LADY MACBETH, THE ILL-FATED QUEEN: EXPLORING SHAKESPEAREAN THEMES OF AMBITION, SEXUALITY, WITCHCRAFT, PATRILINEAGE, AND MATRICIDE IN VOCAL SETTINGS OF VERDI, SHOSTAKOVICH, AND PASATIERI

BY

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Abstract

This exploration of three vocal portrayals of Shakespeare's Lady Macbeth investigates the transference of themes associated with the character is intended as a study guide for the singer preparing these roles. The earliest version of the character occurs in the setting of Verdi's *Macbeth,* the second is the archetypical setting of Lady Macbeth found in the character Katerina Ismailova from Shostakovich's *Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk District,* based on the Nicolai Leskov novella of the same title, and the third is Thomas Pasatieri's monodrama *Lady Macbeth,* which uses significant excerpts from Shakespeare in a solo vocal pastiche of the arc of her character. The archetypical qualities of Shakespeare's Lady Macbeth are established, and incorporate analyses from different historical and cultural contexts, including medical discourse from the time of Shakespeare, the English witchcraft trials of the 17th century, and shifting patriarchal conditions, as well as feminist and psychological perceptions of her character. The ways in which significant stage interpretations of Lady Macbeth from her inception through the Victorian Age have influenced, and in some cases, been influenced by, these vocal works. Archetypical discourse, performance practice, and societal perceptions of Lady Macbeth establish a baseline by which elements specific to the operatic genre and vocal idiom are addressed, including placement and conception of the work in the composer's oeuvre, circumstances affecting the compositional process, including revisions both voluntary (Verdi), and unexpected (Shostakovich), and how societal norms and varying levels of patriarchal dominance affect the representation of Lady Macbeth's motivations in performance interpretations. Adaptations in the vocal libretti of critical moments of character

development are discussed in terms of omissions of certain lines and their implications with regard to character motivation and development. Though many variables exist within these vocal settings, a baseline of archetypical qualities of Lady Macbeth relative to Shakespeare is highly applicable to proper preparation and characterization.

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Chapter One
Introduction

Lady Macbeth is likely not the first Shakespearean heroine, tragic or otherwise, who might first come to mind when one ponders Shakespeare in opera; certainly, Juliet or Desdemona might come to mind first. Fixed in the standard repertoire are Juliet's Waltz of Gounod and Desdemona's hauntingly beautiful and sad Willow Song of Verdi, but the understanding of the nature of these characters is perhaps more clear, generally, and this makes them attractive to singers. Juliet: a victim of family circumstance and of an ill-fated, impossible love, and Desdemona: a pawn in a man's world whose purity of heart is greatly abused. What then of Lady Macbeth? Her nature is not quite so easy to capture in one line; there are so many angles of approach, and this is precisely why she is so compelling a study. There is no aria of Lady Macbeth that is so much a soprano rite of passage as those of her Shakespeare-in-opera cohorts mentioned above. She is a challenging character to portray due to the complexity of her nature and this informs her music in ways that may render it inaccessible to those without deep understanding of what is potentially in play at any moment in her story. Lady Macbeth is not an immediately agreeable character who is haplessly caught in tragic circumstance, quite the contrary. She is the curator of tragic circumstance who at no point in time displays a significant redeeming quality. This is not a character portrayal to be undertaken upon cursory investigation, for her music can be as intriguing as she is and is only accessible dramatically with a thorough investigation of her nature— this is the endeavor of this study.

Three vocal settings of Lady Macbeth, those found in Giuseppe Verdi's *Macbeth*, Dmitri Shostakovich's *Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk District*, and Thomas Pasatieri's

monodrama simply called *Lady Macbeth*, will be the focus repertoire for this character study. What will become clear is that these settings have certain commonalities, but due to their vast differences, there is a great potential for Lady Macbeth to be completely different from one setting to the next. Varying circumstances in dramatic setting, including cultural, social, political, and supernatural elements devise the parameter of interpretation for her character. These circumstances impact which aspects of her nature become prevalent and which lay in the background of the characterization.

To create a platform upon which a discussion of the similarities and differences of her characterization may occur, the first chapter will seek to understand the nature of Lady Macbeth relative to the Shakespeare play. A look into the political and social circumstances of early modern England which greatly inform the conception of Shakespeare's Lady Macbeth will be basis for understanding further the psychological, feminist, and critical analysis of Lady Macbeth in recent times. The impact of cultural and societal factors relevant to each dramatic setting, if any, will be investigated pertaining to an understanding of her character as well. Her qualities are reflected differently in nineteenth century Verdi than in early twentieth century Shostakovich and this malleability of character is precisely what makes her a challenge to portray. Lady Macbeth's motivations, her source of power, and her demise will be discussed as conditions of her character vary from one setting to the next.

The Lady Macbeth of Shakespeare's play is so strong an archetype that mere mention of her name in contexts outside of his play is enough to bring a host of characterization options. Her presence as an archetypical figure in other source material relevant to each composer's process will be addressed. She transfers very well to a new

environments, but certain of her character qualities are amplified by her new surroundings; an understanding of this requires comparison between Shakespeare and the other source material into which her character has transferred, and an understanding of how the opera treats the character in her new environment.

Singers preparing Lady Macbeth in any of the settings addressed here, or future settings, are strongly encouraged to endeavor through this process. A knowledge of the circumstances under which she originally came into being, and critically, an understanding of how she attempts, when circumstances change around her, to adapt and cope with the litany of terror she creates.

Chapter Two
Lady Macbeth

> After "interviewing" Lady Macbeth, I ascertained that in my testimony I would assert that she meets the formal D.S.M.-IV diagnostic criteria for: (1) Major Depressive Disorder, Recurrent Type; (2) Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder; and (4) Sleepwalking Disorder. Additionally, I would argue that owing to the loss of her only child…Lady Macbeth had also suffered from a severe bereavement reaction…"In view of your diagnosis, Professor Kahr, is there an abnormality of mind?"… "Most certainly," I replied. "Such as to diminish responsibility for murder?" she wondered. "Most definitely," I concluded.[1]

While the notion that the wife of Macbeth, a true historical figure— an early king of Scotland— has somehow traveled in time and been put on trial, as suggested by the anecdotal reference above, is a propos of the superstition that surrounds "the Scottish play," this has, alas, not come to pass. The above diagnosis was offered by Professor Brett Kahr, a Senior Clinical Research Fellow in Psychotherapy and Mental Health at the Centre for Child Mental Health in London, in a mock trial of the Macbeths.[2] While this is in no way meant to close the door on the mysteries of Lady Macbeth (and there are many, as we will see), since Professor Kahr's interview was with an actor who was portraying Lady Macbeth, it does open the door to the many complex interpretations of Lady Macbeth's words and actions by actors, literary critics, psychologists, feminist historians, as well as the translators, composers, librettists and singers who have portrayed her on the operatic stage. There does seem to be one constant in all of the discourse pertaining to Lady Macbeth, and that is the issue of her power: speculation as to its source, the

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[1] Brett Kahr, "Letter from London Defending Lady Macbeth: Testimony of an Expert Witness," *American Imago* 67, no. 3 (2010): 453-462

[2] Kahr, "Letter from London," 455. Professor Kahr was invited to be an expert witness for the defense of Lady Macbeth in a mock trial held as a fundraiser for the Criminal Bar Association in London in 2011by Helena Kennedy, Q.C., Baroness Kennedy of the Shaws, a human rights and criminal lawyer, Labor Peer of the House of Lords, and in this mock trial, defense attorney for Lady Macbeth.

motivation that drives it, the balance of good and evil in her power, its impact on others, on herself, on the outcome of the play, and whether she ultimately has any power at all. This issue of power embodied in a woman seems to bear a substantial amount of weight in writings contemporary to Shakespeare and those of the present.

Another glimpse at Professor Kahr's mock trial testimony reveals some well-played humor with regard to Lady Macbeth:

> "Is there any condition from which Lady Macbeth does not suffer?" "Yes," I quipped, now in full playful mode. "Her Ladyship reveals no evidence whatsoever for either Male Pattern Baldness or Erectile Dysfunction," at which point the entire audience, and the barristers as well, chortled with good humor.[3]

Themes associated with gender in *Macbeth* are quite pervasive, and indeed, discourse concerning aspects of Lady Macbeth's power apparently cannot be separated from her gender. The reality, good or bad, of this inseparability does beg attention; as singers wind their way through the process of role and character preparation, there is a certain expectation of due diligence in delving into the historical context of a work, its social context, and so forth. When one is going through this preparatory process for something as culturally significant as *Macbeth,* establishing context for the discourse that will likely be encountered is necessary for a singer to develop an informed understanding of its many perspectives. Even if, after thorough character preparation, a singer arrives to the first rehearsal with a completely different opinion from that of the director with regard to what motivates Lady Macbeth's power, for example, the thorough investigation may, at the very least, help to better understand the director's perspective and provide the basis for an informed dialogue.

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[3] Ibid., 460.

Girl Power

As Lady Macbeth's power is often explained as being derived from aspects of her gender, in context of the supportive-to-a-fault wife, her motherhood status, or her potential for witchcraft, it seems prudent to understand Shakespearean criticism from a feminist point of view. Lady Macbeth's historical, cultural, and literary associations to witchcraft, demonology, hysteria, infanticide, and patrilineage are all relevant to understanding the character. These associations are relative to the ever-shifting role of women in society, as defined by the patriarchal norms of the time. While Lady Macbeth need not be interpreted from a feminist point of view, it is important to explore not only the condition of women in Shakespeare's era, but also in the time of Verdi, Shostakovich, and Pasatieri, and how each composer addresses her source(s) of power.

The feminist perspective on Shakespeare is not without its flaws. Carol Thomas Neely, in her "Feminist Modes of Shakespearean Criticism: Compensatory, Justificatory, Transformational," presents these three distinct modes of feminist criticism in Shakespeare. Compensatory criticism focuses on powerful, prominent women like Lady Macbeth and Cleopatra, declaring them worthy of a "new kind of attention." She says: "It restores to such women their virtues, their complexity, and their power, compensating for traditional criticism which has minimized or stereotyped them"[4] She qualifies this type of attention by presenting the complication it proffers, in that:

> heroines tend to be viewed in a partial vacuum, unnaturally isolated from the rest of the play, the Shakespearean canon, and the culture in which that canon is rooted… Thus the process by which the women are singled out for attention…become[s] suspect – vulnerable to objections of ahistoricity

[4] Carol Thomas Neely, "Feminist Modes of Shakespearean Criticism: Compensitory, Justificatory, Transformational," *Women's Studies* 9, (1981): 6.

> and wishful thinking and, what is worse, subject to contamination by the sex role stereotypes of the culture in which the criticism exists and which it is reacting against.[5]

She cites an example of this contamination of perspective in the writings of early nineteenth-century critic Anna Jameson, who, in her 1835 "Shakespeare's Heroines: Characteristics of Women," "praises Shakespeare's heroines for their intellect and spirit, but she insists always that these are tempered by softness and is defensive about their bold language and overt expressions of sexuality."[6] Jameson's nineteenth-century perspective, in both her discomfort in handling openly the sexual nature of Shakespeare's heroines and offering them as tempered in such qualities, which perhaps were thought best kept in check in the nineteenth century, may shed some light on Piave's libretto for Verdi's *Macbeth*, which will be explored in a later chapter.

Neely finds that the compensatory mode may also cause overcompensation and "attribute inappropriately or too enthusiastically to women characters qualities traditionally admired in men – power, aggressiveness, wit, sexual boldness."[7] Might the opposite then also be true? Could a female character of any time and place, written by a man, and given actions not societally perceived for her time to be feminine and deigns to embody much of the male archetype, also be written, as a result, to collapse physically, emotionally, and spiritually, under the weight of such a burden on her, ultimately more delicate constitution? Her inescapable femininity becomes her fatal flaw. This notion certainly aligns well with how Anna Jameson, and perhaps Verdi as well, might have perceived Lady Macbeth in the nineteenth century.

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[5] Ibid., 6.
[6] Ibid., 7. Neely cites p.23, 25, 54-5, 76, and passim in Jameson's *Shakespeare's Heroines: Characteristics of Women* (London, 1835).
[7] Ibid., 6

Neely's second mode of feminist criticism in Shakespeare, the justificatory, takes into account his "culture of the traditional dichotomy, of the stereotyping of women, of the constraints of patriarchy. This mode has the effect of justifying, or at least of accounting for, the limitations of some women characters and the limiting conceptions of women held by male characters."[8] The issue of patriarchy, specifically patrilineage—producing an heir and successor—are themes in *Macbeth* that resonate fully with Lady Macbeth. Neely qualifies application of the justificatory mode to Lady Macbeth with the following:

> In this mode, critics find that even strong or rebellious women are defined or controlled by patriarchal imperatives. Women like Gertrude and Lady Macbeth, conventionally viewed as lustful or domineering are seen as subordinated to and acting in the service of the patriarchal culture which has shaped them…it points out that nowhere do women withdraw their allegiance from men, act apart from men, or alter patriarchal structures…at the end of the tragedies they have been sacrificed – or have sacrificed themselves – to them.[9]

The flaw Neely cites in this mode of examining Shakespearean heroines in context of the oppression of patriarchy, is that "the result may be depressing— and also unbalanced." She says, "Justificatory critics differ over whether Shakespeare defends patriarchal structures, attacks them, or merely represents them. Such criticism may be led to make the structure more monolithic than they are, to minimize both the freedom of action of individual women within them and the part such women play in determining their shape" The real treatment and perception of women within a patriarchal context has meant many different things during and since the early modern era, and will be explored below in relation to Verdi, Shostakovich, and Pasatieri's characterization of Lady Macbeth.

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[8] Ibid., 7.
[9] Ibid., 8.

Neely's third and final mode, the transformational, asks

> not simply what women do or what is done to them, but what meaning these actions have and how this meaning is related to gender. I term this mode transformational because of its subject - the mutually transforming roles and attitudes of men and women in individual plays and the transformation of these roles throughout the canon – and because of its goal – which is not only to compensate for or to justify traditional criticism but to transform it…Critics in this mode interrogate the relation s between…patriarchal text and matriarchal subtext…[they] examine the mutual accommodation of female power and sexuality and patriarchal control in plays…They delineate in Shakespeare a female subculture, examining its interaction with and influence on the dominant male culture.

Neely clearly favors this third mode, as when she addresses its flaws, she admits her "perspective is not detached enough for its limitations to be fully apparent" but she does say, "feminist critics must find new ways to talk about gender roles…as feminist criticism of Shakespeare enlarges its perspective, both its subject matter and style become still more amorphous and perhaps therefore less political, less definably feminist."[10]

Thus, the discourse related to *Macbeth* and how Lady Macbeth's power is interpreted can be placed into context relative to these modes of feminist criticism. Specifically feminist writings relative to Lady Macbeth will be addressed below, after a discussion of her character in the context of early modern England.

Ambition, Witchcraft, Infanticide and Hysteria

Raphael Holinshed's 1587 *Chronicles of England, Scotland, and Ireland* establishes that *Macbeth* is a true figure in the historical succession of Scottish kings. Shakespeare is believed to have based the character of Lady Macbeth on two women: Donwald's wife in the telling of King Duff, and Macbeth's wife, Gruoch of Scotland. It is

[10] Ibid., 10.

worth noting that Macbeth was Gruoch's second husband and that she brought an infant son to the marriage, which itself proved to be an infertile union.[11] Edith Whitehurst Williams focuses on this same source in accounting for Shakespeare's inspiration for Lady Macbeth: "With Shakespeare's capacity for taking a very slight characterization from the printed page of his source and raising it, alive and full-bodied upon the stage, we have no reason to think that he needed more than the half dozen lines he found in Holinshed as a starting point for his creation of Lady Macbeth."[12] Indeed, the details about Lady Macbeth in the Holinshed give us some insight into Shakespeare's crafting of her: Macbeth's wife "lay sore upon him to attempt the thing, as she that was verie ambitious, burning in unquenchable desire to beare the name of queene."[13]

This ambition and burning desire puts Lady Macbeth into a particular context within the culture of Shakespeare's female characters, one that would not necessarily fit the mold of societal norms. This is, of course, what makes her the dynamic force of power, as she has long been recognized. Lady Macbeth is made all the more interesting when juxtaposed with Lady Macduff, whose character, it can be said, embodies a more culturally acceptable position in Elizabethan and Jacobean England, even while considering the effectiveness of the Maiden Queen. Juliet Dusinberre claims: "Women's harmlessness in the political world…was their worst enemy. Shakespeare understood that in politics power hangs on the power to inflict injury. Women are not told events because

[11] Raphael Holinshed, *Chronicles of England, Scotland, and Ireland,* Vol. 5 (Oxford: Clarendon Press 1917) 269.
[12] Edith Whitehurst Williams, "In Defense of Lady Macbeth," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 24, no. 2 (1973): 221-223.
[13] Holinshed, *Chronicles of England,* 269.

they cannot alter them."[14] Shakespeare illustrates this harmlessness as powerlessness, abject helplessness even, as Lady Macduff learns of her husband's fleeing from another man. She and her children are destined to be slaughtered by Macbeth's forces. Dusinberre writes, "She can only offer the woman's bitter, but also slightly querulous approach to an inattentive male world: "He loves us not." She feels the feebleness of her self-justification to the murderers:

> I have done no harm. But I remember now
> I am in this earthly world, where, to do harm
> Is often laudable; to do good, sometime
> Accounted dangerous folly: why then, alas!
> Do I put up that womanly defence,
> To say, I have done no harm? (4.2.82-7)[15]

Lady Macduff is presented by Shakespeare as the societal norm for a woman, always domestic and caring for her children; yet, what is done to her and her children by this world, in which they remain in their duty bound place, is an unjust and untimely death. Lady Macbeth, then, for a time, rises above the societal constraints that fail Lady Macduff, doing so in a manner that Dusinberre says belies her as a "skilful (sic) woman," who "acquires a man to act on her behalf"[16]

Lady Macbeth seems to see an opening for fulfilling her ambitions of political power after she reads Macbeth's letter from the battlefield in Act I, wherein he describes the prophecies made by the three witches of kingly power made to him directly, and to Banquo, by virtue of his prodigy. In telling her of this news he refers to her as "my

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[14] Juliet Dusinberre, *Shakespeare and the Nature of Women* (London: The Macmillan Press, 1975), 282.
[15] William Shakespeare, *Macbeth* ed. by Barbara A. Mowat and Paul Werstine (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2013), 137. All subsequent excerpts from *Macbeth* are taken from this edition unless noted otherwise.
[16] Dusinberre, *Shakespeare and Women*, 283.

dearest partner of greatness" and is quite eager to tell her even prior to his imminent arrival to Inverness "what greatness is promised thee." However, her reaction is not to revel in her own potential acquisition of glory, but to acknowledge that while she feels he deserves the fulfilment of these prophecies, she doubts his ability to "catch the nearest way." Macbeth includes her in the shared glory more emphatically in the letter than she, in words at least, includes herself. Upon finishing the letter she immediately says:

> Glamis thou art, and Cawdor; and shalt be
> What thou art promised: yet do I fear thy nature;
> It is too full o' the milk of human kindness
> To catch the nearest way: thou wouldst be great;
> Art not without ambition, but without
> The illness should attend it…(1.5.15-20)

Rather than rely on him to act on her behalf in order that she attain political power, as Dusinberre suggests, Lady Macbeth is actually pointing out her husband's flaws of character that will prevent him from doing so independently and on his own behalf. Feminist critic Clara Claiborne Park points out that Shakespeare's women "often intervene forcefully in political matters, it is always in the interest of the male to whom they are attached…and usually – as with Lady Macbeth – their influence is for the worse."[17] She will make sure that he doesn't succumb to his own weakness of ambition, a weakness that is quite feminized by her characterization of him being "too full o' the milk of human kindness." Madelon Gohlke offers another feminist perspective, asserting that in *Macbeth* "the perception of the masculine consciousness is that to be feminine is to be powerless, specifically in relation to a controlling or powerful woman."[18] The

[17] Clara Claiborne Park, "How a Girl Can Be Smart and Still Popular," in *Women's Part: Feminist Criticism of Shakespeare*, ed. Carolyn Ruth Swift Lenz, Gayle Green, and Carol Thomas Neely, (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1980), 103.
[18] Madelon Gohlke, "I Wooed Thee with my Sword: Shakespeare's Tragic Paradigms," in *The Woman's Part*, 103.

obviously feminine reference to breastfeeding here, conjured to relate her perceived weakness in Macbeth's conscience, will be explored further in the discussion of gender issues relative to Lady Macbeth.

Returning to her motivation after reading the letter, we see that she is intent on assisting him in the swift fulfillment of the witches' prophecy.

