

DOI: 10.15643/libartrus-2019.2.1

## (In)visible text: Queen of Spades in silent Russian cinema

© K. Hainová

*Palacký University in Olomouc  
10 Křížkovského, Olomouc 779 00, Czech Republic.*

*Email: ksenia.hain@gmail.com*

*Alexander Pushkin's literary works have been an inspiration for the cinema already from the emergence of the narrative fiction film. One of Pushkin's most frequently adapted stories is a mystical novella Queen of Spades written in 1833. In Russian silent cinema, there were different versions of the story – the first one appeared as a short film in early 1910 and was directed by Pyotr Chardynin, another already a feature-length version was made in 1916 by Yakov Protazanov. While Protazanov's version follows Pushkin's story more closely, Chardynin also seems to draw heavily on Tchaikovsky's eponymous opera, which makes his film more reliant on the viewer's prior knowledge of the original text. The article focuses on both films, particularly on their means of transferring Pushkin's original text on screen. By comparing them to each other as well as with their original source materials (hypotext in Genette's terminology), it also defines the degree of intertextuality in relation to the viewer's understanding of the resulting hypertext.*

**Keywords:** Alexander Pushkin, Queen of Spades, silent cinema, intertextuality, text transfer, theory of adaptation.

There is a curious story connected with Pushkin's novel Queen of Spades and the famous Russian actor and television film director Mikhail Kozakov. Kozakov always dreamed to make a screen adaptation of Pushkin's story, as he saw something similar between the character of German and himself. [1] He started to realize his dream in 1980, however, this attempt failed. Due to his exceptional vision of Pushkin's story, he was unable to finish the script. After returning to the project seven years later, in 1987, Kozakov even started the shooting process but, unfortunately, he was unable to fulfil his intention yet again. His dissatisfaction with the filming process, constant stress and several nervous breakdowns led to depression – Kozakov ended up in a mental institution, just like Pushkin's character German in the Queen of Spades [2, p. 444]. After his recovery, when he was asked about the reason for his broken career and life, he answered with only two letters: PD (Pikovaya dama, eng. Queen of Spades) [2, p. 437]. Kozakov described his mental condition during the project as “fails, short raises and fails again, crushing collapses, horrible depressions, fears, introspection and self-abasement, self-destruction” [2, p. 437]. Later he pointed out that, perhaps, Pushkin simply cannot be adapted to the blue screen, and he failed because he tried to “make something that cannot be done on screen”, although the remark follows “or at least I cannot do it” [1]. The story becomes even more dramatic when we realize how many adaptations of Queen of Spades have been made, and that is not only talking about film adaptations. In 19th century the novel served as inspiration for three operas; *La Dame du pique* by Fromental Halévy (1850), *Pique dame* by Franz von Suppe (1865) and later the most famous one, *The Queen of Spades* by Pyotr Chaikovskii (1890) [3]. The novel was also used as a source for two different ballet performances in 1978 and 2001, both produced by Roland Petit. In the film industry, more than 16 movies from all over the world were based on the story.

A high interest in transferring Pushkin's mysterious novella or its elements to a movie screen can be noticed already in the silent film period – between 1910 and 1927, several adaptations have been

made not only in Russia (*Pikovaya dama*, Pyotr Chardynin, 1910; *Pikovaya dama*, Yakov Protazanov, 1916), but also in Germany (*Pique Dame*, Arthur Wellin, 1918) or for instance in Hungary (*Pique Dame*, Pál Fejös, 1921). The first version of Queen of Spades in Russia was made by Pyotr Chardynin in 1910, only a few years after the first narrative film *Stenka Razin* (Vladimir Romashkov, 1908) was finished in Russia. The second one – already a feature-length film – was filmed in 1916 by Yakov Protazanov starring the famous Ivan Mozzhukhin. Further in this article I will take a closer look at both these versions, comparing them to each other and to the original story, and revealing the key means of the transformation process from text into visual art.

#### *Adaptation theories and intertextuality*

Adaptation theory is for sure one of the most common and oldest branches of film and literature studies. Films based on the famous literary plots started to appear almost immediately with the fiction film itself. The issue of adaptations is therefore a boundary discipline, combining several fields of study. According to Thomas Leitch however, in the adaptation theories literature is commonly privileged over film, as the central figure of the adaptation studies is mostly the author, and the central to the field is fidelity to the original source, comparison the film version with the original plot and evaluation of quality in reflecting literary characters and plot on screen [4, p. 3]. James M. Welsh describes such a perspective as “the most basic and banal” [5, p. 15]. According to Thomas Leitch such an approach until recently has been the most general in the field for several reasons. One of them is the fact that the old generation of film scholars was trained in film studies themselves, while coming from the other departments (mostly from English department), where they were trained in close reading and analyzing the films based on famous authors’ writings as they were literary sources as well [4, p. 4]. That is therefore typical that adaptations have been often compared to their original literary sources. According to Stephen Hutchings and Anat Vernitski, “adaptations are condemned to fail perpetually either to live up to their textual originals, or to realize the inherent potential of the cinematic medium in its authentic, non-literary form” [6, p. xiv]. Hutchings and Vernitski mention the turning point in the adaptation studies – it was André Bazin who proposed the film adaptation should be analyzed “in terms of dialogue”, suggesting that literary source and film adaptation might be considered as a “single work reflected through three art forms, an artistic pyramid with three sides, all equal in the eyes of the critic” [7, p. 50]. Bazin’s suggestion already at that time launched somewhat a reassessment of adaptation studies moving away from the main focus on fidelity to the analysis of both texts according to the rules of the relevant field of art. Nowadays adaptation theory focuses not only on fidelity, but also on methods of text transfer. Although adaptation studies are still mainly considered to be a branch of film and literary studies, their interdisciplinary character allows us to make use of it in any other field of research as well.

