

*Mihaela Claudia Condrat*

## **The Sacred as an Illusion of the Profane in Vasile Voiculescu's Poetry**

### **ABSTRACT**

Can the sacred appear as an illusion in religious poetry? How does it manifest itself? Can the idea of the profane, particularly poetical contexts, be seen just as an illusion, an absence of the sacred, which has not disappeared, but has been blurred by other, much more significant pictures? Mircea Eliade says that nothing can be considered totally profane anymore in the modern world and that, where images appear profane, the sacred can live latently. In what follows, I argue that we can speak of a profane imagery of Vasile Voiculescu, of an *Entsakralisierung* – that creates an illusion of a sacral sense or a secularization of religious feeling. Therefore, illusion may play a dual role: it can act as as certitude of faith – revealing an irrational fact, as in Rudolf Otto's view, or it can be a simple deceiving picture that sends the soul to the darkest profane zone. Both images are found in Voiculescu's lyrical imagery in variegated forms.

### **KEYWORDS**

Romanian Literature; Vasile Voiculescu; Religious Poems; Illusion; The Sacred; The Profane; *Entsakralisierung*.

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### **The Sacred between Reality and the Illusion of Perception**

*For now we see only a reflection as in  
a mirror; then we shall see face to face.*

*Now I know in part; then I shall know  
fully, even as I am fully known.*

1 Corinthians 13:12

The manifestation of the sacred in the world, according to Mircea Eliade, R. Otto, J. J. Wunenburger or Roger Caillois, some of the theorists who have studied the subject, is closely determined by the existence of the secular reality: “the sacred manifests itself solely in profane, through symbols and other mundane realities”.<sup>1</sup> People need these two complementary realities. One in which they engage themselves only superficially, *without fear and trembling*, participating in activities with a precise result; and another, in which they feel the need to express themselves differently, to reach for something beyond nature, a *transhistorical* world of symbols that generates a sense of intimate dependence, and sometimes of fear, compromise and vulnerability, but also of grandness and spiritual richness. Oscillation between these two realities requires an unceasing effort, maintained by the testimony of faith, that *testimonium spiritus sancti*



*internum* without which participation in the sacred is not possible. The manifestation of the sacred chooses real, historical space. Mircea Eliade developed his conception on the sacred while analyzing it through its historical manifestations, and therefore reaching conciliation between history and its transhistorical significance: "... the sacred is real par excellence. Nothing pertaining to the profane is part of the Human Being, because the profane has not been ontologically created by myth."<sup>2</sup> But while entering the mundane reality, it changes it irremediably. The *traces* of the sacred are given by archetypes, symbols, myths or signs. And the sacred manifests freely among all these possibilities of interpretation and reception, or what we can call: *open reality*.

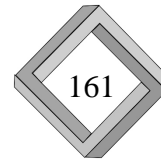
The fundamental questions in the definition of the sacred have been the following: whether it can be defined by itself or only in relationship with other concepts: profane, prohibition, mystery, pure and impure; whether it reflects divine revelation or is it just a mere psychological perception of man, under the form of chimera or projective illusion; whether it has ever known any decline because of the technico-scientific revolution or just transformations, metamorphoses.<sup>3</sup>

Comparing it to the religious imagery, the sacred has always been defined in antinomy, as opposed to the profane, a never-ending play between pure and impure, right and left, holiness and impurity or between divine and demonic.<sup>4</sup> The sacred *saturated with the human being* can be defined through profane reality and vice versa. They coexist in any religion even until assimilation, observes Roger Caillois: "en effet, quelque définition qu'on propose de la religion, il est remarquable qu'elle enveloppe cette opposition du sacré et du profane, quand elle ne coïncide pas purement et simplement avec elle."<sup>5</sup> The human participation in the sacred involves understanding

the rituals of birth, assimilation and expiation of a cyclic ritual marked by prohibitions and which continuously facilitates the contact with the sacred. The two realities unconditionally interchange and reveal themselves. A certain profane state does not elude the sacred, on the contrary it denotes a new stage towards its understanding, "a new manifestation of the same constituent structure of man",<sup>6</sup> after he acquired it through ritual, myth or play. The religious man transforms reality while experiencing these three sacred states without which the sacred can never be perceived and assumed.

In religious thinking, in addition to these components rationally assumed by man, there are the so-called visions or states of grace that occur accidentally, but which radically change one's life. At this point, we encounter the *unreal* of the sacral phenomenon, in the sense that its existence is strictly related to that personal testimony of faith which cannot be certified through objective instruments. Among these mystical manifestations, we can separate two types of the so-called illusions/ visions: *positive/beneficent*, that are specific for the religious man and which intensify the sacred and transform reality until they become certainties (they can be found especially in the Catholic Church); *negative/destructive*, that are specific for those people who have distorted the image of the divine, coming out of the sacred sphere and entering the demonic one. The latest type of illusion leads to fanaticism and extreme acts of sacrifice, including the sacrifice of human life.

