
Leskov, Tolstoy, and the Three Questions

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Nikolai Leskov was drawn to religious questions all his life, a fascination which reveals itself in his fictional and journalistic work and made him a specialist on sectarian and orthodox issues. It is not surprising, then, that toward the end of his life he expressed great interest in and even allegiance to Tolstoyanism. More than other aspects of Leskov's life and art, his relationship to Tolstoy has received considerable scholarly attention.² Due to the scarcity of published primary material on Leskov as compared to the wealth of material on Tolstoy, however, most of these studies have looked at the relationship more from the Tolstoyan perspective, analyzing the writers' correspondence, as well as comments, letters, and memoirs of people close to Tolstoy. The picture of Leskov that emerges is of a devoted, although not uncritical, follower of Tolstoy during the last decade of his life.

The issue of Leskov's adherence to Tolstoyanism is complicated in several ways: first, by his clear turn toward didactic and moral fiction in his later years, which, though predating Tolstoy's religious writings, no doubt gained momentum from their relationship;³ second, by his high regard for Tolstoy the person and writer, which somewhat overshadowed his feelings about Tolstoy's ethical beliefs; third, by the seeming enthusiasm with which he defended Tolstoy's views in public.⁴ Although taken by themselves these points do not necessarily support such an idea, they have helped to create and reinforce the notion that Leskov and Tolstoy were *edino-myshleniki*—"people of one mind."

The origin of the generally accepted view of Leskov's 'conversion' to Tolstoyanism in the 1880s may have been Leskov himself, since on

many occasions he professed his devotion to Tolstoy and his ethical positions (albeit with some reservations). In 1887, roughly six months after the two writers met for the first time, Leskov wrote to Vladimir Chertkov, Tolstoy's secretary:

About L. N[ikolaevich] everything is dear to me and everything is ineffably interesting. I am always in agreement with him, and there is nobody on earth who might be dearer to me than he is. I am never troubled by what I cannot share with him: what is dear to me is the general, so to speak, governing disposition of his soul and the frightening penetration of his mind. Where he has weaknesses, there I see his human imperfection and I am astonished how rarely he makes mistakes; and then he does not make them in the main part, but in the practical applications, in that which is always deceptive and dependent on chance. (*LIT* 11: 356)

No doubt Leskov found inspiration in Tolstoy's moral strength. Considering his own somewhat eclipsed position in the literary world, he could only be flattered by Tolstoy's friendship⁵ and the attention which 'the great writer' lavished on him. As one critic put it: "In his spiritual communion with L. N. Tolstoy, Leskov saw the greatest happiness that had occurred in his life" (Tunimanov 181).

When exploring the issue of Leskov's attraction to Tolstoyanism, it may be helpful to separate personal feelings from ethical beliefs. Up to his very death Leskov expressed his great respect and affection for Tolstoy, which, however, did not prevent him from rather vicious attacks on the Tolstoyans. "I love L. N. Tolstoy, but I don't like the 'Tolstoyans'," he confessed to Faresov (338).⁶ As concerns Tolstoy's views, Leskov criticized the theory of nonresistance to evil, called Tolstoy's attacks on sex "an infringement on nature," passionately rejected his notion of women and education, disagreed with his positions on war and government, had his own ideas about the common people (*narod*), ignored the aesthetic principles of simplification (*oproschenie*), and could not accept what Brigitte Macher called Tolstoy's *Kultur nihilismus* (103). These are hardly minor disagreements or mere "practical applications"!

There is much that unites the two writers. They both turned to the Gospel for religious

guidance and urgently called for a moral renewal of society in the Christian spirit. The path each chose, however, seemed to have been very different. As Lovejoy suggests, it is often useful to distinguish between the motives that lead to the proclamation of a set of ideas and the ideas themselves, since “motives and reasons partly identical may contribute to the production of very diverse conclusions” (5). Examining the work of the two writers, as well as unpublished letters and other material by Leskov, will, I believe, give some new insights into the degree of their spiritual closeness. Notwithstanding Leskov’s personal attraction to Tolstoy, I would suggest that Tolstoy only confirmed Leskov’s own direction. Leskov’s righteous people, furthermore—many of them created long before Tolstoy formulated his beliefs—do not embody the *specific Tolstoyan* understanding of Christian love, but merely demonstrate the *Christian* ethic of love as expressed in the Gospels, and *lack* exactly what is usually called “Tolstoyan.” A similar conclusion was reached by Luzhanovskii (1962-64) in his comparison of popular tales by the two writers. After first deploring the “belittling of Leskov’s originality,”⁷ he finds that an analysis of plots, characters, and literary technique in these stories shows that “in many issues—and it is important to stress, *in basic issues*—N. S. Leskov did not agree with L. N. Tolstoy, and, moreover, his aesthetic principles were diametrically opposed to those of Tolstoy”⁸ (Luzhanovskii 1962-64: 241, 252; emphasis added).

Two stories—Leskov’s *The Hour of God’s Will* (*Chas voli Bozhiei*) and Tolstoy’s *The Three Questions* (*Tri voprosa*)—are especially suited to explore the authors’ spiritual closeness, since they share a common theme—a moral quandary and its solution—which, moreover, embodies essential principles of the Tolstoyan belief. Their close analyses will show that the two writers were not “people of one mind,” and that the differences in their outlooks reflect not minor disagreements but two intrinsically opposed religious world views.

The theme was initially proposed to Leskov by Tolstoy in the late 1880s⁹ and Leskov’s version, *The Hour of God’s Will*, appeared in 1890 in *Russian Review* (*Russkoe obozrenie*). Tolstoy was

highly dissatisfied with Leskov’s treatment of his subject. Eight years later he wrote in his diary: “Leskov used my theme, and badly. My marvelous thought was three questions: what time is the most important of all, what person and what action? The time is now, this very minute, the person is he with whom you are dealing, and the action is to save your soul, i.e. to do the work of love” (*PSS* 53:198-199). In 1903 he decided to correct Leskov’s ‘mistake’ and ‘retaliated’ with *his* version, the story called *The Three Questions*.

A comparison of the two stories should include but not be restricted to the all too obvious differences in the authors’ literary styles. Except for a few stories by Leskov, imitatively ‘written in the Tolstoyan manner,’ the stylistic credo of the two could not be further apart. In this case we have Leskov’s meandering twenty-seven-page story *vs.* Tolstoy’s terse text of four pages. This imbalance usually becomes the focus in comparisons of the authors’ literary works. As Lantz puts it: “Tolstoy’s four page story achieves its power through the utter simplicity of its style, stripped of imagery and effects, and its total concentration on its moral point. Leskov’s runs to twenty-seven pages and is written in a playful *skaz*-fashion with stylistic fireworks [. . .]; its moral point is all but lost amid hyperbole and farcical incident” (118).

