

AMURCON 2020  
International Scientific ConferenceFEATURES OF SALIERIAN BIOGRAPHY IN PUSHKIN'S  
TRAGEDY *MOZART AND SALIERI*

P. N. Tolstoguzov (a)\*, E. V. Tolstoguzova (b), L. N. Kaputsyna (c),  
V. D. Galechko-Lopatina (d)  
\*Corresponding author

(a) Sholom-Aleichem Priamursky State University, 70a Shirokaya St., Birobidzhan, Russia, pnt59@mail.ru  
(b) Sholom-Aleichem Priamursky State University, 70a Shirokaya St., Birobidzhan, Russia, evt5757@mail.ru  
(c) Sholom-Aleichem Priamursky State University, 70a Shirokaya St., Birobidzhan, Russia, lidiya\_kap49@mail.ru  
(d) Sholom-Aleichem Priamursky State University, 70a Shirokaya St., Birobidzhan, Russia, halechkovera@mail.ru

**Abstract**

Biographical motifs and the construction of biographical discourse form the most important, in our opinion, component of the content in Pushkin's tragedy «Mozart and Salieri», and their analysis clarifies additional aspects of the tragic conflict. In the tragedy there is a hero with a distinct, genre-oriented biographical characteristic (Salieri), who is opposed by the hero of impulsive life manifestations (Mozart). This contrast, along with others, needs to be understood and to attract the appropriate context. Salieri combines the normative hero of classical biography and the demonic theomachist of romantic worlds. At the same time, for the Pushkin context, it should not be so much about the clash of the Salerian and Mozartian principles (this conflict mainly exists only in Salieri's mind, it is almost not expressed by the external clashes of the characters), but about the nature of the dual-interpreted tragic self-determination. This is the main topic. It was also emphasized by biographical parallels with the cultural figures mentioned in the tragedy: Gluck, Piccini, Raphael, Dante, Haydn, Beaumarchais, Michelangelo. Biographical parallels, like the counterpoint of classical and romantic, leave the Salerian biography in the deliberately unfinished and problematic form. Salieri's desire to move from the concept of a well-deserved award (the first monologue) to the concept of a confidential choice (the second monologue and finale) cannot complete his biography in a clear and worthy way, since the world may initially be unfairly arranged, and his, Salieri, selectness may only be invented by himself.

2357-1330 © 2021 Published by European Publisher.

*Keywords:* Pushkin Drama, small tragedies, the conflict in the «Mozart and Salieri» tragedy, Salerian biography



This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 Unported License, permitting all non-commercial use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.

## 1. Introduction

Salieri's biography in the Pushkin tragedy «Mozart and Salieri» is the main form of antagonist hero disclosure – in the traditional understanding of this word. Accordingly, a careful literary analysis of the biographical motives in this case clarifies the significant aspects of the main conflict.

## 2. Problem Statement

Both large conceptual monologues of the first scene, which Salieri utters, contain a coherent picture of life from birth and childhood to the era of life and creative maturity (the first monologue) and fundamental biographical moments related to the hero's attitude to death (the second monologue).

At the same time, Mozart is given in deliberately mosaic manifestations, not connected by a distinct and end-to-end biographical canvas: «passing by the tavern, suddenly heard a violin» (Pushkin, 1960, p. 324), «my insomnia languished me at night» (ibid., p. 326), «I played on the floor with my boy» (ibid., p. 330) «there is one motive... I keep holding it when I'm happy...» (ibid., p. 330). Mozart's actions have the character of an impromptu («I wanted to treat you to an unexpected joke»), his story about the reason for his own inspiration is built as a mystical experience of an uncoordinated, at first glance, phenomenon («all at once — a deathly vision, a sudden gloom or something of that sort» (ibid., p. 326); this vision will prove to be accurate foresight, but later).

