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‘The New Woman’: Lady Macbeth and sexual politics in the Stalinist era

ELIZABETH A. WELLS

Abstract: Shostakovich’s *Lady Macbeth of the Mtsensk District* became extraordinarily infamous after its damnation by *Pravda* in 1936. The amount of violence and sex in the opera distinguishes it from the Leskov novella on which it was based, and seems to have underpinned Stalin’s disapproval. The complex relation between Shostakovich’s detailed representation of sexuality and his portrait of Katerina, the opera’s tragic heroine, mirrors the social tensions of the sexual revolution and the conservative backlash of the 1920s and 1930s. The writings of feminist Alexandra Kollontai (1872–1952) about the new Soviet woman display striking similarities to Shostakovich’s portrayal of his female characters and offer a context for his approach.

‘It is the attitude of the composer to a particular subject which he wishes to illustrate that defines his ideology.’

letter from Shostakovich to André Balanchivadze¹

The story remains infamous as one of the most dramatic turning points in all of music history. One January night in 1936, Dmitri Shostakovich sat in on a Moscow performance of his second opera, *Lady Macbeth of the Mtsensk District*.² The work was already two years old and enjoying an enviable second production, when it was rumored that Stalin would be in the audience that night. Perhaps in the wake of drafting new criteria for Socialist Realism in art, he had attended a recent performance of Dzerjinsky’s *The Quiet Don*, a conservative opera which garnered favor and even elicited a post-performance interview with the dictator himself. There was no such audience for Shostakovich. Stalin made a swift exit halfway through the evening, allowing a subsequent unsigned article in *Pravda* to speak for him: ‘Chaos Instead of Music’ read the headline that changed the composer’s career forever and yanked *Lady Macbeth* off the stage for another three decades.³ For Shostakovich, the attack and its aftermath struck a near-fatal blow, consigning his subsequent years to a long upward struggle for acceptance – acceptance upon which, in the Stalinist regime, one’s very life depended. It also served as a strong

¹ Quoted by Elizabeth Wilson, *Shostakovich: A Life Remembered* (Princeton, 1994), 80. Fellow composer Balanchivadze befriended Shostakovich during the compositional period of *Lady Macbeth*. Shostakovich wrote some of the opera’s second act while visiting Balanchivadze in his native Georgia.

² The exact date was January 26, 1936, in a new Bolshoi Theatre Production. The first, almost simultaneous, productions of the opera were in Moscow and Leningrad by the Nemirovich-Danchenko and Maly theatres respectively. Both opened in January 1934 to enthusiastic public and critical response.

³ The *Pravda* article, translated both as ‘Muddle Instead of Music’ and ‘Chaos Instead of Music’ ran in *Pravda*, January 28, 1936. The article’s attribution to Stalin himself is provocative but likely apocryphal. Shostakovich biographer Elizabeth Wilson suggests the author was most likely David Laslavsky, a high-ranking party official. See Wilson, *Shostakovich* (see n. 1), 109.

warning to the unwise (or simply unlucky) composer who failed to bring true Socialist Realism to the operatic stage. As a result, Shostakovich never produced another opera, and his subsequent years were clouded by fear of further retribution.⁴ As *Pravda* made clear, ‘it may end very badly.’⁵ Rationales for Stalin’s censure are legion: the most fundamental and transparent revolve around charges of ‘formalism’ and ‘modernism,’ two vaguely defined terms wielded by both conservative and modernist factions within the erstwhile Russian Association of Proletarian Musicians (RAPM) – the official musical body of the state – to disparage and classify any music viewed as anti-Soviet.⁶ However, *Lady Macbeth’s* modernism, even if defined by irreverence, dissonance, formal irregularity, political incorrectness, or subject matter, was much less radical than the composer’s first opera, *The Nose*, which, although sharply criticized by the RAPM, did not unduly hamper the composer’s career. How did this earnest and more conservative attempt at a thoroughly Soviet opera misstep so badly? If we interpret the *Pravda* article at face value, one of Stalin’s primary objections was to the sexuality in the work. As the anonymous author wrote, ‘The merchant’s double bed occupies the central position on the stage. On it all “problems” are solved.’

As late as 1949 Soviet reactions maintain this initial shock over *Lady Macbeth’s* content, complaining, for example, that ‘unhealthy erotics and sadism fill page after page of the score.’⁷ This critique and *Pravda’s* are no doubt directed specifically at one of the opera’s instrumental interludes, which underscores a sexual scene between the heroine Katerina and her lover Sergei. This music (dubbed ‘pornophony’ by one New York critic) remains infamous as probably the most explicit in the operatic or symphonic repertoire. But *The Nose* contained a similarly explicit bedroom scene which nevertheless was not the focus of that work’s denunciation. Was *Pravda* correct in accusing *Lady Macbeth* of coarse, primitive vulgarity? Or, were there more nuanced dramatic and cultural issues behind the opera’s explicit façade? By basing the work on a well-known nineteenth-century Russian tragedy (Nicoloi Leskov’s 1864 novella, *Lady Macbeth of the Mtsensk District*), the composer and librettist ostensibly presented the work as a searing Soviet critique of an exploitative pre-Revolutionary past. Shostakovich wrote, ‘As a Soviet composer, I determined to preserve the strength of Leskov’s novel and yet, approaching it critically, to interpret its events from our modern point of view.’⁸ However, aspects of *Lady Macbeth* which portrayed this *new* Soviet society, especially its views on love and sex, placed the work uncomfortably in the middle

⁴ Shostakovich drafted but did not stage *The Black Monk* in his later, post-Stalin period, and also revised *Lady Macbeth* as *Katerina Izmailova* in 1962.

⁵ For a complete reprint of the *Pravda* article in English translation, see Victor Seroff, *Dimitri Shostakovich: The Life and Background of a Soviet Composer* (New York, 1943), 204–207.

⁶ The RAPM existed alongside the ACM (Association of Contemporary Musicians). Both were abolished in April 1932 by a resolution of the Central Committee of the Communist Party which unionized all the arts. For more on the politics of this period, see Larry Sitsky, *Music of the Repressed Russian Avant-Garde, 1900–1929* (Westport, Conn., 1994).

⁷ Rena Moisenko, *Realist Music: 25 Soviet Composers* (London, 1949), 204.

⁸ Dmitri Shostakovich, ‘My Opera, *Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk*,’ *Modern Music* 12/1 (November–December, 1934), 23.

of ideological clashes. Whether intentional or inadvertent, the mirroring of this changing cultural milieu made the work, ironically, a little too much of its own time.

Leskov's *Lady Macbeth*

Leskov scholar Hugh McLean assesses *Lady Macbeth* as not just a crime story but the 'most evocative treatment of pure sexuality Leskov ever wrote, and one of the most powerful in all Russian literature.'⁹ Generally acknowledged as Leskov's masterpiece, *Lady Macbeth* enjoyed a popular revival in the 1920s, enjoying a stage adaptation and a film version as well as appearing in a newly illustrated edition by Boris Kustodiev. Kustodiev, a long-time friend of the composer and famous for his *verismo* portrayals of peasant life, seems partly to have inspired Shostakovich to choose the popular tale for his second operatic endeavor.¹⁰

The story is basically a sensational crime tale, which Richard Taruskin has described as a 'tight-lipped little shocker.'¹¹ In the objective narrative tone of a criminal report, the novella relates the murderous and sexual adventures of Katerina Lvovna, wife of wealthy merchant Zinovy Ismailov. Katerina lives in a loveless and childless marriage, subjected to an unbearable existence with pedantic Zinovy and his controlling elderly father, Boris. In lonely frustration, Katerina flirts with the handsome Sergei, her husband's new clerk. Almost immediately, he comes to her room to consummate their mutual attraction, marking the beginning of a covert relationship. One morning the aged Boris catches Sergei leaving Katerina's bedroom, and beats him into unconsciousness. The next day, Katerina poisons Boris, achieving both revenge and a further facilitation of the adulterous affair. Sergei moves in and the couple are happy, but for the ghost of the dead Boris, who comes to Katerina embodied as a sensual cat. When husband Zinovy returns from a business trip after news of his father's untimely death, Katerina and Sergei kill him as well. The two lovers hide the corpse in the cellar, hoping that no one will notice the steady disappearance of Ismailovs.

