Recurrence and Religious Structures in Paremiology: *Protection*

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Concept extrêmement complexe, « la protection » connaît une grande variété de valeurs lexicales et sémantiques, terminologiques, connotatives, dénominatives, etc. Toutes ces valeurs ne sont pourtant pas en mesure de donner une représentation de la dimension trans-sociale de la protection divine. L'hypothèse de cette étude est que la plupart des proverbes du monde représentent une façon d'exploration textuelle des différents textes religieux, organisés en trois catégories distinctes: l'imitation, l'opposition et l'allusion. La définition biblique de la protection, la protection divine conditionnée, les variations dans le mental collectif, la typologie de l'allusion biblique etc. sont quelques aspects que nous nous proposons de traiter dans une perspective intertextuelle.
Les conclusions visent à montrer comment les allusions à la protection divine mettent en valeur deux thèmes dans le « texte » des mentalités, ayant des fondements solides dans l'Écriture Sainte: la vulnérabilité de l'être humain, d'une part, et la compassion du pouvoir souverain envers la condition humaine, d'autre part.

Mots-clés: *intertextualité, parémiologie, texte religieux, protection.*

1. Theoretical and methodological foundations

In Ferdinand de Saussure's conception, linguistic signs not only have the characteristic of being arbitrary (the relationship between signifier and signified is conventional), but also that of being relational. The situations in which the sign refers to an extra-linguistic referent, belonging to the material world – well defined in terms of ontological components –, are infinitely less if compared to infinite situations where the linguistic sign refers to other signs. Researching the literary text, in analogy with the way of thinking of structuralist linguistics, many exegetes have observed the "tied" character of the text, deliberately or not, diachronic and/or synchronic, by other texts (Julia Kristeva, R. Barthes, G. Genette). The text refers to "the intertextual encyclopedia of an age" (Eco 2007), to the matrix forms and to conventions of its own field, of literature, to a greater extent than that which would establish direct "relations" with the world. From the genetic point of view, the concept of intertextuality has its roots in the Russian formalism. Analyzing the polyphonic character of Dostoyevsky's novel, M. Bahtin discussed the possibility to interpret the text in several "keys".

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Julia Kristeva defined intertextuality as the index of the way in which a text reads history and is inserted in it (Kristeva 1980, 266). This definition could be applied in a narrow, more specialized sense, to paremiology, in its acception of general field of interaction of some indices of the way in which phraseologisms "read" several codes and, more or less metaphorically speaking, "are inserted" in the "text" of a mindset. The arguments are brought indirectly by one of R. Barthes' observations: the entire language – old and contemporary – enters a text not through a detectable filiation, a deliberate imitation, but through dissemination – an image which ensures the text not the status of a reproduction, but that of productivity (Barthes 1968, 179).

Paremiology is generally developed by transforming some heterogeneous codes that are no longer dissociated by the contemporary speaker. During a careful analysis of Romanian paremiology, for example, we identify the crossing of some indices of the archaic civilization, of the traditional and the modern culture, of religion, with specific signifiers and formulae, at the level of which formal structural relations are established. The biblical teaching, the archaic wisdom, the Latin way of thinking about the world, the elements of oriental, Byzantine philosophy, etc. are self-dissolved in the field of paremiology, that we must not confuse with the mindset of a nation: the latter is a set of material, spiritual, linguistic culture, while the proverb, in its text-sentence meaning, resides exclusively in the language. It is proper in this context to specify that intertextuality should not be reduced to a simple problem of resources, of "influences". As mentioned before, the concept of *influence* is a consecrated one, but it has a much too general and vague status in comparison with that of intertextuality. At most, in a certain sense, one could speak about an element of adaptability to the line of time, of paremilogy, which brings with itself a renewal of the vocabulary and through this a constant redefinition of mentalities, etc.

The scholarly literature designates several types of intertextual relations such as relations of co-presence, relations of inclusion, of the derivation of one text from another. In Gerard Genette's conception (Genette 1982), the "relationship of co-presence" has several forms between two or more texts: the "quotation" (used in the journalistic language, especially in the title of the articles), "plagiarism" (a "less explicit and less canonical" form in the French author's conception) and "allusion", a theorized intertextual category, with the meaning of "statement the full understanding of which requires the perception of a relationship between it and another, to which its several inflections, otherwise inaccessible, refer necessarily" (Genette 1982, 8).