Only the appearance of a black person forms this incoherent mosaic into some kind of premonition of fate, again unclear and seemingly random («strange case»). The hero-monologist Salieri addresses his words to the city and the world, his position is thought out in advance and is public in its own way (it remains «public-rhetorical», if we use the expression by Bakhtin — Bakhtin, 1975, p. 293), although it is framed as soliloquia, while Mozart is always involved in private dialogue which is characterized by spontaneous reactions of this speech form («well! right? perhaps» — Pushkin, 1960, p. 327). Upset, tormented by bad premonitions at the beginning of the second scene, he is instantly distracted from his mood when remembering Beaumarchais (therefore, it sounds completely fantastic to suggest that Salieri could put poison into Mozart's glass right in front of the latter, see: Chumakov, 2008; Broitman, 2004).

So, we are given, on the one hand, a hero with a distinct biographical characteristic (Salieri), on the other - a hero of some impulsive life manifestations (Mozart). This contrast, along with others, needs to be understood and to attract the appropriate context, which is the main research task in our case.

## 3. Research Questions

The subject under study is a conflict in Pushkin's tragedy «Mozart and Salieri» in the aspect of the biographical context. Key research questions: 1) what are the main cultural signs of biographies in the Pushkin tragedy? 2) are there any contradictions or any kind of semantic strains between these features? 3) can we talk about the presence of external and internal biographical parallels in the tragedy?

#### 4. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study is to clarify the nature of the tragic conflict in Pushkin's «little tragedy» «Mozart and Salieri» (1830) using a heterogeneous biographical context.

#### 5. Research Methods

The methods of our research are typological analysis, as well as literary and cultural comparative studies, see: (Alekseeva, 2018).

#### 6. Findings

The Pushkin autobiography of Salieri has distinct signs of classical (normative) biography. These are these signs according to Bakhtin (Forms of time and chronotop in the novel): life as a path to truth (school of life), the pedagogical normality of the hero (his phenomenon at the time of «maturity and fullness of life»), predestination of the main life vector, distinct professional identity: profession as the highest form of life activity (Bakhtin, 1975, pp. 281, 287).

Life as a school and as a path to truth — this concept is consecrated by the names of ancient authors, primarily Seneca and Phaedrus. We study not for school, but for life — says this concept (Seneca). We learn from examples (Phaedrus). These were common places of classicism, which were manifold in the drama of this large style. Mentor is an almost constant character in this drama. The situation of a wise mentor and a respectful, extremely attentive student is a key to the biography of the classical hero.

Salieri's life is also a cheerful following the one who leads you out of delusion and leads to the truth («the great Gluck» — Pushkin, 1960, p. 324). Self-denial and concentration, achievements in art and in life of a «high degree» (ibid., p. 324) embody a biographical norm. Salieri's words about Mozart «he will not leave us an heir» (ibid., p. 328) implicitly formulate the principle of hardworking epigonry as the only faithful school and life tactics.

So, Salieri is the result of a classic biography of the character who is disappointed in his righteous or, at least, heroic works.

At the same time, the Pushkin biography of Salieri contains significant contradictions. So already in Salieri's first monologue, the most classical in terms of the main features, what is usually called the Pushkin Shakespeare of characters is manifested (Lukov & Zakharov, 2008). The theme of Mozart's unfair, from the point of view of the antagonist protagonist, but ingenious «madness» introduces the Kantian concept of genius as the ability to do something that cannot be taught. (Opposition genius — artisan will arise in Pushkin's work after «Mozart and Salieri» once again: in «Egyptian Nights» — see: (Koshelev, 2018.)

And Salieri at the same time also turns out to be a genius — he is a genius of envy. He is capable to envy the rival deeply and painfully, that is according romantic point of view — truly. In the romantic worlds the passion justifies everything. Schematically speaking, the classical villain is almost always accused, romantic — is almost always justified. Salieri is justified by his own passion, that is beyond his mind, it is deep envy.