In fact, Tolstoy’s appraisals of Leskov’s work in general persistently hark back to matters of style. He intensely disliked Leskov’s manner of writing, and *The Hour of God’s Will* would not be an exception.¹⁰ After reading the story he wrote to Leskov:

I began to read and [at first] I very much liked the tone and the unusual mastery of the language, but . . . then your particular shortcoming came to the fore, which, it would seem, could be so easily corrected and which in itself is a [positive] quality and not a shortcoming—an *exuberance* of images, colours, distinctive expressions which intoxicate and distract you. There is much that is unnecessary and disproportionate, but the *verve* and the tone are astonishing. The tale is still very good, but it is annoying that it could have been better were it not for an excess of talent. (*L6T* 3:342)¹¹

Leskov, on the contrary, liked the story precisely for its linguistic qualities: “I somewhat like *The Hour of God’s Will* for those difficulties with the language which I had to overcome” (to the literary critic Protopopov, April 30, 1894). He repeatedly admits his inability to write in the Tolstoyan manner, as for example in this letter to Chertkov: “I can’t write as simply as Lev Nikolaevich. It is not part of my talent. [. . .] I’ve gotten used to the embellishment [*otdelka*] in my work and it is not possible for me to write more plainly” (*LIIT* 11: 369).¹² If it is true that “nobody in this world is in a position to instill into his creative work a spirit that is different from the one that animates the creating person itself” (*Zagrobnyi svidetel’* 254), then the inability to write in a certain way would have to indicate the author’s difference of spirit. As a close reading of the two selected stories will show, the writers’ stylistic differences—Tolstoy’s clarity vs. what Tolstoy called Leskov’s “curliness” (*kucheriavost’*)—indeed correspond to different ways of thinking, and the values they cherish belong to two opposite world views—one which strives toward simplification and the other which treasures complication and plenitude.

Both writers opted for a fairy tale with a similar plot: A certain king (Leskov), or tsar (Tolstoy) desires to rule in an exemplary manner, and he comes to believe that the answers to the three questions will yield the ultimate guidelines for his kingdom. Thus, both stories illustrate their author’s idea of how to implement a utopian kingdom.

The opening paragraphs already expose the rulers’ personalities and indicate the different paths each author takes in resolving the task before him. Tolstoy does not waste any time with lengthy introductions. His ruler knows exactly the source of his problem and how to correct it. The story begins: “Once the tsar thought that if he always knew when to begin any affair, which people one should have contact with and which ones one should avoid, and most importantly, if he always knew which was the most important affair of all, he would be successful in all things” (*PSS* 34: 134). He consulted his advisers but was unsatisfied since the responses he received were “all

different.” To find the “sure” answers he decided to call on a hermit (*PSS* 34: 135). In short, Tolstoy’s ruler is self-sufficient and does not feel he owes anything to anybody. He rejects the advice of people around him because they propose different solutions, while obviously, in his understanding, the sign of the true answer is the one that all agree on.¹³ In essence, it is *he* who thought up the questions and *he* who knows how and where to get the answers.

In Leskov’s story the king does not have the slightest idea which questions are most crucial. In fact, he only reaches this point on page twelve of the story, when, after many failed attempts, he by chance overhears the three questions from three wise hermits. Page one reveals merely that the king, who is tellingly named *Dobrokhhot*, the Well-Wisher, is wise and well-meaning, but in despair, because his affairs are not going as he would like to:

He loved to live according to the old manner, and ruled his kingdom with great piety, according to the traditions of his fathers and grandfathers, and all his efforts and worries were directed so that in his land truth would triumph over falsehood and all people in his kingdom would be happy, but all of this just never seemed to come out right. *Dobrokhhot* would only have to begin to straighten out his affairs on one end, when—lo and behold!—they would come apart on the other. For a long time *Dobrokhhot* tried all kinds of ways [. . .], wore himself out in his efforts up to the point of exhaustion, but to no avail whatsoever. (*LIIT* 9:5)

Leskov’s *Dobrokhhot* is full of doubts. He knows only that things are not the way they ought to be, but has no idea of how to correct them. He needs help and accepts advice from people around him: First he follows his wife’s suggestion to call a general assembly of his noblemen and advisors. These men, however, do not share the king’s concern, but determine that everything is more or less satisfactory. When the king nevertheless insists that they discuss the issue, they first take a long nap, then quarrel, and finally come up with two possibilities for successful government: the conservative notion “do as your fathers did” and the liberal-progressive belief “value the future with-

out troubling about the present.” Neither solution satisfies the king, since neither provides any directive for the present. Next, the king is helped by his old nurse, a captive “from foreign lands,” who urges him to find three old hermits. For this task he enlists the help of all roaming beggars, and thus, after all these efforts, he obtains the three questions from the three wise men. For the answers, however, the king needs to find a selfless maiden who can solve the riddle. He sends off his advisors who, once out of sight, squander the money for the task and return empty-handed. The king, then, under threat of punishment for non-compliance, sends off a public entertainer who returns with the final answers.

These fictional rulers strikingly reflect the personality of their respective creators. Tolstoy’s tsar shows great confidence, refuses all advice, and chooses on his own where and to whom to go for the conclusive answers. The hero’s unshakable belief in himself is found in the author as well. To Tolstoy, the author of *A Critique of Dogmatic Theology* (1881-2), *The Gospel in Brief* (1881-3), *What I Believe* (1884), *What Then Must We Do?* (1886), *The Kingdom of God is Within You* (1894), and other religious tracts, the truth is very clear and can be expressed in several concrete axioms. In an 1882 letter he writes: “[I]t seems to me now, that if Christ and His teaching had not existed, I would have uncovered this truth on my own. It seems so simple and clear to me; and I am convinced that it will seem the same to you” (*PSS* 63: 116). A bit further he repeats this thought: “Don’t think that in Christ there would be anything unclear. Everything is as clear as day” (*PSS* 63:121). And it was up to Tolstoy to find this truth: “And how strange to say after 1800 years that I had to uncover this rule [of nonresistance to evil] as if it were something new” (*PSS* 63: 118).

In Leskov’s case, the king’s sentiments of doubt and his constant need for people whose knowledge or abilities might be of use are heard as well in the author. He writes to Tolstoy in 1891: “I know that I don’t know anything and I never remain fixed in my position in anything, but I [always] discover something better and more useful” (*LIT* 11: 496). The same self-questioning

tone is heard again in an 1893 letter to Tolstoy:

From my early years on I was attracted to questions of faith and began to write about religious people, when this was considered indecent and impossible [. . .], but I got mixed up all the time [. . .]. I approached *on my own* what I saw in you, but left to myself I was all the time afraid that this was a mistake, because, although in my consciousness there was the same light that I saw in you, in me everything was in chaos—troubled and unclear, and I didn’t have confidence in myself. (*LIT* 11: 519)

To Leskov, who read the Gospels as eagerly as Tolstoy, the message was not that obvious. In a curious unpublished sketch, supposedly written shortly before his death, he mentions that his doubts about the Gospels’ messages and his preoccupation with the meaning of Christ began in early childhood and remained with him all his life.¹⁴ Moreover, in many letters to Tolstoy he singles out passages that have changed their meanings for him after repeated re-readings, or asks Tolstoy for advice on particular interpretations.