Man has continuously struggled throughout history to overcome fear, by creating new representations of the demonic and the divine, and by experiencing feelings of wonder, of the numinous to its amplest form: "the rapture in spirit" (St. Paul) or the visions of the Western mystics St. John of the Cross, St. Teresa of Avila, Edith Stein), an inner experience of the spirit that



involves the rebirth of the being. These categories challenge the reality, and for the man who lives without the sacred, outside the ritual, they remain hallucinatory visions, illusions that can never be rationally explained. For the secular man, the sacred represents a deceptive reality, far from the possibility of being discovered and comprehended, although he is not able to get beyond certain rituals. For the man who pursues the numinous, the sacred element can be revealed in everything, and the illusion of the sacred, when it enters the thinking of the modern man, represents an appearance which, after continuous endeavor, can become certitude. The trichotomy sacred – profane – secular reality (*Entsakralisierung*<sup>7</sup>) refers to the relation of the modern man with the sacred and not the technological development of society. Between the early man, who had direct access to the sacred, and the modern man (who confines the manifestation of the sacred) there is a difference of reception, the functional equivalent of both being given by faith.

As the mystics assert, the sacred manifests itself foremost in the “depths of soul”. The sacred places (the Burning Bush, Mount Sinai, the Stone of Jacob, the place in the Church) intensify the sacred, but they can be *lived in* only after an initiation ritual, in which the person involved proves his/her purification. Moses receives the tablets of the covenant law after 40 days of initiation, fasting and prayer (Exodus 34:28). The missionary activity of Jesus Christ begins in the same way, after a purification ritual (Luke 4:2). The returning or entering the profane does not void the functions of the sacred; on the contrary, it emphasizes them. A person who *purifies* himself/herself can be easily noticed by the community, and people experience the same feeling of fear and reverence as in front of the numinous. According to the theories of the above mentioned authors, many of the archaic societies

have firmly set their sacred places or places of sacrifice.

Those places were part of the life inside the community and were wholly respected: for example, the sacrifice always took place in a clearly established place, outside the community; also, women were taken outside the community during their monthly period. They were not allowed to get close to a sacred place; if that happened, that specific place had to be purified again. The sacred is closely related to prohibitions and sacrifices. If they are disobeyed, the sacred place must be repurified by a group of people performing a certain ritual.

Our modern times have established other criteria of valuing or devaluing the sacred. From the famous saying ‘*the 20<sup>th</sup> century will be a religious one or it won't exist at all*’ to the theories of Don Cupitt, who speaks about the sacralization of life instead of its de-sacralization, man would find himself “on one of the most subtle, but also dangerous rifts of modernism: not only the sacred conceals itself in the profane, but also the profane often assumes the forms and masks of the sacred.”<sup>8</sup> When the profane is taken as sacred reality, then we can say that we are at the end of an illusion which has nothing to do with the divine par excellence, but with an artifact which often leads to fanaticism, the image becomes demonic and the illusion loses its equilibrium with the spiritual world.

The modern society has forced to the extreme the functions of the sacred. It is no longer related to a certain place or ritual, but it can occur whenever and wherever.<sup>9</sup> This decentralization may designate the presence of an an-archetype.<sup>10</sup> Considering the theory of the an-archetype, it can be asserted that there are non-archetypal forms of representing the sacred also in the religious lyrical imagery.

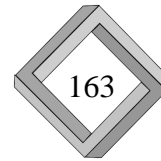
Depending on the semantic content, illusion can improve the image of the divine



or it can distort it. An altered state of consciousness can be, for example, the illusion of a lost paradise from Lucian Blaga's *Paradis în destrămăre/ Fading Paradise*, the image of the human angel from Tudor Arghezi's *Heruvim bolnav/ Suffering Cherub*, or the image of a soul tormented by evanescence from the poem *Povara/ The Burden* in Voiculescu's posthumous volumes. All of these confer a polychromatic image of the sacred which, at a first view, seem to be inexistent in the above mentioned poems. Even the consciousness of the poet seems schizoid when he tries to recompose a reality that rises above the non-verifiable. The states of grace, of reaching the sacred require a certain discipline of concentration and diligence (Simone Weil). A certain type of poetry can become a prayer or can lead a person towards a state of inner peace if repeated several times. In the mystical orthodoxy, this kind of state can be reached by saying the prayer of the heart: "Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, the sinner!" It seems like some poets have practiced this type of prayer through which they achieved certain closeness to the numinous, observable in their subsequent works.<sup>11</sup>

