

St. Clement of Ohrid Sofia University  
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# **Christian faith and values in Yordan Yovkov and Elin Pelin's works**

## **THESIS**

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Academic Supervisor:

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## PREFACE

I accepted as a personal challenge the paper topic entitled "Christian Faith and Values in Yordan Yovkov and Elin Pelin's works", formulated by my academic supervisor Prof. Dr. Dimo Penkov. It suggested a good knowledge of the work of these two distinguished Bulgarian writers, as well as of the literary-fiction and critical texts dedicated to it, in order to unfold the topic at its length and depth. I was motivated by the fact the topic is of interdisciplinary nature - it requires one to enter the field of fiction, yet set on an Orthodox theological foundation, highlighting the manifestations of Christian faith and values - an essential and integral part of the personality of Elin Pelin and Yordan Yovkov's fiction characters. In general, the examination of a literary-fiction issue through the prism of theological analysis is a direction in the field of apologetics, where the foundations were laid by Prof. Archimandrite Evtimii Sapundzhiev, and today it is continued by Prof. Dr. Dimo Penkov in his book "Religious Aspects in Ivan Vazov and Stoyan Mikhailovsky works", published by St. Clement of Ohrid University Publishing House in 2009. My personal motive is the opportunity to make my own modest contribution to this area of research.

In connection with my thesis, I would like to express my gratitude to my academic supervisor Prof. Dr. Dimo Penkov. Also, I would like to take this opportunity to thank Ruzha Donovska, Head Librarian, and librarian Angelina Petrova - with the Faculty of Theology Library, affiliated to the University Library, for their assistance and helpfulness. I am grateful to the staff of St. Cyril and Methodius National Library, the library and archives staff at the Central Library and the Scientific Archives of the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, and the staff at the Central State Archives.

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# **1. Introduction. General characteristics of the thesis**

## **1.1 Relevance of the topic**

For several decades - during the period of atheistic communist rule (1944-1989), not a few studies were made on Elin Pelin and Yordan Yovkov's life and work, two of the best writers in the new Bulgarian literature. Their work was invariably included in the various school and university curricula. The issue here is their work was seen - during these decades - only through the prism of the crude atheistic political system serving the interests of the ideology of materialism. Elin Pelin has been appropriated by the atheist power to serve its interests. Yordan Yovkov was accused of not being empathetic to the vicissitudes of history and they were not reflected in his work. However, he has also in turn been interpreted and adapted to serve entirely the interests of atheistic materialism. As they say, written words remain, and these texts, serving another time, continue to have their influence in the process of studying both writers at school. The time is long overdue to objectively analyze and evaluate these two great Bulgarian writers' merits. In other words, their works need a new reading. To us, this means the research approach should be based on a theological Orthodox paradigm, all the more due to the fact the Orthodox faith and moral value system are at the heart of Bulgarian spirituality - according to both writers here. Such a theological perspective will enable a truer and deeper interpretation of Elin Pelin and Yordan Yovkov's works. At the same time, the ideologically distorted analyses of the second half of the XX century on the two writers' work have not yet been revised. It is proper and right to have a radical dissociation from them, pointing out their specific weaknesses and shortcomings. So this critical point is a useful part of the topical nature of our topic. In this regard, it is appropriate to make an apologetic analysis of the extent Christian faith and moral values associated with it are present in the spirituality and personality of the two writers' characters and what the specificity of this presence in Elin Pelin and Yordan Yovkov, respectively, is. A valuable source in unfolding this current issue is Prof. Archimandrite Evtimii Sapundzhiev's study entitled "Are the Bulgarian Poets and Writers Deniers of Religion", published in 1942.

## **1.2 Scope and objectives**

The scope of our dissertation is to explore the Christian faith and values manifested in Elin Pelin and Yordan Yovkov's works, to trace and reveal how - through the plot and the personality of the fiction characters in the two writers' works - the Orthodox faith is portrayed as part of the spirituality of the Bulgarian people and how it manifests itself in the course of the plot, by examining and analyzing how Christian moral values are preserved and manifested in the individual in particular as well as within the community. Some of the tasks of this paper include the discovery, commentary and analysis of articles, studies and monographs dedicated to Elin Pelin and Yordan Yovkov's works, as they may have a tangential to our topic in ideological and thematic terms. We are going to look for reviews in the periodical press of the two writers' contemporaries and peers done on the occasion of their newly published books: we are going to look for a connection of these reviews to our research paper. We are going to look at sources from the time of atheistic materialism to find evaluations serving that particular ideology, to examine how socialist literary-fiction criticism viewed and adapted the two

writers' works to its time. Of course, we are also going to look for current interpretations of their works carried out in the 1990s as well as in the early XXI century. The scope is to check how close contemporary literary scholars are to our thesis in regards to the Christian faith and moral values of the Bulgarian, as expressed in Elin Pelin and Yordan Yovkov's works.

In turn, we should draw our own conclusions and discover - from the apologetic point of view - the Christian faith and ethical values in Elin Pelin and Yordan Yovkov's works, set on a Biblical foundation. Our task is to discover the overlooked issues - from a theological point of view, the truth about their works - therefore our goal is to find and analyze explicit examples in supporting our thesis. Important themes in our paper include sin and the hope of salvation, as well as the ambivalent attitude toward faith in Elin Pelin's early XX century narratives. We are going to try to examine and analyze the Christian foundation and spiritual and moral values in the collection of stories entitled "Under the Monastery Vine". We are going to trace how Yordan Yovkov portrays the idea a person is a sinner blessed by God to/for repentance. We are going to try to trace the topic of war and the Orthodox creed in Yordan Yovkov's war stories. We are going to look for Biblical messages interpreted in his fiction characters. Of course, we are going to look at the topic of sin and repentance in the Harvester mini-novel, where we are going to try to find a reflection of the writer's personal religious encounters. In a separate part of our paper, we are going to try to compare the specific way Bulgarian Christian spirituality is portrayed in a comparative perspective between Elin Pelin and Yordan Yovkov. Our sub-topics will include that of the temptress woman as portrayed in the Wicked Power mini-novel and in the Albena drama, as well as the question on Bogomilism and the esoteric teachings and messages in the spirit of Elin Pelin and Yordan Yovkov's Orthodox Christianity.

### **1.3. Research methods**

First of all, we would like to point out that analyzing Elin Pelin and Yordan Yovkov comparatively is a rather complicated and complex task. In general, critics who have written about the two have considered them separately without seeking any in-depth comparability. Only prof. Iskra Panova did so - yet in purely literary-science terms, examining and comparing the structure, the construction of the composition, the place and role of landscape, the formation of the characters, etc. - in her book first published in 1967. Her work is valuable, written with professional observation and skillful look in a beautiful, accessible language. Our topic, however, directs us to a new, far from sufficiently explored area, and it has not received any attention yet - the original Christian faith - an invariable and most important companion in the difficult everyday life of the Bulgarian as well as the values this faith forms in them - thus defining their personality and character - according to Yovkov and Elin Pelin's fiction words, analyzed in a comparative, mainly theological perspective. So the main method we are using here is the one of comparative analysis. In this paper, a comparative analysis is done both in examining each author's works, as well as in looking for points of comparison in these two writers' works. In this regard, an analytical method has also been used in the analysis - in order to support our topic. Polemics is among the auxiliary methods - in cases where incorrect and false, mostly ideologized, idea-like propositions are challenged in the interest of atheistic materialism. Yet another tool is the descriptive method, either in bringing further clarity or in recalling the course of the plot action in certain works.

#### **1.4. Object and scope of the paper**

The object, i.e. the research field we position our topic in, is the new Bulgarian literature from the late XIX century to the 1940s, as well as the state of Bulgaria's clergy during this period. The scope of our paper research is the Christian faith and values reflected in Elin Pelin and Yordan Yovkov's works, as well as a comparison between the two authors in relation to our topic.

#### **1.5 State of research**

Much has been written about the aforementioned authors, two of the most distinguished and gifted representatives of the new Bulgarian literature, rightly included in all school and university curricula. They have also been noticed by their most prominent contemporary literary critics such as Nikolai Raynov, D. B. Mitov, Ivan Bogdanov, Ivan Meshekov, Petko Tikholov, Georgi Konstantinov, Mikhail Arnaudov, Petar Dinekov, to name a few - who dedicate reviews, reports, analyses - to them - on the occasion of their newly published books. Yovkov and Elin Pelin's obvious fiction mastery was also revealed during the years of socialism. Krastyo Genov, Petar Pondev, Simeon Sultanov, Ivan Sarandev, Iskra Panova, Spiridon Kazandjiev, Ivan Radev, Dobrin Dobrev, Tatyana Ichevska, Milena Kirova - among others - wrote essays, monographs and articles about them. Of course, most of these writings were in the spirit of the ideological conjuncture and the ruling atheist party system of the second half of the XX century. There was a clear desire on the part of the socialist literary-fiction criticism - to appropriate Yordan Yovkov and Elin Pelin and put them into a party-ideological scheme. This kind of tendentious party analyticism and evaluativism has influenced the study of both authors at school to this very day. The analyses of prominent representatives of such direct atheistic criticism have been studied and still followed. In this regard - in the socialist past - some of the two writers' significant works were ignored, silenced, underestimated, and conveniently forgotten. The literary-fiction criticism of the time of socialism tried insistently to sew their work to its atheistic partisanship and fit it into the framework of its ideological moulds: "Yet, Elin Pelin - with the vital righteousness of his creativity and his great realistic writing art - had objectively bound himself to socialism for ever with his first significant works".

