

*Musical Meaning*

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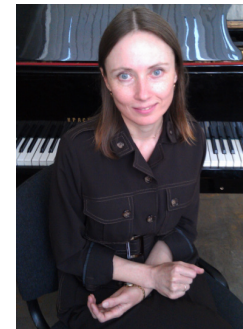
**Pyotr Tchaikovsky's *The Queen of Spades*  
as a "Faustian" Plot: On the Problem  
of the Intertextual Content of the Opera**

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**Abstract.** The material presented in this article is based on a series of works by Marina Grigorieva Raku (1993, 1999) that consider the intertextual depths of Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky's opera *The Queen of Spades* with the aim of identifying a holistic conceptual structure capable of encompassing the opera from within. The work uses the intertextual analysis methodology proposed by Raku, which includes the triad: "manifest intertext", "secret intertext"

and “central text”. By analogy with the intertextual discoveries concentrated in the part of the opera plot associated with the transfer of the action to the 18th century, we reveal Tchaikovsky’s reference to Franz Liszt’s *Faust Symphony* (fragmentary citation of Gretchen’s theme in the duet of Lisa and Polina). The discovery of a deep intertextual plane dated back to 19th century music supports a number of important conclusions. Firstly, the projection of the “Faustian” triangle (“Faust–Gretchen–Mephistopheles”) onto Tchaikovsky’s opera actualises the “Herman–Liza–Tomsky” triangle, which, unlike similar structures that have been recognised as organising the action of the opera (“Herman–Liza–Countess”, “Liza–Herman–Eletsky”), has hitherto not attracted attention. Secondly, this triangle not only reflects the images of the “Faustian” intertext, but also relies on Liszt’s method of monothematic transformations, reflected in the key moment of the transformation of Herman’s lyrical confession (“I don’t know her name...”) into an essential opposite (“...Three cards, three cards, three cards!”). Thirdly, the “Faustian” triangle contributes to the re-evaluation of Tomsky’s role as the invisible director of Herman’s fate and the entire operatic plot, which is confirmed by Olga Komarnitskaya’s establishment of the significance of the Ballad as the super-theme of the entire opera (1991); accordingly, Tomsky’s directorial role creates his own “theatre within a theatre”. The actualisation of the “Faustian” plot as a deep structure of *The Queen of Spades* which corresponds to a reading of the opera through the prism of Christian ontology, forms a basis for assessing its significance for Tchaikovsky’s ongoing work, which resulted in the composer’s last opera, *Iolanta*.

**Keywords:** Tchaikovsky, Liszt, *The Queen of Spades*, *Faust Symphony*, intertext, Mephistopheles, Tomsky

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==== Музыкальное содержание ====

Научная статья

**«Пиковая дама» П. И. Чайковского  
как «фаустианский» сюжет: к проблеме  
интертекстуального содержания оперы**

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**Аннотация.** В статье предпринято новое после ряда работ Марины Григорьевны Раку (1993, 1999) исследование интертекстуальных глубин «Пиковой дамы» Петра Ильича Чайковского. Его основная цель — выявить целостную концептуальную структуру, способную охватить оперу изнутри. В работе используется предложенная Раку методология интертекстуального анализа, включающая триаду: «явный интертекст», «тайный интертекст» и «центральный текст». По аналогии с интертекстуальными открытиями, сосредоточенными в той части оперного сюжета, которая связана с переносом действия в XVIII век, в работе выявлено обращение Чайковского к Фауст-симфонии Ференца Листа (фрагментарное цитирование темы Гретхен в дуэте Лизы и Полины). Обнаружение глубинного интертекстуального плана, восходящего к музыке XIX века, позволило сделать ряд открытий. Во-первых, проекция «фаустианского» треугольника

(«Фауст — Гретхен — Мефистофель») на оперу Чайковского актуализирует треугольник «Герман — Лиза — Томский», до сих пор не привлекавший к себе внимания, в отличие от других аналогичных структур, организующих действие оперы («Герман — Лиза — Графиня», «Лиза — Герман — Елецкий»). Во-вторых, этот треугольник не только отражает образы «фаустианского» интертекста, но и опирается на листовский метод монотематических преобразований, получивший отражение в узловом моменте превращения лирического признания Германа («Я имени ее не знаю...») в сущностную противоположность («...Три карты, три карты, три карты!»). В-третьих, «фаустианский» треугольник способствует переоценке роли Томского как незримого режиссера судьбы Германа и всего оперного сюжета, что подтверждается установленным Ольгой Владимировной Комарницкой значением Баллады как сверхтемы всей оперы (1991); режиссирующая роль Томского создает свой «театр в театре». Актуализация «фаустианского» сюжета как глубинной структуры «Пиковой дамы», обеспечивающей прочтение оперы сквозь призму христианской онтологии, позволяет оценить ее значимость для творчества Чайковского, обусловившей появление последней оперы композитора «Иоланта».

