The Stationmaster Study Guide

The Stationmaster by Aleksandr Pushkin

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Contents

Introduction

Originally published anonymously, "The Stationmaster" (1830), is perhaps the finest short story by the "father of Russian literature," Alexander Pushkin. One of the *Tales of the Late Ivan Petrovich Belkin*, the story chronicles the tragic story of a humble stationmaster and his beautiful runaway daughter.

"The Stationmaster" is considered influential for its concise, plain style, a hallmark of Pushkin's writing. The story is told in chronological order, with a clear beginning, middle, and end and addresses themes such as familial vs. romantic love, moral corruption, the conflict between social classes, and the ambiguity of human existence.

Author Biography

Pushkin's stature in the history of Russian literature is unparalleled; in fact, he is variously called Russia's "national poet" and "the father of Russian literature." While critics suggest that Pushkin's relative obscurity outside of Russia is due, in part, to his particular use of language, which is not easily translatable, other masters of Russian literature, such as Leo Tolstoy and Fyodor Dostoevsky acknowledged their great debt to the achievements of Pushkin.

Born May 26 (June 6, modern calendar), 1799, into an aristocratic family, Pushkin was raised in a literary environment. He traced his lineage back six hundred years, including his maternal great-grandfather Hannibal, a black slave bought by Peter the Great in Turkey and brought back to Russia. Both his father, Sergei, and his uncle, Vasily, were writers, and the young Pushkin had free access to his father's extensive library, which contained a large collection of French literature.

At the age of twelve, Pushkin was sent to school at Tsarskoe Selo near St. Petersburg. There, under the supervision of progressive educators, he developed his literary talents and cultivated friendships with students who would later participate in the Decembrist rebellion. In 1817 he finished school and was appointed to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. After the defeat of Napoleon in 1812 republican sympathies became widespread among Russian intellectuals. Secret societies were formed, such as the Union of Welfare, to bring about an end to autocracy and serfdom. Living primarily in St. Petersburg, Pushkin was a member of "the Green Lamp," the literary branch of the Union of Welfare. His reputation as a writer led to his being exiled by Czar Alexander I for allegedly spreading anti-government and atheistic ideas.

In 1826 Pushkin wrote to Czar Nicholas I asking for an end to his exile. The Czar's consent was conditional; Nicholas insisted that he would personally censor all of Pushkin's writings.

In May the writer became engaged to Natalya Nikolaevna Goncharova. The great cholera epidemic of 1830 delayed their marriage, forcing Pushkin to live at his father's estate in the village of Boldino. During this time he composed five *Small Tragedies*, the long poem *A House in Kolomna*, and the collection of short stories, *The Tales of the Late Ivan Petrovich Belkin*, which includes "The Stationmaster."

Pushkin and Natalya married in 1831. In 1836 he challenged a French officer to a duel because of rumors that the officer was having an affair with Pushkin's wife. The duel was averted when the officer married Natalya's sister, but the rumors persisted. Pushkin was killed in a duel with his brother-in-law at the age of thirty-seven. Despite his untimely death, Pushkin's legacy makes him the most cherished writer of the Russian literary tradition.

Plot Summary

Prologue

"The Stationmaster" opens with the narrator, A.G.N., frustrated with the stationmaster as he travels on his journey. In early nineteenth-century Russia travelers used horses provided by poststations to go from one town to another, along postroads. The stationmaster was responsible for the administration of road permits (required of all travelers) and the horses travelers would use.

The narrator becomes more sympathetic, insisting that the stationmaster is "a veritable martyr of the fourteenth class." This alludes to the institution known as the Table of Ranks, which, in Czarist Russia, established an order of social ranking among all government workers, including the military. The fourteenth class was the lowest of the ranks in the Table. The narrator appeals to his "reader's conscience" by offering examples of situations in which a stationmaster is a victim of circumstances, subject to verbal and physical abuse.

Part II

The narrator discusses a stationmaster he had come to know along his travels. On a hot day he is caught in a spring shower, arriving at a station "along a route that has since been abandoned." Hoping for dry clothes and some tea, the narrator is greeted by the stationmaster and his beautiful fourteen- year-old daughter, Dunia. The stationmaster is described as "a man about fifty years of age, still fresh and agile."

As the stationmaster copies out the traveler's order for fresh horses, the narrator passes the time observing a series of pictures depicting the Biblical parable of the Prodigal Son. The narrator enjoys a drink and conversation with the stationmaster and Dunia as if they were old friends. As he reluctantly leaves the station, he asks Dunia for a kiss, and she consents.

Part III

Years pass before the narrator has a chance to return to the station; he speculates what has happened to the stationmaster and Dunia during those intervening years. When he arrives again at the station, he recognizes the pictures depicting the parable of the Prodigal Son, but both the station and stationmaster are in a state of neglect.

When the narrator asks about Dunia, the stationmaster tells him how one winter evening "a slim young hussar" (a cavalry officer) arrived at his station in an angry mood. When greeted by Dunia, the young officer's anger quickly dissipated. When the horses were readied for the traveler, he suddenly fell ill, insisting he would not be able to travel

on. The stationmaster offered the officer his bed and Dunia attended him until a doctor could arrive the following day.

The doctor arrived and the officer spoke to him in German (which the stationmaster could not understand). The doctor then told the stationmaster that the young officer would need more rest. Then both the officer and the doctor enjoyed dinner and a bottle of wine. After another day passed, the hussar was fully recovered, and offered Dunia a ride in his carriage to church. When Dunia hesitated, her father encouraged her to accept his offer, "His Honor's not a wolf; he won't eat you: go ahead, ride with him as far as the church."

Later the poor stationmaster could not understand how he could have permitted Dunia to go off with the hussar; what had blinded him? what had deprived him of reason? Half an hour had scarcely passed when his heart began to ache and ache, and anxiety overwhelmed him to such a degree that he could no longer resist setting out for the church himself. He could see as he approached the church that the congregation was already dispersing, but Dunia was neither in the churchyard nor on the porch. He hurried into the church: the priest was leaving the altar, the sexton extinguishing the candles, and two old women still praying in a corner; but Dunia was not there. Her poor father could hardly bring himself to ask the sexton if she had been to mass. She had not, the sexton replied. The stationmaster went home more dead than alive. (Excerpt from "The Stationmaster," translated by Paul Debreczeny.)

Falling ill at the loss of his daughter, the stationmaster was treated by the same physician who had seen the hussar, who told him that the officer had not truly been sick. Using the travel documents to determine the identity and destination of the hussar, the stationmaster set off for Petersburg, telling himself, "I shall bring my lost sheep home." When at last he tracks down Captain Minskii, the officer apologizes to the stationmaster but refuses to return Dunia to her father, sending him out to the street.

After a few days the stationmaster returned to Minskii's lodgings but was refused entry. After attending a service at the Church of All the Afflicted, he recognizes the young officer traveling by in a carriage. Following the carriage, the stationmaster arrives at a three-story building and discovers that Dunia lives on the second floor.

Forcing his way into the apartment, the stationmaster sees his daughter seated beside Captain Minskii. When she recognizes her father, Dunia faints and falls to the floor. Angered, the hussar throws the stationmaster out of the apartment. The stationmaster concludes his story, telling the narrator that he has received no news of his daughter 's fate.

Part IV

Years pass, but the narrator cannot forget the stationmaster or Dunia. Traveling nearby on an autumn day, he discovers that the station has been abolished and that the stationmaster has passed away. As he is led to the stationmaster's grave by a little boy,

he is told that a wealthy young lady (whom the narrator seems to presume is Dunia), traveling with three children, had come to visit the stationmaster in the summer. When she was shown his grave, she "threw herself on the grave and lay there for a long time." Having learned this, the narrator leaves the town satisfied.

Summary

"The Stationmaster" is a short story that tells the tragic tale of a remotely located stationmaster and his beautiful young daughter. The pair seems to have a relatively peaceful life, until one day, when the girl goes off with a hussar that had been passing through the territory. Overwhelmed with grief, the stationmaster is unable to fully reconcile himself to being alone and dies a lonely and broken man.

Stationmasters have long been the object of scorn amongst weary and frustrated travelers. Indeed, at their very core, stationmasters are no different from any of the countless travelers that pass through their post looking for a fresh team of horses, yet, on a daily basis, they must endure the insults, demands and whims of the civilians and government officials that pass through their stations. As it is their job to satisfy the demands of those passing through their territories, stationmasters often find themselves under a great deal of pressure. Even so, most stationmasters are general obliging and pleasant and some, if given the opportunity to truly interact with those passing though, can be quite interesting. This story is about one such stationmaster.

In May of 1816, the story's narrator is traveling a long-abandoned route in the Russian region of N.Guberniia. The narrator is to hire a fresh set of horses at each post however, more often than not, he finds that the horses that have been prepared for his use are given to men of higher rank. The narrator finds himself becoming increasingly frustrated, but also realizes that there is little he can do.

At one particular point in his journey, the narrator hits a rainstorm and by the time he reaches the station, he is drenched. Hoping for nothing more than to be able to change into dry clothes and have a hot cup of tea, the narrator is pleasantly surprised to be greeted by the stationmaster's young daughter, a girl named Dunia.

As the narrator waits for the stationmaster to copy his order for fresh horses, he looks around the stationmaster's home. He takes particular interest in a series of photos that depict the story of The Prodigal Son. As he looks at each photo, he reads the accompanying verses. Years later, these verses remain with him. The narrator's thoughts are interrupted by the return of Dunia. He finds that he is instantly smitten with the girl, and he is sure she recognizes this. The narrator, the stationmaster and Dunia chat for a time. The narrator is impressed by how poised and confident Dunia appears to be.

Although his horses have been ready for quite some time, the narrator is reluctant to leave. Before he departs, he asks Dunia's permission to kiss her, a gesture she allows. The memory of this kiss remains with the narrator for many years.

Several years pass, and the narrator once again finds himself in the same region. He remembers the stationmaster and Dunia. While he realizes that it is quite possible that the stationmaster has died or that his daughter has married during the intervening years, he nonetheless feels compelled to pay them a visit.

When he enters the stationmaster's quarters, the narrator notices that the photos depicting the parable of The Prodigal Son are still on the wall, but the rest of the place has been sorely neglected. Dust and dirt have replaced the flowers and other niceties that had once adorned the room. Upon hearing the narrator enter, the stationmaster awakens from his sleep. He, too, appears to have suffered the effects of neglect.

The narrator introduces himself and reminds the stationmaster of their prior meeting. Unable to wait any longer, the narrator asks about Dunia, however the stationmaster's reply indicates that the girl no longer lives there. When the narrator asks if the girl has married, the stationmaster does not reply but rather, busies himself with the task of tending to the narrator's travel documents. Burning with curiosity, the narrator offers the stationmaster a glass of rum, hoping that the liquor will lift his spirits and make him more talkative. The ploy is successful and after the second glass, the stationmaster tells the narrator what has happened since his last visit.

As he speaks about his daughter, the stationmaster tells the narrator how the young girl's charm affected nearly every traveler that stopped at his station. She befriended women and men alike, and he was grateful for this as her presence usually diffused whatever anger or frustration the travelers had. He also acknowledged that he depended on his daughter to keep the quarters clean and to cook his meals and deeply appreciated all she did for him. The stationmaster then begins to tell the narrator what has transpired in the time since his last visit.

One evening, the stationmaster and Dunia were at home. As he recalls, it was a typical evening. He was preparing a new register, and his daughter was sewing. Their evening was interrupted by a traveler demanding horses. Unfortunately, there were no horses available which drew the predicted reaction from the traveler. As he was about to berate the stationmaster, however, Dunia emerged and asked the traveler is he would like something to eat. Supper was prepared, and the three sat down to a good meal and conversation. Before long, a fresh team of horses arrived and the stationmaster excused himself to prepare them for the waiting traveler. However, when he returned to the house, he found that the traveler had fallen ill. It was decided he would remain for the night. If there was no improvement by the next morning, a physician would be summoned.

The next morning arrived, since there was no improvement, the stationmaster sent for a doctor. Meanwhile, Dunia tended to the sick traveler, who, while appearing to be in great distress, managed to drink two cups of coffee and eat dinner. When the doctor arrived, he examined the man, and conversed easily with him in German. When the doctor spoke with the stationmaster, however, he did so in Russian. The doctor tells the stationmaster that the traveler should be fine with a few days' rest. They spent the rest of the evening sharing supper and conversation.