On the other hand, Peter Pondev has defined Elin Pelin as a writer of "petty-bourgeois views" and "unlived petty-bourgeois illusions". At the same time, Peter Pondev has written with condescension about him: "It is now known to us - in terms of his outlook, Elin Pelin stood very far from the height of socialist thought..." At several points in his book, Peter Pondev has drawn parallels between the two writers' work, as they were also in the service of the ideology of that time: "And so, if Elin Pelin in his immediate depiction of social inequality and social injustice of the countryside rises to the level of an implacable denouncer of capitalist reality, Yovkov, by depicting popular suffering, stands up as its implacable accuser. "Driven by his political conjuncture, Pondev has given a completely distorted assessment of Yovkov's works: " In the Harvester and in the Homestead by the Border, Yovkov's creative disabilities are evident - the petty-bourgeois roots of his moral utopianism and conciliatory views on society. In the Harvester, however, along with all the false, artificial lineage in the development of the

main character, along with the speculation on the people's religious notions and the distorted depiction of social struggles, Yovkov also showed the familiar strength of his realistic vision. "What Pondev draws attention to in the Harvester mini-novel are the "vivid and unforgettable images of the working people of the nation" and the "stirring images of rural burden..." Undoubtedly, these evaluations, serving the communist ideology of the time, are distorted and far from a truly in-depth analysis of Elin Pelin and Yordan Yovkov's works. Therefore, a serious revision and dissociation from the plot of any party ideology, a new reading of the two writers and a rethinking of their literary legacy is more than necessary. In our paper on "Christian Faith and Values in Yordan Yovkov and Elin Pelin's Works", we aim to make a study free of class-party qualifications, with a consistent theological argumentation, in order to get as close as possible to the two writers' Christian worldview as well as to search for the spiritual dimensions of the specific fictional characters in their literary works. Nowadays, the interest in these unsurpassed storytellers continues on the part of literary-science scholars. Some have already matched the flowing humanism of Yovkov's work and the messages of his characters with the Biblical texts, and have looked for comparable motifs among some of his works and passages from Holy Scripture. These researchers are academician Ivan Radev and prof. Tatiana Ichevska, among others. In spite of all these efforts, we can explicitly state there are deep gaps and a wide field of work for analyzing these two authors' writings. Our chosen topic requires a continuous and systematic approach. Even in their early years as writers, there was a great interest in their work among both the general public and literary-fiction critics. Every newly published book of theirs is an occasion for reviews, feedback, studies, and essays. The interest in them, being defined as classics of Bulgarian literature, continues to this very day. This means a considerable literary-critical bibliography has accumulated since the beginning of the XX century. Its study and mastery requires systematic work. The scope is to bring out that extract of this analytical literature to be useful in providing a theological perspective and tracing down how Christian faith and spiritual values fit into Elin Pelin and Yordan Yovkov's fiction works, comparing the common and the different in the rich tonality of their fictional image-drawing.

Prof. Boyan Penev, a Bulgarian literature historian, expressed his standpoint in the first half of the XX century, and so did our talented poet Atanas Dalchev, saying our poets and writers have no interest in religious-philosophical reflections and motives. "We have no religious lyrics, although religious motifs and patterns are found in our poetry. In its 50 - 60 years of existence, Bulgarian literature has not produced a single lyric or epic poet whose work would have the idea of God as its main axis, as in Dostoevsky or R. M. Rilke. The point of our topic is to analyze Elin Pelin and Yordan Yovkov and, comparing them, to prove these observations are superficial and they do not objectively reflect the real creative process of these two great Bulgarian writers.

We would like to draw attention to the fact the idea for the present paper was drawn from the active position of our prominent apologist and teacher, Prof. Dr. Archimandrite Evtimii Sapundzhiev. His seminal study is decisive in this matter. In it, he noted our most talented authors in their time, dwelling on their individual works, using numerous quotations to support his thought, justifying and proving our poets and writers are not only not deniers of religion through their work, but, on the contrary, are themselves worthy apologists and valuable helpers in the ceaseless process of strengthening the human soul in faith. In the ranks of these worthy



names, he has placed Elin Pelin, and he has dedicated a special place to Yordan Yovkov, quoting at length from some of his works, as if to remind us God can be experienced not only through direct study of religion, for example, but also through the excitement, the tears, and sometimes through an artistic touch - all done with a sense of humor, as in Elin Pelin, or in a few words to convey a convincing fiction-psychological portrait of a character, as Yovkov did.

Prof. Dr. Archimandrite Evtimii Sapundjiev knew Bulgarian literature well. For years, he was an editor in the ZOV magazine - in the second half of the 1920s and the first half of the 1930s. The editorial office of the magazine was located in the building of the Faculty of Theology. The publication, as noted under its title, is a "Religious Magazine for Orthodox High School and University Youth. A periodical of the Union of Orthodox Christian Societies of the Studying Youth in Bulgaria". Literally, our best writers in the field of literature found their place in this publication of poetry and fiction. Guided by the trust of our distinguished clergyman and apologist for native writers, our scope is to trace in parallel the Christian faith, rooted in the soul of the Bulgarian and motivating them for life in Yovkov and Elin Pelin's works - both close in terms of the social environment, topics, characters, motives they recreated, and at the same time both being so different in terms of characters and worldview yet both so zealous in their own way apologists of faith - through their personal works. By researching this topic, the task is to pay attention to the fact these two writers created such objective and human fiction worlds where faith is a constant companion in the characters' lives and experiences. We hope to achieve this through a thorough theological-apologetic reading. The scope of the study will be the entire volume of works by Elin Pelin and Yordan Yovkov. Literary analyzes made in different periods - by their contemporaries, as well as later studies dealing with various topics related to their works - shall be used. We are going to apply the method of comparative analysis, as well as all other methods specific for the Christian apologetics, in order to clarify how the Christian faith is present in the works of the two writers - directly or indirectly - through the thoughts, psychological states and actions of the characters. In relation to the structuring of our study, we are convinced it is important to pay attention to every detail of the composition of any work by the two authors. A distinctive part of their stories is the landscape description. In Elin Pelin's works, the temple - the village church - is a permanent element of this landscape. The location of the church in Yovkov's descriptions is also part of the common topic. A separate emphasis of the development can be the consideration of the landscape descriptions in their narratives - just as a window to God's natural revelation: nature as an open book speaking of God. A theological approach to the completion of this task requires the use of appropriate apologetic literature.

An essential part of our topic, "Christian faith and values in Yordan Yovkov and Elin Pelin's works" is the application of one of the main questions in apologetics - the relationship between faith and reason (reasoning), between religion and science. We would look for the application of this dependence in a comparative plan in the works by the two writers. Some of Elin Pelin's stories are defined as ridiculing the clergy. Most probably, the writer's genuine sense of humor contributed to such a perception. A new reading from the apologetics point of view helps us rediscover Elin Pelin and notice the author's mature awareness of the place of faith in a peasant's life (as the writer himself is part of the Bulgarian village) and of the clergy's (spiritual brothers are sometimes also tempted to weaknesses and sinfulness) responsible mission stand out under the layer of anecdotal and immediate humor.

In this study, we would like to allocate a special place to the clergy in the range limits between sin and human morality and greatness. Here, stylistic features, literary touches, rich colors, typical of the two authors, could be sharply distinguished and compared clearly enough. The Russian religious philosopher Nikolay Berdyaev has noted: "Christianity is not only faith in God, but also faith in man, in the possibilities of revealing the divine in man." This correlation is interesting to trace and analyze in a parallel analysis between Yordan Yovkov and Elin Pelin's works. Faith in man, in their core moral nature, aimed at creating good, is an expression of the Christian faith; according to it, people live and act directly or indirectly. It is that essence contributing to the two authors' characters' messages in overcoming specific national borders and/or to acquire a universal humane meaning. Here is the place to look for the bond in the work of the two narrators between the supernatural and the empirically natural world, the relationship between the ethical and the religious, the direct or indirect impact of Christian symbolism and art on the characters' worldview and actions. The belief in God as the main creative factor determines the relationship between the two writers' fiction characters. On the topic of "Christian faith and values in Yordan Yovkov and Elin Pelin's works", it is appropriate to follow it as a separate part in the two authors' writings and to compare how, through the events in the plots and the characters, basic dogmatic categories were interpreted, the most important of them being the triadological canon. It is necessary to trace and separate the main eschatological motifs in the structure of the works as part of the ideological-fiction world, the specificity of their creation in each of the writers. In general, the theological analysis should be dominant in the development of the topic, while the literature-fiction writings we are about to use should complement and support this idea. Christian faith and human moral values form an inseparable unity - this is the main conclusion emerging when considering the works of the two Bulgarian masters of function writing. Examining Yordan Yovkov and Elin Pelin's Christian views and values, we enter the direction of "orthodoxy and fiction literature" - and this further requires an apologetic analysis and a good basic preparation in the field of theology and literature. As we pointed out earlier, the model to be followed and unfold is the Professor Archimandrite Evtimii Sapundjiev's study entitled "Are Bulgarian poets and writers deniers of religion?". The apologist Prof. Dr. Dimo Penkov also works in this direction. His "Religious aspects in Ivan Vazov and Stoyan Mihailovski's works" paper is indicative. In the final part of his research, he has summarized: "The influence of the Holy Scriptures on the new Bulgarian literature in the direction of ideas, plot motifs, imagery and narrative constructions is almost immeasurable, yet it is in general related to the process of rethinking the Biblical texts and interpreting their messages in a new aesthetic system. As this process is extensive, it would not be possible to determine with chronological accuracy when the function of the Biblical Scripture changed in the Bulgarian Renaissance literature - from being a canonical, sacred for the Middle Ages writers, it became a text provoking diverse fiction expressions by the writers from a later era. Creators of cultural values constantly turned to the Word of God as a source for the renewal of life.