> Hie thee hither,
> That I may pour my spirits in thine ear;
> And chastise with the valour of my tongue
> All that impedes thee from the golden round,
> Which fate and metaphysical aid doth seem
> To have thee crown'd withal. (1.5.28-33)

With this beckoning to Macbeth, who we know is presently riding ahead of Duncan, toward home and the Lady, we see her call upon her "spirits," rather than domestic confidence, savvy social skills, stability of reason, or her intellect, to assist him in his prophesied rise. It is this calling upon spirits that has linked her so often in discourse to the three witches, though she never interacts with them. In fact, she interacts in direct confidence or counsel with no other woman. In her book *Distracted Subjects: Madness and Gender in Shakespeare and Early Modern Culture*, Carol Thomas Neely addresses the association of Lady Macbeth with the witches: "She and the witches are indirectly identified with each other by their departures from prescribed female subordination, by their parallel role as catalysts to Macbeth's actions, and by the structure and symbolism of the play. They function as cultural scapegoats for the unnaturalness, disorder and violence that unfold."[19] The impetus for the play's murderous plot is initiated by the witches, in their awakening of Macbeth's dark desires, and who seem to wait on his

[19] Carol Thomas Neely, *Distracted Subjects: Madness and Gender in Shakespeare and Early Modern Culture* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004), 57.

arrival ("A drum, a drum! / Macbeth doth come."), which begs the question of qualifying the unseen forces of spirit that guide the witches, and how, upon reading the letter, Lady Macbeth seems to absorb their prophecies as her own outcome to craft.

Daniel Albright, in his article *The Witches and the Witch: Verdi's Macbeth*, which is a portrait of witchcraft references in Verdi's original production, says, "It is generally thought that Shakespeare wrote *Macbeth* around 1606, to celebrate the accession, after the death of Queen Elizabeth in 1603, of King James VI of Scotland to the throne of England, as King James I. James prided himself on his scholarship, particularly on witchcraft, the subject of his 1597 book, *Daemonologie*."[20] Albright also traces the development and expansion of the role of the witches in *Macbeth* and how their contribution to the story is greatly aided by musical expression. This line of thinking becomes significant in a later chapter as it pertains to Verdi's *Macbeth.* Albright also asks:

> What, exactly, is a witch? Why would someone wish to become one? King James asks this very question, and answers it as follows: 'Curiositie in great ingines: thirst of revenge, for some tortes deeply apprehended: or greedie appetite of geare, caused through great pouerty. As to the first of these, Curiosity, it is onelie the inticement of *Magiciens*, or *Necromanciers*: and the other two are the allureres of the *Sorcerers*, or *Witches*.'[21]

Perhaps it is Lady Macbeth's greedy appetite that incites her to want to "pour her spirits" into her husband's ear, but she is certainly not "in great poverty." Albright furthers the Jamesian theory:

> The power of witches in fact springs from their ambiguity, their appetite for scattering things about. In defining the word 'witchcraft' James

[20] Daniel Albright, "The Witches and the Witch: Verdi's *Macbeth*," *Cambridge Opera Journal* 17, no. 3 (2005): 25-252.
[21] Ibid., 226.

> claimed that it was simply the English equivalent of the Latin word 'sorcery,' 'which is taken from the casting of the lot…the theory of sorcery, then, is that chance patterns, such as the distribution of small objects that have passed through a sieve, or the array of tea-leaves at the bottom of a cup, can be construed as manifestations of hidden wisdom.[22]

Shakespeare indicates the Jamesian perspective on sorcery in Macbeth's aside in Act 1 Scene 3: "If chance will have me king, why, chance may crown me, without my stir," just prior to saying this he is characterized by Banquo to Ross and Angus as if he is in a trance: "Look, how our partner's rapt." It is certainly the "without my stir" to which Lady Macbeth alludes when, after reading Macbeth's letter, she voices concern over his weakness to act and determines to assist him. She does know his nature well, but is she at this time a witch fitting the Jamesian description?

Shakespeare marks the identity of the three Jamesian-model witches in their conversations, their bizarre androgyny, and the way they vaporize before Macbeth and Banquo's eyes. That Lady Macbeth is often characterized in analysis as a witch herself, or even as the ringleader of these more obviously defined witches in the story, is not exactly perplexing, but it is definitely not set down with clarity by Shakespeare. Neely says: "Their relationship is not a literal or symbolic 'alliance,' and neither the witches nor Lady Macbeth are unstintingly malevolent and powerful. In fact, the witches wish Macbeth to fail while Lady Macbeth wishes him to succeed, and their relation to the supernatural is represented while hers is only sought."[23] Though the words and actions of Lady Macbeth certainly do not make her a benign, harmless, and helpless domestic, like Lady Macduff, an exploration of some different perspectives on her words and actions reveals the complex nature of her character. Her Act 1, scene 5 speech, which occurs

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[22] Ibid., 227.
[23] Neely, *Distracted Subjects,* 58.

after hearing from a messenger of Macbeth and Duncan's imminent arrival, is the subject of much discourse:

> The raven himself is hoarse
> That croaks the fatal entrance of Duncan
> Under my battlements.
> Come, you spirits
> That tend on mortal thoughts, unsex me here,
> And fill me from the crown to the toe, top-full
> Of direst cruelty! make thick my blood;
> Stop up the access and passage to remorse,
> That no compunctious visitings of Nature
> Shake my fell purpose, nor keep peace between
> The effect and it!
> Come to my woman's breasts,
> And take my milk for gall, you murdering ministers,
> Wherever in your sightless substances
> You wait on nature's mischief!
> Come, thick night,
> And pall thee in the dunnest smoke of hell,
> That my keen knife see not the wound it makes,
> Nor heaven peep through the blanket of the dark,
> To cry 'Hold, hold!' (1.5.45-61)

With another reference to spirits, this time asking them to "unsex" her, there is a strong implication of the androgyny of Shakespeare's Jamesian-model witches that prophesy Macbeth's rise to power. After being unsexed, she wants to be made "full of direst cruelty," presumably a quality not assigned to the feminine nature, and certainly not a desirable one in a mother; Lady Macduff is later characterized as anything but direly cruel.

Motherhood is of significance to the nature of Lady Macbeth, as this speech marks her second reference to a mother's milk, the first occurring in her description of Macbeth being "too full o' the milk of human kindness." She characterizes him as too feminine in nature and in need of her spirits poured into his ear, and she now wishes to be unsexed, or de-feminized, and made cruel in order to help him "catch the nearest way" to

kingly power, i.e.: the murder of Duncan, who is about to arrive at Inverness, their home. The spirits she now also refers to as "murdering ministers," and upon her unsexing and being made full of direst cruelty, she would have them feed upon her woman's breast and "take her milk for gall" as fuel for their manner of inspiring Macbeth to murder Duncan. Neely says of this invocation: "Lady Macbeth's attempted (and unsuccessful) invocation is to spirits that seem more natural than supernatural: they 'tend on mortal thoughts' and 'wait on nature's mischief.' She does not ask for help to harm others as witches typically do, but only for a perversion of her own emotions and bodily functions"[24] Feminist critic Paula Berggren says the "evil in Shakespearean women seems to grow from a sexuality so out of tune with its procreative potential that it breeds villainy rather than children….Even the complex women of the major tragic phase suffer from an excess of libidinal energies that neither marriage nor motherhood can channel."[25] Berggren further qualifies Lady Macbeth's "out of tune procreative potential," specifically in her acquiring a "purgative transvestism," and this speech, if she is indeed looking to assist Macbeth by becoming a Jamesian-defined witch, her perhaps unsuccessful incantation leans toward that brand of evil.

Significantly, in her 1980 article in *Shakespeare Quarterly,* JeniJoy La Belle says:

> The metaphoric significance of Lady Macbeth's opening soliloquy in Act I has long been understood, but its literal meaning has not heretofore been recognized. Her words are usually read as a general plea to be free of pity and remorse. The biological specificity of her speech gives it greater physical impact and horror…The corporeal aberration is both metaphor and cause for Lady Macbeth's psychological condition.[26]

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[24] Ibid., 58.
[25] Paula Berggren, "The Woman's Part: Female Sexuality as Power," in *The Woman's Part,* 24.
[26] JeniJoy La Belle, "A Strange Infirmity: Lady Macbeth's Amenorrhea," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 31, no. 3 (1980): 381-386.

La Belle explains that Lady Macbeth's Act 1 scene 5 speech is rife with language that she directly links to seventeenth-century medical accounts of conditions of the female reproductive system. She posits that the linguistic commonalities between the speech and the Elizabethan medical references she cites are too direct for Lady Macbeth to merely be conjuring psychological fortification for the resolve and masculine fearlessness which will be required to aid her husband in the murder of Duncan. Specifically, Lady Macbeth's mention of "compunctious visitings of nature" is indicated by her research to refer to menstruation. *Vade Mecum: or, A Companion for a Chyrurgion* (London, 1652), discusses "the overmuch flowing of womens naturall visits," defining "visits" as occurrences of menstruation," and this reference effectually qualifies in a physiological way the following: "Make thick my blood, stop up th'access and passage to remorse" and "take my milk for gall," which are indicated as symptoms of amenorrhea in La Belle's research.[27] In this context, earlier images in Lady Macbeth's speech take on added significance. When she pleads "make thick my blood, / Stop up th' access and passage to remorse," she is asking for her periodic flow to cease and the genital tract to be blocked. Renaissance medical texts generally refer to the tract through which the blood from the uterus is discharged as a "passage."[28]

The strong link evidenced by La Belle's research has larger implications on Lady Macbeth's well-being when put into context of early modern principles of psychology.

> To them, psychology…referred to the philosophical study of the soul, located midway between natural philosophy, or "physics" in the broad sense of phenomena in the natural world, and divine philosophy, or metaphysics. What the Renaissance thinkers called the 'organic soul,'

[27] Ibid., 382.
[28] Ibid., 382.

> despite its spiritual aspect, functioned by sense-perception in the material world. Renaissance psychology was grounded on Aristotle's *De Anima* (*On the Soul*), which defined the soul as "the life principle of the individual body – that which differentiated living from non-living things" – in other words, that which is animate with emotion and locomotion.[29]

In early modern psychological terms, then, Lady Macbeth is effectually asking the spirits to shut down that which is animate within her, to deaden her spirit: her "organic soul," which is rooted to her potential for nurturing and mothering. She is denying her own soul and psyche in order to become what she perceives Macbeth needs her to be to claim the crown. Furthermore, if this speech is put into the temporal context of the immediate and urgent need she possesses to take dramatic action in rallying her resolve, as well as the very small window of time she will have to make him understand the heinous act that must be done that very evening, it can be argued that she is not being guided by rational decision making, but rather, by anxiety and fear. One might say that she has lost her temper, which today we use

> in the sense of 'mental balance or composure.' For an early modern, the word meant a person's well-balanced humoral constitution as linked to his moral character in a *complexio* of physiological, emotional, intellectual, and moral parts and faculties…Consequently the expression 'to lose one's temper' in 1600 meant something more serious and potentially less localized than simply a temporary loss of poise; it meant a loss if 'proportionate constitution,' a kind of insanity and/or an attack on bodily health not easily remedied.[30]

Of course this would explain Lady Macbeth's degradation to the hopelessness of permanent somnambulism, perpetual physical lethargy, and eventual suicide.

La Belle's interpretation, that Lady Macbeth is willing to forego her potential for motherhood in order to be filled with cruelty instead of remorse, and gall instead of

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[29] Unhae Langis, "Shakespeare and Prudential Psychology: Ambition ad Akrasia in *Macbeth*," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 40 (2012): 44-52.
[30] Ibid., 44.

nourishing milk, is a significant point of interest in her character. While two references she makes to a mother's milk have already been addressed here, the most significant occurs when she is goading Macbeth into action when he hesitates to follow through with the murder of Duncan. She uses this powerful rhetoric:

> I have given suck, and know
> How tender 'tis to love the babe that milks me:
> I would, while it was smiling in my face,
> Have pluck'd my nipple from his boneless gums,
> And dash'd the brains out, had I so sworn as you
> Have done to this. (1.7.62-67)

This striking imagery of matricide certainly would imply that Lady Macbeth has been made full of dire cruelty, as she has previously requested from the spirits earlier in the act. The connections between this violent rhetoric and the unsexing speech are explored by Stephanie Chamberlain in her article *Fantisizing Infanticide: Lady Macbeth and the Murdering Mother in Early Modern England.* She begins her investigation with this: "Scholars have traditionally read this as well as her earlier "unsex me here" (1.5.39) invocation as evidence of Lady Macbeth's attempt to seize a masculine power to further Macbeth's political goals. To overcome her husband's feminized reticence, Lady Macbeth assumes a masculinity she will prove unable to support."[31] Chamberlain is, of course, referring to Lady Macbeth's collapse into somnambulism and eventual suicide. Instead of linking this horrid rhetoric primarily to Lady Macbeth's earlier invocation for unsexing, Chamberlain investigates the implications of matricide in early modern England, specifically the nature of the power derived from motherhood at that time. "While she clearly seeks power, such power is…conditioned on maternity, an ambiguous, conflicted status in early modern England. Indeed, the images of nursing and infanticide

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[31] Stephanie Chamberlain, "Fantasizing Infanticide: Lady Macbeth and the Murdering Mother in Early Modern England," *College Literature* 32, no. 3 (2005): 72-91

that frame Lady Macbeth's act one fantasy invoke a maternal agency, momentarily empowering the achievement of an illegitimate political goal."[32]

That motherhood is viewed as Lady Macbeth's primary source of power has to do with patrilineage and the power women were seen to have with regard to traditional familial inheritance along the male line. Similarly, Lady Macbeth's reluctance to participate in the cultural norms of motherhood could also be perceived societally to be the result of an unsavory association of female power. If a woman's feminine agency is not being occupied by reproduction and birthing, there is sufficient cause for curiosity. Christoph Clausen explains: "The birthing process and the lying-in period celebrated female communal solidarity within a gendered space that excluded men, but with some women having not been invited or refused to attend, it was also fraught with latent tensions, tensions from which witchcraft accusations could develop."[33] Chamberlain's reference to Macbeth's "illegitimate political goal" alludes to the overall context of what was seen as a mother's power to either support or undermine the line of inheritance within a family in the act of bearing children. She explains that "motherhood was viewed as problematic in early modern England…while on the one hand mothers were praised for a selfless devotion to their children, they were likewise condemned for harming the innocents entrusted to their care…That mothers could undermine patrilineal outcomes, in fact, contributed to a generalized cultural anxiety about women's roles in the transmission of patrilineage. That patrilineage could be irreparably altered through

[32] Ibid., 73.

[33] Christoph Clausen, "Macbeth Multiplied: Negotiating Historical and Medial Difference Between Shakespeare and Verdi," *Internationale Forschungen zur Allgemeinen und Vergleichenden Literaturwissenschaft* 93 (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2005), 55.

marital infidelity, nursing, and infanticide rendered maternal agency a social and political concern."[34]

Since several references are made by Shakespeare to breastfeeding prior to this grotesque image of the murder of a feeding child, including Macbeth's perceived weakness by his wife being summarized by his being "too full o' the milk of human kindness", an understanding of the implications of breastfeeding within the context of patrilineage deserves some attention. While feeding one's child is generally thought of as an act of compassionate love, in early modern England there were notions about mothers not having good intentions in doing so, and likewise toward those mothers who chose to use a wet nurse as opposed to feeding their child themselves. Chamberlain elaborates on this issue:

> Maternal agency could undermine the patrilineal process even as it appeared to support it. This is especially evident in the practice of nursing…there existed a parallel thread that represented mother's milk as a potential source of corruption…Fears that breast milk could be tainted through bodily disease or ethnic impurity as well as economic privation are well documented.[35]

She cites an example of this documentation in a 1630 text, which says:

> Now if the nurse be of an euill complexion, as she is affected in her body, or in her mind, or hath some hidden disease, the child sucking of her breast must needs take part with her. And if that be true which the learned do say, that the temperature of the mind followes the constitution of the body, needs must it be, that if the nurse be of a naughty nature, the child must take thereafter.[36]

Due to this issue of maternal power, and the seeming uncertainty among men in the patriarchal system of early modern England of a mother's intentions in caring for a baby into the context of Lady Macbeth, Chamberlain feels that she is attempting to

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[34] Ibid., 73.
[35] Ibid., 74
[36] Ibid. Chamberlain notes this is found in Robert Cleaver and John Dod's *A Godly Form of Household,* 1630.

overcome her perceived weakness of gender by using it. In contrast to La Belle, who thinks Lady Macbeth wants to be literally, physiologically de-feminized, Chamberlain believes this strong rhetoric of matricide and the power a mother has during the act of breastfeeding and her potential to undermine patrilineal outcomes is Lady Macbeth looking strongly to her gender for power. She is seeking power from the most innately feminine aspects of herself, but calling upon this power as a device for violence and control. She says:

> That this savagery surfaces at a moment of greatest intimacy between mother and child only adds to its incomprehensible brutality. What is perhaps most revealing about Lady Macbeth's proudly defiant disclosure is how absolutely empowering such a fantasized moment proves to one struggling to break free from the gendered constraints that bind her…Lady Macbeth appeals to the maternal to deny the patrilineal. She would readily kill Macbeth's progeny to secure her husband's succession, but in killing the progeny she must likewise destroy his patrilineage, rendering his short-lived reign a barren one.[37]

Ultimately, then, this rhetoric runs against the success of the reign for Macbeth she is attempting to secure; she is not thinking through to a logical end, only in terms of temporary motivation to see him act as she desires. Shakespeare clearly references the issue of patrilineage in the ensuing dialogue, as Macbeth replies to this rhetoric with, "If we should fail?" to which she says "We fail! / But screw your courage to the sticking-place, / And we'll not fail" (1.7.70-71). The imagery in her response obviously alludes to the physical elements of his masculinity of which she is encouraging him to embrace in an aggressive manner. She continues to give a detailed plan for intoxicating Duncan's guards, revealing her premeditation and careful planning of the deed, something that he has not done, it seems, as he has been more consumed by doubt and is having second thoughts. When she is through laying out the details of how they will proceed, it is his

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[37] Ibid.

response that directly references the issue of patrilineage, and indicates his sexual arousal as a result of her unchecked aggression and ferocity. He says “Bring forth men-children only; / For thy daunted mettle should compose / Nothing but males” (1.7.83-85) Inarguably, when in private she calls upon spirits to assist her in her purpose; she is unsure of her feminine power’s capacity to stand to the challenge and wants to be unsexed, but when in his company, she leans heavily on her feminine power to provoke his masculinity to act in ways that she ultimately cannot. His response to her provocation of his manliness in the context of referencing offspring not only indicates patrilineage, but also her capacity to manipulate him sexually to commit the murder. The only power that she has as a woman comes from her capacity to be a mother and produce a male heir.

Considering the complexities of character in Lady Macbeth indicated by the research of La Belle and Chamberlain, the nature of the power of women in the patriarchal context of the time of Shakespeare, and the understanding of psychology in early modern England as defined in context of the organic soul, it seems that Shakespeare’s inclusion of obvious “witches” in this drama, is to indicate that which Lady Macbeth is not, and perhaps to indicate as well that the only true and rightful place of a Jamesian-defined witch is in a work of fiction.

