

**RELIGIOUSLY BASED MORALITY
IN THE THEATRE OF ALEXANDER OSTROVSKY**

by

Olga Muratova

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Comparative Literature in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, The City University of New York

2009

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This manuscript has been read and accepted
for the Graduate Faculty in Comparative Literature
in satisfaction of the dissertation requirement
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

September 23, 2009

Date

Daniel C. Gerould

Chair of Examining Committee

September 23, 2009

Date

Vincent Crapanzano

Executive Officer

Daniel C. Gerould

Elizabeth K. Beaujour

Felicia Bonaparte

Supervision Committee

THE CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK

Abstract

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by Olga Muratova

Adviser: Professor Daniel C. Gerould

The dissertation offers a new way of interpreting Alexander Ostrovsky's dramas. The Ostrovsky scholarship is systematic, thorough, and well documented, but it may overlook a particular aspect of the playwright's work, that of Christian, and more specifically Russian Orthodox, morality. The dissertation correlates facts of Ostrovsky's biography (some of which were not publicized during the Soviet era), textual content of his dramas, and biblical conceptual language in them with the historical and cultural context of nineteenth-century Russia, revealing religiously based didacticism in the playwright's oeuvre. A coherent explanation of the factors (historical, ethnological, theological, epistemological, and, at least partially, ontological) that shaped Ostrovsky's life views and consequently his writing is offered as a key element of the argument presented. The writer's four metanarratives (guilt vs. shame; sin; money; theatre), which are being singled out as dominant in his dramas, are looked at from the standpoint of his understanding and interpretation of Christian doctrines. Previous research traditionally labeled a number of Ostrovsky's plays atypical for his writing style, thus creating an exclusive approach to the interpretation of the body of his work. However, if Ostrovsky is regarded as a didactic author who embodied within his plays certain attitudes about morality, which were the outgrowths of religion-influenced ethical positions of his time, exclusions become unnecessary and every drama conforms to a unifying pattern. By shedding more light on Ostrovsky's work and grounding it in Russian Orthodoxy, the dissertation demonstrates that while the playwright should be considered a realist in form, the content of his plays renders them moral fables, rooted in the Bible and the teachings of the Russian national church.

Contents

Introduction.....	1
Part I.....	1
Part II	6
Chapter I Opposing approaches in the Ostrovsky criticism	12
Periodization of the criticism.....	12
Disputing Ostrovsky's realism.....	30
Tribute to Apollon Grigoryev	46
Chapter II On Russian Orthodoxy	56
Chapter III People driven by guilt vs. people driven by shame.....	66
First period (1847–1859)	74
Second period (1860–1866)	101
Third period (1868–1871)	141
Fourth period (1872–1886)	149
Chapter IV Ostrovsky's study of sin.....	162
Drinking: hardly a sin.....	164
Bribery.....	169
Carnal desires	173
Greed, sloth, wrath, and envy.....	181
Vanity and god complex.....	183
Lying and language as a tool of manipulation	189
Chapter V On money: blessed and unblessed riches.....	208
Chapter VI On the interrelation of theatre and life	241
Conclusion	263

Plot summaries of Ostrovsky's plays in chronological order	266
Bibliography	278

General notes

1. The emphasis in a quotation should be assumed to have been retained from the original, unless otherwise indicated.
2. The translation of Russian and French quotations is mine, unless otherwise indicated.

INTRODUCTION

Part I

Alexander Ostrovsky (1823–1886) is considered by many to be the greatest Russian playwright of the nineteenth century. He virtually single-handedly shaped Russian national theatre into what it is today. He wrote forty-nine plays himself and at least seven in collaboration; he tweaked, edited, and shaped many more, anonymously helping young Russian dramatists of his time. His translations of Shakespeare, Cervantes, Goldoni, Giacometti, Gozzi, Machiavelli, Cossa, and other European playwrights were published and enjoyed by many in Russia.¹ His articles on theatre fill an entire volume in a sixteen-volume edition of his complete works. He literally dominated and, towards the end of his life, actually headed the Maly Theatre² for thirty-six years, from 1850 to 1886, making it popularly known as “the House of Ostrovsky.”³ On May 27, 1929, a bronze monument to him⁴ was erected at Teatralnaya (Theatre) Square next to the Maly’s main entrance. Ina Beasley states

¹ Editorial comments to the translations by Ostrovsky, in Aleksandr Nikolaevich Ostrovskii, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii* (Complete Works; hereafter cited as *PSS*), comp. and ed. Grigorii Ivanovich Vladykin et al., 16 vols. (Moscow: Goslitizdat, 1949–53), vol. 11, pp. 367–389, at p. 370.

² “A theatre in Moscow, which opened in 1824 [...] The Maly (meaning small) is the oldest surviving theatre in the capital [...]” (*The New Penguin Dictionary of the Theatre* (London: Penguin Books, 2001), s.v. “Maly Theatre”). For its achievements in the development of Russian theatre, the Maly was awarded the Order of Lenin and the Order of the October Revolution, two of the highest awards an artistic institution could receive in the Soviet Union.

³ This accolade is acknowledged by several scholars, for example: “The Maly Theater became ‘Ostrovsky’s House’ [...]. Firmly established in the Russian repertory with his numerous plays, Ostrovsky became [...] an organic and very important part of the national stage” (Marc Slonim, *Russian Theater: From the Empire to the Soviets* (Cleveland: The World, 1961), p. 80). There is an entire chapter entitled “Dom Ostrovskogo” (The House of Ostrovsky) in a collection of articles on the Maly Theater (Iurii Arsen’evich Dmitriev, “Velikii russkii teatr” (A Great Russian Theatre), in Nikolai Aleksandrovich Abalkin (ed.), *Malyi teatr: 1824–1974* (The Maly Theatre: 1824–1974), vol. I (Moscow: Vserossiiskoe teatral’noe obshchestvo, 1978), pp. 77–202, at pp. 120–148).

⁴ There are several monuments to Ostrovsky in Moscow. A less famous one, for example, is located next to Ostrovsky’s home (turned into a museum) on Malaya Ordynka Street. The monument in central Moscow near the Maly Theatre was created by Nikolay Andreev (1873–1932), a famous Russian sculptor who is also the author of Gogol’s monument in Moscow. The Ostrovsky monument (in bronze and granite) shows the great Russian playwright in his late years, sitting in a chair and wearing his favorite house robe. Ostrovsky looks thoughtful and tired, with his head lowered and his eyes half-closed. Photographs of the monument can be found at <http://www.cultinfo.ru/fulltext/1/001/009/001/233139259.jpg> or <http://www.trulov.ru/pic-teat/1893.jpg> (both accessed on 3 October 2006). Another photograph of the monument can be found in John Gassner and Edward Quinn (eds.), *The Reader’s Encyclopedia of World Drama* (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 1969), s.v. “Ostrovsky, Alexander.”

that “[i]t has been estimated, for instance, that in the twenty years between 1853 and 1873 his thirty-two plays were given at the Imperial theatres in Moscow and St. Petersburg seven hundred and sixty-six times.”⁵ Ostrovsky is a household name in Russia, and his lines are widely quoted in everyday situations. And yet this colossus of a man is barely, if at all, known in the United States. Norman Henley, a contemporary Western specialist on Ostrovsky and translator of many of his plays into English, observes that “[t]here is no comprehensive study of Ostrovsky’s life or works in English, though much, of course, has been written about Ostrovsky in Russian,” adding in another paper that “[o]ne ought to welcome anything calling attention to Ostrovskij (our forgotten man in Russian letters).”⁶ According to Beasley, “[b]y one of those curious accidents of fame, [...] Englishmen were not introduced to the great national dramatist of Russia, but to another and perhaps rather less representative writer. Ostrovsky was neglected for Chekhov” (p. 603). We can easily replace “Englishmen” with “any westerner” (a denizen of Western Europe or the United States), and Beasley’s statement would remain correct in principle: Russian theatre *is* represented by Chekhov in the West.

Mentioning “Ostrovsky’s outstanding services to drama as founder of the Russian theatrical tradition,” David Magarshack adds:

[...] if the proof of the pudding is in the eating, then Ostrovsky is certainly the most successful playwright in the whole history of drama. His plays are today performed before an immense audience in Russia, very likely the largest audience a playwright has ever had. It is true that even in his lifetime his plays were the mainstay of the Russian stage. [...] An examination of recently published⁷ figures, however, will show that Ostrovsky’s popularity has increased by leaps and bounds after the

⁵ Ina Beasley, “The Dramatic Art of Ostrovsky,” *The Slavonic Review*, vol. 6 (1927–28), pp. 603–617, at p. 605.

⁶ Norman Henley, introduction to *The Thunderstorm* by Alexander Ostrovsky (Letchworth, UK: Bradda Books, 1963), pp. 7–8, at p. 7; and review of Elizabeth Hanson’s translation of Alexander N. Ostrovsky’s *Artistes and Admirers*, *The Slavic and East European Journal*, vol. 15, no. 3 (Autumn 1971), pp. 382–385, at p. 382, respectively. Fans of Ostrovsky are greatly indebted to Henley for his wonderful translations of *Dokhodnoe mesto*, *Goriachee serdtse*, *Bespridannitsa*, and *Talanty i poklonniki*.

⁷ Written in 1960.

Revolution. While, for instance, Ostrovsky's plays were performed on the average 1,358 times a year during the thirty-one years after his death in 1886, over 11,000 performances of his plays were given on the Russian stage in 1939. In 1903 about 1,300,000 people went to the theater in Russia to see an Ostrovsky play. In 1939 this number increased to 6,400,000, and if we include the non-Russian stage in the Soviet Union, about thirty-six and a half million people saw Ostrovsky's plays in that year.⁸

A book widely used in theatre studies in the United States mentions Ostrovsky only indirectly, when discussing Apollon Grigoryev, a famous literature and theatre critic (but an obscure writer), who happened to be Ostrovsky's personal friend:

The aesthetic or conservative critic most concerned with the drama was Apollon Grigoriev (1822–1864), whose criticism reflects two major influences. One is German romanticism, particularly Schelling's view of art as organic process; the other is the "native soul" [sic] movement (*pochvennichestvo*), which sought to encourage a distinctly Russian culture drawn from the people and the land. Grigoriev found these two concerns united in the plays of his friend Alexander Ostrovsky [...], which the critic called a "mirror of the national consciousness."⁹

More evidence of Ostrovsky's obscurity in the West can be found in *The Reader's Encyclopedia of World Drama*, *History of the Theatre*,¹⁰ and *The New Penguin Dictionary of the Theatre*, none of which gives Ostrovsky more than half a page.

How did it happen that a Russian playwright of such caliber is much less known in America than, for example, Gogol, who wrote only two complete plays and six unfinished dramatic scenes, or Chekhov, with his five full-length dramas and seven one-act comedies? Virtually every Russian schoolchild knows that Ostrovsky was lovingly called "merchants' Shakespeare" or "Russian Molière": Ostrovsky's dramas have been included in the Russian high-school curriculum since the early Soviet era.

⁸ David Magarshack, introduction to *The Storm* by Alexander Ostrovsky, trans. and ed. Magarshack (Ann Arbor, MI: Ardis, 1988), pp. 5–13, at p. 5.

⁹ Marvin Carlson, *Theories of the Theatre: A Historical and Cultural Survey, from the Greeks to the Present* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1993), p. 244. An apparent typographical error in the original: the words "native soul" should read "native soil."

¹⁰ Oscar G. Brockett and Franklin J. Hildy, *History of the Theatre*, 9th ed. (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 2003).

This work will offer a new approach to classifying Ostrovsky's dramatic pieces in an effort to make him more accessible for the playwright's researchers in the West. By shedding more light on Ostrovsky's work and grounding it in Russian Orthodoxy, I intend to demonstrate that the playwright should be considered a realist only in form while the content of his plays renders them moral fables, rooted in the Bible and the teachings of the Russian national church. I will single out several metanarratives that Ostrovsky explored all his life. Ostrovsky's works shared their philosophical underpinnings with the Christian doctrine as expounded by such theologians as St. Thomas Aquinas and St. Gregory the Great and popularized in literature by Dante's trilogy—to name just a few of the authoritative voices in religious theory. However, the Russian dramatist can be identified with Western men of art and philosophy only so much, due to his affiliation with Russian Orthodoxy as a distinct branch of Christianity.

Ostrovsky's study of sin that brought him to a discourse on the duality of human nature and on the constant struggle of morals vs. passions in man; his views on money as something once created by man but now existing as an overruling entity; his concept of lying and the ensuing use of language as a tool of manipulation; his juxtaposition of shame and guilt—all differ in various degrees from the Western understanding of the same concepts, keeping him firmly separated from his counterparts in the rest of Europe and America who looked into the same issues in their plays.

According to Nina Shalimova, a contemporary Russian scholar who specializes in Ostrovsky, the nineteenth-century playwright is simultaneously the most accessible and the most mysterious writer of Russia's Golden Age.¹¹ Shalimova's suggestion is in no way new.

¹¹ Nina Alekseevna Shalimova, *Russkii mir A. N. Ostrovskogo: monografiia* (The Russian World of Ostrovsky: A monograph) (Yaroslavl, Russia: YaGTU, 2000), p. 3.

Albert Kaspin, a prolific Western writer on Ostrovsky in the 1960s, raised the same question in one of his articles:

[...]n 1886, the critic and sociologist N. K. Mixajlovskij wrote in his obituary of A. N. Ostrovskij that it was difficult to assess the dramatist's literary activity, not because it created misunderstandings and was in need of untangling and clarification, but precisely because it was as obvious as the palm of one's hand. In fact, the apparent artlessness, casualness of development, and pedestrian incidents that characterize almost all of Ostrovskij's plays create the illusion for the spectator of the reality of humdrum daily life. The problem of how Ostrovskij succeeds in making his works dramatic in a primary sense, that is, capable of deeply stirring the imagination or emotions, remains.¹²

How can the same playwright be simultaneously so accessible and so mysterious even to his compatriots? Many scholars in Russia and in the West have tried to find a key to understanding his writing, but only a handful (e.g., Mikhail Andreev, Valery Mildon, and Shalimova) have managed, with unequal success, to keep their methodological approach to interpreting his works inclusive. For the most part, however, scholars of the past and present tend to find exceptions among Ostrovsky's plays as some do not fit the parameters of the theories put forward by these scholars. Later I will look at the Ostrovsky criticism vis-à-vis my own explanatory theory; let me just mention for now that most scholars marginalize the playwright's historical pieces, early Slavophilic plays, or *Snegurochka* (The Snow Maiden). Some or all of these dramas do not seem to fit the Procrustean confines of the critic's argument. That, of course, can mean either that Ostrovsky is in fact overly mysterious to snugly occupy a niche of a single academic approach—or that all the exclusive approaches are faulty.

My attempt to make the Russian theatre giant better understood in the West will take the form of trying to explain coherently the factors (historical, ethnological, theological, epistemological, and, at least partially, ontological) that shaped Ostrovsky's life views and

¹² Albert Kaspin, "Character and Conflict in Ostrovskij's *Talents and Admirers*," *The Slavic and East European Journal*, vol. 8, no. 1 (Spring 1964), pp. 26–36, at p. 26.

consequently his writing. In my opinion, this would form the most appropriate course of action if one wants to explain a dramatist who was Western in form but Russian-specific in content, to Western scholars.

Part II

In 1984 my aunt Galina Kychakova finished a thoroughly documented research on the life, history, and genealogy of a formerly well-known and well-respected Russian aristocratic family, the Mertvagos. Conceived as a book,¹³ it was ready for publication when the author got seriously ill and soon died. Shortly before her death, she bequeathed two copies of her fascinating manuscript to me.

An old noble Moscow clan, very artistic albeit never rich, the Mertvagos traced their origins to the times of Ivan the Terrible, who ruled in 1533–1584.

[...] Первым зарегистрированным предком этой семьи был царевич Золотой Орды, внук Батые — следовательно, правнук Чингисхана,¹⁴ — «честны выехавший» со своей дружиной в XIV веке к великому князю Олегу Рязанскому. Перейдя на сторону русских, царевич крестился Благоденом и дал начало огромному клану Благоденовичей (считается, что из этого же клана вышел Денис Давыдов¹⁵).

[...] Когда Иван Грозный воевал Казанское ханство, почти все мужчины Благоденовичи — а они всегда были воинами — погибли под стенами Казани. Царь не забыл их заслуг, и двум оставшимся братьям-сиротам [...] была назначена пенсия. Дьяки, заносившие эти выдачи в соответствующую книгу, упрощали дело и вместо точной фамилии и прозвища их отца — Благоденовича — писали просто «а детям мертваго»¹⁶ — 1 рубль...». Кончилось тем, что подросшие мальчики стали носить фамилию Мертваго.¹⁷

¹³ Galina Vladimirovna Kychakova, *Zapiski* (Notes) (unpublished manuscript, 1984).

¹⁴ Genghis Khan (c. 1162–1227), a political and military leader who united Mongol tribes and founded the Mongol Empire, then the largest empire in the world. His grandson Batu Khan (c. 1205–58) founded a breakaway entity—the Blue Horde, which later became the Golden Horde. According to the established view (discussed in more detail in chapter III, under “Second period”), the Golden Horde subjugated Russia and ruled it as a dominion for almost 300 years.

¹⁵ Denis Davydov (1784–1839), a Russian hussar and poet at the time of the Napoleonic wars. His poetry, with its main focus on military life, is steeped in pathos, bravado, and hedonism. In one of his short stories, Pushkin mentions Davydov’s poetry when describing binge drinking in the army (Aleksandr Sergeevich Pushkin, *Vystrel* (The Shot), in his *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii* (Complete Works; hereafter cited as *PSJ*), 2 vols. (Moscow: Klassika, 1999), vol. 2, pp. 23–27, p. 24).

¹⁶ *Mértvago*, with the stress on the first syllable, is an old spelling of *mértvogo*, an adjective (in the genitive case) meaning *dead*. The family name Mervágo was formed from this adjective after the stress shifted to the second

The Mertvagos were always associated with great names in Russian literature and culture, such as Zhukovsky, Derzhavin, Voeykov,¹⁸ and even Pushkin when he was still a schoolboy in lyceum. Later, towards the second half of the nineteenth century, Sollogub, Rubinstein,¹⁹ and Leo Tolstoy were regular guests of the family (Kychakova, pp. 8–9).

The relative directly responsible for me conceiving and writing this work is my great-grandmother, Pavla Mertvago, who was sent to Samara²⁰ to be educated at a private boarding school for girls. That particular school was considered very progressive at the time: the girls were taught three foreign languages and even mathematics. Around 1870, when Pavla was sixteen, the head of the school took the students to see a play that starred Grigory Lukin, the leading actor and a playwright for a local theatre company. Pavla eloped with him several days later, and they got secretly married in a small provincial church 200 miles from Samara. She was never forgiven and was completely cut off by the rest of the Mertvago family (Kychakova, pp. 16–17).

syllable. Grammatically, the word *Mertvago* has the same structure as *Zhirago* (which means *alive*), made familiar by Boris Pasternak's famous novel.

¹⁷ Kychakova, p. 5. "[...]he first registered ancestor of the family was a blood prince of the Golden Horde, Batu Khan's grandson and therefore Genghis Khan's great-great-grandson, who in the fourteenth century, together with his personal army, 'headed in good faith' to serve Grand Prince Oleg of Ryazan. Having gone over to the side of the Russians, the prince was baptized and christened Blagodenovich; he started a huge Blagodenovich clan (to which Denis Davydov reportedly belonged). [...] During Ivan the Terrible's conquest of the Kazan Khanate, almost all of the Blagodenovich males—who had always been warriors—died at the walls of Kazan. The tsar did not forget their service, and two surviving brothers, now orphaned [...], were granted a pension. Clerks who recorded these disbursements in a ledger tended to simplify the procedure and, instead of their father's full name, simply wrote 'to the children of the deceased (*mertvago*), 1 ruble....' Thus the grown-up boys ended up with the name Mertvago."

¹⁸ Vasily Zhukovsky (1783–1852), a famous poet of the pre-Pushkin period, credited with the introduction of romanticism to Russian literature; Gavrila Derzhavin (1743–1825), the greatest Russian poet of the pre-Pushkin period and the first to notice Pushkin's poetic talent; Alexander Voeykov (1779–1839), a poet and journalist famous for his satirical pamphlets.

¹⁹ Count Vladimir Sollogub (1814–82), a writer associated with the *Otechestvennye zapiski* (Domestic Papers), a popular literary periodical of the nineteenth century; Anton Rubinstein (1829–94), a great Russian Romantic composer, pianist virtuoso, and conductor (*Neron* (Nero) and *Demon* (Demon) are his two most famous operas).

²⁰ A major city in the southeast of the European part of Russia, on the Volga river.

In 1885 Grigory Lukin summoned enough courage to send one of his plays, initially entitled *Chuzhaia dusha — dremuchii les* (The Heart of Another Is a Dark Forest),²¹ to Ostrovsky for criticism and advice. Ostrovsky, who would die a year later, was already very famous and much respected in Russia. The playwright replied to Lukin's offer to pay him for his help:

Исправлять Ваши пьесы и хлопотать о постановке их на сцену я возьмусь с удовольствием; но *о сотрудничестве еще говорить рано*. Я знаю, что время и труд дороги для человека делового и что чужим трудом пользоваться не следует, на этом принципе основано наше общество; но труды по исправлению чужой талантливо написанной пьесы частью вознаграждаются удовольствием видеть на родной сцене²² хорошее произведение. Я почти всегда помогаю начинающим писателям безвозмездно; но если Вы находите для себя неудобным пользоваться чужим трудом, то я, уважая Вашу деликатность, и сам не хочу быть неделикатным против Вас. Я соглашусь взять некоторое вознаграждение, о чем мы успеем столковаться после; а теперь прошу Вас об этом уж не беспокоиться и доверить мне Ваши произведения. Что можно сделать из них, я сделаю летом; к осени одна пьеса непременно будет готова.²³

²¹ Kychakova lists seven plays written by Lukin: *Chuzhaia dusha — dremuchii les* (later, upon Ostrovsky's advice, it was renamed *V setiakh iskusheii* (In the Net of Temptation)), *Baloven'* (Grandma's Pet), *Ia zhenius'* (I'm Getting Married), *Net, ne vinoven* (No, Not Guilty), *Ne revniva* (Not Jealous), *Rekrutskii nabor* (Army Draft), and *Muzheboiazni'* (Fear of Men). The Russian State Library, the country's central, has only four: the first three mentioned by Kychakova and one not mentioned by her, entitled *V zakhbolust'e* (Back of Beyond). In the commentaries to volume 16 of Ostrovsky's Complete Works, two more of Lukin's plays are mentioned: *Meteor* and *Pogubili* (Ruined). It appears that Lukin wrote at least ten original plays.

Incidentally, *Rekrutskii nabor* was chosen by Fyodor Burdin (1827–87), a former actor at the Maly Theatre and a close friend of Ostrovsky's, who played thirty roles in the playwright's dramas, for his benefit performance. Since 1847, Burdin had been the leading comic at the Alexandrinsky Theatre in St. Petersburg. Kychakova mentions (p. 18) that this fact was described by Russian writer Pyotr Boborykin (1836–1921) in his published notes.

²² Eight months later, on December 14, 1885, Ostrovsky was made *de jure* head of the Maly Theatre (Lakshin, p. 707), whose *de facto* head he had already been for thirty years.

²³ Ostrovsky to G. G. Lukin, letter of 8 April 1885, in Ostrovskii, *PSS*, vol. 16, pp. 160–161. "I will gladly undertake the task of revising your plays and arranging for them to be staged, *but it is still too early to talk about collaboration*. I know that time and labor are worth a lot to a man of business and that it is not proper to exploit somebody else's labor—this is a principle upon which our society is founded. However, labor that goes into revising a play that is written with talent by another is rewarded in part by the pleasure of seeing a good work performed on a familiar stage. I almost always assist beginning playwrights for free, but if you find it inconvenient to take advantage of someone else's labor, then I—respecting your tact—do not wish to appear tactless myself. I will agree to accept a certain remuneration, which we will have time to agree upon later, and now I'm begging you not to worry about it any more and trust me with your works. Whatever can be done with them, I will do during the summer; by the fall one play will certainly be ready."

Lukin's letters to Ostrovsky are kept at the Bakhrushin State Central Theatre Museum (editorial comments to the letters by Ostrovsky, *ibid.*, p. 324).

Ostrovsky informed Lukin two days later that he had finished revising the play and it was ready for censorship:

Несмотря на множество работ и постоянное нездоровье, я кончил переделку Вашей пьесы «Чужая душа — дремучий лес». Вышла цензурная и *очень эффектная вещь*. Напишите мне, приедете ли Вы в Москву; если не приедете, то я пришлю Вам рукопись на просмотр или только главные перемены, сделанные мной. Торопиться некуда, пьесу надо ставить в разгар сезона. Было бы хорошо, если бы Вы могли приехать к Рождеству.²⁴

A year later, Ostrovsky was already busy moving Lukin's play from Moscow to St. Petersburg. The plot of *Chuzhaia dusha* echoed that of Ostrovsky's *Groza* (The Thunderstorm). In Lukin's drama, the main heroine Tatyana feels and acts similar to Katerina from *Groza*: she does not love her husband and falls passionately in love with a visiting outsider, Vasily Bubnov. Just as in *Groza*, the husband leaves, or rather pretends to leave for a short while, only to face the wife's infidelity upon return. After many scenes of domestic strife that follow, Tatyana decides to kill her husband by choking him with a pillow in his sleep. To hide her crime, she sets her house on fire and offers Bubnov to run away together. However, Bubnov, who earlier was strongly in favor of eloping and urged Tatyana to take action, suddenly has a change of heart and refuses Tatyana's offer, claiming that he cannot be together with a common criminal. The play ends similarly to Leo Tolstoy's *Vlast' t'my* (The Power of Darkness; which, incidentally, was written later, ruling out any possibility of his influence on Lukin): the heroine drops to her knees in a public place, openly confessing her crimes to the people and begging their forgiveness.

In 1886 the company of the Alexandrinsky Theatre included an actress by the name of Pelageya (Polina) Strepetova (1850–1903), famous for her role of Katerina in Ostrovsky's

²⁴ Ostrovsky to G. G. Lukin, letter of 10 April 1885, *ibid.*, pp. 161–162. “Despite a huge workload and persistent ill health, I have finished reworking your play *The Heart of Another Is a Dark Forest*. It came out safe for censorship and *quite spectacular*. Let me know if you are coming to Moscow; if you are not, I will send you the manuscript, or just the main changes that I have made, for examination. There is no need to hurry; the play should be staged at the height of the season. I would rather you could come by Christmas.”

Groza. Ostrovsky thought that she would be perfect for the part of Tatyana in Lukin's play. Portraying a shy and timid woman driven by a destructive marriage to a violent revolt was Strepetova's forte. Ostrovsky might also be hoping that Strepetova would look favorably on a play by someone from Samara because she herself came to the city at the age of nineteen and joined a theatre company headed by Alexander Rasskazov, a former student of Ivan Samarin.²⁵ (Rasskazov became famous for his roles in Ostrovsky's, Pisemsky's,²⁶ and Aleksey Konstantinovich Tolstoy's plays.) Hoping to win Strepetova to his side and counting on the theme of a Russian woman's tragic fate to resonate with her own bitter experiences, Ostrovsky tried to make sure that Lukin's play would get as many supporters at the Alexandrinsky Theatre as possible. He wrote to Strepetova:

Пьеса, о которой я говорил Вам и в которой есть блестящая роль для Вас, еще не была ни в цензуре, ни в Комитете, автор ее Лукин, а называется она «Чужая душа — темный лес». Впрочем, это название будет изменено. Готова она будет к августу.²⁷

As far as I know, Ostrovsky's death in 1886 put a stop to staging Lukin's *Chuzhaia dusha* in Moscow or in St. Petersburg, although the drama was published in Moscow twice and performed several times outside the two capital cities. In 1889, three years after Ostrovsky's death, *Chuzhaia dusha* was published in the *Kolosya* (Ears of Wheat), a Moscow literary periodical, as a collaboration of Lukin and Ostrovsky. Soon after, Maria Ostrovskaya, the playwright's widow, published a letter in the *Novoe vremya* (A New Time), a then popular Moscow newspaper:

²⁵ Rasskazov (1833–1902), a leading actor of the Maly Theatre in 1850–66; Samarin (1817–85), a leading actor and director of the Maly in 1837–85. Samarin was also a professor at the Moscow Theatre School.

²⁶ Aleksey Pisemsky (1821–81), a Russian novelist and dramatist of the nineteenth century, famous in the theatre world primarily for his comedy *Gor'kaia sud'bina* (A Bitter Fate).

²⁷ Ostrovsky to P. A. Strepetova, letter of 18 April 1886, in Ostrovskii, *PSS*, vol. 16, pp. 236–237, at p. 237. “The play I told you about, which has a splendid part for you, has not yet passed through either censorship or the Committee; its author is Lukin and its title is *The Heart of Another Is a Dark Forest*. However, the title will be changed. The play will be ready by August.”

В вашей уважаемой газете, среди объявлений, напечатано объявление о выходе в свет 12-й книги журнала «Колосья», изданного И. А. Баталиным; в содержании этой книги, между прочими статьями, значится: «Чужая душа — дремучий лес», драма в 4-х действиях и 5-ти картинах, сочинение Лукина, переделанная А. Н. Островским. Мне бы хотелось посредством вашей уважаемой газеты довести до всеобщего сведения, что покойный мой муж не переделывал названной драмы г. Лукина, которому потому и следует удерживать за собою исключительно все права и преимущества автора означенного произведения.²⁸

Lakshin, who describes Ostrovsky's wholehearted attempts to assist many aspiring dramatists free of charge and thus promote dramaturgy in Russia (the playwright undertook this task roughly ten years before his death and never quit that altruistic endeavor²⁹), writes, in particular: "Возник на горизонте молодой Г. Лукин из Самары с пьесой «Чужая душа — дремучий лес», и Островский безвозмездно взялся за ее переделку, носился с ней всюду, проча в репертуар Малого театра, соблазнял ею актеров."³⁰

Without going into further details about Lukin or his plays, let me say that the impressive evidence of Ostrovsky's year-long attention to my great-granddad's drama made me feel eternally grateful to the father of Russian theatre for his care and concern for my relatives and obligated enough to undertake this writing, the aim of which, as I stated earlier, is to make Ostrovsky better understood in the West. Those sentiments, it needs to be said, are characteristic of Russian nature and constitute, at least partially, the concept of Russian Orthodoxy and therefore Russianness, which will be the key construct in my research.

²⁸ Editorial comments to the letters by Ostrovsky, *ibid.*, p. 325–326. "Your esteemed newspaper published, among other announcements, one on the publication of volume 12 of the *Kolosya* edited by I. A. Batalin. The table of contents of this volume lists, among other entries, *The Heart of Another Is a Dark Forest*, a drama in four acts and five scenes, written by Lukin and reworked by A. N. Ostrovsky. Through your esteemed newspaper, I would like to let it publicly known that my late husband did not rework the aforementioned play by Mr. Lukin, who should hence reserve to himself exclusively all the rights and privileges as the author of the play in question."

²⁹ See footnotes 302 to 304 and the text to which they refer.

³⁰ Lakshin, p. 666. "A young G. Lukin from Samara appeared on Ostrovsky's horizon, with a play *The Heart of Another Is a Dark Forest*; and Ostrovsky set out to rework it free of charge, fussed over it, intending it for the Maly repertory, and enticed actors with it."

CHAPTER I OPPOSING APPROACHES IN THE OSTROVSKY CRITICISM

Periodization of the criticism

I believe (and will attempt to prove in this work) that in order to understand Ostrovsky's entire oeuvre, it is imperative to understand that although he wrote his plays within the traditions and conventions of an emerging realist current, his works are profoundly marked by the Russian Orthodox morality. That said, I would like to trace the evolution of the Ostrovsky criticism as well as to establish the origins of his label as a realist and the reasons why so few have tried to consider the dramatist's works in the light of the Christian theory.

Theatre and literary critics developed a strong interest in Ostrovsky as early as 1849, when *Svoi ljudi — sochtemsia* (It's a Family Affair—We'll Settle It Ourselves), his second play and first full-length drama, appeared. For the next ten years, the primary focus of critical attention was the stageworthiness of Ostrovsky's dramas rather than their intellectual content. With the exception of Apollon Grigoryev, a critic, poet, translator, author of memoirs and essays on philosophy in art, and, since 1849, Ostrovsky's close friend, practically nobody paid any special attention to the playwright's agenda and life views. Grigoryev's dithyrambs and praise for Ostrovsky's pieces, which started to appear towards the close of the ten-year period, remained rather obscure and localized as they were published in minor periodicals. They remained considerably less influential than the criticism headed and inspired by Nikolay Dobrolyubov (1836–1861), who was the first to pronounce Ostrovsky a writer of realism. However, Grigoryev's criticism is invaluable for my thesis and deserves special attention; it will be discussed in detail at the end of this chapter.

The break in the lull occurred in 1859, and a drastic escalation of the debate around Ostrovsky's work followed, quickly reaching overheated levels. According to Igor Sukhikh, a post-Soviet Ostrovsky critic and researcher, systematic literary study of the Russian playwright

started that year³¹ with the publication of “Temnoe tsarstvo” (The Dark Kingdom),³² an influential essay by Dobrolyubov. Instead of offering a performative review of Ostrovsky’s dramas, it looked into the problems of his metanarratives. The essay stirred so much controversy around Ostrovsky that, in Russia, has not settled down to this day. “Temnoe tsarstvo” was intended as a response to Grigoryev’s understanding of literary art in general and Ostrovsky’s work in particular, and its arrival proved that, however limited in reach Grigoryev’s essays on Ostrovsky might have been, somebody was listening and paying attention. Ostrovsky’s art became a perfect battle arena for two opposing schools of thought in Russia at the time (and, actually, still very much alive there today). It served not only as a problem in itself but also, and maybe predominantly so, as an illustration in the tug-of-war in which the two quickly growing warring camps, the Montagues and Capulets of mid-nineteenth-century Russia, were involved.

Before discussing the Ostrovsky criticism proper, the historicity of the circumstances needs to be explained. Nineteenth-century Russia was an ideological and philosophical battlefield for many opposing sets of ideas: materialism vs. idealism; religion (particularly Russian Orthodoxy, a chapter on which follows) vs. atheism; collective mentality vs. individual enterprise; liberalism vs. conservatism; and Westernism vs. Slavophilism. The latter binary, having partaken of all others in various degrees, was primarily responsible for shaping the Montagues and Capulets of the Ostrovsky criticism.

³¹ Igor’ Nikolaevich Sukhikh, “I davnii-davnii spor...” (An Old, Old Debate), in Mikhail Iakovlevich Bilinkis et al. (eds.), *Russkaia tragediia: p’esa A. N. Ostrovskogo “Gроза” v russkoi kritike i literaturovedenii* (A Russian Tragedy: Ostrovsky’s Play *The Thunderstorm* in Russian Criticism and Literary Studies) (St. Petersburg: Azbuka-klassika, 2002), pp. 7–34, at p. 7.

³² Nikolai Aleksandrovich Dobrolyubov, “Temnoe tsarstvo,” in Lev Iosifovich Sobolev (comp.), *Biblioteka russkoi kritiki: kritika 50-kh godov XIX veka* (A Library of Russian Criticism: Criticism of the 1850s) (Moscow: AST/Olimp, 2002), pp. 115–159.

The Westerners (e.g., Belinsky, Dobrolyubov, Herzen, and Chernyshevsky³³) believed that Russia should unswervingly follow the path paved by other European countries in their development, while the Slavophiles (e.g., Kireevsky, Khomyakov, Samarin, and Ivan Aksakov³⁴) underscored Russia's uniqueness and its right to choose its own way. The Westerners praised Peter the Great,³⁵ who strongly supported Russia's convergence with the rest of Europe and whose policies and numerous reforms were meant to overcome the country's backwardness, securing its industrial and technological advancement. For instance, Peter made university education obligatory for the upper classes, but since none was available at home, the offspring of the gentry had to be sent abroad and then return with a diploma to serve their country. As a result of his rule, Russia saw many impressive achievements and started to catch up with the West, but there were also a number of losses that the Slavophiles would later lament: the language of the nobility switched to German first and then to French, relegating Russian to the status of a foreign language at best; the old Russian patriarchal piety quickly disappeared among the upper classes; religious practices became neglected or perfunctory; concepts of collective mentality were sacrificed for a more individual approach to life; and personal entrepreneurial skills emerged where humble inactivity prescribed by the Church used to be.

The Westerners applauded all of Peter I's reforms as highly progressive and liberal, whereas the Slavophiles blamed the first Russian emperor for expunging the Russian national identity and forgetting the tenets of Russian Orthodoxy that formed its basis. The Westerners

³³ Vissarion Belinsky (1811–48), a prominent literary critic; Alexander Herzen (1812–70), a pro-Western Russian writer and thinker, whom Vladimir Lenin called “the father of Russian socialism”; Nikolay Chernyshevsky (1828–89), a Russian revolutionary democrat and materialistic philosopher.

³⁴ Ivan Kireevsky (1806–56), a literary critic and philosopher, one of Slavophilism's founding fathers; Aleksey Khomyakov (1804–60), a poet and religious philosopher; Yury Samarin (1819–76), a historian and philosopher; Ivan Aksakov (1823–86), a poet, critic, and publisher.

³⁵ Also known as Peter I (1672–1725), this member of the Romanov dynasty ruled since 1668 and was crowned as the first Russian emperor in 1721.

accused the Slavophiles of a desire to go back to the stone age, while the Slavophiles, waving the flag of patriotism, insisted on preserving national traditions and decried selling out to the West.

Dostoevsky³⁶ summarizes the tug-of-war between the two camps in the following way:

Западники, составив себе теорию западноевропейской общечеловеческой жизни и встретясь с вовсе непохожей на нее русской жизнью, заранее осудили эту жизнь. Славянофилы, приняв за норму старый московский идеальчик, *тоже зараз* осудили в русской жизни всё, что не укладывалось в их узкую рамку.³⁷

Nevertheless, gravitating towards Slavophilism, he opines that “национальность заключается в породе, в вере, в языке, в народных обычаях, в истории и пр.”³⁸

Laura Engelstein writes:

As part of their critique of European civilization, with its increasingly secular and rationalist ethos, the Slavophiles had a different view. These religiously oriented thinkers from cultivated gentry families interpreted what they imagined to be the routine quality of village devotion as a sign of its closeness to the source of inspiration, an internalized piety untroubled by the torments of reflection. They celebrated the folk style as an organic and nationally distinctive understanding of the faith, from which, they believed, the Europeanized elite had grown distant. The impact of their ideas can be felt in the persistent identification of Orthodoxy in general and the Russian tradition in particular with the innate spirituality they admired.

[...]he Slavophile vision has often been interpreted as an accurate reflection of what Orthodoxy meant for ordinary believers.³⁹

Ostrovsky's dramas presented a perfect arena for epic philosophical clashes. The Westerners, following Dobrolyubov's main argument that Ostrovsky was first and foremost a realist writer who drew a castigating satirical picture of the Dark Kingdom of contemporary life,

³⁶ Throughout this paper (except in bibliographic footnotes), Fyodor Dostoevsky is referred to as simply Dostoevsky, while his brother Mikhail Dostoevsky (see footnote 47) is always referred to as such.

³⁷ Fedor Mikhailovich Dostoevskii, “Dva lageria teoretikov” (Two Camps of Theorists), in his *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii* (Complete Works; hereafter cited as *PS*), ed. Vasilii Grigor'evich Bazanov et al., 30 vols. (Leningrad: Nauka, 1972–90), vol. 20, pp. 5–22, at pp. 5–6. “The Westerners, having formed a theory of the Western European reality as a universal standard and facing the Russian reality, quite dissimilar to it, were quick to condemn the latter. The Slavophiles, having adopted the idealized ways of old Moscow as the norm, *were also fast* to condemn in the Russian reality anything that didn't fit their narrow framework.”

³⁸ Dostoevskii, “Slavianofily, chernogortsy i zapadniki, samaia posledniaia perepalka” (Slavophiles, Montenegrins, and Westerners: the Latest Squabble), *ibid.*, pp. 23–27, at p. 26. “National identity is in the roots, faith, language, folk customs, history, and so on.”

³⁹ Laura Engelstein, “Old and New, High and Low: Straw Horsemen of Russian Orthodoxy,” in Valerie A. Kivelson and Robert H. Greene (eds.), *Orthodox Russia: Belief and Practice under the Tsars* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2003), pp. 23–32, at p. 24.

appropriated him as a supporter of liberal reforms. The Slavophiles, following Grigoryev's criticism, adorned Ostrovsky with the title of a national poet who lovingly depicted Russianness in his plays. Paraphrasing the famous saying of Alfred North Whitehead from his *Process and Reality*, I would suggest that the safest general characterization of the Ostrovsky criticism is that it consists of a series of footnotes to either Dobrolyubov or Grigoryev. The dispute over a materialistic vs. idealistic understanding of the playwright's oeuvre deviated but slightly from the two initial groundbreaking sources. Where Dobrolyubov saw negativity, a protest, and sharp criticism of the Russian reality (whether accompanied by suggestions for a democratic change or not), Grigoryev saw a warm and affectionate commentary on, or rather illustration of, life with its infinite mysteries, life that is unknown and unknowable, life that never repeats a phenomenon or scenario twice. The two prevalent movements, divided according to the basic viewpoints of their respective progenitors (Ostrovsky: a realistic satirist or a national poet?), would dominate the Ostrovsky criticism, albeit in very uneven proportions, tilting resolutely towards the materialistic school of thought, for almost a century and a half, until a comprehensive collection of Grigoryev's works was published around 2001 and the scale gingerly started straightening.

The questions that need to be answered in negotiating Ostrovsky's place in Russian and maybe in world literature and drama include the following: What is a realist writer and was Ostrovsky one? What is a Christian writer and can the Russian dramatist be called one? and, Can there be a single theory to embrace all of Ostrovsky's plays without any omissions?

Russian criticism on Ostrovsky is divided into three periods: pre-Soviet (1849–1917), Soviet (1917–1991), and post-Soviet (1991 to the present). The periodization of Western criticism is somewhat different, but it is still generally colored and influenced by the same brackets. In the introduction to her monograph on Ostrovsky,⁴⁰ a Western scholar Kate Sealey

⁴⁰ Kate Sealey Rahman, *Ostrovsky: Reality and Illusion* (Birmingham, UK: University of Birmingham, 1999).

Rahman offers an extensive survey of Russian and Western research on the playwright. Rahman, whose primary focus is textual analysis of Ostrovsky's dramas (a less popular field of research as most critics tend to discuss their stageworthiness), does not hesitate to divide the critics into two opposing camps and group them accordingly. Not to repeat what she has covered so well, I will focus on the criticism that the author has omitted as irrelevant for her own argument, but that is absolutely essential for mine.

In the pre-Soviet period, Ostrovsky's moralistic writing style was noticed by only a handful of critics (e.g., Modest Pisarev equates "небесная гроза" with "гроза нравственная, еще более ужасная"⁴¹); the primary focus firmly rested on the typicality and verisimilitude of his dramas:

Признавая главным достоинством художественного произведения жизненную правду его, мы тем самым указываем и мерку, которою определяется для нас степень достоинства и значения каждого литературного явления. Судя по тому, как глубоко проникает взгляд писателя в самую сущность явления, как широко захватывает он в своих изображениях различные стороны жизни,— можно решить и то, как велик его талант. [...] Верность действительности, жизненная правда постоянно соблюдаются в произведениях Островского и стоят на первом плане, впереди всяких задач и задних мыслей.⁴²

These words were written by Dobrolyubov (whom Boris Varneke labels "a militant progressive critic" (p. 326))—a radical who belonged to the democratic-revolutionary trend, was deeply dissatisfied with the existing regime, and sought one more appealing to broad masses. He enjoyed tremendous influence and respect among his contemporaries and beyond. Dobrolyubov openly criticized Russia's backwardness, blaming the Church as at least partly responsible for it.

⁴¹ Modest Ivanovich Pisarev, "Groza: drama A. N. Ostrovskogo" (*Groza: A Drama by Ostrovsky*), in Bilinkis, pp. 184–196, at p. 193. "The heavenly storm serves merely as a parallel to the still more dreadful moral storm" (Pisarev as quoted in Boris Varneke, *History of the Russian Theatre*, trans. Boris Brasol, ed. Belle Martin (New York: Macmillan, 1951), p. 325.

⁴² Dobrolyubov, p. 128. "Considering vital truth the principal merit of an artistic work, we thus define the standard which determines the merit and the significance of every literary phenomenon. By evaluating how deeply the author penetrates the very essence of a phenomenon, how broadly he encompasses in his images the various aspects of life, we become able to determine the greatness of his talent. [...] Faithfulness to reality, to living truth, is invariably observed in Ostrovsky's works; it stands in the foreground above all aims and behind all thoughts" (Dobrolyubov as quoted in Varneke, p. 326).

He classified Ostrovsky as a writer of realism, praising his truthful depiction of the oppressive social conditions of his time. In doing so the critic chose to overlook the playwright's devotion and adherence to Christian doctrines. While overstating the satirical aspect of Ostrovsky's dramas, he downplayed their Christian moral assumptions almost to the level of nonexistence.

Grigory Vladynkin, a leading Soviet critic on Ostrovsky, offers a definitive summary of the pre-Soviet criticism. Clearly distinguishing the two warring groups of Ostrovsky's critics, he calls the first camp that of democratic revolutionaries, restyling it as "Marxist-Leninist" for the post-1917 period, and consistently refers to the second one as that of bourgeois reactionaries, whether before, during, or after the Bolshevik Revolution.⁴³ The first camp stems from Dobrolyubov. (Dobrolyubov was the preferred authority for materialists and Westerners: he was believed to have understood the great Russian playwright in the only correct way, even though he could not qualify as the herald of the ultimate truth about Ostrovsky simply because he had died before Marx and Engels's doctrines saw the light.⁴⁴) According to Vladynkin, the first camp in the pre-Soviet period included Chernyshevsky, Plekhanov, Nekrasov, Goncharov, Antonovich, and, at least partially, Lunacharsky,⁴⁵ who believed that Ostrovsky was harshly criticizing the Dark Kingdom of pre-reform Russia and calling for radical changes in favor of the people.

The second camp had Grigoryev's "крайне узкое и совершенно ложное истолкование"⁴⁶ of Ostrovsky's writing as its ideological source. Its members, Pogodin,

⁴³ Grigorii Ivanovich Vladynkin, introduction to Vladynkin (ed.), *A. N. Ostrovskii v russkoi kritike* (Ostrovsky in Russian Criticism) (Moscow: Goslitizdat, 1953), pp. 3–6.

⁴⁴ Georgy Plekhanov (1856–1918), an eminent Marxist philosopher and politician, says as much in an essay on the topic (Georgii Valentinovich Plekhanov, "Dobrolyubov i Ostrovskii" (Dobrolyubov and Ostrovsky), in Vladynkin, pp. 394–423, at p. 423).

⁴⁵ Nikolay Nekrasov (1821–77), a democratic poet, literary critic, and publisher; Ivan Goncharov (1812–91), a novelist; Maksim Antonovich (1835–1918), a materialistic philosopher and literary critic; Anatoly Lunacharsky (1875–1933), a writer, critic, and post-1917 statesman.

⁴⁶ Vladynkin, p. 6. "An extremely narrow and utterly false interpretation."

Khomyakov, Rostopchina, Mikhail Dostoevsky, Odoevsky, and Kogan,⁴⁷ felt that Ostrovsky's philosophy intertwined with Slavophilism and that his depictions of injustice spoke to human conscience rather than hoisted the red banner of social change. Writings from the first camp were published and republished during the Soviet era, while those from the second one, including Grigoryev's (who, according to Vladikin, was Ostrovsky's short-lived friend, constantly unhappy with the playwright's dramas (p. 19)), were unavailable to the general public and even to most scholars, being kept in library archives whose use required special permission.

According to Sukhikh, the debate between the two camps reached its peak after Ostrovsky's *Groza* premiered in Moscow. The assessments and analyses of that particular piece were as disparate as night and day: "В одном случае она была прочитана как жесткая социальная драма, а в другом — как высокая поэтическая трагедия."⁴⁸

Dobrolyubov's camp grew enormously during the Soviet period (recruiting such names as Alexander Revyakin, Yuri Lebedev, Anna Zhuravlyova, Natan Tamarchenko, Asya Dubinskaya, Sergey Durylin, Efim Kholodov, and Tatyana Moskvina) as all critics published in the Soviet Union built their argument on Dobrolyubov's materialistic approach to Ostrovsky and his assessment criterion, adding various degrees of the Marxist ideology to the main recipe. They abstained from looking at Ostrovsky's philosophy as a writer through the lens of Christian teachings and his interpretation of the Bible. The playwright's talent for characterization was attributed to an ability to draw true-to-life pictures from his surroundings rather than to a desire to look deep into human nature and locate its roots in faith or lack thereof. Disregarding factual biographical evidence and following Dobrolyubov's lead, Revyakin, arguably the leading Soviet

⁴⁷ Mikhail Dostoevsky (1820–64), Fyodor Dostoevsky's older brother; a critic and publisher; Vladimir Odoevsky (1803–69), a writer, journalist, and musicologist; Pyotr Kogan (1872–1932), a literary critic and historian. Pogodin and Rostopchina will be discussed in some detail in chapter III.

⁴⁸ Sukhikh, "Davnii spor," p. 24. "In one case, it was read as an unrelenting social drama, and in the other, as a lofty poetic tragedy."

expert on Ostrovsky and an author of several monographs (at least some of which have seen revised editions⁴⁹), resolutely pronounces Ostrovsky a materialist, and a progressive one at that:

Принципы реализма, народности и историзма служили Островскому ключом для решения любых литературно-эстетических проблем [...].

[...] По мысли Островского, суд над жизнью, борьба против отживших ее форм и утверждение новых должны вылиться в подлинно народном произведении [...].⁵⁰

This statement is equally characteristic of every Soviet critic who was published between 1917 and 1991. Under socialism, Grigoryev's camp was by far the less numerous, as the forefather of the idealistic view on Ostrovsky was himself almost completely censored. During the Soviet era, Grigoryevians were almost exclusively comprised of Western scholars, some of whom had Russian roots.

Kaspin was probably the first to even suggest certain parallelism between Ostrovsky's and Dostoevsky's writings and characters. In one of his articles,⁵¹ he acknowledges similarities between the two men of letters, one of whom is already labeled as a Christian writer by at least half of his critics. By comparing Dostoevsky's Maslobojev and Ostrovsky's Dosuzhev, Kaspin at least singles out a connection between the two writers, and possibly even a legacy, even though he never looks at the two characters vis-à-vis Christian teachings. He mentions the same denominator—Apollon Grigoryev, a pious Christian—as their mutual trusted acquaintance who shared both writers' views ("Dostoyevsky's philosophic ideas round about the time also reflected his association with A. A. Grigor'yev, Ostrovsky's long-time friend and most enthusiastic champion" (p. 225)), which would indicate that Kaspin is looking in the same direction as

⁴⁹ For example, his *Iskusstvo dramaturgii A. N. Ostrovskogo* (The Art of Ostrovsky's Dramaturgy) (Moscow: Prosveshchenie, 1974) is a revised edition of the same monograph first published in 1949.

⁵⁰ Aleksandr Ivanovich Reviakin, *Iskusstvo dramaturgii*, pp. 41–42. "The principles of realism, national identity, and historicism served to Ostrovsky as the key for solving any literary and aesthetic problems [...]. In Ostrovsky's mind, the judgment on life, the struggle against its obsolete forms, and the establishment of new ones should express themselves in a truly democratic piece [...]."

⁵¹ Albert Kaspin, "Dostoevsky's Maslobojev and Ostrovsky's Dosuzhev: A Parallel," *The Slavonic and East European Review*, vol. 39, pp. 222–226.

myself, indirectly supporting my theory that Ostrovsky was first and foremost a Christian writer, just as Dostoevsky was. Additional parallels between Ostrovsky's and Dostoevsky's creations are established by Kaspin in two more articles.⁵² The first one compares Milashin from *Bednaia nevesta* (The Poor Bride) to the Underground Man, while the second one draws a connection between Lyubim Tortsov (from Ostrovsky's *Bednost' ne porok* (Poverty Is No Crime)) and Dostoevsky's humiliated and downtrodden characters.

Irene Esam (later known as Irene Zohrab), who wrote several essays on Ostrovsky in the 1960s and 1970s, seeks to disassociate herself from both camps, looking for her own approach to understanding the playwright.

Because Ostrovsky consistently resolved the conflicts of his plays according to a certain basic pattern, one must conclude that this pattern must have been determined by his subjective understanding and interpretation of the world and of life and this, in turn, provides evidence that he must have held a fatalistic world-view. This conclusion would no doubt be disclaimed by Soviet critics, who consider Ostrovsky an optimist with a life-affirming Welt-Anschauung.⁵³

Since Esam does not name those Soviet critics, her supposition remains questionable. I failed to locate any Soviet critic who did not adhere to Dobrolyubov's label for Ostrovsky—that of a critical, therefore negative, portrayal of the Dark Kingdom. It is possible, however, that the author means Russian, rather than Soviet, researchers. In that case, Esam's argument that Ostrovsky was a fatalist plucks him out of the materialist/realist camp and thus moves him closer to the Grigoryevians. However, "a fatalistic world-view" certainly contradicts any and all concepts of Russian Orthodoxy, and Christianity in general, as it negates its cornerstone notion of free will. In this sense, Esam's classification goes against my argument. Still, I find the very

⁵² "A Superfluous Man and an Underground Man in Ostrovskij's *The Poor Bride*," *The Slavic and East European Journal*, vol. 6, no. 4 (Winter 1962), pp. 312–321; and "A Re-examination of Ostrovsky's Character Lyubim Tortsov," in Zbigniew Folejewski et al. (eds.), *Studies in Russian and Polish Literature in Honor of Wacław Lednicki* (The Hague: Mouton, 1962).

⁵³ Irene Esam, "An Analysis of Ostrovsky's *Ne ot mira sего* and the Play's Significance in relation to the Author's Other Works," *New Zealand Slavonic Journal*, Summer 1969, pp. 69–91, at p. 69.

impulse to break away from Dobrolyubov's army, with its imposition of realistic materialism on Ostrovsky, a positive sign. I firmly believe that *fatum* is never present in the playwright's pieces and that the outcomes of his characters' actions are guided by the scriptures and not predetermined by fate: you sin, you get punished; you repent, you receive salvation; you struggle and suffer if you so choose, and, as prescribed by the Bible, you will get to the Kingdom of Heaven. I have found no indication in Ostrovsky's dramas that individual destiny is preset. On the contrary, his *dramatis personae* choose their lives and get their just deserts accordingly.

The post-Soviet period of the Ostrovsky criticism is still incipient, but the seventeen years after the collapse of the Soviet Union have already yielded several promising names. Lakshin, Mildon, and Shalimova in Russia, as well as Robert Whittaker abroad, all diverge from Dobrolyubov's supporters and come closer (in varying degrees) to Grigoryev's interpretation of Ostrovsky.

Of importance for my argument is a post-Soviet essay on religious motifs in Ostrovsky's works, authored in 1997 by Tatyana Moskvina.⁵⁴ The very fact that this issue was broached so soon after the collapse of the Soviet regime and the attempt, no matter how feeble, to link Ostrovsky's writing to religious themes are definitely commendable. The content of the essay, however, is surprisingly materialistic, not to say mechanistic. Moskvina does not appear to have read the Bible or understood Christian doctrines. Her entire approach is based on counting how many times words with religious content (e.g., *God, faith, holy, heaven*) are used in Ostrovsky's plays. Moskvina tries to come up with a scientific definition of God as mentioned in the playwright's dramas. This endeavor reveals an utterly pragmatic and utilitarian approach to

⁵⁴ Tat'iana Vladimirovna Moskvina, "Evolutsiia religioznykh tem i motivov v tvorchestve A. N. Ostrovskogo: ot 'Semeinoi kartiny' do 'Grozy'" (The Evolution of Religious Themes and Topics in Ostrovsky's Oeuvre: From *The Family Picture* to *Groza*), in Bilinkis, pp. 416–442.

religion, which, to a believer like Ostrovsky, naturally borders on nonsensical. Attempts to dissect faith as one would dissect a frog have never been successful.

Moskvina insists, for example, that Ostrovsky depicts not only the Christian God but a number of other gods, including, but not limited to, pagan gods (a supposition that could be technically correct if one were to discuss the form, and not the content, of *Snegurochka* but is still inadmissible as evidence in her paper: *Snegurochka* was written much later than *Groza*, which is the cutoff play of Moskvina's essay); a household god; a comfortable quotidian god, who is treated as a next-door neighbor; a god-buddy, one's own, personal Jesus; and the like.

After stating that Ostrovsky accepted Russian Orthodoxy as it was, without questioning any of its postulates, Moskvina advances a dubious argument that, unlike him, Tolstoy or Dostoevsky were reformers. While not contesting her opinion on Ostrovsky and Tolstoy, let me express serious doubts about the reformatory nature of Dostoevsky's writing. The proof of the pudding is, again, in its eating. By the Holy Synod's decree of February 19, 1901, Leo Tolstoy was excommunicated from the Russian Orthodox Church, never to be reinstated again—even posthumously, after numerous petitions by his descendents. No such action was ever taken against Dostoevsky, which sufficiently proves that the Church did not find his writings blasphemous, offensive, or dangerous. I believe that Dostoevsky always preferred a philosophical approach to theological one, simply to make sure that his ideas reach as many people as possible. Such an approach necessitated the use of dialectics in some instances or the tactics of *reductio ad absurdum* in others. Without going too deep into the explanation of the novelist's multi-voiced, polyphonic narrative, which Bakhtin explained so well, let me just say that such narratives can be somewhat confusing to a person whose knowledge of Christianity in general and Russian Orthodoxy in particular is fragmentary. Moskvina, for example, erroneously calls Dostoevsky's Raskolnikov a deeply religious man (p. 424), probably because every once in a

while he uses the word *God* in his speech. Coming back to Moskvina's argument, the theological ignorance of the essay renders itself unacceptable for the purposes of the present work.

In one of his two books researched for this paper,⁵⁵ Mildon claims that Ostrovsky was misunderstood by his contemporaries. He states that most critics, from Dobrolyubov forward, erroneously saw him as a writer of everyday comedy of manners. The author also believes that Dobrolyubov was mistaken in fastening Ostrovsky firmly to the historical context of his time (p. 205). Mildon's ontological approach to Ostrovsky breaks the playwright free from his chronological limits within which many critics, e.g., Nikolay Shelgunov and Yuli Aikhenvald, confine him (p. 196). Mildon acknowledges that Ostrovsky did in fact depict Russian everydayness (p. 6), but it was a mere backdrop, a vehicle for discussing his life philosophy. Mildon's conclusion would seem to support my argument that verisimilitude in the playwright's portrayal of Russian people's lives should be considered a vessel, a form that contains a moral fable. I also tend to agree with Mildon's assessment that Ostrovsky was never simply a man of theatre, for whom theatre was an end in itself (p. 9). Theatre, as will be shown below, was only a platform for expressing the dramatist's point of view, and a highly accessible platform at that. It was a means of getting his ideas across, reaching out to the hearts and souls of his fellow Russians.

Mildon's approach, even though he steers clear of calling the dramatist a Christian writer, forms a necessary bridge to understanding the Russian playwright and allows us to take the next logical step. Mildon's forceful "Повторяю, без быта не обойтись, но существование человека не ограничивается его физической жизнью, не помещается только в

⁵⁵ Valerii Il'ich Mil'don, *Filosofiia russkoi dramy: mir Ostrovskogo* (The Philosophy of Russian Drama: Ostrovsky's World) (Moscow: ROSSPEN, 2007).

материальные границы, сколько бы широкими те ни были”⁵⁶ clearly implies the critic’s realization that Ostrovsky’s primary concern lies in the spiritual, non-materialistic—ergo non-realist—plane.

Echoing Esam, Mildon misplaces Ostrovsky among writers with a fatalistic life philosophy, giving as evidence the fact that no matter what the dramatist’s characters do, their lives remain tragic and lacking happiness (p. 39). I believe that fatalism as a signature of Romantic authors is not present in Ostrovsky’s plays. While emphasizing the weakness of human nature and its natural gravitation towards sin, the playwright still insists that if an individual takes it upon himself to avoid transgressions as much as possible and, exercising his free will, decides to change for the better, such a metamorphosis becomes entirely possible. This happens to Pyotr in *Ne tak živi, kak khochetsia* (Don’t Live as You Please), Tit Titych in *V chuzhomu piru pokhmel’e* (Drunk at Another Man’s Feast), Dosuzhev in *Tiazhelye dni* (The Trying Times), Milovidov in *Na boikom meste* (At the Crossroads), Nikolay Shablov in *Pozdniaia liubov’* (Late Love), Valentina in *Bogatye nevesty* (Rich Brides), Erast in *Serditse ne kamen’* (A Heart Is not a Stone), Vitaly Kochuev in *Ne ot mira sego* (Not of This World), Shalygin in the second version⁵⁷ of *Voevoda* (Voevode (a military and civil governor)). The fact that these plays are not clustered around a particular period in Ostrovsky’s work, but cover almost thirty years, from 1855 to 1884, supports the supposition that the playwright was firm in his belief that people may choose to improve themselves and not to follow a predestined path. The mere presence of these nine characters undermines Mildon’s emphasis on fatalism.

⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 6. “I repeat, it is impossible to do away with everydayness altogether, but man’s existence is not limited by his physical life; it does not fit solely between materialistic bookends, no matter how accommodating they could be.”

⁵⁷ *Voevoda*’s first (1865) and second (1885) versions are complete plays; they both have been staged and appear in Ostrovskii, PSS, as distinct texts.

It is remarkable that at the very end of his monograph Mildon himself verbalizes the contention that Ostrovsky could be considered a Christian, rather than fatalistic, writer:

Человек не мал, ибо его действиями управляет сверхлогика («воля Божья» Бакунина), выше всех меркантильных расчетов и логики мира сего. Это «сверх» и делает человека бóльшим, чем он есть от природы, возносит его над фатально обреченным материальным планом бытия. До Островского в русской литературе *так* на эту вечную тему не говорили, после же него это сказал Достоевский. Впрочем, линия Островский — Достоевский еще совсем не исследована.⁵⁸

A certain confusion in terminology that is revealed in Mildon's monograph might be attributed to the fact that the post-Soviet period is still very young; renowned scholars got their education in the Soviet era, which left a certain mark on their ideology and philosophy. Back then, even reading the scriptures on one's own was a difficult proposition at best; studying them under expert supervision, next to impossible. It is quite probable that Mildon uses the relevant terms loosely, to simply suggest that Ostrovsky's primary interest lies in the realm of the spiritual as opposed to materialistic.

Shalimova acknowledges the Dobrolyubov–Grigoryev dichotomy (a writer of manners in the Dark Kingdom vs. a poet of Russian national quintessence (*Russkii mir*, p. 3)) and the division of all later criticism according to whose point of view the scholar chose to accept. She believes that there is something rational in both views and does not discard either. However, her intention to reconcile both critical perspectives (p. 4), I believe, places Ostrovsky in a precarious position, between the two chairs, as it were. By giving him middle ground (between Westerners and Slavophiles (p. 9); between materialists and idealists; between liberals who screamed for social change and guardians of the old piety, national spirit, and traditions), by not anchoring him to a definite life philosophy, Shalimova seems to be doing Ostrovsky a disservice, although

⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 186. "Man is not small as his actions are guided by superlogic ('God's will' in Bakunin's terms), which is higher than any mercantile intentions and the logic of this world. This very 'super' is what makes man bigger than he is by nature and elevates him above the fatalistic doom of material plane of being. Nobody looked at this eternal theme *in such a way* before Ostrovsky; after him Dostoevsky did. However, the Ostrovsky–Dostoevsky parallel has not been explored at all."

her intentions—to make him equally accessible to the West and the East—are definitely highly commendable. If Shalimova's statement distinguished between Ostrovsky's materialistic/realistic form and his idealistic/religious content, I would support it without reservation.

Shalimova believes that every single piece by Ostrovsky is bigger than life and opens the door to transcendental truths of which it is but a single illustration (p. 12), and further insists that Ostrovsky's main interest lies in the idealistic sphere, the spirituality of man, rather than in the materialistic/realistic realm (p. 35). Shalimova comes closer than anybody else to directly calling Ostrovsky a Christian writer. In her three books on him,⁵⁹ she discusses the playwright's focus on the divine and the Bible, but, probably for the same reason as Mildon, she does not feel comfortable drawing direct parallels between biblical teachings and parables and Ostrovsky's plays.

To summarize: up until now, not a single critic, scholar, or researcher has placed Ostrovsky definitively in the pleiad of Christian morality writers. On the contrary, most of Ostrovsky scholars deny him this opportunity. A Christian writer, in my understanding, is one who is guided by biblical doctrines in his assessments and characterization and promotes Christian morality in his oeuvre. The category is by no means new and has been acknowledged by scholars with regard to Russia. For instance, Donald W. Treadgold writes that “[d]uring the reign of Nicholas II there were indications that some of the best intellectuals were finding their way back to church” and maintains that even former Marxists renounced materialism and went back to Orthodoxy:

Struve, Berdiaev, Bulgakov, and others made their own individual passage from Marxism to “idealism” (that is, philosophical idealism) and then to Russian Orthodoxy. [...] The same current has been resumed in our time, partly as a result of the work of a series of

⁵⁹ In addition to the one already cited, these are *Teatral'nye osnovy tvorchestva A. N. Ostrovskogo* (Theatrical Foundations of Ostrovsky's Creative Work) (St. Petersburg: Vsemirnaia literatura, 2001) and *Chelovek v khudozhestvennom mire A. N. Ostrovskogo* (Man in the Universe Created by Ostrovsky) (Yaroslavl, Russia: YaGTU, 2007).

outstanding Christian writers of the Soviet period: Akhmatova, Mandelshtam, Pasternak, Tarsis, Solzhenitsyn. (In fact the list may be lengthened.)⁶⁰

Without challenging the validity of the inclusion of certain authors in the list of Christian writers, I would like to draw attention to the acknowledgement of the fact that the category of such writers definitely existed (and quite possibly still exists) in Russia.

Beasley believes that Ostrovsky “preached no gospel save the eternal verities of truth and honour, saturated to the full with the greatest virtue of all” (p. 616). Rahman offers no discussion of religious matters in her monograph, nor does Lucy Cox in her unpublished dissertation⁶¹ on Ostrovsky. There is no specific discourse linking the playwright to matters of faith in the works of any pre-Soviet or Soviet critics.

In his article on Lyubim Tortsov, Kaspin compares him with Dostoevsky’s miserable characters and establishes, albeit indirectly, a connection between the two Christian writers of the nineteenth century, thus placing Ostrovsky closer to that group than anyone else ever did. Without tracing it to the biblical proverb (“These six things doth the Lord hate; yea, seven are an abomination unto him: a proud look, a lying tongue, and hands that shed innocent blood, a heart that deviseth wicked imaginations, feet that be swift in running to mischief, a false witness that speaketh lies, and he that soweth discord among brethren” (Proverbs 6:16–19)), Kaspin brings forth an important aspect of the truth that is perceived and even at times uttered by Lyubim Tortsov. Lyubim refuses to mask the essence of things for the sake of social acceptance, i.e., he refuses to lie. In him, the imperfect inner is fully congruent with the outer.

In Lyubim Tortsov, Ostrovsky portrayed one of the misfits of a period of social change. His Lyubim stands out as a robust complement to Dostoevsky’s early introverted,

⁶⁰ Donald W. Treadgold, “Russian Orthodoxy and Society,” in Robert L. Nichols and Theofanis George Stavrou (eds.), *Russian Orthodoxy under the Old Regime* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1978), pp. 21–43, at p. 39.

⁶¹ Lucy Cox, “Form and Meaning in the Plays of A. N. Ostrovskij” (Ph.D. diss., University of Pennsylvania, 1975).

mentally-disturbed characters. Part of his appeal lies in his quixotic devotion to ideals, coupled with his ability to become a Sancho Panza to help achieve them.⁶²

Moreover, what Kaspin calls a Sancho Panza ability is what Russian Orthodoxy would call the ability to sacrifice oneself for the sake of others, which is a cornerstone notion of that confession.

Maurice Valency acknowledges the fact that Ostrovsky's plays are predominantly moralistic in character (even though he does not specifically link them to Christian morality), which is "the result of his habit of juxtaposing extreme types in situations designed to demonstrate the triumph of virtue and the inconvenience of vice."⁶³ Esam never directly acknowledges that Ostrovsky should be considered a Christian writer; however, she mentions the presence of allusions to Russian Orthodoxy in his writing. Analyzing a particular drama, *Svoi liudi* — *sochtemsia*, Esam writes:

Continual religious allusions, used in such a way as to undermine and disfigure their true sense and sometimes serve as direct blasphemy, have the effect of bringing out the characters' hypocrisy and lack of moral principles. Instead of depicting a traditional, patriarchal merchant milieu, based on the christian principles of a free individual personality, sacrifice, honesty and justice, Ostrovsky presents a picture of an amoral milieu based on seeming christianity which is, in effect, a distortion and negation of christianity.⁶⁴

Esam's "seeming Christianity" vs. true Christianity is another way of presenting Ostrovsky favorite metanarrative—the opposition of the inner and the outer, guilt and shame—which will be discussed in chapter III.

Even though it seems logical to assume that Grigoryev would be the one critic to refer to the Christian nature of Ostrovsky's writing, no such reference could be found in his essays, at least not in so many words. There is, however, enough evidence (presented at the end of this

⁶² Kaspin, "Re-examination of Lyubim Tortsov," p. 191.

⁶³ Maurice Valency, *The Breaking String: The Plays of Anton Chekhov* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1966), p. 35.

⁶⁴ Esam, "The Style of *Svoi liudi*—*sochtemsia*," *New Zealand Slavonic Journal*, Summer 1972, pp. 79–105, at p. 80.

chapter) to presume that this was a self-evident fact for Grigoryev, one that never needed any special elaboration. This paper will attempt to present a fair amount of proof to justify this argument.

Disputing Ostrovsky's realism

Before turning to Grigoryev's criticism, which will be used to underlie my main argument, I feel compelled to perform two preliminary tasks, i.e., that of defining the concept of realism and that of disproving the idea of Ostrovsky's realism. Even though some contemporary Russian scholars step away from regarding the playwright as a realist, in the West he is still strongly believed to be one.

A popular definition of realism as an art genre states that it depicts phenomena and situations as they appear in real life. A Russian textbook definition also holds that it should necessarily be depiction of the typical under typical circumstances as opposed to the exceptional.⁶⁵ As a result, the genre of realism needs to have the work of art firmly placed within the spatial and temporal constraints of the circumstances it portrays. Without contesting the general validity of the term, let me just wonder if such placement might prevent any work from surviving its time and becoming a classic. My general dissatisfaction with the concept of realism will be looked at in the narrowest sense. Not only will I apply it strictly to theatre, and even more precisely to the nineteenth-century Russian theatre, I will also look at it solely through the lens of Ostrovsky's dramas.

⁶⁵ A writer of realism should focus “не на исключительном, а на типичном, массовом, повседневном и обычном” (Georgii Panteleimonovich Makogonenko, *Ot Fonvizina do Pushkina: iz istorii russkogo realizma* (From Fonvizin to Pushkin: From the History of Russian Realism) (Moscow: Khudozhestvennaia literatura, 1969), p. 474)—“not on the exceptional but on the typical, general, common, and ordinary.”

Kenneth Pickering's recently published book offers a more updated definition of realism in theatre. He argues that realism in dramatic world should be viewed as a staging concept rather than a genre-determining construct:

The idea that a work of art can ever re-create or present "reality" is debatable. There are many perceptions as to what constitutes reality: some would see it as the concrete world of time and space that we perceive around us, and would argue that it is relatively easy to represent this on stage; others would maintain that reality is consciousness or some transcendent quality that can only be represented by images and metaphor. Some would take reality to be a dialectical view of the processes of social change, while others have viewed the ultimate reality as being nothingness.⁶⁶

Later, in the same chapter on realism, Pickering offers Brecht's elucidation of the construct, comparing it to naturalism as "one kind of realism":

According to Brecht in the *Messingkauf Dialogues*, the "naturalists" see the world differently from the "realists": "The naturalists depict men as if they were showing a tree to a passer-by. The realists depict men as if they were showing it to a gardener." In practical theatre terms, Brecht's form of Realism, whilst acknowledging the fundamental unreality of theatre, seeks to demonstrate how things grow and change rather than how they appear, whereas Naturalism attempts the illusion of total imitation.⁶⁷

Both passages are, undoubtedly, very helpful to the present-day understanding of realism.

However, for the nineteenth-century Russian reality, only the specificity of time and space is applicable. Pickering actually acknowledges this and insists that this kind of realism should pertain strictly to staging methods: "The most obvious implication of the growth of Realism in the theatre during the first half of the nineteenth century was the desire to construct scenery that provided a simulation of reality as a setting for the **action**" (p. 183).

Consequently, theatrical realism of Ostrovsky's times refers predominantly to providing a verisimilar form to any kind of content—in other words, supplying the plot with believable details that the audience should be able to recognize as familiar. Therefore, if Ostrovsky is to be called a writer of realism, it should necessarily be added that he appears one only in form. The

⁶⁶ Kenneth Pickering, *Key Concepts in Drama and Performance* (Houndmills, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), p. 182.

⁶⁷ Ibid., p. 183.

realism of Ostrovsky should perhaps be more properly called verisimilitude and refer, contrary to what Dobrolyubov and his followers believe, to anything but the content of his dramas. What Dobrolyubov meant by realism, and what was accepted in the Soviet era as the mainstream literary genre, was, of course, a projection of materialism onto a work of art. Nevertheless, with respect to Ostrovsky, not only did this construct survive in Russia for 132 years (from 1859 to 1991), it also spread to the West and has been rarely challenged so far, at least by Ostrovsky scholars.

Two pre-Soviet critics of Ostrovsky (both wrote after the playwright's death) do not agree with Dobrolyubov's assessment of the dramatist as a writer of realism. Alexander Sumbatov-Yuzhin suggests in a 1914 article that anyone can randomly choose any of Ostrovsky's plays and trace threads of romanticism in his writing.⁶⁸ The critic compares Ostrovsky with Shakespeare, finding similarities, for example, in two literary thunderstorms (*King Lear* and *Groza*), which both have more than a mere background meaning. Sumbatov-Yuzhin contests the popular opinion that Ostrovsky should be viewed as a realistic writer of Russian everydayness. He states that the playwright looks beyond typical circumstances and into the very soul of the Russian people. Those who proclaim him a realist are wrong and deprive Ostrovsky of the very core of his writing (pp. 332 and 334).

The other critic to have stepped away from the beaten path of Dobrolyubov's followers is Vsevolod Meyerhold who, in a 1916 essay,⁶⁹ follows Grigoryev's lead and even quotes his article to bring out the aspect of "таинственность" ("mysteriousness"; Meyerhold's term for

⁶⁸ Aleksandr Ivanovich Sumbatov-Yuzhin, "Romantizm i Ostrovskii" (Romanticism and Ostrovsky), in Bilinkis, pp. 331–334, at p. 331.

⁶⁹ Vsevolod Emil'evich Meierkhol'd, "K vozobnovleniiu 'Grozy' A. N. Ostrovskogo na stsene Aleksandrinskogo teatra: rech' rezhissiora k akteram" (On the Occasion of the Revival of Ostrovsky's *The Thunderstorm* on the Alexandrinsky Stage: The Director's Speech to the Actors), in Bilinkis, pp. 335–343.

Grigoryev's "unknowability") of life. One who can successfully convey this mysteriousness or unknowability is, according to Meyerhold, not a satirist but a people's poet (p. 341).

The Soviet era brought no fresh argument to contradict Dobrolyubov, thus solidifying Ostrovsky's place in the ranks of realists. All critics of that period demonstrate a remarkable uniformity of opinion, taking turns in praising Dobrolyubov's assessment. A very slight, barely noticeable variation could perhaps be seen in an article by Lunacharsky where he offers criticism of futurism as the then newest literary tendency.⁷⁰ He says that it is wrong to call it art simply because it offers strong propaganda of communism, with no essence or didactic content (at some point (p. 426), he actually wonders if he is saying something anti-Marxist). He classifies Ostrovsky as *passé* (p. 431) but says that his dramas have always had strong enlightening content (as opposed to critical content that Dobrolyubov insisted upon), in conformity with Horace's dictum "to delight and enlighten."⁷¹ And that didactic content should serve as an example to contemporary futurists, who insist on being called artists. "«Театральный» театр, театр, лишенный идейного содержания и моральной тенденции [...] в оправдание свое может [...] приводить те соображения, которыми вообще защищается теория искусства для искусства."⁷² In other words, its Bolshevik content aside, futuristic theatre looks less appealing to Lunacharsky than Ostrovsky's positive realism.

