

(Anti)religious propaganda in the Soviet and post-Soviet works of fiction for young readers

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Abstract: The article presents a comparative analysis of two novels for young readers focusing on anti-religious and religious propaganda: *The Miracle Worker* (*Chudotvornaya*, 1958) and *Serafima's Extraordinary Journey* (*Neobyknovennoye Puteshestviye Serafimy*, 2016). Although the novels feature a similar set of characters, the writers use different techniques for their portrayal subject to the pursued objective. The article analyzes how similar lexical units and stylistic devices may be used for the opposite purposes. The analysis reveals the reversal of values between Soviet and post-Soviet societies resulting in the shift of the focus of the didactic messages conveyed through children's literature.

1. Introduction

Orthodox religion has always played an important role in Russian culture, particularly in literature. In pre-Revolution Russia Orthodoxy occupied a special place (K.E.B., 1950, p. 393). In 1918, the Russian Orthodox Church, which enjoyed the status of an official institution in tsarist Russia, was officially separated from the state and the education. An antireligious campaign was launched in the 1920s. 1937-38, the era of the "great terror," saw mass executions of clergy and believers. During the Second World War and in its aftermath, the wave of anti-religious repression abated. However, the 1960s were marked by a renewed wave of attacks against the Russian Orthodox Church. The "militant atheism" of the 1920s-30s was replaced by "scientific atheism." Atheist education through literature became the cornerstone of the campaign. Children's books were expected to emphasize the predominance of the communist ideology over Christianity. Atheism as a new religion had its own scriptures and a pantheon of saints, whose martyrdom heralded by mass literature was to inspire younger generations of readers to follow suit. These books comprised both ideological pamphlets, often written by former priests, and works of fiction by well-known children's writers such as Lyubov Voronkova, Vladimir Tendryakov, Irina Pechernikova (Naydenova 2016; Naydenova 2017).

The choice of literary forms was simple and wise at the same time. As Svetlana Boiko notes, the reader's notion of what constitutes literature has changed little over decades, and he takes his

bearings from the familiar formats (Boiko 2015, p. 7). Therefore, tales about miracles performed by saints were replaced by sagas of ruses to which revolutionaries resorted in order to cheat the gendarmes. For instance, the famous story about bread inkpots used by Lenin in prison to write letters with milk under the nose of a jail warden portrays the leader of the socialist revolution as a typical trickster combining the elements of a folk tale and a saint's life (Zoshchenko 1983).

A separate gallery of young martyrs was created for different ages. Books containing descriptions of virtuous lives and, martyrdom and death of young heroes during the Second World War were created for children of all ages: younger readers were offered a collection of brochures under the common title of *The Pioneer Heroes* (Pionery-geroi 1980-1982), while elder students read *The Young Guard* by Alexander Fadeyev (Fadeev 1969).

The collapse of the USSR marked a new milestone in the development of Russian literature. The 1990s saw the resurgence of the so-called Orthodox, or ecclesiastical, literature, including books for children. According to Boiko, "ecclesiastical literature" is broken out by thematic descriptor, ignoring the genre of the specific work, but in reality, works by Russian Orthodox writers are as a rule distinguished less by theme than by the approach taken to that theme and the nature of the extraliterary tasks (which could be, for example, cognitive or didactic) (Boiko 2015, p. 15). The elements that are of immediate relevance to the Orthodox literature today comprise the didactic or "edifying" element; the element of witness: the witnessing of grace, of Divine Providence made manifest in common and uncommon events; the elements of the chronicling of everyday life and mores (Ibid).

As for Orthodox books for children, they fall into several categories. First, there are purely edifying books. They comprise, for instance, biblical stories adapted for young readers, or descriptions of the saints' lives. Secondly, there are works of fiction, which are aimed at teaching the precepts of the Orthodox faith in an overt or covert manner, subject to the writer's mastery. Thirdly, there are school textbooks. These include *Foundations of the Orthodox Culture*, an elective module at primary school, as well as abecedaries, textbooks of Church Slavonic and even biology taught through the religious perspective.

All of these genres have something in common — they spring from the didactic discourse. Like the atheist propaganda of the 1960s, these books serve the purpose of teaching a certain worldview to the young readers, and the mechanisms they use are often the same, although they may be implemented in different ways. This study is based on two books: *The Miracle Worker* (Chudotvornaya, 1958) by Vladimir Tendryakov and *Serafima's Extraordinary Journey* (Neobyknovennoye Puteshestviye Serafimy, 2009 & 2016) by Timofey Veronin. Both novels were adapted for the screen (for the analysis of screen versions, see Naydenova 2017).