The transformation of one item of artistic work into another piece of art could also be viewed as an example of intertextuality. The most crucial work in this area has been produced by Julia Kristeva, combining theories of the Russian literary theorist Mikhail Bakhtin and the Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure, Kristeva formulated the theory of intertextuality in the 1960s [8]. Saussure’s notion of the differential signs was the main origin of the theory of intertextuality – if all signs can be considered as differential, beside their non-referential nature they can also be viewed as derivative from the vast number of already existing different signs and their connections [9, p. 11]. If, according to Saussure, the linguistic sign in general is “a non-unitary, non-stable, relational unit, the understanding of which leads us out into the vast network of relations, of similarity and difference, which constitutes the synchronic system of language” [9, p. 11], the same approach can be used not only for the literary sign,

but a cinema sign as well, where authors next to the words (in case of literary authors) also choose from already existing number of plots, storylines, characteristic features, camera angles, *mise-en-scènes* etc. from the previous literary and cinematic works and existing texts and cultures all over the world [9]. With the term *intertextuality* Kristeva marked connections within all the existing cultural texts, according to her theory there are no isolated texts, all of them are linked together through different sign systems. The term *intertextuality* soon became a well-known notion, which expanded to different branches of humanities. [10]

Theorists and critics from structuralist and poststructuralist literary theories turn to the term and associate it with the nature of a literary meaning. This results in the existence of two possible ways of understanding the term *intertextuality*. Structuralist theorists, with the most famous representative of this group being Gérard Genette, believe that literary meaning can only be fully comprehended in its connection to the text's basic constituents and its relation to other texts that are part of the same author's original work. Post-structuralists theorists, on the contrary, disagreed with the idea [11, p. 1–7]. In his studies, Genette doesn't deal with individual discourses, but examines the way in which texts and signs "function within and are generated by describable systems, codes, cultural practices and rituals" [9, p. 96]. In Genette's conception, *intertextuality* (which he calls *transtextuality* or *the textual transcendence of the text*) is described as "all that sets the text in a relationship, whether obvious or concealed, with other texts" [12, p. 1].

With the term *transtextuality*, Genette strives to explain ways to examine and understand texts, dividing the concept into five sub-categories: *intertextuality*, *paratextuality*, *metatextuality*, *hypertextuality*, and *architextuality*. In my text, I am going to look at the relations between the literary text and its film adaptations through Genette's approach to *intertextuality*, namely the fourth type of *transtextuality* – *hypertextuality* by which Genette means "any relationship uniting a text B (which I shall call *hypertext*) to an earlier text A (I shall, of course, call it the *hypotext*), upon which it is grafted in a manner that is not that of commentary" [12, p. 5]. According to Genette, there could be another type of *hypertextuality*, such as when text B doesn't relate to text A in an explicit manner, yet is unable to exist without the existence of text A. Genette calls the process in which *hypertext* originates from the *hypotext* *transformation* [12, p. 5]. The model of a text derived from another pre-existing text can be fully applied to the adaptation process, in which film (Text B, *hypertext*) originates from pre-existing literary text (Text A, *hypotext*). In this study, the process of transformation will also be partly examined from the point of view of Brian McFarlane's theory of adaptation and his way of distinguishing between transferable and non-transferable elements of a literary text to the screen. McFarlane calls those elements of the original literary text that are "transferable because not tied to one or other semiotic system" *narrative*; and those "which involve intricate process of adaptation because their effects are closely tied to the semiotic system in which they are manifested" are called *enunciation* [13, p. 20]. By *enunciation*, McFarlane means "the whole expressive apparatus that governs the presentation – and reception – of the narrative" [13, p. 20]. In regard to perception, McFarlane separates "two worthwhile lines of investigation: (a) in the transposition process, just what is it possible to transfer or adapt from novel to film; and (b) what key factors other than the source novel have exercised an influence on the film version of the novel?" [13, p. 22]. In applying these basics of his theory to my view of the transfer of literary art to the screen – apart from the purely transferable elements or "narrative", such as the plot and fidelity to the original source – I will also concentrate on the means of transferring the literary source into another medium, which in the audio-visual means of presentation was rather limited in its period of time – the silent era. Comparing the ways of depicting the originally

literary text on the screen will enable the reader to notice the intertextual connections of both the original source and the resulting work and its requirements in relation to the viewer who must be equipped with a certain degree of basic knowledge to fully comprehend the movies. Finally, I will focus on how the filmmakers deal with the transfer of the actual text into a different code of a completely different medium.

*Original story summary and Russian silent cinema*

The novella *Queen of Spades* was written by the famous Russian writer, Alexander Pushkin, in 1833 during his stay at his family estate Boldino. The story was published in the second issue of *Biblioteka dlya chteniya* in 1834 and was a great success. The mystical prosaic story which takes place in author's time period revolves around a young officer of the engineers German who, regardless of never playing cards himself, attends every game and watches the players. One evening, one of the officers called Tomsy reveals a mysterious story about his grandmother who when she was young, after losing a big amount of money in Paris, managed to get a secret from a notorious count of St. Germain. The subject of the secret were the mysterious three cards that always win in a row. After paying back her debt, the old countess never played again, and only once in her life, out of sorrow, disclosed the secret to a young man in exchange for his promise to never play again. After hearing the story, German becomes obsessed with the secret and decides to use the countess' young ward Liza to get to it. After pretending to love Liza and exchanging a few letters with her, German succeeds to get into the house and during the night visits the old countess in her room asking for the three secret cards. When the countess dismisses the story telling him it was a joke, German loses his temper and threatens to kill the old woman (even though later he would confess the gun wasn't loaded). The fear she feels at that moment results in her death. Admitting to Liza he was using her and feeling guilty about the old countess' death, German decides to attend her funeral in hope to clear his conscience. At the funeral, German sees the countess open her eyes and look at him, and later that night the old woman's ghost pays him a visit and reveals the three mysterious cards that will win for three nights in a row (three, seven, ace). However, he must not play more than one card each night and he must marry Liza. The next evening, German attends a reception of the famous gambler and millionaire Chekalinsky, bets all his savings (47 thousand) on three and wins. The next day he bets on seven and wins again. On the third day he bets on ace but when the cards are shown they reveal that German has a Queen of Spades instead of an ace in his hand, and he loses everything he had. The queen of spades resembles the old countess smiling and winking. German loses his mind and is committed to an asylum, he keeps repeating the words "three, seven, ace" [14].