On their own parallel course, Western scholars of the "Soviet" period offer their opinions on Ostrovsky's realism. Beasley, who accepts Ostrovsky's realism without a doubt, writes:

⁷⁰ Anatolii Vasil'evich Lunacharskii, "Ob Aleksandre Nikolaeviche Ostrovskom i po povodu ego" (On and about Aleksandr Nikolaevich Ostrovsky), in Vladyslav, pp. 424–434.

⁷¹ Horace, *The Art of Poetry*, trans. Smith Palmer Bovie, in David H. Richter (ed.), *The Critical Tradition: Classical Texts and Contemporary Trends*, 2nd ed. (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 1998), pp. 68–78, at p. 75.

⁷² Lunacharskii, p. 427. "A 'theatrical' theatre, a theatre deprived of ideological content or moralistic tendencies, [...] may defend itself [...] using the same arguments in its defense as the theory of art for art's sake uses to justify itself."

All the critics are unanimous in their appreciation of his realistic methods. Realistic plays [...] must be possible; they must be more than this—they must give a complete impression of reality. The people who are represented must appear as natural and convincing as the people of everyday life [...]. Even if the type is unfamiliar, it must be entirely credible.

[...]here should be nothing forced about [characters'] presence on the stage.⁷³

In my opinion, Beasley focuses on the outer instead of the inner, depriving Ostrovsky's dramas of the message that they are meant to send to the audience. Whether Ostrovsky's situations are convincing and his characters credible is also open to question. For example, how credible are Lyubim Tortsov in *Bednost' ne porok* or Parasha in *Goriachee serdtse* (An Ardent Heart); Vasilkov in *Beshenye den'gi* (Crazy Money) or Valentina in *Bogatye nevesty*; Groznov in *Pravda — khorosho, a schast'e luchshe* (Truth Is Good, but Happiness Is Better) or Vera in *Serdtshe ne kamen'*? These and many other characters, taken from plays that most scholars pronounce realistic, were created by Ostrovsky with no intention of making them recognizable as our next-door neighbors. Those people are atypical, exceptional, unique. Their behavior in a play serves a clear moralistic purpose akin to that of characters in biblical parables or fairy tales.

Ostrovsky uses predictions, fortune-telling, dream interpretation, and omen reading to guide his characters not only in plays that are usually excluded from his realist collection (*Voevoda* (both versions), *Dmitrii Samozvanets i Vasilii Shuiskii* (Dimitry the Impostor and Vasily Shuysky), and *Snegurochka*) but also in dramas such as *Ne tak zhivi, kak khochetsya*, the Balzaminov trilogy,⁷⁴ *Groza*, and *Pravda — khorosho*. A miraculous recognition of a long-lost son by his mother (in *Bez viny vinovatye* (Innocent as Charged)), *deux ex machina*-type endings (in *Bednost' ne porok*, *Puchina* (Slough of Despond), *Ne vse kotu Maslenitsa* (Every Day Is not Sunday), *Ne bylo ni groscha, da vdrug altyn* (From Rags to Riches), *Za chem poidesh', to i naidesh'* (*Zhenit'ba Bal'zaminova*) (Be Careful What You Ask for, or Balzaminov's Marriage)), *Shutniki* (The Jesters), *Pravda —*

⁷³ Beasley, pp. 605–606.

⁷⁴ *Prazdnichnyi son — do obeda, Svoi sobaki gryzutsia — chuzhaia ne pristavai*, and *Za chem poidesh', to i naidesh'* (*Zhenit'ba Bal'zaminova*).

khorosho), or a pattern of punishing villains and rewarding virtuous people (in most plays) are unlikely to qualify as typical or realistic means of plot development.

In Ostrovsky's case, the label of a realist has done him, I believe, an ill service, as it misrepresents his writing and helps shape a certain tunnel vision beyond which few dare to look. Let us consider four randomly chosen pairs of dramatic works, one belonging to a Romantic writer, the other to Ostrovsky, ostensibly a writer of realism. In terms of typicality, credibility, and naturalness, Gogol's *Zhenit'ba* (The Marriage) differs little from Ostrovsky's Balzaminov trilogy. Podkolesin's behavior arouses no more questions than that of Balzaminov, and the entire plot is of equal typicality (or lack thereof). The circumstances in Gogol's *Revizor* (The Inspector General) are no more believable, logical, or reasonable than those in Ostrovsky's *Ne tak zhivi, kak khochetsia*. Lermontov's *Maskarad* (The Masked Ball) is no more and no less plausible than Ostrovsky's *Na boikom meste*. Why do we not proclaim Sheridan's *The School for Scandal* a work of realism if we do so with Ostrovsky's *Na vsiakogo mudretsa dovol'no prostoty* (Too Clever by Half), a piece that many scholars⁷⁵ believe to be very similar to Sheridan's in more ways than one? Ostrovsky has his share of heroes (i.e., Dosuzhev in *Tiazhelye dni*, Borodkin in *Ne v svoi sani ne sadis'* (Mind Your Own Station), Minin in *Koz'ma Zakhar'ich Minin*, Nikolay Redrikov in *Tushino* and others) some of whom are ready to die and actually do so for other people's happiness; and villains (Podkhalyuzin in *Svoi liudi — sochtemsia*, Vikhorev in *Ne v svoi sani ne sadis'*, Korshunov in *Bednost' ne porok*, and Shalygin in the first version of *Voevoda*, to name a few) who appall us with their moral ugliness—and yet Ostrovsky's characters are pronounced realistic and therefore believable. Should we consider Romantic heroes and villains equally believable, by extension? Where does the demarcation line of typicality lie? How much leeway in credibility can we give an

⁷⁵ For example, Daniel Gerould, afterword to *Too Clever by Half* by Alexander Ostrovsky, English version by Rodney Ackland (New York: Applause Theatre Books, 1976), pp. 105–118, at p. 110.

author with his stage creations? Where is the fine line beyond which a playwright is labeled a solid realist?

Cox contests Dobrolyubov's widely accepted idea that Ostrovsky was mainly a realist writer who wrote "plays of life," depicting typicality of everydayness (pp. 2–9). She starts with Belinsky's definition of the *naturalnaya shkola*⁷⁶ ("Natural School"; another term for realism before the tendency was officially named), which he drew as markedly opposed to neo-classicism and less so to the Romantic movement.

Adding to the same notions of credibility vs. improbability, typicality vs. uniqueness, and broad, albeit temporal and spatial, universality vs. individuality, Belinsky, in Cox's opinion, imbued the notion of the Natural School with obligatory criticism of the contemporary way of life. This rather simplistic interpretation of Belinsky's idea (shared also by Thelwall Proctor, whose "Dostoevskij and the Belinskij School of Literary Criticism" Cox quotes to illustrate the point) may be disproved using the method of *reductio ad absurdum*. Belinsky, Dobrolyubov, Pisarev, Grigoryev, Vyazemsky,⁷⁷ and other nineteenth-century Russian critics all agreed on the didactic aspect of literature: novels and dramas, short stories and poems need to teach how to make society better (there is nothing new in this concept, if we recall Aristotle's *should be's*⁷⁸ or Horace's dictum that true artists should both "delight and enlighten"). In Russian neo-classicism, the didactic aspect was very strong: dramas by Lomonosov, Zhurovsky, Sumarokov, Vladimir Lukin, and Knyazhnin, along with singing glory to the high and mighty, sought to draw the audience's attention to a certain aspect of life that, they believed, needed improvement.

⁷⁶ The term *Natural School* was coined by Faddey Bulgarin (1789–1859), a Polish-born Russian journalist, who used it in 1846 in a pejorative sense to describe literary works that dealt with unrefined and unpolished pictures of everydayness. Belinsky liked the term and, changing its connotation from negative to positive, employed it to praise authors of the emerging literary school (Vissarion Grigor'evich Belinskii, *Izbrannye stat'i* (Selected Essays) (Saratov, USSR: Privolzhskoe knizhnoe izdatel'stvo, 1974), pp. 187–189 and 206).

⁷⁷ Pyotr Vyazemsky (1792–1878), a poet and literary critic.

⁷⁸ "[...]he function of the poet is not to say what *has* happened, but to say the kind of thing that *would* happen, i.e., what is possible in accordance with probability or necessity" (Aristotle, *Poetics*, trans. and ed. Malcolm Heath (London: Penguin Books, 1996), p. 16).

Once the time of odes and panegyrics was gone and romanticism came to rule Russian literature in the early nineteenth century, hymns to individual heroes and woes to individual villains still contained important lessons to be learned if one aimed at the betterment of society. I firmly believe that until the early twentieth century Russian literature and dramaturgy always espoused an appeal for social meliorism and were never didacticism-free. The first step in any process of improvement is to acknowledge that it is needed and recognize the trouble spot. The trouble spot has to be described textually and/or shown on stage before the process of melioration starts. As a result, the conclusion to which Cox arrives based on a quotation from Belinsky (reproduced here in her own, quite adequate translation: “in order to reflect reality, literature ‘must turn its attention to the multitude, to the masses, to represent ordinary people, not pleasant exceptions to the general rule who always seduce poets into idealization’”⁷⁹)—that the typical reality of the Russian masses had to be quite unpleasant—seems overly generalizing and therefore misleading.

Daniel H. Kaiser writes about the influence of Belinsky’s statements on later critics: “In a memorable phrase, the nineteenth-century radical critic Vissarion Belinskii claimed that Russian peasants were fundamentally atheistic and could conceive of no greater use for household icons than to cover their chamber pots.”⁸⁰ Kaiser proceeds to dispute this statement, proving that religiousness was the foundation of Russian everyday life. However, Belinsky’s

⁷⁹ Cox, p. 5. (Cf. Belinsky’s original text (Belinskii, “Vzgliad na russkuiu literaturu 1847 goda” (A Survey of Russian Literature in 1847), in his *Izbrannye stat’i*, pp. 182–199, at p. 188): “Это могло свершиться только через исключительное обращение искусства к действительности, помимо всяких идеалов. Для этого нужно было обратить всё внимание на толпу, на массу, изображать людей обыкновенных, а не приятные только исключения из общего правила, которые всегда соблазняют поэтов на идеализирование и носят на себе чужой отпечаток.”) Two things need to be remembered when basing one’s argument on this quotation. Firstly, it referred to novels and short stories, which Belinsky considered to be primary indicators of changes in the Russian writing school; dramatic works, including Ostrovsky’s, were never a focus of the critic’s attention. Secondly, Belinsky adamantly stresses (pp. 187–188) that everything needs to be written for a reason, with a bigger picture in mind (thus adding an undeniable enlightening or educational aspect of literature); a mere depiction of everydayness must never be considered a proper work of art.

⁸⁰ Daniel H. Kaiser, “Quotidian Orthodoxy: Domestic Life in Early Modern Russia,” in Kivelson and Green, pp. 179–192, at p. 179.

statement seemed to influence the Westerners and other radical thinkers (such as Dobrolyubov), who discarded the Russian Orthodox ideology as a minor factor that did not deserve much attention in their support for westernization of Russia. Ostrovsky, on the other hand, singled out this very factor—Russians’ adherence to their faith—to present sufficient evidence that Russia needed no pull or push from the West and was following its own path quite successfully.

Granted, Cox acknowledges Belinsky’s emphasis on didacticism but still remains firmly convinced that realism, at least Ostrovsky’s, equals negativity. Dobrolyubov’s opinion on Ostrovsky (Cox is mainly interested in the critic’s focus on the playwright’s honest depiction of negative sides of life (pp. 9–10)), expressed in his article “*Temnoe tsarstvo*,” which Cox mentions when discussing the playwright’s realism, seemingly works in her favor. All Soviet critics, naturally, supported this statement by Dobrolyubov, using it as proof that Russia needed the Bolshevik Revolution to change from a backwards, unjust, and “unpleasant” country into a paragon of a perfect society. I believe that negativity in Ostrovsky’s plays should be viewed as an occasional byproduct of his overall Christian approach to reality.

Cox’s interpretation of Ostrovsky might come from her limited knowledge of Russian. For instance, she mentions an important thought expressed by Ostrovsky in his critical review of Eugenia Tur’s novel *Oshibka* (The Mistake)—that Russian national literature is for the most part *oblichitel’naya*, the word that she mistranslates as *condemnatory* (p. 13) instead of *revealing* or *exposing*. From here, she proceeds to base her entire argument on the assumption that realistic literature ought to condemn negative sides of life, instead of merely being moralistic. Needless to say, her general approach to Ostrovsky cannot fit his entire collection of works. In particular, Cox marginalizes the writer’s Slavophilic plays: *Ne v svoi sani ne sadis’*, *Bednost’ ne porok*, and *Ne tak zhivi, kak khochetsia*. Dobrolyubov, she believes, fits them within the Dark Kingdom while “most other liberal and radical critics felt that [in those] Ostrovsky abandoned his exposure of the evils of

society in favor of a blatant glorification of Russian life” (p. 17). Cox considers the Slavophilic period of Ostrovsky a “brief lapse” after which he “devoted the rest of his long literary activity to an exposure of negative aspects of contemporary life” (p. 18). I will argue below that these plays, instead of being a lapse, happened to be extremely important to the Christian writer.

Rahman, whose understanding of Ostrovsky is closer to my own than Beasley’s or Cox’s, still places him among realist writers:

Ostrovsky is generally credited with playing a pivotal role in the development in realism in Russian drama. He is frequently described as a “chronicler of Russian life.” [...] He is seen as the man who first brought the gritty realities of Moscow merchant world to the Russian stage and who then went on to chart faithfully the social changes wrought by the reforms of the 1860s, describing accurately the rise of the new capitalist class and the decline of the gentry.⁸¹

She then adds that Ostrovsky is firmly anchored in time and space (nineteenth-century Russia) and that this creates the assumption that he “has little to offer to audiences in the West” (p. 3). However, Rahman believes that if we expose psychological and philosophical aspects (which, she is convinced, are always present in the playwright’s pieces), the West might start looking at Ostrovsky’s oeuvre differently as it will also find those issues relevant. I tend to agree that shedding light on Ostrovsky’s psychology and life philosophy, especially through the lens of religious morality, will help transfer his dramas to the category of moral fables and even might boost the dramatist’s reputation outside Russia, particularly in view of the recent general trend towards renewed interest in Christianity and towards a discourse on faith in general in the theatre.

Rahman adds a proviso to her choice of calling Ostrovsky a realist writer. She believes that his characters tend to find solace in a parallel world of illusions and escape into the ideal from reality:

⁸¹ Rahman, p. 3.

What Ostrovsky is depicting are escape mechanisms—means of avoiding or escaping from a reality which his characters find unpleasant or unbearable. As such they relate closely to the exploration of the relationship between realism and idealism in his plays, acting as a means of reconciling the gulf between the real and the ideal. And the means of escape he employs are not limited to nineteenth-century Russia, but are universally recognisable.⁸²

Never contesting Ostrovsky's affiliation with realism in general, Rahman insists, however, that his realism is broader and much more universal than one circumscribed by the nineteenth-century Russian reality. By challenging the very notion of reality (What is reality? Is it what it is, or what we want it to be? Is there such a thing as universal reality or is it strictly individual? Are our dreams, hopes, illusions part of reality? How can deception and self-deception fit into a person's reality? What is role-playing and pretending with regard to reality? and so on), she considerably broadens the traditional understanding of realist writing. By acknowledging Ostrovsky as a psychological and philosophical author (p. 155) who realistically depicts the given milieu, she aspires to challenge his label as a writer who is so local that he cannot be of any interest to Western audiences. In her attempt to proclaim Ostrovsky more global than local, she proves that his dramas contain universally important issues once they are stripped of their local coloring (p. 7).

Focused on redefining the “comfortably defined reality” that is traditionally accepted (p. 154), Rahman does not offer a clear definition of realism as a literary genre. I will venture a conjecture that she refers to Ostrovsky's realism strictly in terms of the outer, i.e., the setting for plot development, and not the inner, i.e., the content of his dramas. When Rahman mentions the “slightly surreal atmosphere” (p. 170) of *Ne tak zhivi, kak khochetsia*, the question will necessarily arise: How can this mystical setting be even remotely mistaken for realism? Rahman's approach is exclusive: her analysis does not include six plays—five historical dramas and *Snegurochka*—as they “are not generally considered to be among the dramatist's ‘realist’ works” (p. 9). However,

⁸² Ibid., p. 105.

she does admit the presence of slight surrealism in at least one other play that has been placed by her under the umbrella of realistic writing. How is the surrealism of *Ne tak zhibi* so different from that of *Snegurochka*—or, for that matter, *Pravda — khorosho, a schast'e luchshe*, *Goriachee serdtse*, or *Krasavets-muzhchina* (A Handsome Man)? All of these plays have a certain amount of surrealism, using Rahman's own terminology. Rahman also excludes five historical dramas, pronouncing them unrealistic. I can see why *Snegurochka*, being a fantasy play, should be excluded from the list. But why exclude the historical dramas—all based on historical chronicles, all thoroughly researched, and even populated with real-life characters? If I wanted to support Ostrovsky's classification as a realist writer, I would certainly include these first.

George Z. Patrick states that Ostrovsky is primarily a realist, with the exception of his five historical plays, *Voievoda*, and *Snegurochka*.⁸³ In Patrick's opinion, historical plays are where Ostrovsky was at his worst: "One must admit [...] that these plays with their lengthy monologues, prolix portrayals of historical figures, and lack of understanding of the spirit of the period, are rather weak" (p. 118). While crediting Patrick with an in-depth knowledge of the historical conflict between the Westerners and the Slavophiles of the mid-nineteenth century (the subject matter of his article), let me express serious doubts about his level of understanding of the Time of Troubles, which practically all of Ostrovsky's historical plays portray. It seems to me that "lack of understanding" is Patrick's rather than Ostrovsky's, whose historical accounts happen to be well researched. Before starting to write his historical dramas, Ostrovsky thoroughly studied works by leading historians and an impressive number of chronicles and other historical documents.⁸⁴ Failure to identify the reason why the playwright mythicized that

⁸³ George Z. Patrick, "A. N. Ostrovski: Slavophile or Westerner," in Alexander Khan and Ernest Simmons (eds.), *Slavic Studies* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1943), pp. 117–131, at p. 118.

⁸⁴ Editorial comments to *Koz'ma Zakhar'ich Minin, Sukhoruk* (1st version), in Ostrovskii, *PSS*, vol. 3, pp. 401–403, at p. 401; to *Voievoda* (1st version), *ibid.*, vol. 4, pp. 409–414, at pp. 411; and to *Dmitrii Samozvanets i Vasilii Shuiskii*, *ibid.*, pp. 417–419, at p. 418.

particular historical period—to use it as a metaphorical warning to his contemporaries—inevitably brings forth a suspicion that Patrick could have missed something significant on the historical arena of that time. As for Patrick’s dislike for lengthy monologues, one can only wonder what he has to say about historical dramas of Shakespeare or Marlowe, for example.

Another critic who accepts Ostrovsky’s realism is Dmitrij Čiževskij.⁸⁵ He recognizes “the theatrical quality” of Ostrovsky’s plays but expresses skepticism as to their “literary excellence” (p. 136), even going as far as calling the plots of some of them “generally primitive” (p. 139). He adds:

The ideological content of Ostrovskij’s plays does not match their linguistic and theatrical quality. Tolstoj and Dostoevskij teach and preach; one finds food for thought in Turgenev, Gončarov, and Grigorovič; the works of the radical “friends of the people” [...] give vent to sociopolitical indignation; but Ostrovskij achieves nothing of the sort. Whether he intended to does not matter. Soviet scholars attempt to show, if not the revolutionary, at least the revolutionizing character of his plays. Naturally, his objective portrayals reflect Russian life as it was, and his appropriate reward is an objective presentation of the Russia of his time.⁸⁶

While insisting that Ostrovsky’s plays “scarcely touch on universal problems” and that their “subject matter [...] has little to do with present-day Russian life—let alone that of the West,” he still acknowledges that “they are often performed in the USSR” (p. 136).

Magarshack also agrees with the realist label and ponders over the steady increase in Ostrovsky’s popularity in Russia:

This is surely a very remarkable thing. For it might have been expected that his plays, which deal mainly with the life of the Russian middle classes between the forties and the eighties of the [nineteenth] century, would have become “dated” and have lost their interest for an audience to whom the circumstances of the life of that period must seem almost incredible.⁸⁷

⁸⁵ Dmitrij Čiževskij, *History of Nineteenth-Century Russian Literature*, trans. Richard N. Porter, vol. II (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 1974).

⁸⁶ Ibid., p. 143.

⁸⁷ Magarshack, p. 5.

Explaining the secret of the playwright's great popularity, Magarshack says that it lies, firstly, in "his greatness as a creative writer" and, secondly, in his creation of "a people's theater" which is envisioned by the playwright as "a theater with cheap seats and a first-rate company rather than a theater with expensive sets⁸⁸ and a third-rate company" (p. 6).

D. S. Mirsky (the English penname of Dmitry Petrovich Mirsky (1890–1939), a Russian political and literary historian who promoted Russian literature in Great Britain and English literature in Soviet Russia) is another critic who proclaims Ostrovsky a realist. According to him, Ostrovsky's plays

are neither tragedies nor comedies, but belong to the middle and bastard kind of drama. [...] With few exceptions his plays are devoid of poetry, and even where poetry is present, as it is in *The Thunderstorm*, it is a poetry of atmosphere, not of words and texture.⁸⁹

I find Mirsky's argument that "Ostróvsky is not a master of language in the sense Gógol, Leskóv, or (to use an English instance) Synge was" (p. 235) somewhat perplexing. It seems to be a comparison of apples and oranges: Gogol's colorful language, almost tangible in its richness, is manifest solely in prose narratives, while in dramatic works with no descriptive paragraphs it is much less epithetic and more succinct; Leskov never wrote dramas, and his novels and short stories have the unmistakable tint of a journalistic style; and Synge is Irish. However, I have to agree with one particular assessment regarding the Russian playwright: Mirsky considers Ostrovsky strictly a local, i.e., Russian, and not universal writer and insists that "[w]ere it not for this limitation, and had he been universal in his nationality, Ostróvsky's place would have been among the greatest" (p. 235).

⁸⁸ This seems to be a misprint. The apparent source, a memo written by Ostrovsky in 1881, suggests *seats* instead of *sets*: "театр [...] с очень дорогими *местами*" (Ostrovskii, "O prichinakh upadka dramaticheskogo teatra v Moskve" (On the Reasons for the Decline of Drama Theatre in Moscow), in his *PSS*, vol. 12, p. 130–161, at p. 131)).

⁸⁹ D. S. Mirsky, *A History of Russian Literature*, ed. Francis J. Whitfield (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1949), pp. 234–235.

Valency, who also votes in favor of Ostrovsky's realism (predictably excluding his historical dramas and *Snegurochka*) and even suggests that the playwright should be called "the father of Russian realistic comedy," mentions nonetheless that his merchant plays reflect interest in common people, which is an important aspect of European romanticism (p. 33–34). By adding that the dramatist's pieces have "a melodramatic tone" (p. 35), Valency presents indirect evidence that Ostrovsky might not be a realist one hundred percent. Without calling Ostrovsky time- and place-specific, Valency insists nevertheless that his genius is strictly Russian in character:

Aside from *The Storm*, his work is barely known outside of Russia, and even this masterpiece has rarely been accorded the admiration it deserves. The reason is, perhaps, that Ostrovsky's plots are neither ingenious nor striking, his situations are firmly rooted in the local soil, and his dialogue, pungent and flavorful in the original, does not survive the ordeal of translation.⁹⁰

The first Western critic to suggest that Ostrovsky might not be a member of the realist faction is Esam, who rightly notices that the limitations of a realistic *byt* (a writer who verisimilarly depicts the typicality of everydayness), imposed on Ostrovsky by the majority of critics, Russian or Western, are too restrictive and not at all justified.

[...A]lthough the dramatist padded and trimmed his plays with details of *byt* or the manners and morals of a specific place and time, these are in fact only accessories. Stripped of all their padding, the plays are about universal and eternal themes, about life and death, about beauty and pain, about the unchanging laws of humanity in history.⁹¹

Esam openly questions Ostrovsky's label as a realist. Armed with quotations from Francis Ferguson's *The Idea of a Theatre*, the author proves that "it is not the literal surface of the play that should be studied," but its "soul." Esam correctly surmises that the actions of individual characters created by Ostrovsky are always mere illustrations of "a movement of the psyche," "a more general action which all share by analogy" (p. 70).

⁹⁰ Valency, p. 33.

⁹¹ Esam, "Analysis of *Ne ot mira sego*," p. 69.

In 1977, writing under the name of Zohrab, Esam published another article, in which she decided to focus only on the plays where the words *heart* and *soul* are used.⁹² She counts twenty-eight such plays, with fifty-six characters using these two words in their lines (p. 38). As abstract, ineffable notions, *heart* and *soul* hardly seem to belong to the realm of a realist. The huge number of plays with those two words in them, a little less than two thirds of the total, proves, according to Esam, first and foremost that the inner in Ostrovsky's plays is more significant than the outer and therefore the discourse on morals plays a bigger part than the realistic background.

Richard Arthur Peace is another Western critic to suggest⁹³ that Ostrovsky might not be a realist writer. Even though Peace never directly says it, his analysis of *Groza* and his comparison of Ostrovsky to Chekhov, who can barely be called a realist writer,⁹⁴ clears Ostrovsky of the "false charges" by extension.

Aleksandr Ostrovsky's play *Groza* ("The Thunderstorm," 1859) is a classic of the Russian literature. In its open-air setting, its exploitation of mood at the expense of plot, its use of guitar and song, of quotation and poetic symbol, as well as in the dramatic use of pause it seems an obvious forerunner of the theatre of Chekhov.⁹⁵

Post-Soviet scholars do not even consider a discourse on Ostrovsky's realism as valid. Mildon believes that the playwright is too philosophical, too cerebral, and even too eternal (pp.

⁹² Irene Zohrab, "Problems of Style in the Plays of A. N. Ostrovsky," *Melbourne Slavonic Studies*, no. 12 (1977), pp. 35–46.

⁹³ Richard Arthur Peace, "A. N. Ostrovsky's *The Thunderstorm*: The Dramatization of Conceptual Ambivalence," *The Modern Language Review*, vol. 84, no. 1 (January 1989), pp. 99–110.

⁹⁴ The complexity of Chekhov's four-act dramas let various critics and scholars treat the playwright's oeuvre so differently that, often, they can agree neither on the genre (classifying it as anything from realism to symbolism, from impressionism to expressionism, and from satirical comedy to tragedy) nor on the message of his plays. My personal impression of Chekhov's dramas is that the profoundness of his writing and the significance of every single sentence in his works (in which he does effectively combine all the above-mentioned genres) create a message so huge that various understandings and interpretations are not only possible but inevitable. Chekhov bursts out of the nineteenth-century Russian theatre conventions, rending the genre barriers and transcending reality with subtle expressionism. However, I tend to agree with Stanislavsky when he says: "[...] Чехов силен самыми разнообразными, часто бессознательными приемами воздействия. Местами — он импрессионист, в других местах — символист, где нужно — реалист, иногда даже чуть ли не натуралист" (Konstantin Sergeevich Stanislavskii, *Moia zhizn' v iskusstve* (My Life in Art) (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1983), p. 228)—"[...] Chekhov's strength is in the variety of forms of influencing, often on a subconscious level. Sometimes he is an *impressionist*; other times he is a *symbolist*; if required, he is a *realist*; and in places he is almost a *naturalist*."

⁹⁵ Peace, p. 99.

8–9) to be categorized as a realist writer. Shalimova, in all her three books, underscores Ostrovsky idealistic (vs. materialistic) nature. Neither Andreev⁹⁶ nor Lakshin is concerned with unifying the playwright's work under a single genre.

Summing up: contrary to what most Ostrovsky critics have said so far, I insist that Ostrovsky should not be regarded as a realist writer without the proviso that this categorization is only valid with regard to form. Firstly, placing the playwright under the umbrella of realism seems an exclusive approach that marginalizes a number of his plays. Secondly and more importantly, the outer, superficial verisimilitude cannot conceal the inner, moralistic content of his dramas.

Tribute to Apollon Grigoryev

Grigoryev was the first critic who noticed and acknowledged the depth of Ostrovsky's plays and whose opinion was initially overlooked and ignored, and later, in the Soviet era, deliberately hushed up. Grigoryev's position and philosophy has been instrumental in shaping my own argument; for this reason, the explanation of his theory comes out of order chronologically, after the above review of the critics who preceded or followed him.

According to Boris Yegorov, a contemporary Russian scholar and expert on Grigoryev, the latter was not yet a Slavophile in 1845.⁹⁷ In his earlier drama *Dva egoizma* (Two Egoisms), Grigoryev openly satirized Baskakov, a Slavophile character whose prototype was none other than Konstantin Aksakov, a known champion of Slavophilism. In 1847 Grigoryev met Ostrovsky, his fellow contributor to the *Moskovskiy gorodskoy listok* (Moscow City Newsletter), a literary periodical. Yegorov believes that true friendship between the two did not start until 1849

⁹⁶ Mikhail Leonidovich Andreev, *Metasuzhet v teatre Ostrovskogo* (Metanarrative in Ostrovsky's Theatre), *Chteniia po istorii i teorii kultury* (Readings in the History and Theory of Culture), issue 11 (Moscow: RGGU, 1995).

⁹⁷ Boris Fedorovich Egorov, "Apollon Grigor'ev — poet" (Apollon Grigoryev: A Poet), in Apollon Aleksandrovich Grigor'ev, *Stikhotvoreniia, poemy, dramy* (Verses, Poems, Dramas), comp. Egorov (St. Petersburg: Akademicheskii proekt, 2001), pp. 5–47, at p. 18.

(p. 19), by which time Grigoryev must have already absorbed enough of Ostrovsky's views on national identity. The latter supposition is supported by reports of Grigoryev's passionate impulsiveness and excessive susceptibility to philosophical ideas that resonated with his inner convictions, in particular by this account of Nikolay Barsukov, a Russian historian: "Григорьев упал на колени и просил кружок усвоить его себе, так как в его направлении он видит правду, которой искал в других местах и не находил, а потому был бы счастлив, если бы ему позволили здесь бросить якорь."⁹⁸ Yegorov adds that Grigoryev found a long-lasting asylum in Ostrovsky's circle and that its influence would forever change his life philosophy and writings.

"But where shall wisdom be found? and where is the place of understanding? Man knoweth not the price thereof; neither is it found in the land of the living. [...] God understandeth the way thereof, and he knoweth the place thereof" (Job 28:12–13 and 23)—these lines from the Bible serve as the best possible epigraph to understanding Grigoryev and Ostrovsky, both devoted (not to be confused with fanatical) Christians who neither questioned the complexity of the divine plan nor offered their own theory explaining the order of life.

According to Nikolay Strakhov, a cleric who knew him closely in the 1860s, Grigoryev always tried to achieve proper loftiness and purity in his thoughts and aspirations and was an impractical man, whose extreme passion made him a hopeless romantic in most people's eyes.⁹⁹ As such, Grigoryev was unpopular as a poet, unnoticed as a playwright, and ignored as a critic

⁹⁸ As quoted in Egorov, p. 19. "Grigoryev dropped on his knees and begged the [Ostrovsky's] circle to adopt him, because he viewed their perspective as the truth for which he had been searching elsewhere in vain, and now he would be happy if he were allowed to drop his anchor there."

Other accounts include Egorov, pp. 216–217; Fedor Dostoevskii, commentary to N. Strakhov's article "Vospominaniia ob Apollone Aleksandroviche Grigor'ev" (Reminiscences on Grigoryev), in his *PSF*, vol. 20, pp. 133–136.

⁹⁹ As quoted in Aleksandr L'vovich Ospovat, "K portretu Apollona Grigor'eva" (For the Portrait of Apollon Grigoryev), in Apollon Aleksandrovich Grigor'ev, *Odisseia poslednego romantika* (The Odyssey of the Last Romantic), comp. Ospovat (Moscow: Moskovskii rabochii, 1988), pp. 3–9, at pp. 3–4.

and philosopher. Konstantin Leontyev¹⁰⁰ admits that, in his younger years, he found Grigoryev's writing tedious ("Слог его я находил смутным и странным; требования его казались мне слишком велики"¹⁰¹); however, he continues, he always felt that the vastness of Grigoryev's nature was too ineffable for human words. Leontyev comes to a conclusion that the reason why he grew to understand and like Grigoryev and Ostrovsky was because, instead of depicting the ideal, they portrayed the Russian reality with an infinite warmth of poets in love with their country's half-peasant, half-merchant life; they found poetry in the very essence of Russian life, which appeared to them rich, broad, and hot-blooded, going to extremes in its virtues and its vices (pp. 442–443).

Alexander Ospovat, a professor at the Slavic Department of the University of California, Los Angeles, who teaches a course on Russian Christian writers, thinks that Grigoryev's philosophy breaks away from both the Westerners and the Slavophiles starting in the 1840s.¹⁰² I absolutely agree with this statement but believe that it requires further explanation. If a choice between the two opposing life philosophies had had to be made, Grigoryev would have been infinitely closer to Slavophilism than Westernism. He did not appreciate the Western influences on Russia and preferred his country's uniqueness. However, this statement might be too limiting to reflect Grigoryev's broad and all-accepting understanding of life. The best possible way to explain what I mean by it is to employ Grigoryev's own words from an essay written when he was serving time in a debtors' prison:

Художником я решительно быть не способен, хоть во мне [...] много художественного понимания и [...] художественного чутья [...].

¹⁰⁰ Konstantin Leontyev (1831–91), a Russian writer and diplomat as well as a pro-monarchy conservative philosopher (well known to students of literature because of his interest in heroic vitalism). As a writer, he voiced his displeasure about Russia moving away from the spiritual serenity of the East and closer to the West with its revolutionary tendencies.

¹⁰¹ Konstantin Nikolaevich Leont'ev, "Neskol'ko vospominanii i myslei o pokoinom Ap. Grigor'evе (pis'mo k Nik. Nik. Strakhovu)" (Some Reminiscences and Thoughts on the Late Apollon Grigoryev (a letter to Strakhov)), in Grigor'ev, *Odisseia*, pp. 442–458, at p. 442. "His style was murky and weird, and his demands appeared too high."

¹⁰² Ospovat, p. 7.

А с другой стороны, я и не мыслитель в строгом смысле этого слова. Мышление мое — какое-то калейдоскопическое. [...] Я никогда не могу видеть предмета с какой-нибудь одной его стороны и не могу поэтому состроить о нем какой-нибудь определенной теории. [...]

А ведь мысль, не прикованная к теории, такой свободой своей ужасно много теряет в своей силе, хоть, может быть, и много выигрывает в своей правде.¹⁰³

In another essay, which he starts with an affirmation that he is “человек, по натуре и по развитию,— религиозный, даже не философски, а просто православно-религиозный,”¹⁰⁴ Grigoryev confirms the same idea—that God-created life is too big and too mysterious to fit into a single man-created theory: “В то время как всякий стоит под каким-нибудь знаменем, я решительно ни под одно стать не могу. Я сочувствую всем вообще, но ни одному исключительно, а решительно всем, без исключения всем.”¹⁰⁵

Among all possible life-explaining theories, Western materialism was ultimately his least favorite. Grigoryev sarcastically calls it “теория о соединении луны с землею.”¹⁰⁶ He says that a world where this merger takes place will have no room for anything spiritual: “Уж я не говорю о высших духовных потребностях, нет,— о тех только, которые одухотворяют

¹⁰³ Grigor'ev, “Bezvykhodnoe polozhenie (iz zapisok nenuzhnogo cheloveka),” in his *Odisseia*, pp. 336–348, at pp. 336–337. “I am absolutely incapable of being an artist, although there is in me [...] a great deal of artistic understanding and [...] of artistic feeling [...]. And on the other hand, I'm not a thinker in the strict sense of that word. My thinking is somehow kaleidoscopic. [...] I can never contemplate an object from any single aspect, and therefore cannot create a definite theory about it. [...] And yet an idea not welded to a theory, by its very freedom loses an enormous amount in force, although it may perhaps gain a great deal in veracity” (Apollon Grigoryev, “A Hopeless Situation (From the Notes of an Unnecessary Man),” in his *My Literary and Moral Wanderings and Other Autobiographical Material*, trans. and ed. Ralph E. Matlaw (New York: Dutton, 1962), pp. 129–143, at pp. 129–130).

¹⁰⁴ Grigor'ev, “Plachevnye razmyshleniia o despotizme i vol'nom rabstve mysli (iz zapisok nenuzhnogo cheloveka),” *ibid.*, pp. 348–364, at p. 349. “By nature and by upbringing a religious man, not even in a philosophical way, but simply orthodoxly religious” (Grigoryev, “Sorrowful Thoughts about the Despotism and Voluntary Slavery of Thought (From the Notes of an Unnecessary Man),” in his *Literary and Moral Wanderings*, pp. 147–167, at pp. 148–149).

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.* “At a time when everyone stands under some sort of banner, I absolutely cannot stand under a single one. I sympathize with all of them in general, but not a single one exclusively, and positively all of them, without a single exception” (Grigoryev, “Sorrowful Thoughts,” p. 147).

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 353. “A theory of merging the moon with the earth.”

земную жизнь, об искусстве, о философии как искании абсолютного. Нечего петь будет и нечего искать будет.”¹⁰⁷

Grigoryev’s perception of life was, as I have mentioned, too big to fall under a single theory, and when I say that he gravitated towards Slavophilism, it does not at all mean that he discarded Westernism completely. First of all, Slavophilism itself in its pure form could not completely satisfy Grigoryev:

Я глубоко сочувствую славянофильству в его любви к быту народа и к высшему благу народа — религии, но и глубоко же ненавижу это старо-боярское направление за его гордость,— так же точно, как глубоко люблю Москву как полный тип русской жизни и не сочувствую некоторым ее историческим несправедливостям... [Славянофильство] только в себя верит,— и, в сущности, оно не народное, а старо-боярское направление. Народ для него — только степной, а не городской народ: вся жизнь наша, сложившаяся в новой истории, для него — ложь; вся наша литература — кроме Аксакова и Гоголя — вздор. К Пушкину оно равнодушно, Островского не видит [...].¹⁰⁸

Secondly, not every single aspect of Westernism was rejected by the critic and philosopher. This is evident in Grigoryev’s attitude towards his arch-rival Dobrolyubov and towards writers whom he considers great and all-Russian. Leontyev maintains that Grigoryev could not agree with Dobrolyubov’s ideology and his inclination towards materialism but still believed that although Dobrolyubov was a hawk sitting on chicken’s eggs, he was a proud and respectable hawk nonetheless (p. 449). Grigoryev appreciated Dobrolyubov as a thinker and a critic, even though he did not care for his philosophy. Grigoryev’s list of the greatest Russian writers included Turgenev (a writer considered by the Slavophiles as well as Dostoevsky to be undeniably

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., p. 350. “And I am not even talking about higher spiritual demands—no—only about those that spiritualize earthly life, about art, about philosophy as a search for the absolute. There will be no point in singing and there will be no point in seeking” (Grigoryev, “Sorrowful Thoughts,” pp. 149–150).

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., p. 354. “I am profoundly sympathetic to Slavophilism in its love for the people’s ways and for the people’s highest blessing, religion, but I hate that ancient-boyar direction with its pride just as profoundly—hate it precisely as much as I profoundly love Moscow as the complete incarnation of Russian life and do not sympathize with several of its historical injustices. [...Slavophilism] believes only in itself, and in reality it is not a national movement but an ancient-boyar one. The people so far as it is concerned, exist only in the steppes, not in the cities: all our life that has taken shape in modern time is a lie so far as it is concerned; all our literature, with the exception of Aksakov and Gogol, is nonsense. It is indifferent to Pushkin, fails to value Ostrovsky [...].”(Grigoryev, “Sorrowful Thoughts,” pp. 154–155).

Western) and Pushkin (a pre-conflict poet with non-Russian roots, unappreciated by the Slavophiles and criticized by Leo Tolstoy). Those, in his opinion, shared the laurels with Dostoevsky, Tolstoy, and Ostrovsky (neither of whom, strictly speaking, can be called purely Slavophilic either).

Admitting his personal preference for Slavophilism over Westernism (p. 444), Leontyev writes that Grigoryev belonged to neither party as both camps pushed him away. The Westerners did not appreciate Grigoryev's idealism and religiousness, while the Slavophiles could not approve of the promiscuity in his lifestyle and the sensuality of his writings, as they were notorious for their puritan approach to life and family (p. 443).

Grigoryev's states that theory and life are as different as east and west,¹⁰⁹ which explains his view on attempts to limit the unlimited manifestations of life and to fit them all under a single theory. This is obviously a position of a deeply religious man who believes that life is both unknown and unknowable and no man's mind can penetrate the divine plan.

Grigoryev managed to come up with a remarkable theory on the Russian national character as it appears in art in general and literature in particular. It was named *pochvennichestvo* (Carlson (p. 244); Mirsky (pp. 206 and 208) translates it as *organic criticism*, describing it as "a cult of the Russian character and Russian spirit," which "insisted on the necessity of art and literature's being an organic growth of the national *soil* (*póchva*: hence the name of *póchvenniki* for his followers"). According to Ospovat, the theory of *pochvennichestvo* was created in the early 1860s by Grigoryev and the Dostoevsky brothers. Philosophically, it was meant to transcend the limitations of both the Slavophiles and the Westerners (p. 7). Dostoevsky, in his manifestos on *pochvennichestvo*, talked about "примирение цивилизации с народным началом" and

¹⁰⁹ As quoted in Ospovat, p. 7.

“обращение к родной почве.”¹¹⁰ Strakhov, Dostoevsky, and Grigoryev believed *pochvennichestvo* to be a common denominator that, as in the case of Pushkin who had successfully married the old Russian lore with contemporary ideas and aspirations that originated in the West, would unite the two warring camps under the umbrella of national spirit.¹¹¹

However, an indispensable pillar of *pochvennichestvo* was to be the Russian national religion, without which there simply could not be any Russianness. According to Grigoryev, the Dostoevsky brothers, and Strakhov, Russian Orthodoxy is what the Russian national identity is all about; without it, no true Russian can be complete. The assumption that Russianness (or its epitome) is inseparable from the state religion was not radically new. Under the rule of Tsar Nicholas I, it was even a part of the official state policy of “One Tsar, One State, One Religion.”¹¹² This concept has been commented on by many historians and is well known to critics from all three periods. It has been noticed by some of Western researchers as well. Rahman observes, for example, that Grigoryev “saw the ‘ideal’ in specifically Russian traits, such as ‘evangelical love of one’s fellow man’ [...] and frequently noted that this ideal was ‘best expressed in Ostrovsky’s plays.’”¹¹³ Evangelical love for one’s neighbor comes directly from the main doctrines of Russian Orthodoxy. It remains unclear why no critic ever tried to explain Ostrovsky’s writing from the standpoint of his confession, the only common denominator in all of the playwright’s pieces with no exception.

Commenting on Grigoryev’s article “Plachevnye razmyshleniia” and on his theory of *pochvennichestvo*, Mirsky chooses the wrong word to describe Grigoryev’s views, saying that “*meekness* was to him the characteristics of the Russian character, as opposed to the predatory

¹¹⁰ Fedor Dostoevskii, announcement of subscription to the *Vremya* magazine for 1861, in his *PSS*, vol. 18, pp. 35–40, at p. 37; and “Riad statei o russkoi literature” (A Set of Articles on Russian Literature), *ibid.*, pp. 41–103, at p. 49. “Reconciling civilization with the people’s spirit” and “turning to the native soil.”

¹¹¹ Ospovat, pp. 8–9.

¹¹² Discussed in chapter III, under “Second period.”

¹¹³ Rahman, p. 11.

quality of European man” (p. 208; emphasis added). What Grigoryev, a devout Russian Orthodox, really said in his work was something that a member of another confession or an atheist might find difficult to understand. The word that Mirsky translated as *meekness* is *smireniye*. I would prefer to translate it as *humbleness*, the most prized quality for a Russian Orthodox, highly valued by Leo Tolstoy in his theory of never answering violence with violence. Meanwhile, Grigoryev made sure the word *smireniye* is not misunderstood even by his compatriots, and added an elucidation: not the sheepish kind of humbleness, but the human kind:

Ведь действительно: только корению основание крепкой проч.... Нас,— не народ, но нас,— *от корени* оторвала реформа, и положение наше, во всяком случае, не нормальное, а болезненное... Но ведь в нас самих две натуры — одна сделанная, и она наружу, и другая, Богом данная, и она в нас самих лежит под спудом, целостная и нетронутая, как жизнь народа с XII столетия. Даже в тех из наших деятелей, которых наиболее коснулось веяние чужой жизни, как в Пушкине и Тургеневе,— эта натура всё-таки прорезывается, да еще как. «Капитанской дочкой», «Дворянским гнездом»! Почему же в нас-то ей тоже не прорваться из-под спуда. Стоит только освободиться от того, что в нас неискреннее, *напущенное*; стоит только отбросить ложный стыд, дать в себе волю кровным сочувствиям... Смирения только побольше, да не бараньего, а человеческого...¹¹⁴

Grigoryev’s extreme idealism, both as a philosophy (opposing materialism) and as a life perception (romanticizing reality), was reflected in his highly emotional assessment of everything materialistic, pragmatic, and atheistic. In “Bezvykhodnoe polozhenie,” he links all of these notions to a single driving force, *proletarians*—an embodiment of evil, in his opinion: “День Страшного суда создал пролетариев [...]”¹¹⁵ By those Grigoryev means not the working class per se (as post-Marx generations would come to construe the term) but pragmatic and atheistic

¹¹⁴ Grigor’ev, “Plachevnye razmyshleniia,” p. 355. “After all, the reality is that only that which is founded in the roots is strong, etc. We, not the people, but we, were cut off *from the roots* by the reform and by our circumstances which are in any case not normal but diseased. And in our very selves there are two natures—the artificial, one that appears on the surface, and another, God-given, which lies hidden in us intact and untouched, like the life of the people since the twelfth century. Even in those of our figures whom the drifts of foreign life affected most, as in Pushkin and Turgenev—that nature nevertheless erupts, and violently! As *The Captain’s Daughter*, as *A Nest of Noblemen*! Why can it not burst out of hiding in us too? One would only have to free oneself from whatever is insincere, whatever is *imposed*; one would only have to throw off false pride, give free reign in oneself to innate sympathies. Only a little more humility, and not sheepish humility but human...” (Grigoryev, “Sorrowful Thoughts,” p. 156).

¹¹⁵ Grigor’ev, “Bezvykhodnoe polozhenie,” p. 337. “The Judgment Day created proletarians [...]”

materialists who focus on producing material rather than spiritual values. Grigoryev senses the impending victory of materialism over idealism. The first step on that path, he believes, was already made when people with encyclopedic knowledge and philosophic ideas, like himself, became useless.¹¹⁶ He argues that “хорошему нас учили, враждовать с неправдой нас учили.”¹¹⁷ And the truth, in his understanding, is that life is so complex that it is unknown and unknowable to man and will never be explained by a single manmade theory.

[...Ж]изнь — дело страшно таинственное: в ней есть ироничное начало, она какой-то двуликий Янус; разбейте молотом обломовщину, вы получите штольцовщину, а штольцовщина, сами вы это чувствуете, гораздо хуже обломовщины. Вот и стоим мы как одурелые и готовы причитать и выть по обломовщине, как по родной матери...¹¹⁸

In the beginning of this chapter, I mentioned that Dobrolyubov’s “*Temnoe tsarstvo*” appeared primarily as a rebuttal to Grigoryev’s defense of Russian spirituality over practical matters and that Ostrovsky was used merely as a suitable arena for the debate. In his retort,¹¹⁹ Grigoryev confirms his previously stated position that we have to be humble before life as it is so multifarious and complex that it can never be forced into a single philosophical theory (p. 94), and offers his critique of Dobrolyubov’s misinterpretation of Ostrovsky. According to Grigoryev, where Dobrolyubov sees *samodurstvo*,¹²⁰ one needs to see Russianness, the people’s spirit (*narodnost*), which is the only key to understanding Ostrovsky’s plays (p. 99). According to Grigoryev, “под народностию в Островском [я] разумел объективное, спокойное, чисто поэтическое, а не напряженное, не отрицательное, не сатирическое отношение к

¹¹⁶ Ibid., p. 338.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., p. 340. “They taught us good things, taught us to be enemies of untruth.”

¹¹⁸ Ibid., p. 341. “[...L]ife is something terribly mysterious: it has an ironic origin, it is some sort of two-faced Janus; if you smash Oblomovitis with a hammer you wind up with Stoltzitis, and you yourself feel that Stoltzitis is a lot worse than Oblomovitis. And that’s where we stand, as though stupefied, and ready to lament and howl about Oblomovitis as though it were our own mother” (Grigoryev, “Hopeless Situation,” p. 135).

¹¹⁹ Grigor’ev, “Posle ‘Grozy’ Ostrovskogo (pis’ma k Ivanu Sergeevichu Turgenevu)” (After *The Thunderstorm* by Ostrovsky (Letters to Turgenev)), in Bilinkis, pp. 85–115, p. 94.

¹²⁰ Discussed in chapter IV, under “Vanity and god complex.”

жизни.”¹²¹ Grigoryev further elucidates that *narodnost* is not an exclusively Russian phenomenon. According to him, German literature had a short period that could be characterized by the presence of *narodnost*, or *Germanness* in that case. Grigoryev insists that, during the *Sturm und Drang* period, artists (writers and composers) united against the foreign, particularly French, influences on their native art (p. 110); therefore *narodnost* in Grigoryev’s understanding has a healthy dose of xenophobia. Grigoryev further insists that *narodnost* in conjunction with Ostrovsky should be understood in its broadest sense, i.e., as a collective portrait of all Russians, irrespective of their class, income, or education. Such a portrait should not, however, be a mere mathematical sum of all typical features of the Russian people; it should be an organic picture of endemic morals that makes the Russians different from other peoples (p. 111), and the first thing that makes any Russian very different is his unique confession.

In conclusion, let me itemize Grigoryev’s arguments regarding Ostrovsky’s writing that helped shape my own thesis:

- Ostrovsky is not a writer of realism;
- He is a national poet (rather than satirist) of Russianness;
- Life is too broad and too infinite to fit into a single manmade theory; it can only be fully known to God;
- Russia should not sacrifice its roots and national identity in order to converge with the West;
- Russianness cannot be separated from Russian Orthodoxy, which both shapes and explains it; thus only a truly Christian writer can capture the quintessence of Russianness in his work.

¹²¹ Grigor’ev, “Posle ‘Grozy,’” p. 110. “*Narodnost* in Ostrovsky was perceived [by me] as an objective, calm, and purely poetic—as opposed to tense, negative, and satirical—attitude towards life.”

CHAPTER II ON RUSSIAN ORTHODOXY

The fact that I classify Ostrovsky as a Christian writer is not sufficient to account for his alienness to the West, unless accompanied by the stipulation that he is a Russian Orthodox. Because of his confession, which in some cases is fundamentally different from Roman Catholicism, or Western Christianity, Ostrovsky might never be fully understood outside Russia, which consequently curbs his appreciation in the West.¹²²

The Eastern Christian Church is distinctly different from Roman Catholicism or any of its branches and, while present in Greece, Eastern European countries, and such other locations as the Middle East and Japan, it is not widely spread in Western Europe or America. Russian Orthodoxy is what serves as an insurmountable barrier between Ostrovsky's works and the West since the basic concepts of this confession are different from any religion that is common there.

In view of the above, I believe a short explanation of idiosyncrasies of Russian Orthodoxy should be offered before I proceed to the textual analysis of Ostrovsky's dramas. This chapter aims to present a brief history of the Eastern Christian Church and to look into some of its fundamental differences from its Western counterpart.

The separation of the Churches of the East and the West occurred in 1054 due to ecclesiastical and political (the barbarian conquest of the West and its subsequent separation from the East) reasons:

¹²² A legitimate question arises: why is Dostoevsky, another Russian Orthodox writer, accepted in the West much better than Ostrovsky? The answer, I believe, may lie in the differences between a dramatic and a non-dramatic text presented to another culture in translation. I would argue that dramatic translation is more challenging than, say, translation of a novel, where a phenomenon alien to the culture of the target language can be explained either in the text itself (if a translator is not averse to certain liberties) or in a reference note (if a translator does not wish to compromise continuity and integrity of the original text). The very nature of dia- or polylogical drama, presented to the audience through the oral, rather than written, medium, puts a number of restraints on linguistic structures describing unfamiliar phenomena or ideas. Concepts alien to the culture of the target-language audience require listenable coherence, a smooth aural flow, and comprehensive accessibility on the first take (at the time of the performance), as opposed to an opportunity to pause for elucidations and further research while perusing a written text. Dostoevsky's ideas are no less complex or less difficult to understand for non-Russian Orthodox cultures, but the very nature of a novel generally allows for a more in-depth study, while a performed drama usually lacks this option.

The foundation of Constantinople, the dismemberment of the empire, and the complete separation, in a political sense, of the East from the West, exalted the pride of the patriarch, and raised his see to an equality with that of Rome. He as indignantly resented the pope's pretensions to supremacy as they were vehemently asserted.¹²³

Since the split, patriarchs and popes traded anathemas, accusing each other of heresy. In the ninth century, Patriarch Photius charged the Roman Church with five heresies—sacrilegious notion of the double procession of the Holy Ghost (from the Son and from the Father); erroneous fasting on the Sabbath; wrongful permission of the use of milk or milk products during the first week of Lent; unjustified prohibition for priests to marry; and uncanonical authorization of only bishops to anoint baptized persons with the Holy Chrism, withholding that authority from presbyters (Heard, p. 4)—and more were added through the years. In the eleventh century, for example, a discourse on the use of leavened or unleavened bread in the Eucharist tore the two confessions even further apart. No matter how insignificant those disputes may look to a third party, they were taken very seriously by the opponents, who displayed a fair amount of fanaticism and passion over each and every issue.

The divergence of the two Churches was greater in reality than it appears to be from a superficial view. It was based on essential variations in the character and disposition of the people in the East and in the West, on the nature of their civilization, and on the different, almost antagonistic, development of the Christian idea in one Church and in the other.¹²⁴

The underlying reason for the disputes, as believed by Heard, was the fact that while the Western Church was left to its own devices and had to fare for itself, its counterpart in the East stayed well protected and shielded by the state from harm, remained uninvolved in political affairs, and focused on spiritual matters. In the West, Christianity had to sacrifice some spirituality to entrepreneurial activities, while the East prided itself on staying true to the sacred doctrines of the old, more theoretical, piety (p. 2).

¹²³ Albert F. Heard, *The Russian Church and Russian Dissent: Comprising Orthodoxy, Dissent, and Erratic Sects* (Boston: Adamant Media, 2005), p. 1.

¹²⁴ Ibid., p. 6.

The above paragraphs may explain why complete reconciliation between the two Churches is difficult, if not impossible. While the Western Church concerned itself with issues of survival and self-preservation and subsequently transposed them onto its laity, the Eastern one stayed firmly anchored to self-sacrifice and humbleness, believing that God will protect a true believer if he loves what He loves and shuns what He shuns. In other words, while the East lingered on purely theoretical issues of theological doctrines, the West moved on to their practical applications. Citing Slavophilic ideas, Patrick writes:

When Roman Catholicism separated itself from the Eastern Church, Christian teaching became distorted through the introduction of the element of rationalism and scepticism. This rationalization, sterile and desiccated, served as a basis for the erudition and literature of the West. The Russians adopted Christianity from the Greeks, who faithfully preserved the universal Gospel in all its purity. The sacred writing of the Church Fathers of the East, particularly after the schism, became the source of ancient Russian enlightenment, which far surpassed the Western through its profound and intuitive feeling for the living Christian truth.¹²⁵

In one of the classes that I teach, I examine Nikita Mikhalkov's film *The Barber of Siberia*, which underscores some of the differences between the East and the West. Mikhalkov is a devout Russian Orthodox who always tries to bring a morality issue into his work. For a number of years, I have inevitably stumbled upon the same obstacle while teaching this film. In the analysis of an episode where a Russian officer sacrifices his career and a brilliant future by readily taking the blame for a crime did not commit, simply to spare a woman he loves an unpleasant inquiry, I talk about the concept of honor and self-sacrifice. As soon as I mention these two concepts, a number of hands rise with a question: "How can one call an act of self-destruction honorable?" When I try to explain the idea of sacrificing oneself for the love of one's neighbor, another question always follows: "Who needs a religion that does not emphasize the primacy of self-preservation and taking care of personal wellbeing, but tells you to self-destruct for somebody else?" This episode illustrates well the basic difference between the theoretical East

¹²⁵ Patrick, p. 119.

and the practical West. It also shows that no full reconciliation between the two confessions may be possible.

Another reason that kept the two Churches separated was that Russia, as Mikhail Sergeev puts it, has always had a “commonly negative stand toward the Western confessions”¹²⁶ and had a certain degree of xenophobia, especially when faced with a prospect of subjugation. Describing events of the twelfth century, Heard says that right after the Teutonic Knights attacked Russia on the west, “aiming not merely at conquest, but at the establishment of papal supremacy,” the Tatars “appeared on the east [...] and, in successive invasions, spread over the country like an overwhelming deluge” (pp. 25–26). Showing perfect understanding of the Russian Church’s reasoning, Heard writes:

Russia’s extremity was Rome’s opportunity. Pope Innocent IV offered to arouse the Christian princes of Europe an a crusade against Mongols, if the Russian Church would unite with that of Rome and acknowledge his supremacy. His proposals were disdainfully refused; Russian princes and the Church preferred submission to the khan rather than recognition of the pope.¹²⁷

The Russian Church’s tolerance of paganism and Islam will be discussed in conjunction with Ostrovsky’s historical dramas; however, it is important to remember that, while lenient towards peaceful coexistence with Asian confessions, Eastern Christianity has always resented any offer of submission to the West.

Before 955, the year of Princess Olga’s (wife of Prince Igor of Kiev, whom she succeeded after his death in a regent’s capacity) journey to Constantinople where she was baptized to become the first Russian Christian, Rus was a pagan state with its own set of pagan gods. Olga’s son Svyatoslav who succeeded her on the throne had no interest in religious matters, and it was not until her grandson, Vladimir, that the entire state was forcibly baptized in

¹²⁶ Mikhail Sergeev, *Sophiology in Russian Orthodoxy: Solov’ev, Bulgakov, Losskii and Berdiaev* (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen, 2006), p. 4.

¹²⁷ Heard, p. 26.

988 and the pagan idols were destroyed. Vladimir also started the official policy of subsidizing of the Church by the state: “By a formal decree he provided for the regular support of the Church establishment and the clergy, setting aside for the purpose a tenth part of the revenues of his kingdom and of his subjects” (Heard, p. 20).

Further evidence of this is provided by Dmitry Poloznev, a leading Russian specialist on Russian Orthodoxy, in an article that deals with legal protections enjoyed by the Church:

“Достаточно сказать, что 1-й главой Уложения стала глава «О богохульниках и церковных мятежниках», притом что защита чести царя отнесена ко 2-й главе. Государство в общем виде брало под покровительство и защиту Православную Церковь и ее вероучение.”¹²⁸

Many historians and theologians note that the Russian Church has always manifested the national spirit and been a true keeper of the national character. According to Robert L. Nichols and Theofanis George Stavrou,

The identification of Russian Orthodoxy with every side of Russian life distinguished the church’s history before the imperial era. In an illuminating passage in the seventeenth-century account of his life, the Archpriest Avvakum writes that

by the gift of God among us there is autocracy; till the time of Nikon,¹²⁹ the apostate, in our Russia under our pious princes and tsars the Orthodox faith was pure and undefiled, and in the church was no sedition.

¹²⁸ Dmitrii Fedorovich Poloznev, “Mesto Tserkvi v gosudarstve i obshchestve po Sobornomu ulozheniiu 1649 goda i Kormchei 1650 goda” (The Place of the Church in the State and Community according to the Code of Laws of 1649 and the *Kormchaya* of 1650) in Galina Mitrofanovna Zelenskaia (comp.), *Nikonovskie chteniia v muzee “Novyi Ierusalim”* (Nikonite Readings at the New Jerusalem Museum) (Moscow: Severnyi palomnik, 2002), pp. 101–104, at p. 101. “Suffice it to say that the 1st chapter of the Code was one ‘On Blasphemers and Heretics,’ while protection of the Sovereign’s honor was dealt with in the 2nd chapter. In broad terms, the state was taking the Orthodox Church and its creed under its protection and care.”

Kormchaya Kniga (Book of the Helmsman), compiled in 1219, was a Russian adaptation of Byzantine nomocanons (adopted also by other Orthodox Churches). It saw several revisions (including the one referred to in the quotation) intended to reflect changes in ecclesiastical laws.

¹²⁹ Nikon (1605–81) became the seventh Patriarch of the Russian Orthodox Church after serving as Metropolitan of Novgorod and archimandrite of the Novospassky monastery in Moscow. After perusing ecclesiastical books, Nikon proposed a number of changes to church doctrines, which were meant to reintroduce old and forgotten Greek traditions in ceremonial observances. Ironically, those changes, whose goal was to bring back the original Greek practices, were perceived as radical innovations and got the name of New (rather than old) Beliefs. Nikon’s supporters were subsequently called New Believers and faced fierce opposition from clergymen and parishioners who erroneously thought their own ways to be old and authentic.

For Avvakum church, autocracy, and society were one, and none could be changed without the others also undergoing alteration. He saw this plainly, feared western innovations when they came [...] and struggled against the new currents.¹³⁰

The state policy of protecting and defending the Church, as an institution that preserved the national spirit, remained constant until the end of Nicholas I's rule in 1855 when it started to dissolve under his successor, Alexander II—a process that Ostrovsky witnessed and did not approve of.

Engelstein writes that “Nicholas I's slogan¹³¹ [...] affirmed a connection between the empire's core cultural identity (*narodnost'*), the form of political authority (*samoderzhavie*), and the character of the historically dominant faith (*pravoslavie*)” (p. 23). Nichols and Stavrou also confirm the fact that the Church remained under the government's wing for a long while: “It has been frequently asserted (or assumed) that the close identification of Russian Orthodoxy with the imperial government determined the church's status and future” (p. 3). However, in the early nineteenth century, the monarchy itself was in need of protection, having come under repeated attacks from the liberals. Supporters of Russian Orthodoxy recognized the threat and, by bringing people back to religion, fought to strengthen the Church and thus the alliance between religious conviction and the existing form of government. The Decembrist uprising¹³² became the first in a chain of events that revealed certain dissatisfaction with the Russian monarchy. The threat to the government increased even more during the rule of Alexander II when an alarming number of bombings, assassination attempts, and other terrorist acts against the government were carried out by individual terrorists¹³³ and, later, by members of Narodnaya Volya.¹³⁴

¹³⁰ The editors' introduction to Nichols and Stavrou, pp. 3–17, at p. 4.

¹³¹ “One Tsar, One State, One Religion”; discussed in chapter III, under “Second period.”

¹³² The Decembrist uprising took place on December 14, 1825, when three thousand soldiers and their commanding officers gathered in Senate Square in St. Petersburg, protesting Nicholas I's assumption of the imperial crown after his elder brother Constantine renounced his right of succession. The revolt was quickly suppressed, with some of its leaders publicly executed and others exiled to Siberia.

¹³³ The first attempt to assassinate Alexander II was made on April 4, 1866, by Dmitry Karakozov, who fired at him but missed.

Ostrovsky's personal response to the events was a number of historical plays that he used as a metaphor for warning his compatriots against the dangers of a radical approach to the Church and the state.

The Church had been the foundation for hope through all the trying times of Russia's development. It kept the people's spirit up during the Tatar-Mongolian invasion; it offered all sorts of spiritual and financial support to the state during the Time of Troubles and numerous military conflicts that Russia was involved in throughout its history. Ostrovsky understood this important role that the Church played in the lives of his countrymen. During the difficult time when the people found themselves at the crossroads between religion and materialism or atheism, he took it upon himself to keep reminding them of Christian doctrines that had united them through thick and thin for centuries, trying to make sure they never lose their national identity by choosing the path of either Western atheism or Roman Catholicism both of which, in his opinion, were equally detrimental to the Russians.

Vera Shevzov talks about the difference of the more individualized Western approach to life as compared to the more communal Eastern one:

As the Russian Orthodox theologian and historian Georges Florovsky has noted about the early Christian experience, "to be a Christian meant just to belong to the community. Nobody could be a Christian by himself as an isolated individual, but only together with 'the brethren,' in togetherness with them."¹³⁵

Shevzov also acknowledges the fact that "[t]he Slavophiles [...] tended to idealize the Russian peasant community and felt that it had, among other things, helped to prepare the way for Russia's assimilation of Orthodox Christianity." To prove that statement, the scholar employs evidence from the writings by Khomyakov, a "well-known scholar of the Slavophiles," who consistently used the word *obshchina* (commune) "synonymously with the term church."

¹³⁴ Narodnaya Volya (People's Will) was a radical Russian political organization that supported a militant fight against the monarchy in the 1870s and 80s.

¹³⁵ Vera Shevzov, *Russian Orthodoxy on the Eve of Revolution* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), p. 3.

According to Shevzov, “by closely associating the Church with the notion of commune, Khomiakov meant to move away from the understanding of church primarily as a bureaucratic institution and instead to emphasize such notions as togetherness and fellowship” (p. 30). In my opinion, this very notion of Russian togetherness and fellowship, which stems from and is supported by the Eastern Church, is what Ostrovsky rooted for in his writing. Apparently, it pained him to see the ideological splits that were occurring in Russia before his eyes, and he used theatre as a platform for voicing his opinion in favor of Russian Orthodoxy—in his understanding, the ultimate uniting force for all Russians.

Shevzov mentions the reason for the marginalization of the Church in the middle of the nineteenth century that Ostrovsky saw and raised his voice against:

In the mid- and late nineteenth century, [...] much of the official legislation concerning the Church tended to marginalize the parish and community, despite efforts from the civil sphere to mobilize the Church for state purposes and pastoral efforts to raise the ecclesial self-awareness of parishioners. At the same time, multiple historical factors—the cultural thaw and *glasnost*’ of Alexander II’s reign, greater exposure to competing philosophical and religious ideas from the West, conflicts between different schools of thought within the Russian Church itself—all contributed to enlivening the field of Orthodox theology.¹³⁶

As follows from Shevzov’s comment, Ostrovsky’s interest in Russian Orthodoxy may be attributed to a believer’s natural reaction to the changing political and social atmosphere in Russia. Had those changes not occurred, he could have remained less fervent in his defense of Russianness as a product of the national religion, which could have resulted in his better acceptance by the West. But Ostrovsky was addressing his countrymen, not the world, and that kept him local.

Western scholars acknowledge Ostrovsky’s marginalization in the West. According to Gerould,

[...] Ostrovsky can be considered the most Russian of playwrights.

¹³⁶ Ibid., p. 27.

But here lies the problem. We are told that Ostrovsky is so Russian that he is not easily accessible to Western audiences and cannot be successfully exported for performance on foreign stages. In other words, Ostrovsky's brand of Russianness has not yet been assimilated into the Western theatrical mainstream in the way that Chekhov's has. Now if we ask why this should be so, the answer that we get is that Ostrovsky is a great national author—but not a universal one—because he depicts a social reality so parochially Russian as to be bound to a particular place and time.¹³⁷

Gerould offers an explanation of the Ostrovsky phenomenon, finding the answer in the fact that the characters created by the Russian playwright “are not very appealing or flattering; they do not correspond to popular notions of the ‘Russian soul,’ derived from reading Russian novels about the upper classes” (p. 107).

Attempts have been made by several scholars to bring Ostrovsky to the same level as the other theatre colossi. Marjorie Hoover finishes her book on the Russian playwright with the following:

Undoubtedly Ostrovsky deserves to be better known in the West today. For his major themes of money and marriage remain topical under modern Western capitalism [...]. The human problems, of course, remain the same, and Ostrovsky's gaze confronts them as unflinchingly, yet humanely, now as then. How could such heroes and heroines as Zhadov, Balzaminov, and Neschastlivtsev, or Katherine, Larisa, and Negina, fail to come alive in the West, if they were given their day on stage?¹³⁸

I would venture an explanation that what prevents Ostrovsky's characters from “coming alive in the West” is exactly this specific “brand of Russianness,” a brand whose emphasis on loving thy neighbor more than thyself made him into a humble servant of his own countrymen who at the time needed a reminder that their national identity was in danger.

Humbleness before people and before God is another feature that is perceived differently by the Eastern and Western Churches. In a Russian church there are no seats available as people are supposed to stand (or kneel) before God. A typical liturgy in a Russian church lasts for two hours, with special services and festive masses lasting at least twice as long.

¹³⁷ Gerould, p. 105.

¹³⁸ Marjorie L. Hoover, *Alexander Ostrovsky* (Boston: Twayne, 1981), p. 138.

Personal comfort is what Russian parishioners readily sacrifice to show their respect and humility. And Eastern humbleness, which Grigoryev insisted on and which was discussed in chapter I, is much more pronounced in Russian Orthodoxy. Heard cites the account by Paul of Aleppo, a Syrian Eastern Orthodox clergyman and chronicler, of his visit to Moscow in 1655:

We returned to our monastery astonished and wonder-struck at the constancy and firmness of this nation, from the emperor to their very infants. We entered the church as the clock struck three, and did not leave it till ten; having stood there with them about seven hours, on our legs, on the cold iron pavement, enduring the most severe cold and piercing frost. But we were consoled for all this by witnessing the admirable devotion of this people.¹³⁹

Paul of Aleppo's surprise at the Russian parishioners' extreme humbleness is also cited by Sergey Lobachev, a professor of the St. Petersburg State University: "За вечерней и при каждом Аллилуиа, взамен малых поклонов, они делали большие до земли... Мы кладем после трех больших двенадцать малых поклонов, а они делают все большие до земли."¹⁴⁰ I believe that this Russian Orthodox humbleness—which made Ostrovsky a true servant of his country and his people—has restricted his access to the world arena and consequently limited the interest of the world theatre in his work.

The distinctions discussed above are the most fundamental ones between Catholicism and Russian Orthodoxy. There are also a number of more specific differences between the two confessions, relevant to Ostrovsky's pieces. These will be dealt with in relevant chapters below.

¹³⁹ Heard, p. 92.

¹⁴⁰ Sergei Vladimirovich Lobachev, "Khronologiia tserkovnoi reformy Patriarkha Nikona" (A Chronology of Patriarch Nikon's Church Reform), in Zelenskaia, pp. 105–111, at p. 109. "During the vespers and after every *alleluia*, instead of small bows, they make low bows, touching the ground.... We make three low bows and then twelve small bows, and they make all of them low, to the ground."

CHAPTER III PEOPLE DRIVEN BY GUILT VS. PEOPLE DRIVEN BY SHAME

A huge question that preoccupied Ostrovsky all his life and that is tackled in all of his works is, Why is there an unbridgeable gap between what people say and how they act—and what they really feel; and consequently: can the inner and the outer ever be equated and, more importantly, should they be? The discourse on guilt vs. shame underlay Ostrovsky's further studies on the nature of sin; lying and using language as a tool of manipulation; and, more broadly, the duality of human nature in general.

Robert C. Elliott gives a good example of the difference between societies or cultures driven by guilt as opposed to those driven by shame:

Some anthropologists have found it useful to distinguish between cultures which rely heavily on feelings of guilt, and those which rely on fear of shame, as sanctions for behavior—as means, that is, for enforcing conformity to an accepted standard of behavior. In a guilt culture, an individual will obey internalized standards of morality without reference to outside forces. A Catholic alone on an island, for example, [...] would not eat meat on Friday. He would be responding to internal sanctions, would be following his conscience. Violation of such sanctions will produce a kind of torment, which, however, can be relieved by confession and atonement. Shame cultures, on the other hand, rely on external sanctions to govern behavior: what other people will think or say, whether they will praise or blame—these are the over-riding considerations. Probably no culture exists in which both internal and external sanctions are not operative, but societies vary greatly in point of emphasis.¹⁴¹

E. R. Dodds maintains that in a shame culture there is “tension between individual impulse and the pressure of social conformity,” adding that “in such a society, anything which exposes a man to the contempt or ridicule of his fellows, which causes him to ‘lose face,’ is felt as

¹⁴¹ Robert C. Elliott, *The Power of Satire: Magic, Ritual, Art* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1972), p. 67. See also Ruth Benedict, *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword: Patterns of Japanese Culture* (New York: New American Library, 1974), in particular the chapter entitled “The Dilemma of Virtue.” The book, which describes the Japanese and their difference from the Americans, was first published in 1946 and popularized the concept of shame cultures and guilt cultures: “True shame cultures rely on external sanctions for good behavior, not, as true guilt cultures do, on an internalized conviction of sin. Shame is a reaction to other people's criticism. [...] It requires an audience or at least a man's fantasy of an audience. Guilt does not. In a nation where honor means living up to one's own picture of oneself, a man may suffer from guilt though no man knows of his misdeed and a man's feeling of guilt may actually be relieved by confessing his sin” (p. 223).

unbearable.”¹⁴² Using these parameters to describe Homeric art, he claims that the Ancient Greeks were shame- rather than guilt-driven: “Homeric man’s highest good is not the enjoyment of a quiet conscience, but the enjoyment of [...] public esteem” (p. 17). Dodds uses the relatively recent theory as a valid explanation of Homer’s world. The temporal gap between the seventh century B.C., when Homeric poetry appeared, and the mid-twentieth century, when the theory was introduced, is over two and a half millennia. I would use the same theory to illustrate the world of Ostrovsky, and the temporal gap in this case would be considerably narrower—a little over one hundred years.

Ostrovsky’s interest towards the ratio of guilt to shame in human beings could be explained by geographical factors: Russia is a country where the East meets the West, and, naturally, it bears certain characteristic features of both worlds. Shame stemmed from the East, guilt came from the West, and Russia, in Ostrovsky’s understanding, found itself between the two ideologies. I believe that the playwright’s choice of guilt over shame (at least most of his life) can only be attributed to his religious background and his awareness of God’s omniscience and the biblical concept of sin, as otherwise, out of practical considerations, he would have voted in favor of shame.

Another reason for his interest in the presence of guilt and shame in the Russian nature was deeply rooted not only in the historic changes that Russia was undergoing in his time but also, and maybe primarily, in his childhood experiences and the family values to which he was introduced in his early years.

¹⁴² E. R. Dodds, *The Greeks and the Irrational* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1977), p. 18.

In the mid-seventeenth century, Patriarch Nikon, head of Russian Orthodoxy, consolidated the official, state-sanctioned Church and modified its rituals.¹⁴³ The ensuing Great Schism of the Church, “[п]оводом для возникновения [которого] послужила церковно-обрядовая реформа [...] с целью укрепления церковной организации,”¹⁴⁴ separated the Old Believers—advocates of the long-standing beliefs and rituals and the ancient piety—from the New Believers, who embraced the religious innovations:

Старообрядцы, создававшие собственные, обособленные от «никонян» общины, не признавали новых икон, исправленных официальной церковью богослужебных книг, новых обрядов (напр., троеперстия вместо прежнего двоеперстия при совершении «крестного знамения» и др.).¹⁴⁵

Nikon’s reforms were

generally accepted by the nobles and by the upper classes, but were repudiated by the people; the lines of demarcation between the two sections of society were more strongly drawn, and the Raskol [the Great Schism] became concentrated, almost entirely, in the lower ranks, which remained persistently faithful to the ancient order of things.¹⁴⁶

According to Mikhail Bryantsev, this period in Russia’s history saw another important development: the emergence of the merchants as a distinct social group. Before the era of Nikon

¹⁴³ As mentioned earlier, even though Nikon’s goal was to revive *old* Greek (Byzantine) practices, his supporters earned themselves the title of New Believers while those who opposed his reforms came to be known as Old Believers.

Heard enumerates the fundamental differences in ceremonial observances over which the Russian Christians split into Old and New Believers: “[W]hether a *triple* halleluia should be pronounced, in honor of the Trinity, or a *double* halleluia, in reference to the double nature of Christ; whether processions around the churches should march *against* or *with* the sun; whether it be *right* or *wrong* to shave the beard; whether at mass there should be upon the altar *one* or *many* loaves—the Russian used seven; whether the name Jesus should be spelled *Iissous* or *Issous*; whether, in prayer, the Savior should be addressed as *our God* or as *the Son of God*; whether it be right to say of God, whose reign *is eternal*, or whose reign *shall be eternal*; whether the cross should have *four* or *eight* points; and whether the sign of the cross should be made with *three fingers extended*, as denoting the Trinity. and *two closed*, in reference to Christ’s double nature, or with *two fingers extended*, in allusion to the double nature, and *three closed*, in token of the Trinity. [...] The Greeks, in each case, followed the former, and the Russians the latter, of the above alternatives [...]” (p. 95).

