COMPARATIVE TRAJECTORIES:
A DIALOGUE OF CULTURES AND AGES

КОМПАРАТИВНІ ТРАЄКТОРІЇ:
ДІАЛОГ КУЛЬТУР ТА ЕПОХ

UDC 82.091
DOI: https://doi.org/10.32342/3041-217X-2025-2-30-10

KYZYLGUL ABBASOVA
Doctor of Philosophy, Full Professor,
Baku State University (Azerbaijan)
https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4938-5637

THE POETICS OF RELIGIOUS FAITH IN CHRISTIAN AND ISLAMIC ARTISTIC TRADITIONS: DIMENSIONS OF INTERRELATION (Based on Western European and Azerbaijani Literary Works)

Статтю присвячено осмисленню релігійної теми в західноєвропейській та азербайджанській літературах XIX – початку XX століття на матеріалі творів Проспера Меріме, Джаліла Мамедкулізаде, Етель Ліліан Войнич і Мамеда Саїда Ордубаді. У центрі дослідження питання про те, як трансформується релігійний дискурс в умовах становлення нової етики і соціальної свідомості, як художні форми реагують на кризу традиційної віри і пошук моральних орієнтирів поза церковними догмами.

Метою дослідження є визначення аспектів взаємодії, подібності та взаємовпливу поетик західноєвропейської та азербайджанської літератур у контексті осмислення цими літературами релігійної тематики із залученням компаративного, історико-літературного, культурно-історичного та герменевтичного *методів* дослідження.

Результати дослідження демонструють, що у П. Меріме («Жінка – диявол, або Спокуса Святого Антонія») і Дж. Мамедкулізаде («Мертві») релігійна тема реалізується в осмисленні мотивів справжньої та уявної святості. У Меріме прийом інверсії сакрального і профанного формує поетику індивідуально-психологічного конфлікту, в якому мотив гріха і спокуси знаходить комічний вимір. У Мамедкулізаде викриття уявної святості і лицемірства набуває соціального аспекту, реалізованого в сатирико-гротесковій поетиці.

У Е.Л. Войнич («Овід») і М.С. Ордубаді («Тавриз Туманний») колізія релігійної віри і революційної боротьби отримує трагіко-філософське звучання. Войнич через долю Артура Бертона розкриває індивідуальний конфлікт між вірою і революцією, між любов'ю до Бога і вірою в людину. Релігійні символи тут переосмислені в дусі секулярного гуманізму, а структура роману відтворює євангельську модель страждання і жертви. У Ордубаді релігійна проблематика розгортається в соціальному та історико-національному контексті: Ісламська традиція показана як сфера, де зіткнення догми і розуму стає рушійною силою духовного пробудження народу. Символіка туману, світла, молитви і плачу набуває філософського сенсу, формуючи поетику символічного реалізму.

У ході дослідження встановлено, що релігійна тема у всіх чотирьох текстах виконує не конфесійну, а філософсько-етичну функцію: автори розглядають віру як внутрішній моральний стан, відмінний від зовнішнього обряду. У поетиці кожного твору релігійні мотиви переосмислюються як художні форми духовного пошуку: молитва – як акт совісті, жертва – як форма самоствердження, плач – як знак історичної пам'яті.

Таким чином, стаття демонструє, що в літературі межі XIX-XX ст. релігійна тематика постає простором художнього експерименту, де виявляється справжня духовність людини, яка шукає сенс за межами догми, в морально-етичній площині, але зберігає внутрішню потребу у вірі.

Ключові слова: релігійна тема, віра, мотив справжньої і уявної святості, благе діяння, конфлікт релігії і революції, комічний конфлікт, сатира, іронія, трагізм, індивідуальний і соціальний аспект осмислення релігійної тематики, морально-етична проблематика.

For citation: Abbasova, K. (2025). The Poetics of Religious Faith Image in Christian and Islamic Literary Traditions: Dimensions of Interrelation (Based on Western European and Azerbaijani Literary Works). *Alfred Nobel University Journal of Philology*, 2 (30), 183-207, DOI: https://doi.org/10.32342/3041-217X-2025-2-30-10

Introduction

The study of the relationship between literature and religion has a long-standing scholarly tradition. Researchers have long emphasized the indissoluble connection between these fundamental spheres of human cultural experience. It is undoubtedly an irrefutable fact that "Religion has been intrinsically linked to literature more closely than to any other art form. Religious meanings, like all others, exist primarily within language, one of the principal modes of which is literary art" [Kruglov, 2015, p. 66]. Both Christian and Muslim traditions attribute a particular significance to the Word, for, as Shaiakhmetova observes, "in every religion, the Word functions as a powerful transmitter of innermost ideas" [Shaiakhmetova, 2012, p. 157].

At every stage of literary evolution, the interpretation of religious themes has been largely determined by the attitude of society toward religion and the Church. The perception of the Church in Western society, to a considerable extent, was shaped by the development of humanistic thought (as during the European Renaissance, when humanist thinkers, without questioning the sanctity of faith itself, critically examined the Church, asserting that the official Roman Catholic institution distorted the concept of God and led believers astray) [Perevezentsev, 2001]. Anticlerical rhetoric inevitably permeated literature, as exemplified in the works of G. Chaucer, G. Boccaccio, N. Machiavelli, and others.

Similar tendencies can be traced in the literature of the East. Noting that since the nineteenth century Muslim literature had gradually become more secular, containing only sporadic religious elements, M. Kubarek emphasizes that the resurgence of religious themes intensified in the 1960s as a result of the Arab-Israeli war. Religion displaced earlier socialist and pan-Arab ideals, reemerging as a central element of social discourse and of a new Arab identity. The fundamental tenets of Islamic revivalism—namely, the imperative to safeguard moral values from Western economic, political, and ideological intrusion—began to resonate ever more strongly [Kubarek, 2016, p. 55].

It is well known that the historical relations between Christianity and Islam have encompassed both convergent and divergent elements, resulting in diverse outcomes ranging from peaceful coexistence to violent confrontation. Contemporary scholars tend to emphasize either Christianity's oppositional stance toward Islam [Aliquah et al., 2012] or, conversely, Islam's challenge to Western civilization [Mavelli, 2015; Strenski, 2020, etc.]. At the same time, literary criticism increasingly foregrounds the mutual influence between European and Islamic literary traditions—on one hand, the impact of European models on Islamic literature [Kubarek, 2016], and on the other, the influence of Islam on European writing [Kersten, 2025].

In this regard, the position of Arif Karkhi Abukhudairi is particularly noteworthy. He articulates a theory of the universality of Islamic literature, understood as a divine gift bestowed by Allah to serve humankind. According to Abukhudairi, the primary function of literature is to explore the essence of the human being, of life, of existence, and of the universe. The central purpose of Islamic literature, he asserts, is to help human beings live in accordance with the divine will so as to fulfill their predestined mission [Abukhudairi, 2015, p. 45]. The theory of universality, as Abukhudairi emphasizes, rejects the confinement of an author's message within the boundaries of any single cultural tradition—Western or Eastern. The writer's role, therefore, is neither to warn the East against the West nor to rally the West against the East, but rather to unite both worlds and to address them as an integrated cultural and human whole. The rhetoric

of conflict, by contrast, only deepens the antagonism of the East toward the West and renders the West unreceptive to the intellectual and literary experience of the East [Abukhudairi, 2015, p. 46].

Fully sharing this scholarly stance, which seeks to discover avenues for the convergence of Western and Eastern literatures, we consider it relevant to examine the affinity and intrinsic interconnectedness between European and Azerbaijani literary articulations of religious themes.

Degree of Problem Elaboration

Traditionally, the study of religious themes in literary scholarship has been approached through the prism of reinterpretations and transformations of Biblical and Qur'anic narratives, myths, religious imagery, and motifs derived from these sacred texts. This research orientation encompasses numerous studies devoted to Christian and Islamic influences in both Western and Eastern literatures. For instance, L. Tatarinova analyzes late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century European works through the lens of Europe's genetic cultural code, which comprises primarily Christian (Catholic and Protestant) archetypes, as well as pagan and Old Testament models. These elements manifest within individual works as inversions of New Testament images and motifs in the writings of É. Zola, H. Ibsen, T.S. Eliot, D.H. Lawrence, J. Joyce, J.-P. Sartre, W. Faulkner, and others [Tatarinova, 2019].

Galina Sinilo regards the Bible as the archetext of European literature. Emphasizing that poetry has been enriched by Biblical images and motifs, she defines the archetext as "an ancient text endowed with heightened axiological and artistic significance, serving as the nucleus of a given culture and generating new texts" [Sinilo, 2017, p. 19].

Elena Kovaleva investigates the reinterpretation of Biblical plots by expressionist artists in the aftermath of World War I. Observing that "religious motifs in the works of members of *Die Brücke* often appear as allusions or echoes" [Kovaleva, 2022, p. 85], she underscores how these Biblical narratives articulate the striving for equilibrium between the forces of light and darkness—an aesthetic informed by medieval sensibilities, Gothic art, and the avant-garde [Kovaleva, 2022].

In Ukrainian literary studies, the exploration of Biblical imagery and motifs occupies a prominent position among the principal directions of research. Thus, the article by Volodymyr Pavlov is devoted to the problem of the Christian worldview paradigm in Ukrainian literature of the post-independence period [Pavlov, 2023], whereas H. Khlypavka and R. Velykyi examine the transformation of the image of God within the same literary context [Khlypavka, Velykyi, 2024]. The reception and reinterpretation of Biblical motifs and symbols in Ukrainian prose and poetry have been analyzed in the works of H. Bondarenko [2021], I. Dundiak [2016], L. Zhvania [2022], among others.

The study of Qur'anic imagery and motifs has likewise attracted sustained scholarly attention both in the East and in the West. This tendency appears to contradict, at least partially, the assertion advanced by Al Areqi that Islamic literature does not yet occupy an adequate position within the hierarchy of the world's artistic systems, and that Islamism has not evolved into a legitimate methodological framework of literary criticism worthy of systematic study and academic discourse [Al Areqi, 2016, p. 682]. The extensive corpus of research devoted to this subject refutes such a claim. E. Hoshoglu Dogan, for example, emphasizes the pervasive influence of the Qur'an on both the thematic and formal dimensions of literary production throughout all stages of Islamic literary evolution [Hoşoğlu Doğan, 2023, p. 1613]. Similarly, Kathleen Kuiper observes that in Islamic literature "the principal source of imagery was the Qur'an itself, its metaphors and utterances, frequently divested of their sacred signification. Thus, the beautiful Joseph (sura 12) becomes a fitting emblem of the beloved; the nightingale may sing the psalms of David (sura 21:79 and elsewhere); the rose is enthroned upon Solomon's seat, caressed by the winds (sura 21:81 and elsewhere), and its unfurling petals recall the garment of Joseph, torn by Potiphar's wife (sura 12:25 ff.)…" [Kuiper, 2010, pp. 54–55].

The engagement with Islamic sacred personages, such as the Prophet Muhammad and his wife Khadijah, in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century European secular literature is also addressed by Ahlam Sbaihat [2022]. At the same time, the influence of literature upon religious consciousness was reciprocal. Scholars have noted that in certain historical periods, literature

itself functioned as a medium for articulating and interrogating religious issues within society. The influence of the Qur'an on literary creation, however, was neither uniform nor unambiguous. As M.R. Sani and F. Sadreddini observe, the Qur'an exerted both an inspirational and a constraining force on Islamic literature: while its impact on literary imagination is undeniable, its sacred status simultaneously imposed restrictions, for "God did not consider poetic recitation an act befitting a prophet" [Sani, Sadreddini, 2018, pp. 1, 8].

From early stages in the development of world literature, the dialectics of sin and sanctity, vice and virtue, transgression and righteousness have constituted enduring thematic concerns. Beginning in the nineteenth century, however, the treatment of these motifs increasingly transcended the boundaries of religious discourse, entering the domain of social ethics and secular morality. Consequently, moral and ethical questions came to be examined within the framework of civic and cultural discourse rather than theological dogma—a phenomenon observable in both Western (Christian) and Eastern (Islamic) traditions. In this process, religious pathos was gradually attenuated, while ethical and philosophical reflection intensified. This shift is exemplified in the works of Mirza Fatali Akhundov—*The Story of Monsieur Jourdan, a Botanist, and the Dervish Mastalishah, a Famous Sorcerer* (1850), *The Adventures of the Vizier of the Lankaran Khanate* (1851) —as well as in Muhammad Husayn Haykal's *Zaynab* (1913), Jalil Mammadguluzadeh's *The Dead* (1909), Farah Antun's *Sultan Saladin and the Kingdom of Jerusalem* (1914), Émile Zola's *Lourdes* (1894), Anthony Trollope's *Chronicles of Barsetshire* (1855–1867), Prosper Mérimée's *A Woman is a Devil, or The Temptation of Saint Anthony* (1831), and Ethel Lilian Voynich's *The Gadfly* (1897), among others.

