

Revealing V. Voiculescu's Paradoxical Personality

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Abstract. Our short study tries to cast light upon a canonical Romanian poet's paradoxical personality, a poet who, in our opinion, “suffered” by the “anxiety of influence” – a concept theorized by Harold Bloom – and, thus, endeavored in an imaginary translation of Shakespeare's “last sonnets”. In order to reach our goal, we travelled throughout V. Voiculescu's paratopia, using Maingueneau's concept to understand how a believer was able to be – at the same time – poet, mystic, physician, philosopher and theologian, in the sense in which God the Word was speaking inside him, *o theos logos*. The multiple aspects of his personality are being revealed with the help of a various bibliography, into the light of *Agapè*, the divine love descending onto a poet who was being moved towards it by the all powerful *Eros*. The paradox is the fact that the full measure of his art was given at an old age – mid seventies –, an age when other poets are repeating themselves in a minor gamut, depleted by their intellectual force, as they are physically weakened.

Keywords: hesychia, imaginary translation, poetry, tradition, Shakespeare's sonnets

As the title shows, our study is conceived on the idea of revealing the paradoxical personality of a canonical author in the Romanian literature, who was a late discovery for his contemporary critics and a big surprise for everyone, after his death.¹ Keeping in mind the fact that V. Voiculescu's *Complete Works* were edited a few years ago and, for that purpose, the entire criticism and bio-bibliographical field swept up, again, our task would not be an easy one. However, the subject is generous enough and considering our decayed world and one's difficulties in choosing the right way in life, a choice which seems to be harder than ever, nowadays, revealing the paradoxical personality of one of the most balanced Romanian writers is an appropriate *démarche*, in our opinion. His

1 At a venerable age but, sadly, because of the injuries suffered due to the time spent in those infamous communist prisons, where he was thrown for writing a poetry which did not match the “Big” and “all powerful” Party's ideology.

life also, a life of an *Aváργυροι* [un-mercenary] physician who had a wonderful childhood blessed with great mentors like the mysterious Neculai Floacă, the one who – along with his parents and grandparents – introduced him into the world of Romanian magical stories, ancestral traditions and healthy readings, on the basis of *The Holy Scriptures*, which defined the becoming writer's intellectual core, seems to us a very actual example in a world in urgent need of solid father figures. The case of an author who was not sure his entire life of anything but the Light as the only path in acquiring the inner peace, the *hesychia*,² a goal continuously followed by any means – with the mind and with the heart, and, at the end, with the mind descended into the heart –, is a worthy one.

The starting point of our short journey throughout V. Voiculescu's "paratopia" (Maingueneau 2007: 11–108),³ a journey taken to reveal the paradoxical

2 According to the hesychast way of life, the communion of man with God – a perfectly functional connection *in illo tempore* but damaged consecutive to the fall of man due to the primordial sin – could be re-established through a sustained effort in order to obtain the original purity, an ascetic effort which implies two consecutive levels. The first of them is *the praxis*, which is the strict following of the exemplary hermits' path, the mastering of the ego, enduring of privations and ascetic trials. The result is the achieving of a good psychic discipline. The moral regeneration is the second level's target when, through a supreme inner focusing, through isolation from the outer world, through continuous meditation and practising the Prayer of the Mind and Heart – "Our Lord, Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy of me, the sinner" –, one could achieve purification, spiritual rebirth and the state of ecstasy which allows the seeing of the divine light – a light identical with the one which appeared on the Mount Tabor, as St. Gregory Palamas asserts. Therefore, the Hesychasm proposes both, a religious theory and a practice. The method is similar to Plotin's attempt to see "the light" of the One with "the soul's eyes": "The philosophical wisdom which has the dialectics as method, clearly asserts Plotin, could not be achieved without the prior running through the process of learning by experience. The knowledge and the virtue of the inferior levels could exist, though, in an uncompleted mode, without philosophy; but, if one does not begin with them, the depths of the theoretical philosophy cannot be reached. Even when those depths are being reached and the Being is being known through intuitive thinking, something still eludes" (Whittaker 2007: 116–117). Saint Thomas Aquinas used, among others – in his thinking system which tried to integrate the medieval scholastic and to reconcile Aristotle disciples' ideas, brought in Europe by Judeo-Arabic philosophers, with the Augustinian Neoplatonists' thoughts, which established the official doctrine inside the Catholic Church –, one of the traditional Neoplatonist ideas, namely the Being's definition through the principles of thought, as Eugen Munteanu reveals in his introductory study to St. Thomas Aquinas's *On Being and Essence* (2008: 5–30). An insight of how the Prayer of the Mind and Heart reflects from V. Voiculescu's poetry comes from Constantin Jinga's criticism: "The Prayer of the mind doctrine's influence is to be found also in the poem *Prizonierul/ The Prisoner [Călătorie spre locul inimii/ Journey to the Place of the Heart]*, where V. Voiculescu describes even the physiological states which are being experienced by the one who prays, in different moments of this particular prayer, corresponding to the states of Grace when he discovers God's presence in his own heart: '*Could be sickness, could be death/ It's my share, I don't revolt. [...] It aches [...] Tiny, tiny, goes my heart...*' Hurt by the beauty of the divine image, he experiences feelings similar to those of the Lord's apprentices when witnessed the Transfiguration. He would like to stop the time and to live eternally the joy of being in God's presence; and, if possibly, to keep God exclusively for himself. But this state of bliss is only a preview of the future elation" [ellipsis in the original] (2001: 54–55).

