

SPACE, FAITH AND DESPOTISM IN 19TH CENTURY RUSSIA: SOCIAL DISINTEGRATION AND CHARACTER MOTIVATIONS IN OSTROVSKY'S STORM TRAGEDY*

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Abstract: Aleksandr Nikolayevich Ostrovsky's drama *The Storm* (Гроза), also known in literature as *Twilight* or *The Tempest*, is an important example in literary studies in terms of how the setting is treated not merely as a physical backdrop but as a dynamic narrative element conveying social conflicts, the psychological depth of the characters, and thematic messages. The author positions his fictional city of Kalinov as symbol of the collapse of the feudal-peasant system in 19th-century Russia and the closed society dominated by narrow-minded, rigid ideas, referred to as the 'Dark Kingdom'. The restrictive nature of the setting deepens the tragic conflict between the protagonist Katerina's quest for freedom and the oppressive moral structure intertwined with religion. The image of the storm functions as a multi-layered metaphor encompassing both a natural disaster and the inevitability of social change and individual rebellion. The author constructs Katerina's psychological breakdown by creating a contrast between the liberating tranquillity of the Volga River and the chaotic atmosphere of the storm. This contrast points to the character's inner tensions as well as the social decay caused by societal hypocrisy. Furthermore, while enclosed spaces such as churches and homes embody traditional authority, the city's static structure also reflects Russia's economic and cultural backwardness. In this qualitative study, dialogues, scene descriptions, and archetypal figures such as the semi-mad noblewoman are examined to reveal the tension between the characters' actions and social reality. This analysis demonstrates Ostrovsky's masterful use of space as both a realistic stage element and an ideological tool. Consequently, this study emphasises that space in literature should not be regarded merely as a decorative element but a fundamental component that deepens the layers of meaning in the text, thereby facilitating the analysis of similar texts.

Keywords: Drama, Russian Theatre, Space, Symbol, Collapse, Storm, Ostrovsky

* This study was presented as an oral paper entitled "The Storm, the Volga and the Dark Kingdom: Symbolic Collapse in Ostrovsky's Kalinov" at the International Congress of Social Studies, held on 15–18 May 2025 in Çeşme, İzmir, Turkey.

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Introduction

In literary texts, space, which is an active narrative element rather than merely the physical plane on which events unfold, plays a fundamental role in shaping the character traits of individuals. As the guide for the emotions, beliefs, and moral convictions that spring from the events, the setting instils a sense of reality in the characters and defines their sphere of action¹. In theatrical works that aim to present the human being as a whole with their environment, the setting becomes one of the most critical elements where social dynamics and individual conflicts are embodied.

Literary historian Berna Moran highlights the clues literary works offer about a society's traditions and way of life, describing art as a 'primary source' in periods where historical documents are limited². French philosopher Riccoeur, meanwhile, argues that the common ground between historical writing and fictional narrative lies in the narrative construction of time. According to the researcher who reveals the layers of meaning in texts, time only becomes a human experience through narrative, and narrative only gains meaning when it has a temporal structure³. When evaluated in this context, the works of Aleksandr Nikolayevich Ostrovsky are not only important historical documents reflecting the social and cultural structure of Russian society in the 19th century, but also demonstrate the effect of place on characters and how it shaped social dynamics within literary fiction. Ostrovski, recognised by his contemporary Ivan Goncharov as the founder of Russian national theatre, stands out through his works, as defined by Dobrolyubov, and is considered the author of the play of life⁴.

In 19th century rural Russia, beliefs and living conditions were based on the idea that time repeated cyclically, and there was a closed attitude towards change. Within this framework, customs and traditions were accepted as the reproduction of practical experience tested and approved by past generations⁵. The belief system of the rural population was based on the classification of different powers believed to govern the world. Within this framework, peasants perceived the world as a tripartite power structure. These could be classified as the Holy Power (God, saints), the Evil

¹ M. Lüleci, *Kent İnsan Roman: Türk Romanında Kentleşme Olgusu Üzerine İncelemeler (1980–2010)*, 2017, Ankara: Gece Kitaplığı, p.74.

² B. Moran, *Edebiyat Kuramları ve Elestiri*, (1999), İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, p.. 72.

³ P. Riccoeur. *Time and Narrative. V.1*, (Trans. Kathleen Mclaughlin and David Pellauer), Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2007, p. 52.