The first Russian film based on the *Queen of Spades* story was made in 1910 by Pyotr Chardynin at the company of Alexander Khanzhonkov, who was one of the first Russian cinema entrepreneurs. In the early years of fiction film, it was common in Russia to turn to classical literature or major events in Russian history for inspiration and to transfer them onto the screen. By doing this, filmmakers use the audience's knowledge of the story in their advantage. Denise J. Youngblood in her publication *The Magic Mirror: Moviemaking in Russia 1908–1918* explains the interest in the Russian literary classics during the early period of the fiction narrative cinema emergence: from the year 1909 on, the native production was rapidly increasing – Russian cinema entrepreneurs started to establish their own production studios, causing competition among the French film companies [15, p. 8]. According to Youngblood, between the years of 1908 and 1912 only 85 percent of Russian movies were acted while the rest of them were newsreels or other factional materials. More than a half (fifty three percent) of

those 85% of acted films were screen adaptations of famous literary works, theatre plays, songs etc. With the quick increase in native production, filmmakers needed new ideas and materials which they often found in the rich Russian culture, borrowing ideas for the screen from literary plots, plays, opera librettos, national songs and poems which were already of a great success among the audiences [15, p. 9].

Among the first literary texts that were transferred to the screen were such famous works as Gogol's *Viy* (1909, Vasily Goncharov), *Taras Bulba* (1909, Alexandr Drankov) or *Dead Souls* (1909, Pyotr Chardynin), Lermontov's poem *The Song of the Merchant Kalashnikov* (1909, Vasily Goncharov) and of course a lot of films based on Pushkin's poems and stories: *Mazeppa* (1909, Vasily Goncharov), *The Fountain of Bakhchisaray* (1909, Yakov Protazanov), *Mermaid* (1910, Vasily Goncharov), *Mozart and Salieri* (1908) and *Queen of Spades* (1910, Pyotr Chardynin). This wide range of classical literary works transferred to the screen, mainly consisting of writings of the famous Russian trio Pushkin-Lermontov-Gogol, suggests that filmmakers tended to choose the most popular subject, which would guarantee extensive knowledge of the material among the audience. Semen Ginzburg's statistics of literary adaptations between the years 1907 and 1912 from his book *Kinematografiya dorevolutsionnoy Rossii* (Moscow, 1963) [16] clearly shows the leading position of Russian classical literature authors – Alexander Pushkin takes the first position with 21 adaptations, followed by Gogol and Chekhov with 17 and 13 adaptations respectively. Nevertheless, most of the adapted literary works were the so-called “cinema illustrations” that relied on the audience's knowledge of the adapted plot for them to fully understand the cinema version [15, p. 9].

### **Queen of Spades, 1910**

#### *Pushkin's original story vs. Tchaikovsky's opera libretto*

By analyzing the plot of Chardynin's version of *Queen of Spades* and comparing it to the original story, a lot of changes and differences can be noticed. Although the film version seemingly retains the main structure of the story, it can be clearly seen from certain points that the film structure is based on the opera libretto by Modest Tchaikovsky, which was written at the end of the 19th century, rather than on Pushkin's original. Everything from characters to mise-en-scène corresponds to the libretto: individual scenes duplicate the opera set, and in some instances, characters behave in accordance with the libretto story (German and Liza both kill themselves).

In Tchaikovsky's version, Liza is the old countess's granddaughter and her direct heir, who is engaged to prince Yeletsky. The opera opens up with a scene in the St. Petersburg Summer-Gardens, where Chekalinsky, Surin and Tomsky talk about the card game of last night, pointing out that German was as usual watching the game without playing himself while also pointing out that “he is very poor”. After meeting him, Tomsky finds out about German being deeply in love with an unknown girl. Another officer, Yeletsky, announces his engagement to young Liza, and when Liza and the old countess suddenly appear, German realizes that Liza is his beloved one. After hearing about the old countess's ability to guess the three cards that will win, German becomes obsessed with the idea to get the secret to become rich, which will also mean that he would be able to marry Liza, who meanwhile falls in love with him. Liza gives German a key to her room but instead of visiting the young girl, he sneaks into the countess's room. After German's attempt to get her secret of how to guess the three cards, the countess dies of fear. Nevertheless, her ghost visits German the next night and reveals the secret to him. She names the three cards that would win the game for German: three, seven, ace. Disappointed in German's obsession with cards and realizing he doesn't need her anymore, Liza jumps into a river

and kills herself. In the evening, after successfully using two of the three cards (three and seven), German feels triumphant. However, when the third card is uncovered, the queen of spades appears instead of an ace. The old countess's ghost appears and German, terrified, stabs himself and dies.

As demonstrated above, Pushkin's story is changed dramatically in the libretto not only on the level of relations between the characters, but mainly regarding German's motivation. In Pushkin's story, captivated with the idea of winning, German becomes obsessed with the countess's secret and nothing would stop him in getting it, not even her innocent young ward, whom he selfishly uses to get to the old lady's room to get the secret from her. In Tchaikovsky's version, it is a genuine love to Liza that leads German first to Liza's room and only then he starts observing the burning desire to win. Being of a passionate nature, German soon substitutes his love for Liza by an obsession with the three-card secret, which ultimately leads to the tragic death of both characters.

