

Iliana Čutura, Violeta Jovanović

*Silence and Laughter as Indications of the Liberation of the Main Character in  
Dobriilo Nenadić's Novel Dorotej*

*Summary*

The paper examines the novel *Dorotej* considering the relationship between the novel and the philosophical-religious dominants of the depicted epoch, as well as the relationship between the Middle Ages and Renaissance in the European culture.

The narrative structure of the novel has attracted researchers' attention from the very beginning, considering the fact that the main character does not speak. Therefore, the paper mainly deals with the analysis of Dorotej's silence as a leitmotif and a narrative principle, and laughter as his only way of expression, with regard to the depicted epoch. Literary critics and researchers have analyzed different aspects of the novel; however, the stylistic devices used for describing the spiritual characteristics of the time have been left unexplored.

Considering the fact that the story takes place in the Middle Ages, when the influence of Byzantium on Serbia was important, *Dorotej* can be considered as a character who represents both the antique and Byzantine ideals of beauty and goodness, thus combining the characteristics of two epochs – the Middle Ages and Renaissance. The paper offers the possibility of a different interpretation of the main idea of the novel – the development of *Dorotej* into a liberated Renaissance man. The complex relationship between *Dorotej* and other characters is based on several dominants which problematize some important issues of medieval philosophy and religion. Firstly, it is about *Dorotej*'s healing ability, which relies on his love for all living beings and considering them as equal. This characteristic is in contrast with the rigorous asceticism that has the purpose of gaining a benefit, emotional or materialistic. Secondly, the analysis shows that *Dorotej*'s silence is essentially connected with the time depicted in the novel. It is the epoch when religious movements that recommended silence as a way of reaching God were developing.

*Dorotej*'s only way of expression is laughter. The laughter itself develops, changes intensity and indicates the changes in *Dorotej*'s personality. It represents a symbol of *Dorotej*'s transformation from a dogmatic ascetic into a liberated Renaissance man, which is one of the main ideas of the novel.

"The birth of the new man" is supported with the symbolism of water, which is not just the setting of the novel. Although water is represented as something that causes natural disasters, which evokes the motif of the Flood, the most important scenes of the novel take place by the water. In addition to this, *Dorotej*'s first and last appearance in the novel are related to water. In this way, the beginning and the end of the novel are connected and form a circle in which water holds a significant place.

The problem of religious and philosophical characteristics of the epoch, confronted with the idea of a liberated man, is partly hidden behind the complex form of the novel and contemporary language. Nevertheless, the analysis of all the motifs shows that the novel *Dorotej* has to be interpreted with regard to the philosophy of the epoch in which it takes place.

*Keywords:* novel *Dorotej*, narrative mode, silence, laughter, Middle Ages, Byzantium, Renaissance, asceticism, Hesychasm, symbolism of water