

Dostoevskian Literary Poliphony as Lyrical-Theatrical Hypostasis of Sergey Prokofiev's Opera *The Gambler*

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Abstract: Fyodor Dostoevsky's perspective on humankind and society continues to intrigue any reader, whether specialized or from other areas of activity, due to the universality of the topics and the complexity of the characters involved. The novel entitled *The Player* depicts the life and specific concerns of 19th-century world society, a subject which attracted Sergey Prokofiev to compose a work with the same title, at the beginning of the 20th century. His opera is a unique work through the avant-garde musical language, the atypical construction of the discourse, the elements of style and conception of the libretto in relation to the original source. These elements generate a multiple correlation between the Dostoevskian prose, literary theory, the philosophy of language through studies and volumes of hermeneutic analysis, such as those signed by critic and semiotician Mikhail Bakhtin, on which we will focus our attention during this research. The terminology used by Bakhtin (dialogism, polyphony, ventriloquism, carnival) indicates a profound insight into the connection between Dostoevsky's prose and the theatrical, dramatic, lyrical, musical aspects of the epic substratum in his novels. At the same time, Dostoevsky was an involuntary forerunner of the artistic movement initiated in Western Europe by German composers – Expressionism –, which also had echoes in the works of Russian composers from the first half of the last century, as we shall see in Sergey Prokofiev's approach of *The Gambler*.

Keywords: Modernism, dialogism, declamation-manner opera, expressionist features, connection between literature-theatre-music.

1. Introduction

The problem of transposing a literary work (novel, epic poem, play) on the stage as a lyric theatre performance has always been an essential aspect of the content and message transmitted through the work of art, both in literary and musical hypostasis. *The Gambler* opera, composed by Sergey Sergeevich Prokofiev, based on the homonymous novel written by Fyodor Mikhailovich Dostoevsky, is a reference work from the beginning of the previous century, accomplished between 1915-1917, with its premiere in 1929, at the *Théâtre Royal de la Monnaie*, Brussels. The work has been less known to the public until nowadays, but has benefited from increased interest in recent decades, through the mise-en-scènes organised by the most important lyrical theatre institutions in

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the world, such as *Mariinski Theatre*, Sankt Petersburg (1991, 1996, 2007), *Metropolitan Opera*, New York (2001), *Royal Opera House*, London (2010).

The value of the work comes, on the one hand, from the literary support of the libretto, inspired by Dostoevsky's novel, and on the other, from Prokofiev's music, who transposed into music the style and the atmosphere specific to the original book, realizing a synthesis between aspects crucial for literature, creating a synthesis between the determining features of 19th century Russian literature and the new directions of 20th century music, in which Prokofiev integrated himself and emphasized his original, daring, invigorating, versatile, well-balanced, polyvalent style.

2. Choice of subject – hazard, experienced as challenge and gambling

Within the artistic works in the lyrical theatre field, Russian composers active before and during S. Prokofiev's time exploited in their works subjects inspired mostly by epic poems and versified dramas signed by A. Pushkin (*Ruslan and Ludmilla* by M. Glinka, *The Stone Guest* by A. Dargomyzhsky, *Boris Godunov* by M. Mussorgski, *The Tale of Tsar Saltan* and *The Golden Cockerel* by N. Rimsky-Korsakov, *Eugene Onegin* and *The Queen of Spades* by P.I. Tchaikovsky) or from N. Gogol's novels and stories (*May Night* and *Christmas Eve* by N. Rimsky-Korsakov, *The Gamblers* and *The Nose* by D. Shostakovich). An important thing to observe is Russian composers' predilection for small literary genres inspired by Russian folklore, myths, specific stories or certain historical events. But the massive literature with numerous characters and complex psychologies, represented by the great Russian novelists of the 19th century – L. Tolstoy and F. Dostoevsky –, was approached only in the following century, when the new generation of composers began to express a particular interest for topics unapproached in the musical field by that time.

Dostoevsky and Tolstoy were two major milestones for Prokofiev when searching ideas for the genre of opera, marking the beginning phase (in his first complete opera, *The Gambler*, composed between 1915-1917) and the maturity of his career (through his last opera, *War and Peace*, created between 1942-1945), both being accomplished during the two world wars. These contextual observations suggest a particular concern for using artistic resources from his native country, especially during the critical periods of history (as it happened during the Russian Revolution in 1917), which determined a sinuous life path for Prokofiev, with constant travels and tours, temporary homes, away from the Soviet Union and its ideological restrictions.