¹⁴⁴ *Bol’shaia sovskaia entsiclopedia* (Great Soviet Encyclopedia), ed. Aleksandr Mikhailovich Prokhorov et al., 30 vols. (Moscow: Sovetskaia entsiclopedia, 1970–81), vol. 21, s.v. “Raskol.” “Brought about by the ecclesiastical and liturgical reform [...] for the purpose of reorganizing and strengthening the church” (*Great Soviet Encyclopedia*, ed. Aleksandr Mikhailovich Prokhorov et al., English translation, 31 vols. (New York: Macmillan, 1973–83), vol. 21, s.v. “Schism.”

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, vol. 24, book I, s.v. “Staroobriadchestvo” (Old Believers Movement). “[The Old Believers] formed their own communities, separate from the “Nikonites,” and refused to acknowledge the new icons, the liturgical books revised by the official church, and the new rituals, such as making the sign of the cross with three fingers instead of two” (*Great Soviet Encyclopedia*, English translation, vol. 24, s.v. “Old Believers”).

¹⁴⁶ Heard, p. 195.

and Peter I, people directly involved in trade had not been classified as an entity; even the word *kupets* (merchant) had had no coherent definition. The merchants established themselves as a clearly delineated class in Russia by the end of the eighteenth century.¹⁴⁷ As they are of vital importance to understanding Ostrovsky's oeuvre, it is relevant to observe that, stemming from the lower classes, they frequently were Old Believers.

The Old Believers were a mixed group united by the idea that the morality rules of Russian Orthodoxy were set in stone and could not be modified to keep up with the changing times. The closest American equivalent, in terms of inflexibility of the rules although not necessarily in terms of the creed, would be the Pennsylvania Dutch who still effectively resist any changes that can intrude on their set of moral values. The Old Believers in Russia formed a recurrent subject of many literary and dramatic works up until the early twentieth century. Saltykov-Shchedrin's drama *Smert' Pazukhina* (Pazukhin's Death), for example, is devoted to a conflict between parents, who strongly advocate the old morality, and children, who welcome laws that are laxer and more forgiving.

Partisans of the ancient faith were upholders of ancient customs [...]. Religious enthusiasts sympathized with Old Muscovites, and the national party with Old Believers. This union was, however, a union among the lower classes; the noble, the wealthy, the ambitious, with few exceptions, followed the emperor's [Peter I's] lead, and looked, with all the haughty superciliousness of that age, upon the people and upon popular opinion. [...The Old Believers'] religious belief and practices encouraged sobriety and frugality; habit of free inquiry, and attempt at independence of thought upon spiritual matters, were followed by general increase of intelligence, and, under these influences, the Raskolniks [Old Believers], gradually and justly, won the reputation of being the most honest, the most capable, and the most reliable portion of the population.¹⁴⁸

Treadgold points to an "estrangement between the westernized intellectuals of the cities and the Russian culture of the unlettered *narod* [commoners]" in Pushkin's time (p. 21). He adds that, in

¹⁴⁷ Mikhail Vasil'evich Briantsev, *Kul'tura russkogo kupechestva (vospitanie i obrazovanie)* (The Culture of Russian Merchants (Upbringing and Education)) (Bryansk, Russia: Kursiv, 1999), p. 5. Bryantsev is a contemporary Russian scholar whose field of academic research is the merchants and who has written extensively on them.

¹⁴⁸ Heard, pp. 211–212.

the years that followed and up until the 1917 Revolution, the gulf between the Church and the intelligentsia became more pronounced and started to include other strata:

The church was failing to meet the religious needs of a substantial segment of the people of Russia. Not only did it fall short in satisfying the intelligentsia, or those among the group who were open to religious issues, but it could not hold many simple people, who found the attraction of the Old Believers and sectarians [...] great and often strong enough to lure them away.¹⁴⁹

Even in 1910 the Old Believers were still a factor in Russia—for example, the first version of Gorky's drama *Vassa Zheleznova*, written that year, repeatedly alludes to a group of them living across the river from the Zheleznovs—and in the nineteenth century they were a definite presence. Heard, Ostrovsky's contemporary, acknowledges multiple groups of the Old Believers, going strong and unyielding to the officially sanctioned practices of the New Believers.

Ostrovsky was born and raised in a very secluded area of Moscow. Across the Moskva River, cut off from the rest of the city and thus almost totally isolated, self-contained, and self-sufficient, lay the borough of Zamoskvorechye—a separate entity, almost entirely disconnected from and unconcerned with Moscow proper. There was a church on every street and in every corner, and its bells were ringing on every Orthodox holiday (Lakshin, p. 13). In Zamoskvorechye, where progress hardly reached, most customs and traditions remained intact forever, and the majority of its dwellers never learned about any innovations. Grigoryev finds a lot of poetry in this secluded, self-contained part of Moscow, calling Zamoskvorechye “an Arcadia.” He notes that even Ostrovsky did not give it enough justice in his descriptions.¹⁵⁰

The mere fact that the playwright was born in that area would have been enough for him to be imbued with rigid biblical morals and Jesus' commandments from the Sermon on the Mount, but Ostrovsky had another factor anchoring him to the Old Believers' high piety: his immediate family had close ties to *beloye dukhovenstvo* (parish clergy). His paternal grandfather was

¹⁴⁹ Treadgold, p. 29.

¹⁵⁰ Grigor'ev, *Moi literaturnye i nraivstvennye skital'chestva*, in his *Odisseia*, pp. 364–402, at pp. 367–370.

an archpriest in the city of Kostroma; his father, Nikolay Fyodorovich, graduated from a theological seminary and then a theological academy before he went into civil service; his maternal grandfather was a sacristan; and his mother, Lyubov Ivanovna, was brought up and trained as *prosvirnya*, a woman who bakes communion bread and is officially part of parish clergy. It was by chance that Lyubov Ivanovna was chosen to live as a protégée in the house of a rich general¹⁵¹ and left her previous occupation. As if to compensate for severing the ties with clergy, the playwright's father rented an apartment in a deacon's house next to a very famous church in Zamoskvorechye, where Alexander was born and raised (Lakshin, pp. 13–18).

According to Lakshin, three out of Ostrovsky's four private teachers before he entered gymnasium (grammar school in nineteenth-century Russia) were seminarians (pp. 28–32). Lakshin also reports of two professors of the Imperial Moscow University who influenced Ostrovsky during his studies there: Stepan Shevryov (language and literature) and Pyotr Ternovsky (theology). Both were adamant about the superiority of Russian Orthodoxy and its pristine piety (pp. 55–57). The playwright was saturated with Russian Orthodox canons, norms, and teachings. However, he could not help noticing that while hardcore Old Believers (although in the nineteenth century they were already a watered-down version of their fervent predecessors who, two hundred years earlier, had often preferred to burn themselves alive together with their families and children rather than bow to the new church rules) were mostly people of guilt, everybody else definitely fell into the category of people of shame.

What started as his own conflict with his father (over Alexander Ostrovsky's common-law marriage to Agafya Ivanovna, which his father did not approve and for which he completely cut off his son, driving him to poverty) turned into a lifelong study. Why did appearances matter to people more than substance; how should one explain why what something looked like was

¹⁵¹ This would explain the recurrent theme of a protégée in Ostrovsky's dramas.

more important than what it really was? This became a burning question about human nature that Ostrovsky strived to understand all his life. On the one hand, why is it that what one feels in his heart of hearts is never good enough for society by way of reason and justification, and he has to follow certain accepted procedures, conform to an established protocol, and satisfy some universal society etiquette? On the other hand, if a person chooses to go against the grain, contradict societal rules and regulations, and revolt against them, would that constitute a commendable deed or a dangerous act?

Shalimova notices that Ostrovsky juxtaposed the inner and the outer sanctions that guide his characters' behavior and labels this phenomenon an opposition of the internal and external personas of man. Shalimova believes that the duality of human nature, and particularly the tension that is created as a result, was Ostrovsky's primary focus of attention. She calls it a dichotomy of an inner and outer man. The inner man is defined as the deepest layer of human existence, that which lies in his heart, a sacred shrine that contains his true self. An outer man is a social construct and should be understood as an empirical layer of human existence, in which he comes into constant contact with particular circumstances and life situations (*Russkii mir*, pp. 65–67). The inner man, according to Shalimova, is of much greater importance to Ostrovsky—a belief I firmly share. The inner is eternal while the outer is but circumstantial; the inner comes from God while the outer, from people around. Whichever becomes a greater factor for an individual—God-induced morality or people-induced dishonesty—triggers guilt- or shame-driven behavior, respectively.

Shalimova finds no exceptions among Ostrovsky's dramas. *Snegurochka*, his historical plays, and even his early "Slavophilic" dramas all form an organically complete picture of Russian character in a dynamic development rather than in stasis. Bypassing the physical chronology of the dramas and establishing her own chronology according to the historical

development of Russianness, she draws a clear picture of how the tension between the inner and the outer in Russian man was evolving (pp. 67–172). Starting with the analysis of the mythologized pagan world of *Snegurochka*, she follows this vector through Ostrovsky's historical pieces and then to his pre- and post-reform¹⁵² dramas set in the nineteenth century.

This progression, I believe, helps us visualize that although the outer man in Ostrovsky's world changed greatly from one historic period to the next, the inner man remained the same. The changes that are visible are therefore not quintessential; they are due to the changed ratio between the inner and the outer. This drive to preserve the national identity or the essence of Russianness appears to be both Ostrovsky's main concern and his aspiration.

The transformation of Ostrovsky's views on the guilt-to-shame ratio should, in my opinion, influence any periodization of his writing. Most critics distinguish two periods, pre-reform and post-reform. Mirsky, for example, states explicitly that the pre-reform Ostrovsky is better than the post-reform one (p. 234). Cox believes that the difference between the two periods lies in Ostrovsky's depiction of merchants. She says that all his pre-reform merchants are "common swindlers" while the post-reform ones are commercial entrepreneurs (pp. 18–19). I can see Cox's point—there was, in fact, a certain shift in Ostrovsky's portrayal of merchants vs. noblemen, which occurred over the years. However, the nature of that shift appears different from what Cox describes it to be, and I feel compelled to show that hers is an erroneous assumption. Two dramas, *V chuzom piru pokhmel'e* and *Tiazhelye dni*, share the same despotic character of Tit Titych, a rich merchant. The first one, written in 1855, belongs to the pre-reform period; the second, written in 1863, to the post-reform one. Tit Titych never had any qualitative changes and remained absolutely the same, unpleasantly tyrannical, character in both

¹⁵² The emancipation reform of 1861 was the first and most important of Tsar Alexander II's liberal reforms. Its goal was to change the status of Russian peasants from dependent serfs to free agents.

pieces. In either one, he is no different from the pre-reform *samodur*¹⁵³ character of Ulanbekova in *Vospitannitsa* (A Protégée of the Mistress; written in 1858) or such post-reform ones as Khryukov in *Shutniki* (1864), Shalygin in *Voevoda* (1864), Kurolepov and Khlynov in *Goriachee serdtse* (1868), Akhov in *Ne vse kotu Maslenitsa* (1871), or Mavra in *Pravda — khorosho, a schast'e luchshe* (1876).

Cox also believes that while tyrannical *samodurstvo* in Ostrovsky's pre-reform dramas comes from life environment and circumstances (Cox uses the word *milieu*), the blame for it in his post-reform ones lies entirely on human vices and the perversity of human nature (p. 177). While I have to agree with the presence of the shift, I cannot link it to the 1861 emancipation reform because, again, there is no textual evidence for it.

Not only have I been unable to find proof in Ostrovsky's texts that 1861 should be considered a demarcation line in his writing, I would also argue that there are four clearly defined periods in his art, corresponding to the changes in his views regarding guilt and shame and, consequently, regarding the state of religious thought in Russia.

First period (1847–1859)

Ostrovsky was twenty-four when *Semeinaia kartina* (A Family Scene),¹⁵⁴ his first one-act play, was written and published a month later,¹⁵⁵ albeit banned for staging. *Semeinaia kartina* offers a vivid comparison of a mother and the younger generation. The mother, Stepanida Puzatova, is not explicitly named as an Old Believer, but she is definitely a person with unbending rules and morals. She constantly chastises her son Antip for spending too much time in pubs instead of working and keeping an eye on his wife Matryona; her daughter-in-law for

¹⁵³ Discussed in chapter IV, under "Vanity and god complex."

¹⁵⁴ The penultimate section of this paper contains plot summaries of all Ostrovsky's plays.

¹⁵⁵ Before Ostrovsky began writing dramas, he tried his hand in prose fiction. *Zapiski zamoskvoretskogo zhitel'ia* (Notes of a Zamoskvorechye Dweller) were written before he turned completely and irreversibly to theatre.

sleeping too late and having a passion for dressing up, which is inappropriate for her station; and both them and her daughter Marya for forgetting proper behavior during fasts, Lent, and other religious observances. The younger characters revolt against the rigidity of unyielding rules and traditions, but Ostrovsky makes sure we understand that their lack of scruples makes them shallow, superfluous, and clearly inferior to Stepanida, who, despite her disagreeable manner, demonstrates strong convictions and an inner core.

Semeinaia kartina is the first play that clearly demonstrates a strong influence by Shakespeare, whom Ostrovsky considered his mentor and guide. The influence has not yet spread to the content of the play; it only manifests itself in the form of the young playwright's work. The discussion between Antip and his sister about the candidates for Marya's hand in marriage is shaped remarkably similar to the discussion about Portia's eager suitors in Act I, scene 2, of Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice*, where one interlocutor suggests a prospect and the other—the interested party—volleys him off, mocking the candidate's personal traits that disqualify him. The difference between the two scenes is, of course, that while Portia demonstrates witticism and thoughtful insight in her criticism, Marya does not venture beyond appearances. She rejects the suitors suggested by her brother because one constantly smells of onions and the other is ugly. It is remarkable that, although the young generation is no match for Stepanida, it gets to win in the end: Marya and Matryona steal to a secret double date while Antip runs away to a local pub.

Svoi ludi — sochtemsia, Ostrovsky's first full-length play, is the cradle of the playwright's lifelong vocation: a multifaceted study of the duality of human nature. The theme of guilt vs. shame becomes bigger and more pronounced here. What started as a mere juxtaposition of the Old and New Believers, their doctrines and behavior, now grows into a larger issue of morality as opposed to lack thereof. This modified focus became a permanent one for Ostrovsky. Until

his very last play, written in 1885, only seven months before his death, Ostrovsky looked for a coherent explanation of why the inner is seldom congruent with the outer; why people pretend to be pious when they are not; why true piety and good intentions get destroyed the second they clash with society and the materialism of the outer world; why what is good on paper and in theory does not work in practice.

In *Svoi liudi*, Agrafena Bolshova, Samson's wife and Lipochka's mother, is an Old Believer. Ustinya, a matchmaker entrusted with finding Lipochka a husband, is not happy about Agrafena's demands with regard to a son-in-law and openly complains about it:

Устинья Наумовна. [...] Маменька-то вот [...] тоже норовит в свое удовольствие: подавай ты ей беспременно купца, да чтобы был жалованный, да лошадей бы хороших держал, да и лоб-то крестил бы по-старинному.¹⁵⁶

Being an Old Believer, Agrafena is, naturally, a guilt-driven person, and it pains her to see that her only daughter Lipochka has chosen to become an unscrupulous shame-driven one. In Act I, scene 2, Lipochka has an argument with her mother about marriage. While Agrafena feels that finding the best possible husband for her daughter should take time, Lipochka is more inclined to marry simply to be able to keep up with the Joneses:

Липочка. [...] Мне мужа надобно! [...] Срам встречаться с знакомыми, в целой Москве не могли выбрать жениха — всё другим да другим. Кого не заденет за живое: все подруги с мужьями давно, а я словно сирота какая!¹⁵⁷

Lipochka, an epitome of shallowness, is mortified by the possibility that her dress might be less fashionable than her neighbor's or her dancing less graceful. It is certainly not her mother that

¹⁵⁶ Ostrovskii, *Svoi liudi — sochtemsia*, in his *PSS*, vol. 1, pp. 27–94, at p. 34. “**Ustinya Naumovna.** [...] And your mamma [...] is always wanting her own taste suited; you must be sure to give her a merchant, with a decoration, who keeps horses, and who crosses himself in the old way” (Ostrovsky, *It's a Family Affair—We'll Settle It Ourselves*, in his *Plays*, trans. and ed. George Rapall Noyes (Honolulu: University Press of the Pacific, 2002), pp. 213–305, at p. 225. This translation offers a footnote commentary about Ustinya's lines: “Evidently, Bolshov and his family, like many other wealthy Moscow merchants, belonged to the sect of the Old Believers, one of whose dearest tenets is that the sign of the cross should be made with two fingers instead of with three” (ibid.)).

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., pp. 30–31. “**Lipochka.** [...] It's a husband I want. [...] I'm ashamed to meet my acquaintances; in all Moscow we weren't able to choose a husband; other girls kept having all the luck. Wouldn't it make anybody sick? All my friends were married long ago, and here I am like a kind of orphan!” (Ostrovsky, *It's a Family Affair*, pp. 219–220).

has made her that shallow, but, despite Agrafena's honest efforts, her convictions have not rubbed off on her daughter in the least. Then who or what is responsible for making people sacrifice morals for passions and choose what is easy over what is right?

On a parenthetical note, the character of Ustinya the matchmaker echoes characters created by Molière and Cervantes. This comparison, albeit in form only, becomes important if we remember that even though Russian Orthodoxy, a non-Western confession, served as a background for Ostrovsky's art, his theatrical theories came strictly from the West. The Ancient Greeks' verisimilar traditions in staging plus their predilection for speech over action (as opposed to the East's primacy of metaphorical and allegorical symbolism of movement and gestures), having influenced all of Europe and America, were absorbed by the Russian theatre as well.

The masters of drama in the later nineteenth century—Turgenev, Ostrovsky, Tolstoy—dealt exclusively with the Russian milieu, but all of them showed clearly the influence of the literary currents that were shaping the course of European art. What was chiefly original in the Russian drama was the Russian spirit; all the rest was borrowed or adapted from the literature of the West.¹⁵⁸

So while the content could be purely Russian, the form of Ostrovsky's dramas, at least at the early stages, remained decidedly Western. His Ustinya is cunning, greedy, selfish, and dishonest just like Cristina, a housemaid in Cervantes's *La Cueva de Salamanca* (The Cave of Salamanca) who is trying to find a young lover for Leonarda, or Frosine, the *femme d'intrigue* of Molière's *L'Avare* (The Miser).¹⁵⁹ Replying to La Flèche's question of what she is doing in Harpagon's house, Frosine says:

Frosine. Ce que je fais partout ailleurs : m'entremettre d'affaires, me rendre serviable aux gens, et profiter, du mieux qu'il m'est possible, des petits talents que je puis avoir. Tu

¹⁵⁸ Valency, p. 5.

¹⁵⁹ Lakshin reports that Ostrovsky was a frequent theatre-goer since 1840 and was much influenced by European dramas and earlier Russian plays staged in Moscow (p. 66). Mikhail Shchepkin (1788–1863), a famous Russian tragic actor, who played Harpagon in *The Miser* at that time, quickly became one of Ostrovsky's favorite actors (p. 72).

sais que, dans ce monde, il faut vivre d'adresse, et qu'aux personnes comme moi le ciel n'a donné d'autre rentes que l'intrigue et que l'industrie.¹⁶⁰

As will be discussed later, getting by on one's wits, plotting and scheming, is something that is characteristic not only of Ostrovsky's matchmakers (who include Manefa in *Na vsiakogo mudretsa dovol'no prostoty*, Akulina in the Balzaminov trilogy, and Karpovna and Pankratyevna in *Bednaia nevesta*) but also of an entire gallery of characters from his third period whose means cannot satisfy their appetites.

While Ostrovsky was still young, he seemed to be harsher and less forgiving in judging people driven solely by shame than when he got older, wiser, and more tolerant. He openly satirized them without looking deep into the reasons for such behavior. Ostrovsky equated dancing attendance to societal whims with a lack of moral principles and consequently the absence of an inner core in a person. This could probably be attributed to the tug-of-war between the Westerners and the Slavophiles that started about that time and escalated very quickly. The Slavophiles insisted on the old piety, high morals, and strict adherence to church rules, while the Westerners advocated liberal ideas, renunciation of church restrictions, and a faster pace of technological progress. Fyodor Dostoevsky writes that the Slavophiles' beliefs about Russia's national uniqueness merged with the convictions of the Old Believers.¹⁶¹ His brother Mikhail considers Ostrovsky to belong to neither the Western camp nor the Slavophilic one¹⁶²; however, we must still acknowledge the fact that, early in his writing career, the playwright took sides (the Slavophiles' side, mostly) and expressed his sympathies more openly

¹⁶⁰ Molière, *L'Avare*, in his *Œuvres complètes* (Paris: Seuil, 1962), pp. 430–462, at p. 441. “**Frosine.** Same as I do everywhere—acting as go-between, making myself useful to people and picking up what I can from such small talents as I may have. You know, in this life you have to learn to get by on your wits and those of us who have no other capital have to depend on our natural talent for plotting and scheming” (Molière, *The Miser*, in his *The Miser and Other Plays: A New Selection*, trans. John Wood and David Coward (London: Penguin Books, 2000), pp. 147–215, at p. 173).

¹⁶¹ Fedor Dostoevskii, “Slavianofily, chernogortsy,” p. 27.

¹⁶² Mikhail Mikhailovich Dostoevskii, “Groza”: drama v 5 deistviakh A. N. Ostrovskogo” (*The Thunderstorm: A Five-act Drama by Ostrovsky*), in Bilinkis, pp. 162–183, at p. 164.

than later in life. Mikhail Dostoevsky states that when the Westerners criticized the playwright for professing Slavophilism, they proceeded from purely formal characteristics. They accused him of an archaic, pre-Peter I morality simply because Ostrovsky liked using Russian maxims as titles of his plays. Dostoevsky observes that those critics never looked beyond the title and into the content of the plays that clearly revealed the author's deepest love for and knowledge of Russian life and Russian soul (p. 164). Even though Mikhail Dostoevsky's assessment is absolutely correct and Ostrovsky is not to be thought of as either a pure Slavophile or a pure Westerner, the influence of Zamoskvorechye's patriarchal laws (to which he clearly displays partisan feelings) on the plays of his first period needs to be acknowledged.

Ostrovsky's 1850 play *Utro molodogo cheloveka* (A Young Man's Morning) is a merciless satire on good-for-nothing children who prefer wasting their wealthy parents' money to working and earning their own. Semyon Nedopekin, the play's lead character, is all appearances and no essence. Whatever society dictates and demands, he does, no questions asked. By mentioning Semyon's passion for spending time in front of a mirror, Ostrovsky suggests that he should be equated with his reflection, a flat, two-dimensional image with no depth; a candy wrapper with no candy inside. Semyon is shown as an inferior person, an empty vessel with neither heart nor soul, who is even ridiculed by the lower classes and his own servants:

Иван. [...] Я еще такого и не видывал, чтобы кто так моде подражал. Вот теперь встает во втором часу; а скажи ему, что господа встают с петухами вместе, ведь и он тоже с петухами станет вставать.

Сидорыч. Тон наблюдают-с.

Иван. Уж и наблюдает-то, просто смех смотреть на него. Увидит где на гулянье или в театре, как кто одет [...], сейчас и перенимает; вот здесь и учится перед зеркалом.¹⁶³

¹⁶³ Ostrovskii, *Utro molodogo cheloveka*, in his *PSS*, vol. 1, pp. 95–108, at p. 96. “**Ivan.** [...] I’ve never seen anything like that, a man to follow the fashions so. He gets up after one o’clock in the afternoon now, but tell him that gentlemen rise at dawn, and he’ll start rising at dawn too. **Sidorych.** Trendy, isn’t he? **Ivan.** Trendy to the point it makes you laugh. Once he catches a glimpse of what they are wearing [...], out in public somewhere or at the theatre, he apes it right away; and he practices right here, in front of the mirror.”

In Sheridan's comedy *The School for Scandal*, which Ostrovsky knew well and loved,¹⁶⁴ one of Sir Oliver Surface's two nephews, Joseph, seems respectful, frugal, and prudent, while the other, Charles, looks and acts in a manner that his uncle finds too extravagant and unfitting. And yet in the end it is Charles who reconciles with Sir Oliver, winning his uncle's respect and inheritance, because he demonstrates that beneath the surface of a dandy and scapegrace lies a good heart with strong moral convictions. Ostrovsky must have pictured Charles as a guilt-driven person who just strayed for a while but still managed to preserve his integrity. The behavioral pattern of the two nephews must have been appealing to the Russian playwright because, seventy-three years later, he adjusted the same situation to illustrate his current views on shame and guilt. In *Utro molodogo cheloveka*, Smurov, a rich and powerful uncle, also has two nephews: Semyon and Vasya. Vasya cannot tell a French book from a German one, and, judging by his speech, his education in general is somewhat scarce. But Vasya has no interest in latest fashions and prefers helping his uncle and learning business from him. In Ostrovsky's opinion, labor is superior to idleness; therefore Vasya's behavior is chosen as preferred, and Smurov ultimately decides to cut off Semyon altogether, letting him deal with his beautification efforts and his huge debts.

Ne v svoi sani ne sadis' is a comedy of manners that studies the opposition of guilt and shame with the strict judgments of a morality play. For the first time, Ostrovsky rather firmly links this binary to different classes: merchants are said to be people of guilt while aristocrats are depicted as people of shame. The father and daughter Rusakov, merchant Borodkin, and even innkeeper Malomalsky, with his affinity for the bottle, are shown as people with strong moral convictions and old-fashioned piety. Aristocrats Vikhorev and Baranchevsky are made into one-

¹⁶⁴ Sheridan's comedies were frequently staged in Moscow in Ostrovsky's time. In particular, they formed an integral part of the Maly Theatre's repertoire (Nikolai Aleksandrovich Abalkin, "Teatr i obshchestvo" (Theatre and Society), in Abalkin (ed.), *Malyi teatr*, pp. 10–74, at p. 39).

dimensional caricatures as brazen money-grabbers and impudent spendthrifts who snobbishly consider merchants an inferior class, yet have no problem milking them for money. This snobbism towards her own class and a fascination with appearances rather than the essence has contaminated Arina, Rusakov's sister who spent a considerable amount of time socializing with nobility in Moscow (the action of the play is set in a small provincial town but might as well have been set in Zamoskvorechye). Arina pushes Rusakov's daughter Dunya into eloping with Vikhorev but gets to genuinely regret it later.

The gradual transformation of a nation of guilt into a nation of shame, a process that Ostrovsky clearly denounces at the age of twenty-nine, is seen in Rusakov's short monologue:

Русаков. [...] Что это, Иванушка, как я погляжу, народ-то всё хуже и хуже делается, и что это будет, уж и не знаю. Возьмем хоть из нашего брата: ну, старики-то еще туда-сюда, а молодые-то?.. На что это похоже?.. Ни стыда, ни совести: ведь поверить ничего нельзя, а уж уважения и не спрашивай. Нет, мы, бывало, страх имели, старших уважали. Опять эту моду выдумали! Прежде ее не было, так лучше было, право. Проще жили, ну, и народ честней был. А то — я, говорит, хочу по моде жить, по-нынешнему, а глядишь, тому не платит, другому не платит.¹⁶⁵

Mikhail Dostoevsky insists that the Westerners were wrong to accuse Rusakov of being too archaically patriarchal, too much in love with the old and gone ways, and that they missed the whole point: Rusakov is not in love with the pre-Peter times; he is in love with life, as the Gospels prescribe any good Christian to be (pp. 165–166). He is all-forgiving, as befits a true Russian and as the scriptures teach us. Ostrovsky's biggest contribution to literature is, according to Mikhail Dostoevsky, revealing this quality of a true Russian Orthodox.

In *Ne v svoi sani ne sadis'*, Moscow, as a location completely separate from Zamoskvorechye, gained the status of an important offstage character. For a long time

¹⁶⁵ Ostrovskii, *Ne v svoi sani ne sadis'*, in his PSS, vol. 1, pp. 221–268, at p. 258. “**Rusakov.** [...] What is happening, Ivanushka? The way I see it, people are getting worse and worse, and what will become of this, I don't even know. Just look at our own kind: the old ones, so far so good—but the younger ones? What is that...? No shame or remorse; you cannot trust them with anything, and don't even ask them for respect. Not us—we used to be fearful, we respected our elders. And then there's this fashion of theirs! There was none of that before, and it was better that way, let me tell you. We lived simpler lives, and so people were more honest. And now he says, I want to follow fashion, be in step with times; but look: he's not paying this guy, not paying that guy.”

afterwards, Ostrovsky continued to show it as a negative force corrupting good inhabitants of his plays. Moscow as a city of insolent libertines and idlers was a popular image in mid-nineteenth-century Russia. *Svad'ba Krechinskogo* (Krechinsky's Wedding), a comedy by Sukhovo-Kobylin started in the same year as *Ne v svoi sani* and finished two years later, had exactly the same layout and topoi as Ostrovsky's play, minus the discourse on class divisions. In *Svad'ba Krechinskogo*, Atueva, Muromsky's sister, invites her brother and his daughter Lidochka to Moscow. There, she convinces her niece to marry Krechinsky, a man of the world who has squandered his fortune gambling. Just as in Ostrovsky's *Ne v svoi sani ne sadis'*, Lidochka gets rescued from a destructive marriage the day before it is finalized.

Outside the theatre world, Leo Tolstoy, who was much respected by Ostrovsky and who had the highest opinion of the playwright, signed the same guilty verdict to Moscow in his *Anna Karenina*. Anna is fine when she lives in St. Petersburg, but as soon as she comes to Moscow (incidentally, because her brother Stiva Oblonsky was caught by his wife in an act of infidelity), she gets sucked into an illicit and ill-fated love affair with Vronsky that leads to her downfall and death. The literary interpretation of Moscow in the nineteenth century was comparable to that of the great whore of Babylon, "the woman [...] arrayed in purple and scarlet color, and decked with gold and precious stones and pearls, having a golden cup in her hand full of abominations and filthiness of her fornication," with a name written on her forehead, "Babylon the Great, the Mother of Harlots and Abominations of the Earth" (Revelation 17). Heard writes that this perception of Moscow was caused by and started soon after Nikon's and Peter I's reforms:

In the new Russia which [Peter I] created the bewildered Muscovite could no longer recognize his native land; strange names were dinned in his ears, foreign habits and habiliments offended his gaze; the calendar and the alphabet were altered, saints' days and holy days were shifted; men's chins were shaven, women appeared unveiled in the streets; Moscow became Babylon; old Russia was shaken as by an earthquake, and chaos seemed come again.¹⁶⁶

¹⁶⁶ Heard, p. 192.

By contrast, St. Petersburg, the second main city in Russia, was not perceived in that way.¹⁶⁷

Moscow was treated as a corruptor of people until the beginning of the twentieth century when the literary practice changed it (for example, in Chekhov's *Tri sestry* (Three Sisters) and Gorky's *Vassa Zheleznova*) into a symbol of unattainable hope that lasted until the Russian Revolution of 1917 and then quickly disappeared.

In *Ne v svoi sani ne sadis'*, Moscow tempts the characters, quickly transforming the weaker from people of guilt into those of shame. By the beginning of the play, Vikhorev, Baranchevsky, and Arina are already seduced by the glamour of the city; Dunya gets affected by it indirectly, through Vikhorev and Arina. Ostrovsky makes sure that the evil influence of Moscow gets counterbalanced by the wholesome influence of a provincial town, represented by Rusakov, Borodkin, and to a certain extent Molomalsky. Dunya is the last character to fall victim to Moscow's charms and also the first one to shake off the spell, awakening from the enchanted sleep and coming back to the high morals professed by the Old Believers.

Another important issue that Ostrovsky started connecting with the guilt/shame binary around the same time is class differences between the nobility and the petit bourgeois (or merchants). In 1852 this was a highly personal theme for the playwright. In 1847 two sisters, who were petit bourgeois, rented an apartment in Ostrovsky's neighborhood. By that time the playwright's father and all his offspring had been granted the status of aristocrats. In 1835, four years after the death of Ostrovsky's mother, his father married a poor noblewoman Emilia Tessin, and three years later, in 1838, he petitioned for being officially recognized as a nobleman. The father's successful judicial career, his riches, and reputation had gained him considerable influence in the society. The petition was approved and the Ostrovskys legally became

¹⁶⁷ St. Petersburg writers found fault with their own city too, but in ways different from Moscow writers. Grammatically, the name Moscow is feminine in Russian and, therefore, can be regarded as a harlot, while St. Petersburg is masculine and can be associated with anything but.

aristocrats. The merchants were henceforth relegated by the family's older generation into the category of inferior classes, and Ostrovsky's father and stepmother frowned upon any association with them, living out the banal truism that appearances in society are more important than essence. The two sisters, whose last name remains unknown, were automatically blacklisted because they were not nobility. However, the playwright fell in love with one of them—Agafya Ivanovna—and, since he knew that his father would never allow him to marry her in church, became her common-law husband. In 1849 Ostrovsky openly brought Agafya into his house, and for eighteen years, until her death, they lived together as husband and wife, although officially out of wedlock. The very existence of the guilt-and-shame issue in the playwright's oeuvre can be explained in part by the painful dichotomy in his personal life, and, since for him this problem revolved mainly around the difference in social status, it naturally became connected with the discussion of class differences in his dramas. The juxtaposition of the nobility and the petit bourgeois underwent several changes but remained prominent in Ostrovsky's dramas for thirty years, until his death.

Bryantsev states that, since the late eighteenth century, the Russian merchant class was trying to break into the niche traditionally occupied by the gentry, demanding equality with the aristocracy, including the right to own manufactories or land with peasant serfs attached to it. The nobility felt threatened by those encroachments, sensing justifiably that they were being bumped off their historical spot. In the eighteenth century, however, the rights of merchants did not become so broad as to supplant the aristocracy. The breed and the blood closely guarded their policy-making powers. With many doors closed for them, one strategy available to the merchants in order to get to the privileged position was marrying into the aristocracy. Mixed

marriages between moneyed merchants and impoverished nobles became popular and were more or less the norm by the nineteenth century.¹⁶⁸

According to Bryantsev, literary merchants appeared first in comedies¹⁶⁹ and comic operas of the late eighteenth century. Up until the mid-nineteenth century, the most typical feature in literary portraits of merchants was greed. Bryantsev believes that the reason for it lies in the generally negative attitude of Russians towards moneyed people of low birth (pp. 183 and 185). Without contesting Bryantsev's statement, I would add another perspective: as stated by Archpriest Abramov, the Orthodox attitude towards money is typically either highly negative, if it is amassed for personal use, or highly positive, if it is intended for charitable purposes.¹⁷⁰ The issue of money will be explained in detail in chapter V. For now, suffice it to say that the merchants were generally believed to amass capital for personal rather than communal benefit, which caused certain negativity in the attitude of other classes towards them. Cox writes about "the negative light in which Ostrovsky invariably presented the merchant milieu" (p. 15). That assumption, however, is not entirely true: it could be tempting—if one believes, as Cox does, that Ostrovsky's realism is paired with his negative attitude towards life—to suppose that the playwright is dissatisfied with the *petit bourgeois*, but his texts prove otherwise. Borodkin and Rusakov, for example, are highly positive characters, well loved and respected by the playwright, and so are Ilya in *Ne tak zhivi, kak khochetsia*, Neuyedenov in *Prazdnichnyi son — do obeda* (A Prophetic Dream), Lyov Krasnov in *Grekh da beda na kogo ne zhivet* (Sin and Sorrow Are

¹⁶⁸ Briantsev, "Obraz kupechestva v russkoi literature kontsa XVIII — pervoi poloviny XIX vv." (The Image of Merchants in Russian Literature of the Late Eighteenth Century to the First Half of the Nineteenth Century), in Valerii Anatol'evich Skubnevskii et al., *Predprinimateli i predprinimatel'stvo v Sibiri* (Entrepreneurs and Entrepreneurship in Siberia), vol. 3 (Barnaul, Russia: AGU, 2001), pp. 181–196, at p. 182.

¹⁶⁹ An earlier example of such a comedy is *Shchepetil'nik* (An Overscrupulous Man), written in 1765 by Vladimir Lukin (1737–94). He was followed by Mikhail Matinsky (1750–1820) and Pyotr Plavilshchikov (1760–1812).

¹⁷⁰ Very Rev. Archpriest Alexander Abramov, interview by author, Russian Orthodox Cathedral of St. Nicholas, New York, 5 May 2008. Archpriest Abramov is the Secretary of the Representation of the Moscow Patriarchate in the United States.

Common to All), Vosmibratov in *Les* (The Forest), Flor in *Posledniaia zbertva* (The Last Sacrifice), and Velikatov in *Talanty i poklonniki* (Talents and Admirers).

Ostrovsky never shared his contemporaries' negative attitude towards the merchants, separating them completely from the issue of money. In fact, in the early 1850s he clearly preferred the company of petit bourgeois to that of nobility (Lakshin, pp. 392–393). Patrick notices that the playwright is a faithful portrayer of merchants, whom he believes to be the core of national life (p. 117). Mirsky writes that the petit bourgeois form Ostrovsky's favorite theme (p. 235). Valency states that Ostrovsky's literary career was based on the assumption, widely shared by contemporary French and German dramatists, that the everyday life of the middle class was the proper field for the drama of the time (p. 34). Certainly, if a person has an agenda, as Ostrovsky did, the best way to illustrate it and prove it in the most convincing way is to use familiar material as reference for the discourse. The dramatist was most comfortable with this class of people and trusted them more than the nobility. After the reforms of Peter the Great, the Russian aristocrats were becoming further and further removed from the commoners. By the nineteenth century they were hopelessly Westernized, speaking French, German, English, and Italian better than Russian.

In 1849 Mikhail Pogodin,¹⁷¹ editor-in-chief of the *Moskvityanin*, met Ostrovsky at a literary party where the playwright and his friend Prov Sadovsky¹⁷² were reading *Svoi liudi* — *sobhtemsia* to Gogol. Before too long, Pogodin recruited Ostrovsky and Sadovsky to form a new editorial board for his periodical, hoping that new blood would give it a boost (Lakshin, pp. 26–245). According to Bryantsev, Pogodin had been campaigning against the fact that the

¹⁷¹ Mikhail Pogodin (1800–75), a writer, publisher, critic, and historian; a devoted Slavophile. He was a close friend of Gogol's (Lakshin, p. 146). The *Moskvityanin* was a periodical promoting the ideas of piety and puritanism.

¹⁷² Prov Sadovsky (1818–72), a prominent actor of the Maly Theatre from 1839 until his death. Sadovsky played a total of twenty-eight roles in Ostrovsky's plays at the Maly (Lakshin, p. 359). In the text of *Bednost' ne porok*, the title is followed by a dedication to Sadovsky, who played Lyubim Tortsov.

aristocracy was the only class depicted in Russian literature (“Obraz kupechestva,” p. 188). In his 1827 article “Pis’mo o russkikh romanakh” (A Letter on Russian Novels), Pogodin stated the need to have novels written about different classes as each of them had its own unique features, culture, language, and lifestyle. He actually made efforts to depict the life of merchants in his own novels, published in the 1820s (*ibid.*).

Out of the *Moskvityanin*’s new board, where Pogodin corralled people who sympathized with Slavophilism, grew a group that came to be known, after Grigoryev got involved,¹⁷³ as the Ostrovsky–Grigoryev circle. Robert Whittaker says that it “saw middle and lower class Muscovites as a modern repository of Russian national qualities, traditions, views and values—in a word, ‘national character.’” According to Whittaker, Edelson (a member of the editorial board since 1848) “claimed that the merchants, through extensive dealings with other classes, had acquired ‘all the life styles and habits’ of Russian society, among which predominated ‘native (*korennoi*) national traits,’” while Grigoryev “described ‘the merchant, middle class’ as ‘the flowering of national juices (*tsvet narodnykh sokov*)’ in which ‘the residue of a national life style (*narodnyi byt*) is best preserved and has developed in freedom, broadly, and at will.’”¹⁷⁴ However, as Whittaker points out, the Ostrovsky–Grigoryev circle was not a Slavophilic group proper; Grigoryev called it “less exclusive” and “less chaste” (pp. 393–394). More importantly, the Slavophiles saw the peasants as the major carriers of Russianness, but the Ostrovsky–Grigoryev group insisted that the nation-defining properties were to be found in the merchant class.

In the mid-nineteenth century, the increasingly important merchants were gradually replacing the weakening aristocracy not only in Russia but throughout Europe. Quickly becoming a factor in historical evolution, they spread their influence from economics to politics

¹⁷³ See footnote 97 and the text to which it refers.

¹⁷⁴ Robert Whittaker, “The Ostrovskii–Grigor’ev Circle, Alias the ‘Young Editors’ of the *Moskvitianin*,” *Canadian-American Slavic Studies*, vol. 24, no. 4 (1990), pp. 385–412, at p. 392.

to art. The new class of life-loving people of action was coming to power, changing human values and attitudes while making new history.¹⁷⁵ Yet Ostrovsky was not the first playwright who looked into the hostile binary of these two classes. In 1833 Scribe¹⁷⁶ based his *Bertrand et Raton ou l'Art de conspirer* (Bertrand and Raton, or The Art of Scheming) on a conflict fed by the opposition between the two classes. In the nineteenth century the moneyed class of the petit bourgeois raised its social influence enough to effectively challenge the class of aristocrats, blue-blooded but fast spinning into poverty. In Scribe's satirical drama, Marthe, wife of Raton Burkenstaff, the richest and most influential merchant in Copenhagen, delivers a panegyric to merchants that also serves as a rebuttal to those of them who forget their station and start seeking power:

Marthe. Moi, déprécier le commerce! moi, fille et femme de fabricant! moi, qui trouve que c'est l'état le plus utile au pays, la source de sa richesse et de sa prospérité! moi, enfin, qui ne vois rien de plus honorable et de plus estimable qu'un commerçant qui est commerçant!... Mais si lui-même rougit de son état, s'il quitte son comptoir pour les antichambres, ce n'est plus ça... et quand tu dis des bêtises comme homme de cour, je ne peux plus t'honorer comme marchand d'étoffes.¹⁷⁷

Ne v svoi sani ne sadis' is imbued with the same pride for the petit bourgeois that shines through Marthe's passionate speech. The merchants in this play are portrayed as decent, highly moral individuals, while the aristocrats flash their unscrupulousness. The comedy does not yet delve into the issue—it barely outlines it—but many years of incessant study will transform this little bud into a strong tree.

¹⁷⁵ Galina Iur'evna Brodskaja, *Alekseev-Stanislavski, Chekhov i drugie: vishniovosadskaia epopeia* (Alekseev-Stanislavsky, Chekhov, et al.: The Epic of *The Cherry Orchard*), 2 vols. (Moscow: Agraf, 2000), vol. I, p. 272.

¹⁷⁶ Eugène Scribe (1791–1861), a French dramatist and the father of the well-made play. The presence of Scribe's ideas in *Ne v svoi sani ne sadis'* may be partially attributed to the guest performances of a famous French actress Elisa-Rachel Félix (1821–58) at the Maly Theatre in 1853—the same year the play was finished. Lakshin notes that the parts played by her in Scribe's dramas deeply impressed Ostrovsky (p. 366).

¹⁷⁷ Eugène Scribe, *Bertrand et Raton ou l'Art de conspirer*, in his *Théâtre choisi* (Paris: Librairie Delagrave, 1929), pp. 105–212, at p. 135. “**Marthe.** Me, underestimate commerce! Me, daughter and wife of a merchant! Me, who thinks that merchants are the most useful class in the country, the source of its wealth and prosperity! And I don't know anyone worthier than a merchant who acts like a merchant...! But if he is ashamed of his station, if he abandons his counter for palace chambers, he is not a merchant any more...and when you start talking rubbish like courtiers do, I cannot respect you any more as a silk trader.”

The play *Bednost' ne porok* shows a further merger of the leitmotif of shame/guilt with the theme of nobility/merchants. The comedy is structured precisely as Molière's *Le Tartuffe ou l'Imposteur* (Tartuffe) or Beaumarchais's *L'Autre Tartuffe ou la Mère coupable* (The Guilty Mother): a money-hungry impostor enchants the father of a family. Other members of the family try in vain to fight off the impostor's fast-growing influence. In the end, a single man (a police officer in *Tartuffe*; Figaro in *The Guilty Mother*; and Lyubim in *Poverty*) manages to disenchant the father and upset the intruder's plans.

While the form of *Bednost' ne porok* may correspond to that of the French dramas, the two topoi of its content merge with Old Russian cultural traditions and rituals preserved intact by the Old Believers outside Moscow, in small provincial towns. Lyubim, Tortsov's brother; Pelageya, his wife; Lyuba, his daughter; Arina, their nurse; Mitya, Tortsov's clerk; Anna and Grisha, friends of the family, are shown as positive characters, and they are all representatives of the merchant class, which in this play is equated with the class of guilt. All of these characters are rural dwellers with a good heart and high moral standing. Ostrovsky portrayed them as the salt of the earth, true carriers of Russian culture and customs, the embodiment of the Russian soul. They are opposed by an extraneous force personified by Korshunov,¹⁷⁸ who is presented as a Muscovite (thus a corruptor with all glitter and no depth) and a person of shame, hobnobbing with the elite in the Russian capital. His first name, Afrikan, suggests that, like the continent of Africa, he is extremely remote from anything authentically Russian. *Bednost' ne porok* is Ostrovsky's tribute to his close friends Grigoryev and Sadovsky, who were both sympathetic to Slavophilism and knowledgeable in Russian folk songs and practices (Lakshin, pp. 368–377).

Many scholars consider the plays that immediately followed *Bednaia nevesta* (some critics count two such plays, others four) to be different from the rest of Ostrovsky's writing because

¹⁷⁸ The name Korshunov, incidentally, comes from the word *korshun* (black kite), a powerful bird that swoops onto its prey and lacerates it with its strong beak and sharp talons.

they are believed to be Slavophilic in character. For example, Kaspin opines that “*The Poor Bride* was written just before Ostrovskij’s temporary change of philosophy was to be reflected in his so-called ‘Slavophilic’ plays which presented a more benign interpretation of Russian merchant life” (“Superfluous Man,” p. 313). If unfamiliar with Grigoryev’s approach to Ostrovsky’s life philosophy, one may consider them (at least *Ne v svoi sani ne sadis’* and *Bednost’ ne porok*) to be somewhat out of tune with the rest of the playwright’s pieces. But once we employ Grigoryev’s statement that theory and life are as different as east and west, that life manifests itself in limitless ways, and that no single theory can explain the complexity of the divine plan, then all the seeming discrepancies are erased and the four “Slavophilic” pieces become mere illustrations to the infinite manifestations of life.

Ostrovsky’s favorite dramaturgical technique, which stayed with him through the entire forty years of his playwriting, was presenting life as full of oppositions. Carefully avoiding preachiness and always revealing both sides of the coin to his audience, the dramatist remained in compliance with the Christian concept of free will. Without hiding albeit never emphasizing his personal preferences, he tried to make people decide for themselves what was right and what was wrong. The oppositions of provincial vs. big-city; authentic vs. corrupted and borrowed; moral vs. immoral; outer vs. inner; tarnished but golden vs. flashy but gold-plated are clearly seen in Lyubim’s passionate speech in Act III, scene 12, of *Poverty*:

Любим Карпыч. Послушайте, люди добрые! Обижают Любима Торцова, гонят вон. А чем я не гость? За что меня гонят? Я не чисто одет, так у меня на совести чисто. Я не Коршунов: я бедных не грабил, чужого веку не заедал, жены ревностию не замучил... Меня гонят, а он первый гость, его в передний угол сажают.¹⁷⁹

¹⁷⁹ Ostrovskii, *Bednost’ ne porok*, in his *PSS*, vol. 1, pp. 269–318, at p. 314. “**Lyubim Karpych.** Listen, good people! They are insulting Lyubim Tortsov, they are driving him away. But am I not a guest too? Why should they drive me away? My clothes are not clean, but I have a clean conscience! I’m not Korshunov; I didn’t rob the poor, I didn’t ruin another’s life, I didn’t torment my wife with jealousy. Me they drive away, but he’s their most esteemed guest, and he’s put in the place of honor” (Ostrovsky, *Poverty Is No Crime*, in his *Plays*, pp. 65–133, at p. 128).

This monologue unnerves Korshunov, making him lash out at Gordey Tortsov, who quickly takes offense and calls off Lyuba's marriage to his Moscow guest, making guilt prevail over shame.

In 1857 Ostrovsky's exploration of shame and guilt underwent certain transformations. Starting with *Prazdnichnyi son — do obeda*, although the main focus remains the same (outer vs. inner, appearances vs. essence), a new thought clearly emerges from the old discourse. No extraneous restrictions can safeguard against falling into sin; the only way to keep evil at bay is to have solid moral notions and consciously to resist temptation. While Ostrovsky never stops laughing at Balzaminov's blue cravat and curled hair that are of utter importance to this character, the playwright injects a serious note into the otherwise very mirthful comedy when talking about young girls whom parents keep either locked or under a close watch before they get married, to keep them out of harm's way. From *Prazdnichnyi son* to his very last play, the playwright never strayed from his conviction that shame is a feeble protector from sin while guilt is a much more effective one. If all one needs to do is make others believe in his unblemished reputation rather than truly keep it unblemished, then all that is required is caution and the ability to cover up his tracks while he yields to temptation. The trick is, then, not in refraining from doing something illicit but in making it look as if it never happened. Such hypocrisy was denounced by many men of literature both in Russia and in the West before Ostrovsky, including Molière¹⁸⁰:

Tartuffe. Enfin votre scrupule est facile à détruire.
Vous êtes assurée ici d'un plein secret,
Et le mal n'est jamais que dans l'éclat qu'on fait.
Le scandale du monde est ce qui fait l'offense,

¹⁸⁰ Molière's influence on Ostrovsky is well documented by the latter's biographers. In Lakshin's monograph, an entire chapter (entitled "Nash russkii TartiuF" (Our Russian Tartuffe); pp. 127–145) is devoted to this topic. Molière was known in the Russian theatre since at least the eighteenth century: Varneke mentions *The Dramatic Lexicon*, which was published anonymously in 1787 and listed all the plays that had been performed in the Russian language up to that year; nine plays by Molière, including *Tartuffe*, were mentioned there (p. 121).

Et ce n'est pas pécher que pécher en silence.¹⁸¹

Ostrovsky's concern with regard to what is good vs. what seems good is voiced, as if in passing, by the tertiary character of Ustinya, a merchant's daughter and Nichkina's close friend:

Устинья. [...] Мы вообще говорим про девушек, что довольно смешно их запирасть, потому что можно найти тысячу средств... и кто ж их не знает. [...] Мы с Капочкой оченно себя знаем и совсем не тех правил. Кажется, держим себя довольно гордо и деликатно.¹⁸²

After *Prazdnichnyi son — do obeda*, Ostrovsky started linking the issue of guilt and shame to a study of sin, another gigantic issue in his work, which is examined in chapter IV. However, in 1857 guilt and shame were still underdramatized and viewed in satirical light. Ostrovsky still seemed to follow in Molière's footsteps, stressing the comedic aspect of the issue rather than its serious side. In *L'École des femmes* (The School for Wives),¹⁸³ Arnolphe's young ward Agnès is asked to read Marriage Maxims that are supposed to help her become a good wife. The Third Maxim states:

Agnès. [...] Loin ces études d'œillades,
Ces eaux, ces blancs, ces pommades,
Et mille ingrédients qui font des teints fleuris :
A l'honneur, tous les jours, ce sont drogues mortelles,
Et les soins de paraître belles
Se prennent peu pour les maris.¹⁸⁴

The notion of beautification was alien to the Old Believers. Appearances meant little to these people of guilt, who always sacrificed them in favor of inner qualities. Ostrovsky's Pavla

¹⁸¹ Molière, *Le Tartuffe ou l'Imposteur*, in his *Œuvres complètes*, pp. 255–284, at p. 279. “**Tartuffe.** If you're still troubled, think of things this way: / No one shall know our joys, save us alone, / And there's no evil till the act is known; / It's scandal, Madam, which makes it an offence, / And it's no sin to sin in confidence” (Molière, *Tartuffe*, in his *Four Comedies*, trans. Richard Wilbur (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1982), pp. 301–470, at p. 433).

¹⁸² Ostrovskii, *Prazdnichnyi son — do obeda*, in his *PSS*, vol. 2, pp. 111–141, at p. 124. “**Ustinya.** [...] We are talking about young girls in general, that it's rather ridiculous to put them under lock and key, because one can find a thousand ways...and who doesn't know them? [...] Kapochka [Nichkina] and myself, we never allow ourselves anything of that sort, and the principles we follow are quite different. I'd say we rather act with pride and decency.”

¹⁸³ A play that Ostrovsky knew and loved since at least 1840 (Lakshin, p. 72).

¹⁸⁴ Molière, *L'École des femmes*, in his *Œuvres complètes*, pp. 174–198, at p. 185. “**Agnès.** [...] Let her not daub her face / With paint and patch and powder-base / And creams which promise beauty on the label. / It is not for their husbands' sake / But vanity's, that women undertake / The labors of the dressing table” (Molière, *The School for Wives*, in his *Four Comedies*, pp. 1–152, at p. 74).

Balzaminova, Misha's mother, knows that no amount of work on her son's appearance will make him attractive as there is nothing to boast of on his inside.

Бальзаминова. [...] Всё завивается! Всё завивается! Красотой-то своей уж очень занят. Эх, молодо, зелено! Всё счастье себе хочет составить, прельстить кого-нибудь. А я так думаю, не прельстит он никого; разумом-то он у меня больно плох.¹⁸⁵

However, while Balzaminova is only being practical, their cook Matryona, who has the old piety of the lower classes, is openly hostile to Misha's attempts to make himself more appealing to the opposite sex. Matryona, who adheres to the Old Russian understanding of good and evil, is the only character in the comedy whom Ostrovsky makes wise and sane and not eager to push for her own personal interests.¹⁸⁶ She does not approve of Misha's exercises with curling irons or his futile attempts to calculate interest on Nichkina's capital that he might end up controlling one day. She urges Misha to stop counting his chickens before they hatch and start taking care of the matters at hand. It is interesting that, with respect to the guilt-to-shame ratio, Matryona, like Stepanida Puzatova in *Semeinaia kartina*, is grossly outnumbered. In the last act of the play, Ostrovsky introduces Neuyedenov, Nichkina's brother, who also adheres to the Old Russian piety and safeguards his sister (and her money) against potential squandering attempts. The ratio of people of guilt (two episodic characters with limited stage time and an insignificant number of lines) and people of shame (five leading characters plus three episodic ones) in the play reflects Ostrovsky's nostalgic feelings for the old-fashioned puritanism of Russia's past that was fast dying out.

It is remarkable that towards the end of 1857 Ostrovsky becomes somewhat less categorical in his assertion that all merchants are people of guilt, and therefore good, while all

¹⁸⁵ Ostrovskii, *Prazdnichnyi son*, p. 112. "**Balzaminova.** [...] He curls his hair! And curls it, and curls some more! He pays too much attention to his looks. Oh, those youngsters! He keeps wanting to find a good match for himself, to lure someone. And I don't think he'll lure anyone; not too strong in the head, my boy is."

¹⁸⁶ Nichkina's brother also acts in a wise and sane manner when he does not allow his sister to marry Balzaminov, but he does so to protect the family money.

nobles are people of shame, and consequently bad. This barely noticeable change, still in its nascent state, probably came as a reaction to the contemporary criticism of Ostrovsky's plays, when the playwright was being accused of inability to portray aristocrats more or less objectively and of stooping to a one-dimensional, stereotypical approach (Lakshin, p. 452). Another reason, which was a much more prominent factor in his changed attitude towards the two classes, was that Ostrovsky seemed to have started severing the connection between guilt/shame and merchants/aristocracy as was common for the Old Believers and started to look into the theme of money (described in chapter V) rather than that of class distinctions in conjunction with the inner vs. the outer.

In *Ne soshlis' kharakterami!* (Too Different in Nature), finished on November 29, 1857, all the aristocrats are still clearly driven by shame and are concerned solely with appearances. However, unlike in Ostrovsky's previous plays, there is no juxtaposition with guilt-driven merchants. All the characters that belong to the class of the petit bourgeois are either openly flawed in this sense (e.g., Serafima, who has been married to a noble and has gotten into the habit of masking her true self with socially accepted behavior; or Ulita, a poor woman who makes herself useful to anybody who has money, in return for free meals and second-hand clothes) or are not shown in this light at all (e.g., Serafima's parents, whose morality is not discussed in the play).

The slight shift in Ostrovsky's attitude towards the two classes vis-à-vis their morals was probably also related to his introduction to and acceptance by the literary salon of Countess Rostopchina¹⁸⁷ in 1850. According to Lakshin, the playwright felt shy and out of place coming into the grandeur of her spectacular house from his own humble abode with low ceilings, squeaky staircases, second-hand furniture, and a permanent smell of cabbage soup and laundry

¹⁸⁷ Yevdokia Rostopchina (1811–58), a poet and a writer. A woman of noble birth, she openly sympathized with Slavophilism and the Russian old piety

(p. 248). However, little by little, the dramatist got used to attending Rostopchina's Saturday salons, made the acquaintance of noblemen like Turgenev (p. 249) and celebrities like Pauline Viardot¹⁸⁸ and Franz Liszt¹⁸⁹ (pp. 246 and 248), and started feeling more at home there. By 1858, when the salons ended after Rostopchina's death, Ostrovsky had consciously replaced his merchant-style dress with a fashionable tailcoat made in Paris, paying the necessary tribute to society standards.¹⁹⁰ Having succumbed to what he used to ascribe to people of shame and after registering this change in himself, he probably could not keep insisting on the fact that merchants were less concerned with appearances and more with their inner convictions—and a new type of characters came into being. The playwright seemed to finally accept Pushkin's view on social ethics that the poet expressed in 1833 in *Evgenii Onegin* (Eugene Onegin):

БЫТЬ МОЖНО ДЕЛЬНЫМ ЧЕЛОВЕКОМ
И ДУМАТЬ О КРАСЕ НОГТЕЙ:
К ЧЕМУ БЕСПЛОДНО СПОРИТЬ С ВЕКОМ?
ОБЫЧАЙ ДЕСПОТ МЕЖ ЛЮДЕЙ.¹⁹¹

Without fully compromising his principles, Ostrovsky found it possible to be a somewhat lesser extremist once he came out of his seclusion in Zamoskvorechye and face to face with Moscow's beau monde. His cult of guilt received its first mild shock. The playwright's transition from the open condemnation of shame to its acceptance (albeit still somewhat reluctant) as an unavoidable reality is clearly seen in *Vospitannitsa*, which was started in 1855 and finished in 1858. The beginning of the play contains two old themes, the first one being that of

¹⁸⁸ Pauline Viardot (1821–1910), a world-known French mezzo-soprano and composer.

¹⁸⁹ Franz Liszt (1811–86), a world-known Hungarian pianist and composer.

¹⁹⁰ It is ironic that Ostrovsky lost his first battle to society, accepting its ethics instead of his own, at the end of the 1850s—the same time when Moscow learned that Rostopchina's glamorous salons were nothing but a tribute to appearances. She could not afford their upkeep and was secretly selling her jewelry to be able to continue. After her death, all her jewelry boxes were found empty (Lakshin, p. 254.)

¹⁹¹ Pushkin, *Evgenii Onegin*, in his *PSS*, vol. 1, pp. 346–401, at p. 349. “A man who's active and incisive / can yet keep nail-care much in mind: / why fight what's known to be decisive? / custom is despot of mankind” (Alexander Pushkin, *Eugene Onegin*, in his *Eugene Onegin and Other Poems*, trans. Charles Johnston (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1999), pp. 7–212, at p. 24).

Moscow as a corruptress of puritan souls. Nadya's downfall starts when she develops a taste for city life after spending several months in the capital:

Надя. [...] Мы целую зиму жили в Москве. Видя всё это, моя милая, и сама стараешься себя облагородить. Уж и держишь себя не так и разговор стараешься вести особенный.

Лиза. Да к чему же нам себя облагораживать-то! Кому это нужно!

Надя. Как к чему? А вот барыня обещали меня выдать замуж, так я стараюсь так себя образовать, чтоб меня никому не стыдно было взять. [...] Посмотри тогда, какой я порядок в доме заведу; у меня не хуже будет, чем у дворянки у какой-нибудь!¹⁹²

The second old theme is that guilt breeds conscience and that conscience is the only thing that safeguards people from sin:

Надя. [...] А вот барыня так напрасно это делают, что нас в такой строгости держат и беспрестанный присмотр за нами имеют. Мне даже обидно! Я такая девушка, что без всякого присмотра могу хорошо себя понимать.¹⁹³

But the end of *A Protégée* presents a new thought: piety is not as beneficial as people wish it to be. Living with shame is easier than living with guilt. Nadya's initial, pre-Moscow guilt never allowed her to even look at Ulanbekova's son Leonid. Her after-Moscow focus on shame prodded her into spending a night with him while taking every precaution to cover her tracks and keep it a secret. Ostrovsky's old beliefs still win at the end of the play: Nadya, after a short period of bliss (which she would have never known at all had she kept adhering to her initial high morals) is punished for life by being forced into marrying Negligentov, a drunk unable to keep a job. The message of the play remains strictly Christian (if you lose your morals and you

¹⁹² Ostrovskii, *Vospitannitsa*, in his *PSS*, vol. 2, pp. 170–209, at pp. 171–172. “**Nadya.** [...] We lived a whole winter in Moscow. Seeing all this, my dear, you try to act like a born lady yourself. Your very manners change, and you try to have a way of talking of your own. **Liza.** But why should we try to be fine ladies? Much good it does! **Nadya.** Much good, you say? Well, you see the ladies promised to marry me off, so I am trying to educate myself, so that no one'll be ashamed to take me. [...] You just watch then how I'll manage the house; it will be no worse at my house than at any fine lady's” (Ostrovsky, *A Protégée of the Mistress*, in his *Plays*, pp. 9–63, at p. 12).

¹⁹³ Ibid., p. 172. “**Nadya.** [...] But the mistress is so unreasonable in holding us in so strictly, and in keeping everlasting watch over us! Indeed, it's insulting to me! I'm a girl that knows how to take care of herself without any watching” (Ostrovsky, *Protégée*, p. 13).

sin, you get punished); however, a nebulous thought is beginning to emerge: pleasures and/or happiness may not even be possible if one follows church doctrines to the letter.

The next year's drama, *Groza*, became an important milestone in Ostrovsky's perception of guilt and shame. For the first time, he traces the origin of guilt and finds it in faith. The class division stops being a factor for the time being, and the playwright concentrates on the shame-to-guilt ratio entirely within the class of merchants. Kabanikha¹⁹⁴ and her daughter Varvara are shame-driven people, although their notions of shame cannot be more different. While Kabanikha puts on a "devout Christian" act for everybody outside her own household and resorts to despotism behind closed doors in her house, Varvara does not care if the whole world finds her behavior inappropriate—the only person she is trying to hide it from is her own mother. With regard to the guilt/shame binary, Katerina forms an opposition to both Kabanikha and her daughter. She feels compelled to expiate her sin, confess it, and repent in front of everybody, including her mother-in-law as her Nemesis, her debilitated husband, and all the people in town. Her guilt, which comes from her devotion to Christian teachings, wins over her temporary slip that allowed her life to be regulated by external and not internal sanctions.

Кабанова. [...] Не заступайся, матушка, не обижу, небось! [...] Что ты выскочила в глазах-то поюлить! Чтобы видели, что ли, как ты мужа любишь? Так знаем, знаем, в глазах-то ты это всем доказываешь.

[...]

Катерина. Ты про меня, маменька, напрасно это говоришь. Что при людях, что без людей, я всё одна, ничего я из себя не доказываю.¹⁹⁵

Mikhail Dostoevsky says that Katerina and Kabanikha share the same religion, even though the women cannot be more different. He ascribes this to Katerina's innate poeticism

¹⁹⁴ "Kabanikha" is the slighting nickname for Kabanova, Tikhon's mother, by which the character is referred to both in the play and in the criticism.

¹⁹⁵ Ostrovskii, *Groza*, in his *PSS*, vol. 2, pp. 210–267, at p. 219. "**Kabanova.** [...] What are you springing to his aid for, anyway, making a fuss? You want everybody to see how much you love your husband, is that it? Yes, well, we know what you're like, showing off in front of people. [...] **Katerina.** Mama, you've no right to say that about me. I'm the same anywhere, in company or alone—I don't try to show off" (Ostrovsky, *The Storm*, in his *Four Plays*, trans. Stephen Mulrine (London: Oberon Books, 2003), pp. 13–81, at p. 26).

(p. 172). However, I insist that the disparity is in the primacy of guilt or shame. Religiousness is inner to Katerina but outer for Kabanikha, and that distinction alone seems to be responsible for the striking dissimilarity between the two female characters. Henley writes that Katerina “is not satisfied that the husband should be free and the wife enslaved” (introduction to *The Thunderstorm*, p. 88)—that is why she commits adultery and later kills herself. Mikhail Dostoevsky’s and Henley’s assessments are representative of two different schools of thought: while Dostoevsky focuses on the spiritual, i.e., Katerina’s poeticism, Henley offers a pragmatic approach to interpreting her actions. This divergence of opinion boils down idealism vs. materialism and bring us back to the two warring camps of the Ostrovsky criticism. I believe that Ostrovsky’s pieces may be used as a perfect litmus test to separate materialists from idealists. The former will undoubtedly see the outer and infer a verisimilar (mostly negative and/or satirical) portrayal of everydayness; the latter will focus on the inner—the moral state of human heart and soul.

It is interesting that if compared, for instance, to Rusakov in *Ne v svoi sani ne sadis’*, Kabanikha of *Groza* comes in an entirely new light. Both Rusakov and Kabanikha take pride in adhering to Russian customs and traditions, but while this quality is praised in Rusakov, making this character the embodiment of the true Russian soul, in *Groza* this Russianness is taken with a grain of salt. The fundamental difference between the two characters lies in the fact that while religiousness is an innate quality for Rusakov, who neither parades nor hides it but uses it as a matrix by which to live his life, it is a matter of appearances for Kabanikha, who “нищих оделяет” so that everybody could see it, but “домашних заела совсем”¹⁹⁶ because there are no outside witnesses. A plus was changed into a minus when the inner got sacrificed to the outer, a positive character turned into a negative, rotating around the same axis of the Old Russian piety

¹⁹⁶ Ibid., p. 217. “She’ll do anything for a beggar, but she runs her own people ragged” (Ostrovsky, *Storm*, p. 24).

once this piety was no longer congenital but acquired, once it was followed because a person had to and not because he wanted to, once it became expected rather than heartfelt.

Кабанова. [...] Молодость-то что значит! Смешно смотреть-то даже на них! Кабы не свои, насмеялась бы досыта. Ничего-то не знают, никакого порядка. Проститься-то путем не умеют. Хорошо еще, у кого в доме старшие есть, ими дом-то и держится, пока живы. А ведь тоже, глупые, на свою волю хотят, а выйдут на волю-то, так и путаются на покор да смех добрым людям. Конечно, кто и пожалеет, а больше всё смеются. Да не смеяться-то нельзя; гостей позовут, посадить не умеют, да еще, гляди, позабудут кого из родных. Смех, да и только! Так-то вот старина-то и выводится. В другой дом и взойти не хочется. А и взойдешь-то, так плюнешь да вон скорее. Что будет, как старики перемрут, как будет свет стоять, уж и не знаю.¹⁹⁷

Rusakov's (quoted earlier in this chapter) and Kabanikha's monologues ostensibly deal with the same subject matter: lamenting the ways of the past and the new generation's inability to follow them. However, while Rusakov regrets the young generation's switch from guilt to shame, Kabanikha never touches on the internal and is only concerned with the external—the shame factor. She merely feels sorry that some traditions have died out, and her rigidity does not allow her to look into the problem deeper.

Kuligin, “часовщик-самоучка, отыскивающий перпетуум-мобиле,”¹⁹⁸ a romantic dreamer and the quintessential loser, whom we fall in love with from the onset of the play, voices Ostrovsky's truly Christian realization: no external factors are responsible for the corruption of human soul; it is a matter of free will. Neither the corrupting effect of Moscow nor the bad influence of aristocrats on good and wholesome old-fashioned merchants has

¹⁹⁷ Ibid., p. 234. “**Кабанова.** [...] These young people, huh! It'd make you laugh, just looking at 'em. Oh yes, if they weren't my own, I'd die laughing. They don't know nothing, they've no idea of what's right. Don't even know how to say a proper goodbye. Just as well they've got old 'uns at home, to keep 'em in order, while they're still alive. Silly fools that they are, they want their own way, yes, and when they get it, well, you see what a mess they make, it's a disgrace—decent people just laugh at 'em. There's some as I'll feel sorry for 'em, of course, but most folks just laugh, and no wonder. They invite people, and they've no idea how to sit them at table—half the time they'll even forget their own kith and kin. Ridiculous, that's what it is! Yes, the old ways is dying out. There's some houses you wouldn't set foot in these days. And if you should do, why, you'd spit in disgust and clear off out, as quick as you like. As for what'll happen, who'll keep the world upright, once the old folks dies off, God only knows” (Ostrovsky, *Storm*, pp. 43–44).

¹⁹⁸ Ibid., p. 210. “Self-educated watchmaker, trying to discover the secret of perpetual motion” (Ostrovsky, *Storm*, p. 15).

anything to do with the path that every human being chooses for himself. Morality or lack thereof comes from the inner convictions and principles. In one of his diatribes, Kuligin draws a very bleak picture of a society driven by shame:

Кулигин. [...] У всех давно ворота, сударь, заперты и собаки спущены. Вы думаете, они дело делают либо Богу молятся? Нет, сударь. И не от воров они запираются, а чтоб люди не видали, как они своих домашних едят поедом да семью тиранят. И что слез льется за этими запорами, невидимых и неслышимых! Да что вам говорить, сударь! По себе можете судить. И что, сударь, за этими замками разврату темного да пьянства! И всё шито да крыто — никто ничего не видит и не знает, видит только один Бог!¹⁹⁹

Kuligin criticizes the contemporary world, but he is also ousted from it as a stranger who does not belong. Ostrovsky does not say anything about Kuligin having a family or offspring, and it is safe to assume (judging by the way he talks and thinks) that he is sterile and on his way to extinction.

It is in *Groza* that Ostrovsky came for the first time to a very painful realization that God was dying out in people and godlessness was prevailing. Contrary to Henley's conviction that Katerina's death was a result of her dissatisfaction that the husband should be free and the wife enslaved, I am convinced that it was, to Ostrovsky, a metaphor for the extinction of a deep and profound reverence for the Christian creed in the contemporary world.

By letting Katerina die and Kabanikha live on, Ostrovsky regretfully recognizes that living by shame has become a new norm of life. People who practice such living survive while the old breed of true Christians perishes. It is remarkable that Varvara comes out of the tragedy's peripetia unscathed. She runs away with Kudryash before Katerina's suicide and thus escapes burdening her conscience with it.

¹⁹⁹ Ibid., p. 242. "**Kuligin.** [...] They've locked their gates long ago, sir, and turned the dogs loose. And you think they're at some useful business, or praying to God, maybe? No sir! And it's not 'cause of thieves they've locked themselves in, but so people won't see how they terrorise their servants, yes, and bully their own families. Oh yes, there's plenty of tears shed behind those gates, unseen and unheard! Still, I don't have to tell you, sir. You've seen it for yourself. And the sort of drunkenness and debauchery that goes on behind those locked doors, sir—all done on the quiet, so nobody ever gets wind of it—well, only God sees that!" (Ostrovsky, *Storm*, p. 53).

Katerina loses her battle with life, and Kuligin's existence is leading him nowhere. Kabanikha is left standing at the end of the play, albeit badly shaken by her daughter eloping, her daughter-in-law committing suicide, and her son blaming her for everyone's misfortunes. Varvara scores an irrefutable victory, but she was never meant to be an essential, leading character. Kabanikha is Ostrovsky's first transitional character on his way to a new phase in his life philosophy. At the age of thirty-six, Ostrovsky shed his youthful optimism and his sanguine hope of changing the world by fixing certain external problems and came to observing the universe and man in it through a very grim lens. With regard to the theme of guilt and shame, the playwright's early period was over and the second, more cynical, period began.

Second period (1860–1866)

This period is primarily marked by Ostrovsky's concern with societal betterment and consequently with the role an artist should play in it. During its span, Ostrovsky became aware that one should consider the form of a drama if its true content was to be understood and appreciated. The plays of this period mostly fall into two distinct categories: historical dramas that served as analogues for the contemporary turmoil and injustice; and satirical comedies designed to depict these conditions in a sugar-coated form. Technically, in the second period Ostrovsky came closer to the West than in any of his other three periods, since he consciously focused on dramatic forms that had originated in Western literature and were well understood and well received in the rest of Europe and in America. The imitation of form caused certain shifts in content; however, such shifts should mainly be attributed to the changing policy of the Russian government towards the Church.

The official slogan of Tsar Nicholas I's reign (1825–1855) was, as mentioned earlier, "One Tsar, One State, One Religion," indicating the goals of consolidating the monarchy and

supporting Russian Orthodoxy while keeping liberals and non-Orthodox confessions at bay. In his book on the tsar, Leonid Vyskochkov quotes Olga Romanova, Nicholas's daughter:

Вероятно, из оппозиции к религиозному безразличию нашего окружения в нас, детях, развилось сильное влечение к нашей православной вере. [...] Мы говорили также часто о религии. То, что молодые девушки переходили в католичество, нас очень удручало. В большинстве случаев это были те, кто воспитывался за границей, главным образом во Франции. Они вырастали безо всякой связи с родной церковью. Мы же были пронизаны учением нашей православной веры... Мы научились понимать, что русский характер и русская церковь — неразъемлемое единство.²⁰⁰

To Nicholas I, who, according to Vyskochkov, never missed a Sunday mass, respect for the Church and its protection was never debatable, and so “[п]равославие было выдвинуто во главу официальной государственной доктрины.”²⁰¹ It is also important that the tsar was sympathetic to Old Believers and even officially allowed them to conduct liturgies, providing that their priest was not an unfrocked monk (this practice, however, was discontinued when Alexander II came to power in 1855). Nicholas I introduced measures to prevent an expansion of Catholicism in Russia, and specific steps were taken to curb the influence of Polish Jesuits in the country. Some of their monasteries were closed altogether, while others were transformed into Russian Orthodox establishments. The tsar also kept a watchful eye on the Uniate Church and its activities and proselytizing (pp. 183–189). Alexander II, who succeeded Nicholas I, was much less interested in religious matters, and during his reign Russian Orthodoxy became more vulnerable, suffering blows from both Western Catholicism and the spread of atheism.

²⁰⁰ Leonid Vladimirovich Vyskochkov, *Nikolai I* (Nicholas I), *Zhizn' zamechatel'nykh liudei* (The Lives of Remarkable Persons), issue 1173 (973) (Moscow: Molodaia gvardiia, 2006), p. 184. “Probably due to our opposition to the religious indifference of our milieu, we, the kids, had developed a strong devotion to our Orthodox faith.... We also often talked about religion. The fact that there were young girls converting to Catholicism greatly depressed us. Mostly it was girls who were educated abroad, chiefly in France. They grew up having no connection with their native church. We, on the other hand, were permeated with the teachings of our Orthodox faith. We had learned to understand that the Russian character and the Russian church formed an inseparable unity.”

²⁰¹ Vyskochkov, pp. 183–184. “Orthodoxy was made the cornerstone of the official government doctrine.”

It pained Ostrovsky to see the position of the Church in Russia becoming less solid, with more people leaving it for either atheism or Catholicism. Alexander II's Emancipation Decree also became a factor broadening the gap between Russians and their national religion:

[...]the majority of the people who constituted the Orthodox laity in Russia—the peasantry—were freed from the bonds of serfdom to direct their lives more or less on their own. With respect to the organization of their religious lives, the emancipation benefited serfs of landowners most directly, as the establishment of local parish life was no longer dependent on the disposition of the landowner. State and appanage serfs, who had become subject to less control in their day-to-day lives, were also boosted by the Great Reforms of the 1860s into a new social and political standing.²⁰²

Shevzov also mentions another factor:

Religious education probably had a significant impact on the sacred community. Education tended to move faith from being a matter of passive acceptance to one of conscious acceptance or rejection. In this sense, even modest educational developments undoubtedly furthered the process of religious diversification among ordinary Russians [...].²⁰³

A concurrent explanation given by Shevzov for the departure of people from the Church in post-reform Russia is the “[g]rowing literacy and a significant increase in the availability of devotional literature” that “fostered some degree of spiritual and religious independence, since a local cleric was no longer as necessary for the reading and interpretation of texts” (p. 5). In the absence of a specially educated priest to interpret the Scripture, people were left to make their own judgments and form their own impressions about the Bible's parables, which, given its challenging language, led to certain misinterpretations and misunderstandings. Grigoryev, Khomyakov, Nikolay Aksakov,²⁰⁴ Ostrovsky, Dostoevsky, and other writers, who actively and consciously accepted faith and whom I define as Christian writers, noticed an unfortunate byproduct of the availability of education and the development of science: spiritual

²⁰² Shevzov, p. 5.

