

From the Editor:

Slavic Review publishes letters to the editor with educational or research merit. Where the letter concerns a publication in *Slavic Review*, the author of the publication will be offered an opportunity to respond. Space limitations dictate that comment regarding a book review should be limited to one paragraph; comment on an article should not exceed 750 to 1,000 words. The editor encourages writers to refrain from ad hominem discourse.

D.P.K.

To the Editor:

I liked Sergei Davydov's monumentally analytical contribution on "The Ace in Pushkin's 'The Queen of Spades'" (*Slavic Review* 58, no. 2). When I showed an Israeli cabalist Davydov's previous revelation of the ace hidden in Germann's favorite saying, he danced with delight over Pushkin's ingenious numerology.

I note, however, that Davydov misses both the gematric irony of Germann's saying and the numerological principles that would have enabled him to more thoroughly analyze this and other syntactic structures he has only partially decoded. To this I must add my surprise that he cites only my initial analyses of Pushkin's tale, tentative work that was published a quarter century ago and has long since been corrected and elaborated in several articles and my book *The Esoteric Tradition in Russian Romantic Literature* (1994).

Far from missing the correct sequence of the tale's three cards, I took my cue from Nathan Rosen's and Diana Burgin's emphasis on the sequence of play and even titled Pushkin's system "3-7-1." I also traced the system's origins back through Masonic and other eighteenth-century thaumaturgical traditions to the European discovery of Lullian and Lurean Cabalism during the Renaissance, and thence to the Tarot and the card game Faro, which derives its tally method from these systems. It seems to me that much of this could have strengthened Davydov's argument.

Actually, I'm doubly disappointed: Davydov missed the cryptogram I encoded just for him.

I appreciate Davydov's endorsement of numerological cryptographic-anagrammatic analyses. However, it seems contradictory to me to go to such lengths to verify the consistency of the system 3-7-1 and then endorse the received opinion that the numbers tantalize but do not quite add up. In fact, the consistency with which the tale's numerical and other games yield meaning and show function is mind-boggling. Still, I disagree with the premise that Pushkin adhered only to the sequence 3-7-1. Numerology is hocus-pocus, and it seems unreasonable to me to close the tale by limiting Pushkin to only one of the numerous "magical coincidences" of numbers. As Davydov himself notes, Pushkin used the 1-3-7 sequence of the Taro tally. His analysis of Germann's saying shows that Pushkin hid the ace between, not after, the trey and seven (*utroiT, USemerit*). Just as important as the numbers 3-7-1 per se are the combinations (3+1, 3×3, 3×7+1) behind which many of Pushkin's finest ironies are hidden.

In "The Queen of Spades" Pushkin invites us to play a game of great risk—not least his own—and if we follow his game to where it leads we are rewarded with new knowledge about the text. Far from remaining impervious to Pushkin's irony, we discover ever finer refinements of that romantic value called wit. Davydov's contribution to this kind of analysis—his discoveries of additional textual and extratextual links—made me dance too. On one foot.

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