THE SEMANTIC FIELD OF FIRE IN THE POETRY OF LUCIAN BLAGA

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Abstract

In this article we present a lexical-semantic study of the word *foc/fire* and of the terms in the field described by it in the poetry of Lucian Blaga; its meanings, shaped by linguistic and cultural paradigms, will be completed by those that are developing in Blaga's noosphere.

Keywords: *semantic field, lexical unit, noosphere, lexeme, seme*

Résumé

Dans cet article nous présentons une étude lexicale et sémantique consacrée au mot *foc/feu* et aux termes appartenant au champ sémantique généré par celui-là dans le cadre de la lyrique de Lucian Blaga. Les paradigmes linguistique et culturel en esquissent maintes significations; à celles-ci viennent se joindre les sens que ledit mot développe à l'intérieur de la noosphère de Lucian Blaga.

Mots-clés: *champ sémantique, unité lexicale, sème, lexème, noosphère*

1. Introduction

Starting from the idea that the study of metaphors implies a revelation of the vision of a poet and the observation that, "a central, original element in Blaga's poetry is fire"[1], we believe that an analysis of the semantic field of the lexeme *fire* can pave the way for new interpretations of Lucian Blaga's work.

Fire is one of the favorite motives of literature, as a lexical unit with a rich mythological and semantic background and includes a significant number of terms that are part of the semantic field designated by it.

2. Linguistic and cultural paradigms

In the linguistic paradigm, the lexeme *fire* (cf. Lat. *focus*) has a wide range of denotative and especially connotative meanings. The main denotative meanings mentioned in the dictionaries[2] are: "violent burning flame and heat generation", "simultaneous emission of light and heat with flame production", "ignited combustible material", "burning furnace, fireplace, stove, with thermic generation", "combustion device", "shot", "beacon flame or conflagration". Among connotative meanings we include: "red light, like flames", "glow", "battle", "war", "excitement, enthusiasm, fervor", "agility, liveliness, jitteriness", "pain, grief and suffering".

The set meanings are successfully completed by a large number of paremiological and phraseological combinations such as: *foc de artificii/burning of combustible materials which produce coloured garlands of flames*; *a lua foc/to light*; a

[1] Elena Indrieş, 1989, p. 23.
[2] Cf. *Dicţionarul explicativ al limbii române*, 2009.

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pune pe cineva pe foc/to ask someone something too earnestly, to insist too much that someone should act in a certain way; *a se arunca* (*a intra*) *în foc pentru ceva/cineva/to expose one's life*; *a băga mâna în foc pentru cineva/vouch for acts and honour of someone*; *a lua foc cu gura/a mânca foc/to do everything possible*; a *se face foc şi pară/to be very angry, the anger peat*; *a deschide focul/to shoot*; *plin de foc/ardent, fiery, blazing*; *în focul.../in moments of great intensity*; *a-şi vărsa focul/to open his soul*; *a-şi scoate un foc de la inimă/to take revenge on someone, to get rid of suffering*; *n-o fi foc/there is no evil*.

The cultural paradigm offers a significant variety of interpretations and meanings, the *fire* being the main element of ancestral rites that take different forms related to the culture of each nation. The Hindu doctrine provides a fundamental importance to fire, being the one that meets the most symbolic aspects; *Agni*, *Indra* and *Surya* are the three ways: land (normal fire), intermediate (lightning) and celestial (sun)[3]. Hinduism distinguishes between the positive and destructive aspect of fire (in Sanskrit fire and pure words are synonymous). Buddha substitutes the inner dimension of enlightenment and knowledge for the purification by fire.

The appearance of fire as purifier, the sacrificial system dedicated to deities are present in most religions; there is also an agricultural rite of regeneration through fire, celebrated even in modern times by the Chortists at the equinox[4].

In the Christian religion fire is a symbol of divinity; we find it in the symbolic sacrifices, in the bush that burns without consuming, in the pillar of fire that protects the Jewish exodus, in the tongues of fire on the disciples' heads on the day of Pentecost, etc. There is also the punitive aspect of fire, the hell, or the apocalypse, regenerative, regarded as a sine-qua-non of regeneration and establishment of a new paradise on earth.

The Greek philosopher Heraclitus' vision of fire consists in a constantly making process, raw materials of the world which generates other elements: *air*, *water*, *earth*. He states, "indissoluble unity between matter and force that animates (...) the living energy of primordial essence of the All-One who, by transforming, creates individual and multiple"[5]. There is an equivalence between *the eternal fire* and *psyche* (soul), which makes the divine live in man. If the soul is a part of the universal fire, it feeds the body, composed of water and earth, dying and being born again through the connection with universal fire.

