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## VASILE VOICULESCU AND THE BURNING BUSH



**ABSTRACT:** *This paper aims at bringing into light Vasile Voiculescu's poetry, especially The Last Fancied, poems whose writing relates to the poets attending to Rugul Aprins (The Burning Bush) meetings. The topicality of its theme is made obvious by the interest of contemporary literary critics in studies, articles or monographies. The goal of the present paper is to identify and analyze the peculiarities of Voiculescu's sonnets and the inter-textual relationship with their great model/ archetype. This work also proposes a view to the religious thread of poems. The novelty consists in a research regarding the relation between work and biography. On the other hand, the main fresh note is given by a multilevel receptiveness of the textual analysis. The objectives of this research are to illustrate the writer's concept of love within his religious propensity and the religious texture of his poetry as well.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Burning Bush, mystic poetry, biblical imagery, transcends, eros*

### Introduction

To write about the writer and especially about the poet Vasile Voiculescu is not exactly an easy enterprise. And this is because, on the one hand, his work is a vast one, including forms and timbres

that escape easy analyses, and, on the other hand, because after 1989, lots of volumes of biography research and exegesis have been dedicated to him, with an interest like for no other Romanian inter-war poet. Numberless exegeses<sup>1</sup> and types of lectures opened other, ever newer perspectives on his works. This interest is due to the spiritual horizons of his writings quite poorly known until not long ago, and to his exceptional biography and destiny of a true martyr. Especially in the last part of his life, when he embraces seclusion and asceticism, his mystic poetry and fantastic stories become a subtle echo of his own dramatic existence. Life defines in such a measure the substance of his poetic imaginary universe that his works are born directly from his spiritual experiences, as with all the great mystic poets of the world:



“The connections between art and faith are old connections of pure dependency. Art has not been relevant on its own; art has always served faith, along all the religions. But ever since art emancipated, since art became a religion itself, which asks exclusive submission from its believers, to only practice its rites and forms, ever since then, one has been forbidden to serve two masters. The one who wants to make pure art betrays pure faith”<sup>2</sup>.

A contemplative spirit, Voiculescu has from the very beginning of his literary activity, the vision of one for whom pure art and faith (inter)communicate, definitively identifying in his last period of creation, when “creation-faith and love will become at the same time living in real and transcending real into imaginary. The experience

<sup>1</sup> We have in view here the contributions of Liviu Grăsoiu, Valeriu Anania, Roxana Sorescu etc.

<sup>2</sup> Vasile VOICULESCU, “Confesiunea unui scriitor și medic”, în: *Gândirea*, 1935, p. 1.

that Vasile Voiculescu communicates is double: spiritual and literary, with the realization of one *complexio oppositorum*<sup>3</sup>.

Nevertheless, the poet is not absorbed by his own emotion and consequently, the works do not mechanically become mystic ecstasy. We are conscious that reducing his creation to an emergent biographism means simplifying it up to mystification.

A solitary spirit, he is still anchored in a cultural tradition, but also in the epoch in which he evolves. The influences, the affinities, the contiguities, but also the peculiar differences are recognizable in various degrees and stages, starting from the very literary debut marked by the famous at that time Al. Vlahuță, Șt. O. Iosif, Al. Macedonski or G. Coșbuc, up to the last sonnets which stand under Shakespeare's sign.

We can inventory themes, formulas and lyrical structures or sonorities which descend and are circumscribed to traditionalism within a fecund intertextuality which has its roots, perhaps, in the religious poetry of Dosoftei and Varlaam, reverberating later in the poetry of Șt. A. Doinaș, Ioan Alexandru or Daniel Turcea. Read diachronically, Voiculescu's poetry is legitimized within a long tradition, being at the same time pregnantly original.

This paradox of the poet's spirit is obvious specifically in *Shakespeare's Last Fancied Sonnets in V. Voiculescu's Imaginary Translation*, when it enshrines his illustrious predecessor's universe, assuming his spirit whose phantasms and sonorities are reflected in his works, the Romanian poet approaching them.