The Gambler is considered a work of youth for Prokofiev's composing career, completed at the age of 25, in a period of creative research and attempts, by experimenting in different genres. The genre of opera, although considered obsolete at the beginning of the 20th century, had concerned Prokofiev since his early childhood and study years, having already had several previous attempts, works that he had begun, but not finished (*The Giant* –1900, *On Desert Islands* –

1900, *A Feast in Time of Plague* –1903, *Undina* –1904-1907, *Maddalena* –1911-1913). Therefore, after gaining compositional experience useful for his evolution, in 1915 he decided to start a motivating project, which he would accomplish as a complete work. For the libretto, he wavered between novels by F. Dostoevsky and L. Tolstoy, eventually choosing Dostoevsky's *Gambler*, for reasons we can guess: the general interest for the subject at that time (because gambling continued to be a popular entertainment activity in Soviet and Western Europe as well in the first half of the 20th century), the construction of the novel (because the chapters followed more precisely the action than other novels, which had consistent commentaries and debates on philosophical, theological, social, moral subjects), and also biographical considerations (as Prokofiev's letters show occasional attendance to roulette games). However, there still remains a question mark on the composer's interest in this subject.

Serghei Prokofiev's statement is clarifying in order to understand his motivation: "Great music is one that, both by intentions and by technical accomplishment, corresponds to the moral dimensions of the epoch." (Prokofiev, 1962, p. 91) Analyzing the issue of the novel with an autobiographical character, we might think of a generalizing perspective on the subject, with deeper implications than one would see in these bourgeois entertainment activities. The term of "game" implies, in its primary acceptance, a ludic attitude towards life; another notion, "luck", involves the idea of chance, which engenders cumulative invisible forces of high impact on the human being. **Hazard** possesses a positive and harmful potential at the same time, through its mobilization power, including the artistic level, as a creative force¹ with a triggering effect on inspiration, but also by the ability to cause obsession, addiction, leading to destructive events (loss of money, waste of assets, duels, crimes, etc.).

Dostoevsky himself was a passionate roulette player, as evidenced by the letters to his older brother, confessing that he had even invented a system of observation during the game that would help him to calculate his chances of winning. On the other hand, in his literary career, a critical situation arose when he began working on the novel, as he took a great risk concerning his copyright and remuneration for the next nine years. He made an agreement with publisher Feodor Stellovsky, who requested a new novel to be ready until November 1, 1866. Given that this agreement was made in early October, Dostoevsky had less than a month to fulfill the deal. With his future wife's help, Anna Grigorevna Snitkina, who made the handwritten transcript of the novel, he was able to complete the volume in time (Burry, 2011, pp. 39-40). Obviously, the writer

¹ This aspect is described in *Cei 9 „I” sau cum compunem – Posibil ghid de compoziție după metoda ficționalistă* [*The 9 "I" or How One Composes Music – Possible Guide of Musical Composition after the Fictionalist Method*], by Dan Dediu (2012, collection *Muzica Viva*, Bucharest: Didactic and Pedagogical Publishing House, pp. 19-22), who establishes a unity of four elements which are involved in the process of artistic creation: calculus, hazard, *kairos*, diligence.

made a dangerous bet with himself, risking his career for the achievement of *The Gambler*.

From the point of view of social class affiliation, Dostoevsky was not a representative of a high social category, coming from a modest family and having a tumultuous life, with constant financial problems and efforts to secure his income. He faces the same problems as the protagonist of the novel, Aleksei Ivanovici, entering the world of casinos and risky adventures, which would catch him in their consuming mechanism. The writer's analytical mind focuses on the whole phenomenon generated by the roulette game, noting that "there are two games, one of gentlemen and one of plebeians, greedy, of all villains. (...) A gentleman, for example, could bet a thousand francs, if he is very rich, but only for play and fun, (...) he might even double it, but only out of curiosity, in order to observe his chances, to evaluate his luck, without any plebeian desire to win" (Dostoevsky, 2011, pp. 20-21). The distinction observed by Aleksei in Roulettenburg (the imaginary city in which the action of the novel takes place) is also present in the studies performed by researchers on the real phenomenon, who comment on the social differences between *beau joueur* or *blasé* and *mauvais genre* or *déclassé* (Burry, 2011, p. 41) based on their style of play; the aristocratic players have a disinterested participation, and the ones wishing financial gainings come with their own computing systems in order to anticipate the movement of the roulette wheel, being called "scientific players". These two categories are followed by another type of play, a poetic attitude which corresponds to Dostoevsky's perspective, who needed both the thrill of experiencing the power of hazard in real time and the material gains that would result from betting on a certain game system.