⁴ E.B. Petrovna and K.F. Pavlovna, "Duhovniye Tsennosti v Piesah A. N. Ostrovskogo", *Vestnik buryatskogo gosudarstvennogo universiteta, Yazık, Literatura, Kultura*, 2016, (3), p. 27.

⁵ Ye. Kunts. "Mentatilet i Kultura Sosloviy Russkogo Obshestva Vtoroy Polovini XVIII. XIX. v.", *Istoriya I obchestvennoye dilya školnikov*, 2015, No:1, p. 26-38. (web <https://www.den-za-dnem.ru/page.php?article=1243>).

Power (demons, household spirits) and the Unknown Power (natural phenomena such as fire and water)⁶. In summary, the belief systems of merchants and rural communities were built on a traditional and fatalistic foundation, far removed from rationality, combining Orthodox religious beliefs with worldly achievements⁷. In addition, with the emergence of compulsory education for trader children, the children of traders began to receive education in state institutions in large cities⁸. This resulted in two distinct problems within society: a confusion of values and generational conflict. The fractures in the merchant class's shared understanding of values were reflected in their lifestyles, leading to uncertainty. The effects of all this enabled 19th century Russian society to experience a great squeeze between traditional values, innovative ideas and individual freedom. The most remarkable examples of this social squeeze and the value conflicts in the merchant environment, described as the 'dark kingdom' are brought to life in the dramatic works of A.N. Ostrovsky. The author reveals this cultural divide by portraying the merchant archetype, who focuses on accumulation rather than spiritual pursuits and establishes despotic pressure within the family. The tragedies experienced by merchant women, victims of their coarse and despotic husbands, and by the younger generation, centred on marriage, in Ostrovsky's plays document the great tension experienced by 19th century Russian society between traditional values, innovative ideas, and individual freedom⁹.

In this context, in the drama *The Storm (Гроза)*, published in 1859, a small town on the banks of the Volga River is not merely a setting for the events, but also a place that symbolises the pressure within the characters' inner worlds, the stifling nature of traditions, and the individual's quest for freedom. The tragedy of Katerina, one of the main characters of the work, gains meaning through the relationship established between this closed and rigid social order and the setting. Within the framework of the views mentioned above, Ostrovsky's works can be read as texts that reflect the moral contradictions and historical transformations of Russian society through the narrative construction of time and space. In *The Storm*, the social life and customs of the period in rural areas are depicted by associating them with the imaginary city of Kalinov in spatial terms and with the images of the Volga and the Storm in symbolic and spatial dimensions. A.N. Ostrovski's work *The Storm*, which reflects the transformation of 19th century Russian society in its most striking form, is a mirror of the social

⁶ Ibid. Web.

⁷ Ibid. Web.

⁸ I. V. Maslova. "Izucheniye Temı Povsednevnost Rossiyskogo Uyezdnogo Kupechestva XIX. v.", *Prepodavaniye istorii i obschevoznaniye v shkole*. 2013, No: 4, p. 31.

⁹ Ibid. p. 31.

and economic crisis in the Russian countryside. The work reflects the collapse of the feudal-peasant system, Russia's economic and social backwardness, and the problems created by old customs that continue to prevail despite everything. The author reflects these problems by identifying them with symbols of faith and storm, representing old traditions, the despotism of the merchant class, and the quest for individual freedom. The storm is not only a natural phenomenon but also a powerful symbol of the aforementioned changes in 19th century Russian life. The Storm drama has been the focus of research on themes such as theatrical staging techniques in theatre, reflections of the Ancient Greek tragedy tradition in 19th century Russian literature, and social backwardness in Russia within the framework of the 'dark kingdom' discourse. In studies conducted in Turkey, Ostrovsky's literary identity, Moscow life in his plays, and Russian merchant characters have generally been highlighted¹⁰. In this context, this article, departing from the above-mentioned studies, examines the images of the Volga and the storm as symbols of the mental and social collapse of the people within the triangle of nature, fate and faith. This article aims to reveal the possibilities for contemporary interpretation of the work by integrating the spatial atmosphere of the drama, faith-based oppression and individual confusion.

