

## THE ORTHODOX CODE OF CONTEMPORARY RUSSIAN PROSE

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**Summary.** *Modern Russian narrative literature actively assimilates traditional church literary genres. Some of the best Russian novels of the 21st century (by authors such as Alexander Chudakov and Eugene Vodolazkin) are genetically linked to hagiography, while Maya Kucherskaya adapts the genre of patericon.*

*Similar processes are characteristic of modern Russian elevated poetry. Timur Kibirov's collection, Greek and Roman Catholic Songs and Nursery Rhymes, reflects the Evangelic realities of a new era. In his poetry collection Tsaritsa Subbota, Sergei Kruglov turns to the Old Testament. Alexei Ushakov, Olga Sedakova and Sergei Averintsev are brilliant poets who, in their poetry and translations, turn to the religious and philosophical paradigm.*

*The current stage of spiritual Russian literature differs from the post-Perestroika period. The Russian poets and writers of the latter were inspired by the very possibility of freedom and the opportunity to address theological topics and problems and bridge the gap after 70 years of silence. Today, Russian writers feel more confident in the realm of theological problems. They need it to cover current events and contemporary life.*

*The literature of the 21st century "came out of the ghetto" and has accumulated some experience, which enabled it to become prose.*

*The main character of Chudakov's novel of modern Christian prose first gives a new understanding of the actual tradition of Russian literature – a picture of the world from today's point of view, and the ways and methods of its description. The predecessors of the*

*literary process today are not so much Dostoevsky and Tolstoy with their novel form, but rather – Old Russian writers such as Leskov, Chekhov, and to a certain extent Bunin. Most writers create cycles of stories, united by a single protagonist or author’s narrative. All of them are aimed at filling the lacunae of the Soviet era, reviewing and giving fullness to the picture of the world in new historical circumstances.*

**Key words:** *Orthodox code, elements of existential literary structure, modern literature, prose, hagiography, patericon.*

In this article, we will discuss three works – the most interesting from an aesthetic point of view – that restore the “connection of times.” Eugene Vodolazkin wrote a novel from the time of eternity. Alexander Chudakov wrote from the “century of the present and century past” of the thirties of the 30<sup>th</sup> of the 20<sup>th</sup> and nineties of the 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, and Maya Kucherskaya wrote exclusively about modernity.

In *Laurus*, which the author himself calls a “non-historical novel”, Vodolazkin refers to the 15<sup>th</sup> century Rus’. The “non-historical” tag emphasizes the author’s attempt to distance his work from the historical novels of the Soviet era, with their “obsessive ethnography”, where traditional Russian headdresses, cloaks and trousers regularly filled in for the missing religious content.

Vodolazkin is extremely flexible in terms of the Orthodox tradition. With a degree in medieval Russian history, he meticulously traces the roots of the historical forms of Orthodoxy in the popular consciousness.

“There is something easier to talk about in the Old Russian context. For example, about God. I

think the connection with Him used to be more direct. What is important is that they simply were. Now the fine point of these links wonders a very few people and I’m really puzzled. Can it be true that from the Middle Ages we learned something radically new, which allows us to relax?” – the author directly raises the question, putting these words on the back cover of the book.

Laurus, the main character, is a herbalist and a healer. A strange fate befalls him, and he sees his destiny as a journey in redemption. He contemplates the conception of sin. Wanting to achieve satisfaction, he takes a vow of foolishness (*юродство*). Laurus is a hereditary healer. His grandfather, Christofer, was also a herbalist.

Christofer did not believe in herbs, but rather he believed that through any herb, God’s help would come for a certain task. Just as this help comes through people. Both are just tools. He did not contemplate why each of the herbs he knew are associated with strictly defined qualities, considering it a frivolous issue. Christofer knew who had established this connection, and that was all he needed to know.<sup>1</sup>

In the prolegomenon to the novel, Vodolazkin writes:

It is suggested that the word ‘doctor’ comes from the word “*vrata*” – “to speak”. Such kinship implies that the word played a significant role in the treatment process. Whatever it means, the word itself. Due to a limited set of medications,

1 Vodolazkin E. G. *Lavr*. Moscow: Astrel’ 2012, p.18.

the role of the word in the Middle Ages was more significant than it is now. And I had to talk quite a lot. . . The peculiarity of the person in question was that he spoke very little. He remembered the words of Arsenius the Great: many times, I regretted the words my mouth uttered, but I never regretted the silence.<sup>2</sup>

Grandfather Christofer instructs Arseny, who was orphaned due to the plague, and talks with him about how the world works and who it is inhabited by, and what the soul and the human body are. The novel moves slowly, in some non-modern, settled rhythm, even though it contains many events and commands unflagging attention.

