

Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk: Sameness and Difference

In Nicolai Leskov

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ABSTRACT

A decade before Leskov published "Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk", Tolstoy described Macbeth as a drama about a spectacular but ultimately mundane criminal. Later, in his Essay on Shakespeare, he complained that such plays were poisonous not only because of what they asked readers to admire, but for what they prevented them from discovering. In the case of Macbeth, readers were prevented from witnessing a genuinely "independent and free individual who, with a powerful spirit...[could] struggle against all conventions in ... morality". The Essay on Shakespeare was published in 1906, but the ideas it contained had, long before that, become a popular subject of discussion in Russian literary circles. Nicolai Leskov, a participant in those circles, was an admirer of Tolstoy's views on art and society, and in "Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk" he seemed to create a story that reflected Tolstoy's ideas. The heroin of his work, Katerina, is compared to Lady Macbeth, but she is also a criminal version of Tolstoy's "independent and free individual" who, through her passionate commitment to love, "struggles against all conventions in... morality". However, the object of her love, Sergei Filipovich, is simply a mundane criminal, and through his presence Katerina's life is darkened, then destroyed. Leskov's story of the relationship between Katerina and Sergei therefore seems to reflect the "epidemic" of influence of which Tolstoy warned. (KEYWORDS: Shakespeare, Leskov, Tolstoy, Lady Macbeth, influence).

RESUMEN

Una década antes de que Leskov publicara "Lady Macbeth de Mtsensk", Tolstoi describió Macbeth como un drama sobre un delincuente espectacular aunque en última instancia vulgar. Más adelante, en su Ensayo sobre Shakespeare, señaló que tales obras eran venenosas no sólo por lo que animaban al lector a que admirara, sino por lo que le impedían que descubriera. En el caso de Macbeth, a los lectores se les impedía que presenciaran un "ser libre e independiente que, con poderoso espíritu fuese capaz de luchar contra todas las convenciones morales". El ensayo sobre Shakespeare fue publicado en 1906, pero las ideas que contenía se habían convertido, mucho tiempo atrás, en tema de debate entre los círculos literarios rusos. Nicolai Leskov, que participaba en estos círculos, era admirador de los artículos de arte y sociedad de Tolstoi, y en "Lady Macbeth de Mtsensk" crea una historia que parece reflejar las ideas de Tolstoi. La heroína de este libro, Katerine, se compara con Lady Macbeth, pero resulta también una versión criminal del "ser libre e independiente" de Tolstoi, quien a través de su apasionado compromiso de amor, "lucha contra todas las convenciones morales". No obstante, el objeto de su amor, Sergei Filipouich, no es más que un delincuente vulgar, y a través de su presencia la vida de Katerina se ve oscurecida y finalmente destruida. La historia de Leskov sobre la relación entre Katerina y Serguei parece reflejar por tanto la "epidemia" de la influencia de la nos prevenía Tolstoi. (PALABRAS CLAVE: Shakespeare, Leskov, Tolstoi, Lady Macbeth, influencia).

Even for a poet of genius, Shakespeare played a surprisingly important role in nineteenth century Europe. Across the continent artists and thinkers insisted on the unique character of his thought: Herder in Germany, Victor Hugo in France, Coleridge in England all suggested that Shakespeare's work offered a thoroughly European vision that could serve as a literary guide for the renewal of the continent's culture; and the will to renew culture was everywhere strong, strong in Germany, as Nietzsche observed, and stronger yet in England. But Nietzsche went on to add that it was

strongest and most amazing by far in that enormous empire...where Europe, as it were, flows back into Asia. In Russia, therefore the strength of will has long been accumulated and stored up, there the will – uncertain whether as a will to negate or a will to affirm – is waiting menacingly (Nietzsche 6, 208).

