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**HESYCHASTIC THEMES AND MOTIVES IN THE UNIVERSAL  
LITERATURE: TOLSTOY, SADOVEANU, DOSTOEVSKY**

**Summary of the PhD. paper**

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## Summary

The paper entitled *Hesychastic themes and motives in the universal literature: Tolstoy, Sadoveanu, Dostoevsky* aims at establishing a possible repertoire of literary themes and motives inspired by the hesychastic values and at verifying such a repertoire as a valid reading grid, by practically applying it in literary analyses, done on famous or less famous texts, signed by three huge names of Russian and Romanian literature: Leo Nikolaevici Tolstoy, Mihail Sadoveanu and Fyodor Dostoevsky.

In order to achieve such an aim, the research had first to decode the notion of *hesychasm* and list a series of "hesychastic universals" (should they exist), universals that shape out a specific vision and a particular cognitive model encapsulated by the *Hesychastic movement*, seen as a spiritual and cultural trend belonging to the Christian Eastern Church. This early stage of research implied the use of the *cultural-historical method*, by which the historical trajectory of the development of Hesychasm, as a specific Christian spiritual trend, has been followed throughout its three major historical ages, that is: the Sinaitic Hesychasm (of the first Christian centuries), the Athonite one (of the Middle Ages) and the Neo Hesychasm or the Paisian Hesychasm (belonging to the XVIII<sup>th</sup> century).

The historical view presented by the first theoretical chapter (entitled "*The Hesychasm: spiritual phenomenon, doctrine or vocation ?*") did not result though in a simple list of names and facts, chronologically ordered, but it is rather a presentation of Hesychasm as a phenomenon that has been continuously extremely sensitive to the political and cultural movements taking place within the Byzantine Empire and throughout the whole Europe. The presented facts and their implications led also to a definition of Hesychasm that tries to capture its essence and distinctive markers. According to the lines of our research, Hesychasm would thus be: "*[...] a spiritual way specific to the Christian Eastern Church, having its origins in the Judaic tradition of the eremitic prophets. Its technique resides in the continuous repeating of the so-called Jesus Prayer (a one-line prayer with the text: «Lord Jesus Christ, son of God, have mercy on me, the sinner»), practiced by the special method of lowering one's mind in his/her heart. The phenomenon has an esoteric nature from all points of view, a fact that implies the obligatory presence of an experimented guide in the practicing of this prayer, and also the crossing, by the disciple, of a trajectory of spiritual refinement*

*that implies the stages of purification, enlightenment and perfection. The ultimate purpose of this practice is the communion of the human person taken as a whole, body and spirit, with God and the outreach of the supra-human stage of an in-God person "* (see our paper, in the Romanian version, p.67).

In the end of this first historical and conceptual debate, we proceeded to establishing a possible repertoire of literary hesychastic themes and motives among which we counted: *the theme of loving the beauty and saving oneself through the love for beauty, the metaphysics of silence, the model of the philokalic man, the pilgrim's theme, of God's poor beggar and of the lunatic into Christ, the motif of the monastic seclusion and the theme of the retirement into the wilderness, the desert theme, the theme of the spiritual father, the motif of obedience and of abandoning one's self will, the theme of the time distinction between the contemplative time and the daily time and, of course, the prayer theme.*

Once determined such a repertoire of literary themes and motives of hesychastic origin, we proceeded to applying it as an analytical system on different literary works belonging to the Eastern literatures. In the second part of our paper, entitled "*Tolstoy's Father Serghi and Sadoveanu's Father Natanail*", we fully employed *the comparative method* into building a study of *comparative literature* between the famous tolstoian short-story *Father Serghi* and the less known novel *Demon of the youth (Demonul tinereții)* signed by the Romanian writer Mihail Sadoveanu (1880-1961). The two literary works have been selected as such because they display such a resemblance of both epical line and artistical means, that they could actually be considered two artistical literary fulfilments of the same initial project.

