

The Ace in "The Queen of Spades"

Sergei Davydov

И постепенно в усыпление
И чувств и дум впадает он,
А перед ним воображение
Свой пестрый мечет фараон.

—A. S. Pushkin, *Eugenii Onegin*, 8:37

(And slowly, as his mind and feeling / descend into a languid dream, / Imagination takes up dealing / her motley Faro game to him.)

At a card table at the beginning of "Pikovaia dama" (The queen of spades), Tomskii recounts a tale about his flamboyant grandmother, an avid Faro player. In her youth the Countess once lost a large sum to the Duke of Orleans *au jeu de la Reine* at Versailles. When her husband refused to pay off her debt, the Countess turned to the adventurer and wonderman Count Saint-Germain for help. Instead of lending her money, the old eccentric revealed to her three secret cards with which she won back everything she had lost. Tomskii's bizarre tale provokes three responses among the Petersburg gamblers:

"Mere chance!" said one of the guests.

"A fairy tale!" remarked Germann.

"Perhaps they were powdered [doctored] cards," joined in a third.

"I don't think so," Tomskii replied in a serious tone.¹

Tomskii, the narrator of this remarkable episode, rejects all three rational explanations and insists on the validity of the supernatural event. Which response is correct? Those who explain the mystery in natural, realistic terms (chance, lie, trickery), or Tomskii, who insists on the intrusion of the supernatural? Fedor Dostoevskii addressed this question in a letter to Iu. F. Abaza:

Pushkin, who has given us almost all artistic forms, wrote "The Queen of Spades"—the pinnacle of the art of the fantastic. One believes that Germann actually saw an apparition, and precisely in accordance with his worldview, and yet, having finished the tale, one does not know how to decide: did this vision emerge from Germann's own nature [realistic solution], or is he actually one of those who have come into contact with

The first portion of this article develops the argument I made in a note "Real'noe i fantasticheskoe v 'Pikovoi dame,'" in *Revue des études Slaves* 59 (1987): 263–67. I would like to thank my anonymous referees for several felicitous formulations and the guest editor of this issue, Stephanie Sandler, for her inspiring suggestions.

1. A. S. Pushkin, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, 17 vols. (Moscow, 1937–1959), 8.1:228–29. All Russian quotations are from this volume (hereafter *PSS*, 17 vols.); all translations of "The Queen of Spades" are from Alexander Pushkin, *Complete Prose Fiction*, trans. and ed. Paul Debreczeny (Stanford, 1983; hereafter *CPF*). All other translations are mine.

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another world, a world of spirits, evil and hostile to man [supernatural solution] [. . .] Now this is what I call art! [Vot éto iskusstvo!]²

In his book on the fantastic, Tzvetan Todorov maintains that the reader's vacillation between the natural and supernatural cause of an uncanny phenomenon is the chief precondition for the genre of the fantastic.³ An exclusive decision for or against the intrusion of the supernatural would destroy the foremost virtue of Pushkin's tale, the "seamless fusion of the fantastic with the realistic" that both invites and frustrates logical decoding.⁴

As skeptical as the Petersburg gamblers, the literary critics remain unconvinced by Tomskii's insistence on the supernatural nature of the triggering event. In pursuit of rational solutions, three questions are usually raised: (1) What is the origin of the magic trey, seven, and ace? (2) Could Germann (or the reader) have identified the three cards without the ghost's intervention? (3) How does one explain Germann's fatal blunder of confusing the ace with the queen in his last game?

Trey, Seven, Ace

Few today share Mikhail Gershenzon's opinion that "it really does not matter whether Germann in his hallucination fancied these particular cards rather than some other three cards."⁵ In searching for the origin of the three, seven, and one (one being the numerical value of the ace), critics have turned to literary sources with which Pushkin was or might have been familiar. The first link to Pushkin's triplet was found in the two lines from Fedor Glinka's 1828 poem "Brachnyi pir Toviia" (Tobias's wedding feast), which contain two of the three cards: "Malo l' platy? / Utroit' syn! usemerit'" (Not enough pay? Triple it, septuple it, my son!).⁶ Viktor Vinogradov suggested another likely source, Karl Heun's novella *Der holländische Jude* in which the hero bets on the magic trey and seven and wins a fortune.⁷ Again, this subtext leaves out the ace. In fact, no single literary source can account for all three cards of Pushkin's triplet.⁸

Boris Tomashevskii and Vladimir Nabokov suggested an extraliterary source that might sensibly have motivated Pushkin's choice. Both scholars argued that the numbers 1-3-7 are derived from the sequence of three

2. 15 June 1880; F. M. Dostoevskii, *Pis'ma*, ed. A. S. Dolinin (Moscow, 1959), 4:178.

3. See Tzvetan Todorov, *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre*, trans. Richard Howard (Ithaca, 1975), 25-26.

4. Caryl Emerson, "The Queen of Spades' and the Open End," in David Bethea, ed., *Pushkin Today* (Bloomington, 1993), 32.

5. Mikhail Gershenzon, *Mudrost' Pushkina* (Moscow, 1919), 102.

6. Pointed out by N. Kashin, "Po povodu 'Pikovoï damy,'" *Pushkin i ego sovremenniki*, 1927, nos. 31-32:34.

7. Viktor Vinogradov, "Stil' 'Pikovoï damy,'" *Vremennik Pushkinskoi komissii* (1936): 87-88. Karl Heun wrote under the pseudonym Heinrich Clauren. His novella "Gollandskii kupets" was translated in *Syn otechestva* 101, no. 9 (1825): 3-51, and reprinted in 1832. See also I. Gribushin, "Iz nabliudenii nad tekstami Pushkina: Vyigrysh na troiku i semerku do 'Pikovoï damy,'" *Vremennik Pushkinskoi komissii* (1973): 85-89.

8. For other subtexts, see Paul Debreczeny, *The Other Pushkin* (Stanford, 1983), 204-9.

straight wins in the game of Faro, if the stakes are doubled each time. If the initial stake (*le va*) is one, then the first win equals *une et le va*; the second, *trois et le va*; the third, *sept et le va*; and so on.⁹ Pushkin himself mentions this lucky series—*sonica, paroli, paroli-paix*—in the beginning of his tale. The sequence 1-3-7 would have been known to Germann who never plays himself but "would sit by the card table whole nights and follow with feverish trembling the different turns of the game." Though Tomashevskii's and Nabokov's answer offers the most likely explanation so far for the identity of the three cards, it is marred by one flaw: it fails to indicate the correct sequence in which the cards had to be played in order to win. Because the ace is in the wrong position, this theory, too, is not entirely satisfactory.

