

Leskov's rewriting of Lady Macbeth and the processes of adaptation and appropriation*

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ABSTRACT

This article tries to provide a thorough analysis of Nikolai Leskov's rewriting of Lady Macbeth, the Shakespearean character, in the novella *Lady Macbeth of the Mtsensk District*, from the perspective of Translation and Adaptation Studies. The focus will be placed on the ideology of the author who, with full knowledge, rewrites a previous work to adapt it to a specific context. Apart from Leskov's work, attention will be also paid to two of its subsequent adaptations: Dmitri Shostakovich's homonymous opera and William Oldroyd's filmic version, *Lady Macbeth*.

Finally, the importance of these processes for the development of target literary systems will be discussed and emphasized.

KEYWORDS: William Shakespeare; Lady Macbeth; ideology; rewriting; Nikolai Leskov; Dmitri Shostakovich; William Oldroyd; Translation and Adaptation Studies.

La reescritura de Lady Macbeth de Leskov y los procesos de adaptación y traducción

RESUMEN: Este artículo trata de ofrecer un exhaustivo análisis desde la perspectiva de los Estudios de Traducción y Adaptación sobre el proceso de reescritura de Lady Macbeth, el personaje shakesperiano, en la novela corta *Lady Macbeth del Distrito de Mtsensk* del escritor Nikolai Leskov. Para ello, se prestará especial atención a la ideología del autor, quien, de manera plenamente consciente, reescribe una obra anterior con el propósito de adaptarla a un contexto concreto. Aparte de la novela corta de Leskov, también analizaremos dos de sus

A reescrita de Lady Macbeth por Leskov e os processos de adaptação e de apropriação**

RESUMO: Este artigo propõe uma análise exaustiva de Lady Macbeth, a personagem shakespeariana, na novela *Lady Macbeth do Distrito de Mtsensk*, na perspectiva dos Estudos de Tradução e de Adaptação. Será prestada especial atenção à ideologia do autor, que, de maneira plenamente consciente, reescreve uma obra anterior com o propósito de a adaptar a um contexto concreto. Para além da obra de Leskov, serão analisadas ainda duas adaptações posteriores da sua

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adaptaciones posteriores: la ópera homónima de Dmitri Shostakovich y la versión cinematográfica de William Oldroyd, *Lady Macbeth*.

Por último, destacaremos la importancia de estos procesos para el desarrollo literario de la cultura de llegada.

PALABRAS CLAVE: William Shakespeare; Lady Macbeth; ideología; rescritura; Nikolai Leskov; Dmitri Shostakovich; William Oldroyd; Estudios de Traducción y Adaptación.

novela: a ópera homónima de Dmitri Shostakovich e a versão cinematográfica de William Oldroyd, *Lady Macbeth*.

Finalmente, será discutida e enfatizada a importância destes processos para o desenvolvimento de sistemas literários de chegada.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: William Shakespeare; Lady Macbeth; ideologia; rescrita; Nikolai Leskov; William Oldroyd; Estudos de Tradução e de Adaptação.

1. Introduction

The transference of knowledge among countries and its importance for the development of cultural and literary systems is often disregarded or only considered as a contemporary phenomenon; however, it dates back to the beginning of civilization and the influence of cultures such as the Spanish, the English or the Portuguese offers a great variety of examples. In order to underscore the importance of cross-cultural relations and the exchange of knowledge in the contemporary age, while paying special attention to how this adapts to specific contexts, this article will try to provide a thorough analysis of the rewriting of William Shakespeare's *Lady Macbeth* as it appears in Nikolai Leskov's *Lady Macbeth of the Mtsensk District*, and two of its subsequent adaptations: Dmitri Shostakovich's homonymous opera and William Oldroyd's *Lady Macbeth*.

The reasons for choosing these three rewritings are manifold, and they will be appropriately discussed later, but they could be summarized as follows. The novella *Lady Macbeth of the Mtsensk District* by Nikolai Leskov (1831-1895) continues a tradition inaugurated by Ivan Turgenev's "Hamlet of the Shchigrovsky District," a rewriting of Shakespeare's play *Hamlet*, whose main contribution was the discussion about the figure of the "superfluous man" in Russia. Leskov, inspired by Turgenev's example, appropriated another of Shakespeare's characters, Lady Macbeth, and adapted it to rural Russia in order to offer an alternative to the original work and, at the same time, a "Russian tragedy" in a provincial environment. The fact that Leskov chose Shakespeare's play as an inspiration for his novella reveals the importance of cross-cultural

relations and the creative possibilities of adaptation. Leskov's masterpiece was later rewritten by other authors and here we will only analyze two of them: the homonymous opera by Dmitri Shostakovich (1906–1975) and the filmic adaptation by William Oldroyd (1979–). Shostakovich's opera appeared during the sexual revolution in the Soviet Union, trying to examine and criticize the confinement and lack of freedom for women in different periods of Russian history. However, as a consequence of its emphasis on sex and violence, it became a scandal and the opera composer had to struggle for acceptance during the next decades. Oldroyd's adaptation is remarkable in many aspects, but the most important is probably that the character of Lady Macbeth returns to a British environment after a long period of critical analysis and reinterpretations, placing now the focus on questions of social and class discrimination.