The Dark Kingdom and Symbolic Collapse

The description 'Dark Kingdom', used in Russian literary criticism to emphasise the oppressive and reactionary social order existing in Russian life, first appeared in Nikolai Aleksandrovich Dobrolyubov's 1859 essay 'Temnoye Tsartstvo' (Темное царство). In this article, the critic discusses the concept, stating: 'In the first article on the Dark Kingdom, I attempted to show how the most serious crimes are committed, how the most inhuman relationships between people are established, not through any particular malice or cunning, but simply through the influence of narrow-minded, rigid, extremely limited and confused ideas'¹¹. Dobrolyubov, while generalising this criticism to the whole society, specifically targets the trading class. According to researcher Aksut: 'Dobrolyubov's harsh criticism caused a great stir and became one of the most important factors in establishing the idea in the Russian public mind that all traders were rich

¹⁰ See. Kamile, Sinem, Küçük, A.N. *Ostrovski'nin Eserlerinde Moskova Yaşamı*, İstanbul Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü, Slav Dilleri ve Edebiyatları ABD, Rus Dili ve Edebiyatı BD, 2008, (Yayımlanmamış Doktora Tezi). Sibel, Erdoğan, A. N. *Ostrovski'nin "Fırtına" ve "Çeyizsiz Gelin" Adlı Eserleri ile Edebi Kişiliği*. Ankara Üniversitesi, Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü, Batı Dilleri ve Edebiyatları (Rus Dili ve Edebiyatı) Anabilim Dalı. 2009, (Yayımlanmamış Yüksek Lisans Tezi).

¹¹ N.A. Dobrolyubov, *Temnoye Tsartstvo (v knige "Russkiye klassiki. İzbrannyye literaturno-kritičeskiye statii")*, (Pod. Yu. G. Oksman), 1970, Moskva: Nauka, p. 66.

but ignorant, resistant to innovation, and cruel people. Thus, the phrase ‘dark kingdom’ became an indispensable term highlighting the negative aspects of merchants as a group¹². Dobrolyubov's definition of the ‘dark kingdom’ emphasises distortions in human relations and social disorder. These elements are highlighted as fundamental problems damaging the structural fabric of society. The author of the drama examines the function of literary works in reflecting social and historical issues, focusing on inertia and superstition in this work. Furthermore, he examines the impact of natural events on human life in parallel with similar issues. Thus, he presents a social critique by comprehensively addressing the contradictions arising from internal and external conditions within society and the interaction between these contradictions.

The dark kingdom at the centre of the work represents a despotic merchant milieu that is closed off from the outside world and far removed from rationality. According to researcher Maslova: ‘In merchant families of the period, women are generally depicted as victims oppressed under the absolute authority of their coarse and despotic husbands or family elders’¹³. Obedience within the family is enforced through ‘fear and piety’ rather than love. In this context, the protagonist of the work, Katerina, feels her honour is being undermined and suffers within the bond of love that her husband and mother-in-law are trying to establish through fear and authority. In the drama, Katerina's state of mind is reflected in the changes in nature. Suddenly, the sky darkens, and the magnificent Volga nature depicted at the beginning of the play begins to reveal all its ugliness with the approach of the storm. This change in atmosphere, which heralds some compelling events, carries different meanings for the townspeople. The difference in this interpretation can be explained by Ostrovsky's effort to make the reader feel a moral judgement without dictating it. From this perspective, according to Bakhtin: ‘Understanding the creator of a work requires becoming aware of another consciousness and its world, that is, a ‘you’. While explanation occurs under the dominance of a single consciousness and subject, understanding is based on the encounter of two consciousnesses and two subjects. Since a dialogical relationship cannot be established with objects, explanation is not dialogical; in contrast, the process of understanding inherently possesses a dialogical structure’¹⁴. Within the framework of Bakhtin's discourse, it is evident that the author

¹² L. Aksüt, “Rus Edebiyatında Tüccar Tiplemesi”, *Sosyal Bilimlerde Güncel Tartışmalar. İnsan Çalışmaları 1. Bilgin Kültür Sanat Yayınları*. 2018, p. 489.

¹³ I. V. Maslova, “Izucheniye Temi Povsednevnost Rossiyskogo Uyezdnogo Kupechestva XIX. v.”, *Prepodavaniye istorii i obschevoznaniye v shkole*, 2013, No: 4, p. 29.

