

## THE CURRENT SIGNIFICANCE OF BLAGA'S CONCEPTION OF METAPHORICAL KNOWLEDGE

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**Abstract.** The author exposes and explains the distinctions made by Blaga between plasticizing metaphors and revealing metaphors, between significant myths and trans-significant myths, as well as between these and the categorical ideas, which are involved in myths and metaphors. The author also presents the philosopher's conception of the co-presence of the metaphorical character and stylistic aspects in any form of culture, which also implies the co-presence of all cognitive sources that contribute to the generation of metaphors and their stylistic modeling/organization. Finally, the author appreciates Blaga's conception of the metaphorical character of culture as significant and current through the following: a) explaining the unitary character of culture by the fact that in its various forms the same elements of human subjectivity are present: metaphorical imagination, en-static intellect, ec-static intellect, the unconscious categories of the stylistic matrix; b) explaining the autonomy of cultural forms by the fact that each form engages the metaphorical imagination and the other faculties of human subjectivity in a certain proportion, different from one form to another; c) supporting the communicability of great cultures through some common or related stylistic factors from one stylistic matrix to another; d) admitting the national character of culture through the stylistic factors specific to each culture.

**Keywords:** plasticizing metaphors, revelatory metaphors, significant myths, trans-significant myths, abyssal categories, categories of receptive knowledge.

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In the present study, I analyze Lucian Blaga's conception of plasticizing metaphors and revelatory metaphors and their presence in myths and in all other forms of human creation, including metaphysics and science. Finally, I highlight some current meanings of Blaga's conception of metaphorical knowledge and its connection with paradisiacal knowledge (governed by the en-static intellect and Kantian a priori categories), with Luciferic knowledge (centered on the ec-static intellect), and also with the stylistic matrix (made up of noological, abyssal categories).

### *1. Plasticizing metaphors and revelatory metaphors – their specificity and sources*

*Plasticizing metaphors* are called so because they plasticize a fact through another fact (the expression of one fact through the expression of another fact). Among the examples given by Blaga, we note an example from one of his poems:

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“on the streets, thin and tall/ the rain walks on the cataligi”; and another from a popular riddle about a spider: “in a peak of straw/ the monastery of the king”. They do not bring an increase in knowledge of the plasticized fact, they are inherent to the human spirit and arise from the disagreement between the abstract and the concrete, that is, between the descriptive-abstract expression of a fact and the concreteness of that fact, which is not

exhausted by abstraction, a disagreement that requires completion through a suggestive comparison with another fact.

According to Blaga, man uses this type of metaphor when he “lives without mystery, without its consciousness, in an undisturbed state of paradisiacal-animal equilibrium”<sup>1</sup>. In other words, he analogizes plasticizing metaphorical knowledge with enstatic, ordinary, empirical or inductive intellectual knowledge, in which the intellect does not leave its usual, empirical-inductive patterns, governed by Kantian a priori forms. Of course, the difference between the two types of knowledge – enstatic intellectual and plasticizing metaphorical is given by the faculties through which it is exercised: the enstatic intellect and, respectively, the plasticizing imagination.

In our turn, we can analogize plasticizing metaphorism with the intellectual definition of notions not by proximate genus and specific difference, but by enumeration, through which we complete a first definition of an object through new features, which do not deepen the initial definition because all the new attributes are located at the level of empirical knowledge or are inductively dependent on the empirical stage. For example, to the definition of man as a rational animal, we can add bipedal, bimanous, featherless animal, etc., without advancing anything in the mystery of the human being. And in this case, analogy does not constitute an identification of the two modes of knowledge specified by Blaga, because the definition by enumeration appeals to the intellect and to empirical aspects of the object to be defined, while plasticizing metaphorism proceeds imaginatively “by approaching one fact to another, more or less similar, both facts being in the domain of the given, imagined, experienced or thought world”<sup>2</sup>. In one of Blaga's examples, the swallows sitting on the telegraph wires are called “some notes on a musical staff”.

*Revelatory metaphors* are called so because they “reveal something hidden”<sup>3</sup> of a fact, that is, they reveal a mystery to it. Blaga finds several revealed mysteries in the popular ballad *Miorița*, including the fact that death is called “the bride of the world”, and death “a wedding”, which gives the fact “death” another

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<sup>1</sup> L. Blaga, *Geneza metaforei și sensul culturii*, în L. Blaga, *Trilogia culturii*, E.L.U., București, 1969, p. 280.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 276.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 279.

meaning, or the comparison of the elements of nature with the participants in a wedding, in a church, through which the whole of nature becomes a kind of church. Among the illustrations with Blaga's verses, we remember two revealed mysteries, one of snowfall: "The ashes of the angels burned in the heavens/ fall flaming on our shoulders, on the houses" and another of a sunset: "The sun, the tear of God,/ falls in the seas of sleep". This type of metaphors does not plasticize some facts, but "has a revelatory character, because they cancel the usual meaning of the facts, substituting a new vision for them"<sup>4</sup>. At the same time, they no longer have as their source a disagreement inherent in the human spirit (between abstract and concrete), but rather they spring from the specific way of being of man *as an existence in mystery and for revelation*.

