

Representations of priests in Russian and Polish literature in the 19th century and their social conditioning

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<https://dx.doi.org/10.5209/ilur.85818>

Submitted: 24/1/2023 • Accepted: 15/2/2024

Abstract: This article compares the representation of clergymen in Russian and Polish literature of the 19th century, with a special, instead of; focus on its second half. It looks to demonstrate that these portrayals combined everlasting characteristics resulting from their orientation to the archetype of Christ as the High Priest with those more socially conditioned; which ultimately transformed European society's relationship with the respective Churches. Despite numerous differences, Polish and Russian literary representations of priests also bear several similarities in terms of how the Christian Church and its clergymen strove to achieve social engagement on a Pan-European level.

Keywords: representation; priest; clergyman; Russian literature; Polish literature

ES Representaciones de sacerdotes en las literaturas rusa y polaca del siglo XIX y su condicionamiento social

Resumen: Este artículo compara la representación de clérigos en las literaturas rusa y polaca del siglo XIX, con un enfoque especial en su segunda mitad. Busca demostrar que esos retratos combinaban características permanentes que eran el resultado de su orientación hacia el arquetipo de Cristo como Sumo Sacerdote con esas características más condicionadas socialmente, lo que en último érmino transformó la relación de la sociedad europea con sus respectivas Iglesias. A pesar de las numerosas diferencias, las representaciones literarias rusas y polacas de sacerdotes también conllevaban algunas semejanzas en términos de cómo la Iglesia cristiana y sus clérigos se esforzaron por alcanzar un compromiso social a un nivel paneuropeo.

Palabras clave: representación; sacerdote; clérigo; literatura rusa; literatura polaca.

Summary: 1. Introduction. 2. The Ontological Dimension of a Priestly Vocation and its Consequences for the Literary Representations of Priests. 3. Sociohistorical Conditioning. 3.1. Critical Representations. 3.2. Idealistic Representations. 4. Conclusions. 5. Bibliography.

Cómo citar: Łukaszewicz, Marta (2025): "Representations of priests in Russian and Polish literature in the 19th century and their social conditioning", *'Ilu. Revista de Ciencias de las Religiones*, 30, e-85818. <https://dx.doi.org/10.5209/ilur.85818>.

1. Introduction

The problem of representation has been an important issue for numerous literary scholars over the last few decades; and also, a central issue for those who focus on diverse connections between literature and the extra-literary world, including history, society, religious institutions, and many more. The term 'representation' has replaced words such as 'reflection' or 'image', as it contains the idea of subjectivity, intentionality and recognition, rather than an automatic and straightforward depiction of the world «as it is» (Young 1999, 128). It also implies social embeddedness and the inclusion of literary representations in the discursive practices of their times.

Therefore, representation conveys knowledge: not knowledge about the actual state of affairs, but rather knowledge about people's beliefs, ideologies, and social relations. In this way, it gives us keys that allow us to better understand the author both as an individual and as a member of society; as well as understanding the society itself. Literary representation, as Rita Felski puts it, has power to provide four «modes of textual engagement» – recognition, enchantment, knowledge, and shock (Felski 2008, 14) – and therefore is capable of expressing in a condensed manner what otherwise needs more elaboration.

In this regard, the representation of a priest seems to be an especially appealing object of research not only for literary scholars but also for sociologists and scholars in religious studies; and particularly as it focuses on multiple issues. The best representation of this cross-disciplinary interest was the international seminar *La figura mítica del sacerdote en la literatura, la cultura y la Sociedad*, organized in October 2022 at the Universidad Complutense de Madrid, which gathered together scholars from different disciplines and demonstrated that the discussion about the representation of a priest can facilitate our understanding of various historical, social, and religious processes and phenomena both of the present and the past¹.

The goal of this paper is to explore peculiarities in the representations of clergymen in Polish and Russian 19th-century literature, and to discuss religious, historical, social, and cultural circumstances that influenced them. It is a part of a larger project² devoted to researching literary portrayals of clergymen in the Russian 19th-century literature in its European context, and aimed at determining how these portrayals were shaped by multiple factors, such as:

- the situation of faith, religion, and church in a changing society, in the age of progress, science, «dis-enchantment of the world», and social changes;
- attempts to reform the church both from inside and from without;
- the ongoing journalistic debates about the role of the church and clergy in the modernizing of society;
- the social positions of clergy;
- the social origins and ideological stances of the authors;
- the literary clichés that functioned at that time, etc.

Thus, I strive to approach my goal from various perspectives in order to perceive the representation of priests in literary works not only as a literary construction but also as a voice in debates about the role of the Church in the changing society. My project discusses, in turn, the cultural, social, and spiritual conditions that shaped these representations and compares them with European trends.