The plague, robbers, fools, townspeople, merchants and monks pass through the life of the protagonist. The protagonist experiences love and becomes the cause of the death of his wife, after which he gets the idea to live not his own life, but hers, and to beg and atone for sin. Vodolazkin does not “reincarnate” entirely in the character and time of the protagonist. With an amazing sense of language and tact, he balances between modernity and the Middle Ages, which is expressed primarily in the style of the novel:

In fact, knowledge of the end of the world was more important to them than healings, because the confirmation of the closeness of light in their eyes reduced healing to nothing.

So, when, we ask, the end of the world, the crowd cried. It is important for us, forgive us for our frankness, both in planning work, and in terms of saving the soul. We repeatedly applied to the monastery for clarifications, but did not receive a definite answer.<sup>3</sup>

With the same humor, there is a lexical fusion of different styles of the Russian language and in the speech of the old man Innokenty, who “sorts” the thirsty for healing according to the severity of the disease. “He did not consider denture treatment, reduction of warts and the like things worthy for treatment, for they distracted Arseny from other, more serious cases. / Such matters were announced by the elder, I ask you to settle on the place of residence.”<sup>4</sup> It is not only the conversational chancellor who represents Vodolazkin in the novel. There is also the modern language of science. After a head injury:

Arseny got up with effort and walked unsteadily, stepping out of the door. Fluffy caps of the roofs in front of him lined the huts of an unknown village. Smoke trailed from each chimney. Arseny thought that with this smoke all the peasant’s log huts were uniformly attached to the sky.

Having lost the inherent mobility of the smoke, the connecting threads acquired extraordinary strength. Where they were a little shorter than necessary, the houses rose a few fathoms. Sometimes they swayed. This was something unnatural and

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2 *Supra* note 1, p.7-9.

3 *Ibid.*, p.373.

4 *Ibid.*, p.383.

Arseny felt dizzy. Grasping at the door jamb, he said: The connection between heaven and earth is not so simple as, apparently, they used to think in this village. Such a view of things seems unnecessarily mechanistic to me.<sup>5</sup>

It is characteristic that these words of the protagonist are not quoted as they would have been in a novel of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The reader, familiar with postmodern texts, is given the choice to determine whose words they are, Arseny's or the narrator's, and whether the author of the novel died in this case, whether he is present inseparably, according to Bakhtin's conception, or unintelligently dissolved in the speech of the protagonist, with whom they are not quite equitable-different. The narrator's sense of humor is present in the most dramatic situations and connects history and modernity. This connection finds a special linguistic mode of expression. The fusion, non-quotation of contradictory statements of the characters is also encountered when they begin to use Old Russian vocabulary or grammatical structure. Vodolazkin loves to use the vocative in the speech of secondary characters ("What's the matter, Ustin?" – "Что ти приключится Устине?"). Or in the dialogues that reveal the position and the inner world of the protagonist: "Great is your glory, Arseny, in the land of Belozero. Show us the doctor's magic touch, and be amply rewarded by the prince. / Only from our Savior, Jesus Christ, I wait for rewards, answered Arseny, and what should I do when the prince renders homage?"<sup>6</sup>

Vodolazkin uses various literary devices and modern and post-Old Russian methods of narration, for example, the inner monologues of the protagonist – in particular, his appeal to the deceased wife – Ustinya, who believes alive and for the sake of prayer for her soul, passes his earthly path and performs various kind deeds. They are written in modern literary language and save the novel from unnecessary stylizations.

The authenticity of the novel lies in the fact that the author does not hide his knowledge about man or the expectation of the end of the world in the past.

