

**“GEORGE EMIL PALADE” UNIVERSITY OF MEDICINE,  
PHARMACY, SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY OF TÂRGU MUREŞ**

**DOCTORAL SCHOOL OF LITERATURE, HUMANITIES AND APPLIED SCIENCES  
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**DOCTORAL THESIS  
SUMMARY**

**PhD Candidate:**

**Ioana Alexandra BORZOŞ (DĂLĂLĂU)**

**PhD Supervisor:**

**Prof. univ. dr. Dorin ŞTEFĂNESCU**

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**THE POETRY OF IOAN ALEXANDRU. THE  
HERMENEUTICS OF SPIRITUAL EXPERIENCE**

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# **The poetry of Ioan Alexandru. The hermeneutics of Spiritual Experience**

Spiritual experience describes the perception of God's reality through intuition, direct experience or penetrating understanding, engaging man in a process of internalizing the real, making him aware of God. Ioan Alexandru, the hymn poet who knelt on the sidewalk in prayer when it seemed to him that his prayer was needed, tried to arm his creation with a speech pleasing to God.

Searches, desire for sacrifice, extraordinary love for all creatures, pronounced patriotism are not only themes and motives of lyrical creation, but also concrete spiritual experiences of his life. Ioan Alexandru's poetry has as its object a search for meaning in life through spiritual experience, through responsibility towards man's destiny. The poet strove to engage the sacred in existence, and the solution he found was the hymn. The spiritual experience thus manifested itself meaningfully in the hymns, but also in the debut poems, where God was perceived in the concrete of ordinary life. The horse's hoof, the grass, the fountain, the bell, the village, the sea float ecstatically in the presence like a breeze of God. The poems show the exaltations of the soul, the white breaks that bring the soul close to the Christian light.

The title of the research project, Ioan Alexandru's Poetry. The hermeneutics of the spiritual experience outlines the two components of the thesis and foreshadows the creative and spiritual trajectory of Ioan Alexandru.

The bibliographic support related to the research subject (studies and critical publications, essays, dictionaries of symbols, publications and the work of the poet, interviews, as well as the poet's diary where the conceptions of numerous themes found in poetics are outlined: peasants, homeland, love, the poet, the village, the family, the trip) give the thesis a scientific character of research applied to the text and the context.

In order to have a clear vision of the spiritual experience reflected in the poetry of Ioan Alexandru, I considered the Bible, the teachings of the holy Fathers, theological articles or volumes, as well as the volumes of essays and epistles in which the poet clearly outlines his

conceptions of life. I thus noticed that the poems are closely related to the essays, to the epistles, having the same vision of life and the same theme, focusing a deep spiritual experience.

In the analytical process, methods such as the comparative and biographical method, analysis, deduction, analogy, the similarity of the message of some poems with biblical teachings were used, all of which made it possible to reveal the ontological significance of the poems.

The originality of this thesis consists in the systematic analysis of the poetry of the writer Ioan Alexandru from the perspective of spiritual experience, but especially the rediscovery of the Hymns as ascetic and kerygmatic poems, based on the theological hermeneutics of the poems, the identification of symbols with mystical radiation and the sacred. The spiritual perspective tends to impose another point of view on the lyric, from the perspective of the poetic imaginary and sacred symbolism, giving a superior coherence to his creation, as a whole. Ioan Alexandru was a poet, essayist and politician, but he stood out largely because of his religious pathos, a pathos that spills over into his entire work. We believe that a careful analysis of Ioan Alexandru's work from the perspective of spiritual experience and ascetic and kerygmatic poetry is essential.

The objectives of the thesis consist in analyzing the work of Ioan Alexandru from the perspective of the spiritual experience that valorizes poetry through beliefs from the religious system; observing the way in which the relation to poetry is expressed, by calling on metaphors of the divinity and referring to experiences in the spirit of Christian perceptions in their perfected forms; observing the historical-religious personalities that fascinated Ioan Alexandru and how they are reflected in the poems; highlighting the expressionistic characteristics of the poet's debut poetry from the perspective of spiritual experience; the reception of the work in a political and cultural context, observing the common characteristics of the works of the poets of the sixties, from which we have selected some poets of the generation such as Nichita Stănescu, Ana Blandiana, Cezar Baltag, Constanța Buzea and Grigore Hagiu; observing the essential truths of the human spirit reflected in the John-Alexandrine work; outlining the way in which the peasant (in his various poses - mother, father, farmer, army leader, etc.) is reflected in Ioan Alexandru's poetry as a unique image; highlighting the characteristics of poems with a testamentary and guiding role that know a special affective solemnity; identifying the religious substratum of Ioan Alexandru's poetry

(optimism in faith, the sincerity of feelings, the echo of Christian love, the importance of sacrifice and birth from the spirit, the joy of Christian holidays and the miracles that emerge from the banality of everyday life, patriarchal harmony, the feeling of death with an uplifting effect, the biblical vision, the turmoil of the soul in the absence of divinity); identifying the characteristic language notes of the poems.