3. Fire in the noosphere of Lucian Blaga's lyrics

An important issue in interpreting the poetry of Lucian Blaga is the vision of Alexandra Indries who proposes the term *noosphere*, considering it a complex and more accurate term than the traditional poetic universe. Noosphere (a lexeme composed of *nous = spirit* and *sphere*, with reference to the ideological, emotional, cultural, abysmal sphere, in which the poetic sign cuts its own section, as well as the semantic areas of reality, geography, geology, botany, from which, through metamorphosis or invention, the poet plays snatches, global visions) is considered an

[3] Chevalier, Gheerbrant, 1994, II, p. 62.
[4] Chevalier, Gheerbrant, 1994, II, p. 64.
[5] Elena Indrieş, 1989, p.11.

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inter-and supracontextual component, consisting of a system of images and meanings, an over sign in the hierarchy of signs in a selective and dynamic system[6].

We should mention that in the work of Lucian Blaga, the noosphere is the result of conjugation of description of the symbols and judgment and prediction upon them; a very important aspect is the act performed metaphorically by these symbols and the poet's attitude, so by the dynamic action and the assigned value, the symbols are endowed with distinctive semantic meanings, deeply imbued with the author's individual mark.

Along with the basic symbols in European poetry and mythology, in Blaga's work we find certain keywords with specific features which would become true reasons by their complexity. They can be considered intermediate macro-fields between the contextual-semantic field of symbols and textual semantic supra-field of noosphere. The particular characteristics of the reasons are: the multitude of iconic elements which are embodied by and which are derived from a variety of images, symbols and metaphors in different poetic contexts and a nuanced emotional paradigm (in relation to the symbols shown in general with only two affective attitudes). "We can define the reason that the macro-field of meaning (abstracts) characterized by univocity of the significant plan and plurivocity of the iconic one (...) a significance with multiple signifiers while the symbols are a signifier with multiple significances"[7].

The main nominal symbols encountered in Blaga's poetry are: *light*, *flesh and blood*, *eye*, *eyelid*, *mirror*, *time*, *mill*, *work*, *aquatic element*, *rubble*, *blue*, *gold*, *sleep*, *death mark*, *rune*, *bee*.

Noosphere is an over-sign, and the study of lexical elements involves the analysis of the terms of a cipher, a code: "a poet's language dictionary is primarily a repository of semantic fields"[8]. The imaginary universe character of noosphere should be analyzed not as static-descriptive, but by studying the evolution of their symbols in the reality of their contexts.

As numerous studies have shown, the interpretation of Lucian Blaga's lyric work requires primarily an approach to the metaphorical structures and semantic fields, because all dynamic connotations of a metaphor are given by the sum of the connotations of its lexemes; so there is an opening of the image towards the semantic fields of each lexeme.

The semantic field is the "dynamic totality of connotations of a term in a certain poetical work by which the fundamental meaning is moving as well as its hierarchy of values, leading in some cases to the lexeme in esteem transformation"[9]. It is noted that the interaction of the micro-texts forms the semantic field, an important role is due to the closer word connotations in a phrase and to the grammatical factors; certain connotations, once acquired, are not lost but accompany the word in other contexts, thus enriching it with new significations, philosophical meanings, emotional nuances.

The semantic field of an esteem is achieved by the convergence of general factors, among which we can mention mythical thinking, literature, cultural and

[6] Alexandra Indrieş, 1981, p. 16.
[7] Alexandra Indrieş, 1975, p. 20.
[8] Idem, p. 21.
[9] Alexandra Indrieş, 1981, p. 9.

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linguistic components, with the individual factor, represented by a particular vision of a lexeme.

In the semantic fields a recurrent or feedback phenomenon (obvious for the poets who have finished their creative activity and whose work is perceived through its global vision) can be distinguished.

Semantic fields rich in connotations and having multiple meanings by the end of a creative activity, significantly enrich the early works meanings that were poor in significations and the early poetic language is nuanced, we discover new images and meanings, unsuspected depths in the beginning.

We caught three types of poetical attitudes to traditional semantic field: accepting and taking their own semantic field historically formed, the poet's struggle to renew the semantic field by enriching it, or correction and sometimes subversion; the third possible attitude is formation of new semantic fields, the struggle to impose an unconsecrated word in the poetic language. This attitude is one of avoiding using words that already have a pre-formed semantic field.

Regarding the attitude of Lucian Blaga, it has been noted that he chose to enrich and possibly to move components of informational load into an attitude of smooth correction of semantic fields.