3 It is a place "existing" beyond any place/ an identity beyond identities. Referring to the literary discourse, Dominique Maingueneau theorizes the existence of three different instances, based

personality of the author of Shakespeare's "last sonnets imaginary translation", is Michelina Tenace's answer to Al. Cistelean, an interviewer who was questioning about the reason which determined the endeavour of writing a book on Vladimir Soloviev's aesthetics:

A personal curiosity determined me to choose the author, a curiosity which I would express like this: how a believer was able to be – at the same time – philosopher, theologian, poet and mystic? What unity of thought and life is being achieved between those different levels of competence, without prejudicing the fundamental imperative of fulfilling God's will through a brave fidelity relative to the marks of time? (Cistelean 2003: 50–51)⁴

The same question represents the trigger of our study on V. Voiculescu. It is true, of course, the fact that he was not a theologian. Not in the common meaning of the term, anyway. But, on the other hand, in the sense in which father Efreim from Vatoped reveals the problem, "theologian is not the one who gets a diploma from the Faculty of Theology. Theologian is the one who has within himself God the Word speaking [*o theos logos*]" (Efreim 2000). And God the Word was speaking inside the poet, a discourse which V. Voiculescu tried to express at the highest level allowed by the fallen words, depleted of their heavy meanings, worn out by the common usage and reduced to chat. The Word was speaking inside this long-distance swimmer in the ocean of belief (Voiculescu 1935: 400) even if he carefully shielded himself – like devil against the holy water, if we may capsiz the plane – from any kind of institutionalized dogma. Or, maybe, that was precisely why.

He was not a philosopher either – not in the traditional meaning of the word –, although he walked his distance on this path in order to find his way into the Light. William James' thinking is visible in some of V. Voiculescu's works, particularly in his short narratives, and Plato's vision is to be found in *Ultimele sonete ale lui Shakespeare. Traducere imaginară* [*Shakespeare's Last Sonnets. Imaginary Translation*]. Let us not forget Kierkegaard, the one who is honored with a poem (Voiculescu 2004b: 509) and, of course, the ancients from the *Upanishads*, or

on the concept of "self-constituting discourse": the "person", the "writer" and the "inscripator". This dispersed "creative identity" is motivated by the fact that the "person" refers to an individual with a certain private life and civil status; the "writer" is defined by a trajectory inside the institution of literature, and the "inscripator" assumes the enunciating subjectivity forms from the text – the "stage managing" – and the stage required by the type of discourse, which could be a novel, a short story, a drama, poetry etc. The different types of investigation reduce analysis to only one of these instances, which are inseparable, in fact. Maingueneau uses the metaphor of the "Borromean knot" – a figure consisting in three rings linked in a way in which the removal of one ring determines the unlinking of the other two – to illustrate his theory. Paratopia is the spontaneous deviation permitting this trinity to work, "the clinamen which renders this knot possible and which is rendered possible by this knot."