In her “Lady Macbeth and the Daemonologie of Hysteria,” Joanna Levin presents an analysis of Lady Macbeth relative to a diagnosis contrary to the contemporary definition of witchcraft and analogous to the one represented in James I’s *Daemonologie.* The diagnosis was the work of the expert witness from a witchcraft trial, which she describes thusly:

> A trial involving many of the leading religious and political authorities in Renaissance England, the case of an allegedly bewitched young girl

> named Mary Glover sparked intense debate over the boundaries between the natural and the supernatural and resulted in the first etiology of hysteria written in English: Edward Jorden's *Briefe Discourse of A Disease Called the Suffocation of the Mother* (1603).[38]

Jorden's testimony in the case was based on his diagnosis of *hysterica passio* the condition elaborated upon in his etiology. *Hysterica passio*, Levin says, "was of course the classical disease of the female anatomy: Plato, Aristotle, and Hippocrates all elaborated a view of the womb as an hysterical organism, roaming wildly within the female form." Lady Macbeth, Levin argues, is fashioned after this "new category in medical literature, one that offered unruly sexual desire and corrupted maternity as a rational answer to and extension of traditional demonology." Though Jorden was a man of science and determined to rationalize the unexplainable side of the nature of women in a way that was not rooted in the supernatural, his diagnosis did not exactly leave the full nature of demonology behind, or explain it away; rather it justified different reasons for the same symptoms as those of women who were defined as possessed or labeled witches. Of his diagnosis, Levin says:

> Far from being a benign "ailing nurturer," the early modern hysteric replayed the contradictions of her satanic predecessors: she was both disorderly and passive; she was a "disturbing threat to phallic power" and (largely) a paternalistic construct; she was and was not a mother; she was deceptive yet utterly somatized; and she both confounded patriarchal authority and provided the occasion for its legitimation. Such contradictions also work themselves out in the figure of Lady Macbeth, and she herself provides a further link between the demonic and the hysterical.[39]

Whereas traditional demonology and the Jamesian-defined witch are rooted in the supernatural, Jorden proposes a medical diagnosis for such women and roots the

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[38] Joanna Levin, "Lady Macbeth and the Daemonologie of Hysteria," *ELH* 69, no. 1 (2002): 21-55.
[39] Ibid., 25.

symptoms in the biological and the rational. It is also worth noting that Levin, in the beginning of her article, references Jorden's introduction to his discourse about the disease he calls the Suffocated Mother:

> Being a Phisition, and judging in my conscience that these matters have been mistaken by the common people, I thought good to make knowne the doctrine of this disease … to the end that the unlearned and rash conceits of others, might be therby brought to better understanding and moderation; who are apt to make everything into a supernaturall work which they do not understand; …who are ready to draw forth their wooden dagger, if they do but see a maid or woman suffering one of these fits of the Mother, conjuring and exorcising them as if they were possessed with evil spirits.[40]

Immediately below this, she quotes Sigmund Freud:

> What would you say, by the way, if I told you that all of my brand-new prehistory of hysteria is already known and was published a hundred times over, though several centuries ago? Do you remember that I always said that the medieval theory of possession held by the ecclesiastical courts was identical with our theory of a foreign body and the splitting of consciousness? But why did the devil who took possession of the poor things invariably abuse them sexually and in a loathsome manner? Why are their confessions under torture so like the communications made by my patients in psychic treatment? Sometime soon I must delve into the literature on this subject.[41]

Lady Macbeth then, as an example of an early modern hysteric affected by Jorden's Suffocated Mother, represents the perception of the otherwise unexplainable (by men) emotional complications seen in women. Jung said: "Lady Macbeth may derive ultimately from that awesome figure, the Terrible Mother…"[42]

Levin explains the historical positioning of the early modern hysteric: "Far from being a docile version of the witch, the figure of the early modern hysteric thus continued

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[40] Ibid., 21 from Edward Jorden's *Briefe Discourse of A Disease Called the Suffocation of the Mother* (1603)

[41] Freud, as found in Levin, 21.

[42] Carl Gustav Jung, "Aion," *The Collected Works,* ed. Sir Hubert Read and Michael Fordham (New York: 1959), IX, Pt. 2.

to embody the contradictions of her predecessor. She modernized an ancient agenda and reinforced misogynist accounts of weak, fragile, and passive femininity."[43] The status of Lady Macbeth's motherhood is not only brought into question in her choice of matricidal rhetoric to empower Macbeth when he expresses doubt— has she truly "given suck" to a child at a point in her past?— but her somnambulism and suicide also prevent her from ever providing Macbeth an heir. "Created three years after the publication of Jorden's etiology, the figure of Lady Macbeth herself intensifies the perverse doubleness of the Mother. As the famous question, 'How many children had Lady Macbeth?' implies, the play leaves her status as a mother ambiguous." As an hysteric, Lady Macbeth sits somewhere between the clearly defined demonic witches on the heath and Lady Macduff, the representation of the truly nurturing mother; she is neither a witch nor a mother. Levin elaborates:

> As dominant representations of femininity came to emphasize the good mother over and against the threatening witch, the hysteric stood as an intermediary figure; combining features of both prototypes, she exposed the instability of patriarchal classifications. Lady Macbeth occupies this intermediary space throughout the play. She resists a splitting of the demonic matriarch and the secular mother, and her narrative development figures the many continuities between the witch and the hysteric. Whether she transforms into a witch or exits as an hysterical somnambulist, she continues to represent the vicissitudes of the wanton will and the desiring womb."[44]

Levin also points out that Shakespeare does not have the doctor that attends Lady Macbeth diagnose her with Jorden's condition of *hysterica passio*; the doctor says, "More needs she the divine than the physician" but he also claims that she has a disease, though he feels unqualified to manage it: "The disease is beyond my practice" (5.2.62). Levin elaborates on the connectivity to Lady Macbeth's somnambulism and the Mother:

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[43] Levin, "Daemonologie," 36.
[44] Ibid., 38.

> The play never mentions *hysterica passio*, but somnambulism was in fact one of the symptoms of the "Suffocation of the Mother." According to Jorden, the hysteric could become "depraved in too much wakefulnesse through the commotion of the animall spirits, also in dreames, where sometimes besides the deprivation of the fantasie they will walk, talke, laugh, crye, &c." But, as we have seen, Jorden primarily associated such deprivation with unsatisfied desire, and Lady Macbeth herself continues to demonstrate signs of a domineering sexuality. Even in her deranged, guilt-ridden state, she commands Macbeth to come to bed, and her lines reveal the urgency of desire as much as "the solicitous wife's care for her husband": "To bed, to bed! There's a knocking at the gate. Come, come, come, come, give me your hand! What's done cannot be undone. To bed, to bed, to bed" (5.1.69-72).These words, her last in the play, enunciate a half-sexualized command, and the femininity recuperated and constituted by her somnambulism remains a goad to patriarchal action.[45]

Feminist critic Paula Berggren qualifies Lady Macbeth's final scene as personifying her womanly role: "In her nightgown, with her hair loose, Lady Macbeth resembles not only an undisciplined madwoman, but a frightened innocent child, or a seductive unsatisfied wife; she is caught in the web that cripples women in a paternalistic society and is doomed to frustration in any case, for the husband who is neither father nor lover is beyond helping her."[46] That she was a dedicated wife and followed through in supporting Macbeth in the most unsavory circumstances, (plotting murder) and that her wifely duties simply became too much to bear seems plausible, if perhaps a bit of an oversimplification of so much of the earlier rhetoric. Her earlier invocations would have fallen on deaf ears; no spirits would have heard or guided her words or actions to inspire Macbeth. In this view, where she is personifying her womanly role, the somnambulism is the manner in which she is shown to be the victim of only her own ambition in service to Macbeth, not a woman breaking under the strain of having been overrun by spirits, or by having been only self-serving. Since the medical doctor is present in her final scene, there

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[45] Levin, "Daemonologie" 43.
[46] Berggren, "The Woman's Part," 27.

is an intimation that she is viewed by larger society to be in need of medical help, but, of course, no medical diagnosis is rendered. Her final state is left quite open to explanation. Christoph Clausen explains:

> The various ambiguities surrounding Lady Macbeth's relation to witchcraft are never resolved. It is often claimed that the play's conclusion moves toward rational skepticism and the disenchantment of witchcraft…the demystification of witchcraft climaxes in Lady Macbeth's sleepwalking scene, thereby anticipating a cultural process in Jacobean culture which turned the witch into the hysteric…The argument is valid in the sense that both the cultural transformation of witchcraft into hysteria and the play's transformation of Lady Macbeth into a troubled somnambulist can be seen as modes of disempowerment.[47]

Lady Macbeth then, is hardly just a self-interested, regicide plotting, ambitious wife who leads her husband to terrible things in her own quest for power, as she is often claimed to be. Neely says: "The effect of these representations of an alienated Lady Macbeth and divided witches, ambiguously connected with each other, is to create a continuum of malevolence in the play that blurs the boundaries between natural and supernatural agency, between witchcraft of English or continental sorts, between guilt and illness."[48]

In her guilt and the allusion of regret, even, in the words she utters in her somnambulistic trance, we are left with an understanding of Lady Macbeth as very human and mortally flawed.

> The Lady Macbeth of Act V whose madness is the heart-rending devastation brought about by the remorse whose access and passage she was unable to stop up as she had anticipated. Her despair that her hands will "ne'er be clean," her whimsical moment of tenderness for the dead Lady Fife, her longing to "sweeten this little hand" speak of a conscience far from dead.[49]

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[47] Clausen, "Macbeth Multiplied," 71.
[48] Neely, "Distracted Subjects," 59.
[49] Williams, "In Defense," 222.

It is as though she is only able to process the guilt, remorse, devastation and the very natural reality of the culmination of her actions, in this somatized state. She resorts to a level of consciousness that provides for a perpetual filtering of unpleasant emotions and memories. There is an allusion to her regret and still active remorse after the murder of Duncan: "Had he not resembled/ My father as he slept, I had done't" (2.1.13-4). Here is the first evidence that her dedication to evil (1.5.41-55) is not going to sustain her, and it is an index of her motivation that filial piety restrained her. Had she been able to murder her father or, in this case, a father surrogate, she would have been an entirely different person.

It is made clear that Macbeth has an intuition of her incipient frailty when he does not make her a party to the murder of Banquo, but urges her to "be innocent of the knowledge, dearest chuck" (3.2.45). To evaluate the character of Lady Macbeth in terms of her expressed intention before the murder of Duncan without regard for the radical alteration afterward, is to misread the character."[50] She immediately calls upon the feminine role as relative to a man, in this case, her own father. This speaks to her still active femininity in a subtle way, in spite of her earlier incantation to be stripped of the qualities of her gender.

The nuanced complexities of her creation, reflective of the culture which defined her, and which she, for us, now defines, make Lady Macbeth much more deserving than any generality brought forward to explain her. Every word and every choice must be made with an understanding of the subtlety of character that may be implied.

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[50] Williams, "In Defense," 222.

Chapter Three
Verdi's Macbeth

> I was in Busseto, eating at Bergonzi's restaurant, I Due Foscari, and I was so thrilled that he was actually there, eating and then visiting guests at their tables. He came over to my table and in our brief chat, he asked me if I'd been to Verdi's house yet and I said no. Later, when I was through with my excellent meal, he got up from his table and walked out the front door of the restaurant with me and showed me a dirt path into the woods, and said to walk a ways until I went over a stream on a small footbridge at which point I would almost be there. It was about a ten to fifteen minute walk, a beautiful walk, and when I entered through the front door of Verdi's house, I immediately saw volumes of Shakespeare translated into Italian and the late string quartets of Beethoven.
>
> -- Ed Navone,
> Retired Art Professor of Washburn University[51]

Cultural Transference

There is a significant cultural transference from Italy in the work of Shakespeare, which draws an interesting parallel on Verdi's *Macbeth*. Verdi's Florentine premiere of *Macbeth* occurred in the mid-nineteenth century, as Italy was gaining momentum toward political independence and unification; conversely, there was a strong presence of Italian political literature in early modern English theatre. In his *Shakespeare, Politics and Italy: Intertextuality on the Jacobean Stage*, Michael Redmond explains that Italy "was synonymous with intertextuality in early modern English culture. Apart from the persistent place of Italianate drama in the theatre…Italy occupied a privileged place in domestic libraries."[52]

It is interesting to consider that in the time of Shakespeare, the well-read Englishman was well versed in matters of Italian theatre, but this is certainly related to the cultural influence that crossed continental Europe to Britain from the Italian rooted

[51] Edward Navone, in a conversation with the author, October 10, 2014

[52]aall Michael J. Redmond, *Shakespeare, Politics and Italy: Intertextuality on the Jacobean Stage* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2009), 2.

Renaissance. The cultural wave of the Renaissance brought with it political ideology as well. Redmond elaborates: "For English students of state affairs…Italian *politica* provided the vocabulary and historical examples for the persistent domestic debates about sovereignty, crisis, and national identity. The prominent references to Italy in English political drama were inevitable."[53] Redmond further elaborates with a direct example of Shakespearean usage of current events in Italy in *The Tempest*. "[Machiavelli's *The Prince*] refers to the exact Italian states featured in *The Tempest* as part of its denunciation of the complacency of the hereditary rulers of the peninsula…The catastrophic consequences of incompetent leadership come to the fore as Machiavelli points to the fall from grace of Milan and Naples after 1494."[54] Was Verdi's attraction to Shakespeare due his understanding of the history of Italian politics? Does his choice to set *Macbeth* indicate his desire to make a national statement with regard to a horrendous abuse of power? In his preface to the 1961 Schirmer edition of the piano/vocal score of *Macbeth,* Walter Ducloux addresses a possible reason for Verdi's choice:

> *Macbeth…*retains many of the earmarks of Verdi's intense and outspoken devotion to the cause of Italian independence. The ruthlessness of tyranny, the plight of its victims, the fiery call to arms by the liberator, most of these are found in every early Verdi opera, no matter what the setting or the period of the plot.[55]

These questions are beyond the scope of this study, but, do posit the relevance of the work to the mid-nineteenth century quest for Italian unification, of which Verdi was a supporter.

[53] Redmond, *Shakespeare, Politics, and Italy,* 3.
[54] Ibid., 121.
[55] Walter Ducloux, preface to Giuseppe Verdi, *Macbeth* (New York: G. Schirmer, 1961), iii.

The Romantic Cult of Shakespeare and the Genesis of a Libretto

In the late twentieth century, a certain amount of scholarly attention was devoted to the European absorption of Shakespeare into the varied cultural contexts of the continent.[56] The purpose was to "assess the cultural impact of Shakespeare on European culture from the Elizabethan period to the present, and to explore the possibility of a more permanent organization for further research into this area."[57]

The conference *European Shakespeares,* focused on aspects of both European translation and assimilation of Shakespeare. Insights into the process of translation are of interest, as Verdi's representation of Lady Macbeth is the only one of the three vocal settings of *Macbeth* that relies on a translation that was then adapted into a libretto. The cultural assimilation of Shakespeare in Italy is also significant: the premiere of Verdi's *Macbeth*, in its first version, "actually preceded the first-ever Italian performance of the Shakespeare play on which it is based." This is one of two reasons cited by Christoph Clausen as to "why the comparative neglect in Shakespearean criticism both of Verdian opera and of opera more generally is regrettable;" the other is that "it contrasts oddly with the sizeable and growing body of literature traversing other transmedial boundaries: Shakespeare and film, Shakespeare and pictorial art, Shakespeare and comic strips, and so on."[58] A discussion of these transmedial associations of Shakespeare will be included below in subsequent chapters dealing with Shostakovich and Pasatieri. Such transmedial associations are much less applicable to Verdi, as his opera was the first dramatic

[56] A. Luis Pujante and Ton Hoenselaars, *Four Hundred Years of Shakespeare in Europe,* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2003), 15
[57] Ibid., 15
[58] Christoph Clausen, *Macbeth Multiplied: Negotiating Historical and Medial Difference Between Shakespeare and Verdi* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2005), 12.

presentation of Shakespeare's play in Italy, and so the issue of translation is the critical locus of cultural transference from Shakespeare's *Macbeth* to Verdi's opera. As will be discussed, there are significant differences between Shakespeare and Verdi, and it is important to understand the filters through which Verdi's relationship to the play came to pass.

The research of scholars who focus on the history and process of European translations of Shakespeare is relevant not only to Verdi's *Macbeth,* but also to operas which are derived from source material in a language other than that of the libretto. Translation studies have "left behind the normative view of translation as one of linguistic transcoding" and taken on a much larger context of cultural transference.[59] In her 1995 article entitled "Shakespeare Translation as Cultural Exchange," Inga-Stina Ewbank describes this concept: "Translation is never purely a philological activity but a collusive re-creation in which cultural differences cling to grammar and syntax and history mediates the effect even of single words."[60]

Verdi's encounters with Italian translations of Shakespeare come from several sources, based on comparisons between Verdi's libretto and existing Italian translations of *Macbeth* that the composer may have known. In his April 1865 letter to Léon Escudier, his French publisher, Verdi complains about what the newspapers in Paris have said after the premiere of the revised *Macbeth:* "One states that I didn't know Shakespeare when I wrote *Macbeth.* Oh, in this they are very wrong. It may be said that I have note rendered *Macbeth* well, but that I don't know, don't understand, and don't feel Shakespeare – no, by God, no. He is a favorite poet of mine, whom I have had in my

[59] Inga-Stina Ewbank, "Shakespeare Translation as Cultural Exchange," *Shakespeare Survey* 48 (1995): 1-12.
[60] Ibid., 6.

hands from earliest youth, and whom I read and reread constantly."[61] The earliest translation of *Macbeth* that Verdi is likely to have known was the 1814-22 edition of Michele Leoni, a "serious and methodical translator…(of) a generous selection of the tragedies in several volumes."[62] William Weaver relates a modern opinion of Leoni's translation by critic Alessandro De Stefani in 1922: "In *Macbeth* he poured the baroque treasure of his arabesques until the tragedy was totally suffocated…Worse than the many, serious mistakes, it is the error of tone that is dire."[63] Porter points out that Leoni revised his translation of *Macbeth* in 1820, and it is likely this version that Verdi had when the libretto was being written. In his own introduction, Leoni "narrates his experience as a Shakespeare translator…when he came to *Macbeth,* he was…shocked, and he actually eliminated part of the scene between Lady Macduff and her child, since he considered it too vulgar. For that matter, he was not unwilling to improve Shakespeare."[64] This is indicative of the early nineteenth-century Italian cultural identity being imprinted on the work via the filter of translation. Weaver also says that Leoni was surprised that Shakespeare had "neglected to give Christian names to Ladies Macbeth and Macduff, Leoni corrected the omission: the former is named Margherita, the latter Emilia."[65] Weaver notes that the names were dropped in the 1820 revision.

Leoni's translation of Macbeth was superseded by that of Verdi's friend Giulio Carcano. It was published in 1848, after the premiere of *Macbeth* in Florence, but it is known that Verdi and Carcano spent time together in 1846 during which Carcano is said

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[61] Andrew Porter and David Rosen, *Verdi's* Macbeth: *A Sourcebook,* ed. Andrew Porter and David Rosen (New York: W.W. Norton, 1984), 119.
[62] William Weaver, "Verdi, Shakespeare, and the Libretto," in *Verdi's* Macbeth: *A Sourcebook* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1984), 145.
[63] Ibid.
[64] Ibid.
[65] Ibid.

to have read the translation aloud for Verdi.[66] "Like Leoni, Carcano translated into verse…but Carcano has a greater feeling for style and, one suspects, a better knowledge of English."[67]

A third translation, published in 1838 by Carlo Rusconi is the version, Weaver says, which "Verdi kept at his elbow while working on his opera, in the last months of 1846."[68] Porter has cross-referenced parallels to the Rusconi translation in Verdi's letters to his librettist, Francesco Maria Piave.[69] An 1865 reference to Rusconi in a letter indicates that Verdi looked to that translation again while making revisions to *Macbeth* for the Paris premiere; "Verdi urges Piave to use 'his [Shakespeare's] very words' and then cites words ("Ora di morte," etc.) that appear only in Rusconi, not in Shakespeare nor in any other Italian translation."[70]

Weaver's opinion of Rusconi's translation is not very flattering:

> Rusconi's translations were reprinted many times and remained widely used even into [the twentieth] century, doing considerable harm to the cause of Shakespeare in Italy. They are, quite simply execrable. The prose is heavy, flat, cluttered. Often the translator omits expressions that he finds difficult…Worse still, he adds words – or even sentences – when the fancy moves him."[71]

While these translations indisputably influenced Verdi's understanding of *Macbeth*, they were not the only resources that helped to define his conception of the work. Rusconi's translation included in the appendix an excerpt from August Wilhelm Schlegel's *Course of Lectures on Dramatic Art and Literature.* Schlegel's views and his

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[66] Francesco Degrada, "Observations on the Genesis of Verdi's *Macbeth*" in *Verdi's* Macbeth: *A Sourcebook* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1984), 157.
[67] Weaver, "Verdi, Shakespeare, and the Libretto," 145.
[68] Ibid., 146.
[69] Porter and Rosen, *Verdi's* Macbeth, the letters are dated 25 and 29 October, 3 and 10 December 1846, and 13 December 1846 and mid-January 1865.
[70] Ibid., 351-2.
[71] Weaver, "Verdi, Shakespeare, and the Libretto," 145.

place in the European reception of Shakespeare in the nineteenth century is rather significant, and possibly had an impact on Verdi's desire to bring forth a valiant effort to be Shakespearean, as demonstrated in his many angry letters to Piave.[72]

Schlegel's critical opinion represents one side of a divided European reception of Shakespeare in the nineteenth century. One was aligned with the French neo-classic aesthetic and considered anti-romantic, "represented by Voltaire's ambivalent praise and latent hostility" toward Shakespeare; the other was a "European cult of Shakespeare who deemed every play by the Bard a masterpiece, every line some profound wisdom, and his very shortcomings worthy of adoration."[73] In his book *The Romantic Cult of Shakespeare*, Péter Dávidházi traces the writings of Hungarian critic Ágost Greguss, who

> maintained that Shakespeare, seen as a child of the Renaissance, should no longer be praised or blamed for attributes of his age, but presented 'in his reality'…He deemed the spread of the cult in England from the second decade of the nineteenth century excessive because critics lavished exaggerated praise on the Bard from every conceivable angle…and 'a blind and boundless admiration had become fashionable,' a veritable 'mental epidemic' that originated in Germany and infected the English.[74]

Of the German critics of Shakespeare, "Greguss preferred Goethe (who could respect Shakespeare without unjustly belittling French poetry) to Schlegel and Tieck, 'the founders of a veritable Shakespeare-worship in Germany that made the Bard the paragon of not only art but philosophy as well."[75] It is through Schlegel, by way of introduction through Rusconi's appendix, that Verdi brought the Romantic cult of Shakespeare to Italy.