For the purpose of this article, it is essential to understand that literature, and the arts in general, are not immune to cultural phenomena. In fact, the study of processes of rewriting from the perspective of Translation and Adaptation Studies reveals that the knowledge transference shows, in most cases, a remarkable tendency to conform to the very specific conditions of the target language and culture. This could well be understood as a reaction against the homogenizing effect of global cultures, or a mechanism to conceptualize universal themes and transform them into something local or more easily comprehensible. In those cases, the work of art undergoes a highly elaborate process of ideological transformations to convey the author's purpose.

We are aware that "universal" and "classic" are two concepts for which no clear-cut definition can be provided, but, at the same time, it becomes essential for the aim of this article to state how they are going to be considered here. "Narrative universals" could be defined as those features of story or discourse which appear in great number of related or unrelated traditions (Herman, Jahn and Ryan 2005, 384), assuming that universality is not a normative concept and that any piece of writing or tradition cannot be considered more "universal" than another. In fact, one of the purposes of this research is to state that narrative universals are not directly comprehensible cross-culturally (Herman, Jahn and Ryan 2005, 384) and, precisely for that reason, the study of these processes of rewriting unveils that some

changes or deliberate alterations of the original are sometimes necessary to conform to the target culture. As for the concept of “classic,” Ankhi Mukherjee regards it as “closely related to the idea of canonicity [...] The classic, like the canonical work, is a book that is read long after it was written—and that demands rereading” (Mukherjee 2014, 30-1). One of the features that best defines it is probably its capacity to survive critical questioning, produce startlement and still be perceived as strange, fresh and fit. Although closely related to the idea of canon, some differences can be found: “the classic is primarily a single act of literature, while the canon, Guillory states, is an “aristocracy of texts” (“Ideology,” 175, Quoted in Mukherjee 2014, 31)”.

In order to carry out this discussion, we will adopt the perspective of Translation and Adaptation Studies, two closely related fields of research which have grown during the last decades incorporating scholars from different academic disciplines and cultural traditions. In fact, Translation Studies has thrived on a great variety of approaches which consider that translation has played an active role throughout history in shaping the appreciation of literature, traditions and cultures among nations. The translator has not only fostered the evolution of cross-cultural images, opinions and stereotypes, but has also promoted ideological and aesthetic values, because there is a certain degree of manipulation, conscious or unconscious, in every translation. Although Leskov’s novella and the subsequent rewritings and adaptations proposed here are not translations *per se*, all of them are the resulting product of a translated text which conveys a certain image and representation of Lady Macbeth. The reinterpretation of this character in Russia and England and its adaptation to a rural environment, the provincial Mtsensk District in Leskov’s and Shostakovich’s rewritings, and a small village in the English north east of the nineteenth-century in Oldroyd’s version, deserves a thorough analysis, as it perfectly portrays how these processes work within target literary systems, fostering and arousing alternative readings.

2. Theoretical framework

In Western culture, the concept of translation has been traditionally understood as an intercultural exchange of knowledge, in which some

linguistic materials are transported from one language into another. However, especially after World War II, with the evolution of the modern discipline of translation studies, scholars and translators started to pay attention to this linguistic exchange, concluding that the traditional interpretation of the concept was an oversimplification which did not provide a positive answer to all the processes involved in this transference of knowledge. Although it is worth mentioning the contribution of James S. Holmes in the 1970, the great development of this research area as an interdisciplinary field of studies came during the 1980s and the 1990s. Far from a homogenous approach, Translation Studies is a conglomerate of dissimilar theories or trends about the translating task and the surrounding world (Calzada 2003, 7). This discipline thrives in an interdisciplinary context, because it establishes a dialogue among cultures, histories and languages. Precisely for that reason feminists, descriptive scholars, gay and lesbian academics or contrastive linguists, among many others, seem to have found a place for their research in this academic field and, at the same time, it has helped to explain the position of minorities in society (Kuhiwczak and Littau 2007, 4). Although their approaches are not homogenous, all of these scholars share a similar idea of translation as a complex process of knowledge transfer in which many factors are involved:

Translation is not a simple matter of communication and transfer. In turn, as interest in and presumptions about linguistic fidelity and the communicative values of translation have given way to a deeper understanding of how translations work within cultural systems and how they are shaped by sociopolitical and historical frameworks, the role of translators as active figures in history, art, politics, and belief systems has become ever more manifest. (Tymoczko 2006, 447)

Accordingly, translation is not merely a transference of linguistic materials, but an interpretation of a different culture in order to make a text available to readers (Bielsa 2009, 14). In this process, the role of translators becomes essential and acquires some visibility as a global actor, because he/she “necessarily promotes, actively or tacitly, ideological, aesthetic, and cultural values. That is, the translator cannot absolutely avoid transforming (changing, modifying) source texts to some degree” (Jaques 2002, 14). This manipulation of the text, always understood by the scholars of Translation Studies as a product, could vary. In most cases, the language of the original is domesticated through translation, and concepts such as intelligibility,

fluidity or transparency acquire special relevance. The text becomes then a sort of a hybrid, an in-between piece of writing that the reader of the target-language can easily understand: “translation is the forcible replacement of the linguistic and cultural difference of the foreign text with a text that will be intelligible to the target-language reader” (Venuti 1995, 18). Therefore, the more closely the translator follows the processes of the original, the more foreign the text will seem to the public (Lefevere 1992, 155). The analysis of the degree of domestication in a rewritten text or a translation is quite revealing for this research, because it brings in contact the global with the local and portrays how knowledge adapts to specific contexts for certain purposes. This domestication could be purely linguistic, but it should be understood in broader terms, especially cultural and ideological.