4 All the translation used in this study comes from the author.

Buddha, through Schopenhauer. But, if we remember that V. Voiculescu's work is rooted deeply in the Romanian tradition, in folklore and in *The Holy Scriptures*, on one hand, and, on the other hand, we draw on Gheorghe Vlăduțescu's vision regarding Romanian philosophy, we can say that – from this perspective – our poet was indeed a philosopher. A philosopher in the sense in which, to us, Romanians:

The philosophy is a relatively recent discipline. It appears with Dimitrie Cantemir and not as a developed extension of the traditional core. It is true, things are like this. But, despite of it, the Romanian folklore is also a philosophy – in a proto-philosophical form; it is people's philosophy, and for many centuries it was our philosophy, void of any philosophical school or current. The wisdom of the Romanian people is our section of old philosophy, the part which is the aquifer supplying the growth of the "grammatical" forms of the philosophical thinking, if it is to give a name to the elevated culture in comparison with the ungrammatical, oral one. (Vlăduțescu, 1998, 30)

As for the writer, there are and will be a lot of studies regarding V. Voiculescu, the poet, narrator and dramatist because he is a canonical author of the Romanian literature and seems that his poetry never ends in revealing new aspects worth to be taken into account. And when it comes to his poetry's mysticism, Ion Oarcăsu reveals the fact that the motif of the pair from the sonnet *CLXIV* [10] (Voiculescu 2004b: 575)⁵ is not erotic, as one could perceive it at first sight, but an essential element of esoteric initiation vision. "The lost pair" returns in the primordial peace to contemplate the world of archetypes. "In the light of this conception rendering a rather poetical – parabolic – than philosophical mysticism, death is a *relief*, not a gloomy fatality; a *beginning*, not an end; blissful return to the primordial stage and supreme act of victory over terrestrial *decadence*" [emphasis in the original] (Oarcăsu 1968: 14). On this subject of Voiculescu's mysticism, Roxana Sorescu asserts in the foreword of one of the volumes of the author's complete works which she edited that the poet had a structural mystic nature, overtaking the dogma of a specific religion, even if "orthodoxy remains his entrance gate into the unity of cosmic spirituality, and his way in accessing transcendence – the hesychast Prayer of the Mind and Heart. This unity is being achieved in poetry through the personification of the inanimate and through the cosmic vision which integrates the animate beings, through the incarnation of the unseen and spiritualization of the seen things (Voiculescu 2003: 9).

Keeping in mind the fact that V. Voiculescu was interested – at a certain point and among others – in studying the Kabala (Voiculescu 1935: 404),⁶ but he ended

5 "The pair's the aim, the sacred law of being."

6 "The instinct guided me onto philosophy and metaphysics. From the high school, I began to read psychology and ethical works. I soon arrived in Schopenhauer's world and did not regret it;

up practising the orthodox Prayer of the Mind and Heart, which was a way of surviving throughout the years spent in the heavy communist prisons, prisons where he was thrown by the former regime because of his poetry's mysticism, one could see that our poet rejected any kind of institutionalized dogmatism – except Christian dogma in the sense in which André Lalande reveals it (apud Țuțea 1992: 41).⁷ Besides, the orthodox ecclesiastic authorities had no trust in a poet, a believer, nonetheless, who did not agree with the course of action taken by the representatives of the Romanian Orthodox Church, even if V. Voiculescu was one of the main contributors to the *Gândirea* literary magazine,⁸ flag of the Romanian orthodoxy, where theologians like Dumitru Stăniloae were active.

However, we think that V. Voiculescu was a mystic in the true sense of the word only in the final years of his life, when he was brutally deprived of the means of fully expressing himself – his beloved poetry. It seems that it was V. Voiculescu's unique "chance" – a chance which we sincerely doubt that many of us would seize – of having no other pillar between God and himself, as his poetry was until then. In a study regarding the sacred in Arghezi's lyric, Cornel Moraru writes:

Theologically speaking, Jesus would be the key, but only from the canonical point of view. On the contemplative level – that of the unrestrained exercise of