The amplitude of Tolstoy’s diaries, letters, tracts, and articles provides much evidence that he, too, was plagued by doubts and kept rethinking his theory, and passages can certainly be found in support of various slants in his world view. Yet, his basic beliefs, first formulated in the early 1880s, remained fairly consistent: for him the Christian religion of love was most fully embodied in the rule of nonviolence, and only total compliance with it would advance man in his struggle toward self-perfection. He wrote to Leskov in 1894: “I think that anybody who has read at the very least the Sermon on the Mount—I won’t even speak of the whole Gospel—and who did not come to the conclusion that nonresistance to evil constitutes the basic condition of the Christian understanding of the world, such a person will not be convinced by any arguments” (*LIT* 3: 414).

Tolstoy’s conviction that evil can be completely abolished by love is reflected in his story: The tsar reaches the hermit’s hut and finds him

digging in his garden. Repeated questions remain unanswered, and the tsar, feeling compassionate, helps the hermit in his work. When evening falls, and he once more requests an answer to his questions, they are interrupted by a severely wounded man who comes running towards them. The tsar attends to the sick man and stays the night. In the morning the stranger reveals himself as a former enemy who had planned to kill the ruler in revenge for previous punishment suffered. When the tsar was delayed from returning—due to his good deed—the man went to investigate, but was caught and nearly killed by the tsar’s bodyguards. The tsar’s aid effected a change of heart: “I wanted to kill you, but you saved my life. Now, if I remain alive and if you want this, I will serve you as your most faithful slave and will order my sons to do the same” (*PSS* 34: 137). The tsar, overjoyed at this reconciliation, forgives his enemy, returns his property, and offers other assistance. The story ends with a long speech by the hermit who tells the tsar that his actions are the answers to his quandary. His help first to the hermit and then to the wounded man saved his life and brought reconciliation. The hermit concludes:

Therefore remember, the most important time is one: *now*, and it is most important because only then do we have power over ourselves; and the most important person is *that one with whom we are together now*, because nobody can know if he will ever have anything to do with another person again, and the most important deed—to *do a good deed* for him, because a person is sent into the world only for that reason alone. (*PSS* 34: 137)

Thus, at the story’s end everything is tied up perfectly, everybody is happy and has profited: the hermit has finished his rows, the tsar has escaped regicide, is reconciled with his enemy, and has found his truth, and the enemy has turned into a faithful servant.

Leskov’s story, on the other hand, ends rather curiously. His king had to go through an enormous amount of trouble and betrayal before he received the riddle’s answers. However, when he wanted to rule according to this wisdom, he became afraid and thought:

“what would happen if others in the neighbouring kingdoms didn’t act the same way? After all, alone I wouldn’t be able to rule in this manner amongst other temporal rulers.” And he decided that he’d better sit the way he was sitting on his throne before, like all temporal rulers, and hold in one hand the sword and in the other the golden apple. (*LIIT* 9: 30)

He banishes the entertainer Razliuliai, who went through the ordeal of getting the answers from the wise maiden from the city and settles him in a pseudo-paradise where he could “eat honey with cucumbers to his heart’s content.” But he receives orders to avoid the marketplace, not to mingle with people and not to tell anybody about the young maiden and her prophesy. As his death approaches, the king has the whole story written down “without even the tiniest mistake.”

And Dobrokhhot ordered that this scroll be rolled up in brocade and in damask and in fine gingham and be placed at the bottom of a small golden chest and be taken to the cellar of the tower behind seven locks and seven seals. May it lie there until the time for temporal rulers has passed.

Precisely thus it was executed, and the scripture is still lying there behind the seals, and the affairs in the kingdom are as before, and everything goes so-so, not good not bad, the way it was at the time of the grandfathers and great-grandfathers. Obviously the hour of God’s will has not yet arrived. (*LIIT* 9: 31)

Thus, the well-intentioned king refuses to obey these Tolstoyan principles, since he realizes that they do not provide protection from outside aggression. In a letter to Tolstoy, Leskov points out the necessity of ending the story in this manner: “[The story] got rather spoilt at the end ‘because of fear,’ but it wouldn’t have come out otherwise” (*L6T* 3: 340).

Another passage in a letter to Tolstoy from 1891 shows how much Leskov was occupied with the interplay of Christian ethics and political power at that time, and how well thought out this ending was. He mentions a verse from Paul’s Epistle to the Corinthians (I Cor XV, 24): “And then the end will come, *when* he will hand over

the kingdom to God,—when he will eliminate any kind of rule, any kind of power and force” and sees it “as a *direct* indication that Christ is *concerning himself with the elimination of any kind of rule, of any kind of power and force*, and without this his task here is not finished. [. . .] This means, that while there exists ‘a rule, power and force,’ he can not ‘hand over’ the kingdom to God—the ‘father’”(L6T3: 362-63).¹⁵ This passage and Leskov’s interpretation probably did not trouble Tolstoy, since he did not like St. Paul and, in fact, considered him a “false interpreter” of Christ’s message (PSS 24: 809). Not recognizing the necessity of power structures and political institutions, Tolstoy thought that man could work toward the ‘Kingdom of God on Earth’ while those institutions were still in place by simply refusing to play a part in their existence. He firmly believed that ‘this evil,’ like any other, would eventually be “swallowed up” if people stopped using force to resist it (PSS 53:197). This technique—later called passive resistance—has been put to good use by Mahatma Gandhi who—as Edgerton expresses it—“some would say far outstripped his teacher” (Edgerton 532).

Leskov may have accepted the theory of nonviolence as an ideal, but was too practical-minded to believe in its universal usefulness. For him, this way of behaving is “very good, but not always” (*Leskov o literature* 137). In some cases, he even considered it harmful. In an article from 1886, *On Goads: An Admonition to the Sons of Resistance* (“O rozhne”), Leskov discussed several of Tolstoy’s folk tales published that year, in which Tolstoy laid out his program of nonresistance. Leskov did not object to the theory’s validity as such but elaborated on its shortcomings and considered Tolstoy’s idealistic view of the effectiveness of nonresistance naive and unrealistic:

In his depiction of the kingdom of Ivan-the-Fool¹⁶ Count Tolstoy is not even faithful to the truth and realism that always distinguish him. The calm subjects of “Ivan the Fool” serve as successful illustrations for Tolstoy: they “resist” not at all, “but only cry.” The soldiers who conquered them softened up as well: they “felt disgusted to abuse them, and there was no one to fight with.” But

such a thing does not happen in real war, which Count Tolstoy knows well. Everybody knows, for example, that defenseless people are beaten, too, and very often even more severe acts of violence are done to women. . . How should one act when before one’s eyes one’s sister is raped, or one’s wife or even one’s mother? . . . Is it possible to look on, not to resist immediately, but go first and water one’s charred pieces of wood? . . .¹⁷ (*Leskov o literature* 137-38)

For Leskov, evil has to be resisted *before* one reaches the point of spiritual purity, and he even argues—calling on emotions understood “by all and everyone”—that, in certain situations, acts of violence are more human and important than the concern for self-perfection:

I am speaking from *the side of the heart*, from the side of feelings, which is accessible and understandable by all and everyone. Judging from this side, I think that there are incidents when a person cannot remain human without having shown the quickest and strongest resistance to evil. And he has to show this resistance without cleansing himself and preparing himself, but exactly as *the person he is now*, with the exact same towel that he has in his hand, with the unfirm block and the charred pieces of wood.¹⁸ (*Leskov o literature* 140).

