

Title: The Mystery of Hermann's Failure in "The Queen of Spades": Cracking Pushkin's Personal Code

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One of the most intriguing questions, to which readers of Pushkin's *Queen of Spades* have long been trying to find an answer, is the protagonist's fatal blunder. Caryl Emerson (*Puškin Today*, 1993, 31 – 37) has suggested that the search for a single code to the story's mysteries is what Pushkin actually parodies and, consequently, the reader's zeal to predict patterns and events. I would like to argue that yet there *is* a code – Pushkin's personal code, embedded deep within the texture and architecture of the story – which accounts for Hermann's loss. It rests with the quest for happiness which, for author and character, lies at opposite poles. While Hermann seeks happiness through money by undertaking a venture, Pushkin believes it can be found through marriage by "following the trodden path." The association between happiness and marriage – and the opposition between marriage and gambling – is well proved by Pushkin's artistic works and personal correspondence of the 1830s.

The reason for Hermann's collapse, I suggest, is his conscious failure to follow Liza's instructions (intended as a prompt to his proper movement around the countess' house) rather than with his blunder (if any) in realizing the winning strategy the countess had disclosed to him. The movement and the course of the three card games, I will show, are based on the same pattern represented by the opposition of right and left. Hermann's choice of money over marriage, which on the level of plot manifests itself as a transgression of Liza's directions by choosing the door to the countess' cabinet (the door on the right), predetermines the outcome of the final card game in which the choice of the queen of spades (the card that falls to the right and signifies a punter's loss) becomes evidence of the game lost in life.

The cause-and-effect connection between Hermann's movement and gambling illuminates another facet of the story, namely, fortune-telling, an essential aspect in Pushkin's life. Disputing Ilya Kutik's proposition to read *The Queen of Spades* as an artistic attempt to destroy the prophecy about death (*Writing as Exorcism*, 2005), I suggest the story is Pushkin's confirmation of life values and his acknowledgement of Fate's benevolence to him, regardless of the prophecy.