

Jane Shmidt (CUNY Graduate Center)

### Pushkin's "The Queen of Spades": Generic Gambling with Fantastic Ambiguity

"Две неподвижные идеи не могут вместе существовать..."  
(Two fixed ideas cannot coexist...)  
-Pushkin's "The Queen of Spades"

Since its conception, readers have been divided on the cause of Hermann's downfall at the conclusion of Pushkin's "The Queen of Spades." Some have deemed the events of the story supernatural manifestations. To such readers, it is a tale of Faustian temptation: a man, subjugated by a magical force that is triggered by his desire for knowledge, sells his soul for the secret of three cards, and is punished. Others favor a realistic reading, arguing that no paranormal events occur in the text, but rather, that all seemingly supernatural incidents are only the hallucinations of a man obsessed by an idea, and the effects of his subsequent mental deterioration. However, as Pushkin's work belongs to the genre of the fantastic, we are not obliged to choose between the two possible interpretations, for the story simultaneously reveals two conflicting codes: the ghost of the Countess both visits Hermann and does not visit him, the secret of the three magic cards both exists and does not exist. In accordance with Dostoevsky's observation, the perfection of Pushkin's "The Queen of Spades" is derived from its ability to present mutually exclusive ideas simultaneously:

"Pushkin...achieved in *The Queen of Spades* the acme of the art of the fantastic. For...you do not know how to interpret it: did Hermann's vision arise from Hermann's nature or was he actually one of those who came in contact with another world, a world of evil and hostile spirits. Now that is art!"<sup>1</sup>

This analysis examines the formal techniques Pushkin used to generate textual uncertainty in the story that Dostoevsky described as fantastic, and suggests Pushkin's possible motivation for writing such a contradictory, indeterminate narrative.

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<sup>1</sup> Fyodor M. Dostoevsky, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii v tridsati tomakh*, (Leningrad, Russia: 1972-90, vol. 30, kn. 1), p. 192.