Leskov’s criticism of the theory of nonviolence by far predates Tolstoy’s own formulation of his beliefs. In an article from 1870, for example, Leskov addresses issues that reappear in the fairy tale *The Hour of God’s Will*, and one passage of this article even presents an ‘alternative version’ of the tale or its sequel, a ‘what would have happened if?’ situation¹⁹ (“Russkie obshchestvennye zametki” 1-2). There he depicts the collapse of an exemplary government whose ruler, “a certain ‘well-meaning,’ ideal prince Irinei,” dogmatically adheres to the practice of nonresistance to evil. Leskov called this endeavour the product of an “endearing, but ridiculous and harmful disposition,” and concludes that “many people are very much afraid of ‘exemplary government’ and share the opinion of Friedrich the Great, that ‘philosophers are of no use at all as

rulers” (“Russkie obshchestvennye zametki” 2). For Tolstoy, the axiom of nonresistance remained the cornerstone of his religious world view, and, considering Leskov’s objections to this most integral portion of Tolstoy’s ethics, it is hard to conceive how Leskov could have been a follower of Tolstoy *at any time*.

The moral of Tolstoy’s tale *The Three Questions* is very clear. The king learns—and we are made to believe that he accepts—the rules given him for successful government. Accordingly, he must make the present the most important time. A fixation on the present corresponds to Tolstoy’s reading of the Gospels, and to this precept he dedicates one of the twelve chapters of *The Gospel in Brief* (PSS 24: 885-893): “True life in the fulfillment of the will of the Father is not life in the past, nor in the future, but life in the present” (PSS 24: 887). This focus on the moment is not only part of the established truth in Tolstoy’s tale; in a certain way it motivates its structure as well. The story depicts a particular incident without any extraneous material and there is a definite sense of “before” and “after”: before the riddle was solved and after. However, we know very little about the past, the time of “before,” of how and why the tsar arrived at precisely those questions, nor do we know anything about the future, how he applied the newly found wisdom. But thanks to the story’s tight construction and the fact that all ends well and all have profited from the ordeal, one might be easily persuaded to accept its moral without questioning its feasibility. A philosophy that focuses on the moment, however, isolates a person’s act from motives (past) and consequences (future). In our motives, we give credit to people or events that have inspired certain acts, and in looking at consequences we are forced to take responsibility for what we have done. In an essay posthumously titled *Towards a Philosophy of the Act*, Bakhtin (1993) develops a theory of action in which the act is not looked at by itself but becomes part of a never-ending chain of existence. The crucial aspect in this theory is answerability—*otvetstvennost’*.

A look at Tolstoy’s story from this angle reveals some of the troubling parts in his teaching

and shows how he controls the story to give a neat and succinct message. The reader—intrigued by the story’s craftsmanship—easily overlooks inconsistencies in content. Since for Tolstoy earthly powers only create and perpetuate evil and, therefore, should be dispensed with altogether, it seems surprising that he chose a ruler in the first place to demonstrate his axiom of love. On the other hand, this ruler fits his role rather incompletely: he has appropriated only selected features of his position and rejected the more uncomfortable ones. Unlike many fairy-tale kings who send others on quests but themselves remain on the throne, Tolstoy’s tsar departs for an unspecified amount of time—however long it will take to “find the truth.” Moreover, his absence is not state-related, but prompted by a personal motive: He “wants to be successful in all things” (PSS 34: 134). This decision betrays irresponsibility, since his office entails the protection and care of his subjects, especially if he does not trust his advisers, which is made explicit in the otherwise very terse story. A negation of power structures poses the same problem as does the application of the theory of nonresistance, namely, the lack of protection of others and, incidentally, of oneself.

But in *The Three Questions* we also see that Tolstoy, an outspoken opponent of power, does not reject the *privileges* that come with a powerful position. His tsar, while leaving his kingdom unprotected, takes off surrounded by “guards carrying weapons (*oruzhenostsy*),” thanks to whom he remains alive and can accomplish his good deed. His good deed is thus the result of another’s “bad deed,” since obviously, when they wound the enemy, the guards are not acting out of love for the person they are with at the moment. Does that mean that the precept applies only to certain people and not to guards? Tolstoy’s rigid application of his theory forces him to close his eyes to what happens outside—at the edge of the forest where the tsar’s guards are positioned. Thus, while neglecting the tsar’s responsibilities, Tolstoy makes extensive use of the ruler’s privileges: his prerogative of personal inviolability and the right to punish and reward are the moving

forces behind the story. They account for the rise and denouement of the evil force, and thus illustrate the moral's soundness. Tolstoy's tsar enjoys the advantages of his office without returning the gift by taking responsibility for his subjects, as well as for unpopular decisions.

The hermit's closing speech confirms the emphasis on personal advantage that makes the moral so palpable to the reader: The tsar's service to the old man saved him from being killed, his help to the wounded made possible the reconciliation with his enemy, and the reason for the good deed now is "because we do not know when we will die and whether we will ever have a chance of being with another person again," i.e., when we will have another opportunity to do good. Or as Tolstoy formulated it in the diary passage quoted above: The deed is "to save your soul, i.e. to do the work of love" (*PSS* 53: 199). An even greater stress on personal gain is expressed in a letter to Chertkov, in which Tolstoy mentions the theme for the first time: "And the most dear of all deeds is to do good to that person, because this is the only deed that is probably *of use to you* (*tebe na pol'zu*)" (*PSS* 86: 63; emphasis added). Most certainly, Tolstoy understood this "use" in terms of spiritual benefit. But in *Confession* and in other didactic stories (*Father Sergius*, among others), he condemned the mere thought of reward when doing good; the application of the language of commerce, of gain and loss, when talking about spiritual matters reveals pride and self-centredness.²⁰

Leskov's king is less concerned with himself and thinks first of his duty as statesman. His motive for seeking the truth is not "that he should be successful in all things" but "that in his land truth would triumph over falsehood and all people in his kingdom would be happy." He rejects the "simple wisdom" meant to assure "that every person in his kingdom would be well in the present hour, in the here and now," since he feels he cannot afford to think only of the present but has to "glance into unreachable distances," where fear of the unknown lurks. In Leskov's story there is no neat division into "before" and "after" that characterizes a mind which concentrates only on

the present. Nothing really has changed in the kingdom: affairs are as before, "not good not bad," and the king returns to rule with "the sword and the golden apple," that is, using the traditional methods of punishment and reward. The reader is not presented with a found truth, but let down. There is a feeling of anticlimax and confusion: all the energy spent on the quest, all the adventures and hardships encountered on the way have come to nothing, since the findings are hidden away "behind seven seals" and the person bringing this truth is isolated as if he were infected by a dangerous and contagious disease. He is banished from society and rewarded with a "golden cage."²¹

This is what happens to the entertainer Razliuliai, who, having done the good work, comes out worst of all. He is not only sent on the journey under threat of punishment to himself and even to his family (the latter to ensure his return), but is advised by the maiden to renounce his well-earned reward so he will be believed (*LIIT* 9: 29). Leskov does not believe that good deeds are "of advantage" to the person doing them. As he shows in the righteous characters of his stories and as he writes to his sister, for him "honest people fare badly (*chestnym khudo*)" (letter to Krokchina, March 4, 1892). He liked best and frequently quoted—often in a slightly distorted version—Saint Paul's definition of perfected love: "Love which seeketh nothing for itself,"²² and saw man's task as an effort "to increase the sum of goodness in oneself and around oneself" (*Leskov o literature* 116).