¹⁴ M.M. Bakhtin, *Karnaval dan Romana Edebiyat Teorisinden Dil Felsefesine Seçme Yazılar*, (Çev. Cem Soydemir), 2001, İstanbul: Ayrıntı, p. 345.

establishes the basis for dialogic perception in the work through characters representing the strata of provincial society. The protagonist, Katerina, is in search of change and freedom. Opposite her are the Kabanova family (Marfa Ignatyevna, Tihon, Varvara), who represent tradition and oppression. The social panorama is completed by the cruel merchant Dikoy, his educated but weak-willed nephew Boris, the enlightened repairman Kuligin, the superstitious Feklusha, and the semi-mad noblewoman who personifies the judgemental voice of society. The complex relationships these characters establish with social norms, natural phenomena, and the Volga River trigger an active process of interpretation in the reader or viewer, creating an open dialogue space at the heart of the work. In this context, critic Dobrolyubov notes in his review of *The Storm*: ‘Thanks to the author's artistry, light gradually illuminates the depiction of the ‘dark kingdom’ in Ostrovsky's work. The people living in this world sustain their existence in an environment blessed by nature's bounty. They live in a verdant city on the banks of the Volga, in a landscape where villages and cultivated fields can be seen stretching far into the distance. The bright and peaceful days of summer invite one to go outdoors, under the breeze that gently caresses the river’¹⁵. The Volga River serves as the primary vehicle for reflecting the emotional shifts of many characters in the drama, thereby validating the critic's statement. In the play's opening scene, Kuligin's words as he gazes at the Volga, ‘On the flat plain, a smooth elevation... Marvels, truly marvels! ... I have been looking at it every day for fifty years, but I cannot look my fill’¹⁶ is an example of both Bakhtin's dialogic perception and Dobrolyubov's interpretation. The author, with this awe-inspiring introduction to nature in the play's first scene, initiates a process of awakening and understanding in the reader or audience through the character's enthusiasm for nature, bringing Volga onto the stage as an active participant and emphasising the importance of the setting in the tragedy. The Volga is the most important driving force, particularly in the main character Katerina's quest for individual freedom. In her childhood memories, Katerina describes her times of distress by escaping to the Volga and defining herself through its presence: ‘I was born like this, so passionate. They punished me for something at home; I was six years old, no older. Towards evening, it was dark, I ran to the Volga, got into a boat and pushed it away from the shore. I let myself drift on the water. The next morning, they found me ten versts away’¹⁷. At the time the work is set, the protagonist's words contain a similar

¹⁵ N.A. Dobrolyubov, *Luch v Temnom Tsvete (V Knige “Russkiye Klassiki. Izbrannyye Literaturno-Kriticheskiye Statii”)*, (Pod. Yu. G. Oksman), 1970, Moskva: Nauka, p. 18.

¹⁶ A.N. Ostrovski, *Groza*, Moskva-Leningrad: Gosudarstvennoye izdatelstvo detskoy literaturi. 1943, p. 3.

¹⁷ *Ibid.* p. 19.

sentiment: 'I feel so overwhelmed at home that I feel like running away. Such a thought grips me, if only I had the willpower, I would be gliding down the Volga in a boat singing songs, or riding in a three-horse carriage and embracing my beloved'¹⁸. Katerina's discourse embodies the desire to escape the suffocating norms of life in Kalinov. The boundless, liberating image of the river serves as an escape in both physical and metaphorical terms. The Volga, with its deep and boundless appearance, constantly gains equivalence with the characters' emotions. Another dialogue space of the river is seen in the reflection of social judgements by the half-mad noblewoman. This woman's words to Varvara and Katerina are an example of how moral judgements, linked to nature, shape social consciousness and fear: 'Does your beauty bring you joy? ... (pointing to the Volga River) Look where beauty leads people! There, right into the whirlpool...'¹⁹. The woman's words clearly point to the place of social norms, moral judgements, and concepts such as sin and punishment in the collective consciousness. Although the deep, still waters of the Volga are peaceful at the beginning of the work, they emphasise the existence of a different destiny, the dangerous consequences of feelings hidden and suppressed beneath the waters.

The Volga's beautiful scenery, which evokes feelings of admiration and tranquillity in people, also embodies sin and the punishment that will follow. Ostrovsky associates social moral values not only with the existence of the Volga, but also with the storm. With the approach of the storm, the changes in the magnificent appearance of the Volga become a mirror reflecting the effect of social decay on individuals. Katerina's statement regarding the approaching storm: 'The storm is coming, let's hurry home!'²⁰ indicates her acceptance of her imprisonment, seeking refuge in her home to escape her inner conflict. Another important point here is her sister-in-law Varvara's words: 'If something is going to happen, you can't hide it at home either'²¹. Because what matters is the character revealing their feelings or how they cope with them. The storm merely plays an effective role in bringing these to light. Although many characters in the city perceive the storm as God's method of punishment, the repairman Kuligin is the only one determined to transform this natural event into productivity. Both perceptions are revealed in the conversations between Kuligin and the merchant Dikoy. For example, Dikoy asks Kuligin what the storm means to him, and Kuligin's answer clearly highlights the difference: 'Electricity.' To this, Dikoy replies: 'What electricity, what audacity. The storm is sent to us

¹⁸ Ibid. p. 15.

