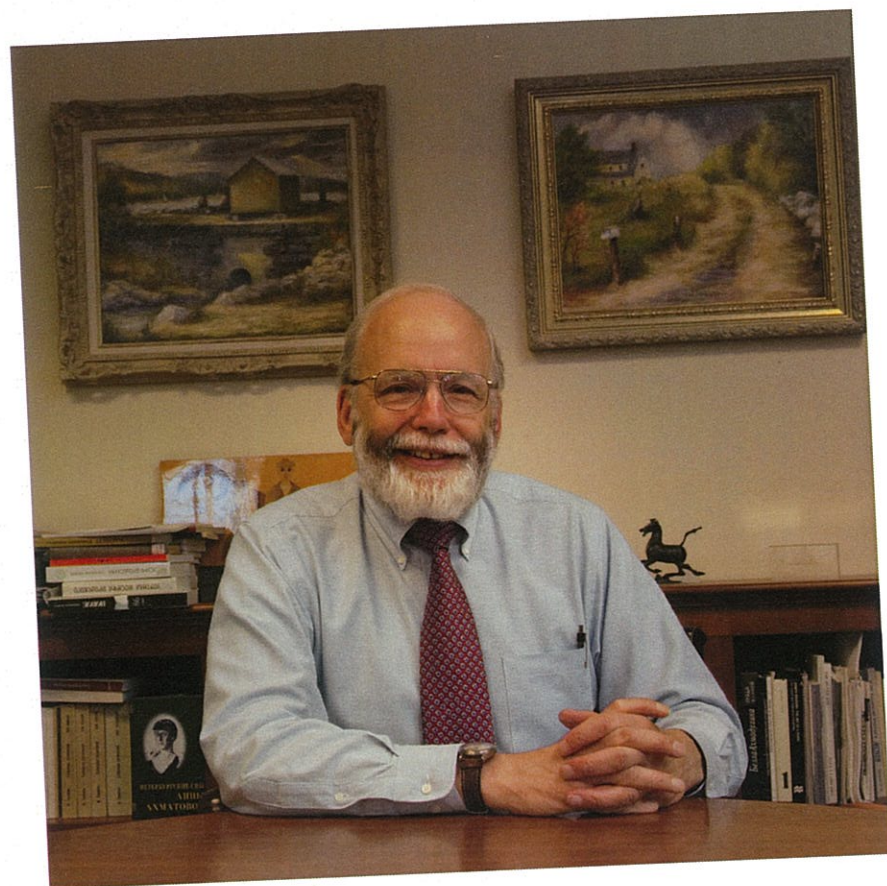




"A CONVENIENT TERRITORY"

**Russian Literature at the Edge of Modernity
Essays in Honor of Barry Scherr**

EDITED BY



Barry Scherr

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**RUSSIAN LITERATURE AT THE EDGE OF MODERNITY
ESSAYS IN HONOR OF BARRY SCHERR**

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**JOHN M. KOPPER
MICHAEL WACHTEL**

Bloomington, Indiana, 2015



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The Rhythmic Structure of *The Tales of Belkin* and the Peculiarities of a Poet's Prose

Evgeny Kazartsev

In the 1920s, Georgy Shengeli and Boris Tomashevsky did pioneering work on the rhythms of Pushkin's prose in connection with his poetry. Thereafter it became common for theorists of verse to examine the prosody of poetry against the background of prose. In such studies, the rhythm of prose was almost always understood as a monolithic, neutral linguistic background against which the distinctiveness of verse could be measured. However, artistic prose is not necessarily rhythmically neutral.¹

If, for example, we take Pushkin's prose and compare the "The Queen of Spades" (1833) with the *Tales of Belkin* (1830), the rhythmical variation is so great that one could easily come to the conclusion that these works were written by different authors (see table 1).²

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¹ This has been noted by scholars such as Mikhail Gasparov, Marina Krasnoperova, and Yuri Orlitsky (see references).