**Ключевые слова:** П. И. Чайковский, Ф. Лист, «Пиковая дама», фаустианство, «Фауст-симфония», интертекст, Мефистофель, Томский

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*Introduction*

In 1993, Marina Grigoryevna Raku described Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky's opera *The Queen of Spades* as a work that, even a hundred years after its creation, continues to be “mysterious, almost mystical, leaving a feeling of the unknown, and even the impossibility of fully understanding it” [1, p. 203]. These words can be repeated today: *The Queen of Spades*, oversaturated with “pretexts, direct intonational, situational-stage and opera-genre quasi- and direct quotations, double meanings and states of otherness and allegories” [2, p. 71], is in no hurry to part with its secrets. Over the last thirty years, not only has a major breakthrough been achieved in the study of the work, but the direction of this research has clearly diverged from a consideration of external forms, which in *The Queen of Spades* are associated with the phenomenon of polystylistics, to focus on their internal equivalents, thus breaking free from the space of myth and intertext to consider problems of style formation and factors of meaning generation. The desire to find the key to the internal unity of the operatic plot somewhere behind the visible curtain of heterogeneous polystylistic formations united scholars of several generations, including Marina G. Raku [3], Elena V. Ponomareva [4], and Georgy V. Kovalevsky [5].

In the present examination of the intertextual depths of *The Queen of Spades*, we will keep the same goal in mind: the quest for a conceptual structure capable of encompassing the opera from within. “The discovery of previously unrecorded intertextual connections not only does not negate previous discoveries, but also does not contradict intertextuality as a method of creative thinking and analysis. In the present work, The latter relies on the concepts discussed by Raku: “explicit intertext”, e.g., a literary source on the basis of which the libretto of the opera is created; “hidden intertext”, which implies the discovery of semantic structures that do not lie on the surface and arise at the level of intertextual interactions; and “central text”, referring to the work under study [3].

In substantiating the method of intertextual analysis, Raku links it with the eclectic and multiple nature of the “hidden intertext”, whose role “can be played not by one or two works”, but by their entire corpus [Ibid., p. 12]. This idea is confirmed by the complex of “hidden intertexts” uncovered by the researcher, which encompasses various literary and musical sources

(Hoffmann's short stories *Spieler-Glück* [*Gambler's Luck*] and *Don Juan*, Byron's poem *Don Juan*, Pushkin's short tragedy *The Stone Guest*, historical facts related to the life and death of Catherine the Great, and Mozart's opera *Don Giovanni* [Ibid.]). These intertexts are united not only by their closeness to the opera's main themes (playing cards and love; "the substitution of Eros by Thanatos" [Ibid., p. 17]), but also by their concentration in the part of the opera's plot that is connected with the transfer of the action to the 18th century, which prefigures the "deep semantic shift" [Ibid., p. 11] that distanced the opera text from its literary source (Pushkin's story). The undisputed leader in this complex is Mozart's *Don Giovanni*. The reference to this earlier work forms a stylistic context in *The Queen of Spades*, in which space Tchaikovsky's "Mozartianism" — as manifested in the pastoral *The Sincerity of the Shepherdess* — feels entirely appropriate. These connections as revealed by Raku can be designated as an *18th-century intertextual complex*.

At the same time, *The Queen of Spades* does not entirely belong to a "past" century. Already Alexander Benois was able to write that the opera "continues [...] to live, intertwined as it is with current reality" [cit. from: 5, p. 154]. Addressing the problem of the reflection of time in Tchaikovsky's opera, other researchers note that "it is precisely the distancing of the plot action into the past that helps to reveal the spiritual drama of modern man" [6, p. 140], that the relevance of *The Queen of Spades*, as expressed in its "cruel psychologism" [Ibid., p. 142], is connected with the individual style of the composer [7, p. 408], whose "music full of rebellious drama" is "difficult [...] to combine with powdered wigs and crinolines" [8, p. 159].

We agree that "the pastorelle [...] and the eerily topical acuity of the plot" [6, p. 141] represent an inseparable artistic unity; at the same time, at each stylistic pole of the opera, its own intertextual cultural codes are revealed. The "spirit of the composer's own era" [8, p. 159] that permeates the opera reveals in its depths one of the most significant archetypes of romantic consciousness — the "Faustian" plot. This fact, in expanding the scope of intertextual connections of *The Queen of Spades*, can serve as a useful argument in defence of the "intertextual direction" of the interpretation of Pushkin's plot revealed by Raku [3, p. 20] as a principle of Tchaikovsky's conscious compositional thinking.

