

Chapter 1

The Theater of Sukhovo-Kobylin

V sudakh cherna nepravdoi chernoi
I igom rabstva kleimena;
Bezbozhnoi lesti, lzhi tletvornoi,
I leni mertvoi i pozornoi,
I vsiakoi merzosti polna!

In the courts you are black with black injustice
And branded with the yoke of slavery;
Full of shameless flattery, foul lies,
Laziness deathly and disgraceful,
Replete with every vileness!

—A. Khomiakov, “Russia,” 1854

On November 9, 1850, in the Presnenskii district of Moscow, the police officer Il’inskii reported to his chief, the *ober-politsmeister* of Moscow, that “outside the Presnenskii gate on Khodynskoe field the dead body of a woman of unknown identity had been found.”¹ The police report made on the basis of an inspection of the corpse at the place of its discovery included the following points.² The woman was about thirty-five years old. The body was found face down, with the arms bent under it. When the body was turned over, “it appeared that the woman had her throat cut.” Her braid was undone, and her hair was twisted around her throat near the wound. The body was frozen. The woman was clothed in a dress of green checked material, under which were a white calico skirt; another skirt, quilted, covered in “drap-de-dames” of

1. “List dela 2,” quoted in Viktor Grossman, *Delo Sukhovo-Kobylyna* (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel’stvo khudozhestvennaia literatura, 1936), 7.

2. I have combined here excerpts from the police report as quoted by Grossman, *Delo Sukhovo-Kobylyna*, in the body of his text and in the appendix, N. V. Popov, “Sudebno-meditsinskaia ekspertiza po delu A. V. Sukhovo-Kobylyna,” 295–331.