² In this essay, I use the conventional term *rhythmical dictionary* (*ritmicheskii slovar'*) to describe the distribution of rhythmical (phonetic) words in a text and their relative frequency. Rhythmical words are simply a cluster of syllables linked by a single stress. For example, the sentence "Какая-то таинственность окружала его судьбу; он казался русским, а носил иностранное имя" (from Pushkin's "The Shot," the first of his *Tales of Belkin*) is divided into ten such clusters *Какая-то | таинственность | окружала | его | судьбу; | он казался | русским, | а носил | иностранное | имя*. In such calculations, proclitics and enclitics (prepositions, conjunctions, monosyllabic pronouns) count as part of the stress-bearing word to which they are linked. The following types of rhythmical words can be distinguished: monosyllabic, such as *дом* (1.1); bisyllabic with a stress on either the first or second syllable: *в доме* (2.1) and *дома* (2.2); three-syllable words with stresses on any of the syllables: *стрѣли* (3.1), *за домом* (3.2), *на дому* (3.3); four stresses, with the various possible positions of accentuation:

Table 1. Rhythmical Dictionary of *The Tales of Belkin* and "The Queen of Spades"³

Word	<i>Tales of Belkin</i>	"Queen of Spades"
1.1	0.060	0.086
2.1	0.151	0.154
2.2	0.185	0.177
3.1	0.074	0.072
3.2	0.151	0.146
3.3	0.083	0.094
4.1	0.008	0.013
4.2	0.080	0.075
4.3	0.089	0.083
4.4	0.018	0.016
5.1+5.2	0.012	0.016
5.3	0.037	0.026
5.4+5.5	0.025	0.022
6.4	0.009	0.008
Others	0.018	0.012
Sum Total	5150	5325

The rhythmical dictionaries of these works clearly differ. And the impression of heterogeneity arises even though we know that these texts were indeed by one and the same author and even written only a few years apart. From Table 1 it is obvious that the frequency of monosyllabic words (1.1) in the *Tales of Belkin* is considerably less than in "The Queen of Spades." In the former they account for only 6 percent, whereas in latter they are almost 9 percent. Moreover, in the *Tales of Belkin* the frequency of "iambic" words (i.e., with stress on the second syllable) such as *читать* (2.2) and *наружность* (3.2), reaches almost 34 percent. In "The Queen of Spades" they are only 32 percent. The frequency of three-syllable words with stress on the last syllable (3.3) is clearly higher, as is the frequency of four- and five-syllable words with stress at the beginning (4.1, 5.1, and 5.2) and other multisyllabic words, especially those beginning with a number of unstressed syllables. It turns out that in

³ *в*строили (4.1), *домашнее* (4.2), *домоча́дцы* (4.3) *он домо́сед* (4.4), and so on with "rhythmical words" of more syllables, e.g. *домовладе́льцы* (5.4), *с домохозяйка́ми* (6.4),

"The Queen of Spades" the stress falls rather frequently either at the end or the beginning of a word, while the opposite occurs in *The Tales of Belkin*, where the stress is more likely to fall in the center. Here there are more words of the type 3.2, 4.2 and 4.3, 5.3, and 6.4. On the whole, the variation between these dictionaries is statistically significant using a χ^2 test, as the observed χ^2 for the distribution (59.4) is greater than the critical value.⁴ Thus we can see that these works are rhythmically heterogeneous.

In her studies of rhythm in prose, Marina Krasnoperova has shown that the statistical data of the dictionary of "The Queen of Spades" is very close to a series of rhythmical dictionaries of classical and contemporary prose. She used this text to determine the so-called probability standard for rhythmical (phonetic) words in the Russian language and in Russian prose (Krasnoperova 2004, 22–24). It turns out that "The Queen of Spades" corresponds to this standard, but *The Tales of Belkin* do not. This can most likely be explained by certain poetic tendencies in the *Tales*, i.e., by the heightened frequency of "iambic" words and words with a stress in the middle. Put differently: there is a preponderance of words that would easily fit into the rhythmical scheme of binary meters. It is possible that in the *Tales*—which were written earlier and were after all Pushkin's first completed work in prose—the poet had not completely overcome the influence of verse; he had not yet become a prose writer in the full sense of the word. He succeeded in doing so only three years later, when working on "The Queen of Spades." Thus we might say that "The Queen of Spades" is "pure" prose, the prose of Pushkin the prose writer, whereas *The Tales of Belkin* remain the prose of a poet.

In the prose of a poet, then, poetic practice manifests itself in certain rhythmical patterns. This occurs unconsciously, even when the poet writes completely ordinary prose, not so-called "rhythmical prose." It is hard to imagine that Pushkin intentionally worked on the rhythm of his stories, trying to align them with the rhythms of his verse in the way that later poets such as Andrei Bely and Marina Tsvetaeva did. Yet the rhythm of the *Tales* nonetheless differs from the "standard" rhythm of artistic prose and seems to reflect the tendencies of verse.