### **The Religious Imagery and the Sacred: Living the Sacred through Image**

The sacred can also be considered outside a religious reality. It can be present within the human being who reaches for the numinous, who experienced an inner revelation, or in the one where the rational prevails and who is apparently out of the religious sphere. Man lives between a sacred reality and a profane one. What he despises in profane, he has the certitude he can recover in the sacred. He tries to give mystical explanations to what he cannot understand through scientific approaches. Illusion is not a perceptive category which falsifies reality, but rather seen from the point of view of the numinous, of that *ganz andere*, it becomes a tangible supra-reality. From illusion to certitude, the human consciousness experiences an entire cycle of manifestations. From *appear* to *reveal*, the numinous reflects through multiple images. From *rough images*, simple opinions or imagination with strong personal and emotional background applicable to the outer world, this type of imagery reaches intuitive, spiritual, perceivable images, but which cannot be conceptualized. As we have seen previously, an image can migrate from archetype to non-archetype, the idea of center being able to multiply in different meanings, determining a polychromic image in novels and poetry. Whether it is about romantic poetry, traditional or modernist, this image has generated various ideas, visions and metaphors in the sphere of the *poietic*. Therefore it is very hard to make a taxonomy of the sacred image migration from the religious sphere to the poetical one. If the traditionalists, for example, have been inspired by an orthodox Christianity (Nichifor Crainic, Sandu Tudor, Ștefan I. Nenițescu), the modernists have preferred the wide sphere of religion and of myth (Tudor Arghezi, Lucian Blaga, Vasile Voiculescu).



For the modernist poets, the representation of the sacred represented a means of poetical, often ludic, virtuosity (See some of Arghezi's poems) and a play of the consciousness. For the traditionalists, the sacred was an image reflected in ethical values. While traditionalists used to keep some canonical references and biblical norms, the modernists applied the force of an image liberated from any constraints, but with some Old and New Testament inspiration. The dominant image of the sacred in the modernist poetry was introverted, while traditionalists used a concrete representation, even with vegetal and mineral elements (for example, the wheat grain was a representation of the face of Christ).

While we agree, like Rudolf Otto, that the spirit is "a universal propensity only under the form of *testimonium spiritus*, then we can assert that any image, even illusive, if demonstrated by faith, can lead to the sacred. In this case, only few poets have assimilated this state of creation.

The category of the numinous, according to the same thinker, can be known only through faith, a priori. Faith is above the rational, it is situated among the irrational elements.<sup>12</sup> It is these elements that convey meaning to a religion. Without them, religion becomes rigor and rationalism, which are inferior to man's force of imagination. *To imagine* means, in this context, *to save the mystery*, to accentuate it or, according to Blaga, it means *minus knowledge*, but a partial knowledge (cf. *motto*) of the numinous. To imagine means to create parallel images or completely different images from an archetype, in order to complete what cannot be known about God. In art, therefore in poetry too, it is very hard to keep a canon of God's image, as long as to create means to imagine differently what is already known, even if reaching heresy or blasphemy. Christianity knew a great freedom of imagination during Luther's reform, when the Catholic Church

started to lose its authority and the conventions regarding the writing on popes' commands have been abolished. Main categories, as trinity, double nature of Christ, omnipotence, omniscience of God, salvation, resurrection, have been the most argued subjects in literature and poetry, often contested or analyzed from interesting points of view, even reaching mystical boundaries (St. John of the Cross, St. Teresa of Avila).<sup>13</sup>

The knowledge of God is partial; therefore it must be doubled by knowledge through faith. Recreating the *image of God* requires consecration, namely divinization, and only then the vision will be possible. All this process of consecration requires a continuous fight with images. Generally, the process of monasticism requires a renunciation of negative thinking and any other thoughts that might divert one's attention from the image of God and from the prayer of the heart. The only canonical images are the religious icons. In poetry, the power of suggestion is given by words arranged in certain images and the relation and connections between these images. It is true that much of the modern poetry has tried to interiorize the sentiment of the divine, renouncing the simple declamation of faith. The interest of the modernists regarding the numinous was that of saving the mystery, as in the example of the poet and philosopher Lucian Blaga.

One of the main attributes of the sacred is that of preserving the mystery, and poetry turned out to be capable of doing it through the religious lyrical imagery. Both in their personal life and in their literary work, the religious poets were actively involved in a religion, finding the necessary means to represent/ observe the absolute in different forms, but without explaining it. The connection between the fictional element and the real one was made through faith, through a poetic motif or a suggestive image. Most often, the sacred reality is represented in



contrast to the profane reality, the dual and antinomic images being the ones which give consistency to the lyrical text. Mystery is the center of interest of any author who approaches the subject of the numinous. However hard he tried to expose a certain reality, the author would feel his limits in approaching mystery as an intensifier of image. What cannot be explained, an *I-don't-know-what*, an *I-don't-know-how* (M. Eminescu), is much more interesting than something that can already be perceived, and any described state/ condition is filtered through this *tremendum* without which the sacred could not be present.