The uncertainty of Russian responses to the forms of cultural renewal reshaping western Europe inevitably extended to the continent's newly elected poet-guide, Shakespeare. Russians asked themselves – in Nietzsche's terms – whether Shakespeare's dramas should be affirmed or

negated, and that question, put repeatedly, made Shakespeare's presence in the work of Russian authors very distinctive. In *Anna Karenina*, for instance, Leo Tolstoy censured the art of *King Lear* through Levin's lengthy commentary on an operatic reconstruction of the old king's mad scenes: in the "Hamlet of Shchigrovsky District", one of the most celebrated *Sketches from a Hunter's Album*, Turgenev criticized the mind of Shakespeare's most celebrated hero; and in "Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk", Nicolai Leskov reproved Shakespeare's notorious heroine, though in a specifically Russian fashion. In these, and in other works like them, the direction of Russian evaluations shifted, but the interest rarely extended to anything as narrow as simple imitation of Shakespeare's plots, or characters, or moral themes. In fact, Russian authors seemed anxious to turn the English dramatist's tragedies into arenas of debate in which they could define the distinctive character of their own work. Responding to Shakespeare in this way still, of course, indicated a strong Shakespearean influence because, as Harold Bloom has pointed out, such debates record a search for singularity or independence from a powerfully felt presence (Bloom 5-16): but the practice meant that Shakespeare's influence in nineteenth century Russia would be measured most satisfactorily by assessing the differences which authors sought to create between their own works and those of the great English dramatist. Certainly it was a sense of difference that Turgenev developed in his essay on *Hamlet and Quixote*, and that Tolstoy underlined – much more emphatically – in "Shakespeare and the Drama". Those essays make clear that cultivating differences was a way of focusing Russian work in order to present ideas about that country's life, and about the literature its authors thought that life could or should produce. But whether this was the case with Leskov is more difficult to know since, unlike Turgenev and Tolstoy, he left no essay on the subject to firmly indicate the direction of his ideas. All we have is a fiction that offers riddling allusions to *Macbeth*.

We do, on the other hand, know something about the way Leskov's famous contemporary responded to Shakespeare's play. A decade before the publication of "Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk", Tolstoy reported to his wife that he had just finished reading *Macbeth* "with great care". It was, he said, "a farcical play by a clever actor with a good memory, who read a lot of clever books – an improved Robber Curkin" (Tolstoy, *Letters* 366). The reference was to N.I. Pastuchov's recently published novel about a spectacular but ultimately mundane criminal. What Tolstoy intended by the comparison is more fully developed in his later essay on "Shakespeare and the Drama" in which he argued that Shakespeare's tragedies were characterized by a number of anomalous ethical assumptions drawn from the author's readings among the "clever books" of sceptical philosophers. For Shakespeare, Tolstoy said,

morality, like politics, was a matter in which, owing to the complexity of circumstances and motives, one cannot establish any principles; and in this he agrees with Bacon and Aristotle – there are no positive religious and moral laws. (Tolstoy, *Shakespeare* 87)

That assumption would seem to promise a radical approach to questions of moral conduct, especially when a second Shakespearean principle is added to it. This second principle is that "activity is good, and inactivity is evil", which is to say that "Shakespeare prefers the principle of Alexander [of Macedonia] to that of Diogenes", or "death and murder to abstinence and Wisdom" (85). For Tolstoy, these were the real premises underlying Macbeth's so-called heroic stature. But to understand why such heroism was tragic, one had to know that Shakespeare thought it

stupid and harmful for the individual to revolt against, or endeavour to overthrow, the limits of established religious and state forms. Shakespeare ... would abhor an independent and free individual who, with a powerful spirit, should struggle against all convention in politics and morality. (88)

According to Tolstoy, this created an anomaly central to Shakespeare, who evidently believed that

the practical wisdom of men could not have a higher object than the introduction into society of the greatest spontaneity and freedom: but because of this one should safeguard as sacred and irrefragable the natural laws of society – one should respect the existing order of things. (88-89)

Tragedy therefore befell an heroic Macbeth for the simple reason that he did not respect the sacred nature of the existing order, which is to say, the privileges of property, kinship, rank, and position. That was why his society made him a criminal; but, Tolstoy added, Macbeth was a mundane criminal since his whole purpose was to participate in those ordinary things that ultimately undid him. Tolstoy, of course, knew that the play, like Shakespeare's other works, was everywhere highly regarded, and on specifically moral grounds; but in his eyes, Shakespeare's prestige as a moralist was dangerously pernicious: it represented, he said, an "epidemic" influence which poisoned readers' imaginations, not simply for what it asked them to admire, but for what it prevented them from discovering, namely, different literary images, and specifically Russian images of powerful and truly independent spirits (97-104).

