

Christ the Savior-Holy Spirit Orthodox Church
Winter Reading Circle 2016

Three Evenings with Pushkin - Session I

The Stationmaster

Principle Characters

Samson Vyrin – the stationmaster

Dunia – his daughter

Captain Minskii – the hussar who took Dunia away

The Narrator

Themes and Questions

This story has been often interpreted as a “parody” of the Parable of the Prodigal Son (see Bailey’s Introduction, xxvi – xxvii – and chart). Perhaps this a major theme that we could discuss. The story has also been interpreted as a parody of sentimental literature, especially as emigrated to Russia from Germany. If so, what are some of these sentimental features?

What are the similarities and dissimilarities with the parable? Perhaps a clue to this question is provided by the scholar P. Debreczeny, who writes: “Indeed convention – not only of sentimentalism, but eventually also of romanticism – demanded that the victim of seduction perish.”

What is the position of the narrator? With whom are his sympathies?

What expectations are aroused through the paintings on the walls of Vyrin’s station?

How would you characterize Vyrin’s treatment of his daughter? Is he a loving father; or does he exercise “emotional tyranny” over his daughter?

Can we 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;” or Dunia as “a justified and successful rebel against social and moral stagnation?” (Debreczeny)

Is the ending – meaning Dunia’s life situation – a surprise? Is she actually married in the end, or is she a “kept woman” (not unusual in 19th c . Russia, where noblemen would not actually marry their mistresses).

In your estimation, is the story convincing or not?

The Queen of Spades

Principle Characters

The Countess N.

Hermann – an engineer

Liza Ivanovna – ward of countess N.

Themes and Questions

For an explanation of the game that Hermann engages in, see Bailey's Introduction, xxx – xxxi.

Hermann has been seen as a precursor to Dostoevsky's Raskolnikov. If you have read *Crime and Punishment*, how is this so? How can we characterize him over-all?

Some interpreters speak of Liza's "gamble" in the story. What would that be? Are her motivations no purer than Hermann's? How can we characterize her over-all?

What can be made of some of the supernatural/occult elements in the story: the ghost of the countess and the three magic cards? Can the story be read in a supernatural manner? If not, then how do we interpret the ending?