2. The ontological dimension of a priestly vocation and its consequences for the literary representations of priests

In the broad scope of religious studies, priesthood is an institution called to mediate between the sacred and the profane aspects of human society (James 2022; Szczurek 2021, 14). This function may be understood and implemented in various ways, in particular religions and denominations; and its understanding may change inside one religion over the course of time. This is the case with the Christian Church, which at the beginning had only one priest: Jesus Christ, the High Priest forever, according to the order of Melchizedek (Heb. 7:17), while members of the early Christian community as a whole were called «a royal priesthood» (1 Peter 2:9) because of their participation in Christ (Baldovin 2011, 408). Instead, *charismata* and ministries mentioned in the New Testament included apostles, prophets, teachers (1 Corinthians 12:28), as well as *presbyteroi* (elders) and *episkopoi* (supervisors) (Ferguson 2012). Yet, as early as in the 2nd century, sacerdotal vocabulary began to be used in reference to bishops and presbyters (Baldovin 2011, 408); and in the 3rd century the distinction between clergy and laity, as well as formal rites of ordination, was established (McFarland 2011, 315).

The sacramental status of priestly ordination, acknowledged both in the Catholic and Orthodox Churches, makes clergymen the bearers of a special grace conferred by God; one which is necessary to carry out the ministry. Again, an understanding of this status may vary and «can include incorporation into Christ's priestly office [...] in a way that extends Christ's priestly ministry through time, as well as the belief that ordination, like baptism, irreversibly imprints the soul» (Harris 2011, 353). Through the sacraments, the priest becomes a consecrated person and an intermediary between God and people, which gives him a unique position among other Church members.

In order to understand the ontological dimension of the priestly vocation, one should also remember that the source and the model of Christian priesthood is Jesus Christ, and that a priest is appointed to act *in persona Christi*: that is, to represent Christ (Szczurek 2021, 31, 37). As Monsignor Francisco Javier Martínez, the Archbishop of Granada, puts it, the life of a priest is fully remitted and offered to the Lord Jesus Christ who fulfills him, giving him strength to be His imitator and a successor of the apostles, which is connected with readiness to sacrifice (Martínez 2014, 20–21). The implications of this teaching have influenced the social perception of clergy, linked as they are with high spiritual and moral expectations, both in ministry and personal life. When clergy are not able to live up to these standards, condemnatory rhetoric comes to the fore. At the same time, for the peasantry, especially in those countries with residual pagan beliefs (such as 19th-century Russia and Poland), the intermediate position of a priest between the earthly and the otherworldly domains made them an alien; a person as dangerous as a sorcerer (Leshchenko 1999, 341).

The intermediate position of clergymen saw its reflection in their literary representation, producing a reverent approach, full of idealization and admiration, which resulted in almost hagiographical literary portrayals

¹ See Universidad Complutense de Madrid (2022), *Publication: La figura mítica del sacerdote en la literatura, la cultura y la sociedad*. Available at: <https://docta.ucm.es/entities/publication/eae86b54-7077-4589-9c06-5d89b4ee33ea> (Accessed: 19 February 2024).

² The project, entitled *Representation of a Priest in Russian 19th-Century Literature and Its European Context*, is funded by the University of Warsaw (Poland) within the action I.1.4. *Implementation of the financing programme for projects submitted to IF MSCA competitions within the EC initiative "Seal of Excellence"*. Information available at: <https://inicjatywadoskonosci.uw.edu.pl/en/actions/i-1-4/call2021/> (Accessed: 19 February 2024).

of priests, who embodied the central virtues of Christ, such as humility, devotion to ministry, an eagerness to renounce their own will, and a preparedness to carry the cross. On the other hand, the incongruence between the clerical ideal and clerical reality gave rise to extremely critical attitudes and satirical representations, vastly dependent on cultural and social factors. Thus, in numerous literary works over the centuries one can find recurring clerical types, such as a counsellor, a martyr, a fool for Christ, as well as a failure (a weak priest) or an impassioned one, who may sometimes become a sinister character of the Gothic literature (Sorensen 2014, 11; 53–175). While in the 19th century the hagiographical representation of a priest mostly transferred from literary to devotional writings because of the rising interest of authors in the psychological and social aspects of their characters, in Polish Romantic literature we may still find portrayals of priests as bearers of the transcendental.

The literary representation of clergymen in Polish literature of that period was greatly shaped by the tragic fate of the country, at the end of the 18th century divided between Russia, Prussia, and Austria. The partitions, as well as the subsequent failed November Uprising of 1830, reinforced a specific mythology and a Polish self-definition as the chosen nation, a new Israel, persecuted by its enemies and doomed to suffer because of its fidelity to the Catholic faith. Polish Messianism, rooted in the 17th century, was in the 18th and in the first half of the 19th century enriched by the concept of Poland as a «Christ of Nations» – betrayed, humiliated and suffering in order to redeem itself, as well as other European nations (Chrostowski 1991). This concept, which strengthened an already strong tie between Polishness and Catholicism, resulted in a merging of the sacred and the profane; whereas priests, as mediators between these spheres, combined the struggle for independence with a striving for salvation. As Jan Prokop emphasizes, such a rapprochement of the sacred and the profane set Polish culture apart from that of western Europe, where after the French Revolution the reverse process had occurred (Prokop 2002, 458–459).