This interpretation of the deed of love is evoked in *The Hour of God's Will*. As was his habit with any source material, Leskov changed and reformulated the three answers given to him by Tolstoy. To the wise maiden, who delivers the key to the questions, the truth is also very obvious. On hearing the riddle she says to Razliuliai: "It is good that you didn't give me a hard task, one that would be beyond my simple understanding, but asked the task of God, the most simple and easy, the answer to which in an honest soul is as clear as the sun" (*LIIT* 9: 28). She begs him to ask her the questions in order and he complies:

—Tell me, dear maiden, which hour is the most important of all?
 —The *present one*,—answered the maiden.
 —And why?
 —Because each person only has power over the present hour.
 —True! And which person is the most important of all?
 —*The one with whom you are now*.
 —Why is that?
 —Because it now depends on you, from what you answer him, whether he will be happy or sad.
 —And which deed is the most precious of all?
 —*The good that you will manage to do in this hour to this person*. If all of you begin to live according to this, everything will go all right and be in harmony. And if you don't want to live in this manner, you won't set things straight. (*LIIT* 9: 28-29)

This is a considerable shift from Tolstoy's self-centeredness. Here, there is no talk of any reward, no soul being saved, no settling of old scores. Leskov's reformulation focuses on responsibility: we are made accountable for the happiness or sadness of the person we are in contact with. And this act will not depend on or result in personal gain.

Of course, Tolstoy would not have rejected Leskov's definition. He, too, advocated active love but was quite tormented by his failure to depict such acts convincingly. The reason for this may be that he was too 'enamoured' of the figure of the hermit or elder, which appears frequently in his didactic stories. These characters come to know the truth—or what they believe is the true way of life—but live in isolation so that we never see how they would apply their new-found knowledge. As Luzhanovskii puts it: "... the story [*Two Elders*] is really constructed on the transmission of the hero's acts, his activities, but only up to his 'purification,' until he realized the meaning of life. Tolstoy breaks off the action in his popular tales at exactly that point" (Luzhanovskii 1962-64: 250). Another example would be Tolstoy's very effective story *Father Sergius*: The bulk of the story is about Sergius' withdrawal and asceticism, whereas the moral of 'going into the world and learning from simple people' is placed at the very end, and we are shown only in very broad

terms how he fares in the world. Tolstoy was very aware of this dilemma. He wrote in his diary: "As concerns F[ather] S[ergius]. Alone he is good—with people he falls" (*PSS* 53: 204). Tolstoy's preoccupation with self-perfection, as well as his method for attaining it, prevent him from showing in his own work *how* this active love can be realized in actuality. Edgerton is not the only one who felt that "Leskov created a number of characters who are more convincing and attractive embodiments of the Tolstoyan religion of love than the characters of Tolstoy themselves" (532).

The most significant difference between Leskov's "righteous men" and Tolstoy's positive characters, however, seems to be that between selfless love as choice vs. selfless love as dedication. Leskov's characters live their not always blameless lives, but in decisive moments do the deed of love; they live like ordinary human beings but do saintly deeds, whereas in Tolstoy, positive characters tend to "live like saints"—dedicate themselves to others to the point of self-neglect. To this category belong the hermit-type who, since he has made a conscious choice, suffers from self-doubt and pride, as well as such characters as Pashen'ka in *Father Sergius*, Platon Karataev in *War and Peace*, or various dedicated serfs and servants, all of whom exemplify love as pure *agape*. Leskov admires this type in his *Prolog* tale *Innocent Prudentius* (*Nevinnii Prudentsii*, 1891; *LIIT* 9: 50-116), but gives the last word to his character Prudentius who rejects this choice for its ruthless disregard for human nature. He says about selfless Melita: "Her spirit is too elevated and serious—it is too merciless in its conquest over the flesh. You [his wife] and I . . . we look [at life] more simply" (*LIIT* 9: 115). Leskov frequently voiced this argument against Tolstoy, namely, that he demands too much from simple human beings. Not everybody is capable of living a life of saintliness. Leskov's characters are more warm and loving than Tolstoy's because they show themselves to be human despite their often 'sinful' positions. They are able to compromise, and although they frequently suffer materially or physically for their loving deeds, they live at peace with their choices. Their attraction lies in

the fact that they include other people's concerns in their own ordinary life, instead of renouncing their life or having it belong to others.

Leskov's repeated and ardent show of support for Tolstoy's "main stream of thoughts" has created much confusion and prevented a fair evaluation of their relationship. What Leskov really saw and appreciated was Tolstoy's tireless effort to turn public attention away from materialistic ends and to advocate a return to Christian ethics. He himself had been recommending such a redirection long ago, as in this letter from 1875:

"We are ruled"—as Panin told Catherine II—"by the grace of God and the stupidity of the people"; we need a "good enlightenment," that is, an enlightenment which is not hostile to the Christian ideal, instead of pursuing the political ideal according to the European model. As for all the rest: "God is with us," because if it were not for Him "who would deliver us from such ills?" (Chertkov 188)

Already in his early writings, Leskov had been working toward reversing what he considered the wrong social values that dominated Russian society, but his work was not getting sufficient attention. As he repeatedly stated, "his light was weak," and he greeted the arrival of "the strong light" that came from Tolstoy (Faresov 308).²³ Leskov saw in Tolstoy a figure who caught an important historical moment, as he stated in a 1890 letter: "Tolstoy does exactly what is ripe now: It is impossible to live without belief, but to believe in banalities is also impossible. To humanize the evangelical teaching is the most noble and a quite timely task" (*LIIT* 11: 456). Or as he wrote in one of his notebooks:

In the interpretations and commentaries of L. N. T. "there are some things difficult to understand" (as Ap. Peter expressed it in regard to Ap. Paul²⁴), but he elevated his contemporaries to a height which can't be attained by the banal view of life [*poshlost'*] that stops at the notions of "gain and loss"; and in all the people touched by him there will survive if not the conviction, then probably the recognition or the notion that "we don't live the way we ought to"—and this is the great service of Tolstoy. (*Zapisnaia knizhka* 3)

There is great evidence, however, that by the early 1890s, if not earlier, he was trying to distance himself from Tolstoy's views. He diplomatically avoids the issue of commenting on *particular* parts of Tolstoy's teaching and only in occasional letters shows his irritation with it, as for example in the yet unpublished letters to Men'shikov,²⁵ such as in this from 1893:

[. . .] I cannot at all agree with the questions of celibacy and whatever else concerns the relationship of the sexes; and this troubles me very much. It seems to me without purpose and has a detrimental effect on the great majority of people, the same effect as some kind of monstrous demand of a terrible price has on a poor buyer . . . He is terrified, walks away and then never comes back and dissuades others from going there: "This is not for us." [. . .] We have to purify people's taste and not rip out the natural law of nature. (Letter from June 29, 1893).