The essay on "Shakespeare and the Drama" was not published until 1906, but, as Tolstoy's letter to his wife suggests, his criticisms of Shakespeare's dramas were developed earlier in his career. The essay itself recalls that those early views were a popular topic of discussion in Russian literary circles (95), a circumstance to which Turgenev seems to allude in an 1857 letter to Tolstoy (*Turgenev Letters* 1: 131). Leskov's literary career began in 1860, and as a member of Russian literary circles he may have been aware of Tolstoy's early views. Certainly he was – by his own account – an early and enthusiastic admirer of Tolstoy (Lantz 34), though whether or to what extent Tolstoy's ideas about Shakespeare may have influenced

hiiii remains uncertain. Leskov never commented directly on the matter, nor did he spell out his own ideas about Shakespeare. There are, nevertheless, interesting parallels between Tolstoy's criticisms of Shakespeare and Leskov's extended use of Shakespeare's drama in "Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk".

In Leskov's story, the heroin of *Macbeth* is presented through the figure of Kateriina Lvovna Izmailova, "a merchant's wife who once enacted a drama so awesome that the members of our local gentry, taking their lead from someone's light-hearted remark, took to calling her 'Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk'" (Leskov 111). Though the narrator does not say so, the allusion may have seemed appropriate because Shakespeare's Lady Macbeth, persuading her hesitating husband to commit a murder he had earlier promised to perform, expressed a willingness to slaughter her own children:

I have given suck, and know
How tender 'tis to love the babe that milks me:
I would, while it was smiling in my face,
Have pluck'd my nipple from his boneless gums,
And dash'd the brains out, had I so sworn
As you have done to this.

(1.7.54-59)

In Mtsensk, the rural sophisticates might also have recalled that it was Lady Macbeth's cruel pledge that finally drove Macbeth to murder the aged Duiicaii, a crime that would, in turn, lead to the murder of a real child, Macduff's son (4.7). Certainly it was in the same way that Katerina's first crime, the strangling of her old father-in-law, led to the murder of Katerina's young nephew, Fyodor. Moments before that murder, she would recall her own still unborn child, stirring within her for the first time (Leskov 150), but like Lady Macbeth, she would prove indifferent to its innocence, for later, after giving birth in prison, she would utter a curse and abandon the babe "without the slightest murmur of complaint" (Leskov 157). The parallels between the fate of Katerina's son and the imagined slaughter of Lady Macbeth's children, or between the murders of Fyodor and young Macduff, therefore create a design pointing to an important similarity between Katerina and Lady Macbeth: both are daring actors ready to reject weakness, a quality especially associated with children. Macbeth, on the other hand, understood that the murder of a helpless child would

plead like angels, trumpet-tongued, against
The deep damnation of his taking-off;
And Pity, like a naked new-born babe,
Striding the blast, or heaven's Cherubim, hors'd
Upon the sightless couriers of the air.

Shall blow the horrid deed in every eye,
That tears shall drown the winds.

(1.7.19-25)

This, of course, is precisely what happens, not only in Shakespeare's story but in Leskov's: the children, in their pitiful deaths, become powerful avengers – giant angels driving an indolent or, in Macbeth's case, an intimidated community to finally oppose the murderers.