Katerina discovers soon after that she is pregnant, and decides to have the family business transferred to her name to protect the inheritance of the child. Ruining her good fortune, however, is the appearance of an unexpected heir to the estate, the nephew Fedya. The couple are in the midst of their third murder when they are caught by returning churchgoers who promptly have them arrested. The story closes as the couple are led to exile in Siberia. Sergei is bitter about his fate, and shuns Katerina who nevertheless continues to pursue him with tragic devotion. He turns his attention to two women he has met on the journey: first Fiona, then the spirited Sonyetka. After spurning Katerina, Sergei implores her to surrender her woolen stockings for his cold legs. She gladly agrees, only to face the humiliation of

⁹ Hugh McLean, *Nicolai Leskov: The Man and His Art* (Cambridge, Mass., 1977), 146.

¹⁰ Kustodiev painted Shostakovich while he was still a boy. Kustodiev's *Lady Macbeth* illustrations seem to have strongly influenced Shostakovich's perceptions of the story.

¹¹ Richard Taruskin, 'Entr'acte: The Lessons of Lady M.' *Defining Russia Musically: Historical and Hermeneutical Essays* (Princeton, 1997), 500. Surely a reference to Joseph Kerman's description of *Tosca* as a 'shabby little shocker' in *Opera as Drama*, (Berkeley, 1988), 205.

watching Sergei offer them to his new mistress. The couple mock Katerina, who becomes uncharacteristically detached. On a ferry crossing the Volga, Katerina suddenly throws herself and Sonyetka overboard. Both disappear beneath the waves.

Even before its operatic treatment, the novella emphasizes sex. Painted with symbols of sensuality and excess, Katerina's desire is portrayed as overwhelming and deeply physical. The force of her passion, for example, is metaphorically represented by the bursting of a mill dam (this is retained in the opera). Her awakening feelings are represented by a sumptuous cat (appearing at first without the ghost of Boris) who visits her while she is in a dream-like state. The third victim is suffocated by a pillow which Katerina holds with her full breasts. Although Sergei initiates the relationship, it is Katerina who becomes the insatiable sexual and criminal aggressor.

The libretto, written by the composer and Alexander Preis, adapts Leskov's original in such a way that the scenes of sex and violence become the central loci for the most significant revisions and departures from Leskov's tale. Father-in-law Boris, who in Leskov's novella is elderly and cantankerous, has become an overbearing middle-aged man with his own sexual designs on Katerina. Parody is essential to rendering the character unsympathetic, but it is not Boris's age or infirmity that are mocked, but his sexual inadequacy. For example, he sings this text under Katerina's window:

Bud' ya pomolóe,
khot' let na desyátok . . .
Togdá, togdá!
Zárko bílo bí yey ot menyá;
Zárko, yey-bógu, zárko.
Oná samá dovól' na búdet!
(II, 4)

[Now if I were younger, / Just ten years or so, / What I'd do! / She'd have it hot from me;
/ Hot, yes, by God, so hot, / It'd be even good enough for her!]

When Boris sadistically flogs Sergei to within an inch of his life, he seems not only to wreak revenge but also to gain a perverse sexual satisfaction. Both imagery and musical motives taken from the more clearly sexual moments of the opera underscore the flogging, sharply conflating sex and violence (Ex. 1). The (mostly male) characters surrounding Katerina are mocked in ways that revolve around themes of virility and impotence, while her emotional authenticity is bolstered by her demonstrations of feminine sexuality. Even those around her focus their abuse on sexual areas of conflict: Boris blames Katerina's infertility for the family's problems. She counters with an equally telling blow: 'It's not my fault. Zinovy is incapable of getting a child into my womb.' While Boris and Zinovy represent male impotence, Sergei embodies raw virility.

The opera is more explicitly about sex than the novel. The lovers' first meeting and mutual attraction perfectly illustrates the opera's escalated level of sex and violence. In Leskov's original, Katerina comes across Sergei amidst the male

The musical score is divided into two systems. The first system includes vocal parts for Katerina, Farm Worker, and Boris, and piano accompaniment. Katerina's line is in treble clef with a key signature of one flat and a common time signature. Her lyrics are "down, help me! help me! help!". The Farm Worker's line is in treble clef with a key signature of one sharp and a common time signature. His lyrics are "(to Katrina) At once, at". Boris's line is in bass clef with a key signature of one flat and a common time signature. His lyrics are "take that, take that, take that, take that!". The piano accompaniment consists of two staves, with the right hand in treble clef and the left hand in bass clef. The second system includes vocal parts for Katerina, Farm Worker, Boris, and Workmen, and piano accompaniment. Katerina's line is in treble clef with a key signature of one flat and a common time signature. Her lyrics are "don't hold me". The Farm Worker's line is in treble clef with a key signature of one sharp and a common time signature. His lyrics are "once". Boris's line is in bass clef with a key signature of one flat and a common time signature. His lyrics are "Shut up, Do not move! cease it,". The Workmen's part is in two staves, with the top staff in treble clef and the bottom staff in bass clef, both with a key signature of one sharp and a common time signature. The lyrics are "ha, ha, ha, ha, ha, ha, ha!". The piano accompaniment consists of two staves, with the right hand in treble clef and the left hand in bass clef.

Ex. 1: Boris flogs Sergei.

farmworkers in the courtyard; they have placed the maid Aksinya in a pig-weighing machine. Aksinya expresses her annoyance, and they grudgingly let her go. This segues to a heartwarming scene in which Sergei and Katerina embrace, ostensibly so that Sergei can determine her weight. The magnified sexuality and

Katerina
don't hold me, don't hold me!

Boris
Now! Now! 8va...

cresc.

Ex. 1: (Continued).

violence of the opera version turns this scene into a near gang-rape of Aksinya, which the angry Katerina interrupts. There are no stage directions to indicate what occurs at the end of the scene; we are only led to believe that the men, led by Sergei, are pinching and generally harassing Aksinya. Most Western commentators have taken this scene as one of sexual harassment, but Soviets read it clearly as rape.¹² The feeling of helplessness and pursuit is compellingly conveyed by the music, in which Shostakovich has marked repeats: each attempt on her is heard twice in a relentless, mechanistic fashion. Sergei tells the other men to 'Look out! Hold onto her!' and commands Aksinya to 'Stand still. Stop, woman, stop' while Aksinya screams and yells 'get him off me.'¹³ Judging from the simultaneous texts of Example 2, and the music shown in Example 3 (with Sergei's rising vocal line), it would seem that he is close to a physical, not just verbal, violation of Aksinya.

Simultaneous texts:

Aksinya:

Oh! Oh! Oh!
Oh, you shameless creature, hey,
don't pinch
Oh, you're hurting
Keep your hands off,
Oh! You swine! Oh! Oh!
Oh! You're hurting
My breast's covered in bruises
The shameless brute, he's pinched my
breast all over
what a rascal, he's torn my skirt to pieces.

