, quoting anecdotes and curiosities. For example, when discussing the problem of the clergymen's appearance, in particular their hairstyle, in the article *Ob ubore russkogo duhovenstva* (*On the Clothing of Russian Clergy* published in "Novosti" in 1878), he tells the story of a priest admonished by the bishop for cutting his hair. However, as the priest declared he was doing it to get the hair to grow better, just like women did, the bishop gave him permission to cut it a small amount and only "at new moon", which the priest willingly and regularly did (Leskov 1878: 1-2).

Such an entertaining and playful way of writing allowed Leskov to convey his ideas in an attractive form, without explicitly expressing his point of view or making his text a mere mouthpiece for his beliefs. His intertextuality, hidden opinion and evaluation are methods he utilised to activate the reader's attention, encouraging them to make an effort to follow the author, understand his way of thinking and interpret the text, enriching it with their own view, experience and understanding.

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### *Abstract*

Marta Łukaszewicz

*Nikolaj Leskov as a Literary Critic. The Case of the Russian Clerical Novel*

The Russian writer Nikolaj Leskov is widely renowned as a portrayer of the everyday life of the Orthodox clergy; his literary works depict God's righteous servants as well as the greedy, selfish priests. Notwithstanding being a significant part of his work and effective way to express his views, Leskov's activity as a book reviewer is not as well-known. Leskov wrote numerous book reviews, mostly on novels featuring clergymen and the ordinary aspects of clerical life, where he analyses the artistic merit and ideological perspective expressed in a work; literary-aesthetic values were, however, at the centre of his critical evaluation and interest. This paper examines Leskov's book reviews by focusing on their content, structure, linguistic style, and the evaluation framework employed by the author for book critical assessment. The aim of the present investigation is to shed some light on Leskov's critical strategies and compare his critical arguments as a reviewer with the way he describes clergymen in his own works.

### *Keywords*

Nikolaj Leskov; Literary Criticism; Journalism; Reception; Orthodox Clergy; Russian Clerical Novel.