The next day, the traveler seemed to be feeling much better. Even so, he spent much of the day joking with Dunia and the stationmaster and even assisted with some of the travelers that stopped at the station. By the time the traveler was ready to leave, the stationmaster was almost sorry to see him go. It was a Sunday and Dunia was

preparing to go to Mass. The traveler offered to drop her off at church on his way out of town. The stationmaster recalls that Dunia was reluctant to go, but he assured her that she would be fine. Shortly after Dunia departed with the traveler, however, the stationmaster began to feel anxious and regretted his decision to send his daughter with the man. His anxiety soon turned to fear, and he drove to the church in search of his daughter.

When he arrived, the Mass had ended and people were leaving. He did not see his daughter and so he entered the church and asked if Dunia had been there. He was told she wasn't, and he returned home in despair. As he traveled, he wondered if Dunia had decided to ride as far as the next station to visit an aunt who lived in that region. His hope was shattered, however, when the driver returned with the team of horses that had taken Dunia and the traveler and told the stationmaster that his daughter had gone beyond the next station with the traveler.

The stationmaster was so consumed with grief that he needed to take to his bed. A doctor was summoned, the same doctor who had visited the traveler. He confirmed the stationmaster's fear that the traveler had feigned illness in order to spend more time with Dunia. The driver who had taken them told the stationmaster that Dunia while had cried for much of the journey it did appear that she had gone willingly. Armed with this knowledge, the stationmaster took a leave of absence from his job and set off in search of his daughter.

The stationmaster set out for Petersburg, the destination noted in the traveler's travel documents. Once there, he found lodging and then set out to find the traveler, who he had learned was named Captain Minskii. He eventually found Minskii and in an emotional scene, asked for his daughter's return. Minskii refused the man's request and assured him that his daughter was quite happy and would be treated well. He then tucked some money into the stationmaster's shirt sleeve and sent him on his way.

The stationmaster realized that he would not be returning home with his daughter, but even so, wished to see her just once more. His request is refused by Minskii. After attending church a few days later, the stationmaster decided to force his way into Minskii's home to see his daughter. When Dunia sees her father, she is overcome by surprise and faints. The stationmaster rushes to tend to his daughter, but is startled by Minskii's entrance. Minskii was clearly angered by the stationmaster's intrusion and threw him into the street.

The stationmaster returned home and resumed his duties.

After recounting this story, the stationmaster tells the narrator that he often wonders what has become of his daughter. He fears that Minskii's prosperity has faded and that his daughter is now in the streets living the life of a beggar.

Years later, the narrator once again finds himself in the region of the old stationmaster. He learns that the station had long ago been abolished, but no one seems to know what has happened to the stationmaster. He journeys to the station and tells the woman living

there that he is looking for the man who had lived there previously. He is told that the stationmaster had died a year earlier. He asks to be taken to the man's grave and so the woman calls one of her sons to take him. Along the way, the narrator asks the young child if he knew the stationmaster. The boy replies that he had, and that he had spent a great deal of time with the old man. The narrator then asks if anyone else has come looking for the old man. The boy tells him that a young woman had recently visited. When asked for more details, the boy tells him that the woman was finely dressed and was accompanied by young children and their nanny. Although the boy offered to take her to the grave, the woman told him that she knew the way and wanted to go alone. She gave the boy a coin before going to the cemetery. She remained there for a long time and then went to the village in search of a priest.

Satisfied that the boy has told him all he knows, the narrator leaves, but before he does, he gives the boy a coin.

Analysis

Pushkin's short story, "The Stationmaster" is a story told from the point of view of an unnamed narrator. The story is prefaced with the narrator's observations on the lives of all stationmasters while its remainder centers largely on the events in the life of one particular stationmaster he had met several years earlier. This is an effective tool, because it allows the reader to become acquainted with the life of the typical stationmaster which, in turn, helps to better understand the stationmaster's plight, thus casting him in a sympathetic light.

On the surface, Pushkin's "The Stationmaster" appears to be a story that mirrors the parable of The Prodigal Son. Indeed, Pushkin goes to great lengths to keep this parable in the forefront of the readers mind. First, there is the description of the photos in the stationmaster's home that depict the story. Then, after Dunia has left with the hussar, the stationmaster vows to "bring my lost sheep home." Later, when reflecting on what may have caused his daughter to leave him for the hussar, he says "She is not the first, nor will she be the last, to be seduced by some rake passing through...," implying that, like the prodigal son, Dunia was tempted by all that existed beyond her simple life as the stationmaster's daughter. Given this, it is possible that the stationmaster kept the picture depicting the parable of The Prodigal Son prominently displayed in his home to dissuade his daughter from leaving home in search of a better life.

Yet, unlike the prodigal son, Dunia appears to be quite satisfied with her new life. Recall that, when her father attempts to take her from Minskii, he is so taken by her appearance that he thinks "Never had his daughter appeared so beautiful to him; he could not help admiring her." Even so, he can not bring himself to admit that perhaps she is happy. This is seen after he has finished recounting his tale to the narrator when he says, "Whether she is alive or dead, God only knows. Anything can happen. "

One of the stationmaster's biggest fears is that Dunia is being used by Minskii and will soon be discarded, not unlike a prostitute. In fact, the stationmaster begs Minskii to "not

ruin her needlessly." Yet, in many ways, he prostitutes her each day when he uses her to effectively protect him from irate travelers. "It often happened that a gentleman, however angry he was, would calm down in her presence and talk to me kindly," the stationmaster tells the narrator.

Clearly, the stationmaster's despair is in large part due to the fact that he really has no idea how Dunia is fairing. Her leaving came as an enormous shock and despite the number of years that have passed, the hurt has not dissipated. However, it is also evident that the stationmaster simply misses his daughter. Remember, it was she who assuaged many an angry traveler who passed through his station. Without her there, it is quite likely that he has been bearing the brunt of these travelers' frustrations. And, since there is no mention of a wife or other children, it is likely that he is now living alone.

Even so, it can be argued that the brief time the stationmaster spent in Dunia's company should have been enough to allay his fears that she is destitute or otherwise unhappy. Recall the description given, when he looks in the room and first sees his daughter. "Dunia, dressed in all the finery of the latest fashion, sat on the arm of his easy chair like a lady rider on an English saddle. She was looking at Minskii with tenderness, winding his dark locks around her fingers, which glittered with rings." Given this, it is obvious that she is well cared for and quite happy to be with Minskii. Yet, his grief does not allow him to see Dunia's situation in this light. Rather than be content that she has found happiness, the stationmaster chooses to dwell in uncertainty and self-pity.

Whether or not Dunia left with Minskii of her own accord, is not clear. The reader learns that she appeared to be in tears for much of the journey, but it is also made apparent that apart from her initial reluctance, she did not seem to resist in any way. While it's quite possible that she was truly in love with Minskii, it is just as likely that she left in an effort to escape her current life.

The story's conclusion also merits some discussion. As the narrator describes his experience of returning to the stationmaster's home several years after hearing the tale of Dunia's elopement, the impression is given that perhaps she has returned and is living in the old house. His description of the brewer's wife as "a fat woman" leads us to believe that the stationmaster has been correct all along, that is, his once beautiful daughter had been used and "ruined" by Minskii and so, she has at last returned to make her home on the site of the station where her father had worked for so many years. Indeed, given the emphasis given to the parable of the prodigal son earlier in the story, the reader expects Dunia's return. This notion is given further credence by the fact that the young boy who takes the narrator to the stationmaster's grave, refers to the stationmaster as "grandpa." The reader soon sees however, that this is not likely as the narrator soon learns that a woman - most likely Dunia - had returned several months earlier to inquire about her father's grave.

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Characters

A. G. N.

See Narrator

Dunia

The stationmaster's daughter, Dunia breaks her father's heart by running off to St. Petersburg with the wealthy young Captain Minskii.

The narrator is struck by her youthful beauty the first time he meets her. When he requests a kiss, she consents. She keeps her father's house in order, performing all the domestic duties earlier taken care of by her late mother. She is so lovely that ladies would give her presents and gentlemen would seek excuses to linger about the station to gaze at her.

When Minskii arrives, she attends to him when he feigns sickness. She hesitates to accept his offer of a ride to church but eventually accepts at her father's urging. During the ride, she is persuaded to run off with Minskii. When her father finds her in St. Petersburg, she looks more beautiful than ever as she plays with the curls of Minskii's hair.

The narrator believes her to be the wealthy woman who arrives with three children, a dog, and a servant to mourn at the stationmaster's grave.

Dunja

See Dunia

Minskii

Minskii is the "slim young hussar" who seduces the stationmaster's daughter, Dunia. ("Hussar" is a military term denoting light cavalry.) When he arrives one winter evening, he threatens to strike the old stationmaster when he is told that no horses are available. Yet when he sees Dunia, his temperament quickly changes. Making himself at home, he settles into a pleasant conversation with them. When the horses are prepared for him, he suddenly falls ill and insists that he is unable to travel.

After spending the night in the stationmaster's bed, he is visited by a doctor. The next day he feels better and he offers Dunia a ride to church on his way to St. Petersburg.

When the stationmaster later tracks him down in town, Minskii apologizes but refuses to send Dunia back home. He then hands the stationmaster some money and sends him out into the street. Later, he again throws the stationmaster out in the street when Dunia is startled to see her father in her apartment.

Minskij

See Minskii

Minsky

See Minskii

Narrator

The Narrator, also known as Titular Councillor A. G. N., meets the stationmaster and his daughter, Dunia, while traveling. In the time that passes between his first encounter with them and the time of the story, he is promoted in rank. He becomes interested in their lives, claiming that he "would rather talk with them than with some official of the sixth class traveling on government business." Attracted to Dunia, he kisses her after their first meeting. When he returns years later, he is sad to learn that Dunia has left and he sympathetically listens to the stationmaster's story. On his third visit he learns that the old man has passed away. When he visits the stationmaster's grave, he is comforted to learn that a wealthy young lady (whom he presumes to be Dunia) has recently mourned at the grave as well.

Postmaster

See Samson Vyrin

Avdotia Samsonovna

See Dunia

Stationmaster

See Samson Vyrin

Titular Councillor A. G. N.

See Narrator

Samson Vyrin

The elderly manager of a posting station, Vyrin loses his teenage daughter to the wealthy Captain Minskii. When the narrator first meets the stationmaster, he is "a man about fifty years of age, still fresh and agile, in a long green coat with three medals on faded ribbons." He is proud of his daughter, Dunia, and relies on her to fulfill the domestic duties once performed by his late wife.

When the narrator returns, Vyrin is an unkempt, hunchbacked, "feeble old man." He relates how Captain Minskii violated his hospitality. He follows Minskii and Dunia to St. Petersburg, where he stays with an old friend from the army. When he finds Minskii, he is turned away and given money, which he throws away in disgust.

When Dunia sees him again she faints. After Minskii again sends him away, his army friend encourages him to file a complaint. He does not and returns home, where he gradually drinks himself to death.

Themes

Class Conflict

Much of the conflict in "The Stationmaster" involves the inequality between social classes. The prologue alludes to the Table of Ranks that established an order of social ranking among all government workers. The stationmaster is in the fourteenth class, the lowest rank in the Table. The narrator tells us that he would rather talk with a stationmaster "than with some official of the sixth class traveling on government business."

He tells the reader of his frustration that a stationmaster would give away to a higher-ranking official horses that had been prepared for him. The narrator asks, "what would become of us if the rule convenient to all, 'Let rank yield to rank,' were to be replaced by some other, such as 'Let mind yield to mind'? What arguments would arise?" While the narrator dismisses his question in favor of practicality, the reader is left to ask the question in the context of the story.

The young hussar, who "steals" Dunia away from her father is an officer, and, therefore, of a higher rank than the stationmaster (who was an enlisted man). In deference, the stationmaster allows the officer to use his bed while he fakes illness. When the stationmaster comes to town and tries to speak with Captain Minskii about his daughter, he is obstructed by the officer's servants. He tries to gain access to Minskii by asking an orderly, who was cleaning the officer's boots, to "announce to His Honor that an old soldier begged to see him."

While we are told how a stationmaster may be called upon at any hour, the orderly informs him that Minskii "never received anybody before eleven o'clock." When he finally confronts Minskii at eleven in the morning, the officer meets him wearing his sleeping attire, hands him money, and sends him out the door. The stationmaster is encouraged by a friend to file a complaint against the officer; after much thought, he decides against it.

Wealth and Poverty

Closely related to the theme of class conflict is that of wealth and poverty. The station is described as "humble but neat." The pictures illustrating the parable of the Prodigal Son at the station show an old man giving a young man a bag of money. After spending the money wastefully, the young man is destitute. He then returns to his father, who welcomes him back.