Peasant/Steward/Porter:

Come on, let's feel her, let's feel her
squeeze harder! Again!
What boobs, oh what boobs,
Oh, how smooth the are!
Harder, Harder!
Let's have another go!
Take it off, Aksyusha
Let's have a suck
Better wear trousers, Aksyusha!

Sergei:

Let me get hold of her arm,
She's a fine piece of woman,
as smooth as silk,
Come on now, let go!
Look out! Stop! Hold on to her!
Well now! Stand still!
Stop, woman!
Stop, stop!
Ah! Oh!

Ex. 2: Sergei and the men taunt Aksinya. Act I, Scene 2.

¹² See Moisenko, *Realist Music* (n. 7) 204. Moisenko asserts that this scene was considered a rape by audiences and critics alike, and also that it was the most revolting of the opera.

¹³ This scene was also sanitized in Shostakovich's 1963 version, entitled *Katerina Izmailova*, where 'breasts' was replaced by 'shoulders,' and the men's swearing was removed.

The musical score is divided into three systems. The first system features Sergei's vocal line with a long melisma, piano accompaniment, and Aksinya's vocal line. The second system continues the vocal lines and piano accompaniment. The third system includes Aksinya's vocal line, Sergei's vocal line, and the Workmen's vocal line.

System 1:

- Sergei:** Melisma: A. Oh!
- Piano:** Accompaniment, *ff*
- Aksinya:** - - - - -

System 2:

- Aksinya:** let go! let go! let go!
- Sergei:** Oh! Oh! Oh! Oh! Oh! Oh!
- Piano:** Accompaniment, *ff*

System 3:

- Aksinya:** let go!
- Sergei:** Oh!
- Workmen:** ha, ha, ha, ha, ha, ha, ha, ha, ha, ha, ha, ha, ha, ha.
- Piano:** Accompaniment

Ex. 3: The seduction of Katerina by Sergei.

In Leskov's story, Sergei is portrayed as passionate and intense, but trembling and gentlemanly in his demeanor. When he gets up the nerve to embrace her, it reads: 'Katerina sighed gently "Oh, oh, let me go . . . becoming weak under Sergei's hot kisses, . . . she pressed, contrary to her own wish, closer to his strong body.' Although probably explicit for the nineteenth century, this romance novel portrayal suggests that Katerina is open to Sergei's advances. Compare this to the same section of the opera's libretto, reproduced as Example 4a, which reads more like a rape scene. Shostakovich provides an interlude after the duet, but it is not actually between scenes – presumably there is a blackout for the musical depiction of the sex act – and we then return to the same scene.

Shostakovich's *Lady Macbeth*

Sex scenes in nineteenth-century opera, either allegorical or literal, usually consist almost entirely of foreplay and afterglow, *Tristan* providing the perfect example. Even in the more contemporaneous *Wozzeck* and *Lulu*, male and female desire are typified by sometimes overly-romanticized, but always lushly-orchestrated, swelling accompaniment, and that is what Berg provides in the seduction by the Drum Major from *Wozzeck*. The style and content of the exchange between the characters, as well as the dramatic situation (Act I scene 5: Ex. 4b) is similar to this scene in *Lady Macbeth*, but the musical treatment is strikingly different.¹⁴

Looking closely at the few minutes which lead up to Shostakovich's 'pornophony' interlude, we see that the composer creates a crystalline portrayal of sexual aggression using musical *topoi* which occur at other key scenes in *Lady Macbeth*. Katerina is roused by the sound of knocking at her bedroom door. It is Sergei. He serenades Katerina in an attempt to win her, until the orchestra unexpectedly drops out altogether.¹⁵ His performance is over, his prospect remains unmoved, and Katerina clearly wants to retire – alone. She bids him goodnight in a descending line ending on B \flat . Sergei takes this note as a point of departure, but

¹⁴ Shostakovich denied any relationship between *Wozzeck* and *Lady Macbeth*, but the claim seems disingenuous: the use of musical interludes to bridge scene changes, the plight of the anti-social anti-hero, as well as the use of a passacaglia to outline the inner psychological workings of the main character, suggests that Shostakovich was indeed strongly influenced by the earlier work. The composer personally attended the Leningrad premiere of *Wozzeck* in 1927. One of his closest friends, musicologist Ivan Sollertinsky, lauded the sexuality of both *Carmen* and *Wozzeck*, and was dismayed that no classic Russian opera matched it on these terms. Sollertinsky's comments are quoted in *Testimony: The Memoirs of Dmitri Shostakovich*, ed. Solomon Volkov, trans. Antonina W. Bouis (New York, 1979), 108. *Testimony* has undergone intense scrutiny by a number of scholars. Laurel Fay ('Shostakovich versus Volkov: Whose Testimony?' *The Russian Review* 39/4 [October 1980, 484–93]) and Richard Taruskin ('The Opera and the Dictator: The Peculiar Martyrdom of Dmitri Shostakovich,' *The New Republic*, 200/12 [20 March 1989], 34–40) were the first and most vocal of the memoir's detractors, and *Testimony* has been subsequently defended by Ian MacDonald in *The New Shostakovich* (Boston, 1990) and, most recently, by Allen B. Ho and Dmitry Feofanov, ed., in *Shostakovich Reconsidered* (London, 1998).

¹⁵ Lev Lebedinsky points out that Sergei in fact quotes *Eugene Onegin* in this scene. See Lev Lebedinsky, 'Code, Quotation and Collage: Some Musical Allusions in the Works of Dmitri Shostakovich,' in Ho and Feofanov, *Shostakovich Reconsidered*, 478.

Katerina: If only I had a child!
 Sergei: Yes, but even a child, if you'll allow me to put it like this, comes as a result of something.
 Sergei: That was a good wrestle we had, you're certainly strong . . .
 Katerina: Well, why bring that up?
 Sergei: Allow me to say, it was the happiest moment in my life. Would you like to try again?
 Katerina: Don't you dare!
 Sergei: Or let's get hold of each other . . .
(He embraces Katerina)
 Katerina: Let go, Sergei, let go! What are you thinking of? Let go! The old man might come back and see us: Let go, Sergei!
 Sergei: Anyway, I'm stronger than you.
 Katerina: Sergei, you mustn't. What are you doing? I'm afraid.
 Sergei: My dearest!
 Katerina: What are you doing? Let go, I don't want . . .
 Sergei: Oh Katya, my dearest love!
 Katerina: Ah!
[segues immediately to interlude]

Ex. 4a: The seduction of Katerina by Sergei. Act I, Scene 3.