2. *The Miracle Worker* and *Serafima's Extraordinary Journey*: Overview

The Miracle Worker reveals a conflict caused by a confrontation between religion (i.e. obscurantism) and modernity (i.e. atheism). The protagonist is Rodion Gulyaev, an adolescent who lives with his mother Varvara and grandmother Avdotya known by the villagers as "old Grachikha". His father left the family and Varvara is unable to get over his departure. Old Grachikha is a strong-willed woman and a practicing Orthodox Christian. However, she is occupied exclusively with the formal side of the religion. Rodion finds an old icon, which used to be the symbol of the abandoned church and was considered lost, and becomes venerated by the locals as the "chosen by God". His grandmother and mother make him wear a cross necklace, which he vehemently tears off more than once. The boy can hardly survive his classmates' mockery and the pilgrimage of believers asking him to pray for them. The old school teacher Paraskovia Petrovna interferes with the situation, escalating the domestic conflict. This chain of events provokes a

psychotic disorder with the boy, who chops up the icon, is beaten by his grandmother and attempts to commit suicide.

The lexical and stylistic devices used by the author are carefully selected. The onomastic strategy in Tendryakov's book is based on popular religious beliefs and intertextual elements. Thus, the name of the adolescent who first found the icon before the revolution is Panteleimon, one of the most loved saints in Russia known as a healer. The teacher is called Paraskovia. Paraskeva is a well-known and respected saint as well, whose figure exists both in pagan beliefs and Orthodox Menaion. The teacher's name, which used to be widespread among the rural population, underlines her closeness to ordinary people. Rodion's grandmother mentions that the boys broke the cross on the tomb of Feklusha the pilgrim woman (Tendryakov 1984, p. 3). This is an allusion to *The Storm* by Aleksandr Ostrovsky, where there was a character with the same name, an ignorant woman fond of gossiping (Ostrovsky 2013). The church, where the icon was kept before it disappeared, is called St. Nicholas-on-the Bridge. St. Nicholas is the most venerated saint in Russian Orthodoxy, and the churches built in his honour were often named after the place where they were founded.

Another trait inherent in the author's narrative is carnivalization based on the blending, and even reversal of the profane and the sacred (Bakhtin 1941):

The icon was lying **on the ground** covered with **putrid beet tops**; two white eyes were staring with gloomy severity at **light little clouds** spread across **the sky**" (Tendryakov 1984, p. 3).

The object of cult is completely profaned and downgraded to the level of decayed vegetation deprived of life and therefore outdated. The icon is opposed to the sky with "light little clouds" running freely and unreachably for St. Nicholas, who looks askance at them. The original phrase in Russian contains two words with diminutive suffixes (*legonkie oblachka*), which makes them look even more ethereal. It is peculiar that Tendryakov's description of nature is sometimes repeated in Veronin's novel. Thus, small clouds (*krokhotnye oblachka*) were floating in the clear sky, while Serafima and her mother were coming home from the orphanage. "The saints must be sitting on them, but we can't see them", thought Serafima (Veronin 2016, p. 134).

The semantics of decay emerges yet again in the scene, where the boys get into the abandoned church at night and instead of a white wall they observed from far away they see a "dilapidated wall with the evil grin of bricks and chipped plaster" smelling of the dungeon mould and bird drops (Tendryakov 1984, p. 37-38). This personification of the church building with bared teeth and fetid odours of the underworld turns it into a treacherous creature ambushing naïve visitors.

It should be noted that *God* is typed in lower-case letters throughout the book, except for the passage from the Book of Genesis quoted by the teacher, contrary to the tradition of using capital letters not just at the beginning of the word, but also for every derivative and pronoun replacing it. It should be mentioned, however, that this was common for all kinds of Soviet printed media.

Serafima's Extraordinary Journey, a novel by Orthodox writer Timofey Veronin, was first published in 2009 and then reedited in 2016. The events take place after the Second World War. The protagonist is Serafima (Fimka) Uspenskaya, the daughter of an executed priest, who ignores her origins and barely survives in a Soviet orphanage being bullied by her classmates who are tacitly supported by the teacher. She falls ill after having spent a night in a pantry on Easter eve as an unjust punishment. While being unconscious, she meets St. Seraphim of Sarov, her patron saint and one of the most respected saints of the Russian Orthodox Church, and together they travel down the river of time, where they stop at different islands, each of them being dedicated to a certain event of the Sacred History, and Serafima learns new facts about Orthodox holidays and biblical episodes. During her journey, she meets different saints, sees the Virgin Mary and even Jesus Christ. Serafima is eventually found by her mother, who takes her from the orphanage.

The book follows two purposes: it is positioned as a work of fiction but at the same time has a didactic mission as it contains retellings of biblical episodes, lives of the saints and historical digressions as well as teachings of the main concepts of the Orthodox faith. The latter are either voiced by the characters, or are implied by binary oppositions between the protagonist and her antagonists.

