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## **SELF-DESTRUCTION THROUGH GREED: “THE QUEEN OF SPADES” AND “ALI BABA AND FORTY THIEVES”**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Greed, a cardinal sin originating from early Christianity, is a notable recurring theme in literature and is universally prevalent throughout civilizations, literary works, and theological systems. It is widely held that people who exhibit greed defy God's command and face punishment, but those who sincerely abide by His commands receive blessings. The works *The Queen of Spades* by Alexandr Pushkin and *The Tale of Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves* in *The Thousand and One Nights*, belong to separate literary traditions. However, both stories depict antagonistic individuals who ultimately meet their own end as a result of their greedy behaviour. In these literary works, there are two different sets of characters, the rewarded and the punished. Within these literary pieces, the initial set of characters experiences significant consequences for their actions, whilst the subsequent group is duly compensated. These works demonstrate that specific topics surpass the limitations of time and culture, regardless of the differences between the eras and communities in which they originated. Accordingly, this study aims to reveal how greed turns into a way of self-destruction in these two works, which belong to completely different periods and geographies, through textual analysis.

**Keywords:** Greed, Divine Justice, Reward and Punishment, *The Queen of Spades*, *Ali Baba and Forty Thieves*.

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## AÇGÖZLÜLÜK YOLUYLA ÖZYIKIM: MAÇA KIZI VE ALİ BABA VE KIRK HARAMİLER

Mustafa KARA<sup>2</sup>

### ÖZ

Erken dönem Hristiyanlıktan itibaren önemli bir günah olan açgözlülük, edebiyatta tekrarlanan dikkate değer bir temadır ve medeniyetler, edebi eserler ve teolojik sistemler boyunca evrensel olarak yaygınlaşmıştır. Açgözlülük sergileyen insanların Tanrı'nın emrine karşı geldiği ve cezaya çarptırıldığı, ancak O'nun emirlerine içtenlikle uyanların kutsandığı yaygın bir kanıdır. Aleksandr Puşkin'in *Maça Kızı* ve *Binbir Gece Masalları*'ndaki *Ali Baba ve Kırk Haramiler* hikâyelerinin her biri ayrı edebi geleneklere aittir. Bununla birlikte, her iki öykü de açgözlü davranışları sonucunda kendi sonlarıyla karşılaşan aykırı bireyleri tasvir etmektedir. Bu edebi eserlerde, ödüllendirilen ve cezalandırılan olmak üzere iki farklı karakter kümesi bulunmaktadır. İlk karakter grubu eylemleri için ciddi fiziksel ve ruhani sonuçlar yaşarken, diğer grup usulüne uygun olarak ödüllendirilir ya da herhangi bir cezaya maruz bırakılmaz. Bu eserler, ortaya çıktıkları dönemler ve toplumlar arasındaki farklılıklar ne olursa olsun, belirli konuların zaman ve kültür sınırlarını aştığını göstermektedir. Buna bağlı olarak bu çalışma, bambaşka dönemlere ve coğrafyalara ait olan bu iki eserde açgözlülüğün bir özyıkım yöntemine nasıl dönüştüğünü metinsel analiz yöntemiyle ortaya koymayı hedeflemektedir.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Açgözlülük, İlahi Adalet, Ödül ve Ceza, *Maça Kızı*, *Ali Baba ve Kırk Haramiler*.

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## Introduction

Greed, which is classified as one of the seven deadly sins that originated in early Christianity, has consistently been a prominent motif in literature. Although it is a fundamental component of Catholic doctrine, the concept is also present in all cultures, literature, and religious traditions, regardless of whether they are Western or non-Western. People become entranced and lose control over their desires as a result of an overwhelming craving, which makes it increasingly difficult to resist the temptation to succumb to sin. Although their environment and cultural influences consistently encourage people to appreciate their possessions from birth, they struggle to be content with their current circumstances. Therefore, they disregard God's command as a result of their greed. Indeed, there is a widespread belief that God metes out punishment to people who display greed, while bestowing blessings upon those who faithfully adhere to His commandments. St. Thomas Aquinas (1274/1922) also states that greed is “a sin against God, just as all mortal sins, in as much as man contemns things eternal for the sake of temporal things” (II-II.118.1). It is undeniable that both *The Queen of Spades* by Alexandr Pushkin and *The Tale of Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves* in *The Thousand and One Nights*, written by an anonymous author, belong to distinct literary traditions. Nevertheless, they both depict antagonistic characters who, as a consequence of their greedy actions, precipitate their own demise. In Alexandr Pushkin's short story, *The Queen of Spades*, Hermann and in *The Tale of Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves* in *The Thousand and One Nights*, Ali Baba's brother Kasim, Kasim's wife, and the forty thieves, including the captain, are characters who face significant challenges in their pursuit of wealth and material possessions in order to improve their lives and ensure their survival. The contrasting characters in Pushkin's work are Lizaveta Ivanovna and Tomsy, while in the Arabian short story, they are Ali Baba, Marjanah the slave, and Ali Baba's son. The first set of characters are subjected to terrible punishment, whereas the characters in the second set are rewarded in one kind or another. One can observe a notable shift in the attitudes of the characters who become imprisoned by their greed. Initially, they are relatively virtuous individuals, but once consumed by their desire for greater wealth, money, and possessions, they engage in malevolent actions. They undergo a sequence of loss, insanity, lack of gratitude, jealousy, and ultimately face the consequences. The characters' outcome is determined by either a spiritual or bodily punishment, which is dependent on the favour of God. It is evident that chance or destiny plays a significant role in this determination. The second category of characters, however, are typically flat characters, exhibiting no discernible change in their inherent qualities from the start to the conclusion of the works. Consequently, they are either rewarded or remain exempt from divine punishment. They possess qualities such as modesty, honesty, trustworthiness, generosity, and loyalty. They are rewarded or spared punishment by God because of their loyalty to His commandments and their avoidance of the deadly sin. Despite the disparities between the periods and societies in which these works were created, they also demonstrate that certain themes transcend the boundaries of time and culture. As such, this study seeks to uncover the transformation of greed into a self-destructive force by the divine in these two distinct literary works from different time periods and geographical locations, using textual analysis as the method of examination.