*Laurus* contains the spoken and literary language of the 15<sup>th</sup> century, as well as excerpts from ancient manuscripts transcribed in the Kirillo-Belozersky Monastery. For the sake of verisimilitude, Vodolazkin organically introduces the realities of religious life. He extensively refers to liturgics, and the novel details the models of the literary basis and the liturgical circle of monastic life. All this gradually expands the reader's knowledge.

The undoubted success of the novel and the justification of integration of "another's word", in particular, the Old Russian literary word is the introduction into the text of the "reading and writing" (*грамоток*) of the herbalist grandfather, which includes more than just medical prescriptions. This is truly Leskov's tradition, which is unusually diverse in the field of Russian language experiments. Vodolazkin uses it paradoxically enough, mixing it with authoritative, biblical and folkloric (as it were not authorial) abstract moralization. For example, the robber Zhila, after robbing the protagonist:

Running his hand into the pocket of his fur coat, Zhila took out Christofer's letters. He read them moving his lips.

5 *Supra* note 1, p.171-172.

6 *Ibid.*, p.130.

David said to him: the death of the sinful is terrible. Solomon said: let thy neighbor praise thee, and not thy mouth. Kirik asked Bishop Niphont: Thou whether to pray over the desecrated in an earthen vessel, or only on a wooden, and the rest need to be broken? – As above the wooden, and above the clay, as well as over the copper one, and glass, and silver, answered Niphont, over all the prayer is needed to be performed. Everyone can't have good friends without many enemies. It is not wealth that brings you a friend, but a friend that brings you wealth. Let the absent friends remember those present, so that those who hear this know that you do not forget about them either.

All of Zhila's friends were absent, and he had to remember them alone.<sup>7</sup>

There is also an excessive enumeration characteristic of the Middle Ages, and the dynamism of the 21<sup>st</sup> century style.

Vodolazkin creates a wonderful style of narration. The abstraction inherent in Old Russian literature adjoins in the novel with visual clarity and picturesqueness. The author – a modern, sober and ironic person – tells us about people of the Middle Ages, whose speech is stylized, full of turns of the 15<sup>th</sup> century. But the author (who is undoubtedly enamored with archaic Russian speech) selects a vocabulary that is understandable to readers who do not know Old Russian or Old Church Slavonic. The linguistic flair is manifested in these transitions from the author's speech to the speech of the characters.

The novel has a special rhythm and intonation. In his previous book, *The Language Instrument*, Vodolazkin depicted the legends and myths of the Pushkin House, where he has worked his entire life. *The Language Instrument* quotes the Nobel Lecture of Joseph Brodsky, who considers the writer to be an instrument of language. And Vodolazkin uses this instrument freely and organically in his work, combining the literary and colloquial languages of the 15<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries, raising urgent issues of the present day. The author has a terse style of writing. He describes the actions and events, but leaves the reader to guess his view of the problem.

For example, Vodolazkin decides to send the protagonist on a pilgrimage to the Holy Land and devises a Pskov *posadnik* (mayor) Gabriel, who, in order to fulfill his vow, turns to Arseny and the Italian merchant Ambrogio Flaccia, who turned out to be in Pskov.

I thought for a long time who to send to Jerusalem and chose you. You are of different religious denominations, but both are real. And strive for one Lord. You will go through the lands of Orthodox and non-Orthodox, and your dissimilarity will help you.

Posadnik Gabriel kissed the lamp. He embraced Arseny and Ambrogio.

It's important to me. This is very important for me.

They bowed to the *posadnik*, Gabriel.<sup>8</sup>

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7 *Supra* note 1, p.174.

8 *Ibid.*, p. 250.

In this way, the author solves the problem of ecumenism. Actually, the birthplace of Arseny's friend Ambrogio is the commune of Magnano in the Italian region of Piedmont – home of the modern ecumenical Monastic Community of Bose, which has been studying Orthodox spirituality for 25 years (the International Ecumenical Conference on Orthodox Spirituality).