Hermeneutics will correlate information from literary criticism regarding poetic creation, but also from interviews, essays, letters that aimed to open the poet's soul and his conceptions regarding the expression of God's presence in the world and the individual's relationship with God; all these being, as will be seen, elements transposed into poems. The poet starts from the spiritual experience revealed in the simple truths of the seemingly banal life of childhood and arrives, after a pause in which he unconsciously enjoys the presence of God, to the unique, the only true Light, perceived with the help of the intuitive intelligence of the soul. Thus, the hermeneutic approach will open up a whole complex of meanings, in the broad horizon of perceiving the poems from the perspective of spiritual experience, the only one truly relevant in the work of the poet Ioan Alexandru.

Chapter I *Towards neomodernism* is an introductory chapter and includes the cultural and political events that preceded the '60 generation, a necessary presentation to understand the role of the '60 generation and the place of Ioan Alexandru in the history of Romanian literature. Marxist-Leninist communist doctrine will be imposed with election rigging in 1946 when the communists come to power and try to change the collective mind. Ioan Alexandru also writes about this period from the perspective of an adult who remembers his childhood, and the poet's work must be seen from this angle of spiritual experience. In the 1960s, we witness the revival of literature, the philosophical-Soviet policy is replaced by a nationalist one, and there are now timid signs of thawing. In this political conjuncture, Ioan Alexandru (1941-2000) makes his debut, who, together with the writers of the period, leads a recuperative action of value and tradition. Although political control was not total, the works of the poets of this period were subjected to rigorous censorship; according to some documents, I noticed that the volumes of sixties poets will be politically analyzed by alternate members of the PCR Executive Committee who will give ascertainment notes, make summary analyzes of the poems and remove those that seemed to them suspicious and in contradiction with the values party, as will be seen in chapter I.

I have briefly analyzed here the work of several writers of the generation including Nichita Stănescu, Ana Blandiana, Cezar Baltag, Grigore Hagiu or Constanța Buzea, highlighting common features of the poetry of the sixties, in the debut period.

Regarding the sub-chapter Essays, we analyzed the essays and articles collected by the poet in the two volumes entitled *Iubirea de patrie* which summarizes the valuing of the people's culture with all that it includes. The John-Alexandrine essay and lyric are twin faces of the same overwhelming sensibility, of spiritual experience. The more than 200 essays collected in two volumes, seven years apart, are true pleas for love, peace, communion and love of country. For the poet, there is nothing more precious than the times of peace, putting the warmth of the family, the mother's eyes on the babies, talking together, the divine joy at the center of the work. The correspondence that Ioan Alexandru maintains with the clergymen Justinian Chira or Calinic Argeșeanul are inseparable from the journey of the poet's spiritual life. Lives, thoughts, feelings and the way to say God become spiritual experiences in poems, experiences that can be found concretely in the epistles. The epistles that Ioan Alexandru writes lead to a deepening of personal humanity, to a deep human experience, aspects that I analyzed in the Paideic Epistolary subchapter: Ioan Alexandru - Justinian Chira, Ioan Alexandru - Calinic Argeșeanul. The letters are written with such delicacy and naturalness that they could be exposed to the faithful public, seeking a spiritual life in harmony with divine love; they are moving testimonies of the spiritual experience and of the tender and deep friendship between Ioan Alexandru and fathers Justinian Chira and Calinic Argeșeanul. The epistles bring as a novelty the convergence of testimonies: of the secular poet who became deeply religious and his vision of the purpose and role of both the poet in the world ("if the suffering of the poet is less than the suffering of the one left without everything, orphaned and naked, then that suffering does not make two parale"), and of man in general, with an intense respect for all the creatures of the world created by God; of the priests who address, not so much to an ordinary man, but to a great poet who has the power to pass on the divine message through an intellectual source.

Chapter II, *Spiritual Experience in Expressionist Poetry* is divided into four subchapters (Expressionism/ Neo-Expressionism, How to Tell You, Life for Now, Expressionist Negativism in the Questionable Inferno) which analyze the Expressionist features of the first three volumes from the point of view of spiritual experience.