*Geometry of Character Relationships*

The formation of a system of similar conflictual relationships in the central text of *The Queen of Spades* is connected with both intertexts. The action at the level of external dramatic structures is visibly held together by a crystalline “lattice” formed by the triangles of the characters. The *18th-century intertextual complex* includes the relationships noted by Raku that date back to Mozart’s *Don Giovanni*: (1) “Hermann–Liza–Countess” (Don Giovanni–Donna Anna–Commander) and (2) “Lisa–Hermann–Eletsky”, with its reflection in the divertissement trio “Prilepa–Milovzor–Zlatogor” (Zerlina–Masetto–Don Giovanni) [Ibid., p. 17].

At the same time, none of the outlined triangles includes in its orbit the Ballad of Tomsky, representing the obvious beginning of the entire operatic plot, connecting into one knot the main characters of the “*Don Juan*” *intertext*. The first triangle involving the Countess–Commander, is revealed only in the second scene (the “fatal” intersection of the three leading characters in Lisa’s room), with the capture of the fourth (the “delayed” death of the Countess), the sixth (in which “Lisa will already act in the role of Elvira” and will die “like Hoffmann’s Donna Anna” [Ibid.]), and the seventh (the “death of Herman in the gambling house, like Don Juan at the ball, which is interrupted by the arrival of the Commander” [Ibid.]). The second love triangle, whose inception occurs in the first scene (Eletsky’s announcement of the engagement, which forms a musical and dramatic counterpoint to Herman’s lyrical confession), also bypasses the Ballad, while in the seventh, the denouement, it falls out of the “*Mozartian*” *intertext* (the duel between Herman and Eletsky at the card table).

In contrast to the intertextual complex of the 18th century, which is somewhat mosaic-like and disintegrated into separate motifs, the *romantic intertext* possesses conceptual integrity. Moreover, its dramatic significance increases due to the fact that it is formed precisely in the Ballad, in which the triangle “Herman–Liza–Tomsky” crystallises under the influence of hidden centripetal forces.

This triangle, which forms the archetypal basis of the artistic concept of the opera, as well as the “*Don Juan*” *intertext*, is capable of illuminating the key moments of Tchaikovsky’s rethinking of Pushkin’s story, first of all, in terms of his introduction of the love plot line. In the “*Faustian*” *intertext* this plot line acquires a special integrity, whereas in the “*Don Juan*” version, the image of its main character,

Lisa, disintegrates into several persons that do not reflect the inner essence of the character and have only plot significance. All three of Mozart's heroines in the space of this intertext appear as the personification of Lisa's plot status at different points in the development of the action (the correlation with Donna Anna indicates Lisa's high social position; Zerlina–Prilepa symbolises a happy beloved; Donna Elvira — an abandoned fiancée).

*Key to the “Faustian” Intertext*

The key number that reveals the “Faustian” intertext of *The Queen of Spades*, which previously attracted little attention as dramatically or conceptually significant, is the duet of Liza and Polina entitled “It's Already Evening.” Olga Komarnitskaya attributes it to the centrifugal line of dramatic development — “moments of contemplative serenity that perform a screensaver function” [9, p. 13]. Moreover, the duet has not tended to be considered in the context of the opera's polystylistics. Only Ekaterina Ruchyevskaya, who noted the general gravitation of the style of *The Queen of Spades* towards musical classicism [7, p. 380], includes it in the list of numbers sustained in the general classical manner as “an allusion to the genre”, “reflecting everyday [...] music-making” [Ibid., p. 378, 403]). In this duet, the researcher identifies a number of characteristic features of classical style: “two high voices in thirds for the flutes and bass” (by analogy with the general bass), “a magnificent soft harmonic basis with subtle details”, and “supple solo ‘performances’ of the clarinet” [Ibid., p. 403–404].

However, as with the analysis of intertextual connections, each case of polystylistics requires an individual approach. Thus, for the Interlude, in which Tchaikovsky's “Mozartianism” is fully manifested, specific sources do not play a role in revealing the secret meaning — what is significant is the integral stylistic appearance, which Ruchyevskaya generally designated as “Mozartian reminiscences” [Ibid., p. 377]. On the contrary, the intertextual probing of the duet outside the precise “address” leaves the number unresolved.

The situation changes dramatically if we redirect Ruchyevskaya's characteristics to a specific object. Repeated listening to the melodic curves of the duet leads us to the main theme of the second movement of Liszt's *Faust Symphony*, which has a number of similar features. As well as “singing” in thirds, it features bucolic flutes and clarinets, echoing the pastoral content of the poetic text of the duet. The common features



also include a more specific hint in the duet between Liza and Polina consisting in the movement of sixteenth notes in the solo clarinet that fill the stops in the vocal part within the verse. This detail, appearing as if it were a technical necessity (i.e. filling a pause), refers to a similar element in Liszt's symphony, which creates a continuous *perpetuum mobile*, which has been an integral part of the image of Gretchen since Schubert's song *Gretchen am Spinnrade*. The rising and falling second that opens the duet brings Gretchen's theme even closer to the theme, which is usually considered in the context of the intonational unity of the entire opera, including the coincidence of the opening intonations of the duet and the quintet "I'm scared!" (see [9, p. 15])

While these connections and half-hints mentioned may seem insignificant, they all take on a completely different meaning in the light of the precise coincidence of not the initial, but rather the developing intonations of the duet and Gretchen's theme.