The study of the interaction of different codes in paremiology determines and justifies the adoption of common research methods for all types of indices, the comparison of the results being interesting and useful, etc. Extending the current research of phraseologisms beyond the realm of mentalities, into the literary text, in the "repeated discourse" (E. Coșeriu), attracts, in different forms and to different degrees, the deepening of the relation of co-presence between texts. What we are

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interested in – from the methodological and conceptual perspective –, in the strict study of paremiology, is the third "nucleus" of intertextuality, *allusion*. It is one of the leading figures of thought, differently defined, under the aspect of functionality: for G. Genette, it is "a punctual figure", and for Allan H. Pasco (Pasco 1995) it becomes one of the fundamental forms of intertextuality, through its ability to be extended to the dimensions of a whole work.

A large part of the world's proverbs are a form of textual exploitation of various religious texts, organized in three distinct categories: imitation, opposition and allusion. The religious allusion ("graft" – in the terms of Allan H. Pasco) and the text of paremiologic statements ("the plant and the implant" – in the same scholar's concepts) are united at the level of the mind, in an always new type of creation, in a "different way from any of the textual components" (Pasco, 1995, 6), different from which would be the text-sentence of proverbs, lacking the external, religious material.

2. Canonical divine protection. Hebrew merism

What is the biblical definition of protection? Let us stop at the classical answer, given by the *Psalms* of David: protection means hiding in "the shadow of God's wings" (Ps. 17:8; Ps. 57:1), in His hut "in that evil day" (Ps. 27:5), and "in the lee of God's face" (Ps. 31:20). The image of God as "helper", who "will not let your foot slip", in His role of the "guardian" of people ("your shade on your right hand", "the Sun will not smite you by day, nor the Moon by night") is omnipresent. God "will keep you from anything bad; He will keep your soul." The divine protection in the *Holy Scripture* is given through a figure which the rhetoric calls *merism*: it is the combination of two contrasting words, used to suggest the unity of the whole. Hebrew merism names the extremes ("coincidentia oppsitorum" in Mircea Eliade's vision), suggesting all the elements between them: God "will keep you at going and arriving, now and forevermore!"

God is the one whom the protection acts are attributed in the collective mindset as well, regardless of religion: "God gave disease, but also gave cures"// "Allah tried people not only by misfortune, but also by giving them riches unexpectedly."// "God makes nests for the blind stork." This proverb is one of many classical examples of protection depicted as shelter.

The allusion with a biblical source is based on suggestion and subtlety in paremiology, but mostly on not declaring the sources, being foreign to what the rhetoric of the Middle Ages called "imitatio". The identification of sources lies on the cultural / informational competences of the receiver. The modalities to realize a figure of thought based on analogy, such as allusion, differs from one thematic typology to another. Here are some patterns:

2.1. Built based on and in the spirit of the canons, the biblical allusion can be expressed through *a fragment of a statement*, through which a situational parallelism is realized with the "facts" from the *Psalms* ("To sit at the right hand of the Father"), or with the characters having a significance in the old Jewish model,

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in the *New Testament*, etc. In "living as in Abraham's bosom", by the allusion "Abraham's bosom" the collective archaic mind avoids the vulgar character (or even obscene, in some instances of actual communication) of the paremiologic statement. In The *Old Testament*, the image of protection, of a safe place appears both in *Numbers* (11:12), in *Ruth* ("Then Naomi took the child in her arms and cared for him..." 4:16), in *Isaiah* (40:11). As noted in *Dicţionar de imagini şi simboluri biblice* 2011, the expression "Abraham's bosom" appears only twice in the *Holy Scriptures*. Abraham was the father of the Jews, and to live "in the bosom of Abraham" is an allusion to a safe place, of high honor. In Jesus' parable about the rich man clothed in purple and fine linen, we read: "the beggar died, and was carried by the angels into *Abraham's bosom*" (*Luke* 16:22).

Another sense of the "Abraham's bosom" allusion is that of "a place of honour" offered to a guest at the table, sitting next to the host – which is found in *John*: "No man hath seen God at any time, the only begotten Son, which is *in the bosom of the Father*, he hath declared him." (*John* 1:18)// "Now there was leaning *on Jesus' bosom* one of his disciples, whom Jesus loved." (*John* 13:23).

In the Hebrew and Christian tradition, "God's hand" is another construction that signifies the canonical protection, used to express the relationships of the ordinary mortals with the Supreme One (Dumistrăcel 2001, 130). In addition to several other witnesses to invoke the sacred, "God's hand" is a universal, supra-individual representation, being related in every situation to the divine protection of being, may it be the Islam or the Christian religion: in Maghreb it has the name of "Fatima's hand" (the daughter of the Prophet and the mother of all believers), or even of Keff Maryam (Mary's hand); in the Christian religion the image is associated with other symbols of anthropological character: "this was God's hand", "he saw God", "he grabbed God's foot", "he holds God by His hair", "he stands in the face of God", "he keeps God at his bosom", etc.