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[72] Ibed., 147.
[73] Peter Davidhazi, *The Romantic Cult of Shakespeare: Literary Reception in Anthropological Perspective* (London: Macmillan Press, 1998), 152.
[74] Ibid., 155.
[75] Ibid., 156.

Francesco Degrada says Schlegel's "influence on Verdi's interpretation of *Macbeth* is clear: not only did the composer follow Schlegel in his delineation of the opera's formal and expressive structure, but he paraphrased his key concepts and even quoted him in his letters to Piave and others."[76] Schlegel's "Nota al Macbeth" includes the following:

> [the witches] gain credence for their words by the immediate fulfillment of an earlier prediction. The opportunity of murdering the King immediately offers; Lady Macbeth conjures her husband not to let it slip. She urges him on with fiery eloquence, which has at command all those sophisms that can throw a false splendor over such a crime; and Macbeth, not master of himself, commits it in a tumult of fascination. Repentance immediately follows, nay even precedes the deed, and the stings of conscience leave him rest neither night nor day.[77]

Lady Macbeth is clearly the guilty party in this description, a point that Schlegel further clarifies:

> At the close, the poet distributes retribution to all his characters with an accurate measure. Lady Macbeth, who of all the participators in the king's murder is the most guilty, is thrown by the terrors of her conscience into a state of incurable bodily and mental disease. She dies unlamented by her husband, with all the symptoms of despair. Macbeth is still found worthy to die the death of a hero on the field of battle.[78]

This interpretation, that Lady Macbeth is more culpable than Macbeth and comparatively lacking in dignity and honor, begs the question of her motivation and source of power, as explored above. Schlegel never draws a direct line between Lady Macbeth and the witches, but her actions are described as a conjuring, which has implications of witchcraft, and her "fiery eloquence" capable of "throwing false splendor over the crime" is very similar to Schlegel's description of the witches:

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[76] Degrada, "Observations," 158.
[77] August Wilhelm Schlegel, "A Note on Shakespeare's *Macbeth,"* in *Verdi's* Macbeth: *A Sourcebook* ed. Andrew Porter and David Rosen (New York: W.W. Norton, 1984), 347.
[78] Ibid., 348.

> With one another the witches discourse like women of the very lowest class; for this was the class to which the witches were ordinarily supposed to belong: when, however, they address Macbeth they assume a loftier tone: their predictions…have all the obscure brevity, the majestic solemnity of oracles, such as ever spread terror among mortals. We here see that these enchantresses are merely instruments; they are governed by invisible spirits….[79]

While this parallel is intriguing, it doesn't seem substantial enough to establish whether Verdi believed that Lady Macbeth is meant to be portrayed as a witch or is aligned in some way with them. Verdi turned to his librettist for additional assistance in condensing this Shakespearean complexity into an operatic drama, but as Verdi's dramatic layout was determined, Piave's task was more technical than creative. As evidenced by their correspondence, their working relationship was not without strife. In fact, Degrada labels it a failure, citing Verdi's letter to Piave on January 21, 1847:

> Oh no indeed, you're not at fault at all – except for having taken so incredible little trouble with these last two acts of mine. But never mind! St. Andrew [Andrea Maffei] came to your aid and to mine. Especially to mine, because – if I must be frank with you – I couldn't have put them to music, and you can see what a mess I'd have found myself in. Now everything is fixed up, but just about everything had to be changed.[80]

Verdi's reference to Andrea Maffei as St. Andrew pertains to Maffei's role in rewriting some of the libretto. In his April 11, 1857 letter to Tito Ricordi, Verdi explains:

> Ten years ago I got it into my head to write *Macbeth*; I wrote the scenario [selva] myself and, indeed, more than the scenario; I wrote out the whole drama in prose, with divisions into acts, scenes, numbers, etc., etc…then I gave it to Piave to put into verse. Since I found things to criticize in the versification, I asked Maffei, with the consent of Piave himself, to go over those lines, and rewrite entirely the *witches' chorus* from Act III, as well as the *sleepwalking scene*.

Julian Budden feels that Verdi's work with Piave:

> turned out to the advantage of their collaboration; for it meant that Verdi was never overawed by him into accepting a word or a line of which he

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[79] Ibid., 347-48.
[80] Degrada, "Observations," 156.

> was not fully convinced. Piave, as Gabriele Baldini and others have pointed out, was in effect Verdi's literary amanuensis. Every line of his librettos was hammered out into the exact form that the composer wanted.[81]

In letters of September 4 and 22 1846, Verdi gives Piave the following directives as regards the witches: "you must adopt a sublime diction, except in the witches' choruses, which must be trivial, yet bizarre and original…to have character, the witches' first strophes should be stranger; I can't tell you how to do it, but I do know that they are not good the way they are…in short, experiment and find a way of writing bizarre poetry."[82]

Verdi never groups his requests for changes to Lady Macbeth's lines together with those for the witches, just as Schlegel makes no direct comparison; her character's textual needs and style are not aligned with the witches in his mind. As a general rule, in all matters other than those pertaining to the witches he emphasizes elegance, brevity, and economy, saying "In your lines, remember well, there should be not one useless word: everything must say something…"[83]

Francesco Degrada asserts that "Verdi on his own could not have stood up to the awesome confrontation with Shakespeare, that he lacked the cultural equipment to condense into an opera one of Shakespeare's most problematic and complex tragedies without falsifying its meaning."[84] It is understandable why Verdi would be attracted to Schlegel's strong point of view, based in nineteenth-century literary Romanticism which likely matched his own aesthetic sensibilities.

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[81] Julian Budden, *Verdi,* 3rd ed., (London: Oxford University Press, 2008), 23.
[82] Porter and Rosen, *Verdi's* Macbeth*: A Sourcebook*, 8-9.
[83] Ibid., 8.
[84]Degrada, "Observations," 157.

Lady Macbeth in the Discourse of Verdi's Premiere

Verdi's letters are an invaluable resource for singers who are interested in preparing Lady Macbeth for performance, because they state his wishes and ideas about the character in the context of the first production of *Macbeth*. The correspondence between Emanuele Muzio, Verdi's principal pupil and conductor and Antonio Barezzi, Verdi's patron, are also valuable, as they are considered to accurately reflect Verdi's opinions.[85]

Letters between Verdi and Alessandro Lanari, the impresario in Florence where *Macbeth* premiered, indicate that the subject matter hinged on which singers Lanari had under contract in the time frame allotted to Verdi's as yet unwritten opera. Verdi inquires about this issue of personnel on August 19, 1846; these letters indicate just how eager he was for the opportunity to write *Macbeth*:

> If you have arranged and settled the contract with Fraschini, nothing could be better…But if you have not signed up Fraschini, I don't want to take a chance with any other tenor, nor do I want to have worries about the others; so I'm thinking about a subject in which we could do without [a lead] tenor. In this case I would absolutely need the following two artists: *Loewe and Varesi.*
>
> Varesi is the only artist in Italy today who is able to do the part I have in mind, both because of his style of singing and his feeling – and even because of his appearance. All other artists, even those better than he, couldn't do that part for me as I'd like…So decide: either you get Fraschini (and in that case I'd find Barbieri more suitable), or, if you can't get Fraschini, do all you can to engage Varesi…Answer me *at once* by return mail, and don't let all the pains I've lavished on these damned subjects come to nothing.[86]

The subject to which Verdi refers is *Macbeth,* and this excerpt confirms several things: Verdi did not want the most beautifully sounding and handsome baritone at

[85] Porter and Rosen, *Verdi's* Macbeth: *A Sourcebook*, 7.
[86] Ibid., 5.

Lanari's disposal for the role of Macbeth, nor did he ever want a tenor. It seems the subject would not have been *Macbeth* if Lanari had been contractually obligated to hire Fraschini. Verdi pairs Fraschini in these negotiations with Marianna Barbieri-Nini, the soprano who is ultimately engaged for the Lady Macbeth, though she is not his first choice. In a letter of August 27, 1846 from Muzio to Barezzi, Muzio says:

> If Varesi agrees to sing in Florence in Lent, then he writes *Macbeth,* in which there are only two principal roles: Cordelia [!] and Macbeth – Löwe and Varesi…No actor in Italy today can do *Macbeth* better than Varesi, both because of his way of singing, and because of his intelligence, and even because of his small and ugly appearance. Perhaps you will say he sings out of tune, but that doesn't matter since the part would be almost totally declaimed, and he is very good at that.[87]

Lanari did hire Varesi, but not without Verdi's interference, as evidenced in the composer's August 25 1846 letter to Varesi:

> So do you want to come to Florence during Lent? If you do, I'll write *Macbeth* for you!...Send me a few words about all the conditions and financial terms; and please, keep them down as much as possible, because you know that Lanari [already] has Ferri and certainly doesn't want to make great sacrifices. Answer me by return mail, and don't forget anything. *Addio, addio* in haste.
>
> P.S. – Answer *quickly* and keep the thing secret.
>
> [P.P.S.] – Keep it *very* secret, for you'll understand that it's not an easy thing to arrange… [88]

Verdi was so sure of the outcome of these machinations that he sent Francesco Maria Piave, his librettist, a draft with instructions to begin working on the *Macbeth* on September 4, 1846, though it is not until a letter of October 15 from Muzio to Barezzi that the project was confirmed: "For Florence, the Maestro is writing *Macbeth.* The singers will be Loewe and Varesi."[89] Verdi's engagement of Piave was not without trial, as the tone of some of his letters indicate.

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[87] Ibid., 7.
[88] Ibid., 6.
[89] Ibid., 11.

For the first Lady Macbeth, Verdi requested Sofia Loewe, who sang the first Elvira in *Ernani.*[90] While Piave mentions Loewe in a letter of October 28 to Lanari in a manner that confirms her engagement, the very next day, Verdi to Piave alludes to a problem:

> I received a letter from Lanari about the Loewe business. I'm just not going to think about it! *Che sará, sará!* I am accustomed to these setbacks, which no longer surprise me.[91]

We find out the details of the "business" in a letter of Muzio to Barezzi, dated November 2:

> Loewe is retiring from the stage. She appeared in Florence in *Ernani,* in which she had a fiasco. She was pregnant and decided to have an abortion, and it's said that this is the cause of her almost having lost her voice. She hasn't been doing too well since she was in Leghorn. The Maestro regrets this, since no woman today could do the part of the Lady in *Macbeth* with the same effect as Loewe. Barbieri will sing instead…[92]

Barbieri-Nini's name is mentioned by Verdi in his early negotiations with Lanari as being a perfect vocal partner to the tenor Fraschini. He indicates the two as a pairing for *I Masnadieri,* which is what Verdi would have written for Florence had Varesi not been contracted to sing, though it is not exactly clear why she was not his first choice for Lady Macbeth. Later correspondence of Verdi and the soprano's own recollections, detailed later in this chapter, certainly do suggest he was ultimately pleased with her performance.

Once the singers and subsequent subject were determined, Verdi's correspondence with Piave, Lanari, Ricordi, and pre-rehearsal correspondence with

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[90] Ibid., 462.
[91] Ibid., 13.
[92] Ibid., 14.

Marianna Barbieri-Nini provide priceless firsthand knowledge of Verdi's interpretation of the character.

Early in his discussions with Lanari in May 1846, Verdi convinced him to agree to a subject in the *genere fantastico*.[93] The main fantastical element in *Macbeth* is clearly the witches' prophecy that propels the dramatic action of the story, and inspires Lady Macbeth's "conjuring" of her husband to murderous action. Verdi, it seems, views this genre as also involving the dramatic and vocal qualities of his lead singers. In a January 1847 letter to Barbieri-Nini, he describes what he envisions for the character of Lady Macbeth, describing in particular detail how she should be vocally characterized, indicating his own painstaking intent on portraying the story as faithfully to Shakespeare as possible.

> First of all, the character of the part is resolute, bold, extremely dramatic. The plot is taken from one of the greatest tragedies the theatre boasts, and I have tried to have all the dramatic situations drawn from it faithfully, to have it well versified, and to give it a new texture, and to compose music tied so far as possible to the text and to the situations; and I wish this idea of mine to be well understood by the performers; indeed, I wish the performers to serve the poet better than they serve the composer.
> Your first number is the *cavatina.* You come out reading a letter, and then there is a broad recitative. There follows an *adagio* of a grandiose and cantabile kind, but not too sugary a cantabile; I would ask you to consider carefully the phrase at the words:
>
> *Che tardi? Accetta il dono*
> *Ascendimi a regnar*
>
> and to do it in such a way that the voice does not swell up at once, but gradually; and to give meaningful emphasis each time to the words "Che tardi."…The first part of the *cabaletta* is to be uttered in a grandiose manner, with pride, but mingled with the pride there should be joy. In the second part, the phrase at the words, "Tu note ne avvolgi," etc. will perhaps be low; but it is precisely my intention to make it dark and mysterious (if necessary, this phrase can be changed

[93] Ibid., 4.

> at once) so as then to have all the brilliance at the end… "Qual petto percota," etc. etc."[94]

This letter is demonstrative of the motivation behind Verdi's insistence with Piave on economy and efficiency of language. Every phrase must be imbued with meaning and the dramatic momentum must be retained within the economy of his prose. Verdi addresses the necessity of respect to Shakespeare's intentions in a January 31 letter to Barbieri-Nini, where he responds to some of her misgivings and provides further explanation of his wishes.

> I am sending you other numbers of *Macbeth*; now all that is needed to complete your part is a *cabaletta* ["Trionfai"], which I shall write for you in Florence so that it will suit your voice perfectly and be sure to make an effect.
>
> From your letter, I saw how much you would have wanted a cantabile of the type in *Fausta*. But observe well the character of this role and you will see that that could not be done without betraying it, and declaring open warfare on good sense. Moreover, it would be a profanation to alter a character so great, so energetic, so original as this one created by the great English tragedian. I believe I told you already that this is a drama that has nothing in common with the others, and we must all make every effort to render it in the most original way possible…
>
> As for the letter, it is impossible to take it out, because the drama is built upon it, but if it would displease you to speak it, we shall set it to music.
>
> Let me stress the importance of these two pieces. The notes are simple and created with the action in mind, especially in the sleepwalking scene, which, so far as the dramatic situation is concerned, is one of the most sublime theatrical creations. Bear in mind that every word has meaning, and that it is absolutely essential to express it both with the voice and with the acting. Everything is to be said sotto voce and in such a way as to arouse terror and pity. Study it well and you will see that you can make an effect with it, even if it lacks one of those flowing, conventional melodies, which are found everywhere and which are all alike.[95]

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[94] Ibid., 29, Italics as in source.
[95] Ibid., 39-40.

Barbieri-Nini's recollections of the rehearsal process in Florence, while considered to be an exaggeration of the truth, still illuminates Verdi's diligent attention to Lady Macbeth's characterization.[96] She wrote:

> I remember that for Verdi there were two climactic points in the opera: the sleepwalking scene and my duet with the baritone. You won't believe this, but the sleepwalking scene cost me three months study: for three months, morning and evening, I tried to imitate those who talk in their sleep, uttering words (as Verdi would say to me) while hardly moving their lips, leaving the rest of the face immobile, including the eyes. It was enough to drive one crazy.
>
> As for the duet with the baritone that begins: "Fatal mia donna, un murmure," – you may think I'm exaggerating, but it was rehearsed more than a hundred and fifty times so that it might be closer to *speech* than to *singing*, the Maestro would say…
>
> The night of the first performance I will never forget that, before the sleepwalking scene…Verdi prowled around me anxiously, without saying anything: it was very plain that the success, already great, would not seem definitive to him until after that scene. So I crossed myself…and went on…the turmoil of the applause had hardly died down, and I had just returned to my dressing room, all trembling and distraught, when I saw the door fly open (I was already half out of my costume) and Verdi entered, gesturing with his hands and moving his lips, as if he wished to make a great speech: but he could not get out a single word. I was laughing and weeping, and I too, said nothing: but looking at the Maestro's face I noticed that his eyes were red, too. We clasped hands tightly, and then, without a word, he rushed out. That striking emotional scene rewarded me with interest for so many months of hard labor and ceaseless trepidation.[97]

Budden says her account "must surely be one of those stories that grow with the telling"[98] Even so, Verdi's emphasis on the success of the sleepwalking scene supports the overall dramatic schema he adopted from Schlegel, in which Lady Macbeth is most

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[96] Ibid., Porter and Rosen note that she could not have spent three months preparing the sleepwalking scene, as Verdi sent her the music on January 31 and the first piano rehearsal was on February 27.
[97] Ibid., 52-3.
[98] Budden, *Verdi,* 40-41. The account was related by a journalist, who supposedly heard it from a friend of the singer.

culpable and, arguably, more the figure of tragic downfall than Macbeth, who is merely caught in the strength of her insistence.

In October of 1848, the year following the premiere, there are letters from Tito and Giovanni Ricordi to Verdi about an attempt of the San Carlo opera house in Naples to produce *Macbeth* without obtaining the proper rights or score.[99] Verdi indicated to Salvatore Cammarano what he thought was being handled incorrectly in the unsanctioned Naples production, including the choice for Lady Macbeth:

> I know that you are rehearsing *Macbeth*, and since it's an opera that interests me more than the others, permit me to say a few words to you about it. The role of Lady Macbeth has been assigned to Tadolini, and I'm surprised that she should have deigned to undertake this role. You know how highly I regard Tadolini, and she herself knows it; but I believe it's necessary – for the interest of all concerned – to make a few observations to you. Tadolini's qualities are far too good for that role! This may perhaps seem absurd to you!!...Tadolini has a beautiful and attractive appearance; and I would like Lady Macbeth to be ugly and evil. Tadolini sings to perfection; and I would like the Lady not to sing. Tadolini has a stupendous voice, clear, limpid, powerful; and I would like the Lady to have a harsh, stifled, and hollow voice. Tadolini's voice has an angelic quality; I would like the Lady's voice to have a diabolical quality! Submit these remarks to the management, to Maestro Mercadante, who will approve these ideas of mine more than the others will, and to Tadolini herself. Then do in your wisdom what you think best.[100]

In this scenario we learn so much of what he wants Lady Macbeth to be, and it doesn't seem that there is much room for any redeeming nature in her. He perceives her character as ruthlessly wicked, and this description of her as evil, diabolical, and ugly with a harsh, stifled and hollow voice makes her more witchlike and *fantastico* than a fatally flawed, vastly misguided woman doing what she can to assist her husband.

This characterization does little to undermine support of Verdi's dramatic conception of Lady Macbeth as more culpable and tragic at the story's end, but the

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[99] Porter and Rosen, *Verdi's* Macbeth: *A Sourcebook*, 65-66.
[100] Ibid., 66-67.

clearly dark nature described here certainly does call into question the source of her power. Christoph Clausen cites Gary Schmidgall's opinion that "the age of bel canto ended and the age of verismo began" when Verdi wrote of his doubts about Tadolini's aptness for Lady Macbeth; others do not give this letter such weight. Julian Budden suggests that it does not communicate so much a "statement of fact" as "an argumentum ad hominem (or feminam)," since "to combat the narcissistic disposition of the Italian prima donna a touch of exaggeration was needed."[101]

In 1864, almost twenty years after the 1847 premiere of *Macbeth* in Florence, Verdi received word from Léon Escudier, his French publishing agent, that Léon Carvalho, the impresario of the Théâtre Lyrique in Paris, wanted to produce *Macbeth.*[102] This occasioned more discussion of *Macbeth,* particularly in regard to the needed revisions of the original 1847 version to make it suitable to the French aesthetic. In a letter from Escudier to Verdi on September 27, 1864, he references a promise made by Verdi: "Let me remind you, dear master, that, as a result of the promise you were good enough to make me, I, in turn, have promised three *airs de ballet* to Carvalho."[103]

This new arrangement gives Verdi cause to clarify his view of Lady Macbeth. In the seventeen years since its premiere, the cultural transference of the source material to Italy via Verdi's opera had influenced the dramatic presentation of Lady Macbeth. Clausen states, "The precise lines of influence are not entirely clear, yet there are certainly notable parallels between the opera and the later performances of the most famous Lady Macbeth in the nineteenth-century Italian spoken theatre: Adelaide

[101] Clausen, *Macbeth Multiplied,* 92.
[102] Porter and Rosen, *Verdi's* Macbeth: *A Sourcebook,* 70.
[103] Ibid., 70.

