

## Metaphorical Mediation Apparatus: The Case of the Psalms

**Mihaela Alexandra Tudor**

Associate Professor Habilit.,

Paul Valéry University, France<sup>1</sup>

E-mail: mihaela.tudor.com@gmail.com

---

**ABSTRACT:** This study belongs to the communication studies domain and it is focused on the Psalms as a metaphorical mediation apparatus. *The Psalms* are a memory place that transmit through a paradigmatical act of communication the meaning of the mediations which made possible their real existence: the primordial mediation through the creative Word of the world, the mediation through the revelation of the Word which has made the law of the world, the mediation through the memory of the Word creator of the history... These mediations will be, for now, an opportunity to defend the universality of “worlds”, “places” and “meanings” established and communicated through psalms through the universality of the manner of creation – the mediation at the ontological level and, in this case, the metaphorical mediation at discursive level.

**KEY WORDS:** mediation, communication, metaphorical mediation apparatus

---

<sup>1</sup>This article was first published in PFA Conference proceedings, 2014.

## 1. Mediation and metaphor

The problem of the mediation in general and of the metaphorical mediation in particular can not be put off the problem of language and thereby outside of the meaning production problem (Bratosin 2007). It is also an evidence that we can not avoid to consider the language in the absence of the consciousness dialogue, which communicate with each other about the world. Moreover, communication understood as a mediation through the language is also a process of self-awareness, of mediation of itself understood as another, in the same manner in which the subject communicate with other subjects in order to share and knowledge of the world, to put it together, in common, available to everyone.

Talking about language, communication and mediation in psalms means, ultimately, to talk about the role of metaphorical language and the role of the metaphor torn off to the exile off the rhetoric for putting it in the registry of foundation, knowledge and eschatology. In this regard, we draw the milestones of a theory of metaphor co-substantial with a mediation theory applied to the psalms texts from a hermeneutic methodological commitment.

Figure represents a vast field of reflection that is under permanent reevaluation by researchers from all areas of social sciences and humanities. During the last century, the cognitive implications of the concept of figure generated widespread debates that defined the status of figure and especially stimulated research on this subject (Tudor&Bratosin 2013, 271). These findings compel us to bend over the figure of the metaphor from the perspective of an archeology and of the concept and from the perspective of a functional hermeneutics. In this context, we defend the definition of the metaphor as a communication apparatus which is 1) the production of implied meanings (Klinkenberg 2000 ; Klinkenberg 2008),

2) the transfer in terms of an interaction among universes or horizons of discourse preserving the general principle of cooperation and placing the receiver under the obligation, on the one hand, not be satisfied with one or several elements present at the surface of the statement (perceived degree) and, on the other, not to produce a superfluous multitude of interpretations that come to overlap this perceived multitude (conceived degree) (Klinkenberg 2008; Tudor&Bratosin 2013, 272).

By the theoretical demarcation of figure that we propose, we place ourselves beyond the traditional terminology of figure that talks about a transfer through substitution or through comparison. Starting for this “drift” of perspective, we can say that the effect of figure takes place from the dialectical interaction between the perceived degree and the conceived degree and can be equally poetical, hermeneutical or cognitive (Klinkenberg *op. cit.*). The major impact of figure can be ascertained by the fact that it forces collisions/clashes among semantic and experiential fields that are completely different (Tudor 2013; Tudor&Bratosin 2013, 272).

Within this approach there is an explicit intent to look upon figure in a sense that transcends the traditional role of mere ornamentation and to share the recent perspectives of rehabilitation, of awakening from a dogmatic slumber, (Tudor&Bratosin, 2009; Tudor&Bratosin 2013, 173). The metaphor is no longer essentially a linguistic phenomenon, confined to a word, but it is primarily a meaning production process independent of the media used or the communication signs (Ferrari 1997; Tudor 2013). Psalm 22 remains a profound illustration of this thesis:

But I am no longer a human being; I am a worm, despised  
and scorned by everyone!

All who see me make fun of me; they stick out their tongues  
and shake their heads.

“You relied on the Lord,” they say. “Why doesn’t he save you? If the Lord likes you, why doesn’t he help you?”

It was you who brought me safely through birth, and when I was a baby, you kept me safe.

I have relied on you since the day I was born, and you have always been my God.

Do not stay away from me! Trouble is near, and there is no one to help.

Many enemies surround me like bulls; they are all around me, like fierce bulls from the land of Bashan.

They open their mouths like lions, roaring and tearing at me.

My strength is gone, gone like water spilled on the ground. All my bones are out of joint; my heart is like melted wax.

My throat is as dry as dust, and my tongue sticks to the roof of my mouth. You have left me for dead in the dust.