Having no further claims, this paper is a try which proposes an attentive (re)view upon *Shakespeare's Last Fancied Sonnets...* in order to highlight their originality and uniqueness, but also to clarify their mystic tone and vision. I think that by the two levels of



<sup>3</sup> Roxana SORESCU, *Prefață*, în Vasile VOICULESCU, *Integrala operei poetice*, Ed. Anastasia, București, 1999, p. 185.

reading that we have in view, we can in a certain measure distill the poetic and poetic specific texture of Voiculescu's writings.

We also propose developing the group photo of Antim monastery, focusing on his way that the poet's attending *The Burning Bush's* meetings come to confirm his religious quests which have had such an echo in his works.

## 1. The imaginary re-writing or about the abidance of Shakespearean Sonnets

The volume *Shakespeare's Last Fancied Sonnets in V. Voiculescu's Imaginary Translation* goes beyond the literary value of any of the previous volumes. Its 90 sonnets form a unitary work, the borders in between them being purely conventional. The volume appears as one single and ample poem, perfectly unitary, a synthesis poem of all the previous lyrical themes: love and hate, the eulogy of the creative spirit, the meditation on the birth of the world and time flowing, the faith in the victory through art upon the ephemeral and fragility of beings, etc.



Shakespeare is not merely thematically reportable, but also in terms of form. It is a known fact that the Romanian poet's intention was to write 154 sonnets to continue those of the great English writer; up to 1958 he only writes 88, in 1960 adding two more, getting thus to the symbolic figure 90. The political events did not allow him to finish the Shakespearean cycle. A complete variant of the cycle was hidden in July-August 1958 in Apostol Apostolides house, which the poet used to visit, and where the elite of the interwar intellectuals gathered in the 1950s. After the poet's death, Ion, one of his sons, retrieves and publishes them in 1964 at E.S.P.L.A., with a preface by Perpessicius.

The 90 poems are numbered with Latin figures from CLV (155) and precisely localized temporally, between 2.12.1954 and 21.07.1958, the author indicating the day, month, and year when they were conceived. With some exceptions, the order is a chronological one, and the structure is obviously the one of an English sonnet: 14 lines with three quatrains and one couplet, differently from the Italian one (with one single exception of 15 lines). These have no dedication, like the ones of his model did<sup>4</sup>.

It is common knowledge that Shakespeare's sonnets are dedicated to Mr. W.H., an unknown man. They are grouped according to the sex of the addressee: those from one to 136 are inspired by the relation with the blond man; those from 137 to 152 are dedicated to the Dark Lady, 153 and 154 being dedicated to a young lady.

Like in antique poems, the author frames his poem in between a prologue and an epilogue, between a *captatio benevolentiae* and a final deep bow in front of the great Will:



“The thousand times heavier pen I hold.  
The purest proof of my ennoblement [...]   
People of thoughts, dream, feeling, body, yearn,  
I crown thee lord o’er all these, in my turn” [*Sonnet CLV (1)*];

“And could not with thy fiery greatness keep!  
Then did I dare, while humbly I did kneel,  
To bring thee low [...] down to my meekness deep [...]   
Yet, timeless sun, allow me that I stay  
A wretched bug that’s basking in thy ray” [*Sonnet CCXLIV (90)*].

<sup>4</sup> English version by Cristina TĂTARU, Sever TRIFU (ed.), *Shakespeare's Last Fancied Sonnets in V. Voiculescu's Imaginary Translation*, Dacia Publishing House, Cluj-Napoca, 1990.

## II. Poems on love

The hermeneutics of *Shakespeare's Last Fancied Sonnets* is not as vaster as it is different going up to the opposite. Researchers often abide irreconcilable positions. The numerous interpretations surprise any attentive reader.