When Men'shikov reproached him that same year for not speaking up for Tolstoy, Leskov answers by sending him an article from ten years earlier, in which he defended Tolstoy and Dostoevsky against attacks by Konstantin Leont'ev (letter from November 12, 1893).²⁶ He writes that this article touched "a difficult and delicate question," and "that after that *as concerns himself*" he felt he was done with this problem (Leskov's stress). Considering that this article was written before the bulk of Tolstoy's religious writing appeared and only treats the story *What Men Live By*—whose source Leskov is quick to point out in Afanas'ev's collection of folk tales—the notion of Leskov as Tolstoy's follower and defender has to be examined more critically.²⁷ As he continues in his letter:

It is correct to say that I "coincided" with Tolstoy, and was not "drawn in" by him as B[urenin]n thinks. I didn't imitate him, but said the same thing *before him*, but only not effusively, not confidently, but timidly and with a bur. Feeling his enormous strength I threw away my little lantern and followed his strong light. I "coincided," but *am tired* continuing with that. (Letter from November 12, 1893).

From the context of the letter, in which Leskov discusses people who could possibly support Tolstoy in public, it becomes clear that notwithstanding their temporary “coincidence” Leskov considers himself not one of them, that he is “tired of continuing” to defend Tolstoy. Despite his disagreements, he nevertheless observed great constraint in criticizing Tolstoy’s teaching. As he said to Faresov: “There is no reason to trot his faults out into the street and trouble his old age. That is only ‘making noise,’ not seeking the truth” (214).

Besides the touchy question of Leskov’s public support of Tolstoy, there is another issue that muddies the water and prevents us from seeing the relationship between the two writers more clearly: both writers use the same sources and see in the Gospel and its message of Christian love the model that mankind should follow. If we examine the concrete issues of how each writer defines good and evil and how they propose to cope with the latter, we can see a great divergence. Tolstoy tends to think in well-defined categories: in his writings right and wrong are always evident. He wants mankind to strive toward a definite end, the establishment of the Kingdom of God on Earth where evil has been overcome by love. Of course, he realizes that this is a utopia which can never be attained. He nevertheless believed that if everybody were to recognize and apply the teaching of nonresistance, and work to perfect himself, evil could be overcome. Tolstoy therefore strives toward a monolithic, static ideal—a humanity unified by love—and could be considered susceptible to what Lovejoy called the “monistic pathos,” a state of mind which suggests that “one is oneself a part of the universal One” and which allows the imagination to escape “from the sense of being a limited, particular self” (13). Such a psychology, however, would have a static and ‘nihilistic’ quality which is seen in Tolstoy’s interest in patience, ‘non-action,’²⁸ and his rejection of all ‘worldly structures,’ political and cultural ones. Tolstoy’s emphasis on the present time, which has been pointed out earlier, supports such a state of mind as well: when cut off from past and future, the present becomes immutable.

Such a temporal orientation allows an enormous freedom, the freedom to create *ex nihilo*, since the mind is free from previous ‘delusions.’ Here we find echoes of Tolstoy’s rejection of culture and of his theory of art.

The values cherished by Tolstoy include purity, perfection, non-contamination, simplicity, clarity, stillness, unity. He is part of the Platonic idealistic tradition which sees evil in the divergence from the norm, in mutability. For Tolstoy, evil does not really exist by itself but consists in the splitting up, the breaking off from an ideal, solid, monolithic structure. He writes in 1882: “One person cannot do anything evil. Evil is the separation of people” (*PSS* 63: 114). And as was shown in the example of the story *The Three Questions*; for Tolstoy evil can be overcome, swallowed up, eliminated. In his 1898 diary he writes:

Nonresistance to evil is not only important because man should act in this way for himself, for the attainment of perfect love, but also because only nonresistance stops evil, swallows it up into itself, neutralizes it, doesn’t allow it to go further, the way it inevitably does, like the transfer of movement by way of bouncing balls, if this force doesn’t exist, which eats it up. Active Christianity does not consist in doing, creating Christianity, but in the act of swallowing up evil. (*PSS* 53: 197)

This view of evil colours Tolstoy’s notion of love. If evil is disunity, love is the striving for ultimate unity. Perfect love, then, is a state that can only be reached in a metaphysical realm. Love of one’s neighbour as a concrete notion Tolstoy considers an idea so “unclear and unrealizable that it remains only an empty phrase.” He continues: “My opinion is that this principle is a metaphysical one, a very important one as such; but when this same principle is understood as a rule of life, as a law, then it is simply stupid. But unfortunately it is often understood that way” (*PSS* 63: 117).

Tolstoy nevertheless struggled with his notion of perfect love and tried to turn it into a theory of active love. He finally concluded that the most perfect love is that which continues even when it is rejected by the recipient. He wrote in his 1889

diary: "I thought: The sign of real, that is, self-renouncing love is, if a person whom I love and for whom I labour does not accept my efforts, despises them, and I nevertheless can't get angry at him and don't value my efforts. The opposite sign is faulty egoistic attachment" (*PSS* 50: 184). It may be ironic with respect to our comparison of the two writers that this entry immediately follows: "I read Leskov. False. Bad."

Leskov might say the same thing about Tolstoy, since he certainly would not agree with such a definition of love. In fact, he treated this theme in an article which was disguised as a 'defence' of Tolstoy, but ends up exposing the egoistic motives in a so-called Tolstoyan type of benefactor ("Rasskazy kstati" 2).

Tolstoy's notions of love and evil seem to be very much tied up with a sense of martyrdom. Evil is overcome by being 'swallowed up' by the good, that is, the better you are the more *you* have to work to absorb even more evil. *The Three Questions* illustrates this idea as well: The enemy's previous punishment and his murderous intention are wiped away by the good deed of the *tsar*, not by anything the enemy himself did. He confessed only *after* having been the recipient of the good deed. Furthermore, the troubling question remains: Why was the previous punishment not only reversed, but the enemy was rewarded *with more*? Does that mean that the punishment was not deserved in the first place?

Tolstoy clearly is working here with the model of Christ, the Saviour, who assumed sins on man's behalf.²⁹ But we have a long way to go to emulate Christ, which is why such a notion has to be accompanied by a theory of self-perfection. Leskov rejected this direction, which Tolstoy called the "regal way" (*tsarstvennyi put'*) to attain perfect love, and found another Biblical image much closer to his heart: the image of the thief on the cross, whose previous evil deeds were wiped away by what *he* did. In *On Goads* he writes:

According to the Gospel, the very best change in a living person can happen very quickly—"in the twinkling of an eye." A thief is hanging there, next to him a righteous person, and then another thief. And the thief was completely as he should be—a

genuine thief. He didn't water any charred wood pieces, but then in his presence the other thief began to harass the meek one—and there immediately appeared all that is necessary:

—Amen. From now on you will be with me. [. . .] The same happened with the fornicatress, as well as with Zaccheus and with the praying publican. In all cases a noble upsurge grabbing the heart, a holy movement of the soul, and not a *method* with charred wood. . . (*Leskov o literature* 138-39).