Scholars have identified this transition as indicative of a broader epistemological reorientation toward realism and the mimetic representation of social reality, including the depiction of nationalist and civic problems characteristic of the fin de siècle [Hoşoğlu Doğan, 2023]. The inverse phenomenon, the impact of religious imagery on sociocultural processes within the dynamics of East-West interaction, has likewise been explored by Ahlam Sbaihat. Discussing the popularization of the image of Khadijah in nineteenth-century European culture, Sbaihat argues that the architects of educational reform became increasingly aware of the sociopolitical potential of bourgeois women in consolidating political movements. Within this ideological framework, Khadijah was transformed into a historical symbol and exemplar designed to inspire the education system to endow women with an active role in constructing the economic and moral future of the nation [Sbaihat, 2022, p. 420].

A parallel dynamic is noted by Th. Pfau in his analysis of nineteenth-century Western European literature. Pfau maintains that the fundamental motifs of Christian theology were progressively assimilated, secularized, and consequently diluted by modern aesthetics and literary production. The rise of historicism, populism, and naturalism within nineteenth-century literature significantly weakened the symbiosis between religion and art, culminating in an increasingly overt and, at times, militant form of anticlericalism [Pfau, 2023, pp. 23–25].

In the twentieth century, this tendency became increasingly pronounced. The religious theme in literature underwent a transformation, evolving into an instrument for the critique and condemnation of sociopolitical vices. Barbara Kathleen Dick notes the displacement of sanctity by social and political preoccupations in both Western and Eastern literary traditions: "Explicitly religious science fiction can be made to question the nature of God, vindicate a faith, or explore the expansion of an earth-bound faith to the cosmos. Pohl and Kornbluth's caustic dystopian satire *The Space Merchants* (1965) shears religion of all spiritual significance, rendering it merely an advertising account in a totalitarian, secular world… In Arabic literature, the influence of religious authority on literary freedom may suppress innovation; hence, the concept of liminal or intermediate spaces in the fictional realm enables the writer to explore real social and political issues concealed only by a thin veil of allegory, thereby elevating speculative fiction from the level of whimsy to that of a powerful instrument of resistance against hegemony" [Dick, 2016, pp. 252, 254].

In the twenty-first century, Western European literature increasingly articulated resistance to the dominance of religious dogma, both Christian and Islamic. This development was largely conditioned by two parallel sociocultural processes: the legitimization of sexual minority cultures (the LGBTQ+ agenda) and the mass migration of refugees from predominantly Muslim countries

into Europe. Consequently, discourses concerning the "Islamization of Europe" began to permeate literary and critical production in the West, emerging as a recurrent motif in both literary criticism and cultural theory. Nella van den Brandt's monograph *Religion, Gender and Race in Western European Arts and Culture* [2024] is devoted to the study of the transformation of the religious theme within literature and culture through the intersecting lenses of religion, gender, and race. The author conceptualizes this transformation as a reinterpretation of religious values within the contemporary world – a process that, in many cases, entails a symbolic rebellion against Christianity, and more recently, against Islam as well. Referring to contemporary Dutch novels, Brandt identifies a prevailing cultural paradigm that constructs self-expression as a trajectory from religious subjugation toward secular emancipation: "Such a trajectory is usually narrated in terms of a linear path from a stifled youth born in a narrow-minded community towards liberation. This cultural trope inspires and underlines current dominant perceptions of a self-evident binary of religious dogmatism, irrationality, community and heterosexist oppression, versus secular freedom of thought, rationality, individualism, sexual freedom and equality between men and women, as well as between heterosexuals and LGBTQs" [Brandt, 2024, p. 2].

Scholars have observed that the gradual displacement of religious thematics in contemporary literature, giving way to a concentration on social and political issues, is determined not only by objective sociocultural and political factors but also by an epistemological reorientation within literary scholarship itself. As N. Bakshi notes, literary studies "have remained aligned with rationalist methodologies in order to avoid reproach for adopting a worldview-based or ideological approach" [Bakshi, 2013, p. 365]. In this light, the renewed scholarly attention to the origins of religious traditions and to the literary conceptualization of sin and sanctity, vice and virtue, acquires particular relevance. Such a focus facilitates the re-examination of Western and Eastern poetics within the broader context of the interplay between literary and religious discourses.

Aim, Materials, and Methods of the Study

The principal *aim* of this study is to determine the aspects of interaction, convergence, and mutual influence between the poetics of Western European and Azerbaijani literatures in their engagement with religious themes. The research employs comparative, historical-literary, cultural-historical, and hermeneutic *methodologies*.

The materials and methods of the study are determined by the specific nature of the analysis of religious thematics in artistic literature. This analysis involves identifying the central conceptual categories of the sacred – sin and sanctity, vice and virtue, faith and disbelief. In the course of the investigation, the contemporary paradigms of the artistic language of works devoted to religious subjects are examined; the factual material obtained is systematized; and the principal artistic techniques used to depict moral and ideological contradictions are described.

The object of this study comprises selected works of Western European and Azerbaijani literature dating from the latter half of the nineteenth to the early twentieth century: Prosper Mérimée's *A Woman is a Devil, or The Temptation of Saint Anthony* (1831) and Jalil Mammadguluzadeh's *The Dead* (1909); Ethel Lilian Voynich's *The Gadfly* (1897) and Mammad Said Ordubadi's *Foggy Tabriz* (1933). The chronology of Azerbaijani works attests to the continuity and reciprocal influence shaping the evolution of literary processes within both Western and Eastern traditions.

Religion and Art: Historical Dimensions of Interaction

Religion, understood as a complex of social norms and values, has at various stages of human history attracted the attention of artists and writers, albeit to differing degrees [Rau Staff, 2021]. Of particular significance in this context is the domain of the visual arts, which, by virtue of their expressive capacity and their achievements in the dissemination of religious values, in certain historical epochs even surpassed the literary word in cultural impact. The moral and aesthetic climate of a given era—its political orientations, ideologies, and systems of belief—inevitably shaped both art as a whole and literature concerned with religious themes, though in distinct and nuanced ways [Tayanova, 2011]. The monumentality or diminishment of sacred imagery in art reflected, in turn, the prevailing worldview of specific social strata and political elites.

The historical development of sculpture, painting, architecture, and the applied arts, as well as of literary genres and forms, reveals a direct correlation between artistic techniques and the cultural archetypes that animated a given society. As early as the art of ancient Sumer, representations of devout figures embodied humility and justice in divine judgment—examples include depictions of the water god Ea and the Assyrian king Shalmaneser. In sculpture, gestures and postures assumed a symbolic function in expressing the sacred, as in Botticelli and Bellange's *Lamentation over Christ* [Schiller, 1972], Leonardo da Vinci's *The Last Supper* [Hartt, 1985], Michelangelo's *The Fall and Expulsion from Paradise*, Bosch's *The Seven Deadly Sins*, and Rembrandt's *Saint Matthew and the Angel*, among others.

The medieval period of Western European Christianity constitutes an especially rich chapter in this history, marked by a remarkable diversity of artistic interpretations of moral virtue and pious deeds [Cohen, 2006]. At the same time, significant lacunae remain in the scholarly examination of analogous moral and spiritual themes within Islamic art and literature.

One of the principal directions in the artistic embodiment of religious morality is the glorification and popularization of the benevolent deeds of God Himself, a theme that served as an obligatory prelude to both Christian and Islamic medieval literature. The gradual crystallization of this motif can be traced across virtually all literary genres. Representations of the divine and of divine attributes often unfolded through the depiction of human contradictions and moral dilemmas [Mishura, 2021], thus situating the sacred within the dialectics of everyday existence.

In Islamic literary tradition, the idea of religious morality is primarily conveyed through narratives describing the lives and deeds of saints: prophets, imams, and other exemplars of virtue. These representations appear in a wide array of literary and oral forms, including legends, myths, folklore, *hadiths*, and religious poetry such as *marsiya*, *munajat*, and *na't* [Ali-zade, 2007].

In the mythologies of various peoples, the depiction of virtue and social solidarity was not always directly associated with divine personages or a monotheistic conception of God [Diakonov, 1990]. Many myths instead center upon the figures of ancestral heroes who instructed humankind in essential arts such as hunting, warfare, and agriculture, for example, the mythic ancestor Sido among the Kiwai Papuans [Landtman, 1917].

Artistic works of explicitly religious content, encompassing virtually all confessional and doctrinal traditions, are abundant. In general, the artistic representation of religious ideas, whether in Christian or Islamic literature, has consisted in the glorification of virtuous acts, both divine and human. These works celebrate not only the deeds of God and the saints but also those of individuals who have devoted their lives to the service of faith and the realization of transcendent moral ideals.

From this perspective, it becomes possible to delineate distinct historical periods in the evolution of literary art associated with the depiction, analysis, and interpretation of religious themes in the literatures of various nations. Of particular relevance to literary studies are the specific features of the poetics of works addressing religious subjects, through which one may discern both the universal and the particular elements in the literary representations of Western European Christianity and Islam.

Religious Thematics and the Problem of Good Deeds: Theological and Literary-Critical Background

The concept of *good deeds* encompasses not only acts of material and spiritual assistance but also the moral and psychological motives underlying true and false sanctity. The evaluation of the moral significance of such religious acts, as well as the discernment of authentic holiness in shaping ethical consciousness and spiritual enlightenment, has been approached from multiple disciplinary perspectives including pedagogical, psychological, and aesthetic ones [Love, 2004]. Within the latter, the relationship between religion and art, or between religion and literature, has often been examined through a philosophical lens, focusing on the analysis of religious symbols and their aesthetic reinterpretation in art and literary expression [Balakhontseva, 2007]. As a result, diverse systems of religious belief and doctrine came to be comprehended in aesthetic terms, which in turn influenced modes of perceiving and conceptualizing reality [Tulpe, 2018, p. 246].

The very fact of faith in the existence of an omnipotent and all-merciful higher being—God—endowed with the capacity to dispense grace in its manifold forms, inspired humankind to

articulate its reverence through creative imagination, linguistic metaphor, and symbolic narrative construction [Dayton, 1977]. Thus, the aesthetic mediation of the sacred in literature became a means of transforming metaphysical conviction into artistic form.

In contemporary humanities, the theme of religious beneficence has been extensively explored within the broader history of confessional development [Mitchell, 2000]. The act of doing good, or divine benefaction, has been reflected in literature in various forms: through the depiction of historically verifiable figures recognized as religious philanthropists, through the invocation of sacred ideas or relics linked to faith in God and the saints, and through narrative representations of piety and grace. In many works, the notion of divine goodness appears indirectly, as a moral counterpoint embodied in virtuous characters, or as a commentary on faith itself, depicted either as a moral virtue or as a source of hypocrisy and contradiction [Little, 2023].

This dialectic is eloquently articulated in Stendhal's *The Red and the Black*, where the parish priest, Abbé Chélan, admonishes his pupil Julien Sorel: "If you think of paying court to the men in power, your eternal ruin is assured. You may make your fortune, but you will have to injure the poor and needy, flatter the Sub-Prefect, the Mayor, the important person, and minister to his passions: such conduct, which in the world is called the art of life, may, in a layman, be not wholly incompatible with salvation… In the calling of a priest, I shall tremble for your salvation" [Stendhal, 2025, pp. 63–64].

At present, the ethical practice of good deeds has been the subject of numerous confessional and comparative studies [Patrick van Esch, 2015]. Concepts such as compassion, mercy, social justice, and moral responsibility are frequently analyzed to reveal both convergences and divergences between Islamic and Christian traditions of charity [Moses & Pristiwiyanto, 2025]. Meryl Bailey observes that "beginning in the fifteenth century, Christian charity was frequently represented in Venetian art as two distinct allegorical figures (*amor Dei* and *amor proximi*). In the sixteenth century, artists began to dramatize rather than allegorize charity, creating narrative compositions in which virtue was enacted or embodied rather than merely symbolized. The imperatives of the Catholic Reformation further stimulated the development of complex, polysemous allegories capable of expressing the intricate relationship between good works, faith, and salvation" [Bailey, 2019, p. 231].

