

THE INTERACTION OF CULTURES. BLAGA IN ARIZONA*

Ramsey Eric RAMSEY**

Abstract. The study starts from the “introduction” of Lucian Blaga’s philosophy to the USA through the works of translators, editors, and through the lecture of Angela Botez at Arizona State University. This starting point unfolds approaching the notion of the stylistic matrix and the metaphorical creations that Blaga has described: the stylistic matrix, the Great Anonym, etc. From this perspective the author construes the concept of man. The fact that man has become Man, that is creative subject, thanks to a decisive ontological mutation, could, of course, signify that man *completed* evolution which works through biological mutation; it could therefore mean that no superior biological species is possible beyond him.

Keywords: Lucian Blaga, Philosophy, stylistic matrix, Great Anonym, human being.

Is it as far as some might think from Lancrăm in Transylvania to the Sonoran Desert in North America? Much makes them distant to be sure, geography, language, flora and fauna; but thinking, as it is sometimes able, brought them near recently.

Thanks to the fine work of editors Drs. Angela Botez and R. T. Allen, and the translators of Blaga into English, Blaga was recently “able to visit” the deserts of Arizona, USA. The students who engaged Blaga's work in my seminar on Eros and Love learned much from his work. Foremost among the lessons, perhaps, are Blaga's thoughts on mystery. No doubt the Sonoran Desert is a mysterious place and the continent's first peoples seem much better able to encounter the mysteries than the very western, instrumental, and calculated spaces of the city of Phoenix, Arizona, which sits in the middle of this desert.

As Dr. Botez made clear in her beautiful lecture at Arizona State University at the West Campus, Blaga's notion of the stylistic matrix has much to teach those who have covered over the desert and its secrets. The notion of the stylistic matrix and the variable creations that Blaga believes come about in metaphorical and historical terms are exemplified throughout the arts and cultures of the southwestern USA. The interaction of cultures here, in their overlap, sharing, resisting, and dysfunction helped students understand some of Blaga's most salient points about culture and the creation of culture. This understanding was enhanced

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** Arizona State University, Phoenix.

as the students took note of Blaga's insights that they gained by reading selections from his classic works *The Genesis of Metaphor and the Meaning of Culture* and *Horizon and Style*. The text from this Works presented by Angela Botez were enclosed here.

The students who met Blaga in these ways saw how his notion of transcendent censorship, made a challenge to Freud's theory of libido, Eros, and Thanatos which they had studied. The mysteries that Freud the reductionist might have thought he had made into scientific objects, were once again freed to their metaphorical character by Blaga's philosophic challenge. This freeing of concepts is exemplified in Blaga's brilliant poem "Light" where the poet talks of a thirst for "sin, desire, elan, and passion", and in Blaga's decidedly un-Freudian view of the unconscious as well as, of course, the metaphorical importance of the Great Anonym.

This and so much more remains of Blaga's visit to the desert. The various stylistic matrices that have grown and been created here and that have added to the mystery await a full-scale Blaga-inspired study. I suspect there are a few students who are planning such an undertaking. The future appearance of this study will further narrow the gap between Lančrām and the Sonoran Desert as it widens our understanding.

It is my pleasure to join Drs. Botez and Allen in their project of publishing in the US an anthology of Blaga's work in English. The forthcoming appearance of their work will make Blaga encounters possible across the US and the UK.

Excerpts from Blaga's Work
The Genesis of Metaphor and the Meaning of Culture (1937)

*From "The Genesis of Metaphor"*¹

The "style" of a work of art or of a cultural creation envisions many aspects of which some at least have a certain depth and a "categorical" sense. The latter have the character of a horizon, of an axiological atmosphere, of orientation, of form.

¹ "In the following extracts, Blaga develops his theory of the 'ontological mutation', produced by cultural creations in the process of the birth of revelatory (distinct from 'manufactory' or 'plasticising' ones). It is by means of revelatory metaphors that we try to apprehend and convey a mystery, that is, something quite new and beyond our existing terms and concepts and for which we have to create a new language. The stylistic elements that we are going to study among several peoples, from the archaic times down to the present, are not meant to be summary expressions of some hazy psychological inclination, but true modelling functions, of 'categorical' status, pertaining to the unconscious mind. Our interests do not concern matters pertaining to national psychologies, but to a possible doctrine of 'spirit', which we endow with heterogeneous sets of categorical functions. Such a doctrine, once fully clarified as to its intentions, could possibly be known as 'abyssal noology' (noos = mind, abyssal = unconscious)". (A. Botez)

We have dealt with this side of the creation of art or culture in *Horizon and Style*. What else we have to say along the same line of thought will come later, the more so as many surprises still lie in store for us; some of these are very important for philosophy in general and others have a deep-going metaphysical significance. Yet, before we dispel the mists which are the abode of such surprises let us extend our remarks upon another aspect of creation. Obviously, stylistic elements do not exhaust creation. A work of art and a creation of culture in general possesses 'substance' as well as style. For the moment we shall have to leave out the kind of style which is clothed by the substance and ask ourselves which are the characteristics of the substance itself, in its most general aspects. The substance of a work of art, of a culture creation, includes everything that is matter, sensuous element or content, an anecdote or an idea, no matter whether it is concrete or abstract, tangible or sublimated. Let us anticipate: unlike the substance of real things in the universe of the senses, the substance of something created has no signification and no meaning in itself; here substance always stands for something else; here substance is a precipitate which implies a transfer and a yoking of terms belonging to different spheres or domains. In this way the substance acquires a 'metaphorical' aspect.