Vodolazkin wrote a great, traditional novel. *Laurus* is constructed in four parts corresponding to the life of the protagonist: The Book of Cognition, The Book of Renunciation, The Book of Journeys, and The Book of Rest. We are always interested in the biography of the main character of his actions and thoughts. Vodolazkin writes with surprising impudence and simplicity, as if there was no damage to the mores caused by the era of Soviet atheism or the “hack and slash” of Perestroika; as if no postmodernism had ever existed. The author is interested in the fundamental questions of Being – the attitude towards God, time, sin and righteousness – and he manages to find an intonation that is both unexpected and long-awaited by the modern reader: “He talked about God in heartfelt simplicity.” (“*В сердечной простоте беседовал о Боге.*”)<sup>9</sup>

In the end, the novel imperceptibly passes into life:

They said that he possessed the elixir of immortality. From time to time even the thought is expressed that the bestower could not die, like all the others. This opinion is based on the fact that his body after death did not have traces of decay. Lying many days in the open air, it retained its former appearance. And then it disappeared, as if its owner was tired of lying. As he got up and left. Those who think so forget, however, that from the creation of the world only two people left the land bodily. On the denunciation of Antichrist, Enoch was taken, and Elijah ascended into the sky in a fiery chariot. The legend does not mention the Russian doctor.

Judging by his few statements, he was not going to stay in the body forever – because, at least, he was engaged in it all his life. And the elixir of immortality he probably did not have. Such things do not correspond to what we know about him. In other words, we can say with confidence that at present he is not with us. It should be noted here that he himself did not always understand what time should be considered real.<sup>10</sup>

Vodolazkin's novel comprehensively represents the religious tradition correlated with the eternal questions of modern historical life: righteousness and sin, sacrifice and humility, attitudes towards death and eternal life. The prism of the 15<sup>th</sup> century lifestyle gives them additional persuasiveness and vividness.

Alexander Chudakov's *A Gloom is Cast Upon the Ancient Steps* is set in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, periodically stepping back to the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. The protagonist of the novel – the storyteller's grandfather – comes from a family of priests. The author shows his

9 Derzhavin G.R. “Pamiatnik”. *Duhovnie ody*. Moskva. Kliuch. 1999, p. 256.

10 *Supra* note 1, pp. 9-10.

grandfather in different situations, without sympathetic tenderness or idealization, but the reader understands that this is a prefiguration of the Righteous. The clash of the grandfather's culture, traditional religious culture with Soviet ideological constructs, a new language, and demonstrates the beauty and organic nature of the "dying breed."

Chudakov creates a novel about Russia, a novel in which this disintegration of the unity of the natural and individual that occurred in the 20<sup>th</sup> century has been overcome. *A Gloom is Cast Upon the Ancient Steps* is a novel that recreates the life of Russia in the unity of the entire religious and cultural system exclusively in history, in the semiosphere of Russian culture.

As Chudakov wrote in his diary on December 23, 1996: "This will be the last novel-idyll – nostalgia for the pre-industrial era, but not patriarchal, as it was described in the writings of F. Iskander, but Russian-intellectual-patriarchal, a fragment of the 19<sup>th</sup> century."<sup>11</sup>

The complexity of the semiotic coding of the novel consists of a two-part design, as the author writes in his diary:

Try to write a story of a young man of our era using autobiographical material, but not giving his portrait . . . The children's world is not exaggerated, the special child perception is not emphasized – who is interested in it after Tolstoy? I'm interested in the hero, who is not the child, but the one who remembered adult life 50 years ago, i.e., who remembered history.<sup>12</sup>

Showing the organic connection between grandfather and grandson – not just a family bond or attachment, but a double portrait against the backdrop of the continuous historical development of Russia over a hundred years and the way it was preserved in ordinary life – becomes the second task of the novel. If you think about how the story is represented in the novel, then it is clear from the very first pages that Chudakov does not describe history as a trend – the novel is anti-ideological and anti-tendentive. The writer ignores history as a fiction, a different kind of utopia. He does not oppose fiction to history as a fact. But the main thing for Chudakov is history as a timeless experience in the unity of Russian culture.