It was essential for Pushkin that a pervasive sense of the occult be sustained throughout the tale. References to the elixir of life and *lapis philosophorum*, the secret galvanism, Joseph-Michel Montgolfier's balloon and Friedrich Anton Mesmer's magnetism, the obscure epigraph from the mystic Emanuel Swedenborg, and the ominous quote from a *Fortune-Teller* are all indispensable ingredients of Pushkin's arcane brew. Stimulated by its potency, but imperious to the irony of Pushkin's tale, critics have availed themselves of a number of occult tools in order to extract the three cards from various numerological motifs.¹⁰ One shortcoming of this approach is that the tale contains a profusion of numbers and dates (1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 12, 17, 20, 30, 40, 50, 60, 70, 80, 87, 100, 275, 47,000, 50,000, 94,000, 300,000) from which any card can be produced. When the focus is on a smaller textual segment, such as "Vot chto utroit, usemerit moi kapital" (This is what will triple, septuple my capital), one card, usually the ace, is missing from the triplet. Even when all three cards can be obtained from a given passage, the sequence is incorrect.¹¹

The same problem that mars the numerological approach also applies to gematria, that is, the anagrammatic method of extracting the cards from the sound texture of the tale. Lauren Leighton ingeniously discovered many card logogriphs in the famous passage describing the Countess's boudoir:

9. See Boris Tomashevskii's letter to André Meynieux, in Pouchkine, *Oeuvres complètes*, ed. A. Meynieux, 3 vols. (Paris, 1953-58), 3:500n5; and Vladimir Nabokov, *Eugene Onegin: A Novel in Verse by Aleksandr Pushkin*, 4 vols. (Princeton, 1964), 2:261.

10. See Aleksandr Slonimskii, "O kompozitsii 'Pikovoï damy,'" *Pushkinskii sbornik pamiati prof. S. A. Vengerova* (Moscow, 1923), 171-80; Peter Bicilli, "Zametki o Pushkine," *Slavia* 11 (1932): 557-60; Vinogradov, "Stil' 'Pikovoï damy,'" J. Thomas Shaw, "The 'Conclusion' of Pushkin's 'Queen of Spades,'" in Z. Folejewski, ed., *Studies in Russian and Polish Literature in Honor of Waclaw Lednicki* (The Hague, 1962), 114-26; Andrei Kodjak, "The Queen of Spades' in the Context of the Faust Legend," in Andrei Kodjak and Kirill Taranovsky, eds., *Alexander Puškin: A Symposium on the 175th Anniversary of His Birth* (New York, 1976), 87-118; Lauren G. Leighton, "Numbers and Numerology in 'The Queen of Spades,'" *Canadian Slavonic Papers* 19, no. 4 (1977): 417-43.

11. The importance of the sequence was pointed out by Diana Burgin, "The Mystery of 'Pikovaia Dama': A New Interpretation," in Joachim T. Baer and Norman W. Ingham, eds., *Mnemozina: Studia litteraria Russica in honorem Vsevolod Setchkarov* (Munich, 1974), 46; and Nathan Rosen, "The Magic Cards in 'The Queen of Spades,'" *Slavic and East European Journal* 19 (1975): 256.

Перед кивотом, наполненным сТаРИнными " [3] ОБРАЗаами [1], теплилась золотая лампада. Полинялые штофные кресла и ДиВАны [2] с пуховыми подушками, с сошедшей позолотою, стояли в печальной СимМЕТРИи [7, 3] около стен, обитых китайскими обоями. На стене висели два [2] портрета, писанные в Париже *тме Lebrun* [Q]. Один [1] из них изображал *мужчину* лет сорока, румяного и полного, в светлозеленом мундире и со звездой [1]; другой [2]—молодую *красавицу* с орлиным носом, с зачесанными висками и с розою в пудренных волосах [Q]. По ВСЕМ [7] углам торчали фарфоровые па-стушки, столовые часы работы славного *Leroy* [K], коробочки, рулетки, веера и РАЗные [1] дамские [Q] игрушки, изобретенные в конце минувшего столетия вМЕСТе [7] с Монгольфьевым шаром и МЕСмерОВым [7, 8] магнетизмом.

(A gold sanctuary lamp burned in front of an icon-case filled with ancient icons. Armchairs with faded damask upholstery and down-cushioned sofas, their gilt coating worn, stood in melancholy symmetry along the walls, which were covered with Chinese silk. Two portraits, painted in Paris by Mme. Lebrun, hung on the wall. One of them showed a man about forty years old, red-faced and portly, wearing a light green coat with a star; the other a beautiful young woman with an aquiline nose, with her hair combed back over her temples, and with a rose in her powdered locks. Every nook and corner was crowded with china shepherdesses, table clocks made by the famous Leroy, little boxes, bandalores, fans, and diverse other ladies' toys invented at the end of the last century, along with Montgolfier's balloon and Mesmer's magnetism.)¹²

No doubt the description of the Countess's remarkable boudoir, which Gershenzon inexplicably characterized as Pushkin's "artistic blunder" (*khudozhestvennyi promakh*),¹³ is one of the most mesmerizing passages of the tale, rife with numerical allusions. The only problem is that in addition to the 3, 7, and 1, this passage generates a number of other cards, such as 2, 8, K, and Q, and it, too, fails to provide the proper order in which the cards should be played. When focusing on a smaller anagrammatic sample, as a rule, one card is missing:

... фонари светились ГУСкло; улицы были ПУСТы. Изредка тянулся Ванька на тощей кляче, высмаТРИвая запоздалого седока. [1, 1, 3] ... на его МЕСТе он ПОСТУпил бы совСЕМ иначе [7, 1, 7] ... —я причною ее СМЕРТИ [7, 3] ... —Я не хотел ее СМЕРТИ, [7, 3] ... В эту минуту показался ему, что мертвая наСМЕшливо взглянула на него, прищуривая ОДНИМ глазом. Германи, поспешно подавшись назад, оСТУпился и навзничь гранулся об землю. [7, 1, 1]

([. . .] the lights shone dimly; the streets were deserted. Only occasionally did a cabdriver shamble by with his scrawny nag, on the lookout for a late passenger [. . .] in his friend's place he would have acted entirely

12. PSS, 17 vols., 8.1:239–40; CPF, 222–23. I have capitalized only the most direct allusions to cards found by Leighton and have added to them one ace and one seven. See Leighton, "Gematria in 'The Queen of Spades': A Decembrist Puzzle," *Slavic and East European Journal* 21 (1976): 455–56.

13. Gershenzon, *Mudrost' Pushkina*, 111–12.

differently [. . .] I caused her death [. . .] I did not wish her death [. . .] At that moment it seemed to him that the deceased cast a mocking glance at him, screwing up one of her eyes. He moved back hastily, missed his step, and crashed to the ground flat on his back.)¹⁴

No matter how intriguing, an exclusively numerological or gematric approach only multiplies the "codes that tantalize but do not quite add up."¹⁵ On the other hand, a cryptographic reading that combines elements of both methods can yield, I suspect, a less illusory solution. Consider, for example, the following passage in which the three cards are disguised under the expressions of time, producing a curious chronogram:

ОДНАЖДЫ—это случилось ДВА ДНЯ после вечера, описанного в начале этой повести, и за НЕДЕЛЮ перед той сценой, на которой мы остановились,—ОДНАЖДЫ Лизавета Ивановна . . .

(One time—this happened *two days after* the party described at the beginning of our story and *a week before* the scene that we have just detailed—*one time* Lizaveta Ivanovna [. . .])¹⁶

"Odnazhdy" stands for the ace (1), "nedelia" for the 7. In order to obtain the missing 3, we have to add to these two days that one "imperceptible night" which Pushkin described at the opening of the tale:

There was a card party at the house of Narumov, the officer of the Horse Guards. The *long winter night passed imperceptibly*; it was close to five in the morning when the company sat down to supper.¹⁷

Because this passage produces the three cards and points in the direction of the correct sequence: 1-3-7-1, it provides us with the needed key to enter the next chronogram, which Pushkin encrypted in the same code and which contains the three cards in the *correct order*:

He прошло *трех недель* [3, 7] с той поры, как она в *первый раз* [1] увидела в окошко молодого человека . . .