According to D. Bakhtizina, artistic creativity is inconceivable without the free play of imagination and the aesthetic delight derived from sensuous imagery. In the Muslim cultural tradition, however, this principle acquired a distinctive form shaped by ascetic restraint and the renunciation of overt sensuality. The rigor of ascetic discipline left its imprint upon poetic art, where symbolism flourished as a subtle mode of expression—a conduit through which artistic imagination could manifest itself without contradicting orthodox religious thought [Bakhtizina, 2011, p. 46]. Thus, asceticism and self-restraint emerge as expressions of spiritual beneficence and reverence toward the surrounding world, conveyed to the believer not only through ethical instruction but also through refined forms of poetic and artistic creation.

The idea of divine benevolence, manifested in God, the prophets, and all individuals in some way connected with religion, has been widely explored in literature as both a structural element of narrative and as a vehicle for expressing specific artistic concepts. This engagement was not merely a response to the demands of religious institutions or spiritual patrons but often arose as a product of creative inspiration shaped by prevailing social conditions and historical circumstances.

Religion, as a social institution and a powerful determinant of human relationships across various historical epochs, naturally stimulated artistic interest, for it formed the moral foundation of societal values and norms of conduct. Inevitably, this influence permeated the worldview of individuals, including writers and poets, whose works reflected their perceptions of reality through an ethical and aesthetic lens. Religious thematics captivated authors by virtue of its moral dimension, its contemplative approach to human existence, and its potential to endow quotidian events with transcendent meaning. The content and stylistic form through which virtue, sacrifice, and devotion to higher spiritual ideals were represented depended upon broader literary trends, linguistic conventions, and aesthetic modes of expression.

Yet attitudes toward religion throughout history have been far from uniform. While religious institutions have often been subject to criticism, it is essential to acknowledge that the universal and humanistic dimensions inherent in religious thought provided a foundation for the literary portrayal of mercy, compassion, and moral virtue. The creative efforts of writers to construct images of benevolence and holiness thus rest upon an objective and enduring humanist basis. Beneath the ideals of sanctity and divine grace lies the principle of humanism—the very cornerstone of social coexistence. Every literary act or moral decision represented in narrative art, regardless of genre, is ultimately grounded in human qualities, both virtuous and flawed. Moreover, even when the focus is on transgression or moral decay, such representations implicitly affirm the moral potential and ethical consciousness of humankind.

The artistic rendering of *good deeds* in literature often unfolds through depictions of ordinary human life through the everyday actions in which moral character reveals itself. This human-centered approach engages the reader emotionally and intellectually: the affective response to artistic material evolves into moral reflection and ethical insight, prompting the reader to internalize certain truths and to formulate personal attitudes toward the moral issues presented.

The highest manifestations of virtuous action in literature are inextricably linked to the divine, to the revelation of God's attributes, and to the distinction between authentic and false sanctity. Within Christian literature, for instance, the figure of the Virgin Mary, mother of Christ, appears as the quintessential embodiment of virtue and compassion: "She is different. I hardly know how to say it… She lives among us, eats, drinks, sleeps, works, rests, just like everyone else. She is ready to help anyone, to take upon herself any labor if only to relieve another of burden. She spares no effort. And yet she is so full of joy – she would sing forever, I think. And you know how much she prays? I wish I could pray like that!" [Tasso, 2019]. Through such portrayals, writers purposefully articulated the possibilities of doing good and the moral pathways available to those who embraced faith. The depiction of benevolent action, both divine and human, thus became a means of affirming the ethical potential of the individual and of demonstrating that spiritual salvation and moral integrity are attainable through compassion, selflessness, and devotion to others.

The problem of *good deeds* is inseparably linked to the theme of *true and false sanctity*, for the deed, an external manifestation of faith, becomes the principal criterion by which authentic spirituality is distinguished from its hypocritical imitation. Genuine holiness presupposes an inner moral state characterized by selflessness and the harmony of word and deed. False sanctity, by contrast, is confined to the outward forms of faith – rituals, gestures, and proclamations – devoid of genuine spiritual substance.

The Comic Resolution of True and False Sanctity in the Christian and Islamic Literary Traditions: Prosper Mérimée vs Jalil Mammadguluzadeh

At the core of Prosper Mérimée's play *Une femme est un diable, ou La tentation de Saint Antoine* (1831) lies a conventional religious conflict—the opposition between spirit and flesh, yet the author's treatment of this motif is profoundly original. Instead of depicting the anticipated struggle between the saint and the devil, Mérimée explores the fragile boundary between faith and hypocrisy, between authentic holiness and its ritualized façade.

The problem of true and false sanctity in the play is articulated on three interconnected levels: the *religious* (temptation and divine grace), the *social* (the mechanisms of the Inquisition and ecclesiastical authority), and the *psychological* (the protagonist's internal conflict). Each of these levels serves to affirm the author's central idea that the distinction between holiness and sin is not dogmatic but moral in nature. The play's unifying comic conflict derives from the dissonance between the characters' self-proclaimed sanctity and their actual moral failings.

The action unfolds in early eighteenth-century Granada, indicated indirectly by the author's remark, *"La scène est à Grenade, pendant la guerre de la Succession"* ("The scene is set in Granada during the War of the Spanish Succession") [Mérimée, 1857, p. 75], where, following the Reconquista, the tribunal of the Inquisition had been established. From the prologue, Mérimée sets the tone of ironic deconstruction, clarifying that: *"Rendre sur le théâtre les ministres cruels d'un Dieu de clémence, ce n'est pas attaquer notre sainte religion. Les fautes de ses interprètes*

ne peuvent pas plus altérer son éclat, qu'une goutte d'encre le cristal du Guadalquivir" ("To place upon the stage the cruel ministers of a merciful God is not to attack our holy religion. The sins of its interpreters can no more tarnish its brilliance than a drop of ink can cloud the crystal waters of the Guadalquivir") [Mérimée, 1857, p. 74]. From the outset, the author thus establishes a fundamental opposition between *religion as sacred faith* and *the Church as a social institution*. This distinction constitutes the central axis of the play: the contrast between *authentic holiness* and *false* of its *social hypostasis*.

The very image of the Inquisition tribunal becomes a key metaphor for the "theater of hypocrisy." The motif of false sanctity is introduced in the opening dialogues between the inquisitors Rafael and Domingo, where comedy exposes the substitution of genuine piety with ecclesiastical careerism. Mérimée employs the technique of *self-revelation*: the characters, through their own speech, betray their inner corruption, confessing to disbelief, envy, and ambition. Rafael laments that after seventeen years as an inquisitor in Granada — *"Il a fait condamner vingt hérétiques par an"* ("He has sent twenty heretics a year to the stake") [Mérimée, 1857, p. 75], his diligence has been "rewarded" by demotion. Domingo replies that this outcome reflects not injustice but the "stupidity" of their superiors. In their exchanges, sanctity emerges as part of a professional costume, a mechanism of self-justification replacing conscience. Rafael and Domingo thus serve as mirror images of one another: one cloaks his transgressions in false piety (he has impregnated a Jewish woman which was an unpardonable sin by the Inquisition's standards), while the other conceals moral apathy beneath bureaucratic logic — *"C'est aujourd'hui samedi, et c'est mon usage de condamner ce jour-là; le lundi j'absous."*("It is Saturday, and it is my habit to condemn on this day; on Mondays I absolve") [Mérimée, 1857, p. 75]. In their speech, prayerful formulas coexist with mockery; piety turns into parody. The Inquisition itself becomes a grotesque stage on which false holiness is performed, a theater of sanctity without faith, in which roles are predetermined and the words "sin" and "virtue" have lost their meaning.

Moreover, the motif of false sanctity reveals the characters' insincerity toward one another, a quality emphasized in Mérimée's stage directions. Many dialogues are accompanied by *asides*, remarks "to oneself" or "aside", which expose the hidden thoughts and desires of the characters, sharply contrasting with their spoken words: *"RAFAEL. Elle est à la Maternité, la petite sotte. / DOMINGO. Sotte en effet ! **(À part.)** Et plus sot qui l'y envoya"* ("RAFAEL. She's at the maternity house, the little fool. / DOMINGO. Indeed, a fool! **(Aside)** Though the one who sent her there is an even greater fool.") [Mérimée, 1857, p. 75].

Through such devices, Mérimée masterfully transforms theological tension into comedy. The conflict between faith and hypocrisy, sanctity and sin, is reframed not as metaphysical struggle but as moral theatre—a mirror reflecting the corruption of religious institutions and the frailty of human virtue.

Against this background, Antonio, who is mockingly called "the second Loyola," initially appears to be a genuinely devout and pious figure. He regards himself as a humble servant of God, yet his sanctity is grounded not in love but in fear. In the monologue delivered before the trial of the "sorceress," he exclaims: *"Seigneur, ne m'exposez pas aux tentations!... **Il est si facile de succomber!"*** ("Lord, lead me not into temptation! It is so easy to fall!") [Mérimée, 1857, p. 77]. This plea captures the essence of his spiritual state: his faith is anxious rather than joyous, founded on the suppression of natural human impulses and on the dread of violating a vow. His religiosity is centered on the self; it is not sanctity but self-preservation, a form of pride masked as humility.

Antonio recounts to his fellow inquisitors the story of his encounter with a woman whose image continues to haunt him. In his narration, the sensual and the sacred intermingle: *"Mon sang bouillonnait... j'étais effrayé... je tremblais... et pourtant, <...> j'éprouvais cette espèce d'extase délicieuse que j'ai sentie quelquefois en priant devant notre sainte Madone."* ("My blood boiled... I was terrified... I trembled... and yet I felt that same blissful ecstasy that sometimes overtakes me while praying before the image of our Holy Madonna") [Mérimée, 1857, p. 77]. In his perception, the earthly and the divine merge; the woman and the Madonna mirror a single desire. This fusion of the erotic and the religious becomes Mérimée's means of exposing the falsity of ostentatious sanctity. The temptation Antonio faces is not external but the projection of his inner conflict between body and spirit. His prayer for deliverance from sin itself turns into an act of pride, for he aspires to be holier than the holy. Mérimée thus incisively reveals the psychological mechanism of religious fanaticism: passion, once repressed, returns in the form of a demonic vision.

When Marikita is brought before the tribunal, Antonio conducts the interrogation with his eyes closed, a detail Mérimée reiterates in his stage directions ("*speaks without opening his eyes*," "*still with eyes closed*," "*covers his eyes with his hands*"). This refusal to see becomes a metaphor for spiritual blindness. Convinced that "*woman is the surest instrument of the devil*," Antonio cannot perceive the human being before him. His fear of temptation becomes the source of his downfall: though he commits no sin, he is already infected by the sin of suspicion.

Marikita, by contrast, embodies the direct opposite of Antonio's perception. She is vibrant, spontaneous, and compassionate, capable of both laughter and empathy. When Antonio asks her what she repents of, she responds: *"Pourquoi donc pleurer et se repentir, quand on n'a rien fait de mal?"* ("Why should one weep and repent when one has done no wrong?") [Mérimée, 1857, p. 80]. In these words lies the moral dignity of an unlettered yet ethically sound individual, devoid of doctrinal piety but endowed with an innate sense of goodness. Her song about *John Barleycorn*, which the inquisitors fail to comprehend, becomes a symbol of popular faith: earthly, joyful, and life-affirming. There is nothing demonic in it, yet precisely this vitality the "holy judges" mistake for blasphemy. In this scene, the comic evolves into satire. What begins as light, erotic play turns into a scathing denunciation of religious hypocrisy. False sanctity cannot tolerate living expressions of joy or freedom. Rafael and Domingo are ready to accuse the girl of witchcraft merely because she laughs and speaks the truth. Yet the accused "ally of the devil" stands morally closer to God than her judges. Her sincerity and compassion contrast sharply with the inquisitors' hollow piety. She is a "woman-devil" only within the distorted imagination of the hypocrites who condemn her.