Ristori."[104] Budden further discusses Ristori, specifically citing her interpretation of the sleepwalking scene as perhaps influenced by Verdi's vocal colorization directions to Barbieri-Nini. "For the *bel canto* singers of the 1840's he had insisted on the greatest possible realism of delivery even to the extent of uglifying the voice. Having heard the curious 'death-rattle' which Adelaide Ristori brought to the sleepwalking scene in Shakespeare, he now warned against all naturalistic touches of this kind"[105] Verdi specifically mentions Ristori's interpretation to Escudier in a March 11, 1865 letter, the day of the Paris premiere:

> And now for the sleepwalking scene – the most important scene of the opera. Anyone who has seen Ristori knows that it must be performed with a minimum of gesture: that of erasing a bloodstain she imagines to be on her hand. Each movement must be slow, and each step should be invisible: her feet must steal over the ground, as if she were a statue or a ghost. Her eyes should be glazed, her appearance corpse-like; she is on the point of death and will die immediately after. Ristori emitted a rattle – a death rattle. This should not and cannot be done in music; just as there should be no cough in the last act of *La traviata.*[106]

That Verdi would mention Ristori's interpretation to Escudier certainly does suggest the impact her performance gave. She was distinguished in her career with the role; she played it in English in 1882 at Drury Lane.[107] In her memoirs she provides a very detailed description of her physical gesturing and motivations for every line of the sleepwalking scene. She says:

> Pretending to see on my hands still some spots of blood, and while rubbing them I make the motion of one who takes in the palms of his hands a certain quantity of water in order to wash them. I am very careful with this motion, which I repeat at various moments…And I show here that I am struck by the colour of blood in which it seems to me as if I had dipped my hands…With a convulsive motion I rub them again. Then,

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[104] Clausen, *Macbeth Multiplied,* 12.
[105] Budden, *Verdi,* 93.
[106] Marcello Conati, *Interviews and Encounters with Verdi,* (London: Victor Gollancz, Ltd., 1984), 28.
[107] Porter and Rosen, *Verdi's* Macbeth: *A Sourcebook*, 362.

> always a prey to my delirium, in a bitter tone, and speaking excitedly, I pretend to whisper in Macbeth's ear…I smell my hands, pretending they smell of blood, and I break forth with passion…And I make exclamation as if in an internal shudder convulsed my heart and caused me to breathe with difficulty, after which I remain with my head thrown back, breathing slowly, as if in deep lethargy…[108]

In terms of score revision based on Carvalho's requests, Verdi began early in determining potential changes, as explained in an October 22, 1864 letter to Escudier:

> I have looked through *Macbeth* with the aim of writing the ballet music, but alas! On reading through this music I was struck by things that I would not have wished to find. To say it all in a word, there are certain numbers that are either weak or lacking in character, which is worse still…
>
> 1) An aria for Lady Macbeth in Act II
> 2) Various passages to rewrite in the hallucination scene of Act III
> 3) Rewrite completely Macbeth's aria in Act III
> 4) Retouch the opening scenes of Act IV
> 5) Recompose the last finale, doing away with the death of Macbeth onstage[109]

These changes emphasize Verdi's view of Lady Macbeth as the dominant tragic character. The addition and dramatic placement of an aria for her in Act II gives her more weight and culpability. Interestingly, this aria is inserted where he demanded Piave be concise and swift in 1846: "In the Lady's first scene in Act II have her just say one simple sentence alluding to the murder of Banquo… "Oh Macbeth, another crime is needed!"[110] This clearly defines her greater role in the continued reign of tyranny. Verdi once again looked to Piave to craft the poetry of the libretto, though he seemed disinterested in the French translation; they corresponded for much of December 1864 to get the text of this new aria just right.[111] On January 6 Verdi writes to Escudier:

> In the Lady's aria at the start of Act II in the Allegro there is a direction saying, "*con voce pianissima ed un poco oscillante…*" I want a *mezza voce* and as soft as possible, but it should be one with tone in it, not

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[108] Adelaide Ristori, *Memoirs and Artistic Studies,* (New York: Doubleday, 1907), 171-74.
[109] Porter and Rosen, *Verdi's* Macbeth: *A Sourcebook*, 71.
[110] Ibid., 13.
[111] Ibid. For the exchange of five letters from December 14 to 20 on this topic see p.77-81.

> "ventriloqual." "*Oscillante"* to express joy, but it should not be too tremulous which then would express fever.[112]

In a very long letter of January 23 1865 Verdi gives Escudier copious production notes; there are a few references to Lady Macbeth:

> The act ends with a duet between Lady and Macbeth. It does not seem illogical to me that Lady, always intent on watching over her husband, should have discovered where he is. The act ends better. We have the Lady appear, and she takes some of the burden off Macbeth.[113]

In the same letter, with regard to the Banquet scene, Verdi provides a diagram of the set from Florence, emphasizes the importance of a trap door for Banquo's ghost, and describes how the set "in this arrangement gives Macbeth room to move, and Lady can always be at his side to tell him, *sotto voce,* whatever the situation requires."[114] This furthers the notion that Macbeth is being coaxed and coerced at every turn. Even as he is breaking publicly under the weight of his guilt, Lady Macbeth is composed enough to be at his side. In his February 4 1865 response to Escudier's inquiry about giving Macduff the second verse of Lady Macbeth's *brindisi* in the banquet scene in an effort to make the role larger, Verdi emphasizes this point:

> Let's not look for effects from a high C *di petto* [from the chest] or a fresh voice, or a secondary role, but rather let us look for solid and lasting effect with whatever is really good in this *Macbeth.* Above all, bear in mind that there are three roles in this opera and three is all there can be: *Lady Macbeth, Macbeth,* and the *chorus of witches.* – The witches dominate the drama; everything derives from them – coarse and gossipy in the first act, sublime and prophetic in the third. They are truly a character, and a character of the utmost importance…To have him sing a part of the *brindisi* in Act II would be a mistake and a dramatic contradiction… The important character, the dominating demon of this scene, is *Lady Macbeth*, and however much *Macbeth* can distinguish himself as an actor, *Lady Macbeth*, I repeat, dominates and controls everything.[115]

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[112] Ibid., 84.
[113] Ibid., 89.
[114] Ibid., 91.
[115] Ibid., 97-99.

That Verdi uses similar words to describe Lady Macbeth and the witches is significant; both should dominate, but the drama is derived from the witches and Lady Macbeth controls it. He is essentially saying the witches release the prophecy, which unfurls the dramatic action and Lady Macbeth transforms into a "dominating demon" to become its curator.

Shakespeare's Lady Macbeth vs. Verdi's Lady Macbeth

Verdi's wishes to remain faithful to Shakespeare are unquestionable and unwavering at all stages of the writing of *Macbeth*. He took quite a bit of personal pride in this opera; it is dedicated to his patron Antonio Barezzi: "Here now is *Macbeth*, which is dearer to me than all my other operas, and which therefore I deem worthy of being presented to you."[116] The obvious affection he held for Barezzi indicates the sincerity of his feelings.

The opera was not only a personal victory, but was a landmark in Verdi's career, as it represented a new method of adaptation of Shakespeare for the Italian operatic stage. In terms of operatic conventions of the 1840's, *Macbeth* is "nearly an anti-opera, since no one falls in love, the lead singers were carefully chosen for their unattractive voices, and the few places that invite vocal display often have an undertone of something hideous or stupid, as if vocal display were forced to express its own meretriciousness."[117] Verdi shirked the formulaic conventions of the time in order to be completely Shakespearean, and a devotion to "the Shakespearian characterization, the Shakespearian dramatic situations, the Shakespearian language [gave] Verdi the courage and the authority to

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[116] Budden, *Verdi,* 41. Barezzi was also the father of Verdi's first wife, Marguerite.
[117] Daniel Albright, "The Witches and the Witch: Verdi's *Macbeth," Cambridge Opera Journal* 17 (2005): 225-252.

break with the old habits of Italian romantic melodrama."[118] His pride in taking this drama-centered approach is evident in his comment many years later, in an 1875 interview with the *Neue Freie Presse*:

> When we came to talk about Wagner, Verdi remarked that that great genius had rendered incalculable services to melodramatic art because he had had the courage to rid himself of the traditional decadent ("baroque") forms. "I, too, have attempted the fusion of music and drama," he said, "and that in *Macbeth;* but I could not write my own librettos, as Wagner does."[119]

While he did not craft all of the prose for *Macbeth*, his involvement was quite significant, and indeed, the scene breakdown was completely of his own design.

Though committed to Shakespearean authenticity, Verdi was not completely unaffected by societal norms of the time and traditions of Lady Macbeth's characterization from the play's stage history, which were influenced by trends in the depiction of the witches and of Macbeth. In the eighteenth century, interpretation of Lady Macbeth shifted from helpmate to ambitious spouse and equal partner in murderous plotting, to the dominant force of power behind the drama's treachery. Jane Bernstein credits this shift in Lady Macbeth to the great reform actor and interpreter of Macbeth, David Garrick, who played the character as a "sensitive, noble hero." Lady Macbeth interpretations grew fiercer in light of Garrick's interpretation. The increasingly dominant nature of Lady Macbeth, Bernstein says,

> did not overshadow her warrior husband until 1785, when Sarah Siddons first performed the part before a London audience. Her Lady Macbeth was an intense, terrifying force. She entered suddenly . . . dressed in white, rather rapidly went to the table . . . [and set] down the candle . . . Then with restless gestures began to rub her hands in the air, seeming at

[118] David R. B. Kimball, "The Young Verdi and Shakespeare," *Proceedings of the Royal Music Association* (1974-75), 59-73.
[119] Frank Walker, "Verdi and Vienna," *The Musical Times*, (1951), 404.

> intervals to scoop up water with the one and pour it over the other. Her great eyes were blank and glazed as they fixed into space or glared straight at the house. Her 'Out damned spot' was said in hollow, tortured tones, and then she appeared to be listening eagerly, '*One! Two!*' followed by a strange unnatural whisper, 'Why then 'tis time to do 't'[120]

Verdi had not seen the Shakespeare play prior to the premiere of his *Macbeth,* but Berstein feels he was familiar with typical concepts of its staging in London, since he mentions that city in communicating staging ideas for the banquet scene to Escudier. "Whether he was aware of the Siddons performance tradition we cannot say, but the Italian composer's reading of Lady Macbeth does reflect the prevalent interpretation of his time. Everything he cut, changed or condensed from the play magnified the role [of Lady Macbeth]."[121]

Significantly, Siddons' on two occasions played the role while visibly pregnant. This unquestionably put issues of amenorrhea, maternity, and unsexing in the foreground. The condition of pregnancy in an actor body provides a state of amenorrhea, as Chelsea Phillips points out, but

> from the moment a pregnant woman requests unsexing, however, the potential codified by the pregnant body has changed: she has rendered her body monstrous, cruel, and unnatural. Siddons' visibly fertile body denies interpretations of the Macbeths as a barren couple with no dynastic hopes; yet her pregnancy still fulfills the textual demand for that Macbeth 'has no children'…Not only did Siddons possess the woman's breasts, and 'access and passage to remorse' (the womb), but perhaps most significantly, the milk that could turn to gall.[122]

Further support of Verdi's fierce, dominating characterization of Lady Macbeth is stated by Christoph Clausen, who cites that a comic treatment of the witches was

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[120] Jane Bernstein, "Bewitched, Botherd and Bewildered: Lady Macbeth, Sleepwalking, and the Demonic in Verdi's Scottish Opera," *Cambridge Opera Journal* 14 (March 2002),:31-46.
[121] Ibid., 35.
[122] Chelsea Phillips, "Unsex Me Here: Bodies and Femininity in the Performance History of Lady Macbeth," *Testi e Linguaggi* 7 (2013): 357-59.

typical in the eighteenth century and early nineteenth century. To balance that trend, Hannah Pritchard portrayed Lady Macbeth "as a terrible, fiendish, larger-than-life monster." Conversely, he says, in the mid-nineteenth century the trend was toward more sinister witches, bringing back a more compassionate, delicate, even fragile Lady Macbeth as a "devoted wife," this being more acceptable to the Victorian normative conception of womanhood.[123]

The version of *Macbeth* that Verdi premiered in Florence does include some aspects of these mid nineteenth-century trends and culturally normative choices. By his own description, Lady Macbeth is a dominating demon; however, what is considered her most demonic moment in the Shakespeare source material, her conjuring of images of murdering a child she feeds, is not in Verdi's libretto. Clausen summarizes Verdi's Victorian normative modification of Lady Macbeth's evil in this manner:

> If in the play, the ambiguous association between Lady Macbeth and witchcraft are crucially bound up with the imaginative locus of perverted maternity, this locus is textually de-emphasized in the opera, and no amount of *versi sdrùccioli* can musically reinvent it. The opera's Lady Macbeth does not fantasize about dashing her milking baby's brains out. She does call upon the 'ministri infernali' but not to unsex her or come to her woman's breasts and take her milk for gall. Macbeth does not think his wife's hardened body should bring forth men-children only…the opera's witches do not 'Pour in sow's blood, that hath eaten / Her nine farrow.' Only the 'Finger of birth-strangled babe is retained ('ditto d'un pargolo / Strozzato nel nascere') but even here the reference to the child's mother ('Ditch-delivered by a drab') is gone.[124]

In addition to Shakespeare's images of maternal violence being removed from the libretto, Lady Macbeth's desire to be unsexed is removed and Verdi eliminates Shakespeare's sexualization of the murderous nature given to Macbeth. Shakespeare qualifies Macbeth's outpacing of Duncan as he rides to Inverness in Act I as being

123 Clausen, *Macbeth Multiplied,* 92-93.
124 Ibid., 91.

motivated by his love "sharp as a spur." Macbeth leaves the company of a paternalized Duncan to ride home to his anti-motherly wife who is simultaneously wishing to be stripped of her feminine core. When Macbeth later expresses doubt about the plot to murder Duncan, he says "I have no spur to prick the sides of my intent." Lady Macbeth then characterizes his doubt by comparing it to intoxication and alludes to the lack of masculinity that his doubt implies. She says "From this time, Such I account thy love, When you durst do it, then you were a man." Clausen compares Shakespeare's sexualization of the plot to murder to Verdi's:

> In the opera there is no love sharp as a spur. Lady Macbeth does not wish to be unsexed…Indeed, after his wife's goading, Macbeth shows no further hesitation, and Lady Macbeth does not compare her husband's ambition to intoxication or turn it into a test of manliness…Macbeth does sing "Tutto è finito" once he returns from Duncano's chamber but, isolated from the whole network of allusions within which "I have done the deed" function in Shakespeare's text, the sexual subtext is gone.[125]

Without these references Lady Macbeth falls easily into a position where the only motivation for her power is being relegated to a witch, a status that is not clearly defined in the Shakespeare, precisely because of the complexity of character these missing references create. Daniel Albright explains this predicament:

> Most of Verdi's witches are surrogates for Fate, deriding mankind; and when Lady derides her husband, she assumes the witch role without quite understanding that the only spectacle that delights a witch is the spectacle of ruin…Verdi never developed an articulate theory about Lady's relation to the witches, but he evidently understood Lady as a character struggling to achieve the witches' manipulative force, uncanny authority.[126]

There is a responsibility on the part of the singer portraying Lady Macbeth in Verdi's opera to allude to these missing references in performance practice, in acting,

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[125] Ibid., 101.
[126] Albright, "The Witches and the Witch," 246.

gesturing, and in vocal colorization that bring forward the complexity of her nature. However faithful to the source material a libretto may be, there is, by nature of reduction and dramatic economy, an understanding that certain aspects of character will only exist in performance. Verdi's choices do seem to have been impacted by normative conditions that are no longer relevant, and thus open the interpretation of Lady Macbeth to more Shakespearean constructs.

In discussing the art of Shakespeare translation, Martin Hilský speaks of a "third text" that is produced from the original text and its translation, which are "Shakespearean mirrors in which the meaning…is not reflected but refracted. These multiple refractions constitute the third text." A complete understanding of the original and its translation creates the possibility for comprehension of this new, unwritten, yet understood "third text."[127] This concept, which Hilský derived in the context of translating Shakespeare's sonnets, beautifully transfers into performance practice and can be useful to a portrayal of Verdi's Lady Macbeth. It resonates with the responsibility of the singing actor to present the full spectrum of refracted light from her internal mirror, where an understanding of the original and of Verdi's libretto meet.

Verdi's Paris revisions of *Macbeth* gave him the opportunity to revisit the dramatic and vocal characterization of Lady Macbeth. Her music is qualified by the prevailing tinta of *Macbeth*, which is marked by an abundance of minor tonality and dark scoring for clarinet, English horn, horns, bassoons, muted strings and timpani in various combinations. Verdi adds flute to the dagger speech and the duet, and adds trombones and bass drum to the sleepwalking scene. His thoughtfulness in orchestration, the

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[127] Martin Hilsky, "Telling what is told," in *Four Hundred Years of Shakespeare in Europe,* ed. A. Luis Pujante and Ton Hoenselaars (Newark: Delaware University Press, 2003), 139-40.

frequent use of minor seconds and thirds in melodic gestures, and a predominance of specific rhythmic patterns and harmonic progressions help to create the overall timbral palette, or tinta, of the opera.[128]

Lady Macbeth's first entrance is made with the standard two section cavatina, "Vieni! t'affretta…Or tutti sorgete, ministri infernali" a convention that is conveniently aligned with her two opening speeches in the Shakespeare, "Hie thee hither" and "Come you spirits that tend on mortal thoughts" (See Ex. 2.1 below). The unceasing patterned accompaniment in this cavatina is typical of Verdi's early style, but the vocal line has a sense of determination and energy demonstrated by dotted rhythms in combination with syncopation, patterned staccati, and melodic ornamentation that propels her determination. This is not music that Verdi saw fit to change in the Paris revision.[129]

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[128] Budden, *Verdi,* 201.
[129] Ibid., 196.

Ex. 3.1, Act I scene 2 Aria

The type of singing that Verdi desired for this cavatina explains the requests in his letters for ugly, declamatory sounds with hushed, hollow tones. Marilyn Somville writes that what Verdi wanted was not "to compensate for bad or faulty singing with fine and subtle acting. What he required from singers was an ability to *act out* the secret stirrings of the soul." She qualifies this in technical vocal terms relative to "Vieni! t'afretta":

> Verdi's characters were required to use what might be called "optional registration" – that is, to sing notes in the middle range with pure chest register or mixed register depending upon the nature of figuration given them and the dynamic level at which this figuration had to be projected. A good case in point is Lady Macbeth's cavatina, "Vieni! t'afretta." Here Verdi has written tight little turns with added trills which [sic] are no so much ornamental or pretty as a strong gesturing of the lust for power that drives the Lady. These figures require the pithy, harsh quality of pure chest register even up to A flat. The challenge for the singer is that Verdi makes the voice soar up and out of this figuration for even more florid singing in the upper register. Few sopranos, even today, can grab with pure chest register, and leave gracefully, any note in the middle range. However, failure to produce these raucous and vicious gestures in the cavatina will destroy the character Verdi wished for.[130]

[130] Marilyn Feller Somville, "Vocal Gesture in *Macbeth*," in *Verdi's* Macbeth: *A Sourcebook,* 241.

The Gran Scena e Duetto of Act I, "Fatal mia donna!" was Verdi's great achievement…where singers make whispery harsh sounds…[and is] an astonishing psychological study of the tremors of spiritual remorse combined with the hilarity of gratified ambition."[131] It is this duet that Barbieri-Nini is to have said

> Verdi rehearsed 150 times so that it could be 'closer to speech than singing'… Certainly, the *voce parlata* or *voce declamata* were not new to the Italian stage…What is new and vocally innovative in *Macbeth* is Verdi's attempt to control *all* the elements of vocal gesture so as to imitate speaking and "act out" the full dramatic and emotional meaning of the words.

The frequency of changes in texture and melodic gesture in this duet demonstrate the constant attention to dramatic focus (See Ex. 3.2, below). The action and psychological motivations push Verdi to fresh originality in a score saturated with invention, for which he seems indebted to

[131] Albright, "The Witches and the Witch," 244.

Shakespeare.[132]

59

LADY

MAC. (di dentro)

Risponde il gu_fo al suo lu_gubre ad_di_o! Chi v'ha?

LADY

Presto

Ch'ei fosse di le_targo u_sci_to pria del col_po mortal!...

col canto

p ALL°

MAC. (barcollando e stravolto con un pugnale in mano)

con voce soffocata e lento

Tutto è fi_ni_to!

ALLEGRO ♩. = 88

p

pp

LADY

MAC. (si avvicina a Lady, e le dice sotto voce)

Del

31

Fatal mia donna! un mur_mure, com'io, non in_ten_de_sti?

Ex. 3.2, Act I scene 2 Duet

[132] Kimball, "The Young Verdi" 71.