he introduced me to the *Upanishads* and Buddha. From the first years of Letters, psychophysics and psychopathology, besides Sergio, Wundt and Höfding, led me to medicine following Washide, Pierre Janet and William James along with his religious experience. [...] I run towards everything which could [...] feed a mind secured by faith and scientifically fed with materialism, positivism, evolutionism. Littré, Claude Bernard, Aug. Comte, Darwin, Spencer. With them, I said to myself that at the beginning of the world would have been God, just as at the beginning of a tree had been the seed. But who stays to search for the seed in the telluric chaos from which the stem rose? God is to be found way up in the fruits of our branches. Away, then, with the whole bunch of the divine cosmologies' archives! But my branches started to seem more and more sterile for me. Unpleased, I deserted and fled to the enemy. I learned Kabala from studies, especially Frank's and Karpe's, I read the Sefer along with its comments, I practised Péladan's Rosicrucian doctrine, I searched for the enlightenment of the unknown philosopher; I abided for a long time in theosophy, from gnosis and Pista Sofia, through Fabre d'Olivet, Saint Yves d'Alveidre, Eliphaz Levy and Papus to the modern Schuré, Rudolf Steiner, M-me Blawatsky, Annie Besant and much more. But I did not affiliate myself to any of the secret societies, I did not adhere to any sect and I am not an initiated person, because I do not want to lose my liberty."

7 "Dogma is a form of cradling mystery, both being revealed by God. The mystery is the only form of relief from the unsettling personal limits, from the cosmic and community chains, and from the perspective of the infinity and death. Therefore, the liberty cannot be considered in any other way but dogmatically, in accordance with the Christian doctrine, which is the religion of liberty. The man is free to participate or not to the act of his own salvation. This liberty is offered by Orthodoxy and Catholicism. The Protestants place the man under the sign of the predestination. They situate themselves, Hegelian, before god's apparition, meaning rational light opposed to the blind destiny."

8 Nichifor Crainic, *Gândirea* literary magazine's director, also criticized the Romanian Orthodox Church for its decay into an inefficient ritualism. A good example for this decay is the episode where Savila, an old and respected medicine woman, dominates the village priest in V. Voiculescu's short story *Lacul rău* [*The Evil Lake*].

the faith –, there is no other palliative valid for the authentic believer, devoted with his body and soul to the seeking/ provoking of the divine Word. The true mystic is constrained to give up on everything, including poetry – if he is a poet –, humbling himself until self-destruction. (Moraru 2007: 35)

A kind of partial destruction was experienced by some poets and philosophers, though, in their attempt to surpass Christianity. Rimbaud or Nietzsche, for example, both tried to pour out the spirit, emptying themselves; one self-castrating of poetry and plunging into the most fierce materialism and the other “sinking into darkness” (Marion 2007: 98).⁹ On the other hand, an illustration of a poet who is near to inhabit the “distance” as a son, on the footsteps of the Son and into the Father, is to be found in Marion’s interpretation of Hölderlin’s letters sent to his mother and of the poetry written in the period of his “madness”.

What is extraordinary here? It is the fact that the letter does not transmit any kind of information, or “idea”. What is the letter’s signification? It describes the son’s departure from the mother: naming the mother opens the letter and naming the son ends it, two adjectives hyperbolically marking the restraint – “Venerable... dutiful”. Then comes the avowal of a relationship which seems more intense despite of the fact that it is purely abstract and strictly epistolary. The abstract connection becomes the very essence of the relationship: nothing is more exact and precious than to admit the “goodness” which communicates itself in it. The “goodness”, which has no other substance but the epistolary relationship, empties itself if it sends the reader to other similar letters. The letter’s object coincides with the pure epistolary function: to send a sign to the other from me. (Marion 2007: 194)

The French Christian philosopher’s conclusion is: “However, in some dozen of amazing poems, the formal intangibility of the terms and themes elevates the language at the height of an almost sacred discourse, filled with a power having an unprecedented density and at a level which remains, perhaps, unknown to the majority of the greatest modern poets: let us dare to say nothing about this” (Marion 2007: 194). On the other hand, the fact that this “goodness” is dissimulated inside the erotic discourse does not mean that it is less present in V. Voiculescu’s poems. The poet’s condition, assumed as an ingrate one (Voiculescu

9 “If we may, Nietzsche did not need to die experiencing the divine, as Empedocles or – in a totally different sense – as Jesus, precisely because he was not worth of it. [...] Nietzsche’s mime can balance Christ’s true death with nothing more than a half-death: the darkening. The death of the spirit without the death of the body: therefore, the spirit did not invest entirely the body, the body surviving by itself. [...] The embodiment which lacks to this death lacked also to his life: because nobody was coming, Friedrich Nietzsche had to surrender his own person to a metaphysical adoption, through the rigour of a seductive lucidity.”