Roxana Sorescu, in *Vasile Voiculescu, Integrala operei poetice*, considers that Voiculescu's erotic poetry that timidly started the first volumes will find its full expression in the maturity volumes: *Urcuș*, *Întrezăriri*, and particularly, in the *Sonnets*. But the metaphysical level reading must not be reduced solely to Christian mystic:

“We have to stand beyond the Christian parable, in full Orphic and Pythagorean initiation, for which the double face of the unitary god was a principle”<sup>5</sup>;

“The transmigration of the spirit gives the key of the volume: in the symbolic plan of human creation, the sign of unity, the incarnation of the transcendent was Shakespeare, a quintessence of cosmic possibilities and of artistic creation. [...] In the ascendant and descendant reincarnation paths, his complex spirit took another body after years; one of another initiated in the cosmic and aesthetic mysteries, the one whose initials, identical with those of the first creator, indicate, beyond any human force, the divine parentage: VV represent the split of the primordial unit W”<sup>6</sup>.

On the other hand, “the Biblical imagery [...] coexists with the polytheistic pagan imagery, as it does not represent the sign of being framed by a ritual, but the sign of revelation beyond any religious organization”<sup>7</sup>.

Liviu Grasoiu, in *Poezia lui Vasile Voiculescu*, explains the full unity

<sup>5</sup> R. SORESCU, *Vasile Voiculescu. Integrala operei poetice*, p. 30.

<sup>6</sup> R. SORESCU, *Vasile Voiculescu. Integrala operei poetice*, p. 30.

<sup>7</sup> R. SORESCU, *Vasile Voiculescu. Integrala operei poetice*, p. 31.



of the sonnets and their complexity through some possible interpretations: a) the sonnets of a love story; b) a versified epistolary novel; c) religious poetry; d) poetry as a game according to the Shakespearean model; e) synthesis poem of the previous creation. This last interpretation is the one chosen by the researcher:

“Synthesis-poem on a multitude of questions the entire poetic works of Voiculescu has asked. Here is the crown for a long effort of artistic meditation, a huge universe where people, feelings, ideas, and concepts move together. The works of a modern thinker, who traveled through centuries of poetic and philosophic thinking, reaching towards the Zenith of his life, finally touched the ideal of lyrical perfection”<sup>8</sup>.

Valeriu Anania, in *Rotonda plopilor aprinși*, advocates the mystic-religious primordial character of the sonnets:



“it is not proper to speak about Voiculescu’s religious poetry; his prayer was art in itself. Not without a smile, I once read some critics’ surprise, thinking that they had discovered the erotic outburst of a poet in the sonnets [...]. The distance between *eros* and *agape* is an enormous one and perhaps in it is the space where the reason to be of the sonnets should be searched for, as a sublime addenda to those of the great Will. If Shakespeare left the poetry of a genius to us, Voiculescu left us as a present the poetry of a charismatic”<sup>9</sup>.

Similarly, he expresses himself in *Introducere la Cântarea Cântărilor în Biblia sau Sfânta Scriptură*: „After centuries of searching and hesitancy,

<sup>8</sup> Liviu GRASOIU, *Poezia lui Vasile Voiculescu*, Dacia Publishing House, 1999, p. 105.

<sup>9</sup> Valeriu ANANIA, *Rotonda plopilor aprinși*, Ed. Florile Dalbe, 1995, p. 234.

a proper reading of the *Song of Songs* becomes accessible through Voiculescu's works from his maturity and spiritual elevation period"<sup>10</sup>.

In fact, no creation of such a spiritual magnitude can be interpreted in a mono-angular manner, so an analysis made from various angles would fit any masterpiece. Consequently, this is an offer for lecture on several levels of significance. That is why I could not claim to analyze all the sonnets in this paper, but rather I will try to reveal some possible levels of reading/lecture. Looking at the text from this perspective, many of the points of view mentioned, would not appear to be irreconcilable any more.

*Shakespeare's last Fancied Sonnets* are, at a first level, a vast love poem. Its similarities with the universal erotic poetry are obvious.