Therefore, Blaga believes that more appropriate than the Aristotelian definition of man as a political animal (*zoon politikon*) is the definition given by him, according to which "man is the metaphorizing animal", because: "The emphasis, which we wish to place on the epithet "metaphorizing", is, however, almost destined to suppress animality."<sup>5</sup>

As for the source of revelatory metaphors, it is found, as Blaga states, in the existential way of man to live in the horizon of mystery and revelation.

It is worth noting that, by their very location in man's existence in the horizon of mystery, revelatory metaphors are also inherent in the human spirit, springing from the permanent tendency of the spirit to discover something new not only to satisfy biological needs, but also to fulfill spiritual requirements, the absolute values of truth, good, beauty and sacredness, which are beyond any utility. At the same time, I believe that Blaga's thesis, according to which revelatory metaphors suspend the usual acceptances of facts in order to substitute other, deeper meanings, is consistent with the Husserlian phenomenological method, with its two stages: 1) *phenomenological reduction*, of suspending or bracketing empirical or other knowledge, and 2) *eidetic reflection*, of accessing the *eidos* or essence objects to know.

Given that the two types of metaphors have always been characteristic of human consciousness to concretize its abstractions and, respectively, to go beyond the already given knowledge about facts, towards their mysterious hiddenness, Blaga rejects excessive metaphorism, present especially in some poetic creations, in which metaphors do not correspond to either of the two purposes, being cultivated as a forced, abusive metaphorical game, in which the object is tabooed either magically, or aesthetically (as in the poetry of Gongora, Mallarmé, or Valéry), or intellectually (as in riddles), being forbidden to be named as such and replaced by metaphors.

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<sup>4</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 280.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 282.

The fact that abusive metaphors (also called *catachreses*) are admitted in some cultures, but rejected in others means that they, metaphors, are imbued with stylistic aspects, which, however, arise from a different source than metaphors, namely from the abyssal categories of the *stylistic matrix*.

2. *Significant myths and trans-significant myths – their revelatory and stylistic specificity*

From the analysis of metaphors, Blaga moves on to the analysis of myths, which include a metaphorical efflorescence.

Myths are grouped, like metaphors, into two categories: *significant myths* and *trans-significant myths*. They differ, however, from metaphors, in that they all aim to decipher a certain mystery (such as the origin of a certain field of activity), having a revelatory character. At the same time, they differ from one category to another: "Significant myths reveal, at least by their intention, meanings that may also have a logical equivalent. Trans-significant myths try to reveal something without a logical equivalent."<sup>6</sup>

Given that philosophical and scientific theories and hypotheses also aim to be revelations of the mystery (for example, to capture the essence or cause of phenomena of the same kind), Blaga discriminates, first of all, between *significant myths* (because their significance can be expressed through a logical idea) and scientific or philosophical ideas. Both forms of knowledge – both myth and scientific hypothesis – appeal to the metaphorical method of analogy, but the mythical spirit exacerbates analogies (it is their slave), while the scientific spirit controls analogies (it is their sovereign), being able to find in a nonanalogy (a dissimilarity between facts) an analogy (e.g.: the moon falls towards the earth) or, conversely, in an analogy (a similarity between facts) a nonanalogy (e.g.: the whale is not a fish, but a mammal).

Another difference between myth and scientific hypothesis, Blaga notes, concerns the relationship between known facts and the revelation permitted by the facts: myth *integrates* (assimilates) the known concrete facts to a revealed power (impersonal or personal – I.N.R. note), while scientific hypothesis *cancels the observed facts* from which it starts, in order to retain only their common note. Indeed, to illustrate this difference, let us consider that the theory concludes that all people are mortal by generalizing the findings about individual people who have died, but ignoring the cases concrete, after the idea of all has been reached. Instead, in the Assyrian-Babylonian myth *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, the idea of man's mortal character emerges from the events experienced by Gilgamesh, who, first, lost his friend Enkidu, because he had refused the goddess Ishtar, then, having gone in search of eternal youth, finds out where the flower of immortal

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<sup>6</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 291.

youth is found, picks it, but it is stolen from him by the snake, which symbolizes precisely man's fall from Paradise, through which he became perishable.

In connection with the difference mentioned, another difference, Blaga notes, consists in the fact that the vision reached by the myth is made up of vitalizing, animated elements, which participate in human life, while the vision constructed by science is made up of devitalized elements, substituted for the concrete world.