## Alexandr Sergeyevich Pushkin and *The Queen of Spades*

### Alexandr Sergeyevich Pushkin's Literary Significance

Alexandr Sergeyevich Pushkin is widely regarded as a significant figure in Russian literature. He exhibited characteristics of a Romantic novelist while also deviating from the typical traits associated with Romanticism. According to Basker (2005), his artistic development is commonly depicted as a progression from neo-Classicism, then to Romanticism, and finally to Realism. However, the progression is not clearly evident. Pushkin consistently demonstrated the ability to blur boundaries and surpass established divisions. He possessed a talent for captivating contradictions that may appear to have originated from the Romantic era but ultimately undermined all established perspectives and singular viewpoints, including the Romantic. He exhibited both Romantic and non-Romantic qualities and frequently incorporated elements from the Classicist, Realist, and Romantic modes, which often coexist and interact (pp. 293 – 294). Nevertheless, his artistic ability extended beyond his amalgamation of Classicism, Realism, and Romanticism. He blended several genres, forging a distinct literary style: “[T]he limitations of his linguistic equipment shielded him from the direct aesthetic impact of the original and enabled his own genius to leak into (or even improve upon) his source” (Emerson, 2007, p. viii). In other words, Pushkin’s language barrier helped him master over the vernacular speech in such genres as “the ode, elegy, long ‘Byronic’ poem, stylized folktale, neoclassical verse drama, *comédie italienne*, short story or *conte*, epistolary prose, travel notes, and eventually the prose of a historian” (Emerson, 2007, p. viii), thereby becoming an influencer for the writers and poets after him. Troyat (1970) posits that all other writers asserted their lineage from Pushkin. Curiously, the entirety of Russian literature originated from his exceptional talent. He introduced his fellow countrymen to a wide range of literary pursuits, including verse, novels, short fiction, historiography, theatrical productions, and critique. He was both chronologically and qualitatively superior. He served as the origin or cause. Both Gogol and Tolstoy owe their existence to him, as he was the creator of the Russian language. Furthermore, he laid the foundation for the development of every literary genre (p. 622). Regarding his achievement in pioneering vernacular speaking, it is important to acknowledge that “[f]or Russians, Pushkin has represented the Apollonian ideal of clarity, balance, harmony, order-and sanity-a poetic refuge against the disorder and dysfunctions of Russian life” (Gofman as cited in Rosenshield, 1994, p. 905). Furthermore, he served as a representative for the literary communities in Russia and dedicated himself to advocating for social change, a stance that undoubtedly unsettled the government of that age. “[A]s the result of a handful of vicious epigrams on prominent government figures and some liberal verses critical of serfdom and (more mildly) autocracy” (Basker, 2005, p. 294), he was banished and his writings were subjected to prolonged censorship. Specifically, despite completing his renowned drama *Boris Godunov* in 1825, he had a delay in publishing his work until 1831. In addition, he actively resisted bourgeois literature and emerged as a prominent figure in Soviet Literature. “He remains the principal shaper of the Russian language into an expressive imaginative form: his spare and intense reworking of European forms to reflect deeply personal and Russian themes set the standard for all Russian literature that followed” (Burt, 2009, p. 70).