Let us examine in more detail the exposition of Liszt's theme, in which, just as in Tchaikovsky's *The Queen of Spades*, two tendencies intersected: stylisation "in the old style" (i.e., in the spirit of classical simplicity) and romantic stylistics. In its structure, the theme gravitates toward classical disjunction: a period of repeated structure, with an expansion in the second sentence and a modulating ending. Its three executions (4 + 6, 4 + 7, 4 + 4) with continuous timbral renewal (1st — oboe accompanied by viola; 2nd — flute and clarinet accompanied by violin; 3rd — violin accompanied by viola) allow us to discern in this repetition a variable AA1A2 strophicity (is this where the three verses in the duet of Liza and Polina come from?). The tonal-harmonic movement that blurs the squareness in the first two "verses", imperceptibly switches from the sphere of restrained emotions of the "canzona" to the dimension of heightened lyrical expression, first enlarging the intonation of the sigh, highlighted by the shift to *F minor*, then creating a bright emotional outburst, marked by the modulation to *C minor* (respectively at the end of the first and second "verses"). Thus, the continuous minor of the third "verse" is gradually prepared, where the strictly maintained squareness is compensated by intensive tonal development (*B-flat minor* → *F minor*) to keep the "action" entirely on the internal, psychological plane.

Among the unchanging melodic elements of the "song", the same pre-cadence motif ending with a "sigh" achieves prominence; its modulatory

flexibility makes it the main object of auditory attention, blossoming from the first “verse” to the second, where it reaches the maximum of lyrical expression (*Examples 1, 2*):

The first system of the musical score consists of two staves. The upper staff is the right hand, and the lower staff is the left hand. The key signature has two flats (B-flat and E-flat), and the time signature is 4/4. The right hand begins with a triplet of eighth notes. Performance markings include *poco rallent.* in the first measure, *smorz.* in the second measure, and *dolce* in the third measure. The dynamic marking *sempre pp.* is located at the bottom right of the system. There are asterisks and circled numbers (2, 3) under the left-hand notes.

The second system of the musical score consists of two staves. The upper staff is the right hand, and the lower staff is the left hand. The key signature remains two flats. The right hand has a melodic line with a slur over it, marked *innocente*. The left hand has a rhythmic accompaniment. The marking *una corda* is written below the left-hand staff. There are circled numbers (4, 5, 2) under the left-hand notes.

The third system of the musical score consists of two staves. The upper staff is the right hand, and the lower staff is the left hand. The key signature remains two flats. The right hand has a melodic line with a slur over it. The left hand has a rhythmic accompaniment. There are circled numbers (4, 3) under the left-hand notes.

The fourth system of the musical score consists of two staves. The upper staff is the right hand, and the lower staff is the left hand. The key signature remains two flats. The right hand has a melodic line with a slur over it. The left hand has a rhythmic accompaniment.

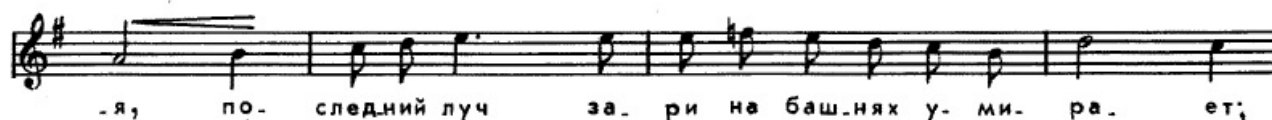
*Example 1. F. Liszt. Faust Symphony. Second Movement.  
Theme (first “verse” of Gretchen’s song)*



Example 2. F. Liszt. *Faust Symphony*. Second Movement  
(third “verse” of Gretchen’s song)

Tchaikovsky “inlaid” this motif into the melody of the duet of Liza and Polina with the words “...the dawn dies on the tower” (see *Example 3*). Perhaps this inclusion (“intarsia”) had an unconscious origin. If so, it not only reflects the situation of the artist’s presence in the multilingual space of art, which underwent practically infinite expansion at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries, but also confirms the words of Wilhelm von Humboldt that “language is the formative organ of thought” (cit. from: [10, p. 280]). After all, from the limitless multitude of intonations “floating in the air”

Tchaikovsky chose one that occupied only its allotted place in the overall semantic structure. And, more importantly, its role in the new artistic context can no longer be refuted by the “random choice” of the artist. Raku also concludes that “intertexts are not formed arbitrarily, but under the influence of certain laws that are dictated by the great Text of culture” [3, p. 19].