Following these productions, we hope to discover in this paper (on this topic) the basic truths of Christian faith and the moral values related to it in human relations - as understood, experienced and recreated in Yordan Yovkov and Elin Pelin's writing fiction. In addition to the positive attitude of the two writers towards religion, it is important to note it was initially a major factor in shaping their worldview and fiction-writing style. Christian faith motivated the

manifestation of moral values as the main guidelines in the life of both the Bulgarian writers and the Bulgarian people.

### **1.6. Dissertation research structure**

In our research, we analytically examine the main works of the two authors, directly related to our topic of interest. We dwell on their early and later works, where the writers' attitude to the Orthodox faith, as well as to faith and Christian morality is sensed as the main plastic component of Bulgarian character trait. Within these works we find the actual message addressed by both Elin Pelin and Yordan Yovkov: sin possesses man, yet not their hope of salvation. In his/her sinfulness, a man strays away from faith, yet they find their true calling - their way to God. In our analysis, we find Elin Pelin's ambivalent attitude to faith and clergy, yet at the end the writer himself preserved himself as a church man and found the fiction form to express himself, as well as the Christian in general, through his unusual collection in our new literature entitled "Under the monastery vine" he had been writing for most of his creative career. In this regard, we are looking for spiritual and moral values and fiction images in the "Under the monastery vine" collection of stories. We pay attention to his writings: we follow the trials on human morality proposed by Elin Pelin where his characters reach moral degradation and complete dehumanization. In his children's stories we find the affirmation of the optimistic beginning, the victory of good over evil - what all younger generations need.

In Chapter 2 of the dissertation we reach the humanism flowing from his work: man is a sinner, blessed by God for/to repentance. This Biblical truth is a companion hidden in man's soul from their early childhood. Yordan Yovkov established himself as a writer with his war stories, where he unfolded the topic of war and the Christian mentality of the Bulgarians. In the course of our research, we draw the conclusion about the specificity of Yordan Yovkov's realism where the soul ascends to God. An important thematic perspective of our dissertation is a distinctive character in the writer's work - Seraphim from Yovkov's story of the same name we derive a projection of the Son of Man from. In general, one may openly find messages consonant with the Biblical timeless values in Yovkov's characters. The Harvester story has a pivotal position in Yordan Yovkov's writings, and it turns out to be a key to the writer's very soul.

In Chapter 3 of the dissertation, Christian spirituality and Christian morality, manifested specifically in Elin Pelin and Yordan Yovkov's works, stand out in a comparative plan. It analyzes how a person stands before God through the fiction sensibility of the two masters of the written word. Perceived superficially as a pantheist by some critics, we come to this conclusion: in fact, the idea of pantheism is incompatible with the writer's religious faith and his works. We find the grounds of suffering raising the soul to God, of course, arouses these critics' literary interest, yet it is exposed with a different interpretation by both of them. In the dissertation, we highlight a separate layer in the structure of human relationships - the conflict between personality and society, refracted through the prism of faith and moral values. Once again, in a comparative plan, we highlight the image of the female temptress in Elin Pelin's Wicked Power story and in Yordan Yovkov's drama called Albena. We try to highlight the eternal topic of sin as a specific trend in both writers' writings.

In the final part, we summarize the ideological and thematic guidelines put on a theological ground by us, offering the possibility of practical applicability of the dissertation, as well as its scientific contribution. We hope our paper offers a new, surprising perspective on Elin Pelin and Yordan Yovkov's works. This viewpoint has its theological grounds and is related to the Holy Scriptures texts. Its primary source is Prof. Archimandrite Evtimii Sapundjiev's idea a large number of Bulgarian writers are not only not deniers of religion, on the contrary, they prove to be valuable apologists of faith through their writings. It turns out the mastery in the realistic recreation of the Bulgarian character in Elin Pelin and Yordan Yovkov's works is due to a large extent of the two writers' skilful insightful depiction, each according to his specific natural look on the specific (unique even) features of the Bulgarian religious mentality from the end of XIX century and in the first couple of decades of the XX century. Undoubtedly, other such studies, placed on theological grounds, on the creativity of our poets and writers will also be definitely useful.

## 2. Chapter 01.

### **Yordan Yovkov: Man is a sinner, blessed by God for/to repentance**

It would hardly be an exaggeration to say Yordan Yovkov is among the first of Bulgaria's writers who recreated how Christian faith and moral values guide a Bulgarian's behavior, actions and life - with such great artistic precision - regardless of the situation they are placed in. The writer reveals his fictional sensibility at a very young age, already in his early work, in an extreme, borderline situation, such as war. Yordan Yovkov participated as an officer in the First and Second Balkan Wars, and later in World War I.

Guided by his faithful feeling of a realist man "of art" in his military stories, Yordan Yovkov created authentic portraits of Bulgarian soldiers on the front. In them, the writer recreated important features of the psychology and character of our compatriots who fought in the Balkan wars. In these stories, the writer depicted and summarized the main features of the moral image of our countrymen at that time. Meditating on these portrait characteristics, we can conclude Bulgarians in the conditions of an actual military situation carried the Eastern Orthodox faith firmly deep in their soul, while they are guided by Christian moral norms in their lives and relations to others. Even at the front, the Bulgarian has a keen sensitivity to the earth as a mother-feeder. This earth, created by God, s/he feels, experiences and devotes her/his work to. In order for their work to be blessed and fruitful, the Bulgarian prayerfully seeks the blessing of their Creator and Maker of everything visible and invisible - the Lord God. The firm conviction Yordan Yovkov expresses in his military stories is this: his innate love for the land and for labour is irrevocably connected to the Orthodox faith and Christian moral values. This unity shaped his character, manifesting itself in the harsh conditions at the front, too.

Yovkov's fictional image of Seraphim from the story of the same name is unique in our new literature - being a projection of the Son of Man descending to earth. Yordan Yovkov's appearance during this period of Bulgarian literature is not accidental. "The Bulgarian world after the wars was waiting for the appearance of an author - a savior of the native/fraternal soul, a preacher of the forgotten God, good, beauty, and love. Yovkov, like every great national author, came to literature at the behest of his time," literary researcher Violeta Ruseva wrote. In her same book, Violeta Ruseva summarized the following about Seraphim: "Seraphim is the end of the journey towards goodness. He is the light God manifested his will in." It seems to us it will not be too much to define Seraphim as a reflection of the divine world, who descended into the mire of the sinful earth to cause something to tremble even among the most sinful men, to made it so that at least for a little while something may convert (or turn) in them... a divine world that has converted the sinful and weak human soul into its temple.

From the mid-1940s to almost the end of the XX century, the Harvester story was placed in the shadow of Yordan Yovkov's famous short story collections. It is obvious this work was uncomfortable for the atheistic ideological system of the 2nd half of the XX century. Yet without it, it is impossible to truly understand the man and the writer Yordan Yovkov. He carried it in himself for at least 20 years, he experienced it, and together with its ideological charge, plot, composition, characters, personalities grew and matured as a writer. He worked on it even before his first war stories and kept revising it until 1930, when it got to its second edition. It is hardly an exaggeration to summarize the Harvester is a key, central work in the

overall Yordan Yovkov's works. In it, he developed the topic of the inseparable connection between hard labour, Christian faith and the moral values observed by the Bulgarian people. The writer picked up this very topic in his military stories, it was close to his heart in his collections of stories, too: *The Song of the Wheels*, *Balkan Mountain Legends*, *A Woman's Heart*, among others.

In the *Harvester* mini-novel, the writer went even deeper into the layers of the dramatic experiences of the Bulgarian soul - the latter has religious and moral orientations above all. The grandfather Nedko, a painter, experienced his repentance - a complex state of mind, an exciting life situation caused by a wounded and lost human soul, where God alone has the power and will to bring it out from, calm it down and heal it; a religious experience recreated so penetratingly and in such a depth that only a writer of Yovkov's rank is able to penetrate. Getting better and becoming established in the difficult field of painting is a process starting from childhood: "Future iconographers (i. e. icon painters) applied for training at an early age, as in all other crafts. In the Middle Ages, painters were mainly monks, while during the Renaissance they were teachers and their training took place in monasteries." It seems to us that, in this sense, Yordan Yovkov could, albeit in a few sentences, represent how the old painter grandfather Nedko developed as an icon painter back over the years, in the spirit of our Renaissance tradition. This would contribute to the fiction logic and the realistic densification of the fiction-literature image.

