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## Leskov's *Ledi Makbet Mtsenskogo uezda*: Composition and Symbolic Framework

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It is striking to recall that Leskov's characteristic heterogeneity, stylistic variety or '*pestrota*' was at one time deemed excessive, even a gross fault;<sup>1</sup> his style came into its own in the appreciation of Russian modernist writers, such as Remizov, Sologub, Zamiatin, and the Formalists, notably Eikhenbaum.<sup>2</sup> But it is still the case that he remains a writer who offers so much scope for further scholarly attention, both overall and in respect of individual works, not least his classic story *Ledi Makbet Mtsenskogo uezda* (Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk, 1865), and beyond this too in terms of broader narratives of Russian literature and culture. Recent studies have offered new overarching ways of approaching or conceptualizing Leskov's characteristic heterogeneity. Thus in Christina Sperrle's study this heterogeneity is seen as integrally related to his

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<sup>1</sup> Scholars typically refer to Tolstoi, who consistently expressed an aversion to Leskov's style and its excess: for an account, and reappraisal, of the relationship between Tolstoi and Leskov, see Irmhild Christina Sperrle, *The Organic Worldview of Nikolai Leskov*, Evanston, IL, 2002 (hereafter, Sperrle), pp. 73–103 (on questions of style, see pp. 77–78). An amusingly extreme judgement on the part of Evgenii Solov'ev is quoted by Faresov in his chapter on contemporary reception of Leskov's language: Solov'ev decried Leskov's style as a national disgrace, 'the shame [*priamo pozor*] of our literature and our language' (see A. I. Faresov, *Protiv techenii. N. S. Leskov. Ego zhizn', sochineniia, polemika i vospominaniia o nem*, St Petersburg, 1904, ch. 13, pp. 269–85 [p. 270]).

<sup>2</sup> B. Eikhenbaum, 'Leskov i sovremennaia proza' (1927), in Eikhenbaum, *O literature*, Moscow, 1987, pp. 409–23.

organic worldview, while in Knut Grimstad's account of the diversity of social and cultural voices in his work it is presented as a 'style of styles'.<sup>3</sup> In his initial discussion of the 'verbal compositeness, or "mosaic"' of Leskov's texts, Grimstad draws on the notion of 'amplitude' advanced in Walter Benjamin's famous essay on 'The Storyteller'; and while Sperrle's main argument concerns the overall consistency and parameters of Leskov's organic worldview, in the course of her study she focuses on the distinctive features of Leskov's composition, its 'collage' character and also the role of 'endless internal linkages' in its verbal texture.<sup>4</sup> Such a composition may be explored in *Ledi Makbet Mtsenskogo uezda* at various levels: in genre, intertextuality,<sup>5</sup> style and language, and

<sup>3</sup> Sperrle; Knut Andreas Grimstad, *Styling Russia: Structuring Mechanisms in the Prose Fiction of Nikolai Leskov*, Trondheim, 2000 (hereafter, Grimstad). In respect of the notion of a 'style of styles' Grimstad draws on the work of Gary Saul Morson and Caryl Emerson: see Gary Saul Morson and Caryl Emerson, *Mikhail Bakhtin: Creation of a Prosaics*, Stanford, CA, 1990 (hereafter, Morson and Emerson), p. 17. Neither Sperrle nor Grimstad cover *Ledi Makbet Mtsenskogo uezda* in their studies; my study engages especially with key aspects of Leskov's worldview as examined by Sperrle.

<sup>4</sup> See Grimstad, p. 20; Sperrle, pp. 117–18, 168; see also Walter Benjamin, 'The Storyteller: Reflections on the Works of Nikolai Leskov', in Benjamin, *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zohn, London, 1992 (hereafter, Benjamin), pp. 83–107 (p. 89).

<sup>5</sup> The intertextual dimension of the story is complex and varied, encompassing the Bible and other religious texts, folklore and popular sources, *Macbeth* and a range of Russian literary texts including Turgenev's 'Gamlet Shchigrovskogo uezda' (Hamlet of Shchigrovskii District, 1849) and Ostrovskii's *Groza* (The Storm, 1860). Concerning the folkloric and popular sources, see Faith Wigzell, 'Folk Stylization in Leskov's *Ledi Makbet Mtsenskogo uezda*', *Slavonic and East European Review*, 67, 1989, 1, pp. 169–82 (hereafter, Wigzell); and A. A. Gorelov, *N. S. Leskov i narodnaia kul'tura*, Leningrad, 1988 (hereafter, Gorelov), pp. 136–46 (Gorelov also briefly considers the religious dimension). The text draws on a range of folk sources: the *lubok*, folk lyric songs, but for its subject/plot of love and death it can more closely be related to folk ballads, in particular 'Zhena muzha zarezala' (A Wife Murdered Her Husband; see Wigzell, pp. 175–78, 181–82) and 'Kniaz' Volkonskii i Vania-kliuchnik' (Prince Volkonskii and Vania the Steward, see Wigzell, pp. 179–80; Gorelov, pp. 138–39). A key intertextual constellation is the popular sources for the plot/subject, as identified by Wigzell and Gorelov, Ostrovskii's *Groza*, with its oppressed but essentially virtuous heroine, Katerina, who resolves her love/domestic tragedy by drowning herself off-stage in the Volga, and Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, with which the story engages in a whole range of ways that may not be indicated by simple equations between the texts but that, nevertheless, directly or indirectly inform our reading of it (these links are both formal and thematic, from the intense dramatic mode, with successive murders, and situational echoes, to themes/motifs such as female sexuality, power relations, apparitions and child-killing — note too that both heroines are murderers and also suicides). In this connection, it is highly interesting to find an anticipatory auto-reflexive passage in Leskov's novel *Nekuda* (No Way Out, 1864), in the chapter 'Chto na russkoi zemle byvaet' (What Can Happen in the Land of Russia), where a debate about the possibility of a Russian 'popular drama', in relation to the story of a young wife who kills her husband and his lover, takes in Ostrovskii's *Groza*, Pisemskii's play *Gor'kaia sud'bina* (A Bitter Fate, 1859) and also the 'universal human' aspect of Shakespeare (see N. S. Leskov, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, ed. N. I. Liban et al., 30 vols, Moscow, 1996– [hereafter, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*], vol. 4, 1997, p. 174; see also V. Guminskii, 'Organicheskoe vzaimodeistvie (ot "Ledi Makbet . . ." k "Soborianam")', in *V mire Leskova. Sbornik statei*, comp. V. Bogdanov, Moscow, 1983, pp. 233–60 [pp. 245–46]; on links/contrasts to *Groza*, which have been noted by a number of scholars, see pp. 238–44).

in the strands and fabric of recurrent, linking detail and motifs. It is this last aspect of the story's composition that I am primarily concerned to examine in this article.<sup>6</sup>

An approach to the text as a composition of recurrent, linking and overlapping detail and motifs can illuminate not only the compositional texture but also the symbolic framework and meanings of the story. Such a composition may operate variously and with varying scope. It may operate locally or in an overarching way across the text as a whole. It may operate through precise verbal repetition or through related words which by contiguity or connotation become drawn into a pattern of linkage; in this connection Leskov's method can be characterized as primarily metonymic. Moreover, as Sperrle suggests, the linkages are potentially endless and operate not in a 'linear-logical' way but "spatially", in accordance with Leskov's way of thinking.<sup>7</sup> Methodologically, there is an issue here of how far to trace the detail and the linkages, moving as they do between the foreground and background layers of the text; or, in other words, the question is how best to describe and synthesize Leskov's '*pestrota*'. In addition, as well as dealing with individual motifs, the motifs may form as clusters of related notions that interact and interrelate dynamically within and between themselves. Of course, what distinguishes Leskov's poetics is not the presence of such recurrent, linking or overlapping details per se, but rather the way they work, their role as a compositional dominant — to use a Formalist term — and the density and plurality, or 'amplitude', and open-ended character of the texture and meanings they generate.<sup>8</sup> Indeed, Leskov's specific attention to just such a composition is manifest, as we will see, in the revision of the original text, published

<sup>6</sup> While studies of Leskov's work contain sections or chapters devoted to *Ledi Makbet Mtsenskogo uezda* (see, for example, Leonid Grossman, *N. S. Leskov. Žizn' — tvorcestvo — poetika*, Moscow, 1945, pp. 128–31; Hugh McLean, *Nikolai Leskov: The Man and His Art*, Cambridge, MA, 1977 [hereafter, McLean], pp. 145–51; I. V. Stoliarova, *V poiskakh ideala. Tvorcestvo N. S. Leskova*, Leningrad, 1978, pp. 34–39), and particular aspects of the text have been the subject of articles, there exists no extensive study of the text as that undertaken here. There is a certain tendency in Leskov scholarship to treat *Ledi Makbet Mtsenskogo uezda* as exceptional/untypical; while this may apply to the story's concentrated narrative mode and the fact that it does not use *skaz*, and to some extent to its crime-packed subject matter too, my study not only offers many avenues into Leskov's wider thematics, but also presents — through its close reading — an exposition of Leskov's distinctive and dominant composition of recurrent, linking and overlapping detail and motifs.

<sup>7</sup> See Sperrle, p. 168.

<sup>8</sup> For comparison, one might refer, for example, to Goncharov's use of motifs in *Oblomov* (1859) — Oblomov's dressing gown, Agaf'ia Matveevna's constantly moving elbows, etc. — which for all their expressiveness are one-dimensional when considered alongside Leskov. On Goncharov's use of leitmotifs, see E. M. Ruttner, 'Leitmotif u I. A. Goncharova i paralleli v proizvedeniiakh Tomasa Manna', *Russian Literature*, 6, 1974, pp. 101–19.

in *Epokha* in 1865, for the 1867 edition:<sup>9</sup> a significant number of his additions serve precisely to highlight and/or enhance the texture of motifs. Rather than 'mosaic' or 'collage', I would say that at this level of composition more appropriate descriptive vocabulary might draw on the lexis of weaving, of threads/strands that go to make up the fabric and tapestry of the Leskovian text; detailed study of this aspect of his poetics has a key role to play in Leskov studies.

*Motif in a metapoetic function*

The motifs which I wish to explore in the main body of this study operate at a larger, overarching compositional level. However, to start with I would like to draw attention to an example of this composition at the local level, in the first two chapters of the story. The reason for starting from this example, the first to be developed in the story, is that it can also be read metapoetically, to foreground the role of recurrent motif and overlapping detail as a key to reading the text.<sup>10</sup> The motif concerned is that of boredom — 'skuka', 'skuchno' — that characterizes Katerina's married life in the Izmailov house, and its opposite, the playful fun, cheer and amusement — 'veselo' — that draws her down into the life of the yard, with all the consequences that follow.<sup>11</sup> A

<sup>9</sup> James Muckle has made an illuminating study of the revision of the original text for the 1867 edition (James Muckle, 'Nikolai Leskov's "Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk": Refining a Masterpiece'; I am very grateful to him for allowing me access to this unpublished article and for providing me with a copy of the original text of the story). The story was first published in *Epokha*, 1865, 1, pp. 39–80 (under Leskov's pseudonym M. Stebnitskii; further references to this version are given as *LM*, 1865, with the relevant page number); the revised version appeared in a collection of Leskov's works: *Povesti, ocherki i rasskazy M. Stebnitskogo*, vol. 1, St Petersburg, 1867, pp. 86–142; only very minor alterations were made thereafter and the final edition in Leskov's lifetime is the source for subsequent editions (N. S. Leskov, *Sobranie sochinenii*, 10 vols, St Petersburg, 1889–90, vol. 5). Leskov was a keen reviser of his writings, as he himself acknowledged, stating, for example, in a letter to Shubinskii of 22 May 1886 that his manuscript 'needs rewriting, correcting and rewriting once more. That's how it is with me' (N. S. Leskov, *Sobranie sochinenii*, ed. V. G. Bazanov et al., 11 vols, Moscow, 1956–58, vol. 11, p. 316; further references to this edition are as *Sob. soch.*, with volume and page numbers). Muckle notes that at least 206 lines of print were added in the 1867 edition (over 10 per cent of the text), as well as there being about 250 minor revisions in the form of the addition of just a few words or amendments (deletions, however, are rare). Muckle shows how the revision affects the characterization and develops certain themes more fully, as well as addressing one or two weaker points in the narrative verisimilitude. The revision starts from the title, which was originally 'Ledi Makbet nashego uezda' (Lady Macbeth of Our District). As indicated in the main text above, the revisions have a significant input at the level of composition analysed in this article.

<sup>10</sup> Concerning the wider importance for Leskov of reading and contact with books, as 'a means of renewing one's perspective', see Sperrle, p. 54; the theme of reading returns with the pious Fedia's assiduous reading of religious literature.