Example 3. P. Tchaikovsky. *The Queen of Spades*. Scene Two. No. 7.  
Duet of Lisa and Polina

As additional evidence of the intertextual nature of this motif, we can note its absence from the general intonational context of the opera, which grows out of the theme stated in the Introduction to form a “grandiose symphonic canvas” [11, p. 102], while the opening phrase of the duet is formed on the basis of the coupling of three intonational links of the generative “thematic impulse” established by Komarnitskaya [Ibid., p. 109].

The connection with Liszt’s theme casts the shadow of Gretchen on the image of Lisa, enhancing the resonance of the poetic text, the symbolic sound of which (“the image of the fading dawn”) was noted by Galina Poberezhnaya.<sup>1</sup> In contrast to the “Mozartian” *intertext*, here correlations of a different kind arise, which actualise not so much the social status of the heroine (in this regard, Gretchen is closer to Pushkin’s “poor pupil” than to the operatic “granddaughter of the Countess”), but rather the essential features of the image. By giving herself to love, Lisa, like Gretchen, violates the dictates of social morality, placing both heroines outside of society and leading to a tragic conclusion; moreover, in both cases, their love saves the souls of the heroes (Faust and Hermann) in the finale.

However, the common points of contact with the image of Gretchen, which are also what determine Lisa’s operatic fate, are not sufficient to reveal the “Faustian” *intertext*. This cannot emerge without the key figures of Faust and Mephistopheles.

<sup>1</sup> Poberezhnaya, G. I. (1994). *Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky*. Vipol, p. 275.

Its complete reconstruction is linked to Tomsy's Ballad, the starting point of the opera's dramaturgy, which escapes the influence of the "Mozartian" *intertext*. And although this reconstruction is carried out outside the intonational connections with the *Faust Symphony*, it follows Liszt's logic of monothematic transformations, which lead up to the key moment in the dramaturgy of *The Queen of Spades* – the transformation of Hermann's lyrical confession ("I don't know her name") into a motif of fate ("Three cards, three cards, three cards").

### *The Appearance of the Protagonists*

In contrast with the duet of Liza and Polina, Tomsy's Ballad has repeatedly become the object of the most diligent research attention [4; 11; 12; 13]. This number, which plays a central role in the reinterpretation of Pushkin's "anecdote" in a mystical vein, is typically interpreted through projection onto the image of the Countess. This is greatly facilitated by the ballad genre itself, as well as the inevitability of fate contained in the poetic text, which is intensified by the incantatory repetitions of the fatal magic words "three cards..."

The lycanthropy of motives ("I don't know her name" – "Three cards, three cards, three cards"), which in the coordinate system of the "Don Juan" *intertext* reflects the idea of "replacing Eros with Thanatos", is most often considered as evidence of Herman's original world-duality. Let us consider similar statements by other researchers: "...The process of germination of externally conflicting, internally related themes [...] reveals the polar states of the subject in terms of the duality of his consciousness" [13, pp. 144–145]; "The melody that accompanies Herman's appearance characterises the appearance of the hero "immersed in a dream", whose subject turns out to be two objects – love and gold" [12, p. 199]; "...Why does Tchaikovsky's Herman, who first appears on stage knowing nothing about the girl he is attracted to, associate his feelings for her with the fatal theme of three cards [...]?" [14, p. 43].

Herman's duality distinguishes him from Tomsy, whose role (with the clarification of a number of important changes in comparison with the literary source) remains unchanged, apparently reducing him to the function of a simple narrator. However, it turns out that this character is not so simple after all. It is in his mouth that Herman's lyrical revelation (known only to Tomsy!)

is reborn into its essential opposite — the motive of money. Vladimir Protopopov explains the essence of such a transformation in terms of “a remarkably discovered realistic detail of Tomsky’s psychology,” who “being under the impression of Herman’s story about his love, being present at his meeting with Liza [...] in the ballad involuntarily comprehends what he saw and heard [...]”.<sup>2</sup> By returning Herman’s revelation in the form of a re-intonated motif of three cards by stretching (deliberately articulating) the initial intonation and switching to a free tempo-rhythm (permitted by the remark *a piacere*), thus maximally drawing attention to the word in the absence of orchestral accompaniment, Tomsky conveys an eloquent hint: “here is the means of achieving the desired goal” (*Example 4*).

The image shows a musical score for a vocal line and piano accompaniment. The vocal line is written on a single staff with a treble clef and a key signature of one sharp (F#). It begins with the tempo marking 'a piacere' and later changes to 'in tempo'. The lyrics are 'три кар - ты, три кар - ты, три кар - ты?'. The piano accompaniment is written on two staves (treble and bass clefs) and includes markings for 'colla parte' and 'ff'. There are also markings for triplets (indicated by a '3' over a bracket) in both the vocal and piano parts.