While Captain Minskii stays at the stationmaster's, he pays the physician a handsome amount and invites him to stay for dinner as if he were in his own home. The next day he pays the stationmaster "generously" for "his bed and board." Later in the story, when the stationmaster confronts Minskii about Dunia, the young hussar shoves money in the

stationmaster's coat sleeve before sending him out in the street. When the stationmaster throws the money away in disgust—then second-guesses himself— a well-dressed young man snatches up the money before it can be retrieved by the old man.

Moral Corruption

The theme of moral corruption in integral to "The Stationmaster." The pictures of the parable of the Prodigal Son tell a story of moral corruption and redemption. The narrator calls Dunia a "little coquette" when she notices his attraction to her beauty. She is on her way to church when she decides to run away with Captain Minskii. The stationmaster tells the narrator that Dunia "is not the first, nor shall she be the last to be seduced by some rake passing through, to be kept for a while and then discarded."

He perceives his daughter as corrupted and Minskii as the corrupter. However, when the narrator is informed that the stationmaster is dead, he is told the cause is "a glass or two too many." While the stationmaster's pleasure in rum and its effect on his conversation are humorous earlier in the story, the loss of Dunia leads to his abuse of alcohol and to his own moral corruption and ultimate ruin.

Style

Point of View

"The Stationmaster" is told from the point of view of the narrator. Although the story is one of *The Tales of the Late Ivan Petrovich Belkin*, the preface to the collection names Titular Councillor A.G.N. as the source of "The Stationmaster," leaving Belkin (apparently) the editor. Although Pushkin is the author of the short story, he effectively removes himself from identification with the narrator's voice.

The story begins with a prologue discussing negative stereotypes of stationmasters as rude and offensive bureaucrats who hinder the traveler on his journey. The narrator plays on these generalizations only to question them, appealing to his "reader's conscience" by offering examples of situations in which a stationmaster is a victim of circumstances and subject to verbal and physical abuse. But the narrator quickly shifts from these generalizations to the story of a specific stationmaster he once knew.

The next section of the story describes the narrator's first meeting with the stationmaster and his only meeting with the stationmaster's daughter, Dunia. While the point of view remains the narrator's, his language is now fully involved with the narrative. The narrator quotes both of the other characters, but any psychological observations are based entirely on the narrator's own perceptions.

This shift back to the narrator's voice also allows for psychological analysis of both the stationmaster and Dunia. Still, the narrator's perspective of these events does not differ radically from that of the stationmaster (despite, or perhaps because of, his having kissed Dunia).

When the narrator returns to learn the fate of the stationmaster, the point of view switches to that of the red-haired boy. He describes the arrival of the wealthy lady, presumably Dunia (although the narrator never states this), who mourns over the grave of the stationmaster. The point of view returns to that of the narrator for the last sentence of the story, which merely states his satisfaction with the boy's description and leaves many questions unanswered.

Setting

The setting of "The Stationmaster" is a crucial aspect of the story. The station itself is "along a route that has since been abandoned," in the Russian village of P. When the stationmaster goes to rescue his daughter from Captain Minskii, he goes to the city of Petersburg, a thriving metropolis familiar to any of Pushkin's readers.

The differences in locale are less subtle than the differences in seasons. The initial visit occurs in the spring. When the narrator returns we are not told of the season, but the stationmaster tells him that Minskii arrived in the winter. The narrator returns a final time

in the fall and is told by the boy that the wealthy lady visited the stationmaster's grave in the summer.

While the narrator initially tells us that he met the stationmaster and Dunia in 1816, the only indication given by the narrator of time's passing is "years went by," while the stationmaster tells him "almost three years" had passed since he last saw his daughter. The setting of the story is, then, roughly contemporary with its publication, 1830.

Realism

Pushkin is often considered the father of Russian literary realism. The realistic style of "The Stationmaster" is evident in the linear flow of the narrative. Each episode follows the last sequentially. There is a clear beginning, middle, and end, and they follow each other in that order. Likewise, the attention to detail conveys a clear representation of the story's reality, in conformity with what may be viewed as "normal" reality. The characters are not of a heroic aristocracy from times long gone; "real" people, like the characters in "The Stationmaster," could be encountered in Russia at the time the story was written. The ambiguity of the story's conclusion is similar to that of "real" life.

Irony

Irony—an indirect presentation of a paradox, or of an ideal situation or circumstance in contrast to the actual—is a key stylistic element of the story. Dramatic irony , in which the irony is inherent in the situation, but unknown to the characters, is evident when Dunia returns wealthy, not destitute, to her "prodigal" father.

The story of the stationmaster and Dunia is an ironic reversal of the parable of the Prodigal Son, as depicted in the series of pictures on the walls of the station. Some scholars have noted inconsistencies in the number of years which pass according to the story, concluding that this may be a form of Romantic irony which forces the reader into awareness of the story as a piece of fiction despite its realism.

Historical Context

"The Stationmaster" was published in 1830—a year of great revolutionary conflict throughout Europe. In France Charles X was deposed by revolutionaries on July 29 after a six-year reign. The Bourbon duc d'Orleans was then declared "citizen king " by the French Liberals. He would reign until 1848 as Louis Philippe.

Inspired by the French example, Belgian revolutionaries demanded independence from the Netherlands and forced Dutch troops out of Brussels in early October. Belgium was recognized as an independent nation-state by the end of December. Russia was not immune to the revolutionary fever sweeping Europe. In 1830 Polish nationalists formed a union with Lithuania and declared independence from Russia. The rebellion was subsequently put down with the Russian victory at Warsaw in September, 1831.

In Russia Czar Nicholas I, a member of the Romanov dynasty, became ruler on December 14, 1825. That date marks the Decembrist rebellion in St. Petersburg, when a group of young army officers led 3,000 troops in an attempt to take advantage of the death of Emperor Alexander I. After Alexander I defeated Napoleon in 1812, republican and constitutional ideologies began circulating among Russian intellectuals, fostered by secret societies such as the Union of Welfare (of which Pushkin was a member).

In 1822 Pushkin published his *Observations of Russian History of the Eighteenth Century*, which addressed the peasant problem, i.e. Russia's reliance on the medieval system of serfdom (a form of slavery). Pushkin claimed that the problem must be resolved in one of two ways: either by spontaneous uprising or by gradual enlightenment; he claimed to support the latter.

The Decembrists sought to abolish autocracy in the absence (or interim) of a Czar and to replace that form of government with a constitutional monarchy or republic. But Nicholas I assumed the title of Czar and administered oaths of loyalty to the Senate and State Council before the troops had gathered. Troops loyal to the Czar surrounded the rebels, putting a bloody end to the rebellion.

The rebellion was the first armed, open attempt to topple autocracy and abolish serfdom in Russia. Pushkin was in exile at the time of the Decembrist rebellion, but he was sympathetic to their struggle. He wrote to Decembrist leaders in his "Letter to Siberia," "Your sorrowful work will not pass away."

But revolution was not the only crisis facing the Russia of Czar Nicholas I. In 1830 a cholera outbreak swept across Russia. In some areas crop failure lead to famine and quarantine efforts lead to rioting. By the end of 1830 cholera had claimed the lives of 900,000 Russians. The disease would spread, eventually killing several million people across Europe.

Despite these social crises, the reign of Nicholas I is considered the golden age of Russian literature. Despite strict censorship (Nicholas I was Pushkin's personal censor),

writers such as Pushkin, Nikolay Gogol, Fyodor Dostoevsky, and Leo Tolstoy produced numerous masterpieces during this era.

Critical Overview

Critics have praised "The Stationmaster" as a masterpiece of the short story genre. Generally regarded as the "father of Russian literature," Pushkin was a great innovator in many mediums, including poetry, drama, and the novel, in addition to the short story. The Realist school of Russian literature owes much to Pushkin, and "The Stationmaster" exemplifies a realistic depiction of Russian life in the time of the author.

Analysis of the story really began in 1919, when M. O. Gershenzon became the first critic to analyze the symbolic significance of the pictures depicting the Biblical parable of the Prodigal Son. While he may not have been the first to notice the parallels between the pictures and the story itself, Gershenzon was the first to speculate on the affect the pictures may have had on the story's characters.

Gershenzon contends that the stationmaster allowed the pictures to dictate his understanding of Dunia's departure. Rather than being happy for his daughter, who has found not only love, but also wealth, the stationmaster instead sees Dunia as an embodiment of the Prodigal Son. This is why he follows the couple to St. Petersburg. The stationmaster's belief in the story of the Prodigal Son clouds his judgment, Gershenzon insists, forcing him to see things not as they are, and deceiving himself into despair.

Willis Konick agrees with Gershenzon regarding the importance of the Prodigal Son pictures, but suggests that Gershenzon perhaps overstates Dunia's happiness. The point of the story, Konick argues, is that sin does not necessarily lead to catastrophe and a moral slip does not always result in a fall.

Walter Vickery, in his book-length study *Alexander Pushkin,* shares this view of the story, calling it "a rebuttal of the sentimentalist fallacy that poor girls are by nature innocent, that they are ensnared and deceived by rich men, and that the results of their seduction or abduction are bound to be catastrophic."

Konick also stresses the emotional effect the story has on the narrator, who is as important to the story as the stationmaster and Dunia. While Konick is interested in how the narrator becomes involved emotionally, Paul Debreczeny, in *The Other Pushkin*, asserts that the narrator "stands for eighteenth-century and early-nineteenth-century sentimentalism."

Whereas Konick notices—but does not question— the narrator's emotional involvement, Debreczeny maintains that the narrator's point of view is "narrow," incapable of seeing that "Dunia is running away from a suffocatingly close relationship with her father as well as from the boredom and poverty of provincial life." While Vickery insists that the element of parody must not be overemphasized, and that emphasis should be placed on the story's "clear and concise" style, "with no attempt at psychological analysis and very few comments from the narrator," Debreczeny shows how the narrator's

sympathetic view of the stationmaster's story "is at times obstructed by a ludicrous presentation."

Debreczeny points to the narrator's penchant for literary allusion, breaking into quotation when recalling Dunia's kiss or comparing the stationmaster's wiping of tears to a character in a ballad, as examples of his "ludicrous presentation." This refusal to comply with the narrator's perspective allows Debreczeny to question the narrator's notion of "poor" Dunia. Instead of viewing her as a victim, subject to the seduction of the hussar, Debreczeny insists, "there is something attractive in her daring. Against all odds, she makes a dash for a better life."

Debreczeny maintains that this uncertainty of the story is its virtue: "Ambiguity—a result of the author's identification with all sides—is a concomitant of Pushkin's highest artistic achievements."

Richard Gregg offers a different perspective in his essay, "A Scapegoat for All Seasons." He shows how the hussar fits the stereotype of the storybook hero, while the stationmaster represents the direct opposite—a contemporary "counterhero." Gregg uses Northrop Frye's myth-criticism method to show how the story may fit into an "archetypal" tragic pattern. He notes that the only outdoor scene in the story occurs in autumn, and that (in Frye's archetypal system) autumn corresponds with tragedy. Gregg sees in the title of the story the ambivalence, or double nature, of the tragic hero who falls from greatness due to the error of pride. He views the stationmaster as a mythical scapegoat figure, a hero who suffers for the pleasure of others.

Despite the lack of Pushkin criticism in English (due in part, his critics suggest, to his particularly untranslatable use of the Russian language), the criticism addressing "The Stationmaster" in English displays a wide variety of reading perspectives and interpretive strategies.

Criticism

- Critical Essay #1
- Critical Essay #2
- Critical Essay #3
- Critical Essay #4

Critical Essay #1

Kilpatrick is a freelance writer and editor. In the following essay, he examines Pushkin's use of irony in the story.

Early in his literary career, Alexander Pushkin was sent into exile by Czar Alexander I for allegedly spreading anti-government and atheistic ideas with his "revolutionary verse." Pushkin was a member of "the Green Lamp," the literary wing of the Union of Welfare secret society.

The Union of Welfare (as well as other political secret societies) was formed in the wake of Napoleon's defeat in 1812. Russian intellectuals began to call for political reform in the form of either a constitutional monarchy or a republic, and for an end to the repulsive institution of serfdom. Czar Alexander I was unwilling to give up power and to allow Russia to modernize.

While he was in exile, Pushkin received word of the Decembrist rebellion in 1825. The death of Czar Alexander I left the nation in a state of crisis: which of the dead monarch's brothers would become Czar? Led by a group of young officers, many of whom were involved in political secret societies (such as the Union of Welfare), 3,000 troops gathered on December 14, 1825, in St. Petersburg, calling for an end to autocracy and serfdom.