2004b: 14),¹⁰ does not impede, though, in recognizing the one and only discourse suited for addressing God – the praise – (Marion 2007),¹¹ the only discourse which permits the distance's habitation, as it is revealed in V. Voiculescu's *a.o.*: "Dead or alive, it's nothing there for being frightened... / You're everything's Beginning and End to everything: / Since I'm apart from You and, never-ending, / I use my utter tumble to fill infinity/ And I can reach to You, but only when I'm far, departed (Voiculescu 2004b: 469).

Keeping in mind the previous idea, if we are considering the fact that the hyperazotemia, which is the diagnosis written on the poet's death certificate, could be V. Voiculescu's prosaic but deceitful "imaginary translation" of a self-starvation process, initiated with the undeclared intention of a sooner arrival into the Light, we can only imagine the depths of the poet's spirituality. After the priest leaves from V. Voiculescu's last confession, the writer says to his son: "I wonder why I didn't feel the Sacrament directly into my heart" (Voiculescu 2003: 38).¹² Therefore, in the light of Moraru's opinion, it is certain that V. Voiculescu could not be a true mystic – in the canonical sense – because he did not give up his beloved poetry. Besides, if it is to point out some of the misinterpretation and the simplicity of most of the literary criticism regarding his work, we have to reveal Constantin Jinga's insight:

From a strictly canonical point of view, the resulted work is fragile. We are not dealing here with an orthodox militant's work, as George Călinescu prefers to present it, or, for that matter, with a writer of religious literature trying to illustrate ecclesiastic canons, to rewrite biblical pericopes, in order to make them more accessible for his contemporaries. Even if he handled art almost in the Patristic way, he writes rather to subjectively illustrate man's efforts to assume a belief in its 'organic' data, impossible to quantify. Voiculescu is no stranger to the aesthetic joy of discovering mysterious, ancestral links between objects, facts, texts, sacred writings, and this is a very visible feature of his work. (2007: 61)

We saw the fact that V. Voiculescu was not a theologian – not in a narrow meaning of the term, anyway – but he had a "theological sight" (Ștefănescu 2012:

10 "Writing to You it saddens me, O, Lord, / With heart and mind tied up by empty rhymes... / Like in the seas of sand I sink in word/ And from your rigour hide in slushy verses. // I am myself deceiving, letters rolling/ On paper sky, vane constellations/ And, line by line, in every moment knowing, / That You are reading me, and not my poems."

11 "But the hurry of a book written by a young philosopher attests, at least, the fact that we should not, and cannot wait, that we have neither the time, nor the justification to delay the long detour and the harsh way towards the imminent Christ, who insists and calls us. And Jesus – who speaks the Word because He is the Word speaking – expects from us a 'speaking mass' (*Romans*, 12, 1). We have to pray the Logos through word."

12 The poet deafens after a treatment with kanamycin forte, in 1962-63. He communicates with his family only in written form. Some of the pages used then are still in the family's possession.

252)¹³ and was attempting to reach what Dionysius the Areopagite named the “theandric way of living” (Crainic 1940: 2).¹⁴ Who was he, then? If it is to accept Eugen Negrici’s opinion regarding Mircea Ivănescu’s poetry, he was not a true writer, either, because: “A veritable writer does not need to feel under his palms the living texture of the reality, because his only reality is literature. He does not exist outside the literature he writes or will write, even if he tries to talk himself into the opposite (Negrici 1985: 114). Or, perhaps, V. Voiculescu was a bit of all and all of them together? Adding to that, he was a physician, too; and not a common one.¹⁵

At this point of our short journey throughout V. Voiculescu’s “paratopia”, we think that it helps to look into Sorin Dumitrescu’s vision on the difference between the “contemplation in the Holy Spirit”, an orthodox characteristic, and the “mystic ecstasy”, specific to the western spiritual experience, on the level of icon – religious tableau relationship.