The deeply intimate act of grandfather Nedko's religious experience related to the miraculous creation of an icon is contrasted with the general celebration on the occasion of the bringing of the threshing machine. Holiday cheer, folks around, hopes for all. The threshing machine is the unifying center of all, it is a symbol of labour and earth fertility, yet in Yovkov's works earthly goods are in direct relation to heavenly goods - heavenly gifts. As the quoted verse in the Book of Revelation makes clear, the Great Harvest begins in heaven - by the One holding the sickle to reap the fields, the ears being the believers following the Harvester. Grandfather Nedko's icon warns: the Harvester is coming down because of the good Christians and the people in Lyulyakovo should get themselves ready. The first thing of this preparation process is the very arrival of the thresher - with the purpose to make the people better, to bring them together, to unite them. The idea of the threshing machine as part of the activity of the village's business cooperation is not only to contribute to greater efficiency of the work of the village community, its meaning is also in the field of Christian ethics - using this machine so relevant for its time in particular, as and through all the cooperation initiative, the main goal is the promotion of Christian faith and moral values among all cooperation members. It is no coincidence the head of this community is the younger priest - Father Docho. "The cooperation does not only provide tangible benefits, it also educates" - the priest answered to teacher Radulov and to all critics of the joint enterprise: through organized labour in the community and in unity towards a stronger Christian faith to follow the Harvester without fail. This is one vector Yordan Yovkov follows throughout his works. Labour and faith are the link between earth and heaven. Labour is not just inevitable work, it is prayerfully spiritualized, as it must prepare the people not only the crop field, but also the souls of the locals for the Great Harvest - souls worthy of the sickle of the Heavenly Harvester.

Yordan Yovkov affirmed it is possible for a person to be at peace with themselves and those around them, if they achieve the unification in a harmonious unity of Christian faith and labour,

that is, to bring together heaven and earth in projection in their soul. A man ascends to heaven - to God - through faith, and through work/labour, they receive God's grace from the earth, giving him not only physical but also spiritual strength. In other words, according to the Harvester mini-novel, Christian spirituality and agricultural work constitute a single whole - and its emanation is the love bequeathed by the Lord Jesus Christ: "And above all this, put on love, which is the bond of perfection - and may the peace of God to reign in your hearts; to him you were also called in one body, therefore be thankful" (Colossians 3:14-15).

It is appropriate to point out the place in the spiritual process of repentance and return to God and the Orthodox faith of the two priests, Father Docho, and the special merit of the elderly father Stefan - the latter enjoying the full trust of both the community and the repentant ones. Father Stefan is distinguished above all by his firm faith and unblemished Christian morality - a strong support and example of morality for every Christian heart and for the entire Christian community. When someone is weak, father Stephen is invariably blessed with calm strength - a true mediator both between God and people in general, and between the Christian community - a bearer of Christian moral values on the one hand, and a soul teller and informal confessor on the other hand - to the penitent members separated from this community because of sinfulness. An undeniably expressive image of a priest with a positive spiritual character who serves as an example not as a patriot, a revolutionary, a rebel who responded to a disobedient call at a specific time, but above all as a cleric of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church. The narrative logic of the Orthodox Christian Yordan Yovkov is explicit - his expressive characters in the Harvester mini-novel, the old icon painter grandfather Nedko and the two enemies Valchan Dukov and Grozdan reach their repentance, they find the strength to forgive each other in order to be fully accepted by the Christian community, that is to say - from God. While the two are at enmity with each other, they remain in sin, only forgiveness and repentance can purify their souls. All three rise to the Lord Jesus Christ, each with their religious experience and purification of the soul - the icon painter, creating the image of the Lord Jesus Christ who had appeared to him, Valchan - receiving the boon of being the donor/sponsor of the icon, and Grozdan, donating a crown of real gold for Christ's image, so that they are part of the mature community of the crop-field of faithful followers, of which the Lord Jesus Christ Himself is the Harvester. In the Harvester mini-novel, Yordan Yovkov examines a conflict between society and the individual who has crossed the line of Christian morality and values driving a community's life. The individual is separated from the vocation of a man to follow God, as the guardian and guarantor of this vocation is the community. Yordan Yovkov tells us the strong factor is community in the times he wrote his stories. The community is the guardian and guarantor for everyone - through the Orthodox faith and Christian moral values it professes and imposes on every member of its group. Those who are separated from it are separated from the faith and Christian morality. The sooner they hear the voice of their conscience, the sooner they experience their repentance before God, the sooner they will be accepted back into the community. This drawing-near force of the community Yordan Yovkov convinces us into, speaks unequivocally about the strong faith of the social wholeness as a guardian of the Orthodox faith and creative moral values, otherwise impossible without this grace work. In Yovkov's world, work gives softness to the heart and joy to the soul. Yovkov's peasant realizes work brings joy, because it is a grace from God, completely in the flow of the Biblical scriptures: "And if a man eats and drinks, and sees good in all his work, it is a gift from God" (Eccl. 3:13). Yordan Yovkov focuses our attention on men, but even in his personal fall, when

reaching down to hopelessness, he instinctively unlocks a concentrated desire for God, being created in the image of God, gifted to be like God, through humility and repentance, he finds his meaning in his life - to follow God again, recognizing His power and authority.

The imposed conclusion is Yordan Yovkov - through the Harvester mini-novel - affirms the inseparable unity between the Christian faith, work and moral values. Without this trinity, it is impossible for a person to lead a full life, they move away from everyone, from full communication, from God, from themselves, away from their basic essence - to live in the image and likeness of God. Work is blessed only through faith, only sincere faith prompts to the two most important commandments - to love God and our neighbor (See: Matt. 22:37-39). The second conclusion is it is possible for a person to fall into grave sin and abandon their faith in their weakness, it is possible even to reach the point of blasphemy, but deep in their soul they keep intact the providence God has placed in them: namely to be God's image and strive for godlikeness (See: Genesis 1:26). We are convinced of this by the turn experienced by the old icon painter - grandfather Nedko, as well as the main character in Grozdan mini-novel. Both return to faith again, they find God again, reaching guileless humility and a religious experience. The mediator in this experience is the image of the Lord Jesus Christ from the icon of the Harvester, depicted by grandfather Nedko's hand. This icon worship is the connection with God, a person feels God's power through it, the power they are subject to. Everyone is called to find the way to God, to follow Him adoringly with hope. They find confidence and strength for this vocation among their loved ones, in the brotherly love of their neighbor, as well as among the Christian faith and values of the entire society - a repentant and humble person joins in - renewed, with a purified soul, and returned to God.

One may claim Elin Pelin and Yordan Yovkov are in the watercourse with the trend in all of our new Bulgarian literature, summarized by Archimandrite Euthymius in his study: "...we have shown the vast majority of our poets and writers are not by conviction opponents of Christianity, and many of them in their writings also show appreciation and reverence for the teachings or at least for the cult of the Church...". Protopresbyter Stefan Tsankov also takes a position on the issue of the Church and these writers, briefly dwelling on the religious views reflected in the work of a number of Bulgarian writers who created their works after the Liberation. Protopresbyter Stefan Tsankov makes a general characterization of the poet Kiril Hristov and Elin Pelin, finding comparatively-comparable elements in a moral sense, one can feel his reticence of a clergyman towards their frivolous statement and to a certain extent a sensual epicurean view of life: "Yet, we also have writers, such as Kiril Hristov, who, especially in his lyrics in his early years (and in contrast to Nikolay Liliev who exalts pure and holy love), sings of "madness in whirlwind delights", or Elin Pelin, who searches through the commonplaces of the people to find and extract precisely that of the religious or clerical life causing pity and laughter. But, despite this, both of them are not principled atheists or embittered detractors of faith and Church". Both Archimandrite Euthymius and Protopresbyter Stefan Tsankov are particularly impressed by Yordan Yovkov's work: "Yet St. Yordan Yovkov stands above all in the horizon of the writer-artist world with his Christian-religious depth, insight and warmth. He is a God-anointed seer in the soul and mystical faith of our people and their fictional re-Creator. Here, he is not affected by any fashion or doctrinaire. He believes in good and its victory over evil. He sees and realizes the power of sin and evil, and even more – the power of redemptive, regenerating and transforming love. And he has this strong, deep faith