The leitmotiv of the novel is the necessity of praying God and believing firmly that God knows what you need. “My joy, our Saviour hears you, our Comforter hears everybody, you are here because of His mercy. Hold Him tight by His feet, and ask for anything”, instructs Saint Seraphim. Serafima hears Christ’s words: “You will have everything you need” (Veronin 2016, p. 125) (cf. So do not worry, saying, “What shall we eat?” or “What shall we drink?” or “What shall we wear?” For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them (Mt. 6:31)) “...I didn’t have time to ask our Lord for anything, but the things I wanted started to happen”, shares her joy the young protagonist (Veronin 2016, p. 140).

It is interesting to note that the same idea is more than once emphasized in *The Miracle Worker*, but as a negative trend. It is presented as a superstition and lack of self-confidence: “<Old Grachikha> did not rely on herself but always looked for god’s help and kept nagging every single day: “Pray! Pray! Only our lord the almighty can help us!” (Tendryakov, 1984, p. 7); “...Varvara was frightened by life <and kept saying>: god, protect <my son>!... Everything around is so scary. Jesus Christ, save us and spare from trouble” (Ibid, pp.7-8).

This idea is also conveyed through the boy’s internal monologue, which highlights the antithesis between the dogmas of Christianity and atheism. The author presents the eternal question of the “daily bread” from the anthropocentric point of view:

Does he really care how to live? His mother and grandmother will always put a plate of soup and thick slices of bread in front of him on the table, and he, Rodion, does not need any more. It has never occurred to him to ponder about god or the soul (Ibid, p. 32).

This postulate is ultimately contested by the teacher who quotes a passage from the Old Testament (Genesis 3:21) and then comments on it: “God gives clothes, god feeds, god orders to be kind – god is everywhere. However, the man became a man only because he achieved everything himself, due to his intelligence, with his own hands. By referring to god’s continuous intervention, you deprive the man of being the master of his life” (Tendryakov 1984, p. 49).

Veronin’s onomastic strategy is mainly focused on Serafima’s last name – Uspenskaya – derived from “Uspeniye”, or the Dormition of the Mother of God. The girl is puzzled about it at the beginning of the novel, as it often causes ambiguous reactions from other people. Starting from the end of the XVIIth century up to the revolution of 1917, Orthodox priests in Russia preferred to have a last name appropriate for clergymen. During the journey, the girl learns what her last name means.

All the words pertaining to the Virgin or Jesus Christ begin with a capital letter. Even the word “Confession” is typed with a capital letter, which is against the rules of standard Russian spelling. This can be illustrated by the passage attributed to St. Anna, mother of the Virgin Mary: “In autumn we had a Girl. We called her Mary. Our eternal Happiness, our Comfort and Joy was born” (Veronin 2016, p. 46). (Here, an informed reader can also unveil the play on words as there exists an icon “Theotokos of Joy and Comfort”). Another intertextual element of the same nature is ciphered in the epithet used to describe Jesus Christ: “The sweetest (*presladkiy*) voice of the Saviour sounded in her soul throughout her life after that” (Ibid, p. 125). This adjective alludes to the Acatist to Our Sweetest Lord Jesus Christ (*Akafist Iisusu Sladchayshemu*), well-known to practicing believers.

In both novels, the characters’ speech is distinguished by specific traits. The lexemes describing believers in *The Miracle Worker* are pejoratively connoted: they “drool”, or “nag” instead of talking, “drag along” instead of walking. If they light a candle, it’s always only one kopeck worth (Tendryakov 1984, p. 8-9).

The believers' speech is characterized by errors, on the one hand, and the correct use of ecclesiastical terms on the other, although they sometimes mispronounce them (*svyacheniy chin* instead of *svyashchenniy san*, *Isuse Khriste* instead of *Iisuse Khriste*). They use erroneous prepositions (*s Nikoly Mosty* instead of *iz Khrama Nikoly na Mostakh*) and vernacular word forms (*napuzhali* instead of *napugali*), confound syllables (*lerigion* instead of *religion*), make pronunciation errors (*motri* instead of *smotri*, *kazhnuyu noch* instead of *kazhduyu noch*). But at the same time old Grachikha exactly knows how to label the new icon:

- That's the lost icon, said mother seriously.
- Curse that tongue of yours for saying "lost"! Not lost, my darling, but **newly appeared** (*novoyavlennaya*) (Ibid, p. 3).

Diminutive forms abound in the believers' speech. Diminutive affixes are added to all kinds of nouns: legs (*nozhenki*), arms (*ruchenki*), intercessor (*zastupnichek*), soul (*dushenka*). The forms of address are excessively sugary and sound unnatural: my angel (*angel moy*), my darling (*rodnenkiy moy, milenkiy, golub moy, golubok, zolotse*).