This remark may cause many eyebrows to rise. The reader will probably shrug and ask: 'All right, but isn't metaphor part of the style itself? Isn't the chapter on metaphor one of the most important in all text books of "stylistics" that have ever come out of the printing presses everywhere in the world?'¹ The question is psychologically justified, but its being raised is due only to a widespread preconception. In what follows we shall try to defend the other way of looking at things.

Before extending the significance of 'the metaphoric', let us analyse metaphors in the usual sense of the word. We shall limit ourselves to linguistic metaphor. There are two types or two large groups of such metaphors:

1. manufactory metaphors;
2. revelatory metaphors.

Manufactory metaphors are produced by putting together two more or less similar facts, both belonging to the given, imagined, experienced or apprehended world. (...)

.... As we said at the beginning, there is yet another type of metaphor, 'revelatory metaphor'. While the first type of metaphor does not increase the signification of the objects it refers to, but only reshapes their direct expression, the word as such, the second type of metaphor increases the signification of the very objects they refer to. Revelatory metaphors bring to light something hidden, something concerning the very facts they concentrate upon. Revelatory metaphors try, in fact, to reveal a 'mystery' by the means put at our disposal by the concrete world, by the experience of the senses and by the imaginary world. (...)

Revelatory metaphors result from the specifically human mode of existing, from existence within the horizon of mystery and revelation. Revelatory metaphors are the first symptoms of this specific mode of existence. We do not idealize the situation when we say that revelatory metaphors also testify to the existence of an anthropological level, a deep level given to man together with his being. As long as man (not yet a full 'Man') lives outside mystery without being aware of it, in an undisturbed state of paradisaic-animal harmony with himself and the world, he uses manufactory metaphors as the only ones required to solve the discrepancy between the concrete and the abstract. Revelatory metaphors are used when man becomes 'Man' indeed, that is the moment he places himself within the horizon and the scope of mystery. (...)

*From "The Uniqueness of Man"*²

Let us now see what perspectives are offered by the philosophy presented in our lectures. Undoubtedly, the animal, as an individual in which a sort of consciousness flickers, exists visibly bound to 'the immediate'. The animal consciousness does not leave the realm and the shapes of the concrete. In animal behaviour everything that seems to go beyond the immediate is due to the purposive workings of life as such and is integrated in a sort of anonymous stream gushing forth into the 'species'. We can therefore safely assume that the world of the animal-individual (the latter understood as a nucleus of consciousness), is organized like man's world, within some functional frameworks (in conformity with certain *a priori* conditions) which may vary from one species to another. Seen in this light, human intelligence is probably characterized only by a more marked complexity; the difference is therefore one of *degree*. On the other hand, the animal is completely alien to 'existence in mystery and for revelation' and to the dimension and complications which result from this mode of existence. Existence within mystery and revelation is an exclusively human mode. Specifically human is, accordingly, the whole train of consequences which derive from this mode, namely man's creative destiny, its impulses, mechanisms and limitations. An animal may produce tools, shelters, organized structures; its acts do not stem from the conscious existence through mystery and revelation; its acts are not 'creative'; they are stereotypes born out of its concern for security for itself

² On the one hand, man does not have absolute knowledge, but, on the other, he has risen above the level of animals. It is this second differentiation of man that Blaga now explores. Animals can use, as well as man, intellectual categories which help them orientate, giving them concrete awareness and collective security. But with man was produced an 'ontological mutation' by the birth of a new mode of existence — that in culture. Biological evolution terminates in man, who has the 'qualitative uniqueness' of existing in mystery and to reveal, by categories of the unconscious, that which radically differentiates him from the animals. Those categories will be discussed in the extracts which follow this. (A. Botez)