Casinos continued to be popular during the 20th century. Prokofiev's biography does not indicate a keen passion for roulette, even though he was invited to attend some game sessions. The Russian composer was a rather rational nature, enticed more by the "logical world of chess and the occasional game of bridge than the roulette wheel" (Burry, 2011, p. 50). Nevertheless, the composition of this opera could be perceived as a bet with the art world in the first decades of the 20th century, due to the constant challenge he felt in Western Europe, where the most wanted types of music were new genres in an avant-garde style. At Sergey Dyaghilev's request, Prokofiev had already composed the ballet *Alla and Lolli* (1914-1915), which was later transformed into the *Scythian Suite*. The great choreographer considered that opera was an old, obsolete genre, with no more potential, regarding ballet as the new point of interest for the fusion between arts in a modern syncretic performance. Prokofiev reacted positively to the challenge launched by Dyaghilev, in order to gain experience in a genre he had not approached before, but also in order to be promoted and asked for in avant-garde music, among other contemporary composers at that time, such as Igor Stravinsky. But the idea of creating a work by following the traditional line of his Russian predecessors did not leave him, as he began to search for a subject in the valuable

literature of the Russian culture, by which he would contribute to the evolution of the genre, combining tradition and innovation, beyond previous conventions.

By approaching Dostoevsky's novel, Prokofiev discovered some common features with his personality, although they had lived in successive centuries, in different historical contexts, in completely different families, which led to them having differing perspectives on the Russian social structure. However, Prokofiev found in Dostoevsky's literary style that dilemmatic attitude which is specific to intellectuals in general, characterized by constant questioning and tormenting, by having a deep intuition of human nature, which sometimes becomes reducible to basic impulses and obsessions. Dostoevsky and Prokofiev shared the perception of the absurd in the surrounding world, which they approached (each with their specific artistic means – literary and musical) from a detached, lucid, sarcastic perspective. Like Dostoevsky, Prokofiev was not an idealist, but a realistic creator and an investigator of human psychology, aiming to reflect genuine truths through his art, things that are much deeper than everyday life.

3. The Dostoevskian epic style – a symbiosis between realism and fantasy. Dialogism, polyphony, literary ventriloquism (in Mikhail Bakhtin's vision)

In the context of 19th century European prose, which was predominantly romantic through its topics and motifs (love, heroism, genius, human condition, historical, folkloric, fantastic themes), Dostoevsky's novels are individualized through a multivalent approach: on the one hand, the general context concerns the environment and the society of the 19th century, both in the Russian area and in Western Europe, presenting the real life, concerns and mentality of people from different social categories; on the other hand, certain features indicate the focus of the writer's attention on particular, isolated or generalized cases. The situations presented by the author, either inspired by his own experiences or imagined as extreme events, have the ability to take the reader out of the comfort of pleasant readings, because Dostoevsky has that epic brilliance which generates atypical characters and unusual, bizarre, even shocking situations. Even if the basic idea of literature is to present extraordinary heroes and unexpected facts, in Dostoevsky's prose things go far beyond this level: the characters – seemingly ordinary people, who live banal lives – become protagonists of radical, shocking, even terrifying events for the readers. The ultimate purpose of his work seems to be the exploration of human limits and social boundaries by testing the consequences of their violation in an imaginary universe, based on the real world, in which things can happen differently.

If one briefly researches the writer's biography, one may deduce the evolution of an anxious, unstable personality, definitely determined by the dominant figure of the father, killed by his own servants – a tragic event that left irreversible marks on young Fyodor's psyche, causing him seizures of epilepsy and a condition of internal fever that would follow him until the end of his life.