Therefore, the religious imagery chooses the *minus knowledge* and the intensification of mystery, the *exposure* of the sacred in superposed and archetypal images that reflect different aspects of the same shape.

The relation between image and the sacred is one of complementarity. What is hidden by one of them can be revealed by the other. Usually, the sacred is surrounded by prohibitions and rules, and the pursuit of mystery can be accomplished only by observing certain eclectic delineations. Very often, the image intensifies this initiation course, amplifying mystery or distorting the reception of the sacred. The sacred does not contaminate all the things around it, but it rather hides under a non-sacred reality, “*depouvres de puissance numineuse*” (J.J. Wunenburger), and the elements of the profane world are not entirely absent from the sacred. The sacred rituals always require a disruption between two states of consciousness that can never be described without gestures, body movement, words or suggestive images, therefore components of the profane imagery.

Intrusion of the mystery in real life creates this *tremendum* and wonder, that is why it can often be perceived as an illusion of a supra-reality: “the image of the world is not created through direct reproduction, but

through reflective artifact meant to assure an appearance as similar as possible to the vision, yet which cannot represent but the illusion of reality.”<sup>14</sup>

The sacred image that is created through components of the profane world, for example in a religious poem, has first of all a function of alterity. The poet uses different stylistical and rhetorical means to see the Other, who makes him experience fear and reverence and without whom he can never truly understand himself. A poetic image that carries the sacred is one that suggests the ambivalence of the human being, who oscillates between utter despair and divine contemplation:

Late have I loved Thee  
Beauty as old and so new  
Late have I love thee  
Thou were inside me  
And I was outside Thee  
And there did I search for Thee  
And I threw myself  
The one who lost thy beauty  
On those beautiful thing  
That Thou have made.  
Thou were with me,  
But I was not with Thee  
I was kept far from Thee  
By beautiful things  
Which if they were not in Thee  
Would not be at all.  
(St. Augustine of Hippo)

However, as J.-J. Wunenburger asserted, living through image requires a certain understanding of what it represents, a certain conceit that does not exclude the possibility of its own weakness, of a beguile. The element which gives the certitude that poetical images do not create a mere illusive sacral field, but they really make the connection with that Someone, *ganz Andere*, is faith.

As a conclusion, we can say that the sacred, among the external manifestations



imposed by the religious ritual or related to frequent theophanies from the Old Testament (the burning bush that never extinguished, the vision from the Mamvri oak) is reflected in man's consciousness through image, usually an image of the numinous. The sacred can be distinguished by simple delusion or illusion through faith, *testimonium spiritus sancti*, and through concentration and continuous attention. In poetry, it appears in different images related to a certain theme or motif, it infiltrates mystery, displays the antinomies of the human being, raises consciousness, saddens the soul, motivates life, justifies death. The sacred is discovered in poetry under different antinomic states, sometimes contradictory, but without excluding the reference to the Other, "any image comes from a minimal awareness of an Ego related to the Other, of a Here related to a There".<sup>15</sup>

#### **The Sacred between Illusion and Certitude in V. Voiculescu's Posthumous Poems**

We chose to analyze the sacred and its relation to reality and the poetical image through Voiculescu's volume of poems entitled *Călătorie spre locul inimii*<sup>16</sup> (*Journey to the Place of the Heart*). Considered the volume that represents the superior stage of the poet's literary activity, it contains an interesting extra- and intra-biographical argument: the poems were written in a period of exile from the social life (during the communist regime from Romania which the poet had no desire to be part of), and also after the death of his wife (that took him to an existential reclusion, while finding tranquility in his literary work). The sacred tremor can be seen from the first to the last poem of this posthumous volume, "maybe the sole authentic religious poetry of the Romanian literature".<sup>17</sup>

Many of these poems are written as simple prayers to divinity (*Călătorie spre*

*locul inimii/ Journey to the Place of the Heart, Vorbesc și eu în dodii/ I Wander, Mirungere/ Chrism, Jălanie/ Mourning, Liturghia cosmică/Cosmical Liturgy, etc.*).

Influenced by traditionalists during his first stage of creation, the poet reaches a mystical, inner type of writing in his last literary stage. He began to write poems at an age when he used to *practice* the prayer of the heart and an ascetic existence. For him, the sacred manifested through a journey of discovery and living an inner time whose sacred centre was the heart. The poet is no longer interested in the external religious act, full of angelic presence (specific for the first stage of literary creation), but he rather becomes concerned with the spiritual evolution of the self, with the journey to the Centre:

Unhindered from the path of your glory  
I stoutly fight for  
The emancipation from the ancestral slavery law  
To be bound only by the beauty of Thy Power  
Unmovable, All Adding Centre.  
(*Centrul eternei gravitații/ The Centre of Eternal Gravity*)

This type of poetry seems like a mere *pretext*, a sheer way of conceiving the inner desires of the human being and of conveying them through verses. Sometimes, the voice of the poet can be heard as pertaining to the entire nation that has lost direction (it can be a reference for the communist regime and the *collectivization* of the soul) and which no longer receives the good news but through the elected ones:

We stand, empty jars of clay  
All the vine of life has been spilt, Holy,  
Where are the souls and hearts?



