



The Forged Coupon

Leo Tolstoy , Hugh Aplin (Translator) , Andrew Miller (Foreword by)

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Tolstoy's final novella, *The Forged Coupon* is an ingenious study of the destructive powers of evil set against a brilliant depiction of Russian life. Inescapably in thrall to the power his crimes bring him, Stepan goes further and further down the path of evil, relentlessly seeking new opportunities to murder and maim. When, however, one of his victims refuses to surrender to him, instead dying with pity on her lips, he finds himself haunted by her image. Suddenly, he is faced with the choice of continuing a life of crime, or facing up to his actions and their certain consequences. Leo Tolstoy, author of *War and Peace* and *Anna Karenina*, is one of Russia's greatest novelists.

The Forged Coupon Details

Date : Published May 1st 2006 by Hesperus Press (first published 1911)

ISBN : 9781843911357

Author : Leo Tolstoy , Hugh Aplin (Translator) , Andrew Miller (Foreword by)

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From Reader Review The Forged Coupon for online ebook

James says

The stories of Leo Tolstoy are linked by what the French scholar and translator Michel Aucouturier calls Tolstoy's "gift of concrete realisation", and an ever-restless breed of philosophical inquiry – a combination that could produce works of an intensity that surprises even after repeated readings.

Tolstoy's greatest short story, The Death of Ivan Ilyich revolves around the eponymous judge discovering, as he slowly, painfully expires, that his entire life has been a sham, built on bourgeois trivialities and bereft of love. Even at his end his family cannot comfort him – "he saw that no one would feel sorry for him, because no one even wanted to understand his situation" – leaving him to receive succor from Gerasim, the butler's helper. Tolstoy himself often contemplated suicide throughout the latter half of his life, but his fear of death was greater even than his suspicion of the meaninglessness of existence. It has been suggested that Tolstoy calmed himself by reading the Scriptures. Apprehending this adds another layer to the terrifyingly powerful climax of Ivan Ilyich, in which Ivan's rapture ("There was no more fear because there was no more death") does not convince, but jars against his earlier, terrible description of death as "that black sack into which an invisible, invincible force was pushing him".

Tolstoy's understanding of death, informed by his wartime experiences in Silistria and Crimea, seems to me unique in literature. Both visceral and meditative, it attains a sort of frozen horror when he describes the thought processes of serial killer Stepan in The Forged Coupon. This story is divided into two parts. In Part I, schoolboy Mitya is in desperate need of money to repay a debt, but his father angrily denies him assistance. Dejected, under the instigation of a friend Makhin, Mitya simply changes a 2.50 rouble bond coupon to read 12.50 roubles, but this one evil deed sets off a chain of events that affects the lives of dozens of others, when his one falsehood indirectly causes a man to murder a woman at the end of Part I, and then seek redemption through religion in Part II.

Having written the novella in his dying years, after his excommunication, Tolstoy relishes the chance to unveil the "pseudo-piety and hypocrisy of organized religion." Yet, he maintains an unwavering belief in man's capacity to find truth, so the story remains hopeful, especially in Part II, which shows that good works can affect another as in a domino effect, just as evil does in Part I. The depiction of Stepan is particularly fascinating as his character reminds the reader of other Tolstoyan characters who are changed by the power of scripture. His story and the fate of Mitya are keen moments in this set of chain-like stories.

The novella is sometimes translated with the title "The Counterfeit Note" or "The Forged Banknote."

Whatever its name this is a powerful tale that features fascinating characters, each given a brief moment in the story, and a thought-provoking depiction of the power of fate.

Sara Shaheen says

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Yours, according to whether you send the money or not, with scorn, or love, Grouchetsky.

Ken Moten says

Now I can finally devote myself to Homer. Merry Christmas and happy holidays and a happy New Year to all! ¡Feliz Navidad y un feliz año nuevo a todos!

Whispering Stories says

Book Reviewed by Clive on www.whisperingstories.com

We all know that at some stage in our lives we should read War and Peace and Anna Karenina but do we all have the time and commitment to cope with the 1272 and 964 pages that they respectively fill? The Forged Coupon gives us an opportunity to pick up Tolstoy's attention to detail and his Christian beliefs in a brief novella.

At just seventy nine pages the book can easily be read in two sessions although I am sure that most readers will take advantage of the Introduction and the useful Extra Material sections which Alma Classics always include.

Part 1 of The Forged Coupon moves along at a pace with a succession of linked persons committing ever increasingly serious crimes. This involves numerous characters, all of course with Russian names which do not always read easily. Hugh Aplin's Introduction tells us that despite its brevity the book was written over a twenty four year period which does not surprise me because Part 2 has a very different feel to it.

The Extra Material section tells us that Tolstoy read a great deal of Western European literature including Charles Dickens and either by design or accident there are similarities. Like Dickens, Tolstoy explores the world of the lower classes and their struggles to make ends meet. The difference is that, harsh though Victorian life was for England's lower classes, the average Russian peasant suffered far more with considerably fewer rights. Tolstoy also demonstrates how, by design or ignorance, the life of the poor is affected by the actions of the rich and with the benefit of hindsight today's reader can clearly see how the seeds of the Russian Revolution were being sown even though Tolstoy died eight years before it occurred.