Chudakov was reproached for making the main character a historian rather than a philologist, and since he is a historian, he must think in chronological categories, rather than in terms of vocabulary, words, or discordance of another's speech. Anton's phenomenal memory does not retain his own words, and Chudakov, in Leskov-like style, intersperses the narration with quotations from a wide variety of texts; with subtle irony, the writer bestrews the novel with individual lexical intonations, clichés, rhetorical phrases, and entire quotations, including tips from a tear-off calendar, such as "Do not go to bed with shod legs or in a dress" or "Observance of personal hygiene rules will increase your productivity."

11 Chudakov A. P. *Lozhitsia mгла na starie stupeni: Roman-idillia*. Moscow:Vremia, 2017, p. 544.

12 *Ibid.*, pp. 502, 548.

By the end of the reading, the laughter has grown louder. Only one person didn't laugh – Stenbock-Fermor. On the contrary, he became sad and spoke bitterly: “Unhappy country. Poor people.” Or something completely incomprehensible: “The recommendation of the intelligentsia to wash badly smelling feet on a national scale. And this is the country of Dostoevsky and Chekhov.”<sup>13</sup>

Chaos and disintegration are opposed to the image of the righteous grandfather, a living carrier of the integrity of Russian history and culture, denying by its very existence all the twists and dismantle statehood of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. “I do not set out to show the evolution of the hero and so on. I would like to show a little bit of Russia, its thickness, which the emigrants did not describe, because they left, and which was not depicted by Soviet writers, because it was impossible.”<sup>14</sup> In Chudakov's novel, all of the characters gravitate around two centers: the lyrical protagonist, Anton, who is the author's alter ego, and the grandfather. The culmination of the plot is the epitaph in the chapter “And they all died...”, about visiting the cemetery and the grave of the grandfather.

Here lies the one whom he remembers ever since he remembers himself . . . any day of childhood is not remembered without him. And without him I would not be me. Why did I never say this to him, though I always thought so? It seemed stupid to say “Thank you for...” But it was far more stupid not to say anything . . . How, perhaps, grieved grandfather was that his grandson had succumbed to Soviet lies. Grandfather, I did not succumb! Can you hear me? I hate and love the same things that you did. You were right in everything!<sup>15</sup>

*A Gloom is Cast Upon the Ancient Steps* has strong lyrical intention. The title of the novel is taken from Alexander Blok's poem “The Faithless Shadows”, which he dedicated to S. Soloviev on January 4, 1902. The old steps are the steps of the temple, the stone “dressed in awful sanity of span” (“одетый страшной святостью веков”).<sup>16</sup> In the novel, this intention, “another's word”, is a theme of Christianity and the church, about which Chudakov does not speak specifically; the novel has almost no reasoning on church or theological topics, or on historical topics either. There is no description of any particular church in the native Chebakhinsk. The story seen through the boy's eyes is most often told ironically... In the author's concept, it is represented in Pushkin's style, as Boris Godunov says about it in the last monologue:

Thou dost know the formal course of government;

Change not procedure.

Custom is the soul of states.

13 *Supra* note 11, p.234.

14 *Ibid.*

15 *Ibid.*, p.555.

16 Blok A. A. “Lozhitsia mгла na starie stupeni”. *Stihotvorenia. Biblioteka poeta. Bolshaia seria*. Leningrad: Sovetskii pisatel. 1955, p. 67.

(Ты знаешь ход державного правленья;  
Не изменяй теченья дел. Привычка –  
Душа держав.)<sup>17</sup>

The centuries-old customs which make up the concepts of Russian culture are carefully preserved and described in the pages of the novel. Chudakov avoids author's comments and tautologies, and widely uses the editing principle. The novel depicts individual pictures. And only after reading the whole do you understand how they are not accidental. Thus, one of the main thoughts of the novel is the stability of culture.

Having plunged Russia into a state of subsistence economy, the country still stood the transfer of traditions in families, the moral reserve of good and righteousness. And this storyline, the tradition of history and religion, the main in the novel is drawn in a poetic dashed line. In prose, it is sparingly present in the text and also marked by a special vocabulary – for example, in the form of an ironic explanation by the grandfather of the unfamiliar word “groundskeeper” (*местоблюститель*), which the boy Anton reads as “bridge-keeper” (*мостоблюститель*). After that, Anton says that his grandfather argued with the bearded guest about the return of the patriarchate in Russia. And at the end of the novel, the grandfather passes away as befits a righteous man: “The grandfather died on the eve of Easter . . . During Anton's last visit he said: to die at Easter, during Holy Week.”<sup>18</sup>

The last line of the novel, “Silence before death is befitting a Christian” (“*Немота перед кончиною подобает христианину*”),<sup>19</sup> is a quote from Nikolay Nekrasov's poem “Orina, the Soldier's Mother” (Орина, мать солдатская, 1863).

