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**The Dialectics of Faustian and Mephistophelean Principles  
in I.S. Turgenev's Novella *Faust***

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**Abstract.** Examines the image of Faust in the works of I.S. Turgenev, based on his eponymous novella (1856). The study demonstrates that Turgenev's Faust is a complex and enriched figure, shaped by the interplay of European and Russian interpretations of this character, the writer's personal life experiences, and the social reality of Russia in the first half of the 19th century. The protagonist-narrator is not a direct embodiment of Goethe's Faust but rather a hybrid figure, blending traits of both Faust and Mephistopheles. Turgenev's Faust is characterized by an Antinomical fusion of contradictory qualities: a spirit of egoism and negation coexists within him alongside a pursuit of goodness, truth, and beauty. Through the protagonist, the writer fully explores the phenomenon of the reflective egoist, reinterpreting it through the lens of Christian moral ideals, as well as the pantheism of ancient and German thinkers. The author of the article concludes that Turgenev's Faust emerges as the outcome of a tension between two principles – natural (divine) and human, theistic and pantheistic. This tension generates an internal conflict that can only be

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resolved by relinquishing individuality and the self. Service to duty is presented as the sole path to achieving unity with the universal.

**Keywords:** image, hero-narrator, internal conflict, individuality

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## Диалектика фаустовского и мефистофелевского начал в повести И.С. Тургенева «Фауст»

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**Аннотация.** Цель исследования – установление различных факторов, благодаря которым образ Фауста в одноименной повести Тургенева усложняется и обогащается как результат взаимодействия русского и европейского типов сознания, а также благодаря проекции в этом образе личного жизненного опыта Тургенева и его восприятия социальной обстановки в России первой половины XIX в. Показано, что герой-повествователь не воплощен в образ Фауста Гёте непосредственно, а являет собой некий гибридный образ, в котором сочетаются черты Фауста и Мефистофеля. В ходе сравнительно-сопоставительного анализа доказывается, что тургеневский Фауст антиномически совмещает противоположные качества: эгоизм и нигилизм соединяются в нем со стремлением к добру, тягой к истине и красоте. В образе главного героя повести «Фауст» Тургенев раскрывает феномен постоянно рефлексизирующего эгоиста, осмысляя его в свете христианских моральных идеалов, а также пантеизма, античной и немецкой философии. В результате исследования делается вывод о том, что тургеневский образ Фауста порожден противостоянием двух

начал бытия, природного (Бога) и человеческого, теистического и пантеистического. Этим противостоянием порождается внутренний конфликт, который может быть преодолен только путем отказа от собственной индивидуальности, от своего «Я». Единственный способ достичь единства со всем сущим для Фауста Тургенева – это служение своему долгу.

**Ключевые слова:** образ, герой-рассказчик, внутренний конфликт, индивидуальность

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## Introduction

Turgenev's novella *Faust* is classified by scholars as belonging to the writer's second period. This work is a complex, multifaceted artistic text in which the author addresses various moral, philosophical, and social issues while proposing ways to resolve them. Foremost among these is the problem of an individual's right to personal happiness, even if it conflicts with his moral duty, as well as the mysteries of existence and each person's place in the world. The origins of Turgenev's dualistic, dichotomous worldview – as a master of words and a thinker – can be traced to a specific cultural-historical milieu, namely Western European culture. The work of this Russian writer was profoundly influenced by ancient thought and classical German philosophy (Hegel, Goethe, Shakespeare, Schiller). This is also noted by the Turgenev scholar G.A. Time, who remarks that in the writer's creative vision, ancient pantheism and the Western culture of theism intermingled closely (Time, 1997, p. 33). This interpenetration of philosophical – religious

systems in the writer's worldview predetermined his creation of ambiguous, contradictory artistic images, among which Turgenev's Faust is prominently included.

## Results and Discussion

The image of Faust is one of the “eternal images” in world literature. The figure of this character, which originates from a popular German legend, was employed by writers long before J.W. Goethe; the story of Doctor Johann Faust appears frequently in German literature from the second half of the 16th century. Known as “the famous wizard and sorcerer”, he symbolized the Renaissance itself in the texts of that period. The character's striking features include a thirst for knowledge and a protest against the mental conservatism characteristic of the Middle Ages. Later, the English dramatist Christopher Marlowe created his own version of Faust, in which the character appears as a heroic superman combining both tragic and comic elements. His compatriots, such as Jacob Lenz and Friedrich Klingler, who lived at the same time as Goethe, also wrote their versions of *Faust*. Furthermore, individual fragments of the Faust narrative are found in the literary heritage of authors such as George Wiedmann, Johann Pfitzer, Gotthold Lessing, and Friedrich Müller. In the first half of the 19th century, European writers depicted Faust as a heretic who had sold his soul to the devil, but Goethe emphasized a different aspect – the pursuit of truth and his redemption.