Drum Major: We'll start a proper stud of future drum majors some day. Well? *(embraces her)*
 Marie: Let go! *(she tries to break free; they wrestle with each other)*
 Drum Major: Wildcat!
 Marie: *(breaks loose)*: Leave me alone!
 Drum Major: *(Steps up to her)*: Is it the devil in your eyes?
(embraces her again)
 Marie: Have your way, then! It is all the same! *(She falls into his arms and disappears through the open door)*
[End of Act I]

Ex. 4b: Berg, *Wozzeck* Act I, Scene 5: the seduction of Marie by the Drum Major.

instead of resolving it down for the expected harmonic and melodic close, he raises the note to C# (Ex. 5). This note is associated with Sergei's sexual excitement, and at this point his arousal begins. As he hits the C#, the orchestra enters, agitated, with the nascent form of the lust motive, a quarter-against-eighth rhythmic gesture which reaches its finished form when he overtakes Katerina. It is at this point that Sergei is not going to take Katerina's 'no' for an answer. Katerina ignores (or does not hear) this crucial moment in the orchestra. In a further attempt to change the subject, both literally and musically, she turns this C# down to A, establishing A major briefly. Sergei diverts the melodic line again, while the lust motive boils more rapidly in the lower strings (Ex. 6). The more Katerina resists, the more persistent Sergei becomes, and this is where we first hear the most material and explicit manifestation of male sexuality – the famed musical erection in the solo trombone line – the primary surface characteristic associated with the infamous 'pornophony' (Ex. 7). Katerina continues to protest in offbeats, until Sergei begins a climactic, chromatically rising phrase as he forces himself on her. Katerina's last scream is a high A, overcome at the last possible moment by Sergei's B. It signals the moment of sexual penetration and, as a result, Sergei's conquest. It segues

Kat. *p* Yes al - right Ser - gei *riteneduto* you must go now *p*

Sergei As you

//

Presto ♩=112

Kat. Good night. (Sergei does not go)

Sergei wish

Strings **Lust motive** *pp* *pizz.*

Ex. 5: Consumption scene: Katerina attempts to dismiss Sergei: Act I scene 3, mm. 401–413.

immediately into the interlude, now featuring the trombones in a striking and oft-cited passage of glissandi.¹⁶

The climax of this interlude finds the trombone on a sustained B \flat , the same tone we associate with Sergei's successful overcoming of Katerina. The sexual denouement begins with a somewhat comical detumescence theme (starting on B \flat and slowly glissandoing downward) which includes a kind of shuddering figure which continues graphically to portray Sergei's physical condition (Ex. 8). In this scene we hear the most blatantly literal sexual element in the score: the representation of the male phallus by the trombone. At the time the instrument was considered suspect because of its associations with jazz.¹⁷ Jazz had become popular with large numbers of Soviets, but it led to dancing, and dancing in the 1920s was inextricably linked to moral corruption. The concept of a 'mass dance' (much like the 'mass song' genre, a creation of Socialist Realism) was just one part of an

¹⁶ Similar rape scenes in Sondheim's *Sweeney Todd*, Previn's *Streetcar Named Desire*, and *West Side Story* provide more contemporary examples of sexual violence in musical theatre.

¹⁷ Although certain brass instruments were accepted as part of the military band, those such as saxophone and trombone which were strongly associated with 'decadent' jazz were seen as corruptive. In 1929 a ban on saxophones was attempted, and eventually passed twenty years later. See Richard Stites, *Russian Popular Culture: Entertainment and Society since 1900* (Cambridge, 1992), 73.

The image displays a musical score for three parts: Horns, Sergei, and Strings. The score is divided into two systems. The first system shows the Horns part with a 'div.' marking, the Sergei part with the lyrics 'Why should I not?', and the Strings part with a 'Lust motive' box highlighting a specific musical phrase. The second system shows the Horns part with 'unis.' and 'pp' markings, the Sergei part with the lyrics 'This was the hap - piest mo - -', and the Strings part with a rhythmic pattern. The score is written in a key signature of one flat and a 2/4 time signature.

Ex. 6: Consummation scene: lust motif underlies Sergei's advances: Act I scene 3, mm. 434–443.

unsuccessful attempt to neutralize the sexual aspects of pairs dancing as the sexual vice tightened through this decade. By 1928, Gorky openly equated jazz music with homosexuality, drugs, and bourgeois culture.¹⁸ The associations of jazz with moral corruption in turn connect Sergei's jazz-inflected sexuality to the realm of the morally repugnant. It is important to note here that 'jazz' referred not to the African-American genre we associate with the term today, but instead to a light popular music filtered via Weimar Germany in such works as Krenek's *Jonny Spielt*

¹⁸ Stütes, *Russian Popular Culture* (see n. 17), 73.

Ex. 6 (Continued) features a multi-staff arrangement. At the top, the Horns section consists of two staves, both marked *pp* (pianissimo), playing a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes. Below this, the vocal line for Sergei is shown with the lyrics: "ment of my life don't you want it once". The accompaniment includes a piano part with a steady eighth-note bass line and a string section with a similar rhythmic pattern.

Ex. 6: (Continued).

Ex. 7: Consummation scene: Rising trombone line: Act I scene 3, mm. 511–522. This section features a rising trombone line marked *a2* and *solo*. The vocal line includes Katerina with the exclamation "Ah!" and Sergei with the lyrics "Ah, Ka - ye my dear - est love." The piano accompaniment is marked *p cresc.* (piano crescendo) and *fff* (fortissimo) at the end. The string section provides a harmonic foundation with a rising line.

Ex. 7: Consummation scene: Rising trombone line: Act I scene 3, mm. 511–522.

The musical score consists of the following parts and markings:

- Bn. (Bassoon):** Marked with *a2* and *ff*.
- Tb. (Trumpet):** Marked with *ff*.
- Tuba:** Marked with *fff*.
- Tenor Tb. (Tenor Trombone):** Marked with *fff*.
- Baritone Tb. (Baritone Trombone):** Marked with *fff*.
- Bass Tb. (Bass Trombone):** Marked with *fff*.
- Strings:** Divided into four staves. Markings include *pizz.* (pizzicato), *div.* (divisi), and *unis.* (unison).

At the bottom of the score, two brackets identify specific rhythmic patterns:

- shuddering figure:** A bracket under the first two measures of the string parts.
- elongated shuddering figure:** A bracket under the last two measures of the string parts.

Ex. 8: Consummation scene: Sergei recovers: Act I scene 3, mm. 626–632.

Auf (staged in Leningrad in 1928, its success extending even to Russia's rural theatres).¹⁹

Shostakovich both finds musical materials which graphically and literally portray the mechanical and crudely physical aspects of sexuality, and repeats them to keep sex very much in the foreground. Examples of such materials include the mechanistic and menacing 'lust' motive which occurs in both the Aksinya and Katerina scenes, the rising vocal line which typically signals Sergei's sexual arousal, the 'pusti' ('let go') motive which the women use unsuccessfully to deter the men, and the lewd and raunchy saxophone glissandi which accompany each of these scenes. It was these 'naturalistic' depictions of sex and violence which *Pravda* attacked. How can we explain this emphasis on sexual violence, and how does it fit

¹⁹ Shostakovich's exposure to the style resulted in his two 'Jazz Suites' – essentially orchestrations of popular dance music of the day – and the inclusion of jazz elements in his theatrical works in a parodistic vein.

into a piece which was intended as the first in a trilogy of operas on Russian women in different eras? Shostakovich claimed he was going to devote an entire decade of his creative life to such a project. Were they all to be like this, or was this portrayal of a nineteenth-century story supposed to represent only the oppressive atmosphere of the bourgeois, pre-Revolutionary past? Or was this simply the prurient and irreverent indulgence of a young, iconoclastic composer? Certainly Shostakovich started to prune back the most explicit scenes as early as the 1935 piano-vocal score, and his erasure of them in the 1962 revision of the work has often been suggested as simply the modesty that comes with maturity.²⁰ Perhaps a more convincing rationale is that by the opera's revision these scenes were no longer as topical as they had been when the opera was first conceived.