(Less than three weeks [3, 7] had passed since she had first [1] caught sight of the young man through the window [. . .])¹⁸

Perhaps the most frequently quoted passage from which the critics have attempted to extract the magic cards is Germann's inner monologue in chapter 2:

"Да и самый анекдот? . . . Можно ли ему верить? . . . Нет! расчет, умеренность и трудолюбие: вот мои три верные карты, вот что *утроит, усмерит* мой капитал и доставит мне покой и независимость."

("And what about the anecdote itself? . . . Can one put any faith in it? . . . No! Calculation, moderation, and industry; these are my three reliable

14. PSS, 17 vols., 8.1:239, 244, 245, 247, and CPF, 222, 226, 227, 229.

15. Emerson, "The Queen of Spades' and the Open End," 6.

16. PSS, 17 vols., 8.1:234, and CPF, 217 (emphasis mine).

17. CPF, 217 (emphasis mine).

18. PSS, 17 vols., 8.1:243, and CPF, 225 (emphasis mine).

cards. They will *treble* my capital, increase it *sevenfold*, and bring me ease and independence!"¹⁹

Aleksandr Slonimskii, who was the first to comment on this passage, speaks of a "double motivation" for the first two cards: the natural (through Germann) and the supernatural (through the Countess).²⁰ Andrei Kodjak agrees that Germann "has subconsciously determined two of the cards that the Countess would reveal to him. Here, however, the psychological theory breaks down; the third winning card—the ace—remains inexplicable."²¹ Nathan Rosen, who also cites this passage, concludes: "The fact that the ace is not included in the passage [. . .] suggests a flaw in this approach."²²

Having more trust in Pushkin than in the Pushkinists, I would like to insist on the flawlessness of the poet's cryptographic method, for Germann's words do contain all three cards, including the missing ace. Squeezed between the 3 and 7 hides the phonetically assimilated *tuz* [tus]:

vot chto *utroi*T, *USemerit* moi kapital.

Pushkin's sleight of hand may be counted on to uncover the right card at the exact time. The tale's maxim, according to which "two fixed ideas can no more coexist in the moral sphere than can two bodies occupy the same space in the physical world," does not apply to the poetic time and space of Pushkin's anagrams.²³

Moreover, the principle of covering up the middle card seems to be derived directly from Faro. The game is played with two decks of cards. Each punter selects a card of his choice from one deck, places it face down

19. PSS, 17 vols., 8.1:235, and CPF, 219 (emphasis mine).

20. Slonimskii, "O kompozitsii 'Pikovoï damy,'" 176.

21. Kodjak, "The Queen of Spades' in the Context of the Faust Legend," 89.

22. Rosen, "The Magic Cards in 'The Queen of Spades,'" 255.

23. "For us, charades and logogriphs are child's play, but in Karamzin's time, when lexical detail and play with devices were in the foreground, such games were a literary genre." Iurii Tynianov, "Literaturnyi fakt" (1924), in *Poetika, istoriia literatury, kino* (Moscow, 1977), 275. Similar anagrammatic jeux d'esprit were a favorite pastime among Pushkin's friends. The readers of their school journal, *Litseiskii mudrets*, readily solved A. Illichevskii's conundrums such as the following "charade-logogriph" (Illichevskii's own term): "Sadovniki vsadu sadiat menia, / Poety nad mogiloi. / Otkin' mne golovu,—i vot uzh vitiaz' ia, / Khotia po pravde khilyi. / Otkinesh' briukho mne, ia stanovius' travoi, / Il' kushan'em pered toboi. / Slozhi mne briukho s golovoi—/ Ia stanu pred toboi s tovarom, / Ni slova ne skazal ia darom, / Poimi zh menia, chitatel' moi." (The gardeners plant me in the garden, / the poets over the grave. / Cut off my head—I become a legendary warrior, / though, to tell the truth, a wimpy one. / Remove my belly—I turn into grass / or food before your very eyes. / Attach the belly to my head—/ I stand before you with my wares. / Not a word I said in vain; / understand me, my reader?). K. Ia. Grot, *Pushkinskii litsei*, 2d ed. (St. Petersburg, 1998), 333. The answer to the charade is "kiparis" (cypress); its components: "Paris, ris, kipa" (Paris, rice, stack). For Pushkin's use of anagrammatic riddles, see my articles "The Sound and Theme in the Prose of A. S. Pushkin: A Logo-Semantic Study of Paronomasia," *Slavic and East European Journal* 27 (1983): 1–18; and "The Shot' by Aleksandr Pushkin and Its Trajectories," in J. Douglas Clayton, ed., *Issues in Russian Literature before 1917: Selected Papers of the Third World Congress for Soviet and East European Studies* (Columbus, Ohio, 1989), 62–74.

on the table and makes his stake on it. (Germann chooses the trey in his first game and bets 47,000 on it.) The banker then deals from a different deck, placing two cards face up to the left and to the right of the punter's card. The punter then uncovers his card. If it matches the card on his left, he wins, if it matches the card on his right, he loses. If no match occurs, no one wins and the game continues. The punters may select for the next round a different card or continue to bet on their old one. The actual suit is irrelevant in Faro.

Thus, if we apply the rules of the game to the phrase "utroit, usemerit," the first reading of the phrase places the trey and the seven face up on the page, the second, cryptic reading uncovers the elusive ace: "utroi-TUS-emerit." The fickle ace, a latecomer to this cryptogrammatic charade, was hidden in the blind spot, both in the middle (graphically) and at the end (perceptually).²⁴ Most important, of course, is that this cryptogram, just like the previous chronogram, precedes the ghost's visit, and if the engineer Germann had marked his own words more shrewdly, he might have deduced the triplet and the correct sequence without the help of the ghost. Nevertheless, the fact that the 3-7-1 would actually win still remains rationally inexplicable.

There is, I believe, only one other passage prior to the ghost's visit that can produce all three cards in the proper sequence. But, since this passage is a rather complex cryptogram, involving numerology, gematria, and visual transformations, we should first examine Pushkin's method more closely. Let us recall that after the ghost reveals the secret to Germann, he begins to perceive the surrounding reality as an encrypted text displaying the most bizarre manifestations of the three cards. The following passage, which Pushkin partially decoded for the benefit of the reader, is a good illustration of this method and can serve as a key to other cryptic passages of the tale:

Тройка, семерка, туз—не выходили из его головы и шевелились на его губах. Увидев *молодую девушку*, он говорил: "Как она *стройна!* . . . Настоящая *тройка червоная*". У него спрашивали: "*Который час*", он отвечал: "без пяти минут *семерка*". Всякий *пузастый мужчина* напоминал ему *туза*. Тройка, семерка, туз—преследовали его во сне, принимая все возможные виды: *тройка* цвела перед ним в образе пышного *грандифлора*, *семерка* представлялась *готическими воротами*, *туз* огромным *пауком*.