This concept of the vocation of the Polish Catholic priest was embodied in emblematic figures of Polish Romantic literature: such as Father Piotr of Adam Mickiewicz's *Forefathers' Eve* (*Dziady*, 1832) or the eponymous hero of Juliusz Słowacki's drama *Father Marek* (*Ksiądz Marek*, 1844). They are presented as spokesmen for the national cause and prophets who reveal the vocation of both individuals and the entire Polish nation. Father Piotr, seemingly a simple Bernardine monk, in a visionary episode experiences a direct revelation from God and the hierophany of the Polish nation, which appears to him as Christ, tortured and murdered by the partitioners, but ready to rise from death and save all European nations. His visions and prophecies are gifts from God, which he receives because of his humility, deep faith, and total dedication to God's will and the motherland (Lebioda 2003, 42, 47–48). Father Marek is a prophet and redeemer, as well as a spiritual leader and thaumaturge. Słowacki presented him as a vehicle for the revelation of God's power, who is aware of his mission received from God. Although surrounded by crowds, like every visionary, he is an isolated figure, and due to his uncompromising nature, he can be full of anger and harsh with others. He is guided by a love for God and Poland, and his humility helps him perceive himself as a messenger of God and an executor of His will. It can be said that the figure of Father Marek combines the features of Christ, as a martyr who gives his life for Poland, and Moses, as the leader of his people. Due to these strong references to the Bible, the figure of Father Marek is monumentalized in Słowacki's work and becomes a source of theophany (Lebioda 2003, 72–82).

Russian Romanticism did not present any clerical figure of such a spiritual power, and the only character of 19th-century Russian literature which may be in some way compared to the Polish priests-prophets, is Father Zosima from Fedor Dostoevskii's novel *The Brothers Karamazov* (*Brat'ia Karamazovy*, 1880), where he is able to contemplate the spiritual beauty of God's creation, to perceive God's glory in the gloomiest circumstances; and he can penetrate other people's souls and thus foresee their future. Yet, despite his mystical experience, Zosima is much more embedded in the social reality than the priests of Mickiewicz and Słowacki, and he contends mainly with the everyday problems of Russian peasants (especially women), such as the death of a child, the disappearance of a son, or a serious illness. Thus, his spirituality is much less spectacular; and connected with helping particular people, instead of witnessing the mystical fate of his motherland. It is also worth noting that Zosima is a monk, which differentiates him in a positive sense from parochial clergymen and reminds about the substantial dissimilarity between the ecclesiastical and social position of monastic, celibate clergy, and that of married parish priests. Only the former could be ordained as bishops and occupy high positions in the Church; and therefore, have more power and influence on its shape and character. Moreover, until the mid-19th century parish priests were considered to be suitable only for celebrating church services and administering sacraments, while spiritual guidance was the privilege of monks and the Church elders (Bernshtam 2007, 98–100).

3. Sociohistorical conditioning

It is a generally accepted fact that the realistic representation of man which dominated in 19th-century European prose was rooted in a social environment. Thus, for realistic writers in Poland and in Russia clergymen were mainly a part of society, and their depiction was strongly influenced by their living conditions, social position, and perception. In the 19th century, the way of perceiving clergy was undergoing transformative change related to the process of secularization and shifts in European religiosity; that included the crisis of traditional piety, the secularization of the society and the birth of both the modern self and modern, individual spirituality. The modernization process resulted in the destruction of traditional communities gathered around the church, the lack of both clergy and churches, and the reduction of their influence on people's daily life. The expansion of liberal values, especially freedom of conscience, made people question the privileged

position of the church and the clergy, who were no longer regarded as defenders of the establishment. Another important aspect of this process was the disenchantment of the world and the intense development of sciences, which put under doubt the religious vision of the world and human history (Chadwick 2002, 352–354).

These changes resulted in gradual shifts in the Church itself and in its relationship with society and the state. While the hierarchs tended to oppose contemporary influences, and condemn modern ideas, such as rationalism, liberalism, freedom of conscience, many Christian theologians and intellectuals made attempts to reconcile faith and modernity; and thus, to find answers to the challenges of the 19th century. This led to the growth of biblical scholarship, while social and political changes resulted in the expansion of liberal theology and the development of Christian social teaching. It also included questioning of the established social divisions, and an attempt to find a Christian answer to the challenge of industrialization and the difficult situation of the working class (Molony and Thompson 2006). Very often the solution to this problem was seen in the more socially engaged position of the clergy, which was connected with a rising awareness of the living conditions of common people, be it industrial workers in Great Britain, urban poor or illiterate Polish and Russian peasants. At the same time, religion slowly evolved from a matter of community and tradition to that of a deeply individual concern; one that pertained to an intimate bond with God and Jesus Christ. This intimate relationship between human beings and God was the foundation of the Church renewal movement which flourished in the 19th century, which also saw the increasing popularity of various non-traditional religious movements.