In Romanian literature, expressionism is highlighted by the fact that writers highlight the inner reality that they aggressively present to the outside world, the connection of the elements stored in the memory that involves thematic elements, contrasts, similarities is noticeable, and as a style, the dislocation of syntaxes, the texts written in ticket style and the elimination of punctuation leading to multiple immediate interpretations, the speeding up of speech and the unimportance given to order, as will be seen below. It can also be observed that the theme of Romanian expressionism aligns with the European one, the lyrics twin existential themes, not lacking the themes of death, love, faith and the end of the world. The art of the word, participation in the contemporary phenomenon, slipping from the plane of observable reality into a tenebrous sphere of a bleak fantastic, the accentuated interest in the pathological, the appetite for the absolute, with different nuances, the expressive and symbolic highlighting of the inner reality of the self or absolutist value objectivism are just some of the defining lines of the Romanian poetic expressionism that manifested itself with significance starting from the 60s in Romanian literature.

Steadfast faith and acceptance of transcendental power will decide the fate that will mark the lyric in the various stages of creation. Already starting with the first volume, a silence emanating from his verses can be observed, the poet having an incredible power to observe the banal elements that calm the soul, he sings the joy of life through the experience of which we get closer to God. Childhood is the fruit of a living spiritual experience, the poet finds himself enthusiastic and in love, full of uncontrollable feelings, in the Transylvanian village where he wants to live forever. The dominant tendencies of neomodernist poetry are the deep experiences of the conscious, the expansion of imagination, lucidity and fantasy, philosophical reflections, metaphorical expressions, verbal play, language as a poetic tool.

The second volume *Viața deocamdată* (1965), is a reflection on the poetic act that develops starting from a general examination of the commonplace (comedy actors, photographs, mother's stories, the image of a dry tree in the middle of autumn, the bell, the cemetery, of the earth trodden by herds of sheep, furrowed by plums over which hover the clouds and a deathly silence), exhausted imperceptibly and susceptible of revision.

The volume stands out through the expressionism manifested in the embodiment of a mixture of strong artistic images, in which the soul suffers the tragedy of limitation, of the impossibility of encompassing the universe in all its splendor and tries to express emotions and moods and the depths of inner feelings on cosmic dimensions. The banal presses the

subconscious of the human being, which expresses itself through the desire to escape to an ideal world outlined by images that have a huge healing potential. The image of the village obsesses the writer's consciousness and decrypts the meanings, the village thus becomes a secure, degrading space.

In the debatable *Inferno* the poet is somewhere "on a cliff of pain and dream", deep in the depths of his heart trying to surface to "much higher rumours". As a general characteristic of the volume, we note the negativism present in the contemplation of patriarchal daily life, where the sticks burn undefended, the horses are doomed to die, the dogs howl hidden in ravines and the tendency to abstract the commonplace. Poetic knowledge belongs to the domain of the spirit, the poet prepares the smooth path that does not stop the impulse of thought towards the infinite. The poet travels as if in a dream through a world of absurdity, suffering, fear and impotence from which he cannot escape and of which only fragments remain scattered here and there, everything being lost early.

The volume ends, not by chance, with the poem *Job*, a symbol of the return to the light after the painful price paid for the exit from blindness/*inferno*. The poet captures *Job* at the height of his sufferings "After *Job* had lost his last son" and was so close to death that it was revealed to him that he was beginning another life. The new life is likened by the poet to a "passage" to the other world, a passage "without regret, without a bit of knowledge,/ as the torts were born and died/ before God was born." The poem *Job*, placed at the end of the questionable *Inferno*, is practically an exit from *Inferno*, *Job* being a model of "manhood and patience" who, facing all the trials of life, manages to emerge stronger, able to start a new life in perfection.

Chapter III, *The spiritual experience between Hell and Hymns* refers to the volume of the ascent from Hell to Enlightening Hymns, *Vămile pustiei* (1969) which connects the two stages of Ioan Alexandru's lyric: expressionist, viscous, material poetry and enlightened, sacrificial poetry, Christian. In order to have a clear vision of the poet's spiritual experience reflected in the lyrics starting from this stage of creation, we analyzed and scored the essential elements of the poet's life in what we can call the bridge of the two lyrical worlds, namely 1966 when the debatable *Inferno* appears and 1973 when he publishes *Hymns of Joy*, the moment when Ioan Alexandru's life takes an existential turn, a turn that will be felt in the lyrics, poetry being the way we could observe his way of existence.

At this moment, the poet is predestined to fill the desert, renews his beliefs and deepens his spiritual orientations, longing deeply for closeness and love to God. The poet is in a kind of purgatory, a passage to Eden, in a speculative process of self-searching that materializes, becoming a concrete spiritual experience.