only because he believes in God, because he sees God's finger in everything while human destiny is placed in God's hands. Furthermore, this faith is also faith in Jesus Christ - the "good, meek, blessing-giving" Christ, the supreme "Harvester" in the world. What a deep and pure insight, what a captivating Christ, what bright clerics (father Docho, father Stefan) – in the Harvester. Or what a striking illustration of evangelical morality - of sin, conscience and remorse, of mercy, forgiveness and love". It is clear Yordan Yovkov is incomparably better welcomed by the Bulgarian clergy than Elin Pelin. The Harvester mini-novel is especially well received by the clerics, and it convinces us we can define Yordan Yovkov as a religious writer and a believing Orthodox Christian in the spirit of the Bulgarian religious tradition. On this occasion, Archimandrite Evtimii Sapundjiev noted: "Neither did Yordan Yovkov go beyond his role of describing only the religiosity of our people. Yet he touched on it in too many places in his works and with such a deep experience in it a personal, unspoken, religiosity clearly shines through his description. The realistic plot of the story, as well as the relationships between the fictional characters confirm the person is a respected and full-fledged part of the collective Bulgarian community through work the blessing of God is prayed over, and the Orthodox faith imposing in turn a life according to Christian moral values. Those who move away from the faith, are not blessed at work or they break away from it, because Christian faith, moral values and work are in a single inseparable whole for Bulgarians in Yordan Yovkov's stories. Falling away from the faith means falling away from God and giving in to a sinful and vicious life. Despite their weaknesses, God does not abandon them and is ready to welcome (accept) them once again, just as the father welcomed his repentant son in the famous Biblical parable of the prodigal son. God speaks to their souls through the voice of their own conscience. Yordan Yovkov's characters go astray, fall into addiction of their personal sins, but then they meet the firm resistance of the collective, uncompromisingly professing the traditional Orthodox faith, bearer of unadulterated Christian morality. In order to return to the community, they must once again - with deep humility and repentance - rediscover God and the meaning of their life: only through Him. It is no coincidence Archimandrite Evtimii Sapundjiev and Protopresbyter Stefan Tsankov highly appreciate Yordan Yovkov, especially his Harvester mini-novel.

In the course of the plot action of his stories, Yordan Yovkov actually explored and depicted human experiences. Although subjected to various life trials, although obsessed with sinfulness, his characters maintain the connection of the soul with God. This connection is also the golden thread in Yordan Yovkov's works. Through their preserved spirituality, regardless of trials, his characters converse with God. Yordan Yovkov's great mastery consists precisely in recreating this relationship as a religious experience. Even in the most difficult challenges and trials, a character remains in direct contact with God. Therefore, although sinful, Yovkov's characters retain humanism in their soul. According to the logic of his narratives, even the worst sinner experiences a turning point in order to join the religious community - the latter being a moral model for the individual. This is possible because the characters of the Great Creator never lose the divine character of their soul, and never become deaf to God's voice through their conscience.

### 3. Chapter 02

#### **Elin Pelin: Fallen man - a manifestation of Bulgarian contemporary traits**

Elin Pelin is a complex writer, driven by an immediate and strong sense of humor, he has an ambivalent attitude towards faith and its spiritual representatives - priests and monks. This ambivalence is maintained to a certain extent in some clerics from the Bulgarian Orthodox Church as they share a particular opinion towards Elin Pelin's work and allow for the atheistic socialist criticism to interpret and accept him as a non-religious writer. The basis for this is his youthful fascination with the journalism of the social democrat Georgi Kirkov and the populism ideas. The truth is Elin Pelin was interested in Christianity, in the life of clerics and in the living examples of Christian holiness since early childhood in communication with his relative, a priest, probably not quite exemplary in his vocation as a clergyman, who, typical of the priesthood at that time, did not have a higher education, yet kindled interest in our faith in his young relative called Dimitar, the future Elin Pelin. In fact, he kept this interest in faith throughout his active life as a writer. Guided by a strong observation, the writer described sparingly, but with precise details, the essence of the folk faith, invariably sealed (knitted) into the psyche of those struggling with life's troubles, with despair and with the restlessness of the Shopians from his native region. About how organically the folk faith is sealed into the psyche of the peasant, it becomes clear, for example, in the All Saints Day story. People's faith is close, natural and understandable to the peasant, and after all, through this faith, the earthly life of the peasant may become even more stable, even more vital.

It is necessary to conclude Elin Pelin showed an ambivalent attitude towards the Christian faith and towards the clergy who profess it in his stories, written in the first five years of the XX century. This is also due to the influence felt by young teachers and representatives of the Intelligence Circles at that time from the ideas of populism and socialism. On the other hand, part of the clergy, especially in the villages, is not sufficiently prepared to be an encouraging example for strengthening in Christian faith. There is a certain disparity between the growing urge for education and science among Bulgarian people and the theological culture and training among the majority of the Bulgarian clergy at that time. The increase in the level of secular education in the society, as well as the increase in its educational and religious requirements, are out of step with the level of a part of the Bulgarian clergy, as it is not yet prepared for this educational upsurge in order to fully assume its vocation of spiritual leadership. Therefore, there is a discrepancy between the upsurge in science, the accumulated knowledge and education among the more awake layers of the people attracting the younger generation to follow them, and the religious faith preached by a still poorly prepared clergy in relation to the social, economic and cultural dynamics in the post-liberation reality. The great writer perceived this key moment and recreated it objectively using all his creative energy in his stories. In the "Plague of God", a work based on a true story, he developed the topic of the conflict between "knowledge and faith", "science and religion". The plot logic of the narrative unequivocally shows such a conflict is a dead-end road - without a way out and without hope for a final resolution. Elin Pelin was not a religious writer, yet he accurately recreated people's life - meaningful and motivated by the living Orthodox faith. Even in cases of impasse and great suffering, as it separates the individual from the whole society, faith is in their heart and soul. Suffering leads to the Lord even in His denial. For a Bulgarian, God has always been seen as a

personal fast-track assistant or helper, and people protect and follow their ethical values in His name, although this faith is professed naively, far from flawlessly, in a version accessible to the people themselves. Elin Pelin's dignity as a writer is that he captured in his living speech the motives and imperfections in the Bulgarians' practical confession of their primitive Orthodox faith.

The Under the monastery vine series of short stories by Elin Pelin is a unique phenomenon both in the history of our religious fiction and in general - in the history of new and modern literature. For the first time, a Bulgarian writer sought such an immediate way to Bulgaria's native Orthodox faith with the means of fictional literature penetrating the soul of the monastic clergy, and touching the manifestations of holiness.

The book has remained unfinished, yet the writer probably thought about its contents almost until the end of his life. The Law of God and religious readings compiled by him were printed until the beginning of the 1940s, and each of their editions perhaps brought the writer back to the Under the Monastery Vine book. The collection is a surprise even for the readers, contemporaries of the writer, yet it remains a unique and one-of-a-kind phenomenon in Bulgaria's new literature. Above all, an authentic atmosphere is recreated in these stories, placed high above a specific-set time and space. Here the personality of the clergyman, summarized by appearance of the character of father Sisoy, is among the brightest personalities in our literature, illuminated by an inner spiritual light, coming from the purity of his soul, from his heart filled with humanity and goodness, with humility and firm orthodox faith. The Christian basis of this wonderful collection is an expression of Elin Pelin's ambivalent attitude, too: not to the Christian faith, but to the personality of the clergy, since the writer himself was a believing Christian and church-goer. Hence, the Creator entered in this wonderful world filled with reverence, humility and complete trust, and created a world where human sinfulness is also present, yet it gives way decisively to Christian faith and virtue, Christian righteousness everyone needs, regardless of their tangible wealth and knowledge.

Using the texts in the Under the Monastery Vine collection, Elin Pelin restored trust and respect to the personality of the clergyman, and not at the end of his own life. As mentioned, he worked on these stories for more than two and a half decades, and it could even be said this unusual collection is his Kook of Life he left open until his very death - he kept thinking it through and intended to add new works to it.

The Under the Monastery Vine collection should not be seen as an isolated phenomenon in Elin Pelin's work. To us, it is in direct connection and in correspondence with the various textbooks, reading books and christologies for the youngest pupils Elin Pelin wrote or compiled for. These valuable tools, approved by the Ministry of Enlightenment (later to be Ministry of Education), the Holy Synod and other representative state institutions, were used by several generations of Bulgarian children while taking their first steps in the Orthodox faith, re-printed many more times and in large editions. Elin Pelin's active work as a textbook writer and book-author for children continued for several decades. In parallel, he considered and wrote the Under the Monastery Vine collection. Many of his peers and fans were convinced the writer had gone way too engaged in creating books for children, depriving himself of the opportunity to write serious works for adults. However, in our opinion, the truth is his participation in the compilation and writing of textbooks on religious education for the youngest pupils had a beneficial effect in establishing the unique atmosphere this collection is filled with - we could

define it as a paradise in the Bulgarian fiction - without exaggeration - and time has no power or influence over it.

In his three more extensive works - the "Geratsi", "Land" and "Wicked Power" mini-novels, Elin Pelin set basic ethical and moral questions guiding life and defining the moral value system the then Bulgarian community was guided by. The writer's unequivocal message is this: evil spreads and dictates human plans and aspirations in this sinful secular world, as the priest directly says in the "Plague of God" story: "You have sunk up to your neck in sins, you have sold your souls to the devil, you have forgotten fasting and honour, you got drunk and angered God"... These bitter words of the village priest are in unison with the disappointment of the Lord God, spoken more than once in the Old Testament to the Jews and in general to all who live in disobedience to His will: "How long will I endure those to whom I have done so many favours?" (3 Ezra 1:9).