These tendencies were to some extent present in every Christian denomination, but they could have very different forms of manifestation, and depended not only on the confessional peculiarities, but also on the religious culture and legislation in various countries. For this reason, when discussing 19th-century Polish Catholicity, one has to take into account that in the year 1795, after the final partition, Polish Catholics – hierarchs, clergy and laymen – came under the rule of three different countries. Yet, there still existed certain similarities in their functioning, such as the requirement of loyalty to the state. This resulted in Church hierarchs being for the most part subordinated, or even servile to the authorities. Also, parochial structures in all three partitions were based on a beneficiary system which granted the clergy material independence; however, these structures were excessively rigid and poorly adapted to the historical and social changes, which resulted in a shortfall when it came to proper pastoral care for the growing urban population (Olszewski 2014, 119–122).

The most important difference was the one between the Austrian partition, where the Catholic Church held a privileged position, and the Catholic clergy strongly influenced politics, society and public life – and the Russian and Prussian partitions, where Catholicity was to a certain extent oppressed or even persecuted. Therefore, the Catholic Church was considered important in conserving national Polish values and forging a patriotic spirit, which was reinforced by parochial clergymen who would organize prayers for the motherland and patriotic processions, and even participate in uprisings and help the insurgents (Urban 1979, 421–426).

The situation was completely different for the Russian Orthodox Church, being the state religion of the Russian Empire and one of its three ideological pillars, together with Autocracy and Nationality. In the first half of the 19th century, the Church was not only fully subordinate to the secular authorities, but it became a part of the imperial structures. This position came with several privileges, but at the same time limited the possibility of making autonomous decisions. For this reason, the Church was often perceived as «the handmaiden of the state» (Freeze 1985), and clergymen usually did not enjoy much respect, although officially they were considered venerable and significant not only in terms of religious matters but also the affairs of state.

Besides socio-political circumstances, clergymen's living conditions also shaped their representations in various literatures. First of all, Catholic priests were celibate, which meant that they did not have any family responsibilities, while the Orthodox parish priests were obliged to marry before taking holy orders. This sole difference had numerous consequences, beginning with the most important, that is a disparate social status. Catholic clergymen in 19th-century Poland usually came from the petty nobility (especially parsons) or townspeople and, more seldom, peasantry (vicars); while in Russia, clergy formed a hereditary social estate, with very few numbers of newcomers from other social groups. This meant that being a priest was often not a vocation or even a free choice, but following a tradition and involving the choice of an easier and better known path. At the same time, it led to separation from other parts of society and even creating a specific clerical subculture (Freeze 1977, 210). Rural clergymen pursued a way of life that brought them close to peasants, because they usually also had a piece of land that they cultivated; but at the same time, they received an education which usually widened their horizons and alienated them from illiterate villagers. However, clerical education was very different from that experienced by the Russian gentry, and clergy lacked the manners of higher society. For this reason, they were not expected to fraternize with local noblemen, who tended to disdain them. This is completely opposite to what we see both in Polish history and Polish literature, where a clergyman was often a guest in a noble family house; and often exerted a lot of influence over the household.

Another essential consequence of the different marital status of the Catholic and the Orthodox clergy was their material situation. While Catholic parsons, even those who had a small and modest benefice, had to feed and dress only themselves, Russian Orthodox priests had to feed, dress, and educate their families (usually very large). As they did not have a fixed salary, but relied on collecting money from parishioners and farming, they were usually in the constant financial need. However, they were often seen as greedy and avaricious, precisely because of the way they earned their living. The peasants, who usually have very little money themselves, were often reluctant to pay for pastoral services. They also overlooked the expenses that clergymen incurred for ecclesiastical matters, particularly for their children's education.

3.1. Critical representations

Despite these crucial differences, the representation of clergymen in Russian and Polish 19th-century literatures bore similar hallmarks. Some of them had their roots in the archetypal image of Jesus Christ as the High Priest discussed above, while others were shaped by the peculiarities characteristic of this specific time, with roots in the pan-European industrialization, and the scientific and social changes which stimulated progressive secularization. Even if the pace of secularization varied between countries, it yielded similar results. This represented an acute challenge to the Church, which had an urgent need to come up with answers.

The solution to secularization was often connected with the expectations of changes in clergymen's daily life; and in their understanding of their vocation as being more socially engaged. Social reformers regarded priests as persons who had direct contact with their parishioners from various social groups and were usually accepted by them. They were considered at least potentially able to mediate in cases of conflict and to help common people in their everyday lives, encompassing the practical, charitable, spiritual, and educational dimensions. Therefore, the social aspect of the ministry was very often at the centre of interest for writers, who also looked to depict and explore the conservative resistance of the ecclesiastical structure against all reforms and transformations. This often led to a critical and satirical representation of the Church and its clergy, sometimes considered to be a relic of the olden times.