His predisposition for excess and “strong feelings” would cause him problems with gambling, the desire for expensive trips, the emergence of strange passions, leading to frequent risky love affairs, aspects that prevented him from living a decent life. Out of this reason, he often got himself involved into critical situations with usurers, creditors and even with the editors of his works, being constrained to write a novel such as *The Gambler* within a month in order to be completed and delivered on time.

Therefore, the problem of **fantastic realism** in the novel *The Gambler*, which will also be found in Prokofiev’s opera, cannot be debated only by a strict analysis of the volume. The aspects that determined the theme, the characters’ psychology, the consequences and the denouement of the novel are based on a series of biographical factors, corroborated with the psychology of the writer himself. This is why the narrator’s voice reinforces the impression of organic realism behind the facts, which overflows into the imaginary world of the novel through excesses and irremediable consequences.

Regarding the dynamics of the text, the characters’ interaction and the importance of the narrative voice in relation to the dialogue between them, there are studies of literary theory, semiotics, narratology, which analyze Dostoevsky’s epic speech in detail. An important researcher in this direction is the critic, philosopher and semiotician Mikhail Bakhtin (1895-1975), contemporary with Prokofiev, who introduced unusual terms in his theoretical works, such as *dialogism*, *polyphony*, *ventriloquism*, which have metaphorical meanings due to their polyvalency in the field of arts.

In order to understand Bakhtin’s perception on dialogue, we must start from the fundamental concept of “voice”, which has a metaphorical significance in a literary context, referring to those characters with complex psychology, whose presence, way of thinking, participation in dialogue and pattern of action decide the course of important events in the novel. The relationship between characters, between these “voices” carrying conscience, generates an interaction with a deeper value than dialogue as a means of communication, determining the phenomenon called *dialogism* by Bakhtin. Dostoevsky had the gift of intuition regarding the existence of dialogic relations in all manifestations of human beings in general, both at the levels of extroverted personality and of internalized consciousness. This aspect can also be found in his manner of writing, which emphasizes the existence of two verbal levels, called by Bakhtin the “great dialogue” and the “microdialogue” (Bakhtin, 1984, p. 40): the first type refers to all relations established between external and internal elements of the novel, between reality and literature (for example, the link between the real city Baden Baden, where Dostoevsky himself played roulette, and the imaginary town named Roulettenburg in the novel *The Gambler*, where Aleksei begins to play this game); the microdialogue refers to the dialogical duality that is impregnated in the text, in the characters’ speeches, gestures and facial expressions, conferring depth and indicating the presence of a psychological background much wider than

it seems in their verbal appearance. These epic-dramatic features underline the theatrical potential of the novel, which Prokofiev used in the musical field.

The main idea of the volume written by Mikhail Bakhtin (*Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, 1963) is the emergence of the polyphonic novel as a new literary genre, created by Dostoevsky, because his work does not fit any of the previous historical-literary typologies identified and classified by critics when analyzing the European novels during the 19th century. "In his works a hero appears whose voice is constructed exactly like the voice of the author himself in a novel of the usual type. A character's word about himself and his world is just as fully weighted as the author's word usually is; it is not subordinated to the character's objectified image as merely one of his characteristics, nor does it serve as a mouthpiece for the author's voice. It possesses extraordinary independence in the structure of the work; it sounds, as it were, *alongside* the author's word and in a special way combines both with it and with the full and equally valid voices of other characters." (Bakhtin, 1984, p. 7) Thus, Dostoevsky's characters appear as autonomous people, with their own beliefs and doubts, whose manifestation does not leave the impression that the narrator is somewhere above all, directing their replies, their actions, their life. In fact, the narrator is merely a voice which presents the places, the people, the situations objectively, but cannot be confused with Dostoevsky himself, allowing the characters to dialogue naturally, without the impression of embodying any authorial perspective. Dostoevsky disappears among the characters, as Bakhtin states: "A plurality of independent, unmerged voices and consciousnesses, a genuine polyphony of fully valid voices is in fact the main characteristic of Dostoevsky's novels." (Bakhtin, 1984, p. 6)