### **Greed in *The Queen of Spades***

*The Queen of Spades* is a concise story written by Pushkin in 1833. The primary focus of the text is on human greed and avarice. The narrative revolves around the gradual entrapment of Hermann, the son of a German who later becomes a Russian, due to these characteristics. It explores the point to which an individual may be willing to transgress rules solely for their personal benefit, inspiring Dostoevsky, “who modelled his character Raskolnikov in ‘Crime and Punishment’ on Hermann, Pushkin’s enigmatic central character” (Burt, 2009, p. 69). Hermann holds the rank of an ordinary officer in the military. As he portrays it in the narrative, “[p]lay interests [him] very much [...] but [he is] not in the position to sacrifice the necessary in the hope of winning the superfluous” (Pushkin, 2017, p. 7). Thus, one might infer that he is not initially described as fervent or avaricious in the text. His intention is to live a modest life, devoid of extravagance, while ensuring he has sufficient resources for his own needs. He observes the gamblers playing the card game from the gaming table since, despite his inclination towards gambling, his financial situation prevents him from participating in this extravagant activity. However, upon learning about the three cards – three, seven, ace – which form a winning combination for gamblers, Hermann becomes enticed by the potential money and material possessions that can be obtained through gambling. Initially portrayed as a rational person, the protagonist undergoes a transformation into a more materialist figure, reminiscent of a Napoleonic persona, due to his insatiable greed. Undoubtedly, his greed will inevitably lead him to his own demise. As Burgin (1974) asserts, “[d]emonic forces destroy Herman[n], but he brings evil upon himself through his one great flaw, greed” (p. 52). Hermann has a constant oscillation between his true personality and his desire to embody a Napoleonic persona, resulting in a conflict between his current state and his desired state. As is put forth by Jackson (1960), “[p]recisely indifference to people, egoistic insensibility to anything opposing his will, the complete subordination of means to ends, and the passion for power characterized Napoleon” (p. 109). Tomsy, the grandson of the Countess, also confirms Hermann's character to Lizaveta: “This Hermann [...] is a man of romantic personality. He has the profile of a Napoleon, and the soul of a Mephistopheles. I think he has at least three crimes on his conscience” (Pushkin, 2017, p. 26). Thus, it is apparent that Hermann's subsequent efforts to achieve his desires mirror those of Napoleon, who was willing to sacrifice innumerable soldiers in order to gain dominion over Europe.

Hermann devises a scheme to manipulate Lizaveta, the ward of the Countess, with the intention of gaining access to the Countess and uncovering the enigma surrounding the three cards. Hermann, having successfully allured Lizaveta, convinces her to rendezvous at the residence. Although Hermann's true objective is to gain access to the Countess's room and obtain the mystical combination, Lizaveta will mistakenly believe that his desire is to meet with his sweetheart. Therefore, Hermann conceals himself in a wardrobe upon entering the house, ensuring that Lizaveta remains unaware of his presence. Lizaveta approaches the cupboard where Hermann is concealed, “[s]omething akin to a pang of conscience stirred in his heart, but was soon stilled. He stood petrified” (Pushkin, 2017, p. 22). Clearly, Hermann continues to vacillate, but he perseveres with his plan methodically, as he is ensnared by his own greed. As previously established, being greedy is an act of sin against God; therefore, Hermann's intention seems futile when one considers the grandeur of God. Regardless of Hermann's efforts and

unwavering adherence to his goal, he will inevitably face divine retribution. This initial endeavour by Hermann is a conspicuous manifestation of his profound commitment towards his objective. Due to his greed-fuelled fervour, he lacks empathy towards others and fails to acknowledge the potential devastation that Lizaveta may experience upon discovering his lack of genuine affection towards her. Thus, it is evident that Hermann is emulating Napoleon's path to achievement, characterised by a lack of concern for anything or anyone in order to attain one's objective. Upon recognising that Hermann's emotions are not rooted in love, but rather in sheer ambition, Lizaveta ponders:

Money was what his soul was craving! It was not in her power to quench his passion and make him happy. The poor ward had turned out to be no more than the blind accomplice of a burglar, of the murderer of her aged benefactress! [...] She shed bitter tears of agonizing, belated remorse. Hermann regarded her in silence: his heart was also crushed, but neither the poor girl's tears nor the wondrous charm of her sorrow could move his icy soul. (Pushkin, 2017, p. 27)

Lizaveta serves as a tool for Hermann; she is the means of access to the Countess's room. Regardless of the extent of the young woman's distress, Hermann displays no indication of remorse. “[T]he essence of his crime lies not in any wilful or calculating intention to kill or destroy, but in a complete moral indifference to people whom he sees merely as means to an end” (Jackson, 1960, p. 109). He displays indifference towards her emotions and integrity. His intense hunger and unwavering focus on his goals make it entirely justifiable to liken him to a true Napoleonic figure. The man's apathy, self-centeredness, and determination to amass fortune through the old woman's mystical formula may not necessarily indicate that he will achieve his intended goals since “human will is unable to triumph over fate or destiny” (Bainbridge, 2005, p. 464). Thus, it may be asserted that he is gradually orchestrating his own demise.