A complementary approach to that of Translation Studies is the discipline of Adaptation Studies, which has predominantly developed in English-speaking universities (Milton 2009, 51). Julie Sanders, one of its main theorists, highlights the concepts of adaptation and appropriation. As she explains in her most celebrated work, *Adaptation and Appropriation*, the concept of adaptation would refer to the rewriting of a text, which includes omissions or additions, but still can be recognized as belonging to the original author (2006, 18-9). In contrast, appropriation implies a more decisive journey away from the source text, and requires the juxtaposition of at least one text against another to reveal the similarities and differences between both texts. In those cases, the reader recognizes the appropriated text as belonging to the rewriter or the adapter (2006, 26). Unlike Translation Studies, adaptation scholars focus on inter-semiotic and intralingual versions, rather than interlingual texts. An example of this would be a novel which later becomes a film or an opera. Most of these authors derive from post-structuralism and question the concept of authorship, Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault, Julia Kristeva or Roland Barthes being some of the thinkers and philosophers most typically quoted and cited (Milton 2009, 55).

It is obvious that both disciplines are complementary and closely related and some authors, as for example Lawrence Venuti (2007), underscore the need to find a link between these two fields of research and a shared theoretical framework. An example of this is the recent incorporation by the discipline of Translation Studies of the analysis of other text types that represent source texts. This article offers

further evidence of this need by presenting one case that is located precisely at the intersection between Translation and Adaptation Studies. Leskov's *Lady Macbeth of the Mtsensk District* or its subsequent reworkings analyzed here cannot be considered as translations, but rather as appropriations or adaptations. However, due to the fact that there is a necessary interlinguistic exchange (from English into Russian, and from Russian again into English), the exercise of translating is needed as well, illustrating the intersection between these two fields.

Before starting with the analysis, it would be interesting to define the concept of ideology, which in this article will be close to the interpretation given for language-related studies by authors such as Verschueren (1999) or Van Dijk (1998). For the former, "ideology is interpreted as any constellation of beliefs or ideas, bearing on an aspect of social reality, which are experienced as fundamental or commonsensical and which can be observed to play a normative role" (1999, preface). This definition is close to that of Van Dijk, who understands ideology as "the set of factual and evaluative beliefs – that is the knowledge and the opinions – of a group [...] In other words, a bit like the axioms of a formal system, ideologies consist of those general and abstract social beliefs and opinions (attitudes) of a group" (1998, 48-9). Consequently, ideology is not only a set of beliefs, but the mode of thinking of a group which considers some opinions and beliefs as fundamental or commonsensical.

If it is assumed that literary systems include a large proportion of translated literature, and this is influenced by ideology (as it is understood here), we can conclude that the intercultural transference of knowledge is a much more complicated question than a simple and mechanical exchange of linguistic information.

3. Nikolai Leskov's rewriting of *Lady Macbeth of the Mtsensk District* (1864)

Leskov's novella *Lady Macbeth of the Mtsensk District* has been traditionally considered as his masterpiece. The book, written in 1864, narrates the story of Katerina Lvovna, who marries the wealthy merchant Zinovy Izmailov. Katerina commits a series of murders as a consequence of her love affair with Sergei, one of Zinovy's workers and a local womanizer. When a dam bursts in one of the mills owned

by her husband, she initiates a covert romance with Sergei, who even occupies Zinovy's place in the marital bed. However, they have to face many difficulties in order to hide their romance. One of these is Katerina's father-in-law, Boris, who catches Sergei leaving his lover's bedroom. The result is a severe punishment which infuriates Katerina and moves her to murder her father-in-law. This killing enables the beginning of a relatively public relationship between Katerina and Sergei, who, it should not be forgotten, belong to different social groups: while Katerina is a *khoziaika* (a mistress), Sergei is a *prikazchik* (a steward). Both lovers fear Zinovy's return, especially Sergei, the more socially disadvantaged of the two, but this circumstance does not hinder in any way their romance. Although they continue their relationship, both characters internalize fear differently: while Katerina starts to have strange dreams about a cat, which she clearly identifies as a bad omen, Sergei reinforces his commitment to the relationship and reveals his desire to marry her. When Zinovy finally returns to the estate, he takes some time to confront his wife, since he has heard rumors about her romance with Sergei. When the merchant faces his wife to reprimand her, Katerina calls her lover and provokes Zinovy. The fight ends with the merchant's death and his body is buried in the walls of the cellar.