The main narrative and the visual structure of the film therefore correspond with the opera libretto, which becomes its major hypotext. As mentioned above, the story takes place in the same time period (in the 18th century, judging from the characters' clothes), it follows the same chronological order, and the relationships between characters are portrayed in a way similar to the opera. However, preservation of characters' roles and functions in the process of transferring the opera libretto onto the silent screen meets with certain difficulties. Mainly because unlike opera, a silent film is not endowed with the same degree of textual information an opera would be able to present through its libretto text. On the silent screen, the actual text is presented through titles – presentation of the characters usually begins with the opening titles while their actions and the location are explained via intertitles during the narration. In Chardynin's film version, one can realize there is a lack of information provided about the characters and their motivation. The main difficulty arises in the character of prince Yeletsky (Liza's fiancée in the opera), whose name is presented in the opening titles (together with the rest of the characters: German, the Countess and Liza) yet there is no further description or a clear explanation of who the character actually is – his name never appears in the intertitles again and considering the fact that the character is absent in Pushkin's original story, mentioning the name without any further clarification can indeed cause certain confusion. Bearing in mind that, even in the original source, Yeletsky is not of the same significance as the rest of the characters, mentioning his name in the opening titles might be considered meaningless, as the audience might mistake the name for any other officer friend of German's. Furthermore, it is just as difficult identifying the character through his actions – in the film's second scene, we see Liza with a young man in her room, although from their behavior (her expression of annoyance, the young man's desperate look) it is rather possible to interpret the scene in a way that this man is just trying to win Liza's affection, while she shows no fondness for him. In this movie, Yeletsky could therefore be any suitor, who is trying to win Liza's love, as no clear connection about their engagement can be made through the visual picture. Using this rather insignificant character's name in the opening titles can therefore be viewed as a direct link to the film's hypotext – opera and its libretto where Yeletsky has a minor, yet recognizable role. Yeletsky's name in the opening titles is a hint, a visible link to those who are familiar with the opera and who can consequently predict that the movie will probably borrow some of the other characters and motives from the opera libretto too. At the same time, mentioning just one secondary character together with the main ones, such as German, Liza and the Countess, can easily lead to misunderstandings and confusion for those not familiar with Tchaikovsky's opera. Yeletsky therefore becomes both visible and invisible textual component.

*Characters' functions and motivation*

Slight changes and differences can also be noticed on the level of the main character's features and functions. Although the relations between Liza and the countess are maintained the same as in the opera (Liza is the countess's granddaughter), their kinship has no significance to the story. When German meets them for the first time in the Summer Gardens, he looks astonished as Liza passes by. Although his behavior might show the signs of possible feelings toward this young woman (he follows her with his eyes, he touches his head as if showing his affection, he keeps looking back at her), he soon returns to his preceding occupation and watches the officers' card game with much curiosity. When one of the officers starts telling a story, German looks back again but now his eyes, as well as the eyes of the other officers, seem to be focused on the young lady's companion – the old woman. This first appearance of the countess is accompanied by the title "The Countess who possessed the secret of the three cards.", which is used in this scene not only to introduce the character to the audience, but at the same time to expose a certain degree of German's interest in the secret. This fact is confirmed by the gesture of his hand clearly showing the number three. As the countess leaves, he takes three cards from the table and walks around without noticing his friends making fun of him. German's obsession with this story therefore becomes central motive of the scene and reveals German's motivation for his further actions to the viewer. That is why, in the following scene when he is sneaking into Liza's room in the countess's house and declaring his love for her while threatening her by his own death we no longer associate his actions with any real feelings for Liza. The circumstances of German's behavior are seen rather similar to those in Pushkin's original story – German intends to use the young girl in order to get hold of her grandmother's secret from the very beginning. Therefore, although based on the opera, the film version also gets back to Pushkin's original plot, mainly in regard of German's motivation. The original screenplay might have intended to implement the opera libretto into the movie, however, a lack of information in the narrative leads to ambiguity and unclarity on the level of story settings and mainly on the level of the characters' motivation.

Even though there are only few differences comparing the film plot with its prior hypotext (Tchaikovsky's opera libretto), the film is based on the viewer's prior knowledge not only of Pushkin's original story, but mainly on the understanding of the intertextual connection with the opera libretto. The hypertext tries to achieve the viewer's understanding of its hypotext by providing them with certain hints throughout the film (the character of Yeletsky, the story opening in the Summer Gardens, Liza being the countess's granddaughter, etc.). While these clues could be more obvious to people familiar with the opera (so that they undoubtedly understand events such as the death of Liza and German), those familiar with Pushkin's text might only find these clues of no significance, which will lead to certain degree of misunderstanding and leave a number of questions unanswered. Moreover, for a viewer not familiar with either of these texts, it is quite possible that the whole story will lose its peculiar mysticism and psychotic atmosphere. Without the knowledge of the original, a full comprehension of the hypertext simply cannot be achieved, as the film plot is shaped by the intertextual significance of another text (Tchaikovsky's opera), that is in turn further connected with its hypotext – Pushkin's original story.

**Text transfer**

Even though the story itself, according to McFarlane's theory, is easily transferrable to the screen, in silent cinema even simple succession of events has only limited possibilities of providing the viewer with certain information. Although as viewers we can see what happens in the movie – which mainly

concerns the characters' physical actions (someone enters, leaves, walks etc.), we still have a very limited access to some important details, mainly regarding the names of the characters, the relations between them and their characteristics – all of which are most commonly presented to the viewer via dialogues and other diegetic sounds. In silent film, a great deal of information is given to the viewer via intertitles which, transformed to text, clearly explain important details. As for the philosophical side of the story and its ideas, which appear in between the lines of a story in a literary text, it is clear that reflecting them onto the silent screen requires very different means of expressing ideas without words.

#### *Intertitles*

The most important constituent of story transfer in Chardynin's *Queen of Spades* are intertitles. There are 8 intertitles in the movie altogether, almost all of which are used at the beginning of the scene to describe the main events of the following sequence. Except for the second title (a1), all intertitles introduce the next scene, which makes it easy for the viewer to understand what is happening on the screen. There is neither direct speech by any characters, nor any other form of dialogue presented in the intertitles. Most of the titles directly describe the scene following them (c, d, e, f), fewer of them present characters and their characteristic features (a, a1), and only two of them specify the location without describing the character's following action (b, g). Almost all titles (except for the second one) introduce a new segment of the film with the least possible disruption for the viewer.