Russia's sexual revolution (1917–1936)

The opera's composition fell during a period of dramatic upheaval in Russian sexual mores, and given its subject, it inevitably addressed a number of wrenching social issues. The ravages of the war and the Revolution had deprived most people of normal sex lives. 'Front-abolished sexuality,' the idea of abstention and a weakening of sexual impulses in aid of the revolutionary effort, was popularized in the media.²¹ Once the Revolution was over, the rebound effect fueled the proliferation of a sexual behavior that, to borrow the famous phrase from Hobbes's *Leviathan*, was nasty, brutish and short. Clearly, the sexual revolution allowed men to enjoy relationships with any number of partners, free from financial or emotional responsibilities, but this was not to the greater benefit of women. A general callousness toward women became the standard. Contraception was practically non-existent, since a rubber shortage curtailed the manufacture of condoms and diaphragms throughout the 1920s and 1930s.²² Abortions, which did little to stop the rising birth rate, were mostly illegal and performed by unqualified midwives, or else were self-induced by desperate, poverty-stricken women. Those living in cities had access to hospital abortions, but most of these were performed without anaesthetic.²³ One of the most serious social consequences created by this unrest and overpopulation was the proliferation of *byesprizornyye*, abandoned children with

²⁰ Laurel Fay, 'From *Lady Macbeth to Katerina*: Shostakovich's Versions and Revisions,' *Shostakovich Studies*, ed. David Fanning (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 181. For a complete discussion of the revisions to this work, see Caryl Emerson, 'Back to the Future: Shostakovich's Revision of Leskov's *Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk District*,' *this journal* 1/1 (March 1989): 59–78, and Royal S. Brown, 'The Three Faces of *Lady Macbeth*,' *Russian and Soviet Music: Essays for Boris Schwarz*, ed. Malcolm Hamrick Brown, (Ann Arbor, 1984), 245–252.

²¹ 53 per cent of males polled during this period reported that the Revolution had weakened their sex lives. See Richard Stites, *The Women's Liberation Movement in Russia* (Princeton, 1990), 358.

²² Wendy Z. Goldman, *Women, the State, and Revolution: Soviet Family Policy and Social Life, 1917–1936* (Cambridge, 1993), 260.

²³ Goldman, *Women, the State, and Revolution*, 264.

no homes who traveled the countryside and cities in gangs. Although there was already a substantial number of these children before the Revolution, their population swelled to 7 million by 1921.²⁴

Stalin himself was believed to have raped a thirteen-year-old girl while in Turukhansk, and almost certainly impregnated the teenage daughter of a fellow politburo member. He even expounded crudely to his colleagues on the sexuality of his own daughter, in her presence: ‘Well, my friends, I bet you don’t know who’s fucking her now.’²⁵ Rape and prostitution were common, and along with them more unwanted pregnancy. Through either unemployment or divorce, single women frequently became the sole breadwinner for their extended families. Almost half of urban prostitutes shared one room with all their relatives, who often had no idea how they made money.²⁶

A series of Family Codes attempted to address these issues, but did little to stem the rising tide of divorces, desertions and family breakdowns. Although the economic upheaval of the Revolution clearly created the most pressing social problems, new ideas about the roles of sex and love in Soviet society, and male–female relationships in particular, exacerbated the conditions and added to societal confusion. Rampant sexuality created not only unwanted pregnancy, but also dangerous and exploitative conditions for women. Young girls were often sexually harassed where they lived and worked, with no real recourse in an environment which supported sexual freedom. Not surprisingly, the women who became involved in conventional sexual relationships were ostracized once they did so. Smaller numbers of Soviet women joined with men in the denunciation of love, proud of their sexually liberated state. This approach, however, failed to work for most women. Even the institution of marriage, such as it was, was strained due to male infidelity and alcoholism.²⁷ The result was a tripled Russian divorce rate between 1924 and 1927, the highest of any European country.²⁸

Clearly, emancipation was a double-edged sword: the Revolution was meant to free women by eliminating the more oppressive domestic and economic aspects of traditional marriage, while allowing them to explore their sexual desires unfettered. However, the dissolution of the bourgeois and primarily Christian value system upholding marriage also involved the disappearance of traditional behaviors (courtship, for example) and obligations (alimony and child-support among them). While many young people rejected love along with other traditional values, single and especially older women were left with a heavier burden than they had carried

²⁴ The state was powerless to reduce their increasing numbers, as were the mothers and fathers who abandoned them because they were unable to care for them. Attempts to reform the criminal behavior or financially aid the *byesprizornyye* proved futile, as they had already divorced themselves from conventional morality at a young age. Not surprisingly, it was from their ranks that Stalin eventually recruited many of his henchmen. Child prostitution was rampant amongst these orphans (a typical wage for sex was a crust of bread). Sutes, *The Women’s Liberation Movement* (see n. 21), 366.

²⁵ Daniel Rancour Laferrier, *The Mind of Stalin* (Ann Arbor, 1988), 100–101.

²⁶ Goldman, *Women, the State* (see n. 23), 121.

²⁷ Sutes, *The Women’s Liberation Movement* (see n. 21), 358.

²⁸ Goldman, *Women, the State* (see n. 23), 107.

before the Revolution. And, while public opinion considered love a bourgeois eccentricity and marriage a passé convention, no immediately viable alternatives emerged within an environment whose sexual atmosphere had already escalated. Intellectual debate on the sexual emancipation, especially of women, went as far back as August Bebel's 1879 work, *Women and Socialism*, which described marriage as a capitalist construct which imprisoned women both economically and sexually. He was one of the first to argue that the sexual impulse was neither moral nor immoral, but a natural expression of human life, an instinct as natural as hunger and thirst. By the 1920s, this attitude was popularly known as the 'glass of water' theory, which maintained that sexual relations should be as natural and casual as drinking a glass of water. This theory was associated with a Central-Committee member and feminist named Alexandra Kollontai.

Kollontai, the New Woman, and Winged Eros

Kollontai not only spearheaded the feminist movement in the 1920s; she was also politically active in a number of arenas: after the October Revolution, she was named commissar of public welfare, the first such high ministerial post occupied by a woman in modern history. Although she worked tirelessly for women's emancipation and the organization of female workers, her most famous contributions came in reforms to the family code which attempted to protect women's legal rights in the case of divorce or desertion. But, she was also highly criticized for her support of the new sexual morality, and the 'glass of water' theory which so intrigued the public was long, and erroneously, thought to have originated with her. Spurred by tension over the 'woman question' which was a natural result of the dissolution of the traditional family unit, Kollontai developed her own ideas about women's roles both in relation to men and in society at large. She saw sexuality as both political and personal, and as an appropriate theme and subject of the revolutionary movement. Her groundbreaking works in this area were *Social Basis of the Women's Question* (1908) and a 1913 essay entitled 'The New Woman' which painted portraits of different versions of the modern, sexually and socially emancipated Soviet woman.

Her ideas on sexuality were influenced by Grete Meisel-Hess's 1910 book, *Die sexuelle Krise*, which combined Viennese psychoanalysis with socialist principles. Both women believed that the erotically bereft prostitute or the sexually deprived middle-class wife could realize their love potential by means of what Meisel-Hess called 'love-play' a kind of free union which left both parties enriched but unburdened. Kollontai later departed from this model, fully developing her ideas of the love collective, where the physiological and mechanical approach to sex would give way to the idea of the 'Winged Eros,' an enriching and enrapturing experience of emotional and physical eroticism. All this would be realized somewhere in the idyllic future, of course, once complete honesty and freedom in love was attained, and both sexes were fully emancipated. For Kollontai, this Winged Eros state was the height of attainment for women, with sexual love outranking even maternal love. The opposite state, the Wingless Eros, was the antithesis of Kollontai's

utopian dream of sexual liberty. It resulted in the ‘naked instinct of reproduction, coarse lust, quick pleasure, mere possession of someone’s body’²⁹ which were the hallmarks of the prostitute.