To this extent, similarities seem to run through the two stories; but there are striking differences as well. For instance, though both women are driven to their crimes by passion, their passions are altogether unlike. Lady Macbeth is moved by ambition for a royal place in the feudal world of which she and her husband are a part. Katerina, on the other hand, is aroused by her devotion to Sergei Filipyich, a man who promises to deliver her out of "the unrelieved monotony of life in the merchant's barred and bolted tower of a house" (112), and into another world associated with love and freedom. Though these twinned themes of escape from dreary sameness and flight to a different world of romantic nature are glanced at in Shakespeare, they dominate Leskov's story from the moment Sergei invades the locked merchant's house and, against Katerina's weak protests, picks her up "like a child" and carries her off to a bedroom (120). In her surrender there is a measure of comfortable self-indulgence, but out of that simple experience there is born something of a very different nature: a passion that erases the codes and conventions of her former world – the world of merchant properties and mundane ambitions. Yet passion also erases Katerina's ability to distinguish between good and evil, or joy and sorrow. This failure the narrator traces to the freedom Katerina once enjoyed as the child of an impoverished family (113), a freedom that encouraged her longing for an event that would alter the story of her life, and elevate it into something better and more meaningful. When at last she meets that possibility in the form of love, she abandons herself to it, and willingly plays whatever role her new and different drama seems to demand.

There is an illustration of this behaviour in the early stages of Katerina's affair with Sergei. Her husband is away attending to business, but when Katerina's father-in-law, Boris Timofeich, discovers the lovers and locks Sergei up in a storeroom Katerina is enraged: "Let him out of there," she demands. "I swear to you on my conscience that nothing bad has passed between us" (122). In referring to her clear conscience, Katerina may, in her own mind, be telling the truth, stating simply that she wants Sergei, is proudly unashamed of her desire, and is prepared to play out its consequences. This, at least, is her attitude as she prepares for the return of her husband, Zinovy Borisych. She is determined not to be the wife she was: she will be her altered self, and defiantly reveal the outline of a new and different life. At this point, we should note, murdering her husband is not a necessary part of her fresh role. That is the invention of Sergei, who suggests that Zinovy, left alive, must inevitably destroy the lovers' world. "No, no, don't say such things," Katerina pleads: "I tell you it just won't happen – I won't be left without you If it ever comes to that ... either he will die, or I will; but you are going to stay

with me" (131). This extravagant speech is a whole system of unconscious prophecies, but what Katerina wants to emphasize is her commitment to her lover and to love itself: nothing, she insists, must stand in its way. Mistakenly, she supposes that Sergei's intentions are like her own, and that his story resembles the new one she has chosen. In fact, he is creating an altogether different drama – a drama with a truly Shakespearean theme because Sergei's conduct is governed by the pursuit of wealth and a better station in the world – the very things that Katerina is prepared to abandon.

Events in Leskov's narrative thus underline a contest between two principles in which the independence of Katerina's imagined love story struggles against the seductive influence of Sergei's mundane ambitions. This becomes particularly apparent in the description of the third murder. Following Zinovy Borisych's murder, young Fyodor arrives to claim a share of the estate. Sergei, learning this, becomes depressed, and Katerina confesses that she cannot understand his behaviour. "All our plans have come to nothing," Sergei explains. "But why do you say that?" she asks, still supposing that their crimes have been for love. "Because," he replies, "the whole place will be divided up now. And what'll be the point of owning a paltry bit of it?" Still not comprehending, she protests, "surely you'll get your fair share?" (146). Sergei, of course, does not want a share: he wants everything, and so he "went on and on" about Fyodor, promising that if the child were got rid of, "there would be no limits to their happiness" (136). Inevitably, the child is murdered, though – as in *Macbeth* – the horrid deed is blown "in every eye" (1.7.24; cf. Leskov 155), and the lovers are soon arrested for their crime. Accused, Sergei quickly confesses and implicates Katerina. It is at this point that the investigators ask Katerina why she committed the murders: "Without anger," and with more truth than she understands, she says, "I did it for him" (156). This simple statement underlines what the whole story emphasizes: that the ambition which moved Lady Macbeth is part of Sergei's world, and does not belong to Katerina.