"The nearness between Voiculescu and the golden substance of the world erotic poetry gives the sonnets a scholarly air of an art shop, where all the grand masters, all the times, all the styles, from Plato to Petrarch, from Antiquity to Renaissance, from Romanticism to Baroque are to be found"<sup>11</sup>.

In Voiculescu's translation, love accepts the most numerous and surprising definitions:

"When Love's the sole eternity well get" [*Sonnet CLXXXIII (29)*];

"Love is genius" [*Sonnet CCXVII (63)*];

"The timeless seed of love in our flesh's grown" [*Sonnet CCXXXV (81)*];

"Love's the all-singing night that soon will faint" [*Sonnet CCXXXVIII (84)*]<sup>12</sup>.

<sup>10</sup> \*\*\*, *Biblia sau Sfânta Scriptură*, Ed. Institutului Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, București, 2001, p. 871.

<sup>11</sup> S. TRIFU (ed.), *Shakespeare's Last Fancied Sonnets...*, p. 11.

<sup>12</sup> S. TRIFU (ed.), *Shakespeare's Last Fancied Sonnets...*, p. 11.

The same love-inspiring muse appears to the Romanian poet as well: an ambiguous presence, a multiple-faced symbol, the noble young man, and the feminine being.

The sonnets dedicated to a woman are 9, 11, 14, 19, 42, 43, 45, 62, 75, 76, 77, 81. We can say that it is always another woman, since their faces and attributes are so diverse: “thy soul is intricate and deep”, “thy dark plait” (CLXV, 11), “the world’s lapis-lazulies hold the eyes” (CLXVIII, 14), “fair-breasted child, with tress’s hair” (CXCVI, 42), “thy green Atlantic eyes” (CXCIX, 45), “goddess of storm and ice” (CCXVI, 62), “in the soft brown with winding shores” (CCXXXI, 77), “those false stars, thy eyes”, “cold idol’s lips” (CCXXIX, 75)<sup>13</sup>.

Thus, the woman is a blonde or a brunette, with green or blue eyes, burning with love, with a deep soul, or, quite the contrary, refusing to fall for the game of love, pure, chaste, bothering to keep her virginity, or a lover inclined to any carnal pleasure.

All these faces indicate not the faces of a beloved woman, but in Maiorescu’s variant, ways of femininity itself, contradictions of Womanhood. The identity of the Muse is not important, as soon as the poet manages to offer a comprehensive image of the eternal feminine in general.

In much more of the sonnets, the inspiration is a man or a neutral being: 5, 7, 8, 10, 12, 13, 16, 17, 18, 23, 26, 27, 28, 30, 31, 32, 33, 34, 36, 38, 40, 41, 48, 50, 51, 52, 53, 54, 55, 59, 60, 69, 70, 72, 73, 78, 79, 80, 83, 84, 86.

The masculine is endowed with a more unitary portrait: young – “onto thy youth I smile” (CLVIII, 4), handsome – “thy haughty charm I look into the face” (CLVIII, 4) or “under thy sunny strands and blue eyes” beam” (CLXXX 26), “thou bear’s thy horrid beauty,



<sup>13</sup> Elena ZAHARIA-FILIPAȘ, *Introducere în opera lui Vasile Voiculescu*, Ed. Minerva, București, 1980, p. 11.

like a curse” (CCXXXII 78), indifferent to the love he is surrounded by: “treason, contempt, I need if they’re from thee” (CLXI, 7), has a noble spiritual origin: “hermetic prince” (CLXII, 8), “too soft, too frail thou seemed” (CCVI, 52), “firm, young, beautiful and wise” (CCVIII, 54), “the highest state of passing flesh” (CCXIV, 60).

