

Title: Secular Kenosis in Chekhov's "Neighbors" and *The Seagull*

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Individuals marked by a manifest tendency to give, spend, and waste are a common trope in Russian literature. This paper terms the tendency *secular kenosis*, extrapolating the theological term kenosis, or "emptying oneself out", to apply it to behavior of irreligious persons in secular contexts. The practical realization of secular kenosis is willfully giving up tangible and intangible personal assets, including money and personal possessions; intangibles such as time, reputation, opportunity and potential; one's bodily and intellectual assets, such as health or talent; and, finally, one's own life.

The paper will explore the ways in which Anton Chekhov treats the theme of secular kenosis in his prose and drama. Chekhov's short story "Neighbors" features a protagonist Vlasich who actively empties himself of all resources, considering this behavior to be the redeeming aspect of his life. Narrated by an impartial observer, the story reveals that Vlasich's kenosis fails to bring about harmony or to affect anyone's life in a positive manner. Instead, the story exposes Vlasich's kenotic bias as a dogmatic delusion, inspired by literary models and harmful in extraliterary life.

Intertextual links connect "Neighbors" to Dostoevsky's fiction – where characters propagate kenosis as a supreme ethical value – and to Chekhov's play *The Seagull*, which chronicles the consequences of following kenotic models in real life. Appreciating Chekhov's insight into the dogmatism and artificiality of the Russian intelligentsia's kenotic beliefs allows for another point of view onto why *The Seagull* is a comedy.