¹⁹ Ibid. p. 15.

²⁰ Ibid. p. 16.

²¹ Ibid. p. 16.

as punishment to make us feel'²². This moral judgement, which reflects the majority view in the work and especially that of the Russian merchant, suggests that the image of the storm is sufficient evidence to reflect the general opinion of society.

In the storm drama, the social structure defined as the 'dark kingdom' symbolises the decay of the feudal system and the hypocrisy in human relationships. In the Dark Kingdom, the protagonist Katerina questions her freedom. Her quest for freedom creates a contrast with the discourse and oppression brought about by the social structure. This contrast results in the tragic end of the heroine, namely her suicide. All this conflict is brought about by the image of the storm, which symbolises a natural force and the inevitability of social change. The Volga River, symbolising tranquillity and infinity, creates a contrast to the image of the storm. This contrast creates a driving force in revealing Katerina's emotional conflicts. The protagonist Catherine's quest for individual freedom can be defined as an escape, a light in the aforementioned dark kingdom. However, this small light, as defined, is not powerful enough to change society. Catherine's tragedy can be seen as a symbolic expression of the struggle for survival within the system.

Religious-based Social Structure in Kalinov

Religions leave deep marks on the cultures of societies. Particularly in traditional and closed communities, religion becomes a defining factor not only for individual belief systems but also for moral understanding, behavioural patterns and social norms²³. This situation is also frequently encountered in literary works. Aleksandr Nikolayevich Ostrovsky's play *The Storm* reveals not only the inner worlds of individuals, but also the contradictory moral structure of Russian provincial society, intertwined with religion. When this work is evaluated in the context of religion-belief and sin-punishment, researcher Yesaulova states that 'it can be interpreted in different ways depending on whether the commentator considers the piety of society to be a remnant of an old and patriarchal past in the characters' consciousness or a deep and serious component of the work's internal structure.' In this context, she also emphasises that 'it is highly unlikely that A. N. Ostrovsky viewed Orthodoxy as an archaic traditional remnant'²⁴. The concept of 'sin' that stands out in the work serves as an important key to understanding the characters' internal conflicts and the oppressive social order around them. The perspectives on sin of the different

²² Ibid. p. 43.

²³ A. Güneş, "Sosyolojik Olarak Din ve Toplum İlişkileri", *Firat University Journal of Social Sciences*, 24(1), 2016. p. 158.

²⁴ Ye. N. Yesaulova, "Narodnoye Religioznoye Soznaniye v Groze A. N. Ostrovskogo", *Problemy istoricheskoy poetiki*, 2001, (6), p. 192.

characters in the play, primarily Katerina, play a significant role in revealing this perception.

Following his article ‘The Dark Kingdom,’ which compiled all critical reviews of the period, Dobrolyubov, in his article ‘A Light in the Dark Kingdom’ (‘Луч цвета в темном царстве’), in which he evaluates the drama *The Storm*. He presents Katerina as the only conscious figure who recognises the decay and oppression surrounding society and stands up against it. According to the critic, Katerina's actions, behaviour, and verbal expressions shine like a light in the face of society's inertia. Katerina's tragedy goes beyond individual weakness, transforming the heroine into a saintly figure. In this context, Katerina should not be judged as a sinner, but rather seen as a symbol of conscience and the desire for freedom within a dark society²⁵. All of the main character Katerina's actions and thoughts in the work show her to be a prisoner within the Kabanov family in the city of Kalinov. However, even her thoughts about her own freedom and feelings lead her to believe that she is sinning. Despite all these internal conflicts, she embraces the feelings that will cause her to betray her husband in rebellion against the established order. Katerina's character is driven to sin as a result of her internal conflicts and becomes a slave to her desires. Her husband's early return from his business trip terrifies her, and unable to bear the pangs of conscience, she confesses her crime. However, this confession is more a reaction to the fear of punishment for her sin than a feeling of remorse. As in all the events in the work, the symbol of the storm corresponds to the inevitability of fate. The storm serves as the psychological backdrop for divine punishment and tragic endings²⁶. According to Tihomirov, ‘The Storm is not only Katerina's personal tragedy, but also a tragedy of fate’²⁷. In this context, not only Katerina, but almost all the characters in the play feel that their existence is inevitably leading to disaster and try to cling to the seemingly reassuring illusion of the past. Katerina, too, clings to memories of her past, troubled by the unease of having betrayed her husband. Her unhappy marriage and life in Kalinov cause her to remember the past as even more unattainable and more glamorous than it actually was. She expresses her longing for those days to her sister-in-law Varvara: ‘Was I like that! ... I lived like a free bird... We went to church... Our house was full of devout people’²⁸. In this sentence,