The formal addressee can in this case be the poet himself in his successive ways of becoming. Voiculescu objectifies himself, interrogating his own spirit multiplied into another or mirrored into his Shakespearean illustrious model, analyzing his relations with Love, Poetry, or Eternity. In a much greater measure than the Woman, the Man becomes a generic character: Man, torn by the contraries of existence, between spirit and matter, ecstasy and pain, hope and fall.

If we admit that the sonnets are a mere vast love poem, we will recognize here the reflections of the entire issue of the universal erotic poetry. The encounter with the Eros describes an inner dynamic, full of surprises and contradictions.



The feminine being represents the opportunity to know the big mysteries of existence and of the universe, a source of vitality, but also of spiritual elevation:

“Something more charmed than victory I wait,  
Not roughly crown the seething blood do I;  
Neath bliss, another profit’s what I rate [...]  
I dream perfection’s dream, that’s still undone” [*Sonnet CLVI (2)*].

Aware of the lack of consistency of carnal love, by its fluctuation and ephemerality, he would feel hurt and betrayed, in an agonizing soliloquy:

“What good are now wit, fame or fantasy [...]  
Thuoats left me [...]. All things fade, cold shimmering [...]  
The wounded eagle’s burdened by his winds,  
Their flutter vainly adding agony” (*Sonnet CLX, 6*).

Love is thus associated with pain, but a voluptuous pain, expressed through insomnia or curses, disillusion or humility:

“Should Love be nothing but a mask of Pain?” (*Sonnet CLXXV, 21*).  
“Nothing can touch my purest love. In vain  
Wrath, treason, slander hid’ in smiles unfold” (*Sonnet CCXXVIII, 74*).

Vulnerable in front of love, he even begins to doubt his creative force:



“But who should lend me verse and soul, if thou  
Essence of miracle, art no more nigh?  
Ah, heart and strings are mute alike, for now  
I clearly see the chasm of thy lie” (*Sonnet CLXIII, 9*).

Hurt by beauty and by love, Voiculescu transcends their meaning in creation:

“Hid in my heart is the eternity  
Which with love’s diamond I do write for thee” (*Sonnet CLXII, 8*).

The sonnetist gradually isolates himself, detaching from the world, hoping that he would thus be able to contemplate the Beauty by

which he would reach mystical ecstasy:

“Love glory’s not engorgement, not by far,  
Kiss feasts or orgies of embraces tight,  
But longing, waiting fused with mystery are  
Its spirit in this world of vain delight” (*Sonnet CLXXIX, 25*).

The mystagogue poet rebels against materiality, against the passion attributed to woman and which hijacks him from his creative mission, calling him into the contingency, forcing him to waste his own self:

“I wonder how, pure like a glass I’ve kept  
Where nothing of what’s past doth ever stay,  
Face, shoulders, arms to hold me that I swept,  
And the black evening-stars beyond her clay” (*Sonnet CCXXX, 76*).



An ever-changing inner dynamic can be glimpsed here, an inner turmoil, feelings pendulating between heaven and earth, holiness and sin. Torn by contradictory emotions, he sees woman as an idol, or, contrariwise, as a source of sins: beauty is but an appearance, a delusion, then returning gratefully to the subject of his worship. The lover seeks his ideal pair, the remake of the archetypal Adamic couple, or the retreat into the contemplation of absolute Beauty:

“The secret flesh will make to spirit turn:  
A yearning stretched from yonder skies I trace,  
That the lost mate should finally return” (*Sonnet CCV, 51*).

The fight between body and soul often gains tragic accents: the obsessions of love are enslaving and the thirst for spirit is a given of the being. Finally Love brings elevation, the rising towards Art, which alone prevails on Death:

“Don’t wonder that a measure I deny,  
 Thou art to give me all, for always hath  
 Thy love been blended with its brethren high.  
 Art everlasting and most sovereign Death” (*Sonnet CLXXXII, 28*).