24. The fact that the ace is discovered as the last card of the series is conclusive proof of the infallibility of Pushkin's 3-7-1 sequence and, by the same token, of the shortsightedness of the interpreters of this phrase. See Slonimskii, "O kompozitsii 'Pikovoï damy,'" 176; Kashin, "Po povodu 'Pikovoï damy,'" 33–34; V. V. Vinogradov, *Stil' Pushkina* (Moscow, 1941), 588; L. V. Chkhaidze, "O real'nom znachenii motiva trekh kart v 'Pikovoï dame,'" *Pushkin: Issledovaniia i materialy* (Moscow-Leningrad, 1960), 3:458; Shaw, "The 'Conclusion' of Pushkin's 'Queen of Spades,'" 119; L. S. Sidiakov, *Khudozhestvennaia proza A. S. Pushkina* (Riga, 1973), 117; S. G. Bocharov, *Poetika Pushkina* (Moscow, 1974), 187; Rosen, "The Magic Cards in 'The Queen of Spades,'" 255; Kodjak, "The Queen of Spades' in the Context of the Faust Legend," 89; L. Leighton, "Numbers and Numerology in 'The Queen of Spades,'" 427, and many others.

(Trey, seven, ace—the threesome haunted him and was perpetually on his lips. Seeing a *young girl*, he would say: “How shapely! . . . Just like a *trey* of hearts.” If anybody asked him *what time* it was, he would answer, “Five of the *seven*.” Every *portly man* reminded him of an *ace*. The *trey*, the *seven*, and the *ace* hounded him even in his dreams, taking on every imaginable form: the *trey* blossomed before him like a great luxuriant *flower*; the *seven* appeared as a *Gothic gate*; and the *ace* assumed the shape of an enormous *spider*.)²⁵

Rosen imaginatively illustrated the visual and auditory transformations of the three cards into three diurnal and three nocturnal images. The diurnal transformations are self-explanatory. The “*stroinaia devushka*” is associated with the “*troika chervonnaia*” through the similarity of sound and shape.²⁶ Just as the tale’s chronology contained the three cards, Germann’s second association turns time into a card: “Kotoryi chas”—“bez piati minut semerka.” The third transformation of a “*puzastyi muzhchina*” into a “*tuz*” is motivated by the similarity of sound and meaning: “*tuz*” is also a man of rank and wealth.²⁷ Unlike Germann’s diurnal associations, their nocturnal counterparts are encoded in a more elusive manner that involves “expansion and deformation.”²⁸ Because the sound element is absent from the oneiric transformations, the reader must rely on visual clues alone. The *trey* with its three leaf-shaped spades or clubs on top of each other blossoms at night into a “luxurious flower” (*pyshnyi grandiflor*), perhaps a *rosa grandiflora*, which was also a Masonic Rose-Croix symbol.²⁹ The *seven* appears in the guise of a gothic portal. This bizarre metamorphosis was deciphered by G. M. Koka, who convincingly related the shape of Fel’ten’s gothic arch in Petersburg’s Ekaterininskii Garden to the arrangement of the seven spades on this card. Pushkin’s friend Anton Del’vig used an engraving of this portal as the frontispiece of his *Severnnye tsvety* (1830).³⁰ Rosen illustrated the next metamorphosis of the *ace* into a “gigantic spider” by linking the shape of the spade to an exotic triangular creature. The more common garden spider, *pauk-krestovik*, would be a more likely candidate, for the cross sign on its back strikingly mimics the club (see figure 1).

The diurnal and nocturnal associations seem to be meaningfully correlated: the analogy between the slender girl and the luxuriant flower (3), and between the potbellied man and the gigantic spider (1) is quite obvious. The link between “five minutes to seven” and the gothic portal remains elusive, however. Rosen suggested that “Gothic portals move time

25. PSS, 17 vols., 8.1:249, and CPF, 230 (emphasis mine).

26. Rosen, “The Magic Cards in ‘The Queen of Spades,’” 262.

27. Cf. A. Griboedov, “Chto za tuzy v Moskve zhivut i umiraiut” (*Gore ot uma*, act 2, scene 1). There is a secondary sound association between the *puzastyi muzhchina* and *tuz*: a chubby little fellow is also called *butuz* in Russian.

28. Rosen, “The Magic Cards in ‘The Queen of Spades,’” 262.

29. Harry B. Weber, “‘Pikovaia dama’: A Case for Freemasonry in Russian Literature,” *Slavic and East European Journal* 12 (1968): 443.

30. “Khudozhestvennyi mir Pushkina,” in G. M. Koka, ed., *Pushkin ob iskusstve* (Moscow, 1962), 18. This arch is reproduced by Rosen, “The Magic Cards in ‘The Queen of Spades,’” 264.

backward to the Middle Ages of the Gothic novel, hence the day and night associations of seven relate to time.”³¹ Kodjak offered an even more abstract link between the day and night associations of the *trey*, *seven*, and *ace*: “youth, passing time, old age = fertility, historical time, destruction or death.”³² If Pushkin’s code is consistent, both metamorphoses of the *seven* should relate to time in a more direct, visual way. Perhaps the fireplace clock from Pushkin’s Petersburg apartment, whose case is a perfect miniature replica of a gothic arch, is the missing iconic link. The fact that Pushkin used the passage of time to encode the three cards twice before in his chronograms would then attest to the consistency of his method.

Although Germann’s spectacular associations occur only after the ghost’s visit, these visual and auditory metamorphoses of the three cards provide the key to another encoded passage that precedes the visit. The paragraph that immediately follows the phrase “*utroit, usemerit*” seems to contain in an encrypted form all three cards in the correct order:

Рассуждая таким образом, очутился он в одной из главных улиц Петербурга. Улица была заставлена экипажами, кареты одна за другою катились к освещенному подъезду. Из карет поминутно вытягивалась то стройная нога молодой красавицы, то гремучая ботфорта, то полосатый чулок и дипломатический башмак. Шубы и плащи мелькали мимо величавого швейцара. Германн остановился.

(Lost thus in thought, he found himself on one of the main streets of Petersburg, in front of an old-style house. The street was crowded with equipages; one carriage after another rolled up to the lighted entrance. Now a young beauty’s *shapely leg*, now a rattling [*spurred*] *riding boot*, now a striped stocking and a *diplomat’s shoe* emerged from the carriages. Fur coats and cloaks flitted by the stately doorman. Hermann stopped.)³³

If we employ the already familiar cryptogrammatic clues, we may arrive at the following reading: The phrase “*karety odna za drugoiu katilis’*” anagrammatically announces the arrival of the cards (*karety-karty*). (Compare this with the analogous formulation in the next paragraph: “[Germann] stavil kartu za kartoi.”) Next, Pushkin pulls from his deck the three cards, disguised as the three pairs of feet stepping one after another from the arriving carriages. The first card he lays forth is the *troika*: “*Iz karey pomnutno vytiagivalas’ stroinaia noga molodoi krasavitsy*.” The transformation of the *trey* into the “shapely foot of a young beauty” is a faithful alliterative and a visual replica of the previous cryptogram: “*Uvidev molo-duii devushku, on govorit: ‘Kak ona stroina! . . . Nastoiashchaia troika chervonnaia.*” Next Pushkin sets down the *seven* in the guise of “*gre-muchaia botforta*”; turned upside down, the “spurred boot” resembles a *seven*. There can be little doubt that a “striped stocking and a diplomat’s shoe” adorn the foot of a big shot, a *tuz*. This last transformation anticipates both of Germann’s later associations, which link the *ace* to a “pot-

31. Rosen, “The Magic Cards in ‘The Queen of Spades,’” 263; suggested by Shaw, “The ‘Conclusion’ of Pushkin’s ‘Queen of Spades,’” 120.