The other Victorian comparison can be seen through Tolstoy's hope in a style of Christianity based on love, respect and equality rather than the doctrine and regulation issued by the Orthodox, Catholic and Anglican churches of the period. I really enjoyed this aspect of the book.

My other personal pleasure was to read about Bearer Bonds and the accompanying sheets of Coupons which had to be "clipped" and presented to an agent to obtain the dividend or interest payment. Most UK readers will be unfamiliar with these but I was taken back to a long forgotten routine when I worked as a bank securities clerk.

The Forged Coupon may be short but its message packs a punch. I have awarded four stars.

Ahmad Sharabiani says

The Forged Coupon, Leo Tolstoy

FEDOR MIHAILOVICH SMOKOVNIKOV, the president of the local Income Tax Department, a man of unswerving honesty--and proud of it, too--a gloomy Liberal, a free-thinker, and an enemy to every manifestation of religious feeling, which he thought a relic of superstition, came home from his office feeling very much annoyed. The Governor of the province had sent him an extraordinarily stupid minute, almost assuming that his dealings had been dishonest.

Fedor Mihailovich felt embittered, and wrote at once a sharp answer. On his return home everything seemed

The door opened and a boy of fifteen came in, the son of Fedor Mihailovich, a pupil of the fifth class of the local school.

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The Cute Little Brown-haired girl says

This book is one of my all time favorites! It's short, sweet, and to the point. A great and twisted plot and a real lesson on materialism, the love of money and how greedy we really are underneath...but how virtue, honesty, and the love of our fellow man always and forever will outweigh these shortcomings. This is a great short read for those who love Russian literature.

Viv JM says

Of all the Tolstoy short stories/novellas in the collection I have read, this is one of my favourites. It begins when a hard up student uses a forged coupon to pay for goods in a shop. This begins a cascade of deceptions and wrongdoings, affecting more and more people, and leading to ever more heinous deeds - culminating in a murder. In the second part of the story, the murderer from part 1 seeks (and finds) redemption through religion and this too has a cascading effect leading to more good deeds done by others. I thought the story really neatly illustrated how our actions can have such an effect on others and cause many unforeseen consequences. Great stuff.

Amene says

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Fady Khattab says

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Ahmed Sallam says

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Edward O'Neill says

This is a lovely little edition of one of Tolstoy's greatest short works.

Towards the end of his life, Tolstoy increasingly worked in a much smaller compass than his familiar great realist novels, in which the writer's great strengths at expansion, dilation and detail are hard at work. But in these smaller works--novellas, if you wanna be technical--you find every bit as much precision, but condensed and then arranged like a fantastic puzzle.

THE FORGED COUPON is about Christianity, make no doubt. And it's part of Tolstoy's famous critique of the church as he knew it. But THE FORGED COUPON is not about a supernatural Christianity: it's about Christ's moral teachings and the psychological and social impact they could have, were they understood "properly"--at least by LT's lights.

So Tolstoy imagines--with his super-human imaginative power, feeling for every class and profession of Russia's enormous social landscape--the exact impact a simple teaching like "love others as thyself" (which is not narrowly Christian: it's bedrock for a number of religions) could have on particular individuals and on a society as a whole.

You must chalk it up to Tolstoy's genius that one of those individuals is a serial killer, another a Prince, another an emperor, another a legless tailor, etc.

And so psychology, ethics and social thought all merge in an imaginative work that is as simple and complex as a flower or a garden.

As for the edition, the font is nice, the pages well laid out, and the introductory material is not at all bad, it's very fine, as far as it goes. But you should really read the novella first, and then you can look at the rest. It's all a footnote.

Hell, we're all a footnote to someone like Tolstoy, eh?

Bettie? says

Wiki description: *The story is divided into two parts. In Part I, schoolboy Mitya is in desperate need of money to repay a debt, but his father angrily denies him assistance. Dejected, under the instigation of a friend Makhin, Mitya simply changes a 2.50 rouble bond coupon to read 12.50 roubles, but this one evil deed sets off a chain of events that affects the lives of dozens of others, when his one falsehood indirectly causes a man to murder a woman at the end of Part I, and then seek redemption through religion in Part II.*

<https://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/243>

Opening: **FEDOR MIHAILOVICH SMOKOVNIKOV, the president of the local Income Tax Department, a man of unswerving honesty—and proud of it, too—a gloomy Liberal, a free-thinker, and an enemy to every manifestation of religious feeling, which he thought a relic of superstition, came home from his office feeling very much annoyed. The Governor of the province had sent him an extraordinarily stupid minute, almost assuming that his dealings had been dishonest.**

Like a snowball rolling downhill or the domino effect, a larceny by a school boy sets off a chain of bad happenings. Robert Bresson used Part I as the basis for his last film, L'Argent (1983)

<http://www.mbird.com/2009/11/leo-tost...>

3* The Forged Coupon
4* Anna Karenina
6* War and Peace
4* The Death of Ivan Ilych
2.5* The Kreutzer Sonata
3* Resurrection
2* The Cossacks
3* Family Happiness
3* The Sebastopol Sketches
TR What Men Live by and Other Tales
WL God Sees the Truth, but Waits
3* A Letter to a Hindu

Gisoo says

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Tyler Jones says

Wise and naive and complex and simple.

I don't care what anybody says, I think Tolstoy can write.