Despite the attention of verse theorists to the problems of prose, the rhythmic structure of poets' prose has not been sufficiently studied. It is not known if different poets' prose rhythms are homogeneous and it is not clear how poets' prose differs from the prose of "pure" prose writers. A study of this question should not be limited to a single work, a single author, or even a

⁴ To analyze the statistical significance of a distribution using Pearson's χ^2 test, we refer to tables of the χ^2 critical values, the size of which depends on the number of parameters being compared (called "degrees of freedom"). If the observed χ^2 value is

single epoch. For this reason we have chosen to compare the prose of *The Tales of Belkin* with the rhythmically neutral prose of poets of various periods: the historical novel *The Silver Prince* by Aleksei Konstantinovich Tolstoy (1863), the novel *The Petty Demon* by Fedor Sologub (1892–1902), and the novel *Doctor Zhivago* by Boris Pasternak (1945–55). All of these works (including Pushkin's *Tales*) are similar in that the authors were poets who nonetheless wrote prose without making any conscious attempt to bring it closer to verse. In other words, in all of these instances the poets were trying to write "pure" prose.

Let us begin by comparing the distribution of rhythmical words in the works under consideration. For this purpose we created a small corpus of texts (close in size to *The Tales of Belkin*) of approximately 5000 rhythmical words from the beginning of each text. On the basis of this corpus, we used a computer program to generate the rhythmical dictionaries (see table 2).

Table 2. The Rhythmical Dictionaries of Poets' Prose and the Probability Standard of Russian Words

Word	Pushkin				Probability Standard ⁶
	Tales	A. Tolstoy	Sologub	Pasternak	
1.1	0.060	0.078	0.065	0.054	0.069
2.1	0.151	0.170	0.135	0.170	0.156
2.2	0.185	0.195	0.167	0.163	0.173
3.1	0.074	0.070	0.078	0.069	0.070
3.2	0.151	0.148	0.179	0.152	0.159
3.3	0.083	0.100	0.088	0.077	0.091
4.1	0.008	0.008	0.011	0.011	0.013
4.2	0.080	0.067	0.069	0.079	0.071
4.3	0.089	0.074	0.102	0.084	0.091
4.4	0.018	0.015	0.015	0.018	0.016
5.1+5.2	0.012	0.010	0.013	0.016	0.017
5.3	0.037	0.027	0.034	0.038	0.029
5.4+5.5	0.025	0.018	0.021	0.029	0.023
6.4	0.009	0.008	0.011	0.012	0.009
Others	0.018	0.011	0.012	0.027	0.013
Sum Total	5150	4522	5802	5434	

A comparative analysis of the data in table 2 reveals the heterogeneity of the rhythmic dictionaries of these poets' prose, with an observed χ^2 (248.3)

greater than the critical value (58.1). In this case, the χ^2 value captures the level of variation of each dictionary from the average distribution of rhythmical words, treating the entire sample (i.e., the prose excerpts of each of the four authors) as a single text and comparing each concrete text to it as a part to the whole.

As a result the differences among the texts turn out to be significant. Yet the particular divergence of *The Tales of Belkin* is considerably less than all the others and not significant ($\chi^2=16.4$); after it comes Sologub's *Petty Demon* ($\chi^2=64.2$), then Pasternak's *Doctor Zhivago* ($\chi^2=79.9$) and finally Tolstoy's *The Silver Prince* ($\chi^2=87.7$).

The particularly small and insignificant divergence of Pushkin from the general dictionary testifies to the exceptional position of his prose in regard to that of the other authors. It can be said that the rhythmic structure of *Tales of Belkin* is the closest to all of the prose texts under investigation when taken as a whole. This can perhaps be explained by the role of Pushkin's dictionary as foundational in the rhythmical dictionary of the other works, whose greater divergences can be explained by the individual particularities of each of the authors.

It is a scholarly commonplace that Pushkin's language forms the basis of the contemporary Russian literary language. However, it is by no means obvious that the same can be said on the level of rhythm. It is not clear that Pushkin laid the foundation of the rhythmical dictionary of Russian prose. Nor are we prepared to make such a claim, since this would require a much broader study of the rhythm of Pushkin's prose and that of other authors. We may nonetheless hypothesize about Pushkin's influence on the development of the rhythms of poets' prose. Our material allows us to test such a hypothesis on various levels.