Example 4. P. Tchaikovsky. *The Queen of Spades*. Scene 1. Tomsky’s Ballad

By creating a mystical atmosphere, whose thickening is most felt in the chorus of the ballad, thereby influencing the “right-brain” perception [4, p. 13] of his counterpart, Tomsky becomes the director of Herman’s fate. The principle of re-intonation and rethinking itself goes back to the method of musical dramaturgy of Liszt’s *Faust Symphony*, based on a similar switching of the figurative and semantic poles of Paradise (First Movement) and Hell (Third Movement).

Thus, a new intertextual direction of Tchaikovsky’s interpretation of Pushkin’s story emerges, suggested by the latter, albeit with one key difference. If Pushkin’s image of Mephistopheles arises thanks to Hermann’s characterisation, which is put into Tomsky’s mouth (“...he has the profile of Napoleon, but the soul

<sup>2</sup> Protopopov, V. V., & Tumanina, N. V. (1957). *Tchaikovsky’s Operatic Works*. Publishing House of the USSR Academy of Sciences, p. 287.

of Mephistopheles”<sup>3</sup>), then Tchaikovsky endows Tomsy himself with the soul of Mephistopheles.

The key role of Tomsy in the plot of the drama “as a kind of conductor of the action of fatal forces” was noted by Elena Semionidi: “...He throws fatal ideas at Herman, which will later develop into tragic consequences” [15, p. 121]. Indeed, once Tomsy is in the spotlight, it is impossible not to notice his leading position in the arrangement of characters. Moreover, he acts as the creator not only of Herman’s fate, but also of the entire operatic plot: the bored socialite starts the intrigue, connecting Herman’s interest in the game,<sup>4</sup> which is introduced at the beginning of the action, with the romantic confession that burst from his soul, into a single plot complex.

Tomsy himself remains on the sidelines of the “play” he has enacted, which acquires tragic dimensions for the protagonists involved in it — Liza and Herman. By throwing the latter a recipe for a win-win game, Tomsy, in accordance with his intertextual double, Mephistopheles, acts under the guise of a friend, skilfully tempting a trusting soul. Thus, in *the romantic intertext of the opera*, as if in competition with *the intertextual complex of the 18th century*, a separate “theatre within a theatre” is formed.

Tomsy’s position is emphasised by two oppositely directed remarks in the third scene in response to the remark of Surin’s “petty demon” about Herman’s fascination with the mystery of the three cards. The first is publicly, openly *false* (for the devil is “a liar and the father of lies”): “I don’t believe it! “You’d have to be an ignoramus to do that!” The second one is *true*, spoken to himself: Tomsy expresses hope that his message has reached its goal: “But, by the way, he is one of those who, having once conceived it, must accomplish everything!” The last word of “sympathy” (“Poor fellow!”) sounds like a sentence to the addressee, whose obsession makes him a convenient toy in the hands of the devil. Like an alchemist of the Reformation era, Herman rushes in pursuit of a ghostly secret knowledge; his soul, initially illuminated by the divine light of love, follows the path set by Tomsy-Mephistopheles of inevitable immersion into the impenetrable darkness of madness, followed by spiritual and physical death.

<sup>3</sup> Pushkin, A. S. (1987). The Queen of Spades. In A. S. Pushkin, *Works in 3 volumes* (Vol. 3, pp. 190–214). Hudozhestvennaya literatura, p. 206.

<sup>4</sup> Chekalinsky: “Was Herman there?” — Surin: “He was, as always, chained to the gaming table from eight until eight in the morning” (Scene 1, No. 2 “Scene and Herman’s arioso”).

By adducing a Mephistophelian essence to Tomsky's image, we may examine his participation in the Pastorale in a new way. The role of Zlatogor, which is projected onto Eletsy in the "Mozartian" triangle, simultaneously appears as one of the incarnations of the devil, tempting his victims with power and wealth. Zlatogor's line "I have golden mountains and precious stones!" echoes in Herman's mouth: "There are piles of gold there, and they belong to me alone!" In this overlapping of intertextual planes, Tomsky–Zlatogor appears as the central figure connecting both mythological dimensions of the opera, i.e., those belonging to the 18th and 19th centuries. This combination of triangles that unite the same characters — Prilepa–Liza, Milovzor–German and Zlatogor–Tomsky (instead of Zlatogor–Eletsy) — confirms the generalising significance of the "Faustian" intertext for the organisation of the opera's action.

After the third scene, in which the face of Mephistopheles appears in the "make-up" of a gallant style, Tomsky the director disappears from view, only to return at the end of the opera as a spectator of the performance he "staged". He only stands out in the crowd of players with his song of a "very manly nature",<sup>5</sup> which in the light of the "Faustian" intertext is perceived as an expression of a cynical Mephistophelian smile. The revelation of Mephistopheles's mask in the opera's finale is also justified in the context of the infernal topos of St. Petersburg, which is revealed in the "lowered" symbolism of the city — in "reducing [...] the gambling house to the underworld [...]" where Herman comes with a weapon received by him from the devil."<sup>6</sup> Tomsky's position as a superhero at the level of visible action corresponds to the similar position of the Ballad as a super-theme — "an inexhaustible source of derivative thematics" of the entire "opera-symphony" [11, p. 113].