With finishing touches from Blok and Nekrasov, all of the stories, people and household mosaics that make up the entire world of the novel acquire a complete frame. Understanding the time, life, the appointment of a person in the novel-idyll of Chudakov, which paradoxically combines with political invective, is all permeated with the light of the Christian system of values. And it turns out that everything reproduced and described in the novel has, as in the paintings of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, one source of light. This is the memory of the dead.

Maya Kucherskaya's *Modern Patericon* describes the new fringes, the parachurch organizations, and the funny stories that they encounter in modern time. She continues the tradition of Leskov's *Trifles From the Life of Archbishops*.

All three authors are specialists in literature and literary critics. The linguistic part of their novels is priceless. The religious component testifies to a deep and original approach to the subject.

Kucherskaya's *Modern Patericon* is subtitled “To Be Read in Times of Despair”. As befits a patericon, the book contains cautionary tales, and describes the life of

17 Pushkin A. S. “Boris Godunov”. *Polnoe sobranie sochineniy v 10 tt.* Vol.5. Moscow/Leningrad: AN Nauk SSSR. 1949, p. 313.

18 *Supra* note 11, p.485.

19 Nekrasov N. A. “Orina, mat soldatskaia”. *Sobranie sochineniy v 3 tt.* Vol.1. Moscow: Pravda. 1956, p. 295.

modern monks, elders, priests, parishioners, and the entire world that has opened up to a wide circle of Russian people since the early 1990s.

The book consists of 15 cycles. Their titles themselves show that along with the traditional sections of the Patericons – stories about the spiritual exploits of monks, about miracles, or if you recall classical Russian literature - then these are just two sections of “Bursak’s Tales” and “Parochial Stories”. And in Kucherskaya’s free and bright literary stylization is comprised of “Reading for Those Who Tasted the Sweetness of True Faith in Recent Times”, “Reading in the Queue for Confession”, and mischievous and funny cycles such as “Reading for Orthodox Girls Who Dream of Marrying”, “Orthodox Miracles of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century”, “Reading at Night in a Women’s Monastery”, “Orthodox Conversations”, and “A Letter to My Holy Father”.

Kucherskaya is very familiar with modern parish and church life. The patericon genre allows her to refer to the parable, aphorism and maxim and draw “our new Christianity” with any colors that are found in national psychology. In the cycle “Good Man”, we read the following vox populi:

1. One priest was a bitter drunkard, and having rest from drinking-bout moments, he used to smoke wheat.

So what? The main thing that he was a man of good intent.

2. One priest was an unbeliever. All he did as he should, and tried very hard, but somehow he did not believe in God. Everyone knew about this in general, but they forgave him. As it used to be before – you might be a Communist, but that did not mean that you believe in communism. Well, so was a Holy Father. The major thing that he was a man of good intent.<sup>20</sup>

Almost the entire cycle is written in this style.

But when Kucherskaya tells of Father Nikolai, a discerning old man, humor gives way to a lyrical intonation and even tenderness, because the story has a documentary nature and many readers will agree with the author that Father Nikolai was really a Good Man – one of the few who openly believed in Soviet times. *Modern Patericon* contains a number of documentary images, including Father Pavel and his cell-mate, Father Alexander Men, Father Misail, and Father Vasily Rodzianko. The story that happened to Father Vasily is extraordinarily surprising in its literary character, but it actually did happen to the American bishop. During one of his visits to Russia, His Grace witnessed a road accident during which a man was killed. Father Vasily offered to serve the funeral rite, if the deceased was a man of faith. The man’s son nodded.

My father always believed in God, he prayed. He did not go to church, since all of the churches are destroyed here, but he always said that he has a spiritual father.