Having been unable to ascertain a general homogeneity among texts of the prose of poets on our initial investigation, we move on to another level and raise the question of the homogeneity of these four dictionaries and ordinary prose. To do this we can compare each dictionary with the probability standard of the rhythms of the Russian language. Interestingly, the prose of all four poets differs significantly from the probability standard, for which the critical χ^2 value is equal to 23.7. (If we compare the probability standard with the dictionary of Pushkin $\chi^2 = 67.7$; in the case of Tolstoy $\chi^2 = 78.9$, of Sologub $\chi^2 = 62.4$, of Pasternak $\chi^2 = 162.9$.) This indicates that the prose of a poet has distinctive rhythmic qualities when compared with ordinary prose.

The divergence of *The Tales of Belkin*, though less than in the other cases, is nonetheless significant, which is hardly unexpected. It turns out that Pushkin's rhythmical dictionary is not the same as that of Russian prose.

Thus, our hypothesis about Pushkin's influence in this case can be viewed as a distinctive phenomenon of a poet's prose.

According to the data of table 2, the dictionaries of poets' prose differ from the probability standard by the increased frequency of words with a "harmonic" stress (i.e., with the accent falling either at the center or towards the center of the word). This is precisely the peculiarity that we observed earlier in *The Tales of Belkin* (in contrast to "The Queen of Spades"). This would appear to be one of the distinctive features of a poet's prose. Looking more closely at the dictionaries of Pushkin, Sologub, and Pasternak we see clearly how frequently word types like 3.2, 4.2, 4.3, 5.3, and 6.4 occur. In the prose of Aleksei Tolstoy, if compared to the probability standard, we can observe a preponderance of short words (monosyllabic, bisyllabic, or trisyllabic) and a decrease in the incidence of longer words. This is quite typical of spoken Russian, which is abundantly present in this novel. In contrast, in the novels of Sologub and especially Pasternak, the frequency of short words (in comparison to the probability standard) is smaller, whereas the quantity of long words is greater. In the dictionary of Pasternak there is also a much greater frequency of rhythmical words with a long unstressed anacrusis, such as *бесповоротные, перед священником*. It may be that in this increase of long words a more general process is manifest, which reflects the broader evolution of poetic rhythm characteristic of Russian verse in the first decades of the twentieth century (Taranovskii [1956] 2010, 367-97).

This section of our investigation thus reveals that the rhythmical dictionary of a poet's prose differs from the dictionary of "pure" prose even when the texts under investigation differ significantly among themselves. These differences, one may assume, reflect the individual poets' proclivities. There are grounds for assuming that Pushkin's rhythmical dictionary served as a model for the prose dictionaries of the other poets. The rhythmical dictionaries of Pushkin, Sologub, and Pasternak are particularly close in their tendency towards harmonic placement of stress, which can be viewed as typical of verse. At the same time the rhythmical tendencies also reflect time of composition, since twentieth-century poets display a preference for long words when compared to nineteenth-century poets.

The next step in our analysis occurs not on the level of the dictionary, but on the syntagmatic level, on fragments of prose that resemble verse. We are concerned here with the excerpts of a prose text whose structure corresponds to the iambic tetrameter so widely used in Russian verse. We refer to these excerpts as "occasional iambs" (*sluchainye iamby*). For the purposes of analysis we considered only those iambic fragments that contain eight or nine

полагали, что на совести его лежала какая-нибудь несчастная жертва его ужасного искусства" the fragment *на совести его лежала* would not qualify, even though it reads as an iambic tetrameter because it does not represent a single syntagmatic unit. However, the words at the end of this sentence, *его ужасного искусства*, form a complete syntagmatic unit and also correspond to an iambic line: they fully conform to the criteria for occasional iambs.

There are only eight possible rhythmic forms of iambic tetrameter, of which as a rule only seven can be found in prose texts.⁶

I.	v -' v -' v -' v -' (v)	"Я вас люблю", сказал Бурмин
II.	v - v -' v -' v -' (v)	Он обходился с нею дурно...
III.	v -' v - v -' v -' (v)	Ни разу не хотел представить...
IV.	v -' v -' v - v -' (v)	...его ужасного искусства
V.	v - v - v -' v -' (v)	...одинадцатилетний мальчик
VI.	v - v -' v - v -' (v)	...напоминала государя
VII.	v -' v - v - v -' (v)	...веселый и молодеватый

V. E. Kholshchevnikov, N. D. Klimovets, and M. A. Krasnoperova as well as the author of the present study have analyzed the phenomenon of occasional iambs. To a greater or lesser extent all of us agree that the rhythms of these iambs in prose are influenced by verse. In occasional iambs in prose a poet subconsciously reveals his poetic preferences. Their rhythmical structure can resemble that of his verse.