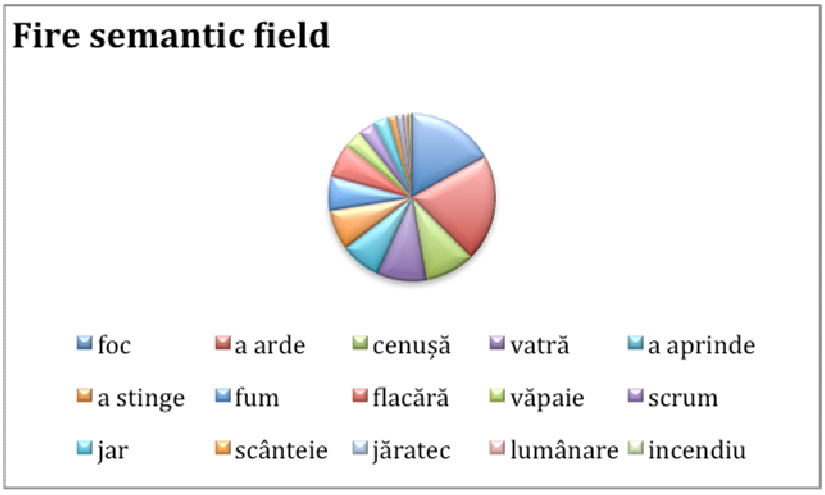
Fire occupies a decisive role in the poetic work of Lucian Blaga, rated as one of the main nominal symbols such as *light*, *flesh and blood*, *eye*, *eyelid*, *mirror*, *time*, *mill*, *work*, *aquatic element*, *rubble*, *blue*, *gold*, *sleep*, *death mark*, *rune*, *bee*.

In the statistical study *About Lucian Blaga's Vocabulary* by Mircea Borcilă we can see a frequent use of the words *fire*, *sky*, *water* and *earth* whereof Elena Indrieş believes it offers a private note to the lyrical work of the poet who mastered "from the Greek culture the structure of Heraclitean philosophy of elements (...) and gives it a phenomenal size by his own poetic creation"[10].

A more recent study of Lăcămioara Solomon[11] placed fire among the basic words of Blaga's vocabulary, i.e. 52 occurrences, while other terms of the lexical field that it opens are: *a arde* (to burn) – 63, *cenuşă*"(ash) – 30, *vatră* (fireplace) – 29, *a aprinde* (to ignite) – 24, *a stinge* (to estinguish) – 24, *fum* (smoke) – 20, *flăcări* (flames) – 20, *văpaie* (flame) – 11, *scrum* (ash) – 10, *jar* (embers) – 9, *scânteie* (spark) – 5, *jăratec* (hot coals) – 4, *lumânare* (candle) – 3, *incendiu* (fire) – 2.

[10] Elena Indrieş, 1989, p. 8-9.
[11] Solomon, 2008, p. 51.

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Before a brief analysis of microtexts or contexts in which the terms within the lexical field of fire appear, we propose a brief semic analysis in which we delineate some semes of some nominal signifiers with denotative sense.

Seme / Lexemes	S1	S2	S3	S4	S5	S6	S7	S8	S9	S10	S11
foc	-	+	-	+	+	+	+	-	+	-	+
cenușă	+	-	-	-	-	-	-	+	-	+	-
vatră	+	-	-	-	-	-	-	+	-	-	-
fum	-	-	+	+/-	+	-	+	-	-	+	-
flacără	-	+	-	+	+	+	+	-	+	-	+
văpaie	-	+	-	+	+	+	+	-	+	-	+
scrum	+	-	-	-	-	-	-	+	-	+	-
jar	+	-	-	+/-	+/-	+	-	+	+/-	+/-	+
scânteie	-	+	-	-	-	+/-	+	-	+	-	+
jăratec	+	-	-	+/-	+/-	+	-	+	+/-	+/-	+
lumânare	+	+	-	-	-	+	+	-	+	-	+
incendiu	-	+	-	+	+	+	+	-	+	-	+

S1- solid substance
S2 - plasma
S3 - gaseous substance
S4 - intensity
S5 - term
S6 - emits heat
S7 - dynamic element
S8 - static element
S9 - combustion process
S10 - residue
S11- emits light

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A careful analysis of the meanings which fire lexical unit develops and the terms of its lexical field shows that the fire becomes both symbol and poetic reason, as interpreted by Alexandra Indries and semantic valences result from the interpretation of the microtexts in which they appear and their interference, in conjunction with data provided by linguistic and cultural paradigms.

Fire as a phenomenon, a primordial element, in a sense imbued by the Heraclitean vision is approached even by Blaga in the *Cosmological Trilogy*, and is mentioned in the *Master Manole* drama and is found in many other poems.

The artist-Creator identity is opposed to the image of alienation from a God pantheistically disseminated in primary elements *în țărnă, în foc, în văzduh şi în ape* (*Psalm*) because *totuşi cu cuvinte simple ca ale noastre/ s-au făcut lumea, stihiile, ziua şi focul* (*Tristețe metafizică*).

Fire as an ambivalent symbol of life and death, is a characteristic of Blaga's poetry, but we can even speak of fire as a reason by the multitude of signifiers that he uses for the signified "life" (fire, flame, burn, light, lights, warm and flame), and also the signified "death" (fireplace, ashes, smoke and extinguish).