²⁵ N. A. Dobrolyubov, *Luch v Temnom Tsvete (V Knige “Russkiye Klassiki. Izbrannyye Literaturno-Kriticheskiye Statii”)*. (Pod. Yu. G. Oksman), 1860, Moskva: Nauka, p. 5.

²⁶ A.N. Ujankov, “A.N. Yišo Raz o Luche Sveta v Temnom Tsarstve (O Drame A.N. Ostrovskogo “Groza”)", *Noviy filologičeskij vestnik*, 2017, 4 (43), p. 188.

²⁷ V.V. Tihomirov, “Struktura Dramatičeskogo Proizvedeniya (Opit Prochteniya Dramy A. N. Ostrovskogo Groza)", *Vestnik KGU im. N.A. Nekrasova*, 2014, 2, p. 151.

²⁸ A.N. Ostrovski, *Groza*, Moskva-Leningrad: Gosudarstvennoye izdatelstvo detskoj literaturi, 1943, p. 13.

the protagonist's dissatisfaction with herself can be interpreted on multiple layers. Primarily, her sense of imprisonment in her marriage and environment, her guilt-punishment dilemma due to her interest in another man, and her longing for her family home and the devout environment of her childhood constitute these layers. The logical inconsistency in Katerina's character is particularly evident in her deadly fear of the storm. Although Katerina is presented in the overall plot of the play as a representative of progressive ideas with her strong will and 'new human' nature, her reactions to natural events symbolising God's wrath contradict this image. Her description of herself as a 'warm-hearted' person appears to reflect her bold and determined nature. However, her fear in the face of the storm reveals the character's inner conflict. In the scene in the first act, Katerina's horrified reaction to the news of the storm and her desire to return home without waiting for her husband show that her fear of the divine is more powerful than her fear of earthly authority, namely her mother-in-law Marfa Ignatyevna Kabanova's wrath. This situation indicates that Katerina's faith-based moral orientation is more decisive than her social roles²⁹. Despite being shaped by religion and social structure, Katerina's tragedy highlights the conflict between her powerful desire for change and her sense of freedom, reinforcing the judgement that sin cannot go unpunished in the patriarchal society in which she lives. For Katerina, freedom is only possible through suicide within the text.

The only educated character in the play who cannot adapt to the city is Boris, the nephew of the cruel merchant Dikoy. Boris represents the educated merchant child of Russian society at that time, while also being a character who highlights the conflict between generations and customs. Depicted in a manner contrary to the general manners and dress code of Russian society, Boris confesses to the repairman Kuligin that he cannot adapt to his surroundings. During this conversation, Kuligin's response about the Russian countryside and its character is an explicit criticism that reveals the general outlines of the society of the time: 'Sir, morality in our city is very strict, very strict! In the bourgeois class, sir, you will see nothing but rudeness and wretched poverty. And we, sir, can never escape from this shell! Because with honest labour, we can never earn more than our daily bread. Those with money, sir, try to enslave the poor so they can use their labour for free and earn more money'³⁰. The contradictory moral structure of bourgeois society revealed in Kulligin's words, the context of poverty and slavery associated with honesty, is striking. Furthermore, the assertion that it is impossible to

²⁹ O.V. Bogdanova, "Slabost Obraza Silnoy Geroini (Groza A.N. Ostrovskogo)". *Gumanitarniye nauki, filologiya*, 2016, 1 (37), p. 53.