<sup>11</sup> In the introduction to his new translation of the story Robert Chandler notes that the story moves from Katerina's initial boredom — 'skuka' — to her final transformation into a pike — 'shchuka' (Robert Chandler, 'Introduction', in Nikolai Leskov, *Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk*, trans. Robert Chandler, London, 2003, pp. xi–xvi [p. xiv]); such a circular/cyclical compositional feature, here at the level of a sound echo, is entirely characteristic of Leskov's method in the text, as we shall see.

pointer towards a metapoetic function is present at the end of the first chapter where there is a congruence of the motif of boredom (following two earlier instances of the word, it appears four times in the last ten lines), the motif of reading (which might dispel the boredom, but Katerina does not read), and the concluding words of the chapter which tell us that no-one paid any attention to this boredom: 'It was a boring life that Katerina L'vovna lived in the wealthy house of her father-in-law over the course of five years married to an unaffectionate husband; and nobody, as often happens, paid the slightest attention to this boredom of hers.'<sup>12</sup> Metapoetically, if as readers we pay attention to the mention of boredom, then we become alerted to it as a recurring motif, and Leskov's own attention to this function is highlighted by the fact that the extension to this final sentence from 'over the course of . . .' was added in his revision of the original text for the 1867 edition: what is notable in this addition is not just the further repetition of the motif of boredom but also, and more especially, the metapoetic marker of 'paying attention'.<sup>13</sup> Accordingly, this is how we should read the text, in a way that engages with this compositional dominant of Leskov's poetics. In addition, such reading corresponds to Iser's seminal account of the reading and re-reading process as both anticipatory and retrospective.<sup>14</sup>

The second chapter, with its vivid scene and speech, then foregrounds motifs that oppose boredom, centred on 'veselo'; here too Leskov's revision of the text for the 1867 edition enhances the prominence of the motif. This word — 'veselo' — has already appeared in

<sup>12</sup> N. S. Leskov, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, vol. 5, 1998, p. 9; further references to the story will be to this edition (see note 5 above) and given in the text, citing page numbers only; as noted above (note 9), the text in this edition goes back to the final lifetime edition which, with only minor amendments, reproduces the 1867 version of the text. Translations are my own and, given the attention to specific and recurrent word use, may at times reproduce quite literally the original; on occasion I have borrowed the wording from Robert Chandler's excellent new translation (see note 11 above).

<sup>13</sup> To underline this function, in another addition in the 1867 version, the motif of 'paying attention' or not is repeated in close proximity in Chapter 2 in relation to Sergei's apparent lack of awareness of the implications of what has gone on between him and Katerina in the yard: 'It was as if he had not paid any attention to what had just gone on' (p. 11); in fact, of course, he is fully attentive to the situation. A further element in the addition of these last two lines of the chapter relates to the epithet 'unaffectionate [nelaskovyi]' applied to Katerina's husband. While emphasizing Katerina's pitiable condition in the Izmailov house, this word also creates a telling forward echo to the two other instances of its use (already present in the original text): when Katerina becomes obsessed by the threat posed by Fedia, this epithet recurs in respect of her conduct towards Sergei (p. 31), and then, when Katerina and Sergei set off on the journey as convicts, it recurs once more in relation to Sergei's attitude to her (p. 39). We see here also the inversion and circularity characteristic of the functioning of motifs in the text.

<sup>14</sup> See Wolfgang Iser, *The Implied Reader: Patterns of Communication in Prose Fiction from Bunyan to Beckett*, Baltimore, MD and London, 1974, ch. 11, 'The Reading Process: A Phenomenological Approach', pp. 274–94.

ironic circumstances in connection with boredom towards the end of the first chapter: 'once more that same boredom, Russian, the boredom of a merchant house, which, as they say, makes even hanging oneself a source of fun [veselo]' (p. 8).<sup>15</sup> As things turn out, when boredom is overcome by amusement it leads not to suicide but first to murder (but with suicide eventually too). In the opening page of the second chapter the motif is developed through a series of adverbs and adjectives: 'Outside in the yard the weather was wonderful: warm, bright, cheery [teplo, svetlo, veselo]'; 'a young man spoke out boldly and cheerily [smelo i veselo]'; 'the peasant woman, cursing jokingly [shutlivo]'; and finally with reference to Katerina herself who, blushing, feels a 'sudden flood of desire' to join in the banter and 'chatter away with cheery and joking words [slovami veselymi i shutlivymi]' (pp. 9–10).<sup>16</sup> While 'veselo'/'veselyi' is the central thread here, the composition characteristically involves a range of words in changing combinations and with shifting connotations: from the initial, positive combination of warmth, bright light and cheeriness the motif has shifted to become associated with the joking and flirtation that makes Katerina blush as she engages in the banter. There is a less than innocent undercurrent in the apparently harmless fun, which leads a little later to Katerina's agreement — 'having joined in the spirit of fun [razveselivshis']' (p. 11) — to be lifted up by Sergei. The physical contact, as Sergei embraces her in this upwards motion, precipitates their subsequent sexual encounter. In this way, through initial foregrounding of the motif of boredom and the immediately ensuing development of the contrasting motif of playful but dangerous fun, Leskov leads us into a heightened awareness of a dynamic of recurrent, overlapping and shifting motifs.<sup>17</sup>

#### *Overarching, archetypal motifs*

The overarching motifs — or motif clusters — which I will look at may be categorized as follows: water, life and death; the house and

<sup>15</sup> The extension of this sentence after 'that same boredom [ta zhe skuka]', with the repetition of 'boredom' and the ironic juxtaposition with the motif of 'fun' ('veselo'), is another example of Leskov's revision of the original text to enhance the fabric of linkages (compare *LM*, 1865, p. 41).

<sup>16</sup> The phrase 'slovami veselymi i shutlivymi', which now links the key recurrent word — 'veselo'/'veselyi' — to Katerina, was added in the 1867 version, together with the introductory 'flood of desire' (p. 10, compare *LM*, 1865, p. 42).

<sup>17</sup> The motifs of 'skuka' and 'veselo' both subsequently recur on occasion hereafter. Most immediately, in the next chapter, Sergei's rhetorical strategy in his seduction of Katerina is to play on her (and his) 'boredom' (see pp. 12–13; this section, with its play on boredom, is in the original text). Moreover, ironically, he initiates his seduction by mistakenly seeking to engage her interest through an appeal to reading as an appropriately refined escape from boredom (concerning Sergei's comically pretentious attempt at linguistic refinement in this scene, and its drawing on sources such as the *lubok*, see Wigzell, p. 175; Gorelov, pp. 139–40). There is of course a further irony here in relation to the tradition of heroine as reader in Sentimental, Romantic and Victorian fiction.

imprisonment; the garden and sensuality. These are archetypal motifs, locating the semantic and symbolic structure of Leskov's 'provincial' Russian story in a broader, universal framework no less than, following Benjamin, does its storytelling. Equally, as we will see, through such motifs the representation and symbolic significance of time and space readily relates to the Bakhtinian notion of the 'chronotope' (as well as prompting a re-consideration of Bakhtin's historical conceptualization).<sup>18</sup>

These motifs are central to the story's composition, its narrative, thematic and symbolic structure, but they are not exhaustive of those present in the story, and some further related motifs, such as high/low, sound and silence (as well as boredom/gaiety), will also be noted. The development of the motifs is located primarily in the narratorial text rather than in the speech of the characters through which, especially in the main body of the story, the action is largely taken forward. The action and the characters are thus framed in a constellation of motifs that incorporate and convey the story's symbolic structure and meanings.

The motifs can be traced not only in their own unfolding and ramification but also in their correlation and interrelation with each other. For example, the motif of tea drinking (and the samovar) constitutes an intersection of the first two motifs: it is an aspect of the water motif that is also an attribute of the domestic (and it is additionally present in the garden scene). The garden itself — both as a real space and symbolically as paradise — is linked to the house through the representation of space as open or enclosed, as well as being the prime location of the sensual. And, as we shall see, in the story's finale all these motifs come

<sup>18</sup> M. Bakhtin, 'Formy vremeni i khronotopa v romane. Ocherki po istoricheskoi poetike', in Bakhtin, *Voprosy literatury i estetiki. Issledovaniia raznykh let*, Moscow, 1975, pp. 234–407. Bakhtin's general concluding account of the chronotope's (or chronotopes' — they can be an interwoven plurality) expressive/semantic role and functioning (pp. 398–400) can be mapped on to the role and functioning of motifs in Leskov (this is not surprising since we are dealing with analogous phenomena of poetics, and Bakhtin's study also invokes the term 'motif'). In its historical sweep, Bakhtin's approach is broadly selective rather than all-embracing, but where he essays into a consideration of nineteenth-century literature he does not include any mention of Leskov. On the one hand, his account of chronotopes (and/or transformations of archetypal chronotopes) in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century European literature has a direct relevance to *Ledi Makbet Mtsenskogo uezda* (for example, the chronotope of the provincial town as stagnant world as in Flaubert's *Madame Bovary*, also 'familiar to us in a range of variations from Gogol', Turgenev, Gleb Uspenskii, Shchedrin, Chekhov' [pp. 396–97]). On the other hand, one might suggest that his central thesis concerning the renewal of a primal folkloric chronotope in Rabelais, and traces of its subsequent, but only partial, continuation/transformation in the modern period thereafter, might need revision in the light of Leskov's active incorporation of folkloric, pre-modern and Russian popular religious elements — not just traces — in his work, including in *Ledi Makbet Mtsenskogo uezda*. At a very general level, this relates to the conceptualization of the discontinuity/continuity between the modern and the pre-modern, and historical shifts in such conceptualization, something which applies also to Benjamin's 'The Storyteller'.

together as the prisoners make their way through a cold, wet landscape — the garden desolated — to, and then along, the river Volga. Thus, as with the motifs examined in the first two chapters, but on a larger scale, the text presents us with an ‘amplitude’ of recurrent and linking motifs and details, and it is through the unfolding of these motifs that the complexities and ambivalences of Leskov’s presentation of the ‘terrible drama’ (p. 7) of sexual passion, located in an archetypal framework, can be illuminated.

*Water, life and death*

The first appearance of the motif of water comes in the opening chapter, as part of the pre-history to the ‘terrible drama’ in the brief and positive account, amounting to a single sentence, of Katerina’s life before her marriage. Her former life of ‘simplicity and freedom’ is associated with water: it included ‘running down to the river to fetch buckets of water’ and ‘bathing in her slip beneath the jetty’, as well as ‘scattering a passing lad with the husks of sunflower seeds’ (p. 8). In the very next sentence, in contrast, the tea drinking of the Izmailov patriarchy is mentioned as part of the routine of the house which imprisons her. By juxtaposition and association, this tea drinking with its accompanying samovar represents an alternative strand of the water motif, located and confined in the domestic space rather than as natural element.

At the start of the second chapter the narrative proper gets under immediate way as the spring season brings a burst in the dam of the Izmailovs’ mill outside town. At the level of plot mechanism, the burst of the dam enables the train of events to get under way by removing Zinovii Borisych from the house while both delaying and storing up his return as a plot device. Symbolically, as is readily apparent, the burst dam signifies the release of Katerina from her imprisonment and the release of her ardent character into a freedom and life that she has not experienced since before marriage (it also disrupts the economic power of the Izmailov male world which has bought Katerina into the captivity of an oppressive marriage). Thus, later in the chapter she feels the ‘sudden flood [priliv] of desire’ (p. 10) to engage in joking banter with Sergei.<sup>19</sup> More generally, the released water symbolizes not only freedom but also the forces of life and nature. Water may release Katerina into life, but in a characteristic inversion it sets in motion a story of death, culminating in that of Katerina herself at the same time as she commits her last murder. Finally, when the convicts embark on a ferry along the Volga, the river becomes symbolically associated, on

<sup>19</sup> As noted above (see note 16), the detail of this ‘sudden flood of desire’, which reinforces the link to the burst dam, is added in the 1867 version.



the mythic plane, with the journey to death (there is an overlapping here of the classical ferry journey to the underworld of Hades with similar motifs in other traditions, including Christian and Russian folk traditions). Thus the water motif encompasses both life and death; in terms of the chronotope, the river of time encompasses both this world and the world beyond.

In addition, the release of water works as a trope of the narrative movement of the story with its relentless forward dynamic. In terms of formal properties, in keeping with the story's orientation towards drama, this concentrated narrative movement achieves a unity of time alongside the unity of action in the tale of passion, murder and death. When the river Volga is reached in the final chapter the story comes full circle and the underlying metaphor of its narrative movement is realized. But at the same time, by expanding the scale of the water from millstream to the Volga — so wide that its further bank is beyond sight — the trope also carries the story's expansion from the local and individual to a Russian and universal scale.<sup>20</sup>

While the flow of water may be submerged but ever present as the trope of the story's movement, details/images associated with water do feature in the interval between the burst dam and the finale on the river Volga. One cannot speak of a foregrounding of the water motif throughout, but rather an accumulation of detail, quite complex in its inter-associations, that weaves the water motif into the background tapestry and creates linkages to the other two motifs. These details/images variously work to negate or undermine the initial symbolic association of water with freedom and life; rather than being liberated by the release of her passionate nature, Katerina is imprisoned by the train of events that flows from the headlong force and sexual possessiveness of her love, leading to death.

A key aspect of the water motif in the central chapters, the scene in the garden (Chapter 6) and the return and murder of Zinovii Borisych (Chapters 7 and 8), lies in its intersection with the motif of the house, in the physical confinement of the samovar and in tea drinking as a symbol of social status and the power relations and routine of the house. Ostensibly, the scene in the garden is an occasion for tea drinking which should confirm the lovers' status as man and wife, masters of the house. Three times in the opening page of this chapter the words 'to drink tea' are repeated (pp. 16–17), but this routine cannot compete with the urges of Katerina's passionate sensuality in her garden 'paradise' (p. 18). For Sergeï, meanwhile, the scene merely confirms his lack

<sup>20</sup> It is curious — and maybe an echo of *Ledi Makbet Mitsenskogo uezda* — that in 'The Storyteller' Benjamin writes that 'the moral catastrophes that appear in Leskov's world are to the moral incidents in Hebel's world as the great, silent flowing of the Volga is to the babbling, rushing little millstream' (Benjamin, p. 105).

of status, as servant not master, and so in fact contributes to Katerina's resolve to murder her husband, to take final control of the house. The husband indeed, the master of the house, is metonymically present throughout the scene in the shape of the samovar, which is associated with the patriarchal order of the house: the samovar is only mentioned at the beginning of the chapter but, though unnoticed, it is present in its absence throughout, just at the time that Zinovii Borisych is making his way home to confront his wife. In Chapter 7, on the other hand, when Zinovii Borisych has returned home, the samovar is off-stage but repeatedly mentioned as the build-up to the murder is conducted alongside the domestic ritual of tea drinking and Katerina plies her husband with tea (the tea, we later learn, is poisoned, but the poisoning is redundant when events take over and they strangle him). At the same time, water also features in the domestic setting in relation to washing/cleaning (with echoes of Lady Macbeth and her hands). First, the return of the cat in Katerina's second dream, or rather nightmare, at the start of Chapter 7 leads her to think that she must use 'holy water' to rid herself of this unwanted 'punishment' (p. 22). Such absolution or expurgation by water is then echoed when Zinovii Borisych washes, showering water 'in all directions' (p. 24).<sup>21</sup> Finally, in Chapter 8, in an explicit congruence of the strands of water, washing and the samovar, Katerina uses water from the samovar to wash away the blood stains (p. 28); such a congruence prompts and informs our reading of the individual strands retrospectively. Rather than absolving her of punishment, the element of water in its domestication is thus implicated in her crime, and her assumption of control of the house through the samovar is poisoned.