and especially for its species. Existence within the immediate and for safety is of course a mode which the consciousness of no animal can surpass and in this category we include both inferior animals as well as those much praised for the superiority of their intelligence or instincts. Yet, man is entirely different! Man is entrapped by his creative destiny in a marvellous way; for this destiny man is capable of casting off –: even at the risk of self-destruction – the advantages of equilibrium and the joys of safety. What an animal may happen to produce – hiding places or organizational structures, for instance – may be exclusively understood as a result of its vital needs. Its productions correct or compensate the vicissitudes of the environment and ensure the animal's existence in an environment, otherwise unsatisfactory from many points of view; the respective productions have no revelatory-metaphorical character nor any stylistic aspects; they are not genuine 'creations'; they never form a world apart and do not require to be judged according to norms immanent in themselves as is the case of all man's cultural creations. Cultural creations can be and are judged according to immanent norms, according to rules whose bases are in a sense interwoven with man's creative destiny and geared to it. Saying this, we do not refer to man's *abyssal categories*, namely those profound categories of the unconscious which constitute the 'stylistic matrix'. If we agree that the animal is endowed with immediate cognition, we can safely assume that it has certain functions needed for organizing its world, that is, a type of 'intellectual categories'. Yet, by all tokens we can *not* ascribe *abyssal categories* to animals. The psychic structure of the animal, cognitive and fabricating, is not made up of doubled, tiered sets of categories, but, at best, of a single range, especially of the categories of concrete cognition. The animal may produce shapes and implements but these shapes have not been generated by a matrix of abyssal categories but by some vital need and are built through repetition, stereotypically, by instinct; they are always the same. The animal does not produce in order to reveal a mystery, but purely and simply in order to secure its own existence and that of the species. One can assert that the animal, as a species, may, in a sense, be the *author* of a 'civilisation'. The students of the complicated ways and habits of the ants and bees give us surprising details which are indeed amazing. Still, this animal civilisation is in many ways different from human civilisation. The state organisation of ants or bees is marvellous, indeed, but at a close look one notices that its bases are far less complex than the analogous human structures. With the ants and the bees it is only a question of a prudential existence through the immediate, of an emanation of vital needs and of concern for the safety of the group. In the human order, state organisation and its structures somehow go beyond this goal, and, at least indirectly, bear the stamp of man's creative destiny beyond man's pure instinct of self-preservation and criteria for safety. The human state, the same as all products of civilisation, bears the stamp of abyssal categories, a stylistic stigma. That is why the forms of man's

state organisation are so varied and change so often in history. They indirectly reflect 'the stylistic matrix' of the human group to which they belong. Animal civilisation, unlike the human one, is 'non-stylistic' and 'non-temporal', that is, non-historical and non-creative. Unlike the animal, man does not exist only through the immediate and for safety but at another level as well; he lives through mystery and revelation. It is therefore man alone that has a creative destiny which modifies and even changes biological laws. The significance and the implications of this destiny on an ontological, psychological and metaphysical plane have been discussed in other chapters which would enable us to dispense with repetitions. Yet, let it be said once again: before he could become 'Man', man suffered not only a *mutation of biological structures* but also an *ontological mutation*. In an *inexplicable* biological outburst, a *new* mode of existence, *unique* in the universe, declared itself in man: existence within the scope of mystery and for revelation. This mode makes man totally different from the rest of the animal world. From the metaphysical point of view, one more thing ought to be added: man 'creates' in order to reveal a mystery: his creative act goes beyond the immediate but is limited by 'transcendental brakes'. These are metaphysical aspects which can in no way be attributed to the animal, who, at best produces in order to correct or compensate the imperfections of the environment to the extent required by the need for self-preservation.

The animal is fully characterized by the following features:

1. It exists exclusively through the immediate and for safety.
2. It knows the concrete world in its own way.
3. The animal can be attributed certain cognitive categories in a functional sense.
4. The animal can produce civilisation but it is a non-stylistic stereotype, a non-temporal one.

Unlike the animal, man is characterized by the following features:

1. Man does not exclusively exist through the immediate and for safety, but within the scope of the mystery and for revelation too.
2. Man is endowed with a culture-creating destiny (culture is metaphorical and stylistic).
3. Man is endowed not only with cognitive categories as is the animal, but with abyssal categories as well.
4. Man has the possibility not only of 'manufacturing', but also of 'creating' a civilisation, variable in stylistic and historical terms.

Let us admit that the species of beings on the earth appeared indeed as a result of evolution and *especially by biological mutation*. Making a concession to the mythical approach, the result can also be formulated as follows: both animals and man are, as 'species', *objects* of a creative act (biological mutations) but it is man alone who is also a *creative subject* (as a result of ontological mutations).

With man something completely new appeared in nature. With man 'the creative subject' in the full meaning of the term appeared in the universe. This could mean that man stops being an object or material for a new biological creation. The fact that man has become Man, that is creative subject, thanks to a decisive ontological mutation, could, of course, signify that man *completed* evolution which works through biological mutation; it could therefore mean that no superior biological species is possible beyond him. This proposition could be also formulated as a question which deserves not only to be asked, but also to be thoroughly considered. In any case, Nietzsche's biological conception about the superman as a possibility for evolution in the future, was too hastily constructed without taking into account man's *qualitative singularity* and his exceptional position in nature. If man were simply an object, a bridge or a material for new biological creation (man-superman), we do not see why man should manifest himself so fully and vigorously as a subject with a creative destiny, taking upon himself great and tragic risks and renouncing even his natural equilibrium and safety. The fact that man is such a subject seems to be rather an argument that biological evolution was *completed* in man. No new and higher biological type can come out of man. Man is an end: in him the potentialities of biological mutations have been extinguished because they were completely realised and because he suffered a decisive *ontological mutation* which left behind all the other species.

Blaga's texts translated by Anda Teodorescu