The intertitles are presented in the following order:

- a. "German never took part in the game" – the first scene in the Summer Garden follows
  - a1. "The Countess, who possessed the secret of the three cards" – the first scene continues
- b. "At the house of the Countess and her granddaughter Liza" – the second scene in Liza's room follows
- c. "At the ball, Liza gives German the key to her room" – the ball scene follows
- d. "Wishing to know the secret of the three cards, German sneaks into the countess's bedroom..." – a scene at the Countess's bedroom
- e. "German's room at the barracks. German reads Liza's letter in which she summons him for an explanation." – the scene with the ghost of the old countess
- f. "Liza waits for German" – the scene of Liza's suicide
- g. "The gambling house" – the scene with the game; the last scene.

#### *Symbolic props*

Together with a precise description of actions and locations via intertitles, the film also uses some diegetic images [17] to depict particular details crucial for the story. The first information about the cards and their numbers, as we've seen before, was presented via the second intertitle, presenting the countess as the holder of the three cards secret. The first mention of the three cards gives a direct impulse to the following narrative. The lucky cards are not named in the movie via text (in Pushkin's story the mysterious sequence "three, seven, ace" is repeated many times throughout the plot), but rather via their images shown in different scenes. When the ghost visits German for the first time in his room, we can clearly see which three cards (three, seven, ace) will win by means of their huge images appearing above German's head when the ghost points at them. By using double exposition, Chardynin shows the ambiguity of what we see – do the cards really appear, or is it just German's inner projection after the ghost names them? In the last scene, however, the cards shown are real. Even though the first two cards played by German stay invisible (we assume he is playing the three and the seven), in the last round the last card (the ace) is exposed in a closer shot. A perceptive viewer

can then notice what German puts on the table as he exposes his cards to the camera. After noticing his card in the winning pack, he turns the same card around again, clearly exposing it to the viewer. At this particular moment, the Queen of Spades' picture can be seen, and thus the main connection with the movie title and Pushkin's original story is revealed.

Albeit the clear meaning of these diegetic images connects the main points within the narrative, it is debatable how clear the sign is for the viewer. When German puts the ace on the table and then discloses the queen of spades, the highlight of the card itself is almost absent. There is no clear image that would explain his loss caused by the mystical interference of supernatural forces (we might think that he simply could not guess the winning card or that the ghost might have given him the wrong card). The very moment of the mystical element of the story (the sudden replacement of the right card with the wrong one) is thus not depicted clearly in the movie. Then again, some small hints and signs (such as German's exposure of the cards to the camera) focus on the viewer's previous knowledge of the story in order for them to be able to notice these clues, to connect them with the story discourse, and to reveal the symbolic ending referring to the story's title.

#### *Gestures*

In addition to the provided textual description via intertitles, diegetic images and props, actor's gestures make for another tool in the process of transferring the libretto story to the screen that in a certain way "speaks" to the audience. The central focus of the film is German's wish to possess the secret of the three cards. Although the second intertitle announces the idea of the countess's secret by means of text (...who possessed the secret of *the three cards*...), a gesture showing the number three on his fingers or his demonstrative holding of the three real cards became German's most characteristic action – he looks at three fingers of his hand and while taking the three cards at the beginning of his obsession, he gestures the number three with his hand at the ball scene after receiving the key. Trying to emphasize the way to the secret, he shows both the "three" gesture and the cards to the old countess when he tries to get the secret from her. He also looks madly at his three fingers after receiving the secret, and finally, he holds the three cards in his hand during the scene with Liza where he explains himself to her. By this sequential use of the same gesture, certain gradation can be noticed – from the somber character of German's gestures in the first scene, they slowly grow to the obsessed psychotic behavior we can observe at the end. The expressive acting of Pyotr Biryukov goes beyond the story itself showing the destructive force of egoistic obsession and finally, the punishment for temptation.

#### *Special effects*

All the mysterious moments, such as the appearance of the countess's ghost or German's vision of the laughing countess's image in the last scene, are achieved through cinematic special effects. Both times, the ghost appears in the room suddenly (which is accomplished by the use of a montage), and disappears in the same way, which evokes the existence of supernatural forces. When German sees the ghost of the countess for the first time, he is alone in his room, therefore, the nature of this phenomenon is not clearly established as real or solely as an imagination of his sick state of mind. It is as if the viewer was free to decide which of the events occurring are real and which were just German's hallucination. In the last scene, however, when the countess's ghost appears near the card table, it's just German who reacts to this occurrence. Everyone else in the room is just watching him with a worried expression. The last scene thus reveals to the viewer the nature of German's visions – they are a mere hallucination of the main character. Comparing this passage with Pushkin's text, a certain degree of explanation can be seen there too: "At that moment *it seemed to him* (highlighted by KH)

that the queen of spades smiled ironically and winked her eye at him. He was struck by her remarkable resemblance..." [18]. Unlike in the book, a queen of spades, the fatal card that caused German's tragedy, is not shown. Instead, it's clearly the countess's ghost appearing in the room.

### Queen of Spades, 1916

Six years later in 1916, Yakov Protazanov shot his version of Pushkin's story for the Ermolev studio starring Ivan Mozzhukhin in the main role of German [15, p. 124]. According to some sources, Protazanov's idea of interpreting the story was influenced by a theatre play in Moscow Art Theatre directed by Konstantin Stanislavsky and Vladimir Nemirovich-Danchenko with scenography made by a Russian artist, Alexandre Benois, who is also known for his famous illustrations of Pushkin's story [19]. In his movie, Protazanov was able to recreate the atmosphere and ambience of Benois' illustrations, which reflect the mystical style of the story. The visual style of Protazanov's version of Queen of Spades is distinguished by expressive lighting, which intensifies the contrast between light and dark shadows, referring to German's actions and creating a mystical atmosphere. German, wearing expressive and vivid make-up shadows around his eyes, intensifies the visual style by his visage and fits perfectly into this expressive contrast of black and white.