Further details associated with water are woven into the description of the garden. Thus, the positive associations of water and of Katerina's garden 'paradise' (p. 18) are undermined through a local play on words associated with dryness. When Sergei joins Katerina under the apple tree which is 'poured over' with white flowers, their initially flirtatious conversation revolves around the idiomatic use of 'sokhnut'' ('to dry out', 'wither') meaning 'to pine for': 'Did you really pine for me, Serezha?' — 'Of course I pined for you', etc. (p. 18).<sup>22</sup> This is then echoed with telling irony when a few lines further on and again a page later the adverb 'drily' ('sukho') is twice used to describe his bored responses (p. 18, p. 19). Other images associated with water echo at

<sup>21</sup> This detail was added in the 1867 edition (compare *LM*, 1865, p. 56); as Muckle (see note 9 above) points out, the presentation of this scene is from the position of Sergei on the balcony, thereby reminding us of his presence, but it also reinforces the water motif and its variant of washing.

<sup>22</sup> This whole exchange is added in the 1867 edition (compare *LM*, p. 50).

larger textual and symbolic levels. At the end of the chapter Katerina's love play on the rug is associated with 'splashing', an echo of her freedom to bathe in the river before her marriage (and possibly echoed in turn in Zinovii Borisych's washing in the next chapter), while the laughter is suggestive of someone being tickled by *rusalki*: '[. . .] ringing, cheery laughter [khokhot zvonkii i veselyi], as if someone was being tickled by *rusalki* from the lake. All this was Katerina L'vovna, splashing in the moonlight on the soft rug, playfully romping with her husband's young steward' (p. 21). Although the *rusalki* are plural, and it may appear that both Sergei and Katerina are being tickled, an association of Katerina herself with the *rusalka* can be inferred, especially as she becomes the active subject of the following sentence and it is men that are tickled — to death — by *rusalki*.<sup>23</sup> Such an association of Katerina with the *rusalka* is appropriate in terms of her role as a sexually dangerous woman and her ultimate fate as a soul in limbo inhabiting the water (there may also be a connection between Katerina as *rusalka* and the garden as fecund nature, which will be noted below). In this context an earlier image, when Katerina is presented as lying in the tall garden grass, acquires an extra suggestiveness: 'as if all the grass beneath the trees had been caught in a net of moonlight' (p. 19). The grass in a net suggests a watery image, with Katerina within this net, either as a fish or perhaps also as a mermaid figure; if so, this would draw more on the literary, Romantic variant of the mermaid tradition, which can feature a mermaid in a net, rather than the specifically Russian connotations of the *rusalka*. In a range of ways, therefore, these images carry an adumbration of Katerina's death by drowning and descent into the element of water at the end.

Water also features in two of the idiomatic sayings that Leskov characteristically introduces in the text, and in both cases the literal sense is realized. Katerina's commitment to Sergei by the end of the garden scene is expressed, literally, as her readiness to go 'into the fire, into water, to the dungeon, onto the cross [v ogon', v vodu, v temnitsu, na krest]' (p. 21); as well as a realization of this saying in her final descent into the waters of the Volga ('v vodu'), her fate as a convict ('v temnitsu') is also invoked (whether or not, or in what way, her tragic fate involves fire and the cross is open to interpretation). In addition, in an ironic twist to the motif, Zinovii Borisych's unexplained disappearance is described using the idiom 'kak v vodu kanul' — 'as if he had

<sup>23</sup> On *rusalki*, see, for example: Natalie K. Moyle, 'Mermaids (*Rusalki*) and Russian Beliefs about Women', in *New Studies in Russian Language and Literature*, ed. Anna Lisa Crone and Catherine V. Chvany, Columbus, OH, 1987, pp. 221–38 (hereafter, Moyle); the combination of a luxurious late spring night and the *rusalka* carries a clear echo of Gogol's 'Maiskaia noch' ili utoplennitsa' (A May Night or the Drowned Woman, 1831).

sunk into water' (p. 30) which again adumbrates the story's ending: thus, his supposed fate becomes her actual fate.

When the element of water comes into its own in the final chapter, it is cold and deathly and permeates all the space, not just in the final expanse of water that is the Volga but also in the transformation of the land into mud in the cold wet weather (this desolate, hellish scene will be explored in more detail in relation to the garden). Here Katerina's transformation from a girl at freedom to swim and fetch water to a creature of the water, attacking her final victim like a predatory pike, and/or her fate as a soul passing into limbo or to the underworld, is enacted: 'just then Katerina L'vovna rose out from another wave almost to her waist, threw herself on Sonetka, like a powerful pike attacking a roach, and neither of them was seen again' (p. 48).

The river of life has become the river of death.<sup>24</sup>

### *The house and imprisonment*

While water is potentially an element associated with freedom, the dominant representation of space within the story is marked by motifs of confinement and imprisonment, and its main location is the house; the chronotope of the stagnant provincial town (see note 18) is here concentrated in the oppressive merchant's house of the Izmailovs. Indeed, the house as an enclosed, imprisoning space is probably one of the most immediately striking images in the story. This motif is extended, as we have seen, to water and its domestic confinement in the samovar (as it will be to the garden as well). It is notable that the house as an imprisoning space is primarily associated with the patriarchal and socio-economic order: it is a 'merchant's house', the 'wealthy house of her father-in-law' (pp. 8–9). In her married life hitherto Katerina has not feminized the space and subsequently desire for socio-economic command of the house wins out over its possible transformation into a feminine, maternal space with the murder of Fedia (she also then rejects her own child). Indeed, even tea drinking and the samovar, which might be an area of female control, however limited, is firmly located instead in the realm of the socio-economic order.<sup>25</sup>

<sup>24</sup> There may well be a visual echo here of the last despairing upward gesture found in representations of sinners' drowning in the tar of hell.

<sup>25</sup> The representation of women and the feminine in Leskov are covered in Muller de Morogues's wide ranging and detailed study: Inès Muller de Morogues, *'Le problème féminin' et les portraits de femmes dans l'oeuvre de Nikolaj Leskov*, Bern, 1991 (hereafter, Muller de Morogues). Concerning the chronotope of oppression/confinement that dominates the representation of women in Russian literature of this period, see Mary Zirin, 'Women's Prose Fiction in the Age of Realism', in *Women Writers in Russian Literature*, ed. Toby W. Clyman and Diana Greene, Westport, CT and London, 1994, pp. 77–94 (p. 87). Concerning the role and representation of women in the domestic ideology of 'middle-class' Russian life at the time, see Diana Greene, 'Mid-Nineteenth-Century Domestic Ideology in Russia',

The motif of imprisonment is associated from the very start with the notion of crime, and hence thematically it links into questions of crime and punishment,<sup>26</sup> and by extension conscience, good and evil, salvation or — in this bleak world — damnation, as they are raised in the story. More generally, this motif also links to the opposition of closed and open worlds that can be seen as a central feature of Leskov's worldview.<sup>27</sup> Clearly the patriarchal and socio-economic order may readily be perceived as a closed and constricting world, but there is another, contrasting site where this theme is also explored. For the story's exploration of sexual passion and sensuality turns out to present these as aspects of human nature that may imprison rather than liberate us; by extension too, this may be linked to the notion of the soul as imprisoned in the body. A further aspect of the organization of space is the motif of high and low. It is notable, however, that this does not work as a simple evaluational opposition of positive and negative (or inversions thereof), but as a motif that — at least in part — rests on contextual valorization.<sup>28</sup> Thus, height is linked to the house as an imprisoning space and its organization: the marital bedroom is on high, even the merchant's bed itself is 'high' (p. 16), the surrounding fence is 'high' (p. 8). Nevertheless, there are moments of symbolic descent (e.g.

<sup>25</sup> *Continued*

in *Women and Russian Culture: Projections and Self-Perceptions*, ed. Rosalind Marsh, New York and Oxford, 1998, pp. 78–97. The domestic ideology of the Izmailov household, however, would draw more on traditions that go back to the (infamous) *Domostroi* (see *The Domostroi: Rules for Russian Households in the Time of Ivan the Terrible*, ed. and trans. Carolyn Pouncy, Ithaca, NY, and London, 1994). I return to a consideration of the gender dimension of the story in the final section.

<sup>26</sup> Concerning Leskov's presentation of the theme of crime in the story, its links to contemporary debate on the topic and, especially, its links to Dostoevskii's *Zapiski iz mertvogo doma* (Notes from the House of the Dead, 1860) and articles published in his journal *Vremia*, see Kenneth Lantz, 'Leskov's "Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk" and Its Place in His Work', in *And Meaning for a Life Entire. Festschrift for Charles A. Moser on the Occasion of His Sixtieth Birthday*, ed. Peter Rollberg, Columbus, OH, 1997, pp. 245–58. This should also be placed in the context of laws and attitudes concerning women, sexuality and crime in the period: see Laura Engelstein, *The Keys to Happiness: Sex and the Search for Modernity in Fin-de-Siècle Russia*, Ithaca, NY, and London, 1992 (hereafter, *The Keys to Happiness*), ch. 3, 'Power and Crime in the Domestic Order', pp. 96–127.

<sup>27</sup> This is one of the main themes of Sperrle's study of Leskov, which she explores in relation to the opposition of the closed world of fixed views, dogmas, systems or 'spiritual death' and the openness of organic movement, variance, distortion, change, heresy and freedom: see especially Chapter 1, 'Leskov's Organic Worldview', pp. 24–72.

<sup>28</sup> For studies of the semiotic organization of space in terms of high and low, see, for example, Iu. M. Lotman, 'Zametki o khudozhestvennom prostranstve', in Lotman, *Izbrannye stat'i*, vol. 1, *Stat'i po semiotike i tipologii kul'tury*, Tallinn, 1992, pp. 448–63 (pp. 448–57); and Iu. M. Lotman, *Struktura khudozhestvennogo teksta*, Moscow, 1972, pp. 265–79. In both cases (Dante and Zabolotskii respectively), Lotman seeks to illuminate the (complex) semiotic systems at work in the organization of space in terms of high and low; in the case of Leskov, as suggested in the text above, there may be a contextual factor in the valorization of the motif (I will return to the larger question of the contextual dimension of moral values in Leskov in the final section of this article).

in the climactic scene when the crimes are discovered) and overall the story's symbolic trajectory is one of fall and, ultimately, descent into hell/limbo. In addition, as we will see, the motif of silence is closely linked to the house, though it is not limited to this setting; as with high and low, any valorization may be contextually determined. In fact, sound and silence run as a continuous strand throughout the text, accompanying the speech and action, enhancing the fabric of connections, and heightening the dramatic intensity (in the build up to the murder of Fedia, for example, the motif of 'quiet' — hushed speech and stealthy movement — is repeated five times [pp. 33–35]).<sup>29</sup> Finally, in relation to the story's formal orientation towards drama, the concentration of most of the action (up to the last few chapters) in the confines of the house realizes the unity of place, alongside those of time and action (noted above).<sup>30</sup>

The motif of imprisonment and crime is prominent from the first chapter of the story. While the opening paragraph identifies Katerina as a Lady Macbeth, the perpetrator of murder and demon figure, the rest of this chapter portrays her primarily as victim, imprisoned in the Izmailov house. She is a victim of the selling of a young girl to be married to an older, richer man: this is the reprehensible act of the first chapter, even the original sin of the story.<sup>31</sup> In this respect, her eventual alignment with prostitutes (or as good as) in the convict convoy is an ironic realization of her initial status. But in keeping with the patriarchal merchant worldview of the Izmailovs, it is Katerina's failure to produce a child, which is evidently not her fault biologically given her easy pregnancy by Sergei (her husband's previous marriage was childless too), that seems a crime: 'it was as if she had indeed committed a

<sup>29</sup> There is also a contrast between the 'quiet' house and the 'terrible drama' that unfolds in it, which mirrors in the microcosm the (apparently oxymoronic) juxtaposition of the Russian provincial setting and a tragedy of Shakespearean scale. The motif of quiet/silence could be explored more widely in Leskov. Volynskii, for example, noted the significance, and positive connotations, of the epithet 'tikhii' in *Soboriane* (Cathedral Folk, 1872) and in 'Kotin doilets i Platonida' (Kotin the He-Cow and Platonida, 1867) (see A. L. Volynskii, *N. S. Leskov*, Petersburg, 1923, pp. 46–47, 111–13); in contrast to such positive connotations, Sperrle shows in her case study of 'Zaiachii remiz' (The Rabbit Carriage, 1894) how Leskov's coinage 'tishnota', a combination of 'tishina' ('quiet') and 'toshnota' ('nausea'), links 'quiet' in this context to a static, stagnant worldview (see Sperrle, pp. 173–82).

<sup>30</sup> In this respect Chapter 12 is a transitional chapter, in terms of both location and narrative mode, while the last three chapters (Chapters 13–15) take us on the convicts' journey. Chapter 12 opens with a break in the narrative to explain how the house comes to be broken into, allowing the narrator to start from a partial digression on the people's love of church singing (discussed in the final section of this article) and effecting the shift from the orientation towards drama to 'prose' (in this connection, the comment in Chapter 14 about 'inevitable prose' [p. 44], which refers to the less than idyllic situation that the lovers find themselves in as convicts, despite Katerina's temporary rapture, can be read metapoetically too).