The critical approach was particularly strong in Russian literature of the second half of the 19th century, for numerous reasons. Foremost, the Russian Orthodox Church was often seen as part of the oppressive state apparatus, deserving criticism. Moreover, due to many years of neglect, the situation of the Church in the middle of the 19th century was truly lamentable, with poorly educated parish priests, difficult financial situation, and lack of social respect. Therefore, in the first years of Alexander's II reign, the liberal reforms were enacted. They included ecclesiastical reform aimed at ameliorating the function of the Church as a part of the state apparatus, which required, in the first place, improving the position of the parish clergy: their educational level, financial and social status. As preparation for the reforms began, the press was flooded with articles and pamphlets concerning the current state of the clergy and the way in which it should be improved. The most important of them was *Description of the Clergy in Rural Russia* (*Opisanie sel'skogo dukhovenstva*) written by the provincial priest Rev. Ioann Belliustin, and published in Leipzig in 1858. Not only did the pamphlet harshly criticize the actual situation of Russian clergymen, and thus add fuel to ongoing discussions, but it also inspired further critical representations in fictional works about the clergy.

One more reason for the distinctive critical tendency seen in Russian clerical fiction was the social background of its authors. The vast majority of them belonged to the social group of *raznochintsy*³, mainly from clerical families. Having experienced almost everything they represented, they had strong personal feelings about the situation of the clergy, and thus were prone to criticism.

The first pieces of clerical fiction published in the 1860s focused on education in ecclesiastical schools, and the decisive moment in the life of a future priest, namely – looking for a bride and ordination (or quitting the clerical estate). Seminary life became a separate and very popular topic, with such famous works as *Diary of a Seminarian* (*Dnevnik seminarista*, 1861) by Ivan Nikitin or *Seminary Sketches* (*Ocherki bursy*, 1862–1863) by Nikolai Pomialovskii. The latter became a pivotal text of the 1860s, and yet another model for subsequent publications about clerical education.

The works of Belliustin and Pomialovskii shaped discourse about the clergy for the next several decades and rendered it in a critical or even satirical tone, which dominated the clerical novels, especially in the 1860s. Seminary life was usually depicted as gloomy and brutal, and a hellish nightmare for the students, which sometimes became a reason to sympathize with the hero; although in several works – the most emblematic of them being *Seminary Sketches* – the seminarians themselves were represented not only as victims of the system, but also as morally corrupt oppressors. The everyday, mundane life of parish priests usually gained much less sympathy, and in numerous literary works clergymen were presented as dull, greedy, and primitive, who treated their service not as a vocation, but as a bothersome duty.

Besides describing typical clerical flaws, recurring in the folk tales and in the 17th-century satirical writings, such as alcohol abuse, avarice, laziness and stupidity, the 19th-century literary works about clergy focused on the hierarchical relationship among the members of the clerical estate. Both the submissiveness to those higher in ranks and overbearing to those lower were criticized as incompatible with the idea of human dignity – one of the central for the Russian 19th-century writers. One can see this type of relationship and its consequences in the novel *Livanov* (1864) by Rev. Mikhail Osokin, *On the Churchyard* (*Na pogoste*, 1865) by Nikolai Blagoveshchenskii or *Avva* (1884) by Dmitrii Mamin-Sibiriak. For example, in *Livanov* the author described two priests and a deacon from a rural parish, emphasizing the domineering behaviour of the parson who seemed to find pleasure in demonstrating his superiority over the vicar and the deacon by constantly giving them orders, and engaging in admonitions and reproaches. In turn, his subordinates always addressed him with reverence, bowing and flattering him, but in fact they held him in silent contempt.

The critical representation of clergymen in Russian literature of the second half of the 19th century might in several cases reach a level of satire or even caricature, unthinkable for the Polish culture of those times. For example, in the short story *Nikola Znamenskii* (1867), Fedor Reshetnikov portrayed the eponymous priest from

³ *Raznochintsy* as a social group in the 18th and 19th-century Russia included persons of non-noble origin who due to their education were excluded from the taxable status; in the second half of the 19th century numerous representatives of this group became active as journalists and writers. They made an important contribution to Russian realistic literature, focusing mainly on the everyday life of the lower parts of the society, usually depicted in a critical manner.

a small northern village as an almost illiterate savage without any knowledge, who spends his time hunting bears, trading and drinking with peasants; while in the story *He Lived to See This* (Dozhil, 1874) by Lidia Turba the main hero was represented as lazy and limited.

