

immigration, the Russian intelligentsia became confused by its newly found freedom. “To live in freedom means to know how to limit it,” she concluded (352). Both Joseph Brodsky and Yuri Levin argued that the freedom that one earns is better than liberation received from others. In a conference speech in 1991, Levin argued that the hard-won freedom of the 1960s was more genuine than that of the era of perestroika. The section ends with Belarussian writer Svetlana Aleksievich’s 2013 reflections bemoaning the materialization and commercialization of freedom for post-Soviet generations.

ANTON FEDYASHIN
American University

Leskov: Prozevannyi genii. By Maya Kucherskaia. Moscow: Molodaia gvardia, 2021. 661 pp. Notes. Bibliography. Chronology. Index. Plates. Photographs. P759, hard bound.
doi: 10.1017/slr.2022.199

Drawing upon a wide range of sources and bringing broad archival research to her study, Maya Kucherskaia offers a richly insightful account of Nikolai Leskov’s artistic and intellectual trajectory, with its twists and turns and recurring public scandals caused by his impetuous judgements and prickly temper. While Kucherskaia explores a vast and varied body of Leskov’s works, she strategically focuses on his masterpieces, treating them as benchmarks in his convoluted trajectory and making her own strong readings of these texts into pillars of her book.

Following many of her predecessors, Kucherskaia approaches “Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk” as the first story where Leskov fully developed his narrative strategies. But like no one before her, Kucherskaia masters a wide range of diverse sources—William Shakespeare and Ivan Turgenev, folk songs and criminal chronicles, the discussion of the woman question, and readings from church services—to reveal how all these seemingly incompatible pretexts of Leskov’s novella contributed to its semantic complexity and linguistic vitality. “The first and most significant of his discoveries was storytelling: the imitation of a free-flowing, not always grammatical speaking style by which he built up an image of his narrator” (254). Kucherskaia unravels all the components of this type of storytelling (*skaz*)—the signature feature of Leskov’s prose—to situate his novella outside the psychological realism of his time. She explores how Leskov filtered the portrayal of his characters through many cultural prisms to create an exuberant narrative that was in many respects closer to modernist than to realist prose.

In her discussion of the subsequent benchmarks in Leskov’s artistic trajectory—from *The Cathedral Folk* to “The Enchanted Wanderer,” “The Sealed Angel,” and “The Steel Flea”—Kucherskaia examines the author’s growing discomfort with realist conventions and studies his literary experiments in the context of his political views, which had undergone radical changes. As Leskov shifted from his alliance with the state-supporting press (Mikhail Katkov’s periodicals in particular) to sharp criticism of the official ideology, a satirical tone and urgent concern about Russia’s future increasingly pervaded

his stories. Political connotations, Kucherskaia shows, imbued even the legends and parables Leskov stylized in imitation of various folk genres.

Perhaps the most revealing analysis in Kucherskaia's book is her interpretation of Leskov's renowned "legend"—"The Steel Flea"—which she reads as a disguised response to the assassination of Alexander II. Interpreted by Soviet and many post-Soviet readers as a eulogy for the savvy blacksmith Lefty, an embodiment of Russian patriotism, the story questions rather than celebrates his deeds. Leskov wrote it soon after the regicide to address, as Kucherskaia argues, the issues then haunting society: "why and for what the tsar was killed" (421). In the story, English blacksmiths have produced a tiny dancing steel flea to give as a gift to the Russian tsar. Lefty manages to shoe the flea to prove the superiority of Russian artisanship. His mission succeeds, but Lefty perishes and the flea is no longer able to dance. Kucherskaia reads this nearly absurdist plot as a mockery of Russian anti-British propaganda from the time of the Crimean War—an expression of official patriotism that, in Leskov's view, had damaged Russia and ushered in the revolutionary terrorism that ended Alexander II's life. This is an eye-opening reading of the canonical story.

Kucherskaia's book delivers far more than it promises. A famous fiction writer herself, she uses her belletristic talents to introduce readers to the diverse cultural contexts that propelled Leskov's creative impulses and animated his masterpieces. The life of poor provincial clergy, the cultural vibrancy of Kiev, the literary gatherings and spiritualist *séances* in St. Petersburg, religious movements across Russia, the debates about the Jewish question—these are but a few of the many subjects that Kucherskaia explores to reconstruct the background of Leskov's works. At times, such protracted excursions into the world around the writer seem too digressive, but most of them help Kucherskaia to unravel enigmatic aspects of his works and grasp the driving forces behind the changes in his views, including his break with the creed and practices of the church.

Performing a systematic examination of Leskov's life and literary corpus, this outstanding book identifies his salient features as a writer and traces the changing reception of his works during his lifetime and in the twentieth century, when his stories gradually made their way to the literary canon. This book is critically important reading for specialists in Russian culture and in nineteenth-century literature in particular.

OLGA MAIOROVA
University of Michigan

The Culture of Samizdat: Literature and Underground Networks in the Late Soviet Union. By Josephine von Zitzewitz. London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2020. xii, 248 pp. Notes. Bibliography. Index. Figures. Tables. \$115.00, hard bound.
doi: 10.1017/slr.2022.200

Samizdat, the underground Soviet practice of self-publication and distribution of texts, has received serious scholarly attention in recent years, enriching our understanding of the phenomenon. Much attention has been paid