<sup>31</sup> Such marriages were a prominent theme debated at the time, linking into the whole problem of marriage as an economic and social institution, sex and love (concerning Leskov's views on this topic, see Muller de Morogues, pp. 367–81).

crime against her husband, against her father-in-law, and against their whole honourable merchant's family' (p. 8). The boredom of Katerina's existence is directly linked to the space in which she is confined: 'the inordinate boredom in the locked merchant's house [v zapertom kupecheskom teremu] with its high fence and dogs let loose from their chains' (p. 8). Her imprisonment is configured as follows: the locked house (in conjunction with 'locked' the word 'terem', especially in its prepositional form 'teremu', may echo through paronomasia the etymologically unrelated but phonetically similar 'tjur'ma', 'prison'); the high fence that adds to the sense of enclosure;<sup>32</sup> and the chained or unchained dogs in attendance — a detail echoed variously in later chapters, from Sergei releasing the dogs before going up to Katerina's room in Chapter 3, to the dogs outside the garden in Chapter 6, to the image of demons breaking free from their chains when Katerina contemplates the murder of Fedia, to the convicts' chains at the end. Therefore, if responsibility for the subsequent events lies with Katerina in her reaction to the tedium of her imprisoned and prostituted condition, complicity in these events lies also with the Izmailov house, the father and son Izmailov, the patriarchy and the socio-economic order that creates this environment and makes its victim feel like a criminal for not bearing the family a child.

The conditions of Katerina's imprisonment are further elaborated in the following paragraph, which also contains the contrasting motif of her earlier freedom (associated, as we have seen, with water) as well as introducing the motif of silence. Katerina's social life is restricted and involves a guard-like scrutiny akin to, but if anything more intrusive than, that endured as a convict at the end, a control of space whereby all she can do is wander aimlessly from room to room, and a control of time in the household's daily routine, associated with tea drinking and the clock.<sup>33</sup> The concluding sentence of this paragraph is particularly

<sup>32</sup> The 'tall house' (*vysokii terem*) is a standard topos of the Russian folk tradition, often as location of the young maiden, for example, when awaiting her lover by the window. It is interesting that the fixed epithet is disrupted by attributing the epithet 'tall' to the fence. On the one hand, this works to reinforce the motif of imprisonment, as does the sound echo 'teremu'–'t'jurma'; but in addition we see how Leskov incorporates folk sources as a dynamic element, and therefore an element open to transformation, in his poetics (see also note 5 above).

<sup>33</sup> Time here is locked in the cyclicity of an endlessly repeating, eventless routine that is characteristic of the chronotope of the provincial town (see Bakhtin, 'Formy vremeni i khronotopa v romane', p. 396). The precise time reference of the tea drinking — 'at six o'clock in the morning' (p. 8) — is unique in the story and links to the motif of Zinovii Borisykh's watch which is hung above the marital bed. In an interesting example of the significance of setting up even apparently minor recurrent details, Leskov appears to make a mistake with this 'pocket' watch when it is introduced in an addition of several lines in the 1867 version (compare *LM*, 1865, p. 45): its ticking is the only sound that intrudes on the silence in which Katerina and Sergei first have sex (p. 13), yet it presumably should not be there but in Zinovii Borisykh's pocket; when he returns and gets ready for bed he hangs his watch above the bed, although it is not here identified as a 'pocket' watch but is described as 'silver', 'with a bead cord' (p. 25).

striking for the ambivalent juxtaposition of contrasting detail: 'Everywhere was clean, everywhere was quiet and empty [tikho i pust], lamps shone in front of the icons, and nowhere through the house was there a living sound or a human voice' (p. 8). The sentence moves from cleanliness/purity through quiet to emptiness, past icons, to a world which has no living sound or human voice, in effect not just a prison but a living death. The emptiness is also an internal one for Katerina. But more generally such silence and the absence, suppression or loss of the human voice is equivalent to death. This is how the story starts, in this house without a human voice, and it accompanies the murders of both Zinovii Borisych and Fedia. It is also Katerina's fate at the end: first, when she is whipped at night in the convicts' room and her head is covered so that her voice cannot be heard, and finally when she more or less loses the capacity to articulate, mumbling with her lips and then, unable to bring to mind a prayer, whispering her final words. But for the time being all there is for Katerina — the imprisoned damsel, the sleeping beauty — is to retreat yawning to the marital bedroom on high, the location both of her victimhood and her future, ambivalent liberation into life, sex/love and then murder. Here she falls prey to the boredom in sleep, her condition ignored, until the burst dam awakens the forces of nature and life.

The spatial motifs recur at key moments in subsequent chapters. In Chapter 2 Katerina looks down from the bedroom on high and is drawn to get up and enter into the life of the yard. If her first freedom is in the yard, outside the house but also an enclosed space, she envisages going into the garden as well. But it is initially to the yard she goes, the symbolic garden still awaits. The flirtatious, physical play with Sergei in Chapter 2 leads rapidly to their first sexual encounter that evening, in Chapter 3, which begins with Katerina again looking down from on high,<sup>34</sup> now shelling sunflower seeds (a detail that echoes her earlier life). Sergei releases the chained dogs, an ambiguous sign both of freedom and of renewed guarding; equally, Katerina's words spoken from on high are presented in highly ambiguous context, since the earlier quiet and emptiness of the house as prison are here transferred to the yard: 'Hello, Katerina said to him quietly from her room on high, and the yard went silent, like a desert [pustynia]' (p. 12).<sup>35</sup> The motif of

<sup>34</sup> As mentioned in note 32 above, this is a standard topos in the Russian folk lyric song, at the outset of a young maiden's affair with a handsome young man (*molodets*) (see Wigzell, p. 180; Gorelov, pp. 139, 174 [note 97]).

<sup>35</sup> The description of the yard falling silent and empty/deserted was added in the 1867 version (compare *LM*, 1865, p. 44), yet another example of Leskov's enhancement of the fabric of linking details in his revision of the text. Muckle suggests (see note 9) that the word 'pustynia' can echo the monastery as hermitage ('pustyn'): such an echo not only invokes, in immediate context, the Izmailov domain as monastic prison for Katerina but also adumbrates the theme of sacred and profane space in relation both to the garden and to the juxtaposition of the Izmailov house and the church in Chapter 12.



quiet extends also to their sexual encounter. When Sergei embraces her she 'groans quietly' as she asks him to let her go (p. 13), thereby linking the motif of quiet with the sound of moaning/groaning ('ston') which itself becomes a repeated motif that ends as the hellish noise of the wind and the waves in the final chapter (pp. 46, 48). Then the sex itself, conducted in a 'dark corner', takes place in the silence of 'speechlessness' (p. 13), though accompanied by the ticking sound of the husband's watch.<sup>36</sup> In this way, at the very outset, sex becomes open to association with death.

Moreover, as we have already seen in relation to the water motif, the further moves which Katerina makes towards apparent freedom are simultaneously accompanied by opposing motifs of enclosure and imprisonment (and death). At one level this is because, with Sergei's active prompting, she is motivated by her pursuit not only of passionate love but also, as a corollary, of social standing and economic power; she is not so much escaping the Izmailov house as taking it over. However, as already noted and as will be explored in detail in the next section, enclosure also accompanies her pursuit of passionate love: at this point we can simply note that the erotic dream of the cat at the start of Chapter 6 takes place in a bedroom in which, despite the heat, she has not only closed the shutters but also hung the window with a 'woollen cloth' (p. 16). The murder of Zinovii Borisysh is acted out in a scene of control of the bedroom space, and the house as prison and the closed shutters are evoked once more as Katerina prepares for the murder of Fedia: 'Katerina L'vovna went downstairs and walked through the empty rooms: everywhere was quiet; the lamps were shining peacefully; her own shadow flitted across the walls; the windows, with their closed shutters, had begun to thaw out and were weeping' (p. 33). Here we have the empty, quiet rooms and the lamps of Chapter 1, but with the icons not mentioned; we also have the closed shutters of Chapter 6, but here taking on the pathos of the scene as they weep and thereby enclose Katerina in the reaction to her pending deed. At the same time it turns out that a chink in the shutters has enabled the scene to be witnessed from outside.

Finally, the 'quiet house which has concealed so many crimes' (p. 35) is broken into by the noise of the crowd who also climb across the 'high' surrounding fence (p. 36). Before Katerina unlocks the door,<sup>37</sup> however, the 'sinful' house has been turned into a hellish location, dark,

<sup>36</sup> As mentioned above (see note 33), these lines are added in the 1867 version (compare *LM*, 1865, p. 45).

<sup>37</sup> The motif of 'locking/unlocking' also features, ironically, in Katerina's decision under questioning no longer to deny the crimes when she uses the verb 'zapirat'sia' — 'to lock up' [intrans.] — in the idiomatic sense of not speaking or shutting up: 'why should I keep quiet [zapirat'sia]: I killed them' (p. 38).

filled with noise and 'shaken to its foundations' by 'unearthly powers' (p. 35). In this way the Izmailov house itself, and all it stands for, is implicated in the unmasking and retribution directed against it. This is the first, symbolic resolution of the motif of the house, its transformation to reveal the mythic, apocalyptic plane on to which the 'terrible drama' is projected. The scene also features a symbolic enactment of descent when Sergei attempts to escape to the bedroom on high, but knocks into the door and flies down, taking Katerina with him and accompanied by a 'thundering' apparition of the murdered Zinovii Borisych (p. 36). At the same time release from the house as prison merely gives way to the actual imprisonment of the convict convoy and its destination in the penal colony; there is a further continuity here too in that the movement from room to room within the confined space of the house is reproduced in the convoy, both at large in the journey from stage to stage and also quietly back and forth along the corridor in the internal space of the prisoners' housing at night. But behind this actual imprisonment there is a further symbolic imprisonment and descent. Descent into the animal, as we will explore more fully in relation to the motif of the garden and sensuality, is an imprisonment in the physical side of human nature. At the same time, when Katerina proceeds on her journey into imprisonment she is also descending into a world of earth and water. When she rises from the river waters in the final sentence, this last upward motion — echoing the way she is lifted by Sergei in the yard — is the prelude to the final, dual descent into the animal and the world of the dead. In a parallel to the duality of the river (life/death), there is here a symbolic overlapping of this world and the other world: this world in the reduction from human to the animal and the other world of a soul in limbo/hell.

#### *The garden and sensuality*

We now come to the third of the archetypal motifs that inform the story's composition and symbolic structure. Located in the middle of the story, but ambiguously at the edge of the imprisoning space of the house, lies the garden. However, as well as being an ambiguous, liminal space, the garden is also linked to the house as an enclosed space, both as such and through its role as an extension of the house. Yet it is also opposed to the house: it represents the blossoming of nature in the warmth or even heat of late spring. This is the same season that has released water to burst the dam, and of course the garden's blossoming derives from water too. Thus there is an underlying connection between the garden and water, which emerges, as we have noted, in the imagery describing Katerina in this scene (the garden's blossoming may also be linked to the *rusalka* who is associated with the bringing of

growth to the fields).<sup>38</sup> The garden — as a garden of earthly delights — is at the centre of the exploration of sensuality, passion and the physical aspect of human nature in the story; by extension it also engages the theme of man's relations to the world of nature. Through its symbolic associations it raises themes of paradise (Katerina refers to it as such) and original sin, knowledge of good and evil, and it participates centrally in the projection of the story onto a mythic plane.<sup>39</sup> It is also a site of densely woven detail, connections and ambiguities.

The first mention of a garden is in the opening chapter when we learn that the Izmailovs' property includes a 'profitable garden/orchard' outside the town,<sup>40</sup> as well as the mill they rent and their house (p. 7). The garden thus contributes to the economic power that has bought Katerina into marriage and so it is implicated in the (unspoken) original sin of the story.

The garden attached to the house first appears near the start of Chapter 2 as an arena, alongside the yard, for Katerina to exercise her freedom and enter life: 'Outside in the yard the weather was wonderful: warm, bright, cheery, and through the green wooden lattice of the garden [skvoz' zeleniuiu dereviannuiu reshetchku sada] various birds could be seen flitting from branch to branch in the trees' (p. 9).<sup>41</sup> The description, however, through use of the word 'reshetchka', a 'lattice' or 'grille' that *inter alia* can refer to the bars of a prison or cage, thereby carries an implicit association of the garden with imprisonment, although Katerina is ostensibly about to break out from her confines. The ambiguity is reinforced spatially: is Katerina looking through the lattice to an open space beyond where birds fly freely, or is she looking into an enclosed space where the movement of the birds echoes her own from room to room in the house (a connection that we are perhaps more likely to make only retrospectively when in Chapter 3 she is

<sup>38</sup> The *rusalka's* bringing of water to the fields is part of the springtime ritual of *Rusal'naia nedelia* (see Moyle, p. 228).

<sup>39</sup> Concerning the history and symbolism of the garden in Russian and European culture/history, see D. S. Likhachev, *Poeziia sadov. K semantike sadovo-parkovykh stilei*, Leningrad, 1982. In contrast to Leskov's garden and heroine, Ostrovskii's Katerina in *Groza* recalls her childhood as a time/site where religion and the garden were fused as a religious/natural idyll, such that she would go into the garden in the early morning and pray (she also calls herself then a 'bird at freedom') (see A. N. Ostrovskii, *Sobranie sochinenii*, 6 vols, comp. O. Dorofeev, Moscow, 1999–2001, vol. 2, p. 48). Another interesting comparison may be made with the imperfect idyll of the garden/world of Gogol's old-world landowners, in which cats also play a transgressive role (see Nina Gourianova, 'Landscape of Transformation: Metamorphosis in Gogol's *Old-World Landowners*', *Essays in Poetics*, 29, 2004, pp. 31–46 [pp. 36–38]).