Bakhtin's utterance during his literary and linguistic analysis drew our attention through the terms he used and the comparisons he made with musical art: "Indeed, the essential dialogicality of Dostoevsky is in no way exhausted by the external, compositionally expressed dialogues carried on by the characters. The polyphonic novel is dialogic through and through. Dialogic relationships exist among all elements of novelistic structure; that is, they are juxtaposed contrapuntally." (Bakhtin, 1984, p. 40) The terminology with musical connotations from the critical comments on Dostoevsky literature indicates an intrinsic connection that the semiotician feels between the epic content of the novel and its theatrical-musical latencies. The *polyphony* to which Bakhtin refers indicates an interweaving structure of observations on reality, society and human soul with the possible interpretation of the existential complexity from the perspective of musical syntaxes: "The essence of polyphony lies precisely in the fact that the voices remain independent and, as such, are combined in a unity of a higher order than in homophony. (...) This could be an analogy with polyphony and with the contrapuntal combination of voices in a fugue." (Bakhtin, 1984, p. 21)

Another idea conveyed by Bakhtin when analysing the language and the connections between the dialogical discourse and the psychological profile of the

characters is *ventriloquism*. Starting from the meaning given for the term “ventriloquist”² in the *Explanatory Dictionary of the Romanian Language*, we are able to deduct that the phenomenon named “ventriloquism” by Bakhtin implies the transfer of ideas, states, judgements from one character to another. “Through ventriloquism, a person takes over, partially or totally, consciously or not, the voice of another. Bakhtin establishes a classification and opens a wide discussion on a particular case of ventriloquism, the term *difon*, classifying it into several categories, of which we mention: stylization, narration, parody, a dissimulated inner polemic, replica of dialogue and concealed dialogue.” (Trausan-Matu, 2009, p. 6)

Therefore, the narrator that can be felt behind the events imagined by Dostoevsky would be perceived as a mute character, intermingled among the other “voices”, without a distinctive face or control power exercised over the characters that are involved in the action. The voice of the narrator, which is so important in any epic literary genre, manifests itself subtly, like a ventriloquist who speaks through his characters, entering their lives and lending them his own ideas, or between them, in a reciprocal manner. In this case, narrative art becomes an elevated game, a symbolic level for the universe created in the literary world.

4. The opera *The Gambler* op. 24 – a work of youth composed by Sergey Prokofiev: typology, style, compositional value

Prokofiev composed *The Gambler* as an initial score with piano accompaniment between November 1915 and April 1916, while the orchestration was completed in January 1917. Even though he had already signed a contract with the *Mariinski Theatre* for the stage setting, the premiere was postponed due to the high difficulty of the score, but afterwards any artistic project of the institution was canceled due to the Russian Revolution in 1917. A few years later Prokofiev revised the score, simplifying certain moments, and the premiere finally took place at *Théâtre Royal de la Monnaie* in Brussels in 1929 with a libretto translated into French.

The libretto was conceived even from the project phase of the opera as a text in prose. It was accomplished by the composer himself, who kept many of the dialogues from Dostoevsky’s novel in order to ensure the authenticity of the score in relation to the original source. Prokofiev’s conception of the ideal libretto aimed at renouncing the versified support of poetic nature that was previously practiced in other European cultures. Its artistic purpose was to follow the content of the novel as accurately as possible and to expose the situations presented as realistically as possible: “I have tried as much as possible not to encumber the singers with superfluous conventions in order to give them freedom in the

² VENTRILOQUIST (noun) – person who can utter words without moving his lips and without opening his mouth, generating the impression that he speaks from the abdomen. From the French word *ventriloque*. (web source: <https://dexonline.ro>)

dramatic fulfillment of their roles. For the same reason the orchestration will be transparent, so that each word is audible, which is especially desirable in view of the incomparable Dostoevsky's text. I feel that the convention of writing operas on rhymed texts is a completely absurd convention. In this case, Dostoevsky's prose is clearer, sharper and more convincing than any verse." (Robinson, 1984, p. 99)

The genre in which *The Gambler* could be classified is that of "operadialogue", initiated from the previous century by A. Dargomajski with *The Stone Guest* (1869) and by M. Mussorgski with the works *The Marriage* (1868), *Boris Godunov* (1869-1873), *Khovanshchina* (1872-1880). Although the work is organized in four acts, the interior construction of the discourse is fluid, cursive, without the interruptions that existed in the Western European works, structured by numbers. The idea from which Prokofiev had started in creating this opera was the unity of the discourse, in the same direction as his Russian predecessors, whose compositional intentions reveal the same kind of inner unfolding. In *The New Grove's Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, the author of the article about *The Gambler* opera, Richard Taruskin, states that "Prokofiev hoped to achieve a 'scenic flexibility' that would rescue opera from its putative impasse and show it to be 'the most vivid and powerful of all the scenic arts'" (Taruskin, 2002, web source), while Dorothea Redepenning, the author of the general article about Sergey Prokofiev, considers that "the rapid changes of mood and expression, and a certain brevity in the various sections of the music, produce an effect close to the techniques of film cutting." (Redepenning, 2001, web source)

