



# The Light as a Central Symbol in V. Voiculescu's *Zahei orbul / Zahei the Blind*

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**Abstract.** Our paper discusses the way in which one of the Orthodox symbols present in Vasile Voiculescu's novel, *Zahei Orbul / Zahei the Blind*, the light, reflects the others and helps the reader to see the depths of the author's work. In order to do that, we see the symbol of light's meaning as *anagogical*, as it was seen by the Hesychasts, especially Saint Gregory Palamas. In addition, we are using Jean-Claude Marion's concept of *intuitively saturated phenomenon*, as the novel could be perceived as an icon by the reader who is able to contemplate it through its symbols. Seeing the novel as an icon could also happen because, according to Constantin Jinga, Voiculescu's style of writing, on some levels, is similar to that of the authors of the Midrash.

**Keywords:** light, Orthodox symbols, icon, double saturated phenomenon, Romanian literature

## 1. Introduction

As underlined in a previous paper (Suciu 2020), Vasile Voiculescu's one and only novel reveals its deep meanings through a rich texture sustained by a sum of intertwined Christian symbols. The vivid picture drawn by the Romanian author on a multi-layered canvas hides in plain sight a delicate Orthodox icon, crafted to be seen only by those who are able to activate their inner sight. Therefore, we try to reveal the *icon* (εἰκών) of Voiculescu's writing in order to access the core of his creativity. We consider that the main symbol in the author's works is the inner light as part of God's Light, and thus we see the light as Saint Gregory Palamas saw it, following Saint Maximus the Confessor's teachings. In this view, the light's meaning is *anagogical*: it reveals a superior level in a being which only exists until its purpose is fulfilled. Therefore, the light is the symbol without real subsistence, created by providence, a symbol that exists only in the moment when

it serves as a symbol. It does not exist, neither before nor after that, disappearing in the moment of its completeness (Stăniloae 2006: 99). Thus, we also use the concept of *intuitively saturated phenomenon*, walking on the footsteps of Jean-Luc Marion and his companions, Paul Ricœur, Jean-Louis Chrétien, and Michel Henry, who tried to establish a phenomenology of religion.

In order to broaden the view, we must say that Voiculescu was a deeply religious person. Being asked by students of the Faculty of Theology about his religiosity, the author described himself as “a long-distance swimmer in the ocean of Faith” (1935: 400). Among others, Roxana Sorescu, the editor of Voiculescu’s most recent complete works edition, pointed out the fact that he does not only use biblical figures and motifs but has a religious feeling, which “is a constitutive characteristic, an essential given of his being”. In this way, “religiosity is not just a literary theme for Voiculescu (...). Voiculescu is a religious writer through his inner structure, and he would be like that even if he, by absurd, did not write a single text related to the biblical figures or motifs (Sorescu in Voiculescu 2004: 7).<sup>1</sup>

Therefore, Voiculescu’s works are born from his mind, a mind descended into his heart, as the Hesychast way of living teaches us. As “God is Love”, according to Saint John the Apostle, Voiculescu’s heart is naturally and deeply in love. His love is the ascending flight of *eros* into the light of *agape*.<sup>2</sup> Thus, Voiculescu’s novel rests on a texture strengthened by a number of Christian symbols and aspires to ascend into the Light.

## 2. Terminology and methodology

The first steps of our journey are made starting from Constantin Jinga’s vision, a Romanian theologian with certain abilities in understanding literature. He is the one who observes that Voiculescu’s way of writing is, in some areas, similar to the authors of the Midrash,<sup>3</sup> as it is clearly visible in some of his short stories such as *Lupta cu îngerul* [The Fight with the Angel] (Voiculescu 1932a: 26–27) or *Buna Vestire* [The Annunciation] (1932b: 156). In Jinga’s view, Voiculescu’s text “must function as an icon: meaning that it has to stylize the significant forms of the century on a frame of biblical origin until the stage of a symbol and to offer them as a support, not for meditation but for contemplation. And the forms of

1 The translations of the Romanian authors cited in this paper belongs to the author of this article.

2 See also one of our papers (Ștefănescu & Suciu 2012: 16–25) written on the subject of the author’s *Ultimele sonete închipuite ale lui Shakespeare în traducere imaginară de V. Voiculescu* [Shakespeare’s Last Imagined Sonnets in V. Voiculescu’s Imaginary Translation].