While Chardynin seems to draw heavily upon Tchaikovsky's eponymous opera, which makes his film reliant on the viewer's prior knowledge of the original text, Protazanov's version follows Pushkin's story even more closely. The film's plot doesn't seem to deviate much from Pushkin's story, with an exception of just a few scenes and details – the scene of the countess's funeral and German's first vision that the old woman had opened her eyes and winked at him is absent in Protazanov's version (as well as in Chardynin's version). The countess's ghost also doesn't name any conditions under which she would give him the secret of the three cards – again, this is true also for Chardynin's earlier version. Protazanov's German, however, although no rules were mentioned by the countess's ghost, behaves according to Pushkin's story. He plays only one card each evening, which was the countess's first condition in the novella.

#### *Character's functions and motivation*

Just as in Pushkin's original story, German tries to reach the old lady via her innocent young ward Liza and by courting and declaring his love to her. After winning her affection and abusing her faith in him he sneaks into the countess's room to get the secret. The character of Liza, played here by Vera Orlova, gets even less space on the screen than in the original text. Her role in the story is solely being a bridge between the countess and German. After the countess's death, she appears on the screen no more. In the movie, the scene at the ball where Liza converses with Tomsy about German is also absent. Liza's character is thus only secondary in the film, and the viewer gets to know her through one sole intertitle: "Lizaveta Ivanovna, the poor companion of the countess, knew all the bitterness of dependence on an old aristocratic lady", by which the full explanation of her life with the old lady is given. Since Liza functions as a bridge between German and the old countess, there is not much attention paid to her feelings and her point of view considering the main events. The whole situation is presented to the viewer through German's behavior, his attempt to get to the old countess, his obsession with the secret and finally, his interaction with the old lady.

Besides the focus on German, the film offers a more detailed look into the countess's story. We don't just see her as an old lady of a difficult character (through her behavior, her character is not attractive to the reader in the original story), nor are we told that she possesses the secret as in Chardynin's version – the viewer is offered to follow her story through a visual illustration of officer

Narumov's (grandson of the countess) story. His story, in Pushkin's text told only briefly, is not only supported by detailed intertitles, but also by a visual representation of an event, functioning as a flashback about the countess's life.

#### *Flashbacks*

Using flashbacks as a technique of transferring parts of the plot to the screen may be noticed at the beginning of the story, when Narumov (in Pushkin's story his name is Tomsy) tells his friends a mysterious story about his grandmother. His narration in the gambling house with all his friends around him is illustrated by flashbacks, in which we follow the events as they happened in the countess's life. This story within a story reveals much more information about the countess's secret in comparison with Chardynin's version. There, the only information given about the secret is the possession of the secret itself. This detailed flashback gives the viewer a much more complex understanding of the following story. At the same time, during the enigmatic narration we can follow changes in German's expression – from a captivated look at the beginning showing he is intrigued, to the obsessed, almost mad expression during the story's climax, when the listeners are told about the three-card secret. German's growing obsession is strengthened by the parallel montage of him and the countess receiving the news about the secret – when the flashback scene where Saint-Germaine tells the countess his secret is over, we return back to the gambling house using a dissolve, the shot leaving German exactly at the countess's place, with his friend standing at Saint-Germaine's place, even in the same position. Thus a parallel is made between the moments when the secret was being told to the countess and the current scene when the story about the secret is being told to German. The first flashback, together with the officer's story, takes up almost 14 minutes of the movie (which full length is 63 minutes), which emphasizes the importance of the secret that had influenced German's mind.

The second flashback is seen as the countess's dream: after returning from the grand ball, she is lying in a chair and remembering herself being young, waiting in the room for one of her lovers – she sits in the chair, probably listening to incoming footsteps. When the door opens, we see her lover standing behind her, however, when she turns her head towards him, we are back in the present: the old countess sits in her chair, and German enters through the door. Once again, the transition between these two scenes is achieved by using a dissolve, which shows the similarity between reality and the dreams of one of the characters.

#### *Intertitles and diegetic images and props*

Just as intertitles in Chardynin's version play one of the most important roles in the story narrative, the same can be said about the text in Protazanov's film. While in Chardynin's version the intertitles fulfilled their main typical function – as short descriptions of the main events of the following scene – Protazanov uses them in a more complex way. There are altogether 52 intertitles in the movie, which might seem as quite a few, taking into account the movie length (63 minutes), and possibly disrupting the narrative flow. The intertitles in Protazanov's film support the narrative in many ways, giving explanation of events, describing the scene to come, and presenting dialogues between characters. All the titles are derived from Pushkin's original text, which not only reveals crucial details throughout the narrative, but also preserves Pushkin's language. This makes the movie closer to the original plot and introduces Pushkin's world and atmosphere to the viewer.

Compared with intertitles in Chardynin's version, the main function of which was to explain what was going on in the following scene and which therefore mainly explained the visible side of the story, in Protazanov's film the intertitles function as a more important element in the story narrative. The intertitles are not restricted to action itself (e.g. someone told German a story, he got the key at the

ball, etc.), but they are used to deepen the story by providing us with details extending much further than the screen action. To name an example, we might mention the countess's secret told by one of the officers in the gambling room. The countess's story is presented in quite a detailed way, it takes up almost 14 minutes of the movie (out of 63), and 10 textual intertitles (out of 52). Such detailed description of one short scene in Pushkin's novella is presented in the movie as one of the central events in the narrative. Intertitles present not only descriptions of actions or location specifications, but in many scenes they also present direct speech that was impossible to express in any other way. Through the intertitles the viewer also finds out about the three secret cards which the countess's ghost names to German. Intertitles therefore present the main narrative events, character's lines in dialogues, and give the viewer a detailed explanation of the story. Since the intertitle text is taken from Pushkin's original novella (although in some instances it was adjusted for the screen), the text presented by intertitles (if read in a chronological order) gives us a precise outline of the story. Protazanov's movie is not just an illustration of the text, but it also reflects the mood of Pushkin's story, both by its textual component and through the visual scenography.

