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ABHANDLUNGEN. Karl Bosl, "Der Osten in der deutschen Geschichte: Vergangenheit—Gegenwart—Zukunft." Karl Bosl, "Das 'Dritte Deutschland' und die Lösung der deutschen Frage im 19. Jahrhundert: Souveränität—Defensivsystem—Aggressivität: Das bayerische Beispiel." Ernst Schwarz, "Beiträge zur Volkstumsgegeschichte der Sudetenländer." Harald Bachmann, "Die nationalen Verhältnisse Böhmens während des Temnos im Rahmen der sozialen Struktur." Gustav Korkisch, "Der Bauernaufstand auf der Mährisch Trübau-Türnauer Herrschaft, 1706–1713: Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte des nordmährischen Bauerntums." Bedřich Stieš, "Die sozialen Verhältnisse der Glasmacher in den westböhmischen Hütten im 18. und 19. Jahrhundert." Norbert Linz, "Der Aufbau der deutschen politischen Presse in der Ersten Tschechoslowakischen Republik (1918–1925)." Martin K. Bachstein, "Programmdiskussion und Krise in der Deutschen sozialdemokratischen Arbeiterpartei (DSAP) in der Tschechoslowakischen Republik." Otto von Habsburg, "Das Jahr 1945 und seine geschichtliche Bedeutung für Europa."

MISZELLEN. Karl Fischer, "Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der Sternatlanten." Renée Gicklhorn, "Neue Ergebnisse der Haenkeforschung." Roman Freiherr von Procházka, "Die letzten königlich-böhmischen Lehensträger und Belehnungen im 19. Jahrhundert." J. W. Brügel, "Um die historische Wahrheit in der deutsch-tschechischen Auseinandersetzung." Jörg K. Hoensch, "Replik." Hertha Wolf-Beranek, "Totenbretter in den Sudetenländern."

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LETTERS

TO THE EDITOR:

Professor Richard Gregg's article, "A Scapegoat for All Seasons: The Unity and the Shape of *The Tales of Belkin*," which appeared in the December 1971 issue of the *Slavic Review*, attempts to apply Northrop Frye's theory of archetypal criticism to the *Belkin Tales*. It would be a serious lapse to allow the article to appear without some kind of public rebuttal of the manner in which Gregg adjusts both Frye's theory and Pushkin's fiction to achieve an erroneous reading of the *Belkin Tales*. Gregg's analysis is outrageous in its distortions of both Frye and Pushkin, and consequently fails to uncover any sort of tenable new approach to the *Belkin Tales*; it demands that we consider the stories in contexts which are nearly always irrelevant and essentially inapplicable. His misconceptions do equal injustice to both Pushkin and Frye; no doubt Pushkin's reputation will manage to survive such tortuous manipulations, but the way he applies Frye's theories discredits a fairly new critical apparatus which deserves more serious consideration.

To begin with Frye, then, I would point to Gregg's own explanation of Frye's theory that "all narratives are reducible to the four archetypal *mythoi*" (p. 753), a bit of clarity on Gregg's part which points to a basic flaw in his theory, obviously: if he is to follow Frye, then "The Coffinmaker" must be accounted for within the schema of the *mythoi*. Frye's hypotheses do not allow for the separate existence of grotesque gargoyles; if he is to designate Frye's rules, then he'd better play by them.

As a matter of fact, all the *Belkin Tales* do fit into Frye's theory; the comic element predominates, involving frequently hilarious plays on literary models, the satiric upsetting of conventional standards (Samson Vyrin in "The Stationmaster"), or purely comic parodies of potentially serious situations: imminent death in "The Shot," ghoulishly poetic justice resolved by the dream alibi in "The Coffinmaker," the seemingly tragic enmity of two families ending in marriage ("The Lady-Peasant"). All of these effects are of a piece, straddling the fence between satire and comedy in Frye's terms. That one story may be essentially satiric and another wholly comic is not particularly important, because Frye's theory involves a continuum in which the satiric gradually merges into the comic anyway. The *Belkin Tales* do, in fact, fit so obviously into Frye's scheme that reference to his theory is not awfully helpful. The theory of *mythoi*, like several of Frye's approaches, is useful principally with works whose attitude toward experience is not at first glance clear.