3 “The term Midrash (‘exposition’ or ‘investigation’; plural, Midrashim) is also used in two senses. On the one hand, it refers to a mode of biblical interpretation prominent in the Talmudic literature; on the other, it refers to a separate body of commentaries on Scripture using this interpretative mode” (Silberman & Dimitrowski 2024).

the century cannot be brought to the stage of a symbol in other way than through contact, by painting them onto a canvas discretely impregnated with elements already consecrated" (Jinga 2001: 61).

Therefore, we identified four main Orthodox symbols in the novel, one of them, the Church, being actually the keeper of all the others, namely the Cross, the Water, the Serpent, and the Light, the latter being in all of them and keeping all of them together. As an artistic work, Voiculescu's novel represents the laic way through which the sacred truth, concentrated in symbols, aspires to get into the light in a world where the sacred struggles for new ways of manifestation.<sup>4</sup> Many thinkers debated on the subject, but one of them, the author of the *intentio operae* concept, seems to complete the aforementioned idea:

The gods speak (today we would say: Being is speaking) through hieroglyphic and enigmatic messages. By the way, if the search for a different truth is born of a mistrust of the classical Greek heritage, then any true knowledge will have to be more archaic. It lies among the remains of civilizations that the fathers of Greek rationalism had ignored. Truth is something we have been living with from the beginning of time, except that we have forgotten it. If we have forgotten it, then someone must have saved it for us and it must be someone whose words we are no longer capable of understanding. So this knowledge must be exotic. Carl Jung has explained how it is that once any divine image has become too familiar to us and has lost its mystery, we then need to turn to images of other civilizations, because only exotic symbols are capable of maintaining an "aura" of sacredness. (Eco 1992: 150)

In this regard, one of the exotic symbols used by Voiculescu in his novel's core in order to revive the others is that of the *pangvandhavān*, a blind man guided by a cripple, which is supposed to be borrowed from Indian folklore.

Going further on our path to discover the core of Voiculescu's writing, we point out its iconic character, because, as in his poetry, the novel reveals the author's ego as deprived of the self-sufficiency of its intentionality, if it is to discuss it in the terms of pragmatics. In this case, we deal with a blinding overthrow of perspective, and not just as a deepening of the reflection. Classifying the phenomena according to their level of donation, Marion puts the *icon* in the category of revelation phenomena, which are intuitively saturated:

Let us repeat that by revelation we understand here a strictly phenomenological concept: an apparition in a pure mode of itself and starting from itself which does not challenge its possibility with any a priori determination. This

<sup>4</sup> See Mircea Eliade's *The Sacred and the Profane*.

kind of revealed phenomena mainly occur in three areas. First, there is the painting as a spectacle which cannot be made from an excess of intuition but still seeable (idol). Then, a particular face which I love, becoming invisible not just because it blinds me but especially because I do not want and I cannot see in it anything but the invisible regard which presses onto mine (icon). (Marion in Chrétien et al. 1996: 126)

In addition, we underline Dorin Ștefănescu's view on the matter of "interpretative sight", when he is commenting Andrei Scrima's *Comentariu la Evanghelia după Ioan* [Commentary to the Gospel of John]:

The "theological" sight opens towards the paradox of the iconic appearance of the invisible in the visible, revealing in reality – as a radical phenomenological exercise – "the mode in which the immediate-visible has to be prolonged by the sight of the one who knows how to see, so that, finally, this immediate-visible to deliver its true image". Not the gaze is that which pierces the visible in order to reach the invisible; the invisible itself – the unpredicted un(more)seeable – offers itself to the sight, lets itself be seen in its self-revelation, calls the sight onto the marks of what appears and reveals itself. (Ștefănescu 2012a: 234)

As for the Light representing the central symbol in the novel, our paper tries to reveal it in the view of Saint Maximus the Confessor, explained by Saint Gregory Palamas when he discusses Christianity's focal event, the Transfiguration of Christ, the event which prefigures the Resurrection. In the explanations given in the argue with Barlaam, and later Akindynos, those who represented the frontline in the attack against the Hesychast<sup>5</sup> movement, he points out the meaning of those "symbols" so poorly understood by the members of the scholastic community. He makes the distinction between

a symbol which belongs to the nature of the symbolized thing and a symbol of a different nature. [...] The natural symbol is always with and in the nature from which it takes its existence. The symbol of another nature and subsisting by itself cannot always be with the symbolized thing but can also exist before and after the moment in which it is being considered as a symbol. Finally, the symbol without real subsistence, made by providence, only exists in the moment when it serves as symbol. It does not exist,