In trans-significant myths, the difference between myth and science fiction is even clearer in that these myths, being much more extensive and developed than the significant ones, no longer have a logical equivalent, a precise meaning, but are "a kind of revelations that themselves hide an ultimate secret"<sup>7</sup>. To try to attribute certain meanings to them is to transform them into allegories, but what they reveal is only revelatory through myth, just as "what is 'poetry' in a poem cannot be translated into prose"<sup>8</sup>. They cannot be a kind of collective dreams that would be an expression of the human unconscious, with all its monstrous tendencies (as psychoanalysis claims), because myths, which are "the first great manifestations of a culture", will always bear the imprint of stylistic factors, "will be shaped, internally, by the abyssal categories of a people", while "the dream, the one on the psychological level, is a-stylistic, like any natural phenomenon"<sup>9</sup>.

### *3. Metaphysical-scientific metaphorism and its difference from mythical-poetic metaphorism*

According to Blaga, metaphors and style are present not only in poetry and myth, but also in metaphysics and science. He states: "A cultural creation (mythical, artistic, metaphysical, theoretical-scientific) has two twinned aspects: one metaphorical, the other stylistic. A cultural creation is "metaphor" and "style", in a kind of mystical union"<sup>10</sup>.

Metaphysics is metaphorical because it tends to reveal the cosmic mystery. Blaga gives as an example the philosophical system of Leibniz, in which the sensible cosmos (a) is explained through the idea-image of monad (b), which constitutes the metaphorical core of the entire Leibnizian philosophical system. Generalizing, he states: "A revelatory metaphorical core is found in any metaphysical conception: regardless of whether the center of the conception is called Brahman, Atman, idea, entelechy or ego, will, etc."<sup>11</sup>

Similarly, science is also metaphorical, because it seeks to reveal the essence of concrete facts from one domain or another of reality through

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<sup>7</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 297.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 300.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 301.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 315.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 311.

metaphorical ideas-images. For example, in physics sound is understood as vibration, and light in the form of particles or waves.

Blaga also reveals the difference between mythical-poetic and philosophical-scientific metaphorism. The main difference lies in the fact that mythical and poetic metaphors respect the parity between the metaphorically amalgamated contents, while metaphors in philosophy and science do not respect it, but substitute the concrete-sensible contents by the ideas-images through which they explain them. For example, in the revelatory poetic metaphor "The sun, the tear of God, falls...", even though the image of the sun (a) receives a new meaning from the image of the "tear of God" (b) and is absorbed by it, it does not degrade, but preserves its existence as a whole that is absorbed by another, more vast whole. In contrast, in metaphysical and scientific metaphors, the concrete-sensible images from which they are taken as a starting point are annihilated and substituted by the idea-images through which they are explained.

Returning to poetic language, Blaga shows that not only explicit metaphors, but the entire poetic language is metaphorical through its material, rhythmic and sonorous side, which also has something analogous to the emotional state or thought. Similar is the language of painting (through color, line, form), sculpture (through matter and volume), music (through tones, melody, harmony), architecture (through tectonic mass and organization of space). Generalizing, Blaga states: "The substance, objectively embodied in the creation of culture of any nature, is in the final analysis, and in some way, always a revelatory metaphor, or if you will a tissue, a weave of revelatory metaphors."<sup>12</sup>

As for the stylistic component of some cultures as a whole, including metaphysical or scientific forms, Blaga illustrates the stylistic characteristics of the culture of ancient Greece, India and Byzantium.

Blaga wants to distinguish cultural creations, including hypotheses, theories and conceptions, which are metaphorical in nature and bear a stylistic imprint, from the categories circulated by philosophy, which lack metaphorical and stylistic aspects. As a result, the categories of receptive knowledge are not myths (as Nietzsche claimed), but categories of this type, Blaga specifies, "(for example the idea of *substance*, *causality*, *unity*, etc.) undoubtedly enter constitutively into "myths", as well as into empirical knowledge"<sup>13</sup>. In fact, as he explicitly claims: "Any revealing-metaphorical act already implies categorical conditions"<sup>14</sup>.

Indeed, in the complex process of empirical or, more precisely, experimental knowledge, we cannot seek, for example, the cause of some facts if

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<sup>12</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 315.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 324.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 325.

we do not already have the idea of causality. Or, in a cultural act, in the creation of a poem, we cannot metaphorically potentiate the usual expression of a fact, if we do not have expressed the idea of that fact, which in turn presupposed a certain categorical idea, such as the idea of *unity* or *identity* of facts of the same kind.