The importance of this difference is underlined in Leskov's treatment of conscience, a subject central to Shakespeare's play. It is conscience, of course, that destroys Lady Macbeth: following the powerful part she played in the initial murders, she wanders sleeplessly through the night, anxiously trying to wash the guilt of bloody ambition from her hands, and finally ending her torment by hurling herself from the castle walls. Through most of Leskov's narrative there is no counterpart to this mental anguish in Katerina. It is true that after the first murder she has a disturbing dream about a cat that takes on the face and voice of her dead father-in-law – a nightmare from which she awakes screaming; and there is another and earlier dream, also about a cat which, in this instance, is associated with Sergei. But the earlier dream, Leskov emphasizes, merely puzzles Katerina; and even after it has been linked to the fearful image of her murdered father-in-law, her conscience is untroubled. Sergei's situation is altogether different, apparently because, being guilty of ambition, he cannot be conscience-free. Following the murder of Zinovy Borisych, his lips tremble "and the rest of him was shaking as if with a fever" (142). Then, following the murder of Fyodor, he shivers and runs away in fear (152).

Finally, after the two have been arrested, "when Sergei was led before the corpse, the very first words of the priest about the Last Judgement and the punishment of the unrepentant were enough to make him burst into tears" (156). It is therefore Sergei, not Katerina, who demonstrates the tormented weakness that is central to Shakespeare's presentation of Lady Macbeth.

This difference is also reflected in Leskov's treatment of a theme related to conscience, namely, the law of consequence. An awareness of conscience and a knowledge of the law of consequence are closely linked in Shakespeare's play, but they are not the same. Unlike Lady Macbeth – and unlike Katerina – Macbeth has "judgement": that is, he knows the story he initiates may be influenced and finally controlled by forces other than his own. "If it were done, when 'tis done," he agonizes,

then 'twere well
It were done quickly: if th' assassination
Could trammel up the consequences, and catch
With his surcease success: that but this blow
Might he the be-all and the end-all here,
But here, upon this bank and shoal of time,
We'd jump the life to come. But in these cases,
We still have judgement here: that we but teach
Bloody instructions, which, being taught, return
To plague th' inventor.

(1.7.1-10)

In this passage, Macbeth identifies the law of consequence that will "return/ To plague th' inventor": it is that "blood will have blood" (3.4.121). As events gradually make this clear, he becomes increasingly – and therefore recklessly – fatalistic. "I am in blood/ Stepp'd in so far," he says, "that, should I wade no more,/ Returning were as tedious as go o'er" (3.4.135-137). The man who required his wife's support in his first murder, when he was "still young in deed" (3.4.143), therefore plans a second crime alone, and then, like one who has "almost forgot the taste of fears" (5.5.9), gives himself over to casual slaughter. But what of Lady Macbeth? Because she was blind to the influence of other powers and to the inevitability of consequence, she was initially strong: but when forced to witness the unfolding of events, she declines into fear. Her mad ramblings disclose only a little of her torment (5.1.), but Macbeth's meditations illuminate the character of a mind like hers, obliged to confront the consequences of its criminal acts. Bitterly, he recognizes that he is captive to something he did not intend: "They have tied me to a stake: I cannot fly./ But, bear-like, I must fight the course" (5.7.1-2). Later, it is this knowledge that leads him to reflect nostalgically upon the life his act has lost, the story he has abandoned:

I have liv'd long enough: my way of life
Is fall'n into the sere, the yellow leaf;
Aiid what should accompany old age,
As honour, love, obedience, troops of friends,
I must not look to have.

(5.3.22-26)

Finally, perceiving in liis wife's suicide an image of his own end, he gives way to anger aiid resentment:

She should have died hereafter.
There would have been a time for such a word –
Tomorrow, and tomorrow, and tomorrow,
Creeps in thiis petty pace from day to day,
To the last syllable of recorded time:
Aiid all our yesterdays have lighted fools
The way to dusty death. Out, out, brief candle!
Life's but a walking shadow: a poor player,
That struts aiid frets his hour upon the stage,
Aiid then is heard no more: it is a tale
Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,
Signifying nothing.

