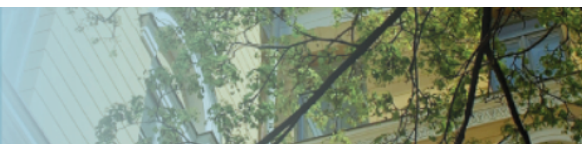


Language and the Scientific Imagination
The 11th International Conference of ISSEI
Language Centre, University of Helsinki (Finland)
28 July – 2 August 2008



Poetry and Philosophy in Lucian Blaga's Works

Born in May 9th 1895, as the ninth son of a priest, in the village of Lancram, Romania, Lucian Blaga published his first poems in 1910, and, in 1914, his first philosophical article, *Notes on Intuition in Bergson*. He graduated from the Theological Institute of Sibiu, in 1917, and he began to study philosophy at the University of Vienna in 1918. He published his Ph D thesis *Culture and Cognition* in 1922. He worked in diplomacy (in Warsaw, Prague, Bern, Vienna, Lisbon), and, in 1936, was elected member of the Romanian Academy. In 1937 he gave his first speech, *Eulogy to the Romanian Village*, at the Academy. Returned to Romania, as Professor of the Philosophy of Culture, at the University of Cluj, he was dismissed from his chair by the Communist regime in 1949, and was appointed librarian at the Romanian Academy library - Cluj branch, and published only translations until 1960. In 1956 he was nominated for the Nobel Prize on the proposal of Bazil Munteanu and Rosa del Conte, but the Romanian communist government protested against his nomination. He died in 1961, and is buried at Lancram.

His poetical works include: *Poems of Light* (1919), *Prophet's Footsteps* (1921), *In the Great Passage* (1924), *In Praise of Sleep* (1929), *At the Watershed* (1933), *At the Courtyard of Yearning* (1938), *Unsuspected Steps - New Poems* (1943), and *Posthumous Poems* (1982-3). His plays are: *Zamolxis, A Pagan Mystery* (1921), *Whirling Waters* (1923), *Daria, Ivanca (The Deed)*, (1925), *Master-BUILDER Manole* (1926), *The Children's Crusade* (1930), *Avram Iancu* (1934), and *Noah's Ark* (1944).

Lucian Blaga's philosophical works include: *The Philosophy of Style* (1924), *The Original Phenomenon* and *The Facets of a Century* (1925), *The Dogmatic Aeon* (1931), *Luciferian Knowledge* (1933), *Transcendental Censorship* (1934), *Horizon and Style* and *The Mioritic Space* (1936), *The Genesis of Metaphor and the Meaning of Culture* (1937), *Art and Value* (1939), *The Divine Differentials* (1940), *Religion and Spirit* and *Science and Creation* (1942), *The Trilogy of Knowledge (The Dogmatic Aeon, Luciferian Knowledge, Transcendent Censorship)* (1943), *The Trilogy of Culture (Horizon and Style, The Mioritic Space, The Genesis of Metaphor and the Meaning of Culture)* (1944), *The Trilogy of Values (Science and Creation, Magical Thinking and Religion, Art and Value)* (1946), *Historical Existence* (1959), *Romanian Thought in Transylvania in the 18th Century* (1966), *Horizons and Stages* (1968), *Experiment and the Mathematical Spirit* (1969), *Sources* (essays, lectures, articles) (1972), *On Philosophical Cognition* (1974), *Philosophical Essays* (1977), *The Cosmological Trilogy (The Divine Differentials, Anthropological Aspects, Historical Existence)* (1983). Lucian Blaga's other works in prose are: *Stones for My Temple*, aphorisms (1919), *Discobolus*, aphorisms (1945), *The Chronicle and Song of Ages*, memoirs (1965), *The Élan of the Island*, aphorisms (1977), and *Charon's Ferry*.