4. *The categories of consciousness and the categories of the unconscious, present in all creations*

Blaga distinguishes *the categories of receptive knowledge*, which belong to consciousness and are expressed through ideas that govern receptive (*paradisiacal*) knowledge, achieved through the *enstatic intellect*, from *the abyssal categories*, which, in the form of a *stylistic matrix*, belong to the unconscious and generate the stylistic aspects of a culture. The categories of receptivity form a constant structure, they can increase numerically, but without changing the structure, and are or tend to become universal, while "the unconscious stylistic matrix is constituted, above all, of a kind of categorical places, which can be occupied by certain specific categories only through alternation"<sup>15</sup>. For example, among the main categorical places, there is *the spatial horizon categorical place* and *the temporal horizon categorical place*, the spatial one being occupied by the categories *infinite three-dimensional space*, or *wavy space*, or *flat space*, or *vault space*, etc., and *the temporal one* – by *the categories time-pool*, or *time-river*, or *time-cascade*. By changing some categories with others or by combining two categories into a hybrid one, a multitude of stylistic matrices can be created. They differ from one culture to another, or from one cultural stage to another of one and the same culture. Therefore, unlike the a priori structures of receptivity, which tend towards constancy and universality, a priori stylistic matrices present, under certain conditions, variation and individualization. In general, matrices differ from one culture to another, but also retain some common categories of one or another categorical place. It follows, as Blaga argued in his work *Horizon and Style*, delimiting himself from Spengler's theory about an autonomous soul of each culture, that: "The stylistic matrix of one culture and the stylistic matrix of another culture often contain various common or related factors."<sup>16</sup>

In a cultural community, there are also individual styles. Namely: sometimes the individual adds his categories to the ethnic, community ones, differing from the ethnic only by peripheral categories, sometimes he differs from the ethnic also by some categories "of primary importance" (p. 363), never, however, by all: "At least a few, of the important ones, are always collective."<sup>17</sup>

<sup>15</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 136.

<sup>16</sup> L. Blaga, *Orizont și stil*, în vol. Lucian Blaga, *Trilogia culturii*, E.L.U., București, 1969, p. 114.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 363.

Blaga's conception of knowledge through metaphorical imagination implies the distinction between paradisiacal knowledge, focused on the en-static intellect and the Kantian a priori categories, which shape empirical and inductive-scientific knowledge, and luciferic knowledge, governed by the ec-static intellect, which tempts the mysteries behind empirical and inductive-scientific knowledge. Thus, plasticizing metaphors are based on an imagination that gravitates in the sphere of paradisiacal knowledge, while revelatory metaphors presuppose an imagination anchored in the sphere of luciferic knowledge. At the same time, given that metaphors of any kind are inserted into the language of various forms of culture, which carry a stylistic stigma, they also involve the unconscious categories of the stylistic matrix, which generate style.

##### *5. The importance of Blaga's conception of metaphorical knowledge*

Through his conception according to which metaphorical knowledge falls within the sphere of paradisiacal and luciferic knowledge and is present in all types of cultural creations, which also engage noological categories, Blaga managed to personally resolve several ambiguities in the field of the philosophy of culture, such as the definition of man as a metaphorizing man, the distinction between paradisiacal, so-called natural truth and the truth of stylistic, luciferic creations, the distinction between natural beauty and artistic beauty, etc.

Blaga's conception of metaphorical knowledge is particularly fruitful and current also in terms of understanding culture as a whole if we consider the fact that the metaphorizing and culturally creative individual affirms himself not only through metaphorical imagination, but, together with this, also through the en-static intellect and the ec-static intellect, as well as through the abyssal categories of the unconscious, both individual and collective.

A first current significance of Blaga's conception of the presence of metaphorical imagination in all cultural creations consists in explaining the unity of culture through the co-presence in the various forms of culture of the same cognitive faculties, namely: metaphorical imagination, en-static intellect, ec-static intellect and the collective unconscious, which is also reflected in the individual unconscious.

Another current significance of Blaga's conception of the metaphorical character of culture consists in explaining the autonomy of the forms of culture by the fact that each form engages the metaphorical imagination and the other faculties of human subjectivity in a certain proportion, different from one form to another.

Blaga's conception of the metaphorism of culture is also current in that it supports the communicability of great cultures by the fact that the metaphors incorporated in the forms of a culture are stylistically shaped by the stylistic matrix of that culture, which also contains various factors common or related to those of the stylistic matrix of another culture.

Blaga's conception of the stylized metaphorism of culture is important and current also because, without denying the communicability of cultures, it also admits their national character both through the stylistic factors specific to each culture and through the cosmological structuring of all the stylistic factors it contains. In relation to the national specificity of each stylistic matrix, it is also worth remembering the idea argued by the Romanian philosopher, according to which all stylistic matrices are equivalent in value.