

Title: Chekhov's Money

Author: Anne Lounsbury, New York University

This paper examines how money works in Chekhov's "Three Years," "A Woman's Kingdom," "A Doctor's Visit" and "In the Ravine." While not presuming to draw definitive conclusions about Chekhov's oeuvre, I argue that these stories can illuminate how Chekhov conceives of money and "the economy" generally (in quotation marks here because, as I explain, in Chekhov's Russia the idea of what we call the economy was still taking shape).

These stories are about characters whose lives are shaped by being rich, but the texts devote little attention to people who made the money, or to the process of making it. Instead, we see money's impact on characters who are a degree removed from the earning. How differently would we perceive economic reality if "A Woman's Kingdom" focused on Anna Akimovna's uncle (who founded the factory that left her a fortune), or if "Three Years" told the story of the old merchant who amassed riches by selling fabric trimmings (rather than of his sensitive son), or if "A Doctor's Visit" was devoted not to a girl who experiences her inherited wealth as illness but instead to her businessman father? I argue that Chekhov's decision to focus on the next-generation beneficiaries of capitalism—who are neither as impressively dynamic nor as straightforwardly culpable as their predecessors—allows for a particularly telling view of the capitalist economy. And here the exception that proves the rule is "In the Ravine," a story in which we *do* see characters making money, but in a way that echoes the other texts' points.

If in Dostoevsky money points us toward questions of metaphysics, in Chekhov money is about the explicitly *social* consequences of how resources are distributed. Since Chekhov scholarship rarely addresses this issue, I will draw on other studies concerning the intersection of literature and economics.

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