Far from being irreducible expressions of the Christian asceticism or specific ways of perceiving the absolute divinity’s proximity, these forms of mystical experience represent two distinct stages of spiritual perfection, the highest being the *contemplation in the Holy Spirit*, ‘eastern ecstasy’ in full light. According to Simeon the New Theologian, the mystic ecstasy’s *subtle* and *discontinuous* manifestation is for the beginners, for those making the first steps towards the unity with God. Is it not, really, the abyss separating light from darkness, specific to the chiaroscuro, the echo of the distance, at the visual expression’s level, which, according to the western theology’s *essentialism*, irreducibly secludes the Creator from the created being? To what extent the icon painters’ gifts of God’s sight and ‘will to give a face’ are determining the synergy with the uncreated energies, a togetherness essentially defining the icon’s art? [emphasis in original] (Dumitrescu 2010: 226–227)

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- 13 “The ‘theological’ sight opens onto the paradox of the iconic appearance of the invisible into the visible, showing in the most real way – as a radical phenomenological exercise – ‘the way in which the immediate-visible has to be prolonged by the look of the one who knows how to see, in order to let, finally, this immediate-visible to deliver its true figure’. Not the sight pierces the visible to reach the invisible; the invisible – the unpredictable un(more)seen – is offering itself for being seen, allowed to be seen in the self-revelation, summoning the sight on the footsteps of what appears and shows itself.”
- 14 “Jesus Christ, says Dionysus the Areopagite, brought a new way of work into the fallen world, devastated by sin: the *theandric* way, meaning the divine-human way. By the Incarnation, God becomes also a creature in order to elevate the man and, along with him, the entire cosmos to the divine destination, the eternal level of the creation.”
- 15 On May 6th 1910, he got his licence in medicine with the thesis *Rezecția intestinului cu sutură termino-terminală în herniile strangulate*. [Bowel Resection with Termino-Terminal Suture in Strangulated Hernias]. In the same year, on June 4th, he becomes county physician in Ocolu, in currently Gorj County. He did not become a surgeon, specializing in internal medicine, epidemiology and hygiene, cashing in the results of the experiences made on the roads between the forgotten mountain villages, roads taken on foot by this true *Ἀνάρργοι* [un-mercenary] physician.

To what extent V. Voiculescu would have overtaken this limit and would have reached the state of *entasy*, as Valeriu Anania names it, only God knows. The departed Metropolitan Bishop of Cluj, Alba, Crișana and Maramureș wrote:

In Romanian literature, the highest and purest expression of faith and religious sentiment is to be found in the work of the great Vasile Voiculescu. [...] Through meditation and hesychast exercises, he outcomes the ecstasy state and goes beyond, reaching the higher state of entasy, namely [...] the place where the ego meets with the Logos. The literary fruits of this experience, or, more precisely, its artistic expression, is the cycle *Ultimele sonete închipuite ale lui Shakespeare în traducere imaginară de V. Voiculescu*, poems which, in my opinion, cannot be fully understood without taking into account the hesychia. (1995: 165)

In the light of Moraru's words regarding a true mystic, it seems that Anania is wrong. Here is a problem in need for clarification because, as it is well known, V. Voiculescu did not abandon his beloved poetry even when he was lying on the bed, dying (Voiculescu 2003: 38).¹⁶ For him, though, creating poetry was not a palliative, and not even one of the alternatives of salvation from the "unhappy consciousness", as it was for B. Fondane, but his way of sharing the wonders discovered on the theandric path, a mode to trans-script the Poetry.

On the other hand, it helps here to remember Șerban Cioculescu's appreciation, from the foreword to V. Voiculescu's unpublished writings. The critic is puzzled by the fact that the poet gave the measure of his true creative power at an old age, around seventy, an age when the great majority of the poets had already drained the fountain of their inspiration and, in the case in which they are still writing, they repeat themselves in a minor gamut, their intellectual reserves being depleted as the physical ones are. "But, in Voiculescu's case, the physical, if we may say it this way, the laws of creation are capsized. As the man seemed to bend under the burden of his age, the creator within got new powers, adding to his long life's experience an artistic experience at a very high level of expression, an amazing volcanic eruption of poetry, in verses and prose" (Voiculescu 1986: IX). Recently, in a monographic study dedicated to this true *Aváργυρος* (un-mercenary) physician, Nicolae Oprea comes to complete Cioculescu's words:

Through a miracle – which belongs to the ineffable process of artistic creation –, Vasile Voiculescu finds inside him, at an old age, the power to get through another literary beginning. Perhaps the explosive moment of the prose creation – and of the creation of *The Last Imagined Sonnets...* – was initiated by joining

16 "V. V.: 'Why can't I hold the pen anymore? I still have strength in my hand, I am not paralysed. Why can't I write anymore?' Ionică: 'You have not practised. I have not written for several months and could not write anymore. You wrote now beautifully.'"

the spiritual movement ‘Rugul Aprins’ [The Burning Bush] from the Antim monastery, after the Second World War. (Oprea 2006: 62)