At this point in our research, we can make a connection with Mikhail Bakhtin's analysis of the linguistic and narrative discourse in the Dostoevskian prose, where he noticed the writer's particular interest in dialogue, leading to a whole literary theory on *dialogism*. Prokofiev understood very well the importance of this aspect in his future opera, emphasizing the exchange of short, unversified replicas in order to give the work a dynamic rhythm, a cursive evolution of the action, without solo stagnations or choral ensembles. The musical discourse features sung declamations and fragments with the indication "spoken", generating a vocal construction mostly based on melodized recitative and declamatory style.

The moments of deep sufferance and those of maximum tension determine a hyperchromatization of the entire vocal and orchestral discourse, based on repeating accents and sonorous structures made of arpeggios or chords, which follow one another obsessively, reaching sharp, strongly dissonant culminations of an expressionist character. Furthermore, the work also contains monologues with a more lyrical character, such as the moments of loneliness of the protagonist, who meditates either on his social position or the unstable feelings between him and Polina, aspects that ultimately condemn him to fall in the addiction to roulette and lead to his complete decay. (Please see the *Addenda*: Fig. 2 – the Old Lady's entry and her announcement about the General's disinheritance in act II; Fig. 3 – scene of General's despair from act III and Fig.

4 – the end of the work, marked by Polina’s stormy exit from the stage and Aleksei’s exclamation regarding the red colour of the roulette).

Inevitably, we come to wonder whether there is any connection between the descriptive and portraying force of Prokofiev’s music and the principle of leitmotif associated with characters, situations, feelings, abstract ideas. Generally speaking, there are certain melodic lines or sonorities with a characterizing function for the main characters and sonorous description of the key-moments, but there are no generating, recurring, symbolic motifs. Even the roulette wheel, which appears several times during the opera, is not always displayed in the same way, because it is not associated with a clearly defined rhythmic-melodic structure, but it can be recognized by inserting some fast, rapid fragments, in small values, usually with a gradual melodic movement, alternating the upward and the downward direction, suggesting the circular motion.

The image shows a musical score for S. Prokofiev's *The Gambler*, act IV, mark no. 625 minus 3 measures, plus 5 ms. The score is in G major and 2/4 time. It features a vocal line for Aleksei (Алексей) and piano accompaniment. The vocal line includes the lyrics: "По - ли - на! / Рау - ли - не! / Рау - ли - не!". The piano accompaniment consists of a right-hand part and a left-hand part. Two specific passages in the piano part are highlighted with red boxes. The first box highlights a passage in the upper register of the piano, and the second box highlights a passage in the lower register. The score is marked with dynamics such as *f* and *ff*.

Fig. 1 S. Prokofiev, *The Gambler*, act IV, mark no. 625 minus 3 measures, plus 5 ms.

The musical language reflects the tendency towards the avant-garde desired and appreciated by the Western public in the context of 1915-1916, featuring chromaticisms and dissonances, sonorous mixtures and dense orchestral textures. This was also the composer’s purpose, who was experimenting genres, styles, sonorities that would be accepted by the public of those times. Prokofiev composed within the limits of the extended tonality, using also bitonal and polytonal structures, with numerous additional elements, which make the score sound harshly and roughly. His artistic language can be compared with Richard Strauss’s style in the two operas entitled *Salomeea* (1903-1905) and *Elektra* (1906-1908) – works that were completed and performed on stage before *The Gambler* –, but on other coordinates of musical thinking and cultural context. Therefore, Prokofiev’s opera, although inspired by classical Russian literature and having stylistic reference to Mussorgski’s works,

approaches both the post-romantic style and the aesthetics of expressionism, whose premises have existed since the first decade of the twentieth century. The subject, rather typical for the romantic melodramas in the 19th century, reflects to some extent an expressionist orientation, through the psychology of the characters who live hectic lives, in contrast to their social status or financial situation, reaching extreme reactions (uncontrolled outbursts, desperate shouts, loss of contact with reality) that are similar to the pathological features of German composers' works for the stage.