The couple lives happily for a time and Katerina discovers that she is pregnant, something which her strange dreams about the cat had anticipated. The announcement is received with happiness, because Katerina is the heir to the house, the fortune and the estate, but suddenly Fyodor, her father-in-law's nephew, appears and prevents her from inheriting all the properties. The relationship changes immediately: Katerina tries to be a good aunt, while Sergei complains constantly about their new situation. Finally, his complaints impel her to murder the nephew when he falls ill; however, a group of townspeople see them while returning from church and, as a consequence, they decide to burst into Katerina's house. The steward confesses to the crime and both of them are exiled to Siberia. Before the journey, Katerina gives birth to the child but rejects the newborn, who will be raised by Fyodor's mother and will become the heir to the house, the estate and the family's fortune.

During the journey to Siberia, Sergei starts to flirt with two other women: Fiona and Sonya. The first is not a serious hindrance to Katerina, as the sexual encounter is interrupted and seems to be

sporadic, due to Fiona's indifference to the whole situation; but Sonya poses a real threat to Katerina. In fact, the former mocks the latter publicly so, while they are crossing the Volga on a ferry, Katerina sets upon Sonya and both of them fall overboard and die.

If we compare Leskov's novella with Shakespeare's play, some similarities and differences can be clearly seen, but the first remarkable clarification to be done appears on the first page, when the narrator himself reminds the reader of the terrible and hideous resemblance between the incident which is going to be described and the original Lady Macbeth:

In our parts such characters sometimes turn up that, however many years ago you met them, you can never recall them without an inner trembling. To the number of such characters belongs the merchant's wife Katerina Lvovna Izmailova, who once played out a terrible drama, after which our gentlefolk, on someone's lucky phrase, started calling her "the Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk." (Leskov 2014, 1)

The paragraph, not lacking a certain irony, reveals that "Lady Macbeth" is in fact a nickname coined by townspeople to refer to Katerina Lvovna and describe her murderous actions. The use of this nickname, considered a "lucky phrase" by its narrator, shows the indirect construction of the character upon the Shakespearean classic. Her representation in *Macbeth*, as she was interpreted in Russia, both as a killer and a merciless person, is the starting-point for the novella and influences the reader negatively. About this first impression, it is relevant to add that this will fluctuate throughout the story.

The first analogy between both works is the role of the instigator. It is well known that, in the original, Lady Macbeth played an essential role in plotting against the "good" king Duncan. This participation has long been discussed and interpreted. For some, the "fiend-like queen," as she is stigmatized at the end of the play by her enemies (1990, V.VII.98-101), has been used to establish a link between her and the Weïrd Sisters. For some researchers, as for example Stephanie Irene Spoto (2010) or Pragati Das (2012), this relationship makes her undergo a highly unnatural process of gender disruption, which enables her to abandon the stereotypical role meant for women during the early modern period. Other exegetes interpret the "unsex me" scene (1990, I.V.39-43) in different terms: for them (and here Cristina Alfar's article "Blood Will Have Blood: Power, Performance, and Lady Macbeth's Gender Trouble" [1998] should be cited),

Shakespeare's female character encourages her husband to attain kingship in order to perform gender according to the politics of power of her period (1998, 190). One way or another, Lady Macbeth is guilty of plotting and, consequently, condemned for her crime. In Leskov's work, by contrast, the instigator is Sergei: firstly, because he was severely punished by Boris, and Katerina felt impelled to murder his father-in-law in order to release him; and secondly, because the steward constantly complains about their unequal social status and expresses his desire to marry her: "I'd like to be your husband before the pre-eternal holy altar: then, even considering myself as always lesser than you, I could still show everybody publicly how I deserve my wife by my honouring her" (2004, 16).

The reversal of the role of the instigator is important from the ideological perspective of the story, as it is the man, and not the woman, who leads directly or indirectly to crime. This circumstance becomes essential for the reader in order to empathize or not with the character at the end of the story:

If I were to speak, your equal, a gentleman or a merchant, never in my life would I part with you, Katerina Lvovna. But as it is, consider for yourself, what sort of man am I next to you? [...] I'm not like those others who find it all the same, so long as they get enjoyment from a woman. I feel what a thing love is and how it sucks at my heart like a black serpent. (2004, 15)

The presence of the verb "suck" should be noted in Sergei's words, which clearly recalls Lady Macbeth's words in Shakespeare's play and proves that the source of the evil instigator has been reversed:

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 plucked my nipple from his boneless gums
And dashed the brains out, had I so sworn
As you have done to this. (1990, I.VII.54-59)

Another remarkable analogy between the original and Leskov's rewriting is the source of violence. While, in *Macbeth*, violence appears every time manhood is questioned – and, consequently, depicted as a socially distinctive feature – in *Lady Macbeth of the Mtsensk District* violence is a consequence of love and Katerina's commitment to the relationship. As the end of the novella shows, Katerina is willing to die for her lover: "No, no, don't speak of it, Seryozha! Never in the

world will it happen that I'm left without you [...] If things start going that way [...] either he or I won't live, but you'll stay with me" (2004, 16).