Lucian Blaga's poems and plays, on the one hand, and his philosophical works, on the other hand, are so closely connected that one cannot understand his poetry and drama without knowing his philosophical ideas, and, likewise, one cannot understand the philosopher's works without knowing the metaphors in his literary works. Blaga's philosophy is marked by his poetic sensitivity, both stylistically and terminologically. In Blaga's philosophical works, one often finds terms not usually used in this type of theoretical works. For instance, the fundamental modalities of knowledge, the

Luciferian knowledge and the *Paradisian knowledge* are not totally corresponding to the usual philosophical concepts of *intuitive knowledge* and *conceptual knowledge*. Even from his first volumes, Lucian Blaga included, in his poems (*Poems of Light*) and in his aphorisms (*Stones for My Temple*), some philosophical ideas that were to become defining concepts of his philosophy. For instance, one of his aphorisms – “There are hidden places in our souls that are as light as shadows: they disappear as soon as we try to spotlight them”¹ – expresses the same ideas as the following verses: “Others’ light/ strangles the spell of the impenetrable/ hidden in the depths of darkness”² (*I Do Not Crush the World’s Corolla of Marvels*), and these ideas are also expressed in the philosophical work *The Trilogy of Knowledge* where the concepts of *Luciferian knowledge* and *Paradisian knowledge* are defined using scientific terms. The mystery is one of the components of the *Luciferian knowledge*. The *Luciferian knowledge* advances into the depths, reaching the hidden essence of the world. From this point of view, the object is not simply a sum of data, but a complex of the signs of a mystery.

On the Philosophical Conscience is the first part of *The Trilogy of Knowledge* and expresses Lucian Blaga’s fundamental ideas. It is a philosophy of philosophy, a meta-philosophy, the self awareness of philosophy, of its role and place in a world more and more tempted by technology, and the amazing development of sciences, according to Henri Wald in his study on this work. Lucian Blaga states that philosophy is accessible to any person who has “the necessary spiritual aptitudes of reception and spontaneity”, the same as art. Blaga says that the role of philosophy, at the crucial moments in the history of thinking, is like an awakening from the mythological or dogmatic sleep of sense. All the great philosophers, as well as the

crucial moments in the history of philosophy, are equivalents of this awakening through which the human spirit is contemplating itself within the magnificence of the universe. Therefore, any metaphysical thought aspires to bring its own light into the vast night. The philosophic eye directed towards the inner human self, reaching, thus, understandings that became “awakenings” for the human spirit. Therefore, philosophy is autonomous, and can be taken neither for science, nor for art. The metaphysical ideas are not senseless imaginations, but “distinct views” that operate a leap into transcendence. Philosophy, the same as science, is meant to fathom the existential mysteries and to convert them into knowledge.

“The philosopher aspires to become author of a world, while the scientist assumes the role of a researcher in a delimited domain of the infinite field of phenomena. The philosopher attempts to convert a mystery, as ample and deep as the entire existence, in human understanding terms. The scientist attempts, in his turn, to convert mystery in terms that are closer to his understanding, but the mystery is circumscribed and displayed rather horizontally than in depth.”³

On the other hand, Blaga states that the magical and mythical thinking is closely connected to the philosophical systems of the most important philosophers of the world. The human beings need philosophy for their spiritual growth and they can be defined not only through their material needs, but also through the mystery quest. In Blaga’s view, the mystery horizon is a basic structural element in human conscience. “Metaphysical inventions are, at least, as necessary food for thought as the material food is for the animal body.”⁴ One of Blaga’s essential philosophical categories is style, as we can see especially in *The Trilogy of Culture*. Blaga defined his theory

regarding the origins of a national identity as style – its source is in the unconscious which, in the philosopher's view, represents the original roots of a nation. Blaga's concept of the unconscious is that it formed the stylistic matrix.

Style brings philosophy close to the other forms of culture, including art. Yet, unlike art, philosophy does not work using only intuitive and sensitive means, but “in a material of concepts and views of a supreme abstraction.”

Blaga's philosophical system proposes a new theory of knowledge, a new theory of culture, a new theory of values and a new theory of man. The core of his new system is the Luciferian knowledge. Knowledge is a necessary relation subject – object. The cognitive act captures the object, and assimilates it. Nevertheless, knowledge cannot be limited to the world of the existence of the phenomena. Knowledge is knowledge only as “an act of transcendence” that cannot be, yet, total, and absolutely positive, because the transcendental censorship appears.