32. Kodjak, “‘The Queen of Spades’ in the Context of the Faust Legend,” 97.

33. PSS, 17 vols., 8.1:236, and CPF, 219 (emphasis mine).

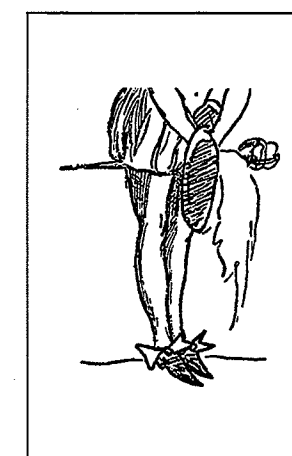
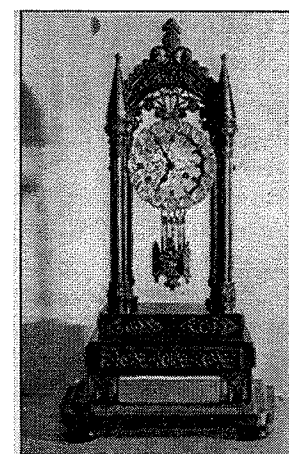
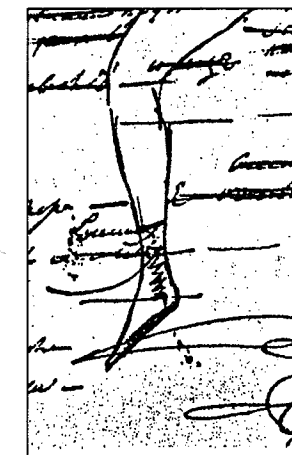
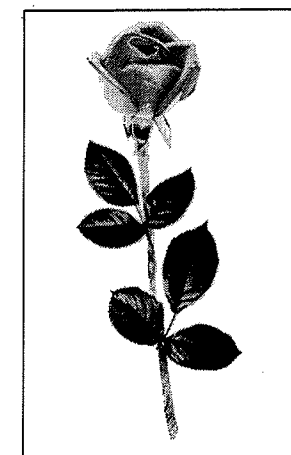
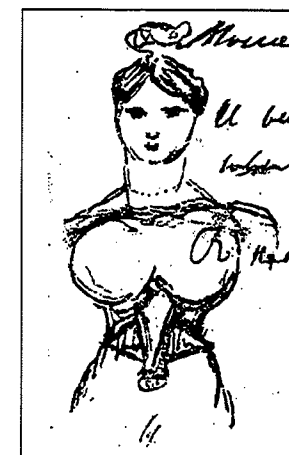
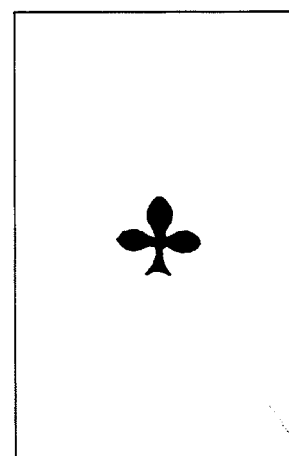
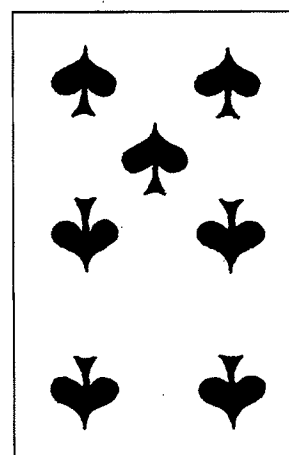
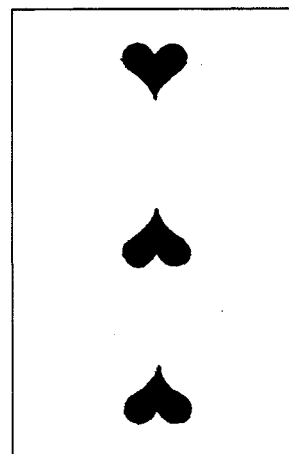
Figure 1.

First column:
Russian playing cards,
ca. 1830 (courtesy of the
British Museum, no. V244).

Second column:
Pushkin's drawing
on the manuscript of
"Osen'" (1833); the
fireplace clock from
Pushkin's last apartment
(*Lichnye veshchi Pushkina*
[Leningrad, 1968], 35);
Pushkin's drawing of
Prince N. B. Iusupov on
the manuscript of "K
vel' mozhe" (1830).

Third column:
Rosa grandiflora; Fel'ten's
gothic arch in Ekaterininskii
park (frontispiece from
A. Del'vig, *Severnye tsvety*,
1830); garden spider,
Araneus diadematus.

Fourth column:
Pushkin's drawing from
the manuscript of "Osen'"
Pushkin's illustrations to
"Grobovshchik" (1830)
and "Andzhelo" (1833).



bellied man" and a "gigantic spider." It is perhaps of interest to note that the legs of the garden spider are conspicuously striped, a detail that further tightens the web of correspondences between the various mutations of the ace.³⁴

Thus, with (or without) a grain of salt, the "shapely foot," the "spurred boot," and the "diplomatic shoe," stepping out from the carriages in the winning order before Germann's very eyes, are encoded images of the three magic cards. Had Germann been as keen an admirer of *nozhenki* as his author, he might have solved the mystery without causing the death of the Countess and, perhaps, he might have found solace at the "shapely feet of a young beauty" such as Liza. Instead, he becomes privy to the "repulsive mysteries" of the old lady's toilette, as he watches how "her yellow dress, embroidered with silver, fell to her swollen feet."³⁵

The Queen

This last pair of feet brings us to the last card of this magic tale, to the *bel-dam* of the story, the queen of spades. The old Countess Anna Fedotovna, a truly extravagant relic of the eighteenth century, belongs among the most remarkable of Pushkin's creations. Her real life model was Princess Nataliia Petrovna Golitsyna, whom Pushkin knew personally (see figure 2). The princess served as a lady-in-waiting to five generations of Russian emperors and was ninety-two years old at the time Pushkin wrote his tale. She was an avid gambler, and because of her failing eyesight, a deck of large-format cards was kept for her at the court.³⁶ Once, her grandson, S. G. Golitsyn, had lost a large sum at cards and came to his grandmother to beg for money. Instead of money, the princess told him of the three winning cards that Saint-Germain had once revealed to her in Paris. The grandson bet on them and regained his loss.³⁷

Nabokov discovered a German subtext for the Russian "Queen of Spades" in a novel *Pique-Dame: Berichte aus dem Irrenhause in Briefen* (1826). The novel is a collection of letters from an insane asylum, addressed to a

34. Those who might take my delicate leg twisting for leg pulling should find reassurance in Pushkin's words to Prince Viazemskii: "Aristocratic prejudices are suitable for you but not for me—I look at a finished poem of mine as a cobbler looks at a pair of his boots: I sell for profit. The shop foreman judges my jack-boots (*botforty*) as not up to the standard, he rips them up and ruins the piece of goods; I am the loser. I go and complain to the district policeman." From a letter to Viazemskii, March 1823, in J. Thomas Shaw, trans. and ed., *The Letters of Alexander Pushkin* (Madison, 1967), 111. My incredulous arbiter may turn for additional solace to Pushkin's parable "Sapozhnik" (The cobbler, 1829): "A cobbler, staring at a painting, / Has found the footwear on it flawed. / The artist promptly fixed the failing, / But this is what the cobbler thought: / 'It seems the face is slightly crooked . . . / Isn't that bosom rather nude?' / Annoyed, Apelles interrupted: 'Judge not, my friend, above the boot!'" (trans. Rosanne Shield, unpublished manuscript).