Almost all believers look and sound unpleasant or foolish: fat Agnia who suffers from pain in her legs "after sitting all day like a bump on a log" (Tendryakov 1984, p. 4), mutilated alcoholic Akindin, who tries to capitalize on his physical disability (Ibid, p. 15), unpleasant shop manager Myakishev, who is disliked by many people (Ibid, p. 16), grandpa Stepan, who feels lonely and confused (Ibid, p. 14).

In *Serafima's Extraordinary Journey*, the writer tries to make the speech of every saint recognizable due to certain repeated lexemes or word forms. Thus, the author reproduces speech patterns, which were typical for Saint Seraphim of Sarov in his earthly life. The saint calls himself "miserable Seraphim", addresses the girl as "my joy", or "my treasure", and uses a lot of diminutive forms (*imechko, denek, chaek, devchonochka, stopochki*) which might seem surprising to a reader, who is not familiar with the subject. Maria Magdalena uses similar forms of address: my dear (*moya khoroshaya*), my sweet one (*moya milaya*), my precious one (*dragotsennaya moya*), honey (*rodnaya moya*). These stylistic features, which might seem exaggerated, are opposed to the vulgar way of speaking of non-believers:

- What are you whispering there? - shouted in a hoarse voice hefty Natalia nicknamed the Shark, - are you praying over there? Your God doesn't exist (*Netu tvoego Boga, netu*). If He did exist, we wouldn't be suffering here! (Veronin 2016, p. 135)

The same expression "God doesn't exist" with the use of the non-normative form of negation *netu* is featured in Tendryakov's novel when Zherebikha, one of the believers, tells the story of certain Vasily who "shouted at all corners: "Lerigion is opium! God doesn't exist! (*Boga netu*)" but then was killed in the Second World War (Tendryakov 1984, p. 31). Thus, the same trait appears in the speech of the opposite characters (a non-believer and a believer) labelled as negative in the respective novel.

An old experienced doctor also has his own traits of speech, which characterize him as belonging to the former upper class. On the contrary, the supporters of the Soviet regime speak in loud voices, shout, use vulgar words. Even the teacher speaks rudely and impatiently to Serafima's mother:

- Tell me the patronymic name.
- Maria Vasilievna.
- Not yours! Your daughter's, **you fool!**
- Nikolayevna, Serafima Nikolayevna.
- We have her here, **snapped** Olga Semenovna (Veronin 2016, p. 137).

3. The Church and the Cross as the Plot Forming Elements

In the majority of books dating back to the 1960s the only term used to describe the place of worship is *tserkov* (literally “church”), and almost never *khram* (literally “temple”). The word *khram* is part of such idiomatic expressions as *khram Bozhiy* (“God’s temple”) or *khram dushi* (literally “temple of soul”, meaning that a human body is a receptacle of a soul placed there by God). The occurrence of the term *khram* in the discourse of believers in *The Miracle Worker* is not surprising: “*Khram bozhiy* (“god’s temple”) stands abandoned, no wonder it has become a nest for all kinds of evil spirits” (Tendryakov 1984, p. 6). However, used together with the evocation of “evil spirits”, the semantic value of this expression is intentionally downgraded by implying the speaker’s superstitiousness and ignorance. For the same purpose, *khram* also occurs once in the atheist teacher’s discourse:

<The priest> is not just god’s propagandist, these are not just prayers he uses for the glory of the lord... he would not spare any means for the old crone’s convenience to prevent her from running twelve kilometres to attend a vigil but to offer her a *khram* next door, so that she could carry there the kopecks she earned or saved (Ibid, p. 48).

This short passage contains several religious terms and expressions, which are correctly used (God, for the glory of the Lord, the Vigil). Their correct usage by the teacher, a seasoned atheist proselytizer and the most respected person in the village, is complemented by the introduction of the word *khram* in her speech, which is also technically the most appropriate term here. This careful choice of vocabulary serves two objectives: to demonstrate the speaker’s superiority for the account of her knowledge as “knowledge itself is power” and to devalue the term *khram* once again as a place, where an old uneducated woman thoughtlessly wastes her meagre savings. This passage constitutes an example of discourse in the Foucauldian sense, which produces meaning and forms the objects of which it speaks (Foucault 1972, p. 54).

Both words (*tserkov* and *khram*) are found in the dialogue between the priest and the village teacher:

- It is now impossible to open the *khram* of St. Nicholas-on-the-Bridge. We’ll not be able to get a permission. The situation would be different, if this *khram* was, let’s say, a warehouse or a grain depot...
- Why? – said Paraskovia Petrovna in a surprised tone. Isn’t that vice versa? If a former *tserkov* building is occupied, it seems more complicated to vacate it (Tendryakov 1984, p. 48).