These sexual debates clearly extended into Shostakovich’s own personal life, where echoes of Kollontai’s sentiments appear in a letter of 1923. Writing to his mother about his first love, Tatyana Glivenko, Shostakovich states, ‘I want to submit a little philosophy. Pure animal love . . . is so vile that one doesn’t need to begin to speak about it. In such an instance, a man is no different from an animal. But now, suppose that a wife ceases to love her husband and gives herself to another, and that they start living together openly, despite the censorious opinions of society. There is nothing wrong with that. On the contrary, it’s even a good thing, as Love is truly free.’³⁰ He goes on with a Kollontai-like description of marriage: ‘The oath sworn before the altar is one of the worst features of religion. Love cannot last for long. Of course the best thing one could imagine would be the complete annulment of the institution of marriage, with all its fetters and responsibilities, but this is of course a utopian wish.’³¹ He repeats ‘love is truly free’ several times in the letter, no doubt echoing the contemporary debates on ‘free love’, in which Kollontai played a major role.

Shostakovich’s opera contains two striking reflections of sexuality during this time: not only the brutish, callous, and disrespectful attitudes to women and sexuality, which corresponded to everyday life, but also elements of Kollontai’s ideas about the Winged and Wingless Eros which informed intellectual discussion. As well as intensifying the story’s sex and violence, the libretto departs most radically from the original in its portrayal of the protagonist. Leskov’s Katerina is startling in her lack of complexity; scholars agree that her inhumanity is one of the most horrific aspects of the story. With no insight into her inner life, the reader is left with the impression that she acts with no remorse or reflection. Shostakovich and Preis transform her from a cold-blooded killer to a tragically betrayed heroine. As a victim of bourgeois society, abused and degraded by those around her, Katerina emerges almost as the battered soul of Russia. Shostakovich gives her the most lyrical, sensual, but also most Slavic-sounding music, beginning the opera with a soliloquy which sets the tone for her musical and emotional portrayal throughout the work.³² Her despair and loneliness fit perfectly Kollontai’s own description of the tragic fate of women: ‘This loneliness in the midst of big bustling cities with their variegated enticements, even among the crowd of close friends and fellow

²⁹ Stites, *The Women’s Liberation Movement* (see n. 21), 353.

³⁰ Kollontai actually wrote an early short story about an older woman in a loveless marriage who falls in love with a younger man and leaves her husband for him. It was never published.

³¹ Quoted in Wilson, *Shostakovich* (see n. 1), 82.

³² Shostakovich employs a number of different musical styles to delineate character and situation. Katerina’s opening monologue and final soliloquy echo a nineteenth-century, minor-mode, lyrical style reminiscent of Romantic Russian opera, whereas characters such as Boris and the posse of police who arrest the two lovers are represented by a more acerbic, dry, and modern style reminiscent of Kurt Weill, Stravinsky, and other composers active at this time.

travelers, arouses in the individual of our day a pathological greed to cling to the illusion of a “kindred soul”, a soul, of course, which belongs to a being of the opposite sex, for only cunning Eros is able – at least fleetingly – to expel the darkness of loneliness.³³ Kollontai’s description of ‘Theresa,’ an example of the New Woman: ‘She . . . is overwhelmed by the waves of passion, she does not deny the radiant smile of life, she does not hide hypocritically behind the faded mantle of womanly virtue – no, she reaches out her hands to the chosen one . . . in order to drink the joys of love from the goblet and convince herself how deep it is.’³⁴ Shostakovich’s description of Katerina, printed in an essay which accompanied the first performance, is remarkably like Kollontai’s description of woman liberated by the Winged Eros. He writes, ‘Ekaterina Lvovna is an outstanding, colorful person and her life is sad and drab. But a powerful love comes into her life, and it turns out that a crime is worth committing for the sake of that passion, since life has no meaning otherwise anyway.’

Both musically and dramatically, the authors caricature all the characters around Katerina, ostensibly to throw her authenticity into the sharpest relief and allow us to see her sympathetically. But this technique also follows Kollontai’s own fiction writing, in which the male characters are exaggerated as foils to the female heroines. In addition to her political writing, Kollontai penned several novels and short stories which crossed the romance genre with socialist tracts. They included *The Love of Worker Bees* (also called *Red Love*), *Great Love* and *Free Love*. The plots revolve around the problems of male–female relationships, and the characters are strikingly similar: the men are always portrayed as weak, selfish, and traditional, interested only in sex and adventure. The women are tragically prevented from fulfilling their personal potential – as in the story ‘Thirty-Two Pages’, in which the heroine laments that the time she devoted to an affair prevented her writing from progressing further than thirty-two pages. Shostakovich’s portrayals of Sergei, Boris, and Zinovy could well have been taken from a Kollontai novel.

Musically, Shostakovich presents not just a procession of unvariegated sexual behaviors, but he separates Katerina’s sexuality from that of the people who surround her. As noted above, the trombone’s music represents the Wingless Eros of Sergei’s sexuality. Loud and raunchy, it makes a sound that can only be achieved with the slide almost completely pulled out, which also makes a striking visual correspondence with Sergei’s physical condition in the consummation scene. In addition, the movement of the slide mimics thrusting. Somewhat surprisingly, however, the trombone also represents Katerina’s sexuality, as we will see in the description of her solo scene below.

Female sexuality is depicted mostly as resistance. Here, Shostakovich has a direct precedent in *Wozzeczka*: The ‘lass mich’ phrase Marie uses with the Drum Major is echoed in Shostakovich’s ‘Pusti’ (‘Let go’).³⁵ We first hear it from Aksinya against

³³ Quoted in Alexandra Kollontai, ‘The New Woman,’ reprinted in *The Autobiography of a Sexually Emancipated Communist Woman*, (1926), ed. with an afterword by Iring Fetscher. Trans. Salvator Attanasio (New York, 1971), 119.

³⁴ Kollontai, *The Autobiography*, 61.

³⁵ See Examples 4a and 4b.

Sergei

not? let us try

Katerina

Let go Ser - gei let go Are you mad Ser - gei?

Ex. 9: Consummation scene: Katerina fights Sergei: Act I scene 3, mm. 354–363.

the men, and it is repeated only a few minutes later when Katerina implores Sergei to stop wrestling with her. It appears again in the consummation scene, where Katerina repeats the same phrase with the identical motive that Aksinya used against Sergei and the men (Ex. 9; compare with Ex. 3). However, there is one occasion of overt sexuality in which the main character expresses her sexual identity directly, to the audience, in a way which sets her apart from her male counterparts. Katerina reveals her sexual feeling, not in response to Sergei's advances in the consummation scene, but before it. Leskov's original provides no preamble to Sergei's arrival at Katerina's room; however, in this newly added scene by composer and librettist, Katerina sings an impassioned soliloquy, 'The Foal Runs After the Filly' about her sexless existence (Ex. 10) – Her desire is persuasively expressed, complete with analogies to the natural world. Katerina's music in this scene, as in most of the opera, is in a cantabile, folk-like style. As she bemoans her fate as a frustrated wife, the music swells to higher and higher climaxes until just before rehearsal number 145 (Ex. 11), where a rising bass line of B – C# – D#, then the marking 'più mosso' indicates the point of climax. Her note of highest release is a B \flat , the same note Sergei will reach when he overcomes her in the following scene. The sexual denouement after this point corresponds to a falling vocal line, as Katerina sings 'No one will caress my white breast and leave me exhausted after his embraces' ending on a middle C#. This low-register 'exhaustion' after the climax of embraces of her imaginary lover, matches in tessitura Katerina's vocal line after Sergei has seduced her. Clearly, this scene is one of auto-eroticism – even the lulling

(Katerina undresses)

The foal runs after the filly,
 the tom-cat seeks the female,
 the dove hastens to his mate,
 but no one hurries to me.
 The wind caresses the birch tree
 and the sun warms it with his heat,
 for everyone there's a smile from somewhere,
 but no one will come to me,
 no one will put his hand round my waist,
 no one will press his lips to mine,
 and no one will stroke my white breast,
 no one will tire me out with his passionate
 embraces.
 The days go by in a joyless procession,
 my life will flash past without a smile.
 No one, no one will ever come to me.