In the Geratsi mini-novel, Elin Pelin recreated a model for manifestations of moral values and Christian faith in the life of a Bulgarian - using the Geratsi clan. In this family community, (the story begins with), the great Christian virtues reign - unity, love, humility and companionship. This archaic community living in the name of God, blessed at first sight, seems to be a small model of the apostles' life after the Lord's Ascension - and the apostles were filled with the Holy Spirit: "And the many who believed had one heart and one soul; and no one called anything his own, but everything was common to them... There was not one among them who was in need; for those who owned lands or houses sold them and brought the price of what was sold and laid it at the feet of the apostles; and it was distributed to each one according to their need (Acts 4:32-35).

"Land" is Elin Pelin's second mini-novel, and it was probably conceived already in the 1920s, and it was published in parts in 1922 in the Gap (Prolom) magazine. The author once again unfolded the motives of greed; in turn when permitted to reach an extreme, invades and sweeps away the true imperishable values stored in the heart, disfiguring and desolating morally, mentally and physically a person. Enyo, the main character in the story, driven by an insatiable possessive passion for land, trampled everything human in himself to reach complete moral degradation. In terms of his greed, he is comparable to Bozhan from the Geratsi, yet driven by the strong boiling blood of his youth, Enyo is even more unrestrained, his negative emotions, pride and malice heat up even more strongly, more unbridled, and the earth attracts him even more passionately. The unbridled greed for land has destroyed the divine image and likeness in him. Instead, he developed the nature of a ravenous wild animal, ready to pounce even on his brother Ivan. Elin Pelin clearly unfolded the image of Enyo, who went through several phases of personality degradation. The beginning is the forsaking of God, and from the standpoint of youth and physical strength it appeared illusory as something innocent a man could live freely and luxuriously without. Losing himself to greed and hatred, Enyo raised his hand to kill his brother - the reason is a piece of his father's field that fell to Ivan during the division. When does one cross the invisible threshold to get Cain's soul? Obviously, this does not happen so quickly, sin has its degrees, and by passing through them, a person has the opportunity to correct themselves. Enyo entered the skin of Cain when he collapsed under the weight of his own spiritual and moral weakness, when he became a wreck in a moral and purely physical sense. Both in the Geratsi and Land, Elin Pelin's decision is to cut down the trees that bring people together and unify, not only to mark the end of a close-knit tribal community, but

also as a symbol of the collapsed religious-moral values in the spiritual world of a man. The oak tree in "Land" does not tower over the ancestral home, as the adorned pine in the Geratsi yard. This is understandable, since the oak is a sacred tree associated with a place where the Christian faith in ancient times was professed with prayer and worship - in the fields where hard work was inseparable from faith and could not be done without God's blessing.

Elin Pelin's third mini-novel - "Wicked Power" - is an unusual work in the new Bulgarian literature in terms of concept and plot. It could be compared to the "Under the monastery vine" collection, although it lacks the positive sound of a monk image, although the abbot of the story - father Gerasim - rather inspires trust and sympathies before succumbing to a deep dependence on the wicked power. "Wicked Power" lacks the spiritual power of a monk or of a layman endowed with the mark of holiness, to not only be a corrective rank, but also to enter into battle with the tempting power of sin and overcome it, that is, defeat it. There is no bright example, no influence of the traditional Orthodox Church to calm, consolidate and impose order and harmony, defeating sin and vice - a deadly counterbalance to Christian ethics, as it is for example in the "Woman with the Golden Hair" story. At the end of the work, the complete victory is for the wicked force, and this creates an impression of incompleteness. Elin Pelin knows this and, just like in the "Under the monastery vine" collection, he understood well the story needed a continuation, not just to seek the volume inherent in a novel, but because the logic of the narrative needed unfolding and development in the direction of confirmation of justice and harmony, not having the vice and weakness of human sinfulness win, but rather to establish peace and just retribution through the blessing of God and the public authority of the Church, to celebrate the Christian faith and moral values. The development of the narrative in this direction would give a complete and harmonious whole.

A connection and continuity could be found among Elin Pelin's three novels: "The Geratsi", "Land" and "Wicked Power", or among the three characters: Bozhan, Enyo and Tsekovitsa, respectively - where the issue in each is moral-related. Christian morality has no place in the thinking and reasoning of any of them. The soul element guiding them is a wicked force - primal malice and insatiable greed. The three fictional characters: Bozhan, Enyo and Tsekovitsa are in graded sequence, with Tsekovitsa at the bottom of this inverted vicious pyramid. By exposing this demonic world where the kiss to the neighbor and the love bequeathed by the Lord Jesus Christ is replaced by a predatory bite, and a neighbor is prey, Elin Pelin ranks among the writers who affirm clearly and with fiction-soaked consistency the Christian morality in the new Bulgarian literature.

## 4. Chapter 03

### Christianity and morality in Yordan Yovkov and Elin Pelin's works

Our goal is to examine the presence of the Christian faith and moral values specifically in Yordan Yovkov and Elin Pelin's works - in a comparative plan.

It is generally known both of them are writers of the Bulgarian countryside, master portrayals of rural characters and souls. Yet any attempt to juxtapose them as writers of rural origin working in the same thematic direction would rather distinguish them than bring them together, even though they lived and worked at the same time. Above all, they are too contrasting as personalities. Their approach to the human psyche is different and they make different discoveries about it. Their sense of humor is dissimilar, although both are generously gifted with it, each of them uses it in their own specific way. Certainly, both of them profess Christian morality and faith, yet everyone has their own vision of morality and faith in the life of a Bulgarian. They both create realistic works, yet each of them has their own principles of realism. Although so different as persons (or: personalities), and therefore as writers, each of them is aware of the significance of the writer in the other. The two established their significance as writers in the genres of short story and mini-novels, yet they diverged from each other as authors, seeking the possibilities of different genre ranges. Elin Pelin devoted himself for years to writings for children, causing critics and admirers to reproach him he was almost wasting his time and wasting his talent by devoting his talent to insufficiently complete literature, creating fairy tales and poems for young readers. Nevertheless, a large part of them remain today among the best works of our literature, created with such heartfelt immediacy and with a subtle sense of humor, in the field of children's fiction. Yordan Yovkov turned to drama and theater to create his plays "Albena", "The Millionaire", "Boryana". "Ordinary Man". There is no shortage of critics, but the truth is Yordan Yovkov remained true to himself, to his spiritual humanism, bequeathing some of the most significant works in the Bulgarian dramaturgy. They both have their novels, and these shall stay in Bulgaria's cultural history. The fact Elin Pelin wrote the first Bulgarian fantasy novel for children - "Ian Bibiyan", consisting of two parts - "Ian Bibiyan. The amazing Adventures of a Kid" (1933) and "Ian Bibiyan on the Moon" (1934). The result of Yordan Yovkov's searches in the genre of the novel are the "Homestead by the Border" and the "Gorolomov's Adventures". Some researchers attribute the "Harvester" to this genre, too.

Satirical negativism Elin Pelin portrays the clergy by, this skepticism towards the clerics, this position of his as a doubter in relation to religion and in particular the Christian creed is undoubtedly related to the deficiency of Christian moral and ethical values professed in the Geratsi mini-novel, at the expense of the moral decay erupting and spread among the majority of the characters in the mini-novel and the literary characters and the plot unfold on the basis of it. In his work, Elin Pelin targeted the vices ruling and deforming the moral nature of man, who finds themselves faced with the challenges of modern post-patriarchal reality. His rebuke as a writer is in harmony with the instructive words of one of the great saints and universal teachers, Saint John Chrysostom, who, in his comparison of royal power and wealth with true Christian piety, noted: "So, indeed, a king is he who conquers anger and envy and lust, submits