Here, the use of the lexeme *khram* subverts itself: the cunning priest is eager to resort to a ruse by profaning the sacred place in order to achieve his goals, while the teacher is straightforward and honest, and, therefore, it is her discourse (including the choice of the word *tserkov*) that is to be trusted.

Haughtiness, hypocrisy, foot-licking parasite attitude and darkness are the key characteristics of the Orthodox religion highlighted in *The Miracle Worker*, which is done through the representation of the church building. The old church building transpires “haughtiness and millennial despise to the crowd of surrounding little houses” (Ibid, p. 19). The crosses on the dome look like “bleeding with fire” and “try to snatch the clouds” (Ibid, p. 9). When the sun goes down, the building is “reluctant” to disappear in the darkness (Ibid, p. 19). Whenever the church – “a monument of ignorant faith in the inexistent god” (Ibid, p. 9) - is mentioned, it is accompanied by

such adjectives as huge, empty and dark. It is connected with “a mysterious god” and hides “an alarming and scary secret” (Ibid, p. 32).

Similar description of the shining cross in the sky is given in *Serafima's Extraordinary Journey*. The church situated in the village, where Serafima lives, is depicted in the following way: “The crosses were shining in the spring sun <...> It was so good there! Fimka did not want to leave...” (Veronin 2016, p. 147). It is also near the church that Serafima meets new friends – the parish priest's children.

In *Serafima's Extraordinary Journey*, the church building is more often referred to as *khram* although the word *tserkov* is also used. It is the centre of attraction for all positive characters of the novel. “How she was attracted by this church!” says the author about Serafima (Ibid, p. 19). When she enters the church in her dream, she finds herself in Eden full of beautiful flowers and singing birds. The church is also denoted by diminutive lexemes *tserkovka*, *tserkvushka* literally “small church”.

When speaking about Heavenly Jerusalem, the author uses exclusively the term *khram*. The paradise is opposed to reality in the following way: “Fimka opened her eyes. The pillow and the night gown were totally wet. A dim light bulb was blinking. A small spider was crawling on the wall. A nurse in an old washed out gown was drowsing in the corner” (Veronin 2016, p. 125). This description alludes to Dostoyevsky's *Crime and Punishment*, where Svidrigaylov discusses future life with Raskolnikov: “Instead of all that, what if it's one little room, like a bath house in the country, black and grimy and spiders in every corner, and that's all eternity is?” (Dostoyevsky 2008, p. 281). This reversal of the heavenly and the mundane is interpreted in *Serafima's Extraordinary Journey* as a contrast between the paradise open only to the believers and the Soviet reality.

Unlike *The Miracle Worker*, the scary building in *Serafima's Extraordinary Journey* is the factory, a symbol of technical progress, which is also personified in the text. Its black pipes look gloomy at the sky and “do not understand the beauty of the surrounding lakes and sunsets” as “only grey smoke and black coal are beautiful” (Veronin 2016, p. 161). Moreover, the factory is “dangerous” as it “takes Mum away” from Serafima (Ibid, p. 160).

Another important element of the plot is the cross. The cross is present in *The Miracle Worker* both materially as an artifact (a cross necklace, which Rodion refuses to wear), and allegorically as the concept of resignation and humble obedience to God's will. This idea can be observed in the following passage:

For every **healthy** boy, the sense of life is contained within one phrase: “When I grow up...” Now he has to renounce from his future... It is only uncertainty and darkness that lie ahead. Rodion could not imagine his future with god and grandmother... If there's no future, there's no life either, he has to give everything up... he has to give it up himself! This is not just a cross put on your neck, not just a shame in front of your comrades... Now <...> the trouble resides inside you. No future, no happiness, no nothing! (Tendryakov 1984, p. 41)

This interior monologue implies that a believer is an unhealthy person, always alarmed and unsure of his future and contests Jesus' words “If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me” (Mk. 8:34).

The cross is mentioned in Veronin's novel as well. In her dream, the girl receives it as a gift from Saint Simeon Stylites. The cross helps her to shoo off ugly creatures who attack her in her sleep (Veronin 2016, p. 38). When the girl wakes up, she wants to take the cross off: “they'll find it, take it away from her, then lock her up in the pantry because of this cross” (Ibid, p. 125). But once she wants to take the cross off and even throw it away, she hears Saint Seraphim's voice and sees the glimpses of the river of time, and then decides to keep it.

Like in *The Miracle Worker*, the cross bears an archetypal nature in *Serafima's Extraordinary Journey*. During her journey, Serafima sees the cross that “illuminates the whole universe” (Ibid, p. 182). Saint Seraphim explains to the girl that the cross is the instrument of salvation, the foundation

of human life, and gives numerous allegorical representations of the cross (the plough, the sail, the house) (Ibid, p. 183-184).