Following his triumph in gaining access to the Countess's chamber, Hermann experiences a profound shift in his emotions. He appears resolute in his determination to get the elderly woman to disclose the secret pertaining to the cards. Initially, he displays signs of fondness for the Countess and requests the enchanted combination of cards. Upon being rejected by the elderly woman, he experiences a surge of wrath:

For whom are you saving your secret? For your grandsons? They are rich as it is, and they don't even know the value of money. A spendthrift will not benefit by your three cards. He who cannot guard his patrimony will die in poverty, whatever demonic machinations he may resort to. I am not a spendthrift; I know the value of money. Your three cards will not be wasted on me. (Pushkin, 2017, p. 23)

The source of his wrath lies in his pursuit of the ultimate goal, which is to acquire wealth and material possessions that will provide him with a life of comfort until his death, and the Countess's obstruction of his ambition. Hermann, initially displaying affection towards the Countess at the start of the conversation, has a shift in emotion and becomes enraged shortly after being rejected. Predictably, he begins pleading with the elderly woman in order to acquire knowledge of the secret card combination, which aligns perfectly with his aspirations. He takes a chance and assumes various emotional states, hoping that one of them will compel the woman to reveal the information:

If your heart ever knew the feeling of love," he said, "if you remember its ecstasies, if you once in your life smiled, hearing the cry of a newborn son, if anything human has ever pulsed within your bosom, then I beseech you, appealing to the feelings of a wife, mistress, mother – to everything that is sacred in life – do not refuse my request! Reveal your secret to me! Of what use is it to you? [...] Maybe it is linked with a terrible sin, a forfeiture of eternal bliss, a covenant with the Devil [...] Consider: you are old, you will not live long – I am willing to take your sin on my soul. Only reveal your secret to me. Consider that the happiness of a man is in your hands; not only I, but my children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren will bless your memory and hold it sacred. (Pushkin, 2017, pp. 23 - 24)

Hermann delivers this remark with the theatrical flair of an actor, assuming a kneeling position on stage. He fervently pleads with the elderly woman, but upon realising that he is unable to coax the words out of her, he becomes consumed by rage, stemming from his insatiable greed. The assailant brandishes the firearm and intimidates the woman, ultimately resulting in the demise of the Countess. This is Hermann's ultimate destination. He ruthlessly murders the woman for his personal convenience. Therefore, it is evident that he diligently continues to prepare for his unavoidable retribution. As is also put forth by Bainbridge (2005), "the egocentric and unfeeling Hermann [...] is destroyed by his own ambition" (p. 464). Upon assassinating the Countess, he experiences no trace of remorse whatsoever: "He felt no pang of conscience over the old woman's death. The one thought appalling him was the irretrievable loss of the secret that he had expected to make him rich" (Pushkin, 2017, p. 27). Subsequently, there is no individual available to disclose the confidential information regarding the cards, which causes him to have an overwhelming sense of discomfort and remorse. He is currently distant from his objective. He presumes that he has forfeited his sole opportunity to attain wealth and live a life of luxury until his final day. The death of a lady, which serves no purpose, does not evoke any sense of shame in him. He is deeply entrenched in his greedy, egocentric, and conformist reality, resulting in his inability to feel any concern for the events happening around him. Furthermore, he abstains from attending the funeral due to his overwhelming sense of guilt. "He believed that the dead Countess could exercise an evil influence on his life, and he decided to go to her funeral in order to ask her pardon" (Pushkin, 2017, p. 29), which is another implication of his selfishness since his presence in the funeral is not due to his remorse deep down, but for preventing a prospective curse on him.

The process of punishment is initiated when Hermann engages in destructive behaviour that disregards the well-being of others and lacks empathy. He has become an erratic person, torn between the realms of morality and the material world. As Pushkin (2017) also poses it, "[t]wo fixed ideas can no more coexist in the moral sphere than can two bodies occupy the same space in the physical world" (p. 32). Through divine intervention, Hermann exhibits signs of madness as he becomes completely consumed by ideas of wealth, possessions, well-being, comfort, and opulence. This obsession is a result of his knowledge of the mystical sequence of cards, which he acquired via the apparition of the Countess.

The three, the seven, and the ace soon eclipsed the image of the dead old woman in Hermann's mind. Three, seven, ace – the threesome haunted him and was perpetually on his lips. Seeing a young girl, he would say, "How shapely! Just like a three of hearts." If anybody asked him what time it was, he would answer, "Five to the seven." Every portly man reminded him of an ace. The three, the seven, and the ace hounded him even in his dreams, taking on every imaginable

form: the three blossomed before him like a great luxuriant flower; the seven appeared as a Gothic gate; and the ace assumed the shape of an enormous spider. (Pushkin, 2017, p. 32)

As evident from the given extract, Hermann has reached a point where he is no longer able to regulate his attitudes, resulting in the deterioration of his mental stability. This decline might be considered as an additional aspect of his punishment since “an insanity of greed has overwhelmed his reason” (Rosen, 2002, p. 722). However, after being advised by the spirit of the Countess to play only once, Hermann disregards this advice and proceeds to play with the magical combination of the cards three times, resulting in the loss of both his sanity and all his property. Consequently, he forfeits his inheritance and the funds he obtained by gaming. He is rendered destitute, which serves as an additional divine retribution for his greed. The occurrence of destiny's intervention becomes understandable when Hermann mistakenly mixes the queen of spades for an ace. “He could not believe his eyes; he could not fathom how he could possibly have drawn the wrong card” (Pushkin, 2017, p. 35). Accordingly, “Herman becomes simply a puppet of fate, manipulated by the power of the other world” (Rosen, 1975, p. 259). Pushkin deliberately includes a significant error in the story to illustrate how Hermann's excessive desire for wealth and lack of integrity ultimately result in his downfall. As is put forth by Jackson (1960), “Hermann's catastrophic defeat in the final round of the card game, in that intoxicating finale of near-victory, is not an accident, but rooted in the moral transgression which he has denied” (p. 109). He has relinquished his self-esteem, mental stability, and possessions. In addition, he has committed the act of murder against an innocent elderly woman, manipulated a young woman into a romantic relationship, and callously toyed with her emotions, akin to how careless boys play with their toys.

