LEONARD ANTHONY POLAKIEWICZ

**DIALOGICITY EXTENDED:**
**LERMONTOV’S TAMAN’ AS INTERTEXT TO CHEKHOV’S THIEVES**

**Keywords**
- narrative structure, syncretism, extended dialogic relation, Romanticism, phenomenology, desire, existential value.

The fact that Chekhov had great admiration for Lermontov’s *Taman’* (1840) is well documented. Sergei N. Shchukin recalls Chekhov saying: “I know of no language better than that of Lermontov. I should do this: I should take his tale [*Taman’*] and analyze it, as one analyzes in school – by sentences, by parts of sentences. That’s how I would learn to write.” On another occasion, as noted by Ivan Bunin, Chekhov said: “I cannot understand how a mere boy could have written *Taman’*!” Vladimir Nabokov expressed a diametrically opposite assessment of *Taman’*: “The worst story of the book, *Taman’*, is deemed by some Russian critics the greatest, for reasons incomprehensible to me. . . . Curiously enough, Russian schoolteachers used to see in it the perfection of Russian prose. This is a ridiculous opinion, voiced (according to a memoirist) by Che[k]hov.” Andrew Barratt and A.D.P. Briggs explain the dichotomy of Chekhov’s and Nabokov’s categorical views of *Taman’* as the result of neither writer taking into account that the language of *Taman’* is that of a traveler-narrator officer, not a professional writer. They

suggest Chekhov’s admiration for Taman’ was more likely due to the artistry of its structure and atmosphere rather than its impressive language. Though justifiably critical of Nabokov’s negative comments, they are mistaken in claiming that Chekhov, the consummate stylist, had overstated his assessment of the language of Taman’. More likely, Chekhov had been impressed by many of Taman’s features: its language, structure, atmosphere, syncretism, imagery, symbolism, characterization, and the fundamental issue of personal freedom and moral responsibility that it thematizes.

Chekhov’s strong admiration for Taman’ appears to have inspired him to write Thieves [Vory, 1890]. In fact, Thieves is modeled in many respects on Lermontov’s work. That is not to say, however, that it is a mere “reworking” of Taman’, as claimed by Petr M. Bitsilli. Rather, it is an impressive artistic creation in its own right.

One of the earliest critics to notice textual affinities between Taman’ and Thieves was Mikhail N. Osorgin. In his analysis “Three Stories” [Tri rasskaza], Osorgin not only found that Turgenev’s A History of Lieutenant Ergunov [Istoria leitenanta Ergunova, 1867] shares significant details with Taman’, but also drew attention to textual affinities between Turgenev’s and Chekhov’s tales, including their protagonists’ identical patronymic and surname and their similar characteristics and experiences. Since the publication of Osorgin’s observations, several critics have pointed to Taman’ as the ‘source’ of Thieves. However, to date, no critical analysis has been made of the extent of the dialogic relationship between Lermontov’s and Chekhov’s

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5. Ibid., p. 60.
6. The original title was The Devils (Cherti). For the publication of his Sobranie sochinenii (1901), Chekhov changed the title to Thieves (Vory). By changing the title to Thieves, Chekhov strengthened the link with Taman’ even more. References to Thieves are to A. P. Chekhov, Polnoe sobranie sochinenii i pisem v tridtsati tomakh, N. F. Bel’chikov et al., eds. (Moscow: Nauka, 1974-83), Sochinenia vol. 7, and will be noted in the text by page number. References to Chekhov’s letters are also to this edition and will be cited as Pis’ma, volume number and page number. V. V. Osnovin in “Chekhov, A. P.,” Lermontovskaia Entsiklopedia, V. A. Manuilov, ed. (Moscow: Sovetsakaia Entsiklopedia, 1981), p. 615, notes that during 1888-1892 Chekhov’s consciousness was filled with thoughts about Lermontov: in 1888 Chekhov traveled in the Caucasus region and was enraptured by the scenery of Hero of Our Time (see letter of August 12, 1888 to K. S. Barantsevich, Pis’ma 2: 308); on November 24-25, 1888 he expressed excitement to A. S. Suvorin about writing a new story [Duel, 1891] with a “Pechorin-type character” (Pis’ma 3: 78). It should also be noted that numerous intertextual links can be found between Lermontov’s prose and Chekhov’s other works, e.g., Verochka, The Bride, House with a Mezzanine, Lights, A Boring Story, Beauties, The Bet, The Black Monk, and so on.