4. Characters: Comparative Analysis

Both books have the same set of characters, who are, however, attributed the opposite traits. The protagonists are adolescents of approximately the same age, both coming from broken families – Serafima's father was taken away by NKVD and disappeared, and Rodion's father left the family. Rodion is presented as a normal boy, who is fond of spending time with his friends, swimming in the river, fishing and climbing up trees. He is not an exemplary Young Pioneer as he sometimes carries his pioneer scarf in the pocket. He often misbehaves, is rude to his grandmother and has problems controlling his emotions. When describing Rodion's appearance, the author compares him with his grandmother as he takes after "old Grachikha" more than he does after his mother: "...with time, he will be as strong as old Grachikha" (Tendryakov 1984, p. 3). This comparison at the very beginning of the novel implies that the confrontation between "fathers" and "sons", "obscurantism" and "progress", "outdated oldness" and "promising youth" will be embodied by the figures of grandmother and grandson.

Serafima's image is rather lopsided. She is presented as a positive character from the onset. Serafima is generous, she shares food with her friends, and, being sick herself, prays for her classmate Nastia. She feels sorry even for a broken toy dog. In her interior monologue, Serafima uses clichés that one would more likely hear from a juvenile officer: "She remembered Katia the Go-Getter. Where will she end up with her criminal ways? She will get into prison and then she will slide down" (Veronin 2016, p. 24).

Although the writer tries to depict Serafima in a more "human" way (she gets angry with the bullies, and even tries to take revenge upon one of them, throws dirt at the boy, who is going to church), once she "finds God" after meeting her patron saint, she immediately remembers all her sins and repents them deeply.

Contrary to the teacher's resolution to educate the girl as a fighter, Serafima is portrayed as defenseless and little (*bezzashitnaya i malenkaya*), skinny and fragile (*khuednkaya, khudenkye/khrupkiye plechiki* – "her skinny shoulders were trembling defenselessly" (Veronin 2016, p. 129)), light (*legonkaya*), with small fists (*kulachki*), and her descriptions are full of diminutive forms.

The word combination "skinny shoulders" is also used to describe Rodion but in the following context: "His shoulders are skinny for the time being, but even now one can see how broad they are under his old quilted jacket..." (Tendryakov 1984, p. 3). This description indicates the vigorous potential of the boy, the strength that is growing inside him.

The anti-religious campaign renewed by Khrushchev dictated a new literary canon for bringing up a new generation of atheists. The main technique was to show that scientific progress was incompatible with obscurant religious beliefs. It was instrumental to portray believers as uneducated hypocrites whose example was not to be followed under any circumstances by a vigilant young reader (Naydenova 2016, p. 172). Therefore, everything having to do with religion in Tendryakov's novel bears sneaky nature:

All these worshippers of the lord act only **underhandedly** (Tendryakov 1984, p. 53).

- Everyone lives as he pleases, everyone saves his soul as he can. **Wear <your cross> secretly** and rejoice (Ibid, p. 10).

Publicity for <the believers> is like **light for a mole-rat** (Ibid, p. 61).

Religion in *The Miracle Worker* is embodied by old people, mainly women, who are insultingly called *starukha* or *babka* (crone):

The **starukhy (crones)** kept talking about the icon, the lights in the marsh, the soul of god's man Panteleimon hovering above the whirlpool and saying that every midnight someone «saws the dome» of the abandoned church... (Ibid, p. 9)

The **babka (old crone)** straightened her back, pursed her lips, and gripped a small cross in her brown fist (Ibid, p. 10).

Grandmother is presented as a religious lunatic, who hits the boy to put a cross necklace on his chest, insults him dedicated to the old woman, who is supposed to represent the most typical believer, is full of violence and rudeness:

...**the old crone** made him go to the next room and, while rummaging in a box through medicine flasks and spools, **hissed angrily**:

- You threw away the cross, didn't you? And you, **miscreant soul**, thought that I would never find out about it? Thank god, who saved you. I'll not **beat you up** today. People are gathering, and I don't want to be ashamed in front of them. Here's another cross. Put it on now, and **stop being difficult**.

The old woman's **rough fingers** unbuttoned his shirt, and she **made him bow with a firm palm of her hand**. The lace of the cross got stuck by the boy's ear, and the **old crone** fixed it **rudely** (Ibid, p. 42).

The old woman, a veteran believer and church-goer, is presented to the reader in the most revolting way: her speech is full of vulgar words, she is powerful and makes the boy bow to put on a cross, a sign of resignation towards her and, *par extension*, God's will. Even her hands are rough and unpleasant to touch. At the same time, she is a hypocrite keeping a cross – the thing, which is supposed to be dear to her – among rubbish, and fearing that the neighbours will see her true colours.