#### *Within the Existential-Aesthetic Bicentric Operatic Space*

If the phenomenon of secret intertext claims the significance of the "author's word" (author's commentary) in operatic dramaturgy [3, p. 21], then the intertextual complex of the 18th century with its "Mozartian" core turned out to be for Tchaikovsky, first of all, an aesthetic problem, associated with the idea of searching for the "ideal" of form [4, p. 78]. This side of the polystylistic concept of opera

<sup>5</sup> Parin, A. V. (1999). *Journey to the Invisible City: Paradigms of Russian Classical Opera*. Agraf, p. 354.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 353.



is revealed by Ponomareva on the basis of the methodology of psychoanalysis and hermeneutics. Its essence lies in the resolution of the “tension between the matriarchal (unconscious) and patriarchal (conscious) world” in the space of Mozart-Beethoven stylistic biocentrism [Ibid.].<sup>7</sup> According to the researcher, the spectre of death and existential terror that Tchaikovsky faced while creating *The Queen of Spades* could be overcome “only by the bonds of form” — in the act of aesthetic creation. According to Ponomareva, “In the most sacred fusion of ‘natural gift’ (Mozart) and ‘polished skill’ (Beethoven), the ‘transcendental element’ of a new operatic creation, unprecedented for Tchaikovsky himself, was born” [Ibid.]. The connection between the theme of the three cards and *Allegretto* of Beethoven’s Seventh Symphony, revealed by the researcher, actualises the aesthetic side of its existence, while the operatic plot itself, refracted through the prism of the logic of Joseph Campbell’s “monomyth”, appears as an unfolding “journey through centuries and styles” [4, p. 58].

The “*Faustian*” *intertext* resides in a different — ontological — plane of the operatic plot. In this intertextual section of the plot, the leitmotif of mystical fear that permeates the opera, which researchers never tire of discussing, becomes the author’s existential experience, as confirmed by his own words: “God, how I cried yesterday when they buried my poor Hermann!”<sup>8</sup>

Fear as the leading emotion of *The Queen of Spades* is typically associated with Tchaikovsky’s contact with the mystery of death. Let us permit ourselves to slightly correct this version. In the ontological space of the “*Faustian*” *intertext*, Herman appears as a man who has turned away from God; in connection with the special attitude towards him of the author, who took “the most active part in his misadventures”<sup>9</sup> during the creation of the opera, the transposition of the “apostasy” of the hero onto Tchaikovsky is aggravated by the fact that the latter was a believer.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Raku also writes about the formation of the artistic concept of the opera “at the crossroads of conscious and unconscious authorial impulses” [3, p. 21].

<sup>8</sup> Tchaikovsky, M. I. (1997). *Life of P. I. Tchaikovsky (Based on Documents Stored in the Klin Archive)*. (In 3 Vols., Vol. 3). Algorithm, p. 320.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., p. 319.

<sup>10</sup> Tchaikovsky wrote about his faith in God as happiness and the highest good: “Every hour and every minute I thank God for giving me faith in Him.” [Tchaikovsky, M. I. (1997). *Life of P. I. Tchaikovsky (Based on Documents Stored in the Klin Archive)* (In 3 Vols., vol. 2). Algorithm, p. 545]. No less significant in connection with this discussion is the fact that Tchaikovsky created a whole series of works for the church. One thing: either “known” or a quote. — N. K.

In the “*Faustian*” *intertext*, the development of the main line of musical events that reflect the process of Hermann’s descent into madness can also be seen from the point of view of the cause that gave rise to it — the loss by the hero of the divine presence in his soul, that divine love that animates man. This motive, which in interpretations of the legend of Faust is most often replaced by the more fascinating and mystical motif of a pact with the devil, is embodied in the theme of love.

It is the theme of love that participates in the creation of the general (essentially “*Faustian*”) antithesis, set out on the “*frontispiece*” of the opera (in the Introduction) in opposition to the theme of the Countess, who possesses the “*elixir of the devil*.”<sup>11</sup>

This confrontation receives an effective symphonic development in the second scene, where it is the theme of love (as a plot and musical motif) that determines the most important turn in the development of Herman’s image (“*Oh, terrible ghost, death, I don’t want you!*”). However, its “*decrease*” in the third scene — truncation to one motive in the volume of a third, rhythmic compression, dismemberment into separate phrases — speaks of the fading of feeling in the soul of the hero. Herman mechanically pronounces the words “*I love you!*” in an attempt to save himself from the “*demons*” of his consciousness (“*The same voice... who is it? A demon or people? Why are they pursuing me?*”), which take possession of his soul as soon as there is no room left in it for love.