(5.4.15-28)

Shakespeare's drama is dominated by thiis rich range of emotions: foreboding prior to the murder, reckless commitment to thr crime, fearful recognition of unintended consequences, nostalgic regret for the road not taken, and the final sense of suicidal fury. The same feelings are present in "Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk", though they are introduced in a very different fashion. Consider, for instance, Leskov's presentation of the lovers' meeting just after Katerina's first dream, aiid before her husband's return. The setting is an orchard, aiid Leskov's description of the place is charged with the gentle imagen of an idyll in which everything seems suspended in a mood of quiet repose, watched over by the moon's observing eye:

"Look Sergei – isn't thiis simply heavenly?" Katerina Lvovna exclaimed, looking up through the apple tree's thickly blossomed branches which covered her, at the cloudless dark-blue sky in which a bright, full moon was shining. (Leskov 128)

Of course the sky does not interest Sergei, and the narrator reminds us that "he sat ... staring hard at liis boots", hinting that Katerina must murder her husband. What follows is a disturbing

exchange in which Katerina, without reflecting and without quite knowing what is happening, surrenders to her lover's influence. After that "their kissing and caressing resumed", though underneath the continuity everything is different. The idyll has passed, the cat of Katerina's dream intrudes once again, and the observing moon lowers its eye. Katerina still "splashed in the moonlight", though as she did so

the fresh, white blossoms kept falling, falling from the leafy apple tree, and then at last stopped falling. And meanwhile the brief summer night had passed, the moon concealed itself behind the rounded roofs of the tall granaries and gave the earth a sidelong look, growing paler and paler; then spitting was heard, followed by angry hissing, and two or three tom-cats fell noisily scrabbling off the roof down a pile of planks. (132)

The rich imagery of this passage – characteristic of Leskov's art – has many counterparts in Shakespeare's work, but because *Macbeth* is a drama, the richness arises out of the characters' own language: it is their meditations that reflect the troubled complexity of the world in which they are cast. Leskov, on the other hand, only sketches Sergei's mind and leaves Katerina's quite untouched, as though it were altogether free of complexity. It is therefore left to the narrator to meditate upon the action, and this he does by surrounding the lovers with images and symbols that anxiously anticipate the direction of their lives.

There is, however, one part of the story in which this is not true, one part in which Leskov moves toward a Shakespearean representation of characters with complex mental processes. Following their arrest, Katerina and Sergei are tried, and sent into penal servitude. If Katerina had, in any way, been attached to the mundane values of the merchant world, or if her romantic decision to abandon them had been slight or fanciful, her sentence might have led toward some anagnorisis; but that is not what happens. In fact her punishment only clarifies the principles upon which she had acted earlier in the narrative:

As she sets out on the dark and difficult passage to Siberia, there was for her neither light nor dark, nor good nor bad, nor joy nor sorrow; she perceived nothing, and loved no one, not even herself. She lived only in the impatient expectancy of the moment when the group would set out on the road, where she hoped she might meet her Sergei again. (158)

For Sergei, on the other hand, the different world to which he has been sentenced changes everything, and he adjusts briskly and brutally. Because Katerina can no longer promise him a better station in life, he is unwilling to play his old part in her story of love: "you're not the wife of an important merchant any more, so do me a favour and don't go giving yourself airs" (163). Katerina's discovery of the real character of Sergei's story unfolds through her painful

relationship with two women, both attached to Sergei's new life. The first is Fiona, whose "gentle, lazy disposition" persuades her to surrender to Sergei out of a comfortable desire for love (160); the second, who quickly displaces Fiona, is Sonetka, who, in spite of her seventeen years, is a complex individual cruelly proud of a new and passionate attachment that will involve "suffering and sacrifice" (160). Together, these two women reflect the range of Katerina's own character, and when they assume their place with Sergei, she comes, for the first time, to recognize the outline of her own life, and the dark influence Sergei has exercised upon it.

When Fiona takes her place in Sergei's bed, Katerina, deeply stung, tells herself: "I don't really love him anyway...yet she felt that she loved him even more ardently than before" (162). Later, Fiona is, in turn, rejected, and she and Katerina are reconciled. But when Katerina tries to recover Sergei's affections, he heaps abuse on her, and meets out fifty lashes as she lays helpless in her bed (167). Though a mere parody of her criminal sentence, Sergei's cruelty is Katerina's first real punishment, and the initial stage of her growth to understanding. When it is over, she collapses on Fiona's breast where she "sobbed out her intolerable grief and, like a child to a mother, pressed herself close to her slow and feckless rival. Now they were equal: they had both been cheapened, and both had been discarded" (167).