Antonio, who strives to preserve purity, ultimately proves incapable of compassion and condemns Marikita to torture. Only when she throws herself at his feet does he open his eyes for the first time and recognize in her the woman from his visions. This moment, which forms the dramatic culmination of the play, represents the spiritual collapse of the protagonist. His artificial sanctity, built upon denial of life, disintegrates. Antonio sees in Marikita not the devil but a human being, yet perceives this recognition as a fall and a curse. His ensuing madness constitutes the logical end of his fanaticism. Deprived of the ability to distinguish good from evil within himself, he begins to see the devil in everything that awakens feeling.

The second part of the play develops the motif of the hero's internal decay. Antonio, increasingly resembling a parody of Saint Anthony, experiences a spiritual crisis in his cell. His prayer turns into blasphemy, his fear into desire. He addresses the Madonna but perceives in her the features of Marikita; horrified, he turns the icon to the wall, a gesture that signifies symbolic renunciation of faith.

The finale is grotesque and tragic. Antonio murders Rafael, who has caught him with Marikita. The inquisitor's death is accompanied by blasphemous laughter; Rafael dies with a sneer, while Antonio realizes in horror that within a single hour he has become "a debauchee, a perjurer, a murderer." His journey ends not with redemption or repentance but with the recognition of his inner void. Mérimée refrains from showing divine retribution; Antonio's punishment lies in his own transformation into what he most feared: the possessed.

The ironic remark that closes the play, *"C'est ainsi que finit la première partie de la TENTATION DE SAINT ANTOINE. Excusez les fautes de l'auteur"* ("Thus ends the first part of *The Temptation of Saint Anthony*. Pardon the author's faults") [Mérimée, 1857, p. 87], shatters the tragic pathos and reminds the reader that this is not a hagiography but a comedy of human passions. The author distances himself from his characters, inviting the audience to discern independently the difference between genuine and false sanctity.

Despite its subtitle "a comedy," Mérimée's play possesses considerable philosophical depth. Its humor is both playful and accusatory. The inquisitors are ridiculous precisely because they believe in their own holiness. Their piety has been reduced to bureaucratic formality, their faith to farce. Antonio's tragedy lies in his honesty; his self-awareness does not protect him from the sins into which he inevitably falls. Marikita, by contrast, is spontaneous and sincere, the only living being in a world deformed by religious perversion. Through her image, Mérimée asserts the concept of "natural sanctity," independent of doctrine. She is not saintly in the ecclesiastical sense, yet her simplicity and compassion make her morally superior to all inquisitors. The play's underlying message is that true holiness is not bound to religious institutions. It resides not in renunciation of life but in its affirmation, not in penitence but in sincerity, not in suffering but in the capacity for love. False holiness, built on fear, inevitably breeds evil and leads to spiritual destruction.

In Jalil Mammadguluzadeh's comedy *The Dead* (*Ölülər*, 1909), the theme of true and false sanctity is reinterpreted through a conflict of distinct artistic nature that combines domestic comedy, social satire, and philosophical allegory.

On the surface, the play develops a traditional comic plot: a fraudster disguised as a saint arrives in a provincial town and, in order to secure shelter, abundant food, and the satisfaction of his desires, deceives gullible townspeople by promising to resurrect their deceased relatives. In the final act, the false saint escapes exposure and disappears, leaving the citizens disillusioned by the collapse of their hopes. Beneath this simple farce, however, lies a deeper symbolic layer. The conflict in *The Dead* operates on two interdependent levels. First, it is not structured around a confrontation between opposing characters, the "good" and the "evil," the "clever" and the "foolish", but around the internal contradiction of reality itself, where falsehood and madness masquerade as normality, and reason and life are rendered absurd. Second, the conflict emerges from the clash of competing interests, values, and worldviews, as well as from the characters' internal contradictions, aligning the play with the tradition of the *comedy of character*. Unlike Mérimée's *The Temptation of Saint Anthony*, where the conflict arises from the discrepancy between the characters' ambitions and their actual capacities, Mammadguluzadeh constructs his drama around the formation of a dual reality: one grounded in empirical existence, the other in mystic absurdity. The play exemplifies what T.B. Radbil defines as the essence of the comic: "the fixation or generation of anomaly, revealing two incompatible perspectives on the world. Comedy, therefore, aims to generate a 'possible world' out of the existing one, establishing a certain duality between the imagined and the real" [Radbil, 2007, p. 687]. Structurally, the play's conflict can be defined as an antinomy between the *form* and *substance* of sanctity, between the ritual shell of religion and its ethical essence. The tension is built upon the contrast between appearance and reality, between outward piety and inner moral decay. Fundamentally, Mammadguluzadeh constructs an ideological conflict in which the struggle unfolds not merely among individual characters but among entire systems of thought. The play opposes two worldviews: blind adherence to dogma and the awakening of reason.

From the perspective of comic poetics, *The Dead* is constructed on the principle of inversion, or the reversal of the natural order. Everything that ought to evoke reverence—death, repose, the sanctity of the departed—is transformed into absurdity and farce through the recurring motif of resurrection. Conversely, the voice of reason, articulated by the author through the character of Iskandar, is denounced as apostasy and blasphemy. Haji Hasan laments that he has been "unfortunate" in his son and declares that he does not even regard Iskandar as human [Mammadguluzadeh, 1966, pp. 329, 347], while Sheikh Nasrulla brands him a heretic "mocking the divine mysteries" [Mammadguluzadeh, 1966, p. 331]. This structural inversion lends philosophical depth to the comic conflict. Laughter arises not from episodic absurdity but from the recognition of an inverted world order, transforming mere irony into satirical grotesque, where incompatible layers of existence intersect to expose the insanity of the system itself.

Within the allegorical conflict between genuine and false sanctity, there is no singular positive hero whose actions directly oppose evil. The play rejects the classical model of dramatic confrontation founded on the collision of individual characters. Instead, society itself assumes the role of a collective protagonist — "the pious townspeople" [Mammadguluzadeh, 1966, p. 311]. This collective represents a crowd of "the dead," a symbolic mask of spiritual immobility. The resulting comedy is typological rather than personal: it ridicules not individual folly but a mode of thinking, a mentality, a historical inertia. Even Iskandar, who attempts to resist collective madness, becomes enmeshed within the same comic system. His rational discourse is drowned out by the ecstatic chorus of superstition.

The comic structure of *The Dead* is polyphonic. It emerges from the collision of distinct linguistic and ideological registers. Sheikh Nasrulla speaks the language of dogmatic "wisdom," filled with clichés, pseudo-biblical aphorisms, and Persian and Arabic maxims that the ignorant townspeople cannot comprehend. Haji Hasan and the other "pious citizens" express themselves in the idiom of superstition, replete with colloquial expressions and constant invocations of Allah. Iskandar's speech, by contrast, is governed by rational clarity, which within this polyphony sounds alien and estranged. There is no genuine dialogue; the voices fail to hear one another and remain confined within their own self-contained linguistic worlds.

The system of characters in *The Dead* reflects both the satirical orientation of the play's poetics and its grotesque aesthetic form. Broadly speaking, two categories of characters can be identified: archetypal and typological. The archetypal figures include Sheikh Nasrulla and Iskandar, while the typological group encompasses the collective image of "the pious townspeople," which also includes Iskandar's family: his father Haji Hasan, his mother Kerbelay Fatma Khanum, and his younger siblings Nazli and Jalal.

The image of Sheikh Nasrulla, the embodiment of false sanctity, is built upon the archetype of the trickster, a deceiver guided solely by personal gain and contemptuous of moral law. His inner essence represents a grotesque synthesis of ignorance and hypocrisy. The false nature of Nasrulla's sanctity is revealed at the outset of the play when the townspeople read a letter supposedly written by the resurrected Kerbelay Fatulla. The letter states that Nasrulla "spent several months deepening his knowledge of magic and mastering its secrets. *Finally, with the blessing of the Almighty, he resolved to test his powers by invoking spirits*" [Mammadguluzadeh, 1966, pp. 318–319, italics done by me – K.A.]. This phrase is paradoxical from the perspective of faith, for according to religious dogma, sorcery constitutes a mortal sin. Thus, from the very beginning, the pretense of Nasrulla's holiness is exposed, and this motif develops in *crescendo* throughout the play – from the pompous and essentially meaningless pseudo-religious pronouncements to his exaggerated asceticism, as when he exclaims: "(*He gazes at Haji Hasan for a while, then rises and suddenly shouts*.) What dinner? What pilaf with chicken? Sheikh Ahmed, where have you brought me? What kind of Muslims are these? … Did you not tell them that my daily meal consists of a single date? … What is this, sons of fornication?" [Mammadguluzadeh, 1966, p. 327]. This self-proclaimed piety, however, soon degenerates into gluttony and lust for young girls. In shaping the image of Sheikh Nasrulla, one can also trace the influence of the European literary tradition. He belongs to the same lineage as Molière's Tartuffe or Arnolphe ("a poor saint whose candles have gone out" [Molière, 1978, p. 17]), yet he is reinterpreted within the cultural context of Azerbaijani literature at the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Unlike Molière's conscious hypocrites, however, Nasrulla remains unaware of his own depravity. His ignorance, sanctimoniously disguised as divine inspiration, transforms him into a grotesque symbol of spiritual decay: a figure both comic and tragic, embodying the hollowness of a faith detached from morality.

The pseudo-prophetic rhetoric of Nasrulla is designed to exert influence over the "pious townspeople," a typified collective image of a mindless crowd. They are not individuals but rather fragments of a single organism symbolizing a spiritually inert society. Mammaduluzadeh constructs this collective image according to the principle of the *chorus* in ancient tragedy; yet in this case, the chorus no longer represents the voice of conscience or the people's will, but instead embodies ignorance, submissiveness, and moral paralysis. Through this inversion, the playwright exposes the false religiosity and performative piety of the citizens. Their hypocrisy is most vividly manifested in the cemetery scene, when it becomes clear that their professed devotion to their deceased relatives is insincere. Once Nasrulla asks whose names should be recorded for resurrection, the townspeople quietly disperse, each repeating the same evasive phrase: "Sheikh, allow me to go and think about it" [Mammadguluzadeh, 1966, pp. 338–339]. It is this hypocrisy and counterfeit sanctity that Iskandar seeks to challenge.

The image of Iskandar also reflects the influence of European literary and cultural traditions, particularly in its resemblance to the archetypes of the fool and the trickster. His social position—a drunkard, a blasphemer, "a man of no respectability" [Mammadguluzadeh, 1966, p. 313] — stands in stark contrast to his education and intellect, acquired during his studies in France. This dissonance allows him to perceive the intellectual stagnation of his compatriots, among whom his knowledge finds no resonance. Within the dramatic structure, Iskandar performs the function of the jester, who mocks others yet speaks the truth both to them and to himself. He refuses to conform to social norms, laughing and jesting even as he acknowledges his own degradation: "Father, you should have asked our guest to resurrect me first, for I too am a kind of dead man" [Mammadguluzadeh, 1966, p. 326]. Iskandar derides the citizens' naïve belief in resurrection, yet when this faith turns into collective hysteria, he alone attempts to restore reason to the deluded crowd, which has placed absolute trust in Nasrulla's "miracles." In this respect, Iskandar embodies genuine sanctity as the voice of conscience and intellect to which all

others remain deaf. It is he whom Nasrulla truly fears, for Iskandar sees through the impostor's intentions: "Sheikh, you should be thankful that I drink wine. If I did not, my mind would be clear, and one fine day I would open my eyes and see that a learned man had arrived in our town, resurrecting the dead, deceiving our pious hajis with tales of miracles, and each night taking a new young girl for his wife" [Mammadguluzadeh, 1966, p. 340]. The play's final monologue belongs to Iskandar, who delivers a devastating indictment of the townspeople's false piety: "When it came to the resurrection of the dead, you, who longed for angels, refused to allow your brothers, sisters, wives, and children to rise again... because you yourselves drove your wives to their graves with beatings, because you married your dead brothers' wives, because you stole the property of your friends' orphans. You did not wish the dead to return and spit in your faces for your vile deeds... I know that I am nothing... but what name do you deserve?... 'The Dead!'" [Mammadguluzadeh, 1966, p. 351]. This accusatory speech transforms the seemingly light comic conflict into a satirical and socially charged drama. Laughter here functions as a moral weapon directed not at individual folly but at an entire social order corrupted by hypocrisy and ignorance. Comedy becomes an instrument of civic indictment: through grotesque exaggeration, hyperbole, and caricatural dialogue, Mammadguluzadeh exposes the spiritual decay of a society that disguises its moral emptiness beneath the mask of sanctity.