Fire becomes a metaphor for the creation by contamination with the semantic field of light. In the Heraclitean vision, fire becomes *psyche* (soul) in relation to deity, the poet being consumed not by the power of inspiration, *nu l-a schimbat în cenuşă/ fulgerul care i-a fost pentru o clipă/ oaspete-n prag* , but by the creative effort *ucis / de-un ghimpe muiat în azur/ ca de-un spine cu foc de albină* (*Poetul*). The creator-fire is the source of light, of Lucifer's knowledge, who has the gift of enhancing the mystery of the universe, and that the poet assumes. In his vision the metaphor, the poetic creation, appeared "the moment he was declared to the world as a miraculous fire, the structure and the mode of existence that are called together man and will continually occur as long as man continues to burn, like a wick with no growth and no decline"[12].

Fire as an indicator of irreversible passage of time is found in the lexeme *ashes*: *Ies vârstele şi-mi pun pe cap/ Aureolă de cenuşă* (*Asfințit*).

Fire as a reverie is found in *Bunavestire* where the presence of fire makes the revelation possible through its double meaning. As Gaston Bachelard such noticed, fire becomes the favourite element for reverie. So, at the denotative level, the presence around the fire creates a favourable atmosphere for the story, myth, as the word suggests the inner fire, burning desire of the human to encounter the divine. The idea is enhanced by the presence of two nominal terms – *flames*, *torch* – and a verbal term – *I lit it*. Dressed in light, *în cojoace cu flăcări de lână*, the shepherds themselves become messengers, carriers of the torch of celestial origin.

In the specific expressionist enthusiasm two myths are intertwined in the poem, the Christ and the Promethean myth, according to his personal vision.

Fire as a hypostasis of love and passion is found in many poems throughout the poet's creation. The first captures pantheistic notes of love, *Noi şi pământul*, bringing together three of the four primordial elements, *the sky* (suggested by the lexeme *star*), *fire* and *earth* and show the strength of the feeling of love intensified by the nocturnal element and astronomical phenomenon of falling meteors. The fire of passion is devouring, the explicit comparison *ca nişte limbi de foc eu brațele-mi întind*

[12] Blaga, 1994, p. 40.

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anticipated by that of the burning bush is meant to evoke the atmosphere of the bloody Middle Ages (*Cântecul focului*).

Fire as good-bad antinomy is found in several poems that bear the seal of Blaga's Bogomilism that establishes an interrelationship between the two principles that govern life and offering them a different mythological fabric of the Christian version. Thus *lumina raiului* comes from *flăcările* of hell, which can open by analogy with the lexical-semantic field of light new avenues of interpretation. Thus, *the light minus knowledge*, Luciferian knowledge whose purpose is growing of mystery, has as a source the fire of love because *căci eu iubesc şi flori şi ochi şi buze şi morminte*, and also an internal combustion, the poet's creative effort.

Regenerator – fire recreates the myth of the Phoenix bird amid the overthrown Christian myth, the flood myth, with final irreparable action. While the apocalyptic destructive image of water dominates everything and the fire of inspiration seems to have lost its creative force *pasărea focului/ nu-mi mai fâlfâie peste pereți*, the hope of poetic sensibility remains alive, for *inima* buried *sub spuza jăraticului* keeps in it the germ of the Phoenix bird (*On the Water*).

We find the same recreated image of the Phoenix bird in vegetal state in *Cântecul bradului* where an *axis mundi* renewed vision occurs through contact with divine lightning which fulfils its transcendent desire.

Along the hypostasis already mentioned we also remember the purifying fire, bush fire as a physical manifestation of divinity, fire as transcendental aspiration, noting that each microtext created around this lexical unit generates new and exciting meanings that highlight the creative capacity of the poet.

Finally we remember the observation that Lăcrămioara Solomon makes on fire regarding the triple signification of the myth fire: the mythological fire which the poet uses in some of his poems, reviving myths such as the flood, doomsday, Christ myth, etc; fire – personal Blagian myth – and fire as an attribute of the built world[13].

The same idea of poetic imagery that manages to transform the philosophical concepts or poetic mythological scenarios in poetical material is remarked by Elena Indries, saying that they "tame their contours, humanize, getting down from abstract and obey the laws of intuition and ineffable lyric coming from the inside of poems and demonstrating that the artistic genius' alchemy can transform a synthetic philosopher's Stone into a sparkling diamond (...)"[14].

The work of Lucian Blaga develops a close relationship symbol – reason – metaphor – myth which gives its multiple meanings claiming an initiated reader able to decipher messages of great semantic subtlety.

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[13] Solomon, 2008, p. 33

[14] Elena Indrieş, 1989, p. 27

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