Yet Nicholas I had already taken the oath of office. When the revolutionaries gathered in the Senate Square, they were met by loyalist troops who put a quick and bloody end to their attempt at reform. Pushkin had established friendships with many of the Decembrist leaders, some from his school days. He wrote to them, in his *Letter to Siberia*, "Your sorrowful work will not pass away." With this introduction to political power, Czar Nicholas I began a regime marked by conservatism and based on the Divine Right of the Czar. In May, 1826, Pushkin wrote to the Czar requesting release from exile. Nicholas I consented in September, under the condition that he would act as Pushkin's personal censor.

How, then, could Pushkin ensure that his friends' "sorrowful work" would endure? What could he, with the Czar as his censor, write that could promote their progressive cause without endangering his life?

In the midst of the cholera epidemic which swept across Russia in 1830 (claiming 900,000 Russian lives that year), Pushkin spent September through December at his father's estate in Boldino. Recently engaged to Natalya Nikolaevna Goncharova, Pushkin enjoyed four months of seclusion that proved to be the most productive, creative period of his life. It was in these circumstances that "The Stationmaster" was composed.

The story begins with a quote from the poet Viazemskii (a friend of Pushkin's), calling a stationmaster a "despot," or a tyrant. The narrator then asks, "Who has not cursed

stationmasters?— who has not quarreled with them frequently?" The stationmaster was responsible for providing a traveler with a permit and horses for a journey along post-roads, which linked towns in early nineteenthcentury Russia.

Just as he conveys the frustration of the traveler waiting for fresh horses, the narrator shifts from this negative tone to a more sympathetic one and insists that the stationmaster is "a veritable martyr of the fourteenth class."

This alludes to the institution known as the Table of Ranks (created by Peter the Great) that established an order of social ranking among all government workers, based on and including the ranks of the military. The fourteenth class was the lowest of the ranks in the Table.

The narrator tells us he is appealing to his "reader's conscience" by offering examples of situations in which the stationmaster is a helpless victim of circumstance, subject to verbal and physical abuse. This appeal to conscience also invites the reader to question the victimization of others based on rank and class.

Having shifted the reader's perception of stationmasters from tyrants to martyrs, the narrator leaves behind generalizations to focus on the story of a particular stationmaster whom he had met in his travels. Yet just as he tells us the time and place (May 1816) when he met this stationmaster, he recalls that he himself was "of low rank at the time" and that he used to become upset, "being young and hotheaded," when forced to yield his appointed horses to someone of a higher rank.

The narrator dismisses his frustration with the social order as youthful impracticality: "Indeed what would become of us if the rule convenient to all, 'Let rank yield to rank,' were to be replaced by some other, such as 'Let mind yield to mind'? What arguments would arise?" With Czar Nicholas I as his personal censor, how much could Pushkin argue with this notion?

If the reader focuses on the question of rank, as the narrator suggests, "The Stationmaster" becomes a critical commentary on the social structure of Pushkin's Russia. After all, each rank yields to a higher rank until the Czar, who yields only to God. This ironic quality of the story—in which the surface meaning conceals a deeper, contrary meaning— is what makes it a masterpiece of short fiction. It is a further irony that censorship encouraged Pushkin's literary genius.

The unfair advantages of social class are illustrated when the stationmaster tells the narrator his story of how he lost his daughter. The young hussar is an officer, whereas the stationmaster was an enlisted man. Despite his youth, the officer is prepared to whip the old man.

When the officer feigns illness, the stationmaster gives the young officer his bed. When the stationmaster goes to St. Petersburg to bring home his "lost sheep," his access to both Captain Minskii and Dunia is obstructed by servants. When the stationmaster tries to retrieve the money Minskii had given him, a well-dressed young man snatches up the

money and races off in a cab. All of these situations arouse the reader's sympathy and appeal to the "reader's conscience."

This appeal to the reader's conscience is effective because of the narrator's point of view. The narrative voice is not omniscient. When the narrator kisses Dunia all objectivity is lost. Some critics have noted the emotional effect the stationmaster's story has on the narrator, but have not reflected on the fact that the narrator participates in the narrative. The narrator identifies with the stationmaster's despair, maintaining his point of view as he narrates, calling Dunia "poor" despite her wealth in St. Petersburg.

Paul Debreczeny, in his *The Other Pushkin*, emphasizes the over-sentimentality of the narrator. Debreczeny argues that the narrator's "narrow point of view" prevents him from seeing that Dunia "is running away from a suffocatingly close relationship with her father as well as from the boredom and poverty of provincial life."

This interpretation stresses another level of irony and allows the reader to see not only sympathy for the poverty-stricken or the low in rank, but to recognize the necessity for the overcoming of such conditions. For Debreczeny, Dunia is not a victim but a hero: "there is something attractive in her daring. Against all odds, she makes a dash for a better life."

The emphasis on the stationmaster's sorrow, emphasized not only through the narrator's point of view but also in most criticism of the story, obscures Dunia's decisive action (an almost misogynist refusal to see her as anything but a victim). Indeed, as J. Thomas Shaw notes in his essay "'The Stationmaster' and the Parable," "We are never allowed to share her consciousness."

Many critics, following the lead of M. O. Gershenzon, have analyzed the story as a parody or reversal of the Biblical parable of the Prodigal Son. Shaw suggests that "the narrator himself feels and reacts to the return of the 'prodigal' as the older brother in the parable should have felt and reacted."

However, such an idealization of and identifi- cation with the narrator's point of view obscures the textual evidence that suggests that the kiss the narrator and Dunia share is anything but sibling innocence.

Debreczeny notes that in "The Stationmaster" "most questions are answered and most details conscientiously followed up . . . but there is one question that is asked twice, yet left conspicuously unanswered to the very end." He points out that most critics assume that when Dunia returns home, she is married, "despite the scarce evidence of the text." He suggests that perhaps Minskii does not marry Dunia, for "it was by no means unusual for nineteenth-century noblemen to refuse to marry mistresses who were not of their own social status."

Debreczeny insists that Dunia's fate is uncertain; this "Ambiguity—a result of the author's identification with all sides—is a concomitant of Pushkin's highest artistic achievements."

However, the ambiguity of Dunia's condition extends beyond the question of her marital status. This is, of course, a question of point of view. We learn of Dunia's return not from an omniscient narrator, but from the "red-haired, one-eyed little boy in tatters." Because point of view is crucial here, isn't the description of the boy's visual impairment essential?

Critics have often noted that Pushkin's great contribution to Russian literature is his precise use of the language. The Russian word he uses to describe the boy is *krivoy*, which has no di rect equivalent in English, but may be translated as either one-eyed or (perhaps more accurately) cross-eyed.

This boy never directly states that the "wonderful lady" is Dunia. He is poverty-stricken, "in tatters," and he mentions, twice, that "she gave me a silver five-kopeck piece—such a nice lady!" While the narrator is satisfied with the boy's point of view, should we accept his visually impaired perspective? Perhaps the boy's story is merely a (successful) attempt to extract money from the narrator.

Thus, while Debreczeny is correct in noting the absence of textual evidence to support the view that Dunia was happily married to Minskii, we must also acknowledge the absence of evidence to support the view that it was Dunia who visited the graveyard.

An awareness of the ambiguities of the story and a suspension of the reader's rush to a complete conclusion opens up to the truly tragic aspect of "The Stationmaster." If the author identifies "with all sides," what about Captain Minskii?

What do we know of the young hussar? The stationmaster, under the influence of rum, told the narrator of the officer's rash behavior. Still, why would he not welcome the stationmaster, who not only is the father of his beloved Dunia, but gave him his very bed and welcomed him earlier into his home? Why did Dunia faint at the sight of her father? Why would Minskii throw the stationmaster out again when Dunia sees him? If the stationmaster was such a loving father, why would she run away?

The narrator calls Dunia a "little coquette" who seemed "like a woman who has seen the world." How did she attain such experience living in her father's house? We know that the stationmaster later drinks himself to death, but what indication is there that he was not alcoholic when Dunia lived with him? Perhaps the greatest irony of the story may be that the stationmaster was a tyrant after all.

Only an omniscient perspective could resolve these ambiguities, but the reader is denied such a view. We are left with the tragic sense of not knowing what really happened. Of course, "The Stationmaster" is a work of fiction; the story did not "really" happen. Pushkin's use of irony leaves us with questions, though he provides the appearance of answers.

Such a narrative strategy was a necessity given Pushkin's desire for the survival of his friends' "sorrowful work." Likewise, reflection on familial vs. romantic love is appropriate for one awaiting marriage, and such a tragic worldview understandable for a story

written in a time of epidemic. The ambiguities of the story leave us to consider the tragic limitations of humanity.

Source: David Kilpatrick, "Tragic Ambiguity in Pushkin's 'The Stationmaster,'" for *Short Stories for Students,* The Gale Group, 2000.

Critical Essay #2

In the following excerpt, Debreczeny gives an overview of Pushkin's "The Stationmaster," focusing on Pushkin's use of parody, sentimental imagery, and poetical devices.

"The Stationmaster," by far the most successful of Belkin's tales, is narrated by Titular Councillor A.G.N. Older than Belkin, he claims to have, "in the course of twenty years, traversed Russia in all directions" at the time of the telling—a claim incongruous with other information given on the same page. He informs us that in 1816—the time of his first meeting with the stationmaster—he was of low rank and was "young and hotheaded," which implies that he had just begun his career. We know, on the other hand, that Belkin retired in 1823, and that the Tales represented his first literary efforts, written probably no later than 1824 or 1825. A.G.N., therefore, could not have been traveling around on business for more than seven or eight years before he told his tale. By this incongruity—in line with the many others in *The Tales of Belkin*—Pushkin may have wished to remind the reader that his narrators are playful fabrications, not to be taken too seriously. . . .

The tale that follows is, at least at first glance, in keeping with the prologue. When A.G.N. first visits the hero of the tale, the stationmaster Samson Vyrin, he meets a hale and hearty man, the doting father of a fourteen-year-old daughter, Dunia, a pretty and coquettish girl, who willingly gives A.G.N. a farewell kiss when he asks for it. When A.G.N. visits Vyrin again some years later, the stationmaster is alone, depressed, and old-looking. He tells A.G.N. the story of his daughter. Dunia had always been good at calming travelers who were angry because of a lack of horses. On one occasion a young hussar officer named Minskii came to the station, demanded horses, and was ready to raise his whip when he heard there were none; but Dunia's appearance on the scene produced its usual effect. Minskii enjoyed waiting in Dunia's company, and when horses became available, he declared that he was ill. He was put to bed and stayed at Vyrin's house for a couple of days.

It was a Sunday when Minskii was at last able to continue his journey; he offered to drive Dunia as far as the village church. Dunia never came back; her father learned from the coach driver that she had gone on with Minskii. Vyrin fell sick with grief, and when he recovered he went to St. Petersburg, aware that this had been Minskii's destination. There he found Minskii; the young man assured him that Dunia was happy and gave him some money. But this encounter with Minskii did not satisfy the old man: he wished to see Dunia in person just once more. He succeeded in finding her apartment, forced his way in past a protesting maid, and saw her sitting close to Minskii, who was visiting with her. When she caught sight of her father she fainted, and Minskii angrily pushed the old man out of the apartment. Vyrin returned home and had been living by himself ever since, obviously drinking a great deal. It is clear to A.G.N. that he expects Dunia to be abandoned by Minskii and to end up on the street.

Some more years pass, and A.G.N. comes to visit Vyrin's station once more. The post had been abolished; A.G.N. is told that Vyrin is dead. He visits his grave and hears from a village boy that an elegant lady, traveling in a coach-and-six with three children, had also been seeking Vyrin; and when she heard of his death she went to the cemetery and lay prostrate on his grave for a long time.

Some of the sentimental imagery introduced in the prologue is carried over into the narrative. The image of a stationmaster's "poor abode," mentioned in the first paragraph, recurs in connection with Vyrin, who lives in a "humble but neat dwelling." This image is, once more, borrowed from Zhukovskii, who advised that "the whole universe, with all its joys, should be contained in the unpretentious dwelling where one loves and reflects." [V. A. Zhukovskii, *Sobraine Sochinenii*, 1959-60] Vyrin and his daughter create the impression of domestic bliss, of the kind depicted by V. Karlgof in his sentimental idyll "The Stationmaster" (1826)— another target of Pushkin's parody. It is this tranquil family happiness that the cruel young hussar sets out to destroy.