It is no less significant that the transformation of the theme of love is accompanied by a thickening of the infernal atmosphere — a curtailment of the grain motif, coloured in the detached and lifeless timbres of the woodwinds (oboe and clarinet) in Tchaikovsky’s late works, into a “*frozen*” third vertical in the bassoons (see *Example 5*).<sup>12</sup> In the context of the “*Faustian*” plot, the disappearance of the theme of love is read as the “*death of the soul*” and madness as the personification of the devil.<sup>13</sup> It is only with the return to the theme of love in the finale of the opera in its original

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<sup>11</sup> S. V. Frolov writes about the connection between Tchaikovsky’s *The Queen of Spades* (“the fixed idea of a card game in the fate of the operatic Hermann”) and Hoffmann’s novel *Die Elixiere des Teufels* (“a description of the mystical properties and special case of the game of faro”) [2, p. 72].

<sup>12</sup> The infernal sound of such formations was noted by Asafiev in the Countess’s song. Cf. Asafiev, B. V. (1972). *The Queen of Spades*. B. V. Asafiev. *On Tchaikovsky’s Music: Selected Works*, (pp. 327–362). Music, p. 345. Ponomareva interprets this lexeme as “a symbol of the mythological ‘threshold of initiation’” [4, p. 61].

<sup>13</sup> In the Encyclopaedia of Christian Concepts, “madness” is interpreted as a state of unbelief: Love (n.d.). In *ABC of Faith*. Retrieved January 25, 2025, from: <https://azbyka.ru/lyubov>

form — in the key of *F minor* and almost complete exposition, marked by the intermittent breathing of the dying Hermann — that the rebirth of the hero's soul and return to the path of salvation receives its symbolisation.

об. I  
 Cl. I  
 Ф. б.  
 Г.  
 Как счастлив я, что ты пришла! люблю тебя!..

об. I  
 Cl. I  
 Ф. б.  
 Г.  
 Лиза  
 люблю тебя! Не место здесь... не для того зва...

Cl. I  
 Ф. б.  
 Л.  
 да тебя я!.. Слушай... вот ключ от потаенной

Example 5. P. Tchaikovsky. *The Queen of Spades*. Scene 3.  
 Transformation of the theme of love

It is no coincidence that in Tchaikovsky's next opera *Iolanta* the main point of common aspirations — both of the composer and the main heroine “who is in a syncretic relationship of parallelism with the author” [16, p. 22] — becomes Light and Love; here, the fundamental Christian values, which Tchaikovsky loses with one hero and regains with another, are restored to their rights. Thus, after the descent into the underworld (*The Queen of Spades*) and contact with the experience of losing the soul (inversion of initiation), a return to God occurs (*Iolanta*) — according to Campbell's logic of the monomyth, but in the space of ontological truths.

### Conclusion

Characterising the revealed connections, designated by us as *intertextual complex of the 18th century*, Raku notes that “the “semantic funnel,” drawing in new intertexts, forces us to gradually dive into the depths of the central text” [3, p. 17]. The same centripetal force is observed in the space of *romantic* — “*Faustian*” — *intertext*: movement along its narrowing orbit, from superficial musical structures to the meanings hidden in them, not only does not bypass the theme of “the substitution of Eros by Thanatos”, but, interpreting it in its own — “*Faustian*” — coordinate system, gradually introduces it into the holy of holies of Tchaikovsky's artistic world, where the secrets of the artist's personality are revealed.

In this regard, it is impossible to ignore the reference to the existence of the *Faustian* line of the opera, carried out by one of its creators, Modest Ilyich Tchaikovsky, in the introduction to the presentation of the libretto scenario. In defending the changes made to Pushkin's story, the librettist first “admits” that “Pushkin's *The Queen of Spades* is equal in significance to Goethe's *Faust*...”<sup>14</sup> Then, expanding the comparative context, he writes about Gounod's *Faust* with its heroes, Gretchen and Siebel, transformed in the French taste, and in the next step creates an exclusive “duet” that unites the two operas, leading up to the key number for the “*Faustian*” intertext of *The Queen of Spades*: “...Princess Lisa and the contralto Siebel, singing such delightful things, give such pure and high pleasure.”<sup>15</sup>

<sup>14</sup> Tchaikovsky, M. I. (1997). *Life of P. I. Tchaikovsky (Based on Documents Stored in the Klin Archive)*. (In 3 Vols., vol. 3). Algorithm, p. 348.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

If initially this preface was perceived only as a justification for the librettist's right to "cut scenarios from the greatest works of poetry,"<sup>16</sup> then in light of the discovery of the "*Faustian*" *intertext*, a clear subtext can be read in it. Thus, the *intertext*, which has a strong gravitational field, organises the work itself from within, and, going beyond its limits and attracting fragments of scattered information, produces an ordering effect in the surrounding context.

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

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