In vane I seek then...  
and I have shouted  
Lord, what is happening on  
earth?  
The answer was like an apparition:

Behold! There were no gentle beasts in  
the fields  
Our bent spirit was pulling the plough  
The rays and waves of the high orb  
Derailed from our hearts by treachery  
Were flapping their wooden wings.  
Submitted as a yoke  
The soul was pushing carts, tractors,  
No more people were to be found in  
the world. But all  
Were grinding transformed into ham-  
mers, wrenches and wheels.  
(*Nou Apocalips/ New Apocalypse*)

It is one of the most clarifying poems with direct reference to the regime that transformed people's soul in a *hammer*, stealing all their ideals (*rays*). In this case, the sacred is concealed by a harsh reality and tied to a Sisyphean work which leads to alienation and hardening. The poet has the courage to speak about the confining of ideals, which no longer raise the human being beyond reality, but they hang tightly inside wooden wings: *the rays... perfidiously removed from our minds flapped their wooden wings*. Face to face with the heavy reality, the poet is left no other choice but the honesty of confession, hoping it would save the world, like Prince Mishkin, the famous dostoevskian character, who hoped that beauty would save the human kind.

In Voiculescu's poems, the artistic beauty is given by the power of confession and of the mystical interrogation, by the honesty of the poetical act, all of them being elaborated in a refined way: "The poems from the volume *Journey to the Place of the Heart* are a direct representation of a unique experience, which does not exclude despair

and tiredness, failure and returning to the starting point, but which finds in the love of God and in faith the necessary strength to overcome all difficulties and most of all to overcome the self, with all human weakness and imperfections that we are given."<sup>18</sup>

The poems from this volume create an unbreakable cohesion with the poet's experience and his spiritual adventures. The main themes are: love, faith, the journey to salvation, the reaching of the divine, the continuous struggle with the self and with the *time wreathed with death*. We are witnessing a step by step writing about an inner journey that does not hide the weakness and the dark sides of the human being. These verses contain aesthetics of the dark thoughts that penetrate the human mind in search of the numinous. Without fear and trembling one cannot begin a religious experience,<sup>19</sup> as without denial there is no certitude. One of the fears and wonders at the same time is that of *not seeing* the divine, an attitude similar to that of Tudor Arghezi, both of them invoking epiphany:

I know you send me rains, summer  
wind...  
But why do thou not arrive?  
All of thee, pure Thee, not cloud, nor  
scourge,  
As Thou once spoke to Moses.  
(*Untitled*)

One of the main traits of Voiculescu's posthumous religious poetry is the awareness of the continuous struggle between *spirit* and *flesh*, between soul and the instinctual. The poet knows very well the divided reality in which man has to live and which he interprets with the signs of the numinous. The poetical adventure lies in an initiation journey towards the place where the divine, the heart might reveal itself:

The place of our heart?  
Who knows it?





How many demand it? [...]  
Lord, towards the place of our heart?  
(*Călătorie spre locul inimii/ Journey to  
the Place of the Heart*)

This time, Voiculescu's imagery moves to the interior of a world where not many have the courage to go. Getting out of the human nature and bearing the ontological requires sacrifice, endurance, stoicism and clairvoyance: "The poet evades himself from the road of the human nature, he refuses the way into the mundane, and he detours his literary creation, but most of all he detours himself to a ceaseless starting point."<sup>20</sup>

The fight with the *angel* or the poet's fight with the images of the sacred takes place on several grounds. Sometimes we can observe his irony when talking about stories of the Old Testament:

As you hold details dear,  
Thou pick the forms and choose?  
Why do thou show yourself only on the mountain  
And clad only in laws? [...]  
(*Untitled*)

And other times he elaborates a biblical verse attributed to Christ: the salvation of the soul can only be made through combining the fundamental virtues: faith, hope and love. Most of Voiculescu's verses represent a handbook of confessions about the struggle between reason (with its vain illusions) and heart, which leads him to the light:

Whatever my mind may be, my heart is  
Christian  
It must not perish in the wake of the  
worldly ocean  
But only sail, through the darkness  
towards the light  
As a living compass towards the eter-  
nal light [...]  
(*Busola/ The Compass*)