In Russia, Goethe's works were translated and adapted with an emphasis on romantic motifs, notably by V.A. Zhukovsky and D.V. Venetinov. However, quite soon the original version of the work also circulated among Russian readers. Its translation, in which the text was somewhat reinterpreted, was once presented to the public by A.S. Griboedov. He drew on the images of Doctor Faust and A.S. Pushkin. In his rendition, Faust appears as an indifferent skeptic who places himself above everything around him and suffers from boredom, sensing the futility of his life. The image created by Pushkin became a symbol of

the modern Russian man. Later, Turgenev further developed this line, portraying Faust as an embodiment of the quest for individual freedom.

In his review of Goethe's *Faust* translated by M.P. Vronchenko (1844), Turgenev commented on Faust's selfishness, noting that throughout the tragedy he is absorbed solely in thoughts of himself. Goethe's Faust "becomes the center of the surrounding world; he (unaware of his benevolent selfishness) does not yield to anything; he compels everything to yield to him; he lives with his heart, yet with a solitary, personal, not alien heart" (Turgenev, 1978, p. 202). In love, Faust is unhappy because he is fundamentally incapable of giving his attention to others. In public matters – which Faust might ponder over for a long time – he is equally useless, for he is unwilling to devote himself to serving the public duty: "For Faust, there is no society, no human race: he is entirely absorbed in himself; he awaits salvation from within himself," writes I.S. Turgenev in his review (Turgenev, 1978, p. 206).

According to the writer, in Goethe's Faust the Mephistophelean element is strikingly evident: "Mephistopheles is the demon in every person in whom reflection has been born; he is the embodiment of that negation which arises in the soul, entirely preoccupied with its own doubts and perplexities; he is the demon of solitary and detached individuals, people who are deeply disturbed by some minor contradiction in their own lives and who, with philosophical indifference, pass by an entire family of craftsmen dying of hunger" (Turgenev, 1978, p. 210).

It can even be said that Faust's soul is entirely permeated by the Mephistophelean spirit. His selfishness is very characteristic of the modern individual, in whom the primacy of "the autonomy of human reason and critique" is evident (Turgenev, 1978, p. 207). However, it should be noted that Faust is not a mere egoist, but a self-reflecting one, yearning to attain a higher meaning and faith. He passionately desires that reality which could be revealed to him provided that a person has his own personal God. Speaking of Turgenev's interpretation of Goethe's Faust, A.I. Batyuto remarks that Turgenev finds himself sometimes

in the position of Goethe, who merely respected ‘Christian morality,’ and sometimes in the position of Faust, with his thirst for happiness, faith, eternal youth, and immortality (Batyuto, 1972, p. 51).

The themes contemplated by contemporary European philosophers are clearly reflected in Faust’s quest for solutions to metaphysical problems – and, evidently, in Goethe’s own pursuit as well. Turgenev believed that these metaphysical problems represent “the fundamental principle of the Middle Ages, which was manifested in everything: in the very structure of society, in history, in poetry, and in art (recall the Gothic churches)” (Turgenev, 1978, p. 206). Moreover, the search for solutions to these problems, in the writer’s view, is the aspiration of all humanity to exist beyond its own earthly life (Turgenev, 1978, p. 207). These words clearly reveal that Turgenev believed medieval Christianity had a powerful influence on the formation of the Faust image.

The literary image of Faust has undergone a complex evolution – from a simplistic figure of a man who sold his soul to the devil, as depicted in European folklore, to a complex symbol of human aspiration for perfection and defiance of fate; it is precisely this evolution that particularly captured Turgenev’s attention and served as the basis for his novella.

The title of this novella is taken from the name of the tragic hero in Goethe’s work; however, as noted by T.B. Trofimova (2004) and I.A. Belyaeva (2014), it is replete with reminiscences and allusions to Dante Alighieri’s *Divine Comedy* as well as to A.S. Pushkin’s poem *Eugene Onegin*. Moreover, the novella *Faust* is in many respects autobiographical. For instance, in the commentary to I.S. Turgenev’s 30-volume *Complete Works and Letters*, a similarity is drawn between the image of Vera and a real girl – Maria, the sister of L.N. Tolstoy, whom Turgenev met in 1854 at the Tolstoy estate in Pokrovskoe. In Turgenev’s characterization of Maria, as conveyed in his letter to her, “certain traits of the external and internal appearance of Vera Yeltsova are captured, in which Turgenev emphasizes simplicity, ‘calmness,’ the ability to listen ‘attentively,’ to respond ‘simply and intelligently,’ the ‘clarity of



an innocent soul’ and the ‘touching charm’ of her ‘childlike’ purity” (Turgenev, 1980, p. 416). Maria Tolstaya and Vera Yeltsova are also united by the refinement typical of noblewomen of that time and by their adherence to Russian traditions. In *Faust*, Vera marries a man chosen by her mother, forgoing a union with her beloved. In this unhappy marriage, she displays humility by loving her husband as required by Christian faith. However, her encounter with her former lover, Pavel Alexandrovich, plunges her into a spiritual moral deadlock, from which Turgenev sees no escape except through her death.

The autobiographical nature of Turgenev’s novella *Faust* is also expressed in other elements of its plot, such as the fact that its main character goes to Berlin to study at a university and, upon graduating, returns to his estate, where he experiences boredom and suffers from an inability to adapt to country life. This can be seen as a parallel with the families of the Priimkovs and the Tolstoys – exemplary traditional noble families in which the spouses were unhappy.