Writing about his own creation, Prokofiev revealed the existence of four stylistic strains during the composition of *The Gambler*: "neoclassical, toccata-like ('this perhaps the least important'), lyrical, and the modern trend... the search for a language in which to express powerful emotions" (Porter, 1962, p. 529). As concerns expressionism, the composer does not specifically refer to it, most probably due to the use of the term in a restricted area at that time, in the context of German literature and painting. In music it had not been yet theorized and applied as a new compositional trend. Instead, Prokofiev refers to another stylistic term more frequently encountered in the context of European music of the time, grotesque, which he preferred to avoid when speaking about his works. He would rather use the traditional character of *scherzo* and its implicit features: humor, playfulness, simulacrum, a whimsical or burlesque style. These aspects can be found not only in *The Gambler* opera, but in all his creation.

The music conceived by Prokofiev for this work has revealed, even since his youth, his musical gift of transposing the conflicts and the psychology of the characters inside the sonic discourse, either through wide melodic sinuosities, in a postromantic manner, either through rhythmic-melodic *ostinatos*, harmonic tensions and ruptures, or through suggestive orchestral elements. A pertinent observation regarding the relationship between Aleksei and the specific musical language can be found in a musical review signed by Alex Ross, a highly experienced musicologist and journalist for *The New Yorker*, where he presents his impressions generated by the premiere of *The Gambler* at the *Metropolitan Opera* in 2001: "Prokofiev's orchestra is a machinelike apparatus of banging rhythms and grinding bitonal chords. But this monomaniacal accompaniment is best understood as a substitute for Aleksei's first-person narration. The *ostinatos* are like the mechanical pistons of his compulsion." (Ross, 2001, web source)

Therefore, at the level of the sonic syntax, Prokofiev uses equally homophonic and polyphonic textures, with a high chromatic density, combining the horizontal level, represented by the characters' vocal lines, with the vertical aspect, which is the entire orchestra – a living, dynamic organism which creates the impression that it breathes in empathy with the soloists' experiences. Like Dostoevsky, Prokofiev had a particular gift when speaking of intuition and understanding human complexity, reflecting the characters' psychological contradictions through interesting plurivocality, in which vocal

and orchestral lines overlap in a dense texture. Even though polyphony cannot be found in the *ad litteram* sense of the baroque style of writing music, the coexistence of bitonal or even polytonic harmonic layers could reflect the social categories (blase aristocrats, lower-classed plebeians and the middle-class intellectuals who seek a place in the social world, as Aleksei himself observes), the psychological sides of the characters and the constant confrontations within their souls.

In 1931, Prokofiev worked on a musical project representing the orchestral suite entitled *Four Portraits and Denouement from "The Gambler"*, in which he reorganized the musical material used in the opera for each of the four main characters (Aleksei, the Old Lady, the General and Polina), conceiving a sonic characterization for each of them, based on the essential features extracted from the action of the work. The last part of the suite brings an additional commentary on *The Gambler's* ending, a final movement conceived as a postlude with a conclusive character, in which the motif of the circular motion symbolizing the roulette is reworked, processed and transformed into a genuine "genetic mutant" of the initial theme, illustrating the devouring force of the game, which consumes all the characters involved in the novel.

5. Conclusions

In the field of literary criticism, the heroes imagined by Dostoevsky in his novels are perceived as *alter egos* of the author himself, reflecting human nature with the numerous hypostases, stages, developments. *The Gambler* emphasizes a particular face or, rather, a predisposition of the human personality represented either by the aspiration towards the unknown, the courage of trying new experiences, or by sliding into obsession and losing contact with reality. Both Feodor Dostoevsky's novel and Sergey Prokofiev's eponymous opera are real-life artistic projections focused on the hypostasis of risk, chance and challenge, which come under the influence of the force of hazard.