This permanent struggle followed by the rescue in spirit made some literary critics speak not so much about erotic poetry, but about one that chants the idea of Love:

“The sonnets are not actually a kind of sentimental poetry on love, but one on the idea of sentiment. Like Michelangelo or Shakespeare, Voiculescu operates concepts such as life, death, fate, love, pain, poetry, art, reciting them in an Elizabethan and Renaissance manner. Some of them must be numbered among the masterpieces of a genre, very rarely frequented by Romanian poets”<sup>14</sup>.



### III. Mystic poems

Another level of reading the sonnets has in view their mystic and religious thread. To better understand these senses of the poems, one should start exactly from the subject of love<sup>15</sup>.

<sup>14</sup> Nicolae MANOLESCU, *Istoria critică a literaturii române*, Ed. Paralela 45, București, 2008, p. 754.

<sup>15</sup> N. MANOLESCU, *Istoria critică a literaturii române*, p. 754.

Eros is known in Greek mythology as God of love, the son of Zeus and Aphrodite. Appearing as a beautiful, winged child, he hides a warrior, whose arrows never miss the aim, sentencing humans to torments with no cure. Eros represents passionate, earthly, possessive and devouring love.

In his *Theogony*, Hesiod speaks about another Eros, a beautiful undying god, emergent from Chaos at the beginnings of time, at the same time with Gaea and Olympus. This Eros masters the humans and guides them wisely. He is the primordial element and the generator principle of the world. He does not know passion and follows the rational and spiritual laws. He is an associate of the Good ethical principle, and of that of Beauty as well.

On the other hand, in Plato's *Banquet*, in Socrates's discourse, the Eros has 4 stages: the bodily Eros, the soul's Eros-one concerned with beautiful things, and a divine Eros that contemplates the essence of things.



Therefore, we have to do with several meanings of the term, from among which we can pregnantly discern two: the commune Eros, the erotic love, which is based on the feminine principle, and primordial, celestial, or divine love, which holds the masculine principle and is connected with thinking and reason.

This second meaning will be adopted by the Church in its first centuries and by its Eastern Holy Fathers. The specializing of the term *agape* to design Christian love as opposed to *eros* – used for sensual, bodily love occurred much later. The term *eros* imposed itself in the first centuries, so as Christian thinking harked back to Plato's philosophy.

In most of the writings of the first Holy Fathers of the Church, *eros* refers to the love of God, the love towards God as object of contemplation.

Dionysius the Areopagite, as apostolic father attaches the sense of ecstatic love to the term, which elevates the humans to God. Origen uses it in the same context, just as St. Gregory of Nyssa or St. Symeon the New Theologian do.

The theme surely charmed and interested him. It was the great theme of Christianity and since always of poetry, the main theme of Mystic and the substance of the contemplative lyricism. The novelty of Voiculescu's vision resides in the fact that love, as the Eros of which The Holy fathers spoke does not unilaterally lead to one ecstatic contemplative vision, but it is the expression of an inner tumultuous life, crossed by in quietude, sadness, existential quests. From the awareness of the innate feeling of the existence of the divinity up to the mystic experience of love, the poet travels a rough ascendant way, full of unrest and inner tension.

*The Burning Bush* was a philocalic and mystic movement. The mental prayer of the heart was practiced at the meetings of the group founded in 1945, along with the readings from the mystic writings of the eastern Christianity, followed by ample comments of the theologians attending. In 1946, the Russian monk Ivan Kulâghin comes to Antim from Optina Monastery. It is very probable that it was here that Voiculescu became familiar with hesychast texts and he learned about the practice of the mental prayer of the heart which he would intensely practice during the years of detention. Also, in 1946 his wife dies, this being the moment that he decides to retreat from the social and lead a seclusion life of inner meditation and prayer. Moreover, he decides to retreat at the monastery, and it is only because he is arrested in 1958 that he does not.