Highlighting his mental decline, it is unsurprising that once he would make such a ruthless error at the gambling table, “it seemed to him that the queen of spades screwed up her eyes and grinned” (Pushkin, 2017, p. 35). After encountering this unexplainable event, Hermann is convinced that it is the result of the Countess's curse, which has caused him to make an error. Ultimately, Hermann is placed under medical care in a hospital, rendered incapable of responding to any inquiries. The only action he is capable of is to replicate the pattern of “three, seven, ace!” and “three, seven, queen!”. Due to his greedy nature and lack of gratitude for the blessings bestowed upon him by God, Hermann has experienced numerous setbacks in his life and has endured physical and psychological retribution from God. Rosenshield (1994) also endorses the notion and posits that “his final condition appears a fate worse than death” (p. 996). Lizaveta Ivanovna has married a pleasant and agreeable young man and has acquired enough wealth to sustain her lifestyle; meanwhile, Tomsy has been elevated to the position of captain and has also married Princess Pauline. However, Hermann is currently confined in a hospital, devoid of any rational speech or control over his own thoughts. Therefore, even though Lizaveta and Tomsy do not crave for a punishment for Hermann's evil and greedy actions, their happy endings serve as another form of retribution for him, if one were to extrapolate a moral lesson from Pushkin's works. Hence, it is evident that Hermann has orchestrated his own terrible demise entirely by himself.



## *The Thousand and One Nights and Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves*

### **A Concise View at *The Thousand and One Nights***

The origin of *The Thousand and One Nights* still stands enigmatic to the world of literature since the modern versions of its translations are the outputs of a compilation of Arabian, Persian, Indian, Syrian, and Egyptian fairy tales. Borges and Weinberger (1984) clarify how the tales were compiled as below:

In the fifteenth century in the city of Alexandria, the city of Alexander the Two-Horned, a series of tales was gathered. Those tales have a strange history, as it is generally believed. They were first told in India, then in Persia, then in Asia Minor, and finally were written down in Arabic and compiled in Cairo. They became *The Book of the Thousand and One Nights*. (p. 566)

Indeed, the tales were authored by various authors “scattered over many centuries and countries of the Middle East. The first document bearing any physical evidence of *The Thousand and One Nights* was a single piece of very rare old Syrian paper that dates from 879 C.E” (Puchner, 2021, p. 1084). As such, *The Thousand and One Nights* “is the work of thousand of authors, and none of them knew that he was helping to construct this illustrious book” (Borges & Weinberger, 1984, p. 568). Furthermore, “it survives as the crafted composition of authors who used various forms of written literary Arabic to capture an oral narrative tradition” (Pinault, 1992, p. 15). While the text's origination has been a subject of considerable debate for an extended period, such speculations should not detract from the artistic merit of the embedded stories within the tales, which transform the dense piece into a treasure trove of open-ended stories. The title of the work is significantly witty and artistic since it has a metaphoric meaning in its essence. Although the Western translations of the *Nights* were not convincing enough to the readers of the time, for the number of the tales is not actually one thousand and one, “its sense [...] is symbolic: adding one more to a thousand implies an unending abundance. There is always one more tale to be told” (Puchner, 2021, p. 1085). In other words, “its beauty lies in the fact that for us the word *thousand* is almost synonymous with *infinite*. To say a *thousand nights* is to say infinite nights, countless nights, endless nights” (Borges & Weinberger, 1984, p. 566).

Classical Arab literature initially struggled to include the *Nights* into its canon. It was a piece of literature that did not pertain to history, practical knowledge, or moral guidance. The characteristics that disqualify it from being considered part of the ancient Arabic canon are precisely the ones that guarantee its broad public appeal, for it unveiled the exotism over the Oriental world, bringing about a considerable interest in readers to know more about the East. The work is exceptionally captivating, with stories that range from light-hearted and frivolous to deeply romantic or distressingly horrific. The themes introduced in the prologue – desire, lunacy, cruelty, righteousness, punishment, and bravery – are significant and are based on common experiences in daily life. Moreover, these stories are narrated with exceptional skill and imbued with enchantment through opulent environments, extraordinary exploits, mystical twists of fate, and the timely involvement of supernatural beings and practitioners of magic. The narratives exhibit significant diversity, encompassing historical accounts, romantic narratives, tragic events, comedic anecdotes, poetic compositions, satirical imitations, and sacred legends of the Muslim faith. The artworks portray djinns, wizards, mythical locations,

and frequently feature Haroun al-Rashid, the historical caliph, as a central character. The stories are included within a broader narrative structure, with Shahryar's story serving as the main framework. He is a ruler who has become insane due to the unfaithfulness of his wife. In order to prevent a similar disgrace from happening again, he has made the decision to wed a fresh, youthful woman every evening and execute her the following morning. Nevertheless, Shahrazad, a very knowledgeable and brave young woman, entertains him with stories in order to pass the lengthy hours. She strategically pauses each morning just before a critical moment, relying on Shahryar's keen interest in hearing the conclusion of the narrative to prevent him from carrying out her execution. By employing this method, she successfully suppresses his homicidal urges until he finally forgives her and renounces his strategy.