Let us look at the data on the distribution of such "tetrameters" in the prose of Pushkin, A. K. Tolstoy, Sologub, and Pasternak in comparison with similar passages from the work of the "pure" prose writer Lev Tolstoy (see table 3). It should be noted that in the prose of non-poets such occasional iambs are as a rule found less frequently.

⁶ In the following diagrams, "-" represents a strong position and "v" a weak position. "-" indicates when an accent falls on a strong position. "v" indicates when an accent falls on a weak position.

Table 3. The Frequency of Occasional Iambs⁷

Rhythmical Form	Pushkin	A. K. Tolstoy	Sologub	Pasternak	Lev Tolstoy
I	0.107	0.160	0.125	0.080	0.112
II	0.066	0.105	0.080	0.070	0.056
III	0.199	0.270	0.030	0.235	0.270
IV	0.378	0.230	0.270	0.250	0.202
V	0.000	0.010	0.000	0.010	0.000
VI	0.179	0.145	0.165	0.250	0.293
VII	0.071	0.080	0.060	0.105	0.067

A comparison of the data in this table shows the heterogeneity of the texts under consideration, $\chi^2 = 38.6$, which is greater than the critical value (28.9). However, when we do comparisons in pairs, whereby each sample from a poet's prose is set against a sample from a "pure" prose writer, it turns out that in all cases χ^2 is below the critical value (11.07). In comparing Pushkin with L. Tolstoy this indicator is of borderline significance $\chi^2=11.01$, thereafter the distinction lessens:

A. K. Tolstoy — the prose of L. Tolstoy $\chi^2 = 8.9$
 Sologub — the prose of L. Tolstoy $\chi^2 = 6.9$
 Pasternak — the prose of L. Tolstoy $\chi^2 = 3.0$

This chronological lessening of the measure of divergence from the prose of a "pure" prose writer can probably be explained by the gradual rapprochement of the rhythmic structure of poets' prose with ordinary prose. It is conceivable that the process is also a reflection of the gradual prosaicization of verse generally, if our hypothesis is correct that the poetic predilections of a given poet are reflected in the rhythms of his prose.⁸

From table 3 it is also apparent that in Pushkin form IV is especially frequent, i.e., occasional iambs with a missing stress on the sixth syllable. At the same time the number of lines with the "pyrrhic" on the second "foot"

⁷ Here we give the data from Klimovets's work on the novel *War and Peace* (in Kholshchevnikov 1985, 139). Incidentally, her data on *The Tales of Belkin* coincide almost entirely with those of the present study (the second column of table 3 above).

⁸ In other cases (Kazartsev 1998, 61) we found some confirmation that the

(form III) decreases. The incidence of form VI (with "pyrrhics" on the first and penultimate "feet") is likewise rather high. These qualities of Pushkin's prose rhythms seem to reflect the law of regressive accentual dissimilation operative in the poetry of his era, the so-called alternating tendency in the placement of stress in verse.⁹ It is noteworthy that this tendency is not found to such a pronounced degree in either A. K. Tolstoy or Sologub. Nonetheless, in the occasional iambs of Pasternak we can discern an echo of the Pushkinian tendency; as in Pushkin the frequency of forms IV and VI is increased, while the first (fully accented) form drops noticeably.¹⁰

The close connection of Pasternak and Pushkin is especially noticeable in the rhythmic profile of their occasional iambs, of the placement of stress in the conventionally strong positions in these "iambs." Let us look at the stress profile of the occasional tetrameters in the prose of our poets (table 4).