³⁰ A.N. Ostrovski, *Groza*, Moskva-Leningrad: Gosudarstvennoye izdatelstvo detskoy literaturi, 1943, p. 7.

escape this framework confirms the information mentioned in the introduction regarding the issues of the period. Another judgement about the city of Kalinov and its inhabitants is revealed through Fekluša's superstitious discourse: 'Ah, what beauty... You live in the promised land! Your merchants are so virtuous'³¹. Such laudatory statements serve to legitimise the oppression perpetuated under the guise of piety and tradition. The superstitious woman's words, implying that the end of the world is approaching, create deep fear in those around her, especially Marfa Kabanova. This discourse reveals not only individual anxiety but also the mentality of the period and the powerful influence of religious and popular beliefs on everyday life³². In the drama, researcher Tihomirov's words about Marfa Kabanova, who takes on the role of guardian of traditions, are noteworthy: 'Marfa Kabanova's adherence to tradition is less a matter of conservatism and more a desperate effort to protect what she sees as right'³³. An example of this hopeless endeavour is evident in his advice to his daughter Varvara: 'Because they love you, parents are strict with you; because they love you, they scold you, always wanting to teach you what is good'³⁴. Marfa Kabanova's actions and words are all aimed at legitimising the oppressive statements mentioned above. After Katerina's suicide, her words to her son Tihon are conveyed in a manner devoid of human emotion: 'I won't allow it, don't even think about it! Is it worth destroying yourself because of her? Haven't her misdeeds been enough?'³⁵. As can be understood from this statement, it was said out of an instinct to protect what is right. With these words, Marfa Kabanova does not allow Tihon to carry Katerina's lifeless body. Tihon also maintains his passive stance by not opposing his mother. Clearly, no figure representing the darkness in the work is as sublime as Katerina's lifeless body. Ultimately, it is Kuligin the repairman who retrieves the lifeless body from the river. Kuligin the repairman is a character specifically chosen for this task, despite his ignorance, as a representative of change. Throughout the work, Kuligin is one of the rare characters who strives to be useful to society. In this respect, it falls to him, as one of the representatives of Russia's bright side, to carry the light of the dark kingdom, that is, Katerina's lifeless body. At the end of the tragedy, Kuligin's final words also reveal the main idea of the critique: 'Here is your Catherine. Do with her what you will! Take her body here. But her soul no longer belongs to you; now she stands before a

³¹ Ibid. p. 8.

³² I. Zohrab, "Pereotsenka Grozi A.N. Ostrovskogo v Kontekste Filosofskoy Kritiki", *Problemi kulturologii i filologii*, 2006, 3, p. 169.

³³ V.V. Tihomirov, "Struktura Dramatičeskogo Proizvedeniya (Opit Pročteniya Drami A. N. Ostrovskogo Groza)", *Vestnik KGU im. N. A. Nekrasova*, 2014, 2, p. 151.

³⁴ A.N. Ostrovski, *Groza*. Moskva- Leningrad: Gosudarstvennoye izdatelstvo detskoj literaturi, 1943, p. 10.

³⁵ Ibid. p. 56.

more merciful judge than you!’³⁶. This scene is where social hypocrisy and moral decay are exposed following Katerina's death. Kuligin's words, interpreting the tragedy as a manifestation of divine justice, represent the culmination of Ostrovsky's critique of traditional structures and oppressive moral norms. For with these words, Kuligin lays bare the internal contradictions and moral bankruptcy of the religion-based social structure in Kalinov, arguing that divine judgement is fairer than the corrupt judgement of social norms.

The other character who helps resolve the plot twists in the work is the half-mad noblewoman. As mentioned in the previous section, this woman's superstitions are emphasised over social judgements. She does not have a specific name, but she is one of the important characters who reflects the social consciousness in many ways. According to researcher Yu. V. Domanskiy, This half-mad noblewoman character in Ostrovsky's *The Storm* is one of the important archetypes revived in classical drama and, unlike the other characters in the play, stands out as a figure who clearly articulates fundamental concepts such as crime, moral choice, responsibility, and judgement. Furthermore, the monologues of this character establish a direct cause-and-effect relationship between beauty and crime, reviving the myth of the ‘tragic crime inherent in beauty’; for example, danger is seen in Volga's beauty, divine punishment in the storm in the sky, and sin and inevitable death in Katerina's beauty³⁷. The words spoken in the drama, ‘You will burn in unquenchable fires... you will boil in cauldrons of tar’³⁸ confirm this expression. The expression used by the old woman, pointing to the Volga to Varvara and Katerina, associates the joy and beauty of women with concepts such as hell, fire, punishment, and sin, revealing the pressure society places on women.