The customs of the wilderness represent the state of the poet after the birth in the spirit spoken of in both the New and the Old Testament, he experiences the transition from the earthly reality to the heavenly reality. Realizing that "it is not enough to exist" (The Poet's Tomb), he sets out on a different path, has new beliefs and new spiritual orientations, his whole being yearns for closeness to God, that Someone who "looks at him with endless mercy". The volume is nothing but this awareness of the new state and an analysis of things and thoughts that take a drastic turn from this perspective. Sometimes the poet feels easy like a butterfly flying to the sky, the path to the light is clear, other times, the butterfly struggles in a too big room "with its wings stuck to the wet floor", but the poet will not back down, from here no more there is a way back.

With Customs of the Desert, the poet reaches maturity, he no longer waits for the initiatory journey, he no longer dreams of ships as in the debut volume, he no longer makes plans that are always wrong, but he is already on his way. The volume proposes an image of the search for peace of the soul, a groping of the soul at the gates of Heaven, a cry for help. The poet left in the Wilderness can no longer return, but moves forward with difficulty, and "catacombs" revolve around the desert and tries to clarify his vision of the past, but also the possible future as an abysmal reaction to the perception of death.

Ego sum via sings the poet, God is the way, the truth and the life, and nothing will be able to separate the poet from God from now on: "Here I entered this Forest/ And I will never come out again. So many are too mysterious/ Lights and roads do not bypass. I want to die/ On these springs that disturb my imagination".

Chapter IV, *Lyric of Preaching, Hymns of Joy*, begins with a demonstration of the fact that the two stages of lyrical creation cannot be definitively separated. I thus noticed that themes and symbols that I encountered in the first expressionist volumes are repeated in other forms in the second part of the lyrics, being combined with new and deep spiritual experiences. The entire creation of Ioan Alexandru is an expression of the rural soul, of the village world seen as the center of the universe, of love as a primordial feeling; the dichotomy

between the secular and religious domains was never very obvious, his poetry was always based on the presence of God on earth and in the cosmos.

The chapter deals extensively with the spiritual experience in the volume *Hymns of Joy*, volume in which John Alexandru becomes a demiurge, a zealous servant of God, who composes a city within which the ego opens its soul to contemplate the Christian realm. Along with the volumes of hymns, new literary motifs are introduced, the most obvious being that of the divine light in whose glimmers divine messages are hidden, prayer, vigilance and death seen as a closeness to God. We also witness a return of the poet, the journey home from foreign lands, the expression of joy in a higher state of spiritual self-transcendence, a joy felt in a heavenly play in which rivers of divine love flow.

Emperor Justinian, Stephen the Great, Avram Iancu, Constantin Brâncoveanu, Alexandru the Good, Stephen, Mihai, Horea are some of the historical personalities to whom the poet sings hymns of praise using allusive and associative techniques, creating a suggestive universe in terms of history and historical figures who stood out for their faith or love of country.

*Hymns of Joy* evoke the idea that all life is a struggle, the poet is in perpetual expectation of a saving hand from heaven to calm the storm of the soul and a ship to bring peace after a night stifled with weeping. The feeling of belonging to a privileged space is accentuated on some explicitly geographical coordinates in the hymns *Carpathian Anthem*, *Romania*, *Duhul Transilvaniei*, *Rohia*, *Transylvania*, *Parental House*, *Anthem of the Oak*, *Anthem of the Eagle*, *Origin*. In fact, Transylvania is the subject of a whole series of poems and outlines the image of sacred places sprinkled with brave people, saints and wonderful places, and in the plains an eternal liturgy is celebrated. The shepherd is likened to a priest, the flocks of sheep – an altar, the vine and the houses of the people are the wine and the communion bread. Everything is holy in Transylvania and everything is sanctified thanks to the light that surrounds the places and people, more than that, the homeland of Ioan Alexandru was born from the speech of the pelican, of Christ and is surrounded by the scent of carnations, basil crosses, and Manole still works down Argeş.

Chapter V, *Anthems of the Fatherland. From Transylvania, in Moldova, towards Wallachia and Maramureş, transfiguring the land into love* is the chapter that deals precisely with the volumes *Hymns of Transylvania*, *Hymns of the Walloon Region*, *Hymns of*

Moldavia, Hymns of Love, Hymns of Putna and the spiritual experience that transpires from these volumes.