Another concept is the concept of the Mioritic space. It defines the Romanian national identity through a connection between environment and culture. The ups and downs of the Romanian landscape, the Mioritic space, are similar to the ups and downs of the Romanian way of approaching life.

The main themes in Blaga's poetry are connected to their corresponding philosophical ideas. The mystery of the *Luciferian knowledge* is the theme of the famous poem *I Do Not Crush the World's Corolla of Marvels*. The advancement into the depths enables reaching the hidden essence of the world, and the poet approaches this mystery by

increasing it, through his light, unlike those who “strangle the spell”, with theirs. His way of “enriching” the “dark horizon/ with great shivers of sacred mystery” - the same as the moon “intensifies the secret of the night” - is love, whose power is to change the impenetrable into more impenetrable. Love is also the primordial force. The poet believes that the light he feels in the presence of his beloved might be “the last drop/ of the light created on the first day” (*The Light*).

We can detect in his poems a “metaphysical sensitivity”, a capacity of intuiting the world as a whole (from a philosophical point of view). This capacity is not an accidental factor, but an individual component. Blaga’s poetry is essentially a lamentation of the intensity of a tragic despair caused by the cosmic isolation of the individual, by the devouring power of time, and by the advancement towards nothingness. The poetic frame is the vast universe; it is not a simple set, but a permanent element, inseparable from the poet’s soul. The dimensions and significances of the feelings are similar. In the poem *A Man is bending over the Edge*, the poet only hears the sound of the cosmic sea, not knowing if he is bending over the edge of the sea or over the edge of his poor thinking, rendering a feeling of loneliness, of alienation. Another theme is the human being’s cry in front of death. In *The Oak*, the ultimate silence is felt in the peacefulness spread by the oak under which the poet is listening how his future coffin is growing, maybe, in the body of the oak. In *Silence*, the poet feels a strange voice inside singing an unknown song, and wonders about his own soul’s possible song inside another being, once, in the future. “Who knows? Who knows?” The silence is so overwhelming that the poet thinks he can hear “the moon rays strike the windows”. Death is seen as nothingness, death is not transcendence, time is a force that devours life, and life is “a great passage”. The

terrible fear and loneliness are, in other poems, changed to an aspiration of fusion with the “great wholeness”. The poet tends to leave the individuality representing limitation and isolation and to integrate in the universe, in nature, in everything (*I Want to Dance, In the Field, If I Were Lost*). The feeling of “passage” is cancelled by the “praise of sleep”, and the state of pre-existence. Sleeping is integration in the succession of generations, crossing the border of death that separates them.

Lucian Blaga’s dramatic work expresses the same aspirations and anxieties of his poems, and is marked by his metaphysical sensitivity. The characters are not individualities or religious ideas. Actually, they are symbols representing different attitudes towards life, found both in nature and in humans.

In conclusion, we could say that Lucian Blaga’s philosophy uses a literary language. His style is metaphorical, and his philosophical ideas are substantially poetical. The essence of his conception on the „human being and the meaning of existence” is the idea of the human’s creative vocation. Lucian Blaga’s philosophical work is an invention of the spirit meant to answer the existential anxieties expressed in his poetical and dramatic work.

Iolanda Manescu

University of Craiova

Department of Applied Foreign Languages, Faculty of Letters

A.I. Cuza , no.13, Craiova

Romania

Email: iomanescu@yahoo.co.uk

¹ Lucian Blaga, *Horizons and Stages* (Bucharest, RO: The Publishing House for Literature, 1968), 11

² Lucian Blaga, *Poems* (Bucharest, RO: Minerva Publishing House, 1981), 7

³ Lucian Blaga, *The Trilogy of Knowledge* (Bucharest, RO: Minerva Publishing House, 1983), 94

⁴ Blaga, *Trilogy of Knowledge*, 169