One of the components contributing to the formation of Turgenev’s *Faust* was his subtle polemic with Goethe and other representatives of European thought on various ethical and philosophical issues. Thus, it can be said that in the novella *Faust* there are not only dialogues between the characters, between the characters and the author, and between the author and the reader, but also a dialogue between Turgenev and Goethe. In Goethe’s tragedy, the hero’s thirst for happiness is not restrained by a sense of moral responsibility, whereas for Turgenev the moral evaluation of the chosen path to happiness is of paramount importance. In reflecting on this issue and attempting to provide his own answer, Turgenev creates distinctive, tragic images of women.

The consciousness of the main heroine in *Faust* is shaped by dominant canonical texts. However, she mostly assimilates them passively, which has a destructive effect on her personality. It can be said that in Turgenev’s worldview, the images and fates of women serve as the reference point for what human life is meant to be and whether a person has the right to happiness.

Turgenev conveys his attitude toward Vera Yeltsova through the prism of the images of Faust and Mephistopheles: Vera simultaneously appears as a symbol of ideal inner harmony and as an object of destructive temptation; this duality endows her image with both complexity and tragedy.

In Pavel Alexandrovich, the character in *Faust*, one sees more of Mephistopheles than of Faust. This character even draws parallels with these Goethean figures himself. The Mephistophelean traits of a “spirit of negation” are vividly embodied in him. For example, he induces Vera to break her mother’s prohibitions and encourages her to create her own spiritual world (if any Faustian traits are present in him, they are only in the background; this will be discussed later). Against this backdrop, Vera’s mother, Yeltsova, with her very image, represents an outdated past that influenced the formation of both a character like Faust and Turgenev’s own personality.

Reflecting on how to “resolve the tragedy”, Turgenev concluded that neither Goethe nor Byron brought their characters to a reconciliation with themselves. Faust is a contradictory, dualistic figure who unites the past and the present. “A son of his past”, he carries within him “the beginning of a new era”. In Goethe’s poem, his image is the arena where the decaying Middle Ages clash with the emerging New Age.

In his novella *Faust*, the writer employs the images of Faust and Mephistopheles – which merge within the character of the protagonist – to emphasize his internal spiritual conflict arising from the contradiction between the pursuit of new knowledge and the base, soul-destroying impulses. Consequently, the hero appears as a man inspired by the quest for the meaning of life while simultaneously experiencing acute alienation from the world due to his rejection of universally accepted human values. Faustian traits manifest in his yearning to understand life and himself; however, this yearning is closely accompanied by the inherent, constant, and endless oscillations and doubts characteristic of the Mephistophelean spirit, which ultimately lead the individual to agonizing self-destruction.



Within the soul of this hero, the search for an ideal in the spirit of Faust is combined with the cynicism and skepticism of Mephistopheles. This combination leads him to a split in his psyche and a tragic end. The internal conflict within this character is resolved in a manner reminiscent of Goethe's drama, which unfolds a grand tableau of the struggle for the salvation of the soul. Vera's demise triggers profound changes in Pavel Alexandrovich, compelling him to recognize that elements of fate and chance – beyond the control of desire and will – pervade human life.

Thus, in his exploration of the opposition between the two key elements of existence – nature and man – Turgenev enters the realm of religious consciousness. He sees the path to salvation for both the individual and humanity in the harmony of these two principles, expressed in the unity of man with the nature-God, which also implies a certain detachment from it. Turgenev believed that the moral anguish experienced in striving for this harmony can only be overcome by renouncing individuality and the self. For the writer, the sole means to achieve unity with being is through the service of duty.

### Conclusion

Faust has become one of the key figures in Turgenev's work. One of the distinctive features of this writer's oeuvre is the "hidden rebellion" of his characters against the established order of the world, a theme present in many of his works. In Pavel Alexandrovich, the protagonist of *Faust*, Turgenev also embeds the rebellion of individual consciousness against the ideals of harmonious existence. The belief in the futility of the world's existence, due to the absence of God, renders the hero an eternally self-reflecting egoist. His rebellion is not a challenge to goodness, truth, and beauty, but to their distorted interpretations.

Turgenev created his Faust not solely based on the interpretations of this "eternal image" by Western European and Russian writers. He reinterpreted the figure by viewing it through the lens of Christian

moral ideals, the pantheism of antiquity, and German philosophy. The interplay of “eternal images” from world classics, plots drawn from Turgenev’s own life and that of the country, together with the writer’s creative individuality, resulted in the complex, dualistic character of Turgenev’s Faust. In the main character of *Faust*, one can see, on the one hand, a convergence of the “eternal images” of Faust and Hamlet, and on the other, the capacity for moral transformation in a person. Faust, imbued with the spirit of Mephistopheles, with his vacillating nature, resembles Hamlet. However, Turgenev distinguishes between these types of characters: while Hamlet, by destroying others, also destroys himself, Faust, after experiencing the loss of his beloved, attains enlightenment and transforms a self-sacrificing character capable of decisive action, akin to Don Quixote.

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