

'The Queen of Spades' or 'The Playing Card Trick' **Magic and the Supernatural** **in Pushkin and Tchaikovsky**



A study morning with
Dr Richard Moore
Friday, 11 January 2019
From 10-1 p.m.
William Elder Building,
Castlegate, Berwick,
TD15 1JT

A classic Russian tale of the supernatural in which everything and nothing is explained in the context of the mysterious power residing in playing cards.

The Queen of Spades is one of the most evocative and chilling of Russian short stories and is also the basis of at least three operas. It tells of the obsessive desire of a German army officer to learn the mysterious secret of three winning cards. A sense of unreliability in the narrator and a strong ghostly dimension add thrilling interest.

We shall relate the story to the Tchaikovsky opera and examine *motifs* of playing cards, hidden secrets and wishes granted as a literary concern; we shall also find out about the author, usually considered one of Russia's very great writers.

In Pushkin's telling, a game of cards becomes the basis for a work of great psychological suspense. A sense of unreliability in the narrator and a strong ghostly dimension add thrilling interest. Also notable is the possibility of multiple interpretations – realistic and supernatural – of the ending. One of the themes is sheer greed and another is the power of obsession. Love in the story is secondary. Hermann used Lizvyeta, the Countess's ward, mainly as a means to gain access to the Countess – with grim and fatal results.

We shall relate the story to the Tchaikovsky operatic version and examine *motifs* of playing cards, hidden secrets, and wishes granted or withheld as a literary concern. This, as regards to the significance of cards, will include reference to works as diverse as Bizet's *Carmen*, Gilbert and Sullivan's *The Grand Duke*, and Lewis Carroll's *Alice* books. In terms of hidden secrets and wishes, we shall include mention of Keats' *Lamia*, Scott's *Messalina*, Stevenson's *The Bottle Imp*, LeFanu's *Carmilla* and Jacobs' *The Monkey's Paw*.

The other strand is biographical, for we shall also find out about the author. He, born into the aristocracy, became famous in his own right as a poet, a playwright and a novelist of the Romantic era. Many consider him the founder of modern Russian Literature, so he is certainly worth our seeking out. Russian Literature, so he is certainly worth our seeking him out.

The cost of the lecture is £9, including refreshments.

All are welcome and no previous knowledge is assumed.

If you supply us with your personal data (name, address or email), we will hold this in accordance with our privacy policy, available [here](#) or by request to BEA, 7 Ravensdowne, Berwick-upon-Tweed TD15 1HX. If you have any queries, please email berwickea@gmail.com or phone Cian McHugh on 01289 303254

To book online, [please click here](#) To book by mail, please fill in the booking form below, and mail to BEA, 7 Ravensdowne, Berwick-upon-Tweed TD15 1HX along with a cheque in favour of BEA.

Name

Address

Tel No

Email

Cheque enclosed £

(*Queen of Spades*)