He seeks for and dares  
visions of the sacred, he me-  
ditates and rethinks the bibli-  
cal message and he compares himself to the  
fools (for Christ) who request everything  
from God: "I want, oh Lord, for you to be  
my whole! [...]" (*Nebunul/ The Fool*). We  
could say that in this journey to the inner  
time, to the centre, the poet ignores any  
laws. When it comes to faith, every single  
word of strengthening is needed:

Soul, be ready to ascend the Tabor,  
The sun and moon have gone blind on  
the peaks [...]  
(*Taborul/ Mount Tabor*)

From the vault of beauty and gems,  
With my ardent heart  
Lord, only Thy love I would steal [...]  
(*Tâlhar/ Thief*)

The only way to get out of the profane  
is through love, it is the sole which *has no  
shadow*, it is not evanescent:

Love stood aside and gazed  
At their innocent queens jape  
And at how hard the light struck  
Leaving not a single shadow [...]  
(*Cea fără de umbră/ The One without  
Shadow*)

And even love cannot be certitude for  
the poet, but he knows that without love he  
struggles in the deepest darkness:

I cannot bring myself to forget Thee as  
I struggle  
Without pause, oh Lord, between Thee  
and life [...]  
(*Untitled*)

The main idea of the volume is that wi-  
thout God, man is a dark soul, experiencing  
illness and difficulties. Without *eternal*



perfection:

Why do Thou sting my mind and haunt  
my heart  
With zest to seek the beyond creation?  
To make me feel agony and still not be  
redeemed  
As Thou stroll through me with every  
breath? [...]  
(*Agonie/ Agony*)

Love generates the sacred and discovers it in the face of the one near you. Love overcomes fear and trembling. When speaking of love, Paul says that it is above all the other virtues of man (1 Corinthians 13). Love is also the one which makes the poet interrogate things, search and struggle: "I beat until my forehead bursts with question [...]" (*Întâia dragoste/ First Love*). But the human love must be strictly related to the divine love. Otherwise, thinks the poet, mundane love remains merely a vain illusion, and all poets might fool the world with it:

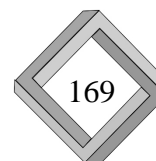
Lord, the hearts of poor poets,  
Eaten by moths and sponges,  
Deceive people to love them  
But Thee they cannot deceive, Ah what  
a princely heart I dreamt for myself  
Touch her, Lord, for it to catch fire or  
to forsake forever [...]  
(*Iubirile noastre/ All Our Loves*)

The seclusion from the world, following the example of the anchorites, the abandonment of the mask of mundane does not represent its negation, but rather the negation of the selfish desire which manifests itself naturally in every human being. Solving the inner conflict between will and desire, at least conceptually, leads to the

sight of the Taboric Light. It is exactly what the poet wants, namely to become a *son of praise*, like Blaga mentioned in his religious poetry about a *son of deed*.

And not only love is sung by the poet as being the manifestation of the sacred. One can also reach it through prayer as a means of meditation, initiation and knowledge. Prayer is the one that dispels illusion, the one that gives a certitude known only by the heart: "you pray, always victorious/ over every defeat, every disaster" (*Rugăciunea/ The Prayer*). The *zenith of eternity* can be reached through the power of prayer, which keeps the mind awake to meditate upon the divine. The prayer-poems are a sum of evangelical and patristic ideas, which demonstrates that the poet has not read the Bible only out of curiosity, but he also complemented it with readings from the Church Fathers, from the *Philokalia*, improving his thinking and theological competence necessary for his creative endeavor. Attending the movement called *The Burning Rogus*, the discussions with people who mastered the art of prayer and of the mystical thinking (the priests Daniil Sandu Tudor, Andrei Scrima, Dumitru Stăniloae, Sofian Boghiu, or Benedict Ghiuș<sup>21</sup>), and also his own personal search and experience have inspired the poet for this type of poetry and knowledge. Practically, the poems from this volume represent a small poetical *Philokalia* in which are gathered the most important images of the Christian life: the acquisition of virtues, the new life in Christ, the struggle between spirit and flesh, the reasoned fear, the desire to reach God, the power of prayer, the poorness or insufficiency of words, the divine power, the escape from the physical time, the living of the inner time, etc.

We can talk also about some mirrored texts, verses that contain explicit biblical and theological correspondence and that allow for double interpretation: one which is exegetical, theological, and a literary-critical one.



Concerning the struggle between flesh and spirit, we can find a reference to the *Book of Romans*:

For I know that good itself does not dwell in me, that is, in my sinful nature.

For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. Thanks be to God, who delivers me through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, I myself in my mind am a slave

to God's law, but in my sinful nature a slave to the law of sin.

Romans 7, 18 and 25

and the poem *Ia-ți sus înapoi* or *Crucea-Cheie/ The Key-Cross*:

I feel I am much more than I know to be  
I have greater abilities than those I master  
I live differently than in this alive face  
Flesh, soul, mind, are not my whole  
[...]

