

**Title:** The Advent and (Melo)drama of the “New People”: Al. Sumbatov-Iuzhin’s Play *The Arkazanovs* (1886)

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This paper analyzes shifts within the representation of villainy, victimization, innocence, and martyrdom in late 19th-century Russian drama through the prism of “spatial-ethical hierarchy.” The playwright’s approach towards the antagonist, the embodiment of “new people”, the newly emerging class of parvenus “moneygrubbers”, makes this work stand out in Sumbatov-Iuzhin’s dramatic oeuvre. Although the dramatic conflict is built on two frequently utilized motifs: ruination of a “gentlefolk’s nest” and a “sale-trade” theme, the play’s text presents an intriguing case of challenging various types of hierarchies: social, psychological, melodramatic. By charting the external clash between the protagonist (Arkazanov) and the antagonist (Navarygin), the playwright negotiates and contests the inner struggle of the characters. For Arkazanov, this is the familiar collision between his zealous public activism and idealism and, what G. S. Morson calls a “lack of prosaic habits”. Navarygin’s obsession with power, on the other hand, collides with his feelings for Arkazanov’s daughter and his own “loss of innocence”.

The development of the characters is constructed by the juxtaposition of Navarygin’s rise to power and Arkazanov’s downfall. In both cases a female character plays a key role: Navarygin’s passage “from rags to riches” lies through his loveless marriage to a wealthy heiress; Arkazanov faces the dilemma of choosing between his estate and his daughter. Predictably, the clash ends with a financial catastrophe for Arkazanov, but the ethical collision resolves with a moral victory for the latter. Although the finale concludes in a typical melodramatic fashion: villainy is punished, virtue is recognized, and innocence is saved, victimization is celebrated as victory. Arkazanov’s moral superiority is validated by his children’s position. Thus the ubiquitous generational conflict is modified and elevated to a generational continuity.

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