### **Greed in *Ali Baba and Forty Thieves***

Antoine Galland, a French scholar, is among the translators of the primary text, as is common knowledge. Nevertheless, the translation of two renowned tales from the *Nights*, namely *Aladdin* and *Ali Baba*, are referred to as orphan stories due to their absence from the three manuscripts utilised by Antoine Galland and their absence of a surviving text. Galland's account of *Ali Baba* was derived from a synopsis he recorded in his journal and then transcribed in French, based on the tale he received from Diab. Galland's approach in this case is more direct. The narrative is significantly condensed and presented in a more straightforward fashion. The action is more rapid, while the dialogue remains true to the characters, although the author cannot help but portray the cunning Marjanah as a refined Frenchwoman, giving her the opportunity to eloquently narrate her acts. Interestingly, the phrase 'Open, Sesame!' or 'Sesame, open!' (or 'close') originates from the Arabic translation provided by Galland, who heard the story as '*Sésame, ouvre-toi!*' and '*Sésame, referme-toi!*' (Lyons et al., 2008, p. 15). Moreover, "no Arabic text older than that Galland's French version exists. The handwritten version preserved at the Bodleian Library in Oxford and published by Duncan B. Macdonald ("*Ali Baba*") dates from the nineteenth century" (Chraïbi, 2004, p. 160). Therefore, the tale might possibly be coined as an extra story into the main frame by Galland, thereby leaving the orphanage of the tale aside.

Regarding Kasim, the older brother of *Ali Baba*, it is evident that he has innate villainous qualities as a result of his insatiable greed. He surrenders to an old-aged "bawd [...] who tested his powers of mounting and coupling, and then married him to a girl with money and appetite. Thus he was saved from starvation and became the owner of a well-furnished shop in the market" (Mardrus, 2005, p. 103). Love holds no significance for Kasim in any situation; his whole focus is on acquiring money and material possessions in order to live a lavish lifestyle. Thus, the audience are immediately made aware that Kasim remains unchanged upon learning *Ali Baba*'s opportunity for wealth, as the story unfolds. He has consistently displayed greedy tendencies, engaging in the sin against God. Therefore, Kasim is marked by God as a transgressor deserving retribution, and his penalization commences upon his discovery of the reality that *Ali Baba* measures gold. The initial phase of his retribution includes experiencing intense envy towards his brother, to the extent that he no longer acknowledges his sibling by name. "[I]nstead of being happy to know that his brother would now be for ever beyond the reach of poverty, he was stricken by a bilious jealousy and felt his gall bladder swelling from

spite" (Mardrus, 2005, p. 109). The term "bilious" in the aforementioned sentence holds considerable significance as it suggests a foretelling of Kasim's demise. He is consumed by envy towards his brother, to the point where he is unable to sleep until morning. Consequently, he visits his brother's residence in order to uncover the hidden truth behind this mysterious occurrence. He is so excessively inquisitive and jealous that he fails to acknowledge the potential consequences of his actions. Kasim, in addition, is completely consumed by his obsession with wealth and material possessions to the extent that he is willing to intimidate his own brother, despite Ali Baba's generous offer to share half of the gold with him:

So you say, so you say. But I also wish to know how to enter the cave myself, in case I should care to do so. I advise you not to give me any false direction, for I feel inclined, as it is, to denounce you to the law as an accomplice of thieves. (Mardrus, 2005, p. 110)

Kasim, thus, signed the death warrant at the hands of forty thieves, undoubtedly another divine retribution. Despite Ali Baba's promise to split the amount of gold in half, Kasim remains unconvinced that the sum is sufficient for him. Furthermore, he has no need for money whatsoever due to his current abundance of wealth. It is evident that Kasim is unappreciative of the blessings bestowed upon him by God.

Kasim's second step in the process involves the loss of his rationality. He is mesmerised by the opulence of the treasure in the cave, which ultimately leads to his impending doom:

He was stunned and dazzled by the sight of the bright gold and the colours of the winking jewels; his desire to be sole master of this fabulous treasure increased and fastened to his heart; also, he calculated that he would need not one caravan of camels to empty the hoard but all the camels which ply ceaselessly between the frontiers of India and Irak. In the meantime, he contented himself with filling as many sacks as he thought his ten mules could carry in the chests upon their backs. The wretched Kasim, unbalanced by the sight of so much gold, had forgotten the necessary word. He shouted again and again: 'Open, Barley! Open, Barley!' but the rock remained impenetrable. Then he cried: 'Open, Oats!' But the rock remained impenetrable. [...] Kasim stood shaking with terror before the cruel door, and muttered over the names of every cereal and seed which the hand of The Sower had cast upon the fields since the birth of time. But the rock remained impenetrable. (Mardrus, 2005, p. 111)