²⁰³ Ibid.

²⁰⁴ Shevzov mentions several essays by Khomyakov, e.g., *Tserkov' odna* (The Church Is One), and Nikolay Aksakov (1848–1909; a theologian and historian), e.g., *Dukha ne ugashaite* (Quench not the Spirit), when discussing Christian writings in nineteenth-century Russia (pp. 33–34).

impoverishment of previously illiterate Russian communities (when systematic absorption of knowledge led to an aggressive questioning of religious dogmas and consequently to a rejection of some or all of them). In response, they doubled their efforts to propagate the Orthodox faith.

As I mentioned earlier, Ostrovsky chose two trusted dramatic forms to convey his ideas to the audience: historical dramas and satirical comedies. While most critics find that he excelled in the latter form, they doubt that the historical dramas was a wise choice for the playwright. Beasley, for one, openly calls them a mistake, insisting that Ostrovsky made a poor choice by using archaic Russian to write them. Shakespeare, she states, used Elizabethan English for his Roman tragedies while Ostrovsky went back in time (p. 611). However, Beasley's comment is not altogether accurate: the playwright used the same contemporary language that he used for his other pieces, only now it came to readers and audiences in blank verse. While the form may be slightly less accessible than that of his other dramas, it is mostly the subject matter that makes those plays alien to foreigners and difficult to understand for Russians unfamiliar with the historical events being described.

All of Ostrovsky's historical dramas deal with the same twenty nine-year period of Russian history in the late sixteenth to early seventeenth centuries, known as *Smutoe vremya* (Time of Troubles). That period gave rise to a number of myths that found various interpretations in literary works produced in Russia and other countries. Its historical chronology is convoluted and controversial. However, Ostrovsky assiduously studied it in libraries and archives. No other historical period ever presented so much interest to Ostrovsky,²⁰⁵ which is most likely attributable to certain features that the playwright found to be common between the Time of Troubles and his own time. Although it is safe to assume that Ostrovsky never chose these twenty-nine years for anything other than metaphorical comparison, I like to think of his

²⁰⁵ With the exception of a single event in 1672: the birth of the Russian royal court theatre. See the discussion of *Komik XVII veka* in chapter VI.

choice, somewhat facetiously, as also very momentous and symbolic because it was exactly the period when the Mertvago family²⁰⁶ was coming to prominence on the Russian historical arena.

A lot of historical documents were deliberately destroyed during the Time of Troubles. The first order of business of each successive tsar who came to rule the country then seemed to be to erase all existing records of his predecessor. Scholars still cannot agree on many dates, facts, and even names in the history of sixteenth- to seventeenth-century Russia. Ruslan Skrynnikov is considered a leading modern-day expert on the Time of Troubles. Having studied other Russian (such as Tatishchev, Shcherbatov, Solovyev, Kostomarov, Platonov, Klyuchevsky, Grekov, and Smirnov, who did not agree on most issues of the period²⁰⁷) and foreign historians and having scrutinized both domestic and foreign archives, he seems to have developed a comprehensive view on the chain of events that shook the Muscovite State at that juncture. I find Skrynnikov's interpretation of the period to be most coherent, and I will primarily rely on his chronology of events if not always on his explanation of them.

The twenty-nine years of troubles started with the death of Tsar Ivan the Terrible of Russia in 1584. Shortly before his death, he made provisions for a trusteeship council to be formed to help his feeble-minded son, heir to the throne, rule the country.²⁰⁸ Tsar Feodor Ioannovich reigned, but never ruled, from 1584 to his death in 1598. The head of the trusteeship council, and the actual ruler of Russia, was Boris Godunov, a very powerful and influential boyar.²⁰⁹ Tsar Feodor did not produce an heir, which opened up an opportunity for people not of royal blood to start fighting for the Russian throne. Ivan the Terrible had three sons with his six wives (three of whom he divorced on the grounds of their sterility) (Skrynnikov, *Tsar Boris*, p.

²⁰⁶ See introduction, part II.

²⁰⁷ Ruslan Grigor'evich Skrynnikov, *Sotsial'no-politicheskaia bor'ba v Russkom gosudarstve v nachale XVII veka* (The Sociopolitical Struggle in the Russian State in the Early Seventeenth Century) (Leningrad: Izdatel'stvo Leningradskogo universiteta, 1985), pp. 3–11.

²⁰⁸ Skrynnikov, *Tsar Boris i Dmitrii Samozvanets* (Tsar Boris and Dimitry the Impostor) (Smolensk, Russia: Rusich, 1997), pp. 6–8.

²⁰⁹ Boyars were noblemen who formed the State Duma, an advisory body to the tsar.

35)). His firstborn son was killed by him in a fit of rage; his second son was feeble-minded Feodor, who reigned for fourteen years; and his third, Prince Dimitry, was born shortly before his father's death and legally was not even in line for the throne if his older brother Feodor produced any male offspring.²¹⁰ On May 15, 1591, at the age of seven, Prince Dimitry died in Uglich, a provincial town in central Russia. Prince Vasily Shuysky was one of the boyars sent to investigate the death of Ivan's youngest son. Dimitry's death is one of the most controversial mysteries of the Time of Troubles as later all the materials, legal documents, denunciations, and records of interrogations were destroyed. There are two main theories, that of a tragic accident and that of a murder. Needless to say, Russian and world literature eagerly appropriated the latter and totally discarded the former.²¹¹ Skrynnikov happens to support the tragic-accident theory after carefully examining what little evidence is left in archives outside central Russia (where virtually no evidence has survived) and in diaries of foreigners who happened to witness the events (*ibid.*, pp. 48–57). According to Skrynnikov, the seven-year-old prince was playing with knives in the backyard of his house, under supervision of his nanny (Arina Tuchkova) and a boyar's wife Volokhova, when he suddenly had a fit of epilepsy he was prone to, and fell onto his own knife, cutting his throat.

The version that attracted literary attention is that of Boris Godunov secretly ordering a deacon in Uglich, by the name of Bityagovsky, and his son to kill the crown prince so that Boris

²¹⁰ Dimitry's mother was Maria Nagaya, Ivan's sixth wife. On the night of Ivan's death, Boris Godunov ordered both Maria and Dimitry arrested on charges of treason and later exiled from Moscow to Uglich (Skrynnikov, *Tsar Boris*, p. 8).

²¹¹ "The overthrow of Tsar Boris in 1605 by the low-born pretender known as the False Dimitry became a subject for dramatic works within a few years after it occurred. From Lope de Vega's *El gran Duque di Moscovia*, published in 1617, [...] to Kotzebue's melodrama and Friedrich Schiller's unfinished last tragedy about the False Dimitry, both at the very end of the eighteenth century, there appeared in the West more than one hundred tragedies, novels, and even harlequinades about this series of events. In Russia there were at least two plays called *Dimitry the Impostor*, one by Sumarokov (1771) and one by Narezhny (1800)" (Simon Karlinsky, *Russian Drama: From Its Beginnings to the Age of Pushkin* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1985), p. 322).

could become Russian tsar after Feodor's death. This popular myth, whether true or not, forms a background for the literary story of Boris Godunov and False Dimitry.²¹²

Tsar Feodor Ioannovich died on January 6, 1598. As it happens, he was married to Irina Godunova, Boris's sister. Traditionally, a royal widow who had not produced an heir to the throne was obliged to become a nun and live in a monastery, and Irina fitted the profile. But, according to Skrynnikov, Boris saw an opportunity of becoming tsar himself: he made the Duma boyars agree to Irina's regency until they could choose the best candidate for the position (*ibid.*, pp. 117–118). Irina served as regent until July or August of 1598.²¹³ During that period, the boyars made several entreaties for Boris to take the Russian throne, but he refused. Finally, in the summer of 1598, Godunov accepted the crown and reigned until 1605.

The first records of Dimitry the Pretender²¹⁴ go back to 1602–1603, when he surfaced in Lithuania and then in Poland. While Tsar Boris was strong and powerful, there was no room for the False Dimitry mystifications,²¹⁵ but Boris became seriously ill in 1600, and the matter of succession became prominent again. In 1605 Boris died and his son Feodor Godunov became tsar. He lasted only a couple of months on the throne when, in a military coup, Dimitry the

²¹² Also known as Dimitry the Pretender, Dimitry the Impostor, Grishka Otrepyev.

²¹³ Skrynnikov writes that there are two almost identical decrees by which the Duma boyars accepted Boris Godunov as Russian tsar and pledged allegiance to him. The documents differ in their dates, the number of the voting boyars, and the names of those present at the meeting. Skrynnikov is unable to say which of the documents is authentic and which is a backup copy (*Tsar Boris*, pp. 114–115).

²¹⁴ According to historian Kostomarov (as quoted in Skrynnikov, *Sotsial'no-politicheskaia bor'ba*, pp. 97–98), False Dimitry I was a petty noble by the name of Yury Bogdanovich Otrepyev. Skrynnikov supports his theory for lack of any other (most records of False Dimitry's existence were destroyed) but agrees with another historian, Platonov, in that it is less important to know his true identity than to analyze his role in the Russian history. Yury Otrepyev was in the service of boyar Mikhail Romanov, but because the Romanovs were at odds with Boris Godunov, he had to become a monk to save his life and changed his first name to Grigory. After a short stay at the Chudov Monastery, Otrepyev proclaimed himself Prince Dimitry Ioannovich who had miraculously survived and returned to reclaim his blood-given right.

²¹⁵ According to Skrynnikov, there were more than twelve pretenders who called themselves Dimitry and claimed to be the third son of Ivan the Terrible, entitled to the throne. However, only three of them played a prominent part in Russian history (Skrynnikov, *Likholet'e: Moskva v XVI–XVII vekakh* (Time of Troubles: Moscow in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries) (Moscow: Moskovskii rabochii, 1988), p. 501).

Pretender snatched the crown from him and ordered the execution of the young Godunov and his mother.

The Church remained loyal to the tsar, and hurled its anathema against the pretender as an unfrocked monk and arrant impostor, but the nobles and the people, weary of Boris's tyranny, hailed him as their deliverer and true-born lord.

[...] When Moscow, in flames, proclaimed the downfall of Boris, [Patriarch] Job proceeded to the cathedral, and, while he was officiating at mass, the infuriated mob broke into the sanctuary, seized and dragged him from the altar. Job, in a loud voice, denounced the sacrilegious intrusion, and the rebellion against the Lord's anointed. "Here," said he, "before this sacred image of the Virgin, for nineteen years, I have fought the good fight and preserved the unity of the faith. Now I foresee the troubles of the Church and the triumph of falsehood and impiety. Mother of God, save Orthodox Russia."²¹⁶

During the rule of Alexander II, Russian Christian writers realized that it was their turn to "preserve the unity of the faith" and fight "falsehood and impiety" to "save Orthodox Russia"—and that is what Ostrovsky tried to do throughout the second period, alluding insistently to the Time of Troubles.

The Pretender ruled for almost a year, when in 1606 Vasily Shuysky, a senior boyar at the Duma, instigated another coup d'état to become tsar himself. His four years in power were far from peaceful: civil wars, peasant wars, diarchy, and even dual church power marked his unfortunate reign. In 1608 a second Dimitry the Pretender set up camp at Tushino, a location near Moscow. There he proclaimed himself tsar and was able to obtain considerable support from Polish and Russian aristocrats. For a year and a half, there were two tsars and two church patriarchs²¹⁷ in Russia. This standoff greatly affected the Russian Orthodox Church: Pretender I professed Catholicism, while Pretender II pledged allegiance to Judaism (Skrynnikov, *Likholet'e*, p. 449). Consequently, supporters of heterodox religions flooded the central part of Russia, building their own churches and instilling their own customs and rituals.

²¹⁶ Heard, pp. 70–71.

²¹⁷ In the fall of 1608, supporters of False Dimitry II captured Filaret Romanov and shortly thereafter installed him as rival patriarch.

Intestine strife and foreign invasions by Poles, Cossacks, and Swedes brought the empire to the verge of destruction. “Mounds of graves,” says an ancient chronicle, “dotted the land of Russia.” The Church throughout remained loyal to Shouesky, the legitimate tsar, and faithful to the cause of national independence.²¹⁸

In 1610 Shuysky was dethroned and shut up in a monastery, where he spent the last two years of his life. In a matter of months, Russian boyars searching for a new ruler petitioned King Sigismund III Vasa of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth²¹⁹ to send his teenage son Wladyslaw to the Russian throne. As soon as the agreement (part of which was installation of Catholicism as Russia’s official religion) was reached and Wladyslaw was declared Russian tsar (then a teenager, he never set foot inside Russia in the entire two years of his nominal reign) on August 16, 1610, many Russian aristocrats moved to Tushino for various reasons, including to protest religious changes.

On December 11, 1610, False Dimitry II was murdered by Pyotr Urusov, his own head of security, as a result of a conspiracy. After this, Russia was left with one tsar again. However, in the summer of 1611 False Dimitry III decided to contest the right to the Russian throne, dug in in Pskov, and started gathering an army of supporters. By 1612 the Pretender’s strength became sufficient enough to present a clear danger of yet another coup d’etat.

“Universal anarchy reigned supreme, and yet there was hope for Russia in the undying attachment of the people for their native soil and their national religion, and from among the people was to arise their deliverer” (Heard, p. 75). It is remarkable that it was not a boyar, not even a nobleman, but a simple merchant from Nizhny Novgorod, Kozma Minin, who took it upon himself to rally for cleansing Russia of all its troubles, which the people attributed to an overpowering influence of foreigners and their religions. Minin raised enough money (starting with contributing most of his own savings to the righteous cause) to support a powerful army

²¹⁸ Heard, p. 73.

²¹⁹ *Zygmunt III Wasa* in Polish; ruled in 1587–1632.

that was led by Prince Pozharsky, a distinguished military leader of the time. On August 24, 1612, Pozharsky won a decisive battle against Polish troops at Zamoskvorechye. On October 26, Pozharsky's men suppressed all resistance in Moscow and ousted the foreigners and their followers from the Kremlin. The Time of Troubles officially ended in 1613 with the installation of Mikhail Romanov, which finally put a stop to the chronic kaleidoscope of dynastic changes.

A solemn fast was enjoined upon the whole land, and this furious outburst of national feeling, stimulated by religious enthusiasm, was universal and irresistible. Traitors and pretenders vanished before it; foreign invaders were driven from city to city. Moscow was recovered, and, in 1613, a great council of the clergy and people, in harmonious accord, renounced allegiance to Vladislav, and acclaimed Michael Romanoff, son of Philaret, as tsar. [...]

The young tsar Michael, educated in a convent, under a pious mother's eye, was by natural inclination, as well as from early training, of a devout and religious character, and the interests and welfare of the Church were the earliest objects of his solicitude.²²⁰

As I said before, Ostrovsky meticulously studied this period, looking for parallels with his own time. Factually accurate, all of his historical dramas also have authentic historical figures for characters. The playwright was undoubtedly fascinated with the role of the Church as the only anchor for Russia's national identity when the country found itself adrift amidst multiple rulers and various confessions. Ostrovsky must have also lamented Nicholas I's slogan of "One State, One Tsar, One Religion," which was discarded under Alexander II. It is also remarkable that, among the historical figures that came to prominence in the Time of Troubles, the playwright was most fascinated with Minin, a merchant and thus an embodiment of true Russianness, who played an important role in saving the country, achieving what no high and mighty noble could.

The first version²²¹ of *Koŝ'ma Zakhar'ich Minin, Sukhoruk* ("драматическая хроника в пяти действиях, с эпилогом, в стихах"²²²) was started in 1855 and finished in 1861. Even

²²⁰ Heard, pp. 76–77.

²²¹ *Koŝ'ma Minin's* first (1861) and second (1866) versions are complete plays (even though the first one, by all accounts, has never been staged); they both appear in Ostrovskii, *PSS*, as distinct texts.

structurally, *Minin* is shaped like all of Shakespeare's historical dramas: five acts, blank verse, real persons for characters. However, what makes it truly Shakespearean is the main concern that both playwrights seem to share: their respective countries seemed to be losing their religious unity. British Catholicism was deeply affected by the Reformation and Protestantism, while late-nineteenth-century Russian Orthodoxy was fighting a losing battle against atheism and materialism, and to a lesser extent Catholicism. Fearing for the diminishing ranks of true believers, both dramatists tried to alert their countrymen to the idea that adhering to the national religion—Roman Catholicism for Shakespeare and Russian Orthodoxy for Ostrovsky—was the only means of redemption. It is remarkable that if Ostrovsky in his first period was mostly concerned with the piety of the Old Believers in opposition to a more watered-down religiousness of the New Believers, in the second period a believer of either denomination was preferred to a non-believer or a member of a non-Orthodox confession.

What was true for Shakespeare in the sixteenth century was certainly true for the Russian playwright in the late nineteenth. Parenthetically, let me note that Shakespeare's influence on Ostrovsky was so great that the latter even translated (and had his translations published) some plays of the former.²²³ Having already found a direct connection between faith and the culture of guilt, Ostrovsky automatically regarded anybody who denounced Russia's Orthodoxy as belonging to the culture of shame. Other religions in late-nineteenth-century Russia formed a somewhat lesser threat to the traditional Russian Church; it was the growing number of atheists that truly scared the playwright.

²²² "A dramatic chronicle in verse, in five acts with an epilogue."

²²³ In 1850 Ostrovsky made a prose translation of Shakespeare's *The Taming of the Shrew*; in 1865 he made another attempt at the same play, this time in verse form. Ostrovsky's death in 1886 prevented him from finishing his translation of *Antony and Cleopatra* (editorial comments to the translations by Ostrovsky, in his *PSS*, vol. 11, pp. 367–389, at pp. 369–370).

The second half of the nineteenth century brought forth a tough choice. People in general and artists in particular, especially those with high social conscience, had to choose between two polar opposites, materialism and idealism. Sandwiched between the neoclassical, Enlightenment literature of the eighteenth century and modernism and postmodernism of the twentieth lies the dichotomy of the nineteenth-century literature.

The late fifties and the early sixties brought about a great change in Russia; it began with the abolition of serfdom and the emancipation of the peasants, the judiciary, administrative, and educational reforms, the transformation of old ways of life, and the improvements in bureaucratic and military practices. This complete rebuilding of the structure of the State signed a death warrant for the old Russia of Nikolay. A new social and economic order gradually renovated the Empire, and for half a century, until 1905, the country remained within this framework. It was, of course, an order based upon class privileges and autocratic rule, despite its monolithic facade. It was often shattered by clashes of interests between the governing minority and the discontented majority, and undermined by the alternation of progress and reaction which has always been the constant rhythm of Russian history; yet all the trends and aspirations of modern Russia came to life in many areas and were developed precisely during this epoch of stir and innovation.²²⁴

My impression of the nineteenth century is that of a crossroads from which one could either take the path of empiricists (from Bacon to Locke and Hume, and finally culminating in Marx's *Das Kapital* in 1867) and, ergo, materialists; or choose the road laid by Plato's divine truths and idealism and paved by Christian and Romantic writers.²²⁵ The Russian literature of the nineteenth century appears to me primarily as a battlefield between those two doctrines: no outcome is visible yet (idealists will still have their twenty years of fame during the era of symbolism), and so literature plays host to extremely heated discussions between the two camps who, fighting for people's minds and souls, try to recruit as many followers as possible. Slonim states that "partisans of romanticism or of realism fought for or against diverse schools of acting in the same manner they did about literary trends" (p. 64). Both novelists and playwrights go on

²²⁴ Slonim, p. 65.

²²⁵ The Russian literature of the nineteenth century was greatly influenced by the German romantics and their concept of imagination. Pushkin, Lermontov, Dostoevsky, and Turgenev openly admitted that they considered Goethe, Schiller, and Schlegel their mentors.

a quest for truth, and in the second half of the century, more often than not, they are torn between the same contradictions of what is moral vs. what is practical. Ostrovsky was no exception; the subtlety and tactfulness of his writing style prevented him from openly preaching his position to the audience, but he still posed questions that worried most of the brilliant minds of the era. Ostrovsky visibly gravitated towards Christian morality and thus towards a transcendental world, divine truths, and idealism; but he did not fail to notice how hardcore materialism spread its tentacles over the heart and soul of nineteenth-century Russia. The questions of right and wrong, of personal advantage vs. personal sacrifice, of breaking or following the Ten Commandments troubled the playwright, and he wrote plenty of “open-ended” dramas where the audience was left with a question rather than an answer. Using the biblical dictum “Judge not, and ye shall not be judged”²²⁶ and guided by divine law:

To me belongeth vengeance, and recompense; their foot shall slide in due time: for the day of their calamity is at hand, and the things that shall come upon them make haste. For the Lord shall judge his people, and repent himself for his servants, when he seeth that their power is gone, and there is none shut up, or left²²⁷ —

Ostrovsky seemed to take care in avoiding cathartic endings where judgment is passed by punishing or rewarding. To the playwright, the choice between materialism and idealism essentially came down to man’s attitude towards faith and religion.

The *Shestidesyatniki*, a liberally-minded generation of the 1860s, headed by Chernyshevsky and Herzen and influenced greatly by the works of Karl Marx, were already involved in heated polemics with Dostoevsky and his supporters. Ostrovsky tried to stay away from political debate, but he joined the group of Christian supporters through his plays. Dostoevsky wrote in an unfinished article:

²²⁶ Luke 6:37.

²²⁷ Deuteronomy 32:35–36.

Есть нечто гораздо высшее бога-чрева. Это — быть властелином и хозяином даже себя самого, своего *я*, пожертвовать этим *я*, отдать его — всем. В этой идее есть нечто неотразимо-прекрасное, сладостное, неизбежное и даже необъяснимое.²²⁸

Avoiding involvement in a direct confrontation with the leftists and carefully presenting his ideas in the guise of a historical drama, Ostrovsky resorted to the Gogolian principle of theatre as “кафедре, с которой читается разом целой толпе живой урок.”²²⁹ He was not ready to give up on the world and mankind; he believed that with a little push in the right direction, i.e., preserving and taking pride in the national identity, societal betterment was possible.

Аксенов. [...] Вот и толкуем, как бы ополчиться
Да либо помереть уж, либо Русь
От иноземцев и воров очистить,
От всякой погани.

Лыткин. Аксеныч, страшно!
В разор нас разорят и животишки
Пограбят все; куда с детьми деваться!
Не трогают, так и сидеть бы смиренно.
Куда уж лезть!

Аксенов. Да ты крещен аль нет?
Аль животы тебе дороже веры?²³⁰

In *Minin*, Ostrovsky for the first time drew a parallel between two sets of concepts: culture of guilt vs. culture of shame, on the one hand, and divine court vs. court of people, on the other. He insisted that a person driven by guilt was concerned with the heavenly trial on the Judgment Day, while one driven by shame held himself accountable chiefly to people's judgment. Minin faces a difficult task of winning people over to the cause that he believes noble.

²²⁸ Dostoevskii, “Zapisnaia tetrad’ 1864–1865 gg.” (Notebook of 1864–1865), in his *PSS*, vol. 20, pp. 188–203, at p. 193. “There is something much higher than god-appetite. That is, to be the lord and master even of one’s own self, one’s *I*, to sacrifice this *I*, to hand it over—to everybody. There’s something inexpressibly beautiful in this idea, sweet, inevitable, even inexplicable” (Dostoevsky, “Socialism and Christianity,” in his *Notes from Underground*, trans. and ed. Michael R. Katz, 2nd ed. (New York: Norton, 2001), pp. 98–99, at p. 98. “Бог-чрево” in the original Russian could perhaps be better translated as “Belly God” or “Gluttony God” rather than “god-appetite”).

²²⁹ Nikolai Vasil’evich Gogol’, “Peterburgskie zapiski 1836 goda” (St. Petersburg Notes of 1836), in his *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii* (Complete Works), ed. O. A. Dorofeev, 8 vols. (Moscow: Terra/Knizhnyi klub, 1999–2001), vol. 7, pp. 28–42, at p. 38. “A lectern from which a live lesson is taught to an entire crowd at once.”

²³⁰ Ostrovskii, *Koz’ma Zakhar’ich Minin* (1st version), in his *PSS*, vol. 3, pp. 7–132, at p. 11. “**Aksenov.** [...] So here we are talking how to form / An army, and either win a victory or perish / In battle with the foreigners and thieves / And other scum polluting Mother Russia. **Lytkin.** Aksenov, I’m scared! / This cause will drain me, and what I have, / I’ll lose. What’ll happen to the children? / My name has not been called, / I’ll wait aside. **Aksenov.** Are you a Christian? / Or is your own life more precious than our faith?”

He needs their spiritual, financial, and physical support in forming a liberation army and leading it to Moscow. He knows that he is right; like Moses or Jules Michelet's Joan of Arc, he has had a vision that he recognizes as God-sent. Just like them, he needs to find a way to convince others who are skeptical—a very frustrating endeavor that requires a lot of strength and a lot of courage.

Минин. [...] Послужишь Богу, так людей обидишь!
Людям служить, так Богу согрешить!
Кому служить-то: людем или правде?²³¹

With *Minin*, Ostrovsky seemed to say that he himself was fighting for a noble cause by advocating a restoration of the *status quo ante* and a return to the old Russian piety, i.e., a society driven by guilt. The main idea of the drama is that if a man is firm in his Christian beliefs, his life is meaningful; but once these beliefs are taken away (by foreigners in the Time of Troubles or by Westerners and materialists in the playwright's time), life becomes meaningless and empty. According to Ostrovsky, in the 1860s the time was ripe for making a choice: to run with the new ideas and slogans of the leftists and therefore inevitably turn into a homogeneous society of shame; or to take a step back, reread the Bible, and preserve the national identity by preventing Russian Orthodoxy from sinking into oblivion.

Minin is full of biblical allusions, both direct and indirect. Conceptually, it follows the story of Moses, but there are also mentions of David, Gideon, Samson, and the town of Jericho.²³² Minin, Aksenov, Pospelov, and Marfa are well versed in biblical narratives and are unwavering in their faith. These people of guilt undergo many hardships and have to make

²³¹ Ibid., p. 121. "**Минин.** [...] If I serve God, then people get offended; / If people, I'm a sinner before God. / Who should I serve, the people or the truth?"

²³² The stories of David, as they appear in 1 Samuel 16:12 and 2 Samuel 10:5, show him as a God-chosen man (Bruce M. Metzger and Michael D. Coogan (eds.), *The Oxford Companion to the Bible* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), s.v. "David"); Gideon, as he appears in Judges 6:32 and 9:1 and in 1 Samuel 12:11, is a judge-deliverer who leads his people to victory by following God's advice to the letter (Metzger and Coogan, s.v. "Gideon"); Samson (Judges 13–16) is the last judge of Israel, whose deeds include a single-handed slaughter of thousands of Philistines; Jericho is a town that, as God predicted, fell on the seventh day after the Israelites walked around its walls seven times and seven priests sounded seven trumpets made of rams' horns (Joshua 6).

enormous personal sacrifices fighting with people of shame, such as Lytkin, Birkin, and Pavlushka. The gallery of people of guilt in *Minin* is crowned with a very important character of Grisha, a holy fool. Grisha, who lives in his own world of extreme poverty and piety, is said to respond only to divine voice and visions. He predicts that if Minin does not purge Russia of Catholicism, Russian Orthodoxy would cease to exist. Grisha is an epitome of a guilt-driven person. No extraneous factors bother him, and he is the ultimate outcast from society. People like Grisha are canonized by the Church and join the cohort of saints. I believe that Grisha's character is based on a real historical prototype: the Russian hagiography tells a story of Nikolay Salos, a holy fool who lived at the Time of Troubles and preached reverence and devotion to the holy scriptures.²³³

Minin, the character created by Ostrovsky, won in the end, while Ostrovsky, the character's creator, lost: the first version of the play never passed censorship. In 1866 the drama was revised and appeared on stage in its new version. In the new *Minin*, the theme of faith was considerably toned down. It was reworked from its original format of a philosopho-theological treatise into a lighter, more theatrical and entertaining, version. Action was added at the expense of Minin's lengthy monologues. Marfa was turned from a saint into an ordinary woman, and a number of personal stories were added to the plot. From a reverend medieval narrative, *Minin* was transformed into a quicker-paced Renaissance-style drama. The revised version feels more Shakespearean, with added battle scenes and a better development of secondary characters.

After the disappointment with the first version of *Minin*, Ostrovsky returned to the form of family drama but never altered the message. In 1862 Shakespeare's influence on the Moscow playwright was still very strong; and the theme of guilt/shame needed further elucidation. This

²³³ Sofia A. Destunis, *Zhitiia sviatykh* (Hagiography) (Moscow: Eksmo, 2005), pp. 144–145. This collection of biographies of saints recognized by Russian Orthodoxy is based on a lifelong study by Archbishop Filaret (1805–66), who left copious notes that were later turned into a folio that, together with the Bible, was carefully studied in schools and referred to at church sermons.

led to a new play, *Grekh da beda na kogo ne zhivet*, that offered a nineteenth-century interpretation of Shakespeare's *Othello* with the topos of guilt/shame in the spotlight. A vulnerable marriage that requires perfect, greenhouse conditions to survive is doomed because life is no greenhouse. All it takes is for a third party (Iago in *Othello* and Lukerya in *Sin and Sorrow*) to plant a seed of mistrust in the family and manipulate the highly gullible husband to the personal advantage of the instigator who hates him. Iago wants to be the first lieutenant, and Lukerya wants her name to be once again associated with nobility and big-city life. Their relentless efforts to achieve personal glamour and glory lead to the murder of the wife by her husband.

In *Grekh da beda*, Ostrovsky came back to the old and tried motif of Moscow as the cradle of shame and temptation. He also resumed his discourse on the difference between heavenly judgment and people's judgment, becoming more explicit about it this time. His chain of logic is seen in Tanya's conversation with Babaev about their illicit love affair:

Краснова. [...] Если послушать, что старые-то люди говорят, так я и то грех большой делаю. По старому-то закону я, кроме мужа, не должна никого любить. Только что, так как я его любить не могу, а вас и допрежде того любила, и сердца мне своего не преодолеть, так уж я... Только сохрани вас Господи!.. и уж я ни под каким видом... потому что я хочу в законе жить.²³⁴

The Great Schism of the Church resulted, among other things, in lesser punishments for violating various laws. The Old Believers remained true to their "old law," as Tanya calls it, and the New Believers moved on to a milder code. According to Ostrovsky, the first step away from Christian morality was made; the next logical step would be atheism and renunciation of the old piety altogether. What sounded totally blasphemous to an Old Believer—plunging into an extramarital affair—was very much approved by Chernyshevsky, for example, who, unlike

²³⁴ Ostrovskii, *Grekh da beda na kogo ne zhivot*, in his *PSS*, vol. 3, pp. 246–304, at p. 262. "Tatyana. [...] If I should listen to the opinions of older people, then I am committing a great wrong. According to the old law, I must love no one other than my husband. But since I can't love him—and loved you before my marriage, and can't change my heart, so I—only God preserve you from—and I won't in any respect—because I wish to live right" (Ostrovsky, *Sin and Sorrow Are Common to All*, in his *Plays*, pp. 135–212, at p. 157).

Ostrovsky, not only let his Vera²³⁵ live but also turned her into a successful and prosperous woman.

Comparing two contemporary interpretations of Lyov Krasnov, Dostoevsky writes that Burdin²³⁶ misunderstood the character and played him as a comic type, as a moonstruck merchant, which, in Dostoevsky's understanding, was a mistake; while Vasilyev²³⁷ played Krasnov as a tragic figure: serious, respectable, strict, and purified, as it were, by his passion that uproots him from his traditional milieu. But more importantly, the novelist looks closely at the secondary character of Babaev, who seduces Tanya and ultimately causes her death. The manipulator Lukerya is not even a factor to Dostoevsky since she is never mentioned in the review, but Babaev is the true culprit, who (forgetting that "whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart" (Matthew 5:28)) "[...] увлекает женщину, начинает с ней любовь и даже чуть-чуть ей самой не говорит: что это всё *pour passer le temps*, потому только, что скучно четыре дня без клубнички сидеть в городишке; и говоря это, он считает себя совершенно правым перед своею совестью."²³⁸ In his article, Dostoevsky is not stingy with demeaning epithets to describe the man who violates one of the Ten Commandments.

While Ostrovsky found the old morality beneficial and even crucial to Russia's development, he never insisted on keeping old rituals and traditions if people felt they were a thing of the past. The form did not bother Ostrovsky; it was the content that he believed to be

²³⁵ The main character of Chernyshevsky's novel *Chto delat'? (What Is to Be Done?)*, Vera Pavlovna, not only starts such an affair—she also gets all possible support from her husband and achieves a successful outcome.

²³⁶ See footnote 21, second paragraph.

²³⁷ Pavel Vasilyev, an actor at the Maly Theatre in 1856–79.

²³⁸ Fedor Dostoevskii, "Ob igre Vasil'eva v 'Grekh da beda na kogo ne zhivet'" (On Vasilyev's Acting in *Sin and Sorrow Are Common to All*), in his *PSS*, vol. 20, pp. 148–151, at pp. 150–151. "[...]S]educes a woman, starts an affair with her, and almost tells her directly that it's all *pour passer le temps*, only because it's boring to spend four days in a small town without a little bit of naughtiness; and while saying that, he finds himself to be absolutely just before his own conscience."

This review, the only one ever written by Dostoevsky, was provoked (editorial comments to Ostrovsky's essays and articles, *ibid.*, pp. 247–426, at p. 343) by a theatre-themed article by Grigoryev.

essential. In his effort to understand why godlessness was spreading through Russia like cancer, Ostrovsky returned to the Bible. The Bible's conceptual language is firmly embedded in the playwright's next play, *Tiazhelye dni* (a family drama that contains the moral themes and structure of a morality play), serving as its substructure. By conceptual language, I mean a language of ideas, premises, assumptions, connections, and attitudes that, while belonging to a specific historical period and/or philosophical concept, becomes metatextual and implicit²³⁹ in a later literary work. Ostrovsky struggled to understand why people (including very often himself) voluntarily ran away from the teachings of the Holy Scripture, preferring shame to guilt, and he tried to voice this concern of his in *Tiazhelye dni*. Vasily Dosuzhev, if we assume that he is the same character as in *Dokhodnoe mesto* (A Profitable Position),²⁴⁰ has unexpectedly developed a new life philosophy (possibly to atone for his sinful and shameful ways from before)—selflessly helping others and sacrificing himself for a worthy cause. Hinting at a parallel with Jesus, who helped people out of sheer love for mankind, and invoking the commandment “Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself” (Matthew 22:39), one that is of utmost importance in Russian Orthodoxy, Dosuzhev finds a way to help his friend Andrey in getting his father's permission to marry Sasha Kruglova, the girl of Andrey's dreams. Dosuzhev tolerates verbal abuse and suffers financial losses while undertaking this task, which requires a considerable amount of his time and effort. Having transformed from a lawyer of shame (in *Dokhodnoe mesto* he was interested in personal advantage rather than justice) into a lawyer of guilt (serving justice even when it is done at a personal loss), Dosuzhev stoically finishes what he started. His last words (“Ничего мне от

²³⁹ Traditionally, this metalanguage is almost always implicit, providing the reader with an opportunity for some “detective work.” A good example of such conceptual language can be found in the following paradigm: the Bible (Exodus) tells the story of Moses who had a speech impediment and found it next to impossible to communicate divine truths to people; texts of the nineteenth century, such as Melville's *Billy Budd* and Leo Tolstoy's *Vlast' i'my* and *Anna Karenina*, as well as of the twentieth, such as Albee's play *Tiny Alice*, deal with the impossibility of “effing” the ineffable without making it glib or reductive. The biblical text is never actually present in the later works, but a connection is always detectable.

²⁴⁰ This play is discussed in chapter IV.

вас не надо. [...] Живите, женитесь, плодитесь, ссорьтесь, миритесь, судитесь; а я буду глядеть на вас да радоваться!”²⁴¹) relates his philosophy to that of Jesus.

The character of Andrey was first introduced in *V chuzom piru pokhmel'e*,²⁴² where he was head over heels in love with a worthy daughter of an honorable and honest schoolteacher. Apparently, he chose staying with his father over being cut off from the family money. Sasha turns out to be an avaricious glutton who wants Andrey for his money, which will buy her fur coats and luxurious carriages to impress her neighbors. Ever-present mendacity permeates mankind, rendering it incapable of redemption.

Настасья Панкратьевна. Да как жить на свете?

Наталя Никаноровна. И жить так, как жили. Слава Богу, лет до шестидесяти прожили, теперь не переучиваться stattь.

Настасья Панкратьевна. Да разве мы так живем, как человеку указано! Вот так бы жить, чтобы всё исполнять.²⁴³

In the second period of the development of his guilt/shame philosophy, Ostrovsky visibly loses hope and becomes pessimistic. By populating his plays with either unworthy scoundrels, unfamiliar with the concept of guilt, or losers who are poor and desperate albeit highly moral and proud, Ostrovsky seems to bow reluctantly to reality and accept the fact that perhaps living comfortably on earth (i.e., following the principles of living by shame) should be more important than eternal bliss after death.

In *Shutniki*, Ostrovsky returned to the idea of placing guilt and shame in direct opposition. Nedonoskov and Nedorostkov are sons of very rich merchants, who grew up vile,

²⁴¹ Ostrovskii, *Tiazholye dni*, in his *PSS*, vol. 3, pp. 305–343, at p. 343. “I don’t need anything from you. [...] Live, marry, procreate, quarrel, reconcile, litigate, and I’ll be looking at you and rejoicing!”

²⁴² *V chuzom piru pokhmel'e*, written eight years earlier than *Tiazholye dni*, is discussed in depth in chapter IV.

²⁴³ Ostrovskii, *Tiazholye dni*, p. 322. “**Nastasya Pankratyevna.** How should we live in the world? **Natalya Nikanorovna.** Live the way we always have. Thank God we’ve lived to sixty, there’s no changing our ways now. **Nastasya Pankratyevna.** Do we really live the way man is told to? I wish we could live by doing everything right.”

heinous, and nefarious. Ostrovsky deliberately gives them speaking names²⁴⁴ that sound and look almost identical. Following Gogol's example of Dobchinsky and Bobchinsky,²⁴⁵ who finish each other's sentences and generally do not seem to exist as separate entities, Ostrovsky makes Nedonoskov and Nedorostkov so blatantly sub par that, even when taken together, they cannot fill the shoes of one decent man.²⁴⁶ Obroshenov provides a description of the two spoiled brats:

Оброшенов. Соседи, соседские ребята, богатых отцов дети озорничают. То ли еще они делают! От них проходу нет по улицам: понаделают трубок, через забор на прохожих водой брызгают; краской шляпы мажут; женщинам к платкам записочки прикалывают. А отцы только утешаются на своих чадов.²⁴⁷

It is remarkable that the knaves belong to the merchant class. As I stated before, in the second period Ostrovsky stopped looking for a direct correlation between morals and classes.

Incidentally, people of guilt in this drama, Sasha Goltsov (who spent a client's money on his mother's funeral) and Obroshenov, are noblemen, although poor. Obroshenov sacrifices his honor to play a fool for rich merchants who pay for his jokes. Ostrovsky makes sure we understand that family is more valuable and important than one's reputation. People are free to think what they want and do as much finger-pointing as they deem necessary; their judgment means nothing to the devoted father. God, who sees his true intentions, will not err when judging Obroshenov.

Ostrovsky focuses on Anna, her father, and her sister's fiancé, who constitute an insignificant minority in society both in the play and in real life. Their everyday heroism is unnoticed at best or laughed at, at worst. Their humble nature wins them neither friends nor

²⁴⁴ The derogatory word *nedonosok*, from which the name Nedonoskov is derived, refers to a prematurely born child or, figuratively, a child who has not spent enough time with his parents to learn proper ways of behavior. The name Nedorostkov alludes to infantilism and immaturity.

²⁴⁵ Two comical characters from Gogol's *Revizor*.

²⁴⁶ The prefix *nedo* with which both last names start means *short of the whole, under-, sub-*.

²⁴⁷ Ostrovskii, *Shutniki*, in his *PSS*, vol. 3, pp. 344–397, at p. 345. “**Оброшенов.** The neighbors—the neighbor's children, the rich parents' offspring, are being mischievous. You should see what else they do! They pester everyone who passes by: they would make pipes and spray passers-by with water from behind the fence; they soil people's hats with paint; they pin notes to women's kerchiefs. And their fathers just look at their progenies lovingly.”

favours. Having decided to save her father and her future brother-in-law and having agreed to a loathsome marriage, Anna is doomed to live all her life unhappy.

In the first version of *Voevoda*, Ostrovsky returned once again to the Time of Troubles, focusing this time on the peasant wars. Without naming any famous instigators of those unrests, he hinted at an important role they played in Russia's history. While trying to cut the Gordian knot that is the combination of guilt and shame in man, Ostrovsky took a new step: he democratized his play. By bringing in multitudes and introducing people's voice, Ostrovsky tried a majoritarian approach to the problem. If peasant wars were a decisive factor in bringing Russia, which seemed to have lost its path, back on track in the seventeenth century, maybe the same approach should work in the late nineteenth century too. The most likely prototype for Khudoyar, a just highway robber who is mentioned in *Voevoda*, is Stepan Razin, a Cossack from the Don region who headed the peasant war of 1670. However, in my opinion, Ostrovsky's Russian Robin Hood could equally be a literary interpretation of Ivan Bolotnikov, a runaway serf at the Time of Troubles who led peasants near Moscow in a revolt against serfdom in 1606–1607.²⁴⁸ It is also possible that Khudoyar combined traits of all people's leaders of all times. The important thing about him is that he is a personification of people's voice. Simple folk, the salt of the earth, could provide an answer that Ostrovsky was looking for: Is it possible to live comfortably without necessarily compromising one's moral principles? Do the masses know a secret of heaven on earth, or does one have to be driven by shame to obtain it?

In *Voevoda*, Ostrovsky took a closer look at the opposition of people's court and divine one. By constantly stating that the former is that of shame while the latter is that of guilt, Ostrovsky tried to prove their corruption and ultimate justice, respectively. The playwright's

²⁴⁸ However, in the second version of *Voevoda*, there is a direct mention of Stepan Razin and his campaigns in Astrakhan and Saratov. Editorial comments to *Voevoda* (1st version), in Ostrovskii, *PSS*, vol. 4, pp. 409–414, at p. 412; and to *Voevoda* (2nd version), *ibid.*, vol. 9, pp. 420–422, at p. 421.

contempt for human court went beyond the mere criticism of its imperfections. His critique was based on the comparison of two kinds of justice, heavenly and earthly, and while he believed the former to be based on the laws of morality, the latter, he thought, worked on anything but. Ostrovsky's low opinion of human court also stemmed from his unfortunate and short-lived career as a court clerk (in 1843–1851), for which he had neither any inclination nor respect (Lakshin, pp. 78 and 240). In *Voevoda*, for example, there is no human law against a person marrying for a third time after his first two wives died young, if he could not be implicated in their deaths. And while the good Christians in the play consider such an action morally wrong, they know all too well that there is no use taking this matter to court. Nor does it help that Shalygin, the very person who is strongly suspected of sending his first two wives to an early grave, is the head of this court, which people describe as villainous:

Брусенин. Какие воры, страсть! Концов не сыщешь,
И ни суда, ни правды нет на них.
Тыра. Какой те суд! Вестимо, воевода
Своих людей оправит.²⁴⁹

Shalygin and his people enjoy impunity that allows them to avoid punishment, while they are free to prosecute and punish their own enemies. Khudoyar, for example, was tried and sentenced, even though what he did—robbing the rich and giving money to the poor—seemed just to the majority of the people. By human law, the Bastryukovs, Shalygin's sworn enemies, are guilty of harboring outlaws and abetting their cause. Yet Ostrovsky stresses that the Bastryukovs and Khudoyar with his gang of supporters have God on their side. The playwright persisted in showing that no man, least of all one who heads a human court, should be above the law, manipulating and bending it to serve his personal needs.

²⁴⁹ Ostrovskii, *Voevoda* (1st version), in his *PSS*, vol. 4, pp. 7–155, at p. 12. “**Brusenin**. Such vile thieves! And everything is hushed! / Look not for truth or justice in their trial. **Tyra**. What trial?! Don't you know that Shalygin / His people will acquit?”

In *Na boikom meste*,²⁵⁰ Ostrovsky continued expanding his gallery of immoral scoundrels who survive life peripetia unscathed. Bessudny gets his skull cracked; finds out that his wife is a whore, not just a flirt that he thought her to be; loses his sister; and gains a dangerous enemy who has learned the secret of his sleeping draught. And yet as soon as Milovidov leaves with Annushka and a new guest comes into his inn, he resumes his criminal routine. Apparently, people like Bessudny are able to recover quickly after a setback because their conscience is at peace, devoid of guilt or remorse.

The next play, *Puchina*, a bleak and pessimistic family drama written in 1865, looks into many issues, but its main theme remains the juxtaposition of the court of shame and the court of guilt. The very notion of shame is revisited and looked at from a new standpoint: a bad thing is not really bad if everybody keeps on doing it. In this drama, Ostrovsky again employed a majoritarian approach but this time he changed its polarity. If in *Voevoda* the opinion of the majority matters in determining what is moral and what is not, that same opinion in *Puchina* ostensibly leads to a conclusion that people need to forget guilt as soon as possible in order to survive in the contemporary world. Ostrovsky kept on looking and found more and more voices speaking in favor of switching completely from guilt to shame and staying practical to survive.

Переярков. Вот тебе пример: положим, у тебя на опеке племянники; ты — человек хороший, состоятельный, торговые дела знаешь, а они выпали ребята так себе, ни то ни се, к торговле склонности не имеют, а готовое прожить охота большая; ну, ты и попользовался от них сколько мог, видимо попользовался; и отчеты представлял безобразные и всё такое; то есть не то что ограбил, а себя не забыл. Виноват ты или нет? Вот тебе и задача. По закону ты виноват!

Турунтаев. А по-человечеству — нет.²⁵¹

²⁵⁰ A more profound analysis of this play will be offered in chapter V in conjunction with the discourse on the money.

²⁵¹ Ostrovskii, *Puchina*, in his *PSS*, vol. 4, pp. 200–251, at p. 218. “**Переярков.** Here is an example for you: let’s say you are your nephews’ guardian; you are a good man, wealthy, you know the trading business, and they turned out to be neither here nor there, with no nose for business but eager to run through what they have; so you used them for your advantage as much as you could, used them in earnest—you falsified accounts, and so on—that is, you didn’t quite rob them, but you took care of yourself. Are you guilty? Here is a conundrum for you. The law says you are. **Turuntaev.** And people say you are not.”

In Act III, Kisel'nikov's mother teaches her son to start taking bribes and bending the law based on who offers a bigger sum, the defendant or the plaintiff.

Анна Устиновна. Ты уж очень совестлив, как погляжу я на тебя. Нынче так жить нельзя.²⁵²

It seems as if life itself is pushing Kisel'nikov towards shame, away from his innate predilection for guilt, and yet Ostrovsky still tried to hold on to his conviction in the supremacy of guilt over shame. He made sure that we did not miss two important instances in the drama, the first of which is found in the prologue when two merchants are discussing the play that they have just seen performed:

2-й купец. [...] Это вы верно, что от приятелев. От кого мы занимаемся дурному чему-нибудь? Самому не выдумать; потому и в голову не придет. А всё от других.

1-й купец. И всё это вы пустяки говорите. Всякий себе сам виноват. Коли я добрый человек да имею свой разум, так что мне приятели? Всё одно, что ничего. А коли я дурак либо мошенник, да ежели начал распутничать, так уж ничто делать, что на приятелей сворачивать.

2-й купец. Но однако ж...

1-й купец. Что «однако ж»? Стой твердо, потому один отвечать будешь! Ответчика за себя не поставишь. Как жил, что делал? Так и так, мол, приятели. А у тебя есть своя голова на плечах? Закон знаешь? Ну, и шабаш, и кончен разговор.²⁵³

The second instance comes at the end of the play, when divine justice finds Kisel'nikov and his father-in-law. Kisel'nikov becomes insane, and his father-in-law loses everything that he has been trying so hard to gain.

In his next historical drama (in two parts), *Dmitrii Samozvanets i Vasilii Shuiskii*, Ostrovsky returned to the Time of Troubles, feeling that this period's potential had not been fully

²⁵² Ibid., p. 232. "Anna Ustinovna. Your conscience is too sensitive, the way I see it. You cannot live like that these days."

²⁵³ Ibid., p. 201. "2nd merchant. [...] You are right, it's the company you keep. Who do we learn bad things from? You can't come up with them on your own, it just won't occur to you. It all comes from others."

1st merchant. Oh, you are getting it all wrong. Everybody is guilty with his own guilt. If I'm a good man and have my wits about me, what's my company to me? Nothing, that's what. But if I'm a fool and a knave, if I've become promiscuous, then all I can do is blame it on bad company. **2nd merchant.** Yes, but.... **1st merchant.** What do you mean, "but"? Remain firm, because you'll have to answer alone! Nobody will answer for you. What kind of life have you led, what kind of acts committed? Bad company, you say? Don't you have your own head? Do you know the law? Lights out, pal; case closed."

exhausted and it could still be used as a metaphor for his agenda. The holy fool from *Koz'ma Minin* makes his second appearance in this drama. This time his name is Afonya instead of Nikolay, but this minor change in form does not result in any change in content. Afonya adheres to the old Russian piety and wants to see Russian Orthodoxy protected from being weakened by the Polish influence of False Dimitry I's supporters.

Dmitrii Samozvanets explores the correlation of the guilt/shame dichotomy with power. The process of deep transformation of an individual by power is explored over two parts. In Part I of Ostrovsky's drama, False Dimitry I is shown at the very beginning of his rule. This is a period when Dimitry, both historical and literary, is going out of his way to fit the image of a good, benevolent tsar. His intentions behind lying his way to the throne can presumably be categorized as good. After all, he is plotting against Godunov who, according to the legend, committed an infanticide to be enthroned, and now justice needs to be served.

Dimitry's righteousness manifests itself in his adherence to biblical laws.²⁵⁴ For example, when Basmanov, the man in charge of the new tsar's security, accuses Vasily Shuysky of treason and suggests his execution, False Dimitry responds with a commendable vow:

Дмитрий. [...] Я никого не осужу один
И не пролью ни капли крови русской!
Над Шуйским суд назначить в нашей думе
Из выборных от всех чинов народа
И дать ему все средства оправдаться.²⁵⁵

Dimitry refuses to judge Shuysky personally; he orders a fair trial to be held, with a jury composed of several boyars. The jury finds Shuysky guilty and their verdict is death, but Dimitry would not allow it. When Shuysky is brought to the place of his execution, the verdict is annulled and he is fully reinstated in his title and position. In Part I of *Dmitrii Samozvanets*,

²⁵⁴ See footnotes 224 and 225 and the text to which they refer.

²⁵⁵ Ostrovskii, *Dmitrii Samozvanets i Vasilii Shuiskii*, in his *PSS*, vol. 4, pp. 252–389, at p. 289. “**Dimitry.** [...] I won't judge a single man alone / And won't waste a drop of Russian blood! / Convene a court to judge Vasily Shuysky, / Comprised of men elected from all classes. / Let Shuysky first defend himself.”

Ostrovsky depicts Dimitry primarily as a man rather than a ruler. The title of Russian tsar has not yet sunk in, and Dimitry thinks and acts as a regular, decent human being.

Ostrovsky juxtaposes Dimitry's conduct and mentality in the beginning and by the end of his reign. Dimitry's intentions and aspirations appear to be highly moral in the beginning of his rule. Otrepyev suffers from remorse for taking something that does not belong to him. His soliloquy at the end of Act III reveals his uncertainty and inner conflict that tear him apart. The monologue ends with Dimitry's oath to Ivan the Terrible whose son he pretends to be:

Дмитрий. [...] Отец мой грозный,
Пусти меня! Счастливый самозванец
И царств твоих невольный похититель,
Я не возьму тиранских прав твоих —
Губить и мучить. Я себе оставляю
Одно святое право всех владык —
Прощать и миловать.²⁵⁶

Then he sincerely forgives Shuysky, who is caught plotting against the new tsar. By scene 5, however, Ostrovsky's Dimitry exhibits signs of corruption by power. His initial good intentions to stay moral fade away, and a new realization of personal impunity starts to set in by degrees. His first transgression—lust after Boris's daughter Ksenia—was only hinted at by Ostrovsky, but later the playwright shows the full extent of pernicious influence of power on man. In order to strengthen his position and make people stop gossiping about his true origin, he forces Tsarina Marfa²⁵⁷ to publicly call him her real son.

But to Ostrovsky, who in this two-part drama hints heavily at Alexander II, the biggest crime that Otrepyev commits is that against faith and religion. Several times in the course of the drama, Ostrovsky repeats that tsars, according to Russian Orthodoxy, are God-chosen and

²⁵⁶ Ostrovskii, *Dmitrii Samozvants*, pp. 292–293. “**Dimitry.** [...] My mighty father, / Let me be! Impostor though I am / And an usurper of your orb and scepter, / I swear not to follow your ways / Of death and torture. I will keep one sacred / Right of every sovereign in the world, / To pardon and forgive.”

²⁵⁷ See footnote 208. Maria Nagaya was forced by Tsar Feodor Ioannovich to become a nun and thus change her name from Maria to Marfa (Skrynnikov, *Tsar Boris*, p. 63).

ought to be treated accordingly. Their will and their law should be God's will and God's law, and people doubting a tsar doubt in fact the Lord's ways. On the other hand, a tsar has an obligation to support and strengthen the Russian faith and Church. The main reason for the people's desire to overthrow False Dimitry I is not his squandering government money or womanizing and debauchery or even lying about his origin; it is his betrayal of Russian Orthodoxy. Dimitry builds a Jesuit church in Moscow, fills the court with Polish nobles who become his most trusted advisors, and promises the pope to legitimize Latin as the language of the church and prayers. That, according to Ostrovsky, is an unforgivable sin punishable by death. The character of False Dimitry I, who started with good intentions and arguably a good cause, is corrupted by power and gradually turns into a monster of shame. He is rightfully dethroned and killed by Prince Shuysky, who becomes a new Russian tsar at the end of the drama's Part II.

Ostrovsky's next historical play, *Tushino*, is based on true historical events that took place during the Time of Troubles, but the historical setting is used as a bitter metaphor for the contradictions that tore apart nineteenth-century Russia and, on a bigger scale, entire Europe. The drama is built on oppositions. Everything is compared and contrasted. Dementy Redrikov has two sons, Maxim and Nikolay. Maxim is a person driven by shame, while Nikolay is clearly driven by guilt. In the beginning of the play, Maxim promises to go far as he is an adept and fearless survivor. Nikolay, on the other hand, is a mama's boy, inept and homely. Dementy brings his sons to serve Tsar Shuysky, and all three give an oath of allegiance. At night Maxim steals away to Tushino and allies himself with False Dimitry II, while Nikolay stays true to the word he has given Shuysky. Later, when Nikolay is taken prisoner by False Dimitry's troops, Maxim allows his brother to escape, breaking his oath once again. Ostrovsky shows that there is no inner core in Maxim, who is only looking for personal gain and is ready to betray anybody and anything, including his own family and country, if that brings him some profit or advantage.

On the other hand, Nikolay, who never looked like much and was laughed at instead of being taken seriously, displays strong moral convictions and willingly accepts a horrible death by burning when the only other option would be to see all his family captured by False Dimitry's men.

Here I would like to digress and take a closer look at Ostrovsky's time. The theory that I am about to apply to *Tushino* (as well as to a play from the playwright's fourth period, *Posledniaia zherstva*, which will be discussed in chapter V) grew out of Slavophilism and possibly started to coalesce about the same time when *Tushino* was written, even though it appeared as a formed concept only fifty years later and outside Russia. This theory, *Eurasianism*, will be applied to the analyses of two secondary characters (one in *Tushino* and the other in *Posledniaia zherstva*) after the fact, as it were, since the theory was not yet officially formulated at the time of Ostrovsky, even though an indirect connection between the playwright and the creators of Eurasianism is easy enough to trace.

The theory of Eurasianism, which originated in the 1920s among Russian émigrés, such as Nikolay Trubetskoy, Pavel Savitsky, and Georgy Vernadsky, proclaims that the entity formerly known as the Russian Empire can only be understood as a conglomerate of different ethnicities that populate it and therefore should be viewed as a unique nation that possesses an inimitable nationalism.²⁵⁸ Eurasianism and now Neo-Eurasianism (with Lev Gumilyov, Gleb Nosovsky, Anatoly Fomenko, and Gali Yenikeev as its modern-day advocates), stemming out of Slavophilism in their outright opposition to westernization of Russia, acknowledge the presence of a superstratum of pan-morality, a common-sense metric for judging ethical human behavior. According to Vyskochkov (p. 183), a similar doctrine was professed by Ostrovsky's contemporary, Tsar Nicholas I, and, judging by the evidence found in *Tushino* and *Posledniaia*

²⁵⁸ Lev Nikolaevich Gumilev, *Ritmy Evrazii* (Rhythms of Eurasia) (Moscow: AST, 2007), p. 6.

zbertva, was supported by Ostrovsky himself. This pan-morality is said to exist only within a major ethnic group, which Gumilyov calls *superethnos*, and it can never be passed on to members of another superethnos (*Ritmy Evrazii*, pp. 189–190). According to Gumilyov, a superethnos is not defined historically, culturally, linguistically, or socially. It is primarily determined by geographical and ethnographical factors. By ethnographic factors, Gumilyov means *passionarity*, a concept that defines the level of absorption of biospheric vitality by an ethnic group (p. 22). Smaller groups, ethnos or subethnos within a superethnos, may be visually different from each other, profess different religions, have dissimilar levels of education, and be characterized by strikingly different social ways, but their existence within the same supersystem will be happily *complementary*,²⁵⁹ with never any need for domination, because they will share the same level of passionarity (pp. 186–187). Eurasianists and Neo-Eurasianists further insist that Asian influences on the conceptualization of such pan-morality as adopted by the Russians should be not only included but given primacy over Western ones. According to Eurasianists, group-forming within superethnos is distinctly different from historically accepted traditional groupings based on origins or linguistic and religious similarities: for example, the Romano-Germanic superethnos is said to include the Czechs and the Poles, while the Russians share the Eurasian superethnos with the Tatars (or Tatar-Mongols) and the Yakuts (pp. 34–35).

Both *Tushino* and *Posledniaia zbertva* list Asians as *dramatis personae*. A seemingly insignificant detail—only two Asians in Ostrovsky’s forty-nine dramas—was in fact rather extraordinary for the reality of mid-nineteenth-century Russia. Before, during, and even some forty years after the appearance of *Posledniaia zbertva*, the oppressive nature of the Tatar-Mongolian Yoke as presented in historical chronicles was not questioned in Russia.²⁶⁰ Russian

²⁵⁹ Gumilyov’s term to describe peaceful and mutually beneficial coexistence (*Ritmy Evrazii*, p. 35).

²⁶⁰ According to the predominant historical version supported by prominent Russian historians such as Karamzin, Sergey Solovyov, and Klyuchevsky, adopted as a historical fact by all Russian history textbooks, and universally

emperors propagated it, and Marx commented on it in 1857, writing that “the Tartar yoke lasted from 1237 to 1462—more than two centuries; a yoke not only crushing, but dishonouring and withering the very soul of the people that fell its prey.”²⁶¹

Due to the established view that Asians had a clearly detrimental effect on Russia, positive portrayal of Asians in Russian literature and drama was practically nonexistent. Before and even during the rule of Peter the Great, Russians were notorious for their xenophobia. Describing the death of Russian Patriarch Joachim in 1690, Heard points out that the prominent cleric “shared the general dislike felt by all Russians of high and low degree for foreigners, and mourned the tsar’s [Peter the Great’s] deplorable predilection for their society” (p. 115).

According to Heard,

To Russians a foreigner was not only a stranger, he was an alien in blood, language, and religion. They divided mankind into three categories, and, leaving aside “Busurmani,” or Mussulmans of the East, the remainder of the human family was composed of the “Slovenie,” or those having the gift of speech—their own and kindred races who could comprehend, or “speak” with, each other, and of the “Nyemtsi,” or the “Dumb,” who could not “speak” with them, comprising all Western nations.²⁶²

It is logical to assume that until Peter the Great forced Russia into accepting their Western neighbors, all foreigners had been treated equally negatively. After Peter welcomed Western nations to Russia, the attitude towards them improved while that towards Asians remained negative. Peter I’s reforms, aimed at bringing Russia closer to other European countries, naturally resulted in taking it further away from the East. The literary intolerance towards Asians became further ingrained, widening the gap between Russians and Easterners, who were clearly viewed as the *others*.

recognized in the West, the Tatar-Mongolian Yoke, or the subjugation of the Russian lands by the Mongol Empire, lasted over 250 years (1223–1480). According to the same version, the defeat of the Mongols was followed by almost as many years of persistent incursions by the Kazanian, Astrakhanian, and Crimean Tatars.

²⁶¹ Karl Marx, *Revelations of the Diplomatic History of the 18th Century*, August 1856–April 1857, <<http://www.marxfaq.org/archive/marx/works/1857/russia/ch04.htm>> (6 June 2008), chap. 4. This assessment was never challenged by Soviet ideologists, who absorbed Marxism as a government doctrine.

²⁶² Heard, p. 69.

The Asians with the historically biggest impact on Russia should be roughly divided into two groups: the Tatar-Mongols (the Russian term for denizens of the Mongol Empire), who invaded Russia in 1223 near the Sea of Azov²⁶³; and the Turks and Persians, who shared a border with Russia along the coasts of the Black Sea and the Caspian Sea, respectively, and who engaged in military conflicts with Russia since the sixteenth century.²⁶⁴ The first were predominantly pagans that practiced heliolatry²⁶⁵; the second were Muslims. By the nineteenth century, the first group was rather well assimilated in Central Russia, having assumed the adoptive country's language, living in its cities, generously contributing to its economic growth, and even taking part in Russia's social and military development. Vyskochkov quotes Tsar Nicholas I's remark to Astolphe Marquis de Custine, a French writer known for his negative account of his visit to Russia in 1839:

[...Н]ет другой страны, где расы, нравы, верования и умы разнились бы так сильно, как в России. Многообразие лежит в глубине, одинаковость на поверхности; единство наше только кажущееся. Вот, извольте взглянуть, неподалеку от Вас стоят двадцать офицеров; из них только два первых русские, за ними трое верных нам

²⁶³ For the purposes of this work, it is irrelevant whether the expansion of Genghis Khan westwards was a belligerent occupation (as mainstream historians tend to believe) or a benevolent expansion (as Eurasianists and Neo-Eurasianists choose to proclaim). The mere fact that after the Battle of the Kalka River in May 1223 the Horde moved into the lands of Kievan Rus affirms the presence (be it belligerent or protective) of Mongols in the territory of Russia. Even if 1480 (during Ivan III's rule)—the official time of Russia's release from the Tatar-Mongolian presence—is not entirely accurate, there is no denying the fact that the relationship between the two entities was lasting and mutually influential. Whether the animosity towards Asians originated as a result of the invasion or, as Eurasian theorists argue, as a result of Peter the Great's policy (further fueled by the eighteenth-century Russian rulers), the fact remains that the general attitude of Russians towards Asians until the 1850s was chiefly depreciatory.

²⁶⁴ The first Russo-Turkish war dates back to 1568–70 (the time of Ivan the Terrible). The last one, in 1914–18 (part of World War I), closed the period of conflicts that stretched over 330 years and saw 17 wars. The first Russo-Persian war dates back to 1722–23 (under Peter the Great); the last (fourth) one took place in 1826–28 (the reign of Nicholas I).

²⁶⁵ According to Yenikeev, a contemporary Tatar scholar who studied the Horde by analyzing and comparing historical documents written in Russian, Arabic, Chinese, and various Turkic languages, at the time of the invasion the Horde, which was believed by the Turks and Persians to be comprised of infidels, was only starting to adopt Islam (Gali Rashitovich Enikeev, *Korona ordynskoi imperii* (The Crown of the Horde Empire) (Moscow: Algoritm, 2007), pp. 290–291 and 297–298). However, he also points out that Russian Orthodox priests were among chief advisors to Mongol khans and were very influential (p. 348). Gumilyov believes that at that time the still predominantly pagan Mongols (at least those who invaded Russia) were gravitating rather heavily towards Russian Orthodoxy (*Rimny Evraziï*, p. 162).

поляков, другие частью немцы; даже киргизские ханы [...], случается, доставляют ко мне своих сыновей, чтобы те воспитывались среди моих кадетов...²⁶⁶

By the 1850s, benefiting from the policy of religious tolerance under Nicholas I,²⁶⁷ the outcomes of two Russo-Turkish (1828–1829 and 1853–1856) and one Russo-Persian (1826–1828) wars,²⁶⁸ and the general leniency of the Russian Orthodox Church towards Islam, the literary image of Asians started to display signs of conceptual change.

Even if we disregard the evidence presented by Eurasianists and Neo-Eurasianists²⁶⁹ to show that the Mongol invasion was in fact not an invasion but a mutually beneficial partnership of two nations in need of each other's military strength and economic support and to explain why Russian Orthodoxy has always been more tolerant to Islam and paganism than to Roman Catholicism, the fact still remains that the Russian Church has never been openly antagonistic to Oriental faiths. Treadgold writes that "Islam in general fared far from badly at the hands of the

²⁶⁶ Vyskochkov, p. 251. "[...]here is no other country where races, morals, creeds, and minds would differ as much as they do in Russia. The diversity lies within while the uniformity lies without—our unity is but illusory. Here, if you will, take a look at the twenty officers standing not far from you: only the first two of them are Russian, the next three are Poles loyal to us, others are partly German; as it happens, even Kyrgyz khans [...] send me their sons to be trained among my cadets...."

²⁶⁷ According to Vyskochkov, Nicholas I professed religious tolerance and preferred common-sense morality to devout fanaticism (pp. 183–192).

²⁶⁸ On September 14, 1829, the Treaty of Adrianople (a.k.a. Treaty of Edirne) was signed between Russia and Turkey. It gave Russia most of the eastern shore of the Black Sea and the mouth of the Danube. Turkey also recognized Russian sovereignty over Georgia and parts of Armenia (Vyskochkov, pp. 358–361 and 682). The Russo-Turkish war of 1853–56, a.k.a. the Crimean War, started under Nicholas I but spilled over into the first year of the reign of Alexander II, who signed the Treaty of Paris between Russia and the alliance comprising the Ottoman Empire, the United Kingdom, France, and Sardinia (Mounir A. Farah and Andrea Berens Karls, *World History: The Human Experience* (New York: Glencoe/McGraw-Hill, 1997), p. 697). The treaty proclaimed the Black Sea neutral, clearing it of all warships and shore fortifications, which was a considerable blow to the Russian influence in the region (Boris Grigor'evich Pashkov, *Rus' — Rossiia — Rossiiskaia imperiia: khronika sobytii 862–1917 gg.* (Rus–Russia–Russian Empire: A Chronicle of Events, 862–1917) (Moscow: TsentrKom, 1994), p. 523). On February 2, 1828, Abbas Mirza, a crown prince of Persia, signed the Treaty of Turkmenchay with Ivan Paskievich, a general of Imperial Russia. The three main provisions of the treaty allowed Russia to maintain a navy in the Caspian Sea, allowed Russian merchants to freely trade in Persia, and ceded certain areas to the Russian Empire (Vyskochkov, pp. 248 and 682). The favorable outcomes of two of the three wars, the earlier Turkish and the Persian, might have softened the attitudes of Russians towards their Asian enemies, while the loss in the second Turkish war might have demonstrated that the peoples of the Near East should be treated with respect.

²⁶⁹ In addition to the works and authors already cited: Georgii Vladimirovich Vernadskii, *Nachertanie russkoi istorii* (An Outline of Russian History) (Moscow: Algoritm, 2008); Gleb Vladimirovich Nosovskii and Anatolii Timofeevich Fomenko, *Novaia khronologiia Rusi, Anglii i Rima* (A New Chronology of Rus, England, and Rome) (Moscow: Delovoi ekspres, 2000); Nosovskii and Fomenko, *Tataro-mongol'skoe igo: kto kogo zavoioinyval* (The Tatar-Mongol Yoke: Who Conquered Whom) (Moscow: AST/Astrel, 2008).

imperial regime, though it was treated more gently in Central Asia than in the Caucasus. Perhaps a case can even be made that the position of Islam under the empire was stronger than that of Orthodoxy” (p. 35). While I would not go so far as to suggest that the position of Islam was stronger or even nearly as strong as that of Russian Orthodoxy, I would agree that the Russian Church showed much more tolerance towards Islam than towards other world religions.

According to Heard, the Russian Orthodox Church flourished and prospered during the time of the Tatar-Mongolian Yoke. “[I]t was favored and protected by Tatar khans,” and it even replaced the cross on church cupolas with a crescent, which, even at the end of the invasion, was not “removed, but was surmounted by a cross, in significance of the triumph of Christianity” (pp. 154 and 96). Archpriest Abramov (interview by author) refuted Heard’s theory (which is supported by such secular Russian scholars as Trubetskoy, Vernadsky, Savitsky, and Gumilyov, as well as the Tatar scholar Yenikeev) and explained the official view of the Russian Orthodox Church that the crescent under the cross on church cupolas has nothing to do with Islam, having come from Byzantium as a symbol of justice. The archpriest’s elucidation is corroborated by Rafael Narbaez, Jr.²⁷⁰

Gumilyov refers to historical testimonies according to which many Orthodox churches in big cities like Kiev and Vladimir and smaller towns were neither devastated nor desecrated by the Tatar-Mongols (*Ritmy Evrazii*, p. 26). Heard also mentions the fact that during the invasion the Russian Church not only retained all its assets but prospered noticeably. It erected “innumerable churches in the different cities” and considerably developed monastic life, “which led to the creation of great and powerful religious establishments. The most celebrated among

²⁷⁰ Rafael Narbaez, Jr., “The Star and the Crescent: Is the Symbol of Islam Shirk?,” 1996, <<http://www.themodernreligion.com/misc/hh/crescent.html>> (1 June 2008).

them is the monastery of the Troïtsa, or the Trinity,²⁷¹ near Moscow, founded by St. Sergius” of Radonezh, the patron saint of Russia (pp. 26–33).

It needs to be noted further that the Tatar-Mongolian presence in Russia might have strengthened the position and autonomy of the Russian Church by severing its ties with the See of Constantinople. As communications became difficult, the removal of the “seat of government from the banks of the Dnieper far to the interior of the country, separated the two Churches, and isolated them one from another.” Before the invasion, the heads of Russian Orthodoxy were mostly “Greeks, ignorant of the language and customs of the people over whom they ruled; the [Russian] Church was simply a diocese, a province of the Byzantine patriarchate” (Heard, p. 153). Therefore we may speak of a contribution by the Tatar-Mongols towards the consolidation of Russian Orthodoxy, which was not forgotten and was paid back through tolerance to their faith.

Ostrovsky was the first major dramatist to challenge the stereotype of Asian *otherness* in Russian theatre. Before Ostrovsky, Asians, if they appeared on stage at all, were depicted as predominantly negative characters. A handful of eighteenth-century playwrights introduced Asians in their plays. Zhurovsky in his *Slava Rossiiskaia* (Russian Glory; 1724) depicts Turkey and Persia as allegorical characters who compete with Russian Glory (also a character) for primacy on the continent. Mars, the god of war, chooses Russia over the other powers and crowns her. Lomonosov’s tragedy *Tamira i Selim* (Tamira and Selim; 1750), which Karlinsky calls “an ‘Oriental’ classical tragedy set among the Moslems in the Near East” (p. 75), tells of the shameful defeat, escape, and death of Mamay—a Tatar prince and a descendant of Genghis Khan. Alexander Sumarokov’s tragedy *Artistona* (“more correctly *Artystone*” (ibid., p. 67)), written in the same year, is set in Ancient Persia and shows its ruler Darius as an unjust and violent

²⁷¹ Also known as the Holy Lavra of St. Sergius. Founded in 1340 and very much active today, it is mentioned in Ostrovsky’s *Tushino*.

usurper who forgets his obligations to his people and against whom his subjects revolt. Naturally, there were exceptions to the mainstream theatre canon; however, their paucity reaffirmed, not contested, it. One of such iconoclasts was Nikolay Nikolaev (1758–1815), a minor and barely influential playwright who in his early years professed extreme liberalism. His 1784 tragedy, *Sorena i Zamir* (Sorena and Zamir), narrates a story of true love and integrity of two Cumans who resisted the tyranny of Russian Prince Mstislav. It needs to be mentioned that Nikolaev renounced his liberal views after the French Revolution of 1848 and even refused to include *Sorena i Zamir* in the edition of his collected works.²⁷²

By the end of the eighteenth century, Asian dramatis personae had been forgotten; there were none in the pieces by Fonvizin,²⁷³ Griboedov, Pushkin, Lermontov, Gogol, Sukhovo-Kobylin, Turgenev, or Leo Tolstoy. In 1848 Grigoryev wrote *Basurman* (The Infidel), a historical drama where Asian characters were treated with respect, but it only saw three performances and was never published until 2001, having had virtually no effect on the development of Russian drama. Ostrovsky's first Asian character (albeit a secondary one) of Hassan Uraz, a Tatar, appeared in 1866 in *Tushino*.

Tushino is arguably the most pessimistic play of Ostrovsky's: in it, he invokes the practice of self-immolation used by Old Believers when faced with forcible conversion. At the end of the drama Nikolay, Dementy, and Lyudmila step inside a burning house calm and determined. One of the play's binaries (as mentioned earlier, *Tushino* is full of oppositions) consists of two characters who are shown as antipodes: Hassan Uraz, a Tatar who professes Islam, and a Russian nobleman by the name of Besputa, who wears a Christian cross. Both characters are employed by the enemy of the Russian crown; both, upon False Dimitry's orders, pillage and

²⁷² Aleksandr Vasil'evich Kokorev (comp.), *Kbrestomatiia po russkoi literature XVIII veka* (Russian Literature of the Eighteenth Century: A Reader), 3rd ed. (Moscow: Uchpedgiz, 1961), pp. 409–410.

²⁷³ See footnote 344.

plunder, and capture peasants to turn them into slaves. However, Ostrovsky stresses that Besputa is out of control and sin-ridden over and above his job requirements. He is prone to violence and wanton destruction; he steals when there is no need for theft and kills when murder is unnecessary. He picks fights with his fellow soldiers, especially when he gets drunk, which happens so often that they have developed a habit of tying him up until he becomes sober again. Besputa is also sadistic: by his own admission, he takes pleasure in torturing people, especially those who are physically inferior to him.²⁷⁴ The Tatar Uraz is nothing like him. He never forgets God; he practices common sense and moderation; he does not lie, nor does he steal or kill for personal enjoyment. Hassan's biggest fault is his lack of judgment: when he had to take sides in the conflict, he chose the wrong tsar. However, unlike in Besputa's case, that choice has not given him license to sin against his conscience or inner convictions.

Besputa captures an old Russian priest, orders him to sing and dance for him, and when the cleric refuses, shoots him without hesitation or remorse. This crime appalls Uraz, even though the old man is not a Muslim mullah but an Orthodox priest.²⁷⁵ Later, in Act IV, Ostrovsky describes the historical event of False Dimitry's siege of the Trinity monastery, which occurred after Tsar Shuysky had been dethroned and Russian Patriarch Hermogenes had been "deposed by the invader [and] thrust into prison to die of starvation."²⁷⁶ Besputa is thrilled by the idea of abundant spoils; Hassan, as soon as he realizes that the target of the attack is a sacred shrine, refuses to be cajoled into fighting and remains adamant in his refusal to take part in the siege, pronouncing it unholy. In the last scene of *Tushino*, when Voevode Seitov's house is

²⁷⁴ Ostrovskii, *Tushino*, in his PSS, vol. 5, pp. 7–104, at p. 47.

²⁷⁵ This scene is reminiscent of Act III, scene 2, of Molière's *Don Juan* where the title character offers a poor beggar money if only he would "jurer" (Molière, *Don Juan ou le Festin de pierre*, in his *Œuvres complètes*, pp. 285–310, at p. 298)—"curse and blaspheme" (Molière, *Don Juan*, in his *The Miser and Other Plays*, pp. 89–145, at p. 121)).

The difference, of course, is in the intensity of the scene: unlike Don Juan, Besputa never offers the old priest any reward for entertaining him; Molière's beggar is not killed, and, unlike Uraz, Sganarelle chooses not to revolt even though he does not approve of his master's actions.