He considered himself a mystic: "Beginning with the year 1947, I have written many poems with a religious content, urging towards a spiritual life, far from the crowd"<sup>16</sup>. At the interrogatories, he



<sup>16</sup> Florentin POPESCU, *Detenția și sfârșitul lui Vasile Voiculescu*, Ed. Vestala, 2000, p. 132.

declared that he had written mystic poetry, sustaining his own artistic creed in a dignified manner. On various occasions, the poet confessed his contemplative and mystic vocation:

“Gândirea’s mystic concern chimes in with my inner structure and my religious views. I went through all the phases of a mystic experience [...]. I had a hunger in my soul which I couldn’t satiate neither with literature nor with any great deed”<sup>17</sup>.

This is precisely why the sonnets, written exactly in the period when he attended *The Burning Bush*, can be read as mystic poems. Valeriu Anania, writer, theologian and the poet’s close friend, offers a pertinent perspective. He shows that Voiculescu’s connection with Shakespeare refers only to the theme and prosody, while the message and the meanings originate in *The Song of Songs*;



“If the allegory *The Song of Songs* originates in the relation between the divine Logos and the human soul, the hesychast doctrine moves the main stress on the human heart. It does not mean as much the anatomic organ, but the spiritual centre of the human being, the deepest and the truest I, level at which the noetic engagement is consumed”<sup>18</sup>.

Filtered through the reading of the Holy Fathers, the sense of eros-love gains a new connotation: that of absolute love for God, spiritualized, full of the Grace or energy of the Spirit, which works in favor of the completeness, the perfectness of the human being. He generates the mystic ecstasy, the out coming of the human for the

<sup>17</sup> Vasile VOICULESCU, *Gânduri albe*, Ed. Cartea românească, București, 1986, p. 436.

<sup>18</sup> Valeriu ANANIA, *Din spumele mării*, Ed. Dacia, București, 1995, p. 187.

communion with God. Only heartened by Eros can the human work his way through the path of knowledge and initiation.

This type of poetics has, of course, some distinctive peculiarities, among which I would mention here the allegorism. That is why the *Gandirea* – type traditionalism of Voiculescu’s is the origin of his modernism: “The poetic which bursts out from this lyric cut its way like a razor blade into the heart of words, freeing them from the superficial fossilized strata and discovering their unknown poetic resources”<sup>19</sup>.

The ambiguity becomes specific to the mystic sense which surpasses the level of literalness with a view to allegory. The God of mystics is inaccessible, unthinkable in its being, a *Deus Absconditus* who cannot be rationally known, a reality impossible to express, ineffable, which the poet meets through his mystic love, through ecstasy. The divine love transcends the eros. This is a new type of wedding, a union between the beloved groom Christ/God himself and the Hesychast’s bride-heart:



“Thee, like in timelessness in it, will I,  
 Hermetic prince, from time’s claw torn, enshrine. [...]  
 Hidin my heart is the eternity  
 Which with love’s diamond I do write for thee” (*Sonnet CLXII, 8*).

The allegory takes on the spiritual, mystic, locked-in meanings, transposing them into concrete images. Each concrete image that describes love hides a transcendent meaning. The passion between the poet and his beloved leads to another sense, that true love begins where passion, the carnal, the sensual ends. It hides the timelessness

<sup>19</sup> Puiu IONIȚĂ, *Poezia mistică românească*, Ed. Institutului European, 2014, p. 214.

within the human, his/her divine origin. Even if the discourse often stresses the importance of the body in the mystic unity, the vision is that of the transcendence of matter into a union that results into ecstasy. The worshiper abandons himself to melt into the subject of his worship.

The plastic expression, in terms of physical love, speaks of the love for God. Love takes off from its profane sense towards its analogue through spiritualization:

“For love won’t look at random shapes, you, see?” (*Sonnet CLXIV, 10*) or

“Living within the realm of meanings, I

Can’t be misled by semblance easily” (*Sonnet CLXVI, 12*).

“Alike in beauty and in genius twin,

Of thought eternal we disclosed the land” (*Sonnet CLXX, 16*).