35. *CPF*, 223.

36. N. Rabkina, "Istoricheskii prototip 'Pikovoi damy,'" *Voprosy istorii* 43, no. 1 (1968): 213–16. Pushkin acknowledged the link between the princess and the Countess in his diary entry of 7 April 1834.

37. V. Grigorenko et al., eds., *Pushkin v vospominaniakh sovremennikov*, 2 vols. (Moscow, 1977), 2:195.

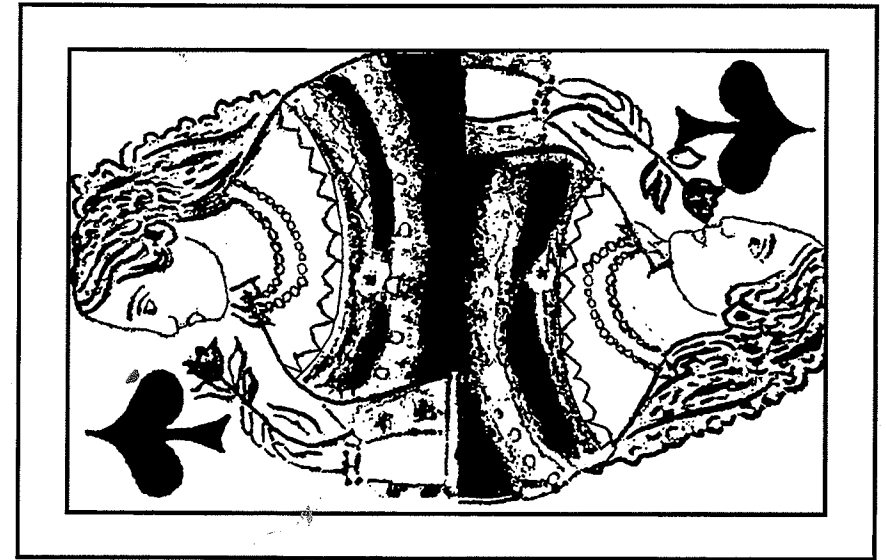


Figure 2. Princess N. P. Golitsyna (née Chernyshova) by an unknown painter, beginning of the nineteenth century (courtesy of the Pushkin Museum, no. 656) and the card of the queen of spades.

dead friend by a young gambler who ruined his life in a game of Faro when he bet for the tenth time on the queen of spades.³⁸

Neither the Russian princess nor the Swedish *Pique-Dame* can explain the dénouement of Pushkin's "Pikovaia dama," however. The most puzzling aspect of Pushkin's tale is not that the ghost reveals the three winning cards to Germann, but that he actually fails to win with them. There have been numerous attempts to explain the fatal displacement of the ace by the queen in realistic terms. Some of the solutions echo the responses of the gamblers at the beginning of the tale: "Mere chance!" "A fairy tale!" "Perhaps they were powdered cards." Gershenzon maintained that Germann pulled out the queen of spades by "pure coincidence," and that there was hardly any similarity between the card and the Countess.³⁹ The Soviet scholar L. V. Chkhaidze offered a crudely materialistic explanation, claiming that in a new deck of cards "the printing tint was, of course, fresh, and the cards were slightly sticking to each other. [. . .] Hence, everything is explained realistically; there is no 'mysticism' in the tale whatsoever."⁴⁰ Gary Rosenshield argued that by choosing the "wrong card" (the queen instead of the ace), Germann has actually chosen the "right card," because to "win would, of course, have been to lose; it would have been never to gamble—to live—at all."⁴¹ Vinogradov offered a more plausible explanation of the uncanny dénouement; he cast the mysterious intrusion of the queen of spades at the end of the tale as the materialization of Germann's repressed guilt for the death of the old lady.⁴²

This psychological interpretation becomes even more valid if one takes into account the various visual assimilations of the Countess with the card. First Germann sees the Countess framed in a portrait by Mme Lebrun, depicting her as "a beautiful young woman, with an aquiline nose [and] a rose in her powdered hair." The portrait is reminiscent of the queen of spades, shown in profile with a rose in her hand (figure 2). Observing the Countess undressing, Germann sees her as an inverted double figure framed in the mirror. In the same scene he sees her sitting in a rectangular Voltaire chair and involuntarily "swaying from left to right" as if moved

38. In his commentary to *Eugene Onegin*, Nabokov erroneously attributed this novel by the Swedish romantic writer Clas Johan Livijn to its German translator la Motte-Fouqué (Nabokov, *Eugene Onegin*, 3:97). The original title of Livijn's novel is *Spader Dame, en Berättelse i Bref, Funnne på Danviken* (1824). Pushkin could have been familiar with the novel in a French translation. Moreover, its Swedish title and a brief plot summary appeared in *Moskovskii telegraf* (1825). See D. M. Sharypkin, "Vokrug 'Pikovoi damy,'" *Vremennik Pushkinskoi komissii* (1972): 128-31; and J. Douglas Clayton, "'Spader Dame,' 'Pique-Dame,' and 'Pikovaia dama': A German Source for Pushkin?" *Germano-Slavica*, 1974, no. 4:5-10.

39. Gershenzon, *Mudrost' Pushkina*, 102-3.

40. Chkhaidze, "O real'nom znachenii motiva trekh kart v 'Pikovoi dame,'" 459.

41. Gary Rosenshield, "Choosing the Right Card: Madness, Gambling, and the Imagination in Pushkin's 'The Queen of Spades,'" *PMLA* 109 (1994): 1004. I have to admit that I fail to understand this argument. If gambling was what Germann really desired, as Rosenshield claims, why should selecting the ace and winning 367,000 rubles have prevented him from gambling again at some future point? The true gambler Chaplitskii continued to gamble after his fabulous bet on the three cards the Countess had revealed to him.

42. Vinogradov, "Stil' 'Pikovoi damy,'" 96-97.

by "the action of a hidden galvanism."⁴³ In addition to the framing of the Countess as a card, her swaying resembles the mechanics of the Faro game, in which cards fall to the left and right of the punter's card.⁴⁴ Twice Germann glimpses the Countess framed in his window, and twice she winks at him from other rectangular frames: from her open coffin and from the fatal card when Germann is finally struck by the "extraordinary likeness."⁴⁵

Having established the visual link between the Countess and the card, we may now look into the mechanics of the actual displacement of the ace by the queen. To begin with, there is no visual resemblance between the two cards that would account for Germann's error. The contrast between the ace, with its single suit in the center, and the queen, whose figure fills almost the entire card, defies confusion. More likely, Germann's inexplicable blunder was prepared through a chain of assimilations based on contiguity rather than similarity, whereby the unstable position of the ace plays a significant role. Throughout the tale the ace is the most elusive member of the triplet and is often absent from the series altogether. When the ace does appear, it is usually the best-camouflaged card of the three. Semantically dissimulated as "raz, odin, odnazhdy" (one, once) or hidden at the word boundary between the two other cards, "utroit, usemerit," the ace is the least perspicuous component in the various cryptograms. Its weaker position within the triplet makes the ace an especially vulnerable target for displacement by the queen.