²⁷⁶ Heard, p. 74.

set on fire and its inhabitants are faced with either capture and torture or annihilation, Besputa and Uraz, enchanted by Lyudmila's beauty and viewing her as a valuable war trophy, both try to carry her off. Besputa cold-heartedly kills his comrade-in-arms to get rid of the competition.

Contrasting the inner with the outer, Ostrovsky stresses that appearances (in Besputa's case, Russian ancestry and a Russian name, an Orthodox cross, and the fact of his baptism) should never replace essence (presence of honorable intentions, solid ethics, and morality). Besputa's language is grammatically and lexically perfect, while Hassan's Russian is rudimentary:

Ураз. Ни бачка нет, ни мачка.
Твой бачка царь, а мачка нож-булат.²⁷⁷

And yet although Hassan's grammar, i.e., form, is less than perfect, the content of his speech, compared to Besputa's continuous insults and obloquy, is rather virtuous, which is what causes the divarication. Uraz, a Muslim, reproaches Besputa, a Christian, of sinning excessively against God, to which he snaps:

Беспуга. Тебе ль, татарин,
Учить меня: какое дело грех
И что не грех! Ты что мне за указчик!
Собака ты, а я крещеной веры!²⁷⁸

Eurasianists, who, it needs to be noted, have never acknowledged Ostrovsky as a champion of their theory, might have seen in *Tushino* a break with "Russianness" as the requirement for national identity, and the application of more-global criteria to morality, which allowed the Russian playwright to transcend ethnic and cultural barriers and look at a bigger picture. In any case, Ostrovsky's pointedly negative attitude towards Besputa and clearly empathetic depiction of Uraz (since it was not an isolated incident, as we will see below) need to be commented on. I believe that, to a Christian writer, a Christian who sins against the very

²⁷⁷ Ostrovskii, *Tushino*, p. 56. "Uraz. Nor fazer have, nor mozer. / Your fazer's tsar, and mozer's your sharp knife."

²⁷⁸ Ibid., p. 46. "Besputa. How dare you, Tatar, / Teach me which deed shall be pronounced sinful / And what is not a sin?! And look who's talking— / Muslim dog, while they baptized me Christian!"

basics of morality prescribed by God is more of an alien and an anomaly than a non-Christian who respects them.

However, there may be additional circumstantial evidence presented in support of a theory that Ostrovsky is in fact be a precursor of Eurasianism. It may be noted that Tsar Shuysky, who in the drama is more entitled to the Russian throne than the impostor and who has the author's and reader's sympathies, seeks advice on how to better serve his country from a pagan witch, whose shamanistic rituals he is prepared to believe more eagerly than suggestions of his fellow Christians. This anti-biblical practice, which resonates with the similar events described in Chapter 28 of 1 Samuel, and is clearly proclaimed sinful by both the Hebrew and Christian Bibles, may be viewed as paying tribute to Asian and/or ancient Russian paganism in accord with the more recent theory of Eurasianism. The fact that a positive character intends to consult a medium who communicates with the dead, rather than ask the Roman Catholic Church for guidance, may be interpreted as evidence of Ostrovsky's trust of Asians over Europeans, seen by him as treading on the Russian national religion and attempting to subordinate Orthodoxy to the papal rule.

This assumption finds further proof in Act III, when cleric Skurygin discusses False Dimitry II ("The Thief of Tushino") with the crowd. In this play, Ostrovsky acknowledges the historical fact that Marina Mniszech, widow of False Dimitry I, was subsequently wed to False Dimitry II, thus creating a certain legacy between the impostors. Skurygin's interlocutors, common people, believe that False Dimitry I was a *chernoknizhnik* (sorcerer; literally, "black-book practitioner"), who renounced Christianity and used "a black book" to summon evil forces²⁷⁹ and, relying on them, to keep Marina in the "dynasty" and make sure that his attempts to usurp the Russian throne would not end in his death. These anti-Christian practices are condemned by

²⁷⁹ Nikolai Sergeevich Ashukin et al., *Slovar' k p'esam A. N. Ostrovskogo* (A Dictionary for Ostrovsky's Plays) (Moscow: Vesta, 1993), s.v. "Chernoknizhnik."

the playwright and his characters, while Shuysky's use of similar rituals is not frowned upon. The difference, I believe, is in the motives and intentions. If they are honorable and patriotic, sidestepping from Christianity to paganism may be rendered nugatory.

The Russian tendency to gravitate towards pagan rituals and rites may, of course, be explained differently. Heard, for example, believes that since Russia was converted to Christianity in a hurry and without proper preliminary education, pagan practices never fully died out and that some of them were even incorporated in Orthodox ceremonies.

On his return to Kiev [Prince Vladimir²⁸⁰] commenced, with characteristic energy, the propagation of the new faith; his twelve sons and all the people, by his command and under penalty of his anger, were baptized; idols were overthrown, the great statue of Peroun was cast into the Dnieper, and the entire nation, with a unanimity and suddenness that have no parallel in the religious history of Europe, turned from paganism to Christianity at the bidding of its prince.²⁸¹

In 1866 Ostrovsky's second period, influenced by the general pessimism over the policy and reforms of Alexander II, ended. Describing this period, Valency writes:

[T]he emancipation of the serfs in 1861—the focus of the hopes and efforts of the best minds in Russia—brought about a period of disillusion reminiscent of the despair that attended the failure of the Great Revolution of 1789 in France. The obscure and exorbitant provisions of the Emancipation Law, [...] the harsh and hasty reorganization of the judiciary, the over-zealous imposition of forms of local self-government without regard for existing conditions and the obvious unreadiness of the country to govern itself at the time, resulted in the most widespread dissatisfaction. The predictable consequence of the wave of social protest that followed Alexander's reforms was a progressive renewal of the despotic policies of his predecessor.

[...] Liberals, led by the exile Alexander Herzen in London, Slavophiles like Ivan Aksakov, and radicals of the type of Chernyshevsky were for the first time given a public hearing.²⁸²

Ostrovsky must have been caught up in the ongoing ideological debate of the period and, as usual, used theatre as his platform for expressing his personal views.

²⁸⁰ Grandson of Princess Olga (discussed in chapter II), he converted Kievan Rus to Christianity in the tenth century.

²⁸¹ Heard, p.19.

²⁸² Valency, p. 29.

Third period (1868–1871)

Tushino, Ostrovsky's last historical play set in the Time of Troubles,²⁸³ was the last piece in the second period of Ostrovsky's deliberations on the issue of guilt and shame. The previous seven years were spent by the playwright lamenting that the government policy had abandoned the Church and led to a westernization of Russia, and trying to sound a warning to his compatriots in the form of historical dramas that alluded to the present, while the third, three-year, period was clearly marked by Ostrovsky's realization of personal defeat (Lakshin, pp. 580–585). His country obviously chose not to listen to his concerns and was quickly getting further and further away from the humbleness and piety prescribed by Russian Orthodoxy. The dramatist's historical heroes failed to engage his fellow Russians emotionally; many of his dramas of the second period were not as successful as he had hoped they would be. In 1868 the playwright started depicting new life, populating his dramas with characters who were clearly more materialistic and much less concerned with adhering to biblical doctrines. In 1868 Ostrovsky moved into a third period, which would feature a whole gallery of people of shame who manage to grab life by the horns and ride it to their pleasure, as opposed to ever-suffering guilt-driven individuals.

The playwright's most popular characters of the third period follow Horace's dictum "*Carpe diem!*"²⁸⁴ They live in the here and now, voraciously consuming life and feeding their passions. The thought of the Judgment Day never enters their minds, and they do not try to

²⁸³ In 1872 Ostrovsky wrote *Komik XVII stoletia*. But that comedy, despite being based on certain facts from the history of Russian theatre, cannot fully qualify as a historical drama and falls outside the Time of Troubles.

²⁸⁴ According to Lakshin, Ostrovsky excelled in Greek and Latin while still in gymnasium (p. 47). The playwright is said to have read Sophocles, Plautus, and Terence in the original and, later in life, translated several Roman comedies (editorial comments to the translations by Ostrovsky, in his *PSS*, vol. 11, pp. 367–389, at p. 370; and Lakshin, p. 47). Lakshin reports that, in the university, Ostrovsky took a course in Greek and Roman literature and culture with Professor Kryukov, who is said to have made a deep impression on the future playwright (p. 54). He also lists some authors from Ostrovsky's personal library: Plautus and Terence appear together with Racine, Corneille, Molière, and Shakespeare (p. 651).

atone for their sins and repent before it is too late for their life to be spent in heaven rather than hell.

Tu ne quaesieris, scire nefas, quem mihi quem tibi
finem di dederint, Leuconoe, nec Babylonios
temptaris numeros. ut melius, quicquid erit, pati,
seu pluris hiemes seu tribuit Iuppiter ultimam,
quae nunc oppositis debilitat pumicibus mare
Tyrhenum: sapias, vina liques, et spatio brevi
spem longam reseces. dum loquimur, fugerit invida
aetas: carpe diem, quam minimum credula postero.²⁸⁵

The “shamers” of the third period create their own heaven on earth, forgetting humbleness and moderation preached by the Christian scriptures.

In playwright’s third period, his primary focus was not so much on the theme of guilt/shame as on topics that spawned from it: the study of sin, which is described in chapter IV, and the discourse on money, discussed in chapter V. Ostrovsky saw the futility of a shame/guilt discussion because guilt, in his understanding, was driven out of the picture by people’s emerging dissatisfaction with biblical doctrines. His countrymen now preferred to listen to Herzen, Chernyshevsky, and Marx, whose works called for political and economic changes and for moving away from monarchy to a more democratic form of government. That is why the third period is marked by a considerable decrease in the thoroughness with which the guilt-and-shame ratio is explored and by the least (out of the four periods into which Ostrovsky’s playwriting is divided in this work in terms of the guilt/shame discourse) amount of attention to internal motivations vs. external ones.

²⁸⁵ Horace, *The Odes: New Verse Translation with Facing Latin Text and Notes*, trans. and ed. Colin Sydenham (London: Duckworth, 2005), p. 30. “What the end the gods ordain for you and me, Leuconoë, / ask not, such designs are secret; don’t consult astrology / or Chaldean incantations; better far your fate to bear, / whether you have many winters, or this is your final year / now with sullen beaches wearing out the Tuscan sea. / Practise wisdom; filter wine, and prune back to life’s brevity / long ambition; as we argue spiteful minutes steal away; / don’t rely upon tomorrow’s harvest, gather in today” (ibid., p. 31).

Yegor Glumov from *Na vsiakogo mudretsa dovol'no prostoty* is a prominent portrait in Ostrovsky's gallery of shame of the third period. The plot of the comedy is often compared to the plot of Sheridan's *The School for Scandal*, a comedy of manners written in 1777. It is true that both plays seem to follow the accepted formula for a Gregorian comedy, which calls for

a pair of lovers [...], about whom the action could pivot. At the start the lovers would find themselves unable to marry because of certain obstacles, usually the objections of parents or guardians. Further complications would develop as the loved ones and those opposing them schemed and counterschemed to overcome or to uphold the obstacles. The denouement would resolve everything, and would do so in the traditional manner of chance events and sudden revelations and discoveries delivering heroes and heroines from their difficulties and visiting punishment on all those guilty of villainous behavior.²⁸⁶

But if in Sheridan's play the action does revolve around a couple—Charles Surface and Maria, who want to get married but cannot until the very last act—Yegor Kurchaev and Masha of Ostrovsky's *Na vsiakogo mudretsa* are never fully in the spotlight of the author's attention and their love affair is truly incidental. The action in the Russian comedy revolves around Glumov who has no love interest—in fact, he forms a major obstacle to the young couple's planned matrimony as he is a money-grabber in search of a wife with a fat dowry.

In addition to this major discrepancy between the two comedies, Sheridan's and Ostrovsky's messages to their audiences are quite different. While Sheridan clearly satirized gossiping, labeling it a social vice, Ostrovsky was more concerned with a recipe for individual success with regard to the guilt-and-shame ratio. It never even occurs to Glumov to think of his actions as immoral, and Ostrovsky made sure we understand that his machinations and unscrupulous manipulations are very much the norm of the time. Glumov is not depicted as either a villain or a bad character. Nor does he come to any significant harm. The temporary setback at the end of this play only means that Glumov needs to hone his social skills a bit more. The playwright made his main character an enterprising survivor who, through his ability to

²⁸⁶ Gassner and Quinn, s.v. "School for Scandal."

adapt and adjust, is able to take care of his needs as well as advance his career. Ostrovsky does not criticize Glumov and even seems to marvel at his capacity to be a survivor and successful entrepreneur. The playwright lets his character move up in the world steadily, unfazed by temporary setbacks.

However, the very next year Ostrovsky would write *Beshenye den'gi*, discussed in chapter V), a play in which this same Glumov will play a very unsavory role. At the end of *Na vsiakogo mudretsa*, the audience is told that life cannot go on without him, that he is very useful and much needed. Only looking back at this statement from the perspective of *Beshenye den'gi* can we realize how bitter it sounds. After a slight slap on the wrist, Glumov, a godless creature whose egoism will never allow him to comprehend the cornerstone biblical principle of sacrificing himself for the love of his neighbor, will be welcomed back by the same people whom he offended by writing the unpleasant truth about them in his diary. Glumov, who could have been created by Chernyshevsky or Turgenev, is a new hero of his time. There are no morals in *Na vsiakogo mudretsa* to talk about save one: Cover your tracks better, do not get caught, become the most efficient person of shame you can be, and you will go far in the world that seems to have respect solely for such kind of people. *Na vsiakogo mudretsa dovol'no prostoty*, like Gogol's *Revizor*, has neither a single positive character nor a single person of guilt among its dramatis personae.

Apart from his dissatisfaction with the new direction that Russia took under Alexander II's rule, Ostrovsky's radical change of heart in the third period can be explained, at least in part, by major changes in his personal life. In 1863, when the playwright was forty, he became acquainted with Maria Vasilyevna Bakhmetyeva. Bakhmetyeva, who was only eighteen at the time, had just graduated from a theatre school and joined the company at the Maly Theatre with the stage name Vasilyeva II.²⁸⁷ Apparently, her affair with Ostrovsky started soon thereafter,

²⁸⁷ She performed at the Maly from 1863 to 1877 (Abalkin, p. 720).

because their first son was born on December 27, 1864. Maria named him Alexander, after his father. Their second son, Mikhail, was born a year and a half later, on August 15, 1866. The playwright was tormented by the guilt he felt towards his common-law wife Agafya Ivanovna, who suspected that something was amiss in their relationship but never reproached her husband. Agafya, who was a couple of years older than Ostrovsky and by 1863 had been part of his life for sixteen years (since 1847, when she first moved into a house next door in Zamoskvorechye), felt that she could not compete with a much younger replacement, especially since all of her own children fathered by Ostrovsky had died. Agafya was getting increasingly ill and on March 6, 1867, less than four years after Ostrovsky started his affair with Vasilyeva, passed away (Lakshin, pp. 570–580). Since November 1866, the time when *Tushino*, his darkest and most depressing drama was written (when Agafya was still alive and his second son was not yet three months old), Ostrovsky was creatively sterile for two full years, unable to write a single line. His inspiration returned to him in 1868 with *Na vsiakogo mudretsa dovol'no prostoty*, an acutely satirical comedy.

At the very end of the same year, Ostrovsky wrote another play, *Goriachee serdtse*, which he himself called a comedy. It can be classified as a comedy in the sense that it ends with a marriage and vice gets punished; it can also be called a comedy because of several comical situations and some comical characters. For example, in a scene in Act II, Kuroslepov's janitor Silan thinks he has caught the thief who stole his master's money, but in fact he grabs and restrains Kuroslepov whose face he cannot see in the dark. Matryona, scared by the commotion, imagines that there are fifteen hundred thieves near her house and pretends to faint, falling onto a park bench. Local police chief Gradoboev sits down on this bench and lands on Matryona, who raises hue and cry, imagining that she is about to be slain by the thieves.

Gradoboev is one of the comical characters in *Goriachee serdtse*: the stage directions for the beginning of Act III require the police chief to appear in his house gown, wearing his military cap and holding a cane and a pipe.²⁸⁸ This comical image is vividly reminiscent of a famous painting by Pavel Fedotov, *Svezhii kavaler* (The Newly Decorated Civil Servant/An Official the Morning after Receiving His First Decoration²⁸⁹). Fedotov (1815–1852), Ostrovsky's contemporary and a Muscovite like him, is considered Russia's first realist in painting, just as Ostrovsky is believed by many to be its first realist in dramaturgy. Both artists are said to have been diligent students of human nature; both are said to care for social betterment and resort to satire as a powerful weapon.

The Newly Decorated Civil Servant is described by Fedotov in the following way:

Утро после пиrowания по случаю полученного ордена. Новый кавалер не вытерпел: чуть свет нацепил на халат свою обнову и горделиво напоминает свою значительность кухарке, но она насмешливо показывает ему единственные, но и то стоптанные и продырявленные сапоги, которые она несла чистить. На полу валяются объедки и осколки вчерашнего пир...²⁹⁰

The house gown worn with a medal or a military cap serves as a grotesque depiction of comical veneration for form rather than content.

The comedic elements in *Goriachee serdtse*, however, are interspersed with tragic events: Matryona slanders Parasha and steals money from her husband. She does not step forward to admit either misdeed later, when Parasha runs away from home or when Vasya is wrongfully accused of the theft. Gavriilo is fired and has to leave Kuroselepov's house, the only place where

²⁸⁸ Ostrovskii, *Goriachee serdtse*, in his *PSS*, vol. 5, pp.177–259, at p. 212.

²⁸⁹ The title under which the painting was displayed in New York as part of the exhibition *Russia! Nine Hundred Years of Masterpieces and Master Collections* (New York: Guggenheim Museum Publications, 2005), p. 179; it can also be viewed at <http://www.abcgallery.com/F/fedotov/fedotov16.html> (21 August 2007).

²⁹⁰ As quoted in Natal'ia Ivanovna Iakovkina, *Istoriia russkoi kul'tury: XIX vek* (History of Russian Culture: Nineteenth Century) (St. Petersburg: Lan', 2002), p. 244. "The morning after the feast on the occasion of receiving a medal. The newly decorated couldn't resist the temptation: at the crack of dawn, he pinned his new decoration onto his morning gown and is parading his importance before his cook, who mocks him by pointing at his only pair of boots, worn-out and hole-ridden, which she was going to polish. Leftovers and shattered dishes from yesterday's feast are scattered on the floor...."

he had a roof over his head. Parasha and Gavriilo seriously contemplate suicide several times in the course of the drama. Vasya gets recruited into the army²⁹¹ and is later bought out by Khlynov to entertain him.

In *Goriachee serdtse*, Parasha and Gavriilo are the only two people of guilt amidst what seems to be a crowd of people of shame who appear on stage in the course of the play (around twenty altogether: Kuroselepov's workers, whose number is not specified in the text; characters proper; and an assortment of boat rowers, singers, retired disabled soldiers, prisoners, and town folk). They get lucky (at least Gavriilo, who has been in love with Parasha for a long time) in the end simply because the right people of shame appear at the right time in the right place. A chain of negatives finally makes a positive that provides an ideal opportunity for Parasha to marry Gavriilo, not because she loves him but because she holds him in high esteem. Needless to say, this outcome is hardly an altogether happy ending: Parasha, who is in love with another man, is unlikely to find bliss in such a marriage, and, since Gavriilo genuinely cares about her, he is equally unlikely to be happy married to a woman who does not love him.

Matryona and Narkis get punished for stealing Kuroselepov's money, but all the other people of shame—including Gradoboev, who has a god complex and judges and tries people as he sees fit; Khlynov, who buys and sells human beings as if they were a mere commodity; Kuroselepov, who cares about his money more than he does about his daughter; Aristarkh and Vasya, who, together with the rest of Khlynov's entertainers, sell themselves for his money—live on and prosper, suggesting that Ostrovsky resigned himself to the fact that people of guilt were a dying race and that those of shame would be the only surviving species.

In *Les*, Gurmyzhskaya and Bulanov join the other characters of shame of Ostrovsky's third period. What makes this play remarkable is that it introduces a new type of character, a

²⁹¹ A soldier in those times was expected to serve for at least ten years.

cross between a person of shame and a person of guilt. Gennady Neschastlivtsev, a wandering tragedian who does not have a penny to his name, starts as a regular character of shame not averse to lying, fooling, or manipulating others. He is prone to every sin that people in his line of work are supposed to be prone to: excessive drinking, womanizing, debauchery. His vanity does not allow him to treat his fellow actor Arkady Schastlivtsev as his equal. Schastlivtsev is a comic actor, and Neschastlivtsev proclaims comedy to be an inferior dramatic art. And yet, at the end of the play, Neschastlivtsev takes Akysusha's misfortunes so close to heart that he readily gives her a thousand rubles for her dowry, without which she cannot marry Pyotr. That money was meant to be used as seed capital for a theatre company where Schastlivtsev and Neschastlivtsev would star. Is this voluntary parting with his money (Akysusha never asked him for it) a grand ostentatious gesture with which he intends to impress his audience, i.e., all the people around him, a gesture that he will regret later; or is it something that he simply feels compelled to do, a true Christian's self-sacrifice out of love for his neighbor, an ability that has always existed deep down in his soul and only surfaced at the right moment? Ostrovsky seems to leave this for his audience to decide, but the fact remains that Neschastlivtsev manages to surprise us with a complete character reversal, morphing from an egocentric and dissolute creature into a man with strong moral convictions of a true Russian Orthodox. A more in-depth explanation of Neschastlivtsev's metamorphosis is provided in chapter VI.

The third period is Ostrovsky's most Western one. Its plays are truly cosmopolitan in character, once we take away the Russian setting. If the characters' names are changed, they can easily pass for generalized Europeans. This Western universality was noticed by Gerould, who, analyzing *Na vsiakogo mudretsa dovol'no prostoty*, the first play of this period, writes:

After so many warnings about Ostrovsky's daunting Russianness, we turn to the celebrated *Too Clever by Half* [...] with a sense of relief that comes from being on familiar ground. Why, we exclaim, here is a delightful play immediately intelligible to a non-Russian public! [...] The plodding, earth-bound merchant quarter has been left behind

for the more fashionable and luxurious salons of Moscow where a Westernizing high society vies for position of pre-eminence. Atypical though it may be in several respects, measured against the author's earlier work, *Too Clever by Half* is, from the Anglo-American perspective, Ostrovsky's most universal play—which simply means that it seems to conform closely to dramatic materials and formulas with which we are acquainted, thereby affording the pleasures of recognition.²⁹²

Gerould's assessment is equally applicable to all the plays of the third period. Plot developments, peripetia, and characterization in them are easily accessible to Western audiences since there is almost nothing of Russian Orthodox doctrines in them. The third, however, was the shortest period in Ostrovsky's career—only three years. It followed a severe personal drama and came in the wake of the highly dissatisfying policy of Alexander II. Even in *Les*, the last play of this period, Ostrovsky is already recovering from the temporary betrayal of his convictions and, with the creation of the character of Neschastlivtsev, bounces back to faith as a basis for the Russian national identity that he fully regains in the next period.

Fourth period (1872–1886)

Yepishkin, Fetinya, Larisa, Yelesya, and Yelesya's mother from *Ne bylo ni grosha, da vdrug altyn* join Ostrovsky's gallery of successful "shamers," started in the third period, as its last additions. At the age of fifty, Ostrovsky started his fourth period of exploring the guilt/shame dichotomy. This period lasted thirteen years, until the playwright's death in 1886. Like many other Russian artists, e.g., Dostoevsky,²⁹³ Ostrovsky was able during the final years of his life to relive, himself and through his characters, the parable of the prodigal son (Luke 15:11–32). The playwright's new focus in the fourth period is on characters who start as guilt-deficient immoral

²⁹² Gerould, p. 109.

²⁹³ According to Lubov Fedorovna, Dostoevsky's daughter, "[t]he dying writer called his son and daughter to his side, asked that the parable of the prodigal son be read to them, and said: 'Children, never forget what you have just heard here. Preserve an unbounded faith in the Lord and never despair of his forgiveness. [...] If ever it should happen that in the course of your life you commit an offense, still you must not lose hope in the Lord. You are His children—humble yourselves before Him, as your father; beg Him for forgiveness and He will rejoice at your repentance, as He rejoiced at the return of the prodigal son'" (as quoted in Konstantin Mochulsky, *Dostoevsky: His Life and Work*, trans. Michael A. Minihan (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1971), p. 647).

men but, through a series of peripetia, come to accept and welcome Christian teachings and to obey “internalized standards of morality without reference to outside forces.”²⁹⁴ During this period, after making a full circle, Ostrovsky came back to what he started with in his understanding of guilt and shame: condemning the latter and advocating the former. From 1873 to 1886, his focus never shifted from his prodigal sons, who become the most prominent characters in the dramas of his late years.

The prototype of such characters is, of course, Gennady Neschastlivtsev from *Les*, a half-baked prodigal son from 1870, i.e., the playwright’s third period. The character’s intentions are still somewhat nebulous, and the audience is left with the understanding that giving his money to Akysusha could be a one-time deal rather than a carefully chosen new life path. After this selfless act, Neschastlivtsev might go right back to his preferred ways of drinking, lying, and debauchery. However, starting with *Pozdniaia liubov’*, Ostrovsky’s first drama of the fourth period, characters who become reformed, demonstrate genuine and sincere repentance, and shed their life of shame in favor of life of guilt, appear in full force. The first such fully developed literary prodigal son is Nikolay Shablov, a lawyer who has wasted all his money drinking and partying. He is facing debtors’ prison and is in love with Lebyodkina, a vile woman who wants him to commit a crime (steal an incriminating financial document in order to invalidate her debt to a merchant). Nikolay is the object of profound and pure love for Lyudmila, a virtuous albeit plain woman. The force of this unrequited and unconditional love helps him make the right choice and expose Lebyodkina, making sure that she gets her comeuppance. Nikolay Shablov is one half of a unity (the other half of which is his brother Dormidont)—a device that Ostrovsky so effectively and successfully used in *Pozdniaia liubov’* in particular and his entire literary career in general and that always worked for the playwright whenever he needed a contrasting polarity.

²⁹⁴ Elliott, *Power of Satire*, p. 67.

Black and white, thesis and antithesis, a minus and a plus form the playwright's favorite philosophical yin–yang. Smurov's two nephews Semyon and Vasya in *Utro molodogo cheloveka*; Gordey and Lyubim Tortsov in *Bednost' ne porok*; Yulinka and Polina Kukushkin, two sisters in *Dokhodnoe mesto*; Lukerya and Tatyana Zhmigulin in *Grekh da beda*; Marya and Praskovya Dyuzhaya in *Voevoda*; Annushka and Vukol Bessudny in *Na boikom meste*; Maxim and Nikolay Redrikov in *Tushino*; Schastlivtsev and Neschastlivtsev in *Le*; Nikolay and Dormidont Shablov in *Pozdniaia liubov'*; and Ksenia and Kapitolina Snafidin in *Ne ot mira sego* are the most illustrative examples of entities whose components balance each other out and are best understood and appreciated in their opposition.

Nikolay's brother Dormidont humbly and selflessly loves Lyudmila, who only has eyes for his brother. Dormidont's feelings are so truly Christian that he gets genuinely happy when Lyudmila finally finds bliss with Nikolay. Nikolay is transformed by the sheer power of Lyudmila's selfless love, which, in turn, has been enhanced, multiplied, and reinforced by Dormidont's. Lyudmila's creed that she proclaims in a conversation with her father (“Я не умею жить для себя; в том только и счастье, когда живешь для других”²⁹⁵) also affects Nikolay; he warms up to her virtue and righteousness and decides to follow her example by turning a new leaf in his own life and repudiating his former convictions.

Mizgir and Lel join the ranks of Ostrovsky's prodigal children in *Snegurochka*. They both fall into temptation and sin before the redeeming power of love brings them back onto the righteous path. However, neither Mizgir nor Lel is the main character in this fantasy play, which was greatly inspired²⁹⁶ by Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. A truly biblical metaphor shines through a rich folkloristic background and mythological setting: a person not of this

²⁹⁵ Ostrovskii, *Pozdniaia liubov'*, in his *PSS*, vol. 6, pp. 307–358, at p. 319. “I cannot live for myself; happiness is only found when you live for others.”

²⁹⁶ Editorial comments to *Snegurochka*, *ibid.*, vol. 7, pp. 333–335, at p. 334; and Lakshin, p. 627.

world comes to be among humans to atone for their sin of living with no love. This person has to sacrifice his (in Ostrovsky's play, her) life and perish so that humankind can have a fresh start after realizing its mistakes. Love in its broadest sense, love for one's fellow human being, love that presupposes self-sacrifice for the sake of others is pronounced by Ostrovsky the most important factor in people's relations. Snegurochka, the Snow Maiden, consciously chooses death as an inevitable consequence of acquiring the gift of true love because without such love her life is meaningless and empty. She melts, sacrificing herself, so that the Berendeians could live on.

Akin to *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Snegurochka* references pagan mythology: a pagan deity responsible for nature's fertility is lacking a component necessary for his or her fecundity functions. If we compare *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *Snegurochka* with the Homeric "Hymn to Demeter,"²⁹⁷ for example, we will see that, in all three cases, a deity is deprived of a certain something that is indispensable to his or her ability to make things flourish. Demeter misses her daughter Persephone, who is taken away by another deity; Shakespeare's Titania ("I am a spirit of no common rate,— / The summer still doth tend upon my state"²⁹⁸) is infuriated by and simultaneously estranged from her husband Oberon; Ostrovsky's Yarilo is angered by men who have defied love and goes into voluntary seclusion. It is remarkable that while in the hymn and in Shakespeare's fantasy play the deity refuses to produce crops as a result of aggravation caused by another deity, Ostrovsky puts the blame for keeping the earth barren on mortal men.

The imagery, however, remains similar in all three works of literature:

And she [Demeter] caused a most terrible and savage year for men
on the much-nourished land, and the earth did not sprout

²⁹⁷ The Greek goddess who controls all crops and vegetation and is the sustainer of life for men and animals (Simon Hornblower and Antony Spawforth (eds.), *The Oxford Classical Dictionary*, 3rd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), s.v. "Demeter").

²⁹⁸ Shakespeare, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, in his *Complete Works* (New York: Collier & Son, 1925), pp. 167–190, at p. 177.

any seed, for fair-wreathed Demeter buried it.
Many curved ploughs did the oxen drag in the soil in vain,
and much white barley fell to no avail on the earth.
And now she would have destroyed the whole race of mortal men
with painful famine, and she would have deprived
the Olympians of the splendid honor of gifts and sacrifices,
if Zeus had not noticed and pondered in his heart.²⁹⁹

In Act II, scene 2, of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Titania puts all the blame for nature's sterility on Oberon, the King of Fairies, while humans remain innocent collateral victims caught in the middle of a confrontation between two immortals:

But with thy brawls thou hast disturb'd our sport.
Therefore the winds, piping to us in vain,
As in revenge, have suck'd up from the sea
Contagious fogs; which, falling in the land,
Have every pelting river made so proud
That they have overborne their continents:
The ox hath therefore stretch'd his yoke in vain,
The ploughman lost his sweat; and the green corn
Has rotted ere his youth attain'd a beard;
The fold stands empty in the drowned field,
And crows are fatted with the murrain flock;
The nine men's morris is fill'd up with mud;
And the quaint mazes in the wanton green,
For lack of tread, are undistinguishable:
The human mortals want their winter here;
No night is now with hymn or carol blest:—
Therefore the moon, the governess of floods,
Pale in the anger, washes all the air,
That rheumatic diseases do abound:
And thorough this distemperature we see
The season alter: hoary-headed frosts
Fall in the fresh lap of the crimson rose;
And on the old Hyem's chin and icy crown
An odorous chaplet of sweet summer buds
Is, as in mockery, set: the spring, the summer,
The chiding autumn, angry winter, change
Their wonted liveries; and the maz'd world,
By their increase, now knows not which is which:
And this same progeny of evils comes
From our debate, from our dissension:
We are their parents and original.³⁰⁰

²⁹⁹ "Hymn to Demeter," in *The Homeric Hymns*, ed. Susan S. Shelmerdine (Newburyport, MA: Focus Publishing, 1995), pp. 29–90, at pp. 49–50.

In Act II, scene 2, of Ostrovsky's *Snegurochka*, Tsar Berendey explains Yarilo's (chief pagan deity of the Berendeians) ire solely by his discontent with the people:

Царь. [...] Благополучие — велико слово!

Не вижу я его давно в народе,
Пятнадцать лет не вижу. Наше лето,
Короткое, год от году короче
Становится, а вёсны холодней —
Туманные, сырые, точно осень,
Печальные. До половины лета
Снега лежат в оврагах и лядинах,
Из них ползут туманы по утрам,
А к вечеру выходят злые сестры —
Трясучие и бледные кумохи,
И шлятся по деревням, ломая,
Знобя людей. Недавно мы гуляли
С женой твоей, Прекрасною Еленой,
В саду моем тенистом. Под кустами,
От зорких глаз садовников скрываясь,
Таилась подтаявшая льдинка;
[...]

Не все у нас благополучно, друг.
Пятнадцать лет не кажется Ярило
На наш призыв, когда, встречая Солнце,
В великий день Ярилин, мы напрасно
Тьмотысячной толпой к нему зываем
И песнями его величье славим.
Сердит на нас Ярило.

Бермята. Царь премудрый,
За что б ему сердиться?

Царь. Есть за что.
В сердцах людей заметил я остуду
Немалую; горячности любовной
Не вижу я давно у берендеев.
Исчезло в них служенье красоте;
Не вижу я у молодежи взоров,
Увлажненных чарующею страстью;
Не вижу дев задумчивых, глубоко
Вздыхающих. На глазах с поволокой
Возвышенной тоски любовной нет,
А видятся совсем другие страсти:
Тщеславие, к чужим нарядам зависть

³⁰⁰ Shakespeare, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, p. 172.

И прочее.³⁰¹

In *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and in *Snegurochka*, two pairs of lovers mix and match, but while Shakespeare's Hermia, Helena, Lyzander, and Demetrius need a deity's interference to sort out their love interests, Ostrovsky's Snegurochka, Kupava, Lel, and Mizgir do not need external interference to realize that their happiness depends solely on their own ability to love in a broader sense, to love a fellow human being. Ostrovsky pronounces such an ability the most important thing in the world because it lets people forget their personal interests and sacrifice themselves for the sake of others, which in the fourth period is recognized by the playwright as the only worthy endeavor. Only when all four main characters of *Snegurochka* understand the ultimate wisdom of devoting their lives to the happiness of others, can harmony be achieved in the land of the Berendeians. Through pagan metaphors, Ostrovsky did what Shakespeare had done earlier: he brought the Ancient Greek theme of human dependency on the divine plan closer to the Christian doctrine of salvation through sacrifice and suffering.

Seven years before *Snegurochka* was written, Dostoevsky in his *Prestuplenie i nakazanie* (Crime and Punishment) vividly described salvation through sacrifice and suffering which was characteristic of the old Russian piety. In the scene Porfiry explains to Raskolnikov why Nikolay took the blame for a crime he never committed:

А известно ли вам, что он [Николай] из раскольников, да и не то чтоб из раскольников, а просто сектант [...], и сам он еще недавно, целых два года, в

³⁰¹ Ostrovskii, *Snegurochka*, in his *PSS*, vol. 7, pp. 7–115, at pp. 63–64. “**Tsar.** [...] Wellbeing is a mighty word! / I saw it in my people long ago. / For fifteen years now I see none. / Our summer's short and getting shorter still; / Our springs get colder, and like autumns / They're foggy, damp, and mournful. / Midsummer comes: in canyons and ravines / There snow lies, begetting morning fogs, / And evening fevers, their angry kin, / All pale and shaking, wander through our towns, / Bespreparing pains and chills. / Not long ago I took a walk with Helena, your wife, / In shaded gardens. Underneath some bushes, / All hidden from the gardeners' attention, / We found an icicle half-melted. [...] I say we've lost our wellbeing, friend. / For fifteen years, Yarilo has been hiding, / Avoiding us, when on his day at sunrise / The whole world is calling out to him / And singing hymns to his great might and glory. / Yarilo's cross with us. **Bermyata.** Our wisest tsar, / Why would he be so cross? / **Tsar.** There is a reason. / I've long since noticed that people's hearts / Got noticeably cooler. I fail to see love's fire in them. / They don't worship beauty any longer. / The younger men are strangers to hot passions; / Desire doesn't gleam in their eyes. / Our maidens don't sigh with sweetest sorrow; / Their eyes display no sign of sensual fever. / Instead, they show very different passions— / Pride, envy for the clothes of others, / And so forth.”

деревне, у некоего старца под духовным началом был. [...] Ну-с, в остроге-то и вспомнился, видно, теперь честной старец; Библия тоже явилась опять. Знаете ли, Родион Романыч, что значит у иных из них «пострадать»? [...] Так вот, я и подозреваю теперь, что Миколка хочет «страдание принять» или вроде того.³⁰²

The Oxford Companion to the Bible offers an explanation of why suffering should be so important for pious Christians:

[...]Suffering introduces a test into human lives, both disclosing and forming a character. For religious people, suffering comes as a special trial, particularly its unjust distribution. [...]Chosen individuals voluntarily take upon themselves the suffering of the guilty. Less bold, but also significant, is the view that suffering offers an opportunity to learn something worthwhile, especially patience (James 1.2–4).

[...] The suffering of Christ manifests the divine response to evil, culminating in victorious resurrection. Christians are called on to enter into the suffering of Christ for the sake of the Kingdom.

Suffering, therefore, is rooted in divine mystery, and at the same time it is profoundly human. God's redemption of the world employs suffering in its numerous forms to enable persons to recognize their own humanity and to acknowledge their true selves.³⁰³

Coming back to his pleas of the 1860s, when he was addressing his contemporaries by relying on the analogues of his historical dramas, Ostrovsky in *Snegurochka* sounded yet another warning to a country that was quickly forgetting God and focusing on personal wellbeing. Complacency was disastrous and destructive; Snegurochka, Kupava, Lel, and Mizgir all had to suffer before they were rewarded with true love and one of them had to sacrifice herself not only for that love but so that her fellow countrymen could find it too.

In 1875 Ostrovsky wrote *Bogatye nevesty*, where he created his first prodigal daughter. By the age of twenty-three, Valentina, a kept woman, has sinned a great deal, having swapped all her virtues for vices. For a while, she has been milking a sixty-year-old married man for money, living in luxury and idleness. Valentina's only remaining asset is her angelic beauty that fools

³⁰² Dostoevskii, *Prestuplenie i nakazanie*, in his *PSS*, vol. 6, pp. 5–422, at pp. 347–348. “And do you know he [Nikolay] is an Old Believer, or rather a dissenter? [...]He was for two years in his village under the spiritual guidance of a certain elder. [...] Well, in prison, it seems he remembered the venerable elder, the Bible, too, made its appearance again. Do you know, Rodion Romanovich, the force of the word ‘suffering’ among some of these people! [...] So I suspect now that Nikolay wants to take his suffering or something of the sort” (Dostoevsky, *Crime and Punishment*, trans. Constance Garnett (New York: Barnes and Noble Books, 1994), p. 372).

³⁰³ Metzger and Coogan, s.v. “Suffering.”

Yury Tsyplunov, a man who has been in love with her since early childhood, into thinking that she is equally beautiful on the inside as well. Tsyplunov's fervor in preaching virtue makes Valentina rethink her life goals, turn down her lover's offer of paying her off, and choose living honestly and honorably instead.

In the fourth period, Ostrovsky starts finding inspiration in literary creations of other Russian Christian writers, which helped strengthen his own devotion to the Russian Church and resolve to fight for the hearts and souls of his fellow countrymen. From the end of 1870s and until his death in 1886, Ostrovsky devoted himself to giving back to society by educating and helping aspiring young dramatists. Kupchinsky,³⁰⁴ Nikolay Solovyov,³⁰⁵ Nevezhin,³⁰⁶ and Lukin³⁰⁷ benefited greatly from his knowledge of theatre and playwriting. Ostrovsky believed it his moral obligation to nourish the world of theatre even at his own expense. He chose reading and editing young authors' plays over working on his own, living up to the doctrine that he professed in his fourth-period plays: to become a pastor for young worshipers of Melpomene, one must readily sacrifice his own comfort and wellbeing for the sake of a bigger cause, ensuring new healthy growth in the field of theatre; to help his countrymen, who were, in his understanding, prodigal sons waiting to return home, i.e., to their true religion and true national

³⁰⁴ Ivan Kupchinsky (1844–1917), a Russian playwright who wrote several historical plays, satirical comedies, and vaudevilles.

³⁰⁵ Nikolay Solovyov (1845–99), a Russian playwright who became a lay brother in a monastery where he met Leontyev (see footnote 99), who recognized his dramatic talent, introduced him to Ostrovsky. That introduction proved to be very beneficial to the young playwright whose career visibly picked up; in addition, Ostrovsky and Solovyov successfully collaborated on a number of plays, four of which *Schastlivyi den'* (A Happy Day), *Zhenit'ba Belugina* (Belugin's Marriage), *Dikarka* (Unsociable), and *Svetit, da ne greet* (All Shine, No Warmth) appear in Ostrovsky's Complete Works and were successfully staged in Russia.

³⁰⁶ Pyotr Nevezhin (1841–1919), a Russian playwright; some of his plays, e.g., *Vtoraia molodost'* (A Second Youth, 1888), are still very popular in Russia. Ostrovsky wrote two plays in collaboration with Nevezhin, *Blazh'* (A Whim) and *Staroe po-novomu* (The Old in a New Way), both appearing in his Complete Works. Nevezhin dedicated the first edition of his dramas, published after Ostrovsky's death, to “памяти незабвенного драматурга Александра Николаевича Островского” (Vladimir Vasil'evich Grigorenko et al., *A. N. Ostrovskii v vospominaniakh sovremennikov* (Ostrovsky as Remembered by His Contemporaries) (Moscow: Khudozhestvennaia literatura, 1966), p. 561)—“the memory of the unforgettable dramatist, Alexander Nikolaevich Ostrovsky.”

³⁰⁷ See introduction, part II.

identity, one must be willing to suffer personal losses. In the fourth period, the external factors of shame were eagerly sacrificed to the internal convictions of guilt.

Selflessly giving to others became Ostrovsky's favorite leitmotif in his last plays. *Serdtsse ne kamen'*, *Bez viny vinovatye*, and *Ne ot mira sego* are uncharacteristically preachy and moralizing. Their plots and characters are predominantly metaphorical. In *Serdtsse ne kamen'*, for example, the story line is overly idyllic, the villains are overly villainy, and Vera, the main heroine, is so virtuous that she easily qualifies as a martyr and a saint. The all-conquering good is so sterilized, purified, and idealized that the play can form a chapter in a "Gospel According to Ostrovsky," if such had ever been written. The message and moral of those pieces is that God looks out for and protects those strong in faith and impeccable in morals. Vera's creed is expressed in Act IV, scene 2, of *Goriachee serdtse*. When asked if she was content, she responds:

Вера Филипповна. Да какое мое довольство! Мне для себя ничего не нужно; тем я довольна, что всякому бедному помочь могу; никому отказывать не приходится, всякий с чем-нибудь да уйдет от меня! Сколько богатства-то и доходу у Потапа Потапыча! Точно я из моря черпаю, ничего не убывает, тысячу-две истратишь, а три прибудет. Или уж это Бог посылает за добрые дела.³⁰⁸

It is remarkable that Ostrovsky's most potent and powerful characters had always been females, and, in his fourth period, they assume an additional role—that of a savior and messiah, traditionally believed to be a male prerogative. It is even more remarkable that although Ostrovsky explicitly opposed Chernyshevsky and the *Shestidesyatniki* with their radical atheistic ideas and materialistic nihilism, he believed, just like his ideological adversaries, that it was through woman that mankind's salvation was possible. Both Ostrovsky and the *Shestidesyatniki* thought that women's primary social role was not simply that of a mother or a wife or even, in a

³⁰⁸ Ostrovskii, *Serdtsse ne kamen'*, in his *PSS*, vol. 8, pp. 232–293, at p. 280. "Vera Filippovna. How much comfort do I need? I do not need anything for myself; I'm content that I can help any person in need, that I don't have to refuse anyone, that everyone leaves with something. How wealthy and prosperous Potap Potapych is! It seems that I've been drawing water from a sea; it just doesn't drain—you spend a thousand or two, and three more will come in. Or is it God rewarding us for good deeds?"

broader sense, a hearth keeper, as was believed in the rest of Europe, but something bigger.³⁰⁹

But if the *Shestidesyatniki* saw in this a chance of ushering in a new world, for Ostrovsky women were supposed to play a vital part in preserving Christian piety through which social betterment could be achieved. Religion was among the few spheres in which women exercised authority in a traditional Russian family, and from it they derived both strength and satisfaction (Engel, p. 11).

This, as a matter of fact, happens to be a characteristic feature that Russia shared (and possibly still shares) with Asia, as in some parts of the Orient it is considered a woman's prerogative to assemble praying or sacrificial alters, pray at their homes, and teach their children to do so.

Ostrovsky believed true faith to be the panacea for the world's betterment and woman to be its agent. Chernyshevsky's "new woman" from his novel *Chto delat'?* is called Vera, which may be translated from Russian as *belief*. While Chernyshevsky's Vera is extremely entrepreneurial in the Western sense of the word, Ostrovsky's heroine from *Serdtshe ne kamen'*, who is also called Vera but whose name should be best translated as *faith*, is self-sacrificing and humble. Ostrovsky's Vera is honest, compassionate, and pious. People like her, who take the word of God seriously, are truly guilt-driven and, according to Ostrovsky, should be able to reform mankind, leading by example. "Sell that ye have, and give alms; provide yourselves bags which wax not old, a treasure in the heavens that faileth not, where no thief approacheth, neither moth corrupteth. For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also" (Luke 12:33–34)—and this is exactly what Vera is doing, following the Holy Scripture to the letter. The death of the titular character in *Snegurochka* was not in vain: Veras, her female disciples, live on and keep spreading the morality of love in society.

³⁰⁹ For the discussion of the changing perception of the role of women in the Russian society, see, for example, Barbara Alpern Engel, *Mothers & Daughters: Women of the Intelligentsia in Nineteenth-Century Russia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), pp. 3–5.

Lakshin mentions an interesting conversation that the playwright had with Varlamov, an actor from St. Petersburg, who reproached Ostrovsky for idealizing woman too much in his last plays. The playwright responded that it was impossible not to love and idealize woman because she had given birth to God (p. 648). It seems that Ostrovsky believed that a woman, who had managed this miracle once, was capable of working further wonders for the sake of the world if only she remained focused on self-sacrifice.

Lyuba Otradina/Kruchinina, the main heroine from *Bez viny vinovatye*, is another one of Ostrovsky's prodigal daughters. Just as Valentina Belesova from *Bogatye nevesty*, Lyuba gets reformed and fully atones for her sins of the past by selfless help that she is always ready to give to the poor, especially to young actors and actresses in need. Her secret—a son born out of wedlock—has caused her much grief and suffering, and she has paid for her transgression dearly, with the loss of her baby and his father, whom she loved. Kruchinina bears her cross stoically and never complains about her misfortunes, trying consciously to pay for the mistakes of her youth by aiding others as much as she can. Her efforts are not lost: after twenty years of penitence, she is rewarded with the discovery of her long-lost son and reconciliation with him.

The reforming influence of a virtuous woman on a dissolute man is seen once again in *Ne ot mira sego*, Ostrovsky's last original play. Ksenia, a highly moral albeit physically very fragile individual, redeems Vitaly Kochuev, her promiscuous husband, even though she pays for her efforts with her life. Vitaly, who has fallen in love with his wife all over again, is the penultimate prodigal son created by Ostrovsky's genius; the very last is Nechay Shalygin, the governor from the second version of *Voevoda*. Twenty years after the first version of *Voevoda* was written, it was more important to Ostrovsky to show a guiltless immoral man of shame who comes to a willing acceptance of the Christian teaching and the redeeming power of morality that is fed by inner guilt. *Voevoda* of the fourth period differs from its second-period predecessor primarily in focus.

The drama is transformed from a recipe for societal betterment—if the majority of people is still driven by guilt, do not oppose the majority—to tracing the evolution of convictions in a single man.

Ostrovsky's quest for the guilt-and-shame ratio has a distinctly cyclical character. After thirty-nine years, the playwright finished this discourse exactly where he started it, having come full circle.

CHAPTER IV OSTROVSKY'S STUDY OF SIN

Феклуша. Нельзя, матушка, без греха: в миру живем. Вот что я тебе скажу, милая девушка: вас, простых людей, каждого один враг смущает, а к нам, к странным людям, к кому шесть, к кому двенадцать приставлено; вот я надобно их всех побороть. Трудно, милая девушка!³¹⁰

Ostrovsky's exploration of the subject of guilt and shame led to his study of sin, a theme closely connected to that of inner and outer regulators of human behavior. According to Archpriest Abramov, the Russian Church had not had a strict hierarchy of sins until the fifteenth to sixteenth centuries, when it borrowed it from Roman Catholicism, and even after that it was never discussed by the Synod. He states that Russian Orthodoxy relies in its understanding of sins solely on the Ten Commandments, as opposed to Western Christianity that supplements the latter with the concept of seven deadly sins. The Russian Church has traditionally recognized spiritual sins as graver than physical ones, which means that if one is destroying his flesh through drinking, debauchery, or gluttony, he is less of a sinner than if he is destroying his soul through vanity, lying, betrayal, and the like (Archbishop Abramov, interview).

Ostrovsky, obviously well versed in theological teachings due to his parentage and upbringing, absorbed Christian doctrines on sin but seemed less interested in their theoretical implications than in their applicability to the reality of nineteenth-century Russia. The playwright appeared to be particularly interested in coping with the universality of sin and its omnipresence. In all of his plays that deal with the study of sin, Ostrovsky was adamant about his belief that even if man is guided by the best of intentions, transgressions are unavoidable as long as he lives in the world; and that even voluntary seclusion in a monastic cell might or might not assist in shielding oneself from sinning. This belief stems from the Christian teaching:

³¹⁰ Ostrovskii, *Gроза*, p. 227. “**Feklusha.** You can’t live in this world, my dear, without sin. And I’ll tell you this much—simple folks like you has only one devil to work on you, whereas folks like us, godfearing travelers, well, we’ve got as many as six, or a dozen devils set on us, and we’ve got to fight ’em all off. It’s hard work, my dear, believe me” (Ostrovsky, *The Storm*, p. 35).

Man is born with a corrupt bias which was not his at creation; the first man, when created, POSSESSED IMMORTALITY, PERFECT WISDOM, AND A WILL REGULATED BY REASON. Through the first sin Adam and his posterity LOST IMMORTALITY, AND HIS WILL RECEIVED A BIAS TOWARDS EVIL. In this natural state man, who, even before he actually sins, is a sinner before God by original or inherited sin, commits manifold actual transgressions; *but he is not absolutely without power of will towards good, and is not always doing evil.*³¹¹

Mildon acknowledges that the ever-present concept of sin in Ostrovsky's dramas (life lacks harmony because the evil one tempts us) and their message that salvation may only come from the ancient piety (the only road to salvation is the one used by our fathers and grandfathers) (*Filosofia*, p. 23). However, for some reason, Mildon chooses to ignore that the evil one can only be interpreted theologically and not ontologically. The evil one, in the understanding of Russian Orthodoxy, is the devil, the snake, the creature of hell that constantly tempts and confuses man to test his willpower and the firmness of his faith in Christ. The ancient piety is the piety of the Old Believers, pre-Peter Russians unaffected by the corrupting influences of the West.

In Ostrovsky's play *Komik XVII stoletia* (A Seventeenth-Century Comedian), Kochetov's father voices what seems to be the playwright's creed:

Кочетов. [...] В миру живем, приятель,
Не согрешить нельзя — питаться надо,
Кормить семью. Греха не убежишь.
В грехе рожден.³¹²

Ostrovsky was, in varying degrees, interested in all types of sins: deadly ones, venial ones, carnal ones; ones committed on a sudden impulse and ones committed willfully (these are further subdivided into sins committed because of a necessity that has arisen from earthly cares

³¹¹ Heard, p. 84.

³¹² Ostrovskii, *Komik XVII stoletia*, in his *PSS*, vol. 6, pp. 222–306, at p. 282. “**Kochetov.** [...] An earthly life we lead, my friend, / One can't not sin. One needs to eat; / He needs to feed his kin. Sin's unavoidable, / We're born in it.”

and sins committed on an idle whim); ones after which man repents and ones after which he keeps on sinning. He even looked at the three known stages of sin:

[...A] sin is committed in three stages, namely, the suggestion of it, the pleasure experienced, and the consent. The first is the act of the Enemy, the second that of the flesh, the third that of the spirit. For he who lies in wait for us suggests the evil, the flesh submits to the pleasure, and at last, the spirit, overcome by the pleasure, consents.³¹³

Ostrovsky looked at the nature of sin within a bigger framework, as an obstacle to the world's betterment.

According to Apostle Paul,

Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God.³¹⁴

Ostrovsky was looking in his study of sin both at people's inability to stay away from it and for mitigating circumstances for sinners, as it were. In doing so he identified several categories of sins and attributed different degrees of gravity to them.

Drinking: hardly a sin

Marmeladov, a tertiary character in Dostoevsky's *Prestuplenie i nakazanie*, an alcoholic beyond salvation who sold his wife's and kids' clothes for a drink, pushed his daughter Sonya into prostitution, and ended up run over by a horse, offers in his passionate speech in Part I, Chapter 2, an explanation of the insignificance of his affliction, which seemed to be shared by Ostrovsky:

И когда уже кончит над всеми, тогда возглаголет и нам: «Выходите, скажет, и вы! Выходите пьяненькие, выходите слабенькие, выходите соромники!» И мы выйдем все, не стыдясь, и станем. И скажет: «Свиньи вы! образа звериного и печати его; но приидите и вы!» И возглаголят премудрые, возглаголят разумные: «Господи! почто сих приемлеш?» И скажет: «Потому их приемлю, премудрые, потому приемлю,

³¹³ St. Gregory the Great, *Pastoral Care*, trans. Henry Davis, ed. Johannes Quasten and Joseph C. Plumpe, Ancient Christian Writers, no. 11 (New York: Newman, 1950), p. 202.

³¹⁴ 1 Corinthians 6:9–10.

разумные, что ни единый из сих сам не считал себя достойным сего...» И прострет к нам руке свои, и мы припадем... и заплачем... и всё поймем!³¹⁵

Archpriest Abramov (interview with author) confirms that Russian Orthodoxy regards drinking as the least significant sin, a conviction that dates back to the times when Rus, still a pagan state, was considering which confession to adopt. His account of events is exactly the same as it appears in Heard's book, who writes:

Vladimir's³¹⁶ success in war spread his renown abroad; his alliance was courted, and his conversion became an object of solicitude to nations near and remote. Emissaries came to him from the Mahometan Bulgarians and the Khorazian Jews, from the Latin Christians of Germany and Rome, and from the Greeks of Constantinople. To each of them he returned a characteristic reply. The pleasures of Mahomet's paradise were tempting, but he refused to be circumcised or to abstain from pork or from wine, "for drinking," said he, "is the delight of Russians, nor can we live without it."³¹⁷

Ostrovsky places drunkards at the lowest level of the tower of sin if affinity for the bottle is their only affliction. In *Ne soshlis' kharakterami!*, Serafima's parents ask their daughter if the man she has chosen for her husband drinks:

Улита Никитишна. Смотри, не пьет ли?

Карп Карпыч. Опять ты всё врешь! Кто нынче не пьет!

Улита Никитишна. То есть ты спроси, во хмелю-то он каков?

Карп Карпыч. Ну, вот это дело!

Улита Никитишна. Потому другой смирный во хмелю, так это нужды нет, всё равно что непьющий.³¹⁸

³¹⁵ Dostoevskii, *Prestuplenie i nakazanie*, p. 21. "And when He has done with all of them, then He will summon us. "You too come forth," He will say, "Come forth ye drunkards, come forth, ye weak ones, come forth, ye children of shame!" And we shall all come forth, without shame and shall stand before Him. And He will say unto us, "Ye are swine, made in the Image of the Beast and with his mark; but come ye also!" And the wise ones and those of understanding will say, "Oh Lord, why dost Thou receive these men?" And He will say, "This is why I receive them, oh ye wise, this is why I receive them, oh ye of understanding, that not one of them believed himself to be worthy of this." And He will hold out His hands to us and we shall fall down before Him...and we shall weep...and we shall understand all things!..." (Dostoevsky, *Crime and Punishment*, p. 18).

³¹⁶ A tenth-century Russian prince, grandson of Princess Olga (see chapter II).

³¹⁷ Heard, pp. 16–17. Archpriest Abramov provided the actual wording used by Vladimir: "В Руси веселие есть пити, без этого не может быти."

³¹⁸ Ostrovskii, *Ne soshlis' kharakterami!*, in his *PSS*, vol. 2, pp. 142–169, at p. 158. "Улита Никитишна. See if he drinks or not. **Карп Карпыч.** Baloney! Who doesn't drink nowadays? **Улита Никитишна.** I mean, ask how he is when he's in his cups. **Карп Карпыч.** Now you're talking! **Улита Никитишна.** Because some men are peaceful when drunk, so then it's fine: they are as good as teetotalers."

Lyubim Tortsov from *Bednost' ne porok* likes the bottle but would not let his infirmity become a fertile soil for bigger sins. Lyubim remains a positive character as the reconciler of Lyuba and Mitya's love and protector of family honor. Acknowledging that drunkenness alone is not enough to qualify a man as a serious sinner, Kaspin starts one of his articles with this quotation:

“Make way—Lyubim Tortsov is going by!” exclaimed the teacher of Russian literature who had been sitting with us, as he put on his coat at the end of the play.

“What do you mean to say by that?” asked a student. “I see no ideal in Lyubim Tortsov. Drunkenness is no ideal.”

“It is truth that I see!” retorted the teacher sharply. “Yes, my dear sir, truth. Make way! Truth is the end for stage rustics, the end for Kukolnik³¹⁹: personified truth has appeared on the stage.”³²⁰

Despite Marmeladov's and Lyubim Tortsov's alcohol addiction, each character is depicted as positive by Dostoevsky and Ostrovsky, their respective creators, as both Christian writers let their virtues outweigh their minor affliction.

To the same category of mere alcoholics belongs the relatively harmless Negligentov, a comic relief from *Vospitannitsa*. His clownish behavior makes people laugh, he cannot hold a job, but, technically, he is not doing anything to harm anybody but himself. At the end of the play, he even gets “rewarded” with a wife, who is supposed to reform him. Ostrovsky's next harmless drunkard,³²¹ Apollon Murzavetsky, appears in *Volki i ovtsy* (Wolves and Sheep). His addiction is never a threat to anything or anybody, keeping him in the status of a comic character who amuses the audience without playing an important part in the plot development.

Alcoholism becomes an entirely different matter if it gets paired with another sin or if it harms other people. Ostrovsky's first alcoholic who allows his affliction to take over and succumbs to graver sins is a petty clerk Rispolozhensky who appears in *Svoi ljudi — sochtemsia*.

³¹⁹ Nestor Kukolnik (1809–68), a Russian writer and playwright, famous for his historical dramas.

³²⁰ Ivan Gorbunov as quoted in Kaspin, “Re-examination of Lyubim Tortsov,” p. 185.

³²¹ By a drunkard I mean here a person who is pronounced one by Ostrovsky. Some of his characters do appear drunk occasionally, e.g., Arkady Schastlivtsev in *The Forest*, or Robinson (the same Arkady Schastlivtsev) and Karandyshev in *Without a Dowry*, but an occasional intoxication, in Ostrovsky's view, does not equal the chronic condition of alcohol dependency.

Rispolozhensky, with his shaking hands and his ever-present refrain, “Что это, водочка у вас? Я [...] рюмочку выпью,”³²² becomes susceptible to Podkhalyuzin’s influence when greed grows out of his need to obtain more liquor. This bigger sin drives him to double-crossing and forging financial documents for monetary remuneration, and for this bigger sin he is punished at the end of the play when Podkhalyuzin refuses to pay him what he promised.

In *Staryi drug luchshe novykh dvukh* (An Old Friend Is Better than Two New Ones), Prokhor Vasyutin is a drunkard who resorts to barratry, a more serious transgression, a sin that Dante finds so gruesome that he places it in the eighth circle of hell. It is noteworthy that Ostrovsky obviously treats barratry a lot lighter than Dante, pronouncing it part of the Russian way of life and national culture, unchangeable and eternal.³²³ The general leitmotif of *Staryi drug* is that the order of things is set in stone and neither can nor should be changed. Since the beginning of time, bribes have been an inseparable part of Russian reality, why should one take it upon himself to condemn them? This established order includes not only the bribe-giving etiquette; there is a certain protocol one needs to observe in doing other things as well. During a drinking party, for example, one needs to know what to say or do while serving and accepting drinks, who drinks first, how big the interval between drinks should be, and so on. No one man (or woman, in the play) is supposed to change the prescribed procedure. The same established order of things includes a certain ritual that a maiden has to follow if she wants to “catch” a husband. If she deviates from it, results are not guaranteed; and so the set pattern is passed from mother to daughter as a foolproof recipe for matrimony. The order of things is unalterable—as Orest, a *raisonneur* and philosophically minded fifty-year-old servant of Vasyutin, stresses in his

³²² Ostrovskii, *Svoi ljudi*, p. 37. “Is that vodka [...]? I’ll just take a thimbleful” (Ostrovsky, *It’s a Family Affair*, p. 229).

³²³ Even now, in the twenty-first century, barratry and bribery are a very prominent part of Russian reality, penetrating virtually every system at every level. An obligatory gift to a school teacher, a banknote to a traffic police officer to avoid a traffic ticket, a present to a hospital nurse are as deeply rooted in the Russian way of life as much more significant monetary offerings to doctors, judges, politicians, and the like.

speech in Act II. In light of that speech, Olinka's statement that she will reform Prokhor after the wedding cannot be taken seriously. The play ends proving Orest right and Olinka wrong: Prokhor teaches his bride and her mother the drinking etiquette, and the women eagerly absorb the knowledge. Since the play ends before Olinka and her mother become addicted, Ostrovsky neither moralizes about Prokhor's affliction nor brings his character to any harm, which obviously means that he is not labeled a villain.

In *Pravda — khorosho, a schast'e luchshe*, Baraboshev is a drunkard with aggravating circumstances. His binges are accompanied by vanity and lying, and that is what places him in the category of unpleasant and disreputable characters. Baraboshev's vanity comes from his power over his employee Platon Zybkin, whom he terrorizes with a prospect of debtors' prison merely for personal amusement. Baraboshev's lying is done for his mother's sake because she is in a position to either grant or withdraw her money and, by doing so, either indulge her son's propensity to drink or curb it. Baraboshev is also categorized by Ostrovsky as a negative character because of his attitude towards money, which is described in chapter V.

There are two more drunkards in Ostrovsky's dramas: tragedian Erast Gromilov in *Talanty i poklonniki* and comic actor Shmaga in *Bez viny vinovatye*. Both cases are different from the previously mentioned alcoholics because Gromilov's and Shmaga's drunkenness is categorized as an occupational hazard, an unavoidable peril that is associated with serving Melpomene. For that reason, even though neither Gromilov nor Shmaga has the virtues of Lyubim Tortsov, they cannot qualify as negative characters solely because they are alcoholics. Nor do they resemble comic reliefs such as Negligentov or Murzavetsky. For Gromilov and Shmaga, Ostrovsky found a separate niche that harbors drinking actors who, even though they might look pitiful or revolting off the stage, still earn the audience's admiration and respect on the stage. Theatre-related issues in Ostrovsky's plays are further discussed in chapter VI.

As can be seen, Ostrovsky's attitude towards drinking not aggravated by another sin is rather light and possibly even casual. It neither follows the verdict pronounced against drinking by traditional Christian theologians nor agrees with Dante's placing drunkards with the other gluttons who are punished in the third circle of hell. In the opinion of a Russian Orthodox, if alcoholism does not affect others, it should probably be left alone.

Bribery

Bribe-taking and bribe-giving are treated by Ostrovsky very differently: while the latter is just a necessity, the former is definitely a sin, albeit not a very significant one. Bribery, in Ostrovsky's understanding, is still a long way from full-fledged mortal wrongdoings. *Dokhodnoe mesto* is a very powerful drama that is set against the backdrop of barratry. Its pivotal question, to take or not to take bribes, divides its dramatis personae into two warring camps, with Zhadov and his two female supporters (at least for the most part), Vyshnevskaya and Polina, in one; and Vyshnevsky, Yusov, Belogubov and their two female followers, Mme Kukushkina and Yulia, in the other.

Dokhodnoe mesto uses barratry as a background for a deeply philosophical discourse on the nature of sin and its effect on human life. In this play, Ostrovsky draws a very bleak picture of sin's omnipresence; there seems to be no foolproof remedy or panacea that will allow man to stay virtuous. *Dokhodnoe mesto* clearly states that no matter what one does, he will come to sin this way or another.

There is not a single totally virtuous character in *Dokhodnoe mesto*. Every dramatis persona, sooner or later, faster or slower, comes to sin in his or her own unique way. Ostrovsky shows the omnipresence of sin in every possible life scenario. Mme Kukushkina says that it is poverty that leads a woman to commit the sin of adultery, but Vyshnevskaya, who has unlimited access to her husband's wealth, commits adultery too. Vyshnevskaya believes that her life was

ruined and she was pushed into sin by her husband, who shamelessly and openly bought her, and yet Yulia is happy to offer her love to Belogubov in exchange for gifts and luxuries. Education and intellectual growth, two phenomena that are supposed to elevate a person, destroyed Lyubimov; made Dosuzhev forgo his principles, stoop to barratry, and start selling his services to the highest bidder; and led Zhadov to bowing to his uncle, begging him for a profitable position, i.e., one that ensures offers of bribes. The question that Ostrovsky raises in this drama—Is it possible to remain free of sin?—is answered firmly in the negative.

Yusov, an amateur philosopher, gives Vyshnevskaya his utterly pessimistic outlook on life, crossing barratry from the list of sins and focusing on the vanity of vanities in the earthly life:

Юсов. Взятки? Взятки что-с, маловажная вещь... многие подвержены. Смирения нет, вот главное... Судьба всё равно, что фортуна... как изображается на картине... колесо, и на нем люди... поднимается кверху и опять опускается вниз, возвышается и потом смиряется, превозносится собой и опять ничто... так всё кругообразно. Устраивай свое благосостояние, трудись, приобретай имущество... возносишь в мечтах... и вдруг наг!.. Надпись подписана под этой фортуной... (*С чувством.*)

Чуден в свете человек!
Суетится целый век,
Счастья сыскать желает,
А того не воображает,
Что судьба им управляет.

Вот что раскусить надо! Вот что должен человек помнить! Мы родимся, ничего не имеем, так и в могилу. Для чего же трудимся? Вот философия! Что наш ум? Что он может постигнуть?³²⁴

³²⁴ Ostrovskii, *Dokhodnoe mesto*, in his *PSS*, vol. 2, pp. 39–110, at p. 103. “**Yusov.** Bribes? Bribes are of no great importance...lots of people have been subjected to them. There’s no humility, that’s the main thing.... Fate is just like fortune...the way it is shown in this picture.... There’s a wheel with people on it, it takes them up and then brings them down, they’re elevated and then they’re humbled, exalted and then nothing.... So it’s all a circle. You establish your well-being, you work, you gain property.... You fly high in your dreams...and just like that you’re naked!... There’s an inscription below that wheel of fortune, and it reads like this...(*with feeling*) ‘Marvelous is earthly man! / Striving all his lifelong span, / Happiness to him is dear, / Yet to him is not that clear: / Fate his course doth surely steer.’ That’s how you have to get down to the bottom of things! That’s what a man has to remember! We are born with nothing, and that’s how we’ll go into the grave. What do we labor for? There’s room for philosophy! What is our mind? What can it comprehend?” (Ostrovsky, *A Profitable Position*, in his *Without a Dowry and Other Plays*, pp. 17–71, at p. 65).

This monologue redefines the Christian concept of rewarding virtuous behavior on the Judgment Day, which has existed since medieval times. By making Yusov a fatalist rather than a true Christian, Ostrovsky clearly shows his negative attitude towards this character.

Dokhodnoe mesto was written when Ostrovsky was thirty-three, which is a very symbolic age for any Christian. It was the time for evaluating and reevaluating the ideals, looking back at what had been done, and pausing to think about the future. It was also a time when Ostrovsky was bed-ridden with a badly broken leg. His pessimism found its way onto the pages of the work in progress. Zhadov resists falling into sin the longest, refusing to bow to his uncle and to the cruelty of life:

Вышнеvский [(К Жадову)]. Ты все еще не уходился, мой милый! Всѣ проповеди читаешь. (К жене.) Представьте: читает в канцелярии писарям мораль, а те, натурально, ничего не понимают, сидят, разиня рот, выпуча глаза. Смешно, любезный!
[...]

Жадов. Однако что же смешного в моих словах?

Вышнеvский. Всѣ, мой друг. Начиная от излишнего, нарушающего приличия увлечения, до ребяческих, непрактических выводов. Поверь, что каждый писец лучше тебя знает жизнь; знает по собственному опыту, что лучше быть сытым, чем голодным философом, и твои слова, естественно, кажутся им глупыми.

Жадов. А мне кажется, что они знают только то, что взяточником быть выгоднее, нежели честным человеком.
[...]

Вышнеvский. Глупо, мой милый! И дерзко, и глупо.

Жадов. Позвольте, дядюшка! Для чего же нас учили, для чего же в нас развивали такие понятия, которых нельзя выговорить вслух без того, чтобы вы не обвинили в глупости или дерзости?

Вышнеvский. Не знаю, кто вас там и чему учил. Мне кажется, что лучше учить делать дело и уважать старших, чем болтать вздор.³²⁵

³²⁵ Ibid., p. 48. “**Vyshnevsky** [(to Zhadov)]. My boy, you’re still at it! Still preaching your sermons. (To his wife.) Can you imagine, at the office he preaches morality to the clerks, and they, of course, don’t understand any of it, sitting there with their eyes and mouths wide open. It’s really funny! [...] **Zhadov**. [...] What’s so funny in what I say? **Vyshnevsky**. Everything, my friend. Starting with your unnecessary indecent enthusiasm and ending with your childish impractical conclusions. Believe me, any clerk knows life better than you. He knows from his own experience that it’s better to have a full stomach than to be a hungry philosopher. It’s no wonder your words seem stupid to him. **Zhadov**. But as I see it the only thing they know is that there’s more profit for a bribe-taker than an honest man. [...] **Vyshnevsky**. That’s stupid, my friend! Both insolent and stupid. **Zhadov**. But Uncle! What was their purpose in teaching us, why did they fill us with those ideas we can’t mention without you accusing us of stupidity or insolence? **Vyshnevsky**. I don’t know who taught you there or what. It does seem to me better to teach people to do their work and respect their elders than to babble nonsense” (Ostrovsky, *Profitable Position*, p. 25).

However, Zhadov is finally broken by the circumstances and comes to his uncle, apologizing for his high morals and standards, and requesting a profitable position. He is miraculously saved from his inevitable fall through a *deus ex machina*-type intervention, when criminal charges are filed against his uncle and his office is closed by the authorities. Ostrovsky wrote a moral fable that is well hidden under the mask of an anti-moral fable, since Zhadov does not choose to repent but is pushed by external forces into atoning for the sin he was about to commit.

Does Ostrovsky truly believe that life offers man nothing but a vicious circle that he is obliged to follow? Does he mean that theoretical knowledge of morality, humbleness, and piety that one gets from literature and the scriptures necessarily dooms him to poverty and life discomforts while, on the other hand, stepping away from Christian teachings leads to riches and cushioned living? Is the playwright really posing the question, Why people need education and ethics if they offer nothing but theoretical knowledge not applicable in real life? The general pessimism of *Dokhodnoe mesto* might easily suggest that Ostrovsky did, in fact, answer yes to all those questions. However, the ending of the play—Vyshnevsky being brought up on charges and having a stroke; his whole legal office being shut down; Belogubov and Yusov out of job; Zhadov coming back to his ideals of honest labor; and Polina returning to him—clearly proves that Ostrovsky was only testing his audience and, quite possibly, himself but still remained anchored to his belief that good is mightier than evil.

There are several other dramas that deal with the question of bribes and barratry, all of them involving corrupt lawyers and paralegals. Ostrovsky, as will be shown later, knew the mechanics of the Russian judicial system well enough to feel comfortable writing about it. Rispolozhensky from *Svoi ljudi — sochtemsia*, Benevolensky from *Bednaia nevesta*, Prokhor from *Staryi drug luchshe novykh dvukh*, Kisel'nikov from *Puchina*, Nikolay Shablov from *Pozdniaia liubov'*, and Chugunov from *Volki i ovtsy* are some of Ostrovsky's legal clerks susceptible to bribe-taking,

but this susceptibility is incidental and works more like a backdrop for the plot development rather than the focus of attention. Those dramas were written with a different message in mind, and as such they are discussed in other parts of this work.

Carnal desires

Lust is yet another sin that Ostrovsky does not seem to treat too severely, again with the proviso that it does not grow into something nastier. And again, just as in the case of alcoholism, the playwright appears to share Dostoevsky's opinion on the near irresistibility of physiological longings. In *Prestuplenie i nakazanie*, for example, Raskolnikov's life philosophy in general and Napoleonic theory in particular are mercilessly condemned by the writer. Dostoevsky's voice in that novel is heard not through this main character but through Sonia Marmeladova,³²⁶ a prostitute who preaches the idea of suffering and thus expiating one's sin. In *Brat'ia Karamazovy* (The Brothers Karamazov), the impetuous and romantically passionate Dimitry together with Grushenka, a woman of questionable reputation but with a solid inner core, are presented not as mortal sinners but as innocent victims entangled in a vicious web of life's cruelty and deserving compassion instead of finger-pointing, accusation, or ostracism. It is interesting that Ostrovsky, much like Dostoevsky, neither harshly criticized nor blamed his lascivious characters, whether they were male or female, married or unmarried. (He did, however, distinguish degrees of sinfulness here, with lust in single males considered least sinful and in married females, most sinful. Ostrovsky's nonjudgmental attitude may be explained in part by his own less-than-puritan behavior but mostly by his adherence to the biblical dictum: "Judge not, and ye shall not be judged" (Luke 6:37). As a true Russian Orthodox, Ostrovsky believed in what Archpriest Abramov (Abramov, interview) calls one of the cornerstone concepts of the Russian confession

³²⁶ Mikhail Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, trans. and ed. Caryl Emerson (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), p. 92.

and also its difference from the Western Christian Church: it is not a man's privilege to define the degree of gravity of a particular sin, it is strictly God's prerogative. Therefore any man-created hierarchy of sins is nothing but a human construct and, even though it has a biblical background, is interpretative and subjective.

Exhibit one in Ostrovsky's gallery of lechers is Pyotr from *Ne tak zhivi, kak khochetsia*. The main message of this drama could be summarized with Leo Tolstoy's proverbial subtitle to *Vlast' t'my*³²⁷ that was written more than a quarter of a century later: "Коготок увяз — всей птичке пропасть."³²⁸ Pyotr, a married man, is lusting after his neighbor Grusha, knowing full well that his best friend Vasya is deeply in love with her. Just as in *Dokhodnoe mesto*, Ostrovsky uses lust as a backdrop for a broader case in his study of sin; and much in the same way, lust, although definitely reprehensible, should not, in the playwright's opinion, constitute a very serious crime if it does not spawn bigger transgressions. Pyotr's main sin lies not in lusting but in lying to and hurting other people: his wife, his friend, his father, his in-laws, and even Grusha.

Pyotr's father is named Ilya, Russian for Elijah. Just as the prophet Elijah cautions the Israelites when they turn against God and begin worshiping Baal (1 Kings 18), Ilya repeatedly cautions Pyotr, trying to return him to virtuous life; and just as Elijah predicts King Ahab's punishment if he does not repent (in the parable of Naboth's vineyard; 1 Kings 21), Ilya warns his son of misfortunes that would befall him if he continues on the road of sin.

Илья. Не говори, не греши! [...] Наделают дела, не спросясь у добрых людей, а спросясь только у воли своей дурацкой, да потом и плачутся, ропщут на судьбу, грех к греху прибавляют, так и путаются в грехах-то, как в лесу.

Петр. Да что ж, батюшка, делать-то? Как еще жить-то?

Илья. Живи по закону, как люди живут.

³²⁷ Tolstoy was a great admirer of Ostrovsky (Lakshin, pp. 417–418 and 668), and it is quite feasible that *Vlast' t'my* was inspired and influenced by *Ne tak zhivi, kak khochetsia*.