A.G.N. strives to touch the reader's heart at every step. On his second visit, not only does he exclaim about how much Samson had aged (the "laconic" Belkin, one would suppose, would be content with that much), but he enters into detail about the man's "gray hair, the deep furrows lining his face, which had not been shaven for a long time, [and] his hunched back." Not satisfied even with this forceful image, A.G.N. repeats what he has already stated in other words, that Vyrin had become a "feeble old man". Further, Vyrin does not simply put up the sick Minskii (for which there should have been facilities at a wayside station), but yields him his very own bed, which makes the young man's ingratitude appear even more heinous. A civil servant, low-ranking as he may have been, should have nevertheless been able to go to the city by coach, but A.G.N. makes Vyrin take to the road on foot, in order, presumably, to make even more of a martyr of him. Phrases like "his heart began to ache and ache," he was "more dead than alive," "tears welled up in his eyes," "tears welled up in his eyes once more," "with an inexpressible leap of the heart," and "a few seconds of painful anticipation" put added emphasis on emotions that should already be clear from the situation. When the sorrowful old man goes to religious services, it is, naturally, to the Church of All the Afflicted (Tserkov' Vsekh Skorbiashchikh.) A.G.N., like Karamzin, often addresses the reader, asks rhetorical questions, bursts into exclamations, uses anaphora to achieve poetic effects, and—what brings him even nearer to the early sentimentalists—favors archaic forms such as tokmo ("only"), stol' ("so"), sii ("these"), and koi ("which,"). Miss K.I.T. succeeded in stamping her sentimental style on "The Blizzard" and on "The Squire's Daughter" only occasionally; A.G.N.'s stylistic presence, though not exclusive, is felt throughout "The Stationmaster."

Like Burmin in "The Blizzard" and Silvio and the Count in "The Shot," Samson Vyrin is given an opportunity to tell his own story up to a point. His speech abounds in colloquialisms, often substandard. But, as we have seen, Pushkin did not like to burden his prose with class speech: after a dozen or so sentences the stationmaster ceases to speak in first person, letting A.G.N. tell the rest of the story for him. He takes over again only after the conclusion of the St. Petersburg episode, in order to lament his daughter's fate. Consequently his narrative, except for dialogues quoted directly, is not given in his

style. But often where his style is not maintained, his point of view is. For example, when Minskii slips "something" into the cuff of Samson's sleeve, this is clearly his own, and not an omniscient narrator's, perception of what happened. His point of view is all the more easily maintained because A.G.N. is fully in sympathy with Samson, describing him as his "friend," as the "warmhearted stationmaster," and as "the poor stationmaster." Minskii is no less of a "deceiver" in A.G.N.'s eyes than he is in Vyrin's. And, what also emphasizes his closeness to the indigent stationmaster, A.G.N. worries about the seven rubles it cost him to make a detour in order to accomplish his last visit.

As we have seen, in "The Shot" Pushkin fully exploited the technique of frustrating expectations to great effect. At first sight exactly the opposite seems to be happening in "The Stationmaster": A.G.N. seems to fulfill each and every expectation he raises. The theme of the beating of stationmasters, introduced in the prologue, is taken up by Vyrin as he describes how Dunia used to calm angry gentlemen; and Minskii raises his whip at Vyrin, only to lower it again as he beholds Dunia. The general rule is that gentlemen pretend they want a meal in order to stay with Dunia a little longer; the individual scene presented to us shows Minkii pretending to be ill with the same purpose in mind. We see Dunia sewing a dress before Minskii's arrival; it is her physical attractiveness that will make a lasting impression on the young hussar. She sees A.G.N. to his carriage and gives him a kiss, which prepares the reader for the second occasion she walks to a carriage—this time in order to get in and ride away for good. When ladies give kerchiefs and earrings to Dunia, she is placed dangerously within the reach of all the wealth that passes by the station; and indeed we shall see her in St. Petersburg, decked out in the latest finery, with her fingers glittering with rings. "The pots of balsam" are sketched in as symbols of a cheerful household in the first scene, only to be mentioned for their conspicuous absence in the second. Minskii's generous payment for his room and board is a prelude to the scene in which he gives money to the old man in an attempt to compensate him for his daughter. The bed that Vyrin yields to the seducer is the same bed he himself takes to later, sick in earnest. If the story begins with a spring shower, a big storm will play havoc with the lives of the characters; if Vyrin feels instinctively restless after his daughter has gone to church, there is good reason for it; and if A.G.N. is full of forebodings while approaching the station for his second visit, we can safely predict some tragic development in the plot. There is no detail given in this story that does not fit into a pattern or is not followed up in some way.

If A.G.N. is such a trustworthy fulfiller of expectations, can we believe that he would place a set of images in the center of the story's symbolic structure without assigning those images prognostic function? Yet this is precisely what happens. These central images are a set of pictures on the stationmaster's wall depicting the parable of the Prodigal Son; their function is to reverse the pattern of fulfilled expectations.

The first quality that strikes us as we read the description of these pictures is their divergence from the Biblical text. Here are the relevant passages from Luke 15 and "The Stationmaster" ; expressions in the tale that conspicuously deviate from the Biblical text are italicized: . . .

Luke 15
11 And he said, There was a man who had two sons;
12 And the younger of them said to his father, Father, give me the share of property that falls to me. And he divided his living between them.
13 Not many days later, the younger son gathered all he had and took his journey into a far country, and there he squandered his property in loose living.
14 And when he had spent everything, a great famine arose in that country, and he began to be in want.
15 So he went and joined himself to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him into his fields to feed swine.
16 And he would gladly have fed on the pods that the swine ate; and no one gave him anything.
17 But when he came to himself he said, How many of my father's hired servants have bread enough and to spare, but I perish here with hunger!
18 I will arise and go to my father, and I will say to him, Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you;
19 I am no longer worthy to be called your son; treat me as one of your hired servants.
20 And he arose and came to his father. But while he was yet at a distance, his father saw him and had compassion, and ran and embraced him and kissed him.
21 And the son said to him: Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son.
22 But the father said to his servants, Bring quickly the best robe, and put it on him; and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet;
23 And bring the fatted calf and kill it, and let us eat and make merry;
24 For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found. And they began to make merry.
25 Now his elder son was in the field; and as he came and drew near to the house, he heard music and dancing.
26 And he called one of the servants and asked what this meant."The Stationmaster"In the first [picture], a venerable old man, in *nightcap and dressing gown*, was bidding farewell to a restless youth who was *hastily* accepting his blessing and a *bag of money*.The second one depicted the young man's lewd behavior in *vivid colors*: he was seated at a table, surrounded by *false friends and shameless women.*

Farther on, the ruined youth, in rags and with a *threecornered hat* on his head, was tending swine and sharing their meal; *deep sorrow and repentance* were reflected in his features.

The last picture showed his return to his father: the *warmhearted* old man, in the same *nightcap* and *dressing gown,* was running forward to meet him; the Prodigal Son was on his knees; in the background the cook was killing the fatted calf, and the elder brother was asking the servants about the cause of all the rejoicing. . . .

This is the morality that suits A.G.N.'s sentimental attitudes best. He clearly is very favorably impressed by the pictures, for he attempts to heighten their effect by the epithets he chooses in describing them. The simple Biblical phrase "there was a man" is transformed into a "venerable old man"; the Prodigal Son, instead of simply asking for

his share, is "restless" and receives his money "hastily"; later "deep sorrow and repentance" are re- flected on his face, which is the same kind of overstatement of emotions that we have seen A.G.N. make elsewhere in the story; the Biblical father, just like Vyrin, is a "warmhearted old man"; and all this is depicted in "vivid colors."

Indeed, at times the reader cannot be sure just what was in pictures and what was read into them by A.G.N.: one can credit a painter's brush with suggesting the looseness of women, but how can the falseness of friends, sitting by a table, be indicated in a picture? . . .

As he arrives for his second visit, A.G.N. emphasizes that he "immediately recognized the pictures illustrating the parable of the Prodigal Son." This repeated emphasis lends the pictures the kind of premonitory meaning that the reader of romantic literature was used to. . . . A.G.N.'s general trustworthiness is a further enticement to the reader to accept the pictures as portentous. So many signs have been followed up, so many expectations have been fulfilled in the story, that the reader cannot doubt the outcome of the plot: it is only too natural that Dunia, the Prodigal Daughter, should come on hard times in St. Petersburg and return to her father, repentant.

Several details, in accord with the pictures themselves, seem to point to such a denouement. Encouraging his daughter to take a ride with Minskii, Vyrin says, "His Honor's not a wolf; he won't eat you," which prepares us for the old man's later declaration, "I shall bring my lost sheep home." This detail refers the reader back to Luke 15, for the parable of the Prodigal Son immediately follows— indeed elucidates— that of the lost sheep. In both parables, the dear ones that have been lost are found. Further, when Samson Vyrin begs Minskii, "You have had your fun with her; do not ruin her needlessly," we are reminded of the false friends and shameless lovers of the parable and do not doubt for a moment that Dunia will indeed end up on the street. Indeed, the old man explicitly says as much. "Anything can happen," he predicts. "She is not the first, nor will she be the last, to be seduced by some rake passing through, to be kept for a while and then discarded. There are many of them in Petersburg, of these foolish young ones: today attired in satin and velvet, but tomorrow, verily I say, sweeping the streets with the riffraff of the alehouse." Sweeping the streets with the riffraff, Dunia would of course remember her aging father and come home.

In sympathy with Vyrin and sharing his view of the world, A.G.N. also accepts his friend's interpretation of the pictures. . . .

Indeed convention—not only of sentimentalism, but eventually also of romanticism—demanded that the victim of seduction perish. Baratynskii's Eda, in the verse tale bearing her name (1826), pines away after her hussar leaves, and even Pushkin's own Water-Nymph throws herself in the Dnieper after her Prince tells her he is marrying someone else. The stationmaster's exclamation "Oh, Dunia, Dunia!" echoes both Karamzin's "Oh, Liza, Liza!" and Baratynskii's "Oh, Eda, Eda!"

But in this instance A.G.N. lets his reader down. In all likelihood he does not do this by design: rather, his own expectations have been frustrated. Try as he might, he cannot fit

life into the mold of *petit bourgeois* morality. The analogy between the parable of the Prodigal Son (as perceived by a Philistine) and Dunia's fate proves to be false. In fact the parallels only serve to draw attention to the contrasts: unlike the Biblical father, the stationmaster himself encourages his daughter to ride away with Minskii; Dunia takes no bag of money from her father; she runs away from poverty rather than recklessly abandoning a life of contentment; the father, rather than the child, appears to sue for favors at another man's doorstep; and Dunia, even if she wished to return, would have no home to come back to, for it is her father, rather than she, who ends up in dissipation. The details that reverse the parable in the most subtle manner are items of clothing: in the picture it is the father who is in nightcap and dressing gown—that is, wearing the symbols of domestic comfort and stability—but in the story we see Minskii receiving the stationmaster in just such garments. Moreover, in the parable (though, admittedly, this is not mentioned in the description of the pictures) the father orders his servants to put a ring on his repentant son's hand, but in the story it is through Minskii's generosity that Dunia's fingers glitter with rings.

Pushkin's manipulation of his narrator is most successful in "The Stationmaster" because A.G.N.'s narrow point of view is never ostensibly abandoned, yet vistas open to a broader understanding of life. This creates a dual perspective, reminiscent of that in *Poltava*. Like Mazepa, the characters in "The Stationmaster" are susceptible of different interpretations: some critics see Vyrin as a poor old man, a victim of corrupting social forces that have taken away his last comfort in life, his beloved daughter; others see Dunia as a justified and successful rebel against social and moral stagnation.

Despite the narrator's naive overstatement of his case, a sympathetic appraisal of Samson Vyrin is indeed achieved, for he is undoubtedly the victim of a cruel personal and social destiny. . . .

Dunia is running away from a suffocatingly close relationship with her father as well as from the boredom and poverty of provincial life. The description in the epigraph —"Despot of the posting station" —may well imply, as one critic suggests, Vyrin's emotional tyranny over his daughter. Moreover, the fact that Pushkin insisted on restoring Vyrin's original first name, "Samson," after it had been misprinted as "Simeon" in the first edition, indicates that he wanted Vyrin to be associated with a Biblical hero who had been deprived of is power by a woman. . . . With this in mind, we are not so surprised to hear that Vyrin would sooner see his daughter in the grave than in Minskii's arms.

Whether or not Dunia's elopement can be justi- fied, she certainly feels guilty about it: although she is going voluntarily, she cries all through the first two stages of the journey; she faints when she beholds her father in her apartment; and she lies prostrate on his grave for a long time. All these details make us judge her conduct less harshly. Besides, there is something attractive in her daring. Against all odds, she makes a dash for a better life. What she takes is a calculated risk: she might very well end up as her father expects—as Katia Maslova was to do in Tolstoi's Resurrection (1899)—but she throws a challenge to fate. In his 1829 lyric "Reminiscences of Tsarskoe Selo" Pushkin had

likened himself to a Prodigal Son; there is no doubt he felt kinship with Vyrin's Prodigal Daughter.

