



## BUZZ GROUP: THE QUEEN OF SPADES

1. Why does the Countess react as she does when Hermann demands to know the secret from her? What does she tell Hermann? Comment on her silences and words.

Group 1: blank,  
She is, shocked. Strong emotion when he references Chaplitsky,  
draws out pistol  
Doesn't reveal; silent. Bluffs - unknown

Group 2: → She says that it was a joke.  
→ She was probably silent ~~because~~ out of fear; It could  
since she didn't really also be due to unwillingness  
to sh

Group 3: Her silence can be interpreted as unwillingness to share the secret.  
~~Eventually, when~~ If the secret of the three cards had been given to  
her as a 'deal with the devil', then it makes sense that she would not  
want to disclose it to Hermann.

Also, when she finally tells Hermann the secret (as a ghost) she doesn't  
tell him the right cards. This relates to the first epigraph ("the  
queen of spades signifies secret malevolence"), and can be interpreted  
as Hermann's own deal with the devil.

Q4 → We don't think it was a joke since she was seeking words to form a  
reply. If she really formulated the whole thing as a joke, she would've  
outright said it.  
She was initially surprised by the sudden appearance of Hermann.  
Later she carefully chose her words because she did not wish  
to share her secret. As when she returns \

~~The Counter~~

65) The story can be interpreted as being Countess winning being a chance event, with a story constructed around it by society. Countess was naturally surprised that someone completely believed in it

b) initial silence: shocked  
claim of joke → may actually be a joke,  
may be her not wanting to share it  
with Hermann.

later silence → unwillingness to share; fear.  
Strong emotions → Seared by pistol,  
(visibly)  
maybe the case that Chaplitzky was not  
told the "secret" either.

she is aware of the secret, yet has not made attempts to  
dispell the rumours.

Chaplitzky's bad ending may explain her reluctance to share  
again,  
or it may indicate her malevolence towards people  
who entreat her for the secret.



- i) Intimate relation as <sup>while</sup> getting dressed, one did not receive strangers or formal visitors.
- ii) Hermann loses sanity due to his 'losing' of the game. This was against Chekalinsky, a one-on-one unlike games that are usually

done in groups. **BUZZ GROUP: THE QUEEN OF SPADES** <sup>(financial death is this case of game)</sup>

2. i. Find out what is the social significance of visiting people when they are getting dressed (Hint: look up the word "toilette")
- arrogant/<sup>arrogant</sup> enough about the positive result but just couldn't accept the reality when lost.
- ii. Why does Pushkin compare the game Hermann plays to a duel? What are the similarities between the two?
- (i) continued: you allow only the people you trust most to even see you in that state (state of extreme vulnerability).

i) It was considered a privilege for a person to be able to watch a noble get dressed. Men also had a morning toilette where they usually discussed business.

ii) It is a technical expression which implies a card is beaten/<sup>(ubita)</sup> killed by a stronger card, similar to a duel.

i) It was an elaborate affair to get dressed

ii) It is compared to duel as it can be an economic death to Hermann if he loses as in duel. There is a lot of suspense/anticipation, just like in a duel. It is also a matter of life-or-death for Hermann, as if he loses, he loses all his money, and Hermann has been deeply obsessed with winning this 'duel' and doubling his wealth.

~~Just like duel there is a, big, the stakes is~~

ii) Pushkin himself was an avid gambler and also participated in 29 duels so it was natural for him to correlate these situations with pretty much very high stakes → similarity

(i) Piece of clothing describes the status, now  
privilege/closeness is associated with wearing at  
taken

(ii) the social significance was of familiarity.  
Tomsky was better acquainted with  
the countess than Hermann and hence

ii) similarities  
→ Their honor and pride depends on  
who wins the match in both duel  
and the card game.  
→ It is a matter of wit, ~~etc~~ luck  
and competitive spirit and both  
the game and duel.

ii) The fact that economic death is a ~~death~~ his obsession with wealth  
Also indicates a tense and high stakes atmosphere → for both/all  
participants  
Pushkin being an avid dueller, ~~the~~ analogy  
it makes sense for him to make the analogy

i) Became a ritual under Louis XIV. levels of f (in)formality





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3. What is Pushkin saying about the literary and philosophical culture of the day? Interpret the following examples:

- a. "The portrait sketched by Tomsy resembled the picture she had put together herself, and, thanks to the latest novels, this already banal character frightened and captivated her imagination" (164).
- b. Tomsy calls Hermann a "truly romantic character: he has the profile of Napoleon and the soul of Mephistopheles" (164). Later, Lizaveta Ivanovna thinks that, sitting on the windowsill in her room, he "bore an astonishing resemblance to the portrait of Napoleon" (165).

b. she may be referring to the Romanticized portrait of Napoleon and saying Hermann is physically fit (muscular) and Handsome like Napoleon

Mephistopheles is known for his ~~so~~ cunning wit & his immoral acts.