The pilgrims and fools in Christ, integral parts of the Orthodox world once loved and respected by the people, are shown as hysterical hideous creatures. They are earmarked as “those who consider praising god and visiting sacred places to be a job”, for whom “the appearance of the miraculous icon is a fluke”. They travel across Russia “drooling in a falsely affectionate tone”: “Christians, donate for the church” (Ibid, p. 8).

A parody of the fool in Christ is also represented by a limbless character Akindin (Kindya) (“I'm handicapped, everything is allowed to me, I can kill, I can mutilate!” (Ibid, p. 15), angrily shouts drunk Kindya). In a dramatic episode, Kindya, who gets angry with the teacher for preventing the boy from participating in a collective prayer, is described with the words derived from the Russian word *bes* (demon). On the contrary, the teacher shows genuine Christian qualities such as compassion and forgiveness:

Kindya was infuriated (**vzbeshen**) by [Paraskovia's] impassionate confidence. His already red face became deep purple and his hoarse voice thundered obscenities heard throughout the warm sunny yard. A heavy leathered iron Kindya used for moving flew right into the teacher's direction... Paraskovia Petrovna turned brusquely... [She saw] an infuriated (**besheniy**), pathetic, insane cripple. And **the wrath disappeared from her face** (Tendryakov 1984, p. 45).

All believers in the novel reside in the village. In fact, in the USSR, those persons who were most apt to be religious, rural dwellers in the smallest and most isolated villages, were least apt to be exposed to propaganda (Powell 1967, p. 373). Some of the believers are rudely called by their

nicknames derived from their last names: Zherebikha, Myakishikha. They also use swear words in respect of each other. For instance, a woman and her handicapped son are addressed as “the witch from Troitskoye with her chopped idol” (Tendryakov 1984, p. 15). Troitskoye is the name of the village, which is etymologically connected with the Holy Trinity (*Troitsa*). Its combination with the word “witch” sounds grotesque and inappropriate. By applying the word “idol”, a pagan symbol, to a person, the author contests the idea of the man as God’s image.

In *Serafima’s Extraordinary Journey*, the believer figure is represented by the old nanny Auntie Sonia and the young boy going to church and confronted by the teacher and orphanage children. Both are exclusively positive characters. Auntie Sonia deeply regrets that she has to hide her faith and is ready to lose her job because of it. The boy called Serezha, who never missed a church service, is described as “quiet and caring” (Veronin 2016, p. 136). He is opposed to the orphanage kids who throw dirt at him and insult him. The adolescent’s face is described as “wistful and fair” (Ibid, p. 35). When he is attacked and bullied by the children, his eyes are “surprised, frightened” but at the same time “a little bit joyous for an unknown reason” (Ibid, p. 37). The reason for the boy’s joy is implied to be the glory of being persecuted for his faith (cf. Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven (Mt. 5:10)).

It is peculiar that the opposition “believer – non-believer” is also actualized in *Serafima’s Extraordinary Journey* by contrasting Russia and the USSR. Thus when the teacher asks the boy going to church in which country he lives, she receives the following reply: “I live in the Russian country”. The teacher vehemently contests it by saying that it is not “the Russian country” but the USSR (Veronin 2016, p. 35). The opposition between good and evil is embodied by the figures of believers and Soviet authorities, respectively. When speaking about the repressions of the 1930s, the author says that “many **kind people** were sent <to Siberia> by **evil rulers**” (Ibid, p. 134). The workers from the factory, whose image was glorified and idealized by the Soviet cinema and literature, are rude. Women workers enjoy drinking beer with men and speak in a vulgar manner (Ibid, p. 168).

Since Stalin’s times, writers and playwrights were instructed to portray a teacher as an impeccable and virtuous character. The classical example is the teacher from *The Miracle Worker*, who acts strictly in line with the ideological canons. Her rigorous stance triggers a family tragedy, but averts the adolescent protagonist from religion although he nearly dies. Tendryakov’s teacher is never wrong and always knows what to do. In fact, she is the only “real man” of the novel both in her behavior and appearance. Paraskovia’s movements are described by the writer as brusque, she walks “like a man” (Tendryakov 1984, p. 21), her face is “large and rather rough”, and when she gets angry, its expression becomes “masculine and tough” (Ibid, p. 45).

The teacher Olga Semenovna from *Serafima’s Extraordinary Journey* is portrayed as an extremely strict but at the same time caring person. She first seems cruel as the book opens with the scene where Serafima sits in the pantry because she was unjustly punished. The teacher is rude and impatient. She shouts at Serafima, and her face starts “to look like a pike of lance, or a spear” (Veronin 2016, p. 13). She publicly humiliates Serafima for believing in God and makes the girls shout in chorus: “God does not exist!” Olga Semenovna repeats the beaten anti-religious clichés almost like a parrot:

“These are ignorant peasant women, they cannot read and they do not know anything about the advances of the modern science. They are going to church because they were taught like that since they were girls. It’s their habit. That’s why they are taking their children with them. They want their kids to have the same habits and the same foggy mind”, **blabbed** Olga Semenovna (Ibid, p. 35).