everything to God's laws, keeps his mind free and does not allow the passions to possess the soul with pleasures. I would like to see such a man ruling over nations, over land and sea, over cities and provinces, and armies; because the one who has subjugated the passions of the soul over reason, they would easily rule over people - according to divine laws..." The deficit of Christian morality worried Yordan Yovkov, too; he focused the reader's attention on this topic - in his own way. This feature of Yordan Yovkov's work, rather his concern and message as a writer, is noticed by Stoyan Iliev: "For a writer, man's trouble is not they make their living by the sweat of their brow, but in enmity among people, in the lack of love among them. Greed, selfishness, vengeful malice are the main cause not only of mutual alienation, but also of all the disasters and sufferings of people." Lack of love, spreading greed, selfishness, malice... Elin Pelin and Yordan Yovkov are convinced of these priorities of sinfulness. Both confess - in their works - a deficiency of Christian ethics among the people. It is their moral belief uniting them as individuals and writers. In his work, Yordan Yovkov, unlike Elin Pelin, is inclined to reconcile people, to achieve peace with themselves, but also with others; faith in God and goodness sent by God, brotherly love and virtue free man from the shackles of sin. Moral optimism is a unique trait in Yordan Yovkov as a writer. This optimism, spiritualizing and elevating, triumphs in the "Boryana" play as opposed to the Geratsi mini-novel where alienation, greed and vice rule over man, leaving them weak and helpless in front of their worldly worries. Zlatil's family ("Boryana" play) goes in the direction of Elin Pelin's Geratsi - towards alienation, and it is distinguished by a devaluation of moral values, where brotherly love gives way to selfishness, greed, hatred among Zlatil's three sons: Raly, Andrey and Pavli. The immediate motive to the outbreak of these vices is Zlatil's hidden money, and this secret ignites alienation, greed, anger and hatred among the brothers. Up to this point, one can indeed suggest something in common with the situation among the characters and actors in the Geratsi mini-novel and the "Boryana" play. That's why after the premiere of "Boryana" Elin Pelin announced Yordan Yovkov "had robbed" him, but obviously this accusation is hasty and unfounded. The play takes a completely different direction with the appearance of Boryana on the stage. Her young spirit, accompanied by physical and moral beauty, her heartfelt unadulterated purity, frankness and immediacy in relations with the members of the numerous family won the trust and awakened the Zlatil clan head's conscience. Boryana's expressive personality gradually won everyone's sympathy, finally even of the eldest brother Raly and his wife Vida. This is evidenced by the excited words of the middle brother Andrey: "Ah, Boryana, Boryana! She is worth more than money, more than property. When was this in our home? Not even a swallow comes to build a nest, and there are no storks at our house! People have it, we don't have it, as if we are cursed by God. And hey, a bird came to the house and sang!" What changes the people of the whole household is precisely the realization of the truth, being actually biblical, as it is contained in the Lord Jesus Christ's Testament. There is something more important than the accumulation of tangible wealth in order for a man to please God and remain forever alive before Him: "Provide purses for yourselves that will not wear out, a treasure in heaven that will never fail, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also." (Luke 12:33). Moreover, comparing Boryana to a singing bird can be taken as a hint of the coming of the Holy Spirit, who blesses this house burdened and gray with sedition and elevates it above the power of malice, greed and avarice. In the image of Boryana, we also discover the theme of the birds sacrificed to God by the poor - the dove and the cuckoo, as the Virgin Mary and Joseph the Betrothed brought

Jesus Christ into the Jerusalem Temple when he was 40 days old, to offer as a sacrifice two turtledoves or two doves according to God's law (Luke 2:22-24). Boryana, in addition to an allusion to the Holy Spirit, is also a sacrificial bird - she chose to get married for the youngest brother Pavli, to lay down herself and thus restore peace and Christian love in Zlatil's home. Yordan Yovkov writes in the popular belief about the sanctity of a seemingly insignificant bird like the cormorant: according to it, whoever raises their hand on it, they neglect the sacrificial bird before God, this is blasphemy against the Holy Spirit himself, and this is not forgiven, as it is also written in the Gospel: "And everyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven, but anyone who blasphemes against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven" (Luke 12:10). In a quote by Edrew, Andrey's friend, the writer gives a life expression to what was said in the New Testament: "Once upon a time, when I was a hunter, I went through the forest. I saw two little gourds on a tree, stupid little goshawks. I did not need them, but I raised the rifle and ban! – I killed them both! (Silence.) Later, two of my children died... And I kept thinking: I shouldn't have killed them...' Here is the reason for repentance and humility before the One who renders justice to all for their deeds. For Yordan Yovkov, similar touches of folk beliefs and faith are typical, thus enriching one's unique personality, and at the same time imbue the work with an element of spirituality. This technique, no less often and prominently, was also used by Elin Pelin, as this is an invariable side of expressive fiction realism, of course, each has it in their own way.

Yordan Yovkov, in turn, in his realistic drawing strives for a stylization in the creation of his fictional characters. Despite the dark social reality in Bulgaria at that time, despite the human weaknesses of character, despite the wanderings among sinful passions, the character reaches humility with it, to repentance in his religious experience, in order to achieve a religious catharsis when they turn to God for their salvation and return to Christian moral values. Comparing Elin Pelin and Yordan Yovkov, Toncho Zhechev wrote about Elin Pelin: "Everything in his prose is classically simple, clear, paganly cheerful. It can be said he is the most un-book, bookless Bulgarian writer. No one knows how to shorten the distance between life and literature like him, to put one, as it were, in direct contact with reality itself, with the angular phenomena themselves in all their diversity and vital fullness".

It is not so with Yordan Yovkov. It can even be said the exact opposite is unique of him. Yet, he is perfect in his works, too - just like Elin Pelin is. The scandal about literary theft, no matter how ridiculous it actually is, is not accidental precisely because one always has a sense of secondary processing of something already known, seen and heard, honored or told... with Yordan Yovkov. With his mini-novel art of fiction, Bulgaria's literature received a high fiction-artistic form, the right to exist in the highest spheres of the spirit... Even with Stoyan Mihailovski and Pencho Slaveykov, we are talking about an art focused mainly on moral issues..." It seems to us the expression "... mainly on moral issues... is too general for these writers and too distant from Stoyan Mihailovski's religious work, as well as from the deep religious experiences of the old icon painter Grandfather Nedko and Grozdan from the Harvester mini-novel and Zlatil in the "Boryana" play by Yordan Yovkov. Toncho Zhechev's observation the poet Stoyan Mihailovski and the novelist Yordan Yovkov can and should be compared in a future comparative analysis is completely justified, based on the specific features of the religious dimensions and the features of how religion and religious morality are included in the works of both authors. It is appropriate to recall the conclusion made by Dimo Penkov



in his study devoted to the religious aspects of Stoyan Mihailovski's poetry: "Stoyan Mihailovski is the only poet in Bulgarian literature who created a complete religious work." Yordan Yovkov is a writer who tells us how Christian faith and Christian moral values renew both the individual and the whole community and fill people with optimism and gratitude to God. With Yordan Yovkov, religion is more present as a support and a frank motivation for the life of his characters. The Christian faith in Yordan Yovkov's work predetermines and models the moral appearance of the characters, it characterizes the behaviour, the way of communication, the attitude of a person to a person, the Christian faith as an initial force plastically sculpts both human and landscape reality, the attitude of a person to a person to themselves, and towards humanity, too, the love for the piece of their field and storehouse, but also for the land in general as a creation of God. Yordan Yovkov is a writer of the one who carries and experiences God in themselves, as well as all of nature as God's creation and brings awareness that their labour is a gracious gift from the Heavenly Creator. All this constitutes that holy trinity, Ivan Sarandev wrote about: "In his prose and dramas, he proposed his moral and aesthetic model of human behavior, social relationships - combined in one the moral and aesthetic maxims tested over the centuries in order to raise them to the tablets of a philosophy of life, consistent with the changes occurring in Bulgaria after the wars. The writer built this worldview doctrine on three principles - man, labour and nature. Yovkov is convinced the violation of this trinity will confront society with tragic trials."

As a conclusion, we can derive the thesis that when we look for the dimensions of pessimism and optimism in Elin Pelin works, we also discover the writer's ambivalent attitude. In his mini-novels and in some of his short stories, pessimism has the last word, yet optimism triumphs indisputably in his "Under the Monastery Vine" collection. The basis of this optimism is the Christian faith and the ethical values derived from it. Elin Pelin's message through this unique narrative cycle in Bulgarian literature is this: faith is the true source of resilience and optimism. The extraordinary atmosphere stories in it are filled with carries the suggestion God's all-seeing eye and God's just judgment for all penetrate over the whole earth - and this is in the spirit of what was sung by the psalmist: "The eyes of the Lord are turned to the righteous, and His ears - to their cries" (Ps. 33:16). The pessimism typical of Elin Pelin's stories is actually an indirect pointer to the optimistic beginning in life. If pessimism is the direction for all those who dare to live without God, that is, the direction of human and moral degradation, then optimism is the opposite side - vertically, towards the Christian faith and towards God, the Heavenly Creator of all good things. In this sense, both Elin Pelin and Yordan Yovkov are writers, apologists for the optimistic beginning, apologists for the Christian faith and the moral values glorifying it.

Elin Pelin and Yordan Yovkov are not ecclesiastical writers, yet as artists endowed with extraordinary sensitivity, each of them portrays, according to their individuality, the religious spirit of entire generations of Bulgarians, bearers of personalities, characters and virtues that have long since subsided in the irretrievable past. The research we conducted has convinced us the Orthodox Christian faith is unconditionally preserved in their psyche. Already in the first decades of the XX century, when the two writers were working, an unhealthy interest in the heresy of Bogomilism and other Eastern esoteric teachings was provoked among the public, and these were promptly denounced and rejected by the Bulgarian Orthodox Church. However, during the mentioned period, a few writers tried, under the cover of cheap patriotism or out of

unhealthy interest, to turn their eyes again to these heresies and teachings, although these had never found fertile ground in Bulgaria and are far from the traditional Bulgarian Orthodox faith. Their writings, in general, do not have a high fiction value and do not touch the essence of Bulgarian religiosity or the moral values associated with it either. To those who try to popularize and provoke interest in these foreign to Bulgarian national studies, we will point to the work of our literature classicists Elin Pelin and Yordan Yovkov, who depict with convincing fictional-artistic realism both the life and the soul of our ancestors, as inimitable exponents of the Bulgarian language, remain forever connected with the God-inspired teachings of Orthodox Christianity.