This is the reason why two languages interwove: an erotic one (passion, lover, pleasure, flesh, hunger, kiss) and another one, in close dependence on biblical imaginary (master, strong master, perfection, chalice, myrrh, virtue, magus, heavens).

An aspect too rarely commented of Voiculescu’s sonnets relates love with art, with poetry. A luminous figure is the one of the Poet. Conscious of his genius, the poet has the vision of the undying masterpiece which will confront time. Sometimes the work (poem) itself is compared to love or the great myths of creation are invoked, the Orphic myth or The one of Pygmalion and his Galatea:

“I bid thee no adieu: like thou wrest not [...]

Thought stay the shell of her I take with me [...]

I drew thy essence, poured thy self from thee [...]

I leave with all thy splendour, charm, aught not” (*Sonnet CCXXIX, 75*).

We are invited to come into the lab of poetic trials of the creator, who, like an original *homo faber*, takes love to master it by word:

“Twixt phials from head to toe with melody,

That are with word saps, scents of yearning filled.

Bent onto cores that whisper secretly,

Saint venoms to sore tears that I should change

And in the golden balance where sounds range,

To find the balm of immortality” (*Sonnet CCXIX, 65*).

## Conclusions



A traditionalist poet, Vasile Voiculescu is one of the few Romanian religious poets (writers).

This dimension of his works is obvious already in the volume *Poems with Angels*, up to *Shakespeare’s Last Fancied Sonnets*.

The original convention that he starts from in this cycle posthumously published is that of being the translator and not the author, of some Shakespearean sonnets, the two adjectives in the title “imaginary” and “fancied”, unveiling the intention of a game with its model.

Even so, what makes his difference from Shakespeare is the religious substance of his poems. The Romanian poet figures his own lyrical universe, in which love as a theme is reconsidered in a Christian key.

Attending the meetings at *The Burning Bush*, the poet meets the mystics of The Eastern Church Holy Fathers, who would be an inspiration to him, marking his poetic vision, and not only that.

That is why the sonnets of Voiculescu can be read in another key, namely as mystic poems, in which love is a mystery of humans gifted by God, by means of which the human can reach ecstasy, the inner illumination that allows him to contemplate Divinity.

The Shakespearean triad is replaced by Vasile Voiculescu with another: the faithful man/poet, the heart-bride/poetry and the eternal Groom.

### **Rezumat: Vasile Voiculescu și Rugul Aprins**

*Această lucrare își propune să scoată în evidență poezia lui Vasile Voiculescu, în special „Ultimele imaginate...”, poezii a căror scriere se referă la poezii care participă la întâlnirile „Rugul Aprins”. Actualitatea temei sale este evidențiată de interesul criticilor literari contemporani pentru studii, articole sau monografii. Scopul prezentei lucrări este de a identifica și analiza particularitățile sonetelor lui Voiculescu și relația intertextuală cu marele lor model/arhetip. Această lucrare propune, de asemenea, o privire asupra firului religios al poeziilor.*



*Noutatea studiului acestuia constă într-o cercetare privind relația dintre operă și biografie. Pe de altă parte, principala notă de prospețime este dată de o receptivitate pe mai multe niveluri a analizei textuale. Obiectivele acestei cercetări sunt de a ilustra conceptul de iubire al scriitorului în contextul înclinației sale religioase, precum și textura religioasă a poeziei sale.*

*Poet tradiționalist, Vasile Voiculescu este unul dintre puținii poeți (scriitori) religioși români. Participând la întâlnirile de la Rugul Aprins, poetul îi întâlnește pe misticii Sfinților Părinți ai Bisericii Răsăritene, care aveau să-i fie o inspirație, marcându-i viziunea poetică, și nu numai atât.*

*De aceea, sonetele lui Voiculescu pot fi citite într-o altă cheie, și anume ca poeme mistice, în care iubirea este un mister al omului dăruit de Dumnezeu, prin intermediul căruia omul poate atinge extazul, iluminarea interioară ce îi permite să contemple Divinitatea.*