

TAP: Necropolis!

CR: Intro Paragraph Activity (for Monday, October 17 in class)

Directions: Read the following opening paragraphs, taken (unedited) from previous student papers on “The Queen of Spades,” then answer the questions below in pairs.

The passage from Pushkin’s “The Queen of Spades” depicting the first encounter between Lizaveta Ivanovna and Hermann provides the reader with a glimpse of an important moment in the story. Throughout this passage there are insights into the characters of both Lizaveta and Hermann, the development of several themes, and foreshadowing for events to come.

In the second chapter of Pushkin’s short story “The Queen of Spades,” we read about the first encounter between Liza and Hermann. This passage is key in helping establish what type of character Hermann is and what his goal is throughout the story. We see him beginning his relationship with Liza and what that will mean for the rest of the story. In this passage, we come to notice that Hermann is an outsider looking into a life he is not a part of but ardently believes he deserves. Such a conclusion can be gleaned from Hermann and Liza’s characterizations and their reactions to each other, and the symbolism of the window and the carriage.

The passage this close reading is about is the scene in which the Countess arrives home from a ball and begins to undress. The scene takes place on page 223 of the Alexander Pushkin’s “Queen of Spades” and is important to the story overall because of its characterization of the Countess. Specifically, this passage portrays to the reader the old age of the Countess through rich details.

This passage, in which Hermann hides from the Countess in her bedroom and oversees her bedtime rituals, comes just before the first climax of Pushkin’s “Queen of Spades” and sets the stage for Hermann’s unintentional murder. While it is possible that we are meant to be horrified by the contrast of the Countess’s past beauty and present old age, and to see her transformation in the same shock and horror as Hermann does, it seems more likely that Hermann’s reaction to “the loathsome mysteries of her dress” reveals his greatest character flaw: that his desire for escapism makes him incapable of accepting gritty realism.

Questions:

1. Are you able to find (and underline) a thesis statement in each introductory paragraph?
2. Does the thesis provide strong direction for the paper?
3. Is the thesis original? Is it too basic or obvious? Too ambitious for a 2-3 page close reading? Discuss and compare.
4. Is it clear how the author intends to “prove” his/her thesis in the paper? Which details will s/he analyze?
5. Which seems like the “best” opening paragraph to you? Why do you think so?