<sup>40</sup> For convenience I will refer throughout to the garden as garden, rather than as orchard.

<sup>41</sup> I take the 'lattice' to be a visual image of the criss-cross of branches, rather than an actual wooden lattice or trellis bordering the garden, but the association with imprisonment/enclosure applies either way (and the image can be open to both interpretations).

likened to a caged bird by Sergei)? It is also worth noting that the linking of human and animal is initiated, playfully, in this yard scene with the likening of Aksin'ia to a 'pig' (p. 9).

In Chapter 6, the garden scene itself, the ambiguous and liminal significance of the garden is developed further: it is located not just between the apparently free and the enclosed, but it is itself an enclosed space (as, of course, is paradise or its image in this world, such as the monastery garden *hortus conclusus*);<sup>42</sup> and it is also located between the world of nature and of man/society. Thus, while it is seemingly part of the natural world, it is also a domesticated space through its function as the setting for tea drinking and the presence within it of the samovar. It is notable too that the house and bedroom are included within the space of the chapter itself, as its opening, and that the cat of Katerina's dream in this opening is an animal particularly associated with the duality of the wild and the domestic. The enclosure of the garden itself, which, as we have just seen, is ambiguously intimated in Chapter 2, is not initially highlighted here (unlike the house which is very quickly and definitively identified as enclosed), and so as a space it may seem to be an arena of freedom rather than imprisonment. However, the lovers' site within it is subtly represented as enclosed, both by man and nature: on a rug and under an apple tree (p. 18); this site is itself a transposition of the bedroom in the house (the link between the rug and the 'woollen cloth' [p. 16] draping the bedroom window is explored in the next paragraph).<sup>43</sup> Furthermore, as we shall see, the imagery of enclosure thoroughly infiltrates the description of the 'golden night' (p. 18) the lovers spend beneath the apple tree. Leskov's presentation of the garden motif suggests that engaging in the sensual side of our nature and being at one with nature are not at all an unproblematic exercise in simplicity and freedom, to borrow the words used to characterize Katerina's life before marriage. It is not just Katerina's ready assumption of socio-economic power that renders the garden an adjunct of the house and hence projects onto it the motif of imprisonment; but, as mentioned in the preceding section, the physical or animal nature of man can also be seen as an imprisonment and in pursuing this side of our nature, through sexual love, we may not — or do not — free ourselves, but the opposite.

<sup>42</sup> Concerning the monastery garden in medieval Russia, see Likhachev, pp. 42–57: on its dual symbolism as Mother of God (purity/chastity) and paradise (eternal spring and happiness of mankind in a sinless state), see p. 43; on the monastery garden as enclosed, see p. 45.

<sup>43</sup> The rug or cloth on which to sit or lie in the garden is a standard feature of the topos; what is interesting is the way in which Leskov ties this into the motifs of both confinement and sensuality through the material of the rug (as explored in the next paragraph in the main text).

In this connection, as just indicated, it is worth returning to the 'woollen cloth [sherstianoi platok]' (p. 16) that reinforces the enclosure of the bedroom at the start of the chapter. This detail works metonymically, both as attribute and adjunct, as a motif of sensuality. In turn it then transforms straight away into the 'furry coat [pushistaia sherst']' (p. 16) of the cat in Katerina's dream and then into the 'furry rug [pushisty kover]' (p. 18) — the sensual from the house transported to the garden — on which the lovers disport themselves, so that Katerina is symbolically enclosed in her animal sensuality, both vertically, in the bedroom, and horizontally, in the garden (it is worth noting too that [cat] fur can be associated with pubic hair).<sup>44</sup> In this respect the repeated image of the garden 'lattice'/'grille' in Chapter 8, when the night of passion and murder is concluded, is highly interesting: 'When they returned to the bedroom, a thin red strip of dawn was showing in the east. Lightly touching the apple trees, clothed in blossom, with gold, it peered through the green poles of the garden lattice [skvoz' zelenye palki sadovoi reshetki] into Katerina L'vovna's room' (p. 29). Here it appears that Katerina is separated from the outside world of nature, or from paradise, and indeed from now on she is firmly located in the 'sinful' house, as its mistress, until it is broken into at the discovery of the crimes. In context, however, this retreat into the house does not unambiguously redeem nature as 'free' and 'simple', or innocent: on the contrary, the 'lattice'/'grille' is a feature of the garden, and nature in the shape of the apple tree is explicitly associated with the postlapsarian motif of being clothed. Rather, what underlies the imagery is the paradoxical affinity with nature and separation from it that characterizes the human condition; moreover, when Katerina becomes at one with nature at the end this is negative and reductive, for it is her animal side that takes over as she is likened to a predatory pike.

The ambiguous status of the garden is manifested in its symbolic significance too: as paradise and a prelapsarian Garden of Eden, also the site of original sin and the knowledge of good and evil, or as the world of nature and the senses and a postlapsarian garden of (sinful) earthly delights. Such ambiguity is further evidenced not only within

<sup>44</sup> The final transformation of this motif is found in the 'woollen stockings [sherstianye chulki]' (p. 45) which are transferred to adorn Sonetka's legs by Sergei's betrayal in the last chapter. Yet again too we see how the motif develops through associative fields and connotation alongside simple repetition: thus the third instance 'furry rug [pushisty kover]' omits the word 'sherst'/'sherstianoi' that initiates the motif but repeats the epithet 'pushisty' and echoes the 'cloth' in the form of rug both as a woven cloth and rectangular in shape. Similarly, the motif is linked to that of the cat, and hence to the cats that tumble off the roof at the end of Chapter 6, as well as to the nightmarish cat that appears to Katerina in her second dream at the start of the Chapter 7. The motif of cat fur recurs, with a splendid ironical resonance, in Sergei's coat, which is 'trimmed with cat fur [pushisty kotik]' (p. 33), once he has become master of the house; the final reference to a cat occurs at the very end when Sergei taunts Katerina, calling her a 'ragged pussy cat [koshka obodrannaia]' (p. 48), in other words a cat whose fur has lost its vitality and sensuality.

the chapter itself, but also in its contextualization. Thus, Katerina and Sergei enter the garden not in innocence but already in guilt; but within the garden it is still spring and so, rather than choosing to eat the fruit of the tree, the lovers are scattered with the petals of blossom;<sup>45</sup> and Katerina enters the garden clothed, she becomes semi-undressed during the course of the night, and then is naked — or at least completely undressed — only after leaving the garden and returning to the marital bed, where her dream of the cat turns to a hellish apparition. In this way Leskov mingles and inverses both pre- and postlapsarian indicators in such a way as to recontextualize the meanings associated with the garden's symbolism.

If the story carries indications of the body as a prison for the soul, it also gives rein to an engagement with the physical. Indeed, the acuity of Leskov's presentation of the problematics of sensuality is enhanced by the remarkably suggestive and open way in which the exploration of love as sexual, physical passion is addressed: in McLean's words, it is 'the most evocative treatment of pure sexuality Leskov ever wrote, and one of the most powerful in all Russian literature'.<sup>46</sup> The motif of sensuality is introduced almost immediately in the description of Katerina at the start of the second paragraph of the first chapter:

Катерина Львовна не родилась красавицей, но была по наружности женщина очень приятная. Ей от роду шел всего двадцать четвертый год; роста она была невысокого, но стройная, шея точно из мрамора выточенная, плечи круглые, грудь крепкая, носик прямой, тоненький, глаза черные, живые, белый высокий лоб и черные, аж досиня черные волосы. (p. 7)

Katerina L'vovna was not a beauty from birth, but she was a very good looking woman. She was only twenty three; she was not tall, but she was well-proportioned, her neck could have been sculpted from marble, she had round shoulders, firm breasts, a straight, thin little nose, eyes that were black and lively, a high white forehead and black, such shining black hair.

By following on from the gentry gossip that has tagged her as Lady Macbeth, a male gaze is readily assumed and through the wording of

<sup>45</sup> The fact that in the Russian Bible the tree is identified as the 'tree of life', rather than specifically as an apple tree, does not of course affect the symbolism of the tree here, and it is the apple tree that features in the Russian monastery garden as symbol of paradise (see Likhachev, p. 45). As an example of the story's heterogeneous intertextuality, in the Russian folk lyric song the blossoming apple tree is linked to the young maiden and has explicit sexual connotations (see Wigzell, p. 180). It is interesting, nevertheless, that Leskov's method contrives to give the fruit itself an appearance in the text, when the density of the crowd at/outside the church in Chapter 12 is described as follows: 'there was not even room for an apple to fall' (p. 36).

<sup>46</sup> McLean, p. 147. Part 2 of Muller de Morogues's book is devoted to the subject of eros in Leskov (see Muller de Morogues, pp. 235–411; on female sexuality, pleasure and desire, see pp. 261–69).

the introductory sentence, with its focus on her appearance, is even invited; by extension too, the temptation of her sexuality is intimated. What is striking in this description is not only the characteristic juxtaposition (and pleasing combination) of opposites — black/white, not high/high — but also the attention to sound play which embodies both the sensuality of Katerina and the nature of the gaze directed at her, as, for example, in the following sequence: ‘sheia tochno iz mramora vytochennaiia, plechi kruglye, grud’ krepkaia.’ The aesthetic aspect is further enhanced by the play with the word order of adjective(s) and noun, and the build-up from one to two adjectives to the final ‘black, black hair’. The sound play is perhaps particularly notable in relation to her breast (with which, in a betrayal of the maternal, she subsequently presses down the pillow she uses to smother Fedia).<sup>47</sup>

The most strikingly sensual passages hereafter occur, fittingly, in the garden chapter. With its descriptions of nature and of the lovers, this chapter draws the reader into its texture, inviting us to participate in an absorption in the sensual and hence, at the least, complicating our response to Katerina, who has already murdered once and by the end of the chapter has resolved to do so again. The effect is reinforced by the slowing down of the narrative pace, which makes the chapter stand out in contrast to the story’s dominant mode; we are seemingly out of time, although all the while time is in fact hurrying Zinovii Borisych on his way home. This is also the longest chapter, and its greater length strikes especially in comparison to the preceding chapter in which the tyrannical Boris Timofeich’s murder is dealt with in such a brief and indirect manner that we may read on without much pause for thought (hence embarking on a complicity with Katerina). The chapter begins with Katerina’s erotic dream of the cat rubbing itself against her and quietly singing:<sup>48</sup>

<sup>47</sup> Concerning the gaze in Leskov and his views on female physical appearance, the positive associations of a large, full-bodied type and the negative associations of the small and especially the skinny (prone to passion), see Muller de Morogues, pp. 21–27, 249–56. Muller de Morogues suggests that Volynskii may have extrapolated Leskov’s own views on the female body too literally from his works, but she too notes the breast fixation that may be traced through his work (see Muller de Morogues, pp. 251, 263; Volynskii, pp. 117–21); see also note 61 below. Volynskii suggests that Katerina is ambivalently placed on the Leskovian scale, between the ‘wonderful, luxurious’ Fiona and the ‘sharp-faced little blonde’ Sonetka (Volynskii, pp. 120–21). The main physical description of these two women, who contrast not only with each other but also, in their different ways, with Katerina too (along with their similarities), is present in the original version but was extended by some ten lines in the 1867 version to establish explicitly the differences in character too: the capricious, choosy Sonetka, Fiona as ‘Russian simplicity’ in her easy-going ways (pp. 40–41; compare *LM*, 1865, p. 73).

<sup>48</sup> Concerning this dream, as well as the nightmarish apparition in the following chapter, in the context of interpretations of dreams of cats as a bad omen in Russian popular culture, see Faith Wigzell, ‘Russian Dream Books and Lady Macbeth’s Cat’, *Slavonic and East European Review*, 66, 1988, pp. 625–30.

А кот промежду ее с Сергеем трется, такой славный, серый, рослый да претолстующий толстый ... и усы как у оброчного бурмистра. Катерина Львовна заворошилась в его пушистой шерсти, а он так к ней с рылом и лезет: тычется тупой мордой в упругую грудь, а сам такую тихонькую песню поет, будто ею про любовь рассказывает. (p. 16)

The cat rubbed itself between her and Sergei, it was such a fine tomcat, grey, well-grown and fat, fat as they come ... and with whiskers like a bailiff. Katerina L'vovna explored his furry coat while he snuggled his muzzle up to her: he pressed his blunt snout into her firm breasts and sang such a quiet song, as if he was telling her a story of love.

The sound play here is even more prominent and suggestive: for example, 'roslyi da pretolstiuschii tolsty', 'zavoroshilas' v ego pushistoi shersti', 'tychetsia tupoi mordoi v upruguiu grud'.

The most extended sensual passage comes in the middle of the chapter following Katerina's exclamation 'paradise, what a paradise' (p. 18). Over four paragraphs Leskov evokes the moonlit night, where the magical effect of the light turns Katerina into a sensuous, dappled figure. The richness of the description, with its appeal to the senses, to light, sound, smell, accords with classic features of the garden paradise, but it is punctuated by directly or obliquely ambivalent, ambiguous or discordant elements. It is a 'golden night', but also a scene conducive to 'dark desires' (p. 18).<sup>49</sup> The heady quiet of the garden is accompanied in the third paragraph by a backdrop of sounds which are described or located in ways that may be seen either to dissolve the enclosed space or else to emphasize the motif of enclosure — or indeed to produce both of these effects at the same time:

Золотая ночь! Тишина, свет, аромат и благотворная, оживляющая теплота. Далеко за оврагом, позади сада, кто-то завел звучную песню; под забором в густом черемушнике шелкнул и громко заколотил соловей; в клетке на высоком шесте забредил сонный перепел, и жирная лошадь томно вздохнула за стенкой конюшни, а по выгону за садовым забором пронеслась без всякого шума веселая стая собак и исчезла в безобразной, черной тени полуразвалившихся, старых соляных магазинов. (pp. 18–19)

A golden night! Quiet; light; sweet scent; and a beneficent, enlivening warmth. Far away beyond the ravine, behind the garden, someone started up a sonorous song; below the fence in the dense cherry thicket a nightingale trilled and struck up a loud song; in a cage on a tall post a drowsy quail sang dreamily, and a plump horse let out a languid sigh on the other

<sup>49</sup> In the 1865 edition the desires are 'languorous' ('tomitel'nyi') not 'dark' ('temnyi'), a change which preserves the sound texture but makes clearer the ambivalence of the description (compare *LM*, 1865, p. 50).



side of the stable wall; and a merry pack of dogs tore noiselessly across the pasture beyond the garden fence and disappeared in the formless black shadow of the half-derelict old salt storehouses.