(Katerina undresses completely and lies down
 on the bed)

Ex. 10: Katerina's soliloquy, original text.

music which follows her aria is similar to that which follows the couple's consummation, marking both events as clearly sexual. In this scene, Katerina is accompanied only by strings, clarinet, bassoon, and, occasionally, trumpet. At the moment of climax, however, a trio of trombones enters, in a fluid, upward-moving chord. They fade off, as does Katerina's vocal line, and do not sound again in the aria (see Ex. 12). This brief (and sudden) nine-measure unit constitutes the only appearance of the instrument in this scene. And it is entirely different from what we are about to hear from this instrument. Understated, upward motion in thirds, completely tasteful, with a minimum of movement of the trombone slide, which mostly remains closed. Katerina is dreaming of an ideal love, a Winged Eros, and when she is awakened from this post-orgasmic state by Sergei's insistent knocking, Shostakovich provides the stark contrast of the consummation scene.

The utopian emancipation that Kollontai describes, however, and that Shostakovich portrays musically, does not ultimately lead to Katerina's happiness, but to the destruction of herself and all around her. And this is because, on a fundamental level, she fails as the New Woman, slipping into the ways of the pre-Revolutionary past against which Kollontai inveighs. Although true love is liberating, Kollontai warns against a free union based on 'great love,' a hallmark of pre-emancipation. She defined this as an all-consuming, tragic mistress-lover relationship which drains the energy of both partners and suppresses the ego of the woman. A likely accomplice in the creation of great love is the 'Don Juan,' described by Kollontai in 'The New Woman,' but also a perfect picture of Shostakovich's Sergei: 'The experienced Don Juans not only understood how to take a woman's body, but they also ruled her soul, in that most of them acted out the comedy of "understanding," exhibiting a tender-solicitous attention to [her] unimportant "ego," which her own husband inconsiderately and indifferently

145 *Più mosso* ♩ = 112

ff

Katerina

lips to mine I've no one who'll

ff

kiss and caress my white breasts, and leave me ex -

dim.

rit.

haust - ed af - ter his em - bra - ces.

rit.

Ex. 11: Katerina's bedroom: Climax of 'The Foal Runs after the Filly': Act I scene 3, mm. 158–170.

passed by.³⁶ Shostakovich echoes this exact sentiment in the consummation scene. After a whispered exchange, Sergei enters Katerina's bedroom and breaks into his first broadly lyrical section, attempting to win Katerina over by emulating the Slavic, folk-tinged music which has been associated with her character up to this point; he even takes up the motive of 'boredom' which she sings at the opening of the opera, trying to find a common ground (Ex. 13). He continues to serenade her, accompanied by sentimental, pseudo-waltz music, acting out the comedy of 'understanding'.

In her initial encounter with Sergei, Katerina seems to be on the ideal Soviet path, asserting her feminist spirit while open to his sexual advances. Compare the heat

³⁶ Kollontai, *The Autobiography* (see n. 33), 78.

Allegro ♩ = 144

B. Clar. Bassoon Contra Bassoon Horn Trom. Choir Katerina

lips to mine I've no

Allegro ♩ = 144

Strings

Ex. 12: Katerina's bedroom: Orchestral score of the climax of 'The Foal Runs after the Filly': Act I scene 3, mm. 158–170.

of Katerina's passion with Kollontai's description of New Woman 'Tatiana': 'A passerby stirs her soul, she weeps, is inflamed and gives herself to him. Simply and straightforwardly she wrests for life her small earthly joys.' But Katerina cannot live up to the New Woman's next move: 'she does not want to bind her life to the passerby: "That's not for me – no, I don't like that. Yes, if only you were a peasant! But this way, it makes no sense! That might do for an hour, but not for a whole life!" And she goes forth, gently smiling at him in farewell, she goes forth in search of the happiness of which she dreams, she goes forth lost in her own thoughts, as though she were alone in the world, and as though everything willed to be created anew by her.'³⁷ Katerina's desperate and murderous love could not be farther from

³⁷ Kollontai, *The Autobiography*, (see n. 33), 58.

— one who'll kiss and ca - res my white breast, and leave me ex -

Ex. 12: (Continued).

Katerina *cresc.* *dim.*
Oh God _____ it's all so bor - ing!

Sergei *Adagio* ♩ = 74
God, _____ I'll die of bore - dom!

Ex. 13: Katerina's opening aria. Act I scene 1, mm. 42–45; and Act I scene 3, mm. 281–4: Sergei ingratiates himself with Katerina.

Kollontai's heroine. Consider the last scene, in which Sergei trades in Katerina for a less demanding model, and Katerina's pathetic forfeiting of her stockings before ending her own and Sonyetka's lives.³⁸

The death of the New Woman

Kollontai's ideas were misunderstood from the beginning, and came up against further resistance during the zenith of Russia's conservative sexual reaction, dubbed the 'Thermidor.' Writers began to develop new sexual theories that combined Freudian ideas with communist values. Dr Aron Zalkand, the founder of the Society of Marxist Psychoneurologists, developed a theory of revolutionary sublimation. He derided Kollontai's emphasis on love, asserting that sexual energy should be conserved and harnessed for procreation alone. He took war-time sublimation and made it into a way of life, going so far as to develop what were known as 'Zalkand's Twelve Commandments.' Among the taboos were sexual activity before marriage (no earlier than age twenty-five); sexual attraction to a class enemy; sexual desire as a purely physical phenomenon; and too-frequent sex.³⁹ Zalkand's last commandment allowed for state intervention in citizens' sex lives.

Naturally, criticism of the new sexuality and its aftermath was focused on Kollontai herself. She was depicted by her detractors as the ultimate sexually insatiable female, as in this quote from 1917: 'It is plain that her revolutionary enthusiasm is nothing but a gratification of her sexual satyriasis. In spite of her numerous "husbands" Kollontai, first the wife of a general, later the mistress of a dozen men, is not yet satiated. She seeks new forms of sexual sadism.'⁴⁰ Misogynist writers up to the present day paint Kollontai in such a light. In reality, her lovers numbered four, two of whom she married. Lenin, who was one of her most important opponents, used insinuations about her loose morals as a way of discrediting her ideas about social reform.

At the same time that Kollontai fell under attack, social problems were blamed increasingly on *all* women, who continued to be abused in male-female relationships. One man seduced a sixteen-year-old with a promise of marriage, afterward telling her: 'You little whore, giving yourself up without any resistance.'⁴¹ Shostakovich's Sergei derides Katerina in more or less the same terms after the consummation scene: 'Ha, I've never experienced that yet, a married woman giving in so quickly.' For men, the problem lay with women and their new role outside of the home. When polled on what they wanted out of marriage, men gave responses such as 'the wife prepares everything,' and 'the wife must be less developed than the husband.'⁴² As Boris says to Katerina after he has flogged Sergei: 'Well, what now? That's really made me hungry. Is there anything left from supper? Hey! Are you

³⁸ Here we find resonances in Kollontai's own personal life. One of her greatest disappointments was the dissolving of her second marriage after her husband had an affair with a younger woman.