However, the writer points out that the teacher’s face showed pity when Serafima fainted after public humiliation and was ashamed to look at the girl when the latter fell seriously ill because Olga Semenovna had forgotten to let her out of the cold pantry for the night. Olga Semenovna “was

not that heartless as it might have seemed. She did care for all those little girls, but wanted to educate them as fighters, capable of building new life, and not snivellers” (Ibid, p. 16). This passage containing soviet clichés (“fighters”, “builders of a new life”) implies that the teacher was lured by the new “godless religion”, which is the atheism, and the reader is to realize which choice is correct as “by their fruit you will recognize them” (Mt. 7:16). Unlike Paraskovia Petrovna, Olga Semenovna mainly causes pity with the reader: “poor thing, she doesn’t believe in God”, thought Serafima (Veronin 2016, p. 121).

The local priest, Father Dmitry (who is never called in the novel by his name in Church Slavonic – Dimitry), is described as a chameleon capable of adjusting himself to any circumstances. He may seem a teacher, a doctor, or a manager. Every description of Father Dmitry is ambivalent: “There he is – in a **rumpled old** hat, a **cheap** raincoat, but has a **new** carriage and a **well-fed** horse” (Tendryakov 1984, p. 48). Even his appearance is contradictory: “It seemed that his **pulpy sensual** lips did not belong to his **doughy** face with sparse moustache” (Ibid, p. 23); “...the **disheveled** locks of grey hair fell on the collar of his **well sown** coat made of coarse fabric” (Ibidem). He boasts off expensive accessories like a golden cigarette box. Father Dmitry is capable of transforming from a “homegrown nihilist” into “a kind old man” in a split second (Ibid, p. 24). He knows the laws and it is not easy to dispute with him. His main rule is “it’s none of my business” (Ibid, p. 27). Father Dmitry follows double standards. When speaking about Christ, he says that he “might believe in him with reservations”, but he “uses” the name of Christ to conjure good feelings (Ibid, p. 48). In the non-believers’ speech he is mainly called *pop*, a lexeme used to denote a priest with a disdainful connotation.

On the contrary, in *Serafima’s Extraordinary Journey* the priest is the embodiment of kindness and strength at the same time. He has a kind smile and strong arms (Veronin 2016, p. 149-150). He has radiant eyes (Veronin 2016, p. 158). “He looks like those saints I saw in my dream”, ponders Serafima when she looks at Father Anatoly, the parish priest. He is patient and suppresses his desire to slap his mischievous son but instead smiles and puts the boy on his lap (Veronin 2016, p. 159). Another priest is Serafima’s father who heroically defends the church from demolition and always addresses his congregation as “brethren”, or “my children” (Veronin 2016, p. 193).

5. Conclusion

The research has demonstrated that the works of fiction aimed at anti-religious and religious propaganda have more in common than might seem at first sight. Indeed, the title of *The Miracle Worker* would suit *Serafima’s Extraordinary Journey* much better than the gloomy drama of 1960. Moreover, if we had a time machine enabling Rodion and Serafima to swap places, there would not have been a tragedy at all as the girl would have been totally compatible with Rodion’s grandmother and the worshippers of the icon, while the boy would provide perfect company for the orphanage girls. This signals how values have shifted from Soviet to post-Soviet society.

We can see that there has been a reversal in how various characters are depicted. For instance, the figure of the teacher formerly promoted as the role model in Soviet literature is depicted as a confused person lacking education in contemporary fiction. Not surprisingly, the figure of a believer turns from negative to positive. In *Serafima’s Extraordinary Journey*, the opposition between the religion and the atheism is combined with that between Russia and the USSR. The church and the cross embody the Orthodox faith in both books. In *The Miracle Worker*, the church is personified as an evil creature and the cross is presented as a useless burden, both literally and metaphorically. In *Serafima’s Extraordinary Journey*, the church is the centre of attraction for positive characters. As for the protagonist, Rodion is more vividly portrayed than Serafima, whose character sometimes looks lopsided. Both authors tried to create specific speech traits for the main characters. It is interesting to note that the use of diminutive forms is typical for

the speech of believers in both novels. However, in *The Miracle Worker* it is presented as a sign of hypocrisy, while in *Serafima's Extraordinary Journey* it is supposed to bear affectionate nature.

A comparative analysis of the novels, written at different moments in Russia's history, foregrounds the mechanisms used by the writers to convey their ideas, which constitutes a looking-glass into the mindset of the society of a given period of the country's history.

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