In the dialogues and monologues of the characters, sarcasm intertwines with lyricism, bitterness with laughter, and comic episodes alternate with moments of tragedy. This interplay sustains tension throughout the narrative and gradually reveals the moral and existential stance of ordinary people who, through ignorance, fall prey to deception and manipulation. Scenes of fanaticism and distortion of faith succeed one another with vivid dynamism, exposing the perversion of Islam's fundamental tenets regarding the blessed nature of belief itself. Through these juxtapositions, Mammadguluzadeh constructs an emotionally charged panorama of provincial life: a world where education is regarded as near heresy, especially for women, and where genuine good deeds are supplanted by ostentatious piety. This superficial religiosity is veiled by obscure pronouncements about divine grace, which, according to local understanding, must be "earned" through blind submission and continued ignorance. In this environment, the sacred is reduced to performance, faith becomes habit, and spiritual vitality is replaced by ritualized inertia.

Thus, in the plays of Prosper Mérimée and Jalil Mammadguluzadeh, the problem of true and false sanctity is articulated as a central moral and philosophical concern. In both works, false holiness is unmasked, yet each author approaches this theme in a distinct way. Mérimée treats hypocrisy with a tone of aesthetic detachment, drawing on the elegance of ironic theatricality, while Mammadguluzadeh invests the comic mode with ethical and social energy: laughter becomes an instrument of awakening public consciousness. In Mérimée's work, the exposure of false piety unfolds within a chamber-like irony of individual passion and deceit; in Mammadguluzadeh's, the same theme expands into a panoramic social satire, where "sanctity" becomes a tool of manipulation and collective obscurantism. These two artistic strategies, differing in scale and tone, converge in their moral outcome, demonstrating that the problem of genuine and counterfeit sanctity is universal, transcending epochs and cultural boundaries.

Religious Faith and Revolutionary Struggle as Personal Tragedy and Social Incompatibility: Ethel Lilian Voynich vs Mammad Said Ordubadi

Ethel Lilian Voynich's novel *The Gadfly* (1897) occupies a distinctive position in late nineteenth-century literature for its synthesis of revolutionary ideology with profoundly religious symbolism. Although often interpreted as a neo-romantic manifesto of its age, the novel's structure and imagery are rooted in theological and philosophical inquiry. Faith, doubt, guilt, and redemption constitute the essential components of its psychological and ideological framework. Religion in *The Gadfly* is not an accessory motif but the axis around which the characters' inner conflicts and existential transformations revolve. Voynich, reinterpreting Christian symbolism through the ethics of self-sacrifice, constructs a myth of spiritual rebirth through suffering, in which faith undergoes a radical metamorphosis—from belief in God to belief in humanity and the ideal of freedom.

From the opening pages, a profoundly religious atmosphere shapes the tone of the narrative. The protagonist, Arthur Burton, appears as a deeply devout young man studying theology and

spiritually bound to his mentor, Father Montanelli, a Catholic priest. Their relationship, built on spiritual mentorship, carries overtones of paternal affection. In the very first chapter, Voynich establishes a contemplative and mystical register, portraying Arthur as inwardly attuned to divine revelation: "He knelt down and waited all night. And in the morning when I came to my senses—Padre, it isn't any use; I can't explain. I can't tell you what I saw—I hardly know myself. But I know that God has answered me, and that I dare not disobey Him" [Voynich, 1897, p. 11]. This episode represents a pivotal moment in Arthur's spiritual development, conveying the sense of immediate communion with the divine. For him, prayer is not ritual but personal revelation, a form of direct dialogue with God. This experiential approach endows his religiosity with a Protestant-like individualism within a Catholic framework. Voynich thus defines faith as an inner condition of conscience rather than conformity to ecclesiastical law; at this stage, she establishes a crucial dichotomy between genuine spiritual experience and institutionalized religion.

Yet it is precisely this immediacy of divine experience that becomes the source of tragedy. At the center of the novel lies the clash between religious idealism and historical reality. Arthur, raised in the traditions of Catholic obedience, undergoes a crisis of faith as he discovers the moral incompatibility of church doctrine with the dictates of conscience. His awakening leads him toward a concept of active love that transforms into revolutionary fervor. In his conversation with Montanelli, Arthur utters words that can be regarded as programmatic for Voynich's worldview: "To give up my life to Italy, to help in freeing her from all this slavery and wretchedness, and in driving out the Austrians, that she may be a free republic, with no king but Christ" [Voynich, 1897, p. 11]. Here, the phrase *"no king but Christ"* acquires a secularized, messianic meaning. Christ ceases to be the God of the Church and becomes a symbol of moral liberation – a figure through whom human dignity and political freedom converge.

The image of Cardinal Montanelli plays a pivotal role in the religious dimension of the novel. His character unites holiness and guilt, pastoral compassion and human frailty. Montanelli is not portrayed as a representative of ecclesiastical hierarchy, but as a profoundly spiritual individual sincerely devoted to Christian principles. His speech is marked by gentleness and empathy: "My son, God forbid that I should say He has not spoken to your soul" [Voynich, 1897, p. 11]. This line defines Montanelli as a true shepherd: he does not reject the mystical experience of his disciple but seeks to protect him from delusion. Voynich reveals that within the institutional framework of Catholicism there still survives an authentic Christianity rooted in love and mercy. Yet the novel's tragic logic implies that such faith, precisely because it is genuine, is doomed to defeat within a world governed by political violence and hypocrisy.

Alongside the figure of Montanelli, the novel features a series of episodic characters: bishops, monks, Vatican officials, portrayed without individualization. Their representation is schematic, embodying the anonymity and rigidity of ecclesiastical hierarchy. In describing these figures, Voynich employs subtle irony to underscore the hollowness of their sanctity and the ritualistic automatism of their behavior, while carefully avoiding overt satire ("The irreproachable strictness of his life was a phenomenon sufficiently rare among the high dignitaries of the Roman Church to attract the attention of people accustomed to regard blackmailing, peculation, and disreputable intrigues as almost invariable adjuncts to the career of a prelate"; "There are probably many old-established ghosts who have never seen such a thing as an honest cardinal" [Voynich, 1897, pp. 135, 143]). Through this restrained irony, the text gains philosophical depth. Voynich's critique of the Church does not rely on depicting the moral corruption of individuals but rather exposes the historical ossification of spiritual forms—the transformation of religion into an institution that has lost its living essence.

A central motif in the novel is the contrast between the Church and the Gospel. For the protagonists, religion transcends the limits imposed by the clergy and codified dogma. Faith becomes an inward experience rather than a prescribed belief system. When Arthur reminds Montanelli, "Christ said: 'He that loseth his life for My sake shall find it'" [Voynich, 1897, p. 12], he reclaims the authentic Christian meaning of sacrifice that official Catholicism has long obscured. The irony is evident: the young seminarian recalls to his confessor the forgotten truth of faith itself.

Through her portrayal of the clergy, Voynich investigates the process by which faith becomes estranged from its essence. The Church, originally conceived as an intermediary

between humanity and God, is shown to have evolved into a barrier separating them. Even Montanelli, who strives to embody love, honesty, and compassion, is forced to conceal the truth. His mission of spiritual guidance collapses under the weight of moral compromise. In this respect, he becomes an emblem of Catholicism itself, in which virtue and sin are inextricably intertwined.

A comparative view of Montanelli and other priestly figures in late nineteenth-century literature, typically depicted in anti-clerical tones, reveals Voynich's innovation in creating a new type of spiritual hero. In her interpretation, the priest becomes not the guardian of dogma but the bearer of a dying faith, its last glimmer of sincerity within a corrupt system.

The image of Montanelli thus plays a dual role in the development of the novel's religious theme. On one hand, he embodies the ideal of Christian meekness and compassion, personifying pastoral love directed toward his disciple. On the other, he carries the burden of tragic guilt: the secret of his paternity undermines both his sanctity and Arthur's trust. Arthur's loss of faith does not begin as theological skepticism but as moral disillusionment. The revelation that his spiritual mentor and his biological father are one and the same person, who has built his authority on concealment, constitutes for Arthur not merely a personal crisis but a religious cataclysm. This moment marks the transition from faith in God to existential denial. At the beginning of the novel, Arthur affirms, "If my trouble were his own, he couldn't feel it more" [Voynich, 1897, p. 7]; yet this very superhuman empathy of the priest turns out to be deception, a mask of false sanctity. Arthur loses trust not only in man but in the moral order of existence itself.

Voynich interprets the hero's tragedy through the Christian paradigm of fall and resurrection. His renunciation of faith signifies not spiritual destruction but purification through suffering. After Montanelli's exposure, Arthur undergoes a symbolic death and rebirth, assuming a new identity as *The Gadfly*. In his transformed figure converge the traits of the martyr and the apostate. When he returns to Italy as a revolutionary, his idealism takes on the form of secularized Christianity: "I have endured it all, and have possessed my soul in patience, because I would come back and fight this God of yours... And now, when I come back, I find Him still in my place – this sham victim that was crucified for six hours, forsooth, and rose again from the dead! Padre, I have been crucified for five years, and I, too, have risen from the dead" [Voynich, 1897, p. 336]. These words articulate the essence of a new religion of action, where faith is replaced by duty and prayer by struggle. The hero preserves the moral architecture of Christian sacrifice while stripping it of its transcendental dimension. Voynich thus creates the image of an "atheistic Christianity," in which biblical archetypes survive within the ethics of revolutionary devotion, a reinterpretation of sanctity through human will and moral courage rather than divine grace.

Particularly significant is the motif of sacrifice, which permeates the entire structure of the novel. The suffering of the protagonist is not external but intrinsically connected with the idea of redemption. The novel's conclusion, in which the Gadfly meets his death at the hands of the Italian authorities, constitutes a direct reinterpretation of the Gospel scene of Golgotha. In the moment of execution, Voynich reproduces the tone of serene resignation characteristic of Christian martyrdom, devoid of fear or complaint. The hero's death becomes an act of spiritual self-overcoming, while the figure of Christ is transformed into an ethical archetype of revolutionary self-sacrifice. The sacred words *"He that loseth his life for My sake shall find it"* (Matthew 10:39), first cited in the early chapters, serve as a prophetic key to the finale: the loss of life in the name of truth and freedom becomes a form of salvation—not heavenly, but human.

The novel's religious theme is inseparable from the problem of fatherhood and sin. Voynich constructs a complex symbolic system in which personal guilt and collective evil coexist within a single space of expiation. The complexity of Montanelli's image lies in his dual nature. As a priest, he is bound by vows of chastity, obedience, and truth; as a father, he is compelled to live in deception. In this duality, Montanelli embodies the spiritual crisis characteristic of the late Victorian era – a man striving to reconcile faith and love, yet doomed to inner dissonance. His hidden paternity becomes a metaphor for the moral disintegration of the ecclesiastical institution, where human feeling is suppressed by form. When Arthur learns the truth, the revelation functions not only as a personal disclosure but also as a symbolic unmasking of the Church as a structure of spiritual hypocrisy.

The novel's pathos, however, is not anti-clerical but tragic. Montanelli is no villain but a victim of a system in which virtue itself becomes transgression. His guilt transforms into a cross

that he carries to the end of his life. Having recognized his responsibility for his son's spiritual collapse, Montanelli undertakes his own form of penitence. His tragedy lies in the fact that faith, for him, ceases to be a source of salvation and becomes a source of division. Voynich here explores a profoundly Christian antinomy between the law of the Church and the law of love. In the climactic scene of the Gadfly's final encounter with Montanelli before his execution, both men experience a mutual confession:

"There is no use in talking any more," he said.

"You understand?"

"I understand," the Gadfly answered, with dull submission. "It's not your fault. Your God is hungry, and must be fed."

Montanelli turned towards him. The grave that was to be dug was not more still than they were. Silent, they looked into each other's eyes, as two lovers, torn apart, might gaze across the barrier they cannot pass [Voynich, 1897, p. 340].

Here, the motif of forgiveness becomes the ultimate expression of the novel's spiritual meaning. In a world where faith has been destroyed, mercy remains its final manifestation.