Here each sound is located in relation to a boundary or enclosure: the song in the distance 'beyond the ravine', the nightingale in the cherry up against or 'below the fence' (by implication, repeating the motif of the high fence), the horse 'on the other side of/beyond' the stable wall, the dogs 'beyond the garden fence', and, embedded in the middle of the paragraph, on its 'tall' post, the caged quail — the parallel to Katerina who has been described by Sergei as a caged bird. There is a further possible aspect to this image of the caged bird, in relation to the notion of the soul as imprisoned in the body, for the bird, in Russian folklore, as more generally, can stand for the soul: thus in the very centre of Katerina's paradise is a potential image of her soul as caged just as she is exercising the freedom of the flesh; in escaping the cage of the house through the freedom of physical passion she has committed her soul to a cage within the paradise of sensuality. The final image of the disappearance of the 'merry pack' ('veselaia stiaia') of dogs — a complex echo both of the playful fun of the yard scene and of the release of the chained dogs — in a 'formless [or monstrous] black shadow' creates a further ominous counterpart to the sense of golden magic; moreover, dogs can be associated with the spirits of the dead who are doomed to wander rather than rest at peace (note also that these dogs move noiselessly). So if paradise is a perfect and yet also enclosed space, then this garden is a compromised paradise in a whole range of ways: it is compromised by the intrusion of sounds from outside as well as by the ominous detail; in addition, the passage foregrounds boundaries and enclosure as such, within and outside the garden, not just around it.

While expressing the sensuality of the golden night, the description also conveys a specific viewpoint, that of Katerina (for Sergei, meanwhile, is unmoved and is looking at his boots):

Катерина Львовна приподнялась на локоть и глянула на высокую садовую траву; а трава так и играет с лунным блеском, дробящимся о цветы и листья деревьев. Всю ее позолотили эти прихотливые, светлые пятнышки и так на ней и мелькают, так и трепещутся, словно живые огненные бабочки, или как будто вот вся трава под деревьями взялась лунной сеткой и ходит из стороны в сторону. (p. 19)

Katerina L'vovna raised herself up on one elbow and looked at the tall garden grass; it was like the grass was playing with the light of the moon that filtered through the blossom and leaves of the trees. All the grass was turned gold by these capricious spots of light, they flickered and quivered over it like living fiery butterflies; or it was as if all the grass under the trees had been caught in a net of moonlight and was swaying from side to side.

As she takes in the scene Katerina has been lying down, and even when she half raises herself on her elbow, she looks at the 'tall garden grass'. Both adjectives are significant: the height of the grass encloses Katerina, while the repetition of 'sadovyi' emphasizes the garden motif. Katerina's position at ground level in the garden is symbolic: she is here placed in the position of the serpent after the Fall in the Garden of Eden, ready half a page later to 'wind herself round her lover' (p. 19), an image that links into a web of references to the snake and temptation both in this chapter and through the text.<sup>50</sup> As we have seen, another, overlapping transformation — into a fish and/or perhaps a mermaid — may also be suggested by the image of Katerina surrounded as if by a net of moonlight projected onto the grass. Such associations aside, the imagery of entrapment is here brought right down into the garden grass. Whether Katerina is viewed as lying on the 'furry rug' that she brings with her or in the 'tall garden grass' that the garden provides, the sensual aspect of human nature and the affinity with the world of nature can again be seen to be problematized as a site of potential human entrapment and imprisonment as well as, or rather than, freedom.

At the end of their conversation Katerina, manipulated by Sergei and deceived by her own jealous infatuation, is ready for anything and vows to make him a merchant (that is, to murder her husband). The garden is thus corrupted by false words, jealousy and economic power, and by death: Katerina is not just ready for murder but has also threatened that she will not part with Sergei while alive. The chapter ends with a final description of the lovers' night and their departure from the garden. The penultimate paragraph — its texture full of ambiguities, dissonances, sound play, echoes and linkages (as in the water imagery

<sup>50</sup> The snake is a feature of the characters' discourse of condemnation: Sergei is called an 'asp' by Boris Timofeich (p. 14), when Katerina confronts her husband with Sergei, Zinovii Borisych says: 'What are you doing, you snake?' (p. 26), and at the end Katerina calls Sergei a 'base serpent' following his betrayal (p. 47). The initial tempter was Sergei, and this whole scene in the garden is informed by temptation and deception: Katerina is stirred by jealousy and, seeking to provoke Sergei's reaction, she calls him a 'deceiver', while Sergei excuses his earlier dalliances as 'temptation' and eventually calls love a 'black snake sucking at my heart' (pp. 19–21). The motif of winding/coiling is subsequently applied to Sonetka, to whom Sergei transfers his attention after a brief dalliance with Fiona. It is reported that people call her a slippery person, someone constantly on the move, using the idiomatic 'v'iuu' in this meaning and adding that 'she twirls [v'etsia] around your hands but doesn't get caught' (p. 40); 'v'iuu' is also a fish (a loach), thereby linking Sonetka to the dual imagery of snake and fish associated with Katerina in the garden and adumbrating her descent with Katerina into the Volga, a carp seized by a predatory pike. In this context it is at least intriguing that the imagery of winding/coiling is used to describe the flight of the boat hook and rope thrown in to save the two women: 'A heavy boat hook flew up [vzvilsia] on a long rope and fell into the water' (p. 49). As a means of attempted rescue the heavy boat hook seems most likely to sink before it can offer a life line; or perhaps, even at the moment of apparently irrevocable descent, the alternative of salvation is ambiguously present.

already noted) — traces a course from the lovers' laughing love play, presented as if children were 'making wicked fun of feeble old age' or as if from tickling by *rusalki*, through the blossom that 'showers' on to the lovers, to the ugly parody of the sounds of sex in the 'piercing duet of cats' that then, with 'spitting' and 'angry snorting', 'two or three' of them come tumbling down from the roof (pp. 21–22). The return of the cats both echoes Katerina's erotic dream and presages its return as an apparition of the murdered Boris Timofeich in her nightmare at the start of the next chapter. When Katerina leaves the garden in the final sentence, the slowness of her movement encapsulates the slowing down of the plot through the chapter:

— Пойдем спать, — сказала Катерина Львовна медленно, словно разбитая, приподнимаясь с ковра, и как лежала в одной рубашке да в белых юбках, так и пошла по тихому, до мертвенности тихому купеческому двору, а Сергей понес за нею коверчик и блузу, которую она, расшалившись, сбросила. (p. 22)

— Let's go to bed, said Katerina L'vovna as she slowly, as if shattered, got up from the rug; and as she had been lying, just in her slip and white petticoat, so she set off across the silent, deathly silent, merchant's yard, while Sergei followed her carrying the rug and her blouse which she had playfully thrown off.

The description of Katerina as 'shattered'/'broken' as she makes her way, half-undressed, through the 'deathly quiet' of the yard presages her tragic end (the word 'broken' [razbityi] returns in the final chapter when, following Sergei's betrayal, Katerina sleeps 'with a broken soul' [p. 45]), and the image of 'deathly quiet' not only echoes the silent house at the beginning, extended — as before the initial sexual encounter — to the yard, but also locates the story's terrain from here on as one of death.<sup>51</sup> Indeed, the sensual, physical element very shortly turns into the graphical, hands-on description of the murder of Zinovii Borisych. On leaving the garden only death awaits.

But desolation also awaits the garden. When Katerina embarks on her punishment in the final part of the story (Chapters 13–15), there is a brief indication that the weather, though spring in terms of the calendar, is not yet spring in terms of weather, but Chapters 13 and 14 contain no further description of the weather or natural surroundings. For when Katerina sets out on the convicts' journey she is oblivious to everything except Sergei so that she has no need to accommodate to her dire surroundings. Instead, for her the journey 'blossoms with happiness' (p. 39). In other words, she has transported with her the

<sup>51</sup> This scene also carries a likely echo of Lady Macbeth's sleepwalking; a further, but inverted, situational echo of *Macbeth* lies in the motif of the husband's return (not to murder but to be murdered) which continues into the bedroom scene that follows.

scene in the garden as her love for Sergei; her inner world is the opposite of the world outside. She has also left the house, and all that it stands for, behind, and is motivated exclusively by her love. Katerina remains deluded in her happiness through the first two chapters of the journey, at the end of which she is tricked into giving up her 'woollen stockings [sherstianye chulki]' (p. 44), thereby also severing her ties with this motif of the sensual associated with 'sherst'.<sup>52</sup>

In the course of Chapter 15, however, the true state of Katerina's garden, manifested in the weather and landscape, is progressively revealed alongside the tragic denouement of her story. The opening sentence briefly sets the scene of cold, wind and rain mixed with snow, as the preface to Katerina's realization of her betrayal by Sergei: 'A cold, miserable day, with a gusty wind and rain that was turning to snow, met the party with a grim welcome' (p. 44). Following her whipping at the hands of Sergei, punished and humiliated to the level of Fiona on whose breast she weeps, the truth of what has happened to the garden becomes clear (from the weeping on Fiona's breast through to the hellish landscape and grim moral, a whole page was added in the 1867 edition).<sup>53</sup> Instead of the luxurious, sensuous warmth of the garden of the 'golden night', Katerina is faced by a desolate, hellish landscape where hope is abandoned:

Безотраднейшая картина: горсть людей, оторванных от света и лишенных всякой тени надежд на лучшее будущее, тонет в холодной черной грязи грунтовой дороги. Кругом все до ужаса безобразно: бесконечная грязь, серое небо, безлиственные, мокрые ракиты и в растопыренных их сучьях нахолившаяся ворона. Ветер то стонет, то злится, то воеет и ревет.

В этих адских, душу раздирающих звуках, которые довершают весь ужас картины, звучат советы жены библейского Иова: «Прокляни день твоего рождения и умри». (p. 46)

The grimmest picture: a handful of people, torn from the world and deprived of any shadow of hope for a better future, sinking in the cold black mud of the dirt road. All around everything is horrifically ugly: endless mud, grey sky, leafless, wet willows with a spiky crow in their wide spread branches. The wind moans and rages, howls and roars.

In these hellish sounds, sounds that tear the soul apart and complete the whole horror of the picture, there rings out the counsel of Job's wife in the Bible: 'Curse the day of your birth and die'.

<sup>52</sup> See note 44 above; along with the desolation of the garden sensuality in relation to the body is now associated not with pleasure but with pain (Katerina gives up her stockings to alleviate, supposedly, Sergei's painful feet, thereby by implication giving up also her own defence against such pain).

<sup>53</sup> This is the longest and most important addition to the text in the 1867 version; it not only makes explicit the hellish dimension of the landscape but also has a significant and ambivalent impact in the moral reading of the story (see below, in the final section of the article).

The element of water is taking over: the earth is cold, black, endless mud, into which people sink; the trees are leafless and wet; the only bird is the sinister crow; and the wind howls hellishly. The scene and the fate of those inhabiting it are presented impersonally, intensifying the desolation. The bleak moral is from the Book of Job,<sup>54</sup> and faced with such hopelessness a person, especially the 'simple person', is reduced to letting loose their 'animal simplicity' and 'becomes evil' (p. 46);<sup>55</sup> we will return to this passage in the final section below.

The weather is again described as the river is approached: 'grey clouds covering the sky', 'wet flakes of snow', 'impassable mud', the 'dark leaden strip [polosa]'<sup>56</sup> that is the Volga, its 'other bank out of sight', a 'strongish wind' and the 'wide-mouthed waves' (p. 47). Cold, wet snow and mud lead to the water, which is formed by the wind into waves (through the use of the word 'past' — an animal's mouth — even the waves take on animal form). As a final detail, when on the ferry, the convicts are 'showered by wet flakes of snow' (p. 47) as in the garden Katerina had been by blossom (and as once she had showered sunflower seeds on a passing lad). All that remains is the descent into the water, accompanied by apparitions of those she has murdered and, like a pike, killing yet once more herself, to the 'moaning [ston]' (p. 48) from the waves.

Thus, the dual resolution of the motif of the garden and sensuality lies, on the one hand, in the garden's (nature's) desolation and, on the other, in the final, negative realization of the sensual/natural with Katerina's descent into the animal.

#### *Architectonics and symbolic framework*

Examination of the story's overarching, archetypal motifs has shown how dense and yet open a texture Leskov weaves through his composition of recurrent, shifting and overlapping details; the main motifs, while tracing their own line of unfolding, are also interwoven, and there is an 'amplitude' in the story's meanings generated by this composition. Now in this final section I would like to turn to the architectonics of the

<sup>54</sup> The actual biblical text says 'curse God, and die' (Job, 2, ix).

<sup>55</sup> The reference to the 'simple man' and to 'animal simplicity' echoes the quality of simplicity, along with freedom, associated with Katerina's early life. To state the obvious, the 'simple man', the 'simple life' and, in general, the 'simple'/'simplicity' represent a huge, rich and complex topic for study in nineteenth-century Russian culture; this is a large and complex topic in Leskov himself, and he would certainly be a key figure for consideration in any overarching account.