Now, as a parenthesis trying to reveal some aspects of the hesychast Prayer of the Mind and Heart, we will remember the fact that, being questioned by an apparently puzzled interviewer about one of his books’ theme, where Tomáš Špidlik tries to integrate the founder of the Society of Jesus in the descendance of the Patristic tradition, the departed Jesuit cardinal said:

The prayer has to be a fundamental exercise of Ignatius’ courses. In fact, the method of “Ignatius’ meditations” has been taught and explained throughout centuries. Despite that, it would be an iniquity towards this master of the praying, who was Ignatius of Loyola, to reduce his instructions to a unique method. At a meeting with orthodox theologians from Thessaloniki, in Crete, I held a conference on the “Prayer of the Mind and Heart”, considered typically eastern. I demonstrated that in the *Exercises* a short but accurate description of this way of praying can be found. Even more: this has to be the goal of Ignatius’ meditations, as he says at the beginning, “Not the wealth of knowledge satisfies the soul, but to feel and taste the things from inward.” (Cistelecan 2003: 63–64)

In addition to that, the Jesuit, who was closely preoccupied with the eastern spirituality, tried to bring together the secluded roads of Christianity, consecutive to the East-West Schism from 1054 – roads “secured”, if we may use a bellicose term, by the long-term fight between Scholastic and Patristic “warriors”, a fight recalled in one of our previous works (Ștefănescu et al. 2012: 7–52) –, in the ecumenical spirit born from the imperative necessity to reunite the Christians in this time of crisis of the modern world. Illustrating this spirit, father Špidlik recounts an episode, again as a response to the interviewer’s question, this time regarding the heart’s importance in spirituality.

No doubt. I remember what Athenagoras, the great patriarch of Constantinople, said to me. When I introduced myself he asked: “Are you a professor of theology? Those are the ones who make the unity of the Christians difficult because they are reasoning with the head. Thoughts are meant to divide; the heart is the one who brings togetherness to the people.” I answered: “I am a professor, for that matter, but I am teaching spirituality and the heart is my priority, therefore.” Then, the patriarch embraced me. I am handing on to you this embrace, my friends from Romania. (Cistelecan 2003: 64)

Summarizing, we can say that our study, which is part of a larger research, tried to discover the roots of an endeavor which led to the discovery of some of

the universal culture's gems, which are Shakespeare's "last sonnets" *translated imaginary* by V. Voiculescu, gems holding inside some true rays of Light, Love's quintessence. Going further than his mentor, and expressing the fruits of an "illness" which Harold Bloom named as "the anxiety of influence" (1997), V. Voiculescu extended the horizon of the Shakespearean love sonnets, stepping into Marion's *distance*, led by Eros' burning desire to reach for the Agapè's healing descend. In the larger domain of our research, this part is trying to reveal some aspects of V. Voiculescu's life and work, to illustrate the passage, through his poetry, to that contemporary philosophical current which tries to institute a "phenomenological theology"¹⁷ (LaCoque and Ricœur 2002: 316–317) based on the Johannine assertion "God is Love".¹⁸ Thus, we arrived, as in Amis' *Time Arrow*, at the origins of our quest, getting through the "imaginary translation" and "major epigone" concepts reflected in the poet's works (Boldea, Cistelean and Moraru 2013: 189–202) and through the elements which are revealing the entwining of two of the four terms¹⁹ defining love in the Patristic and New Testament's Greek, *Eros* and *Agapé* (Ștefănescu and Suciu 2012). The method of solitary style (Scrima 2004: 12–23) could explain our attempt to reveal V. Voiculescu's personality, along with the visions of some Romanian critics regarding *The Last Sonnets*... This method can be imagined through Marion's look into the *distance*: "[...] the distance opens the unifying departure only starting from a term which is revealing inside it, or, better said, which discovers in itself its own horizon: the distance reveals only as a road is being cleared, starting from a place, and not as the itinerary is read on a map, from the elsewhere of a neutralized representation" (Marion 2007: 278). And, because we recalled the founder of the Society of Jesus, we will add here Jinga's opinion on another aspect of V. Voiculescu's writing:

Following Michael Wadsworth's suggestion, when he discusses the role of midrashes and targums in reinforcing the Canon, we could launch, here, a hypothesis concerning the crystallization of another canon, namely the modern one: in Voiculescu's writings, the technique of the midrash entwines with a

17 "This development of an ethics without ontology, made by a Jew thinker [Emanuel Lévinas, *note ours*], produced many echoes through Christians. There are different attempts made to develop, on the categories of *love* and *gift*, a new theological thinking under the sign of 'God without Being'. Jean-Luc Marion, the most brilliant of these new theo-philosophers, begins also from Nietzsche's declaration regarding the death of God."

