

Title: The Influence of Pushkin's "The Station Master: on Dostoevsky's *Humiliated and Insulted*: Searching for Moral Depth in Dostoevsky's "Weak Novel"
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This paper will focus on the moral significance of Dostoevsky's adaptation of both the plot and the literary strategy of Pushkin's famous story.

In "The Station Master," Pushkin parodies the parable of the Prodigal Son by reading the biblical narrative through the prism of a trite sentimental theme, a daughter running away with a lover and abandoning her aging father. The irony, however, does not become obvious until the reader considers the epigraph introduced into the story by the editor. Thus the two conflicting readings, a serious yet somewhat naïve transposition of the theme by the author [Belkin], and an ironizing twist of the editor [A.P.] leave the burden of the decision on the reader as to what the moral significance of the story should be.

Dostoevsky accepts Pushkin's invitation to explore the moral potential of the biblical narrative by taking seriously Belkin's unorthodox focus on the character of the father. Equally significant for Dostoevsky is Pushkin's use of the narrator who, as a character in the story, illuminates the connection between the main story line and its biblical archetype. Dostoevsky's debt to Pushkin, however, is not limited to the plot, but also includes the same literary strategy. Many commentators of *The Humiliated and Insulted* have held against its author the novel's excessive sentimentality. What has been perceived as a failure must instead be viewed as part of Dostoevsky's literary intention. Dostoevsky relies on the sentimental theme for the purpose of deceiving a careless reader, thus making the task of discerning the novel's true moral question a more arduous and rewarding process.