An evil gang is around me; like a pack of dogs they close in on me; they tear at my hands and feet.

They gamble for my clothes and divide them among themselves.

O Lord, don’t stay away from me! Come quickly to my rescue!

Rescue me from these lions; I am helpless before these wild bulls.

I will tell my people what you have done; I will praise you in their assembly: “Praise him, you servants of the Lord! Honor him, you descendants of Jacob! Worship him, you people of Israel!

He does not neglect the poor or ignore their suffering; he does not turn away from them, but answers when they call for help.”

In the full assembly I will praise you for what you have done; in the presence of those who worship you I will offer the sacrifices I promised.

The poor will eat as much as they want; those who come to the Lord will praise him. May they prosper forever!" (Psalms, Psalm 22, GNT, 606-607).

Apparently a sum of figures of speech, metaphors that abound in building seemingly irreconcilable worlds. In reality, it is a symbolic and figural fabric of successive mediations that establishes and announces new discursive universes, new worlds, and therefore new fields of experience: birth, life, death and resurrection for the salvation of the Mediator who will come back for the salvation of those which will be part of a new people who will be reborn again.

It is true that, following Aristotle, all those who were bent over the metaphor have meant it to a minor destiny. Practically until the nineteenth century, the metaphor could not escape to the second-class conceptual history.

Aristotle guided for almost two millennia the Western thinking. He define the metaphor figure as "a transfer upon something of a name that designates another, a transfer that is either of a species upon a genus, or of a genus upon a species, or according to the analogy of relationship" (Aristotel 1964, 1457b). This terrible conceptual legacy, metaphor as "*epiphora* of a name", had also terrible consequences in interpreting sacred texts, reducing the contribution of metaphorical figures at rhetorical processes that create illusions, sometimes very convincing or having a poetic aesthetic value (Aristotel 1964, 1355 b 15). In his two works, *The Poetics* and *The Rhetoric*, Aristotle does not place any cognitive and comprehensive value on figure, but treats it as a mere persuasive device or a linguistic *topos* that only creates the appearance of truth and embellish the representation.

Fr. Nietzsche, who opened the discussion on figure, does not overcome this limiting vision: "What is truth? A shifting multitude of metaphors, of metonymies, of anthropomorphisms, for short: a multitude of human relations, which rhetorically and poetically have been extolled, transposed and embellished, and which, after

a long usage, canonized and made to be compelling; truths are just metaphors about which we have forgotten what they were, spent metaphors that have lost their sensible force” (Nietzsche 1990, 198).

J. Derrida will take over the reflection upon figure again by means of metaphor. According to him, the metaphor figure is the source of the concept. The death of figure through usage and conceptualization gives the impetus for the emergence of the concept. Derrida assigns to the metaphor figure the role of generating force for the concept of figure through a hermeneutic process keeping the linear conceptualizations of Aristotle (Derrida 1972; Tudor&Bratosin 2013).

The most comprehensive restoration of figure (Tudor 2013) and the transition from semiotic to hermeneutic regarding the understanding of the emergence of the figure metaphor is achieved by Paul Ricoeur in his work *La métaphore vive*. Metaphor is placed by Ricoeur within the privileged *topos* of the nominal verb to be (Ricoeur 1975). It is a mediating figure that has the power and vitality to set up and describe a world, to produce meaning in a world (Tudor 2013; Tudor&Bratosin 2013). Ricoeur’s major contribution to the study of metaphor allows for the emergence of a new avenue of reflection, of some heuristic patterns, centrifugal perspectives, and so on, that facilitate finding some answers for the comprehensive and ontological role of the metaphor, especially for the study of sacred texts, our corpus. In this comprehensive framework we consider metaphorical mediations in psalms and we intent to bend over some illustrations in order to begin a reflection for a hermeneutics of mediation in the sacred texts.

## 2. Metaphorical mediation in Psalms

The psalms give us some types of mediations whose hermeneutical stakes we will summarize thereafter. Depending on the modes of

interpretation and starting from the roles of mediation that different practices and uses gave to objects, expressions, processes and so on, we can identify in the Psalms several mediations types: symbolic, discursive and figural (non exhaustive list).

The Psalm 23 is an example of archetypal symbolic mediation. Mediator elements with a strong referential character that designate processes, meanings, ideas, which culture has already given a mediator value—"The Lord (...) my shepherd" that protects me with the "shepherd's rod and staff"—are mobilized in the psalm in a very explicit manner in order to describe the promises for the eternal life through the dialectic between discursivities and opposite fields of experiences. The operation of description through the symbolic mediation is an interpretative maneuver completed with two others of the same nature: on the one hand, the operation of corresponding to the discursivities and opposite fields of experiences a pair of equivalences ("staff" and "rod" that "protect", "he gives me new strength/ he guides me in the right paths, as he promised. Even if I go through the deepest darkness"), and, on the other hand, the operation of exploring new bridges between the equivalences (I know that your goodness and love will be with me all my life; and your house will be my home as long as I live", ie the "love" with its obvious mediator function). In the same logic of the archetypal mediation we can evocate two iterative metaphors in psalms—the light and the grace: God as light and grace is communicated in a salvific manner *by* light and grace, and the human being as the recipient of light and grace can communicate as well as *by* light and grace (Coman 2011).