The descriptions of the settings used in the work have been transformed into heroes that feed this atmosphere woven with contrasts. Rather than directly depicting the stage in Ostrovsky's plays, he constructs a symbolic setting through words. The judgement presented regarding the scene at the climax of *The Storm* can be read based on the characters' lines. The ruined church described here can be interpreted not only as a physical space but also as a sacred symbol, a reminder of divine justice and death. In this respect, the structure resembles the altar in ancient Greek tragedy, meaning that the place where the tragedy unfolds is not merely a stage but also a

³⁶ Ibid. p. 56.

³⁷ Yu. V. Domanskiy, “Polusumashedshaya Barinya, Lyudi s Pesyimi Golovami i Svyatoy Hristafor v Groze Ostrovskogo (K Voprosu O Janre Pyesi)”, *Noviy filologicheskiy vestnik*, 2014, 2 (29), p. 8.

³⁸ A.N. Ostrovski, *Groza*. Moskva-Leningrad: Gosudarstvennoye izdatelstvo detskoy literaturi, 1943, p. 16.

symbolic space that points to fate, the will of the gods, and sacrificial rituals³⁹. Researcher Zohrab notes that alongside the physical depiction of the church, the resolution of the work's pivotal points occurs with the accompaniment of the Volga River landscape- that is, nature and the storm and that this resolution also facilitates Catherine's confession⁴⁰.

The social structure in Kalinov is based on a rigid hierarchy shaped by religion and tradition. Religion here is not merely a belief system, but also becomes an instrument of moral judgement and social pressure. Katerina's struggle with the concepts of sin and punishment reveals the suffocating effect of this structure on the individual. Characters such as Marfa Kabanova and the Merchant Dikoy legitimise despotism in the name of preserving tradition, while figures such as the half-mad noblewoman embody the fears in the collective consciousness of society. Places such as the church and the Volga serve as symbols of divine justice and escape. Ostrovsky uses these elements to reveal the religious and moral contradictions of Russian society. Katerina's suicide is a sign of the individual's helplessness in the face of these contradictions and the immutability of the system.

Conclusion

In literary works, setting is not merely a physical backdrop for events; it is an active narrative element that constructs the characters' identities, social statuses, and psychological states. Ostrovsky's drama *The Storm* successfully embodies, on a spatial plane, the disintegration of the feudal-peasant system in 19th-century Russia and the contradictory moral structure of rural society, intertwined with religion. As emphasised throughout the study, the fictional city of Kalinov is the centre of the established value system, inertia, and social decay, representing Dobrolyubov's conceptualisation of the 'Dark Kingdom'.

The phenomenon of 'hypocrisy,' detailed in the study, stems not so much from the personal wickedness of individuals as from the narrow-minded, rigid, and superstition-bound mentality of society. In this context, figures such as Marfa Kabanova and the Merchant Dikoy perpetuate social oppression by legitimising despotism under the guise of 'preserving tradition and what is right'. The tragedy of the protagonist Katerina reflects the helplessness of an individual seeking freedom in this stifling climate, faced with archetypal figures such as the half-mad noblewoman representing collective guilt and the image of the storm symbolising the fear of divine punishment.

³⁹ L. N. Dmitriyevskaya, "Elementy Drevnegreçeskoj Tragedii v Groze Ostrovskogo", *Gromota*, 2018, 9 (87), p.14.

⁴⁰ I. Zohrab, "Pereotsenka Grozi A.N. Ostrovskogo v Kontekste Filosofskoy Kritiki", *Problemy kulturologii i filologii*, 2006, 3, p. 167.

The contrast between the liberating tranquillity of the Volga River and the chaotic atmosphere of the storm mirrors Katerina's inner conflicts and the inevitable collapse of the social order. Katerina's suicide, despite shining as a 'light' in the dark kingdom, demonstrates that individual rebellion alone cannot change the rigid hierarchy of the existing system. However, Kuligin's final protest, carrying Katerina's lifeless body, represents the climax in terms of exposing social hypocrisy and questioning traditional moral norms with its emphasis on a 'merciful judge'.

Although Ostrovsky is generally discussed in academic researches in terms of Moscow life and merchant types, this study reveals how space functions as an ideological tool within the triangle of nature, fate, and faith. Consequently, *The Storm* continues to serve as a model for analysing literary texts through historical and sociocultural dynamics, presenting a universal tragedy through its symbolic use of space and social criticism.

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