Above the textual intertitles, there are several diegetic texts that serve as a source of textual information for the viewer. When Liza writes German a letter, it is not directly the letter we see – instead, the content of the letter is presented in italics as written by hand in the intertitles, which helps the viewer to perceive it as a written text. German, when playing the first card in the gambling house, writes down the amount of money he bets – 47 thousand rubles – but at the same time there is no visual information about the card he plays. The next day, on the contrary, there is no information about the amount of money he bets but now the viewer can notice the card that German turns around – a seven. On the third day, the emphasis given to the card German chooses is even bigger; in a close up, we follow his hand picking one particular card from the card deck. He chooses an ace. Although the viewer doesn't see the cards that are being turned around one by one, it is clear from German's reaction that his card has won again. When he turns it around, the explanation is yet again provided via intertitles – Chekalinsky declares the victory of an ace and the defeat of German's queen. The visual support to his words appears right after the intertitle – German stares at the card in his hand, which is indeed the queen of spades.

#### *Gestures*

Compared to Chardynin's version, gestures don't play such an important role in Protazanov's Queen of Spades as they do in the earlier adaptation. German, played by a great star of that time Ivan Mozzhukhin, is acting mostly by using facial expressions rather than using a lot of gestures like Pyotr Biryukov in the same role. Mozzhukhin's German possesses expressive facial features and his fixed eyes hint to obsession, egocentrism and madness. His bold make-up with the emphasis on eye shadows strengthens his look, corresponding with his mental state.

Other support gestures used by actors in Chardynin's Queen of Spades are eliminated in this version thanks to the increased use of intertitles: all the main information is given by the means of direct speech, dialogues or a simple clarification of events through textual explanation. Gestures are therefore not needed as much as they were in the earlier movie version of 1910. That can be explained by the changing character of movies throughout time, including the improvement of technical equipment, the transformation of visual style, the alteration in the movie perception etc.

#### *Special effects*

As well as in Chardynin's version, Protazanov uses some special effects to create a reflection of the mysterious side of Pushkin's novella. Those parts of the text that are impossible to transfer clearly

onto the screen – characters' mood, description of their feelings, etc. – are shown in the movie by perfectly chosen methods. When Tomskey tells the story about his grandmother's secret, the meaning of the scene is not only to present the audience with detailed information about the three-card story. Protazanov combines the narration in the gambling house with flashbacks providing visual representation of the main events. Although the whole story is told mainly via intertitles, and flashbacks are used rather as an illustration to the story, their meaning becomes much deeper when viewed through German's perspective – as the story goes on, German becomes more obsessed with the idea of getting the secret. His obsession grows throughout the Narumov story.

Left in his room, German thinks about the countess's secret and imagines himself playing cards and winning. To depict his daydreaming, the split screen technique is used – being alone in an empty room, German stays on the left side of the screen when an image of him playing cards with the other officers slowly appears on the other side of the screen. German sees himself winning card after card, and eventually the dream image fades out. The daydreaming sequence also helps the viewer to get into German's mind, to understand his obsession and it helps explain the future events and his desire to get the secret from the old countess.

All the visual hallucinations are happening in German's mind, which is expressed through special techniques and the emphasis is put on the subjective perception of the events happening. After losing the game, German goes out of his mind – first, he sees the countess at the card, in the next shot we see him mumble something over and over (through the movement of his lips we can clearly recognize that he is repeating the names of the three cards that were supposed to win – troyka, semyorka, tuz – a three, a seven, an ace). When the picture on the wall changes into an ace, it is clear that what is happening is only a projection of German's obsessed mind. The same thing happens when he is suddenly caught in a giant cobweb trying to get out. After a few moments, everything returns to its place – the picture is back on the wall, and German sits freely on a sofa. The subjective perspective continues in the next scene; being in a mental institution, German imitates playing cards, dividing them into three decks. Using double exposition, giant cards (a three, a seven and an ace) are flying over him, emphasizing the reason of his madness and allowing the viewer to glance once more into German's mind. Together with the cards, the old countess appears in the lower left corner of the screen, slowly growing in size and filling more space – indicating the growing place that she occupies in German's mind. A title saying "The End" suddenly cuts the image's growth, leaving the viewer tense.

#### *Conclusion*

Although both movies refer to Pushkin's original novel *The Queen of Spades*, there are certain differences between the two screen versions and their use of Pushkin's original text. The first movie by Pyotr Chardynin gives an impression of being an illustration to the famous plot, drawing inspiration mostly from Tchaikovsky's opera version rather than the original literary novella. Chardynin's film version relies heavily on the audience's knowledge; although it contains a lot of hints for the viewer to follow that would help them understand the story, it is relatively difficult not to miss anything without some background knowledge not only of the story, but ideally of the opera by Tchaikovsky as well. Chardynin uses the cinema language mainly to depict the outer version of the story, without deepening into its essential motives and atmosphere. The main focus of the film is concentrated on the three cards that German is trying to get, not on his inconsistent personality that leads to the tragedy.

Protazanov's movie portrays Pushkin's text more accurately, it is not an illustration anymore, but an attempt to reflect Pushkin's novella in its full form. Despite the intertitles quoting directly from

Pushkin's novella, the story does not rely too much on the audience's prior knowledge of the original material. The detailed explanation (by intertitles and flashbacks) of the old countess's story gives the audience all necessary information to fully comprehend the following story. The deep focus on the countess's life in the past also highlights the flow of the history, where one era was changed by the other. Protazanov's film thus focuses almost to the same extent on the countess as well as on German as the main character of the story. The wide use of intertitles, gestures and special effects expresses German's unstable state of mind, while various visual effects, such as the expressive lighting and Ivan Mozzhukhin's make-up reflect the mysterious atmosphere and mood of the novella.