I can find her neither soul nor word  
The mind is too feeble to comprehend  
Thee [...]

Or about suffering and bearing:

I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us.

Romans 8:18

and:

There is no yearning, but a stern unquenched desire:

I pull myself together, I haul myself in me  
I built myself as Babel tower, burned clay

I care not for the want and spending

In the hard battle with the secret to reach God [...]

(*Babel*)

About God and His sovereignty:

I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End.

Revelation 22:13

and the poetry  $\alpha - \omega$ :

You are the beginning and the end of all

About degeneration and the limits of the human being:

The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear?

The Lord is the strength of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?

Psalms 27:1

and:

I have fallen as you have torn me from Thee

As you have cast me down, I have fallen...

So does all the eternity in me cry out?

Fill me with sin, fill me with shame...

My guilt came out of clay [...]

(*De profundis*)

About keeping the commandments, doing good and justice and about staying away from evil:

Rejoice in the Lord and be glad, you righteous;

sing, all you who are upright in heart!

Psalms 34:26



May their path be dark  
and slippery, with the angel  
of the Lord pursuing them

[...] They repay me evil for  
good and leave me like one bereaved  
Psalm 35:6-12

and:

So long as you do not reconcile with  
justice  
You will not make peace with truth  
You souls shall not be founded  
But they shall be constantly at war with  
me  
(*Așa zice Domnul/ So Says The Lord*)

The key to Voiculescu's posthumous poems can be found only through a theological and critical approach and by referring to his main inspiration, the Bible. His poetical creed is represented through a form of *poetical liturgy*. In front of the Creator, the poet stands like a priest ready to sacrifice his artful words that are insufficient for answering to the divine voice. Poetry is the sacrifice of words that are trying to get the most beautiful shape in order to speak to the Creator:

From the bounty of my harvest, Father,  
On the altar of Thy beholding sacrifice  
I have no other gifts to put before you  
But these verses, a humble offering [...]  
(*Ale Tale dintru ale Tale*)

The poet is not substituting himself for the Creator, but for a defender of people, a *forger of sonnets* who mostly wanders, incomprehensible for some, but understood by those who choose the same inner journey and who know how to read the *signs* of the sacred:

I am a crafter of sonnets  
And spike them slowly on rhythms

The ear of the heart at Thy steps [...]  
(*Vorbesc și eu în dodii/ I Wander*)

The finality of the mystical poetry consists in reaching the depths of the human being and revealing the numinous, in exposing the idea that man belongs to the sacred and that he is part of it. The poet ought to be the binding element between these two great constants (or variables!) of the world: I, the World, Divinity! In the opinion of the German theorist and theologian Karl-Josef Kuschel, the *ambiguity* and the tension of a religious text can only be decoded through a transparent dialogue between Literature and Theology. These two disciplines must efficiently borrow from one another proper means of investigation, in order to bring to light the depths of the human being: "Im Gespräch zwischen Theologie und Literatur geht es letztlich um die *Ausleuchtung des Geheimnisses menschlicher Existenz*."<sup>22</sup>

#### Notes

<sup>1</sup> Mircea Eliade, *Întâlnirea cu sacrul/ Experiencing the Sacred*. Volume edited by Cristian Bădiliță, in collaboration with Paul Băneagră, Cluj, Echinox, 2001, p. 115.

<sup>2</sup> Mircea Eliade, *Sacrul și profanul/ The Sacred and the Profane*, translated from French by Brândușa Prelipceanu, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition, Humanitas, Bucharest, 2007, p. 74.

<sup>3</sup> J.-J. Wunenburger, *Le sacré. Que sais-je?* Paris, Presses Universitaires de France, 1981, p. 70.

<sup>4</sup> Although, if we think of Goethe's assertions, the demonic manifests itself as a positive energy, specific for dynamic and powerful people (for example, Napoleon) and which does not make them holy, but numinous. See Rudolf Otto, *Sacrul. Despre elementul irațional din ideea divinului și despre relația lui cu raționalul/The Sacred. About the Irrational from the Divine and Its*



*Connection with the Rational*, translated from German by Ioan Milea, Humanitas, Bucharest, 2005, p. 199.

<sup>5</sup> Roger Caillois, *L'homme et le sacré*, Paris, Gallimard, 1950, p. 2.

<sup>6</sup> Mircea Eliade, *op. cit.*, p. 8.

<sup>7</sup> The philosophy and theology professor Richard Schaeffler from the Faculty of Bochum speaks about the relation between profane, sacred and desacralization, which is antithetical, but also indissoluble and essential. See also *Das Heilige im Denken. Ansätze und Konturen einer Philosophie der Religion*, Klaus Kienzler, Josef Reiter, Ludwig Wenzler, Lit Verlag, Muenster, 2005, pp. 33-61.