Apart from that, Lady Macbeth's involvement in the crimes is much more active. While, in Shakespeare's work, she participated in the instigation and the plotting, in Leskov's novella, the protagonist plays an active role in all the murders. In relation to that violence, there is another strong connection between the original and the rewriting: blood. Its presence is remarkable and depicts a different kind of character. While, in the original, Lady Macbeth was seen rubbing her bloodstained hands—a symbol of remorse and guilt which clearly recalls her previous "a little water clears us of this deed" (1993, II.II.67)—in Leskov's work, the reader can see the ironic reflection of these words:

Under his head on the left side was a small spot of blood, which, however, was no longer pouring from the clotted wound stopped up with hair [...] Katerina Lvovna, having rolled up the sleeves of her bed jacket and tucked her skirt up high, was carefully washing off with a soapy sponge the bloodstain left by Zinovy Borisych on the floor of the bedroom [...] and the stain was washed away without a trace. (2014: 23)

It is obvious that the complete disappearance of blood suggests that the murder had a liberating effect on Katerina and, consequently, she did not feel any remorse. The only minimal reference to Katerina's psychology in the story is the description of her dreams. For his work, Leskov chose the form of the Russian folk tale, which lends a particular Russian flavor to the narration. Apart from this formal choice, one of the most characteristic features of his prose is the use of the *skaz*, a particular type of narration in which the figure of the author is dissociated from that of the narrator, so that the ideas expressed in the narration are not the author's words:

[Skaz is] a stylization of the narrative text according to the non-literary forms of colloquial speech, as well as in the presentation of verbal communication and the strengthening of the expressivity of the narrative text, which reveals a non-professional narrator, whose thoughts, values and speech can become more important than the story which he is in the process of narrating. (Schmid, 2010: 122)

The *skaz* was a form of experimental narration cultivated in Russia in the literature of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, especially

during the modernist and avant-garde periods (1890-1930). Although some similar forms can be found in other Western literatures (as, for example, in Mark Twain's *Huckleberry Finn* or J.D. Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye*), these did not play so great a role as in this country. First mentioned by the Russian formalists, the *skaz* normally appears where literate and non-literate traditions coexist (Herman, Jahn and Ryan 2005, 535-36). Derived from the verb *skazat* ("to tell"), this narrative technique tries to reproduce oral speech, including articulation, mimicry and sound gestures so that "there is no direct authorial commentary, no analysis, no psychological interpretation" (Leskov 2004, xxiv). Consequently, the use of the *skaz* and the importance given to dialogue in the novella makes it especially suited for later adaptations to the opera and the cinema.

The psychological treatment of the protagonist, a characteristic of the nineteenth-century European novel, is completely absent in Leskov's work, to the extent that the author himself always "insisted that art must serve the true and the good and that art for art's sake did not interest him at all" (Leskov 2004, xxiv). The reader and only the reader must interpret and judge the characters described in the story:

Leskov is a master at this [...] The most extraordinary things, marvelous things, are related with the greatest accuracy, but the psychological connection of the events is not forced on the reader. It is left up to him to interpret things the way he understands them, and thus the narrative achieves an amplitude that information lacks. (Benjamin 2006, 366)

The only psychological insight present in the book has to be inferred from Katerina Lvovna's dreams; however, again, the role of the oneiric seems to be strongly rooted in the Russian folklore tradition in order to recreate the atmosphere of the Russian countryside (Wigzell 1988, 625). The protagonist has two dreams. In the first, which takes place soon after the poisoning of Boris, she dreams of a grey cat lying beside her on the marital bed. When Katerina tries to touch the cat, it fades into the thin air. She fails to interpret it but the cook, Aksinya, unveils the dream and sees it as a prophetic allegory: "A crescent moon means a baby" (Leskov 2014, 12). In the second, the cat (which exhibits the head of the poisoned Boris) claims to be her father-in-law. As Faith Wigzell suggests (1998, 629), the presence of a large cat in a dream means sorrow or disaster in the Leskov's native province of Oryol, where the Mtsensk District is to be found:

It would be inconsistent with the rest of the story if the large grey cat that Katerina Lvovna sees in her dreams were purely the product of Leskov's imagination. In fact, as a symbol, it is taken primarily from Dream Books, where dreaming of cats is a sign of marital breakdown. That the cat is large and male reflects local beliefs from Oryol province, where this portends sorrow or disaster. The doubly unlucky symbol partly explains Katerina's sense of supernatural horror. (Wizgell 1989, 181)

The presence of the oneiric in Leskov's novella links his work to Shakespeare's, as the presence of the supernatural is remarkable in both of them. While in *Macbeth* the presence of the witches, for whom no explanation is given throughout the play, sets the play in motion, fuels Macbeth and Lady Macbeth's ambitions and anticipates the final disaster; in Leskov's novella, the oneiric world does not reflect the main character's psychology, but emphasizes that the narration is rooted in the Russian storytelling and folk tale.