<sup>56</sup> It is interesting to trace the three occurrences of the word 'polosa' in the text: it first occurs in relation to the dawn which looks through the 'lattice' of the garden into the bedroom after the murder of Zinovii Borisyeh; it then becomes the chink of light through the shutters which reveals the murder of Fedia; and finally here it becomes the 'dark leaden' river that conveys Katerina's fate, and conveys Katerina to her fate.

motifs and a wider consideration of the chronotope and the moral and symbolic framework of the text.

The three main motifs examined have complementary roles. At the level of formal organization, the water motif carries the trope of the story's intensive movement, while the house embodies the main unity of space; an alternative counterpoint is created between the dominant mode of intensive movement and the slowing down of the narrative in the central and longest chapter, the scene in the garden paradise with its symbolic association of a place out of time. All three motifs come together in the story's finale: the water motif reaches its full realization in the final chapter, the imprisonment of the house is transformed into the convicts' convoy, and the blossoming garden of late spring also returns, only transformed into a desolate landscape of mud, wind and water. The development and elaboration of the motifs may be marked by inversion, circularity (or cyclicity) and, especially, the juxtaposition or combination of alternatives or opposites. Thus, the water motif combines both life and death, moving from the former to the latter; the motif of the garden and sensuality is resolved not only in the desolation of the garden but also in the negative realization of Katerina's sensuality, her descent into the animal, what might be seen as the desolation of her higher human nature; and her fate itself has a dual aspect, not only descent into the animal but also a soul's passing into limbo (transformation into a *rusalka*) and the world of the dead (the river journey to the other world). At the same time, as we have seen, juxtaposition of alternatives or opposites informs the elaboration of these motifs at every level, down to the individual sentence, in a way that consistently creates ambivalence, ambiguity and a dense openness of semantic texture. We can say that the process of juxtaposition, located in the coexistence and correlation of alterities, is central to Leskov's view of the world.

Individually and together, the motifs generate a constellation of themes: crime and punishment; good and evil; socio-economic power, patriarchy and gender roles/identity; freedom as a natural element; the world of nature and human nature; the physical, sensual, animal dimension of human nature; sexual passion and love. While the symbolic and mythic planes are primarily generated by the motifs of water and the garden, the motif of imprisonment/enclosure, centred on the house, organizes the dominant thematic ambiance of the text; it intersects with the motif of water and permeates the representation of the garden. In this way, a key underlying problematic of the text — and an example of the coexistence and correlation of alterities at a fundamental level of existence — concerns human life in the conjunction of the world of man (the house and all it stands for) and the world of nature (water, the garden and all they stand for). More specifically, Leskov's presentation of this problematic most acutely centres on the

engagement with the physical, sensual side of human nature, in its range from sensual absorption in the body and in nature to descent into the animal. The thematic prominence of imprisonment/enclosure also links, as we have seen, to the opposition of closed and open as one of the key underlying features of Leskov's worldview; in relation to the juxtaposition of alterities, openness lies in the maintenance of the dynamic of alterities, closure in its suspension. The story is a study of contrasting ways in which we may open or close ourselves to the world, but with closure in the ascendancy. On the one hand, there is the merchant world of the enclosed Izmailov house, its oppressive socio-economic and patriarchal order: here Katerina is first the victim of this world and then assumes its mantle. On the other hand, Katerina's liberation into life becomes, paradoxically, a headlong, exclusive pursuit of self-expression in passionate, sexual love which leads to imprisonment and (en)closure at a number of levels.

Indeed, Leskov's presentation of sexual passion is remarkable for its suggestive engagement with the sensual, but it is also highly ambivalent in its implications. In this the story forms a crucial part of an exploration of the problematics of sex, sexuality and sexual love in his work, especially in this early period. As Muller de Morogues has shown, drawing on his entire *oeuvre*, there is an unresolved tension in Leskov's presentation of sexual love: he affirms the place of sexual love in human nature, and perhaps nowhere with more force than in this story, but sexual passion brings with it punishment, and the erotic needs to be located within a higher and/or conjugal love.<sup>57</sup> The trajectory of Katerina's story is indeed starkly clear: her 'terrible drama' leads to murder and death and a descent into the animal and into limbo/hell. The text invokes not only a shared feeling for the sensual but also a 'shudder in the soul [*dushevnyi trepet*]' (p. 7), as the story's effect is characterized in the opening paragraph, at where sexual passion can lead. While sex initially releases Katerina into life and opens her to a sensual engagement with her own nature and the world of nature at large, the single-minded pursuit of her passion ultimately closes her to life and leads to death, the death of others and finally her own. The garden of earthly delights is corrupted and implicated in the entrapment of human nature in the flesh; the soul is a prisoner of the body; and sex is linked to death. It is worth noting too that sex as practised by

<sup>57</sup> In a letter to L. I. Veselitskaia of 9 June 1893, Leskov states that he 'cannot accept his [Tolstoi's] view on sexual relations, as inconsistent with the demands of nature' (*Sob.soch.*, vol. 11, p. 540). See Muller de Morogues: on passion, punishment/death and expiation (pp. 331–65); on marriage as a union of souls (pp. 423–40: this is the first chapter of Part 3, 'Agape', pp. 415–534); see also McLean, pp. 118–20 (on 'Zhitie odnoi baby' [The Life of a Peasant Martyress, 1863]), pp. 146–51 (on *Ledi Makbet Mtsenskogo uezda*), pp. 156–61 (on 'Voitel'nitsa' [The Battle-axe, 1866]), pp. 179–83 (on 'Kotin doilets i Platonida').

Sergei, Sonetka and the easy-going Fiona also gets them into trouble, even deadly trouble, in its way, although this is not sexual passion. At the same time the text offers no example of sexual moderation, nor of abstinence.<sup>58</sup>

But Katerina's fate derives also from her character, her passionate nature and lack of moderation, so that her commitment to her love knows 'no measure', as is also the case for her sense of insult when jilted (pp. 21, 45); a certain quality of meekness, which Katerina so notably lacks, is something that Leskov values in many of his positive figures. A nature such as Katerina's let loose in sexual love is disastrous, yet the simple truth of passionate love that Leskov depicts also transcends the notion of degree and measure. For Leskov is a champion of the ordinary and unremarkable, but may be drawn as well to human nature exemplified in extremes, as in traditional tragedy (and in both respects he is also an explorer and portrayer of Russianness).<sup>59</sup> The story's title and its heroine, Katerina, each encompass both these aspects: the title conjoins an emblem of the extreme manifestation of human nature (Lady Macbeth) and an emblem of ordinariness (the provincial Russian setting of Mtsensk); Katerina herself is any other simple Russian girl, albeit with a passionate character, who in the space of little time and few pages is transformed into an extreme of what human beings are capable of. In this way the story participates in the negotiation of the tragic in the modern world and the representation of the archetypal hero/heroine in the contrasting, but not necessarily exclusive, terms of the exceptional and/or the ordinary.

For all the story's openness in exploring the sensual, in gender terms it is largely one-sided: while Sergei's good looks and track record are noted, sensuality is explored primarily through the feminine. At the same time, the maternal path, which could have been an alternative way out of her predicament, is one that Katerina does not wholeheartedly embrace and then turns against or betrays, first in murdering Fedia, smothering him with a pillow held down by her breast, and then

<sup>58</sup> Concerning chastity and love beyond/without sexual relations, and also the androgynous Kotin Pizonskii, for whom Leskov coins a masculine form 'doilets' of 'doilitsa', a cow that is a good milker, see Muller de Morogues, pp. 441–63, 514–17; for McLean, the case of Pizonskii shows that 'in Leskov's moral system desexualization is often the price of male sainthood' (McLean, p. 180).

<sup>59</sup> For their definitive exposition of the 'prosaic', the significance of the everyday, see Morson and Emerson; as for extremes, a comparative study of *Ledi Mak bet Mtsenskogo uezda* and *Ocharovannyi strannik* (The Enchanted Wanderer, 1873) might offer significant insights into Leskov's view of human nature and Russianness, sensuality and asceticism, damnation and salvation. Concerning the Russianness of Katerina's extreme character, see Lantz, pp. 252–55; the story was originally offered to *Epokha* as the first in a series of depictions of Russian provincial female types (see Leskov's letter to Strakhov of 7 December 1864, *Sob.soch.*, vol. 10, p. 153). Concerning *Ocharovannyi strannik*, see R. A. Peace, 'The Enchanted Wanderer: A Parable of National Identity', *Russian Literature*, 29, 1991, pp. 439–54.



in giving up her own child (however, Leskov's presentation of the mother/child theme in relation to Katerina is significantly, and ambivalently, enhanced in the 1867 edition). Certainly, the patriarchal Izmailov order is portrayed as oppressive and complicit in the sin of the house, but Katerina's pursuit of socio-economic power becomes in turn a powerful, corollary agent in the murders of her husband and Fedia. Therefore, while taking an uncompromising view of the patriarchal order that subjugates women such as Katerina, the story does not offer any radical reevaluation of gender roles and so, in this respect, may broadly speaking be placed in the dominant male-authored tradition of Russian nineteenth-century literature.<sup>60</sup> In appropriating socio-economic power Katerina does not find liberation, rather the reverse, while in pursuing the passionate, sensual side of her nature she realizes the truth of the flesh but in a context which ultimately locates this truth in a trajectory of fall and death. Moreover, the text does not disturb a tendency to identify the feminine and the sensual, while it can also be inferred that a maternal role is the safe and appropriate path for a woman to follow.<sup>61</sup> Finally, while the main male characters are all subject to degrees of moral condemnation (the child Fedia excepted), and Sergei remains a worthless deceiver through to the end, the focus of the moral situation is clearly on Katerina.<sup>62</sup>

Leskov's presentation of the moral case of Katerina is by no means cut and dried, even if certain aspects of the story's ethical dimension may be overly simplistic. In this latter respect, alongside the

<sup>60</sup> Leskov does not in fact feature at all prominently in feminist/gender studies of nineteenth-century Russian literature (he does not feature, for example, in Barbara Heldt's seminal *Terrible Perfection: Women and Russian Literature*, Bloomington and Indianapolis, 1987). For an overview of such studies/approaches, see Rosalind Marsh, 'An Image of Their Own? Feminism, Revisionism and Russian Culture', in *Women and Russian Culture: Projections and Self-Perceptions*, ed. Rosalind Marsh, New York, Oxford, 1998, pp. 2–41; see also ead., 'Introduction: New Perspectives on Women and Gender in Russian Literature', in *Gender and Russian Literature: New Perspectives*, ed. Rosalind Marsh, Cambridge, 1996, pp. 1–37. Among other studies of contextual or comparative interest in relation to Leskov, see, for example: Engelstein, *The Keys to Happiness*; Amy Mandelker, *Framing 'Anna Karenina': Tolstoj, the Woman Question, and the Victorian Novel*, Columbus, OH, 1993; Peter Ulf Möller, *Postlude to the Kreutzer Sonata: Tolstoj and the Debate on Sexual Morality in Russian Literature in the 1890s*, trans. John Kendal, Leiden, 1988; Arja Rosenholm, *Gendering Awakening: Femininity and the Russian Woman Question of the 1860s*, Helsinki, 1999. One might venture to relate the inattention to Leskov in this context (notwithstanding Muller de Morogue's study) to his marginalization more generally. In a very obvious way Katerina can be related to the stereotype of demonic, whorish woman as opposed to virtuous, maternal madonna; there is some interest too in relating her to the derived Victorian stereotypes of madwoman in the attic as opposed to domestic angel.

<sup>61</sup> Leskov does, however, feature in Jane T. Costlow, 'The Pastoral Source: Representations of the Maternal Breast in Nineteenth-Century Russia', in *Sexuality and the Body in Russian Culture*, ed. Jane T. Costlow, Stephanie Sandler and Judith Vowles, Stanford, CA, 1993, pp. 223–36 (pp. 223–25, 231).

<sup>62</sup> See Muller de Morogues, pp. 471–72.

unproblematic worthlessness of Sergei and the oppression of the Izmailov patriarchy, there is the equally unproblematic moral certainty exemplified by the case of Fedia, both in his piety and in his murder; no less simplistic is the seductive case of Fiona, the 'tart with a heart'. At the same time, however, other markers of the ethical plane are distributed through the text in a way that tends to problematize an easy moral reading while not diminishing the story's moral import. To give just one example at this point: any ready moral condemnation is problematized at the very outset — and thence throughout, as our view of Katerina fluctuates, by reference to the title — when the demonizing tag of Lady Macbeth is contextualized as someone's 'light-hearted quip' which gets taken up by the local gentry (p. 7). McLean proposes an interpretation whereby the initial collusion with Katerina that the reader is led into has to be disrupted in the interests of morality, hence the introduction of Fedia and his murder; in the denouement Leskov, for McLean, 'recovers himself' through the 'pathetic commentary on human inconstancy'.<sup>63</sup> While one can accept this interpretation in broad terms, I would suggest that our reading of the text should be significantly more nuanced, and that its moral implications are more open. In an interesting way, the story is both demanding and undemanding of its readers. In her discussion of Leskov's moral world, Sperrle posits an organic worldview which is focused on 'movement and transformation in "an organic manner," a transformation in which death and rebirth alternate and condition each other', so that 'elements do not have *a priori* or fixed ontological moral values but only become moral in certain applications and can change their moral content'. It follows that 'this worldview does not start with a separation of good and evil [...] but integrates the two', hence Leskov's perceived 'moral fuzziness'. Sperrle elaborates on the way that evil and death are understood in this worldview: 'For Leskov, evil is a prerequisite for growth, thus an important element in his active Christology'; and in the process of 'continual renewal' in interpreting and reinterpreting the truth, 'the transformative model is based on life's cycles of death and rebirth'.<sup>64</sup> The more nuanced and open reading of the story that I would propose (compared, for example, to McLean) engages with this 'ideational' framework posited by Sperrle as applicable to Leskov's *oeuvre* as a whole, but at the same time it can also be related to a diachronic approach to Leskov's evolution as a writer and his at times uneven moral positioning in this early period.<sup>65</sup> Certainly, as Sperrle contends,

<sup>63</sup> See McLean, pp. 149–50.