It is Sonetka who compounds Katerina's suffering by proudly allying herself with Sergei while he mocks the romantic delusions of "madam merchant", as he insists on calling her. The others prisoners, hearing Sergei's taunts, are shocked:

"You ought to be ashamed of yourself," said Fiona shaking her head. "It does you no credit," said a convict named Gordyushka, in support "Even if you've no conscience in front of her, you ought to have some in front of the rest of us." (170)

What her fellow prisoners do not recognize is that in all this Katerina is the victim of something she herself had been – a conscience-free lover, indifferent to moral conventions.

The humiliating reversal in her position is as cruel and cold as the crossing of the Volga which serves as its background. The experience forces Katerina to look inward, at the meaning of her story: gazing at the river's waves, she silently moved her lips, apparently rehearsing something to herself. Then, while Sergei continued his "foul-mouthed tirade",

she seemed to hear a groaning, rumbling sound that came from the heaving, crashing breakers. And ... suddenly, in one of the breaking waves she fancied she saw the blue, swollen head of Boris Timofeich, and in another the swaying form of her husband, peeping out at her and embracing Fedya's hanging head. Katerina Lvovna tried to remember a prayer, and she moved her lips, but all her lips could whisper were the words: "how we used to enjoy ourselves, how we used to sit together on those long autumn nights, how we dispatched your kinfolk to a cruel

death in broad daylight....” (171)

The imagined words are Sergei’s, and they mock not only those who have been murdered, but what it was that led Katerina to become their murderer. It was her love for “a villain” (167), “a vile snake” (169), a man motivated by the most ordinary kind of ambition – a mundane criminal. Because she had pursued love and passion without reflecting on the destructive nature of Sergei’s influence, Katerina, like Fiona, had become a pitiful victim; but for pursuing that passion – for playing Fiona’s role, and for performing the proud part now acted by Sonetka – Katerina reserved a special loathing:

Katerina Lvovna shivered. Her intermittent gaze focused itself, and became u-ild. Once, twice her arms stietched out towards some unknown point in space and fell back again. Another minute passed – and suddenly she began to rock and sway and, without taking her eyes off the dark waves, she bent down, seized hold of Sonetka by the legs and in one single movement hurled herself with her over the side of the ferry. (171)

In Katerina Lvovna’s conscience-stricken meditation on her actions, she and Lady Macbeth come to resemble one another closely, but in their suicides they seem, at last, to be the same.

Though the course of Katerina’s life and death discovers fascinating parallels with the history of Shakespeare’s notorious heroine, it is clear that Leskov also sought to develop differences between the two characters. In fact, it was through the mixture of their samenesses and differences that he reflected something characteristic of nineteenth century Russian responses to Shakespeare, namely, a will to debate the nature and meaning of the English dramatist’s work; but beyond that general characteristic, the specific direction of Leskov’s story seems to ally him with one Russian response in particular: that of Leo Tolstoy. Much later in his career, Leskov wrote to Tolstoy and remarked on the striking similarity between their ideas about literature, ethics, and Russian society (Lantz, 35). Principal among those ideas, Leskov would have known, was Tolstoy’s regard for love as “the supreme law” and the “one means of salvation” because it fostered heroic courage of the kind discoverable in Katerina’s first, passionate response to Sergei: courage to introduce the sort of “spontaneity and freedom” (Tolstoy, *Law of Love* 75-76; *Shakespeare* 88) that might finally liberate a “barred and bolted” society (Leskov 112). Leskov, of course, carefully elaborated the flaws that warp this thoroughly Russian story of love, and these flaws he traced to Sergei: and the criminal nature of Sergei’s influence is directly related to his mundane ambitions. Leskov therefore seemed to construct his story around two features of Tolstoy’s response to Shakespeare: the worldly ambitions that underlie Sergei’s mundane criminality ally him with the Macbeth that Tolstoy had criticised; and Katerina, fitted to the fate of Lady Macbeth, concedes the “epidemic” influence of Shakespearean ideas that Tolstoy apprehensively resisted.

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