Although basic means of transfer used by both directors are generally the same (mainly the abundant use of intertitles and some special effects meant to present the mysterious side of the story), comparing the two movie versions clearly shows that the process of transferring original story to the screen can be versatile and had changed through decade.

However Chardynin's version of Pushkin's story is mainly based on the secondary source (the opera) and moves away from the original text (making it invisible for the uninitiated viewer), it at the same time requires the viewer's knowledge, which is essential in noticing the direct, almost invisible hints, that provide him or her with the story material. Pyotr Chardynin in his version of Queen of Spades is not possibly trying to make an original text transfer to the screen, but rather uses a well-known story in creating an attraction for a contemporary most likely local society. The later movie version by Protazanov on the contrary operates a lot with the visibility of the literary text and its essence even for those unfamiliar with the original source. Protazanov tries to transfer a well-known text into a new form of art, putting emphasis on fidelity and accurate reflection of the story.

Comparison of the two silent versions of one text might contribute to understanding approaching the adaptation process during the beginning of the cinema and its changing character during the first decade of fiction films. While the earlier film was still relying on the audience's knowledge of the material, later filmmakers were more concerned with bringing the written story to the screen in its fullness and detailed explanation within the bound of possibility at the time.

*This article was supported by the grant of the Ministry of Education of the Czech Republic, "IGA\_FF\_2017\_026-Text and intertextuality in Slavic literature and Culture I".*

## References

1. Ne day mne bog soyti s uma. Kontrast Tv Center. **2011**.
2. Kozakov M. *Akterskaya kniga*. Moscow: Vagrius, **1996**.
3. Operas Based on Works of Pushkin. URL: [http://www.operatoday.com/content/2005/10/the\\_operatic\\_pu.php](http://www.operatoday.com/content/2005/10/the_operatic_pu.php).
4. Leitch T. *Film Adaptation and Its Discontents: from Gone with the Wind to The Passion of the Christ*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, **2007**.
5. *The Literature/Film Reader: Issues of Adaptations* / Ed. M. J. Welsh, P. Lev. Lanham, Maryland: Scarecrow Press, **2007**.
6. *Russian and Soviet Film Adaptations of Literature, 1900-2001* / Ed. S. Hutchings, A. Vernitski. London: Routledge Curzon, **2005**.
7. Bazin A. Adaptation, or the Cinema as Digest / *Bazin At Work: Major Essays & Reviews from the Forties & Fifties*. London: Routledge, **1997**.
8. Kristeva J. *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Language and Art*. New York: Columbia University Press, **1980**.
9. Allen G. *Intertextuality*. London: Routledge, **2000**.
10. *Intertextuality: Research in Text Theory* / Ed. F. H. Plett. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, **1991**.
11. Mihnea S. V. *The Matrix and the Alice Books. An Intertextual Study*. Lulu Books, **2010**. Pp. 22-25.
12. Genette G. *Palimpsests. The Literature in the Second Degree*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, **1997**.

13. McFarlane B. *Novel to Film: An Introduction to the Theory of Adaptation*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, **1996**.
14. Pushkin A. *Pikovaya Dama*. In *Izbrannye proizvedeniya*. Kaliningrad: Yantarny skaz, **1999**. Vol. 3. Pp. 308–326.
15. Youngblood D. J. *The Magic Mirror*. Wisconsin: The University of Wisconsin Press, **1999**.
16. Ginsburg S. *Kinematografiya dorevolutsionnoy Rossii*. Moscow: Iskusstvo, **1963**.
17. *Cinema Studies: the Key Concepts*. London: Routledge, **2006**. P. 101.
18. Pushkin A. *Queen of spades*. United Kingdom: Delphi Classics, **2017**.
19. Rostova N. V. Ekrannye interpretatsii „Pikovoy damy“ v otechestvennom kinematografe // *Vestnik nizhegorodskogo universiteta im. N. I. Lobachevskogo*. **2014**. Vol. 2. No. 2. Pp. 72–79.

Received 09.03.2018.

Revised 01.03.2019.

DOI: 10.15643/libartrus-2019.2.1

## **(Не)видимый текст: «Пиковая дама» в русском немом кино**

© **К. Хайнова**

*Palacký University in Olomouc  
Czech Republic, 779 00 Olomouc, Křížkovského 10.*

*Email: ksenia.hain@gmail.com*

Литературные произведения А. С. Пушкина были источником вдохновения для кино уже с появлением нарративных художественных фильмов. Одно из наиболее часто адаптированных для экрана произведений Пушкина – мистическая повесть «Пиковая дама», написанная в 1833 году. В русском немом кино существуют две версии адаптации этого произведения для экрана: первый короткометражный фильм появился в начале 1910 года, снятый режиссером Петром Чардыниным, следующая, уже полнометражная версия, была снята в 1916 году Яковом Протазановым. В то время как версия Протазанова более подробно перенимает текст Пушкина, Чардынин в то же время также опирается на одноименную оперу Чайковского, что делает его кино-версию новеллы более зависимой от предварительного знания зрителем оригинального текста. Статья посвящена обоим фильмам, в частности, о способах передачи исходного текста Пушкина на экран. Сравнивая их друг с другом, а также с их исходными материалами («гипотекстами» в терминологии Женетта), в статье также определяется степень интертекстуальности в отношении восприятия зрителем готового гипертекста.

**Ключевые слова:** Александр Пушкин, Пиковая дама, немое кино, интертекстуальность, передача исходного текста, теория адаптации.

Просьба ссылаться на эту работу как: Hainová K. (In)visible text: Queen of Spades in silent Russian cinema // *Liberal Arts in Russia*. 2019. Vol. 8. No. 2. Pp. 91–106.

*Поступила в редакцию 09.03.2018 г.  
После доработки – 01.03.2019 г.*