It can be that Herzer  
or ~~an~~ This says that a cunning, ruthless, violent, characters were fascinated by authors of the day to the point of banality. These values are anti-Christian and might imply the church wasn't so powerful.

b. The culture romanticized and admired powerful characters like Napoleon.

they saw beyond morality and in this case admired Napoleon. Thus their values lied on admiring power than goodness.

- a) Banal - lacking ~~to~~ originality / imagination  
↳ indicates a stock character; <sup>most</sup> novels followed similar beats. He could ~~be~~ be a romantic hero or he could be a cunning plotter.  
↳ in the modern sense.

~~At~~ ~~Not~~ The perception is that novels of the time lacked in originality.

- b) Napoleon was a prominent character in the Russian cultural conscience.

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a) . Napoleon, a French emperor, was active in Russian elite imagination as a romantic/strong figure - influence of western Europe / France on Russian elite culture.

Banality of character sketch - occurred in novels by later authors

~~mephistopheles - originally feature~~  
[group] b) this shows them idealizing the french characteristics. Russia occupied France for a while and their ideals of liberty, fraternity and equality crept into the literature. Napoleon was the "ideal" & an embodiment of these characteristics & nobility.  
a) the literature of this time ~~only~~ have portrayed banal characters as having a cunning side. <sup>thinking her life may now resemble the</sup> stories from these novels. so perhaps her love interest 'herman' too may be in fact cunning.  
however this could also imply izabella was scared of the ~~gossip~~ that might follow. if <sup>Tomsky</sup> were in fact aware of their brewing relationship this might lead to a buzz or gossip around which will affect her position. She might feel it as a breach of trust.





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4. Consider the references to these literary characters or authors in the story and try to explain their role or purpose in the story:

a. Mephistopheles

b. "Bitter is another's bread, says Dante, and hard it is climbing another's stairs, and who knows the bitterness of dependency if not the poor ward of an aristocratic old woman?" (157)

a) Tomskey talks about Hermann, referring him as the profile of Napoleon (overall character?) & the soul of Mephisto (the demon king of Hell/Germany)

a. Tomskey, Hermann's friend describes Hermann as a Napoleon in frame and Mephistopheles in heart. ~~this~~ Mephistopheles is Faust's antagonist, in which Faust sells his soul for knowledge. Mephistopheles embodies devilry and evil and a cold calculated mind. - "intertextuality"

b) Respite being exposed to the aristocratic ways, she is forced to continue her lifestyle and is dependent of

b) The quote refers to the fact that it is never as enjoyable to enjoy comforts <sup>and wealth</sup> when they are not ones ~~own~~ own. (The Divine Comedy)

Both @ & b make references to Hell or the devil, introducing a sinister tone to the story.   
 -> seven Furies of Hell

Herrmann, compare

It references  
hickery and manipulation,  
later seen in Herrmann's  
treatment  
of Lizaveta

Tomsky compares Herrmann's heart to Mephistopheles, the demon king, so seems to have an insight into his calculating or 'evil' nature. ~~A~~ Reference to Napoleon highlights strong character and ruthless ambition. Author introduces features in a romantic way by comparing him to well known / romantic figures.

"Bitter bread. . ." describes the difficulty of being dependent on another for well being. It highlights Lizaveta's position of necessarily yielding to the Countess caprices, and having no say in her time or companions.

Group 2: a) 'Mephistopheles' is ~~an~~ agent of evil. He is also said to be an unconscious force for good. Does this show up

Group 3:

a) 'Mephistopheles' is what Herrmann is referred to as in one point; this is done in juxtaposition with the reference to Napoleon (profile of Napoleon; mind of Mephistopheles); Tomsky says this to describe Herrmann's nature to Liza.

b) "Bitter bread. . ." is possibly used to refer the plight of both the Countess who is dependent on Lizaveta's income and is often ignorant of her, participating in ornamental and ritualistic life of high society and Lizaveta's as well since instead of living out her life, is serving the ignorant Countess. Liza's life revolves around the Countess' life.



Q4 continued: Liza also felt remorse as she realised she got attracted to a ruthless and greedy person. ↑



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5. Why does Lizaveta Ivanovna have so much remorse, and Hermann none, for the death of the Countess?

Hermann is a ruthless and ambitious character. His main motive is to find the secret of the cards. He decides to go to any lengths possible for monetary gain. He becomes hardened by his life experiences.