³²⁸ Literally, "When the claw is caught, the whole bird is lost"; this Russian proverb means "crime breeds crime" or "small mischief leads to a bigger misdeed." A good English equivalent can be found in Herbert's *Jacula Prudentum*: "Disgraces are like cherries, one draws another" (George Herbert, *Jacula Prudentum or Outlandish Proverbs, Sentences, etc.*, in his *Poems and Proverbs* (London: Longman, Green, 1891), pp. 219–260, at p. 237).

Петр. [...] Мне что за дело, как люди живут; я живу, как мне хочется.

Илья. Известно, по своей воле легче жить, ничем по закону; да своя-то воля в пропасть ведет. Доброму одна дорога, а развращенному десять. Узкий и прискорбный путь вводит в живот, а широкий и пространный вводит в пагубу.

[...] Не для веселья мы на свете-то живем. Не под старость, а смолodu добрыми-то делами запасаются. Ты оглянись на себя: дома ты не живешь, знаешься с людьми нехорошими, жену обижашь.³²⁹

Ostrovsky's great humanism and empathy for people may be taken for a conscious attempt to exonerate them from blame for being weak and succumbing to temptations. The Russian playwright had the same opinion as far as people's judgment was concerned, but the divine justice was a different situation, where the only guiding criteria was upholding or breaking away from the biblical morality.

Илья. [...] Будет, пожил в миру, всего насмотрелся, только дурного-то больше видел, чем хорошего. С тех пор и свет увидал, как у братца в его келье живу. Вот немножко прошел по Москве, всего-то от монастыря до вас, а сколько мерзости-то видел! Народ-то словно в аду кипит: шум, гам, песни бесовские! [...] Какое житье в миру-то нынче?³³⁰

The questions that Ostrovsky raised in *Ne tak zhivi* were so engaging and the philosophical underpinnings so intriguing that twelve years after the drama was written and

³²⁹ Ostrovskii, *Ne tak zhivi, kak khochetsia*, in his *PSS*, vol. 1, pp. 319–354, at p. 322. “**Илья.** Don’t say that, it’s sinful! [...] They do things without asking good people first—they only ask their own stupid wishes; and then they weep, blame their fate, add one disgrace to another, and get lost in those disgraces as if in a thicket. **Pyotr.** So what am I supposed to do, father? How should one live? **Илья.** Live by the law, as people do. **Pyotr.** [...] Why should I care how people live? I live as I like it. **Илья.** True, it’s easier to live as you like than by the law; only your likes will lead into the abyss. A good man has but one path and a wicked one, a dozen. A narrow and sorrowful path leads to life, while a wide and spacious one leads to perdition. [...] We do not live in this world for merriment. You stock up on good deeds early in life, not when you are old. Look at yourself: you don’t live at home, you keep bad company, you hurt your wife.”

³³⁰ Ibid., p. 321. “**Илья.** [...] I’ve had enough of worldly life; I’ve seen it all—more evil than good, though. I’ve only able to see the light since I moved in with my brother at his monastic cell. Indeed, I only took a short walk through Moscow, just from the monastery to your place, and how much filth I saw! It’s as if people are burning in hell: hue and cry and devilish chanting! [...] What kind of life is there in the world nowadays?”

staged at the Maly Theatre, Alexander Serov³³¹ used it as a libretto for his opera *Vrazh'ia sila* (Devil's Power).³³²

If we look at *Vospitannitsa*, we will see that Leonid, Ulanbekova's son, is lusting after every woman he sees, regardless of her social status and station. He equally likes ladies, poor dependent protégées, and peasant girls. Being a single male and thus the least culpable, Leonid escapes punishment for spending the night with Nadya, nor does he develop a strong feeling of remorse when he witnesses the punishment that she receives the next morning. The punishment in Leonid and Nadya's case comes from Leonid's mother, who is, naturally, biased in her judgment, but it nonetheless reflects the general human tendency of assigning a bigger blame for promiscuity to the woman than the man. However, even for Nadya the penalty for yielding to her carnal desire might have been less severe had it not been for an unfortunate chain of events. Had Grisha not been drinking all night and returned home when asked; had he at least apologized in the morning for his lack of respect for Ulanbekova's instructions; had Vasilisa not been going out of her way to instill extra-puritan ideas into her benefactress's head; had Nadya demonstrated obedience instead of unnecessary bravado when caught, her punishment (forced marriage to an alcoholic, Negligentov) might have been milder.

The same remains true for *Groza*. Boris, a single male who succumbs to his passion for Katerina, a married female, displays no other sin in the course of the drama (weakness of character cannot be counted as one); thus all he gets in the end is yet another factor (Katerina's suicide) that is added to his general misery. Boris actually verbalizes his wish for Katerina's speedy death, knowing that she would not be able to fight reality for long:

³³¹ Alexander Serov (1820–71), a famous Russian composer, musicologist, and critic. As the libretto shows, Ilya's character stands out in *Devil's Power*, apparently being the focal point for the composer (Aleksandr Nikolaevich Serov, *Vrazh'ia sila: opera v 5 deistviakh* (Devil's Power: An Opera in 5 Acts) [libretto] (St. Petersburg: Balashev, 1882)).

³³² Editorial comments to *Ne tak zhivi, kak khochetsia*, in Ostrovskii, *PSS*, vol. 1, pp. 412–414, at p. 414.

Борис (*рыдая*). Ну, Бог с тобой! Только одного и надо у Бога просить, чтоб она умерла поскорее, чтоб ей не мучиться долго!³³³

Katerina is killed off by Ostrovsky; however, it is not a regular case of a writer doing away with a character. Katerina embodies faith, which is dying because people are turning away from it. *Groza* is not a symbolist drama in any way, shape, or form, and yet it definitely contains some soft and subtle, velvety symbolism. For example, the setting for Act IV of *Groza* is described as “узкая галерея со сводами старинной, начинающей разрушаться постройки; кой-где трава и кусты.”³³⁴ Paintings on its walls representing fires of hell, where “едут [...] всякого звания люди,”³³⁵ are still visible but barely so, as the whole building is falling apart after a big fire many years ago. Is this half-ruined building symbolic of the crumbling edifice of faith after the big fire of the Church Schism or an even bigger fire of materialism coming on the radar of human history? The Nicene Creed stays almost forgotten and abandoned in the second half of nineteenth century, but as soon as there is real thunder and lighting, i.e., tragedy and disaster in one’s life, people, looking for shelter, willingly run to this half-ruined building called faith, with its half-demolished roof over its crumbling gallery. Even people like Kuligin, home-grown inventors and science worshipers, i.e., typical nineteenth-century educated men who have been drawn away from faith by impressive scientific achievements and theories, run for cover in a downpour—a cover both real and symbolic. When Kuligin is looking at Katerina’s dead body fished out of the river and brought ashore, he finds shelter and consolation in a most unscientific and truly Christian belief:

³³³ Ostrovskii, *Groza*, p. 264. Although the play has been translated into English, this particular passage has some very apparent and unfortunate mistranslations that compelled me to supply my own: “**Boris** (*crying*). God bless you [Katya]. There’s only one thing left to ask God for, for her to die soon, for her not to be tormented any longer!”

³³⁴ Ostrovskii, *Groza*, p. 250. “[A] narrow vaulted gallery of an ancient building, now beginning to crumble, with weeds and bushes springing up here and there” (Ostrovsky, *Storm*, p. 62).

³³⁵ Ibid., p. 251. “[P]eople going into ’em, from all walks of life” (Ostrovsky, *Storm*, p. 62).

Кулигин. Вот вам ваша Катерина. Делайте с ней, что хотите! Тело ее здесь, возьмите его; а душа теперь не ваша; она теперь перед судьей, который милосерднее вас!³³⁶

It needs to be said that in *Groza*, Ostrovsky pointed out for the first time that physical beauty is not an asset but a liability. It almost unavoidably leads to lust and breeds other sins. At the end of Act I of *Groza*, Varvara and Katerina meet an old lady who prophesizes Katerina's tragic end after she notices her physical beauty:

Барыня. Что, красавицы? Что тут делаете? Молодцов поджидаете, кавалеров? Вам весело? Весело? Красота-то ваша вас радует? Вот красота-то куда ведет. (*Показывает на Волгу.*) Вот, вот, в самый омут. [...] Все в огне гореть будете неугасимом. Все в смоле будете кипеть неуголимой! [...] Вон, вон куда красота-то ведет.³³⁷

Never abandoning his view on beauty as a liability, Ostrovsky further reinforced it in *Grekh da beda na kogo ne zhivet*, *Voevoda*, *Ne bylo ni grosha*, *Talanty i poklonniki*, and *Krasavets-muzhchina*. This treatment of beauty is very Orthodox. A woman is not supposed to enter a church in Russia without wearing a kerchief or a shawl over her head while men are supposed to take off their hats out of respect for the establishment. The reason for the obligatory head-covering for women is that, since the beginning of days, their hair, long, lush, and lustrous, unlike that of men, was attributed with the power to entice, enchant, and enamor. In the Russian Orthodox Church, women are supposed to be humble before God and not parade their beauty, distracting men from their prayers. Ostrovsky's religious upbringing and his life convictions constantly found their ways into his pieces.

Beasley calls *Groza* a conflict of mysticism and hunger for beauty. Katerina's confession is attributed to her overstrained nerves and a general fear of thunderstorms. Her suicide is

³³⁶ Ibid., p. 267. "**Kuligin.** Here she is, here's your Katerina. Do what you will with her. Her body's here, you can take it, but her soul's no longer yours. She stands now before the judgment of one more merciful than you!" (Ostrovsky, *Storm*, p. 81).

³³⁷ Ibid., p. 224. "**Lady.** Well, well, my beauties—what's going on here? Waiting for your young men, are you, your lovers? Having a good time? High spirits? Rejoicing in your beauty, eh? Well, there's where beauty leads. (*Points to the Volga.*) Down there, yes, to the very depths! [...] You'll all burn in the eternal fires! All of you, in boiling pitch for evermore! Oh yes, that's where all your beauty leads" (Ostrovsky, *Storm*, pp. 32–33).

predetermined by Boris's refusal to take her with him. Beasley finishes with the question "What does another sin matter?" and offers a very practical and pragmatic explanation: "[B]etter suicide than this half-death" (pp. 606–608)—forgetting that, to a devout Christian, which Katerina is depicted as (praying at all-night vigils, seeing angels in the ray of light in church, shedding tears during mass, and so on), adding another sin for practical reasons is impossible. To a non-believer it might seem that Katerina's suicide was an easy way out, a merciful death and oblivion over a merciless life of perpetual suffering and atoning for her sin in the hard way. But a Christian would see a different explanation for her death: Katerina punished herself for succumbing to lust that led to an illicit affair by confessing her sin to everybody, and it was a conscious decision to leave herself no choice of repentance and, upon committing suicide, sending her sin-ridden soul straight to hell where she thought it belonged.

Everybody in *Groza* has a sin, but only Katerina is painfully aware of hers. This awareness is what ultimately pushes her to suicide, a much bigger and absolutely unforgivable sin for any Christian. From a Christian standpoint, there is a huge difference between Katerina's suicide and the murder of Tanya Krasnova in *Grekh da beda na kogo ne zhivet* or of Larisa Ogudalova in *Bespridannitsa* (Without a Dowry). All three women are guilty of the same transgression (Larisa is the only unwed one in the trio), but Katerina is certain to end up in hell, while Tanya and Larissa obtain the status of martyrs and should be regarded much more favorably on the Judgment Day. Larisa dies thanking Karandyshev, who pulled the trigger, for her deliverance.

To further prove that lust and acting on it, two stages of the same sin,³³⁸ are not overly serious transgressions, Ostrovsky writes them into *Na boikom meste*, *Na vsiakogo mudretsa dovol'no prostoty*, *Les*, *Posledniaia zhertva*, and *Bez viny vinovatye*. It is significant that in all these plays

³³⁸ "But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed. Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin [...]" (James 1:14–15).

Ostrovsky's focus remains on women and not their partners in crime. Yevgenia, Kleopatra, Gurmyzhskaya, Yulia, and Otradina/Kruchinina are guilty of carnal sins, with different aggravating circumstances. Yevgenia, a married woman, seduces Milovidov to hurt her sister-in-law Annushka; Kleopatra, also a married woman, makes advances at Glumov out of sheer boredom and vanity, fishing for proof that she is not yet old and is quite capable of turning a man's head; Gurmyzhskaya, a middle-aged widow, known for her promiscuity, throws herself at Bulanov, who is thirty or so years younger than she is, simply because her sexual desires get the better of her; Yulia, a young widow, spends all her money on Dulchin in the hope that he is going to marry her in the near future; Otradina/Kruchinina pays dearly for abandoning her son, begotten out of wedlock, with twenty years of grief over him, believing him to be dead. Although for completely different reasons, both Yevgenia and Kleopatra have their husbands' consent to their promiscuity. Gurmyzhskaya is "rewarded" with a young lover; Yulia "wises up" under the influence of her much older neighbor and marries him instead of Dulchin. With the exception of Otradina/Kruchinina, who spends years atoning for her sin with good deeds and is rewarded at the end with a reunification with her son, no punishment befalls these women (save the audience's negative attitude) in the course of the play they appear in, and the same is true for their partners.

Ostrovsky's attitude to carnal sin follows the parable of the woman taken in adultery.

Jesus went unto the mount of Olives. [...] And the scribes and Pharisees brought unto him a woman taken in adultery; and when they set her in the midst, They say unto him, Master, this woman was taken in adultery, in the very act. Now Moses in the law commanded us, that such should be stoned: but what sayest thou? This they said, tempting him, that they might have to accuse him. But Jesus stooped down, and with his finger wrote on the ground, as though he heard them not. So when they continued asking him, he lifted up himself, and said unto them, He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her. [...] And they which heard it, being convicted by their own conscience, went out one by one [...].³³⁹

³³⁹ John 8:1, 3–7 and 9.

Greed, sloth, wrath, and envy

These four deadly sins, first formulated by St. Gregory the Great in *Magna moralia in Job*,³⁴⁰ which was written in the sixth century and was further developed and reinforced by Aquinas and Dante in the thirteenth, do not get much attention from Ostrovsky. The only truly greedy characters in his entire oeuvre are Serafima in *Ne soshlis' kharakterami!* and Krutitsky in *Ne bylo ni grosba, da vdrug altyn*. They are true copies of Harpagon from Molière's *L'Avare* or the Baron from Pushkin's *Skupoi rytsar'* (The Miserly Knight). Serafima and Krutitsky obsess over every penny and readily sacrifice everything, including love and family relations, to gold, the only thing they consider valuable in life. Sloth is even more scarce in Ostrovsky's plays; the only two indolent persons in conventional understanding are Belotelova, a secondary character in *Za chem poidesh', to i naidesh' (Zhenit'ba Bal'zaminova)*, and Kuroslepov in *Goriachee serdtse*.

Overly energetic, Misha Balzaminov runs around following the scent of money for three whole plays. Each part of the trilogy is precisely the same architecturally: Balzaminov believes that he has received “a sign from above” and interprets it as an omen of good fortune. At that very moment, a matchmaker appears to inform him of a rich woman interested in making his acquaintance. Balzaminov dreams up his prosperous future but inevitably suffers a complete fiasco at the end. He is rejected first by Nichkina in *Prazdnichnyi son — do obeda*, then by Antrygina in *Svoi sobaki gryzutsia, chuzhaia ne pristavai!* (Two Is a Company, Three Is a Crowd), and finally by Raisa Pezhenova in *Za chem poidesh'*. All three women are actively trying to rope in a husband and therefore are far from slothful. Belotelova, who spends her life eating and napping, is the only one who is not actively seeking Balzaminov's or any other man's company, and Misha literally drops to her feet as if from the sky. The breakneck speed of action that Ostrovsky

³⁴⁰ *Moral Discourses on Job*, a work of over two thousand pages written by St. Gregory during his sojourn in Constantinople where he served as episcopal representative upon request of Pope Pelagius II and for which he had to abandon monastic life he much preferred (Christopher A. Hall, *Reading Scripture with the Church Fathers* (Dover Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1998), p. 126).

borrowed from *commedia dell'arte*,³⁴¹ is in sharp contrast with the unhurried laziness and fat immobility of Belotelova. And yet Ostrovsky leaves us hoping that if Misha does not mess up yet another opportunity, he will finally be able to wed a moneyed woman.

Kuroselepov from *Goriachee serdtse* is much the same way as Belotelova. Perpetually sleepy and stupefied by his inactivity, he has lost almost every connection with reality and can no longer tell if he is awake or asleep. He thinks, for example, that his clock strikes fifteen times and takes it for a sure sign that the end of the world is fast approaching.

Курослепов (*садится на крыльцо и несколько времени зевает*). И с чего это небо валилось? Так вот и валится, так вот и валится. Или это мне во сне, что ль? Вот угадай поди, что такое теперь на свете, утро или вечер?³⁴²

Neither greed nor sloth, taken in isolation, aroused enough interest in Ostrovsky. He used them both as a background in his research on money. The playwright combined greed and sloth, added his point of view on amassing and spending capital, and tried to come up with his own understanding and interpretation of the relation between people and money, which is discussed in chapter V.

Wrath and envy were two cardinal sins that Ostrovsky seemed to be immune from. As notions practically alien to the playwright, or for some other reason, they found only a negligent manifestation in his plays. Dikoy from *Groza* might be said to be susceptible to chronic fits or rage, feelings of unjustified revenge, ungrounded hatred, and unwarranted punitive desires. But Ostrovsky traces the source of such behavior and firmly plants it in vanity that, in Dikoy's

³⁴¹ Lakshin mentions that when Ostrovsky was writing his Balzaminov trilogy, traveling abroad became a new Russian pastime (p. 523). The playwright took a trip to Prussia, Austria, France, Hungary, England, and Italy (pp. 526–542). He used his stay in Italy to study not only the Italian language (which he mastered enough to translate, later in life, a fair number of Italian plays into Russian (editorial comments to the translations by Ostrovsky, in Ostrovskii, *PSS*, vol. 11, pp. 367–389, at p. 370)), but also the Italian theatre, including Goldoni (Lakshin, p. 527) and others, such as Giacometti, Ciconi, Machiavelli, Grazzini, Cossa, and Gozzi (pp. 530–531).

³⁴² Ostrovskii, *Goriachee serdtse*, p. 179. “**Курослепов** (*sits down on the porch and yawns awhile*). And why was the sky falling? So if it falls it falls. Or was I dreaming it? Just try and guess what's going on in the world—is it morning or evening?” (Ostrovsky, *Ardent Heart*, in his *Without a Dowry and Other Plays*, trans. and ed. Norman Henley (Dana Point, CA: Adris, 1997), pp. 77–143, at p. 80).

opinion, is equal to impunity. For the most part, Ostrovsky's characters are envy- and wrath-free, and whenever these two sins may be briefly spotted, they are always byproducts of another passion or phenomenon. By themselves, these two sins do not seem to attract a lot of the playwright's attention.

Vanity and god complex

They speak vanity every one with his neighbor: with flattering lips and with a double heart do they speak. The Lord shall cut off all flattering lips, and the tongue that speaketh proud things.³⁴³

Ostrovsky's understanding of vanity is tightly connected to his views on shame that were discussed in chapter III. Once a person chooses to be guided by shame rather than guilt, he or she should be pronounced vain. According to Dante and Christian theologians, vanity is the biggest deadly sin; however, according to Ostrovsky, it is surpassed in terms of seriousness by lying and should be considered the second gravest transgression. Archpriest Abramov says that, to a Russian Orthodox, lying is the equivalent of a verbal betrayal of your neighbor, of the truth, and of God, and as such is considered the gravest of all sins (Abramov, interview).

Instances where Ostrovsky offered a detailed description of a vain man are numerous and are described in chapter III. What I find truly remarkable, however, is his collection of people who are so vain that they develop a god complex that can only be justified by their imagination and their overblown self-esteem. Such a person is called *samodur* in Russian, which loosely means someone who does whatever comes into his head and considers himself the ultimate authority on everything. A *samodur* in Ostrovsky's understanding is a person who indirectly challenges God and thus becomes a transgressor of gigantic proportions. *Samodurs*, to Ostrovsky, equal the giants whose torsos Dante mistakes for towers of a great city. The giants

³⁴³ Psalms 12:2–3.

are rebels against God and therefore belong almost at the very bottom of hell.³⁴⁴ Ostrovsky's *samodurs* may be smaller physically, but their egos are just as huge.

It should be noted that the word *samodur* in Russian is strictly masculine, with no feminine equivalent, which would suggest that female *samodurs* are impossible or nonexistent.

This grammatical anomaly may be explained from a cultural standpoint:

Mid-nineteenth-century Russia remained a traditional society, and religious values continued to be a powerful force in the culture. But whereas religious values still commanded respect at all levels, as a result of the formalization and secularization of official, public life, it was primarily the powerless and humble who tried to live according to religious principles.

This was especially the case with women, for whom religion provided not only a consolation but also a source of strength. Among the qualities that Russian Orthodoxy endowed with special meaning were humility and the capacity for suffering and self-sacrifice, and people who manifested such qualities could exercise considerable moral authority. This made a religiously based feminine ideal perfectly suited to women's position in the family, for while leaving the exercise of genuine authority to the male head of the household, it granted the wife a distinct, honorable, and in many respects gratifying sphere of her own. Women derived real satisfaction from living according to the loftiest precepts of their culture, especially because in Russia individual interests remained subordinated to the family or state [...]. Therefore, while religion helped to reinforce women's subordination to men and to the family, it also elevated and sanctified women's endurance and allowed women to feel a certain moral superiority.³⁴⁵

There is certainly enough evidence in Russian literature and history to back this point of view.

Russia had enough women who were humble, highly moral, pious, and ready for self-sacrifice.

And yet there were a few female *samodurs* in pre-Ostrovsky literature and drama: Fonvizin's³⁴⁶

Mme Prostakova from *Nedorosl'* (The Minor) kept her entire household in utter submission;

Gogol's numerous dominating and despotic females, such as Oksana from *Noch' pered*

Rozhdestvom (Christmas Eve), the witch from *Viy*, and Praskovia Osipovna from *Nos* (The Nose),

had everybody around them dutifully subdued; Katerina Marmeladova from Dostoevsky's

³⁴⁴ Dante Alighieri, *The Inferno*, trans. Henry Wadsworth Longfellow (New York: Barnes and Noble Classics, 2003), pp. 161–163.

³⁴⁵ Engel, pp. 4–5.

³⁴⁶ Denis Ivanovich Fonvizin (1745–92), a famous Russian satirical writer, playwright, pamphletist, and philosopher of the Enlightenment. *The Minor*, written in 1781, was one of his most acclaimed satirical comedies.

Prestuplenie i nakazanie, pulled her husband's hair every time she was displeased with him and beat her children every time she was displeased with life. However, they are not acknowledged as *samodurs* in the criticism, nor do they enjoy a special term in the language.

If Fonvizin and Gogol portray these characters in a negative light, without looking deeply into the roots of their behavior, Ostrovsky, like Dostoevsky, probes the phenomenon of female tyranny, discovering vanity at its bottom. Unlike Dostoevsky, however, the playwright does not offer, in this case, mitigating circumstances in the form of oppressing reality. Ostrovsky's female *samodurs* are nowhere near Katerina Marmeladova, with her unbearable life and desperate situation. The playwright's female *samodurs* are uncompromising, ruthless, relentless, and remorseless, and they are actually much more potent than their male counterparts. Readers and audiences of the nineteenth century were quite used to the exposure of despotic men, and a deeper look into the psyche of a tyrannical woman was infinitely more shocking.

Ostrovsky's definition of *samodur* could be perceived as a person who has a god complex, tries to usurp the power of God over other people, but, unlike God, does not recognize their free will. Ostrovsky's first female *samodur* is Ulanbekova, an aristocrat from *Vospitannitsa*. Her little hobby is matching and marrying everybody she knows. Ulanbekova's old servant Potapych describes his mistress's quirk the following way:

Потапыч. [...] Скажут: я тебе нашла жениха, и вот, скажут, тогда-то свадьба, ну и конец, тут уж разговаривать ни одна не смей! [...] А бывает, сударь, и так, что и жених невесте не нравится, и невеста жениху, так уж тут очень гневаются. Так даже из себя выходят. Пожелали они одну воспитанницу отдать за лавочника в город, а он, человек неполированный, вздумал было сопротивляться. Мне, говорит, невеста не нравится, да я и жениться-то не хочу еще. Так в те поры и городничему жаловались, и отцу протопопу, ну и уломали дурака.

[...] Они даже и у знакомых у кого, если увидят девушку, так сейчас и ищут ей жениха. Наша барыня так рассуждают, что они глупы; если теперича над ними попечения не иметь, так они зря и проживут, без всякого порядка. Точно так,

сударь. Некоторые даже, по своей глупости, прячут девок-то от барыни, чтоб они как-нибудь на глаза не попались; потому тут им уж и конец.³⁴⁷

In dealing with his *samodurs*, Ostrovsky universally uses a proverbial rule: “Бодливой корове Бог рог не дает.”³⁴⁸ The true God stands guard against such execrable individuals, finding ways to curb their appetites and keep them in check. Ulanbekova, for example, is given a son who is an unbelievable womanizer and a constant source of grief to her as she strongly advocates chastity.

Ostrovsky's next play, *Groza*, has two *samodurs*, one male (Dikoy) and one female (Kabanikha). There the playwright finds another argument supporting his views on false-godness: if the true God evokes feelings of reverence, love, and devotion in people of faith and they follow Him willingly, false gods need to enforce their rule by fear that helps to bring people to submission. This fear comes from power, and power, according to Ostrovsky, comes from money.³⁴⁹ Dikoy and Kabanikha belong to the class of merchants, and they are no less wealthy than Ulanbekova, a noble woman. In fact, wealth is a signature of all Ostrovsky's *samodurs*, a starting point for them to develop their god complex. Vanity in this case comes second; there are no *samodurs* who are vain but poor. This is where Ostrovsky parts company with Dostoevsky, whose tyrants may be poor and may even elicit understanding and empathy. Ostrovsky's despots are not meant to arouse empathy in the audience. The playwright is very adamant about linking

³⁴⁷ Ostrovskii, *Vospitannitsa*, p. 174. “**Potapych**. [...] The lady says: ‘I have found you a prospective husband, and now,’ she says, ‘the wedding will be on such and such a day, and that’s an end to it; and don’t one of you dare to argue about it!’ [...] And sometimes it happens that the bride doesn’t like the groom, nor the groom the bride: then the lady falls into a great rage. She even goes out of her head. She took a notion to marry one protégée to a pretty shopkeeper in town; but he, an unpolished individual, was going to resist. ‘The bride doesn’t please me,’ he said, ‘and, besides, I don’t want to get married yet.’ So the mistress complained at once to the town bailiff and to the priest: well, they brought the blockhead round. [...] And even if the mistress sees a girl at one of her acquaintances’, she immediately looks up a husband for her. Our mistress reasons this way: that they are stupid; that if she doesn’t look after them closely now, they’ll just waste their life and never amount to anything. That’s the way, sir. Some people, because of their stupidity, hide girls from the mistress, so that she may never set eyes on them; because if she does, it’s all up with the girls” (Ostrovsky, *Protégée*, pp. 15–16).

³⁴⁸ “A curst cow hath short horns” (Herbert, p. 239).

³⁴⁹ For Ostrovsky's view on money, see chapter V.

money to power, and because of his distinctly negative attitude towards the former (at least with regard to *samodurs*), there is nothing good about the latter.

As the uncle of Boris and his sister, Dikoy is left in charge of the money they inherited from their grandmother. The will contains a clause that makes it impossible for Boris or his sister to get the money if they fail to show respect for their uncle. This clause completely unties Dikoy's hands, allowing him to humiliate and abuse his nephew incessantly, since he knows full well that Boris will swallow his pride and do anything to get the money he so desperately needs. Kudryash, an employee of Dikoy, offers the following quick assessment of his boss's character:

Кудряш. Кто ж ему угодит, коли у него вся жизнь основана на ругательстве? А уж пуще всего из-за денег; ни одного расчета без брани не обходится. Другой рад от своего отступить, только бы унялся. А беда, как его поутру кто-нибудь рассердит! Целый день ко всем придирается.³⁵⁰

Dikoy does not pretend to be “omnipotent” with everybody: he becomes meek and pliable when he faces people with more money and thus more power.

Борис. А вот беда-то, когда его обидит такой человек, которого он обругать не смеет; тут уж домашние держись!³⁵¹

Kabanikha's feeling of impunity comes from the realization that she is the financial head of her household, since her only son Tikhon is incredibly inept and no help to her. When Katerina tells her sister-in-law how she used to live before marriage in her parents' house, Varvara remarks that it seems basically the same as in Kabanikha's house. In response Katerina pinpoints what makes the two households polar opposites: “Да здесь всё как будто из-под неволи.”³⁵² The absence of free will would seem to render people helpless and unable to revolt against tyrants who wrongfully usurp God's functions. And this rebellion is what is supposed to

³⁵⁰ Ostrovskii, *Groza*, p. 214. “**Kudryash.** No, there's no pleasing him—it's his life's work, abusing people, especially when it comes to money. He won't settle a single bill without a fight. Quite often people are happy to give in, just to shut him up. Worst of all, is when somebody annoys him first thing in the morning—he'll pick holes in us the whole day then” (Ostrovsky, *Storm*, p. 21).

³⁵¹ Ibid., p. 215. “**Boris.** Yes, but the real trouble starts when somebody insults him. Somebody he daren't abuse. Heaven help the family then!” (Ostrovsky, *Storm*, p. 21).

³⁵² Ibid., p. 222. “Yes, but it's as if it's against your will” (Ostrovsky, *Storm*, p. 30).

be the worst punishment for *samodurs*. As a result of such a rebellion, Kabanikha loses her daughter-in-law, alienates her son, and pushes her daughter into elopement. She is bound to live the rest of her life in isolation.

Isolation, seclusion, and estrangement is what ultimately befalls all of Ostrovsky's despots: Tit Titych in *V chuzhom piru pokhmel'e* and *Tiazhebye dni* loses his son Andrey; *Voevoda's* Shalygin loses everything, including his family, women he loves, his position, and people's respect; Akhov in *Ne vse kotu Maslenitsa* not only has to part with his nephew, a superb business manager, but is also forced to say goodbye to fifteen thousand rubles, a blow all the more substantial for a money- and power-hungry individual; Meropiya Murzavetskaya in *Volki i ovtsy* has to forget about acquiring additional property and capital as well as to lose control over her relative Glafira and her neighbor Yevlampiya; Mavra Barabosheva in *Pravda — khorosho, a schast'e luchshe* has to let go of the only joy of her life, her granddaughter Poliksena.

The only *samodur* that ever wins at the end of a play is Khryukov, a rich sixty-year-old merchant in *Shutniki*. Khryukov is reformed by his love for Anna Obroshenova, a virtuous twenty-five-year-old daughter of a retired clerk. Khryukov ousts his own sons from the family house and invites Anna to live with him in sin under a facade of using her services as housekeeper. In return he offers to take care of Obroshenov's desperate financial situation.

Хрюков. [...] Ты мне понравилась. Если ты меня полюбишь, так я всему вашему семейству могу благодетелем быть. В экономки ко мне хочешь?³⁵³

When Anna firmly refuses and Obroshenov rebukes his neighbor for lack of respect and declares that their family honor is not for sale, Khryukov, upon weighing his options—losing Anna forever vs. parting with his principles—chooses to forget his prejudices and start a new life. Ostrovsky does not suggest that the despotic merchant is getting completely reformed, but

³⁵³ Ostrovskii, *Shutniki*, p. 390. “**Khryukov.** [...] (*To Anna.*) I fancy you. If you choose to love me, I could be a benefactor for your entire family. Would you be my housekeeper?”

the first step on the road towards love and sacrifice has been taken and a voluntary act of parting with money to pay Obroshenov's debts has been committed. Khryukov is not hopeless; he is not beyond salvation and might serve as a good example to other tyrants, literary or real.

Statistically, the mere fact that only one of Ostrovsky's ten³⁵⁴ *samodurs* is redeemed proves that parting with money and power is the most difficult sacrifice a person has to make, and it takes real strength in combination with a truly powerful feeling of love to forgo one's custom and resist the temptation. Vanity, as portrayed by Ostrovsky, is a grave offense against God and as such almost impossible to atone for: "Who shall ascend into the hill of the Lord? [...] He that hath clean hands, and a pure heart; who has not lifted up his soul unto vanity, nor sworn deceitfully" (Psalms 24:3–4).

Lying and language as a tool of manipulation

Rahman finds instances of deception in most of Ostrovsky's dramas (pp. 8 and 35–58) but explains its presence as the playwright's philosophical attempt to define reality and its components. Like Cox (p. 99), she links it to the dichotomy of appearances and essence (p. 59), calling it "blindness to reality" (pp. 69–93). Uniting lying and theatricality under the same umbrella of what she calls an escape into the illusory from the real (p. 127), Rahman accentuates the uncertainty of reality where nothing is what it first appears to be (p. 154).

Lying is not acknowledged by St. Gregory the Great as a deadly sin, nor does it get much attention from Aquinas. However, Dante recognizes lying and other sins that stem from it and belong to the same family—hypocrisy, forgery, seduction, false counseling, and counterfeiting—

³⁵⁴ The tenth *samodur* is Khlynov in *Goriachee serdtse*. Khlynov is only a secondary character in a secondary plot and is not deeply analyzed by Ostrovsky.

as serious transgressions that belong in the ninth circle of hell as sins of malice, i.e., sins committed with the intent of inflicting injury or harm on another.³⁵⁵

Lying as the process of saying the untruth or, in Plato's terms, saying the thing that is not,³⁵⁶ needs to be looked at from the standpoint of various language theories. An interesting illustration to Plato's view on saying the untruth as something harmful in both theological and psychological/moral ways is found in Part IV of Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels*, in a discourse on lying and false representation. Gulliver's host and master, a Houyhnhnm, does not see any reason to debate a point since there can never be any difference of opinion on anything. If a thing/notion is what it is, there is no need to talk about what it is not. God's creations have innate meanings, and to attribute a meaning that was not originally there, i.e., not God-given, is not just wrong but also harmful and inappropriate, undermining stability of human beings. The Houyhnhnm argues that

[...] the use of speech was to make us understand one another, and to receive information of facts; now if one *said the thing which was not*, these ends were defeated; because I [Gulliver] cannot properly be said to understand him; and I am so far from receiving information, that he leaves me worse than in ignorance; for I am led to believe a thing *black*, when it is *white*; and *short*, when it is *long*. And these were all the notions he had concerning that faculty of *lying*, so perfectly well understood, and so universally practised among human creatures.³⁵⁷

And later:

Neither is *reason* among them a point problematical as with us, where men can argue with plausibility on both sides of the question; but strikes you with immediate conviction; as it must needs do where it is not mingled, obscured, or discoloured by passion and interest. I remember it was with extreme difficulty that I could bring my master to understand the meaning of the word *opinion*, or how a point could be disputable; because *reason* taught us to affirm or deny, only where we are certain; and beyond our knowledge, we cannot do either. So that controversies, wranglings, disputes, and positiveness in false or dubious propositions, are evils unknown among the Houyhnhnms.³⁵⁸

³⁵⁵ Dante, pp. 154–158.

³⁵⁶ Plato, *Cratylus*, trans. Benjamin Jowett (London: Hard Press, 2006), p. 97.

³⁵⁷ Jonathan Swift, *Gulliver's Travels*, in Robert Maynard Hutchins (ed.), *Great Books of the Western World*, vol. 36 (Chicago: William Benton, 1952), pp. 1–184, at p. 146.

³⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 165.

The Houyhnhnms never lie, i.e., never say “the thing that is not,” and that is the key to their general disposition, to all their virtues and nobility of the heart. They are creatures of reason, who never try to reinvent reality and who take for granted what God provided them with. In Swift’s opinion, that is exactly what makes them benevolent, decent, comely, civil, industrious, and strong. Needless to say, after spending three years with the Houyhnhnms, Gulliver feels no inclination to return to his own land as people there appear too inferior to those remarkable horse-like creatures.

Swift’s is an idealistic approach to language, but there also exists a materialistic one. The great Swiss structuralist and linguistic theorist Ferdinand de Saussure found Plato’s (and Swift’s) idea of things having certain innate qualities reflected not only in their nature but also in their very names, absurd. Coming from Aristotle (whose knowledge of science was extensive and who may, in my opinion, be called the forefather of empiricism), who refused to accept the divine essence of truth and was looking for answers elsewhere, de Saussure believed in an arbitrary nature of language, grounding it in matter rather than the realm of the ideal.

De Saussure devoted his life to examining the structure and history of language, its social and cultural aspects, as well as its relationship with linguistic signs and speech. He regarded language as just one of the existing sign systems, although undoubtedly the most complex one. According to de Saussure, signs within any semiological system, including language, are arbitrary, i.e., they only have meaning because a community has agreed to attach a particular meaning to a particular sign.³⁵⁹ It follows therefore that there is no such thing as intrinsic meaning, so saying a thing that is not becomes not just possible but also, and mainly, a matter of choice.

³⁵⁹ Ferdinand de Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics*, trans. Wade Baskin, ed. Charles Bally et al. (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1959), p. 113.

When talking about the idealistic approach to language, it is also necessary to mention the biblical understanding of it, which was later described and explained in Walter Benjamin's language theory. Benjamin maintains that "[l]anguage communicates the linguistic being of things" and "[n]ame [...] is not only the last utterance of language but also the true call of it."³⁶⁰

According to Benjamin, the very first language belonged to God, and it was a creative language (rather than a naming or signifying one), where words created what they named. "Let there be—He made (created)—He named" (p. 322). That language was not at all human. Chapter 20 of Exodus tells of the time when God speaks through Moses to the freed Hebrews. According to that story, all the people saw and heard while God was addressing them was "the thunderings, and the lightnings, and the noise of the trumpet, and the mountain smoking" (Exodus 20:18) and that they failed to understand God's message completely, requesting that Moses speak to them in his own voice and explain the divine will using his own words. Benjamin reminds us that God created man out of earth, i.e., a material substance, and then He breathed soul into him, together with which He also breathed "life and mind and language." Human language is thus different from God's because it is half-material as God did not create man solely "from the word" (pp. 321–322).

The Adamite language, i.e., Adam's naming of God-created things, is not creative and does not conceive anything; rather, it relies upon the direct knowledge of that which it names, because it receives its guarantee directly from God. Benjamin asserts that "God made things knowable in their names. Man, however, names them according to knowledge" (p. 323). Man's language is but an imitation, mimesis, reflection of God's language, Plato's famous inferior copy of the divine truth. Human language therefore cannot be free from ambiguity and can never be

³⁶⁰ Walter Benjamin, "On Language as Such and on the Language of Man," in his *Reflections: Essays, Aphorisms, Autobiographical Writings*, trans. Edmund Jephcott, ed. Peter Demetz (New York: Schocken Books, 1986), pp. 314–322, at pp. 316 and 319.

interpreted in only one way. Consequently, lies become intrinsic to the inferior nature of human language because after Adam's Fall, the connection with divine word was severed and earthly influences became dominant.

Zohrab quotes a draft of Ostrovsky's unfinished note "Opyt volzhskogo slovaria" (On the Dictionary of the Volga Language), in which the playwright distinguishes between two processes, creation and invention:

Человек тогда творит, когда он бессознательное, послушное орудие творческих сил природы. — Сочиняет, когда комбинирует отвлечения (которых не существует). Творение продолжается. — Теперь так же творится, как творилось и прежде... [...] Почему язык хорош? Потому, что это творение, а не сочинение.³⁶¹

This view on language, as an organic part of the world and not as a man-invented system of characters, reveals Ostrovsky's idealistic rather than materialistic background. This should be enough to sever decisively any connection that the playwright is claimed to have with realism which, in turn, stems from materialism.

As I mentioned before, Ostrovsky, as any other Russian pre-avant-garde³⁶² dramatist, inherited the traditions of the Ancient Greek theatre and thus paid special attention to language in his dramas. Language as an instrument of human communication, as a powerful tool that is almost always readily accessible to man, fascinated Ostrovsky from the start. Having absorbed Plato's and Aristotle's views on language and having perused Shakespeare's study of it, the playwright chose to take a theological look at lingua, choosing content over form, the inner over the outer. He even used his characters' speech as a litmus test for distinguishing between people of shame and people of guilt, between positive and negative *dramatis personae*. The obvious demarcation line lies between those who speak the truth, i.e., whose speech corresponds to their

³⁶¹ Ostrovsky as quoted in Zohrab, p. 36. "Man creates when he acts as an instinctive and obedient instrument of the creative forces of nature.—Invents when he arranges abstractions (which do not exist). Creation goes on.— Things get created as they have been.... [...] Why is language good? Because it is a creation and not an invention."

³⁶² Following the concepts of Brecht, Russian avant-garde theatre stepped away from the Western verbal tradition and tried to incorporate the Eastern canon of the prevalence of movement and gestures.

inner feelings, and those who do not, i.e., for whom the content of their speech does not equal the form. The first group would necessarily be comprised of people of guilt while the second, of people of shame. But there is a subtler criterion for the good/bad division. For example, Mizgir from *Snegurochka* is neither an obvious villain nor an apparent hero. His character is complex and ostensibly multifaceted: he is ready to marry Kupava but falls deeply in love with Snegurochka on his wedding day and abandons his fiancée, never looking back and never considering how much he has hurt her feelings. He goes on wooing and pursuing Snegurochka, sacrificing his riches, his reputation, and even his sanity to his overwhelming love for her. Without applying the criterion of Ostrovsky's personal attitude towards language, it is difficult to place this character and even more difficult to decide whether we like the man or not. However, if we follow Ostrovsky's view on language, it is easy to see that the playwright passes judgment on Mizgir based solely on the character's attitude towards language:

Мизгирь. К чему слова! Для сердца нет указки.
Немало клятв безумных приберешь
В пылу любви, немало обещаний;
Да разве их запомнишь после? Клятвы
Цепями ты считаешь, я — словами;
Не помню их, и сердца не вяжу:
Вольно́ ему любить и разлюбить [...].³⁶³

If words are not laden with meaning, they, according to Ostrovsky, should not be uttered at all, and Mizgir suddenly appears in a very unattractive light.

Ostrovsky, whose interest in language can be traced from his very first play to his very last, started small. He avoided establishing any relationship between language, on the one hand, and lying and sin, on the other, but simply looked at speech as another modality available to man to shape, bend, and manipulate reality as he sees fit.

³⁶³ Ostrovskii, *Snegurochka*, in his *PSS*, vol. 7, pp. 7–115, at p. 55. “**Mizgir.** Who still needs words?! The heart cannot be ordered. / Great many vows one would give in love. Those crazy oaths! / Who would remember them once love is over? You think / That vows are like chains secure, I see no more than mere words in them. / Once said—forgotten. I never force my heart: / It's free to love and free to love no more [...].”

Neozhidannyi sluchai (An Unexpected Occurrence) seems to be written with a single question in mind: Who is Rozovy? Is he who he *says* he is, even when he is talking to himself, with no other person present and listening? Can he be deliberately lying to everybody—his friend, the audience, and himself—or does he suffer from a split personality? Does he solicit Druzhnin's help and moral support to rebuff Sofya's unwanted advances, or does he need his friend to help him rope her in? Both suppositions have a flaw: first, when Druzhnin shows up at Sofya's house, he has witnessed Rozovy going out of his ways to marry the woman, and there are no signs of him trying to wriggle out of their relationship; secondly, Sofya's advances turn out to be nothing more than her response to Rozovy's rather insistent courting, in which he is already well advanced and definitely needs no help from Druzhnin. At one point, Rozovy even suggests to Sofya that they should get rid of Druzhnin as if it were his friend's idea to pay her a visit and Rozovy tried hard but was not able to prevent the intrusion. So why does Rozovy keep voicing the need for his friend's help?

There is a huge difference between what both men say and why they say it. When Druzhnin pays Sofya compliments that he does not mean, he is simply following a social etiquette. He is well aware that what he is saying about her virtues is not what he means, so he is simply using language to hide the truth—the fact that he dislikes Sofya—behind the untruth. And at the end Druzhnin does come clean and tells Sofya the truth about the purpose of his visit. Rozovy, on the other hand, does not seem to have any correlation between the signifier and the signified in his speech; there is no meaning, hidden or obvious, attached to his words. He begs his friend for help that he obviously does not need and even resents, and he finds unpleasant things to say about Sofya (he even claims to be displeased with her presence in his life merely a couple of hours before proposing to her). What do his words mean? Do they mean

anything at all? Are they nothing more than Hamlet's "words, words, words"³⁶⁴? Can anyone understand another by listening to his speech, the outer manifestation of his inner thoughts and intentions? Or is it just another illustration to the parable of the Tower of Babel, when "the Lord did there confound the language of all the earth" (Genesis 11:9)?

Soon enough, Ostrovsky started looking at language as an instrument of seduction and a tool of sin. Judging by the playwright's close attention to the issue of lying and misuse of language, his aggressive dissection of language, and his open condemnation of verbal machinations in his work, Ostrovsky reserved the spot of the gravest sin for linguistic wrongdoings. A clear proof of that is found in Act III of *Grekh da beda na kogo ne zhivet*, where Lyov Krasnov suspects his grandfather Arkhip of lying about his wife's intentions to make peace with him. The harshness of Arkhip's response ("Аль ты совсем рехнулся? Врать, что ли, я стану на старости лет"³⁶⁵) derives from the fact that it is clear to Arkhip that at an age when one is preparing to meet his maker, adding such a grave sin to the burden of the prior transgressions is, to put it mildly, inadvisable.

The playwright's attitude towards deliberately falsifying the true meaning with a false form and saying the thing that is not firmly places him in the camp of idealists (supporters of Plato) and Christian writers (supporters of the biblical interpretation of lying and misuse of language). Another factor that anchors Ostrovsky to the idealistic interpretation of language is the acknowledgement of limitations of human speech. Some notions, such as love, God, faith, morality, virtue, and good and evil, simply cannot be defined using man's vocabulary and should be placed in the category of ineffable truths. These truths are impossible to express verbally without making them glib or reductive.

³⁶⁴ Shakespeare, *Hamlet, Prince of Denmark*, in his *Complete Works*, pp. 1127–1170, at p. 1140.

³⁶⁵ Ostrovskii, *Grekh da beda*, p. 288. "Have you gone mad? D'you think I'm going to lie, at my age?" (Ostrovsky, *Sin and Sorron*, in his *Plays Two*, trans. Stephen Mulrine (London: Oberon Books, 2003), pp. 307–375, at p. 356).

Голицын. Язык всего не скажет,
Что чувствует душа [...].³⁶⁶

Portraying those who are privy to the truth hidden from the majority as persons with speech impediment is a trope that can be found in world literature.³⁶⁷ Much like Moses, several Ostrovsky's characters cannot express themselves to be properly understood. They all possess the knowledge, but none of them has the means of conveying it to other people. To them, human language in general, and their vocabulary in particular, is too limited to express what they know to be right, and to others their speech seems ridiculous and incomprehensible. The original concept is that if one can say it, it is already wrong because one cannot and should not adequately verbalize the ineffable. In Ostrovsky's oeuvre, characters who are unable to put into words deep truths that they feel include Borodkin and Malomalsky from *Ne v svoi sani ne sadis'*; Mitya from *Bednost' ne porok*; Andrey from *V chuzhom piru pokhmel'e*; Minin and Grisha the holy fool from *Koz'ma Zakhar'ich Minin*; Sasha from *Shutniki*; and Gavriilo from *Goriachee serdtse*. For contrast, a person possessing this inexpressible, *a priori* knowledge, has to be paired with a smooth talker, placed next to him. Moses has his brother Aaron, who, not having listened to God himself and not fully getting the sense of what is going on, tries to bring God's will to the people (getting it all wrong while doing so). Borodkin and Malomalsky have Vikhorev and

³⁶⁶ Ostrovskii, *Dmitrii Samozvanets i Vasilii Shuiskii*, in his *PSS*, vol. 4, pp. 252–389, at p. 305. “**Golitsyn.** The language's never capable of saying / That which the soul feels [...].”

³⁶⁷ To further illustrate this point, let me look at some examples from world literature. If a higher notion gets mediated through language, which is artificially created by men, it loses its potency and even meaning. In Melville's *Billy Budd*, we find the same idea embedded in the story of a naïve and innocent sailor whose speech impediment prevents him from telling the truth when Starry Vere, ship's captain, gives him a chance to defend himself against the false accusations of John Claggart, master-at-arms. A lover of verbal portraiture, Claggart is a mirror opposite of “Baby Billy,” and the two of them create an antithesis of morals and intellect/power. Billy knows the truth but, because of his “liability to vocal impediment” (Herman Melville, *Billy Budd: Foretopman* (New York: Franklin Watts [n.d.]), p. 84), fails to deliver it to Captain Vere, while Claggart, employing his eloquence, produces a well-structured lie about Billy's mutinous nature. The abstract concept of truth does not materialize in a verbal form and is forever buried with Billy's execution.

Leo Tolstoy toyed with the same idea of the impossibility of “effing” the ineffable in his tragedy *Vlast' t'my*. Much like Moses and Billy Budd, Akim (Nikita's father in Tolstoy's drama) suffers from a speech impediment. In his heart of hearts, he has the *a priori* knowledge of what is right and what is wrong, what is God's way and His will and what is a sin, but he can never coherently express it.

Baranchevsky, whose speech is as refined as it is far from the truth; Mitya has his rival Korshunov, the ultimate manipulator who is beyond repentance and has no piety; Minin and Grisha are contrasted with Birkin and Semyonov; Andrey is placed in opposition to the landlady; Sasha is juxtaposed with Nedonoskov/Nedorostkov; and Gavril with Narkis. The sweet-talkers are portrayed as more or less similar to the biblical serpent-like creature from Genesis, as tempters and seducers capable of snaking, with their devilish ways, into the hearts of those less strong in their convictions.

Why do ye not understand my speech? even because ye cannot hear my word. Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do: he was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar, and the father of it.³⁶⁸

Characters who have considerable difficulties expressing themselves possess the knowledge of truth, and loquacious ones are only able to weave a pretty linguistic pattern without grounding it in meaning, thus saying the thing that is not. None of Ostrovsky's liars is a positive character.

In Ostrovsky's *Pozdniaia liubov'*, before Nikolay is reformed, he discusses correlation between the signifier and the signified with Lyudmila, who has always equated the form with the content:

Николай. Боже мой! (*Закрывает лицо руками.*) Вы меня любите?

Людмила. Удивительно было бы, если б я не полюбила вас.

Николай. Зачем это, зачем? По крайней мере, я себя не виню; я, кажется, не подавал вам никакого повода.

Людмила. Нет, подали. Помните, с месяц тому назад, вот здесь, у этого окна, вы поцеловали мою руку и сказали, что вы бы умерли от счастья, если б вас полюбила такая женщина, как я.

Николай. Да ведь это фразы, это та же шутка.

Людмила. А зачем вы тогда же не сказали, что шутите? Вы бы спасли меня от страданий.³⁶⁹

³⁶⁸ John 8:43–44.

³⁶⁹ Ostrovskii, *Pozdniaia liubov'*, in his *PSS*, vol. 6, pp. 307–358, at p. 327. “**Nikolay.** Oh my God! (*Hides his face in his hands.*) Are you in love with me? **Lyudmila.** It would have been surprising if I hadn't fallen in love with you. **Nikolay.** But why, why? Well, at least I am not blaming myself; I don't think I ever encouraged you. **Lyudmila.** Oh

Ostrovsky's understanding of lying, and necessarily that of language as a primary instrument of lying, was rigidly and unwaveringly negative throughout his life. Not being able to find any mitigating circumstances for liars proves that, to Ostrovsky as a true Russian Orthodox, speaking the untruth was the gravest sin.

In 1876 Ostrovsky created Platon Zybkin in *Pravda — khorosho*, a *schast'e luchshe*, who is compelled to tell the truth and nothing but the truth. After much peripetia, Platon ends up acquitted of the crime he has never committed but has been accused of, and united with the girl he loves. But the conclusion reached in *Pravda — khorosho* is that speaking the truth in the world does not work and people do not want to hear it. Platon's good fortune comes through divine providence, not as a result of his worldly endeavors.

In December of 1883, two and a half years before his death, Ostrovsky returned to analyzing what happens to a person when he speaks the truth in public. Ostrovsky's second character who never lies is Grisha Neznamov from *Bez viny vinovatye*. His uncomfortable habit of speaking the truth irritates people around him.

Коринкина. [...] А какие вещи он говорит женщинам! Невыносимо, невыносимо! Так бы вот и убила его.

Дудыкин. Обижает вас, сочиняет про вас небылицу, выдумывает? За это действительно убить следует.

Коринкина. Да положим, что и не выдумывает; пожалуй, всё это правда, что он говорит; да зачем? Кто его просит?³⁷⁰

Grisha's propensity to equate the signifier and the signified ostracizes him from society, and at the age of twenty he already finds himself an unwelcome guest at various gatherings. And yet it

yes, you did. Remember, about a month ago, right here by this window, you kissed my hand and said that you would die of happiness if a woman like me fell in love with you. **Nikolay.** But those were just words, like a joke. **Lyudmila.** Why didn't you say then that it was a joke? You would have spared me the suffering."

³⁷⁰ Ostrovskii, *Bez viny vinovatye*, vol. 9, pp. 149–219, at p. 165. "**Nina.** [About Grisha] [...] And the things he says to the women! He's quite insufferable! I could cheerfully kill him. **Dudukin.** What, does he insult you? Does he invent slanders about you? You'd certainly kill for that. **Nina.** Well, no, I suppose he does not invent things. What he says is true enough, but why does he do it? Who asked him?" (Ostrovsky, *Innocent as Charged*, in his *Four Plays*, pp. 269–352, at p. 290; in his translation, Stephen Mulrine calls Korinkina by her first name, Nina).

is this habit of saying exactly what he means that ultimately works in his favor and returns him his mother. When, at a party, Grisha proposes a toast “за матерей, которые бросают детей своих”³⁷¹ and proceeds to tell the story of his golden medallion, Kruchinina recognizes her long-lost son.

Ostrovsky always remained openly hostile to characters who say one thing and think quite another. In *Bednost' ne porok*, Mitya, Lyuba, Pelageya, Arina, Lyubim, and Anna always speak the truth while Korshunov, Masha, and Liza hide behind the language accepted by society and therefore speak the untruth. This criterion is what separates the first camp from the second, the positive characters from the negative ones.

Ostrovsky's obvious disdain for lying could be yet another reason for Katerina's death in *Groza*, adding to the complexity of the drama's content and philosophy. The woman is incapable of saying the thing that is not. But one cannot live in the world without this ability, and Katerina, doomed to never be able to find her place in society, has to perish. On the other hand, a man like Prokhor Vasyutin from *Staryi drug luchshe novykh dvukh* will live on and prosper because, as his servant Orest testifies, even though he is far from being smart and speaks nothing but nonsense to his colleagues, he knows the right (in reality, wrong and dishonest) words and how to say them when he meets with clients seeking his help in litigation. “НУЖДЫ НЕТ, ЧТО НЕ УМЕН, А НА ЭТИ ДЕЛА ТОНОК.”³⁷²

In *Koz'ma Zakhar'ich Minin*, Minin spends considerable time trying to convince people that if they open their mouth to speak at all, their speech should be truthful and, ergo, meaningful.

Минин. За веру православную стою,
Не за дурное что. Молчать нельзя мне.

³⁷¹ Ibid., p. 217. “[T]o all mothers who abandon their children” (Ostrovsky, *Innocent as Charged*, p. 350).

³⁷² Ostrovskii, *Staryi drug luchshe novykh dvukh*, in his *PSS*, vol. 2, pp. 268–314, at p. 285. “Never mind that he is not too bright; he has a knack for these things.”

Семенов. Ведь ты еще не воевода! Скажут,
Чтоб ты говорил — так говори, что хочешь;
А скажут: замолчи! — так замолчишь.

Минин. Не замолчу. На то мне дан язык,
Чтоб говорить. И говорить я буду
По улицам, на площади, в избе,
И пробуждать, как колокол воскресный,
Уснувшие сердца. Вы подождите,
Я зазвоню не так.³⁷³

If an utterance is not truthful, it will lead to all sorts of wrongdoings, the mildest of which is deliberate misleading for personal advantage. A graver degree of untruth is slander, deliberately saying the thing that is not in order to harm another human being.

Ostrovsky's gallery of victims of slander is very impressive: Dasha in *Ne tak zhivi*, Lyubimov in *Dokhodnoe mesto*,³⁷⁴ Sasha in *Shutniki*, Annushka in *Na boikom meste*, Vasya in *Goriachee serdtse*, Platon in *Pravda* — *khorosho*, Kruchinina in *Bez viny vinovatye*, and Vitaly in *Ne ot mira sego*. All of them suffer a bitter fate of the wrongfully accused, if not legally (like Vasya) then in public opinion.

Another one of the more gruesome linguistic sins is manipulating/seducing with words. In Scene V of *Dmitrii Samozvanets i Vasilii Shuiskii*, for example, Dimitry skillfully manipulates Tsarina Marfa into publicly calling him her real son. This verbal manipulation is necessary to strengthen Dimitry's position at the royal court and among the people and put a stop to rumors about his true origin. This scene strongly resembles Act I, scene 2, of Shakespeare's *Richard III*. Richard seduces Lady Anne with words so effectively that she forgives him for killing her husband Edward (whom she has not even buried yet) and agrees to become Richard's wife.³⁷⁵

³⁷³ Ostrovskii, *Koz'ma Minin* (1st version), pp. 36–37. “**Minin.** I pledge allegiance to the Russian church, / Not any other. I can't keep quiet. / **Semyonov.** You're not yet voevode. You'll speak / When you're told, and then speak freely. / But if you're ordered to shut up, you will do so. / **Minin.** I won't shut up. The Lord gave me a tongue / To speak. And speak I will / In squares, streets, and houses of people. / I'll wake up dormant hearts as church bells do. / I'll sound louder still.”

³⁷⁴ Lyubimov is a character who does not appear on stage, but his tragic story is told by Vyshnevskaya.

³⁷⁵ Shakespeare, *The Life and Death of King Richard III*, in his *Complete Works*, pp. 673–715, at pp. 675–677.

Part I, scene 5, of *Dmitrii Samozvanets* follows the Shakespearean pattern,³⁷⁶ and the only difference is that filial love is substituted for conjugal one. Both Shakespeare and Ostrovsky make sure that the audience understands that love is declared but not felt, and that the only reason for verbal seduction is the seducer's personal gain.

If Dimitry is malevolent in terms of using linguistic slalom and language manipulations, Vasily Shuysky is much worse. Ostrovsky makes certain that his audience has no doubt about it; his judgment of Shuysky is unwavering and severe. It does not matter that Shuysky is plotting to overthrow an impostor and later effectively does so; his methods are more unscrupulous than those of the impostor himself. Shuysky, in both parts of the drama, appears cunning, smart, thirsty for power, and ready to bend the truth for his personal advantage. Ostrovsky presents him as a pivotal player and the ultimate manipulator. Manipulation itself is less important to the playwright than its means. Shuysky does not manipulate with money or with power as he simply does not have enough of either. His only trusted tool is language, which he skillfully uses to achieve his goals. In Part I, scene 1, of *Dmitrii Samozvanets*, Shuysky is shown planting a seed of doubt in the minds of Deacon Osipov and a couple of Moscow merchants who will, in Part II, assist him in instigating a coup to dethrone and murder the pretender. But Shuysky's intentions are far from being selfless; Russia's fate is never his concern, and his intention never is to serve justice:

Василий Шуйский. [...] Сегодня трое, завтра будет больше,
А через месяц вся Москва — моя.
[...]
Рожденному на троне
Тяжка она — корона Мономаха!
А мне, рабу, холопу Годунова,

³⁷⁶ Ostrovsky acknowledged that he had deliberately followed the form of Pushkin's historical drama *Boris Godunov* (editorial comments to *Dmitrii Samozvanets i Vasilii Shuiskii*, in Ostrovskii, *PSS*, vol. 4, pp. 417–419, at p. 418), which, in turn, is said to follow the pattern of Shakespeare's historical dramas (editorial comments to *Boris Godunov*, in Pushkin, *PSS*, vol. 1, pp. 590–592, at p. 590). Čiževskij also writes that “Ostrovskij made use of the Shakespearian technique in Puškin's *Boris Godunov* [...]” (p. 140).

Почувствовать себя хоть раз владыкой,
Почувствовать, что между мной и Богом
Ни власти нет, ни силы! О!.. Каких же
Тревог, забот я побоюсь, какими
Крамолами во мне смутится сердце!
Решился я! Отныне каждый помысл
И каждый шаг ведут меня к престолу;
Умом, обманом, даже преступленьем
Добьюсь венца. О господи! помилуй
Нас, грешников!³⁷⁷

This lying defiles everything Shuysky says or does later. In Part I, scene 4, during Shuysky's trial, the prince's self-defense could have been called commendable and his behavior praiseworthy and exemplary, had it not been for that self-exposing soliloquy. The same is true for Part II, scene 1, where Shuysky talks the boyars out of going into battle with the Sultan of the Crimea. What could have sounded as politically sane advice becomes another exercise in manipulating the boyars and maneuvering towards his personal objective, when viewed through the lens of the soliloquy. Later, in Part II, Shuysky openly gives bad advice to his "opposition"³⁷⁸ on many occasions.

It needs to be said that only after inferring Ostrovsky's views on language and lying can one understand an important message that would otherwise remain hidden in *Dmitrii Samozvanets* behind more obvious ones (Russia, purity of faith, a lawless usurpation of the throne). Shortly before the end of Part II, the drama reveals it: only people of shame, unscrupulous in their means and ready to stoop to sin for a bigger purpose, can effectively become puppet masters

³⁷⁷ Ostrovskii, *Dmitrii Samozvanets*, pp. 268–270. “**Vasily Shuysky.** [...] Today there's three, tomorrow there'll be more, / And in a month the whole of Moscow's mine! [...] He who is born a tsar / Can hardly carry the weight of Russia's crown on his head. / But I, a slave and lackey of Boris, / Can have a chance to feel all high and mighty, / Erase the distance between me and God, / And match Him in omnipotence and power. / So do you think I'll fear extra work / And extra lies, as burden on my heart? / I'm resolved! From now on, all thoughts / And every step will lead me to the crown. / By cleverness, untruth, and even crime / I'll make the throne my own.”

³⁷⁸ The word *opposition* can only be used in quotation marks because, until the very last scene in Part II, Shuysky pretends to be honestly supporting and serving False Dimitry and his followers, and although the audience knows that Shuysky is plotting a coup behind the tsar's back, the ruler himself is lulled into a false sense of security with regard to the prince's actions and intentions.

and twist reality to suit their personal needs. Dimitry and Shuysky effectively manage to pull the right strings in order to advance their goals of coming to power.

The same theme of linguistic machinations appears again in *Tushino*, when boyars and nobles with their children pledge allegiance to one tsar in daytime, knowing full well that they will run to the opposite camp at night and pledge allegiance there. If words are not burdened with meaning, one can swear an oath of loyalty and fidelity as many times as he wants to different causes and persons.

In Act II, scene 5, of *Posledniaia zhertva*, Yulia displays mastery of linguistic tricks when, upon Dulchin's request, she tries to outsmart Flor and borrow money from him for her lover. She starts with an obvious lie, pretending to want to sell her house. She proceeds to persuade, beg, and command Flor to lend her the money; she appeals to his masculinity and openly flirts; she sheds tears, trying to invoke his pity and soften his resolve not to give her a penny. She then resorts to half-truth, admitting that the money is needed for Dulchin and promising that it will be absolutely the last time that she is giving it to him as she will marry him next week. She proceeds to fall on her knees and plead Flor to show mercy and not to be the cause of her death. Finally she threatens to curse Flor; this tactic works on him, and he gives her the six thousand she was asking for.

In describing *Talanty i poklonniki*, Kaspin notes that although this piece is called a comedy, it simply "presents little of the comic, and even that concerns only a few episodic characters." Kaspin maintains that Ostrovsky's "curious" (by modern standards) classification of plays seems to have been influenced by Belinsky's definition of the genre, who "characterized comedy as dealing with 'the prose of daily life, its triviality, its accidental character' as opposed to tragedy, which 'concentrates within the narrow circle of its action only the exalted, poetic moments in the life of the hero'" ("Character and Conflict," p. 28). Without disputing Kaspin's

explanation of Ostrovsky's genre divisions, let me add that it seems fitting to employ Apollon Grigoryev's idea of humbleness as applied by him to Ostrovsky's writing. This humbleness must have never allowed the writer to consider his own creations exalting, poetic, or heroic. As a true Russian Orthodox, Ostrovsky felt obliged to wait for others to find exaltation, poeticism, and heroism in his writing instead of announcing their presence himself.

Mildon believes that Russian classical comedy from Fonvizin to Chekhov has distinctly unique features that are absent from both Ancient Greek and European comedy. Russian comedy, according to him, is "едва ли не трагичнее трагедии."³⁷⁹ He also quotes a famous sentence from a letter by Odoevsky³⁸⁰:

Читал ли ты комедию или, лучше, *трагедию* Островского «Свои люди — сочтемся», и которой настоящее название есть «Банкрот»? [...] Я считаю на Руси три *трагедии*: «Недоросль», «Горе от ума», «Ревизор». На «Банкроте» я ставлю номер четвертый.³⁸¹

Mildon insists that Bolshov from *Svoi ljudi* — *sobchtemsia* should be compared with King Lear from Shakespeare's tragedy (p. 32). He also insists that the tragedy–comedy ratio in Ostrovsky's *Svoi ljudi* is the same as in Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice*. He believes that even though comedic elements are abundant in both pieces, the tragic fate of its characters, Bolshov and Shylock respectively, firmly places both dramas in the category of tragedies (p. 38). What Mildon calls the tragedy–comedy ratio, I call the form and the content. Comedy was a preferred dramatic genre to Ostrovsky because its attractive form effectively masked the more serious content and safeguarded deep philosophical issues, keeping them intact for those who were interested in digging them out to inspect closely. The attractive wrapper, the sugar coating, was

³⁷⁹ Mil'don, *Filosofia*, pp. 30–31. "Russian comedy is almost more tragic than tragedy."

³⁸⁰ See footnote 47.

³⁸¹ Mil'don, *Filosofia*, p. 32. "Have you read Ostrovsky's comedy, or rather *tragedy*, *It's a Family Affair—We'll Settle it Ourselves*, whose real title should be *The Bankrupt*? [...] I count three *tragedies* in Russia, *The Minor*, *Woe from Wit*, and *The Inspector General*. I am assigning the number four to *The Bankrupt*."

needed to entice the people of the audience, amuse and please them aesthetically, so that they would remain receptive to underlying arguments.

Volki i ovtsy is a comedy that deals with using language in order to give an appearance of faith. “If any man among you seem to be religious, and bridleth not his tongue, but deceiveth his own heart, this man’s religion is vain” (James 1:26). Meropiya loudly announces that she gives money to charity and distributes alms, leading a modest, pious, and simple life. She even wrings a thousand rubles out of gullible Yevlampiya, allegedly to help the poor. Half of this sum is immediately spent to pay what Meropiya owes her house painter, carpenter, and the like; the other half also goes to anything but alms. Lying, according to Ostrovsky, is bad enough as it is, but lying about something as sacred as faith is doubly the sin. At the end of the play, Meropiya is faced with the utter destruction of all her plans and is very grateful to Berkutov when she is allowed to avoid imprisonment.

Possessing a profound knowledge of the scriptures and having the deepest respect for them, Ostrovsky scrutinized the notion of sin in Russian Orthodoxy. Christian theologians, including Jerome, Augustine, Athanasius, Gregory of Nazianzus, Gregory the Great, and Basil the Great, agree that all sins are divided into those against God and those against neighbor. Unlike Dante, who examined both types of sin in *The Inferno*, Ostrovsky mostly looked at the latter category, and he seemed to distinguish within it various degrees of gravity depending on how much the wrongdoing affected the neighbor. This is why bribery, for example, was treated lighter than in the West. To a Russian Orthodox, if it remains strictly voluntary, without crossing the line into extortion, and balances on the fine line of free will, without toppling over, it might be looked at as the giver’s individual choice. Vanity and lying, on the other hand, cause the largest amount of harm to another human being and thus should be regarded as much more serious transgressions. False piety and lying about one’s faith are by far the worst offenses

because they are, in Ostrovsky's opinion, the only sin that combines a transgression against neighbor with that against God. Nothing defiles a man more than putting on a false facade of piety and faith, hiding his evil deeds behind regular mass attendances and prayers. "[...] Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh. For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other; so that ye cannot do the things that ye would" (Galatians 5:16–17).

CHAPTER V ON MONEY: BLESSED AND UNBLESSED RICHES

According to Archpriest Abramov, Russian Orthodoxy distinguishes between two types of riches: “праведное и неправедное богатство.”³⁸² Stemming from the postulate that “the Lord thy God [...] giveth thee power to get wealth, that he may establish his covenant” (Deuteronomy 8:18), all wealth is divided into that which is used to help the needy (“He that had gathered much had nothing over; and he that had gathered little had no lack” (2 Corinthians 8:15)) and that which is amassed for personal enjoyment (“He that loveth silver shall not be satisfied with silver; nor he that loveth abundance with increase: this is also vanity” (Ecclesiastes 5:10)). The first type is labeled blessed, while the second one is unblessed and potentially even sinful as it might lead to various wrongdoings: “But they that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is the root of all evil [...]” (1 Timothy 6:9–10). As a true Russian Orthodox, Ostrovsky incorporated the Church’s doctrine on money in his dramas, always applying it to specific everyday situations.

Money, or rather lack thereof, was always an issue for Ostrovsky:

It has been suggested that the unfortunate circumstances of Ostrovsky’s life, which left him more or less permanently short of money, increased his sensitiveness to this particular side of life. [...] Money [...] is the motive for actions in a number of the plays.³⁸³

In May 1843, the twenty-year-old playwright decided against getting a university degree and quit before his last year of education was completed, to devote more time to the Maly Theatre, his biggest passion in life, where he “studied” Shakespeare, Molière, Schiller, Sheridan, Gogol, Griboedov, and other great playwrights. After that there was never a day when Ostrovsky would not experience financial difficulties. On September 19, 1843, having heard many bitter

³⁸² Abramov, interview. “Blessed and unblessed riches.”

³⁸³ Beasley, p. 610.

reproaches from his father for being a parasite who was not earning his own and squandering family money on theatre outings (Lakshin, p. 78), Ostrovsky took a clerk's position at a Moscow court.

The lowest echelons of court employees were not paid salaries. They had some monetary remuneration if their bosses found them worthy, capable, and eager. Low-ranking court officials in nineteenth-century Russia were supposed to live on bribes and bonuses received for zeal and assiduity (Lakshin, pp. 84–85). Ostrovsky was neither zealous in his work nor cut out for caviling or bribe-taking, and consequently he was always struggling. Agafya Ivanovna, Ostrovsky's common-law wife since 1849, was good at home economics, but with two babies that they had by 1850, no amount of frugality could save them from poverty. At the age of twenty-four, in 1847, he had his first publication of *Semeinaia kartina*; in March 1850, he became an editor at the *Moskvityanin*³⁸⁴; and in the beginning of 1851, Ostrovsky quit his court job and fully devoted himself to a career in playwriting. Fame is a fickle friend, here one day and gone the next, but even on his better days, when his publications came out or his editorial salary was due, Ostrovsky experienced acute financial difficulties because Pogodin, the *Moskvityanin*'s owner and editor-in-chief,³⁸⁵ was stingy and reluctant to part with his money even to pay his writers and editors.

Between July 1850 and December 1855, Ostrovsky wrote fifty-four letters to Pogodin. Out of those fifty-four, twenty-eight ask, beg, and plead for money.

Михайло Петрович! Я в крайности, в какой не дай Бог быть никому. Если Вы считаете для себя обязательным то условие, которое было между нами, то Вы мне должны 75 руб. сер., которые мне завтра неотразимо нужны [...].

Михайло Петрович! Наступает время холодное, ни шубы, ничего теплого у меня нет. Я простудился в среду, когда ехал от Вас в холодном пальто. Пришлите денег, ради Бога [...].

³⁸⁴ See footnote 169.

³⁸⁵ These letters can be found in Ostrovskii, *PSS*, vol. 14.

Михайло Петрович! Ради Бога, пришлите денег, крайность необыкновенная. У Вас теперь есть деньги, и главной причины к отказу, т. е. неимения, нет, а все остальные причины должны сконфузиться перед моей нуждой.³⁸⁶

Ostrovsky wrote a number of articles where he pointed out that if Russian theatre was aiming higher and sought improvement, one of the factors that needed to be considered was providing an incentive to playwrights in the form of much more substantial monetary remuneration. In quite a few of his articles,³⁸⁷ he insisted that until theatre administrations started offering bigger salaries to playwrights, the level of dramatic performances would continue leaving much to be desired. Poverty was an ever-present issue for Ostrovsky:

Я не завидую французским драматургам, составившим огромные состояния и получающим за свои комедии ордена Почетного легиона, я знаю, что при нашем положении это невозможно, я не мечтаю даже оставить что-нибудь детям, я только всей усталой душой моей жажду освободиться от постоянной заботы о насущном хлебе, освободиться от торопливой, срочной работы, насилюющей и убивающей талант. Вся беда моя в том, что я никогда не уверен, буду ли я сыт завтра!³⁸⁸

By the time Agafya Ivanovna died (none of the children survived her), Ostrovsky had become well established in the theatre world, which meant steadier income. But his marriage to Maria Bakhmetyeva that quickly followed, and the six children that they had by 1877, further strained the playwright financially. It is little wonder that money was a recurrent theme in most

³⁸⁶ Ostrovsky to M. P. Pogodin, letters of 21 September 1851, 2 November 1851, and 11 January 1852, *ibid.*, pp. 26–27 (at p. 26), p. 27, and pp. 28–29, respectively. “Mikhailo Petrovich! I am in dire straits that, by God, I do not wish upon anyone. If you consider the arrangement between us binding, then you owe me 75 rubles in silver, which I will desperately need tomorrow [...]” “Mikhailo Petrovich! The cold season is approaching, and I have neither a winter coat nor anything else warm to wear. I caught a cold on Wednesday when I was riding from your place in a light coat. For God’s sake, send some money [...]” “Mikhailo Petrovich! For God’s sake, send some money; I’m in desperate need. You have the money now so that the main reason to refuse me, i.e., lack of the money, is obviated; and any other reason should shy away before my need.”

³⁸⁷ Ostrovskii, “O polozhenii dramaticheskogo pisatel’ia” (On the Plight of a Dramatic Writer), “Ob’asnitel’naia zapiska k Ustavu Russkogo dramaticheskogo obshchestva” (An Explanatory Note to the Statute of the Russian Dramatist Society), and “O Polozhenii 13 noiabria 1827 goda” (On the Regulation of November 13, 1837), in his *PSS*, vol. 12, pp. 63–78, 79–80, and 81–84, respectively; and (already quoted above) “O prichinakh upadka.”

³⁸⁸ Ostrovskii, “O polozhenii dramaticheskogo pisatel’ia,” pp. 76–77. “I am not envious of French dramatists, who have made huge fortunes and who are awarded *Ordres de la Légion d’honneur* for their comedies; I know that in our situation it is impossible; I do not even dream of leaving something to my children; I only yearn, with all of my ever-so-tired soul, to be free from constant worries about my daily bread, to be free from hurried and pressing work that violates and kills talent. My trouble is that I am never sure whether I’ll have enough food on my table tomorrow!”

of his plays, and even in those where it was not directly mentioned, e.g., in *Ne tak zhivi, kak khochetsia*, the issue was raised indirectly. Ostrovsky carefully traced the influence of money on every aspect of man's life. Following the Christian notion that every man is born a sinner and therefore easily succumbs to temptation, the playwright's predominant view on money was that this invention of people had long outgrown its useful purpose and turned against them, having become mankind's solitary ruler, a self-serving evil that spread like cancer if not counterbalanced by faith. According to Ostrovsky, people subjugated by money obediently threw their love, friendship, family, and moral values to the hooves of the high and mighty Golden Calf.

“And he said unto them, Take heed, and beware of covetousness: for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth” (Luke 12:14). Yet this “abundance of things” happened to be what the majority of people seemed to crave the most, especially with faith losing more and more ground to materialism that kept pressing on. Condemning descriptions of man as a slave of gold had been a popular theatre topic since medieval morality plays, and all of Ostrovsky's theatre mentors tackled it one way or another.

In his plays and articles, Ostrovsky scrutinized the role of gold in society. The conquering march of materialism and atheism over Europe, Marx's articles on political economy that spread like forest fire, and Chernyshevsky's economic pamphlet *Chto delat'?*, which became popular almost overnight in Russia, help explain the severe scrutiny with which the playwright looked at the money issue from every possible angle, as if with a magnifying glass. For nearly forty years of his play-writing, he was preoccupied with money-related questions that he asked himself and the audience: What happens when people need money but do not have it? when they need it and get it? when they have it but do not need it? when they neither have it nor need it?

