

Title: Monetizing Morality: Tolstoy's Language of Debt, from Liberal Economics to Anarchy
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Abstract:

Discourses of debt pervade Tolstoy's narratives from the beginning. Debt is linked with feelings of guilt and obligation for the nobleman, and for the peasant—fear of loss. Tolstoy casts his heroes as victims of debt when they lose track of the connection between real value and abstract monetary figures. A critic of currency's slippery relationship with value, Tolstoy depicts peasants ruined by mere contact with money, which, once lost, enslaves them all the more. Again and again Tolstoy assimilates the Biblical motif of debt forgiveness in a polemical gesture that would eventually be interpreted as full-blown anarchism. At the same time, repaying one's intangible moral debts is the premise of much of Tolstoy's fiction, such as Nekhliudov's long journey to repay Katiusha for what he had "taken" from her in *Resurrection*. This latter tendency betrays Tolstoy's continued reliance on sentimentalist and enlightenment values, and it pushes back against his subversive statements about currency elsewhere. By tracing these themes through a series of scenes in Tolstoy's work (early and late), we will show how Tolstoy's fluency in the discourse of moral and monetary debt both enabled and undermined his anarchist project.