

Dangerous Desires: Crisis of Democracy and Restoration of the Past in Russian Children Literature

The paper presents a comparison of the book *Land of Good Girls* (2009) by Anna Starobinets and the film adaptation of this book *Land of Good Kids* directed by Olga Kaptur in 2013. The story about Polina (Sasha) Petrova shows the typical family living in Moscow in the 2000s. Polina's parents think that the girl has badly behaved and they make a wish for the New Year that "bad" Polina will be replaced by a "good girl". The family's wish comes true and Polina magically replaced by a Good Girl who looks exactly like their daughter, and Polina ends up in a Land of Good Kids, which remains a totalitarian-utopian otherworld based on strict discipline and obedience, where "bad" children should be re-educated.

The book and the film adaptation have numerous allusions to the recent political situation in Russia: the crisis of democracy and the strengthening of patriarchal sentiments. The visual content of the film brings allusions to the Russian feminist/anti-Putinist punk-rock group *Pussy Riot*, appeals to the imagery of the omnipresent conspiracy of NKVD/FSB, a secret policy. The novel by Anna Starobinets shows the historical and literary analogy between the USSR and present-day Russia (for example, uniformity and using numbers instead of names in *Land of Good Girls* becomes an allusion to a dystopian novel *We* by Yevgeny Zamyatin, who describes the totalitarian Panopticon-like state where people live under permanent surveillance). The Panopticon-like structure of the otherworld in the novel reflects the restoration of the vertical state power in Russia in the 2000s. The time described in the novel known as a time of "a dramatic increase in measures designed to restore central power", centralization, and the decrease of the autonomy of regions in Russia (Hyde, 719). Polina's parents' desire for the re-education of their daughter reflects the strengthening of the nostalgia for the USSR and Joseph Stalin's favorability, which is constantly developing in Russian society since the 2000s.

The story of Polina also traces the concept of Good Girl, the author tries to answer the question of what means to be a Good Girl in modern Russia and what are parents' expectations of their children. Anna Starobinets shows how girls' character as well as appearance are shaped by these expectations, which leads to the reduction of kids' individual features. Being a feminist activist, Anna Starobinets reconstructs society's expectation from a woman whose duties concentrated on keeping the house and looking for children, which corresponds to the traditional and patriarchal family discourse. Ironically, the representation of Polina's parents' family shows social development tendencies and historical changes and formations of family dynamics. Polina's parents become an example of the shift in traditional gender roles, female masculinization and the new understanding of masculinity.

This paper address the question of how children literature reflects the influence of the past (especially rising nostalgia for the USSR, "the desire for this collectively imagined, more egalitarian past" (Kristen Ghodsee)) on the young generation, in particular girls. In the novel, the main heroine manages to escape the totalitarian-utopian otherworld; present-day young people in Russia are looking for an escape. The novel *Land of Good Girls* enables young people to question the authorities and shows how their parents can avoid "the oblivion spell" of the nostalgia and restoration of the "good" past.

Works cited:

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