Apart from the critical and satirical representation, one can find in the Russian literature of the second half of the 19th century the image of a weak priest, which may be compared to its Polish and European (especially British) equivalent (Sorensen 2014, 140–150). This representation, apart from being present in the Russian clerical novels (e.g., in *The Mirages* [Mirazhi, 1881] by Grigorii Nedetovskii or *The Cassock* [Riasa, 1886] by Mikhail Albov), was also to be found in other 19th-century writings where he could appear as an episodic character, e.g. in *The Golovlev Family* (Gospoda Golovlevy, 1880) by Mikhail Saltykov-Shchedrin, or *A Nightmare* (Koshmar, 1886) by Anton Chekhov. These clergymen were usually depicted as poor, downtrodden men, unable to perform their pastoral duties mainly because of life circumstances which had deprived them of their human dignity and power.

As Sofiia Melnikova notes, two modes of representation of the clergy may be perceived as two variants of the well-known Russian literary *topos* of a «little man» – an insignificant, poor, and badly educated clerk, who could be portrayed either in a sentimental or dramatical, or in satirical vein (Mel'nikova 2015, 102), just like the kind to be found in Nikolai Gogol's *Overcoat* (Shinel', 1842) and Anton Chekhov's *The Death of a Government Clerk* (Smert' chinovnika, 1886). The weak priest was described as a good man who wants to serve his parishioners, but life circumstances made it difficult or even impossible for several reasons. Impediments he might encounter included personal problems and vulnerabilities (often alcohol-related), as well as a lack of education needed for rural living, misunderstandings with parishioners, dealing with poverty, family responsibilities, the oppressions of church structures.

The situation was quite different in the Polish literature of the second half of the 19th century. Although after the defeat of the 1863 January Uprising the religious base of the Polish national mythology was often questioned, and the anticlerical theme emerged in the journalistic writings of that time, Polish writers, especially those from the Russian Partition, avoided fully negative and satirical representations of clergy. It was due to the Christian-minded collective imaginary of Polish society, the important role of the Church, and the constraints and prosecutions of Catholic priests carried out by the Russian authorities (Prokop 2002, 461).

At the same time, it should be emphasized that Positivism⁴ in Poland was not atheistic; its followers considered religion an important moral force and reflected on reforms needed to make the Church more efficacious in civilizing people. They came up with the idea of the priest as both citizen and social worker, who served to enlighten and help the poorest members of the society, working at a grassroots level. The most influential positivist journalist Aleksander Świętochowski devoted the fifth chapter of his famous article *The Grassroot Work* (Praca u podstaw, 1873) to the role of the parish priest as a citizen and educator, while Aleksander Głowacki (Bolesław Prus) emphasized the civilizing and culture-forming role of the Church. Yet they both made note of the low intellectual level of contemporary clergymen, their tendency to fanaticism and servility, their abuse of their own religious authority, and their neglect of social problems (Dragańska-Adamiec 2020, 182–183; Fita 1993, 171–172; Janicka 2018, 582–583).

In accordance with these two aspects of the journalistic discourse on clergy, the representations of priests in literary works of the second half of the 19th century were either critical, focused on clerical flaws and weaknesses, or idealized, aimed at showcasing the desired pattern. In the first case, the dominant image was that of a priest with good intentions, who tried to preach and support common people but who was too weak and unprepared for being the moral authority, the spiritual leader, and the social worker in his community. In other words, he was not ready to sacrifice his comfort and the company of nobility; and had difficulty finding a common language with his parishioners: both peasants and those who belonged to the progressive young generation. For example, in his novel *The Outpost* (Placówka, 1886), Bolesław Prus portrayed a nameless village parson, who despite his amiable character and good will to help his parishioners, was unable to renounce his habits and predilections for a comfortable life. For him, the everyday life of a rural parish was synonymous with boredom, and he was unable to engage in the social work among the common people, as postulated by the Positivists. He was conscious of his weakness, which became for him the source of a constant moral dilemma; but he was usually inclined to choose his own comfort. His noble origin set him apart from his parishioners who, though liking and respecting him, were not able to find common language with him (Karpowicz-Słowikowska 2014, 33–34). In Prus's other novel, *The New Women* (Emancypantki, 1890–1893), a parson from the town of Iksinovo, although caring for his parishioners and integrating the local community, was described as a conventional and traditional minister, unable to become a spiritual guide for the main heroine Madzia Brzeska, who was seeking her vocation and the meaning of life (*Ibid*, 35–36).

These mildly critical portrayals of provincial parsons as good men with good intentions, but not prepared for their ministry among common people may be considered as polemical with the sentimental image of a simple, gentle parson so characteristic for the earlier genre of noble tales (*gawęda szlachecka*), popular in the 1840s. These literary works depicted the lives and mores of the nobility, and presented an idyllic vision of society, affirming values and stability of the existing social system. Therefore, a priest acted here as a guarantor of the existing state of affairs, such as traditional values, social hierarchy, and religious rituals. He also

⁴ Polish Positivism was a social, philosophical and literary movement dominant in Poland after year 1863. It was based on the principles of reason and science, as well as the concepts of the grassroots and organic work. In literature, it followed the aesthetics of European realism, focusing on societal issues and aiming to faithfully represent reality.

protected Polish religious and national identity; and because of his proximity to both nobility and peasants, he was able to reconcile them and to contribute to the imaginary unity of the Polish nation (Prokop 2002, 459).