The structure of *The Gadfly* reveals a gradual secularization of the Christian myth. Voynich constructs her narrative as a paraphrase of the Gospel: Arthur as Christ, Montanelli as God the Father, Gemma as Mary Magdalene, and the Revolution as the Second Coming. Yet these archetypes are stripped of their theological content and reinterpreted through a humanistic lens. The image of the suffering hero preserves its Christological semantics, but its purpose shifts – from the salvation of the soul to the liberation of humankind. "My life is of no use to me except to fight priests. I am not a man; I am a knife" [Voynich, 1897, p. 339] encapsulates the new form of religiosity that Voynich articulates: faith without Church, yet grounded in the spiritual structure of sacrifice.

The novel's artistic language sustains its religious symbolism through recurring imagery of nature, light and darkness, body and spirit. The description of the monastery garden, where Arthur and Montanelli first converse, abounds in allusions to the Garden of Eden: the scent of lavender and roses, the stillness, the "shadowy cloister garden" forming a space of peace and innocence akin to paradise. Later, this garden transforms into a site of loss: the hero is expelled from his spiritual Eden and condemned to wander. The shifts in landscape, from Italian monasteries to the stark Alpine summits, mirror his inner purification and the stripping away of naïve faith. The mountain scene, where Arthur says, "I see a great white being in a blue void that has no beginning and no end" [Voynich, 1897, p. 16], conveys a mystical intuition of infinity, resonant with pantheistic notions of a God of nature. Voynich thereby opposes this "natural theology" to ecclesiastical dogma, suggesting that divine revelation resides not in the altar but in contemplation of the world and human suffering.

The psychological verisimilitude of the novel's religious conflict is achieved through the precision of internal monologue, prayer-like reflection, and symbolic repetition. Voynich employs biblical vocabulary—*sin*, *forgiveness*, *temptation*, *sacrifice*—within the framework of a secular drama. She deliberately avoids explicit anti-clerical polemic: the Church serves not as a target of denunciation but as a metaphor for the rupture between faith and morality. The conflict between Arthur and Montanelli embodies the division between spirit and letter, between the Christian ethic of love and the hierarchical authority of the Catholic institution.

From the philosophical point of view, Voynich's novel represents an artistic exploration of the transformation of religious consciousness in the age of modernity. The protagonist's path leads from mystical faith to ethical humanism, while preserving the spiritual essence of Christianity—the idea of redemptive love. This evolution reflects the broader cultural tendency of the late nineteenth century toward the anthropologization of religion. Just as Tolstoy transforms religiosity into moral action and Ibsen interprets it as individual responsibility, Voynich envisions faith as redemptive compassion directed toward the salvation of the human world.

In concluding *The Gadfly*, Voynich unites the motif of resurrection with that of memory: the spiritual life of the hero continues in those who remain after him. Gemma, holding his portrait in her hands, utters a prayer without God, a symbolic invocation of a new religion grounded in human dignity. The sound of tolling bells at the end of the novel announces Montanelli's death. This news arrives precisely as Gemma reads the Gadfly's final letter,

written on the night before his execution. The echo of the bells thus completes the motif of *secular sanctity*, the sanctity of human conscience.

Hence, the treatment of the religious theme in *The Gadfly* is structured around the gradual transcendence of traditional religiosity and its reinterpretation through the lens of moral heroism. Voynich does not reject Christianity but liberates it from dogmatic constraint, asserting the possibility of an *inner Christianity* independent of institutional mediation. Religious symbolism functions as a universal language through which the author articulates the ideals of humanism, freedom, and ethical responsibility. Arthur, the Gadfly, emerges as a new type of saint: a martyr without religion, whose faith is directed not toward heaven but toward humanity. Through this image, Voynich proclaims that true holiness is not lost but transformed: redirected from the vertical to the horizontal, from prayer to action.

Mammad Said Ordubadi's novel *Foggy Tabriz* (*Dumanlı Təbriz*, 1933) occupies a distinctive place in the writer's oeuvre as one of the first epic works to interpret the Iranian Revolution of the early twentieth century through the prism of moral, national, and religious conflict. At the center of the narrative lies the struggle for human liberation from both spiritual and social bondage, where the religious dimension functions not only as an ideological framework but also as an ethical and philosophical category defining the novel's artistic world.

The religious theme in *Foggy Tabriz* is multifaceted. On one level, religion appears in its socio-historical aspect, as an instrument of power sustaining oppression and ignorance. On another, it is an existential quest for truth that emerges through the shell of fanaticism. Ordubadi reinterprets faith not in theological but in moral terms. Significantly, there is no image of a single divine figure, neither Islamic nor Christian. Instead, the narrative is guided by the concept of a universal moral law. Even when characters swear by the name of Allah ("I swear by Imam Hussein, they are all enemies of Muslims" [Ordubadi, 2025]), the rhetoric is devoid of true sanctity: religious language becomes an element of social routine rather than a manifestation of faith. The sacred name is used as a rhetorical ornament, emptied of transcendence. At the same time, central to the novel's artistic structure are the motifs of oath, allegiance, and fidelity. These motifs generate a field of tragic interaction between religious and revolutionary consciousness, where an oath sworn in the name of Allah coexists with an oath sworn in the name of freedom. The martyrdom of Imam Hussein is thus philosophically paralleled with that of Khakverdi, who dies for the cause of peasant uprising.

As in *The Gadfly*, this reconfiguration of religious imagery can be defined as the *secularization of myth*: traditional religious symbols—sacrifice, martyrdom, redemption – constitute the aesthetic foundation of revolutionary heroism. Within this framework, Khakverdi is transformed from a random victim into a prophetic martyr of a new faith. The description of his body "lying outstretched on the frozen ground" [Ordubadi, 2025] transposes the biblical pathos of the Passion and Crucifixion into the universal context of revolutionary history, where the struggle for freedom is invariably accompanied by death.

Equally significant is the narrative strategy of first-person testimony, through which the voice of the narrator unites documentary precision with confessional intensity. The narrator—an eyewitness—acts as a mediator between sacred and rational discourses. His attitude toward religion embodies the dialectic of faith and knowledge. He does not destroy the myth but seeks to interpret it, transferring it from the domain of blind submission into the realm of historical consciousness. This narrative technique approximates what Mikhail Bakhtin termed the *dialogization of consciousness*: diverse religious perspectives: the cleric, the revolutionary, the European woman interact polyphonically, forming a complex system of voices. Religion thus becomes a field of dialogue, a discursive space without final truth, where the path toward understanding is suggested but never completed.

In *Foggy Tabriz*, Ordubadi presents religion not as a monolithic belief system but as a site of tension between dogma and awakening, between inherited fatalism and the moral imperative of freedom. By transforming religious archetypes into ethical symbols of revolutionary struggle, the author achieves what might be called a *moral modernization of faith*: the sacred is no longer transcendent but immanent to human action, preserved in the conscience of those who fight for justice.

One of the central philosophical conflicts of *Foggy Tabriz* lies in the tragic incompatibility between revolution and religious faith. Ordubadi interprets this opposition not as a superficial antagonism between "belief" and "atheism," but as a deep historical and psychological fracture running through both collective and individual consciousness. The novel juxtaposes two modes of spirituality: one traditional, founded on submission and suffering, and another emerging from the impulse toward freedom and action. These worldviews, as Ordubadi shows, cannot coexist within a single spiritual space. Revolution demands agency and movement, while religion, in its distorted form, preaches endurance and resignation. From this contradiction arises not merely conflict but tragedy: the tragedy of a people unable to free themselves at once from centuries of dogmatic subjugation.

The narrator repeatedly notes that religion in Iran has turned into a form of historical slumber, a "fog" that veils the horizon of consciousness: "Tonight Tabriz is mysterious and terrifying. Clad in the impenetrable armor of political fogs, the city dozes like an opium smoker, enveloped in the stupor of dreams"; "My eyes went blind, my mind was clouded with mist" [Ordubadi, 2025]. The recurring image of fog acquires philosophical meaning. It transcends the descriptive function of landscape and becomes a symbol of spiritual indistinction, revealing how the light of freedom barely pierces the veil of religious fear. Ordubadi articulates this collision from the very first scene, introducing the image of a river as the boundary between worlds. The characters gaze across the Aras toward the northern shore illuminated by electric light and lament the darkness of the southern bank, where "the gloom marks the beginning of the night of the world we have entered" [Ordubadi, 2025]. The river thus delineates the frontier between past and future, between the religious East and the revolutionary North. This image transforms into a spatial metaphor of the incompatibility of two spiritual worlds.

Within the narrative structure, religion and revolution form two mutually exclusive systems of value. In the religious system, the dominant category is eternity: everything is perceived as a repetition of what has already been ordained: "fate," "the will of Allah." In the revolutionary system, the defining category is time, implying movement and transformation. Ordubadi constructs them as an antinomy between cyclical and linear worldviews. The essence of the tragedy lies precisely in this philosophical irreconcilability: revolution must destroy old symbols, yet those very symbols are part of the nation's cultural memory. Renouncing religious tradition thus signifies not only liberation but also the loss of meaning and continuity.

On the level of plot, the conflict manifests in the relationship between the people and the revolutionaries. The latter, who advocate enlightenment and equality, face resistance not only from the Shah's power but also from the believers themselves, who fear sin more than bullets. Faith, originally a source of comfort, becomes an obstacle to moral action. The tragedy is that belief and fear have become inseparable: to overcome one is to forfeit the other. Revolution, therefore, is portrayed not merely as a political act but as a spiritual cataclysm that shatters the inner world of the human being.

This dynamic appears most vividly in scenes with peasants who, despite the evident injustice of the landlords, cannot bring themselves to rebel, fearing divine wrath: "Most peasants are bound not only by land but by religion to their clerical landlords. Faith has so clouded their minds that they cannot even imagine raising the question, for doing so would mean rebelling against the mujtahids in whom they blindly believe" [Ordubadi, 2025]. The tone here is not derision but compassion. The author sees in this not guilt but tragedy. The incompatibility between revolution and religion is not absolute but historically necessary: the old faith must perish for a new one to emerge. Yet Ordubadi refrains from ideological simplification. He portrays this process as painful, marked by the loss of familiar moral supports. Revolution triumphs only at great spiritual cost, consuming not only fanaticism but also memory, tenderness, and the sense of communal belonging.

The tragic incompatibility of these two worlds is also reflected in the novel's system of characters. Ordubadi's revolutionaries possess messianic traits; they act as prophets of a new faith whose gospel is belief in humanity itself. The author deliberately employs religious connotations to underscore the paradox that revolutionary rhetoric assumes the functions once performed by religion. In the speeches of Sattar Khan and his comrades, one hears the same tone of conviction, the same emotional fervor found in the sermons of the mujtahids, but now

directed not toward God but toward conscience: “People of Tabriz! Have shame! Beware the curses of future generations! Do not listen to the hypocrites…” [Ordubadi, 2025]. A new sacred space thus arises—the revolution as the substitute for religious ritual. Yet this transformation retains its tragic dimension: the spiritual energy that has left the mosque cannot find a new sanctuary.

Particularly significant is the image of Hafiz Efendi, a transitional and ambivalent figure. He belongs neither fully to the clergy nor entirely to the camp of the revolutionaries, embodying a generation suspended between faith and reason: “As I listened closely to Hafiz Efendi, I noticed a leather cord around his neck. Looking closer, I saw a Qur’an hanging on his chest” [Ordubadi, 2025]. His relationship with the revolutionaries is marked by inner tension. He sympathizes with their cause yet fears their violence; he supports the idea of freedom but cannot renounce his faith: “I am a revolutionary myself and love the revolution, but I cannot agree to bloodshed” [Ordubadi, 2025]. Hafiz Efendi personifies the attempt to reconcile faith and revolution, an attempt that fails to find understanding in the eyes of the narrator, who speaks from an uncompromising position: “To discuss revolution with a revolutionary wearing the Qur’an on his chest was pointless” [Ordubadi, 2025]. This failure signifies not only the personal tragedy of the character but the impossibility of synthesis between two incompatible truths—the sacred and the historical.