But it is not only the author's divided sympathies that leave the story open to various interpretations. If the parable of the Prodigal Son were fully reversed—if we saw Dunia happily married at the end—the issues would be much clearer. In that case we could simply say that the stationmaster and his friend A.G.N. applied the wrong set of moral standards to life and were deceived. But in fact the final outcome is not the exact opposite to A.G.N.'s expectations: it is neither their confirmation nor their full reversal, for we are not told whether Dunia is married or not.

This is a story, as we have seen, in which most questions are answered and most details conscientiously followed up—either in a straight line or reversed—but there is one question that is asked twice, yet left conspicuously unanswered to the very end. Approaching Vyrin's house for the second time, A.G.N. says: "I remembered the old stationmaster's daughter, and the thought of seeing her again gave me joy. I told myself that the old stationmaster might well have been replaced, and that Dunia was likely to have married." Having roused Vyrin from sleep and asked how his daughter was doing, A.G.N. receives an uncertain answer, to which he rejoins: "So she's married, is she?" If A.G.N. were true to himself, he would answer this question in no uncertain terms; but in the end all the information we are given is this: "'A wonderful lady,' replied the urchin; 'she was traveling in a coach-and-six with three little masters, a nurse, and a black pug.'" Is Dunia married, then, or not? Some critics have assumed she is, despite the scarce evidence of the text. Yet she could equally well still be a kept woman. If she is, she is certainly kept well; and the fact that she has had three children indicates that her position must be fairly secure. But it was by no means unusual for nineteenth-century noblemen to refuse to marry mistresses who were not of their own social status. . . . Thus in my own view Dunia's fate is still in the balance. She is not sweeping the street with the alehouse riffraff; nor has she come back, as the Prodigal Daughter, to sue at her father's door. But her future is uncertain: otherwise, as a married woman, she would have come to make it up with her father much sooner. . . .

Having experienced difficulties with an omniscient mode of narration, Pushkin turned to the use of imaginary narrators chiefly with parody and stylistic experiment in mind. Four of Belkin's five tales reflect—to varying degrees—his parodic design. But in the fifth he transcended parody and, putting a conventional technique to a novel use, created one of the masterpieces of nineteenth-century Russian prose.

Source: Paul Debreczeny, "'Belkin' and 'Goriukhino,'" in *The Other Pushkin: A Study of Alexander Pushkin's Prose Fiction,* Stanford University Press, 1983, pp. 56-137.

Critical Essay #3

The narrative technique of the Parable of the Prodigal Son, like that of the other New Testament parables, is quite different from that of "The Stationmaster." The parables of Jesus as quoted in Luke and the other synoptic Gospels are in thirdperson, omniscient-narrator form. Their basic style is simple, direct, succinct, and unambiguous; they are homely in subject and setting, and devoid of the "literary." In them, the narrator is not a participant in the story told. In the Parable of the Prodigal Son, which has more conversation than perhaps any other biblical parable, the mode of narration and the mode of speech of all the characters is basically the same; the speech of the different characters is differentiated by what they say, rather than by a different manner of speaking. The words of the father and each of the two sons fit into the one style of the parable.

"The Stationmaster" presents a basic contrast in style with the biblical accounts of the parables. All is seen through the consciousness of a firstperson narrator, whose own mode of writing is quite different from the passages in which the Stationmaster is quoted directly. "The Stationmaster," like the other Tales of Belkin (Povesti Belkina), is quite short and concise; nevertheless, it is many times as long as even the longest New Testament parable. The story proper in "The Stationmaster" consists of the narrator's account of what he himself saw and heard during three successive visits to the poststation. Three of the scenes directly relating to the Parable of the Prodigal Son are presented during his recountal of the second visit, and the fourth such scene, in the third visit. Of the four scenes relating to the parable, the narrator participates directly only in the last one. The narrator's mode of narration, instead of being simple and direct, shows qualities of empathy and ironic detachment. The detachment of the story is increased by the use of distancing literary allusions. . . . There is complexity of attitude and response in "The Stationmaster" that is quite different from the simple, terse, immediate directness of the third-person narrative technique that Jesus used in the New Testament parables.

"The Stationmaster" is, along with "The Shot" ("Vystrel"), one of the two of the *Tales of Belkin* told in the first person by a narrator. One of the most characteristic qualities of the *Tales of Belkin* is the way they use artistic distance and give a multiple illumination to the events narrated "The Stationmaster" is said to have been told to Belkin by titular councillor A. G. N., who can be considered as directly representing the first person of the narrator. Belkin is to be considered as having revised the "anecdotes," shaping them into stories, and the "publisher A. P." (that is, Pushkin himself) to have supplied the titles, epigraphs, and specifically literary allusions.

The role of the narrator in the story is of such importance that his characterization must be studied in some detail. At the time of telling the story, his rank of titular councillor is "ninth class" in the Table of Ranks, while Vyrin has the fourteenth (or lowest) rank, that of collegiate registrar. (Vyrin's past as an enlisted soldier suggests that he is of peasant origin, and that he has been given, upon retirement from the army, a civilian post with a promotion to the lowest civilian rank—one that was supposed to protect him from

corporal punishment. Pushkin's own rank during his government service from 1817 through 1824 was collegiate secretary, "tenth class.") The narrator has been promoted since he paid his first visit to Vyrin's station in 1816, though his rank even then was well above Vyrin's. Minskij, at the time of his visit, has a military rank of rotmistr (captain), "eighth class." By 1816 the narrator had already been in government service long enough to have become accustomed to the way those of lower rank were treated (and mistreated), though he professes to see no practical alternative to *chin china pochitaj* ("observe precedence of rank"). His age in 1816 is suggested to be about twenty-six, so that he is young enough both to be Dunja's older brother and to appear to be a whole generation younger than the Stationmaster, who is about fifty. The time of the telling the story is suggested as being approximately a decade later.

The mode of narration in "The Stationmaster" shows two sharply contradictory characteristics as regards the Stationmaster and his daughter Dunja: sympathetic involvement in their life, character, and fate; and objective, even ironic, detachment. Sympathetic involvement is directly expressed or clearly implied a number of times. In the introduction the narrator says that he will tell of a particular stationmaster whose "memory is precious to me." At the end of the first visit, his haste has been forgotten: "The horses had long been ready, but I did not want to part from the stationmaster and his daughter." Before the second visit, he has "sad forebodings" that perhaps the Stationmaster has been replaced and Dunja has married. At the end of this visit, during which he learns of Dunja's elopement and the old man's vain effort to bring her back, he says that the Stationmaster's "tears moved me deeply," and adds that "after taking leave of him, it was a long time before I could forget the old Stationmaster, and for a long time I thought of poor Dunja." His interest in them is emphasized by the fact that the last visit requires special arrangements and expenditures to find out about the Stationmaster, "my friend" (o moem prijatele). Once there, he is not satisfied after learning of the death of Vyrin until he learns about Dunja at the end of the story.

The narrator's mixture of involvement and detachment is particularly pronounced regarding Dunja. He warmly remembers her kiss at the end of the first visit: "I can count up a great many kisses 'Since first I chose this occupation,' but not one has left behind such a long, such a pleasant recollection." But, as Vinogradov points out, the specifically literary allusions of the story are distancing, and to classify kissing as an "occupation" is hardly enhancing. [V. V. Vinogradov, *Stil' Pushkina*] The kiss is remembered at the beginning of the third visit, when he sees the "portals where poor Dunja kissed me once upon a time." We have noted above how he specifically thought of Dunja before and after the second visit and how, in the third visit, he is not satisfied until he learns of Dunja's visit. Along with the expressions of empathy, there is a characterization that shows her ability to take care of herself, to note and make use of the impression she makes on others (including the narrator), to induce people to do what she wishes. The story shows her utilizing this ability to protect her father from the bad temper and even the whips of travelers. Her name Dunja (Avdot'ja, Evdokija) suggests her ability to arouse "favor, kindness, good will." We are never allowed to share her consciousness. We are told that her conversation is lively, but her speech is directly quoted only once. However, this quotation gives the story's basic characterization of her: she tells her children to "sit still" while she visits the graveyard;

and she tells the young boy who offers to guide her, "I know the way myself." Thus the term "poor Dunja," is either the Stationmaster's consciousness, which is given ironic illumination in the story, or the narrator echoing the Stationmaster, with multilevel irony. But, curiously enough, the light irony hardly lessens her appeal.

There is similarly a mixture of empathy and irony toward the Stationmaster, beginning with his name. His surname comes from *vyr'* or *vir* ("whirlpool"), but more particularly from the folk expres sions containing it. One is *s viru i s bolotu* ("from no one knows where, the dregs of society," Ushakov), a double-edged allusion to his low birth and rank in the government service. The other has multilevel application to both Vyrin and Dunja, *poshsol v mir, a popal v vir* ("into temptation," Dal'). Vyrin's given name, Samson, alludes to the Old Testament story of the man who lost his strength and eventually his life because of a weakness for a woman, with the sharp distinction that Samson Vyrin's death brings destruction unto no Philistines. There is artistic distancing in the use of a literary allusion with regard to him. He is seen "picturesquely" wiping away tears, like Terent'ich in Dmitriev's ballad "Karikatura." In that ballad, the "zealous" and faithful servant contrasts with both the master's wife, who kept a den of thieves during her husband's long absence and was taken away by the police, and with the returned husband, a cavalry sergeant major, who quickly manages to find solace with another wife. Detachment, as well as empathy, is shown in the narrator's words about Vyrin's tears: " . . . these tears were partly aroused by the punch, five glasses of which he drained during the narrative. . . ." There is considerable distancing in the way Vyrin's words and attitude about Dunja are conveyed. On the first visit, upon being asked whether Dunja is his daughter, "'My daughter, sir,' he answered with a *rather self-complacent air."* (Italics mine.) His hurt puzzlement at her decision to leave him is self-centered: ". . . didn't I love my Dunja, didn't I cherish my child, didn't she have the good life here?" (Italics mine.) In that every instance of the term "poor Dunja" has an ironic component, the four different uses of the same adjective with regard to the Stationmaster are suspect (the last of them occurs in Scene II, quoted above). Nevertheless, the characterization of Vyrin is appealing in its humanity, while sentimentality is completely avoided through the use of irony and the rather detached point of view.

In the structure of "The Stationmaster" the first three of the scenes corresponding to the Parable of the Prodigal Son are recounted to the narrator during his second visit, and he retells them (quoting the third of them directly in the Stationmaster's words). The narrative of the fourth scene—the return of Dunja—is a small boy's directly quoted account, interspersed with the observations and reactions of the narrator.

Dunja, who did not wish to be *returned*, returns voluntarily. She has to ask about her father—which shows that she had not known about his death—but she knows, without asking, where his grave would be. Through the eyes of the small boy we see how she went to the grave, "lay down on it and lay there a long time," showing grief in the peasants' way [N. Ja. Berkovskij, *Stat'i o literature*, GIXL, 1962], and then gave money to the priest for prayers and departed. The narrator's reaction—first of vexation that he has "squandered" the seven rubles for the trip (when he learns about the Stationmaster's death but not about Dunja), and then, upon learning of her visit to the

grave, of no longer regretting the seven rubles—suggests a "recognition" on his part and a reaction to that recognition. In the context of the story, Dunja returns, like the Prodigal Son, for reconciliation with her father and for his blessing. In the mature Pushkin's world, real and fictional, one must go home again; even the heroine of returns home, in madness. Though Dunja did not return barefoot or in rags, she returned. The final "picture" of the Prodigal Son kneeling before his father is balanced by the scene where she lies on her father's grave.

The Parable of the Prodigal Son has not just two main characters in the father's household—father and son—but also a third, the older brother who reacts with hurt jealousy when he learns how his father has received his prodigal brother. The fourth German picture shows in the background the older brother inquiring of servants what is happening and this figure suggests the rest of the parable. In the relatively short Gospel parable, there is a recounting no fewer than four times of the reception of the prodigal son by the father: in the objective narrative, in the servant's words to the older brother, in the older brother's angry refusal to join in the festivities, and in the father's conciliatory words to the older son. But in "The Stationmaster" there is only one account of the "prodigal's" return. In the final passage of the story the narrator asks the boy what has happened, and then through the boy's words the narrator visualizes the scene of the daughter visiting her father's grave. And the narrator has a "recognition" that leaves him rejoicing.