In order to support these observations, I have used the linguistic concepts that were created by the semiotician and literary critic Mikhail Bakhtin, highlighting the subtle interplay between realism and fantasy in Dostoevsky's literary style, the polyphony and dialogical relation between characters, as well as the epic level beyond the facts, where the narrator's voice "speaks" similarly to a ventriloquist, in a hidden and subtle manner, like a consciousness that remains permanently active in people's lives. Prokofiev, through his musical composition, talent and fine psychological observations, achieved a synthesis of the literary, social, historical features from the 19th century through a scenic work of strong impact, with expressionist elements, with a concise libretto and being focused on dialogue. *The Gambler* is conceived in a declamatory style, associated with modern musical language, containing acid sonorities and using

extended tonality. Even if it's not among the Russian writer's most famous novels and in Prokofiev's creation is considered a youth stage work, the value of the opera is undeniable, from the ideational substratum to the sonic means used by the composer with great talent and musical artistry.

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Dialogistica_lui_Bahtin_ventrilogism_polifonie_carnavalesc1

Score: Prokofiev, S. (2015). *Igrok* [*The Gambler*] op. 24. Saint Petersburg

Addenda

Fig. 2 S. Prokofiev, *The Gambler*, act II, marks no. 290-292

290 V.1 pizz.
p

Бабуленька (оборачиваясь к Генералу, очень широко)
Le Grand-Mère (se tournant vers le Général, largement) rit.
 Die Großmutter (zum General gewandt, breit)

291 *Andante*
 А нег
 Mais pas un
 Doch Geld be -

f pesante

Полина, Алексей и растерянный Генерал следуют за Бабушкой. Blanche уходит под руку с князем Нильским.
Pauline, Alexis et le Général, troublé, suivent la Grand-Mère. Blanche s'en va au bras du prince Nilsky.
 Pauline, Alexej und der aus der Fassung geratene General folgen der Großmutter. Blanche geht am Arm des Fürsten Nilsky ab.

292

Баб.
 Gr. M.
 а те бе не дам.
 sou, pas un pour toi.
 -kommst du von mir nicht.

f

ЗАНАВЕС
 RIDEAU
 VORHANG

f

Fig. 3 S. Prokofiev, *The Gambler*, act III, marks no. 424-426

424 (захлебываясь)
 (suffoquant)
 (weinend)

Ген.
 Gen.
 Не - бла - го - дар - ношь!
 De l'in-gra-ti - tu - de!
 un - dank - bar bist du!

Не - бла - го...
 De l'in-gra...
 Ganz un-dank...

f molto espress.

Ген.
Gen.
He . бла . го... ..го - дар - ность...
de l'in - gra... ..ti - tu - de...
ganz un - dank... ..bar bist du...

Quart. Tr. be.
mp *f* *mf*

Ген.
Gen.
... дар - ность... Hei Hei
... ti - tu... Hei Hei
... bist du... Hei Hei

425 **[SREBOSCHI] (suscitant) (suscitant)**

ff *f* *ff*

2 Arpe gliss.
Tuba

Ген.
Gen.
и Hei Hei A!
Hei Hei Hei A!
Hei Hei Hei A!

Tr. ni con sord.
Tr. be con sord. V. ni. Ob. Cor.
espress. *f* *ff*

Занавес
Rideau
Vorhang

Ген.
Gen.
ad libitum (—) (—)

3 3 3 3
fff

8.....

Fig. 4 S. Prokofiev, *The Gambler*, act IV, marks no. 626-629

(УБИТЫМ ГОЛОСОМ)
(D'une voix morte)
(Mit einer toten Stimme)

626 ritard.

Ал.
Al.
По - ли - на...
Pau - li - ne...
Pau - li - ne...

Cor.

627 Andante assai

Ал.
Al.
И все же... И все же... Не мо - жет быть...
Quand mê - me... Quand mê - me... C'est i - pou - i...
Und den - noch... Und den - noch... Es kann nicht sein...

V. I, Celli *espress.*

628 Moderato

Ал.
Al.
Кто б мог по - ду - мать... Два - ацать раз под - ряд вы - шла
C'est in - croy - a - ble... Oui, vingt fois de sui - le... oui, le
Wer wird es glau - ben... Zwan - zig - mal kam Rot, im - mer

(Внепившись руками в стол с деньгами и устремив глаза к невидимой рулетке.)
(Il s'accroche à la table couverte d'argent, les yeux sur une roulette invisible.)

629 ЗАНАБЕГ
RIDEAU
VORHANG

Ал.
Al.
крас - на - я! Ха - ха!
rouge est sor - ti! Ha - ha!
wie - der Rot! Ha - ha!