Our *hermeneutical approach* focused, as expected, on the analysis of the two protagonists of these literary works, and that is prince Stepan Kasatsky retired from the tumultuous life of the Imperial Russian Court among walls of monastery, where he is to be forever Father Serghi, a solitary contemplative monk, a hesychast and a healer, and the former student in medicine Naum Popovici, who, due to an unhappy love story would give up his wordly life, drop University and become Father Natanail, a monk, a priest and also, a healer. Our study meant to underline, however, the fact that the literary character is not and should not be considered the only vehicle of the hesychastic themes and motives in the text. In his subsidiary, there are other levels of analysis that could reveal different means for the presentification of the hesychastic themes in the text, and thus we dedicated here distinct

paragraphs to what we have called "*the hesychastic nature*", "*the hesychastic topology*", "*the hesychastic metatemporality*", or even "*the hesychastic sonorous universe*". In this way, we aimed at giving evidence for the fact that the literary themes and motives of hesychastic inspiration are extremely complex, conceptually speaking, and they therefore employ an equally complex series of literary means of expression, in which the literary character of hesychastic profile is but one means of presentifying such a theme in a literary work.

As a *tertium comparationis* we have included in our study the unfinished novel entitled ***Song of the ewe (Cântecul mioarei)***, signed by the same great Romanian novelist Mihail Sadoveanu. The third term brought into comparison is an unfinished story of an unjustly condemned to prison young mechanic, who would escape to the mountains and become a solitary monk, spending twenty-five long years, only in the company of his book of prayers, his dogs and a passing-by shepherd, every now and then. The text, though unfinished has a fantastic richness of literary refinement and force of expression, and helps us bring into discussion interesting aspects of our topic, such as the national features of hesychasm, in relation with the Romanian hesychastic tradition as compared to the Russian one.

The last chapter of our study, entitled "***For a dostoevskian hesychastic anthropology***" makes the attempt of applying the hesychastic themes and motives analysis grid to the works of the famous Russian novelist, Fyodor Mihailovici Dostoevsky. For such a purpose we selected three of the novels from his last period of creation, that is ***The Idiot*** (1868), ***Demons*** (1871-1872) and ***The Brothers Karamazov*** (1879-1880). Taken into consideration that, in fact, the whole dostoevskian literary work can be considered a single stream-novel with autobiographical hints, a single novel focused on a single type of character, and that is the type of the ideal man, we directed our discussion towards the section on which this ideal dostoevskian man coincides with the philokalic- hesychastic man, and we concluded that they share their defining essence, which is the constant preoccupation for identifying beauty in the world and for restoring its dignity, within a society that has abolished for long any need for beauty and any consideration for its soteriological function.

In our discussion on the dostoevskian texts, we have come to obtain derived concepts such as ***the pseudo-hesychasm or the anti-hesychasm***, concepts that are extremely well literarily portrayed by famous dostoevskian characters such as Semion Iakovlevici (from

*Demons*) or the Grand Inquisitor (from the last dostoevskian novel, *The Brothers Karamazov*).

**In conclusion**, we can state that the Hesychasm is a spiritual trend specific to the Christian Eastern Church which has not secluded itself within the boundaries of the theological-doctrinary language, but expressed its conceptual richness and its profound vision in the secular culture as well, especially in literary shape. From this prospective, we can speak of a repertoire of literary themes and motives of hesychastic origin, and even of a hesychastic type of literary character, that build up together a reading grid for the great public and a hermeneutical lens for specialists, that can be applied not only to old literature of religious inspiration, but also to modern and contemporary literature. The hesychastic message, of which validity is ageless, can still offer answers, even nowadays, to a humanity absorbed by the non-spiritual and by the a-sacrality.

**\*\*\* This text represents the English version summary of the PhD. paper entitled *Hesychastic themes and motives in the universal literature: Tolstoy, Sadoveanu, Dostoevsky* (in Romanian: *Teme și motive isihaste în literatura universală: Tolstoi, Sadoveanu, Dostoievski*), a PhD. paper signed by NICOLETA-GINEVRA BACIU (ginevra.baciu@yahoo.com), that has been scientifically supervised by PhD. prof. VIORICA S. CONSTANTINESCU and it has been presented within the PhD paper defense session at the University "Alexandru Ioan Cuza", in IAȘI, ROMANIA, in the 28<sup>th</sup> of September, 2013, at the Department of Compared Literature.**