In the second act of the original version of the opera, Lady Macbeth's aria,"Trionfai! secure alfine," is "a song of triumph, yet another bravura number of overpowering rhythmic energy and some coloratura excitement…it is here that we find a variation on a part of Macbeth's omitted soliloquy, now shifted to his wife."[133] It is interesting to note that although Shakespeare does not have Lady Macbeth ever claiming victory for herself, the libretto translates clearly to "I have triumphed!" a demonstration of ambition on her own behalf, not just his. This was modified by Verdi in the Paris revision; with its removal he dismisses florid coloratura singing in favor of "the wonderfully sinister 'La luce langue' [that] with its wide range of modulation and richness of harmony reminds us that in the 1860's sopranos were no longer expected to use more coloratura as a means of forceful dramatic expression"[134] This revision may be a sign of changing trends in opera, but the qualities of "La luce langue" are much more realistic to the nature of the character and create a more satisfying dramatic arc into the sleepwalking scene. The aria generates a change in the dramatic presence of Lady Macbeth, one that increases her power and significance as the source of her husband's murderous path (See Ex. 4.3, below). Clausen says that the new aria represents Verdi's increased penchant for interiority, no longer opening with a display of exalted triumph but with what comes close to being an incantation...no longer a boisterous song of victory, the orchestral brilliancy of the [original aria] is replaced by a more subdued

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[133] Clausen, *Macbeth Multiplied,* 98.
[134] Budden, *Verdi,* 197.

scoring, harmonization becomes more intense, Lady Macbeth's vocal range is lowered, an her melodic lines, marked *legato e cupo*, acquire a more incantatory quality.[135]

LADY *legato e cupo*

La lu - ce lan - gue, il fa - ro spe - gnesi

ch'e - ter - no scor - re per gl'ampi cie - - li!

Ex. 3.3 Act II scene 1

Lady Macbeth's changes in mood in this new aria, as well as the parlando quality seemingly driven by internal thoughts, affect tempo, but not in a way that propels the music into a fit of fioritura. Clausen refers to these notions as an expression of her "essential femininity," and are an interpretation of her character that moves away from the ferocious Pritchard interpretation of the role toward a more obviously feminine

[135] Clausen, *Macbeth Multiplied,* 102.

characterization "whose moral scruples and female tenderness show through the undaunted mettle she so desperately tries to construct."[136]

In the cabaletta that follows the cavatina of "La luce langue" the mood shifts dramatically, as Lady Macbeth introduces the sexualization of her perceived power. Many of Shakespeare's Act I references to the sexualization of the regicide are omitted in Verdi's Act I, as are references of Lady Macbeth's questioning her husband's virility when he expresses doubt, however, in this cabaletta, Verdi's "O voluttà del soglio!" – "Oh lust for the throne!" creates a sexual energy and excitement at what she perceives to be her own rise to power, "O scettro, alfin sei mio!" – "Oh scepter, at last you are mine!" This quite direct reference to her own ambition is not as clearly defined or sexualized in Shakespeare.

The sleepwalking scene (See Ex. 3.4 and 3.5, below) is perhaps the most dramatically significant in the opera. The Shakespearean text almost asks to be set as recitative, but Verdi does not make that choice, nor does he choose to create an aria in the traditional sense. Verdi ultimately gave this scene to Andrea Maffei when he felt Piave was not hitting the mark, as indicated by frustration in his letters. His instructions to Maffei were to write *ottanari* for this scene; he wanted a consistent syllabic stress even though the dramatic motivation for the text is nearly stream of consciousness. This juxtaposition, no doubt, helps to create the overall sense of instability in her character. Maffei was very careful to maintain the syllabic pattern; even the interjections of the maid and doctor, though less than the Shakespeare, adhere to this meter. Verdi establishes dramatically that she is coming unhinged; it is a mad scene, though it lacks some typical elements, such as a chorus of reason. Here the doctor and the lady's maid function as

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[136] Ibid., 105.

agents of reality and ground the scene.[137] Albright says of this combination of the Lady and her observers, on whose perspective the scene is presented, create an element of the *genere fantastco:* "[Verdi] is a literalist of the supernatural, in that he presents the fantastic creature to the audience in a way that simulates the creature's appearance to the other characters on stage – Verdi always understands that terror pertains not to the creature (why would it be terrified of itself?) but to those onstage who behold it."[138]

Of course, Shakespeare understood this, too. Verdi seems to be following the Shakespearean dramatic formula for madness, not those of operatic convention. She is vocally dramatic in the scene, but not in the manner of the fioritura of *La Sonnambula* or *Lucia de Lammermoor;* the vocal tessitura sits lower that her other singing, implying depth of feeling and internal musings. The scene starkly contrasts the sexually charged nature of her excitement in her rise to power in the cabaletta in her Act II aria, but also becomes oddly aligned with it, as it depicts with equal intensity her mental collapse. This journey depicts Verdi's "general fascination…with musical intensification of extreme states of mind and [his] growing fascination with representations of interiority."[139]

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[137] Ibid., 138.
[138] Albright, "The Witches and the Witch," 234.
[139] Clausen, *Macbeth Multiplied,* 107-8.

LADY
AND.te ASSAI SOSTENUTO ♩= 50
sempre sotto voce
U - na
AND.te ASSAI SOSTENUTO ♩= 50
p
L
macchia... è qui tut - to - ra! via, ti-

Ex. 3.4, Act IV scene 2

Musically, the scene has a patterned accompaniment which is joined by dissonant and lamenting English horn and a

> restless string figuration of the continual washing of hands…the same pattern does not persist throughout…it is succeeded by another, returning only in fits and starts as the sense of the verse requires. The huge design of 63 slow bars pivots on typical Verdian axis of D flat and E, including at the words "co' suoi balsami," what will become the composer's hallmarks – a plunge onto a 6/4 chord in a remote key. A unique conception for 1847, it is no less striking in its later context.[140]

[140] Budden, *Verdi,* 200.

Ex. 3.5, Act IV scene 2

Verdi's faithful dedication to the service of Shakespearean drama in his *Macbeth* clearly meets the challenges of the social and operatic convention of the time. That several years pass before he sets another play of the Bard for the operatic stage is not so much a curiosity as an obvious turn in later years to that which he apparently enjoyed exceedingly well. He was only 33 when he wrote *Macbeth,* and though his renown and status as a treasure of Italian opera was becoming quite clear, later he was certainly more at ease to do that which pleased him, and nothing more, when it came to *Otello* and *Falstaff.*

Chapter Four
Shostakovich's *Lady Macbeth*

> I want to write a Soviet *Ring of the Nibelungen.* This will be an operatic tetrology in which *Lady Macbeth* will be a kind of *Rheingold*. The main image of the following opera will be a heroine of the 'People's Will' Movement. Then a woman of our century. And finally, I will describe our Soviet heroine who combines in herself the qualities of the women of today and tomorrow.
>
> Dmitri Shostakovich[141]

The Russian Ring Cycle That Wasn't

The socio-political environment and circumstances surrounding Shostakovich's *Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk District* are obviously vastly different from Verdi's *Macbeth*; it was written one hundred years later, in post-World War I Soviet Russia. In 1931, after a two-month vacation on the Baltic Coast, during which he worked on his *Lady Macbeth*, Shostakovich wrote and released his *Declaration of a Composer's Duties,* in which he complained that the majority of his recent composing was servicing contracts for incidental music for theatres and films.

> Among other things, he lamented the low status accorded music in the theater as contributing to the low quality of performance…the dependence on stock "illustrative" musical clichés…he deplored the role of music to "naked accommodation" with the appalling tastes of some theaters…The one exception he made to is litany of disgrace was and failure was *The Nose*, precisely because it had been composed independent of any collaboration with a theater. With impassioned rallying cries, he summoned composers to accept responsibility for their art form and turn away from subordination to theatrical institutions in the creation of works for the stage.[142]

His *Declaration,* while controversial, was well-timed; its publication coincided with a conference in Leningrad in April 1932 to discuss the general unhealthy situation of

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[141] Andrew B. Wachtel, "The Adventures of a Leskov Story in Soviet Russia, or the Socialist Opera that Wasn't," in *Epic Revisionism: Russian History and Literature as Stalinist Propaganda,* ed. Kevin M. F. Platt and David Baumgardner (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2006), 120. Shostakovich said this in a 1934 interview when the opera premiered.
[142] Laurel Fay, *Shostakovich: A Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 64.

musical life as a result of the Russian Association of Proletarian Musicians (RAPM). During the conference the Communist Party passed a resolution that disbanded the RAPM; Shostakovich received the news with relief and enthusiasm.[143]

Shostakovich clearly had grand plans at the outset of his opera *Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk District* when it premiered in 1934, and for two years afterward it enjoyed critical success in Soviet theatres. "In the program book that accompanied the first production, Shostakovich claimed that 'no work of Russian literature…more vividly or expressively characterizes the position of women in the old pre-revolutionary times than Leskov's.'"[144] After *The Nose,* it was certainly music for the theater he was proud of, as evidenced by his *Declaration* of 1931. Yet, after this initial wave of quite favorable reception, Stalin walked out in the middle of a performance on January 26, 1936, and the fate of the opera, as well as Shostakovich's larger plans of a Ring Cycle with *Lady Macbeth* "as a kind of *Rheingold*," were shattered. Stalin's third act exit from the Bolshoi was rationalized in a now-infamous January 28 editorial in *Pravda,* the official newspaper of the Central Committee of the Communist Party, titled "Muddle Instead of Music."

> Several theatres have presented to the culturally maturing Soviet public Shostakovich's opera *Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk District* as a novelty, as an accomplishment. Fawning musical criticism extols the opera to the heavens, trumpeting its fame. Instead of practical and serious criticism that could assist him in his future work, the young composer hears only enthusiastic compliments.
>
> From the very first moment of the opera the listener is flabbergasted by the deliberately dissonant, muddled stream of sounds. Snatches of melody, embryos of a musical phrase drown, struggle free and disappear again in the din, the grinding, the

143 Fay, *Shostakovich,* 65.
144 Wachtel, "Adventures," 118.

> squealing. To follow this "music" is difficult, to remember it impossible….[145]

Andrew Wachtel explains the context of the *Pravda* editorial:

> The editorial epitomizes in many ways the relationship of the state to Soviet cultural life during the 1930's…the party elite, including Stalin himself, hovered over the cultural scene…often intervening without warning according to an ill-defined set of norms and protocols. Bureaucrats and cultural agents treated these periodic emanations from above as a form of bellwether, dictating the general path that future artistic activity and cultural policy were to take. In this regard, "Muddle Instead of Music" may be seen as one of the first signs of an impending crackdown on works judged to deviate from the officially prescribed (but poorly defined) Socialist Realism mainstream.[146]

Russian Folk Ballad-on-Avon

Shostakovich's *Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk*, is not a setting of Shakespeare's play, but an adaptation of the novella of the same title by Russian writer Nikolai Leskov. "Leskov's *Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk* is Shakespearean in both its linguistic vigour and its emotional intensity. Leskov was not the first writer to transport a figure from Shakespeare to the Russian provinces…but none of Leskov's contemporaries, not even Dostoevsky, ever came so close to recreating the essence of Shakespearean tragedy."[147]

Shostakovich did not choose this *Lady Macbeth* because of a desire to honor Shakespeare, but because he felt Leskov had created an emotionally worthy and truly operatic Russian tragic heroine.

> One shouldn't write an opera…about socialist construction, one should write about living people, about the builders of the Five-

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[145] "Sumbur vmesto muzïki; ob opera 'Ledi Makbet Mtenskogo uyezda,'" *Pravda,* 28 January 1936, 3, cited in Fay, *Shostakovich*, 84. While the editorial is largely thought to adequately express the opinion of Stalin himself, the actual authorship of it has not been definitively proven: candidates include a *Pravda* staff writer and the head of a Committee of Cultural Affairs.

[146] Wachtel, "Adventures," 135.

[147] Robert Chandler, introduction to Nikolai Leskov, *Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk* (London: Hesperus Press, 2003), xiii.

> Year Plan. Our librettists have not yet come to grips with this circumstance. Their heroes are anemic, impotent. They (the heroes) inspire neither sympathy nor hate; they are mechanical. That is why I turned to the classics (Gogol, Leskov). Their heroes make it possible to laugh uproariously and to cry bitter tears.[148]

This story contains a good amount of detail pertaining to pre-revolutionary life within both the Russian merchant class and the peasant world, between which the heroine Katerina exists. There are references to Russian folk culture and religious orthodoxy, as well as the quite obvious transference of the archetypical qualities of Shakespeare's Lady Macbeth, which seem not only to apply to Katerina, but others as well. While the story is quite dissimilar from the Shakespeare play, there are many concurrent themes: murder for power and control, motherhood, matricide, patrilineage, sexualized ambition, and dream states.

The story of the novella has at its center Leskov's tragic heroine, Katerina L'vovna Ismailova, a young woman of twenty-four who favorably marries a man almost twice her age from the merchant class. She lives with her husband and father-in-law in a rural district on a working farm. Her marriage is, disappointingly to all three, a childless one. She is her husband's second wife, and he and his father were hopeful for an heir to the family's business and wealth. This is not of concern to her, but she is utterly bored and disenchanted with her life and feels a child would be a good diversion. She daily sits in her attic bedroom window and yawns repeatedly; the only book in the house is *The Lives of the Holy Fathers*, but she has no love of reading anyway. While her husband is away conducting business, she is suddenly inspired to take a walk and finds herself among the farmhands, where one steward named Sergei pays particular attention to her.

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[148]Dimitri Shostakovich "Plakat' i smeyat' sya," Sovetskoye iskusstvo (3 March 1993): 3, cited in Fay, *Shostakovich*, 68.

She learns from the cook that he has recently come from another farm, where he was fired for inappropriate behavior with the lady of the estate. Nonetheless, her passion for life is awakened by a sudden and rapturous affair with Sergei.

Katerina finds herself compromised when her father-in-law catches Sergei jumping from her bedroom window one night, and he demands Sergei be lashed, which he does himself. Katerina insists that Sergei be released, and that same night she kills her father-in-law by lacing his bowl of kasha and mushrooms with rat poison. Since he is in his eighties, this generates no suspicion and she and Sergei carry on their affair, as her husband is off in a remote area purchasing lumber and cannot even be reached to attend his father's burial service. After a time her husband returns home late one evening from his business; he has heard rumors and is quite suspicious of his wife's activity. He questions her intently upon discovering Sergei's belt in their bed and Katerina quite boldly confirms her lover by bringing him into the bedroom and kissing him passionately; he has been outside waiting. Though a planned choice by Katerina, in a spontaneous moment she strangles her husband while Sergei holds him and they hide his body in the basement.

After a certain amount of time goes by, speculation as to the whereabouts of her missing husband diminishes with the arrest of a driver who is the last person to have seen him alive. Katerina pleads to the local government and is granted control over her husband's business and estate. She and Sergei become more open about their relationship, and she discovers she is three months pregnant with his child. Unexpectedly, a young boy arrives at the estate with his grandmotherly caretaker; he is a nephew of Katerina's husband who has come to live at the house, as he has legal claim of co-heir

through his father's investment in the family business. After some time, and Sergei's clear disappointment at this turn of events, she suffocates the boy quite maliciously, with Sergei again acting as accomplice. Someone witnesses the crime through the boy's bedroom window and a throng beats down the door. Police arrive and Katerina denies her guilt until Sergei confesses and the body of her husband is discovered in the basement.

They are convicted and sent off to a Siberian prison camp together, where she gives birth but is completely indifferent to the baby, which she gives away without holding. Sergei has become indifferent to Katerina; in prison, he meets Sonetka, a young, attractive fellow inmate, and he readily moves on to his next distraction. While the prisoners are being transported across the Volga one day, Katerina lunges for Sonetka and takes her overboard, drowning both the girl and herself.

"Leskov," writes Gorky, "is the writer most deeply rooted in the people and is completely untouched by any foreign influences. A great story-teller will always be rooted in the people, primarily in the working class."[149] Leskov was clearly influenced by Shakespeare. His most famous short story, *Lefty,* is about a Russian blacksmith who, with invisible nails, tries to shoe a dancing steel flea made for the Tsar by some English blacksmiths. "The story's brilliant language…provides an entertaining commentary on Anglo-Russian cultural differences and misunderstandings." While he had a "deeper understanding of Russian provincial life than any of his contemporaries, Leskov was also extremely open to Western ideas. He was strongly influenced, for example, by British low-church morality – perhaps because one of his aunts was married to an

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[149] Walter Benjamin, "The Story Teller: Reflections on the Works of Nikolai Leskov," *Chicago Review* 16, no. 1 (1963): 95.

Englishman."[150] His understanding of provincial life was balanced by a similar understanding of the merchant class, the contrast between which is the milieu for his *Lady Macbeth*.

> Leskov's ancestry was unusually hybrid. His maternal grandfather was an impoverished gentleman who married a merchant's daughter. His father, though technically ennobled as a result of promotion in government service, came from a line of village priests; dismissed from his administrative post after a conflict with the provincial governor, he retired to the country to farm a small estate. There Nikolai Leskov grew up in close contact with the peasantry, and much of his education – although he did attend the Oryol Gymnasium for several years – was informal.[151]

Prior to his professional writing career, Leskov worked in the civil service in both Oryol and Kiev. He then worked for three years for his English uncle's estate management firm, Scott & Wilkins, and traveled all over Russia. Walter Benjamin says that Leskov is the perfect combination of what he sees as two archaic types of story-tellers: those who travel and those who stay at home. "The figure of the story-teller gets its full corporeality only for the one who can picture them both…people imagine the story-teller as someone who has come from afar. But they enjoy no less listening to the man who has stayed in the land, making an honest living, and who knows its tales and traditions."[152] The combination of travel, which allowed him to witness conditions of life in many areas of Russia, and contact with Western ideas through his employment and family connections, shaped Leskov into a writer with a unique, unapologetic, voice that was not well appreciated in his own time.

Leskov's exposure to Shakespeare at the time of his *Lady Macbeth* was certainly not limited to his own experiences with the West. Russian translators began to produce

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[150] Chandler, introduction to Leskov, *Lady Macbeth,* xi-xii.
[151] Ibid., xii
[152] Benjamin, "The Story Teller," 81.

faithful versions of Shakespeare in the 1820s, so he certainly would have known the work by the time he wrote his novella in 1865. Earlier translations of Shakespeare's works—including a *Macbeth* by P. Korsakov in 1815—were in the prevailingly French influenced neo-classical style.

> By the mid-1820s Russian men of letters keenly felt a lack of reliable Shakespeare versions…Within the next year two Russian writers - the well-known Decembrist poet Wilhelm Kyukhelbeker, then in confinement, and the much lesser-known amateur translator Mikhail Vronchenko simultaneously but independently set out to provide new and unmediated translations of Shakespeare.[153]

Kyukhelbeker presented the first significant translation of *Macbeth* in this new standard in 1828, written while he was in prison. He belonged to a group of translators who took a great deal of care in the process:

> The work of these new Shakespeare translators was steeped in scholarship. They spared no pains to study the source texts and what critics and editors had written about them, and provided their versions with extensive commentaries…These translators no longer wanted to cater for the 'enlightened taste' of groups of prospective readers or spectators…Instead, they attempted to reproduce Shakespeare's artistic conception, and to this end they recognized no means except textual fidelity to the original and absolute submission of the translator to the revered author.[154]

While in exile in 1835, Kyukhelbeker reworked three acts of his Macbeth translation; eight years passed before another Russian *Macbeth,* by Mikhail Vronchenko, was made public in 1843; it was delayed due to censorship of the regicide.[155] This sanction of *Macbeth* is only the first example of how politics impacted that story's entry into Russian Soviet culture.

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[153] Dirk Delabastita, "Russian Translations of Shakespeare in the Romantic Era," in *European Shakespeares: Translating Shakespeare in the Romantic Age* ed. Yuri D. Levin (Antwerp: John Benjamins, 1990), 76. "Decembrist" poet refers to Kyukhelbeker's activities relative to the December Revolution.
[154] Ibid., 78.
[155] Ibid., 83-4.

> By the late 1920s members of the Soviet creative intelligentsia…were heirs to a vigorous literary tradition, one they knew practically by heart and could not easily jettison, yet the ideological changes introduced in the wake of the Octorber [sic] Revolution ensured that the nineteenth-century canon could not be folded unproblematically into the new culture…in tandem with the development of Soviet culture, a slow process of assimilation and, necessarily, reinterpretation of the classics began.[156]

By the time Shostakovich turned to Leskov's *Lady Macbeth*, the novella was already an example of pre-Soviet culture that didn't enjoy a comfortable position in the new aesthetic. Andrew Wachtel explains that "active mediation was needed, either by critics who could contextualize the work, of an author in terms needed for acceptance, or by writers and artists who could revise, borrow from, adapt, or otherwise integrate a given work for the new cultural scene." Wachtel explains Leskov relative to these conditions:

> Nikolai Leskov was one of those nineteenth-century figures who did not easily fit into the new interpretive schema…his political qualifications were decidedly questionable: he had written novels vilifying the left (*No Way Out*, 1864, and *At Daggers Drawn*, 1870-1871). And although in later years he had mostly avoided politics, his extravagant writing style and fondness for folk religiosity did not endear him to those who would soon come to see writers as "engineers of men's souls."[157]

Walter Benjamin, as stated above, regards Leskov as a story-teller with the perspectives of a traveller and a well-defined sense of a home territory. Benjamin elaborates on his point with a statement by Leskov: "Writing," he says in one of his letters, "is to me no liberal art, but a craft."[158] In his *Lady Macbeth*, he takes the Shakespearean archetype of Lady Macbeth and artfully infuses her into a story that draws on his childhood experience, Russian folk ballads, and his work in journalism.