The last of the analogies we could trace connecting the original with the rewriting refers to the protagonist's death. As it is known, both of them die at the end of the story. Lady Macbeth's suicide, although probable, is not clear but a rumor spread by her enemies once Macbeth has been finally defeated on the battlefield and Malcolm crowned as the new king. By contrast, Katerina Lvovna sets upon Sonya while crossing the Volga, they fall overboard and drown. In both cases, death seems to ask for purification, redemption and forgiveness, although the reader's reaction to it is probably different. For Shakespeare, Lady Macbeth's sleep disorder and her confession to the crimes at the end of the play could be understood as a sign of concern for the afterlife and the salvation of her soul. The case of Katerina Lvovna is slightly different, as its perception on the part of the reader varies throughout the story. At the beginning, she is described as bored, rejected and bound to a loveless and childless marriage, so the audience can easily empathize with the character:

Katerina Lvovna lived a boring life in the rich house of her father-in-law during the five years of her marriage to her unaffectionate husband; but, as often happens, no one paid the slightest attention to this boredom of hers. (Leskov 2004, 3)

As a consequence, she throws herself into an extramarital romance with Sergei, which leads to three terrible murders: Boris, Zinovy and Fyodor. The third one, the assassination of the child, is the most abominable of the three, as the only reason is economic. After these

incidents, Katerina is perceived as a cold-blooded and merciless criminal who does not deserve pity or compassion.

However, at the end of the novella, when she is betrayed by Sergei and mocked publicly, the Volga becomes a redemptory journey to death and the perception on the part of the reader changes again. At this moment, Katerina is no longer a criminal, but a victim of an unfair marriage and a hostile environment which have led her toward vengeance. In that light, it is remarkable to highlight the symbolism of water, which appears at two important moments in the novella and reinforces this perception of the protagonist. At the beginning, a dam burst makes Zinovy leave the house to supervise the repairs. Symbolically for Katerina, this means the release from her confinement and freedom, and the return to a life that had been denied after marriage (Aizlewood 2007, 408). And secondly, the Volga, at the end of the story, which embodies the journey to death. Consequently, water encompasses both life and death (Aizlewood 2007, 409), but the perception on the part of the reader of Katerina as a victim of society leaves open the path to forgiveness and rebirth. In fact, according to Caryl Emerson, this idea is going to be reinforced in subsequent rewritings of Leskov's novella, especially in Shostakovich's opera, in which Katerina Lvovna becomes a martyr (1989, 76).

All these analogies connecting Shakespeare's classic with Leskov's rewriting obey some ideological patterns, as it was previously mentioned. The main one is that this work becomes a treatise on social order in nineteenth-century Russia to denounce the situation of confinement and lack of freedom for women, especially in rural environments. The use of the *skaz* narrative or the form of the storytelling should be understood, not as a literary device to create ambiguity, but quite the opposite: the author tries to portray this situation in the most objective way, so that the reader, as Walter Benjamin suggested, interprets the real facts in order to draw a final conclusion. The same ideological reason can be found in the subsequent adaptations proposed here; however, this will show some differences, as we will analyze later. The second motivation has to do with the setting: Leskov seems to suggest that Russian provincial life could produce its genuine types of tragedy (Wigzell 1989, 170), which clearly criticized the over-mythicized motif of peasantry and rural life.

This capacity on the part of Leskov to represent oral speech, traditions, folklore and the heterogeneity of the Russian people has made some authors, as for example D.S. Mirsky, define him as “the most Russian of Russian writers”:

Those who really want to know more about Russia must sooner or later recognize that Russia is not contained in Dostoevsky or Chekhov [...] they will perhaps come nearer to Leskov, who is generally recognized by Russians as the most Russian of Russian writers and the one who had the deepest and widest knowledge of the Russian people as it actually is. (Leskov 2004, xviii)

4. Dimitri Shostakovich’s rewriting of *Lady Macbeth of the Mtsensk District* (1930–1934)

Dimitri Shostakovich adapted *Lady Macbeth of the Mtsensk District* to the opera but, unfortunately for him, Stalin greatly disapproved of it and allowed the publication of an article in *Pravda* entitled “Chaos Instead of Music” condemning his work (Wells 2001, 163). It became a scandal and the blow for the opera’s composer was nearly fatal, because he had to struggle for acceptance for the next decades. After the incident, Dmitri Shostakovich became immediately one the greatest symbols of Censorship and Fear in Stalin’s Soviet Union.

When Leskov’s novella and Shostakovich’s opera are compared some significant differences can be found, the emphasis on sex and violence in the latter being one of the most important. The opera is divided into four acts and nine scenes and was understood as part of a trilogy portraying the situation of confinement and lack of freedom for women in different historical periods; but, after the *Pravda* incident, the project was abandoned. However, in 1962, Dimitri Shostakovich retook his work, included some minor arrangements, softened the use of sex and violence and even changed the name for that of *Katerina Izmailova*. The new version was performed in Moscow in December of the same year for the first time and it was a great success.

In the first version, two main categories of infidelities related to Leskov’s original work can be found: those involving changes in the plot and some characters; and those which slightly modify the attitude toward the protagonists and their fates (Emerson 1989, 62).