5 One should know that the Church's intestine battle between the Hesychasts and the scholastics represented a level of the devastating civil war which drastically undermined the Byzantine Empire, being a major source of its falling.

neither before, nor after that moment, disappearing at the moment of its perfection. (Stăniloae 2006: 99)

This “symbol” – which could be equivalent to the phenomenon of revelation, a saturated phenomenon<sup>6</sup> – reveals a transcendent and a transcendental reality at the same time because the horizons are opening inwards as well. This unseen reality is what Voiculescu's writings aim to elicit in the mind of the reader, a mind which should come home from going astray in order to be embraced by the heart: “It is only in the heart that one can see rightly; what is essential is invisible to the eye” (Saint-Exupéry 1996: 60). But the poetry is limited by the linguistic barriers, as Hermogene's word seems to prevail over Cratylos's. This limitation was probably one of the reasons for Voiculescu's archaic vocabulary, especially in the writings from the beginning of his career. He was constantly training his thoughts in a battle against the word's rocky matter in his never-ending pursue of the Light. Thus, we will try to reveal the way in which Voiculescu's poetic symbols are working together under the Light as a “theological symbol”,<sup>7</sup> as it is pointed out by Saint Gregory Palamas in his polemical writings addressed to Barlaam and Akindynos. In our case, this revelation would be consecutive to the contemplation of an icon insofar as the reader could be enabled to see it, to perceive and to cover the *distance* revealed by the possible fulfilment of *Zahei's* destiny.

### 3. The Light: A symbol in “a book as simple as a prayer”

We entitled the main chapter of our paper being inspired by Ioan Petru Culianu's way of saluting the publishing of Voiculescu's novel. In his exile, Culianu writes a short study in one of the Romanian magazines from the Federal Republic of Germany, a study which begins like this: “Voiculescu's novel, *Zahei orbul*, appeared in 1970, at Dacia Publishing House in Cluj. The message of the dead still creeps towards the living, troubling the blockheads” (Culianu 1973: 164). Now, we try to avoid the blockheads and focus on the message from the dead, a message enveloped in a narration which contains the aforementioned symbols.

6 The other intuitively saturated phenomenon is the pure historical phenomenon, in Marion's vision.

7 It is not in our intention to portrait Voiculescu as a theologian, because he was not. We only try to underline the presence of his theological sight, which he certainly had. On the other hand, as the reviewers asked about the reason for naming the Light an Orthodox symbol and not simply a Christian one, we must say that the reader would understand it if they went deeper into the matter of the light as uncreated energy, which was the basis for the dispute between the representatives of the Orthodox Church such as Saint Gregory Palamas, who was the most important one (a Father and Doctor of the Orthodox Church), and a large number of scholastic theologians such as Barlaam the Calabrian (who was the first on a relatively long list). For a brief intro, see Amadio (2024).

Briefly said, *Zahei orbul* [Zahei the Blind] was published in 1970, two decades after the conceiving of the narration which represents its core and which became the novel's last chapter, *În codrii Cervoifului* [In the Stag's Forest]. From here, Voiculescu goes backwards "constructing a symbolic biography for this symbolic destiny", as Culianu sees it. The small temporal inadvertences which could make a nitpicker's day were underlined by Roxana Sorescu in one of her studies (in Voiculescu 2010: 29–30). As for the story itself, we are using again Culianu's view when he writes that Voiculescu:

follows a destiny, simply and naturally, in a way in which one realizes only later that it is projected on two levels, that the destiny of the Blind from the Brăila's sloughs is a symbol in a book as natural as a prayer. He dashed into the world's sludge, which is "filthy love, poisoned spirits, cursed tobacco", and was blinded by an innkeeper's alcohol. He is seeking all the possible paths for his redemption until he reaches Father Fulga, a priest who was a horse thief but repented through a long illness and became crippled in both feet (lame would be a better word for it), although his hidden powers were concentrated in the upper part of his body. He could heal ill people, his hand put on Zahei's head makes the blind to see as through a dense fog. The blind orders for a saddle and carries the cripple on his back, in this way completing a new creature. (Culianu 2000: 9)