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[156] Wachtel, "Adventures," 117.
[157] Ibid., 118.
[158] Benjamin, "The Story Teller," 87.

Leskov said that the inspiration for the plot of *Lady Macbeth* came from a memory of something that occurred when he was a child:

> Once a neighbor, an old man who clung to life despite his more than seventy years, went one summer's day to take a rest beneath a blackcurrant bush. His impatient daughter-in-law poured boiling sealing-wax into his left ear…I remember him being buried, his ear had dropped off…Later, on Il'inka (the public square), she was flogged by the hangman. She was young, and everyone was surprised at how white her skin was.

Faith Wigzell notes that the emphasis Leskov places in this story on the pallor of the woman's skin indicates that, like Katerina, she was of the merchant class, among whom beauty was indicated by whiteness of skin.[159]

While not entirely dismissing this story, Wigzell proposes other sources for the novella, including Russian folk ballads and the tradition of the Russian *lubok* literature: primitive, illustrative woodcuts and engravings popular among the peasant class in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. She notes that one particular ballad, *Zhena muzha zarezala,* bears a strong resemblance to Leskov's *Lady Macbeth*. There are several variations, each bearing some similarities to the plot*,* including hiding the body of a merchant husband in the basement, the sexual allure of a peasant farmhand, and references to black curls of hair. Wigzell says "There is little reason to doubt that Leskov knew these ballads, though it is not possible to establish a precise link with any of the variants cited."[160]

According to Benjamin, Leskov was "a member of the Greek-Orthodox church, a man of genuine religious interests."[161] As he also worked as a journalist, he was adept at

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[159] Faith Wigzell, "Folk Stylization in Leskov's *Ledi Makbet Mtsenskogo uezda, The Slavonic and East European Review* 67, no. 2 (1989): 169-182.
[160] Ibid., 177-9.
[161] Benjamin, "The Story Teller," 82.

presenting information without bias. As Caryl Emerson notes, Leskov gives his novella the subtitle of "sketch," which in the second half of the nineteenth century had "come to designate a mix of eyewitness reportage and fiction, often characterized by a garrulous, gossipy narrator of humble origin who 'sketched in' a story amid many digressions and indulgences…The tone of Leskov's narrator is both 'folk-like'…and at the same time elevated, distanced…."[162] Leskov's personal orthodoxy and journalistic ability combine in the narrative voice of the story in his *Lady Macbeth*. Benjamin explains:

> Whether the course of events is eschatologically determined (a chronicler) or is a natural one makes no difference…Leskov is among those whose work displays this with particular clarity. Both the chronicler with his eschatological orientation and the story-teller with his profane outlook are so represented in his works that in a number of his stories it can hardly be decided whether the web in which they appear is the golden fabric of a religious view of the course of things, or the multicolored fabric of a worldly view.[163]

Andrew Wachtel qualifies the nature of the narrative style in Leskov's novella as well, saying, "Lady Macbeth is by no means a typical Leskov story…This tale does not employ *skaz*, the colloquial narrative style present in most of Leskov's more famous works," and in the foreword to the Hesperus edition of the novella, Gilbert Adair says, "never deigning to moralise or editorialise, never once intervening to express his own approval or disapproval of his protagonist's behavior…Leskov confines himself merely to *reporting*…the atrocities committed by the monstrous but all too human Katerina."[164]

Indeed, Leskov admitted that the writing of his *Lady Macbeth* was not a very pleasant experience. While visiting his brother at Kiev University in the summer of 1864, he locked himself in the student punishment cells, "hoping to work his nerves into the

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[162] Caryl Emerson, "Back to the Future: Shostakovich's Revision of Leskov's 'Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk District,'" *Cambridge Opera Journal* 1, no. 1, (1989): 59-78.
[163] Benjamin, "The Story Teller," 91.
[164] Gilbert Adair, foreward to Leskov, *Lady Macbeth*, ix.

necessary state of frenzy to write *Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk.*"[165] A friend related that Leskov said, "while I was writing my *Lady Macbeth*, the effect of overstrained nerves and isolation almost drove me to delirium. At times the horror became unbearable…Those were painful moments, and I shall never forget them."[166] It seems that Katerina was the exact opposite of his own mother, who Leskov described as "so thoroughly good that she was not capable of harming any man, nor even an animal. She ate neither meat nor fish, because she had such pity for living creatures." Benjamin says of the "righteous" characters that often lead the story-telling of Leskov are "all of them, embodiments of wisdom, kindness, the consolation of the world…It is unmistakable that they are suffused with the *imago* of his mother."[167]

Katerina's initial feelings about mothering are described as a potential relief for her state of boredom, "that more than once reduced the young woman to a state of depression bordering on stupor; how glad she would have been, God knows how glad, to have a little child to fuss over!"[168] Shakespeare's Lady Macbeth never has such a thought; quite the contrary. However, Katerina ultimately and literally acts on the matricidal invocation of her Shakespearean counterpart. When she is quite pregnant she suffocates her young nephew with "a large feather pillow and threw herself across it, her firm resilient bosom pressing down on the pillow" (43). Katerina enters and exits the boy's room twice before she urges Sergei in to hold the boy down at just the right moment on the third visit to his room. On the second visit it is noted by the narrator:

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[165] Emerson, "Back to the Future," 60.
[166] Hugh McLean, *Nikolai Leskov: The Man and His Art* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1977), 151.
[167] Benjamin, "The Story Teller," 97.
[168] Nikolai Leskov, *Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk* (London: Hesperus Press, 2003), 4. Unless otherwise stated, all quotations are from this edition

"Katerina L'vovna went pale; her own child had stirred inside her for the first time, beneath her heart, and a chill passed through her. She stood in the middle of the room and then went out, rubbing her cold hands together" (41).

Leskov incorporates other folkloric elements that fulfill the supernatural nature of the witches in the Shakespeare play. He uses Katerina's dream state as a means of exploring the supernatural, giving a nod to sleepwalking as well, which does not literally present itself in the Leskov as it does so famously in the Shakespeare. Faith Wigzell notes that the entry of Katerina's dream state fills a void in Leskov's narrative style:

> A psychological approach…would suggest itself as the natural way of coping with an obviously melodramatic plot, but…Leskov moves in the opposite direction, depicting Katerina from the outside, resisting analysis of her feelings and motivations…Leskov is nodding briefly in the direction of contemporary literary approaches to dream by using Katerina's dreams as a minimal clarification of her psychology.[169]

She dreams on two occasions of a large grey cat, a symbol "taken primarily from the Dream Books, where dreaming of cats is a sign of marital breakdown. That the cat is large, grey and male reflects local beliefs from Orel province, where this portends sorrow or disaster. The doubly unlucky symbol partly explains Katerina's sense of supernatural horror."[170]

The first visit of the dream cat occurs when Katerina and Sergei are asleep in the heat of the day, not long after she has poisoned her father-in-law. The cook comes to the door to tell them the tea is getting cold outside in the usual spot under an apple tree, and Katerina's dream begins with her waking up as the cat rubs itself on her and Sergei. He "pressed up against her, pushed his blunt little face into her springy breasts and all the

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[169] Faith Wigzell, "Russian Dream Books and Lady Macbeth's Cat," *The Slavonic and Eaast European Review* 66, no. 4 (1988): 625-630.
[170] Wigzell, "Folk Stylization," 181.

time went on singing his quiet little song, as if he were telling a tale of love…She tried to seize hold of the cat and throw him out, but he slipped through her fingers like a breath of mist" (16). The similarity of the cat's disappearance to that of witches on the heath before Macbeth and Banquo is surely not an accident.

Katerina wakes and goes down for tea, where she seeks the counsel of the cook Aksin'ya to decipher the meaning of her dream. The cook does not offer much insight, and as Wigzell points out:

> Aksin'ya produces a vague interpretation, Leskov making it clear it is based not on divinatory ability but on her knowledge of the situation, and very probably, the desire not to offend her mistress. In semi-educated circles…in pre-revolutionary Russia, dream interpretation was widespread…Those without access to books relied, as Aksin'ya does…on folk beliefs.[171]

It seems, though, that there may be a larger supernatural role played by Aksin'ya that Wigzell does not take into consideration. The reader's introduction to the cook occurs at the very beginning of the story as Katerina is out for an atypical walk and happens upon the farmhands, who are in fits of laughter. When she inquires as to the cause of their happiness, they reply that they are weighing a live sow, and she says "what sow?" The response is "A sow called Aksin'ya, ma'am, one as gave birth to of a son called Vasily and forgot to invite us along to the christening" (7). A few moments later, as Katerina departs the company of the farmhands with the cook, she asks her if the baby is still alive, as perhaps the baby's death would explain the lack of a christening; the ensuing conversation is this:

> 'Of course ma'am, why wouldn't he be? It's them as aren't wanted as prove the sturdiest.'
> 'And where did he come from?'
> 'How would I know? Live in a crowd – you walk about with many'(9).

[171] Wigzell, "Russian Dream Books," 626.

This exchange supports the notion that Leskov is presenting the cook as a woman who could easily have been labeled witch in the eyes of James I. She is an unwed mother of an unwanted, unchristened child of unknown paternity. Further, that the farmhands refer to her as a sow – she has literally been launched by them into the pan of the livestock scale to be weighed – is a direct reference to the conversation of the three witches of Shakespeare in which they discuss the contents of their cauldron, which contains the ear of a sow. Additionally, the occasions on which Aksin'ya appears are otherwise relative to the dream consultation or making tea, which is potentially a reference to the definition of sorcery as rooted in unpredictability, as evidenced in scattered tea leaves referenced in chapter one above.

The second appearance of the cat is very different: it speaks, claiming to be her dead father-in-law, and it derides her and her lover. The cat then comes to represent the removal of the first obstacle to obtaining her husband's wealth and a life with Sergei, which is her singular goal.

Katerina's murderous acts are all described by Leskov as occurring "in a single movement" or "in one movement."[172] Her actions are pre-planned but spontaneously undertaken, and often make references to her bosom, which relate to the themes of matricide in the Shakespeare play. Leskov's Katerina is simple in her wickedness. There is no complexity allowed, even in the manner of her possible redemption. Just before the final murder-suicide, it is clear that there is no room for empathy in the reader's mind. She becomes catatonic, numb to her surroundings and sees in the waves of the Volga the heads of her previous victims. In her husband's arms is the boy, "whose head was hanging down against his chest. Katerina L'vovna tried to remember a prayer; she moved

[172] Chandler, introduction to Leskov, *Lady Macbeth,* op. cit, xiv.

her lips, but all they could whisper was 'What good times we had together, and how we delighted in the long autumn nights. And how, through terrible death, we robbed people of the light of day'" (62).

'Modern' Woman & Winged Eros, and the Transposition of a Novella

Philip Ross Bullock proposes that in order to investigate Soviet opera of the 1930s, we need to shift "away from the well-known martyrology of individual works and composers…[to shed] light on the cultural ambitions of the musical and political establishment of the day."[173] He is referring to Shostakovich's *Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk District*, which has inarguably dominated the conversation of Russian opera in the 1930s, due to the *Pravda* editorial cited above, and an understanding of its implications for the life and career of the composer.

Bullock argues that the editorial had implications beyond Shostakovich, in that it is "one of a large number of documents dealing with the present condition and future direction of a key contemporary art form, it lays bare aesthetic and ideological anxieties and assumptions about the nature of Soviet thinking on opera at a fundamental moment in its development."[174]

Bullock tracks the nature of Soviet thinking to a genre called song opera, which was developed out of a call for "classical Russian opera, with its affinity for folk images and national musical idioms" to become the foundation for a "Soviet lyric theater." In

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[173] Ross Bullock, "Staging Stalinism: The Search for Soviet Opera in the 1930s," *Cambridge Opera Journal* 18, no. 1 (2006): 83-108.
[174] Ibid., 84.

this endeavor, productions of operas would move from Leningrad to Moscow, and libretti would be adapted from socialist realist novels.[175]

These circumstances, when used as a lens through which to view Shostakovich and his *Lady Macbeth,* shed some new light on the problematic nature of the opera; namely, Leskov's novella was not a socialist realist novel. Thus, one problem for Shostakovich was likely his choice of source material: a Russian folk-idiom retelling of a classic nineteenth-century novella, with the deepest of Western roots.

Shostakovich's introduction to Leskov's novella is related by Andrew Wachtel:

> Although Shostakovich should have been far too young to have been actively aware of the culture climate of the immediate post-revolutionary years (he was born in September, 1906), he had been a frequent visitor in the Kustodiev household as early as 1909, when as a child prodigy he had been asked by his schoolmate, Irina Kustodieva, to play for her wheelchair-bound father. Kustodiev took a liking to the young pianist and his family, who even spent part of the summer of 1923 at the painter's Crimean dacha. At the time Kustodiev was working to complete his illustrations for "Lady Macbeth."

The illustrations Shostakovich saw in the Kustodiev home, Wachtel explains, would have created the idea in his mind of a highly sexually charged heroine. Wachtel cites a trail of visual depictions of voluptuous women that he claims led to Shostakovich's hypersexualization of Katerina, beginning with Gaugin's *The King's Wife* (1896), borrowed by Mikhail Larionov in his *Katsap Venus* (1912), which also includes a cat, and is in turn borrowed by Boris Kustodiev, who painted a series of "Russian types" that feature merchant-class women.[176]

As clearly defined in chapter two, even a composer with the most indefatigable intentions for accurately depicting the events and characterizations of source material

[175] Ibid., 91.
[176] Wachtel, "Adventures," 124.

may run into some challenges relative to social, cultural, and, in the case of Shostakovich, political, contexts. However, Shostakovich chose to depart in very significant ways from his source material to create a characterization of Katerina that is unburdened by the complexities of the original Lady Macbeth that Leskov so carefully integrated into his novella. An examination of the incongruities between the opera and its source material indicates that Shostakovich's characterization of Katerina rests squarely on the social circumstance of her life; she is a woman whose only option for satisfaction is a fleeting, passionate and doomed affair which she must commit murder to sustain. In the plot alterations, Shostakovich eliminates that which makes Katerina evil in Leskov's novella and eliminates suggestion of certain motivations for her actions, which could cause her to be an unsympathetic character. He transforms her into a tragic, sympathetic victim of social circumstance, in line with the dramatic arc of the opera cycle he had hoped to compose.

The manner in which source material is adapted into a libretto is dependent on many factors, and accuracy is not always a priority. Bullock cites Caryl Emerson's consideration of libretti in terms of their "transposition," their translation from text that is read to text that is sung and staged. "Russian operas and their source texts often exist in a creative or…'dialogic' relationship with each other…[where] discontinuities and infidelities are a crucial feature of the libretto, which makes clear its debt to the source text whilst also laying bare its departures from that very text." Emerson further suggests that "texts live only as they are cited, recited, republished, and as they become a source of allusions and shared metaphor."[177]

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[177] Caryl Emerson, "Boris Godunov: Transposition of a Russian Theme," Cited in Bullock, "Staging Stalinism," 97.

Relative to his alteration of his source material, Shostakovich said: "Leskov, as a brilliant representative of pre-revolutionary literature, could not correctly interpret the events that unfold in his story."

> Statements of this kind were standard fare in the rehabilitation of classic Russian writers. As the message of the story could not be approved, it was imperative to attribute that message to the ideological constraints of the author's time, constraints against which he was seen to have been struggling. This method could be called Soviet deconstructionist criticism, and its initiator was the great deconstructor himself – Lenin, -- in his influential articles on Tolsoi.[178]

Some of the plot integrations in the Leskov which allude to the Shakespeare play were altered contextually, generating new implications instead of being removed altogether. Elizabeth Wells states bluntly: "The opera is more explicitly about sex than the novel."[179] In eliminating references to the supernatural via witchcraft and to matricide, what remains is the Kustodiev-inspired hypersexualization of Katerina, which makes her a woman worthy of our empathy; all she has to gain control of the society-induced coma that is her life is her sexuality.

One scene about which Wells' statement is clearly true is the character of Aksin'ya, Leskov's use of Katerina's encounter with her while out walking to establish the cook as Russian folk version of a witch is not alluded to in the opera. In fact, the nature of Leskov's scene shifts completely, from the cook being weighed on a livestock scale and derided by the men as a sow who doesn't christen her baby to being physically and sexually attacked by the farmhands. Katerina happens upon this violent scene and interrupts it. Elizabeth Wells explains the score:

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[178] Wachtel, "Adventures," 118.

[179] Elizabeth A. Wells, "The New Woman: Lady Macbeth and Sexual Politics in the Stalinist Era," *Cambridge Opera Journal* 13, no. 2 (2001): 186-189.

> 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.[180]

Katerina's disgust and haste to assist Aksin'ya as she is being assaulted amplifies the disintegration of her honor when she is later reduced to murder to perpetuate her shallowly-rooted happiness in the satisfaction of her sexual appetite. Wells poses that this scene and the general hypersexualization of Katerina are in large part responsible for Stalin's reaction to the opera. "One of Stalin's primary objections," she says "was to the sexuality of the work. As the anonymous author [of the *Pravda* editorial] wrote, 'The merchant's double bed occupies the central position on the stage. On it all 'problems' are solved."[181]

Her argument seems valid, as she points out the attack on *Lady Macbeth* as a 'modernist' work, "defined by irreverence, dissonance, formal irregularity, political incorrectness, or subject matter, was much less radical than the composer's first opera *The Nose."* She also notes that *The Nose* had a "similarly explicit bedroom scene" which was not a focus of that work's denunciation.[182]

Laurel Fay says *The Nose* was "harshly criticized by the proletarian wing for its avoidance of a Soviet theme, its musical complexity, and its inaccessibility to the masses" and was "immediately subjected to ruthless criticism that focused…on the opera's serious ideological flaws, esoteric style and rejection of classical operatic values." Shostakovich did cite the societal woes of women in pre-Revolutionary Russia

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[180] Ibid., 168. Wells notes that this scene was "sanitized" in the 1963 version titled *Katerina Izmailova*
[181] Ibid., 164.
[182] Ibid.

as the cause for Katerina's circumstance and characterization, so he may have learned from his experience with *The Nose* to imply a Soviet theme.[183]

Since the similar scene in *The Nose* was not criticized, Shostakovich had likely not planned on the sexual intensity of *Lady Macbeth* being an issue, yet it was significantly toned down in revisions to the opera in 1963. Significant modification was made to the characterization of Katerina's mood in her Act 1 scene 3 aria, which in the original is a lament about her lack of sexual fulfillment that she sings while she undresses; in the revision, the aria becomes an anthem of her domestic satisfaction.[184]

The significant bedroom scene noted by Wells occurs immediately after Katerina's aria; it is the first sexual encounter of Sergei and Katerina. The scene is transferred quite faithfully from the Leskov novella; he knocks on her door to borrow a book and their brief conversation turns to passion quite quickly. In the novella he says to her: "now, at this very moment, everything lies in your hands, everything lies in your power," but there is no reference to her being in control in the libretto; it is quite the opposite, as he is persistent in his efforts and she acquiesces rather quickly without the need to feel in control. The explanation of this turn of events in the Leskov narration is: "Sergei lifted his mistress into the air like a child and carried her into a dark corner" (11-12). Shostakovich refers to this dark corner in an instrumental interlude that depicts their sexual intercourse, which was called "pornophony" by one New York critic" (see example 4.1, below)[185]

Wells provides some history on the Russian sexual revolution, which supports Shostakovich's hypersexualization of Katerina as a means of pro-Soviet expression:

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[183] Fay, *Shostakovich*, 55.
[184] Wells, "The New Woman," 188. The texts of both arias are provided in the appendix.
[185] Ibid., 164.

> 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.[186]

Kat.
fff
183
Ах!
Ach!
Sergej
Ах, Катя, радость ты моя!
Ach, Katja, sei doch endlich mein!
183
p cresc.
fff
184

Ex. 4.1, Act I, scene 3

[186] Ibid., 178.