## 5. Conclusion

In conclusion, let us return again to Archimandrite Prof. Evtimii Sapundjiev studies, entitled "Are Bulgarian poets and writers deniers of religion?", in order to express our sympathy for it and to answer firmly in turn Elin Pelin and Yordan Yovkov do not only not deny the Christian religion and the moral values derived from it, but through their fiction work they affirm the Christian faith. It would not be an exaggeration to define them as writers apologists of the Eastern Orthodox faith and Christian moral values, primal and initial for Bulgarians.

Of course, their apology is not expressed in specific didacticism, with journalistic pathos and direct edification or in the form of literary syncretism. On the contrary, both writers were gifted with a fine sensibility as artists of the word regarding setting a plot and logical sequence in the unfolding of the former, and action, compositional unity and construction of individual characters. In all this unified whole, Christian faith and morals are an invariable and essential part of the colorfulness of their works. Christian faith is inscribed in the very personalities of their fiction characters, in their psychological profile, among the deepest layers of their soul. In fact, the most expressive touches in their work are the ones of the Christian faith and ethical values of the former Bulgarian peasants - our ancestors and peer/contemporaries of the two writers. Naturally, each of them has their own individual physiognomy as a creator, his own perception of the world, his own sensitivity, handwriting, sense of humor, his own individual heartfelt look into the soul of a Bulgarian man or woman. It is obvious the Bulgarian Church favoured Yovkov at that time. His characters, although reaching a conflict with the church institution and even open blasphemy in their despair, as is the case with the old painter Grandpa Nedko and with Grozdan from the Harvester mini-novel, at one point reach humility, realize their grave sinfulness, reach to a true religious experience, raising their soul in search of God's condescension, expressed through an unexpected invention, a great creative realization of grandfather Nedko himself, creating an extraordinary icon - the Lord Jesus Christ himself, standing in a field of ripe wheat. Let's pay attention to the fact grandfather Nedko is a belated representative of the old school of painting, of the revival Christian art, and not of the modern artistry arising at the turning of the 20th century. It was this talented and modest man who appeared as a provocateur and a rebel against the Church, desperate because of the failures in his personal life. This contrast between revivalist religious traditions and the rebellion of a man with one foot in the age of modernity is dramatic, it is a borderline historical situation where Christian faith takes over. Grandfather Nedko, as well as Grozdan, and his enemy Master Valchan, return to the faith, in other words, to the two first commandments of Lord Jesus Christ: love the Lord your God and your neighbor (Mark 12:30-31), as you worship and trust God's power and might. The changing direction of life and the new socio-economic trends were not a contradiction and a confrontation with the Christian faith and Christian moral values. Therefore, this overcoming doubt by faith, reaching the point of blasphemy, and returning back to this very society as a guardian of this Christian faith as a deep spiritual turning point rising to God, appeals to both Archimandrite Prof. Evtimii Sapundjiev and Protopresbyter Prof. Stefan Tsankov. Moreover, Elin Pelin is a contemporary of this borderline historical situation between the archaic society, where religious faith, brotherly love and companionship are leading, together with the advancing modernity, although it was yesterday's archaic representative. But the new age appears hostile to the archaic family. According to Elin Pelin,

in this borderline situation, the majority moves away from God, the person begins to rely only on themselves and his own strength, until he reaches complete alienation and helplessness. This is the beginning of the moral and physical degradation of man. In this disastrous process, when both the farmer and the representative of the civil authority and even the monk reach their fall and madness, there is no room for repentance and for turning back to God. According to this indicator of the borderline situation, Elin Pelin and Yordan Yovkov hold radically different positions as individuals and writers, creating their original works and typical fiction characters. This research on Elin Pelin and Yordan Yovkov's works was inspired by the studies of Prof. Archimandrite Evtimii Sapundjiev "Are Bulgarian poets and writers deniers of religion?". In his work, he lists the names of many writers, and to many of them he applies quotations from their works, in order to prove Bulgarian writers not only do not deny the Christian faith, but, on the contrary, their work is in resonance and in harmony with the Christian faith. In this study, Prof. Archimandrite Evtimii Sapundjiev mentioned Elin Peli, while he even uses lengthy quotations by Yordan Yovkov as proof of his thesis. Inspired by this great apologist's studies, we have tried to understand what place Christian faith and Christian moral values have taken in the work of these two great Bulgarian writers. Although quite a lot has been written about them, it turned out the theological basis, from the point of view of Orthodox Christianity, we placed their work on is an unusual and useful research perspective, unexpectedly presenting the two writers in a different light. In the course of the work, we had to enter into an extraneous polemics with literary critics who impose their atheistic understanding in the interest of a certain political conjuncture, which is, for example, an extremely distorted reading of the true Elin Pelin. In our research, we were able to trace and reflect the movement of the main trends in literary studies made by their contemporary peers and up to the present day about the two writers. We hope what we have done on the topic is going to be useful for pupils, students, teachers and researchers of our classicists - the writers Elin Pelin and Yordan Yovkov. Our paper, we hope, proves how useful they can be and what interesting revelations can lead to the interpretations of the work of these great Bulgarian writers, placed on a Christian Orthodox basis, but above all, a good theological preparation is needed for that. Moreover, such research should be done by religious people with sufficiently rich religious experience.

We hope our dissertation offers a new perspective on Elin Pelin and Yordan Yovkov's work. This view has a theological basis and is related to the Holy Scriptures. Its primary source is Prof. Archimandrite Evtimii Sapundjiev's idea a large number of Bulgarian writers are not only not deniers of religion, but on the contrary: they prove to be valuable apologists of faith through their works. It turns out the mastery in the realistic recreation of the Bulgarian personality and character in Elin Pelin and Yordan Yovkov's works is due to a large extent to the skilful insightful depiction by the two writers, each according to their specific naturel, of the characteristic features of the Bulgarian religious mentality at the end of XIX century and in the first decades of the XX century. Undoubtedly, other such studies, placed on a theological basis, on the creativity of our poets and writers will also be useful. According to the realistic work of the two writers we have analyzed, Christian faith and the morality associated with it is an invariable part of the character and personality of the Bulgarian people. Elin Pelin and Yordan Yovkov's message is unequivocal: if a person loses faith and trust in God, they experience a moral decline, reaching a complete degradation of one's personality. Yet there is hope for everyone. It goes through humility, repentance, a religious event, thus enriching the religious past experience, and one finds again - through it - the way back to faith and God. Regarding

this message, the two Bulgarian literature classic authors complement each other. Our dissertation confirms Prof. Archimandrite Evtimii Sapundjiev's thesis they are not only not deniers, but are undoubtedly expressive apologists - through their colorful world of plots and literary characters - of the Orthodox faith.

## **6. Main contributing ideas in the dissertation:**

**6.1.** For the first time, a theological analysis of the Christian messages and moral values in selected Yordan Yovkov and Elin Pelin's works was carried out. We find the Orthodox faith and Christian values are the basis of their creative writings. They are a starting point, catalyst, criterion and logical motives for their literary characters and personalities, an unchanging tone and touch in the portraiture of both their individual fiction characters and the society as a whole.

We disprove a false notion imposed during the years of atheistic power, and in later decades, literary criticism unequivocally suggested Elin Pelin and Yordan Yovkov were not believers.

**6.2.** The argumental approach in our dissertation from the position of Orthodox apologetics to the ideological encroachments of atheistic critics is of a useful contribution nature, too.

**6.3.** The numerous Biblical quotations are proof tElin Pelin and Yordan Yovkov's works are in harmony and in the spirit of the divinely inspired word.

**6.4.** We refute attempts to associate Yordan Yovkov's works with the ideas of pantheism, as it leads to atheism only.

**6.5.** We explicitly distinguish Elin Pelin and Yordan Yovkov's works from the obsessions of their contemporary peers, such as Nikolay Rainov, on the false teachings of Bogomilism and other esoteric trends.

**6.6.** We consider Elin Pelin's textbook work and his famous works for adults, such as the "Under the Monastery Vine" collection, as a single, logically grounded whole, fully and best representing the writer on the topic we have set.

**6.7.** We have come across a number of archive papers with the St. Cyril and St. Methodius National Library, the scientific archive with the Bulgarian Academy of Science, the Central State Archive, the Rila Monastery library, some unknown or forgotten, yet referring to them proved to be useful and fruitful, with their indisputable contribution.

## **7. Related Publications**

**Bonov, J.** - "Spiritual and moral values and images in the "Under the monastery vine" collection by Elin Pelin". Thoughts, words, text - Paisiy Hilendarski Plovdiv University Publishing House, volume 15 (21), new series 2024. The collection is published in the Bulgarian portal for open science. ISSN 2815-2816.

**Bonov, J.** - "Seraphim, the Protagonist of Yordan Yovkov's Story of the Same Name, as a Projection of the Son of Man." Library, Sofia, year XXX, No. 1, 2023. ISSN 0861-847X.

**Bonov, J.** - "Christian Faith and Values in Yordan Yovkov and Elin Pelin's works". Theological Thought, an. XXVI, issue. 2/2021. ISSN 1310-7909.