In his portrayal of the clergy, Ordubadi achieves a rare balance between satire and tragedy. He does not merely expose the hypocrisy of the religious establishment but presents it as a symptom of an age that has lost its genuine capacity for faith. Portraiture, speech patterns, and systems of contrast transform these figures into moral metaphors for society’s spiritual decline: “In the front corner, on a thick mattress, sat Mullah Qurban. Fingering his heavy rosary beads, he mumbled prayers indistinctly. His eyes were outlined with kohl, his nails stained with henna. His thin mustache, recently stripped of dye, was trimmed so as to expose his thick, clumsy lips, which moved incessantly in prayers for the salvation of all apostates. He had drenched himself so heavily in rosewater that its scent filled the entire room and made breathing difficult” [Ordubadi, 2025]. The conflict between the clergy and the revolutionaries thus reveals the novel’s central philosophical idea: the struggle of living conscience against false sanctity. From this clash emerges a new spirituality, freed from fear and dogma yet still animated by the inner quest for truth.

Significantly, the revolutionaries themselves are not entirely free from religious associations. Their heroism carries the aura of martyrdom. Ordubadi intentionally brings them closer to the figures of saints but does so with subtle irony. In the scene of Hakverdi’s death, the motif of sacrifice recurs, though stripped of its religious halo. His body lies “spread upon the frozen ground” [Ordubadi, 2025] — a crucifixion without resurrection, suffering that promises no paradise. Here lies the novel’s deepest tragedy: revolution, having liberated humankind from God, offers no new form of consolation. By destroying the religious illusion, it leaves the soul face to face with emptiness.

Thus, in Ordubadi’s conception, the conflict between revolution and religion is not a simple confrontation between progress and reaction but a meditation on humanity’s painful transition from one system of belief to another. The author takes no triumph in the destruction of the old religious world; he regards it as an inevitable loss, the sorrowful cost of civilization’s coming of age. Faith in God yields to faith in freedom, yet this passage brings no peace. In place of the temple arises a space of spiritual disorientation. The tragic incompatibility of revolution and religion resides not in their external opposition but in the impossibility of reconciling two inner modes of being: submission and liberty, eternity and time, prayer and action.

Both *The Gadfly* by Ethel Lilian Voynich and *Foggy Tabriz* by Mammad Said Ordubadi belong to different cultures and epochs, yet they are united by a shared motif—the spiritual rupture between faith and revolution. In both novels, this conflict is understood not as an ideological struggle but as the tragedy of the human soul, for which religion and revolution become two mutually exclusive yet equally compelling paths toward truth.

In both works, religion and revolution appear as distinct spiritual worlds that cannot coexist. In *The Gadfly*, the conflict is psychological and individual: the struggle between father and son, between faith and reason within a single consciousness. In Ordubadi’s novel, it is collective and

historical. Voynich depicts the tragedy of a man betrayed by the Church and cast into a godless world; Ordubadi portrays the tragedy of a people slowly realizing that the god they worshiped has become the instrument of their oppression. In both cases, religion is revealed as a distorted form of truth that revolution seeks to reclaim but only through destruction, which gives rise to the tragedy itself.

The essential difference lies in how each author interprets the drama of faith. Voynich structures her novel around Christian symbolism: suffering, redemption, crucifixion. Arthur Burton becomes a new Christ, his cross replaced by the barricade. Ordubadi's symbolic framework, rooted in Islamic culture, follows a different rhythm: the focus is not on crucifixion but on purification, not on death but awakening. His protagonist is not an individual martyr but a collective figure, the people, moving through the fog of ignorance toward enlightenment. For this reason, the tragedy in *Foggy Tabriz* does not culminate in death, as it does in *The Gadfly*, but continues as a slow, painful process of awakening.

Conclusion

The analysis of these works demonstrates that the interpretation of religious themes in Christian and Islamic literary traditions develops in accordance with the specific logic of consciousness inherent to each culture. The works of Mérimée and Voynich confirm the well-established scholarly view that Western consciousness has historically evolved within the framework of individualism, which conceives of human existence as *being-for-itself* (a concept extensively discussed in modern research across history, philosophy, and psychology; see, for example: [MacDonald, 2019; Kashima et al., 2025; Heigham, 2022; Khalilov, 2023; Trang, 2024]). In contrast, as numerous studies attest ([Barinova, 2025; Musah, 2011; Jiang et al., 2017; Shemagh, 2025; Abubakar, 2024]), Islamic Eastern consciousness tends toward a collectivist type, oriented toward unity within the Muslim community and grounded in the principle of *being-with-others*, which in philosophical terms corresponds to the model of *being-for-the-other*. This tendency is clearly reflected in the works of Mammadguluzadeh and Ordubadi.

The present study does not aim to analyze literary texts through the lens of cultural consciousness theories. Nevertheless, without delving deeply into that field, it can be stated that despite fundamental differences in religion and culture, literary analysis of the works of Mérimée and Voynich, Mammadguluzadeh and Ordubadi reveals significant poetological affinities in their treatment of religious themes.

First, the study confirms the central hypothesis: in nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century literature, the religious theme extends far beyond the level of plot construction, becoming a formative element of poetic structure. In each of the authors examined, religion determines the configuration of imagery, the system of motifs, and the compositional logic of the work. This is evident in three interrelated outcomes:

(a) the transformation of religious archetypes;

(b) the specialization of poetic techniques such as antithesis, inversion, grotesque, and leitmotif;

(c) the functional redistribution of sacred motifs within secular and social discourse.

Second, the works of Mérimée and Voynich, Mammadguluzadeh and Ordubadi display a shared set of thematic constants in their engagement with religious material – namely, the problem of genuine and false sanctity (Mérimée vs Mammadguluzadeh) and the tragic collision between religious faith and revolutionary struggle (Voynich vs Ordubadi). In Western European literature, these aspects are realized through individualistic logic and personal conflicts: in Mérimée, the exposure of false sanctity and hypocrisy unfolds through a chamber-like ironic comedy of personal passion and moral self-deception; in Voynich, the conflict between faith and revolution takes the form of a psychological drama centered on the tragedy of an individual conscience. In Azerbaijani literature, by contrast, these same aspects are framed as social conflicts within a collectivist logic: in Mammadguluzadeh, false sanctity is ridiculed through social satire; in Ordubadi, the conflict between religion and revolution is historical and collective, focusing on the tragedy of an entire people.

Third, the comparative analysis reveals four distinct models of artistic realization of the religious theme:

(a) in Mérimée's *A Woman Is a Devil*, the poetics are based on inversion and chamber irony: religious language intertwines with the erotic, sanctity is demythologized through personal temptation, and fanaticism is deconstructed psychologically through metaphorical displacement.

(b) in Mammadguluzadeh's *The Dead*, the dominant mode is satirical and grotesque: false sanctity is exposed through mass scenes, the choral structure of the "pious townspeople," and the caricatured typification of the sheikh. Religion functions here as a sociocultural mechanism and becomes an object of collective comic critique.

(c) in Voynich's *The Gadfly*, religious archetypes undergo secular reinterpretation: Christian symbols of crucifixion, redemption, and pastoral love are transformed into an ethical "religion of action," producing a poetics of tragic heroism and a structural paraphrase of the Gospel within a revolutionary framework.

(d) in Ordubadi's *Foggy Tabriz*, sacred motifs are encoded as symbols of national and historical awakening: the fog becomes a metaphor for spiritual blindness, the *marsiya* (funeral lament) functions as a ritual of frozen memory. The novel's poetics combine realist chronicle with symbolic and allegorical layers, turning religion into a criterion of moral awakening.

These four models provide empirical grounds for concluding that literature produces a multiplicity of "translations" of religion – ranging from psychological deconstruction to social satire and mythopoetic transformation.

References

Abu Aliqah, Yu., Mahmood, A.R., Omar, M.N., Zakaria, I. (2012). The Religious Objective of Orientalism in Studying Islamic Literature according to Muhammad al-Bahi and Muhammad Yasin Arabi. *International Journal of Islamic Thought*, 1 (1), 87-97.

Abubakar, Yu.M. (2024). Islam Identity and Collective Behaviour: Unveiling the Unique Strengths of Islam in Contemporary Global Politics. *SSRN (Social Science Research Network)*. DOI: http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3787358

Abukhudairi, A.K. (2015). Universality towards a new theory of Islamic literature. *European Journal of Research and Reflection in Arts and Humanities, 3 (1),* 34-47.

Adeoye, M.A., Pristiwiyanto, P. (2025). The Role of Charity in Islam and Christianity: A Comparative Analysis. *Jurnal Paradigma*, 17 (1), 1-17. DOI: https://doi.org/10.53961/paradigma.v17i1.307

Ahlam Sbaihat, A. (2022). Khadijah's Image in 19th Century Orientalism. *Al-Jāmi'ah: Journal of Islamic Studies*, 60 (2), 399-426. DOI: https://doi.org/10.14421/ajis.2022.602.399-426

Al Areqi, R. (2016). Rise of Islamic Literature between Fact and Fiction. *Journal of Language Teaching and Research*, 7 (4), 682-689. DOI: http://dx.doi.org/10.17507/jltr.0704.07

Ali-zadeh, A. (2007). *Islamskij jenciklopedicheskij slovar* [The Islamic Encyclopedic Dictionary.]. Moscow: Ansar Publ. (In Russian)

Bailey, M. (2019). Charity as Act and Allegory in Venetian Art. *Studies in Iconography*, 40, 231-272.

Bakhtizina, D.I. (2011). *Muzyka v duhovnom bytii cheloveka* [Music in Spiritual Existence of Man]. Ufa: BSPU Publ. (In Russian)

Bakshi, N. (2013). *Overcoming Boundaries. Literature and Theology in the Post-War Period in Germany, Austria and Switzerland*. Retrieved from https://esxatos.com/bakshi-preodolenie-granic?ysclid=mg3fd4agw9969124122 (In Russian).

Balakhontseva, I.G. (2007). *Simvol i interpretacija v religiozno-hudozhestvennom poznanii* [Symbol and Interpretation in Religious and Artistic Cognition]. (PhD Thesis). Orenburg: Orenburg State Pedagogical University (In Russian)

Barinova, N.G. (2025). Collectivism and individualism in the Islamic tradition of self-knowledge Minbar. *Islamic Studies*, 18 (1), 224-248. DOI: https://doi.org/10.31162/2618-9569-2025-18-1-224-248 (in Russian).

Bondarenko, H. (2021). Bible Reception in the Poetic Heritage of Ukrainian Poets of the 19th Century. *Transcarpathian Philological Studies*, **19 (1), 11-15.** DOI: https://doi.org/10.32782/tps2663-4880/2021.19.1.2 (In Ukrainian)

Brandt van den, N. (2024). *Religion, Gender and Race in Western European Arts and Culture*. London & New York: Routledge. DOI: https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003394754

Chile, L.M., Simpson, G. (2004). Spirituality and community development: Exploring the link between the individual and the collective. *Community Development Journal*, 39 (4), 318-331. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1093/cdj/bsh029

Cohen, E. (2006). Sacred, Secular, and Impure: The Contextuality of Sensations. L. Besserman (Ed.), *Sacred and Secular in Medieval and Early Modern Cultures. The New Middle Ages* (pp. 123-133). New York: Palgrave Macmillan. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1057/9781403977274_8

Dick, B.K. (2016). *Modern Arabic Science Fiction: Science, Society and Religion in Selected Texts*. Durham: Durham University.

Dundiak, I. (2016). Religious theme in the work of creation of Volodymyr Fedko. *Bulletin of Lviv National Academy of Arts*, 28, 14-24. DOI: http://dx.doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.51641 (In Ukrainian)

Dyakonov, I.M. (1990). *Arhaicheskie mify Vostoka i Zapada* [Archaic Myths of the East and West]. Moscow: Nauka Publ. (In Russian)

Hartt, F. (1985). *Art: a History of Painting, Sculpture, Architecture*. New York: Harry N. Abrams Incorporated

Haskin, D. (1977). Mercy and the Creative Process in Measure for Measure. *Texas Studies in Literature and Language*, 19 (3), *An Issue Devoted to the Renaissance*, 348-362.