As we stated before, the central symbol of the novel is the Light, Zahei's redemption. The Light is being sought by a profoundly human hero, handsome as a Greek god, with a big and warm soul, but hooked on and devoured by alcohol consumption, ultimately the source of his physical blindness. He is destined to complete a saint's figure which originates from an intelligent, cultivated but at the same time vicious man as Father Fulga, a man touched by the divine Grace not before he was symbolically relieved by the author from the temptation of the flesh through crippling, a lame, actually. The failure of the newly created being, a cripple guiding and being carried by a blind, an exotic symbol, actually, as Eco pointed out, comes from the fact that the priest could not let aside the Luciferian temptation of trying to demonstrate his spiritual superiority. He baptizes his rival's child guided not only by Christian mercy but mainly by pride, in order to humiliate the representative of the new clergy. This proves to be a fatal mistake which would block the redemption and the symbolical rebirth of a sickened world, a rebirth which is postponed until the second coming of Christ.

It is not difficult to see that the main symbol in *Zahei Orbul* is the Light. Edifying for perceiving the way in which Voiculescu sought the light, at a certain moment, are the verses from one of his poems, *Prometheus*. Here, the ardent desire of his ego, which is not yet fully deprived of its own intentionality, is to reignite God's

spark remained within us after the fall: "I'd want the spark, the ardent gleam,/ When springs, arising from my soul,/ Not to become a burning stubble./ I'd want, within, to carry flare and ember/ But not to be consumed by them/ To lighten all of me, inside and out"<sup>8</sup> (Voiculescu 2004: 173–174). Here, The Burning Bush is also to be seen. On the other hand, as Vladimir Streinu points out, Voiculescu's Prometheus has some Luciferian accents, and the critic links it to one of the final poems from the volume *Pângă, Urează-mi* [Wish Me]: "Wish me battle, don't wish me win,/ The bounds of life I do not want to move/... But as I see myself a hungry flame,/ I'm all in turmoil and I throw myself.../ (...) If is for me to fall, let's haste it:/ Not like a leaf, like rocket wish I fall" (Voiculescu 2004: 207). As for Hesychast's light and its relation with Voiculescu's works, we discussed it in a previous study (Suciu in Ștefănescu 2012b), but it helps to remember here some other verses (*Noul mag* [The New Magus]) which are relevant in revealing the author's struggle from the moment of the aforementioned volume: "That morning star, which meant to rise to me it was/ So much it tarried/ That I don't want to know if faded,/ Or if I blinded.../ I wait no more for outside light:/ Another one inside me lighted/ And burning deep its ardent fire/ A flame at night, at day a smoking tower/ With eyes towards it I start my longest haul" (Voiculescu 2004: 204). We could object to Streinu's remarks because, as a true Christian believer, Voiculescu's revolt from *Prometeu* [Prometheus] seems to be more like an attempt to provoke God to a fight, similar to Jacob's, than a Luciferian rebellion. Therefore, we underline Șerban Cioculescu's opinion when he discusses the poet's suffering near his wife's deathbed:

Here is the source of the inward turning in order to find not the pitch darkness of the abyss but, on the contrary, the sublime enlightenment. A thirst for too much light turns the haze white, and it is not by accident that on a manuscript page the hand reveals "White Thoughts", which became this book's title. In this context, the poet brings back characters and deeds from the Byzantine iconography, mining for them in the deepest layers of Romanian traditional spirituality, in the very spirit of a universal humanism, nurtured from his vast cultural background accumulated as a physician and philosopher. (Cioculescu in Voiculescu 1986: VIII)

Mentioning the fact that the critics' view on Voiculescu's light seeking is very much applicable to his narrations as well, we move on to the symbolism of his novel's hero. Therefore, the best view on this name's signification, in our opinion, is to be found at Culianu, again:

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8 The translation of the verses from the various poems by Voiculescu also belongs to us.



In this way, the name Zahei (Zacharias), being randomly similar and almost homophonous to its Greek counterpart, is not a name without a particular “meaning”, at least inside the borders of that oneiric-aesthetic “game” which defines Voiculescu’s prose. In Greek, “Zahreies” means ‘violent’, and “zahreios” means ‘the one in need for (something)’. This is exactly the case of the violent Zahei from the novel, blinded by his addiction to alcohol, and then always in the pursue of the light which was being taken from him and which becomes more and more a seek for internal redemption. Allegory for the soul’s “obscure night”? Pilgrimage through history and world, a world against which he develops a radical negation (the world is: “filthy love, poisoned spirits, cursed tobacco”? Maybe that too, but the novel’s value resides precisely in the overtaking the allegory in the symbolic meaning of the “natural” changes. (Culianu 2000: 21–22)

Taking the thought to another level, Sorescu points out the fact that the biblical character Zaheu/Zacchaeus, the customs officer who climbs the sycamore tree, greeted the poet from the mural picture at the gates of Antim Monastery every time he visited it. However, according to the editor, the author modifies “some of the biblical prototype’s characteristics”, since Zahei the Blind<sup>9</sup> is not a small man but a real colossus with the allure of a Greek divinity.