If the queen of spades has its human counterpart in the Countess, then the ace could stand for her husband, the Count. After hearing Tomskii's story about his grandparents, Germann sees the two figures on the portraits hanging next to each other in the Countess's boudoir: "One of them showed a man about forty years old, red-faced and portly, wearing a light green coat with a star [Count—portly man—star = ace]; the other a beautiful young woman with an aquiline nose, with her hair combed back over her temples, and with a rose in her powdered locks [Countess—profile—rose = queen]." The contiguity of the two portraits might have contributed to Germann's confusion of the two cards. Furthermore, Tomskii's unflattering account of his grandfather underscores the Count's inferior position vis-à-vis the Countess: "My late grandfather, as far as I remember, played the part of a butler to my grandmother. He feared her like fire." After he refused to pay off her debt, "Grandmother slapped him on the face and went to bed by herself as an indication of her displeasure."⁴⁶ The next day she pays a visit to Count Saint-Germain, who helps her in his own mysterious way. Thus, throughout the story, the "queen" clearly dominates over the vulnerable "ace."

Another factor contributing to the assimilation and eventual displacement of the ace by the queen is the Countess's androgynous appearance.

43. *CPF*, 223.

44. Noted by Vinogradov, "Stil' 'Pikovoi damy,'" 103.

45. A number of these frames were also pointed out by Rosen.

46. *CPF*, 212.

Once her feminine attributes such as the "cap, decorated with roses" and the "powdered wig" are removed, Germann faces a rather masculine "gray and closely cropped head." In turn, the appearance of the Countess's real-life prototype also intensifies the gender confusion: because of her facial hair, Princess Golitsyna was called in Pushkin's circle "Princesse Moustache" (*Usataia printsessa*) or by the androgynous name "Princesse Woldemar."⁴⁷

Yet even this gender osmosis cannot satisfactorily explain Germann's fatal error of pulling the wrong card. After all, the 3-7-1 revealed to him by the ghost were the *correct* three cards, and nothing should have gone awry. Germann's repressed guilt or the assimilation of the two cards and of their gender offers only an auxiliary explanation of Germann's failure to distinguish between them. When he selected "his card" (Pushkin does not say ace, but "svoiu kartu"), the alleged ace must have been before Germann's very eyes. Yet, when he turned the card over, the "queen of spades screwed up her eyes and grinned." All rational explanations again break down at this point, and we are compelled to resort to the last and most authoritative word on the issue.

The Recent Fortune-Teller informs us in the tale's epigraph that "The queen of spades signifies secret ill will." Vinogradov explains: "Thus the queen of spades, that is, the dead Countess, penetrated the series of the three 'reliable cards,' replaced the ace, and, having destroyed Germann's plans, has fulfilled the will of destiny, 'the secret ill will' of fate."⁴⁸

One can hardly blame the Countess for acting as she did. After all, one dislikes being called "old witch" (*staraia ved'ma*) and being threatened with a pistol, just as much as one abhors dying, even at such an advanced age. One may conclude therefore, that the Countess assumed the form of the queen of spades and, acting as befits a lady of her suit, spited Germann, *sygrala Germannu v piku*, as the Russian expression goes.

This simple, if fantastic, explanation has one fundamental flaw, however. At one point Pushkin confides to the reader that "the Countess had by no means a bad heart." Trusting Pushkin, I would like to suggest that Germann was ruined not because of the Countess's ill will but rather in spite of her goodwill. During her nocturnal visit, the Countess made it clear that she came to Germann against her will ("ia prishla k tebe protiv svoei voli"). She also reveals the three cards to him against her will: "mne veleno ispolnit' tvoiu pros'bu." In both cases the Countess seems to act on behalf of some other involved party. But then comes the unexpected move: "I will forgive you my death, under the condition that you marry my ward, Lizaveta Ivanovna."⁴⁹

47. See Nikolai Osipovich Lerner, *Proza Pushkina*, 2d ed. (Moscow, 1923), 47, and Shaw, trans. and ed., *The Letters*, 362, 394. The confusion of the ace with the queen and their gender could also have been facilitated by Germann's possible misunderstanding of the French phrase from Tomskii's tale: "au jeu de la Reine" (the queen's game—fem.), which Germann might have associated with *au jeu de l'araignée* (the spider's game—masc.). This pun was mentioned by Rosen, "The Magic Cards in 'The Queen of Spades,'" 273n. The German engineer's French was probably not as good as that of his aristocratic friends.

48. Vinogradov, "Stil' 'Pikovoia dama,'" 97.

49. PSS, 17 vols., 8.1:247; CPF, 230 (emphasis mine).

Forgiveness and compassion are virtues not traditionally associated with the vengeful ghosts of gothic lore, yet the Countess forgives Germann of her own accord, *because of her good heart*. One can argue that her sudden, albeit posthumous concern for Liza's well-being is an attempt to atone for the ill-treatment of her poor ward, and in establishing this last condition, the Countess is arranging Liza's future. If Germann were to marry Liza, his fabulous win would come in lieu of her dowry and would also handsomely compensate for Liza's salary which, as Pushkin tells us, "was never paid in full."⁵⁰ Thus, if Pushkin's statement about the Countess's heart can be trusted, and if her concern for Liza's well-being is genuine, it is highly unlikely that the Countess would double-cross Germann, for the ruin of Liza's benefactor could not be in her interest.

Yet the Countess may have concluded from his behavior that he had no intention of marrying her ward. Germann's predicament would have been further exacerbated if Liza's chastity had been compromised during that night she spent, "bare-armed and open-chested," alone with her "midnight bridegroom."⁵¹ Because Germann has disregarded an important part of the contract with the dead Countess—for both love and magic are contracts—the "Vénus moscovite" intercedes and in the guise of the queen of spades ruins the knave.

But what if Germann had intended to marry Liza? In that case, his ruin must have been orchestrated by forces beyond the Countess's control. There remains only one character capable of this meddling. Germann was ruined through the diabolical intervention of the Wandering Jew, the discoverer of the elixir of life and of the philosopher's stone, the alchemist, spy, and founder of Freemasonry, Count Saint-Germain himself. The notorious master of the three cards, he prevents Germann from winning the "superfluous" and robs him even of the "necessary." Germann's 47,000 rubles, the patrimony left to him by his thrifty German father, comes to the banker Chekalinskii, while Germann ends up in the insane asylum.

Diana Burgin offered the most intriguing argument for the necessity of this seemingly excessive punishment. Causing the old lady's death is only the most overt of Germann's transgressions. During his visit to the Countess, Germann inadvertently stumbles upon an arcane mystery that involves a "cabalistic, erotic, familial, and possibly incestuous" relationship among three generations of gamblers and lovers: Saint-Germain, the Countess, and Chaplitskii.⁵² It was Gershenzon who in 1919 deviously suggested that Saint-Germain may have helped the destitute "Vénus moscovite" in exchange for a small "romantic favor."⁵³ We know from Tomskii's tale that "to this day grandmother loves him with a passion and gets cross

50. *Ibid.*, 217.