As envisioned by the Positivist journalists and writers, these traditional priests, found in such literary works as *The Memoirs of Soplica* (*Pamiątki Soplicy*, 1839–1841) by Henryk Rzewuski, *The Memoirs of a Collector for Charity* (*Pamiętniki kwestarza*, 1844) by Ignacy Chodźko or in the novel *The Brothers of the Vow* (*Bracia Ślubni*, 1854) by Zygmunt Kaczkowski, turned out to be not appropriate for the needs of the Polish society after the January Uprising. They questioned their ability to be the enlightened citizens needed by a modernizing society. Yet the writers usually were not prone to condemning such clergymen; and they preferred to see the roots of their weaknesses in the ecclesiastical system and their time spent in the seminary. An exception was made for the dark figures of Jesuits who appeared in the works of Józef Ignacy Kraszewski (e.g., *The Last of the Śląski Princes* [*Ostatnia z książąt Śląskich*, 1841], *The Ramults* [*Ramultowie*, 1871]), Jan Lam (*The Idealists* [*Idealisi*, 1876]) and Michał Bałucki (*The Niece of the Parson* [*Siostrzenica księdza proboszcza*, 1872]). They were depicted according to their popular stereotypes: as hypocrites and schemers, adherents of blind devotion and total submission to church authority, and prone to condemning people of different beliefs.

Thus, when examining critical representations of clergymen in Russian and Polish 19th-century literature, we may observe that they were focused mainly on the clergy's inability to engage properly in pastoral care and social activity. Yet, because of the different historical circumstances, social position, and living conditions, the impediments met by Polish Catholic and Russian Orthodox priests were of a different kind. The Catholic parsons were considered equal to the nobility and tended to socialize with the same; but they were usually depicted as being condescending to common people, and paying excessive attention to the devotional side of the religion. The Orthodox rural priests were members of a separate social group which mingled mainly with each other and, to some extent, with their parishioners, usually of a lower social status. They were portrayed as downtrodden men in financial straits, who were desperately trying to survive.

The different marital status of Orthodox and Catholic clergymen was also of great importance for their literary representations. Furthermore, it also influenced the choice of the plot. The most obvious example is the courtship plot, which played an important role in the Russian clerical novel, while being, obviously, absent from literary works about the Catholic clergy. Moreover, in numerous representations of Russian Orthodox priests, their families present the main hindrance to their selfless ministry; and here one can find the image of a «bad wife», described as a down to earth, dull person, unable to understand her husband's striving to be a good shepherd; and all the while expecting him to collect more money. We encounter such family misunderstandings in *Ozerskoe Parish* (*Ozerskoi prikhod*, 1864) by Nikolai Bunakov, *The Snezhin Family* (*Semeistvo Snezhinykh*, 1871) by Anna Lachinova, or *Father Varfolomei* (*Otets Varfolomei*, 1872) by Dmitrii Stakheev⁵.

3.2. Idealistic representations

Yet, apart from these more or less critical representations of clergymen, Polish and Russian 19th-century authors also portrayed ideal priests, meant as models worthy of emulation. In Polish literature, it might have been the traditional image of a priest as a defender of Polish values, found, for example, in the works of Henryk Sienkiewicz (Abbot Augustyn Kordecki in *The Deluge* [*Potop*, 1886]) or Rev. Jan Gnatowski (Jan Łada) (Rev. Wincenty in the story *The Last Mass* [*Ostatnia msza*, 1893]). Also portrayed were clergymen who accorded with the Positivist vision of a priestly vocation, wherein they were depicted as social workers and activists who taught people both about religion and the basics of general knowledge, supporting those in need, and providing advice in everyday matters. Moreover, the understanding of Christianity as presented by these priests was often very close to the Positivist outlook: they perceived it mainly as a moral, rational teaching, and thus might even tell parishioners that love and work were more important than religious rites. They were also thoughtful, tolerant, and open-minded; and these traits made them ready to serve the cause of social progress. This type of priest was also very active in the social sphere: establishing schools, hospitals and orphanages, and even tending to minor ailments. We can find such figures in the early novels of Eliza Orzeszkowa, such as *In a Cage* (*W klatce*, 1869) and *In the Province* (*Na prowincji*, 1870), as well as in several works by Michał Bałucki (Rev. Jan Olęka in *The Niece of the Parson*, Rev. Klemens in *White Negro* [*Biały Murzyn*, 1875], Rev. Piotr in *Lordly Beggars* [*Pańskie dziady*, 1881]). For example, Rev. Jan Olęka is portrayed as a quiet and amiable man, one who lives to help people in their everyday problems. He is engaged in the establishment of a reading room and a school, and in his pastoral activity he appeals to people's intellect and heart, instead of their fantasies.