“The fact that Voiculescu alters the appearance of the biblical model gives to the literary character an extra symbolic dimension: Zahei, a Greek god unleashed in a Dionysian, pagan existence, tends to become a Christian saint, just as the pagan magician in *The Last Berivoi* will only be able to reactivate good in the world by assuming Christ’s sacrifice” (Sorescu in Voiculescu 2010: 29).

This potential of the hero to become a Christian saint is also underlined by Nicolae Balotă, who names one of the sections of his study dedicated to Voiculescu, “The hagiographic model”. Although it may seem a little far-fetched, we can place this fusion of the Greek model (representing the essence of Western culture, a culture assimilated from the extremely wide range of his readings) with a symbolic New Testament’s character (whose name is borrowed from a hero who

9 Constantin Jinga also underlines the biblical origins of the name of Voiculescu’s hero: “Saint Luke the Evangelist presents him as the greatest of the tax collectors in the area of Jericho and says that when Jesus makes his triumphal entry into Jericho, Zacchaeus, short in stature, climbs to the top of a sycamore tree to see him better. Later, he invites Jesus to his house for dinner. On this occasion, he repents of all the misdeeds he has committed and promises to make amends without delay. The Son of God absolves him, and Zacchaeus thus becomes an example of repentance (Luke 19:2 ff.). The Gospel text in no way suggests that Zacchaeus was blind or that he was subsequently blinded. It is possible that V. Voiculescu may have synthesised here the image of two characters who meet Jesus Christ at the entrance to Jericho: Zacchaeus the tax collector and blind Bartimaeus (Mark 10:46–52, Matthew 20:29–34, Luke 18:35–43) – both symbolizing the power of prayer and the value of repentance. Zacchaeus, the novel’s character, is no stranger to these meanings” (Jinga 2001: 57).



embodies in the text the pilgrim of the Hesychast tradition, a pilgrim deprived, however, of the guidance of a spiritual father precisely because of the need to emphasize the importance of this aspect) in the line of descendants of Stephen the Great, the “last Basileus”, an approach intended to reconcile the two branches of Christianity, separated with irreparable – but ameliorable – consequences in terms of European spirituality. Moreover, referring to the valorization of popular culture in Voiculescu’s writings, George Muntean points out this particular ability to combine apparently irreconcilable phenomena and states: “Always interested in ‘lighting the light on the new altars’, he will serve the old ones with the same devotion, revealing their vigour and unquenched flame, their role of guide, sometimes. It is a way of being contemporary with the age – illuminating intensely and naturally its dimensions and roots in a history that surpasses itself, flourishing in human eternity itself (Muntean in Papadima, ed. 1970: 309).

Completing the previous thought in another register, we recall Al. Cistelean, who, in his characteristic style, i.e. ironically shooting several rabbits at once, proposes an interesting research theme by reproaching to Nicolae Oprea – author of a monograph dedicated to Voiculescu, where he downplays the poet in favour of the prose writer – for “not insisting on this separation of mentality between the poet and the prose writer, on this subterranean conflict between the poetry of Christian enlightenment and the prose of pagan rites. For, looked at more closely, Vasile Voiculescu also shows himself to be a *homo duplex*; and not only through the intra-poetic opposition between sensuality and prayer” (Cistelean 2007).

If we take into account Micheline Tenace’s puzzlement about Soloviov from the “almost theological” interview with the same Al. Cistelean, we could indeed see the author of *The Last Sonnets...* as *homo quadruplex*, even. And this is because the theologian, in the sense of *o theos logos*, fuses with the mystic and adds to the physician, to the philosopher, and to the poet. He is a *homo quadruplex*, but just apparently because our man aspires to the *theandric* way of being, thus to be one.