Regarding plot and character changes, the presence of a highly eroticized Boris Timofeevich, who harasses Katerina and competes for her sexual favors, should be emphasized. In fact, Sergei becomes a symbol of raw virility, while Boris and Zinoviy are examples of sexual impotence (Wells 2001, 166). It should be also underscored that Boris's nephew, Fyodor, disappears. Some scholars such as Caryl Emerson have pointed out that this elimination is clearly ideological: in the first place, Fyodor's murder is only connected with Katerina's economic welfare and the future of the estate; and secondly, the killing of a child does not fit with the redemptive features the opera composer had imagined for his heroine (Emerson 1989, 63).

Another important adjustment has to do with the celebration of a wedding between Sergei and Katerina, which is not mentioned in Leskov's novella. On the one hand, the wedding shows Sergei's greater commitment to their relationship; but, on the other, it means that Katerina Lvovna is going to be abandoned by her husband twice. Neither her first marriage nor her second can release her from the constraints of nineteenth-century Russian society and the patriarchy. In fact, her depiction in Siberia is much more pathetic than in Leskov's work, and suicide, more than ever, becomes the only escape.

There is another important difference between the original and Shostakovich's opera regarding the character of Katerina. In Leskov's work, she is a frustrated woman in a childless and loveless marriage; but in the opera, despite her unhappiness, she still tries to fulfill her obligations, or at least, what society understood as the duties for a woman in the nineteenth century: to give birth and provide an heir to her husband. This ideological adjustment makes her appear in front of the audience as a victim of the patriarchal society more than in Leskov's novella.

As it was previously mentioned, the use of violence and sex in Shostakovich's rewriting is extensive, but the presence of humorous and comical situations is also remarkable. In fact, the real drama is sometimes surrounded by some peripheral scenes in which other minor characters laugh and dance on stage:

[Katerina] sings in opposition to her environment. She casts her lyrical confessions against the crudeness of the world, and against the parody embodied by the other characters. The heroine becomes most lyrical and victimized, in fact, precisely at the point where the

most crimes have accumulated [...] the opera enters the mainstream Russian tradition of purification through crime. (Emerson 1989, 70)

For Shostakovich, one of the main problems in Leskov's story was precisely the use of the *skaz* which, according to him, produced ambiguity and lacked authorial responsibility. The story was told from the outside, so that readers could judge for themselves:

The tone of Leskov's narrator is both "folk-like" (that is, oral and colored by folk expressions) and at the same time elevated, distanced; the tale is told from the outside, efficiently but sparingly, without relish. The narrator rarely reproduces an inner thought as direct discourse, assumes no responsibility for the tale, and demonstrates little sympathy for (or even interest in) the heroine. (Emerson 1989, 67)

This use of the *skaz* was a serious problem for Shostakovich and, for that reason, he tried to reach the opposite effect in order to make the audience aware that Katerina Lvovna was not only a victim of the patriarchal society, but also a martyr. The murders are somehow understood as acts of self-defense and they become, not only a way to escape from captivity, but a pathway toward purity: "Shostakovich had a chance to cleanse his Katerina morally, to justify her (as Leskov did not) in her intoxicating physicality and intensely Russian-style unfreedom" (Emerson 2011, 353). Shostakovich himself explained this situation:

If one remembers Leskov's story, Katerina Lvovna Ismailova commits three murders before she is sent into hard labor [...] My problem was to acquit Katerina Lvovna so that the spectator would be left with the impression of her as a sympathetic character. (qtd. in Melick 2000, 32)

This effort to justify her actions creates a prototype of Lady Macbeth different from that planned by William Shakespeare. Shostakovich's character cannot learn or express regret. She is not looking for forgiveness, as she does not consider the moral consequences of her actions: "In the opera, Zinoviy and Boris seem somehow morally deserving of their fates, the former for his complete neglect of Katerina, the latter for his cruel tyranny" (Melick 2000, 34).

Leskov's version of the character looked for salvation. Feeling herself innocent, Shostakovich's Lady Macbeth does not feel she needs it. The resultant image is static, while all the previous versions were highly dynamic:

The mixing of pathetic and grotesque in this releases Katerina from all serious moral obligations. She is a tragic victim, but the victim of an environment so musically trivialized that for most of the opera we cannot take its threat seriously. (Emerson 1989, 78)

In conclusion, it can be stated that Shostakovich's adaptation of *Lady Macbeth of the Mtsensk District* offers a much more ideological depiction of the character, who has not only abandoned the stigma of witchcraft, but also become a martyr of her time. Rather than evil, her acts are presented as self-defense so that the protagonist becomes a weapon against the male-dominated society. However, in the process, the ethical debate is sacrificed and the resultant Lady Macbeth becomes a monolithic statue unable to question the morality of her own acts.