Since the times of Moses and Aaron, people had a choice to either follow the true but unseen God or worship a man-made one that is shiny and bright and clearly visible on a pedestal made for it. The warning that “[n]o man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon” (Matthew 6:24), and the physical presence of the Golden Calf vs. the material absence of God have always made it much more difficult for them to make the right choice. People’s voluntary enslavement to gold is naturally related to their choice of shame over guilt, as it claims the preference of the outer over the inner.

When expressing his view on money, Ostrovsky proceeded from two mutually exclusive starting points, creating a binary opposition, a device that he used so abundantly and effectively in his career. One of them obviously came from the Bible, which states that “[i]t is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God” (Mark 10:25). This idealistic viewpoint was, more often than not, challenged by the question of how it was possible to survive in the world without at least trying to acquire some wealth. The same old question of the split in human nature was examined vis-à-vis people’s attitude towards gold. Speaking from personal experience, Ostrovsky drew a very down-to-earth picture of people who, even though they might abhor money as evil and loathe their dependence on it, failed to shake off the longing for it even for a second.

Bednaia nevesta is one of Ostrovsky’s signature comedies: it is a comedy in that it has a comedic element and ends with a wedding, but it should otherwise qualify as a tragedy, having five acts and containing tears, trouble, distress, misery, dipsomania, and even a faint. Masha (the bride) weeps lamenting her poor fate, and Dunya, with whom Benevolensky (the groom) had lived for five years before he decided to marry Masha, sheds tears because she feels used and abandoned. Masha’s case in court is lost; her family house is taken away from her; Benevolensky,

whom she absolutely hates, has one foot in jail already for his illegal practices; Ivan Milashin, who is in love with Masha but too poor to propose to her, is miserable; Misha Khorkov, who has always wanted to marry Masha and lost her to Benevolensky, is sad, as is his mother, who takes her son's misfortune close to heart; Masha's mother Anna is unhappy because the condition on which she agreed to let her daughter marry Benevolensky—his promise to save their family house—is not fulfilled and the house is gone. The only person who is relatively happy at the end of play is Benevolensky, who got himself a beautiful wife whom he promises to treat like a shiny new trophy.

The true essence of the play, the factor that subverts the comedy and turns it into a tragedy, is money—an invisible, albeit omnipotent, character in *Bednaia nevesta* and one that is clearly divorced from morality. People in the play are judged not by their good deeds, thoughts, or intentions but by the absence or presence of funds. Those who have money are powerful; those who do not are powerless. Since money is the solitary ruler in the play, everything is subservient to it, measured and judged by it. Masha is a young woman of exceptional beauty, but that only means that she has a bigger monetary value than other girls of her age and station. Beauty in a world ruled by gold has a price and is for sale like any other commodity.

Another thread in Ostrovsky's discourse on money may be best expressed in the famous words of Captain Shotover, Bernard Shaw's character from *Heartbreak House*³⁸⁹: "Money is not made in the light."³⁹⁰ To Ostrovsky it means that fortunes cannot be made by honest means, that big capitals are solely a result of some illicit or immoral act that should better stay hidden from the rest of the world. When Anna points out that Benevolensky is well-to-do and thus is a much better candidate to become Masha's husband, Milashin exclaims:

³⁸⁹ The drama was written in 1913–16.

³⁹⁰ Bernard Shaw, *Heartbreak House*, in his *Complete Plays with Prefaces*, 6 vols. (New York: Dodd, Mead, 1963), vol. I, pp. 447–597, at p. 530.

Милашин. Состояние! А где взял он это состояние, спросить надобно. У нас совесть есть, оттого и состояния нет. Состояние нажить немудрено.³⁹¹

Ostrovsky stresses that although everybody knows that Benevolensky's money was amassed by unscrupulous means, they neither judge him nor shy away from him. On the contrary, he is believed by many to be a real catch, and young girls and their mothers, especially those financially less fortunate, are after him. When society passes judgment according to outer factors, appearances rather than essence, shame-driven individuals prevail over guilt-ridden ones and the comedy of life turns into a tragedy.

In *Bednaia nevesta*, Masha's unhappiness is caused by the absence of money. In *V chuzhom piru pokhmel'e*, Andrey has money but is unhappy still. Andrey is in love with Liza Ivanova, a poor but proud girl, and his father is very much against this relationship. Andrey's money is definitely enough to buy him some education. However, he prefers to borrow books from the Ivanovs, and this gets him Liza's time and attention but does not buy him happiness. At the end of the play, his father decides to give him a considerable sum, one hundred and fifty thousand rubles, so that Andrey could be financially independent and free to marry Liza. The play ends with Andrey rushing to propose. As we find out in *Tiazhelye dni*, a play written eight years after *V chuzhom piru*, Andrey never married Liza. Whether it was because the money was not enough or for another reason, we can only guess.

In *V chuzhom piru pokhmel'e*, Ostrovsky once again separates money and morality. Liza's father Ivan Ksenofontovich is poor, but that allows him to stay moral and resist the temptation of gold. As accepting one thousand rubles that Andrey's father paid for his son's marriage contract and now wants back will taint Liza's honor, he proudly returns the money, choosing his family's unblemished reputation over comfortable living. Tit Bruskov, on the other hand, is

³⁹¹ Ostrovskii, *Bednaia nevesta*, in his *PSS*, vol. 1, pp. 134–220, at p. 203. “**Milashin.** A fortune! And where he got this fortune is a question worth asking. We have conscience, so we have no fortune. It's not that hard to make a fortune.”

portrayed as a person intoxicated with his prosperity and resulting weight in society. Money has made him powerful, and he is drinking in his own impunity and omnipotence.

Тит Титыч. [...] Смеет меня кто обидеть?

Настасья Панкратьевна. Никто, батюшка [...], не смеет вас обидеть. Вы сами всякого обидите.

Тит Титыч. Я обижу, я и помилую, а то деньгами заплачу. Я за это много денег заплатил на своем веку.³⁹²

Ostrovsky once again warns against attaching a monetary value to immaterial, intangible, and ineffable things. If Masha's beauty in *Bednaia nevesta* is a price-raising factor, female unattractiveness in *V chuzhom piru* means that the girl's parents need to amass and announce a handsome dowry to attract a man who will be willing to marry their plain-looking daughter. This commercialization of people's lives, bringing everything in life, including higher values (such as art, beauty, love, respect, and friendship), to a single and very material denominator, i.e., money, is of course the central observation in Karl Marx's economics, one that separated the materialistic *Shestidesyatniki* from the idealistic thinkers in nineteenth-century Russia. Money, according to Marx,³⁹³ is a universal equivalent, a mediator between a man and his passions; therefore there is very little, if anything at all, that gold cannot buy. Siding with Ostrovsky, for whom, as a true Christian, this logic must have been alien, Leo Tolstoy also openly condemned materialization of the immaterial values. In *Chto takoe iskusstvo?*, for example, he states that attaching a price tag to an artist's calling invariably kills the high art of the content, replacing it with the consumer-oriented art of the form.³⁹⁴ A destruction of the content for the sake of the

³⁹² Ostrovskii, *V chuzhom piru pokhmel'e*, ibid., vol. 2, pp. 7–38, at p. 31. “**Тит Титыч.** [...] Does anybody dare hurt me? **Настасья Панкратьевна.** Nobody, sir [...], will dare hurt you. You can hurt anyone yourself. **Тит Титыч.** I'll hurt and I'll pardon, or I'll pay them off. I've spent a lot of money on pay-offs in my life.”

³⁹³ As follows from part 3 of chapter I, as well as chapters II and III, of his *Das Kapital* (Karl Marx, *Kapital: kritika politicheskoi ekonomii* (Capital: A Critique of Political Economy), ed. Friedrich Engels, Russian translation, 3 vols. (Moscow: Politizdat, 1967–70), vol. I, pp. 79–156).

³⁹⁴ Lev Nikolaevich Tolstoi, *Chto takoe iskusstvo?* (What Is Art?), in his *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii* (Complete Works), vol. XIX (Moscow: Sytin, 1913), pp. 77–78.

form is what Ostrovsky considered to lie at the core of the chase for riches and what he blamed the Golden Calf for.

Ostrovsky, like many other representatives of the Russian intelligentsia, struggled to balance his literary vocation with his everyday needs. He had a lot to say to his audiences, but if plays got banned from publishing or staging, no money was coming in to support him and his family. Longing for riches was hardly a factor for the playwright in his private life—striving for some financial stability so that he could feed his family seems a more accurate description. Constantly balancing between his own material needs (which depended on whether or not his plays were published and/or picked up for staging) and his vocation as a Christian writer, Ostrovsky seemed to be preoccupied with the same set of questions all his life: How much could one compromise without mutilating the artistic idea and message of a play? Where does one draw the line separating truth from necessity? Can one sacrifice his convictions, honor, reputation, and good name for a little bit of money and life comfort? Can one sell his talent short?

The Balzaminov trilogy offers a bird's-eye view on money, from the position of economics. The dominant pre-Marxist economic theory³⁹⁵ belonged to Adam Smith,³⁹⁶ who correlated the amount of commodities present in a state with its level of prosperity. If, according to Smith, this amount surpassed the consumption needs of the same state and allowed it to sell the commodities abroad, then the state got richer. If the state had to buy commodities elsewhere, it got poorer. Smith's theory was so popular that it was even described in Chapter I of Pushkin's *Eugene Onegin*:

Бранил Гомера, Феокрита,
Зато читал Адама Смита,

³⁹⁵ Economic issues have been clarified and economic theories commented on by Dmitry Sapsay, a United Nations economic analyst with concentration in Russian economy.

³⁹⁶ Adam Smith (1723–90), a famous British economist and founder of the classical school of political economy.

И был глубокий эконо́м,
То есть умел судить о том,
Как государство богатеет,
И чем живет, и почему
Не нужно золота ему,
Когда *простой продукт* имеет.³⁹⁷

A nation's economy was pronounced healthy if it produced enough simple product, or commodities, to cover its own needs and sell the surplus abroad. By extension, on a smaller scale, a person who produced enough goods to take care of his own necessities and had something extra to sell for profit was doing fine. He was said to be *earning* money. The *invisible hand*, a term that Smith came up with, meant that those who *earned* a profit seeking individual wealth were also helping society, working towards common good. On the other hand, one who produced nothing, did not contribute to the economic growth of his country or community, lived off somebody else's capital, and did nothing but spend was said to be *squandering* money and deserved little respect. In Russian, the verbs *nažhivat'* and *prozhivat'* ("to earn" and "to squander") have a minimal difference in form, which appears only in the prefix, but a gigantic one in content, especially if one applies Smith's economic theory to them. The first verb, for Smith's supporters, has a positive connotation while the second, an unmistakably negative one. On top of it, the verbs presuppose a certain moral judgment of a person. If he earns, he is useful and good; if he squanders, parasitic and bad. If one were to correlate economics as a science with religion, Smith's theory would be considered infinitely closer to Christian ideas than that of Marx. Earning enough money to help (directly or indirectly) thy neighbors arguably imbues economics with morality issues, while bringing life's higher values (including moral ones) down to their common denominator of money looks like deprecation of everything righteous, honorable, sacred, and ethical.

³⁹⁷ Pushkin, *Engenii Onegin*, p. 347. "He cursed Theocritus and Homer, / in Adam Smith was his diploma; / our deep economist had got / the gift of recognizing what / a nation's wealth is, what augments it, / and how a country lives, and why / it needs no gold if a supply / of *simple product* supplements it" (Pushkin, *Eugene Onegin*, p. 16).

Ostrovsky's contemporary, Pavel Tretyakov,³⁹⁸ a merchant who worked hard so that he could put together a collection of sculptures and paintings and donate it to his country in 1892, was also a supporter of Smith's theory. In his own words, "С юных лет моя мысль была: наживать, чтоб нажитое от общества вернулось бы также обществу, народу. Мысль эта не покидала меня никогда."³⁹⁹ Ostrovsky, never convinced by Marx, shared the same views on earning and squandering as Tretyakov did, grounding his judgment in Smith's theory.

Ostrovsky's Balzaminov trilogy is a great illustration of earning vs. squandering. All of the three plays focus on useful merchants, who amass capital, and useless noblemen, who squander it if they manage to marry into a merchant family. The *invisible hand* that the merchants offer their nation by pushing its economy forward is threatened to be broken by the nobility that produces nothing but is very pretentious and lavish in its expensive tastes. The trilogy falls into the first period of Ostrovsky's guilt/shame exploration, when he was adamant about depicting his merchants as hard-working and progressive because they helped society to advance. The nobility, on the other hand, did not yet impress the playwright with any of its good qualities.

Misha Balzaminov, the main character of the trilogy, is an aristocrat whom Ostrovsky portrays as lazy, dumb, and superfluous. Even his mother is less than happy with him:

Бальзаминова. Всё у тебя глупости на уме.

Бальзаминов. Какие же глупости?

Бальзаминова. Разумеется, глупости. Разве хорошо? Растреплешь себе волосы, да и пойдешь мимо богатых купцов под окнами ходить.

[...] Незачем шататься-то.

Бальзаминов. Как незачем? Разве лучше в бедности-то жить! Ну, я год прохожу, ну два, ну три, ну пять [...], зато вдруг...

Бальзаминова. Лучше бы ты служил хорошенько.

³⁹⁸ Pavel Tretyakov (1832–98), a philanthropist, collector, and patron of arts, founded the Tretyakov Gallery, a famous art museum in Moscow.

³⁹⁹ Aleksandra Mikhailovna Pistunova, "Pavel Tret'iakov," *Russkii iazyk za rubezhom*, no. 1 (1982), pp. 111–113, at p. 112. "From my youth, my goal was to earn, so that what I have earned from the society, should return to the society, to the people. This idea never left me."

Бальзаминов. Что служить-то! Много ли я выслужу? А тут вдруг зацепишь
миллион.⁴⁰⁰

Balzaminov is contrasted with Neuyedenov, a merchant who, in the play, expresses views similar to Smith's economic doctrine. Neuyedenov openly proclaims that squandering money leads to sin as it feeds vanity. He also labels squandering as robbing the society.⁴⁰¹ In Act III, when Neuyedenov, protecting the family money, is trying to size up Balzaminov to see if he is worthy of his sister, he appears opinionated and merciless but nonetheless justified in his assessment of people like Balzaminov:

Неуеденов. [...] А в нашем, в купеческом деле — деньги важная вещь.
[...]

Бальзаминов. Деньги всякому приятно иметь-с.

Неуеденов. Никому, сударь, и не запрещается. Кому приятно иметь, тот
наживи.

Бальзаминова. Трудно наживать-то по нынешним временам.

Бальзаминов. Особенно если человек со вкусом-с, просто должен страдать.
Хочется жить прилично, а способов никаких нет-с. Вот хотя бы я...

Неуеденов. Зачем же жить-то прилично такому человеку, который не имеет
способов деньги достать?

Бальзаминова. А коли человек не имеет способностей ни к службе, ни к чему,
коли Бог не дал, чем же он виноват?

[...]

Неуеденов. А по-моему — такому человеку, который не умеет достать ничего,
не то что в богатстве жить, а и вовсе жить незачем.⁴⁰²

In *Svoi sobaki gryzutsia, chuzhaia ne pristavai!*, Balzaminov persists in his attempts to get
money the easy way, only to be able to start squandering. He pronounces money dust under his

⁴⁰⁰ Ostrovskii, *Prazdnichnyi son*, p. 113. "**Balzaminova.** You have nothing but follies on your mind. **Balzaminov.** What do you mean, follies? **Balzaminova.** Definitely follies. Do you think it's good? You dishevel your hair and parade yourself before the windows of rich merchants. [...] Loafing will get you nowhere. **Balzaminov.** What do you mean, nowhere? Is it maybe better to live in poverty? So I'll stroll up and down for a year or maybe two or three or five [...] and then one day.... **Balzaminova.** I would rather you distinguish yourself in service. **Balzaminov.** What use is my service? How much good d'you think will come out of it? And here you get a chance to rake in a million."

⁴⁰¹ Ibid., p. 139.

⁴⁰² Ibid., p. 137. "**Neuyedenov.** [...] In our merchant business, money is an important thing. [...] **Balzaminov.** Anybody would be happy to have money. **Neuyedenov.** Nobody is forbidding you, sir. He who is happy to have it, needs to earn it. **Balzaminova.** It's hard to earn it nowadays. **Balzaminov.** Especially if a man has taste, he just has to suffer. It's nice to live decently, but there are no means to do so. Take me for example.... **Neuyedenov.** Why should a man who cannot earn money live decently? **Balzaminova.** And what if a man does not have the aptitude for service or anything else, if God made him inapt, is he to blame? [...] **Neuyedenov.** In my opinion, a man who cannot get anything should not live at all, let alone in luxury."

feet and says that its only purpose is for him to spend it to satisfy his vanity. His obsession with squandering results in him subjugating his entire life to this one *idée fixe*. Even wedding a woman to whom he feels no attraction does not scare him, as he considers her nothing but a source of money. He openly admits this to Antrygina when she feigns interest in him. When Balzaminov tries to convince her that he is a worthier candidate for her hand in marriage than his opponent Ustrashimov, his only reasoning is that Ustrashimov has enough money of his own and does not need her contribution. This one-dimensional, or rather half-dimensional (because Balzaminov speaks only of what he might gain from their marriage, never considering the prospective bride's interest in the affair), primitive, debilitating view on marriage crosses all the t's and dots all the i's in our assessment of Balzaminov as a superfluous individual.

Balzaminov is not capable of evolving, maturing, or even learning from his own mistakes. In the last part of the trilogy, he still insists that happiness is nothing but an ability to spend money:

Бальзаминов. Уж очень мне, маменька, разбогатеть-то хочется.

Бальзаминова. Ничего-то ты в жизни не сделаешь!

Бальзаминов. Отчего же, маменька?

Бальзаминова. Оттого что не умешь ты ни за какое дело взяться. Всё у тебя выходит не так, как у людей.⁴⁰³

In *Ne soshlis' kharakterami!*, another play with a money leitmotiv, the same theme of useful merchants vs. useless noblemen is continued and expanded to include the discourse on validity of education. The same constants are present. Paul Prezhnev and his aristocratic family know how to live in luxury but cannot earn. Serafima and her parents are merchants, who can earn and keep money and are strongly averse to any spending. Paul has received spectacular education, but it does little to help him get enough funds for his extravagant needs. In fact, it is

⁴⁰³ Ostrovskii, *Za chem poidesh', to i naidesh' (Zhenit'ba Bal'zaminova)*, in his *PSS*, pp. 345–388, at p. 386.

“**Balzaminov.** Oh my dear mother, how I want to get rich. **Balzaminova.** You won't get anywhere in life!

Balzaminov. Why is that, dear mother? **Balzaminova.** Because you cannot apply yourself to anything. Everything you do is done topsy-turvy.”

said to have made things worse. All education did for Paul was expose him to things that he now craves to see, experience, or possess. Just as in *Dokhodnoe mesto*, education is shown as instilling impractical ideas and polluting one's mind, distracting it from pragmatic matters. Serafima's rudimentary schooling, which was enough to teach her the advisability of converting paper money into silver coins, serves her life purposes much better.

In *Ne soshlis' kharakterami!*, Ostrovsky's favorite scenario of a curst cow with short horns puts Paul in Balzaminov's shoes when he yearns for something he cannot have, and Serafima in the shoes of Nichkina and Belotelova when they have something that they do not feel like using. Paul is appalled when his uncle suggests that he should either start working to earn money or stop wanting to squander it gambling, drinking, and buying unnecessary luxuries. Paul's monologue sounds very much like Balzaminov's, even if his level of education is much higher than Misha's:

Поль. [...] Мне нужны деньги, чтоб быть порядочным человеком, чтоб играть роль в обществе, одним словом, чтоб делать то, к чему я способен. Я наживать не могу, я могу только проживать прилично и с достоинством. У меня для этого есть все способности, есть такт, есть вкус, я могу быть передовым человеком в обществе.⁴⁰⁴

Paul grew up in luxury while Misha never knew it; Paul is well educated while Misha, only just—so how come they are both obsessed with the same thing? Does their passion for squandering and aversion to earning come from their social status, that of nobility? The answer is yes, and not simply because it is the only thing those two characters have in common. Still in his first period and very mistrustful of the nobility as the class furthest removed from Russian Orthodoxy, Ostrovsky clearly favored merchants not only as true keepers of Russian religion

⁴⁰⁴ Ostrovskii, *Ne soshlis'*, p. 147. "Paul. [...] I need money to be a decent man, to be somebody in society; in short, to do what I'm capable of. I cannot earn; I can only spend, with grace and dignity. I have every ability to do so, I have tact and taste, and I can be a progressive member of society."

and national identity but also as an economically sustainable class that helped its country's enrichment.

Ne soshlis' kharakterami! is interesting in that Ostrovsky openly states for the first time that people are judged according to the absence or presence of money in their possession. Serafima twice exclaims that she is important and means something only because she has her capital. Take it away from her, and she will mean nothing. The parting gift from Serafima to Paul thus becomes very symbolic. She presents him with an elaborately embroidered wallet, a piece of genuine craftsmanship, that she made herself. Paul hopes that before leaving him, she decided to put money inside to save him from his creditors, but the magnificent wallet is empty, remaining nothing but a luxurious facade with no essence, just like Paul himself, a man who is doomed to have no content behind an elaborate exterior.

In *Shutniki*, Ostrovsky shows what happens when money becomes a qualitative and quantitative criterion of man's life. When money rules and dictates, a rich person has greater leeway and is much less restricted by norms of society, laws, and other people's attitudes. What is unpardonable and punishable for the poor is pronounced charmingly eccentric for the rich. An act that will arouse indignation and protest if committed by the destitute, will be dismissed with a smile if done by the wealthy. People do not dare hurt somebody who is well-to-do, while the underprivileged attract insults and offences like a magnet. In Act I of *Shutniki*, Obroshenov tells his older daughter Anna the story of his downfall: as soon as he had children, his income was not enough to provide for the family, and he started looking for on-the-side assignments to supplement it. Once he did an odd job for a merchant who started behaving in an overly familiar, patronizing, and demeaning manner towards Obroshenov. His colleague advised patience and humility instead of attempting to correct the merchant's behavior, and this advice led to a much bigger tip for Obroshenov's job. Obroshenov insists that money buys a person

whole, with his pride, honor, and principles. Yes, he has been selling himself and his dignity to the rich and powerful, but that is how he has managed to rear both of his daughters after his wife died. Like Dostoevsky's Sonya Marmeladova, who sells her body to help her family, Obroshenov was selling himself to provide for his daughters. He does it out of the same necessity that drove Sonya to her disgrace:

Оброшенов. [...] Бедность-то нас изуродовала. Тебя оскорбляют, ругаются над детьми твоими; а ты гнись да гнись, да кланяйся. Покипит сердце-то, покипит, да и перестанет.⁴⁰⁵

Who is right and who is wrong: Obroshenov, who, bowing to the pressing circumstances, sells himself to the rich and shameless for a pittance, or Ivan Ksenofontovich from *V chuzhom piru pokhmel'e*, who refuses to compromise his honor even for a relatively big sum of money? Ostrovsky presents both fathers in such a way that the audience becomes very empathetic and approving in both cases, and yet their actions cannot be more opposite if one fails to apply to them the main principle of Russian Orthodoxy, that of self-sacrifice. Only when one does so can it be understood why we have sympathy for both fathers and find them both in the right. To save loved ones, a woman starts selling herself like Sonya Marmeladova, and a man plays a fool like Obroshenov or refuses to accept much needed money like Ivan Ksenofontovich.

Na boikom meste further explores the temptation of money and its influence on the weak human nature, tilting now towards elucidating the difference between blessed and unblessed riches. Neputyovy, a rich merchant's son, demands that people line up before him and salute him every time he feels an itch to break dishes—an act he thinks he is entitled to because he has more money than the next guy. Yet Neputyovy has never earned a penny in his life and uses his parent's capital to demand obedience and impunity. He is not working to continue his father's

⁴⁰⁵ Ostrovskii, *Shutniki*, p. 393. “**Obroshenov.** [...] Poverty has crippled us. You are insulted and your children are treated like scum, but you bend—you bend and bow. You let your heart boil awhile, and then you calm down.”

business—he is squandering what has been earned. He is not helping the needy but wastes horrendous sums on a whim out of sheer vanity. For that reason, his riches should clearly qualify as unblessed. Furthermore, Neputyovy's wealth leads him to sin, destroying his moral core and turning him into a person of shame. All the gold in *Na boikom meste* is unblessed and thus detrimental. The characters lusting over it try to obtain it by various dishonest means and intend to use it selfishly. Money in the drama acts as an invisible puppet master that transforms everyone who cannot resist its temptation into a sinner: Neputyovy is turned into a juvenile delinquent, Bessudny into a highway robber, Zhuk into his accomplice, and Yevgenia into a slut and a slanderer.

In *Na boikom meste*, Bessudny literally sells his wife Yevgenia to his customers to extract better profits from their stay at his flophouse and to entice them to come again. Guests are encouraged to kiss Yevgenia once they cross the threshold. But the kiss has a price: Yevgenia appears with a tray, and only after money has been placed there will she bestow the favor on the guest. Gold is the only incentive for everyone in the play, with the exception of Annushka, who is clearly out of place in the mercantile universe of the drama.

Аннушка. [...] Что за житье! У всех только деньги на уме, как бы ни добыть, только бы добыть. А сколько из-за этих денег греха на душу принимают, об этом никто и не думает.⁴⁰⁶

Because she sees that she does not belong with the rest of them, Annushka decides to commit suicide and takes what she thinks is poison. However, the concoction that her brother uses on the unsuspecting guests is merely a sleeping draught, and Annushka is spared the sin of taking her own life. Instead, she is granted a better chance when Milovidov wises up to the goings-on and decides to take her away from the diseased environment of her family house.

⁴⁰⁶ Ostrovskii, *Na boikom meste*, in his *PSS*, vol. 4, pp. 156–199, at p. 186. “**Annushka.** [...] What kind of life is this? Everybody has only money on their minds—getting it, any which way. And how much sin they commit for this money, nobody seems to mind.”

Money, like human nature, is characterized by duality: if used properly, i.e., in a Christian way, it is blessed and therefore good; in improper use, it becomes evil and detrimental to man. In *Puchina*, money is shown as a tempter luring people deeper and deeper into sin. When Kiselnikov suddenly comes into a fortune after one of his relatives dies and leaves him a comfortable sum, he allows himself many luxuries that he otherwise would have never done.

Кисельников. [...] Вдруг в моем распоряжении довольно денег, а главное — свобода; ну, разумеется, я сейчас же захотел воспользоваться свободой, немного развлечься, погулять; таким образом я мало-помалу отстал от университета.⁴⁰⁷

Kiselnikov had money only for a short while, which was nonetheless enough for him to develop a taste for it. It also made him into its slave ready to do anything, including forgery, to get it. Kiselnikov's dependency becomes so great that he is not able to control himself, and once his daughter Liza is ready to marry a wealthy man, he deliberately refuses to move in with them because he knows that he will not be able to resist the temptation to start gambling, drinking, and partying all over again.

Twelve years prior to writing *Puchina*, in *Bednost' ne porok*,⁴⁰⁸ Ostrovsky reasoned that poverty is neither a crime nor a sin in itself. In *Puchina*, while still expressing the same idea, the playwright adds that it might nonetheless lead to crime and sin if one loses perspective and stoops to getting money by any means possible:

Погуляев. [...] Бедность страшна не лишениями, не недостатками, а тем, что сводит человека в тот низкий круг, в котором нет ни ума, ни чести, ни нравственности, а только пороки, предрассудки да суеверия.⁴⁰⁹

⁴⁰⁷ Ostrovskii, *Puchina*, p. 202. “**Kiselnikov.** [...] Suddenly I found myself in possession of a fair sum of money, and what is more important, I obtained freedom. Naturally, I decided to take advantage of my freedom, have a good time, and party a bit; that was how, little by little, I fell behind and had to leave university.”

⁴⁰⁸ The Russian word *porok* that is used in the title of the play means *crime* only indirectly; it is more properly translated as *vice* or *sin*, but *Poverty Is No Crime* seems to be the established translation of the title. However, it is necessary to remember that in all of Ostrovsky's discourse on poverty, he is primarily trying to establish if it is a vice/sin or not.

⁴⁰⁹ Ostrovskii, *Puchina*, p. 224. “**Pogulyaev.** [...] Poverty is scary not because of its deprivations or shortages; it is scary because it pushes a man into this low circle, where there is no intellect, no honor, no morality, but only vice, superstition, and prejudice.”

The universal question—Can money buy happiness?—is answered in this play in the negative. Pogulyaev is well off but admits in Act IV that he is still unhappy. Only when Liza accepts Pogulyaev's marriage proposal does he stop feeling lonely and start believing that his personal happiness is quite possible. As a true Christian, Ostrovsky simply could not allow any of his characters to be fully satisfied with their life if it meant only an abundance of material possessions.

Beshenye den'gi is another five-act comedy that has many tragic features except for the ending that might qualify as less unfortunate than the rest of the piece. Vasilkov finds himself used and mercilessly lied to. He stops one step short of committing suicide, and is ready to duel his best friend. Yegor Glumov, a successful albeit evil puppet master, resurfaces from *Na vsiakogo mudretsa dovol'no prostoty* to pull people's strings for his own amusement. When Vasilkov falls in love with Lidiya, a young woman of unsurpassed beauty and equally unsurpassed snobbery, he is advised not to even try introducing himself because unless his fortune reaches at least half a million, no guy has a chance of getting her attention. This shameless advertising of love for money results in all sorts of trouble for both Lidiya and Vasilkov. Lidiya's house is filled with unsavory characters who pretend to have enough money to hold the young woman's interest, and she almost commits adultery, mistaking that her would-be lover for a wealthy person.

If in *Bednaia nevesta* Ostrovsky called beauty a commodity, in *Beshenye den'gi* he took it one step further and called it a smart investment.

Глумов. Но эти многие глупы; они сами не знают, зачем хотят жениться. Красота им нравится, и сами хотят только сами воспользоваться этой красотой, то есть похоронить ее, как мертвый капитал. Нет, красота не мертвый капитал, она должна приносить проценты. Только дурак может жениться на Чебоксаровой без расчета; на ней должен жениться или шулер, или человек, составляющий карьеру. У первого ее красота будет служить приманкой для неопытных юношей, у другого приманкой для начальства и средством к быстрому повышению.

[...] Все эти кислые толки о добродетели глупы уж тем, что непрактичны. Нынче век практический.⁴¹⁰

Clearly, the *Shestidesyatniki*'s pragmatic approach to life that stemmed from the Marxist economic theories is satirized here. Ostrovsky found it scary that Glumov's approach of finding a monetary value for everything under the sun sounded perfectly sane to a growing number of people towards the end of the nineteenth century. The playwright could barely reconcile himself with the practical approach to beauty from the standpoint of its possessor, and the fact that the "owner" of the possessor could also claim material interest gained from the beauty of his partner was a purely monstrous notion to him.

Beshenye den'gi adds a new link to the chain of discussions on whether or not poverty is a sin. In *Bednost' ne porok* it is not; in *Puchina* it can become a road that leads to one; and in *Beshenye den'gi* it is decisively called the worst of all vices and the gravest of all sins:

Лидия. Порок! Что такое порок? Бояться порока, когда все порочны, и глупо, и нерасчетливо. Самый большой порок есть бедность.⁴¹¹

However, one needs to remember that these harsh accusations belong to Lidiya, an unpleasant money-grabber, for whom poverty means nothing more than the inability to purchase a season's subscription to the opera house. Since Lidiya has neither the playwright's nor the audience's sympathies, her words should not only be taken with a grain of salt—they should in fact achieve the reverse effect and show that Ostrovsky never shifted from his biblical views on poverty best shown in a parable from St. Luke: "Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat; neither for

⁴¹⁰ Ostrovskii, *Beshenye den'gi*, in his *PSS*, vol. 5, pp. 260–341, at p. 267. "Glumov. A great many idiots, yes. They don't even know why they want to marry her. They're dazzled by her beauty, but they want to keep that beauty all to themselves, to bury her away like so much dead stock. No, looks like that aren't frozen assets, they've got to earn interest. Only a fool would marry Lidiya without an ulterior motive. She should marry a card-sharp, or some civil service type on the make. The card-sharp would use her as bait, for giddy youths with more money than sense, and the other sort would dangle her in front of his superiors, and shoot up the career ladder. [...] All that po-faced stuff about virtue's frankly silly, it's just not practical. And we live in a practical age, sir" (Ostrovsky, *Crazy Money*, in his *Four Plays*, pp. 171–268, at pp. 182–183).

⁴¹¹ Ibid., p. 304. "Lidiya. Vice? What on earth's that? To be afraid of vice, when everybody's vicious, is both stupid and wasteful. Poverty's the greatest vice" (Ostrovsky, *Crazy Money*, pp. 224–225).

the body, what ye shall put on. The life is more than meat, and the body is more than raiment” (Luke 12:22–23). Poverty to a Christian is not only a “condition temporarily assumed for the sake of higher goal,” i.e., entering the Kingdom of Heaven; it is also “a means of freedom from material goods that enables one to attain a higher spiritual state in union with Jesus.”⁴¹²

In *Beshenye den'gi*, Ostrovsky looks at gold as an object that encourages or provokes lying, a serious sin to a Christian. Kuchumov lies that he has a huge amount of money while he actually does not. To him this lie provides self-esteem and the necessary weight in society. He refuses to see that he has become a laughing stock and nobody believes his lies any more; he is doing it mostly for himself, to feel important. On the other hand, Glumov “lies” about Vasilkov’s millions to create entertainment for himself. He hopes that Lidiya will bite the bait and marry Vasilkov and that he, Glumov, would enjoy watching this odd, mismatched couple try and get out of Lidiya’s debt together. As it turns out, Glumov’s words tell a lie; financial papers and letters that Vasilkov signs prove that his invented wealth is not a lie, and that he does have a considerable capital to pay off Lidiya’s extensive debts and still be viewed as wealthy thereafter. Yet, he has no intention of paying for her demands and expensive tastes. He even firmly refuses to pay off her debts. And it is not because Vasilkov is greedy in the slightest way—he is just portrayed as a firm believer in an educational value of money as a means to build character and strengthen one’s willpower, which inevitably happens if one is able to resist its temptation. And this resistance to the temptation of gold was made by Ostrovsky into the central message of *Beshenye den'gi*.

Лидия. [...] Мне нужно о многом поплакать! О погибших мечтах всей моей жизни, о моей ошибке, о моем унижении. Мне надо поплакать о том, чего воротить нельзя. Моя богиня беззаботного счастья валится с своего пьедестала, на ее место становится грубый идол труда и промышленности, которому имя бюджет. Ах, как мне жаль бедных, нежных созданий, этих милых, веселеньких девушек! Им не видать больше изящных, нерасчетливых мужей! Эфирные существа, бросьте

⁴¹² Metzger and Coogan, s.v. “Poor.”

мечты о несбыточном счастье, бросьте думать о тех, которые изящно проматывают, и выходите за тех, которые грубо наживают и называют себя деловыми людьми.⁴¹³

Lidiya is punished at the end of the play, but her punishment instills the audience with a hope that she will also be reformed. She will atone for all her sins by hard work, self-restraint, and moderation, and she will emerge a new woman, worthy of Vasilkov and good enough to be called his wife again.

In *Les*, Ostrovsky added yet another thread to the discourse on earning vs. squandering: Gurmyzhskaya is eagerly squandering not only her capital but also the sublime beauty of nature. With no consideration of the consequences, she sells her forest to Vosmibratov, a man in woodcutting business. The magnificent forest, hundreds of years old, is sold cheap so that Gurmyzhskaya's relatives do not inherit it while she converts it into money and spends it all on her new lover. Ostrovsky, who was known to be deeply moved by the beauty of Russian rivers, woods, and meadows; who preferred the quiet vastness of the country to the quick-paced and stressful civilization of the big city; who was enchanted by loveliness of Shchelykovo, his family estate,⁴¹⁴ and was inspired by its gorgeousness to write *Snegurochka*,⁴¹⁵ could not bear the thought of converting the sublime and eternal God-created magnificence of nature into a handful of banknotes. Nevezhin⁴¹⁶ wrote about how organically the playwright merged with nature: how happy he was during thunderstorms, or riding nowhere in particular for hours, drinking in the majestic beauty of the Russian land, or sitting on his favorite bench, watching clouds and letting

⁴¹³ Ostrovskii, *Beshenye den'gi*, pp. 340–341. “**Lidiya.** [...] I have so much to cry over. The broken dreams of my youth, my mistakes, my humiliations. I need to weep for what I can never bring back. My goddess of untroubled delights has been tumbled from her pedestal, and in her place stands that rough-hewn idol of toil and industry, whose name is budget. Oh, how I pity these poor, delicate creatures, these carefree darling girls. No more exquisite young husbands, with no heads for figures! Oh, you ethereal creatures, give up your impossible dreams, forget that young man who can squander money with such style, and marry the man who can earn it, with no style whatsoever, and who calls himself a businessman” (Ostrovsky, *Crazy Money*, p. 267).

⁴¹⁴ Ostrovsky inherited it after his father's death.

⁴¹⁵ Lakshin, p. 624.

⁴¹⁶ See footnote 304.

his imagination run wild.⁴¹⁷ Ostrovsky's love for the beauty of the land was so great that he applied for and was granted permission to join a literary expedition over Russian seas, rivers, and lakes; he took part in it in 1856–1857, and this spawned many plays set on the banks of the Volga, such as *Voevoda*, *Groza*, *Na boikom meste*, *Bespridannitsa*, *Ardent Heart*, *Talanty i poklonniki*, and *Bez viny vinovatye*.⁴¹⁸

To Ostrovsky, Gurmyzhskaya squandering money on a lover who was thirty years her junior was bad enough, but squandering the beauty of Russian nature was totally unacceptable. Because of this open denunciation of Gurmyzhskaya's actions, *Les* may have an additional theme in its rich and philosophical content: the theme of human obligation to preserve nature might qualify this drama as an environmental play.

Ne bylo ni grosha, da vdrug altyn continues Ostrovsky's exploration of money, with yet another affirmation that poverty can only be viewed as something utterly disgraceful by people of shame and never by people of guilt:

Настя. Я боялась, что вы войдете к нам, увидите нашу бедность и разлюбите меня. (*Плачет.*)

Баклушин. А плакать-то об чем?

Настя. Мне стыдно.

Баклушин. А зачем же стыдиться бедности?

Анна. А то чего же стыдиться-то! Есть ли что еще хуже, обидней бедности, особенно для молодой девушки?

Баклушин. Мало ль что есть хуже бедности!

Анна. Вы посмотрите хорошенько на людей-то! Многие ль стыдятся того, что хуже-то? А бедности-то всякий стыдится.⁴¹⁹

And later:

⁴¹⁷ Grigorenko, p. 259.

⁴¹⁸ Lakshin, pp. 425–440.

⁴¹⁹ Ostrovskii, *Ne bylo ni grosha, da vdrug altyn*, in his *PSS*, vol. 6, pp. 147–221, at p. 179. “**Nastya.** I was afraid that you’ll come inside our house, see our poverty, and fall out of love with me. (*Weeps.*) **Baklushin.** But what are you weeping for? **Nastya.** I’m ashamed. **Baklushin.** Why should you be ashamed of poverty? **Anna.** What else is there to be ashamed of? Is there anything worse and more hurtful than poverty, especially for a young girl? **Baklushin.** There are plenty of things that are worse than poverty. **Anna.** Look carefully around you. Are there many people who are ashamed of things that are worse than poverty? And yet everyone is ashamed of poverty.”

Баклушин. [...] Просить, побираться, милостивая государыня, вот что хуже бедности.

Анна. Это не хуже бедности, милостивый государь, это самая бедность-то и есть. Сначала просить, потом воровать...⁴²⁰

Anna's unfortunate circumstances do not steel her resolve or strengthen her endurance; her constant lamentations over being unable to maintain a decent facade and produce an appropriate appearance do not earn her much compassion from the audience.

In *Ne bylo ni grosba, da vdrug altyn*, Ostrovsky openly condemns greed by showing it in its most unattractive form: if earning is irrefutably better than squandering, then squandering is better than avaricious acquisition with no intention to spend, loving money not for what it can do but for what it is, little coins and bills. Krutitsky's greed and lying about his financial despondency are two sins that are begotten by money, and the ugliness of his character suggests the playwright's deepest loathing of such people.

A new type of dramatis persona—a vagabond, a wandering philosopher—is introduced in *Trudovoi khleb* (Hard-Earned Bread) in the character of Korpelov. He goes around sharing his wisdom and bringing people hope much like biblical prophets—or Gorky's Luka.⁴²¹ Korpelov tells a parable of the value of hard-earned money (blessed riches) vs. the value of money that one miraculously stumbles upon (unblessed riches), with its moralistic content of the necessity to work hard for what one acquires.

Корпелов. [...] Сестра моя была красавица, выдали ее замуж за горького, несчастного чиновника Сизакова. Маялась с ним, маялась она; года через два и овдовела, осталась с дочерью без копейки, хоть по миру идти. Тут один барин, старый знакомый, и пригласил ее к себе в экономки. Ну, и жила она, точно, покойно, только не нравилась ей эта жизнь. «Скучно,— говорит,— дела мало; да без заботы и без горя жить нехорошо, Бога забудешь. Жила я с мужем,— говорит,— выработала себе денег на шерстяной салопчик, и сама его сшила, так,

⁴²⁰ Ibid., p. 181. “**Baklushin.** [...] Being a beggar, a panhandler, dear madam, that's what's worse than poverty. **Anna.** This is not worse than poverty, my good sir, this what poverty is. First begging, then stealing....”

⁴²¹ A wanderer from Gorky's drama *Na dne* (The Lower Depths), written in 1902.

веришь ли, как он мне был мил; а потом,— говорит,— как жила у барина и очень хорошо одевалась, да всё немилло, только людей стыдно».⁴²²

According to Ostrovsky, one needs to stay humble, exercise moderation, and work hard in order to remain strong in his faith.

In *Trudovoi kbleb*, Ostrovsky once again points out money's good qualities, such as the ability to separate people like Natasha and Chepurin, who work honestly and earn their bread, from Potrokhov, who gets bored with his life if he is not squandering (partying hard or losing money in a card game), or Koprov, who feigns a desperate financial situation to ask for money to buy a new carriage and horses.

The playwright also asks a valid question: Where is the fine line that separates good earned money from bad earned money? Chepurin, a likable character, started small and worked hard to become fairly wealthy; Koprov, a despicable *dramatis persona*, started big, with enough initial capital to be quite comfortable, but his attempts to double his fortune proved to be an exercise in futility, and he lost it all. Both characters worked, both tried to enlarge their capital; why then Chepurin is positive and Koprov is negative? The difference is revealed in Chepurin's Christian humbleness and moderation, and Koprov's lack thereof. Asked why, if he owns a two-storey building and rents out apartments there, he refuses to live on the second floor but prefers to stay in the basement, Chepurin answers that had he been married, he would have certainly moved to the second floor, but since he lives alone, he sees no need in luxuriating. Meanwhile, Koprov, in his conversation with Natasha, supports the idea of avariciousness and excess:

⁴²² Ostrovskii, *Trudovoi kbleb*, in his *PSS*, vol. 7, pp. 116–167, at pp. 123–124. “**Korpelov**. [...] My sister was a beauty, but she was married off to a destitute and hapless clerk, Sizakov. She suffered in her married life, she really did. In a couple of years, she became a widow, with a daughter and penniless; it looked like they might as well start begging for alms. At this point, a nobleman, an old acquaintance of hers, offered her a job as his housekeeper. To be sure, she led a quiet life; only she didn't like that kind of life. “Boring,” she said, “too few things to do; and it's not good to live your life carefree and without sorrow—you will forget God. When I lived with my husband,” she said, “I earned enough money for a woolen overcoat, and I sewed it myself. And, can you believe it, it was the dearest thing to me,” she said, “but later, when I lived in this nobleman's house and dressed very well, I did not care for anything, and I only felt shame before other people.”

Наташа. Вы прежде имели состояние, имели деньги?
Копров. Имел очень много.
Наташа. Отчего ж вы запутались?
Копров. Оттого, что захотел иметь больше.
Наташа. Зачем же вам больше?
Копров. Затем, что больше — лучше.
Наташа. А потом опять больше, и так далее, где же конец?
Копров. Конца нет. Ведь совершенства тоже нет на земле, а всё-таки всякий стремится к нему [...].⁴²³

It is interesting that Ostrovsky adds a philosophical (or maybe theological) challenge to this dialogue. In their discussion of excess vs. moderation, Koprov uses an argument that is not sufficiently answered by Natasha, a virtuous character in the play. When Koprov says, “Конечно, человек может до крайности умалить свои потребности, может приучить себя ко всяким лишениям, довольствоваться только одной коркой хлеба; но для кого ж тогда будут расти ананасы!”⁴²⁴—Natasha is stumped and cannot think of a counterargument. Even though Natasha does not effectively rebuff Koprov’s statement, there is no doubt what Ostrovsky meant by this challenge. According to the Christian doctrine, temptations present a perpetual test of faith to believers, separating them into those who can resist them for the sake of a higher goal and those who succumb to them.

Posledniaia zbertva combines the discourse on money with what I, when discussing *Tushino*,⁴²⁵ referred to as early sprouts of Eurasianism. In this drama, Ostrovsky’s second (after Uraz in *Tushino*) and last Asian character appears. Salay Saltanych is a well-to-do moneylender, fully assimilated in Moscow and well respected there. Dulchin, a libertine and squanderer, a gigolo living off rich women, used to borrow money from Salay, and he calls the Asian every possible derogatory name in his uppity description of him. He labels him “Обалдуй-оглы

⁴²³ Ibid., p. 150. “**Natasha.** Did you have a fortune before, money? **Koprov.** Yes, I did, and a lot of it. **Natasha.** How come you found yourself in this predicament? **Koprov.** Because I wanted to have more. **Natasha.** Why would you need more? **Koprov.** Because more is better. **Natasha.** And then more again, and so on—where is the end to this? **Koprov.** There is no end. Just like there is no perfection on earth, and yet everybody is striving for it [...].”

⁴²⁴ Ibid., p. 151. “Certainly, a man can cut his needs to a bare minimum, can learn to accept all sorts of deprivations, and be content with a piece of stale bread, but for whom, then, will pineapples be growing?”

⁴²⁵ See chapter III, under “Second period.”

Тараканов” (“Mr. Dumb-Ass Yellow Roach”), a Turkish Jew, an Armenian Greek, a Turkoman, and a Bucharian Uzbek all at the same time. Dulchin adds that such people have no pity and would slay a man in cold blood.⁴²⁶ As the audience soon finds out, Salay is smart, fair, and has a great business sense. The reason Dulchin hates him is that the Asian now demands full repayment of his loan, and Dulchin is broke.

It is remarkable that Ostrovsky’s depiction of Salay’s *complementary* existence and assimilation in the Central Russian society coincides fully with Lev Gumilyov’s point of view, which he would express a hundred years later within his theory of Neo-Eurasianism. Before the 1920s brought in Eurasianism, and specifically in Ostrovsky’s time, any Asian was officially considered the *other*. However, both of Ostrovsky’s Asian characters indirectly prove Eurasianists correct, since both of them coexist quite harmoniously with their Russian neighbors. Hassan is well respected for his heroism and bravery in battle, and Salay is acknowledged as a successful businessman. It should be noted that even though Salay is firmly established in the Russian community, he is not seeking Russification. He remains markedly Asian, with distinctive patterns of speech, cultural preferences, and behavior, and he is acknowledged as such by the Russian denizens of *Posledniaia zhertva*. When Flor, looking for prospective grooms for his grandniece Irina, discusses the matter with Salay, he facetiously says that the latter is not on his list of eligible bachelors, because “очень нам нужно азиатцев-то разводить,”⁴²⁷ proving thus the Eurasianists’ theory of complementarity rather than absorption, and the peaceful coexistence of ethnoses instead of the domination of one national identity over another. Salay, who has never intended to marry Irina, is not offended by the remark and continues the conversation in order to pursue his own purpose—to find out if Dulchin might, through this marriage, obtain enough money to finally pay back his loan.

⁴²⁶ Ostrovskii, *Posledniaia zhertva*, in his *PSS*, vol. 8, pp. 66–156, at p. 82.

⁴²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 119. “There is no need for Asian offspring.”

In *Posledniaia zhertva*, Salay (a worthy individual who honestly earns and amasses capital, thus contributing to the general prosperity of the society) functions as a bank: he loans money to individuals and businesses, who put it to good use. He has to exercise caution and be a fairly good judge of character to be able to successfully conduct his business. That is why, when Dulchin asks for another loan, Salay refuses. Salay, like Uraz in *Tushino*, practices sobriety and moderation. Ostrovsky's positive attitude to both characters may be inferred from the fact that the dramatist gives them the right to judge Russians. While Uraz judges Besputa's morals or rather lack thereof, Salay judges Dulchin, using money as a criterion of human value:

Салай Салтаныч. Пустой ты человек, дряннь.

Дульчин (*зрочно*). Салай!

Салай Салтаныч. Что пугаешь? Нажил деньги — человек, прожил деньги — дряннь.⁴²⁸

Salay is shown as a far more useful member of Moscow society than Dulchin. Being Asian, he might be considered the *other* de jure, whereas Dulchin, a Russian, is the *other* de facto. It is the Asian who informs Dulchin that Irina's dowry is only five thousand rubles instead of three hundred thousand as Dulchin believed when he proposed matrimony to her. The joke is on Dulchin as now he will go straight to debtors' prison, while Salay will continue his successful money-lending business. It is significant that Ostrovsky leaves it to Salay to deliver the final blow to Dulchin, thus demonstrating his supremacy in the social stratum.

An interesting opinion is expressed in *Posledniaia zhertva* with regard to the connection between gold and family relations. It was already said in *Les* that women were more prone to squandering than men,⁴²⁹ and now Flor builds his theory of family hierarchy on this assumption.

⁴²⁸ Ibid., p. 121. “**Salay Saltanych.** You're an empty vessel, scum. **Dulchin** (*threateningly*). Salay! **Salay Saltanych.** Are you trying to scare me? You've earned money—you're a man, you've squandered—you're scum.”

⁴²⁹ This point of view was rather an anomaly as it was expressed by Ostrovsky in his plays only once and was never supported elsewhere in his oeuvre. Usually Ostrovsky showed squandering as done in equal proportion by men and women, but in Act I of *The Forest*, Bodaev says to Gurmyzhskaya: “Но действительно у нас много дворянских имений вконец разорено бабами. Если мужчина мотает, всё-таки в его мотовстве какой-нибудь смысл есть; а бабьей глупости меры не положено. Нужно любовнику халат подарить, она хлеб продает не

Флор Федулыч. [...] Муж копит да бережет для жены, его-то скупым да скарedom прозовут, а любовника после добрым барином величать будут. На наши деньги они себе добрую славу и заслуживают. [...] Муж-то почему бережет деньги? Потому что он историю каждого рубля знает, как он ему достался; а любовнику-то что ж не бросать деньги! Он не считая, полной горстью их в карман кладет, не считая и бросает.⁴³⁰

But what makes *Posledniaia zbertva* truly remarkable is that for the first time we hear in Ostrovsky's voice nostalgic notes for the recent past and dissatisfaction with the present.

[In] 1861, Alexander II decreed the emancipation, or freeing, of the serfs. Although the serfs attained legal freedom, they received no land individually. Their village communities, called *mirs*, were granted varying amounts of the landlord's holdings, for which they had to undertake a 50-year mortgage. Peasants could not leave the *mirs* without paying their share, so they were still bound to the worst land and had an additional tax to pay. The landlords kept the best land and received compensation from the government for their losses.

Many peasants gave up farming rather than return to bondage. Landless peasants moved from the farms to the cities, adding to the growing number of unskilled urban workers.⁴³¹

Alexander II was known to avoid seeing Ostrovsky's plays. Burdin⁴³² in his memoirs quotes the tsar as saying that Ostrovsky was a talented man, but he could not bear watch his plays. "Я приезжаю в театр отдохнуть от трудов и развлечься [...], а, посмотревши пьесы Островского, уезжаю еще более грустный и расстроенный."⁴³³ It took several years for progressive minds in Russia to realize what Ostrovsky was very quick to acknowledge, that the emancipation reform was a half-measure at best, which, economically, did more harm than good

во время за бесценок; нужно любовнику ермолку с кисточкой,— она лес продает, строевой, береженный, первому плуту" (Ostrovskii, *Les*, in his *PSS*, vol. 6, pp. 7–95, at p. 18)—"[T]he fact is that we've seen any number of fine estates absolutely ruined by old women. If a man flings away his money, then at least there's some thought behind it, but there's really no limit to the stupidity of these women. I mean, let's say she wants to make her lover a present of a dressing-gown. Why, she'll sell her entire corn crop out of season, for next to nothing. Or if her lover fancies a skull-cap with a tassel on it, say, she'll sell a forest full of good timber to the first crook that comes along" (Ostrovsky, *The Forest*, in his *Plays Two*, pp. 13–118, at p. 28).

⁴³⁰ Ostrovskii, *Posledniaia zbertva*, p. 99. "Flor Fedulych. [...] When a husband saves and conserves for his wife, he is called greedy and stingy; then her lover steps in, and he is called 'our kind sir.' They buy their repute with our money. [...] Why does the husband save money? Because he knows the story of every ruble, how he got it; and the lover—why shouldn't he throw this money about? He never counts it when he puts handfuls into his pocket and never counts it when he spends."

⁴³¹ Farah and Karls, pp. 691–692.

⁴³² See footnote 21, second paragraph.

⁴³³ As quoted in Lakshin, p. 548. "I come to the theatre for relaxation from hard work and for distraction [...], but after seeing Ostrovsky's plays, I leave even sadder and more upset."

for landowners and peasants. It was Alexander's turn to disappoint the great Russian playwright. In the post-emancipation decade something did not feel right, and Ostrovsky tried to understand what it was.

Наблюдатель. [...] Деньги разные бывают. Прежде покутить любо было. Прежде деньги были веселые, хорошие такие, барские. Где, бывало, кутят, где бросают деньги, туда иди смело. Так и знаешь, что компания хорошая, люди честные, доверчивые, великодушные, бесхитростные, как птицы небесные, которые ни сеют, ни жнут, ни в житницы собирают.

Иногородный. А если ни сеют, ни жнут, откуда же у них деньги были?

Наблюдатель. Деньги им обязаны были доставлять те, которые и сеют, и жнут, и в житницы собирают.

[...] А теперь, где кутят, там по большей части дело не совсем чисто; а иногда и прокурорский надзор, того гляди, себе занятие найдет.⁴³⁴

What Ostrovsky was saying was that maybe the old ways were regressive and hindered the country's development, but at least everything was more or less straightforward, morals were not compromised, and there was a possibility for money to be made in an honest way. After the reform, this possibility was almost totally lost since both the nobility and the peasantry were getting noticeably poorer, and those who got richer did so using questionable methods. Blessed wealth remained, according to Ostrovsky, almost exclusively a feature of Smith's economics and therefore the past. The new, capitalistic ways, Marxist ideas, general materialism, and atheistic trends resulted in a demoralization of the process of amassing the gold and consequently in it becoming almost universally unblessed.

Some of those new, morally questionable, methods of building capital are studied in *Bespridannitsa*, a drama that has money as its invisible leading character and looks at everything from its perspective.

⁴³⁴ Ostrovsky, *Posledniaia zhertva*, p 117. "**The Observer.** [...] Money is all different. Partying in the old times was a pleasure. In those times money was landowners'—merry and good all over. Wherever there was a party, wherever money was thrown about, one could go safely. You just knew that the company would be good, people honest, trusting, generous, ingenuous, like birds of heaven, who don't sow, don't reap, and don't stow their crops. **The Out-of-Towner.** But if they didn't sow or reap, where was their money coming from? **The Observer.** The money had to be delivered by those who sowed and reaped and stowed the crops. [...] And now, wherever there is a party, more likely than not there is some rotten business there, such that just might interest the state prosecutor."

Паратов. [...] Время просвещенных покровителей, время меценатов прошло; теперь торжество буржуазии, теперь искусство на вес золота ценится, в полном смысле наступает золотой век.⁴³⁵

What Paratov refers to as the golden age has, according to Ostrovsky, its unmistakable downside, as the price tag is now attached to everything. Larisa cannot marry as she has no money to entice a potential husband, but since she is very beautiful and has a great artistic talent, she is quite valuable as a companion or a mistress— and that value can be sold for a very high price. She has two interested parties who see her as a smart investment, Vasya Vozhevatov and Moky Knurov, and they are ready to spend a fair amount on her if only she agrees to escort them to an exposition in Paris. Immoral as this offer can be, it is at least honest: neither Vozhevatov nor Knurov plays games with Larisa, and she is given no false or misleading promises. Sergey Paratov, on the other hand, manages to get for free what the other two are ready to buy. He spends a night with Larisa, and it costs him nothing but some acting skill and a good command of language as a tool of manipulation.

Money in *Bespridannitsa* buys talent (Larisa's, Robinson's (he is actually none other than Arkady Schastlivtsev, a comic actor from *Les*, Ostrovsky's earlier play), Ilya's, and that of the Gypsy chorus), beauty, respect, and public opinion, while neither of those things is supposed to be for sale for moral reasons. When Knurov makes his offer to Larisa, he is very sure of what he is saying:

Кнуров. [...] Не угодно ли вам ехать со мной в Париж на выставку? [...] И полное обеспечение на всю жизнь? [...] Стыда не бойтесь, осуждений не будет. Есть границы, за которые осуждение не переходит; я могу предложить вам такое громадное содержание, что самые злые критики чужой нравственности должны будут замолчать и разинуть рты от удивления.⁴³⁶

⁴³⁵ Ostrovskii, *Bespridannitsa*, in his *PSS*, vol. 8, pp. 157–231, at p. 223. “**Paratov.** [...] The era of enlightened patrons, the era of a Maecenas has passed. Now we see the triumph of the bourgeoisie, now art is worth its weight in gold, and the golden age in the full sense has set in” (Ostrovsky, *Without a Dowry*, in his *Without a Dowry and Other Plays*, pp. 147–204, at p. 198).

⁴³⁶ Ostrovskii, *Bespridannitsa*, p. 227. “**Knurov.** [...] Wouldn't you like to go with me to Paris, to the exposition? [...] And have full security for the rest of your life? [...] Don't be afraid of shame, there won't be any condemnations. There are boundaries which condemnation does not cross. I can offer you such tremendous wealth

Money in this drama buys free will, as in the case of Kharita's oldest daughter who had to marry a young prince from the Caucasus who killed her on the way to his place out of jealousy. It also buys man's dignity. All those ineffable truths that cannot be defined by human language can very well be bought and sold for a price. Once again Ostrovsky sounds exasperated by the amount of evil that money has brought into the changed world: it made Kharita into a liar, a beggar, and ultimately a killer of her two daughters; Larisa into a prize in a heads-or-tails game that Knurov and Vozhevatov play, and a fallen woman; Karandyshev into a laughing stock and a murderer; Kharita's oldest daughter into a victim of uxoricide; Yefrosinya into a miser; Arkady Schastlivtsev into party paraphernalia; and Paratov into Mephistopheles. Ostrovsky's exasperation with gold and the role it acquired in human life, once its connection with faith has been destroyed, turns *Bespridannitsa* into a potent cathexis.

Nevol'nitsy (The Enslaved) is an atypical play for Ostrovsky, since it is more influenced by Western drama. At the time of its writing, Ostrovsky was actively involved in the translation of English, Italian, French, Spanish, and Roman plays. From 1850 to 1886 the playwright translated a total of twenty-two dramas⁴³⁷; and the early 1880s were devoted to the translation of Cervantes's *Entremeses* (Interludes). This is obviously where he borrowed the idea for *Nevol'nitsy*'s secondary plot that looks at the wisdom and cunningness of Marfa, Styrov's maid. Marfa may seem to represent the Western stereotype of a house help who manages to effectively manipulate an entire household. The same servant character appears in Molière's *Tartuffe* and *Le Malade imaginaire* (The Imaginary Invalid), Beaumarchais's Figaro trilogy, and Sheridan's *Duenna*. However, Ostrovsky's Marfa, though identical in form, is still different from her Western counterparts because by the end the Russian maid achieves nothing and gains nothing for her

that even the meanest critics of other people's morals will have to keep still and open their mouths in astonishment" (Ostrovsky, *Without a Dowry*, pp. 200–201).

⁴³⁷ Editorial comments to the translations by Ostrovsky, in Ostrovskii, *PSS*, vol. 11, pp. 367–389, at p. 369.

personal advantage. All her efforts at manipulating and orchestrating life in the household turn out to be selfless and intended for the benefit of her neighbor.

In *Nevol'nitsy*, the issue that concerns Ostrovsky's interest in the theme of money lies in the difference of Yevlalia's and Sofya's love for Mulin. Yevlalia loves him platonically, while Sofya not only offers physical love but also reinforces Mulin's interest with materialistic offerings of money and expensive gifts. When in Act IV, scene 6, Mulin faces a choice of ideal love vs. material one, he chooses Sofya's with little hesitation. Love, another divine truth, got a price tag in the golden age of the bourgeoisie.

Ostrovsky's entire life was a financial roller coaster. He barely managed to crawl out of one money pit only to fall into another right away. In 1884, less than two years before his death, it looked as if Ostrovsky could finally stop worrying himself sick about financial problems. The royal court gave him a yearly pension of three thousand rubles. But in less than half a year, his estate at Shchelykovo was set on fire by the peasants, who quite possibly were displeased with the treatment they received from Ostrovsky's wife. That fire devoured the small material gain that Ostrovsky was so happy about. On December 14, 1885, the playwright was made chief artistic director, i.e., head, of the Maly Theatre, which meant a considerable increase in his salary. And half a year later, on June 2, 1886, the giant of the Russian theatre died without spending enough time to enjoy his newly found financial stability. It does seem as if Ostrovsky was living out his own philosophy as far as his personal convictions on blessed and unblessed riches, money earned with hard work, and temptation and moderation, were concerned. In terms of finances, whether his art followed his life or vice versa, there was a unique harmony in what the playwright preached and how he lived up to his preaching.

CHAPTER VI ON THE INTERRELATION OF THEATRE AND LIFE

Господа, я предлагаю выпить за здоровье артистки, которая оживила заглохшее стоячее болото нашей [...] жизни. [...] Мы спим, господа, так будем же благодарны избранным людям, которые изредка пробуждают нас и напоминают нам о том идеальном мире, о котором мы забыли.⁴³⁸

Theatre, in Ostrovsky's understanding, aimed for the stars and was idealistic in nature; life in nineteenth-century Russia was materialistic and firmly anchored to the ground. And yet, to Ostrovsky, the notion of theatre was inseparable from life. Theatre and life nurtured and taught and fed on one another; they also corrupted and depraved each other.

Beasley states that "[i]t was natural for Ostrovsky to think in terms of the theatre. Just in the same way as to a painter there seems some curious connection between life and colours which is incomprehensible to the uninitiated, unversed in this particular art form, so the artist, who is essentially a dramatist, has a way of regarding life peculiar to his craft" (p. 604). The almost forty years of Ostrovsky's literary career can be regarded as a literary lifespan, beginning in 1847 and ending in 1886, marked by naive idealism in childhood, bitter intransigence in youth, and philosophical wisdom in maturity. In this literary life, any poet, including Ostrovsky, tries to make sense of the world, tie up some loose ends, and leave the generations to come with advice.

Ostrovsky chose theatre as a venue for disseminating wisdom and virtue. Theatre fascinated him at the beginning of his literary career, when he discovered that he had something to say to society. The playwright started with the question of guilt and shame, which gradually brought into focus the necessity to examine the pyramid of sins, on the one hand, and to zero in on the role of money in people's lives, on the other. These major issues developed and evolved

⁴³⁸ Ostrovskii, *Bez viny vinovatye*, p. 216. "Ladies and gentlemen, I propose a toast to a true artist, who has stirred up the weed-choked, stagnant waters that are our [...] life. [...] Ladies and gentlemen, we are, so to speak, asleep—so let us be grateful to those chosen few, who from time to time manage to waken us up, and remind us of that ideal world we have all forgotten" (Ostrovsky, *Innocent as Charged*, p. 349).

quite naturally in the course of Ostrovsky's literary life without ever crossing boundaries circumscribed by Russian Orthodoxy. The harmonious evolution of the three major metanarratives of Ostrovsky's oeuvre organically led Ostrovsky to self-evaluation, self-criticism, and self-assessment. Was he succeeding as a playwright? Did people hear what he had to share with them? Was a Western dramatic form efficient enough to spread his non-Western (not to say anti-Western) message? Why did he choose theatre in the first place? Was theatre a mere mimesis of life, and if yes, was it its inferior or superior copy? Was it an adequate platform for spiritual immortality?

Ostrovsky's very first play in which theatre as an institution is mentioned is *V chuzom piru pokhmel'e*, written eight years into his literary career. Kapiton Titych, Andrey's brother, is pronounced a bad egg in the family because, instead of learning the family business, he succumbs to a passion for theatre. This is not yet a philosophical or theoretical tour into the depth of theatre; it is merely a tribute to the playwright's own biographical fact. Kapiton Titych is a merchant's son with no education worth mentioning, and yet his love for theatre is deep and profound. Acknowledging his own passion for theatre that had not come from his parents, Ostrovsky set up one of his major goals in life: making theatre accessible, enjoyable, inspirational, and educational for all walks of life, irrespective of their family background and upbringing.

As mentioned earlier, Ostrovsky, together with Grigoryev and his other supporters, considered merchants to be true carriers of the Russian national identity. In some way or another they appear in the majority of his plays, and it is through their eyes and their perception that we learn about the playwright's innermost thoughts and ideas. Theatre as the fourth and last metanarrative that I am going to focus on in this work, was no exception. It was looked at through the lens of the petit-bourgeois class first and foremost.

According to Bryantsev, merchants in nineteenth-century Russia were true carriers of patriarchal Russian traditions that translated into a collective (rather than individualistic) way of life, adherence to high morality, unalterable concepts of good, love, truth, and wisdom (*Kul'tura russkogo kupechestva*, pp. 5–6). Bryantsev acknowledges the fact that merchants as a class were generally averse to learning and education (p. 7). Theatre, which appeared in Russia during the reign of Peter the Great's father, Tsar Alexis I,⁴³⁹ was viewed for a long time as a tempter and seducer, source of debauchery and sin. Since it was strongly denounced by the *Domostroi*⁴⁴⁰ as an anti-religious entity, merchants both despised it and feared its corrupting influence. However, in the mid-nineteenth century, and in no small degree due to Ostrovsky's dramas (pp. 167–169), they eagerly embraced theatre not only as a source of entertainment but also, and actually primarily so, as a unique resource in cultural education and upbringing (p. 166). Theatre became an invaluable school of life that effectively taught right and wrong, concepts too dear and important for Russian merchants. Precisely because they saw a huge educational value in theatre, merchants started to favor and frequent it (p. 167).

The very next year after *V chuzhom piru pokhmel'e*, Ostrovsky was semi-ready to look at theatre from a theoretical standpoint. In *Dokhodnoe mesto*, a nascent, half-formed and half-formulated, thought that theatre does not equal life is mentioned in passing. When Zhadov proudly tells his uncle that he would choose honest poverty over dishonest wealth, Vyshnevsky sarcastically comments:

ВЫШНЕВСКИЙ. Благородная бедность хороша только в театре. А попробуй перенести ее в жизни. Это, мой друг, не так легко и приятно, как нам кажется.⁴⁴¹

⁴³⁹ Tsar Alexey Mikhaylovich (Alexis I) ruled in 1645–76 and was nicknamed *Tishaysky* ("the Quietest"). Ostrovsky timed his *Komik* to the bicentennial of theatre in Russia, officially celebrated on October 30, 1872 (editorial comments to *Komik XVII stoletia*, in Ostrovskii, *PSS*, vol. 6, pp. 370–372, at p. 370). Incidentally, Peter the Great was also born in 1672.

⁴⁴⁰ A set of rules and regulations to govern various aspects of domestic life in sixteenth-century Russia. This document will be further discussed below in conjunction with *Komik XVII stoletia*.

⁴⁴¹ Ostrovskii, *Bespridannitsa*, p. 49. "Vyshnevsky. Noble poverty is good only in the theatre. But just try it out in life. That, my friend, is not so easy or pleasant as we'd like to think" (Ostrovsky, *Without a Dowry*, p. 26).

Theatre, according to Ostrovsky, is not and should not be equated to life in general; it should remain a superstratum of life, capable of looking at it from above, as it were, and didactically pinpointing areas that need improvement. The role of theatre, then, is based on the Aristotelian *should be's* and the Horacian instruction that necessarily has to be coupled with entertainment.

The thought expressed by Vyshnevsky did not get any further development in *Dokhodnoe mesto*, and the issue was dropped as less significant than the other philosophical questions occupying Ostrovsky's mind in 1856. The playwright did not return to it for nine years (and even then did so only indirectly), until he started working on *Puchina* in 1865. Apparently, the connection between theatre and life was an important issue for the Russian playwright, and he made another attempt at clarifying this correlation. In *Puchina*, Ostrovsky looked at the formula of "life follows (or at least should follow) theatre." Kiselnikov leaves the university and gets married. He then fights his life battles both at home and at work—in vain. He commits a forgery, which results in him losing his mind. If theatre merely imitates life, as one might expect from the theatre of realism, then its didactic aspect is diluted as it teaches almost nothing. Not much can be learned by mere replication and an accurate, realistic reproduction of events and developments. Had Ostrovsky's intent been to hold a mirror to life without sending his audience a message, he would have finished the play with Kiselnikov's irreversible deterioration that could be considered a logical end to the depicted life scenario. However, the curtain drops on Kiselnikov's lucid moment when he consciously rejects a helping hand and decides to remain with nothing rather than jeopardize the lives of his loved ones. Even at the moment of utter misery and need, one still has the option of redeeming himself with selfless love for his neighbor. Is Kiselnikov acting out of character? Perhaps, but Ostrovsky needs him to, in order to show that salvation is possible even at the very end of one's life journey. Between a realistic

and a biblically moralistic ending, the playwright chooses the latter in accordance with his personal understanding of theatre as an instrument for societal betterment.

Frank Kermode believes that for poets “the End is a figure for their own deaths.”⁴⁴² In this sense, Ostrovsky’s literary/dramatic endings, or rather lack thereof, did not qualify as real ends to the playwright. We feel as if his dramas often leave us with an ellipsis mark instead of a full stop, and that, to Ostrovsky, was not an experiment with the form. It was a feature of philosophical content that should be understood in only one way: the playwright’s quest for the truth was not over. The ellipsis mark meant continuation—if not by Ostrovsky himself, then by his numerous disciples after his death.

After *Puchina*, it took Ostrovsky another five years and six new dramas to come back to the subject of theatre. *Les*, written when Ostrovsky was forty-seven years old, is his first wholehearted and earnest attempt to look at the relation between theatre and life and their mutual influence. *Les* is populated by actors and “normal” people, who are viewed in opposition. The principal pair of antagonists in the play are Gurmyzhskaya and Neschastlivtsev. To make the experiment as pure as possible, i.e., least affected by external factors such as class distinctions or differences in upbringing, Ostrovsky makes his pair of antagonists related and not too far apart in years. That means that practically the only difference between them is the presence or absence of theatre—Neschastlivtsev is a professional actor while Gurmyzhskaya is not.

Gurmyzhskaya lives among “normal,” non-acting folk, who put on different masks and act, i.e., pretend and say things that are not, in real life. She has been wearing the mask of a virtuous woman for a long time, fooling everybody into thinking that she is benevolent and good-natured. Bulanov is a real-life chameleon, easily adaptable to any situation and any circumstances, pretending to have no opinion of his own and living solely for the pleasure of

⁴⁴² Frank Kermode, *The Sense of an Ending: Studies in the Theory of Fiction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1967), p. 7.

others, while this is, in fact, his way of manipulating everybody around, much like Glumov's in *Na vsiakogo mudretsa dovol'no prostoty*. Ulita snakes her way into Gurmyzhskaya's heart by making herself a useful spy and a flatterer who guards her benefactress's many dirty secrets. Usually the difference between a professional and an amateur is in remuneration. The former is paid for acting and pretending while the latter does it for free. In *Les*, Ostrovsky insists that this differentiation is irrelevant. Ulita and Bulanov get a tangible material gain from their "performances"; Gurmyzhskaya experiences financial losses but gains herself a toy husband. Getting something for real-life acting seems a fair exchange for wearing a mask and pretending to be a person one is not.

Гурмыжская. Комедия! Как ты смеешь? Да хоть бы и комедия; я тебя кормлю и одеваю, и заставляю играть комедию.⁴⁴³

Food and clothing is the price for Aksyusha's acting and can be withdrawn if the girl does not agree to pretend to be Bulanov's fiancée as ordered by Gurmyzhskaya. For Ulita, Bulanov, and Gurmyzhskaya, the whole world is a stage, and the only difference between them and professional actors and actresses is that when the curtain falls, their masks do not come off and they continue to stay in character. For those three, acting consumes all of their lives.

In contrast, the true nature of Schastlivtsev's and Neschastlivtsev's characters is much more clearly defined. They do their share of pretending and mask-wearing on stage, but they are able to transform into their true selves after the performance is over. The comedian and the tragedian readily admit their real-life weaknesses, sins, and afflictions instead of masking them with good behavior. Schastlivtsev, for example, makes no secret that to him, like a great many other actors, "трактир дороже всего,"⁴⁴⁴ while Neschastlivtsev claims that he and Arkady are

⁴⁴³ Ostrovskii, *Les*, p. 23. "**Raisa.** A farce! How dare you! All right, farce it may be, but I feed you and clothe you, and I'll make you play out this farce" (Ostrovsky, *Forest*, p. 34; in his translation, Mulrine calls Gurmyzhskaya by her first name, Raisa).

⁴⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 35. "[A] wayside inn's dearer [...] than anything" (Ostrovsky, *Forest*, p. 50).

“почти черти.”⁴⁴⁵ The characters of Schastlivtsev and Neschastlivtsev are written in Ostrovsky’s favorite manner as a contrasting pair, but they stay united by their love for theatre and the effect of extreme poverty that it has on both.

Having been let down by the theatre, Neschastlivtsev decides to put on a real-life act for his aunt’s sake so that he could take a short rest from his wanderings and spend some time under her roof. He decides to play a role of a high-ranking officer and wants Arkady to pretend to be his flunkey. It turns out that Gurmyzhskaya owes her nephew one thousand rubles, exactly the amount that Neschastlivtsev forces Vosmibratov to return to her for a sale deal botched by Gurmyzhskaya. Gennady is happy that he did a good deed by helping his aunt get her money back, while Arkady chastises him for not being practical enough and pocketing the money that is rightfully his. Arkady has picked up on the goings-on and realized that all of the inhabitants of the estate are playing some kind of a role.

Счастливец. [...] Вот вы говорите, что умны; а гимназист-то [Буланов], видно, умнее; он здесь получше вашего роль-то играет.

Несчастливец. Какая роль, братец. Ну, что он такое? Мальчишка, больше ничего.

Счастливец. Какая роль? Первый любовник-с.

Несчастливец. Любовник?⁴⁴⁶

Both parties in *Les*, the actors and the non-acting folk, are pretending to be someone they are not, and they all do it off stage, for their personal advantage, so why does Ostrovsky insist on Neschastlivtsev’s inability to tell that the rest of the household is putting on an act? At this point, the playwright merely hints that actors are not accustomed to real-life pretending and that the mere notion that somebody can be living a constant lie appears alien to them. Arkady, by the way, was tipped off by Ulita; he did not recognize the deception on his own either.

⁴⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 42. “[L]ittle better than devils” (Ostrovsky, *Forest*, p. 58).

⁴⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 58. “**Schastlivtsev.** [...] Well, you’re saying you’re smart, but the way I see it, that schoolboy’s [Bulanov] a lot smarter. He is playing his part here better than you, that’s for sure. **Neschastlivtsev.** What part? I mean, what is he? He’s just a silly little boy. **Schastlivtsev.** What part? The romantic lead, that’s what part. **Neschastlivtsev.** The lover?” (Ostrovsky, *Forest*, p. 76).

Apparently, theatre and life have great many differences. Lying, pretending, and verbal manipulation are, according to Ostrovsky, the biggest sins in life, but in theatre they are useful devices absolutely necessary to move and convince the audience if one is looking not merely to entertain but also to instruct.