The other element of the character’s name is related to light, more precisely to the lack of it. The numerous healings of the blind performed by Jesus are mentioned in the studies cited so far. It should be noted only that healing from blindness involves two components, not necessarily complementary: the acquisition of physical and spiritual light. Zahei the Blind sets out on the path of the former with vengeance as his battle flag and comes close to acquiring the latter, which is the essential one, but which is not allowed to him because of the inappropriate motives underlying the base of his spiritual quest. Besides, in one of his poems, Voiculescu shows us what kind of light he seeks: “Blindness had set a gleam in me/ And I was fumbling in my flooded grottoes/ With hunches and bright visions/ As you can feel the flowers from their scents./ As you opened my clay eyes again,/ I can see things, but there’s no light./ How useful is that you restored my sight,/ I sought no sight, I was salvation seeking” (Voiculescu

2004: 281–282). But salvation is in us because God is in us from the beginning. In one of his articles, *White Light*, Joseph Tetlow (1982: 241) links Newton's optical experiment to the Divine Light. He compares the Divine Light descending into each of us, the divine love, with the white light before refraction. Like the refracted spectrum of the prism, man emits a range of types of love, from the selfish love that penetrates everywhere, like infrared radiation, to the royal blue of self-giving, depending on one's ability to perceive the Light. The simplistic analogy between the spectrum of refracted visible light and the range of love types of which each of us is capable does not take into account (coming from a Jesuit prelate) the fact that the laws of physics cannot explain *the uncreated light*. Not even in the subtle way in which Pavel Florenski opens the door of metaphysics to Orthodoxy. If it is to remain in the realm of colours, the light is not alterable and remains white, and it is amplified as the divine spark in man is reactivated, the "royal blue of self-giving" representing no physical barrier. The divine light, the uncreated energy is not transformed but only amplified, enhanced by the extent to which we respond to God's call. In our opinion, the necessary condition for approaching the royal part of the spectrum of Light within us, the God who is Love, is blindness to the *Vanity Fair's* attractions.

On the other hand, Barbara Weightman generalizes the role of light as a defining phenomenon of religious landscapes:

The presence of light as a manifestation of the divine is a characteristic of many religions. Light, by its presence or absence, separates the sacred from the profane and, in its cognitive, aesthetic or symbolic forms, reveals and delineates the world, develops emotional and sentient awareness, literally giving meaning and purpose to life. (...) Color, as an affirmation of light, reveals and defines a relative purity, holiness and supremacy (...). Pervading both religious movements and landscapes, light is fundamental to religious experience, evoking varied responses and representations both among and within various particular belief systems. (Weightman 1996: 59)

The fact that Zacchaeus begins to see as if through a mist, under the influence of the shred of divine grace descended from the hand of the priest returned to the holy after the banishment, reveals his approach to truth under the guidance of the astonished Fulga, the priest, who is amazed and even frightened sometimes by the visions of the blind man who, for example, sees the eyes of the cherubim, a luminous sight difficult to imagine, unbearable for ordinary people.

Zahei the Blind establishes contact with his inner world, a world of whose existence he was unaware, only when, following his stubborn efforts to draw a shred of light from his surroundings, he realizes a fundamental truth:

(...) the light wanders outside, plays in the scales of the waves stirred by the wind, circles the shores, now on the one where he stands, then on the other, nestles in the tangle of budding branches. He sought it, felt it near him, pursued it fiercely, ready to feel it, but unable to catch it. Then a bitter pang of conscience came over him. What? Are eyes the only thing in the world? And, again he strove, so blind, to find out. But he could only imagine it. He hadn't forgotten the sky. He lifted and rolled his white eyes to it, and could only catch a faint, faint touch, like a caress. It was sweeter, thinner, other than the tingling tremor that tingled his skin. And he was astonished that he could thus distinguish light from heat, hitherto one and the same. He was on this thread of skill that led him deep down. He felt he had reached another realm, a world of inner light, where there was no need for eyes. He first stepped, astonished, into his own land, where no one had ever been before. (Voiculescu 2010: 72)

This brief connection with the Self (the spark that has always been waiting to become a flame and that will blow the hero's Ego away when the path is reopened), initiated empirically in the shack of Paraipan (out of the need to adapt to his new condition) and grown through meditation, in the light of spring, on the water's edge, will be resumed at the end of the third chapter:

From that moment on, he put no more brandy nor tobacco in his mouth. And nothing more could be done with him. The quiet fellow from within, who had been waiting in a corner of the stinking blackness of drunkenness, came out, beat the fool who had taken the helm and threw him out. In an instant, Zahei returned to the soul with which he had entered the pit. It was the first miracle, and not the least. The next day, with a boy by his hand, the blind man set off over seven hillocks to Fulga, the priest, in the village of Cervoi. (Voiculescu 2010: 222)

Note the symbolic number, specific to the fairy tales, but also to the Bible. The seven hillocks can represent, in a way, the seven days of the World, over which each of us will have to pass in order to reach the eighth day, the Monday. In the darkness of this long "Sunday of History", in which we are confined to rest because we live within the letter of the Law, or even outside it, we shall prepare ourselves, each according to their own strength, for a Monday, the true day of the Resurrection, which will be revealed only to those who have come to penetrate the Spirit of the Law.

## 4. Conclusions

All in all, the idea that emerges from the novel *Zahei orbul* [Zahei the Blind] is related to the acquisition of the true “sight”, a sight that requires to ignore the mess of vanities and to concentrate on the spiritual side, on “looking” inside the being in order to find the One who gave us life, an approach in which Voiculescu’s hero fails because a lack of culture in the sense of Nikolai Berdiaev, a culture which comes from cult, from the roots of the Church. The value of the novel is also given by the plethora of images, *Theatrum Mundi*, a world into which access is being denied for the blind man. Thus, the romantic antithesis between the exuberance of worldly life and Zahei’s impossibility of participating fully in a world where the visual predominates is a well-chosen procedure of this literary work, as Nicolae Balotă points out. In this sense, Zaharia-Filipaș, highlighting the moral theme (which exists but, in our opinion, is not the defining theme of the novel), states, “Voiculescu intuit that his character is truly fascinating, especially when seen from the outside and concentrates particularly in the description of the world that concerns Zahei and in the images of Zahei himself. A succession of portraits of the hero that bear no resemblance to one another punctuates the text of the novel, from the beginning to the end, revealing the gaze as the essential axis” (Zaharia Filipaș 1980: 195).

However, it is not advisable to dwell only on the exuberance of imagery used to portray this fairground of vanities which is the world, because we would be manifesting *catholitis*,<sup>10</sup> one of the “diseases” of the contemporary spirit, theorized by Constantin Noica (2012: 51), which is also manifested through the “plethora of images”. Moreover, the etymology of the word *world* brings us back to Light, the central symbol of this novel. Father Dumitru Stăniloae,<sup>11</sup> referring to Romanians, said, “There is luminosity in our people, goodness, gentleness, kindness, generosity, warmth, purity, there are virtues... We speak a lot about

10 “Using the Aristotelian terms for general, individual and determination (*katholou*, *tode ti* and *horos*), Noica, half seriously as he himself admits, coins six pseudo-medical terms for these maladies of the spirit: *catholitis*, *todetitis* and *horetitis* for pathological excess, and *acatholia*, *atodetia* and *ahoretia* for pathological deficiency of one or more of the terms of Being as they manifest themselves through the spirit” (Honeywill 2009). According to Noica, *catholitis* consists in “the abnormalities produced by the lack of the general in humans and things”. Therefore, in the matter of Being, the things’ placidity comes from the fact that they cannot have “another general” by themselves. On the other hand, man’s suffering comes from the fact that humans *could have* another general, but they cannot truly obtain it. These “maladies” are not necessarily a bad thing, as they have positive sides as well, like creativity, for example. In Noica’s view, culture is the cure for them (Noica 2012: 33–34).

11 Recently sanctified by the Romanian Orthodox Church, Dumitru Stăniloae was one of the most influential Romanian Orthodox theologians. See more at: [https://orthodoxwiki.org/Dumitru\\_Stanolae](https://orthodoxwiki.org/Dumitru_Stanolae).

light, we also say light to the world;<sup>12</sup> world from light... we have very clear depths, luminous depths, light is our depth... fairy tales, again; there is so much goodness, so much light in them... we have carols, *doinele*, and *dorul* – words without equivalence in other people's languages" (Stăniloae 2008: 3).

The uncreated light, the emanation of Love, is the base note of fragrance, the divine grace that blesses the choicest of men with its unmistakable fragrance. The failure of *Zahei's* quest is determined by the lack of love, a lack that is, in a subsidiary way, the essence of this novel. "Love never fails", and "if there's no love, there's nothing".

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12 The Romanian word for 'world' is *lume*, which comes from the Latin word *lumen*, meaning 'light'.

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