The clothes were brought from the car, and Father Vasily began to put on his clothes, but before commencing the funeral rite, he asked: “And it’s amazing, yet – your father never went to church, who then was his spiritual father?”

20 Kucherskaya M. A. *Sovremenni paterik: Chtenie dlia vpavshih v uninie*. Kiev: Quo Vadis. 2012, p. 52.

He caught religious programs of “enemy voices” and listened to them almost every day. I don’t remember the first name of the priest, but his last name was Rodzianko. And this Holy Father my father called his spiritual father, although of course, never saw him.

Father Vasily slowly knelt down before his spiritual son, whom he met for the first and last time in his life.<sup>21</sup>

Kucherskaya’s book presents many wonderful stories, mostly of how people overcame weaknesses and despondency and found the true path to God.

But the book also contains an unflattering criticism of church life, which for 70 years was closed and unknown, and therefore “untouchable”. In the section “Parish Stories”, Kucherskaya describes the public response the book caused.

The Patericon was published and spread throughout Russia in a great number of copies. In one convent it was burned as soul-damaging and pernicious literature, in another the sisters read the book secretly and glorified the unknown author, in the third – a friary – the brothers read and quoted the Patericon overtly. Father Feofan said: “This must be published as the ninth volume of the *Handbook of the Priest*.”<sup>22</sup>

It seems that the book was rated this highly due in no small part to its denouncement in the final chapter, “Dismissal. Christ is Risen!”, when Easter joy unites all of the people in the temple. “The temple was full, the Easter vigil began. And what a divine vigil!” Kucherskaya draws an ideal all-night vigil, bringing the characters familiar to the reader into the temple.

It became quite light in the church, new faces appeared, and with each instant they multiplied. How they came, where they came from – it was impossible to understand. Thin young men, beautiful girls, strong men in white shirts, slender women in colored dresses, boys and girls, old men and old women, reminiscent of angels. And still came again and again.

Patriarchs, metropolitans, archbishops and bishops teared out of the altar in turn – in shining red robes, in white and black hoods, in miters and without them, there were tens, hundreds, uncountable number of holy fathers, martyrs, first-blessed, blessed, reverends, and saints. And they all repeated the same “Christ is Risen! Christ is Risen! Christ is Risen!” They were answered by thousands, millions of voices, and everything was singing, everything was shining, everyone was happy, and all these people were hugging and kissing each other on the cheeks.<sup>23</sup>

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21 *Supra* note 20, pp. 196-7.

22 *Ibid.*, p. 281.

23 *Ibid.*

The author puts a gray priest – the prototype of the Patriarch – on the pulpit, where he reads the words of the paschal liturgy in Church Slavonic, cited on half a page – the most effective means of casting discouragement.

The book is written by a kind and sensible person. The author perfectly sees all the oddities and incongruities of “our new Christians”. But Kucherskaya loves her strange, holy characters. She talks about miracles, human delusions and nobility, mental deviations and “quirks”, hypocrisy and self-interest. The stories from the cycles of “Reading for Orthodox Parents” and “Edifying Stories for Reading in Sunday School” are quite remarkable. This is where the talent of the writer manifests itself in full splendor. The fool-for-Christ Grisha, who sometimes dresses up as a Pokemon, or encourages a boy play the fife (which turns out to be magical) during worship, gives parishioners ecclesiastical advice: “How to teach children to pray? And fast? Grisha always answered the same to the questions of father and mothers: “Teach yourself.”<sup>24</sup> The weakest part of our Christian literature – literature for children – Kucherskaya, parodying simultaneously the stories from the “Book for the People” by Leo Tolstoy, laughs out of court. One can find straightforward interpretations of the Bible, narrow-minded rigorism and tongue-tied pseudo-educators with their tired cliché rhetoric, adapted to modern life with a live thread (“Pray without Ceasing”, “The Story of the Orthodox Hedgehog”, “Harry Potter is Bad”, “Two Daughters”). Except for these chapters, the author is lenient with human weaknesses from the point of the inaccessibility of the ideal, but not actually to sins.

And by virtue of this, the most important thing is that the book is filled with love. True Christian love, which is so lacking in modern Russian life.