It is not only, though principal, sign of romantic interpretation of this character. Not clear preromantic demonism is shown also in words about Izora's gift, see: (Vatsuro, 1974). The biographic motive of reached happiness, and peaceful enjoyment of «work, success, glory» (Pushkin, 1960, p. 324) in the first monologue openly and sharply contradicts the confessions in the second monologue in which life appears as «an intolerable wound», and the hero's «thirst for death» (ibid., p. 328) rises from time to time.

The logic of Salieri's reasoning also contains contradictions, essential to our subject. The initial statement that there is no truth neither on the earth, nor in the sky is metaphorically underlined with clarity of «simple scale» (ibid., p. 324), and it is in turn connected contextually with a Pythagorean and Nicomachean scale connecting the earth and heights in the music of spheres. And if in tradition the music of spheres connects different plans of life, then here it becomes a symbol of world dissonance.

In the same monologue, however, we meet the appeal to the sky as to the higher justice instance again: «Oh, heaven, where is the justice?» (ibid., p. 324). In the second monologue there is an *izbrannichestvo* subject («I have been chosen to stop him» — ibid., p. 327) which inevitably asks: whom is he elected by? Is it self-electiveness or the hero feels as if he is a tool of the highest forces which have already been disavowed by him? In other words, the ethical and legal consciousness of the protagonist antagonist is extremely confused and even turned inside out — justice is reached through violation of divine and human laws.

It, perhaps, the real Shakespearian logic (cf. in «Hamlet»: the time is out of joint: o cursed spite, that ever I was born to set it right), but in his late, Shillerian, preromantic, radicalized treatment, that is extremely pointed. Cf. in «Robbers»: O über mich Narren, der ich wähnete, die Welt durch Greuel zu verschönern, und die Gesetze durch Gesetzlosigkeit aufrecht zu halten! Ich nannte es Rache und Recht (Oh, I'm a fool: I hoped to improve the world with villainy, and to execute the law with lawlessness; and I called it [fair] revenge and the [highest] justice). The logic of robber Karl Moor is close to the logic of Salieri.

This is how Salieri combines the normative hero of the classical biography and the demonic theomachist of the romantic worlds. So, in the tragedy by Pushkin, the positions of the antagonist and the protagonist are confused, or rather, they form a biographical counterpoint that takes the conflict beyond the villain — righteous situation into the space of redundancy of the tragic «I» in relation to the close and unjust world order, see: (Tyupa, 2004).

In this regard, perhaps, for the Pushkin context, it should be not so much about the collision of the Salierian and Mozartian principles (this conflict mainly exists only in the mind of Salieri, it is almost not expressed by the external clashes of characters), but about the nature of the ambiguously interpreted tragic self-will. It is the main subject. It is also emphasized by biographical parallels with the cultural figures mentioned in the tragedy: Gluck, Piccinni, Raphael, Dante, Haydn, Beaumarchais, Michelangelo.

The biographical parallel is the method of biographical narration dating back to Plutarch (see: Averintsev, 1973). It involves the establishment of both similarities and significant differences between the heroes of the compared biographies — with an obligatory moralistic component. The names of Gluck and Piccini mentioned in Salieri's first monologue connect to the hero's biography the context of the well-known musical dispute of the 18th century second half between the supporters of Gluck's renewed opera-seria (gluckists) and supporters of the spectacular music of the traditional Italian school (piccinnists). Salieri, on the one hand, positions himself as a gluckist («I followed ... vigorously after him» — Pushkin, 1960,

p. 324, — that is after Gluck), on the other hand, he notes the fascination of Piccinni's music. It is possible to understand it as a rare ability to rise over a fight. This interpretation of the motive is confirmed by the fact that Salieri, perhaps, like no contemporaries, is able to understand Mozartianism with its «depth, courage and harmony» (ibid., p. 327), freely overcoming the main aesthetic conflicts of the era, see: (Tolstoguzov, 2018).