Frye is the loser when Gregg applies literally the theory of seasons to the *mythoi*: the season most crucially mentioned in "The Stationmaster" is autumn; *ergo*, this story must be a tragedy. As I understand Frye's analysis of *mythoi*—comedy, romance, tragedy, irony and satire—the seasonal motif is nothing more than a metaphorical representation of basic phases in the gamut of attitudes a writer may take toward experience. Frye would be the last person to assert that tragedies, for example, necessarily have an autumnal and romances a summer setting. He uses the seasons, rather, as a generalized metaphor for the cyclic nature of attitudes. Gregg, therefore, misuses Frye's theory when he implies that the predominance of any given season in a story presupposes the dominance of a particular *mythos*. One of his most outlandish and arbitrary definitions in this regard is Samson Vyrin as tragic hero. He is working in this instance on two assumptions: (1) the season is autumn, thus tragedy; (2) in tragedy the hero dies. Assuming that in general parlance the latter is the crucial dictum, I suggest we look at "The Blizzard." If Samson "takes to drink and dies" (p. 756), one might argue that Vladimir takes to the army and dies; if Samson exhibits *hubris* when he "imprudently accepts his [Minsky's] offer to drive Dunia to Mass unaccompanied" (p. 756), Vladimir imprudently sends his coachman to fetch Masha and arrogantly assumes that he will be able to find his way in the storm by himself; if Samson's downfall stems from "that peculiar combination of impersonal fate (*moira*) and individual error (*hamartia*)" (p. 756), then certainly one could argue equally well that Vladimir's downfall stems from the snowstorm (*moira*) and a whole series of errors in judgment (*hamartia*), carried to an insane extreme when he refuses the invitation of Masha's parents to resume his relations with the girl. The last thing I want to do is make a serious case for Vladimir as tragic hero; what I want to indicate rather is the wholly arbitrary case which Gregg makes for Samson as tragic hero. Actually, in Frye's terms, Samson may well be a blocking character of comedy. Frye observes, "Comedy often includes a scapegoat ritual of expulsion which gets rid of some irreconcilable character." (The frequent appearance of scapegoats in comedy might well account for Gregg's discovery of six of them in the *Belkin* series.) I can conceive of other plausible interpretations of Vyrin's role, but it is equally clear that he is no more a tragic figure than he is a villain or a heroine.

Gregg continues to misuse Frye in his literal identification of season with *mythos* elsewhere. A crucial case in point is "The Coffinmaker," the problem

story for Gregg. He asserts that this piece is distinctive for the absence of seasonal definition. There are, however, references to rain and to moonlight. Might this not suggest that "The Coffinmaker" is homogeneous with the other stories not in using seasons but in using those attributes of seasons which fit the moods of particular stories: the ironic reversal which leads to resolution of conflicts in "The Lady-Peasant" occurs in autumn (this particular story for Gregg has its inception in spring); while the graveyard scene in "The Stationmaster" does take place in autumn, the absence of leaves is apparently accounted for by the absence of trees nearby; earlier in the story, for better or worse, winter dominates the narrative. In other words, Pushkin uses natural elements (season, weather, fields, clouds, etc.) as they are appropriate to the mood of the story at a particular moment.

When Gregg refers to the *cognitio* of "The Lady-Peasant," "in which 'characters find out who' is 'available for marriage'" (p. 757), he is of course on solid ground, for this story is clearly comedy. Since he applies all four *mythoi* to the Belkin collection, he was bound to get something right, even on a hit-or-miss basis. But how can he fail, then, to recognize the *cognitio* in "The Blizzard," where Burmin and Masha discover that they are not available for marriage because they are already married to each other? Here Pushkin clearly parodies a basic convention of comedy with great drollery, but since Gregg has assigned "The Blizzard" to the ironic *mythos*, "which ends in frustration or defeat" (p. 755), he is obliged to ignore an obvious source of comedy in the story.

Gregg asserts that "The Shot" is "closer to that *mythos* [romance] than it is to the other *mythoi*" (p. 755). He is completely off base here. Frye claims that the quest is the central plot element in the romance. If we look at "The Shot" from Gregg's standpoint, the hero, the count, obviously lacks a quest of any sort. However, Silvio, Gregg's nomination for the antagonist, does have a quest; he seeks revenge on the count. If the elements of romance seem to be getting distorted in this account, that is precisely the point: Frye notes that "the central principle of ironic myth is best approached as a parody of romance." To take the antagonist of a romance and transform him into a hero with a quest is to write parody. I would submit that Pushkin beautifully exemplifies Frye's dictum in "The Shot" and that, as I stated earlier, all the stories do fall into either the *mythos* of winter—irony and satire—or the *mythos* of spring—comedy. The conflicts in all the *Belkin Tales* center on romantic or sentimental ideals which come unhinged when set up against "unidealized existence," in Frye's words.