Evidently, Kasim lacks the ability to exercise control over his own rationality and is unable to recall the enchanting word, which serves as the key to the stone gate. He is influenced by his wealth and, as stated in the extract above, he is also quite greedy. This necessitates a penalty, as it is against the will of God. As previously stated, the punishment might take the form of either bodily or spiritual consequences. In the case of Kasim, the penalty is physical. Upon learning that Kasim had trespassed into their cave and attempted to pilfer their treasure, the forty thieves "chop at him with their swords. In the twinkling of an eye Ali Baba's wretched brother sighed out his soul at unawares and lay at the entrance of the cave in six parts" (Mardrus, 2005, p. 112). Thus concludes Kasim's life; he is subjected to such severe divine punishment that he not only loses his life, but also his sanity. He has shown disrespect for Ali Baba, and in addition, he has not been given a public funeral service. Instead, he has been buried in secret. In summary, Kasim's catastrophic downfall is the outcome of his meticulous preparation, which ultimately results in his own demise, underscoring the destructive nature of greed.

Another greedy character is Kasim's wife. Actually, she alone is responsible for the mishaps of Kasim to come true, for she is curious about what Ali Baba's wife would weigh and puts some suet at the bottom of the measure only to find out that what she weighs is gold. The initial link in the chain is undoubtedly envy, so it is unsurprising that she has harboured jealousy towards Ali Baba's opportunity: "Her face became the colour of saffron and her eyes of pitch. In a devouring jealousy, she cried: 'Ruin seize their house! How have these rats got gold to measure?'" (Mardrus, 2005, pp. 108 - 109). The rat is an additional manifestation of the intensity of jealousy exhibited by Kasim's wife. The woman is unable to comprehend how the impoverished woodcutter is able to get such a substantial quantity of gold; the magnitude is so vast that it is incalculable yet quantifiable. Undoubtedly, this is sufficient to cause the woman to lose her composure. She eagerly anticipates Kasim's arrival to inform him of the news. Both she and her husband are ensnared by their greed and inquisitiveness, leading them to succumb to their own downfall. Although she does not face physical punishment, her life has undergone a profound transformation. She has suffered the consequences of her greed, lost her husband and become a widow, which is particularly perilous in Arab society. Consequently, she has been compelled to assume the role of a co-wife in Ali Baba's household. She is no longer able to independently care for herself; from now on, Ali Baba will provide her with financial support. The irreversible mistake she made will continue to trouble and torture her until the rest of her life, as it has led to a significant transformation in her own life and the demise of Kasim. As is observed, she has shown no gratitude for the blessings bestowed upon her by God, therefore deserving the appropriate retribution as a wrongdoer. It is likely that the tears she has shed throughout the night will continue to be a significant aspect of her life until she passes away.

When considering the forty thieves, it is evident that they share a strong similarity in their greed with that of Kasim. They possess an inherent greed. After successfully uttering the enchanting words and unlocking the entrance to the cave, Ali Baba's remarks provide a clear depiction of the immense riches possessed by the robbers:

Arrived at the entrance of the hall, he beheld, all along the walls and piled from floor to ceiling, a profusion of rich merchandise, with bales of silk and brocade, bags of varied food, great chests filled to the brim with minted silver and silver bars, with golden dinars and bars of gold. And, as if these were not enough, the floor of the cave was heaped with loose gold and precious stones, so that the foot could hardly find a resting place, but tripped over some rich sample of the jeweller's art or sent a cascade of gleaming gold before it. Though Ali Baba had never in his life seen the true colour of a dinar or smelt the smell of it, he was able to judge that the cave, with its vast treasures heaped at haphazard and its innumerable costly ornaments, the least of which would have honoured a king's palace, had been, not only for years but for hundreds of years, the store house of generations of robbers, descendants, perhaps, of the mighty Babylonian thieves. (Mardrus, 2005, pp. 105 - 106)

It is understandable that the thieves have been amassing gold and goods by plundering people and caravans in the vicinity of towns for a considerable period of time. The abundance of money in the cave is sufficient to provide a life of luxury for hundreds of people. However, their insatiable need for more and lack of gratitude hinder them from recognising their present hunger, ultimately leading them towards their own destruction. Furthermore, the leader of the thieves confirms Ali Baba's prophecy and affirms that their forefathers have been accumulating wealth with great effort and peril over many years (Mardrus, 2005, p. 116). Evidently, the

thieves and their forebears are so consumed by the allure of wealth that they show no hesitation in jeopardising their lives to pilfer from others. Moreover, amassing golds and goods for hundreds of years may also provide an indication of the substantial quantity of wealth involved; it exceeds what forty men would need to sustain their lives.