The psalm 143 is an example of overcoming of the polarity through another type of mediation, the discursive one. In this psalm, the polarity is put in the statement (on the one hand, "my enemy has hunted me down", "and completely defeated me", "he has put me in a dark prison", and, on the other hand, "rescue me, Lord, as you have

promised; in your goodness save me from my troubles! Because of your love for me, kill my enemies and destroy all my oppressors, for I am your servant”, and the solution for the oppositions is progressive and realizes through the intrigue giving birth of a new interpretation, a new meaning. The opposition between the weak and the strong man created by unjust oppressive enemy is overcome by the fact that the intrigue of the psalm does intervene the justice of God that, by His Spirit transform the weak in “His servant”, victorious against his enemy.

Figural mediation, directly based on metaphor, appears in the Psalm 46. In this case, the mediation and the interpretative effort are instantaneous. The figural approach produces new categorizations of the experience and creates sense as it does the scientific discourse. When the psalmist says: “God is our shelter and strength, always ready to help in times of trouble (...) There is a river (...) The Lord Almighty is with us: The God of Jacob is our refuge”, he bases on the on the assumption of the existence of God and the existence of a non-God in the same time, ie a opposite force against which God is powerful and domineering because defends, rescues... We find, thanks to this original mediation the entire scaffolding and the entire disjunctive structuration underlying any activity and cognitive approach.

When the psalmist says, “God is our refuge and strength / a very present help in trouble (...) is a river (...) is a Tower” is based on the assumption that posits the existence of God at the same time, the existence a ‘non-God’, ie an opposing force against which God is powerful and domineering because defend, escape, guards etc.. We find, thanks to the mediation originating, structuring across the entire scaffolding and disjunctive underlying any activity and cognitive approach.



This concise exercise of reading of psalms from the hermeneutic of mediations proves once again that the place of the effectuation of the meaning in any context is paradoxical - both inside and outside. Moreover, he is the re-confirmation that the overcome of polarities within and between universes of discourse or fields of opposite experience (divine-human, good-bad, war and peace, life-death, and so on) is realized by convening a interactive mediator principle which consists of three types of mediations that I have mentioned in the beginning: the primordial mediation through the creative Word of the world, the mediation through the revelation of the Word which has made the law of the world, the mediation through the memory of the Word creator of the history..

## References

- Aristotel. 1964. *Poetica (La poétique)*. Bucharest: Ed. Academiei.
- Bratosin, S. 2007. *La concertation. De la pratique au sens*. Berne: Peter Lang.
- Coman, I. 2011. "The Light and the Grace: Christian Metaphors". *Essachess – Journal for Communication Studies* 4: 189-197.
- Derrida, J. 1972. "La mythologie blanche". *Marges de la philosophie*. Paris: Minuit.
- Ferrari, S. 1997. *Méthode et outils informatiques pour le traitement des métaphores dans les documents écrits*. Thèse en informatique, Paris: Université Paris XI, Orsay.
- \*\*\* *Good News Bible*. 1976. New York: American Bible Society.
- Klinkenberg, J.-M. 2000. "L'argumentation dans la figure". *Cahiers de praxématique* 35: 59-86.
- Klinkenberg, J. 2008. "Le rhétorique dans le sémiotique: la composante créative du système". In *Figures de la figure. Sémiotique et rhétorique générale* by Badir S. et Klinkenberg J.-M., 35-57. Limoges: Presses Universitaires de Limoges.
- Nietzsche, Fr. 1990. *Considérations inactuelles I, II*. Paris: Gallimard.
- Ricoeur, P. 1975. *La métaphore vive*. Paris: Seuil.

Tudor, M.-A. 2013. *Epistémologie de la communication. Science, sens et métaphore*. Paris: Harmattan.

Tudor, MA & Bratosin, S. 2013. "Internet and Multimedia: Towards a Theory of Multimediated Figure in Communication Sciences". In *PR Trend*, by D Balaban, I Hosu and M Mucundorfeanu, 271-280. Mittweida: Mittweida Hochschulverlag,

Vattimo, G., Bovatti, A. (coord.). 1998. *Gandirea slaba (Weak Thought)*. Constanta: Pontica.