2.2. The religious allusion is generally expressed by *a single word* which suggests variants of the thematic strands of the idea of protection. Thus, not only a situational parallelism is realized, but also a *sapiential* connection and/or a concretizing of abstractions.

Without being built solely upon biblical canons, religious allusions have the highest degree of *universality*, with deep roots in the anthropology of the human being. Since ancient times, man has sensed being part of a cosmic unity which exceeds man, shared through a network of correspondences, a common destiny with the world of vegetation, of the animal and the invisible world: "Nothing is random, everything is connected, everything resonates" (Le Breton 2009, 66). Any aspect of manifestation can become – regardless of the geographical position, of occupation, of the type of religious community – the sign of the Creator's care for the beings of His own creation: God finds a lower branch for the bird which cannot fly.

From the examples considered above, one can notice that the allusions regarding divine protection highlight two issues in the "text" of the mindsets, with

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solid foundations in the *Holy Scriptures*: the vulnerability of the human being, on the one hand, and the compassion of the sovereign power towards the condition of the creatures of the universe. Armor, castle, fortress, stronghold, divine warrior, refuge, weakness, walls – all these are recurrent images that suggest sovereign power and the tendency of a compassionate Creator to offer protection.

3. Conditional divine protection and the patristic discourse

The variations of the theme are extremely subtle in relation to the gender and species cultivated in the text of the *Scripture* (*Gospels*, *Psalms*, *Proverbs*, etc.) and/or in relation to the sermon/homilies. Rediscovering the divine power, the human being ensures a permanent access to the dimension of the intelligible and explainable. Both canonical texts – constructed on prescriptions –, as well as the patristic teaching have generated another "variant" of the topic in question – on the level of the mindsets – by connecting it to the psychology of the being. We discuss the type of *divine protection which is conditioned by human action* (earnest in prayer, in work, in wisdom, humility, etc.): "Preserve me, O God: for in thee do I put my trust." (*Ps*. 16:1). In *Matthew* we read: "And all things, whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive." We will stop at a few discourse models of the patristic literature: Saint John Chrysostom frequently used in his sermons the idea that "God loves the ones who persevere." Saint Cyprian: "Those can receive what they ask from God whom he sees guarding in prayer". Saint Philip Neri: "Hold me, God, from my ears, because otherwise I will sell you just like Judas did".

A comfortable existence under the protection of the Father can be given only to the entrepreneurial spirits, this being one of the "assertions" of conditional divine protection we find in the mindsets of several nations and people: "God feeds the flapping birds", says a Danish proverb, while in the English language we find the following variant: "God gave us hands, but he does not build bridges with them." The Czechs and the Slovaks correlate the divine care with human involvement in the manifest, in the action: "He whom God has revealed a treasure must remove it himself", a teaching we also find in the mentality of the Romanians: "God gives, but he does not put it in the bag"// "God gives, but he does not carry it home", etc.

4. Allusion and typology in context

Sometimes, close to literary periphrasis and having an evocative function, the allusion to divine protection knows several contextual patterns: a) it can be studied in combination with other figures of speech, including what the scholarly literature calls *antomasia*: "sitting at the feet of the Lord", where *Lord* has become the common name through which a protecting God is appointed. The common name becomes thus generic. Unlike the lyrical text, where allusion/antonomasia individualizes the biblical vocabula in the context – the procedure having a certain recurrence („Pentru-al lui cap ai înfruntat revolte./ Și astăzi simți că strîngi la piept pe-o Iudă" [For his head you faced rebellion/And today you feel you hold a Judas

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to your chest], M. Eminescu), in paremiology the phenomenon does not have the same frequency/intensity of individualization: "Do not get mad *at God* for having created the tiger, thank Him that He did not gave it wings"[1]; b). the allusion to the biblical "narration" can have a parody dimension: "for you, old Adam, we ate spikes in slaps"; or: allusions to relationships between different types of religion can have a euphemistic side: "Adam and Eve declared their love in Persian, but the angel who cast them away, spoke Turkish" (Iraqui proverb); c) the allusion is realized as a generalizing figure in paremiology: "When God is not at home, the Saints have a blast"; d) there are several cases where the allusion to protection has a gnomic value: "Protect yourself if you want God to protect you".

Resources

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[1] African proverb, la http://ecitate.ro/citeste/1124.

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