The Russian authors of the second half of the 19th century also represented ideal priests, good shepherds, whose images might differ in accordance with the pastorship envisaged by the writer. First of all, one may find numerous priests of this kind in Nikolai Leskov's works (*A Case that Was Dropped* [*Pogashee delo*, 1862], *The Cathedral Clergy* [*Soboriane*, 1872], *At the Edge of the World* [*Na kraiu sveta*, 1876], *The Priest who Was Never Baptized* [*Nekreshchenyi pop*, 1877], etc.), and their main trait is active, evangelical love, understanding, willingness to help others, and faithfulness to their own conscience. There were also conservative portrayals of clergymen as defenders of the traditional values put in danger by nihilists, emancipated women, and followers of new religious trends, especially popular in the so-called «anti-nihilistic» or «polemical» novels of the 1860s – 1870s, and in short stories and sketches published in the ecclesiastical press. Examples of this type of priests might be found in Vsevolod Krestovskii's novels *The Flock of Panurge* (*Panurgovo stado*,

⁵ More details about this motif may be found in Łukaszewicz 2011.

1869) and *Two Forces* (*Dve sily*, 1874) where he portrayed Bishop Ioasaph and Rev. Silvestr as those who were ready to sacrifice their life and prosperity in defence of the Orthodox faith.

However, most often the ideal priest was portrayed similarly to his Polish counterpart, that is, as a social activist who served his parishioners not only in the spiritual sphere, but who also played an important role supporting them in their everyday life – giving advice, teaching, handle official matters and even treating simple illnesses (*Ozerskoe Parish* by Bunakov, *The Life of the Rural Priest* [*Zhizn' sel'skogo sviaschchennika*, 1877] by Fedor Livanov, *The Deputies* [*Gospoda deputaty*, 1878] by A. Krasnopol'skii, *At the Active Duty*⁶ [*Na deistvitel'noi sluzhbe*, 1890] by Ignatii Potapenko). Especially Rev. Aleksandr Almazov from *The Life of the Rural Priest* demonstrates an extremely high level of pastoral activity, as he establishes a parochial school, a small hospital, an almshouse, a pharmacy, a mill, and even a rural bank. For some of these priests (namely, Rev. Nikolai Panikadilov in *Ozerskoe Parish* and Rev. Kirill Obnovlenskii in *At the Active Duty*) the social activities, along with moral teachings, seemed even more important than strictly religious duties, such as the celebration of services, etc.

4. Conclusions

Thus, for the Polish and Russian writers of the second half of the 19th century the social dimension was the most important aspect when it came to the representation of clergymen, and it was this very dimension that shaped both the critical image and, to a certain extent, the ideal model of priest. A weak clergyman in both literatures was the one who was aware of his duties but unable to perform them in a desired way because of the failings of his character, the specificity of his seminary training, his lack of skills, and the various pressures of the given environment. In turn, when portraying ideal clergymen, writers often foregrounded their engagement in social work and dedication to those in need. This focus on the social aspect of the clerical vocation was common to all 19th-century European literatures, with distinctions and peculiarities dictated by differences in denominations and social position of the clergy.

Another aspect which influenced the way clergy were represented in Russian and Polish literature of the 19th century which I would like to briefly discuss – namely, the social origins of the authors. While Polish writers were mainly of noble or bourgeois origin, who were familiar with the lives of clergy from their observations (or indeed from reading about it), the vast majority of Russian writers who depicted the priests' mundane duties were themselves of clerical origin. Their writings could comprise autobiographical and auto-fictional motifs, as well as strong journalistic overtones. Their stances favoured social change, which had not much in common with the philanthropic sympathy expressed by the rich and privileged, as in case of noble writers (both in Poland and in Russia, and everywhere). The most intriguing and specific trait of these works by Russian *raznochintsy* writers was that they were unprivileged and oppressed themselves, and they were searching both for their own voice to express their experience and for the betterment of society as a whole, with emphasis on their own social group.

Thus, when discussing the representation of priests in Russian and Polish 19th-century literatures, one should take into account a multiplicity of factors and characters; and especially the social conditioning dominant in that period, so characteristic of the aesthetics of Realism. Studying and enumerating the literary portrayals of clergy reveals facts not only about their living conditions and social roles, but also about the expectations towards them as presented by various social groups. These expectations might be put explicitly: in the images of ideal priests; as well as in an implicit form: when representing clergymen in a critical and satirical manner. For this reason, apart from being an artistic form of writing which is studied with literary tools, these literary works should be interpreted within their respective historical and social circumstances, as a part of a wider discourse about the vocation of priests and the situation of the Church in a changing society.

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⁶ The novel was translated into English by Thomas Fisher Unwin in 1916 under the title *A Russian Priest*.

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