As the Russian proverb goes: “A holy place is never empty” (*Свято место пусто не бывает*). The books of Orthodox authors filled the void of spiritual life that was exposed with Perestroika. Chudakov draws a portrait of the Righteous, Vodolazkin – the image of a fool-for-Christ yurodivy, and Kucherskaya concentrates on the beauty of everyday life, helping to overcome the sin of despondency. And this is by no means the entirety of authors and works of Russian Christian literature. A separate topic in itself is the prose of poet Olesya Nikolayeva: “Tutti: A Book about Love”, “Apology of a Man”, “Invalid Childhood”, and “Celestial Fire and Other Stories”, which, together with Archimandrite Tikhon’s (Shevkunov) *Everyday Saints and Other Stories*, represent the beginning of a series about modern monasticism and the life of the church. More artistic Christian literature for children is also emerging, including *Dimon: A Fairy Tale for Children from 14 to 104 Years* by Archpriest Alexander Torik, and an adaptation of the Gospel for children by Maya Kucherskaya. In short, Russian literature enters its natural deep-seated channel of continuity of Christian traditions.

**Note:** Last year, *The Guardian* published the “Top 10 Novels About God”.

Two Russian authors were included the list: Fyodor Dostoevsky and Eugene Vodolazkin.

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24 *Supra* note 20, p.204.

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## ORTODOKSŲ DOKTRINA ŠIUOLAIKINĖJE RUSŲ PROZOJE

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**Santrauka.** *Modernioji rusų literatūra plačiai savinasi tradicinius religinės literatūros žanrus. Kai kurie žymiausi XXI amžiaus rusų romanistai (A. P. Chudakov, E. G. Vodolazkin) genetiškai siejami su hagiografijos žanru. Maja Kucherskaja savaip pritaiko paterikono žanrą.*

*Panašūs procesai stebimi ir aukštojoje rusų poezijoje. Timuro Kibirovo poezijos rinktinė „Greek and Roman Catholic songs and nursery rhymes“ („Graikų ir Romėnų giesmės ir eilės vaikams“) atspindi naujosios eros Evangelinę tikrovę. Sergejus Kruglovas savo poezijos rinktinėje „Tzariza Subbota“ („Karalienė Šeštadienė“) brėžia sąsajas su Senoju Testamentu. Aleksejus Ušakovas, Olga Sedakova, Sergejus Averintsevas – talentingi poetai, kurie inkorporuoja į savo peotinius tekstus ir vertimus religinės ir filosofinės pasaulėjautos paradigmas.*

*Šiuolaikinė rusų literatūros pakopa skiriasi nuo post-perestroikos periodo literatūros. Post-perestroikos pradžioje rusų poetus ir rašytojus įkvėpė vien jau laisvės tikimybė, galimybė prisiliesti prie teologinių temų ir problemų, perkopti per 70-ies metų tylos prarają. Šiandieną rusų rašytojai labiau pasitiki savimi žvelgdami į teologinių problemų lauką. Iš jo atsiranda galimybės apžvelgti vykstančius įvykius ir šiuolaikinę gyvenimą. XXI-ojo amžiaus literatūra „išaugo gete“, išėjus iš jo, praturtėjo patirtimi, įgavo galios imtis prozos.*

*Pagrindinis Chudakovos modernaus krikščioniško romano herojus pirmiausia įteisina naują rusų literatūros tradicijos suvokimą, pasaulio vaizdą iš šiuolaikinio žiūros taško, jo vaizdavimo būdus ir metodus. Nūdienos realistinės tradicijos pirmtakai ne vien Dostojevskis ir Tolstojus ir jų romano forma, bet labiau Senoji rusų literatūra, skaitoma Leskovo, Čechovo ir tam tikra prasme Buninio prozoje. Daugelis rašytojų kuria grožinius*

*ciklus vaizduodami tą patį veikėją ar autorinį naratyvą. Visi siekia užpildyti Sovietinės eros tuštumą kurdami pasaulėvaizdį naujose istorinėse aplinkybėse.*

**Reikšminiai žodžiai:** *Ortodoksų doktrina, egzistencinės literatūros struktūriniai elementai, modernioji literatūra, proza, hagiografija, paterikonas.*

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