Gregg distorts Pushkin's characters and situations in nearly every phase of his argument, but I think the examples offered here are sufficient to indicate the ways he misapplies Frye and misconstrues Pushkin for the sake of a seemingly ingenious interpretation. A reading of a literary work which radically distorts the tone and emphases of that work in order to support an arbitrary scheme of parallels cannot result in a viable exegesis.

I am assuming, of course, that Gregg intended that his article be taken seriously. One other interpretation of his point is theoretically possible—that he is not trying to interpret the *Belkin Tales* at all, but rather hopes to undermine a critical approach with which he disagrees. In this case the article is centrally concerned with an attack on Frye. There is a vague possibility that this really is what he had in mind; in note 26 on page 758, for example, he states that "Pushkin's familiarity with the seasonal theme is attested in a letter to his friend Delvig. . . ." Now, either he is belaboring the obvious or else he is pulling my leg by documenting

a major poet's familiarity with the seasonal theme in a mock-serious convention of academia. If this is his intention, then the irony, like Daniel Defoe's in "The Shortest Way with the Dissenters," is too all-pervasive to be effective as satire.

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PROFESSOR GREGG REPLIES:

Poor Mr. Kramer, who, I gather, cannot suffer fools gladly. In a field like ours his cross is a heavy one. On the other hand, happy Mr. Gregg, who, as the following paragraphs will suggest, possesses in abundance precisely this faculty, and is, moreover, pleased to mount his Pushkinian *koněk* once again and prance before the rapt readers of the *Slavic Review*.

Peering at the stiff brocade of Mr. Kramer's invective I believe I can discern nine basic strands of thought. They are of varying degrees of obtuseness.

1. Mr. Kramer begins by saying that, having adopted Frye's "rules" [*sic!*] I'd "better play by them." (Note the tone of veiled menace here.) Oh dear! Oh dear! So wrong, so early! Must I really remind Mr. Kramer that literary works never conform in *all* their parts to the schemata—be they mythic, Marxist, Freudian, or other—evolved by the theorist; and that the responsible critic does not try to pretend they do. According to Mr. Kramer's disconcertingly totalitarian rule Ernest Jones's celebrated interpretation of *Hamlet* would have validity only if he had found an Oedipal role for Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. ("If Jones wants to adopt Freud's rules, he'd better play by them!")

2. Mr. Kramer observes that a parodic element obtains in the *Tales*. A hit, Mr. Kramer, a palpable hit! First Gershenzon noticed it, then Iakubovich noticed it, then Gippius, then Vinogradov, and now Karl Kramer! (Note the crescendo.) But *of course* there are parodic elements in the *Tales*. Many of them. And I'm sure that the readers of the *Slavic Review* are heartened to learn that Mr. Kramer knows what every undergraduate Russian major in the country knows. But having kicked this rather tired truism around for the last fifty years, is it not perhaps time that we critics pressed beyond the platitudes of our forefathers and took cognizance of some of the differences that separate these diversely colored tales? The dangers of painting oneself into a parodistic corner are embarrassingly evident in Mr. Kramer's unintentional *reductio ad absurdum*—namely, that the literary effects of the *Tales* are "all of a piece." Merciful heavens! Is Mr. Kramer really suggesting that the effect of the end of "The Stationmaster," for instance, is "all of a piece" with that of "The Lady-Peasant"? Put down your Shklovsky, Mr. Kramer! Take up your Pushkin! And then *read!*

3. Trying honestly (at least I *hope* he was trying honestly) to paraphrase me, Mr. Kramer writes "the season most crucially mentioned in 'The Stationmaster' is autumn; *ergo*, this story must be a tragedy." No, no, no, Mr. Kramer, I'm afraid you've muddled things once again. It's just the other way around. *Because* "The Stationmaster" has tragic overtones, it *therefore* is interesting to note that autumn is the dominant season. Do you see the difference now?

Mr. Kramer helpfully informs us that "Frye would be the last person to assert that tragedies, for example, necessarily have an autumnal . . . setting." So would I; so I hope (but who knows?) would Karl Kramer. On the other hand Frye would be the first to admit that the frequency with which the comic *mythos* is in point of