The opera meaningfully encompasses the love for the values of the nation and humanity, being an expression of the history, life and aspiration of the homeland and full faith in God, with a language that is meant to be authentic. Arriving at this point of creation, the poems come into being through the metamorphoses of the spirit and reduce the horizon of an incessant search; the text draws its expressive juices from the homeland, history and faith oriented towards the stable nature of experiences.

The chapter presents a rigorous thematic classification of hymns, as well as the revelation of spiritual experience in poems with historical, religious, or testamentary themes. Mother, father, aunt Teodosia, Ioan Daniil, aunt Marie, aunt Ana, aunt Susană, old father, Ioan, the Moldavian woman, the Mocans, Iancu are some examples of Romanian peasants who managed to live according to nature, in the ways of their ancestors, as people of the land and of the sky that characterizes the soul settlement and the size of nature. History and places are always re-actualized in Ioan Alexandru's lyrics, sacred spaces re-actualize the sacrifice made in the service of a total knowledge of God, and the parents are a model of perfection. Most of the poems are inspired by stories, verses and characters from the Old Testament who experienced the appreciation and benevolence of a judging God, the poet proving to be a good connoisseur of the Bible.

The exceptional work capacity of the poet who wanted to leave behind a monumental, complex lyrical work, with a large thematic scope devoted to history, art, literature, the church and biblical teachings, is noteworthy. The poet strove to know everything about his homeland; and above all to love everything. The revelation of the soul of the Romanian people is the great decisive discovery of the poet, sufferings help the heart to receive God's revelation, and historical sufferings produce something authentic, they lead to perfection, to a perfection of faith and to the strengthening of the people.

A special sub-chapter of this chapter is the Sacrifice of the Brâncovenians, in which we dealt with the hymns with a specific theme of the sacrifice of the Romanian ruler, knowing that Ioan Alexandru had an extraordinary admiration for the Brâncoveanu family, evidenced not only by the essays, the volume dedicated to the martyrs and the poems read in all volumes of Hymns, but also the testimonies of those close to us.

Nothing left behind by the ruler remains unutilized in the lyrics. Brâncoveanu builds from the Carpathians to the Black Sea a glorious gate to heaven adorned with founders, icons, scriptures and books: "At Hurezi the best books/ From holy fathers and dogma and science/ And the state of the world-imagined in maps/ How people prophesy by faith" (Library from Hurezi, in Hymns of the Romanian Country).

The moment of the martyrdom of the Brâncovens is a divine-human deed of high spiritual strength, through which the ruler moves into eternity even during his lifetime through the work of the Holy Spirit. Faith and suffering overcome human strength, so that the martyr is no longer part of the visible world, but goes ecstatically with soul and consciousness into eternity.

The self-portraits of Ioan Alexandru, displayed in all the volumes, are defining for the artistic and spiritual identity of the poet. They are so complex that by reading them a painter could accurately paint the physical portrait, and a psychologist could easily make the moral portrait. In the first volumes, the autobiographical poems highlight the physical portrait and biographical data My head, in Infernul debatable, Portrait, in Viața Deocamdata, Self-portrait in Movement, in How to tell you, and in the Hymns volumes the poet's self-portraits reflect the conception of the creative self and the ambition the logos to identify with the being.

I also carried out a structural reading of the work which put us in front of a poem that changed its thematic and stylistic composition along the way, some constructive and thematic elements becoming, with the passage of time, obsessively dominant. If the expressionist volumes came with an innovative style, defining themselves as a victory of the era, the climax being defined by the debatable Inferno, together with the volumes of Hymns we witnessed a change of style that will be felt at first in Customs of the Desert, then in Hymns of Joy and more and more meaningfully in the following volumes of hymns, the poetry out of phase in relation to the obsessive searches of the self. The lyrical tone of the religious poems, starting primarily with the Hymns of Transylvania, is made up of two notes: the tireless admiration of the homeland and everything it encompasses, interspersed with biblical symbols (roses, lilies, eagles, butterflies, light, wilderness) and the idea that at the base of any historical component is deeply rooted faith and humility that bring God's grace.

The entire creation of Ioan Alexandru is a deep spiritual experience that is perfected in the contemplation of the Word. Through his poetry, the poet outlines the meaning of life that has its beauty in the surrounding world because, he says, "who has not loved a flower, a girl, a

child, a sunrise or a sunset, who has not understood the sad song of the unsteady waters and he has not known the joy of his own overcoming, he does not find meaning in life, nor does he deserve to love it". Ioan Alexandru understood all this, he loved nature and all that is beautiful, and his poetry - of a problematic serenity - tries to draw attention to the beauty of these small things, created by God out of love for man.