<sup>8</sup> See Constatin Jinga, *Biblia și sacrul în literatură/ The Bible and the Sacred in Literature*, p. 7. About the theories of Don Cupitt in *The New Religion of Life in Every Day Speech*, SC; Press Ltd., 1999.

<sup>9</sup> Analysing the religious life in Germany, I discovered that the religious ceremonies of the protestant ritual (as opposed to the orthodox rite where they can never be held outside the church, namely outside a previously consecrated space) can be held in different profane spaces, like the stadium or a theatre, precisely by virtue of the fact that the sacred can be manifested *hic et nunc*.

<sup>10</sup> See Corin Braga's theories on non-archetype in *De la arhetip la anarhetip/ From Archetype to An-Archetype*, Iași, Polirom, 2006, pp. 249-261.

<sup>11</sup> The case of Vasile Voiculescu as a member of the movement *The Burning Rogus* is well-known. They tried to improve the spiritual life through practising the prayer of the heart. Voiculescu described the experience in his poems and therefore he was detained on the night of 4/5 of August 1958, under the following pretext: "...Voiculescu Vasile writes a series of poems with mystical

themes, with hostile and spiteful content against the communist regime of the Republic of Romania". Roxana Sorescu, *Introducere în poezia lui Vasile Voiculescu. Poezii/ Introduction to the Poetry of Vasile Voiculescu. Poems*, Bucharest, Cartex 2000, 2005, p. 17.

<sup>12</sup> Rudolf Otto, *op. cit.*, p. 187.

<sup>13</sup> Gisbert Kranz, *Europas christliche Literatur 1500-1960*, Aschaffenburg, Paul Patloch Verlag, 1961, p. 13.

<sup>14</sup> Jean-Jacques Wunenburger, *Filosofia imaginilor/ The Philosophy of Images*, translation edited by Muguraș Constantinescu, edition and afterword by Sorin Alexandrescu, Iași, Polirom, 2004, p. 314.

<sup>15</sup> Daniel-Henri Pageaux, *Literatură generală și comparată/ General and Comparative Literature*, translated by Lidia Bodea, foreword by Paul Cornea, Iași, Polirom, p. 82.

<sup>16</sup> Volume published in 1994 by the Romanian Cultural Foundation, Bucharest, edition and notes by Radu Voiculescu. Some of these poems have been published in the following volumes: *Poezii. Ciclul Clepsidra/ Poems. The Hourglass*, 1968. Anthology by Aurel Rău; *Poezii. Ciclul Clepsidra/ Poems. The Hourglass*. Edited by Liviu Grăsoiu; *Gânduri albe/ White Thoughts*, 1986, edited by Victor Crăciun and Radu Voiculescu. There are also other 31 unique poems added to the volume.

<sup>17</sup> Mircea Braga, *V. Voiculescu în orizontul tradiționalismului/V. Voiculescu in the Sphere of Traditionalism*, Bucharest, Minerva, 1984, p. 110.

<sup>18</sup> Roxana Sorescu, *op. cit.*, p. 6.

<sup>19</sup> R. Otto says that the experience of the mystery has three stages: *mirum*, paradox and antinomy, *op. cit.*, pp. 150-151.

<sup>20</sup> Mircea Braga, „...timp înspicat cu moarte”... Time Wreathed with Death”, from the volume coordinated by Aurel Pantea, *Sacrul*

*în poezia românească/ The Sacred in the Romanian Poetry*, Cluj-Napoca, Casa Cărții de Știință, 2007, p. 132.

<sup>21</sup> See the testimonies of His Holiness Antonie Plămădeală about this movement and about what it meant for the Romanian culture and spiritual life: *Rugul Aprins/ The Burning Rogus*, Sibiu, 2002, pp. 28-29.

<sup>22</sup> Karl-Josef Kuschel is the coordinator of the inter-religious dialogue and cultural theology from the Faculty of Catholic Theology in Tübingen, and also the representative of the Institute for Ecumenical Research in Tübingen. Since 1995, he has also been the vice-president of the Weltethos Foundation. He wrote numerous studies on

the triad Christianity-Judaism-Islamism, on the relation between theology and literature, analysing the work of the most important universal authors precisely from this point of view. Among his most important works, I mention: *Im Spiegel der Dichter. Mensch, Gott und Jesus in der Literatur des 20. Jahrhunderts*. Patmos, Düsseldorf 1997; *Jesus im Spiegel der Weltliteratur. Eine Jahrhundertbilanz in Texten und Einführungen*. Patmos, Düsseldorf 2010; *Rilke und der Buddha: die Geschichte eines einzigartigen Dialogs*. Gütersloh 2010; *Abrahamische Ökumene: Dialog und Kooperation*. Lembeck, Frankfurt M. 2011.