Once the thieves become confident that there may be another person who is aware of their hidden cave and the enchanted words that reveal the disappearance of Kasim's body, they resolve to locate the trespasser and eliminate him. Here is the initial penalty for the thieves. The agreement amongst the thieves entails that one of their members will venture into the town, locate Ali Baba, and eliminate him in order to save their fortune from potential jeopardy. In the event that the volunteer fails to accomplish the objective, he will consent to the punishment that his companions will impose upon him. Unsurprisingly, the initial thief fails to complete the job and upon his return to the cave, he kneels down to get the stroke from the captain, who has been designated to administer it (Mardrus, 2005, p. 118). Therefore, it can be deduced that the thief has been subjected to divine justice by means of his own leader. Driven by a desire for wealth and oblivious to his lack of gratitude towards God, he willingly gives up his own life, a predictable outcome for a sinner consumed by greed. Additionally, there is a second volunteer who has endeavoured to accomplish the same objective, but unfortunately, his efforts have only led to failure. As a result, he experiences the same destiny as his deceased companion. The collective retribution for the thieves, save the captain, is completed when Marjanah fortuitously discovers that the vessels contain not oil, but rather human beings. After discovering that the oil merchant, who is also the leader of the thieves, is a killer, Marjanah, a slave, chooses to eliminate the men trapped in the jar by pouring scalding oil on them. By doing so, Marjanah becomes an instrument of divine punishment, through which God would punish the greedy people in various ways. Consequently, the remaining thieves, who are unappreciative of God because of their possessions, receive the appropriate punishment. Moreover, as the leader of the robbers, the captain receives not only physical retribution but also spiritual consequences. The true culmination occurs when Marjanah discerns that the captain is, in fact, not a genuine friend of Ali Baba but rather the ex-oil trader with the intention of assassinating Ali Baba. The captain is fatally stabbed by her, resulting in his immediate demise. Ultimately, it is evident that God has not allowed any greedy person to thrive and enjoy a life of peace and luxury.

There is no doubt that Ali Baba, his wife, son, and Marjanah have been rewarded. They have always been accompanied by divine justice. Ali Baba is defined as follows:

Ali Baba, the younger brother, being devoid of ambition and having modest tastes, became a woodcutter; but though his takings were small he lived so wisely that, in the end, he was able to buy, first one ass, then two, and finally three. He would lead these beasts to the forest and load them with the faggots which he cut there. After he had bought the third, he became a person of importance among the woodcutters and one of them offered him the hand of a daughter in marriage. The three asses were written down in the marriage contract as dowry, though the girl, being poor, brought no portion at all. (Mardrus, 2005, p. 103)

He embodies the true essence of modesty. Although his actions can be classified as robbery, he is aware that revealing the successful occurrence will lead to complications for both himself and those who are privy to the thieves' confidentiality. Hence, he refrains from disclosing the existence of the concealed cavern and its riches to anybody until the end of the story. Moreover,

as a result, he manifests the secret of the thieves to his son, leading them to attain the highest positions in the city via the utilisation of their wealth and success (Mardrus, 2005, p. 125). Furthermore, Marjanah's intervention prevents the bloodthirsty thieves from killing Ali Baba. She consistently discovers evidence of the thieves' scheme against Ali Baba's family and prevents them from assassinating Ali Baba. Her ability to perceive impending danger has consistently been aided by coincidence, fate, or a divine force due to her inherent innocence. It might be argued that Ali Baba has not been punished by God because he is neither greedy nor selfish. Instead, he has been rewarded for his selflessness and thankfulness towards others and God. In addition, Marjanah has received two rewards. The story claims that Marjanah is, in fact, a slave owned by Kasim. However, following Ali Baba's orders and concealing Kasim's death from others, Ali Baba takes her in and ensures she is not squandered. The second instance in which she is awarded is when she rescues Ali Baba and his family from the malevolence of the thieves. Not only does Ali Baba release her from captivity, but he also welcomes her into his family as his daughter-in-law. Freedom holds the utmost value for a person in bondage. Ali Baba's son is also rewarded through Marjanah. He marries her and wins the support of Ali Baba (Mardrus, 2005, p. 124).

### Conclusion

In conclusion, *The Queen of Spades* and *The Tale of Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves* exhibit several common traits despite their distinct historical and literary contexts. Whether in the opulent salons of imperial Russia or the bustling bazaars of the *Arabian Nights*, human desires are portrayed as double-edged swords, capable of both enriching and destroying those who wield them. Both stories involve the intercession of divine forces, destiny, and fortuitous events. Furthermore, magic is an integral element of the narrative. In both works of art, there are malevolent individuals that orchestrate their own downfall. Due to their ingratitude and defiance towards God, people are subjected to either a corporeal or metaphysical retribution. Although the difference is not significant, an alternative style for rewarding is developed. While Pushkin's work does not explicitly present the rewarding mechanism, it is clearly illustrated in Ali Baba's story. Both works of art utilise supernatural elements, such as magical card combinations, ghosts, and magical words, to emphasise the moral lesson of avoiding greed and obeying God's commandments while refraining from committing any of the seven deadly sins. As such, both literary works serve as cautionary tales, urging readers to reflect on the consequences of their own desires and the choices they make in pursuit of wealth and power, thereby emphasising, as is inscribed in Christopher Marlowe's putative portrait, that *quod me nutrit me destruit* - what nourishes me destroys me!

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