Tolstoy did not like this notion, as his reaction to Leskov's legend *Conscientious Daniel* shows. D. P. Makovitskii, during one of his visits to Iasnaia Poliana in 1909, reports:

Maria Nikolaevna had read *Conscientious Daniel* in Leskov's version, published in *The Intermediary* (*Posrednik*), and recounted it at breakfast. L. N. didn't approve of the end (I—Dushan Petrovich—don't remember the story itself. It was something to the effect that due to his deed, former evil done by him stopped being evil). L. N. didn't approve of this thought of Leskov. Maria Nikolaevna didn't agree, and couldn't really understand L. N. ("U Tolstogo" 52)

Leskov advocated exactly the opposite of what Tolstoy expressed in the diary passage quoted earlier: For Tolstoy "active Christianity does not consist in doing, creating Christianity, but in the act of swallowing up evil" (*PSS* 53: 197). For Leskov active Christianity was precisely "doing, creating Christianity," or, as he expressed it in *The Hour of God's Will*, the sign of the good deed is whether a person leaves happy or sad.

The two writers disagree furthermore not only on the notion of love but, more importantly, or resulting from it, on their idea of evil. Again, Leskov's concept of evil proves to be diametrically opposed to Tolstoy's. For Leskov, evil comes from closing one's mind to the surrounding world, from the conviction that the truth has been revealed to you alone. Throughout his whole writing career, he tirelessly attacked dogmatic thinking and showed the downfall of characters who preach and rely on what they think is an infallible truth. His targets include idealist social-

ists (*The Musk-ox*), nihilists and materialists (*No Way Out, At Daggers Drawn*), Slavophiles (*The Kolyvan Husband*), and proto-existentialists (*Iron Will*). It is not surprising, then, that toward the end of his life he would take on the Tolstoyans in *A Winter's Day* and in *The Rabbit Carriage* (*Zaiachii remiz*).³⁰ Unlike Tolstoy's, Leskov's righteous characters perform their deeds of love *unconsciously*. As Durylin characterized them: "[They are] Christians without Christ, righteous ones who do not know the name for their truth" (Durylin 74).

Leskov then is not prone to the 'monistic' cast of mind, but to what I would call the 'organic' pathos. He is attracted to unexpected but decisive moments, quick changes, distortions of norms, openendedness, constant transformation, connectedness not in the metaphysical but in the actual realm, and to a certain "curliness" and "muddiness."

Of course, a mind that is always seeking, that is in constant doubt, that constantly rejects what it has found, would be very attracted to a mind that seems to have found a firm set of beliefs. Such was Leskov's attraction to Tolstoy. He had been "digging in the pile"³¹ of Christian love all his life and was relieved that somebody "had found a solution," a "practical application" of Christianity which seemed very close to his heart. His intellectual restlessness shows itself as well in his boiling temperament, a quality which was remarked on by many people who knew him. And once he realized that he could never agree with Tolstoy, that his mind could never be directed toward a fixed solution, he rebelled against Tolstoy with all the force that he was capable of. He told Gurevich:

He [Tolstoy] wants—and his son, and the Tolstoyans, and others as well—, *he* wants what is beyond human nature, what is impossible, impossible, because such is our essence. . . I know myself. . . all my life I was a demon. I did such things, that . . . nobody knows this. And now—I am an old man, I am sick, and nevertheless, such feelings are boiling in me that I myself am not able to say what and why it is. I have dreams, terrible dreams which can't be expressed in words. And who knows what this is? And what for, why and where from? Can

you call it sensuality? But after all I don't know myself what I need it for! I don't need anything, in my mind I don't want anything,—I am looking for peace of soul, but something is troubling and tormenting me. . . (301).

Tolstoy was not spared the excesses of this passionate nature. Leskov attributed a lot of what he considered Tolstoy's misinterpretations to the latter's "withdrawal from the world," to the fact that he surrounded himself with people who fully and uncritically accepted his views. Dismayed that Tolstoy might be "spoilt once and for all" by having made up his mind and closed it to any objections, Leskov made it his mission to be that critical presence from afar whether Tolstoy liked it or not. A. M. Khir'iakov, an acquaintance of both writers, describes the relationship thus:

It [was] not blind worship, but love with criticism, with a constant readiness for protest[. . .]. In Nikolai Semenovich this protest was expressed with special obstinacy.

He loved Tolstoy very much and valued the correspondence of his own thought with that of this great writer. But when the great writer began to say something which was not acceptable to the mind and the heart of Leskov, then the protest would begin. Affectionate, but undoubtedly protesting letters were sent off to Iasnaia Poliana, and at home [. . .] his study would resound with denouncing and refuting tirades.

—No, Modestych—he would say—it is not said for nothing, that it is not good for man to be alone. He sits there like a bear in his hole, in his Iasnaia Poliana, not seeing real people and losing an appropriate point of view. He should see people, follow up on everything that's going on in the world. . . It would be good for him to go to Europe. Look at contemporary European life. Then he wouldn't have written *Non-Action* in this manner. And who is around him? They are very nice people, these non-resisters, but can they really give him the necessary rebuff? He is breaking them, crushing them, and the result is a swamp, which is not offering him resistance, but sucking him in. But he needs rebuttal, he needs a fight. . . Why am I worrying so much? Because what he says with such terrible force is so dear to me. (2-3)

In an attempt to prescribe the ‘way to heaven,’ Tolstoy had to ignore many elements that did not fit—sweep the dirt under the rug, or let others clean up the mess. “Sitting in his bear hole,” he did not really appreciate the enormous task that Leskov had set for himself, the hard task of “cleaning up,” tirelessly pointing out inconsistencies, wrong turns, false claims. As Leskov mentioned repeatedly, his task was to clean away “the dung that had accumulated outside the cathedral.”³²

Tolstoy did not see the relationship that way. From his point of view, Leskov was just one of his followers, although one with some unpredictable and troubling idiosyncrasies. As he remarked to Men’shikov several years after Leskov’s death: “I was very struck at how completely Leskov attached himself to us in his later years, but I was always waiting unconsciously, that he would go ahead and present us with something really unexpected . . .” (249).