What the narrator has understood is that the old Stationmaster's fears for Dunja's fate have not come to pass but that she has nevertheless found it within herself to return to ask her father's blessing. This understanding makes him content, not only with his memory of her but also that of his "friend" the Stationmaster, who provides the title of the story and its main focus. In terms of the biblical text and the German picture of the return of the Prodigal, the little boy has played the role of the "servant" who tells the "older brother" what happened. And the unaccepting, jealous blood brother of the Gospel parable has been replaced by one who accepts the return of the "prodigal" daughter with disinterested and unselfish rejoicing. Her "brother," then, is one who accepts and understands as a brother should. This brotherly attitude can combine compassion and the objective acceptance of human frailties and mixed motivations (as indicated by the artistic distancing and the play of irony in the story).

The story ends with the narrator's "recognition" that Dunja returned for reconciliation with her father. The further recognition available to the reader is that the narrator himself feels and reacts to the return of the "prodigal" as the older brother in the parable should have felt and reacted. Thus, in this adaptation and application of the parable, he plays the role of the older brother, but a quite different one—not the "real" one, but the kind of brother the desirability of whose existence is the main point of the parable. . . .

"The Stationmaster" presents both in content and in form a complex, sophisticated, and integrated adaptation and application of the New Testament parable. This adaptation and application leads, however, to a prose literary form quite different from the New Testament parable, especially in style and tone, largely through the technique of first-person narration and through the role of the narrator in the story. . . .

Source: J. Thomas Shaw, "Pushkin's 'The Stationmaster' and the New Testament Parable," in *Slavic and East-European Journal,* Vol. 21, No. 1, Spring, 1977, pp. 3-29.

Critical Essay #4

In the following excerpt, Gregg examines the unity and narrative structure of each story in The Tales of the Late Ivan Pertrovich Belkin, particularly with regard to the story "The Stationmaster" and the tragic character of Vyrin.

,p>Pushkin's Tales of the Late *Ivan Petrovich Belkin* are five in number, and four of them ("The Shot," "The Blizzard," "The Stationmaster," and "The Lady-Peasant") belong to the same literary species. The narrative features binding this quartet of stories together are, in the main, conventional. Each relates— among other things—the story of a young man who, having won the affections of a beautiful woman, overcomes some obstacle (or series of obstacles) which threatens their union, thereby paving the way to, or consolidating, a *mariage d'amour* at the end of the tale. All of which is to say that embedded in each is one of the oldest of all plots, the "successful courtship."

But these tales share resemblances that go beyond such broad fictional stereotypes; and it is on the less conventional (and less obvious) points of similarity that I wish to dwell at greater length. From the time that man first became aware of those differences in station, wealth, and natural endowments which separate one individual from another, storytellers—especially tellers of love stories—have preferred to draw their protagonists from the ranks of the fortunate. Thus the typical lover-hero of the older fictional forms (the short story, the romance, the legend, etc.) has through the ages been young, handsome, nobly born, and—at the end of the narrative at least—materially well off. Moreover, until the advent of the picaresque novel it was axiomatic that these "external" attributes were the counterparts of moral qualities without which the hero would be no hero. "Handsome is," after all, "as handsome does."

Now insofar as their outer attributes are concerned, Pushkin's suitors conform perfectly to the familiar mold; for Count *** ("The Shot"), Burmin ("The Blizzard"), Minsky ("The Stationmaster"), and Berestov ("The Lady-Peasant") are without exception young, handsome, wealthy, and wellborn. Morally speaking, however, they diverge somewhat from the traditional norm. For each is endowed with a touch or more of patrician presumption, which has nothing to do with virtue and is, at times, opposed to it.

In "The Shot" ("Vystrel"), for instance, a tincture of this attitude colors the scene where Count ***, the perfect, hence blasé, gentleman, shows his aristocratic indifference to life itself by munching cherries as Silvio takes deadly aim. In "The Blizzard" ("Metel") this attitude is less pleasantly apparent in Burmin's wild and wanton caprice of marrying an unknown bride without her consent. And in "The Stationmaster" ("Stantsionnyi smotritel") Minsky's abduction of Dunia is a similar perversion of the young gentleman's "right" to sow his wild oats. Finally, in "The Lady-Peasant" ("Baryshniakrest'ianka"), though young Berestov, like the Count, is essentially likable, it cannot be denied that his aloof manners before the daughters of the local gentry and the not-quite-proper

advances he makes to "Akulina" in the woods are examples not of *noblesse oblige* but of its antonym, *noblesse permet*.

In endowing his young lovers with a certain sense of privilege or license Pushkin is not so much breaking with an old-fashioned fictional model as conforming to a more recent one. For, as the examples of Tom Jones, Squire B., and Peregrine Pickle suggest, a streak of frivolity or highhandedness can be found in many an eighteenth-century lover-hero. It is noteworthy, however, that whereas Fielding, Richardson, and Smollett uphold conventional morality by punishing or purging their errant heroes, Pushkin rewards the presumption of his noblemen with outrageous good fortune. Thus it is precisely the Count's lordly indifference to life which prompts Silvio, temporarily at least, to spare it. Had Burmin not indulged in a "criminal" (the word is his) whim at a wayside church he would never have ended up enjoying the affections of the beautiful and wealthy Masha. And if Minsky had not acted with the heartlessness of a Lovelace, he would never have made the charming Dunia his wife. Though the comic spirit of "The Lady-Peasant" tends to dissolve such ironies into uncritical laughter, it is a fact that the wooing of Liza—a venture which brings profit or pleasure to all concerned—begins with the liberties which a young nobleman tries to take with a "peasant girl" in the woods. In short, if crime does not quite pay in *The Tales of Belkin*, it is certain that the common peccadillo of its four gentlemen suitors, a touch or more of aristocratic fecklessness, is nobly rewarded by the author.

But the most unusual feature shared by these stories remains to be mentioned—namely, the presence, alongside the gentleman "hero," of a second "hero." In the first three tales the identity of this person is obvious. In the last it is, for reasons that will be discussed in due time, less so. But in all four his self-fulfillment and that of the gentleman suitor are mutually exclusive goals. For this reason I shall, provisionally, call him the "counterhero."

In contradistinction to Pushkin's broadly stereotyped gentlemen suitors his counterheroes are a very mixed lot. The first (Silvio) is an ex-officer of mature years; the second (Vladimir) is a young subaltern and petty land-owner; the third (Vyrin) is a middle-aged widower and *chinovnik* of the lowest grade. Yet despite these differences they share certain attributes which bring them together and oppose them to their more fortunate adversaries. In the first place, whereas the latter possess both wealth and status, the former have little of either. Thus, despite his bravado and barracks-room popularity, the shabby and obscurely foreign Silvio is no social match for the Count. Similarly, Vladimir, unlike Burmin, is too poor and obscure to sue openly for Masha's hand. As for Vyrin, his plebeian birth places him wholly beyond the social pale.

The unusual and sometimes unmerited good luck of Pushkin's gentlemen suitors has been noted. The opposite is true of his counterheroes. Silvio, who is early eclipsed by the brilliant Count and is later forced to swallow public insult without requital, and ultimately perishes in a futile campaign abroad, is not, to say the least, the darling of fortune. Before Vladimir is killed in 1812 he is the victim of an almost unbelievably calamitous convergence of circumstances—the wedding, a blizzard, the caprice of a

chance intruder. Vyrin's downfall, too, is largely precipitated by bad luck—the unpredictable machinations of a young libertine.

It was further noted that, viewed as a product of literary history, Pushkin's gentlemen suitors are an amalgam of traditional stereotypes—the storybook hero plus a tincture of the eighteenth-century rake. In direct contrast, the counterheroes are distinctly contemporary (i.e., Sentimental or Romantic) in conception. Thus the brooding, mysterious, and vengeful Silvio derives from the satanic hero popularized by "Monk" Lewis, Maturin, and Byron. Vladimir, the poor, persevering young suitor who is accepted by Masha, but rejected by her parents, recalls the hero of *La Nouvelle Héloïse*. (Saint Preux is, in fact, named in the story.) And Vyrin, the patriarch whose white hairs are mocked by cruel youth, steps out of a Diderot *comédie larmoyante* or a sentimental painting by Greuze.

To sum up then: each of the four stories portrays a rich, handsome, happy-go-lucky nobleman, based on traditional fictional models, and a beautiful woman whose love he is trying to secure; in each story this union is threatened by the existence of an impecunious and socially inferior man, based on a Sentimental or Romantic stereotype; and in each the "scapegrace" suitor triumphs, while his "scapegoat" adversary is defeated and dies. . . .

Evidence that a number of items are similar is not ipso facto proof that they are *unified*. Unity inheres only when the group as a whole is seen to possess a definable "shape." When perceived in the context of this shape, the items, though similar and coordinate, will be seen to play different—that is, functionally diversified—roles. The basic structural similarities binding these four tales have been shown. We must now ask whether, taken together, they make an organic whole.

A clue to the answer is provided by the number of stories we are dealing with. Among the great quaternary patterns present in nature (e.g., the lunar phases, the points of the compass, the times of day) none is more fundamental to our experience than that of the four seasons. Whether, as some have argued, Western literature itself is an outgrowth of seasonal rites celebrated by primitive man need not be debated here. Proof that the seasonal cycle is deeply rooted in the creative "mind of Europe" is supplied by the great number of artists, literary and other, who have through the ages drawn on it for inspiration. In *The Tales of Belkin* Pushkin joins their number.

Although none of our four stories encloses a single season, a specific time of year may be said to dominate each. . . .

As for "The Stationmaster," although the narrator makes several seasonal references in the course of the tale, only once is an outdoor scene fully evoked. Near the end of the story, having learned that Vyrin's old station has recently been shut down, he goes to the nearby village to make inquiries: "This occurred in autumn. Grayish clouds covered the sky; a cold wind blew from the reaped fields, carrying off the red and yellow leaves from the trees which we met on the way." A moment later, apprised of his friend's death, he has a small boy lead him to Vyrin's grave: "We arrived at the cemetery, a bare

unenclosed place sown with wooden crosses and not shaded by a single small tree. Never had I seen such a sad cemetery." It is while the narrator is taking in this desolate scene that his small guide tells how a "beautiful lady" (Dunia) had recently visited the same sad spot and had prostrated herself at the stationmaster's grave for some time before leaving. In this autumnal mood and autumnal setting the story ends. . . .

Each of the four stories is, then, colored—or at least "tinted"—by one of the four seasons: "The Shot" by early summer, "The Blizzard" by winter, "The Stationmaster " by autumn, and "The Lady- Peasant" by spring. And we need only join the seasonal epithet to the narrative moment which it frames to see that the former harmonizes with the latter. We may thus speak of the *summer* fullness of the Count's happily preserved marriage, the *wintry* despair of Vladimir, hopelessly lost in the blizzard, the *autumnal* melancholy that suffuses Vyrin's burial place, and the spring freshness of Liza's early morning escapade. But beyond this rather obvious consonance of narrative moment with seasonal milieu, one can recognize two larger patterns—one defined by the relation of the season in question to the total narrative structure of its particular story, the other defined by the relation of the sum of all the seasons to the quartet of tales taken as a whole.

An invaluable tool for clarifying these relationships is supplied by the eminent literary theorist, Northrop Frye. In the third part of his seminal *Anatomy of Criticism*, entitled "Archetypal Criticism: Theory of Myths," Frye argues that all narratives are reducible to the four archetypal *mythoi* of romance, tragedy, irony (or satire), and comedy. [*Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays* , 1968] Concerning the specific narrative features assigned to each of these *mythoi* more will be said later. Of immediate relevance is Frye's association of each *mythos* with a particular season of the year: romance with summer, tragedy with autumn, irony with winter, and comedy with spring. . . .

Autumn, we have seen, is the season of "The Stationmaster," the season of tragedy. Because the tragic *mythos* (like the ironic one) cannot, by definition, coincide with a "successful courtship" a hybrid narrative might, again, be expected. What in fact we find is a tale with two unequal facets: one— which is "happy" and plays a subordinate role—reflects Minsky's love affair with Dunia; the other— which is melancholy and plays a dominant role—describes Vyrin's reaction to these events.

That Vyrin's fate is in the popular sense "tragic" is plain enough: brokenhearted at his daughter's supposed ruin, he takes to drink and dies. That his career imitates the tragic curve in the narrow literary sense needs, perhaps, some amplification. Like the tragic hero of antiquity Vyrin is, as the story opens, at the top of fortune's wheel: a happy bemedaled patriarch, boasting to strangers of his daughter's virtues. Then, briefly but fatally, he reveals the classic symptoms of *hubris*—rashness and arrogance. Flattered by his passing acquaintance with a "gentleman," he imprudently accepts his offer to drive Dunia to Mass unaccompanied, brushes aside her doubts with a rebuke, and watches the two depart—never to return. His downfall thus stems from that peculiar combination of impersonal fate (*moira*) and individual error (*hamartia*) which, typically, lays the tragic hero low. And while he never attains the ultimate moment of high tragedy, insight into his own error, there is in the final pictures of the helpless suppliant in the

streets of St. Petersburg and the lachrymose drunk in the dilapidated stationhouse more than enough pathos to confer the tragic title on his destiny. . . .