<sup>64</sup> See Sperrle, pp. 17–18.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 18.

‘to get to Leskov’s message and to divulge the originality of this writer it is necessary to explore the endless details’.<sup>66</sup> In this respect, it is notable that the revision of the original text for the 1867 edition serves to enhance and foreground not only the compositional fabric of linking detail but also the complexity and openness of its ethical dimension.

Before turning to the case of Katerina, I would like first to focus on what might serve as the provisional moral centre of the text. This is the transitional moment in the narration (see note 30), at the intersection from Chapter 11 to Chapter 12, the point at which the dramatic unfolding of events in the Izmailov house reaches its conclusion with the heinous murder of Fedia — innocence and evil-doing in stark juxtaposition — and its discovery amid a cacophony of sound. The narrative continuity is disrupted in order to explain how the house came to be broken into, as we learn about the church service and singing for the festival of the Presentation in the Temple of the Blessed Virgin (Mother of God). The juxtaposition of the church, the church music and the people’s appreciation of it provide a moral, spatial and aesthetic antipode to Katerina, the sinful, enclosed Izmailov house and the cacophony that accompanies the climax of its story. Although the narrator does state briefly that ‘our people are pious’, the fundamental, unspoken moral contrast is not with the people but with the Mother of God: while Katerina is about to be cast *out from* the ‘sinful house’, this is the festival of what is literally in Russian the Mother of God’s ‘introduction *into* the temple’. In addition, in opposition to the Izmailov house, the church as house of God is filled to overflowing and internal and external space are joined in the congregation (or, one might say, *sobornost*) that is gathered outside as well as inside.<sup>67</sup> The people’s main interest is aesthetic, but the presentation of this interest shifts in the space of ten or so lines from the sacred to the human, from the statement that ‘ecclesiastical grandeur and the harmonious “organ-like” singing constitute one of the people’s highest and purest pleasures’ to mention of the tenor’s ‘capricious grace-notes’ to discussion, after the service, of ‘the merits of the famous tenor and the chance awkward moments in the singing of the no less famous bass’ (p. 36). It is surely important that Leskov offers an alternative orientation for aesthetic experience, other than Katerina’s sensual engagement in a paradise of earthly delights. On the moral side, however, the shift is more from the sacred to the outright profane, since the unmasking of Katerina is

<sup>66</sup> See *ibid.*, p. 19. As she adds, ‘in this respect it is understandable why Tolstoi often “edited” Leskov’s stories before he incorporated them into his journal *The Intermediary* (*Posrednik*)’ (p. 20).

<sup>67</sup> Part One of Grimstad’s study of Leskov is devoted to the ‘compositeness’, in a range of stylistic, semantic and broadly social, cultural and anthropological respects, of Leskov’s *Soborane* (Grimstad, pp. 32–126).

instigated by those whose interest deviates readily from church music to gossip and voyeurism, and it is they who create the cacophony of sound as they break into the house in the expectation, at the outset, of witnessing sexual action, not murder; and yet it is they who reveal the crime. In such a combination and juxtaposition of the sacred and the human or profane, and the transition from one to the other, one can see in this passage an embodiment in miniature of the dynamic organicity of Leskov's moral world outlined above.

No less interesting is the fact that the murder of Fedia is referred to by the narrator in this passage in the morally neutral terms of an 'event' ('*proisshestvie*' [p. 37]). In larger context, the narrator's role in these final chapters is both more prominent/intrusive and more varied in terms of its impact on a moral reading of the story. The most explicit and generalizing moral intervention comes after the despairing (mis)quotation from Job's wife — 'Curse the day of your birth and die' — at the end of the long addition, in the 1867 version, in the middle of the final chapter:

Кто не хочет вслушиваться в эти слова, кого мысль о смерти в этом печальном положении не льстит, а пугает, тому надо стараться заглушить эти воющие голоса чем-нибудь еще более их безобразным. Это прекрасно понимает простой человек: он спускает тогда на волю всю звериную простоту, начинает глупить, издеваться над собою, над людьми, над чувством. Не особенно нежный и без того, он становится зол сугубо. (p. 46)

Someone who does not want to listen to these words, who is frightened by rather than attracted to the thought of death in this sorry situation, needs to try and drown out these howling voices with something even more hideous. The simple man understands this perfectly: this is when he lets loose all his animal simplicity, he starts to grow stupid, to mock himself, mock people, mock emotions. Lacking in tender feelings anyway, he now becomes particularly evil.

The powerful evocation of the hopeless predicament described is matched by the starkly extreme interpretation of (simple) human nature. On the one hand, this merely makes explicit the descent into the animal that is Katerina's impending final fate. On the other hand, the narrator generalizes in a way that is not well substantiated by any character other than Katerina: the worthlessness of Sergei (and Sonetka) is now unadorned, but not much of a change from before except in his explicit mocking of Katerina; the good heart and easy morals of the 'stupid' Fiona (p. 46), who also typifies 'Russian simplicity' (p. 41), are little if at all affected by her surroundings; and when Fiona appeals to Sergei's conscience in the final scene there is at least one other convict, Gordiushka, who supports her (p. 48). So what is the relation between human 'simplicity' and the 'animal'? If Katerina does

descend into the animal, is this the point at which she also 'becomes evil', or was her most evil moment the murder of Fedia? Thus, this explicit moral intervention turns out to be ambiguous in its import.

The case of Katerina, which is indeed straightforward in its dreadfulness at one level, is made yet more complex through the way it is presented. As already noted, any ready moral condemnation is problematized at the very outset through the contextualization of the demonizing tag of Lady Macbeth as the quip of a member of the local gentry. Katerina herself is seemingly both aware and unaware of the moral framework and/or significance of her actions. In this respect, Leskov's lack of psychologism in his portrayal of character only enhances the presentation of such a moral case. Put more generally, one of the most interesting aspects of Leskov (in contrast, for example, to Dostoevskii and Tolstoi, in their different ways) is his presentation of moral issues that may not be thought through or experienced by those involved in a consciously elaborated way. Thus, the seduction scene is carefully modulated to make Katerina's awareness hard to read, and in this context Leskov makes a highly significant alteration, including a rare deletion, in the 1867 edition. When, besieged by Sergei's kisses, she presses herself 'involuntarily' against him, Leskov removes the words 'like a snake', thereby mitigating her role as temptress, and then adds the following two sentences in which Sergei carries her off into a 'dark corner' 'like a child' (p. 13; compare *LM*, 1865, p. 45). She may seem to leave any childlike innocence behind soon enough, yet when she waits for Zinovii Borisych to enter the bedroom in which she will murder him she is both overtaken by 'evil laughter' and breathing 'like an innocent child' (p. 23). When, prompted by Sergei, she starts to consider Fedia as an obstacle, her thinking is striking in its naive ambivalence: "How much have I suffered, what a burden of sin have I taken on my soul", thought Katerina L'ovna, "and he just comes along without any fuss and takes away from me . . . And it would be fine if he were a man, but he's just a child, a boy . . ." (pp. 31-32). Given the aspects of the child in Katerina's undeveloped moral awareness, expressed here also by the ellipsis, there is an ironical reflexivity in these words. In this context, the juxtaposition of Katerina and Fedia, apparent moral antipodes but linked through the child/childlike and also through their personal affinity, is particularly interesting. If, taken alone, Fedia may seem to represent an overly simplistic, sentimentalized antipode, the dynamic of the juxtaposition of him and Katerina makes the text more complex in its presentation of Katerina's case.

In addition, Leskov complicates the reader's response in further ways. As we have seen, we are drawn to embark on a complicity with Katerina when we pass on all too easily from the murder of Boris

Timofeich and engage with the sensual in the garden scene. Such complicity interacts with the architectonics of Leskov's engagement of sympathy for Katerina. Over the text as a whole, the presentation of Katerina is cyclical: she moves from victim at the beginning to vilest wrongdoer and back to both wrongdoer and victim. In the last three chapters, as Katerina's story moves into its final tragic denouement of descent into the animal, and into limbo/hell, Leskov reengages the reader's sympathy with her in her humiliated condition.<sup>68</sup> Childlike, she is put back in contact with the maternal when she weeps on Fiona's breast, and in the final scene, as Sergei and Sonetka mock her, it is Sergei whose conscience is called to account by Fiona. Yet if our sympathy is potentially reengaged, and Katerina appears as wronged, she herself is also passing beyond the human. Thus, the ambiguity and liminality of the garden, the location of original sin and the knowledge of good and evil, is echoed in the presentation of a moral case that shows a person at the border of moral responsibility: separately and together, it is a case of the border between the physical, sensual side of human nature and morality, between love as sexual passion and morality, between the adult and the child. Overall, the 'shudder' the story evokes is complex, it is in response both to the dreadfulness of what Katerina does and the dreadfulness of what becomes her. In the interaction of these two poles, and in the space between them which is traversed through the composition of details and linkages, lie the ambiguity and ambivalence of the story.

Finally, in conclusion, let us turn to the story's larger symbolic framework. As the story's scope, through the image of the river, expands from the local and individual to the universal, its symbolic framework encompasses time, heaven and hell. The experience of time as continuous flow is linked to the image of the river but this is placed within the cycles, on the one hand, of nature and, on the other hand, of human and religious history, from the cycle of the church year to the whole of religious history. Conventional markers of time, meanwhile, are notable for their almost complete absence (though alluded to in the shape of Zinovii Borisych's watch that controls the house). In terms of nature and the seasons, the story begins in the warmth of late spring and ends in the cold of an early spring that is still at the transition from winter. In this way, the organization of the temporal dimension of the chronotope locates the story's events foremost in the cycle of nature. At one level

<sup>68</sup> Much later in his life, in a letter to Shubinskii of 26 December 1885 in which he discusses a story by Suvorin, Leskov stresses the need to sympathize with the humiliated woman (*Sob.soch.*, vol. 11, p. 307); there is no comparative reference to Katerina, but he does invoke Shakespeare's Lady Macbeth (her hand-washing) and an incident from Orlov province.

Katerina's fate — as a playing out of a passionate love that is tied to the physical, sensual side of the human person, the aspect that ties it to the world of nature — is to be drawn down into the world of nature and locked in its cyclical time. In terms of human and religious history, on the other hand, the festival of the Presentation in the Temple of the Blessed Virgin provides an alternative point of reference in the cycle of the year. The story is also placed in the symbolic framework of universal time: from innocence and the fall associated with the garden through to the 'general resurrection' (p. 29) laconically invoked at the end of Chapter 8 and the final descent into hell (or limbo) in the river, with the wailing sounds of the wind which 'tear a soul apart' (p. 46).

The temporal frameworks of the text overlap. Thus, the path of Katerina's life that leads to hell/limbo overlaps with the cycle of nature into which she descends. However, neither framework is closed. The cycle of nature breaks off at the transition from winter to spring, leaving open the possibility of renewal. The framework of religious time includes the possibility of universal resurrection, not as an alternative ending to continuous time but as a loophole within the text. Moreover, the moral of the Book of Job is not only that there is no hope but also that salvation can come even in despair; and of all the spirits in the Russian folk pantheon, only the drowned woman that is a *rusalka* can be saved (by a man who will make her a Christian bride).<sup>69</sup> So is Katerina's descent into the animal world and the world of the dead a sign of her irredeemable sin? Or is her wish to remember a prayer, though unsuccessful, sufficient to allow for redemption in the universal resurrection? In this context, her final whispered words are of note. She repeats Sergei's mocking adaptation of the folk lyric song 'Vspomni, moia liubeznaia' (Remember, my beloved) but changes his euphemistic addition 'we dispatched your family off to eternal rest without deacons or priests [tvoikh rodnykh bez popov i d'iakov na vechnyi spokoi sprovazhivali]' to 'we dispatched people from this world in cruel death [liutoi smert'iu s bela sveta liudei sprovazhivali]' (pp. 47–48). Employing idioms of folk poetry — 'liutoi smert'iu', 's bela sveta' — and replacing 'your family' with 'people', Katerina makes a direct statement of her past and imminent crimes and voices her own story, even if she cannot utter a prayer. But at the same time that she gives voice to her story she is also, paradoxically, almost deprived of a voice; she can only whisper, a condition which is itself equivalent to death. Finally, the concluding image of the drowning women combines both closure and openness: while their disappearance from view presents a striking image of closure, they have been subsumed within the flow of the river,

<sup>69</sup> Concerning the coiling flight of the life-saving boathook rope that falls heavily into the water, see note 50.

the trope of the story's ongoing narrative movement. Thus, even if 'the process of renewal [. . .] based on life's cycles of death and rebirth' is hardly present as actively 'transformative' in relation to Katerina herself, the possibility of such renewal is open for interpretation.<sup>70</sup>

In its presentation of cyclical models, whether as closed or open, the text at a symbolic level engages with the organic worldview that Sperrle posits as the ideational centre of Leskov's entire work. More generally, the overlapping of both pagan and Christian symbolic frameworks may be related to the representation in the text of the popular Russian religious worldview, with its incorporation of pagan elements in the Christian; it may also be adduced in an explication of the nature of Leskov's own religious outlook which, as Sperrle suggests, draws on the organicity of the Russian religious tradition.<sup>71</sup> In this and other ways, as we have seen, the study of key motifs in *Ledi Makbet Mtsenskogo uezda* contributes to our understanding of Leskov's overall worldview, alongside an appreciation of the remarkable compositional texture — and the 'amplitude' of meanings it generates — that Leskov the story teller weaves from the threads of his text.

<sup>70</sup> See Sperrle, p. 18.

<sup>71</sup> See *ibid.*, pp. 66–72, 203–04.