51. Between 3:00 A.M. when Germann enters Liza's room and the moment he kisses her good-bye in the morning, another winter night, long and dark enough to accommodate a Dantesque pause, passes imperceptibly. We learn from the tale's epilogue that Liza has married and is bringing up a poor relative, perhaps "her own illegitimate daughter by Germann." Suggested by Neil Cornwell, *Pushkin's "The Queen of Spades,"* Critical Studies in Russian Literature (London, 1993), 62–63.

52. Burgin, "The Mystery of 'Pikovoia Dama': A New Interpretation," 46–56.

53. Gershenzon, *Mudrosti' Pushkina*, 98.

if she hears disrespectful talk about him."⁵⁴ Burgin suggested that Chaplitskii, to whom the Countess once revealed the three cards, might be their natural son. (It is rumored that Saint-Germain himself was the natural son of the Queen of Spain.) But, in order to qualify for Saint-Germain's inheritance, Chaplitskii had to become the Countess's lover. Gershenzon was the first to intimate that the Countess passed down the secret to the distressed young gambler for his "leniency toward her fading charms."⁵⁵ To complete this arcane genealogy, J. Thomas Shaw added to it the banker Chekalinskii who acts as "the card-playing agent of fate." A man of about sixty, Chekalinskii is of "the right age to be the 'son' of the Countess and Chaplitskii."⁵⁶ It seems that Saint-Germain's incestual clan, spanning four generations of gamblers and lovers, is governed by strict laws of primogeniture (and paranomasia) according to which *Chaplitskii* and *Chekalinskii*, rather than Germann, are the legitimate heirs. Unlike the true members of Saint-Germain's cabal, Germann was averse to risk and to love, which further disqualifies him from the patrimony. Thus, it is only befitting that the banker Chekalinskii should dispossess the pretender.

Germann, of course, is unaware of this cabal, yet on several occasions he comes dangerously close to its taboo-ridden scenario. At one point he considers becoming a lover of the old Countess, mentions to her some "covenant with the devil," and is willing to take her "terrible sin" upon his soul. Prying from the Countess her secret, Germann inadvertently evokes the "cry of a new-born son" and beseeches her by appealing to the "feelings of a wife, mistress, mother." At first the Countess dismisses the whole affair as a joke: "Eto byla shutka." But when Germann mentions Chaplitskii's name, she becomes "visibly uneasy" and, for the first time, shows a "profound stirring of her heart" (*cherty ee izobrazili sil' noe dvizhenie dushi*).⁵⁷ The amorous innuendo lingers even after her death. As Germann leaves the house by the secret staircase, he imagines some eighteenth-century beau, "with hair combed à l'oiseau royal, pressing his three-cornered hat to his heart,"⁵⁸ stealing into the Countess's boudoir. Was it the apparition of Chaplitskii, or of Saint-Germain himself, returning to claim the Countess's soul? Such musing would not be far off the historical mark: In 1762, when the Countess was in her thirties, Saint-Germain actually visited Petersburg and was involved in the conspiracy that ousted Peter III and brought Catherine II to the throne. While in Russia, Saint-Germain stayed at the house of Princess Mariia Golitsyna, a relative of Pushkin's prototype for the Countess.⁵⁹ The amorous innuendo transpires also through the liturgical words of the bishop's funeral sermon: "The angel of death found her [. . .] waiting for the midnight bridegroom."⁶⁰ And toward the

54. *CPF*, 213.

55. Gershenzon, *Mudrost' Pushkina*, 98.

56. Shaw, "The 'Conclusion' of Pushkin's 'Queen of Spades,'" 125n23.

57. *PSS*, 17 vols., 8.1:241, and *CPF*, 224.

58. *CPF*, 228.

59. See Cornwell, *Pushkin's "The Queen of Spades,"* 88–89.

60. *CPF*, 228.

end of the service Germann himself becomes implicated in the most risqué aspect of the cabal. A close relative of the deceased misidentifies him as the Countess's "illegitimate son." Thus, because Germann inadvertently disturbed the privacy of Saint-Germain's clan and came within a hairsbreadth of its secret, the patriarch sends the ghost of his mistress to punish the intruder.

For those who dislike this magic scenario and would prefer to remain on this side of the supernatural, there is a simpler explanation for Germann's ruin. Pushkin punishes Germann out of Masonic loyalty to Count Saint-Germain—both men were members of the Ovid Lodge in Odessa. Simultaneously, in a gesture of chivalry, Pushkin intercedes on behalf of the two slighted ladies. By chastising Germann for his caddishness, Pushkin fulfills the old lady's last wish better than she had ever envisioned: he marries off her heartbroken and dowryless ward to the wealthy son of the Countess's former steward. With this offstage marriage, the matchmaker Pushkin transfers a substantial part of the Countess's fortune to poor Liza, for it was known that the "numerous domestics [. . .] did what they pleased, robbing the moribund old woman left, right, and center."⁶¹

Having meted out justice, Pushkin also settles his own poetic scores with Germann, who scoffed at Tomskii's story, calling it a "fairy tale." What the German engineer berated as *Dichtung*, Pushkin stages as pure *Wahrheit*. The author surrounds his hero (and the reader) with uncanny events, teases him with tantalizing anagrams, chronograms, and cryptograms that the calculating engineer repeatedly fails to crack, and when he also fails to respond to the call of Liza's heart, Pushkin spites Germann with the fatal card, thus completing his path from the beldam to bedlam.

Dostoevskii called "The Queen of Spades" "the pinnacle of the art of the fantastic."⁶² Its concealed galvanism and the seamless weaving of the fantastic with the realistic invites yet frustrates logical decoding, leaving reader and critic alike to perpetually sway between natural and supernatural explanations for the inexplicable. Pushkin's fantastic tale is a positive proof of Lord Byron's claim that "'the Artist' who has rendered the 'game of cards poetical' is by far greater" than one who describes a "Walk in a forest" badly.⁶³ By the same token, Pushkin also fulfills Baron Brambeus's prophecy that "The Queen of Spades" will be read with the "same pleasure by a Countess and merchant alike."⁶⁴ We can only guess what Anna Fedotovna thought of it:

"Paul!" called the Countess from behind the screen. "Send me a new novel, will you, but please not the kind they write nowadays."

"What do you mean, *grand' maman*?"

61. *CPF*, 217. Noted by Shaw, "The 'Conclusion' of Pushkin's 'Queen of Spades,'" 121.

62. Dostoevskii, *Pis'ma*, 4:178.

63. "Letter to John Murray Esq" (1821), in Andrew Nicholson, ed., *The Complete Miscellaneous Prose* (Oxford, 1991), 141. See Shaw, trans. and ed., *The Letters*, 281.

64. *PSS*, 17 vols., 15:110, 322.

"I mean a novel in which the hero does not strangle either his mother or his father [. . .]"

"There are no such novels these days. Would you perhaps like some Russian ones?"

"You don't mean to say there are Russian novels? . . . Send some to me, my dear, send some by all means!"⁶⁵

65. *CPF*, 215.