Our seasonal cycle is now complete: four stories with a common narrative core, each colored by one of the four seasons, and each modified (or reinforced) by the *mythos* associated with that season. Seen as a whole, moreover, their overall design is clear: starting with the moral simplicities of romance, where noblemen are good and lucky, and their enemies evil and ill-tarred, Pushkin has taken us through the darker and more complex seasons of irony and tragedy, where the victors are not always right, nor their victims necessarily wicked, to bring us out into the reconciling brightness of spring, where scapegoats turn out to be chimeras and every mouth is found to have a silver spoon in it. . . .

Source: Richard Gregg, "A Scapegoat for All Seasons: The Unity and the Shape of *The Tales of Belkin," in The Slavic Review,* Vol. 30, No. 4, December, 1971, pp. 748-61.

Adaptations

A German film version of "The Stationmaster," entitled *Der Postmeister*, was made in 1940 by Wein Films.

Topics for Further Study

Research the social order in Russia under the reign of Czar Nicholas I. How is this hierarchical order depicted in "The Stationmaster"?

Discuss the character of Dunia in the context of recent advances in women's rights. How would her actions be viewed today?

Research the role of the military in early nineteenth- century Russia. Determine how this affects the relationship of the young hussar and the stationmaster.

Compare and Contrast

1830s: After the death of Emperor Alexander, his brother Nicholas is made Czar of Russia. An armed uprising of young army officers and troops numbering nearly 3,000 men gathers in St. Petersburg to demand a republican government. Known as the Decembrist revolution, troops loyal to Nicholas quelled the uprising.

Today: The Russian political system is by no means stable. Communist radicals threaten to topple the democratically elected President, Boris Yeltsin. Economic problems add to the political instability.

1830: Cholera sweeps across Russia and spreads to the rest of Europe, killing millions of people. By the end of the year the disease kills 900,000 Russians.

Today: Cholera is very rare. Diagnosis and treatment for such airborne diseases has greatly improved, but the threat remains with the danger of germ warfare or a hybrid of existing contagions.

1830s: In Russia travelers use horses provided by post-stations to go from one town to another along post-roads. The stationmaster is responsible for the administration of road permits (required of all travelers) and horses.

Today: Russia has all forms of modern transportation, with a comprehensive and reasonably priced train system. The job of stationmaster does not exist and horses were replaced by autos long ago.

What Do I Read Next?

The historical drama *Boris Godunov* (1831) was Pushkin's attempt to shatter the conventions of dramatic literature.

Eugene Onegin (1833), a verse-novel, is perhaps Pushkin's most famous work. The hero of the title refuses the love of a country girl, only to fall in love with her after she marries another.

Fyodor Dostoevsky's *Notes From the Underground* (1864) describes the isolation of a hyperconscious modern man.

Leo Tolstoy's *The Death of Ivan Ilyich* (1886) details the reactions of family members, friends, and colleagues to the death of a Russian judge.

Further Study

Bloom, Harold, ed. *Alexander Pushkin*, Chelsea House, 1987.

Collection of modern critical approaches to Pushkin.

Brasol, Boris. *The Mighty Three: Pushkin, Gogol, Dostoievsky: A Critical Trilogy*, William Farquhar Payson, 1934.

Studies of Pushkin and two of his literary descendants.

Cross, S. H., and Ernest J. Simmons, eds. *Centennial Essays for Pushkin*, Russell & Russell, 1937.

Essays addressing various aspects of Pushkin's life and literature.

Simmons, Ernest J. *Pushkin*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1937.

Authoritative biography by a noted Pushkin scholar.

Vickery, Walter N. *Alexander Pushkin*, Boston: Twayne, 1992.

Comprehensive book-length study of Pushkin's life and works. His brief discussion of "The Stationmaster" emphasizes Pushkin's clear, concise style.

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Konick, Willis. "Categorical Dreams and Compliant Reality: The Role of the Narrator in *The Tales of Belkin,*" in *Canadian American Slavic Studies*, Vol. 11, pp. 75-90.

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Introduction

Purpose of the Book

The purpose of Short Stories for Students (SSfS) is to provide readers with a guide to understanding, enjoying, and studying novels by giving them easy access to information about the work. Part of Gale's□For Students□ Literature line, SSfS is specifically designed to meet the curricular needs of high school and undergraduate college students and their teachers, as well as the interests of general readers and researchers considering specific novels. While each volume contains entries on □classic□ novels

frequently studied in classrooms, there are also entries containing hard-to-find information on contemporary novels, including works by multicultural, international, and women novelists.

The information covered in each entry includes an introduction to the novel and the novel's author; a plot summary, to help readers unravel and understand the events in a novel; descriptions of important characters, including explanation of a given character's role in the novel as well as discussion about that character's relationship to other characters in the novel; analysis of important themes in the novel; and an explanation of important literary techniques and movements as they are demonstrated in the novel.

In addition to this material, which helps the readers analyze the novel itself, students are also provided with important information on the literary and historical background informing each work. This includes a historical context essay, a box comparing the time or place the novel was written to modern Western culture, a critical overview essay, and excerpts from critical essays on the novel. A unique feature of SSfS is a specially commissioned critical essay on each novel, targeted toward the student reader.

To further aid the student in studying and enjoying each novel, information on media adaptations is provided, as well as reading suggestions for works of fiction and nonfiction on similar themes and topics. Classroom aids include ideas for research papers and lists of critical sources that provide additional material on the novel.

Selection Criteria

The titles for each volume of SSfS were selected by surveying numerous sources on teaching literature and analyzing course curricula for various school districts. Some of the sources surveyed included: literature anthologies; Reading Lists for College-Bound Students: The Books Most Recommended by America's Top Colleges; textbooks on teaching the novel; a College Board survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; a National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; the NCTE's Teaching Literature in High School: The Novel;and the Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA) list of best books for young adults of the past twenty-five years. Input was also solicited from our advisory board, as well as educators from various areas. From these discussions, it was determined that each volume should have a mix of □classic□ novels (those works commonly taught in literature classes) and contemporary novels for which information is often hard to find. Because of the interest in expanding the canon of literature, an emphasis was also placed on including works by international, multicultural, and women authors. Our advisory board members□educational professionals□ helped pare down the list for each volume. If a work was not selected for the present volume, it was often noted as a possibility for a future volume. As always, the editor welcomes suggestions for titles to be included in future volumes.

How Each Entry Is Organized

Each entry, or chapter, in SSfS focuses on one novel. Each entry heading lists the full name of the novel, the author's name, and the date of the novel's publication. The following elements are contained in each entry:

- Introduction: a brief overview of the novel which provides information about its first appearance, its literary standing, any controversies surrounding the work, and major conflicts or themes within the work.
- Author Biography: this section includes basic facts about the author's life, and focuses on events and times in the author's life that inspired the novel in question.
- Plot Summary: a factual description of the major events in the novel. Lengthy summaries are broken down with subheads.
- Characters: an alphabetical listing of major characters in the novel. Each character name is followed by a brief to an extensive description of the character's role in the novel, as well as discussion of the character's actions, relationships, and possible motivation. Characters are listed alphabetically by last name. If a character is unnamed□for instance, the narrator in Invisible Man-the character is listed as □The Narrator□ and alphabetized as □Narrator.□ If a character's first name is the only one given, the name will appear alphabetically by that name. □ Variant names are also included for each character. Thus, the full name □Jean Louise Finch□ would head the listing for the narrator of To Kill a Mockingbird, but listed in a separate cross-reference would be the nickname □Scout Finch.□
- Themes: a thorough overview of how the major topics, themes, and issues are addressed within the novel. Each theme discussed appears in a separate subhead, and is easily accessed through the boldface entries in the Subject/Theme Index.
- Style: this section addresses important style elements of the novel, such as setting, point of view, and narration; important literary devices used, such as imagery, foreshadowing, symbolism; and, if applicable, genres to which the work might have belonged, such as Gothicism or Romanticism. Literary terms are explained within the entry, but can also be found in the Glossary.
- Historical Context: This section outlines the social, political, and cultural climate in which the author lived and the novel was created. This section may include descriptions of related historical events, pertinent aspects of daily life in the culture, and the artistic and literary sensibilities of the time in which the work was written. If the novel is a historical work, information regarding the time in which the novel is set is also included. Each section is broken down with helpful subheads.
- Critical Overview: this section provides background on the critical reputation of the novel, including bannings or any other public controversies surrounding the work. For older works, this section includes a history of how the novel was first received and how perceptions of it may have changed over the years; for more recent novels, direct quotes from early reviews may also be included.
- Criticism: an essay commissioned by SSfS which specifically deals with the novel and is written specifically for the student audience, as well as excerpts from previously published criticism on the work (if available).

- Sources: an alphabetical list of critical material quoted in the entry, with full bibliographical information.
- Further Reading: an alphabetical list of other critical sources which may prove useful for the student. Includes full bibliographical information and a brief annotation.

In addition, each entry contains the following highlighted sections, set apart from the main text as sidebars:

- Media Adaptations: a list of important film and television adaptations of the novel, including source information. The list also includes stage adaptations, audio recordings, musical adaptations, etc.
- Topics for Further Study: a list of potential study questions or research topics dealing with the novel. This section includes questions related to other disciplines the student may be studying, such as American history, world history, science, math, government, business, geography, economics, psychology, etc.
- Compare and Contrast Box: an □at-a-glance□ comparison of the cultural and historical differences between the author's time and culture and late twentieth century/early twenty-first century Western culture. This box includes pertinent parallels between the major scientific, political, and cultural movements of the time or place the novel was written, the time or place the novel was set (if a historical work), and modern Western culture. Works written after 1990 may not have this box.
- What Do I Read Next?: a list of works that might complement the featured novel or serve as a contrast to it. This includes works by the same author and others, works of fiction and nonfiction, and works from various genres, cultures, and eras.

Other Features

SSfS includes □The Informed Dialogue: Interacting with Literature,□ a foreword by Anne Devereaux Jordan, Senior Editor for Teaching and Learning Literature (TALL), and a founder of the Children's Literature Association. This essay provides an enlightening look at how readers interact with literature and how Short Stories for Students can help teachers show students how to enrich their own reading experiences.

A Cumulative Author/Title Index lists the authors and titles covered in each volume of the SSfS series.

A Cumulative Nationality/Ethnicity Index breaks down the authors and titles covered in each volume of the SSfS series by nationality and ethnicity.

A Subject/Theme Index, specific to each volume, provides easy reference for users who may be studying a particular subject or theme rather than a single work. Significant subjects from events to broad themes are included, and the entries pointing to the specific theme discussions in each entry are indicated in boldface.

Each entry has several illustrations, including photos of the author, stills from film adaptations (if available), maps, and/or photos of key historical events.

Citing Short Stories for Students

When writing papers, students who quote directly from any volume of Short Stories for Students may use the following general forms. These examples are based on MLA style; teachers may request that students adhere to a different style, so the following examples may be adapted as needed. When citing text from SSfS that is not attributed to a particular author (i.e., the Themes, Style, Historical Context sections, etc.), the following format should be used in the bibliography section:

□Night.□ Short Stories for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 234-35.

When quoting the specially commissioned essay from SSfS (usually the first piece under the □Criticism□ subhead), the following format should be used:

Miller, Tyrus. Critical Essay on □Winesburg, Ohio.□ Short Stories for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 335-39.

When quoting a journal or newspaper essay that is reprinted in a volume of SSfS, the following form may be used:

Malak, Amin. □Margaret Atwood's □The Handmaid's Tale and the Dystopian Tradition,□ Canadian Literature No. 112 (Spring, 1987), 9-16; excerpted and reprinted in Short Stories for Students, Vol. 4, ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski (Detroit: Gale, 1998), pp. 133-36.

When quoting material reprinted from a book that appears in a volume of SSfS, the following form may be used:

Adams, Timothy Dow. □Richard Wright: □Wearing the Mask,□ in Telling Lies in Modern American Autobiography (University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 69-83; excerpted and reprinted in Novels for Students, Vol. 1, ed. Diane Telgen (Detroit: Gale, 1997), pp. 59-61.

We Welcome Your Suggestions

The editor of Short Stories for Students welcomes your comments and ideas. Readers who wish to suggest novels to appear in future volumes, or who have other suggestions, are cordially invited to contact the editor. You may contact the editor via email at: ForStudentsEditors@gale.com. Or write to the editor at:

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