Notes

1. I would like to thank Donna Orwin and the two anonymous readers for their helpful and generous comments and suggestions. Research for this article was supported by two grants from the International Research and Exchanges Board, with funds provided by the US Department of State (Title VIII program) and the National Endowment for the Humanities. None of these organizations is responsible for the views expressed.
2. Apostolov, Azarova, Boiko, Edgerton, Filimonova, Gudzii, Kupriianovskii, Kurlanskaia 1985 and 1986, Luzhanovskii, 1962-64 and 1965, Sergeenko, Tunimanov, Viduetskaia.
3. See, for example, *Pravedniki*, his cycle of stories about righteous characters written in the mid-1870s through the 1880s, and his reworked *Prolog* legends.
4. Leskov followed Tolstoy’s writing career with interest and, beginning with an early comprehensive review of *War and Peace* from 1869, he commented extensively on Tolstoy’s work and mentioned Tolstoy or his teachings in more than thirty articles (not counting those on such Tolstoy-related subjects as vegetarianism, nonresistance to evil, marriage, education, or forgiveness of offences). Significantly, his last published piece was “O povesti Tolstogo.”
5. The two writers met for the first time on April 20, 1887. Their extant correspondence consists of 52 letters from Leskov to Tolstoy and 10 letters of Tolstoy from Leskov dating from April 1887 to October 1894. The majority of Tolstoy’s letters unfortunately seems to have been lost due to the negligent handling of the Leskov archives after his death. Unlike other letters by Leskov, the majority of which are still unpublished to this day, his letters to Tolstoy—with the exception of one which was discovered later—received preferential treatment and appeared already in 1928 in the collection *Pis'ma Tolstogo i k Tolstomu*. The first complete publication of the correspondence is found in *L6T* 3: 334-415.
6. One of Leskov’s most blatant attacks on the Tolstoyans is in *Zimnii den’* (*A Winter’s Day*, 1894).
7. Leskov was aware of this trend to diminish his own contribution: “They say I am imitating him. Not in the least! When Tolstoy was writing *Anna Karenina* [between 1873 and 1877], I was already close to what I am saying now” (Faresov 307-08). Even Tolstoy admitted this fact in an interview in 1898: “Leskov was my follower, but not in a spirit of imitation. He had long before started out in the same direction I am travelling now. We met each other, and I am moved by his agreement with all my views” (Faresov 71).
8. Luzhanovskii’s arguments were already brought up in 1897 by Sementkovskii, a largely forgotten Leskov critic.
9. Tolstoy mentioned the theme first in a letter to Chertkov from June 20, 1887. See Tolstoy’s *PSS* 86: 2-63. A variant appeared in 1889 in the collection *Tsvetnik* which was the text supposedly used by Leskov (*PSS* 26: 245, 737).
10. Although Tolstoy’s statements on Leskov are very inconsistent, depending on his interlocutor, as concerns Leskov’s style they are almost invariably negative, as for example in a letter to Chertkov from January 23, 1887: “Leskov’s article is excellent, except for the language in which one feels artificiality” (*PSS* 86: 18) or in a conversation after Leskov’s death: “One should reexamine Leskov—there is much good in him. His

style is heavy, with entanglements and long-windedness. This is why he has been totally forgotten. But in his thoughts is lots of good stuff (Gusev 100). Apart from stylistic considerations Tolstoy was very fond of several of Leskov's pieces, in particularly his story *Pod prazdnik obideli* (*Offended Before Christmas*). He recorded, recited, and spoke of it frequently. One must not forget, however, that even then he did not have Leskov's story in mind, but *his own* edited, cut, and renamed version. See Boiko.

11. The two italicized French words are the same in the original.

12. Apparently, the two writers discussed their stylistic differences. A visitor to Iasnaia Poliana reported a discussion from 1894 in which Tolstoy was asked whether he liked Leskov: "He answered that, in his opinion, certain places in Leskov were extraordinary (he began to recall the title of [some] pieces and scenes from them), but his basic shortcoming was an artificiality in his plots and in his language, and his particular little words (*slovechki*). He even 'dared to tell him that' when they met in person, but he [Leskov] answered that he was unable to write otherwise" (Lazurskii 23-24).

13. Tolstoy developed this idea in his article "Nedlanie" (1893), in which he rejects scientific truths—and with it all of science—exactly for that reason.

14. The sketch mentions two books from early childhood which made the most lasting impressions on him: "A Hundred and Four Holy Stories" with pictures, read at age five (Dostoevsky was intrigued by this book as well in his childhood), and "Readings from the Four Gospels" read at age ten. See Leskov's "Iz vsekh knig . . ."

15. Leskov's choice of title for his fairy tale, with its obvious reference to the Bible, and especially to the Second Coming, makes its link with this letter even clearer.

16. Leskov refers to *Ivan Durak*, one of the folk tales published in the 1886 Tolstoy volume.

17. The "charred pieces of wood" is a reference to the parable *The Goldchild* in the same volume. In this parable, the spiritual strength necessary to overcome external evil is gained by completing three preparatory steps symbolized by three objects: the step of 'cleansing oneself'—not using a dirty towel for cleaning; then,

'strengthening oneself in good work'—firmly attaching the wooden support necessary for moulding a rim; and 'warming with never-ending love'—making charred pieces of wood sprout again through patient watering.

18. The references are again to the parable *The Goldchild*, see note 17.

19. I am grateful to I. V. Stoliarova for pointing out this passage to me.

20. Konstantin Leont'ev called the idea of saving one's soul, the concern for personal salvation, "transcendental egoism.." (Berdiaev 223)

21. The "banishment" of the entertainer which was added to the revised (published) version of the story shows that Leskov must have believed that the found wisdom did not only not work for rulers, but was something dangerous that had to be hidden away *in general*. He furthermore describes in great detail the isolation in which the wise maiden lives and her immense ignorance of all worldly matters. She does not even know the meaning of "king" (*LIIT* 9: 27). In the earlier draft of the story which is much milder as concerns this point the king actually tries to apply the rules but could not manage and turns over the kingdom to his son, who in turn buries the found answers (*Skazka o korole*).

22. The quotation in question (1 Cor 13, 5) literally says "love seeketh not her own" (King James) or "love does not insist on its own way" (Revised Standard Version)—in Russian "*ne ishchet svoego*." Leskov often changed it into "love that seeketh nothing for itself" (*nichego ne ishchet dlia sebja*.) See, for example, *Leskov o literature* 136.

23. Hugh McLean has explored in great detail the 'rushlight (*ploshka*)' and 'torch (*fakel*)' trope which Leskov used when comparing himself to Tolstoy (529-530).

24. The quotation is from 2 Peter 3, 16.

25. The literary critic Mikhail Osipovich Men'shikov was personally acquainted with both Leskov and Tolstoy.

26. The article in question is *Graf L. N. Tolstoi i F. M. Dostoevskii kak eresiarhki*.

27. Of course, Leskov did not stop "defending" Tolstoy after 1883 as he stated but wrote many more articles on Tolstoy-related issues. Many of them, however, follow the pattern of pointing out older sources of Tolstoy's thoughts and continuing roughly in this vein: "Why are you attacking Tolstoy for this. . . . This is not new, but can be found in such and such a book."

28. See his 1893 article *Nedelianie* (PSS 29: 173-201). As for more transcendent notions of non-action, in 1911, when he presented the essence of Taoism to the reader, he equated the Taoist abstinence from all corporal desires with the Christian notion of love as expressed in the first epistle of John (PSS 40: 351).

29. The previous titles of Tolstoy's parable *The Godchild*, mentioned above (see note 17), further support this view: *How the Godchild Redeemed the Sins of Others*, *The Godchild as the Man who Assumed the Sins of Others and How he Atoned for Them*, *How a Person Assumed the Sins of Others and How he Redeemed Them* (PSS 25: 725).

30. The usual translation of this title is *The March Hare* or *The Rabbit Warren*. I proposed this translation as an alternative in my PhD dissertation (Weinberg 174-181).

31. "kopal tu kuchu," see Faresov, 308.

32. See, for example, in a letter to Tolstoy, January 4, 1893 (L6T 3: 371).

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