

Title: Old Story, New Setting: Moscow in A. P. Chekhov's "Pripadok"

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In his quiet way, Anton Pavlovich Chekhov frequently subverted literary conventions -- stylistic, thematic, and regional -- and he knew how to use cliché for aesthetic effect. This paper examines one of the ways in which Chekhov's short story "Pripadok" (1888) subverts the traditional 19th century literary paradigm of the urban prostitute and the setting in which she thrived.

"Pripadok" occupies an important place in a long line of 19th century Russian literary texts dealing with the theme of prostitution, including Gogol's "Nevskii Prospekt," Chernyshevsky's *Chto delat'*, Dostoevsky's *Zapiski iz podpol'ia* and *Prestuplenie i nakazanie*, Garshin's "Proisshestvie" and his *povest'* "Nadezhda Nikolaevna," among others. Not surprisingly, the theme of the "fallen woman" in her various literary manifestations (prostitute, adulteress, seduced victim) has received considerable critical attention (Siegel, Heldt, Matich, Stites, *et al.*). The secondary literature on "Pripadok" has identified the most important motifs Chekhov borrowed from Gogol, Dostoevsky, and Garshin, and several articles treat the parallels between Chekhov's hero Vasil'ev and Garshin, in whose honor Chekhov wrote "Pripadok" (Conrad, Flath).

Critics have, however, missed one suggestive point in Chekhov's story that forms the tip of a different thematic iceberg. The cultural binary of Russia's dual capitals, St. Petersburg and Moscow, creates a point and counterpoint between "Pripadok" and the earlier texts to which it responds. Before 1888, almost every author of a literary text that treated the theme of an encounter with a prostitute set his text in the "fallen" city of Petersburg, not in Moscow. Likewise Chekhov, in his 1883 short story "Slova, slova, slova," deals with the theme of the fallen woman in an implicitly Petersburgian setting. In "Pripadok," however, Chekhov recasts this traditionally Petersburgian trope into an overtly Muscovite context.

Questions to be addressed: Why is literary prostitution a specifically Petersburgian trope until the end of the 19th century? Why does Chekhov relocate the theme to Moscow? Did changes in the evolving symbolism of the "Petersburg" and "Moscow" texts make this possible? What were those changes? Or was the change motivated by a shift in the Russian understanding of the nature of prostitution (in response to the "Woman Question" and the theme of the "New Woman")? What other factors contribute to the change?

This paper explores possible interpretations of Chekhov's subtle break with literary tradition in "Pripadok" and its implication for the "Moscow Text" of Russian literature. The dominant arch of the story of Moscow in Russian literature has yet to be charted, but Chekhov's deviation from the normative Moscow/Petersburg binary in "Pripadok" offers interesting clues to the variegated evolution of "*Moskovskii tekst*."