It is possible that it was Scribe who planted in Ostrovsky's mind the idea of contrasting positive lying on stage with negative lying in life. In his last drama, *Adrienne Lecouvreur*, written in 1849 and by 1870 already well known in Russia,⁴⁴⁷ the Princess reads the titular character's letter, in which Adrienne is openly judgmental about the difference of onstage and offstage acting:

La Princesse. [...] [« ...L]’avantage des princesses de théâtre sur les véritables, c’est que nous ne jouions la comédie que le soir, tandis qu’elles la jouaient toute la journée [...] ». ⁴⁴⁸

Faced with the swift proliferation of materialism and atheism in late-nineteenth-century Russia, Ostrovsky insisted that emotions were wasted on people's insensitive natures in real life as there were two main principles that guided the newly discovered race for survival: every man for himself, and *homo homini lupus est*. In theatre, on the other hand, the same emotions could still elicit a powerful response from the same people, and audiences would feel, commiserate, and rejoice in unison, together with the actor on stage.

Несчастливцев. [...] Зачем же даром изнашивать свою душу! Кто здесь откликнется на твое богатое чувство? Кто оценит эти перлы, эти брильянты слез? [...] А там... О! Если половину этих сокровищ ты бросишь публике, театр развалится от рукоплесканий. Тебя засыпают цветами, подарками. Здесь на твои рыдания, на твои стоны нет ответа; а там за одну слезу твою заплачет тысяча глаз. ⁴⁴⁹

⁴⁴⁷ Scribe's plays were very popular in Tsarist Russia because they were detached from Russian reality and therefore free from painful issues red-flagged by censors. Herzen described Scribe as “гений, писатель буржуазии, он ее любит, он любим ею” (as quoted in Abalkin, p. 90)—“a genius, a writer of the bourgeoisie, in love with it and loved back by it.”

⁴⁴⁸ Scribe, *Adrienne Lecouvreur*, in his *Théâtre choisi*, pp. 411–510, at p. 423. **The Princess.** [...] “[...T]he advantage of theatre princesses over real-life ones is that we playact only in the evening, while they are doing it all day long [...].”

⁴⁴⁹ Ostrovskii, *Les*, p. 70. “**Neschastlivtsev.** [...] Why wear your immortal soul in vain? Who in this place has the slightest inkling of that rich store of feeling you possess? Who can appreciate those pearls, those diamond-bright tears? [...] But there.... Ah! If you fling even half of those treasures to an audience, the very theatre will tumble down in ruins from the sheer force of the applause! You'll be showered with bouquets, expensive gifts. Here, all

Here Ostrovsky is not speaking about holding a mirror to real life in theatre; he is clearly insisting on the Aristotelian *should be*'s and Horace's theatrical didacticism. In keeping with the tradition of Ancient Greek and later Christian morality plays, drama needs to be used as a means of education. Gogol said it first and then Ostrovsky made it his life credo:

[...К]нижку журнала прочтут несколько тысяч человек, а пьесу посмотрят несколько сот тысяч. Всякие другие произведения пишутся для образованных людей, а драмы и комедии для всего народа.⁴⁵⁰

Ostrovsky insisted that theatre should educate, influence, and inspire through feelings rather than through intellect, and people should respond to it on a subconscious rather than conscious level:

[...В]сякое художественное произведение дает мысль — и не одну, а целую перспективу мыслей, от которых не отделаешься. Голые тенденции и прописные истины недолго удерживаются в уме: они там не закреплены чувством. Сказать умное, честное слово не мудрено: их так много сказано и написано; но чтоб истины действовали, убеждали, умудряли,— надо, чтоб они прошли прежде через души, через умы высшего сорта, т. е. творческие, художнические. Иметь хорошие мысли может всякий, а владеть умами и сердцами дано только избранным.⁴⁵¹

In *Les*, Ostrovsky idealizes theatre not only by putting it in a position of life's educator but also by giving it supremacy over life. The main message of the drama is revealed on its last page, when Neschastlivtsev insists that, compared to theatre, life is nothing but a dark, scary, uninviting, and unfriendly forest where one feels alone and gets easily lost.

your sobs and groans find no response, but there, one solitary tear will cause a thousand eyes to weep" (Ostrovsky, *Forest*, p. 90).

⁴⁵⁰ Ostrovsky as quoted by Sergei Vladimirovich Mikhalkov, "Slovo ob Ostrovskom" (A Word about Ostrovsky), in Vladimir Rodionovich Shcherbina (ed.), *A. N. Ostrovskii: novye materialy i issledovaniia* (Ostrovsky: New Materials and Studies), 2 books, Literaturnoe nasledstvo (Literary Heritage), vol. 88 (Moscow: Nauka, 1974), book 1, pp. 9–14, at p. 10. "[...A]n issue of a journal will be read by thousands while a play will be seen by hundreds of thousands. Other works are written for the educated, while comedies and tragedies are for everybody."

⁴⁵¹ Ostrovskii, "O prichinakh upadka," p. 158. "[...E]very work of art provokes an idea, and not just a single one, but an entire host of ideas, which one cannot shun. Pure tendencies and common truths do not stay in one's mind for long, for they are not fastened by feeling. To say a wise and honest word is easy; so many of them have already been said and written. But for these truths to have an effect, to convince, and to educate, they need to first pass through souls and minds of the highest quality, i.e., creative, artistic minds. Anyone can have good thoughts, but only the chosen few are empowered to reign over the hearts and minds of others."

Несчастливцев. [...] И в самом деле, брат Аркадий, зачем мы зашли, как мы попали в этот лес, в этот сыр-дремучий бор? Зачем мы, братец, спугнули сов и филинов? Что им мешать! Пусть их живут, как им хочется! Тут всё в порядке, братец, как в лесу быть следует. Старухи выходят замуж за гимназистов, молодые девушки топятя от горького житья у своих родных: лес, братец.

Гурмыжская (*пожимая плечами*). Комедианты.

Несчастливцев. Комедианты? Нет, мы артисты, благородные артисты, а комедианты — вы. Мы коли любим, так уж любим; коли не любим, так ссоримся или деремся; коли помогаем, так уж последним трудовым грошом. А вы? Вы всю жизнь толкуете о благе общества, о любви к человечеству. А что вы сделали? Кого накормили? Кого утешили? Вы тешите только самих себя, самих себя забавляете. Вы комедианты, шуты, а не мы.⁴⁵²

Magarshack comments on Ostrovsky's opinion of the importance of theatres,⁴⁵³ referring to a truly important pronouncement by the playwright:

Драматическая поэзия ближе к народу, чем все другие отрасли литературы. Всякие другие произведения пишутся для образованных людей, а драмы и комедии — для всего народа [...]. Эта близость к народу нисколько не унижает драматической поэзии, а напротив, удваивает ее силы и не дает ей опопшиться и измелъчать.⁴⁵⁴

The presence of this very quality, dramatic poetry, is what affirms the elevated role of theatre over life. The high aspirations of theatre have to keep pulling the material everydayness up, reaching for what is better, kinder, more moral, enlightened, and just in human existence. An actor, who lives his life pretending to be someone he is not and saying things that only *should be* the truth but in fact are not, is portrayed as a man infinitely more virtuous than a non-acting

⁴⁵² Ostrovskii, *Les*, pp. 93–94. “**Neschastlivtsev.** [...] Arkady my friend, why did we drop in here? How did we come to land in this forest, this damp pinewood jungle? What are we doing, frightening all these owls and nighthawks? Why bother with them? Let them live however they like! Everything's in apple-pie order, my friend, as it should be in a forest. Old women are marrying schoolboys, young girls are drowning themselves, because of the wretched lives they lead with their relatives—oh yes, that's the forest, my friend. **Raisa** (*Shrugs*). Huh—comedians. **Neschastlivtsev.** Comedians? No, we're artistes—honourable artistes. It's you who are the comedians. If we love, we do so truly. If we don't love, we quarrel, or fight. If we help someone, we give them the last hard-earned kopeck we possess. But you? You spend your whole life droning on about the welfare of society, about your love for your humanity. And what have you actually accomplished? Have you fed anybody? Have you comforted anybody? You comfort only yourselves, you amuse only yourselves. Yes, you're the comedians, you're the jesters, not us” (Ostrovsky, *Forest*, pp. 116–117).

⁴⁵³ Magarshack, p. 6.

⁴⁵⁴ Ostrovskii, “Zapiska o polozhenii dramaticheskogo iskusstva v Rossii v nastoiashchee vremia” (A Note on the Present State of Dramatic Art in Russia), in his *PSJ*, vol. 12, pp. 110–127, at p. 123. Although Magarshack offers a translation of this passage, he misattributes it to a different article (p. 6), and I am supplying my own translation: “Dramatic poetry is closer to the masses than any other branch of literature. All other works of literature are written for educated people, while dramas and comedies are for everybody [...]. This closeness to the masses does not degrade dramatic poetry; on the contrary, it doubles its potency and prevents it from turning vulgar and shallow.”

person. An actor, who lies and manipulates others for a living is placed on an elevated platform, in a position to chastise and instruct those who do something different in life. He is given this right merely because he is instrumental in a struggle for societal betterment. As paradoxical as it may seem, in terms of role-playing *Les* portrays theatre as an entity more normal and less twisted than real life. What is good, justified, and even beneficial on stage should, according to Ostrovsky, be unacceptable in life or else the entire society would change into that of shame.

In *Ne vse kotu Maslenitsa*, theatricality is successfully used in life to achieve a purpose. Unlike *Les*, where theatrics had an immoral goal, here Agnia and Ippolit find a good use for them. In the first instance, in Act I, scene 5, when Agnia pretends to be mad with Ippolit for taking the bookmark that she has embroidered for him, it helps the young man to overcome his shyness and finally tell her how he feels about her. Agnia, of course, acts the part, hoping to achieve that same result, and it is nothing but clever tactics in a dating game. The play belongs to the third period of Ostrovsky's shame/guilt exploration where appearances (shame) are depicted as the only existing impetus for the new generation in Russia. Therefore Agnia is portrayed as resourceful, smart, and capable; a female Glumov, as it were. Just like Glumov, she is charismatic enough for the audience to be taken by her from the beginning. Her practical approach first to dating and later to acquiring the money that she believes is rightfully her fiancé's wins her the audience's sympathies.

The second instance of a creative and effective use of theatrics in life, which takes place in Act III, scene 3, is more dramatic and much riskier than the first. Akhov, Ippolit's uncle and employer, owes his nephew fifteen thousand rubles for a decade of impeccable service. Ippolit has lost all hope of getting this money because every time he asks for it, he gets a vehement refusal. Agnia, who is very interested in marrying Ippolit and consequently has plans for the money, advises her boyfriend to put on an act to get it. Ippolit masterfully feigns a suicide

attempt, aiming a knife at his own throat and delivering a farewell speech in which he blames his ruined life on his uncle. Akhov gets cold feet and chooses to part with the money rather than be responsible for the grave sin of driving a relative to an untimely death. Later, in Act IV, Ippolit comes clean and tells his uncle that he never planned a suicide, and it was all just a trick to get the money. Lying and manipulating aside, pretending to commit a suicide, which for a Christian is an unpardonable sin—since, if God gives man life, only He can claim it—is treated lightly in the play. Apparently, in a society of shame, the means is always justified by the goal, and any type of theatrics may be used for personal advantage.

It also needs to be pointed out that in *Ne vse kotu Maslenitsa* the question of real-life playacting is linked to that of honest and dishonest money: Akhov withholds the money that belongs to Ippolit, but does the goal justify the means in this situation? Doesn't aiming a knife at one's own throat and making a condemning farewell speech mean going way over the top in a situation like this? Two wrongs never make a right, and if Ippolit's method of obtaining the money is that dishonest, the money itself becomes dishonest by extension. This particular thought is, of course, not easily accessible if one merely follows the intrigue of the play.

Komik XVII stoletia is Ostrovsky's second play devoted entirely to theatre. It was written to commemorate the bicentennial of Russian theatre and harks back to the rule of Tsar Alexis I. *Komik* is a semi-historical play: its historicism comes from actual chronicles, archives, historical manuscripts, and the *Domostroi*, but its fictional component is so substantial that it does not allow it to be categorized as fully historical. The main aim of the comedy was to show that theatre in Russia was not a mere invention of the royal court; it was an institution that had organically grown out of balagan-type and ballad-performance entertainment that had amused the masses long before the seventeenth century. *Komik* places theatre and real life in direct opposition, creating considerable tension and even a conflict between the two. Instigated by the Church and

much supported by the government, the contemporary policy was to denounce any type of performance as dishonest, devil-inspired buffoonery. Decent people were advised to stay as far away from it as possible:

А если при этом [...] забавы разные или игра на гусях и всякая музыка, пляски и хлопанье в ладоши, и скачут всякие игры, и песни бесовские,— тогда, словно дым отгоняет пчел, отойдут и ангелы божьи от этой трапезы и непристойной беседы. А бесы возрадуются и налетят, свой час улучив; тогда и творится всё, что им хочется: бесчинствуют [...], всякими бесовскими играми тешатся [...].⁴⁵⁵

In Act I of *Komik*, Yakov tells Natalya about his passion for theatre that he cannot resist, and it scares the young girl:

Яков. Да так-то хорошо,
Что, кажется, кабы не грех великий,
Не страх отца... Вот так тебя и тянет,
Мерещится и ночью.

Наталя (*с участием*). Без крестов
Играете игру-то? Перед действием
Снимаете кресты-то?

Яков. Не снимаем.

Наталя. Греха-то что!⁴⁵⁶

Buffoonery, however sinful, provided good entertainment and brought aesthetic pleasure to people, who looked forward to performances during street fairs and holidays. The public universally craved something that was expressly forbidden. Tsar Alexis I found a compromise that seemed to appease the clergy and reconcile it with the idea of creating the first professional Russian theatre: only plays with biblical content were planned to be staged.⁴⁵⁷

⁴⁵⁵ *Domostroi: russkii semeinyi ustav* (The *Domostroi*: Russian Household Code) (Moscow: Eksmo, 2005), p. 75. “If they [people] indulge in [...] any diversion—harps or dancing, clapping, galloping about, games, irreligious songs—then just as smoke drives away bees, so will the angels of God leave that table and that disgusting conversation. The demons will appear, rejoicing. Their desires will be loosed and all kinds of things that please Satan will happen” (*The Domostroi: Rules for Russian Households in the Time of Ivan the Terrible*, trans. and ed. Carolyn Johnston Pouncy (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1995), p. 77).

⁴⁵⁶ Ostrovskii, *Komik*, p. 243. “**Yakov.** It’s so good, / That had it not been called a mighty sin, / And had I not been scared of my father... / I’m so drawn to it, I dream of it at night. **Natalya** (*with empathy*). You do perform with holy crosses off? / You take them off before you start the show? **Yakov.** We don’t. / **Natalya.** My, how sinful!”

⁴⁵⁷ It needs to be noted that Russia did not follow the rest of Europe in the development of its drama. Because of the three hundred years of the Mongolian yoke, Russia started with medieval drama, then skipped Renaissance altogether, and jammed commedia dell’arte of the sixteenth century, drama of the seventeenth, Enlightenment, neo-classicism and romanticism into one short century (eighteenth).

In *Komik*, however, the focus is kept on comedy rather than a mystery play. Gregory, a German chosen to train the first Russian professional company, insists that the comedic genre is the most promising and engaging one if didacticism is the main aim of a theatrical performance. The very form of comedy is appealing; its lightness, brightness, and loveliness entice the audience to come and see it, and a more substantial content can be easily hidden under it.

Матвеев. [...] Как ты полагаешь,
Для царской ли забавы лишь годна
Комидия? Для русского народа,
Для всех чинов и званий — от посадских
До нас, бояр — немало пользы в ней.
[...]
Простой народ, коль верить иноземцам,
В комидии не действо, правду видит [...].⁴⁵⁸

Komik ends in a panegyric to comedy that exposes people's vices and makes a person take a fresh look at himself and his life. This panegyric also gives theatre and a comedian in it the status of a judge of life. In his idealization of theatre, Ostrovsky bestows on it a prerogative to sound a warning to a life gone astray, in order to bring it back to the righteous path. The ostensibly sacrilegious statement of the last Act, which might be perceived as going slightly overboard in praising the playwright's preferred genre, should be viewed in a historical context where panegyrics, laudations, and high rhetoric were considered the norm of daily communications. Ostrovsky's eulogy to comedy can also be partially explained by the very nature of the play. It was meant as a glorifying hymn to theatre as opposed to an accurately historical account of its emergence in Russia; a drama that mythicized, not reflected, reality.

In *Bespridannitsa*, Ostrovsky brings a comedian back to earth, while not necessarily lowering his assessment of the role of comedy as a theatre genre. A devout servant of Thalia, Robinson cannot even remotely qualify as a judge of anything. His is the most pitiful role in the

⁴⁵⁸ Ostrovskii, *Komik*, pp. 259–260. “**Матвеев.** [...] Do you reckon / That comedy is only to entertain the tsar? / For all the Russian people, for every class and title— / From lowest to highest—it's greatly useful. [...] The simple folk, if foreigners be trusted, / See truth in comedy, not mere action [...].”

drama; just as Larisa, he is used as an object, a thing that one might need from time to time. However, unlike Larisa, whose permission was at least asked when others decided that they wanted to use her as a toy or trophy, Robinson is placed in a position when he has no choice but to become Paratov's personal property. The comedian's performing capacity is never employed in its full capacity: all that is asked of him is that he should outdrink whomever his benefactor Paratov points out to him. Schastlivtsev does not get paid for his services, but he is fed and clothed and allowed to accompany his master whenever the latter feels like it. There is no glory or meaning in such a role; the truth remains forever hidden from this comedian, and he is exposed to it only on a need-to-know basis. Such a comedian cannot judge life, because he is barred from actively participating in it and because he is processed by it with no regard for his professional qualities. A non-acting comedian without a stage or dramatic plot and thus uninvolved in enlightening the public is, to Ostrovsky, just a pitiful figure with no moral weight in society. It is the dramatist and the director who unite in crafting the message to the audience, utilizing the talent of the theatre's cast and crew.

In *Talanty i poklonniki*, Ostrovsky reverses the lens with which he examines the life–theatre relation: he is no longer looking at theatre influencing life; he is scrutinizing the ramifications of life influencing theatre. If theatre is supposed to educate life, then through an inevitable backwash, life unmistakably educates theatre. The audience shapes every performance by dictating and imposing its own rules on the bohemians. *Talanty i poklonniki* insists that the audience primarily pays for an actress's ability to flirt with it and please it, and it notices her talent second. An actor's fame is a fickle thing, and talent alone is never enough for a thespian. Sasha Negina is a much better actress than Nina Smelskaya, and yet she lives in poverty and does not even have a dress to wear on the night of her benefit performance, while Smelskaya enjoys an expensive and luxurious lifestyle.

Дулебов. [...] Чтобы брать большие бенефисы, нужно знакомство хорошее, нужно уметь его выбрать, уметь обходиться... Я могу вам назвать лиц десять, которых нужно привлечь на свою сторону; вот и великолепные бенефисы будут: и призы, и подарки.⁴⁵⁹

Dulebov proceeds to offer Neginia to move into a much better apartment in exchange for her attention and devotion. When Neginia firmly rejects his offer, he refuses to buy tickets to her benefit performance. Apparently, Neginia's talent alone is not enough to keep the public interested.

Pyotr Meluzov, a non-actor, and Sasha Neginia, an actress, are both young and idealistic. They aim for the stars and try to stay moral and pure. But life is creeping in on both of them, feeding them a reality pill and teaching them to shed their idealism in favor of pure practicality:

Великатов. [...] Я очень люблю молодых людей.

Мелузов. Уж будто?

Великатов. Очень люблю их слушать... это освежает душу. Такие благородные, высокие замыслы... даже завидно.

Мелузов. Чему же тут завидовать? Кто ж вам мешает иметь благородные, высокие замыслы?

Великатов. Нет, где же нам, помилуйте! Нас проза жизни одолела. И рад бы в рай, да грехи не пускают.

Мелузов. Какие же за вами грехи водятся?

Великатов. Тяжкие. Практические соображения, материальные расчеты — вот наши грехи. Постоянно обращаешься в сфере возможного, достижимого; ну, душа-то и мельчает, уж высоких, благородных замыслов и не приходит в голову.

Мелузов. Да что вы называете благородными замыслами?

Великатов. А такие замыслы, в которых очень много благородства и очень мало шансов на успех.⁴⁶⁰

⁴⁵⁹ Ostrovskii, *Talanty i poklonniki*, in his *PSS*, vol. 9, pp. 7–76, at p. 17. “**Dulyebov.** [...] You’ve got to know the right people, to do well from benefit performances—you’ve got to know who to pick, how to handle them.... I could name a dozen people you’d need to back you, then you’d have magnificent shows—with prizes and gifts, even” (Ostrovsky, *Artistes and Admirers*, in his *Plays Two*, pp. 119–195, at p. 132; in his translation, Mulrine uses a title that is slightly different from what Ostrovsky meant in Russian, and spells the name Dulebov as Dulyebov).

⁴⁶⁰ Ibid., pp. 25–26. “**Velikatov.** [...] I’m very fond of young people. **Meluzov.** Really? **Velikatov.** Yes, I like listening to them—it refreshes the spirit. They have such noble, high-minded designs.... I even envy them. **Meluzov.** What’s there to be envious about? What’s stopping you having your own noble, high-minded designs? **Velikatov.** Oh, good heavens, where would we get them? The prose of life has overwhelmed us. I’d love to be in paradise, but my sins won’t let me. **Meluzov.** What kind of sins do you mean? **Velikatov.** Oh, grievous, mortal sins. Practical considerations, material concerns—those are our sins. When you’re constantly revolving in the sphere of the possible, the attainable—well, you become mean-spirited, and exalted, high-minded schemes never even enter your head. **Meluzov.** So what do you call exalted schemes? **Velikatov.** Well, projects which have a great deal of virtue, and very little chance of success” (Ostrovsky, *Artistes and Admirers*, p. 142).

The dichotomy of aspiring youth and pragmatic maturity, with the latter getting the upper hand, is what constitutes the influence of life on theatre. This sheer pragmatism has consumed Smelskaya and is finding its way to Negina, lowering her from idealistic heights into materialistic hollows. Negina's middle-aged mother has already forgotten the symbolic value of flowers and poems as rewards for artistic talent; she is much happier to see money and useful gifts bestowed on her daughter as signs of appreciation. Velikatov's gradual, six-step approach—an evening dress for Sasha's performance; a carriage ride to a good dinner; a promise to the mother that she will be able to breed her favorite chickens if her daughter wises up and accepts his proposal to move to Moscow with him; the gift of a shawl to the mother; paying a very good price for Sasha's benefit performance; and finally a skillfully composed love letter to Negina—buys Sasha's talent and Sasha herself for his personal amusement. What Dulebov could not achieve in one step, Velikatov managed in six because he chose to be wiser and more patient than his opponent.

In contrast to Narokov, who chose the high art of theatre over fortune, Sasha Negina sacrifices theatre for materialistic gain. Her talent is sold for a good price and will never again inspire Narokov's poetry or bring tears to the eyes of theatre-goers in the town of Bryakhimov. Life corrupted theatre by unceremoniously bringing it down to its crude level.

Ostrovsky's next play, *Krasavets-muzhchina*, is not about theatre per se, but those familiar with the nineteenth-century French theatre in general and Scribe in particular will easily recognize a tribute to a well-made play with its fast-paced and abundant action, unquestionable logic in development, plenty of surprises, and an obligatory ingenious *coup de théâtre*. Ostrovsky even provided an acting challenge for the actress who has to play two disparate parts: Susanna, a pleasant-looking, affable, and easy-going young flirt, and Oboldueva, an uneducated, ugly, and physically deformed millionairess. The “real-life” theatre performance that the character puts on

for Okoyomov's sake saves her own and Zoya's honor, their family money, and upsets Okoyomov's plans to remarry. Susanna's use of theatrics in life is not as extreme as the mock suicide attempt by Ippolit in *Ne vse kotu Maslenitsa*, but while Ippolit's performance belonged to Ostrovsky's third period of shame/guilt exploration, hers belongs to the fourth, in which the playwright firmly renounced shame and thus any outer falsification of true content. The explanation of this ostensible discrepancy lies in the fact that, unlike Ippolit's, Susanna's character is far from virtuous. It takes her uncle Naum to disclose her shameful intentions of paying Okoyomov so that he could divorce Zoya and marry her. This performance, into which Susanna is pushed by Sosipatra, also serves as a test for Okoyomov and his intentions to marry her. Once Susanna is assured that he prefers Oboldueva's hump to her own prettiness because Oboldueva has twice as much money, she becomes convinced of Apollon's unworthiness and manages to make the right choice and take the first step on the road of reformation.

I had to mention the sole theatrical incident in *Krasavets-muzhchina* to pave the path to Ostrovsky's last play on theatre, the piece that I believe to be a crowning achievement of his philosophy. Just as *Brothers Karamazov* is the result of Dostoevsky's lifelong philosophical research, *Bez viny vinovatye* ties up most of the loose ends that the playwright has left in his quest for the truth so far. *Bez viny vinovatye* was written only three years before Ostrovsky's death, and only one original play appeared after it. The entire research that Ostrovsky had been conducting for decades was finalized in this four-act drama, which the author called a comedy—naturally, in his own understanding of the term.

Bez viny vinovatye has a distinctly Western form, that of Scribe's well-made drama; it even has a typical Scribean object that serves as an axis around which the action makes about-face turns when we least expect it. The golden medallion that Grisha mentions in his toast at the farewell party for Kruchinina unites the long-separated mother and son, providing a happy end

for the otherwise highly dramatic, tense, and tragic plot. The content of *Bez viny vinovatye* is profoundly philosophical. At the age of sixty, Ostrovsky looked at the relativity of everything under the sun, once again refusing to be categorical and judgmental and leaving this prerogative to God who, unlike man with his limited knowledge, understands all the mysteries and complexities of life.

The two most relative things in the world are, according to Ostrovsky, the concepts of good and evil if they are placed outside the doctrines enshrined in the Scripture. The harm that was caused to Lyuba Otradina by Murov in Act I builds her character and fills her heart with such potent emotions that once she becomes an actress, she is able to easily touch and move her audiences. Her ability to empathize turns Otradina into the greatest actress of her time, which translates into both fame and fortune. The benefit that Murov is chasing when he dumps Otradina and marries Taisa turns out to be nothing but an acute disappointment later in life. His marriage remains perfunctory and unsatisfactory and leaves no children. Kruchinina seeks to do something good for Grisha Neznamov, but all her actions are misinterpreted and result in Grisha's aggravation and alienation. Nina Korinkina's jealousy leads her to plotting against Lyuba Kruchinina, trying to slander her, but the result of it is a reconciliation of a mother and her son.

In the end of Act III, Grisha Neznamov asks Shmaga about the difference between good and evil, and he gets an answer that Ostrovsky came to fully support by the age of sixty:

Незнамов. Да ведь есть же разница между добром и злом?

Шмага. Говорят, есть какая-то маленькая; да не наше это дело.⁴⁶¹

Shmaga's facetious remark does not sound so facetious when we look at it from the standpoint of the playwright's reluctance to judge anything outside the biblical principles of morality. In *Bez*

⁴⁶¹ Ostrovskii, *Bez viny vinovatye*, p. 202. "Незнамов. What, you don't think there's a difference between good and evil? Шмага. Oh yes, there's some small distinction, but that's none of our business" (Ostrovsky, *Innocent as Charged*, p. 333).

vinny vinovatyye, Ostrovsky also looked at the relativity of the theatre–life interrelation. Hard life has influenced Kruchinina’s thespian talent, and now this talent is influencing thousands of people who come to see her performances. The same influence, but on a smaller scale because of his young age, can be traced in Grisha. Nina’s comfortable living has transformed her into a mediocre actress, whose performances are passable but never profoundly influential. Since Nina’s mediocrity keeps her tightly tied to real life, she needs to constantly sacrifice her integrity to stay afloat. Mukhoboev, a theatre patron on whom the company depends financially, demands that Grisha should be fired, and even though this will mean a great loss to the company, Nina is actively lobbying for Grisha’s expulsion. Life and theatre obviously take turns influencing and educating one another, remaining in a constant tug-of-war, or rather tug-of-peace-and-evolution.

The contrasting natures of life and theatre once again appear in *Bez viny vinovatyye*, confirming Ostrovsky’s view with regard to their coexistence:

Дудукин. [...] Обыватели у нас большею частью люди солидные, тяжеловесные, богатые, благотворительные, степенные и даже первостепенные.

Кручинина. Чего же еще!

Дудукин. Но относительно нравов и умственного развития находятся еще в самом первоначальном невежестве и о существовании искусства имеют представления самые смутные. А ведь артисты народ не обеспеченный [...], по-русски [сказать], птицы небесные [...].⁴⁶²

However, staying focused on his main topic of research, that of guilt and shame, Ostrovsky still insists that acting should always remain the prerogative of theatre and should only be reserved for the stage. While it is definitely appropriate and beneficial there, it is absolutely unacceptable

⁴⁶² Ibid., p. 167. “**Dudukin.** [...] People round these parts are for the most part solid, sober citizens, wealthy philanthropists and the like, staid in the extreme. **Kruchinina.** What more could you ask? **Dudukin.** Yes, but as far as their morals, and mental development is concerned, they’re still in the most primitive state of ignorance, and they have only the haziest notion of the very existence of the dramatic art. And actors are very special folk—[...] as we call them in Russia, ‘birds of heaven’” (Ostrovsky, *Innocent as Charged*, p. 292).

in real life: not only does it serve as an act of manipulation and deception, it also inevitably turns one who acts into a person of shame.

Незнамов (*задумывается*). Актриса! актриса! Так и играй на сцене. Там за хорошее притворство деньги платят. А играть в жизни над простыми, доверчивыми сердцами, которым игра не нужна, которые правды просят... за это казнить надо... нам обмана не нужно! Нам подавай правду, чистую правду!⁴⁶³

When theatre strives to portray unmarred beauty and unsoiled morality, it should result in it being educational and elevating life to a higher level. Life's unavoidable counter-influence pushes theatre down to the ground, creating tension between aspirations of the soul and restrictions of the body, while firmly uniting the two opposing forces, the two struggling natures within the same living man. In Ostrovsky's understanding, there is a constant pull and push between life and theatre: the latter tries to ameliorate life; the former responds by depraving its high art. As long as theatre remains of superior quality, the two forces will preserve their parity, remaining forever locked in their mutual dependency. Ostrovsky knew very well what it meant to adapt the form of his dramas to the accepted norms, without compromising their content, in order to appease strict censorship and the erratic public. During his almost forty years of involvement with theatre, he learned how to veil important messages, concealing them under the established theatre canons. In his resolute struggle to preserve Russian Orthodox morality, the playwright managed to provide his audiences with high-quality, inspiring, and deeply philosophical plays while almost never aggravating his censors.

By the end of his life, Ostrovsky came to a realization that the duality of human nature is not just the key to its understanding but also, and most importantly, the key to its acceptance. Every means in shaping man's morals and mentality is important—love, education, exposure to

⁴⁶³ Ibid., p. 196. “**Незнамов** (*deep in thought*). An actress, eh? Well, you can keep your acting for the stage. Folk pay good money for a clever impersonation. But in real life, playing on the hearts of simple, trusting people, people who don't want acting, but the plain truth...that's a hanging matter! That's fraud, and we don't need that—just give us the truth, the honest truth!” (Ostrovsky, *Innocent as Charged*, p. 326).

high arts—but trying to adhere to the principles of Christian morality is the most important of all. Sinning is as inevitable for man as breathing, but trying to stay away from the gravest transgressions is quite possible if one's behavior and choices are guided by inner and not outer sanctions, i.e., if one attempts to be a person of guilt rather than a person of shame as much as possible. In this universal yet individual quest for self-improvement, theatre, according to Ostrovsky, may and should play an important part, providing, of course, that it is pulling man in the right direction.

CONCLUSION

In one of his articles about Apollon Grigoryev, Dostoevsky wrote:

Кому есть что сказать, тот знает, как иногда трудно высказаться. Рутинные формулы, взятые напрокат, да еще задним числом, то есть когда уже все о них имеют некоторое понятие, гораздо более удаются, более нравятся обществу, чем незнакомые ему убеждения. Только обносившиеся идеи *очень* понятны.⁴⁶⁴

Dostoevsky's words refer to Grigoryev's philosophy but might as well be applicable to Ostrovsky's views. Adapting a traditionally Western theatre form to the authentic Russian reality in order to revive the doctrines of the national religion and consequently elevate societal morals was a radical idea in nineteenth-century Russia. Trying to successfully marry form and content without compromising either was not an easy task. Grigoryev started it, but it took Ostrovsky's genius to finalize the project. This, however, was and remains a challenging idea to absorb. In his lifetime the playwright fought against the winning materialism, whose powerful supporters included Marx, Chernyshevsky, and Dobrolyubov. After his death his work had to survive the seventy-year ban on religion during the Soviet era. It is little wonder that even in 1995 some scholars misunderstand the playwright's agenda.

For example, Andreev in his entire article is able to discern only one metanarrative in Ostrovsky's dramas, that of family ties with an obligatorily present element of love, and concedes that there are some obvious exceptions to the pattern: the historical plays, the early plays, and *Snegurochka*. This oversimplifying and rather exclusive argument only goes to show that Ostrovsky does not fit comfortably into any single theory. Much like Grigoryev, he is too complex to fit neatly under a single criterion or label. A fair assessment of the playwright's

⁴⁶⁴ Fedor Dostoevskii, commentary to N. Strakhov's article "Vospominaniia ob Apollone Aleksandroviche Grigor'evе" (Reminiscences on Grigoryev), in his *PSS*, vol. 20, pp. 133–136, at p. 135. "He who has something to say knows how difficult it can be to express himself. If you borrow conventional formulas, especially after the fact, i.e., when everybody has some understanding of them, they work much better and are appreciated more by society than unfamiliar ones. Only well worn ideas are *very* clear."

achievement is provided by Mildon. He starts with a quotation from Goncharov,⁴⁶⁵ who said that Ostrovsky kept working on the same picture, whose title should be *A Millennial Monument to Russia* and which extended from prehistoric times (*Snegurochka*), on its one end, and made a stop at the first railway station, on the other. However, Mildon reworks the ending of the phrase and insists that on its other end this picture extends to Russia's present, as Ostrovsky's portrayals remain fresh and relevant (*Filosofia*, pp. 7–8).

According to Mildon, the key to understanding Ostrovsky lies in acknowledging his Russianness (pp. 70 and 221). This approach is only seemingly simplistic. Even to a contemporary Russian, with all bans on the national religion removed, it is not altogether easy to trace the roots of the playwright's Russianness to Russian Orthodoxy. This task becomes doubly complicated to a foreigner. Mildon nonetheless insists that once Ostrovsky's Russianness is no longer questioned, it becomes possible to take the next step towards establishing a universality of Ostrovsky's life views.

Mildon defines the philosophy of drama as a world of ideas, “представления о смысле бытия, о назначении человека, его природе, которые не исчерпываются сиюминутными задачами.”⁴⁶⁶ He believes that the presence of this philosophy in Ostrovsky's work lends him a European if not universal significance (p. 9). Acknowledging the playwright's adherence to the topic of family relations, Mildon disagrees with Andreev, refusing to treat this topic mechanistically, as the author's only metanarrative. On the contrary, the negative connotation present in Andreev's essay is stood on its head in Mildon's monograph, where it is transformed into a positive assessment of the magnitude of themes encompassed by such an infinite field of research. To this argument I will add that Ostrovsky's preferred discourse on love and family is

⁴⁶⁵ See footnote 45.

⁴⁶⁶ Mildon, *Filosofia*, p. 8. “[...N]otions on the meaning of existence, the purpose of man, and his nature, which are not limited to momentary goals.”

accorded such an important place for one reason alone: family ties are treated by the Bible as the basis of human life and as such are given top priority. One would be hard-pressed to find a chapter in the Bible that does not reflect *mišpāhā*, *bêt* or *oikía*⁴⁶⁷ in its narrative.

In my understanding, Ostrovsky's writings are best understood if the reader is aware that their traditional Western dramatic form envelops Russian-specific content, which is rooted firmly in Russian Orthodoxy.

⁴⁶⁷ The original words for family and household in the Hebrew and Christian Bibles (Metzger and Coogan, s.v. "Family").

PLOT SUMMARIES OF OSTROVSKY'S PLAYS IN CHRONOLOGICAL ORDER

Semeinaia kartina (A Family Scene) is a one-act play written in 1847. It depicts one hour in the life of a merchant's family. Antip Puzatov wants to marry off his twenty-year-old sister Marya to Paramon Shiryalov, an elderly fellow merchant. The marriage negotiations between Antip and Paramon turn into a battle of wits over dowry terms. Marya is more interested in cavorting with good-looking young men who have no money or matrimonial intentions than in her own marriage. Her constant companion in forbidden fun is none other than her sister-in-law Matryona, who eagerly cuckolds her husband when he is not watching. The play is a picture of everyone lying to everyone else, trying to outsmart them. It has what is known as an open ending, when nothing gets resolved. In this sense, *Semeinaia kartina* resembles a photograph where time is frozen, and one is left to guess what will happen in the next second.

Svoi liudi — sochtemsia (It's a Family Affair—We'll Settle It Ourselves) is a family drama in four acts completed in 1849. Bolshov, a rich merchant, decides to fake bankruptcy to avoid paying his debts. Duped by his manager Podkhalyuzin's flattery, he trusts him with his secret, only to be brutally double-crossed, robbed of every penny, and sent to debtors' prison. To add to Bolshov's grief, Podkhalyuzin marries his only daughter Lipochka and easily turns her against her father by lavishing her with expensive gifts.

Utro molodogo cheloveka (A Young Man's Morning) is a one-act play written in 1850. The drama looks into Semyon Nedopekin's way of life. He is a well-to-do dandy whose only goal is to keep up with the trends and fashion. He stays in bed past noon, even if he is not sleepy, because it is supposed to be the established norm in certain circles. He has a substantial library of French novels and journals although he cannot read a word of French. He feels the need to get a front-row ticket to every ballet performance in Moscow, and he allows his multiple acquaintances, servants, and even total strangers to live off him, partly because he is afraid that if he does not, he will be shamed by the society, an integral part of which he longs to be; and partly because squandering the parent's capital seems to be the norm at the time. The play ends with the decision of Semyon's uncle to cut him off.

Neozhidannyi sluchai (An Unexpected Occurrence) is a one-act play written in 1850. Ostrovsky called it a dramatic study rather than a real play. Rozovy asks his close friend Druzhnin to help him get rid of Sofya Antonovna, a woman that he is courting solely due to his weak nature and lack of willpower. Rozovy takes Druzhnin with him to Sofya's house to support him in the final confrontation and breakup. Instead, Druzhnin witnesses Rozovy's proposal of marriage to Sofya and gets very jealous at first. However, he soon realizes that his jealousy might cause him his friendship and starts getting out of his way to make his friend's bride like him.

Bednaia nevesta (The Poor Bride) is a five-act comedy written in 1851. Masha is very beautiful but poor. She has a lot of admirers but prefers the most worthless of them all, a conceited and vainglorious scapegrace Merich. Masha's feelings for Merich are quite irrelevant because she is forced to marry Benevolensky, a rude, crude, and corrupt man one step away from prison. Masha abhors Benevolensky, but he has money and the right means and connections to help her and her mother get back their family house, which they have lost in litigation. This supposed comedy ends with a wedding that makes everybody but Benevolensky unhappy.

Ne v svoi sani ne sadis' (Mind Your Own Station; literally: "Don't get into someone else's sled") is a three-act comedy written in 1853. Merchant Rusakov is very rich and extremely smart, and he has the high morals of an Old Believer. His only daughter Dunya had been reared in accordance with her father's life principles until Rusakov's sister Arina, an old spinster corrupted by Moscow's beau monde, started putting different ideas into her head. Dunya used to love Borodkin, another hard-working merchant and a friend of her father's, until she met Vikhorev, a spendthrift aristocrat who needs to marry into money to continue squandering it. Dazzled by the suave manners and immaculate appearance demonstrated by Vikhorev and skillfully played up by her aunt, Dunya elopes with her new chic suitor. To see if Vikhorev's intentions are heartfelt, Rusakov announces that Dunya will have no dowry or inheritance. Angered, Vikhorev sends Dunya back to her father where Borodkin is waiting for her with a marriage proposal. The play ends with an engagement party.

Bednost' ne porok (Poverty Is No Crime) is a three-act comedy written in 1853. The balladic play of a folk-tale quality tells the story of Gordey Tortsov, a rich merchant who is dazzled by the outer glamour of Moscow and its society. Tortsov aspires to marry his daughter Lyuba off to Korshunov, an unscrupulous impostor seeking Tortsov's money. The marriage is stopped by Tortsov's brother Lyubim, who advocates Lyuba's engagement to Mitya, Tortsov's poor but honest clerk. Mitya and Lyuba have loved each other for a long time, and after Lyubim's intervention, they are finally able to get married.

Ne tak zhivi, kak khochetsia (Don't Live as You Please) is a three-act drama based on folk stories and myths. The first version was finished in 1855, and the second, definitive one, in 1859. A year ago, Pyotr, a son of a rich merchant Ilya, took Dasha to Moscow, away from her parents. He married her there without her parents' blessing. When the play starts, Pyotr has fallen out of love with his wife and is lusting after another girl, Grusha, who runs an inn together with her mother. Grusha used to date Vasya, Pyotr's friend, who still loves her. Dasha, who is very miserable, decides to leave her husband and go back to her parents. Midway, at the inn run by Grusha, she meets her parents who have decided to visit their daughter and are on their way to Moscow. Pyotr's transgressions are revealed. Grusha dumps Pyotr and returns to Vasya. Dasha's father refuses to take his daughter back home and insists that she should return to her husband as marriages are made in heaven and are considered sacred. Pyotr asks a local sorcerer for two potions, a poison for Dasha and a love potion for Grusha. While crossing the frozen Moskva River in the middle of the night, Pyotr hears the sound of church bells that stops him on the edge of a waterhole, saving him from a terrible death. Pyotr comes to his senses and, on his knees, asks forgiveness of everyone he has hurt.

V chuzom piru pokhmel'e (Drunk at Another Man's Feast) is a tragicomedy written in 1855. Tit Titych Bruskov is a rich, tyrannical, and ignorant merchant. His younger son Andrey is in love with Liza, a daughter of a poor but proud schoolteacher. To help arrange their marriage, Liza's landlady lures Andrey to her room, gets him drunk, and demands that he should write and sign a contract by which he is obligated to marry Liza. The landlady sells the contract to Tit Titych for one thousand rubles, hoping to help Liza financially. Liza and her father, who knew nothing of the landlady's plan, get offended. The father runs to Tit Titych and buys back the contract. Tit Titych is so impressed that he gives his word to provide Andrey with a handsome endowment and let him do whatever he wishes.

Dokhodnoe mesto (A Profitable Position) is a five-act comedy written in 1856. Acts I and V contain the drama's secondary plot—a story of Vyshnevsky's unhappy marriage, where an old and rich husband literally bought a young and pretty wife from her poor relatives. Her deep hatred towards her husband pushes her to adultery that leads to her lover's destruction by the society and her own depression. Their story provides a backdrop for the main plot, a tale of two polar-opposite marriages. Mme Kukushkina has two daughters of marrying age, Yulia (a gold digger, adept at goading people into doing what she wants) and Polina (an impractical dreamer). Yulia marries Belogubov, a junior clerk in Vyshnevsky's employ, an unscrupulous flatterer who knows on which side his bread is buttered and manages to make a brilliant career in litigation because of that. Zhadov, Polina's husband, adheres to a code of honor and refuses to sacrifice his high morals for a high salary. He refuses to bend the law for monetary remuneration, a condition upon which his uncle Vyshnevsky offers him a profitable position in his law firm. When Zhadov's marriage almost gets ruined by poverty, he decides to bury his life doctrine and bow to his uncle and the necessity to lie and cheat if it is going to bring him money. The moment Zhadov comes to beg Vyshnevsky for the position, his uncle's firm gets shut down, and its owner and executives are arrested for illegal practices.

Prazdnichnyi son — do obeda (A Prophetic Dream; literally: "A weekend dream comes true by noon"), subtitled "Three Scenes of Moscow Life," was written in 1857. It forms the first part of the Balzaminov trilogy. Misha Balzaminov is a poor aristocrat with one life ambition: to get enough money so that he could quit his boring job and dress fashionably at the same time. Balzaminov has a "prophetic dream" that can be interpreted as sudden riches. Aware that a weekend dream can only come true before noon, Misha is doubtful. But then a matchmaker comes to announce that Nichkina, a rich merchant's widow, has sent her to arrange her marriage with Balzaminov. Misha is invited to her house where Nichkina is impressed with his dress, and particularly his blue cravat. The engagement is halted by Nichkina's brother Neuyedenov, who convinces his sister that Balzaminov is only looking for money, and proposes his fellow merchant as prospective husband.

Ne soshlis' kharakterami! (Too Different in Nature), subtitled "Scenes of Moscow Life," was written in 1857. The Prezhnev's, an impoverished aristocratic family, want to improve their financial situation by arranging their son Paul's marriage to Serafima, a very rich and beautiful daughter of a merchant, who has received some education. Serafima is an officer's widow and is thus a lady by marriage. While Paul is a squanderer, Serafima is a miser. Serafima is madly in love with Paul, but as soon as he asks her, one month into their marriage, to pay off some of his debts, she leaves him and runs away to live with her parents.

Vospitannitsa (A Protégée of the Mistress), subtitled "Scenes from Rural Life," was started in 1855 and finished in 1858. Ulanbekova, a rich aristocrat, keeps a small army of poor protégées that she enjoys marrying off to useful people in town. That gives her almost unlimited control over town affairs. Ulanbekova's passion for dictatorship and despotism makes people fearful of her. Nadya, one of her protégées, revolts when she discovers Ulanbekova's plan to marry her off to Negligentov, an alcoholic and the town's laughingstock. Nadya spends a night with Ulanbekova's son Leonid. In the morning, Ulanbekova sends her son away to another city to avoid scandal and announces that her plan for Nadya's marriage to Negligentov remains unchanged.

Groza (The Thunderstorm) is a five-act drama written in 1859. Kabanikha tyrannically rules and reigns over her family. Her son Tikhon, his wife Katerina, and his sister Varvara suffer from Kabanikha's despotic nature, and they all revolt in their own ways. Varvara resorts to lying and pretending—obeying her mother when she is watching and breaking the rules once she turns her back. Tikhon escapes into drinking whenever he can get out of the house. Katerina, aided greatly by Varvara, plunges into an extramarital love affair. Katerina's mutinous passion comes into direct conflict with her inner piety. She suffers deeply and, finally, confesses her transgression. Driven to despair, Katerina throws herself into a river and drowns. Tikhon openly blames his mother for his wife's death, and Varvara runs away from home.

Staryi drug luchshe novykh dvukh (An Old Friend Is Better than Two New Ones) subtitled "Scenes of Moscow Life in Three Acts" was begun before *Groza* but finished after it, in 1860. Tatyana and her daughter Olinka, who belong to the class of the petit bourgeois, dream of attaining the status of nobility through Olinka's marriage. Prokhor, the potential husband of their dreams, is a fool and a drunkard who accepts bribes. Prokhor is engaged to be married within his own class to an educated young lady. By bribing Pulkheria, a local matchmaker, Tatyana and Olinka manage to break the engagement and lure Prokhor into their house. Prokhor promises to marry Olinka but also brings along his drinking buddy Vavila, who begins their acquaintance by tempting Olinka and Tatyana with alcohol, which they promptly imbibe.

Svoi sobaki gryzutsia, chuzhaia ne pristavai! (Two Is a Company, Three Is a Crowd; literally: "When the neighborhood dogs are fighting, an outside dog shouldn't get involved")—the second play in the Balzaminov trilogy—was written in February of 1861. Misha Balzaminov sees a new moon and interprets it as a sign of good fortune. The only good fortune Misha can think of is marrying into money. Krasavina, the matchmaker from the first part of the trilogy, brings him the good news: Antrygina, a rich petit bourgeois, is interested in a date with Balzaminov. She has a steady relationship with Ustrashimov, Balzaminov's coworker, but suspects she saw him in a park with another woman. Jealousy drives her to revenge, for which Balzaminov seems to be the right accomplice. During Balzaminov and Antrygina's first date, Ustrashimov and Antrygina make up and Balzaminov goes home empty-handed.

Za chem poidesh', to i naidesh' (Zhenit'ba Bal'zaminova) (Be Careful What You Ask for, or Balzaminov's Marriage)—the last part of the Balzaminov trilogy—was written in April of 1861. Chebakov, a retired captain, uses Balzaminov's help in eloping with one of Pezhenov sisters. Balzaminov is needed to woo the other sister so that she would not alert their parents out of jealousy. At the same time, Krasavina the matchmaker works hard at arranging Balzaminov's marriage to Belotelova, an old, fat, and lazy widow. After the older sister elopes with Chebakov, the younger one dumps Balzaminov. The comedy ends with Krasavina delivering the news of Belotelova's readiness to marry Balzaminov.

Koz'ma Zakhar'ich Minin, Sukhoruk (first version), a dramatic chronicle in verse in five acts with an epilogue, was started in 1855 and finished in 1861. The people of Nizhny Novgorod (a major Russian city) are appalled by the arrest of the Russian Patriarch and the Polish influence in the Russian government. Many men attempted to win back their home country and free it from the Jesuits, but failed. Minin, a merchant, has a vision that he is chosen by God to purge Russia and the Russian Orthodox faith from the infidels. Minin starts a money-collection campaign to organize a liberation army and appeals for Prince Pozharsky, a famous military commander, to head the troops.

Grekh da beda na kogo ne zhivet (Sin and Sorrow Are Common to All) is a four-act drama written in 1862. Lyov Krasnov, a well-to-do merchant who takes care of his blind grandfather and his disabled younger brother who live with him, marries Tanya, a poor girl from the lowest levels of nobility. Tanya and her older sister Lukerya move into Krasnov's house reluctantly and, once there, never hide their disdain for the ways of the merchant class. Lukerya, an instigator and a temptress, pushes Tanya into a love affair with Babaev, a young and unworthy aristocrat who is passing through town and is sufficiently bored to get himself a mistress for a couple of days. Their affair becomes the talk of the town, and everybody rushes to bring it to Lyov's attention, escalating his jealousy, which culminates in him murdering his wife.

Tiazhelye dni (The Trying Times) is a family drama written in 1863. Dosuzhev, most likely the same unscrupulous private-practice lawyer who appeared as a secondary character in the conversation with Zhadov in Act III of *Dokhodnoe mesto*, takes it upon himself to help his friend Andrey marry Sasha Kruglova. Andrey Bruskov is also a familiar character, from *V chuzhom piru pokhmel'e* (apparently, he never married Liza). Andrey's father Tit Titych, a despot with a god complex who also appeared in *V chuzhom piru*, is against this marriage because the choice was not his. Dosuzhev's new life creed is to do good deeds, never asking for anything in return. Pertsov, a knave and a reprobate, lives off the quarrels that he purposely picks up with rich merchants once they get drunk in restaurants. Pertsov, who has some rudimentary legal knowledge, threatens to take them to court for moral damage and winds up with a handsome sum. Once Tit Titych becomes Pertsov's victim, Dosuzhev offers him his help and gets him off the hook. Instead of taking money from Tit Titych, Dosuzhev requests that his services are paid for by the father's promise to let Andrey marry Sasha.

Shutniki (The Jesters), subtitled "Scenes of Moscow Life in Four Acts," was written in 1864. Obroshenov is a doting father who sacrifices his honor playing jester for rich merchants for the sake of his two daughters. His younger daughter Vera is in love with Sasha, a poor paralegal who embezzled a client's money when his mother died and he needed to take care of her funeral. Sasha needs to return the money or face the consequences. Khryukov, a rich and tyrannical old merchant, fancies Anna, Obroshenov's older daughter. When he proposes, Anna uses his attraction to her to ask for twenty thousand rubles, the amount necessary to cover Sasha's debt and make the rest of the payment for the house that Obroshenov purchased for his younger daughter's family.

Voevoda (Voevode) (first version), subtitled "A Dream on the Volga," is "a comedy in verse in five acts with a prologue." It was written in 1865. A voevode (also spelled *voivode*, *voivod*) was a civil as well as military governor in provincial Russia in the seventeenth century. Shalygin, a voevode in a big city, is a reprobate who brought his first two wives to an untimely death and is now lusting after Marya, a beautiful young girl who is in love with Stepan Bastryukov. The Bastryukovs are Shalygin's sworn enemies, tirelessly fighting against his lawless actions. After much peripetia and tug-of-war, justice prevails: Marya gets engaged to Stepan while Shalygin is removed from his position by a royal decree.

Na boikom meste (At the Crossroads), labeled a comedy by Ostrovsky, was written in 1865. Vukol Bessudny, a sixty-year-old man, runs an inn together with his thirty-year-old wife Yevgenia. Bessudny uses his beautiful and flirtatious wife as bait for rich merchants who stay at his inn. Once the merchants get drunk, he spikes their drinks with his homemade sleeping

draught and robs them. Annushka, Bessudny's twenty-two-year-old sister has high morals and resents the life led by her brother and her sister-in-law. Annushka is in love with a local nobleman Milovidov, who loves her back. Yevgenia, who hates Annushka, engineers a campaign of slander, telling Milovidov that Annushka has a lover and simultaneously seducing him. Annushka overdoses on her brother's sleeping draught and, thinking that she is going to die, tells Milovidov that she has been slandered and never had a lover. Milovidov summons Bessudny to tell him about his wife's lewd behavior and takes Annushka into his house to take care of her. Bessudny, in the meantime, is upset because his plans of a highway robbery backfired, and instead of bringing home a handsome sum of money, he is now nursing a head injury.

Puchina (Slough of Despond), subtitled "Scenes of Moscow life," was written in 1865. The drama starts when Kirill Kiselnikov is twenty-two, and goes on to describe seventeen years of his life. In the beginning of the drama, Kirill is a student, but he drops out of the university to marry an uncouth daughter of unpolished parents from the merchant class, who drives him straight to poverty by swindling him out of his money in her parents' favor. Kirill fathers five children and buries four of them, and then he buries his wife. His last remaining daughter Liza is all he has left, and Kirill decides to forge legal documents for a small remuneration. His conscience troubles him so much afterwards that he loses his mind. The *deus ex machina* ending brings Kirill's classmate Pogulyayev to visit him at his home. Pogulyayev is rich but lonely. He proposes marriage to Liza and rescues her from her misery.

Koz'ma Zakhar'ich Minin, Sukhoruk (second version) was written in 1866. The primary plot did not change, but secondary threads were added to tell the story of Marfa's love for Pospelov that ends with their engagement at the end of the play. A lot of action scenes were added as well, the most prominent being the battle with the Polish army in Act V, scene 2. Prince Pozharsky is made into an actual character, who appears in the last act.

Dmitrii Samozvanets i Vasilii Shuiskii (Dimitry the Impostor and Vasily Shuysky), Parts I and II, were written in 1866. Part I starts on June 19, 1605, when False Dimitry becomes Russian tsar, and covers about a month of his rule; Part II starts nine months after the beginning of Part I and ends on May 17, 1606, when False Dimitry I is executed and Vasily Shuysky becomes the next candidate for the throne. The drama explores the corruptive influence of power on an individual and follows the development of two major characters vying for the Russian throne. False Dimitry I gets the support of Poland and Lithuania by marrying Marina Mniszech, a Polish princess. This support is paid off by installing Catholic churches all over Moscow, switching to Latin in church practices, and stamping out Russian Orthodoxy altogether. Dimitry starts with an arguably good intention of dethroning Boris Godunov; however, towards the end of Part II, he gets spoiled by power and commits so many crimes that he falls out of public favor and completely loses people's trust and respect. In the meantime, Shuysky plots to usurp the Russian orb and scepter.

Tushino, a dramatic chronicle in verse, was written in 1866 and covers the events during the diarchy (Vasily Shuysky and False Dimitry II) of 1608. Dementy Redrikov fathered two sons, Maxim and Nikolay, who are as different in character as night and day. Maxim is a tough warrior who is also hot-tempered and mean. Nikolay is tender-natured, sweet, and girly. Maxim gets into conflict with Seitov, a voevode from Rostov, and bears a grudge. Nikolay is in love with Seitov's daughter Lyudmila. Dementy brings his sons to serve Tsar Shuysky, and they pledge allegiance

to him. But Maxim runs away to False Dimitry II's headquarters at Tushino and takes an oath of allegiance to him. Nikolay stays in Shuysky's service and marries Lyudmila. False Dimitry's troops attack Shuysky's army, and Maxim and Nikolay find themselves in the warring camps. Nikolay kills his brother. The end of the play finds Lyudmila, Dementy, and Nikolay unable to cope with the confusion in their lives and deciding to burn themselves alive.

Na vsiakogo mudretsa dovol'no prostoty (Too Clever by Half) is a five-act comedy written in 1868. Yegor Glumov, a poor but enterprising young man, makes it his life plan to come into money and obtain a good position in the world. He sees a path to gaining both through flattery and hypocrisy. Polishing his verbal skills in the presence of the high and mighty, flirting with the right women, and trying to marry into a fortune, Glumov makes rapid progress and is on his way to success when his diary, where he wrote his honest opinion describing and ridiculing the mediocrity of people he was dealing with, is discovered and brought into the open. Glumov's benefactors are appalled and withdraw their protection and help, only to realize that they need to hear the young man's flattery to feel good about themselves. The play ends with Glumov's patrons deciding to give him a cold shoulder for a while but bring him back eventually.

Goriachee serdtse (An Ardent Heart) is a five-act comedy written in 1868. Two separate plots are brought together at the end of the play. The primary plot deals with a messy household of Kuroselepov, a rich but stupid and lazy merchant. Parasha, his daughter from the first marriage, a decent young girl albeit shy and meek, is in love with Vasya Shustry, a son of an impoverished merchant. Parasha is much hated by Matryona, Kuroselepov's second wife, who is having an affair with Kuroselepov's manager Narkis. Narkis's only ambition is to milk Matryona for her husband's money and join the class of merchants. He forces Matryona to steal two thousand rubles from her husband. Kuroselepov notices that the money is missing and mistakenly blames Vasya Shustry, who is regularly seen near his house after dark (when in fact he comes to see Parasha) and who can definitely benefit from the money. Vasya is detained and sent to serve in the army. Parasha runs away from home to follow him. At the same time, Kuroselepov fires his second manager Gavrilov, who secretly loves Parasha. A secondary plot deals with a rich merchant Khlynov, who has so much money and is so bored that he buys the most extravagant and pricey entertainment for himself on a daily basis. Khlynov has a small army of performers on his payroll, and he buys Vasya out of his army service so that the latter could join his train of entertainers. Aristarkh, who is Parasha's godfather and chief entertainer for Khlynov, skillfully choreographs a chain of events that leads to a revelation of the truth about Narkis and Matryona's theft and about Vasya as wrongfully accused. But when Parasha learns that Vasya agreed to serve as Khlynov's personal jester, she rejects him and marries Gavrilov instead.

Beshenye den'gi (Crazy Money) is a five-act comedy written at the end of 1869. Savva Vasilkov, a well-to-do nobleman with good education and a strong business sense, has earned his money by hard work. Vasilkov comes to Moscow and falls madly in love with Lidiya Cheboksarova, an epitome of an egotistic squander, whose father was accused of embezzlement and exiled from Moscow. Lidiya is trying to catch a rich husband. Yegor Glumov, the same character from *Na vsiakogo mudretsa dovol'no prostoty*, whose insignificant slip has apparently been forgiven and who is now well established in the highest walks of life, decides to play a puppet master and manipulate several people for his amusement. Glumov tells Lidiya that Vasilkov has gold mines and is rich beyond imagination. Lidiya promptly marries Vasilkov, who pays off all her debts but insists that she should stop squandering money and start living a simple life on a very strict budget. Lidiya starts looking for a rich lover among her admirers. Kuchumov seems

the most promising one, and she decides to give in to him. Glumov arranges it so that Vasilkov and another Lidiya's admirer, Telyatev, show up at the time when Lidiya is getting ready to jump into bed with Kuchumov. Vasilkov banishes his wife from the house, and she is left with no sustenance. Lidiya begs her husband to take her back, and Vasilkov does so on the condition that she would go to the country and spend enough time living with his mother to learn how to manage the house. Then she would be allowed to return to the city and live in his house as his housekeeper. Only then, providing she proves herself an efficient and humble house worker, would she be allowed to reestablish herself as his wife.

Les (The Forest) is a five-act comedy written in 1870. Gurmyzhskaya, a middle-aged woman with intense carnal desires, spends all her money on her lovers. When the play opens, she is trying to seduce a man some thirty years her junior with attention and gifts. To get more money, she is selling her forest to her neighbor Vosmibratov, a well-to-do merchant. To avoid gossip and public scandal and before she is sure that Bulanov is firmly caught in her nets, she invites Aksyusha, her distant poor relative, to live with her. Gurmyzhskaya pretends that her sole intention is to marry Aksyusha to Bulanov. Aksyusha is in love with Pyotr, Vosmibratov's only son, but his father does not consent to their marriage because Aksyusha has no dowry. When Aksyusha is ready to drown herself because she fails to see a way out, two vagabond actors chance upon Gurmyzhskaya's estate. Schastlivtsev, a comic, and Neschastlivtsev, a tragedian, are both penniless and dream of finding any theatre engagement. Neschastlivtsev happens to be a distant relative of Gurmyzhskaya whom she owes some money. Neschastlivtsev ends up giving this money to Aksyusha for use as dowry so that she could marry Pyotr, preferring to help another human being rather than take care of his own needs.

Ne vse kotu Maslenitsa (Every Day Is not Sunday; literally: "It's not always holiday for a cat"), subtitled "Scenes of Moscow Life," was written in 1871. Kruglova, a merchant's widow and a doting mother for her twenty-year-old daughter Agnia, lives solely for her daughter's happiness. She is faced with a dilemma: to marry Agnia to Ippolit, a young and decent young man who is pathologically shy, or to an old rich merchant Akhov, who is so vain and self-important that he wants other people to treat him like a god. Ippolit is Akhov's nephew and has been his manager for ten years. Not once in these ten years did Akhov pay him his salary and not once did Ippolit request payment. At the time of the play, Akhov owes his nephew fifteen thousand rubles for his services. Kruglova gently steers her daughter into pushing Ippolit to a decisive action, which he does take. Ippolit uses theatrics and demonstrates a great acting talent to goad his uncle into paying him everything that he owes, and marries Agnia.

Ne bylo ni grosha, da vdrug altyn (From Rags to Riches) is a five-act comedy written in 1872. Yepishkin, a rich merchant who buys and sells stolen goods, has a daughter Larisa. His neighbors, who are not as rich as he is, dream of marrying their son Yelesya to Larisa and thus improve their financial situation. Yepishkin's other neighbors, Krutitsky (possibly the same Krutitsky who appears in *Na vsiakogo mudretsa dovol'no prostoty* as one of Glumov's benefactors) and his wife, who live in extreme poverty, are also taking care of their niece Nastya, who used to be a ward in a noble family but was later asked to leave because she was more beautiful than the ladies of the house. Nastya is about to be "sold" as a mistress to a rich married merchant when suddenly Krutitsky, who turns out not to be poor but avaricious, mistakenly thinks that he has lost all the money that he has been hiding from everybody. Krutitsky gets so upset that he hangs himself and his wife inherits all his millions. She shares them with Nastya, who announces that

she is going to marry Baklushin, a poor nobleman that she loves, and start squandering Krutitsky's money right away.

Komik XVII stoletia (A Seventeenth-Century Comedian), a comedy in verse in three acts with an epilogue, was written in 1872. Tsar Aleksey decides to create the first royal court theatre for staging morality and mystery plays. Yakov Kochetov is recruited to study theatrical art with a German invited to train the first group of Russian actors. Yakov, who loves acting and has a great talent for it, is afraid of his father's wrath since the latter considers actors to be nothing but jesters and court fools and believes acting to be blasphemous. Yakov is in love with Natalya and asks for her hand in marriage. At the end, after much effort from Yury Mikhaylov, director of the first royal theatre, Yakov is able to marry Natalya and even gets his father's blessing to continue acting.

Pozdniaia liubov' (Late Love) is a tragicomedy written in 1873. Shablova rents out an apartment in her house to Margaritov, a lawyer who lives with his utterly honest and virtuous daughter Lyudmila. Shablova has two sons, Nikolay, the older son, who is also a lawyer, and Dormedont, the younger one, who serves as a clerk for Margaritov. Nikolay has wasted all his money on drinking and debauchery and is about to go to debtors' prison. Dormedont is very kind and sweet but not very bright. He loves Lyudmila who loves Nikolay who loves Lebyodkina, an immoral and licentious widow. One of Margaritov's clients wants Lebyodkina to repay her debt to him. The promissory note is locked by Margaritov in a box, and only Lyudmila is trusted with the key. Lebyodkina promises Nikolay the money, which he needs to cover his debts, and her love if he agrees to use Lyudmila's affection for him and asks her for the note. Nikolay pretends to agree, Lyudmila gives him the note, and Nikolay makes a copy of it. The copy is then given to Lebyodkina, who realizes that she has lost and needs to pay her debts. The money that Margaritov makes helping his client get his money back is given to Nikolay to pay off his own debts. Nikolay marries Lyudmila and becomes Margaritov's partner in business.

Snegurochka (The Snow Maiden), subtitled "A Spring Tale," was written in 1873. Snegurochka is the beautiful daughter of Father Frost (the pagan master of winter) and Beautiful Spring, and she is born with no soul, no warmth towards other creatures, and no ability to love. She is fascinated by local shepherd Lel's beautiful songs and begs her parents to let her live among people, to which they consent. Lel falls in love with her, but Snegurochka cannot love him back. A beautiful young maiden who lives next door from Snegurochka has been in love with Mizgir, a young and prosperous tradesman. Finally, Mizgir proposes to Kupava, but before they are joined in matrimony, he sees Snegurochka and, unable to resist love at first sight, dumps Kupava and proposes marriage to the snow maiden. Snegurochka runs to her mother and asks her to teach her how to love. Beautiful Spring warns her that the gift of love will kill Snegurochka. It will be too strong and powerful, and she would melt. Snegurochka chooses a short but bright moment of life with love over a long and barren existence without it, and melts at sunrise.

Trudovoi khleb (Hard-Earned Bread) was written in 1874. Korpelov, his niece Natasha, her distant relative Yevgenia, and Pavel Gruntsov are virtuous and hard-working but poor. Ivan Chepurin, another honest and hard-working character, is in love with Natasha, but because he is plain and humble, he loses her to Koprov, a young man with an impeccable appearance and polished manners. Koprov's only ambition in life is to get so much money that he would always be able to satisfy any of his extravagant desires. For that, he is planning to marry a particularly ugly daughter of a fantastically rich merchant. However, to favorably impress her parents, he

needs at least some money. Koprov charms it out of Natasha, who, thinking that he is going to marry her, eagerly gives him the meager dowry left to her by her late mother. Koprov's plan backfires when truth is discovered, and he is implicated in a forgery. Natasha marries Chepurin and braces herself for a life of hard and earnest work.

Volki i ovtsy (Wolves and Sheep), a five-act comedy, was written in 1875. The plot develops along two vectors starting from the same point but going into separate directions. The starting point is Meropiya Murzavetskaya, a power-hungry old woman whose ambition is to reign and rule in the small town where she lives. She wishes to marry off her nephew Apollon to her wealthy neighbor, Yevlampiya Kupavina, so that she could control Kupavina's wealth and lands. Since Meropiya is smart enough not to trust her worthless nephew who is only interested in alcohol and hunting dogs, she sends her distant female relative Glafira to spy on Yevlampiya and put in a good word for Apollon. Kupavina, a young and gullible widow, is in love with Berkutov, her wealthy neighbor, who also wishes to exercise control over her capital and real estate. Berkutov cleverly outmaneuvers Meropiya and marries Yevlampiya. Meanwhile, Glafira has an interest of her own. She wants to marry Lynyaev, a wealthy landowner who is uncomfortable with women and cherishes his bachelor's freedom. Glafira manages to push him into marrying her, getting access to his riches.

Bogatye nevesty (Rich Brides) is a four-act comedy written in 1875. Gnevyshev, a sixty-year-old nobleman, decides to leave his mistress Valentina and come back to his wife who has just inherited a handsome sum of money. He wishes to marry off Valentina to an honest man and give her some dowry. Yury Tsypunov has been in love with Valentina for ten years, thinking naively that a woman of her beauty should also be beautiful inside. Yury is about to marry Valentina when Piramidalov tells him the truth about her. Tsypunov is appalled to find out that his bride is a kept woman and accuses Valentina of fooling him into thinking her virtuous because of her angelic face. Upon hearing Yury's ardent speech, Valentina falls in love with him and decides to decline Gnevyshev's dowry and start a new, honest life.

Pravda — khorosho, a schast'e luchshe (Truth Is Good, but Happiness Is Better) is a four-act comedy written in 1876. Platon Zybkin is a young man who works as a manager for Baraboshev, an unworthy son of Mavra, a despotic woman oppressive to her household. Platon is compelled to speak nothing but the truth even if it causes him much grief and discomfort. Platon is in love with Baraboshev's daughter Poliksena, who loves him back and wants to marry him. Mavra does not want to hear about her granddaughter intentions as she wants her to marry somebody important rather than a poor manager in the employ of Poliksena's father. Platon is wrongfully accused of stealing apples from Mavra's orchard and also of embezzling Baraboshev's money. The appearance of an old retired soldier, Mavra's flame from years ago, resolves the desperate situation in which the young people find themselves. It takes one conversation between Groznov, the soldier, and Mavra to fully acquit Platon and allow him to marry Poliksena.

Posledniaia zhertva (The Last Sacrifice) is a five-act comedy written in 1877. Yulia, a young widow, has squandered all her inheritance on Dulchin, a gambler and a rake who pretends to be ready to marry her. Yulia's neighbor, an elderly merchant Flor, wants to marry her, but Yulia is so much in love with Dulchin that Flor's proposals fall on deaf ears. Dulchin asks Yulia to get some money from Flor so that he could impress Glafira, a woman that he intends to marry.

Yulia's aunt, skillfully playing a puppet master, manipulates everybody so that Dulchin and Glafira's marriage plans fall apart and Yulia breaks up with her worthless lover to marry Flor.

Bespridannitsa (Without a Dowry) is a four-act drama written in 1878. The Ogudalovs are noble-born but poor. Kharita Ogudalova is desperately seeking rich husbands for her daughters. The youngest one, Larisa, a beautiful girl of many talents, falls in love with Paratov, a rich and practical nobleman. Paratov, like most men in the town, is smitten by Larisa's shiny personality but never considers marrying her. He finds himself a rich bride whom he is about to marry for her money. Meanwhile, yielding to the constant pressure from her mother, Larisa agrees to marry Karandyshev, the first person who asks for her hand. Wedding preparations are underway when Paratov decides to close the bachelor chapter of his life with seducing Larisa. He bedazzles Larisa and spends a night with her, never mentioning his engagement. In the morning, the lovers are discovered by Karandyshev, who shoots Larisa to death.

Serdtshe ne kamen' (A Heart Is not a Stone) is a four-act comedy written in 1879. Karkunov, an old rich merchant, has been treating his young and virtuous wife Vera despotically for fifteen years. Vera's only desire in life is to help the poor, and she is happy when she can give alms to beggars. Karkunov's nephew Konstantin, a worthless rake and squanderer, dreams of inheriting all of his uncle's money. For that, he thinks of a plan that will soil Vera's reputation enough to cut her out of his uncle's will. Erast, Karkunov's manager, promises Konstantin to start courting Vera and lure her to his room at 10 p.m. At that time, Konstantin will bring Vera's husband to Erast's room too, and Vera would be implicated in an illicit love affair. However, Konstantin's plan backfires when Olga, his wife that is having an affair with Erast, gets jealous of Erast's attention to Vera and comes to confront her lover about it. Vera hears their heated conversation and leaves before her husband shows up. Konstantin and his uncle see Olga in Erast's room when they show up at 10 p.m. Karkunov has a severe stroke from which he never recovers. Vera is carefully nursing her husband, who decides to leave all his money to her and insists that she should remarry after his death. Vera quickly divides his money among the poor and needy, leaving nothing for herself. Erast falls in love with Vera, and she promises to marry him after her husband dies and she spends some time in mourning.

Nevol'nitsy (The Enslaved) is a four-act comedy written in 1880. The play has two plots, the primary one revolving around Styrov, an old and rich man married to Yevlalia, a young woman. Styrov lives in constant fear of being cuckolded, and his business partner Koblov advises him to charge his servants with spying on his wife. Yevlalia has long been in love with Mulin, Styrov's and Koblov's employee, but her feeling remains truly platonic. Yevlalia tortures Mulin with her demands not to see other women, and Mulin suffers greatly from her unwanted attention. He is also having an affair with Sofya, Koblov's wife, who skillfully feeds the flame of passion by showering her lover with expensive gifts and money. Once Yevlalia finds out about Mulin's affair with Sofya, she decides to find consolation in card games. The secondary plot is the story of Styrov's maid Marfa, a true puppet master who manages to effectively manipulate the entire household, choosing to help or hamper her masters.

Talanty i poklonniki (Talents and Admirers) is a four-act comedy written in 1881. Sasha Neginia, a young provincial actress, is very talented but very poor. Her integrity does not allow her to flirt with rich admirers and sell herself for expensive gifts and money, as her colleague Smelskaya does. Sasha likes Pyotr Meluzov, a poor but honest and hard-working young man who dreams of marrying her. The night of Sasha's benefit performance comes, bringing her

anxiety over having no dress or jewelry for her part. Velikato, Sasha's rich and powerful admirer, skillfully throws his net of temptations that gradually entangles and entraps the young actress. Starting with a magnificent dress and expensive dinner for Sasha and a superb shawl for Sasha's mother, Velikato gets Negin's attention and then secures her agreement to follow him to a big city, where she would be able to perform at a famous theatre. Negin leaves Meluzov and her hometown Bryakhimov, and boards the train to Moscow.

Krasavets-muzhchina (A Handsome Man) is a four-act comedy written in 1882. Six years before the play starts, Zoya, who was a rich bride in a small town, fell madly in love with and married Apollon Okoyomov, a worthless liar and squanderer, who is heavenly handsome. When the play opens, Apollon is trying to convince Zoya to divorce him and even fake infidelity so that he could be allowed to marry for a second time. The wife of his dreams is Susanna Lundysheva, a widow with half a million rubles to her name. Zoya and Susanna are two nieces of Naum Latokhin, an old and rich man who has taken upon himself to watch over the financial affairs of his entire family. With the help of his cunning accomplice Sosipatra, Naum prevents Zoya's divorce and Susanna's marriage and the inevitable impoverishment. Zoya pays off all of Apollon's debts and insists on their separation.

Bez viny vinovatye (Innocent as Charged) is a comedy written in 1883. In Act I, Lyuba Otradina, a young and inexperienced girl living in Bryakhimov, is madly in love with a handsome young man by the name of Murov, with whom she has a son. Murov's mother does not allow him to marry Lyuba and wants him to wed their neighbor Taisa, who is well-to-do. Murov heeds his mother's advice. Act II starts twenty years later, when Lyuba, now a famous actress known by her stage name as Lyubov Kruchinina, comes to Bryakhimov on tour and joins the local company for a number of performances. Kruchinina is overwhelmed with reminiscences and sorrowful memories of her youth in her hometown that witnessed her breakup with Murov and her baby son's death. Kruchinina, whose life goal is helping others, especially aspiring actors, takes to heart the misfortunes of a young local actor Grisha Neznamov, who is clearly miserable and well on the path to self-destruction. After a series of peripetia, Kruchinina meets Murov, who became a landowner and has been most unhappy in his marriage to Taisa. He falls in love with Lyuba all over again. Kruchinina recognizes a medallion on Grisha as the one that she put on her son's neck years ago. Grisha gets reunited with his mother.

Ne ot mira sego (Not of This World), subtitled "Family Scenes in Three Acts," was written in 1884. Yevlampia has two daughters, Ksenia and Kapitolina. Ksenia, who suffers from a serious nervous disorder, is married to Vitaly Kochuev, a former gambler who used to cheat on her but has since reformed and now genuinely loves his wife. Barbarisov, Kapitolina's fiancé, does not want to share Yevlampia's money with the Kochuevs; he wants it all for himself. He steals two of Vitaly's old bills that expose his connection to a former mistress. When Ksenia's condition exacerbates, Barbarisov uses this opportune moment to show the bills to her. Ksenia is not strong enough to survive the shock and dies.

Voevoda (second version) was written in 1885. The plot essentially follows that of the first version. However, in the revised version, Shalygin asks his fellow countrymen for forgiveness at the end and is granted one. After Shalygin's conversation with the Hermit, in which the latter insists that the former should repent, the voevode firmly decides to spend the rest of his life in a monastery, serving God and atoning for his sins.

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