In the second monologue there is a name of Haydn, and Mozart is called «another Haydn» («another Haydn will create new greatnesses — wherein I will delight» — Pushkin, 1960, p. 328), which was reflected in the post factum accuracy of the cultural and biographical detail: Mozart is twenty-odd years younger than Haydn and immediately follows him in the list of outstanding composers of the Viennese classical school, and also renews Hayden's symphonism with his trademark harmonic symmetry of sound and deep dramatic content. The nonliterary biography of Salieri demonstrates: he was the first conductor-performer of the well-known fortieth symphony of Mozart (Abert, 1990), where the genius of «another Haydn» was shown fully.

Another parallel arises in connection with the names of Beaumarchais and Michelangelo, whose connection with Pushkin's work in the context of tragedy and in a more general context has been repeatedly noted, see: (Vatsuro, 1974; Volpert, 1977). These names mark the contrast of biographically funny and biographically serious. Ridiculous (according to Voltaire assessment, reproduced by Pushkin) is Beaumarchais, and serious is melancholic (according to contemporaries) Michelangelo. The names of both are associated with legendary murders — for everyday reasons (Beaumarchais) and in the name of art (Michelangelo). «Reread The Marriage of Figaro» (Pushkin, 1960, p. 330)— this advice is addressed not only to the interlocutor, but also to the reader / viewer who is well acquainted with the comedy: that is, understand that this is a dark matter (an expression repeated several times by Beaumarchais's characters), where envy and deception form the main intrigue, but in the end it is happily resolved.

The parallels with Mozart and Salieri are obvious here, but not simple. The name Beaumarchais arises in the course of a monologue between the characters, while Michelangelo is present in the play as Salieri's previously unspoken internal argument in favor of his decision: a genius may be capable of committing a crime in the name of art. «Salieri is not afraid to pronounce the name Beaumarchais, because he does not put the comedian in any connection with his terrible plan. He would have been careful not to pronounce the name of Michelangelo Buonarotti, about whose “act”, as one might suppose, he had been thinking for a long time. It is no coincidence that Mozart's killer, having committed his atrocity, immediately remembers the «creator of the Vatican». In his eyes, Buonarotti is a genius and therefore has the right to a “great” crime in the name of high art. Not like the author of funny comedies, “funny” Beaumarchais with his vulgar legend» (Volpert, 1977, p. 118).

But if Salieri in the end does not have the right to act before himself and considers himself chosen in vain, then, therefore, his act is dictated by ordinary envy and also in a sense ridiculous, the consciousness of which should be unbearable for him. So, serious and ridiculous motives, if they do not change places in the tragedy, then in any case they acquire a certain eccentric.

Here in the Salerian biography a significant moment is revealed. The original title of the tragedy «Envy» reflected the concept of cataloged characterology, dating back to Theophrastus and Plutarch, as well as to the literature of the moralists of the Renaissance and New Age. Since antiquity, the victory over

envy has been one of the standard stoic exercises (compare, for example, this topic in its educational version in Krylov's «Mail of Ghosts»), and the metaphor of the snake («Who will say that Salieri is proud to be / Ever envious despicable, / Snake, trampled people, live / Sand and dust gnawing powerlessly?» — Pushkin, 1960, p. 324) goes back to the ancient mythological context (serpentine Megaera, Eriny of envy), the Bible (you will eat ashes — in Genesis 3:14 faces the serpent, which Solomon 2:24 interprets as the devil in a state of envy: death entered the world with the envy of the devil), as well as to such famous stories of envy as Lafontaine's fable «Serpent and Saw» etc.

Moralists, as a rule, denounced envy as the insignificance of the soul (Vauvenargues). You can choose a number of similar widely known expressions (real friendship does not know envy — from La Rochefoucauld, etc.). Among these maxims, almost identical in content, the words of Rivarol are closest to Pushkin's tragedy: envy is silent. True, in the tragedy it is silent for Mozart, but clear to the viewer, turned to him as the confession of Salieri. All the more striking is the rehabilitation of envy on the part of Pushkin himself in his diary entry of 1831: «envy is the sister of competition, consequently from a good family» (Pushkin, 1962, p. 348). You can, of course, regard these words as an attempt at rehabilitation in front of critics like Katenin, but for Pushkin, such a scale will be too small. Most likely, we have before us not only the answer to literary critics, but also the author's interpretation of his own text. For the motive of envy in creativity and in Pushkin's biography, see, for example: (Bagno, 2018; Grigorieva & Lyapushkina, 2018).