³⁹ Stites, *The Women's Liberation Movement* (n. 21), 381.

⁴⁰ Pitirim Sorokin, quoted in Stites, *The Women's Liberation Movement*, 346.

⁴¹ Stites, *The Women's Liberation Movement*, (see n. 21) 361.

⁴² Stites, *The Women's Liberation Movement*, 365.

deaf? Wives who resisted were often beaten or forced to give up their work. Some women did resist, as in the famed Bryansk Province sexual strike of the mid-1920s. Their ultimatums included demands that they were not to be addressed as 'hag,' 'bitch,' or 'slut.'

Kollontai maintained her staunch support of women's rights despite these obstacles, but she suffered ridicule from fellow politicians and criticism from women who did not see that 'free love' would benefit them economically or emotionally. In an attempt to force men to take economic responsibility for wives and children, Kollontai fell under heavier scrutiny from them as well. A key scene from Shostakovich's opera seems to mirror Kollontai's own experience, particularly an attack by a fellow committee member during the heated 1925 debates on marriage law, which publicly humiliated Kollontai. Katerina interrupts the assault on Aksinya with an ominous cymbal crash. Aksinya complains bitterly that the men have torn her skirt to pieces, suggesting that Katerina has arrived just in time to foil a rape attempt. Katerina then launches into a proto-feminist speech on the plight of Soviet women. Her monologue is set to the most dignified of the Russian folksong-like themes of the opera, though it is interrupted and thus undermined by the derisive laughter of Sergei. His mockery of her feminist stance echoes Kollontai's experiences debating for women's rights. When Sergei, fresh from this humiliation, comes to Katerina's room later that night and derides her at the end of the consummation scene, his tone is so similar to that voiced during her feminist monologue earlier in the day, that it supports reading this as a vengeful sexual encounter. Katerina's monologue, a radical departure from Leskov's original, seems to echo Kollontai's feminist polemics in an increasingly hostile environment. Ironically, Kollontai talked very little about sexuality or morality in her writings, which were mostly aimed at social reform. But, as with Shostakovich's opera, it wasn't so much Kollontai's ideology which disturbed her detractors; she was criticized for talking about sex too often and too openly. Although Kollontai and Shostakovich both escaped death at the hands of Stalin's henchmen, their careers were irrevocably changed by failure to toe the Party line. For the composer, it was the end of his operatic career and the proposed trilogy of operas on heroines from Russia's past. For Kollontai, after repeated attempts to expel her from the Party, it meant virtual exile in Norway. She died in political obscurity in 1952, and with her the early years of hope for a new, emancipated society.

Somewhere between Shostakovich's formative years and the second production of *Lady Macbeth* in 1936, the opera, like Kollontai and Katerina, was unable to gulf the changes between old and new. The tide was turning too quickly. In 1936, Stalin put one of the final nails in the anti-feminist coffin, banning all non-therapeutic abortions. In the same year he sat in on *Lady Macbeth*. Perhaps what fueled his anger was not just an aversion to powerful women – as some have suggested – or to feminism *per se*, but to the embodiment in Katerina of Kollontai's 'free love,' the 'life without control' that so many of her detractors thought Kollontai recommended. Perhaps it was *Lady Macbeth's* international exposure, through a number of

(Katerina snuffs out the candle and sits down at the window)

From the window, a while ago I saw
 that under the roof there was a little nest:
 in it a dove and his mate were cooing
 and circled together in the spacious sky.
 Now I often look in on them,
 I often cry, cry out of envy –
 the happiness of the dove's mate is what I envy,
 always with someone I love not, always locked up.
 Oh, there is no liberty, no freedom.
 I cannot fly.
 Oh, I have no dove mate, beloved and dear
 I have no dear one.
 The days go by in a joyless procession
 my life will flash past without a smile.
 Alone, alone, forever alone. Why is that my fate?

Ex. 14: Katerina's soliloquy, substitute text.

full-scale productions and concert versions,⁴³ that made it even more dangerous. *Pravda* condemns the opera for 'tickling the perverted tastes of the bourgeoisie.' Clearly, good Soviet citizens did not harbor such tastes; more likely, the new audiences from the West were at risk of taking this embodiment of Socialist Realism as prototypical.

Shostakovich's contemporary and sympathetic treatment of the female protagonist was sensitive to the sexual context of the 1920s as its critique of the regime which destroyed her was to the political climate of the time. For Shostakovich, Kollontai's ideal of liberating love allows Katerina a human passion which makes her a sympathetic character, even if it cannot save her. But as she fails to bridge the gap between old and new, she unwittingly takes down the opera which brings her to life.

In the early 1960s and safely after Stalin's death, Shostakovich took steps to revise *Lady Macbeth* into a second incarnation as *Katerina Izmailova*. Key among the revisions was the excising or toning down the sexuality and violence which so characterized the original score. Even a contemporary film version, starring Galina Vishnevskaya, was careful to avoid any gratuitous glimpses of body hair or nudity.⁴⁴ But Shostakovich's revisions began long before that, even before the work came to the operatic stage. The key scene in which Katerina expresses her own Winged Eros view of sexuality, 'The Foal Runs After the Filly,' was cut before the première and replaced with one praising domestic (as opposed to purely sexual) bliss. (Example 14.) For all that the original text and its music perfectly manifested Kollontai's ideas, the librettist and composer overrode their original idea and Kollontai's assertion that sexual love rivals maternal love by replacing the text with this throwback to an earlier era. Perhaps librettist and composer felt that a more traditional nineteenth-century outlook was appropriate for a representation of the oppressive bourgeois past, a character who had not yet been touched by

⁴³ Both fully staged and concert versions appeared in the United States, Sweden, Denmark, Czechoslovakia, London, and in regional productions within the Soviet Union.

⁴⁴ See Galina Vishnevskaya, *Galina: A Russian Story* (San Diego, 1984).

Sergei's 'great love,' or perhaps Katerina needed to be desexualized before the consummation scene (which follows directly on this aria) to make her more sympathetic as a rape victim, less complicit in her own sexual life. Alternatively, the exchange of the physically powerful horse for the dove could be read as more in tune with Kollontai's 'winged' Eros of love and the 'wingless' Eros of lust. In other words, the substitution of the sexually climactic phrase 'No one will put his hand round my waist, no one will press his lips to mine, no one will stroke my white breast, no one will tire me out with his passionate embraces' with 'Always with someone I love not, always locked up. Oh, there is no liberty, no freedom. I cannot fly.' suggests that it is the freedom that love brings, rather than its physical satisfaction, that arouses Katerina. By extension, this reading suggests that Shostakovich and Preis wanted to create a more sympathetic and thoughtful version of Leskov's carnal heroine.

The original text of this aria did not make it to the stage, it was not included in the 1935 published score, Stalin never heard it, and it was not reinstated in Shostakovich's remake of this opera thirty years later.⁴⁵ So, for all that *Pravda* complained that 'love is smeared all over the opera in the most vulgar manner,' it is possible that Shostakovich took the preemptive strike. In this work of sexual excess in which male sexuality takes the main role, perhaps the Winged Eros of feminine desire was more than the composer and librettist were willing to indulge. Perhaps they decided on second thought that Katerina, like Kollontai, simply talked about sex too much.

⁴⁵ According to Richard Taruskin, this text was reinstated only in 1996. For a more exhaustive discussion of this text and its exclusion from *Lady Macbeth*, see Taruskin, 'Entr'acte: The Lessons of Lady M.' (see n. 11).