5. William Oldroyd's rewriting of Leskov's novella: *Lady Macbeth* (2016)

William Oldroyd's adaptation to the cinema of Leskov's masterpiece is the most recent one and the best example of how literature and the arts conform to new historical periods of time and different environments. In Oldroyd's version, Russia is abandoned and the story is set in nineteenth-century rural England during the mid-Victorian era. Consequently, the main protagonists' names have been transformed or adapted. Katerina becomes Katherine; Zinovy turns into Alexander; Sergei is Sebastian now; and Aksinya, the maid, becomes Anna.

The film does not provide any reasons for the change of location, but it can be assumed that the change obeys an ideological motivation as well: rural England does not seem to provide a better environment for women either and the sense of confinement remains. In fact, Katherine's lack of freedom is underscored and described in depth, and the contrast between light and darkness plays a remarkable role.

In the film, Alexander is no longer an impotent man; he just does not have any interest in her. Katherine, confined and sexually rejected, is a prisoner of the estate and a loveless marriage. Her female duties do remain as well, and her father-in-law, no longer a competitor for Sebastian but an authoritarian man, symbolizes the social pressure to perpetuate the future of the family.

Sex and violence are significantly softened in Oldroyd's adaptation. The incident with Anna, which in Shostakovich's opera was understood as rape, becomes now sexual harassment. The scene serves to humiliate the maid, who appears naked, but the workers are not trying to rape her. In that sense, Oldroyd comes back to Leskov's original version, where it was the bored Katerina who initiated the flirt with Sergei.

Another important difference is the constant presence of the bed. Everything happens around it, which suggests a transition from the opera toward the theater. In fact, the film exhibits some theatrical features which can rarely be found in contemporary film productions, which underscores Oldroyd's previous experience in this genre.

The complete disappearance of the oneiric parts or the supernatural in the film is also a relevant variation with regard to Leskov's novella, and *Lady Macbeth* does not suffer from any sleep disorder. There is no trace whatsoever of remorse in the film either. The murderous acts are understood as self-defense or the direct consequence of a lack of freedom. The reason is that William Oldroyd tried to depict a real story, and not a folk tale with supernatural elements. The ideological reasons for portraying *Lady Macbeth* as a victim of the patriarchal society transform the folk tale into a realistic story, which could perfectly fit in the nineteenth-century English tradition of Realism. There is no ghost, and the only exception is the presence of a cat, a far and distant memory of Leskov's novella. Blood as a symbol also disappears in all its possible interpretations, physical or symbolical. Perhaps, the only enigmatic phenomenon is that, after Boris's murder, Anna loses her capacity to speak, which, instead of the supernatural, implies two ideological problems: the social clash between masters and servants, and race discrimination:

While *Lady Macbeth* speaks to the claustrophobia of mid-Victorian-era life for women, it also takes a bold look at class and race. Both Sebastian and Anna are black [...] Oldroyd explores these explicitly gendered hierarchical themes through the taut relationship between Katherine and Anna, "two sides of feminine oppression" [...] As unbearable as Katherine's situation may seem, Anna's is the true tragedy of the film, forced to witness Katherine's terrifying reign in silence. (Weston 2017, 36)

The end of the film is probably the most interesting part and, perhaps, the most ideologically affected. After Fyodor's murder, renamed in

the film as Teddy, Sebastian confesses to the crimes, but Katherine denies the charges and accuses Sebastian and Anna of committing them. The police arrest them and Katherine is exonerated from any suspicion or charge. At the end of the film, she is left alone with her unborn baby, who will become the future heir to the estate and the fortune. Consequently, there is no journey to Siberia in the film and Oldroyd's rewriting portrays an ironic interpretation of Leskov's work. The transformation from a victim of the patriarchy to a heroine is complete at the end of the film, which offers alternative possibilities to women rather than suicide and purification by murder.

6. Conclusions

It is obvious that ideology shapes the vision of the world and how other cultures are interpreted. Translation and adaptation have become a tool for connecting different societies and peoples, but this transference of knowledge is nothing new. On the contrary, rewriting processes have always been present, as the examples discussed here have proven, making possible that exchange. This cultural connection encourages discussion and debate, bringing closer to the reader or the spectator alternative interpretations of those works of art. At the same time, the study of these rewritings shows that they tend to turn the foreign into something much more recognizable, by adapting universal themes to specific contexts and local concerns.

Leskov's novella provided an alternative interpretation of Shakespeare's play, reversed the role of the instigator and offered a "Russian tragedy" in the countryside. His work proves that literary themes produced in other parts of the world can have an influence on regional conflicts.

Shostakovich's opera discussed the situation of confinement for women in the Soviet Union during the sexual revolution. Although his work did not have the expected results at its premiere, it became later a success, which shows the capacity of adaptation to reopen debates and foster discussion.

Oldroyd's film takes the Russian version of *Lady Macbeth* and brings it back to a British environment to discuss social and racial discrimination. The comparison between Oldroyd's and Shakespeare's protagonist becomes the perfect example of how

adaptation can enrich the target culture by offering multiple interpretations and views on a specific subject matter. It is, therefore, evident that some processes of rewriting such as adaptation and appropriation stimulate the evolution of target cultural systems and foster analysis, discussion and debate. In fact, the character of certain literatures could be measured, not only by the number of national writers and translations, but also by their adaptations.

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