Heigham, S. (2022). A cultural evolutionary approach to understanding the development of Individualism in the Western world. Psychotherapy Section Review, 66, 37-40. DOI: https://doi.org/10.53841/bpspsr.2022.1.66.37

Hoşoğlu Doğan, E. (2023). Islamic Literature: An Attempt at A Historical Overview. *Korkut Ata Türkiyat Araştırmaları Dergisi*, 13, 1612-1630. DOI: https://doi.org/10.51531/korkutataturkiyat.1353421

Jiang, G., Garris, C.P., Aldamer, S. (2018). Individualism Behind Collectivism: A Reflection from Saudi Volunteers. *Voluntas: International Journal of Voluntary and Nonprofit Organizations*, 29, 144-159 (2018). DOI: https://doi.org/10.1007/s11266-017-9872-y

Kashima, Yo., Shafa, S., Blake, Kh. (2025). Cultural logics and individualism-collectivism: a conceptualization of the two frameworks from a cultural dynamical perspective. *Current Research in Ecological and Social Psychology*, 9, 1-11. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cresp.2025.100232

Kersten, C. (2025). *Islam and Contemporary European Literature*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1515/9781474492690

Khalilov, R. (2024). Philosophical analysis of the Western European personalism. *Metafizika Journal*, 6 (4), 206-215. DOI: https://doi.org/10.33864/2617-751x.2023.v6.i4.206-215 (in Azerbaijani)

Khlypavka H. H., Velykyi R. H. Transformation of the Image of God in the Works of Ukrainian Writers of the Early 21st Century. *Scientific Notes of V.I. Vernadsky Taurida National University. Philology. Journalism*, 35(74/5), 79-83. DOI: https://doi.org/10.32782/2710-4656/2024.5.2/13 (In Ukrainian)

Kovaleva, E. (2022). Sacred Motifs in the Work of German Expressionists, Members of the "Bridge" Association. *Abyss (Studies in Philosophy, Political Science and Social Anthropology)*, 3 (21), 78-86.

Kruglov, R.G. (2015). *Hristianskie temy i motivy v sovremennoj russkoj literature* [Christian Themes and Motifs in Modern Russian Literature]. A.L. Kazin (Ed.), *Religion and Art in Modern Russia: a Dialogue of Worldviews* (pp. 66-81). Saint Petersburg: Publishing House of the St. Petersburg State Institute of Cinema and Television (In Russian)

Kubarek, M. (2016). "Should the Culture Be Engaged? Modern Islamic Literature and Its Religious and Political Engagement," *International Journal of Culture and History*, 2 (1), 54-58. DOI: https://doi.org/10.18178/ijch.2016.2.1.037

Kuiper, K. (Ed.). (2010). *Islamic Art, Literature, and Culture*. New York: Britannica Educational Pub. In association with Rosen Educational Services.

Landtman, G. (1917). *The Folk-Tales of the Kiwai Papuans*. Helsinki: Printing-Office of the Finnish Society of Literature.

Little, B. (2023). *Acts of Faith and Imagination Theological Patterns in Catholic Fiction*. Washington: Catholic University of America Press.

MacDonald, K. (2019). *Individualism and the Western Liberal Tradition: Evolutionary Origins, History, and Prospects for the Future*. Amazon: Kindle Direct Publishing.

Mammadguluzadeh, J. (1966). *The Dead*. A. Zamanov (Ed.), *Selected Works* (Vol. 1, pp. 311-352). Baku: Azerbaijani State Publishing (In Russian)

Mavelli, L. (2015). *Europe's identity crisis, Islam in Europe, and the crisis of European secularity.* R. Tottoli (Ed.), *Routledge Handbook of Islam in the West* (pp. 185-197). Abingdon: Routledge.

Mérimée, P. (1857). Une femme est un diable ou La tentation de Saint Antoine. J. L'estrange (Éd.). *Théâtre de Clara Gazul* (pp. 74-89). Paris: Charpentier, Libraire-Éditeur.

Mishura, A. (2021). The metaethical assumptions of arguments from evil. *Philosophy Journal*, 14 (2), 123-137. DOI: https://doi.org/10.21146/2072-0726-2021-14-2-123-137

Mitchell, C., Moody, S. (Eds.). (2000). *Foundations of Charity*. Oxford: Hart Publishing.

Molière, J.-B. (1978). *The School for Wives* (Transl. by R. Wilbur). London & New York: A Harvest Book.

Musah, M.B., (2011). The Culture of Individualism and Collectivism in Balancing Accountability and Innovation in Education: An Islamic Perspective. *OIDA International Journal of Sustainable Development*, 2 (8), 69-76.

Ordubadi, M.S. (2025). *Foggy Tabriz*. Retrieved from https://royallib.com/read/ordubadi_mamed/tavriz_tumanniy.html#0 (In Russian)

Pavlov, V. (2023). Biblical motives in the modern Ukrainian literature. *Synopsis: Text, Context, Media*, 29 (1), 8-13. DOI: https://doi.org/10.28925/2311-259x.2023.1.2 (In Ukrainian)

Perevezentsev, S.V. (Ed.). (2001). *Antologija filosofii Srednih vekov i jepohi Vozrozhdenija* [An Anthology of Philosophy of the Middle Ages and Renaissance]. Retrieved from https://e-reading.life/book.php?book=102164 (In Russian)

Pfau, Th. (2023). European Literature and Christian Theology (1700–1900). Brendan N. Wolfe et al (Eds.), *St Andrews Encyclopaedia of Theology*. Retrieved from https://www.saet.ac.uk/Christianity/EuropeanLiteratureandChristianTheology17001900

Radbil, T.B. The nature of the comic sub specie of linguistic anomaly. N.D. Arutyunova (Ed.). *Logical analysis of language. Linguistic mechanisms of comedy* (pp. 686-698). Retrieved from https://djvu.online/file/0YMFjJXZsGcR3?ysclid=mgox6z5udw431465027 (In Russian)

Sani, M.R., Sadreddini, F. (2018). The Impact of Religion and Spirituality on Literature: A Systematic Review. *Asian Journal of Language, Literature and Culture Studies*, 1 (1), 1-8.

Schiller, G. (1972). *Iconography of Christian Art, Vol. II*. London: Lund Humphries.

Shayakhmetova, A.K. (2012). Melodizm arabskogo slova v musulmanskom kulte [The melodism of the Arabic word in the Muslim cult]. *Language and Culture*, 1(1), 156-161 (In Russian)

Shemagh, A. (2025). Collective Consciousness Challenging Ignorance. *Al-Mujtama*. Retrieved from https://www.en.mugtama.com/

Sinilo, G.V. (2017). The Bible as the "axial" archetext of European Literature (by the example of German lyric poetry). *Journal of BSU. Philology*, 3, 19-29.

Staff, R. (2021). Art and Religion: A Centuries-Old Relationship. *M.S. Rau: Fine Art. Antiques. Jewels*. Retrieved from https://rauantiques.com/blogs/canvases-carats-and-curiosities/art-and-religion-a-centuries-old-relationship?srsltid=AfmBOooa1Ks5455DPKZGTr0rAubdUJflOJdXehIViv E-AAP0zvmNP9Tp

Stendhal, F. (2025). *The Red and the Black* (Transl. by C.K. Scott Moncrieff). Retrieved from https://oceanofpdf.com/authors/stendhal/pdf-epub-the-red-and-the-black-download/

Strenski, I. (2020). Prospects for the Death of Europe: Islam, Christianity, the Future Identity of Europe. *Terrorism and Political Violence*, 32 (3), 654-680. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1080/09546553.2020.1733341

Tasso, T. (2019). Slezy Presvjatoj Devy [Tears of the Blessed Virgin] (Pavel Alyoshin Trans.). *Paleshin. Livejournal*. Retrieved from https://paleshin.livejournal.com/130052.html?ysclid=mggd2j22cf602897097

Tatarinova, L.N. (2019). Artistic text in the paradigm of Catholic and Protestant culture (T.S. Eliot, W. Faulkner, F. Kafka, A. Camus, D.G. Lawrence, J. Joyce, G. Green, etc.). Retrieved from https://e-univers.ru/upload/iblock/ce2/ce210a2eee69d88cfb1ca69c4ac1bd24.pdf (In Russian).

Tayanova, T.A. (2011). Specific Character of Religion-Based Literature. *Journal of Historical, Philological and Cultural Studies*, 1 (31), 238-245

Trang, L.Th. (2024). Individualism in Europe: A Comparison to Asia. *International Journal of Social Science and Education Research Studies*, 4 (5), 415-419. DOI: https://doi.org/10.55677/ijssers/V04I5Y2024-09

Tulpe, I.A. (2018). Religious Art: Problem of relationship between religion and Art. Review of Russian Christian Academy for Humanities, 19 (4), 246-255. DOI: https://doi.org/10.25991/VRHGA.2018.19.3.023

van Esch, P. (2015). Religion in Mass Media Social Marketing Campaigns: A Paradox. *International Journal of Business and Management*, 10 (11), 55-55. DOI: http://dx.doi.org/10.5539/ijbm.v10n11p55

Voynich, E.L. (1897). *The Gadfly*. New York: Henry Holt and Company.

Zhvania, L. (2022). Peculiarity of Dialogue with the Bible in the Lyrics by Lesya Ukrainka (Based on the Poetry Collection "Reviews"). *Scientific Notes of V.I. Vernadsky Taurida National University. Philology. Journalism*, 33(72/3), 213-219. DOI: https://doi.org/10.32838/2710-4656/2022.3/36 (In Ukrainian)

THE POETICS OF RELIGIOUS FAITH IN CHRISTIAN AND ISLAMIC LITERARY TRADITIONS: DIMENSIONS OF INTERRELATION (Based on Western European and Azerbaijani Literary Works)

Kyzylgul Yasin Abbasova, Baku State University (Azerbaijan)
e-mail: q.abbasova@mail.ru
DOI: https://doi.org/10.32342/3041-217X-2025-2-30-10

Key words: *religious theme, faith, motif of true and false sanctity, virtuous act, conflict between religion and revolution, comic conflict, satire, irony, tragic dimension, individual and social comprehension of religious discourse, moral and ethical issues.*

The article examines the interpretation of religious theme in nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Western European and Azerbaijani literatures, drawing on the works of Prosper Mérimée, Jalil Mammadguluzadeh, Ethel Lilian Voynich, and Mammad Said Ordubadi. At the center of this inquiry lies the question of how religious discourse is transformed amid the formation of new ethical systems and social consciousness, and how artistic forms respond to the crisis of traditional faith and the search for moral orientation beyond ecclesiastical dogma.

The *aim* of this study is to identify the dimensions of interaction, similarity, and mutual influence between the poetics of Western European and Azerbaijani literatures in their engagement with religious themes. The research employs comparative, historical-literary, cultural-historical, and hermeneutic *methods*.

The findings demonstrate that in P. Mérimée's *The Woman Is a Devil, or The Temptation of St. Anthony* (*Une femme est un diable, ou La tentation de Saint Antoine*) and J. Mammadguluzadeh's *The Dead* (*Ölülər*), the religious theme manifests through the exploration of the motifs of genuine and feigned sanctity. In Mérimée, the inversion of the sacred and the profane shapes a poetics of individual-psychological conflict, wherein the motif of sin and temptation acquires a comic dimension. In Mammadguluzadeh's *The Dead*, the exposure of false holiness and hypocrisy assumes a social dimension, expressed through a satirical and grotesque poetics.

In E.L. Voynich's *The Gadfly* and M.S. Ordubadi's *Foggy Tabriz* (*Dumanlı Təbriz*), the collision between religious faith and revolutionary struggle attains a tragic-philosophical resonance. Through the fate of Arthur Burton, Voynich reveals an individual conflict between faith and revolution, between love for God and belief in humankind. Religious symbols are reinterpreted here through the lens of secular humanism, while the novel's structure reproduces a Gospel-like paradigm of suffering and sacrifice. In Ordubadi's *Foggy Tabriz*, religious problematic unfolds within a socio-historical and national-historical framework: the Islamic tradition is portrayed as a realm in which the confrontation between dogma and reason becomes a driving force of the people's spiritual awakening. The symbolism of fog, light, prayer, and lament acquires a philosophical significance, shaping a poetics of symbolic realism.

The study concludes that in all four texts, the religious theme serves not a confessional but rather a philosophical and ethical function. The authors treat faith as an inner moral state distinct from outward ritual. Within the poetics of each work, religious motifs are reinterpreted as artistic expressions of spiritu-

al quest: prayer becomes an act of conscience, sacrifice, a form of self-affirmation, and lament—a sign of historical memory.

Thus, the article demonstrates that in the literature of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, religious themes emerge as a field of artistic experimentation, wherein the genuine spirituality of the individual—one who seeks meaning beyond dogma, within the moral and ethical domain, yet retains an inner need for faith—is revealed.

Дата надходження до редакції / Submitted: 10.12.2024
Дата прийняття до публікації / Accepted: 05.08.2025
Дата публікації / Published: 02.12.2025