She relates the philosophy of a Soviet Central Committee member and feminist, Alexandra Kollontai, who

> saw sexuality as both political and personal, and as an appropriate theme and subject of revolutionary movement…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…[this state] was the height of attainment for women, with sexual love outranking even maternal love.[187]

Kollantai describes a utopian sexual freedom for modern women, and Wells likens Shostakovich's musical treatment of Katerina to an attempt to make her happy through casual sexual gratification. His musical portrayal of her "does not ultimately lead to Katerina's happiness, but to the destruction of herself and all around her…she fails the New Woman, slipping into the ways of the pre-Revolutionary past…[of the] tragic mistress-lover relationship which drains the energy of both partners and suppresses the ego of the woman."[188]

As stated above, the novella does feature a very strong sexualized power in Katerina that fuels her murderous rage, but her sexuality is simplified in its single intent and lack of narrative voice for her conscience. Empathy for her is nil. However, in the opera:

> Katerina's inner life…has developed in a direction out of keeping with the Leskov's narrative. The operatic heroine sings a final arioso…which so hauntingly gives voice to her guilt that her subsequent death appears to be more self-punishment than revenge against her lover and rival. This spiritual elevation of the heroine (which occurs not only at the end but throughout the opera) puts considerable strain on Leskov's coolly detached and amoral tale.[189]

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[187] Ibid., 178.
[188] Ibid., 182.
[189] Emerson, "Back to the Future," 64.

Ultimately, what is likely more disturbing is that Katerina's actions are no longer merely being reported to the reader, but in her music she is given a conscience and "spiritual elevation." Wachtel describes Shostakovich's responsibility in the composer's frame of cultural reference:

> In order to be elevated from the merely acceptable into the pantheon of classics, Leskov's story needed further interpretation. It had to be understood as the harbinger of the most progressive trends; it had to contain positive elements, as opposed to being merely an implicit criticism of its own time. Shostakovich found these positive elements through a clever reinterpretation, or more accurately, revision of the main character Katerina L'vovna Izmailova. According to the composer: "N. Leskov depicts the main heroine of his story…as a demonic figure. He finds no reasons either for a moral or even a psychological, justification of her…I interpreted Katerina L'vovna as an energetic, talented, beautiful woman, who is destroyed by the gloomy, cruel family surroundings of serf-holding-merchant Russia.[190]

Shostakovich has characterized Katerina as a sexually free champion of the modern Soviet woman, no longer constrained by the conventions of marriage. When Sergei is caught leaving Katerina's window and is being thrashed by her father-in-law, Katerina pleads: "All you people in there! Help me, someone! Oh! let him go; whoever opens the door for me will be rewarded with my love." She is so sexually free that she can offer her love to anyone who will provide assistance; yet, it is her new awareness of this state of sexual emancipation that leads her to murder and ultimately lose her freedom. Oddly, she also returns to the institution of marriage via this awareness of sexual freedom as she and Sergei marry, but happily so for only a few hours, as their wedding party is interrupted by the police, who have discovered the body of Katerina's husband in the basement. Her indulgence in sexual freedom brings her to a most confined way of life: a prisoner in Siberia, just as Lady Macbeth's guilt in conjuring her husband

[190] Wachtel, "Adventures," 118.

to act leaves her in a permanent state of confinement to sleep. Neither Katerina nor Lady Macbeth are able to sustain these circumstances and both choose suicide.

The amplification of this hypersexualized characterization of Katerina perhaps required Shostakovich to avoid overtly emphasizing features of Leskov's plot that are more aligned to Shakespeare's Lady Macbeth. What remains congruous with Leskov is the premeditation of her crimes and the nature of Sergei's assistance being secondary to her guilt. In terms of character and plot development, the most obvious change in the libretto is the elimination of the nephew, Fedya Lyamin; his murder is Katerina's most egregious sin, as it occurs while the boy is praying. This exclusion and the elimination of Katerina's own pregnancy greatly weaken references to the issues of motherhood, matricide and patrilineage in both the Shakespeare and the Leskov.

Emerson says another difference of note in the "transposition" of Leskov's novella is a change in the character of the father-in-law relative to Katerina, and by extension, Sergei. "Boris Timofeyevich is vastly expanded and eroticized. The 'old widower nearing eighty' interested only in the honour of his house becomes a vigorous and aggressive competitor for Katerina's favours" or "the strong-willed, sexually possessive parental tyrant who is a voyeur in the married life of a passive son."[191] In the musical interlude of the dark corner, Boris interrupts briefly to make sure that Katerina is doing well, as he had previously locked her door after witnessing her play-wrestling with Sergei outdoors.

The most significant change in the opera is the musical voice as narrator. It is not possible for an orchestra to be an unbiased narrative reporter of events as exists in the novella. Emerson says, "Leskov is spared the task of relating the heroine's words and

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[191] Emerson, "Back to the Future," 62-3.

unspoken thoughts…What seemed to mark her Russianness was the absence of any dramatic maturation, or of anything like a conscience. The horror is induced in the audience, not on stage, and whatever inner voice the heroine might have had is undeveloped or silenced." The un-silencing of her conscience into the orchestral narrative is the most salient point in Emerson's writing. She says:

> Here is where the orchestra, with its potential to 'symphonise the word', is so successful in its function as narrator. In its own way the orchestra is as successful as Leskov's cool storyteller, although it works to opposite effect. Leskov condemns his heroine by stylizing her outer surface, denying the reader access to anything but her appetites and the record of her murders. She is of a piece with her world. Shostakovich's orchestral narrator, on the contrary, rehabilitates the heroine by continually revealing lyrical inner surfaces, hidden virtues that cannot be reflected in the outer deed. Where Leskov's Katerina cannot be saved, Shostakovich's Katerina does not need to be saved…Thus, for all the dynamism of its music and richness of its source texts, Shostakovich's *Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk* does not succeed in returning its heroine to Shakespeare – which is to say, to a genuine struggle over unethical acts and their consequences.[192]

Katerina's musical language is anything but muddled. Her vocal lines are lyrical, and their post-Romantic elegance is not at all indicative of her murderous tendencies. While the boredom and lethargy of her latent sexualization in the opening scene of the opera is the closest Katerina comes to a grand sleepwalking scena (perhaps a detriment to Shostakovich's reception), the vocal writing implies a trance-like, catatonic state with its high tessitura marked piano and its slurred octave leaps from the middle register to the head voice, marked pianissimo (see Ex. 4.2, below).

Katerina's Act 1 scene 3 aria, mentioned above as a point of interest in the Cold War-era revisions of *Lady Macbeth*, is similarly lyrical and features head voice tessitura at a pianissimo dynamic (see Ex. 4.3, below). This aria is characterized by Elizabeth Wells as

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[192] Ibid. 78.

an impassioned soliloquy…about her sexless existence…Her desire is persuasively expressed, complete with analogies to the natural world. Katerina's music in this scene…is 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, where a rising bass line of B – C# – D#, then the making 'piu 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.[193]

Ex. 4.2, Act I scene 1

[193] Wells, "The New Woman," 181.

144 *f accelerando*

Kat. *cresc.*

мне ни – кто не при – дет, ни – кто стан мой ру –

kommt denn je – mals zu mir, ja wer strei – chelt mir

mf

Kat. *cresc.*

кой не об – ни – мет, ни – кто гу – бы к мо – им

zart den Hals, und wer küßt mir wie Feu –

145 Più mosso ♩ = 112

Kat. *fff*

не при – жмет. Ни – кто мо – ю бе – лу – ю

- er den Mund? Ach, wer wird mir lust – voll die

ff

Ex. 4.3, Act I scene 3

Caryl Emerson summarizes her position: “Through the symphonized word, and in defiance of its own source text, the opera enters the mainstream Russian tradition of purification through crime – and salvation through suffering.”[194]

[194] Emerson, “Back to the Future,” 70.

This setting of the Lady Macbeth provides the opportunity for focused character development based on an interpretation that more deeply explores one aspect of the archetype as described in chapter one. Katerina is a Lady Macbeth who transfers the sexualization of the act of murder and infanticide from Shakespeare into her own dormant sexuality, with tragic consequences. A full understanding of the archetype allows the singer the proper perspective on the vacuum that remains when certain aspects of her archetype are absent, a vacuum that is filled in this interpretation with legato and lyric sexual tension.

Chapter Five
Pasatieri's *Lady Macbeth*

Thomas Pasatieri's setting of Lady Macbeth was premiered in 2008 by the Voices of Change Chamber Ensemble, with Lauren Flanigan, in the title role and Joseph Illick on piano. The composer said:

> Yes, the idea for Lady Macbeth germinated when Lauren and I were discussing her performances of the part at La Scala. I knew that she embodied Verdi's character vocally and musically and thought that it would be wonderful to have her intone Shakespeare's words.[195]

This work is quite different than the two previously discussed settings because it is neither a full retelling of the story of *Macbeth* nor is it an insertion of the Lady Macbeth archetype into a new story and setting. Rather, it is a monodrama for soprano solo and piano, using the words of Lady Macbeth directly from Shakespeare's play to create the entire dramatic arc of her character in one continuous musical setting. This places a large burden on the singer, as there is much less time to effect changes in character as compared to an entire performance of the drama. There are no entrances or exits, no costume changes, and the soprano is without the benefit of other characters to which she would typically relate, including Macbeth. The singer must look inward to create that which is not provided, and these circumstances require complete understanding of the character, and a clean and clear objective regarding choices of motivation; these choices must be made in the physical presence, facial expression, and vocal quality of the singer.

An obvious similarity between the Verdi and the Pasatieri is that they both deal with Lady Macbeth as in Shakespeare. Verdi's direction to Barbieri-Nini on the vocal

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[195] Thomas Pasatieri, email to the author July 16, 2014.

characterization of Lady Macbeth, as noted in chapter two, is thought by one modern critic as the beginning of the verismo period in opera; Pasatieri has been called the bel canto composer of the 20th century.[196] He says, "I love being called a 'bel canto of the 20th century' (now the 21st), but I have also been called American verismo. I think my music is a combination of both styles."[197] This is indeed evident in the score of his monodrama. The opening *maestoso* has a sweeping melody reminiscent of Puccini, but ends simply with one melodic voice cadencing on a fermata, setting up the opening unaccompanied incantation as Lady Macbeth awaits the arrival of her husband and Duncan. It is as though the lushness of Puccini is reduced to a sparse Verdian accompaniment. (see example 5.1, below).

The opening incantation (1.5.45) gives way to a sweeping melodic theme setting the text of Lady Macbeth's "unsex me here" speech. This work, due to its use of the original text, is the only of the three settings discussed to so directly recreate this pivotal dramatic moment in the Shakespeare play. Pasatieri's melody has a very evocative initial gesture that returns in variation three times, each with a denser accompaniment, and each time beginning with the word "come," as she increases her demands on the spirits that she is intending to conjure with her words (see examples 5.2 a, b, and c, below).

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[196] Lon Tuck, "The Prolific Pasatieri," *The Washington Post,* February 6, 1978, B4.
[197] Pasatieri, email to the author.

Maestoso

Piano

poco accel. a tempo

dim.

a piacere

The ra-ven him-self is hoarse That croaks the fa-tal en-trance of Dun-can Un - der my bat - tle-ments.

Ex. 5.1, m.1-9.

Come, you spir-its that

Come to my

Come thick night, And

Ex. 5.2 a, m. 12 Ex. 5.2 b, m.22 Ex. 5.2 c, m.32

Less than a measure into a new section marked *allegretto*, Lady Macbeth is speaking to her husband (though he is not physically present), explaining her plan for

Duncan's murder. The eighth note staccato accompaniment articulates her dry, emotionless demeanor as she tells him what must be done; the piano becomes the narrative voice of her conscience, similar to Shostakovich's use of the orchestra. In setting the text for this scene, Pasatieri eliminates line 82 of Lady Macbeth's scene six dialogue. The complete speech is:

> He that's coming
> Must be provided for; and you shall put
> This night's great business into my dispatch,
> Which shall to all our nights and days to come
> Give solely sovereign sway and masterdom. (1.6.78-82)

By eliminating the last line of this text the ultimate intent of the sentence, which is that the goal of the "night's great business" is for Macbeth to become king – "give sovereign sway and masterdom." – is missing. It now ends with the word "come," alluding to the gestures in examples 5.2 a-c, and the double-entendre as the murder plot becomes sexualized.

Pasatieri addresses this choice: "What to include and what not to include of the text is always a wrenching question for a composer. I had to rely on my muses to guide me in choosing the best words and scenes to express her with my music."[198] He has replaced the missing words with a musical fulfillment of this literal reference in Shakespeare to the power Macbeth will gain by committing the regicide, choosing instead to merely suggest this power with a truncation of text that sexualizes the moment and a musical climax that implies a favorable outcome. The power of suggestion, combined with the narrative voice of the piano in a musical climax, heightens the effect of the speech (see Ex. 5.3, below). Pasatieri clearly indicates that changes to the text are always to support the musical interpretation of the moment, saying: "Adapting this text

[198] Pasatieri, 2014.

does not change Shakespeare's original text, it provides a basis for music."

Ex. 5.3, mm. 58-64

The absence of other characters, specifically, Macbeth, adds a new dimension to the work's characterization of Lady Macbeth, putting her in a vacuum of her existence, as though the entire monodrama were a replaying in her mind of past events while she is sleepwalking. The action of this monodrama could be interpreted to exist entirely in this internal fashion, as she is completely alone with only her own thoughts and words. Pasatieri says of the piano: "Everything is from her point of view, while she does converse with others, the piano always represents her."[199]

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[199] Ibid.

Once again, a transition of only one bar, this time an *allegro*, (see Ex. 5.4) leads to the next section of text, which comes from act 1 scene 7. The one bar transitions are unnatural to temporal reality, supporting an interpretation of the work as a sleepwalking mirage of past events. At this moment in the drama she is deriding Macbeth for his doubts on whether to proceed, and the abrupt, rhythmic *allegro* indicates her impatience with his lack of determination. A longer interlude before text from a new scene would imply a dramatic transition that is carefully thought through, but the one bar transitions Pasatieri uses create the impression of erratic, unexpected shifts in her mind; yet, she lands squarely in a new perspective and conversation as though she's been there before, thus reinforcing the interpretation of the dramatic action as a figment of her imagination.

Ex. 5.4, mm. 65-68

Pasatieri explains his interpretation of Lady Macbeth: "The psychology of this woman is rooted in strength and ruthless ambition. She will stop at nothing to get what she wants and will use anything at her disposal to achieve this. Much of this is painted with the use of fioritura both in Verdi's and my scores.[200]

[200] Ibid.

An example of this Verdian fioritura (see Ex. 5.5) can be found in Pasatieri's setting of text from act 2 scene 2 of Shakespeare, when Lady Macbeth is describing how she successfully incapacitated Duncan's guards.

After this florid section of wicked mockery and glee, there is a three bar interlude prior to her response to Macbeth's returning to report the deed, bloody daggers in hand. She begins her dialogue with the absent Macbeth at a section marked *più mosso* that almost immediately accelerates into a clipped rhythmic accompanimental figure, a more anxious version of the staccato eighth note articulation from earlier that depicts her preparing him for the crime in Act I. She is once again chastising him, this time for saying that he heard a voice cry "Sleep no more!" (2.2.47) after he had done the deed. This gives way to a *meno mosso* and a moment that is indicative of Pasatieri's verismo nature as she resolves to replace the daggers herself (see Ex 5.6).

In such a musically dramatic moment, Lady Macbeth's insistence upon an absent Macbeth that he hand her the daggers creates a hauntingly disturbing effect; this is increased if the singer is convincing in the character's belief that he is actually present.

Poco meno mosso

f mp

gives the stearn'st good - night. He is a-bout it: The doors are o - pen;

cresc.

op - en and the sur-fei-ted grooms Do mock their charge,

p

Ex. 5.5, mm.134-140

f
ff appassionata
In - firm of pur - pose! Give me the dag - gers:
the sleep-ing and the dead Are but as pic - tures: 'tis the eye of child-hood That fears a
rit. a tempo
paint-ed dev - il. If he do bleed, I'll
mp p mf

Ex. 5.6, mm.177-186

The final section of the monodrama, the sleepwalking scene, is reminiscent of Verdi's setting of the scene. The longest piano interlude (see Ex. 5.6, below) occurs prior to "Out damned spot" with one hand low in the bass clef, but by her vocal entrance the accompaniment has shifted to two hands in the high end of the treble register effecting a

mood change which indicates her release from the depths of depravity into the relative weightlessness of a sleeping conscience.

Ex. 5.6, mm.200-212

When she begins to sing, the accompaniment becomes sparse and detached. Lady Macbeth's tessitura is lowered, her melody is less expansive than before and fragmented into shorter phrases, each beginning with a half measure of rest, just as in Verdi.

The final section begins with a return to the musical theme of her "unsex me here" speech on the line: "All the perfumes of Arabia will not sweeten this little hand"

(5.1.53-55). The sensual, conjuring melody now represents the permanent evidence on her hand of the sexualized murder of Duncan.

Ex. 5.7, mm.228-236

The texture and lowered tessitura from the beginning of the sleepwalking section returns for the end of the work with Lady Macbeth's final utterance of "What's done cannot be undone. To bed, to bed, to bed" (5.1.72-73).

What is abundantly clear in a monodrama such as this is that the musical efficiency and attention to immediate shifts of tempo and texture must be accompanied by a similar change in the physical presence and demeanor of the singer. She must anticipate all changes in texture, particularly as the composer has stated that the piano

accompaniment is her conscience. Changes of characterization must precede, and thereby motivate, the musical change that is about to occur. Pasatieri's musical and textual choices focus primarily on the sexualization of her power and the murderous act, avoiding references to patrilineage and matricide. The main melodic gesture is imbued in this nature, and a singer can extend that idea, allowing it to colorize other moments in the setting for a cohesive and unified interpretation.

By eliminating all other characters and isolating Lady Macbeth, an emphasis is placed on her culpability and how the plot depends on the transformation of her character, as well as the decline of the state of her mind. This is advantageous to the singer in developing the arc of her disintegration, and creates the option of an interpretation that puts the entire monodrama in the space of her solitude while she is coming apart.

This work is a fine combination of many of the elements discussed in the previous chapters. Pasatieri uses textures that are similar to Verdi, while incorporating the lush melodies for which he is known. He employs the piano as a narrative voice, as Shostakovich does with the orchestra, and he uses Shakespeare's text to create a new, haunting presentation of Lady Macbeth in a beautifully lyric, and vocally indulgent manner.

Chapter Six
Conclusion

The complexities of Shakespeare's Lady Macbeth create in her a malleability that sustains transference from the theatre to the operatic stage. Each aspect of her character is in its own way a pillar of strength by which she initially stands, but with passing time and circumstance these pillars give way and she falls, repeatedly, until she cannot recover. Her forceful nature and enduring rigor are rooted in a variety of traits: supernatural conjuring, sexualized ambition, sexualized murder, power in motherhood and patrilineal society, abject ruthlessness, and indifference to horror. As a character, she can survive on the operatic stage without references to matricide, as we have seen in all three settings: Leskov's novella, the source material for Shostakovich's Lady Macbeth, depicts her actually murdering a child, which is farther than Shakespeare takes this aspect. Her evil persists in the Verdi without the sexualization of murder and disowning her femininity; she relies instead on a fiercely motivated sexualized ambition to make her husband stay on course to victory at any cost. She becomes indifferent to the horror she creates as a means to an end that is never truly realized, as the rightful heirs to Scotland's throne have honor on their side. Conversely, her characterization in the Shostakovich relies upon her sexualization of murder. Instead of asking to be unsexed, Katerina is awoken from the trance of boredom that is her life by sexual desire and fulfillment, and this feeds her murderous ways.

Indeed, just one trait from the above list is enough to suit the relative brevity of character development of operatic convention, and yet, at her genesis in Shakespeare, she possesses them all. A preparation of Lady Macbeth in any vocal setting is best informed by the whole complexity of her evil. Knowledge of her matricidal fantasy, for example,

can be used to make the voice expressive in a manner that is suited to "La luce langue," even if this fantasy is not indicated in the libretto for that aria. Characterization goes beyond vocal expressivity: how would a woman who desires to be stripped of her femininity to inspire her husband to murder carry herself? Even if Verdi's libretto does not directly translate "unsex me here," he certainly was aware of this element while he was composing her music, and a performance must also be informed by this sentiment. Katerina, Shostakovich's Lady Macbeth, does not literally sleepwalk, but early in the opera her existence is a state of catatonic boredom that can be informed by the idea of sleepwalking, particularly in her first act aria. Through her murderous actions, she is sent to punishment to Siberia, and again assumes a trance-like state, indifferent to her surroundings; her response to a very real Siberia can be informed by the 'Siberia' of sleepwalking. Likewise, the Lady Macbeth of Pasatieri's monodrama is continually physically isolated in her interpretation, and this can also be informed by the nature of sleepwalking.

The music inspired by her character is as complex as she; it is at times lush and others sparse; it can be simultaneously lyrical and marked by fierce articulations, and then declamatory and clipped when necessary; her character inspires buoyant energy as well as listlessness and apathy. The character therefore demands vocal versatility and an understanding of what motivates these choices in the given context. The challenge in adequate preparation of these roles is to investigate, interpret, and possess her characterization with a tireless intensity that equals her own.

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