The Raphael and Dante mentioned in the tragedy, at first glance, do not represent clear parallels to the main biographical conflict. At the same time, Pushkin's special attitude to these names and their carriers is known, see, for example: (Potashova, 2014; Vatsuro, 2000). It is unlikely that they arose in the tragedy by accident. The creative rivalry of Raphael and Michelangelo (!) described by Vasari is known. The soiling of «Raphael's Madonna» is the motif of Pushkin's early lyrics («Renaissance», 1819, where a prototypical conflict between the «barbarian artist» and the «genius» is outlined against the background of the future semantic complexity of Mozart and Salieri).

Dante, on the other hand, could have arisen as a completely clear indication for an educated reader of the fall of Salieri's soul from the purgatory of envious people into the deepest hell of traitors to friends and companions, where his sin receives the fullness of the Cain seal. Salieri's crime thus turns out to be a «parody» of the gravest crimes of Dante's heroes, and the «contemptible buffoon» (Pushkin, 1960, p. 326) from the «Dante's» replica of the hero turns out to be an unexpectedly significant parallel to his own words about the «contemptible envious» (ibid., p. 324).

In addition, the mention of Raphael and Dante implicitly contains a disciple-respectful gesture towards the classical tradition - «absolute and non-discussed» (Bukharkin, 2017, p. 9), and the mention of the unnamed Madonna Raphael is an implicit ephrasis (see: Mazur, 2018), which clearly places Salieri in the context of aesthetic conservatives, to which the aesthetics of Mozart is to a certain extent opposed, in which «a grave vision, a sudden gloom, or something like that» (Pushkin, 1960, p. 326) is possible, that is, a Gothic aesthetics close to sentimentalism and romanticism in the spirit of the Zhukovsky school, see: (Prozorov, 2016).

## 7. Conclusion

So, the biographical parallels in Pushkin's tragedy «Mozart and Salieri», as well as the counterpoint of the classical and the romantic discussed above, leave Salieri's biography unfinished and problematic. Salieri's desire to move from the concept of a well-deserved reward (the first monologue) to the concept of providential chosenness (the second monologue and finale) cannot complete his biography in a clear and dignified way, since the world, perhaps, was originally arranged unfairly, and his, Salieri, chosenness, perhaps was only invented by him.