18 "He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is Love" (1 John 4, 8). Saint John's assertion could be completed by St. Mathew's: "'Teacher, which is the great commandment in the law?' And He said unto him: 'Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind.' This is the first and great commandment. And a second like unto is this: 'Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.' On these two commandments the whole law hangeth, and the prophets" (Matthew 22: 36–40).

19 The other two terms are *storghe* (Στοργή), which defines affection, the love coming from the respect of children towards their parents or the parental love (it could mean also marital love) and *philia* (φιλία), the equivalent of friendship, of love between the human beings.

diversity of folkloric motifs, with elements of “pagan” mysticism and with the author’s original ideas regarding faith. This synthesis, as we could see, is of Renaissance proportions. He does not imperatively propose to himself to edify the virtual reader. At least, he tries to introduce the reader into a certain atmosphere, to lead him, but as Ignatius, throughout his own imagination’s labyrinth. Many of Voiculescu’s writings could be seen as very elaborate supports for the fulfilment of some much profound spiritual exercises and, anyway, personal ones (2001: 59).

Arriving at the end of our short journey, we can conclude that the poet’s ultimate goal, to achieve *hesychia*, the inner peace – at the end of a long and painful quest on various itineraries –, of the divine revelation, consecutive to the initiation into The Prayer of the Mind and Heart, which came along with the providential meeting known as *Rugul Aprins* [The Burning Bush], would represent a gem of a lifetime experience carved by pain and sorrow – similarly to the rose giving its life, the perfume, when squeezed – for the ultimate expression of V. Voiculescu’s poetry.

The author of *Shakespeare’s Last Sonnets. Imaginary Translation* is not a monk, though, even if he tends towards theandry. Life is ubiquitous in his work, proving the fact that it is the most valuable gift from God, the reason why, the one and only interdict which God imposed on Lucifer in the case of Job was the attempt on his life (*Job*, 2, 6). Life is not absent in a spiritual father, though. On the contrary, the hesychast flounders less and less until he finds peace, by detachment, and arrives at a point where he could see the uncreated light, symbol of God’s Grace. Therefore, putting his life’s experience, his Promethean aims and undivided love, through the pain’s *athanor*, our poet tries to reveal a living icon, making us able to see, on the threshold, through contemplation, the look of The Father gazing at us from the *distance*. The Poetry, in its original sense of *poiesis*, re-presents the world seen by V. Voiculescu’s theolgal eye, a world re-created in grace, a world of the man who tends to purify himself for living in theandry. We took the liberty to wander, in wonder, through V. Voiculescu’s work and life, allowed or not, more or less, by the Light which guides the poet in this vast valley of sorrow tagged with oasis of joy for those who can see them. We also have a *Compass* to show direction, “carved” into the manuscript given to André Scrima when he fled from the country: “Whatever be my mind, my heart is Christian, / Her way in the world’s ocean is to keep, / Always as guide through dark and tarry sites be, / A living compass into the Light’s eternity” (Voiculescu 2004a: 683).

In conclusion, we think that our short study casts light upon V. Voiculescu’s paradoxical personality, a light which would help the reader get into the core of an artist possessing – or being possessed by – an organic faith, an author who wrote mostly by inspiration and who melted the deep vein of the tradition

into the crucible of his heart filled with burning Love, the resulting gems being polished, then, with the art and patience of a craftsman. Complex personality, with a destiny to match it, unjustly broken, V. Voiculescu started slowly to climb on the road to Poetry, his art being in need of a relatively long period of incubation in his mind and heart occupied by those “enemy brothers”, the equivalent of Eliade’s “coincidentia oppositorum”. When this occupation was over, when the poet started to walk on the path of hesychia, then his entire artistic and life experience distilled into the athanor, which became his heart containing the mind for stepping into the Light. Then, he gave himself as a gift, as did the One whose traces were followed by our poet during his entire life, on various paths. From his gift we received a small part, on our heart’s measure, thus trying to give it forward to those who might be in need.

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