

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 *konëk* 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

literary fact associated with spring is by no means irrelevant to his theory. Which of course is all I implied. (Come, Mr. Kramer, you can surely do better than that!)

4. Mr. Kramer thinks that *I* think that “in tragedy the hero dies.” Well, God bless you, Karl Kramer! A kind word at last. You have, if only for a moment, pierced my Machiavellian veneer and seen the warm Flaubertian *coeur simple* that thumps beneath; a heart that knows what every groundling knows: that in comedies people make merry and marry; in tragedies they cry and die, etc. (*Aside*: Of course I do not think this at all and never said anything like it. Still it’s nice to know that Mr. Kramer can get things wrong in a spirit of *charity* sometimes.)

5. Mr. Kramer confesses that he is unable to see anything tragic in the story of a patriarch who, heartbroken at the loss of his only beloved daughter, takes to drink and dies. Well, I’m sorry to hear this; but I really don’t see what I can do to help. May I remind him, however, that there are state and federal agencies which can be contacted in cases like his. In the meanwhile may I suggest Dial-a-Prayer?

6. Mr. Kramer paraphrases me (correctly this time, I’m happy to say) as asserting that there are no seasonal references in “The Stationmaster.” Then, having lulled the cobra into a sense of false security, the mongoose pounces. “There are, however,” he snaps, “references to *rain* and *moonlight*,” which he later characterizes as “seasonal attributes.” Is it really necessary to remind a denizen of Seattle that *the rain can fall in all twelve months*? As for the seasonal affiliations of moonshine (a subject on which Mr. Kramer appears to be somewhat of an authority)—but no, *lezhachego ne bit’*.

7. Mr. Kramer generously concedes a comedic *cognitio* in “The Lady-Peasant,” but implies that, intent on hoodwinking a gullible public, I sought to conceal its presence in “The Blizzard.” *Sancta simplicitas!* Having spent what I feared was an inordinate amount of time showing that a comedic formula (“the happy courtship”) inhered in *all four* seasonal stories, and having further noted that the dénouement of “The Blizzard” was “incredibly happy,” I felt no need to dilate on the obvious. But I did not reckon with readers like Mr. Kramer.

8. Like the Marquand dentist who was “quite good if you show him your cavities” Mr. Kramer is at his probing best when the *lacunae* in a particular thesis have been carefully pointed out by the propounder himself. Having gone out of my way to note that “The Shot” is anything but a perfect embodiment of a romance, and that the crucial quest motif is, insofar as the Count is concerned, absent, I thought it was quite clever of Mr. Kramer to repeat and even expand on what I said. If you point him carefully in the right direction, he does not *always* go astray.

9. Concerning Mr. Kramer’s final, splendidly sardonic imputation, little did he realize that his savage, Swiftian irony was stating the simplest of truths. For that reason I think it best to make a clean breast of things right now, publicly. Yes, I *was* out to get Northrop Frye! For years I have been devoured by a consuming hatred for that smart aleck Canadian know-it-all and publicity hound. But like Salieri I knew how to bide my time and keep my counsel until the moment was ripe. And then I struck. But the jig’s up now, and I’m ready to pay my debt to society. I’ll tell the world one thing though: when I get out of the Big House, I’m going to start laying for Empson; and after Empson it’ll be Leavis’s turn. And by then, who knows, I may be ready for Karl Kramer Himself. For have no doubt about this, gentlemen: Dr. Moriarty will never, never rest until—be it on some Alpine cliff or in the pages of the *PMLA*—he grapples at last with Holmes himself.