## References

- Abert, G. V. (1990). *Mozart [Mozart]*. Part 2. Book 2. Muzyka. [in Russ.].
- Alekseeva, N. Yu. (2018). Nekotorye zamechaniya po povodu istorii russkoy literatury [Some comments on the work on the history of Russian literature]. *Russian literature*, 4, 7-14. [in Russ.].
- Averintsev, M. S. (1973). *Plutarch i antichnaya biografiya [Plutarch and ancient biography]*. To the question of the place of the classic genre in the history of the genre. Nauka. [in Russ.].
- Bagno, V. E. (2018). Dar dvoyakogo svoystva: chuzhoye slovo kak svoye, svoye slovo kak chuzhoye u Pushkina [The gift of two properties: someone else's word as his own, his word as a stranger to Pushkin]. *Russian literature*, 3, 5-18. [in Russ.].
- Bakhtin, M. M. (1975). *Voprosy literatury i estetiki [Issues of literature and aesthetics]*. Khudozhestvennaya literatura. [in Russ.].
- Broitman, S. N. (2004). Istoricheskaya poetika. [Historical poetics]. In N. D. Tamarchenko, V. I. Tyupa, & S. N. Broitman (Eds.), *A theory of literature*, V. 2 (pp. 1-348). Academy. [in Russ.].
- Bukharkin, P. E. (2017). Klassicheskaya traditsiya v russkoy literature [Classical tradition in Russian literature through the prism of receptive aesthetics]. *Russian literature*, 1, 7-15. [in Russ.].
- Chumakov, Yu. N. (2008). *Pushkin. Tyutchev. Opyt immanentnykh rassmotreniy [Pushkin. Tyutchev. Experience of inherent reviews]*. Languages of Slavic cultures. [in Russ.].
- Grigorieva, E. N., & Lyapushkina, E. I. (2018). Istoriya zavisti: Pushkin and Baratynsky [The story of one envy: Pushkin and Baratynsky]. *Russian literature*, 3, 153-163. [in Russ.].
- Koshelev, V. A. (2018). Pushkinskiy sujet ob improvizatore [Pushkin plot about the «improviser»]. *Russian literature*, 1, 61-72. [in Russ.].
- Lukov, V. A., & Zakharov N. V. (2008). Shakspirizatsiya I Shekspir [Shakespization and Shakespeare]. *Knowledge. Understanding. Skill*, 3, 253-256. [in Russ.].
- Mazur, N. N. (2018). «Ty videl devu?»: poetika i psikhologiya romanticheskogo ekfrasisa [«Did you see the virgin?»: poetics and psychology of romantic ekphrasis]. *Russian literature*, 3, 141-153. [in Russ.].
- Potashova, K. A. (2014). Fenomen Rafaelya v tvorchestve A. S. Pushkina i M. Yu. Lermontova: k probleme rodnogo i vselenskogo [The phenomenon of Raphael in the works of A. S. Pushkin and M. Yu. Lermontov: to the problem of native and universal]. *Modern problems of science and education: electronic scientific journal*, 4. <http://www.science-education.ru/ru/article/view?id=14154> [in Russ.].
- Prozorov, Yu. M. (2016). «Zanyalsya ot strakha dukh...»: «uzhasnoye» v estetike i poezii V.A. Zhukovskogo [«The spirit was engaged in fear...»: «terrible» in the aesthetics and poetry of V.A. Zhukovsky]. *Russian literature*, 2, 19-50. [in Russ.].
- Pushkin, A. S. (1960). *Sobraniye sotchineny v 10-ty tt [Collected works in 10 volumes]*. V. 4. Khudozhestvennaya literatura. [in Russ.].
- Pushkin, A. S. (1962). *Sobraniye sotchineny v 10-ty tt [Collected works] in 10 vols. V. 7*. Khudozhestvennaya literatura. [in Russ.].
- Tolstoguzov, P. N. (2018). Tragediya «Motsart i Salyeri»: fenomenologiya i kul'turologiya konflikta [The tragedy «Mozart and Salieri»: phenomenology and cultural studies of the conflict]. *Scientific dialogue*, 9, 192-202. [in Russ.].

- Tyupa, V. I. (2004). Tipy esteticheskogo zaversheniya [Types of aesthetic completion]. In N. D. Tamarchenko, V. I. Tyupa, & S. N. Broitman (Eds.), *A Theory of Literature, V. 1.*(pp. 54-77). Academy. [in Russ.].
- Vatsuro, V. E. (1974). Pushkin i Bomarshe [Pushkin and Beaumarchais]. *Pushkin: research and materials*, 7, 204-214. [in Russ.].
- Vatsuro, V. E. (2000). Pushkin i Dante [Pushkin and Dante]. In V.E. Vatsuro (Ed.), *Pushkinskaya Pora [Pushkin's time]* (pp. 235-253). Academic project. [in Russ.].
- Volpert, L. I. (1977). Pushkin i Bomarshe [Pushkin and Beaumarchais]. In E. A. Maimin (Ed.), *Pushkin collection* (pp. 54-62). Publishing house of the Leningrad State Pedagogical Institute. [in Russ.].