Lizaveta, serving and under Countess, has a kind and empathetic personality. Though the Countess was authoritarian in nature, they had a working and friendly relation. Lizaveta had also developed guilt for being the indirect reason of Lizaveta's death by allowing Hermann into the Countess's mansion.

Lizaveta does feel guilty, but that has more to do with the fact that she is intended to be a fundamentally good character in general and not just a working relationship w/ the Countess.

Hermann OTOH is driven by monetary gain, ~~at~~ even though he has never been as poor as Lizaveta. He also is a character that shows the effect of unchecked ambitions.



The author may be trying to say something about people's inherent natures.

Hermann was a ruthless egoist, single minded, and completely selfish. He didn't think about the effect of his actions. He admits he intended no harm, but refuses to feel ~~any~~ regret for consequences unintended or not. In fact he was horrified by the loss of the secret. Lizaveta is shocked by her role in bringing about the countess's death and cries out of remorse for the loss of her benefactress. She seems to feel ~~grief on realizing her position and~~ guilt on aiding the event.

Group 2: Herman is German. In Russian lit, Germans are portrayed to be cold and emotionless. Herman plays up to this stereotype and doesn't feel any ounce of regret when the countess died, his sole goal was the money.

Earlier Tomsky had also mentioned to Lizaveta about 'those evil deeds' of Herman's. So later when the death of the countess does happen, she probably thinks back to this.

Even in the countess's funeral, Herman's concubine tells 'you're the old woman's murderer'. He ~~didn't~~ wanted to ask for her forgiveness in her funeral. Does this show his guilty conscience or a fear of the supernatural?

Group 3: Hermann does feel some guilt, but whatever it is, is overshadowed by the loss he feels of the secret - now he's never going to get the secret of the cards. We ~~think~~ also disagree with the point <sup>a</sup> the previous group made about Hermann being an egoist - he's just selfish, doesn't necessarily have ~~be~~ a big ego. Liza could also have been more shocked, as she was expecting Hermann to visit her due to their affair; but instead he comes to her with the news of the countess's death, and the revelation that all their letters were just a means to an end for him.

Q4:- Lizaveta was an indirect reason for countess's death, ~~because~~ because she told Hermann how to enter the house ~~thus~~ she felt guilty. She also felt remorse because ~~she~~ of her relationship with the countess & all the years she lived with her, she was also naturally a caring person. Hermann <sup>OTOH</sup> had a single minded obsession with the secret, he was an greed hence felt no

Herman we agree with Group 3's conclusion for Hermann



Years later Hermann is still obsessing over what the ~~car~~ last card was supposed to be. He has gone mad



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6.8. How do we interpret the conclusion and the fate of the characters mentioned in it?

Hermann's ending gestures towards his obsessive nature and chaotic mind. We also notice that all the characters who were amiable towards Countess had good endings and prospects for the future. This indicates something supernatural.

Lizaveta takes care of a figure like herself, showing her to be an essentially good person.

Summary : Poetic justice - Hermann, Tomsy and Lizaveta get what they deserve in a way. Hermann, previously obsessing over the 3 cards (before winning) falls prey to madness and is in an asylum. Lizaveta settles in life as she might have hoped for and repays/carries on the 'favour' of adopting a poor relative. Reads like a fable's moral ending:

Summary 6: ~~Each ended up~~ ~~Herm~~ - An interpretation of the some would be that of the countess having the last laugh on Hermann as she said 3, 7, A instead of 3, 7, Q; this prompted Hermann to bet more in reliance of his dream. He hoping to win large sum of money, loses all of it and the countess has her revenge. Lizaveta and Tomsy continue to have good lives.

Group 2: Herman's obsession ~~with~~ <sup>with</sup> madness <sup>clear + place</sup> dramatises the financial obsession he displayed from the beginning. "Cure" his madness in a mental institution. Hisaveta marriage to an anonymous "agreeable young man" emphasises her desire for marriage as rescue not attachment to a significant other.

Tomsky, relatively unimportant, his promotion to "good" marriage tells us everyone in society seeks personal advantage... #

Group 3:

p 3:

Herman has got a poetic justice, the ending is rushed and the writers needed a quite complete ending, as also maid gets married but it sounds like an open ending as it is not specified as the good/bad marriage. at the end each character got a good share of happiness/sadness for what we deserve and the ending is not conclusive completely, open to readers interpretation

Group      Date & Conclusion

4 Fate & Conclusion  
~~Lizaveta~~ Lizaveta was innocent and had good intentions, so  
in the end she got freed from ~~the~~ ~~then~~ the  
trap she was in to start a happy life.  
... his choices

as ~~the~~ some mysterious force ~~was~~ or "greed" was making choices for him which is shown when Hermann goes to the study instead of going to ~~the~~ ~~basement~~ Lizabeth.