Table 4. The Stress Profiles of Occasional Iambs

Syllable	Pushkin	A. K. Tolstoy	Sologub	Pasternak
2	0.755	0.740	0.755	0.670
4	0.730	0.640	0.640	0.650
6	0.372	0.545	0.505	0.380
8	1.000	1.000	1.000	1.000

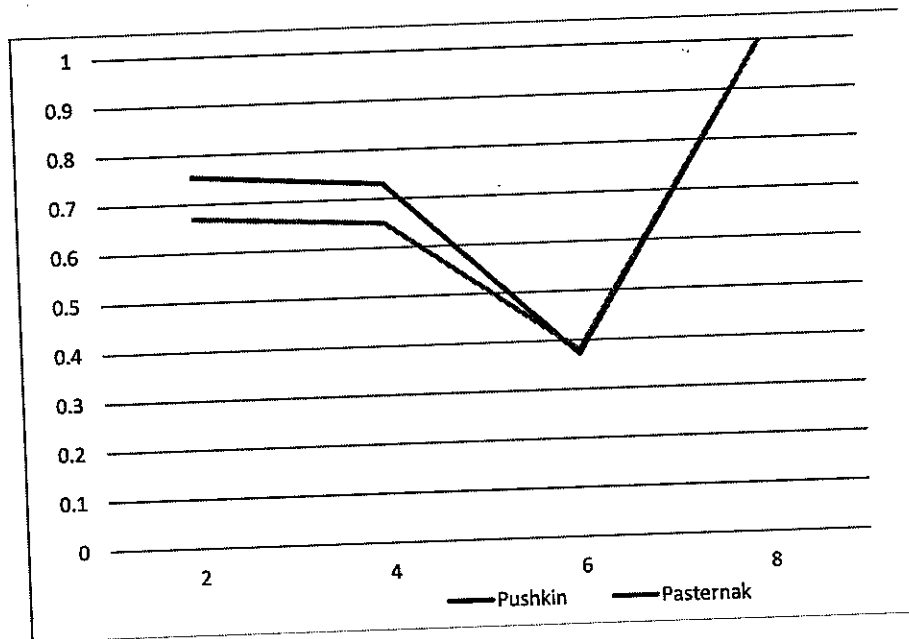
Though in all cases these results show a ring structure (whereby the second and eighth syllables receive the most stress and the fourth and sixth noticeably less), it is nonetheless evident that in Pushkin's "iambs"—in contrast to those of A. K. Tolstoy and Sologub—the stress on the fourth syllable is remarkably frequent, almost as frequent as the stress on the first "foot."¹¹ The

⁹ See Taranovskii 2010, a Russian translation of his book first published in Serbian in 1953.

¹⁰ The Pushkinian tendency of alternating weak and strong ictuses appears in Pasternak's prose, despite the fact that in his verse he avoids—or represses—it (Kazartsev 1998, 60). In the first two decades of the twentieth century Russian verse displays the so-called process of prosaicization, whereby the rhythmic profile of verse comes close to the natural rhythm of the Russian language and the alternating tendency disappears almost entirely (Taranovskii [1956] 2010, 367–97, first published in Serbian).

¹¹ It should be noted that in earlier studies, when we compared occasional iambs to theoretical iambs (to a linguistic model that predicts the rhythmic profile of verse in conditions where a poet writes verse as if he were a

same phenomenon can be found in Pasternak. In comparison to the other poets, the average stress in Pasternak's occasional iambs is remarkably low. Nonetheless, the stress profile of Pushkin and Pasternak is remarkably similar, cf. the chart below:



While numerically different, the ratio of pyrrhic feet on the first and second ictuses (i.e., second and fourth syllables) in both poets is almost identical. Thus it turns out that there is an equivalence between Pushkin and Pasternak not only in the second, but also in the first part of their verselike prose syntagms. This suggests a close connection of Pasternak's *Zhivago* to *The Tales of Belkin*. On yet another level, then, we find support for the hypothesis of Pushkin's influence on the rhythm of another poet's prose.

To summarize, our investigation indicates that the prose of a poet, even one not attempting to write "rhythmical prose," represents a special type of prose in which the rhythm is influenced by prior verse practice. It is probable that most poets are not able—or do not try—to liberate themselves from the influence of verse when writing prose. "The Queen of Spades" seems to be the rare exception to this rule. In *The Tales of Belkin* Pushkin was still beholden to his verse, as evidenced on the level of rhythmic dictionary as well as on the syntagmatic level of the "iambic" fragments. The rhythmic profile of these

occasional iambs reflects the alternating tendency of the Russian poetry of Pushkin's day. Comparative analysis suggests that the rhythms of *The Tales of Belkin* influenced the development of Russian poets' prose, both in their rhythmic dictionaries as well as in the iambic fragments. There is strong reason to believe that Pasternak's prose in *Zhivago* was especially influenced by the rhythmic structure of Pushkin's occasional iambs.

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