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Mask and Face, Sublimity and Proximity – Metaphors of Cognition as Experience in Translations of Psalm 139

Abstract

In theory of suggestion, the metaphor of the mask and the face is used to better define the only concept of suggestion. I use here the metaphor as a starting point to tie the theory of suggestions to the theory of the sublime. The analytic material provides me with 15 English translations, 15 Polish translations, 2 Latin translations, 2 German and 2 Swedish and Greek and Hebrew versions of Psalm 139. When analysing the translations I use a concept of the dominant semantic domain as references of metaphors in a given text. In Psalm 139, there are several important terms to know. According to my analysis of the dominant domain of reference for the metaphors used in the text, it is the experiential domain, defined by senses other than sight. Knowledge does mean meeting with the presence, of which can be illustrated by the metaphor of the face and that feeling is overwhelming, corporeal, visceral, and tangible. An important argument and analysed text in this article are drawn from a poetic paraphrase of Psalm 139 by Jan Kochanowski.

Keywords: cognition, experience, translations, Psalm studies, theory of suggestion, theory of the sublime.

It is quite hard to define suggestion. The suggestion theory as developed in Indian thought[1] and by Teresa and Sławomir Cieślikowski[2] try to make clear this by using metaphors of "mask and face" that refer to the invisible however present and overwhelming. It is quite easy also to use in this context theory of the subli-

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[1] V. Mishra, *Devotional Poetics and the Indian Sublime*, Albany 1998.

[2] S. Cieślikowski, T. Cieślikowska, *Sacrum i maska czyli o wypowiadaniu niewypowiedzianego*, "Roczniki Humanistyczne" 1980, T. 28, z. 1, p. 65–82, and in: S. Cieślikowski, T. Cieślikowska, ibid. [in:] *W kręgu genologii i teorii sugestii*, Łódź 1995, p. 106–125.

mity[3] because one can find in it talk about the invisible roots or roots that are so visible that blinding and overwhelming. An interesting example of the primitive theme of the sublime in ancient Hebrew culture is a fragment of Psalm 139.

139:1   Przewodnikowi chóru. Psalm Dawidowy. Panie, zbadałeś mnie i znasz.
139:2   Ty wiesz, kiedy siedzę i kiedy wstaję, Rozumiesz myśl moją z daleka.
139:3   Ty wyznaczasz mi drogę i spoczynek, Wiesz dobrze o wszystkich ścieżkach moich.
139:4   Jeszcze bowiem nie ma słowa na języku moim, A Ty, Panie, już znasz je całe.
139:5   Ogarniasz mnie z tyłu i z przodu I kładziesz na mnie rękę swoją.
139:6   Zbyt cudowna jest dla mnie ta wiedza, Zbyt wzniosła, bym ją pojął (BW).

In verse 6 of this Psalm, sublimity is too high for the reason, so that the subject cannot grasp the knowledge. Sublimity is suggested in this translation by the unattainable knowledge and total helplessness of intellectual dumbness of the subject. No coincidence that these qualities are juxtaposed with qualities so frequently mentioned in suggestion theory. The common association is "the miraculous", because it evokes the wonder, of wonder and amazement, the reaction equal to holding the breath during the inability of intellectual reaction and behavior of ordinary communication.

Therefore, Stefania Skwarczynska when she alluded to the concept of the sublime used the case of extreme un-communicability drawn from one of the *Stepy Akermańskie* by Adam Mickiewicz: „Aaaah…" In Psalm 139, one cannot find such extreme communicative behaviors expressing awe. Instead, one of the striking properties of the poetics of this psalm is to draw attention to the dichotomy of what is visible and what is invisible, but obvious and known at the same time.

When I think of the sublime, visual metaphors dominate, originally it took up almost all of perceptual domain, the subject of the experience is overwhelmed by visual stimuli. However, this particular real experience also evokes the sublime element of the unimaginable and, therefore, also the invisible. Reference to the invisible God is quite common in the Bible, even though just the same word often appears explicitly in the New Testament. It seems that the Greek culture and the Greek language imposed conceptualisation of the sublime category of visibility--invisibility in a more categorical way. Prior in the Hebrews times, God has been experienced not as primarily the invisible, but as the invisible, but at the same time extremely powerfully experimental (or, experiential), so strongly that you could not even speak his name. Most modern English translations of Psalm 139 is compatible with the original Hebrew sacred conceptualisation. You can clearly see it in the KJV.

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[3] K. Holmqvist, J. Płuciennik, *The Hebraic and the Indian Sublime from the Rhetoric Point of View*, "Journal of Indian Philosophy and Religion" 2001, no. 6, p. 37–52.

In each 15 Polish and 15 English translations, I have distinguished and identi-fied the verbs relating to the relationship between God and the psalmist. They are equivalent to the Hebrew words of the Masoretic text

חָקַר ḥāqar
יָדַע yāḏa'
יָדַע yāḏa'
בִּין biyn
זָרֱה zārāh
סָכַן sākan, סֹכֵן sōḵēn
יָדַע yāḏa'
צוּר ṣûr
שִׁית šiyṯ
נָחָה nāḥāh
אָחַז 'aḥaz
קָנָה qānāh
סָכַךְ sākaḵ, שָׂכַךְ śākaḵ
רָקַם rāqam
רָאָה rā'āh, רֹאֶה rō'eh
כָּתַב kāṯaḇ
חקר: ḥāqar
יָדַע yāḏa'
בָּחַן bāḥan
יָדַע yāḏa'
ראה: rāāh
נָחָה nāḥāh

These 22 distinguished semantic slots in this Psalm in translations can be assigned very different values. I divided semantic domains characterized by the relationship of God and the psalmist into three main groups: Experiential Seman-tic Domain (ESD), Abstract Semantic Domain (ASD) and visual semantic domain (VSD).

After isolation and the oldest and most popular English version of the KJV thing looks like this:

The ESD will find the following expressions: searched me, compassest, hast beset me behind and before, and laid thine hand upon me, thy hand lead me, thy right hand shall hold me, hast possessed my reins, hast covered me in my mother's womb, I was made in secret, and curiously wrought in the lowest parts of the earth, in thy book all my members were written, which in continuance were fashioned, Search me, try me, lead me.

In ASD, you can find the following words: known me, knowest, understandest my thought afar off, acquainted with all my ways, knowest it altogether, know my heart, know my thoughts.

In the VSD I can find but only three tokens: not hid from thee, eyes did see, see, though even here one can discuss whether non-hiding is the domain of visual recall.

As far as I can tell, after examining 15 different English translations, most of them are trying to be faithful to conceptualise archaic Hebrew psalmist reference to God. You can likely tell that the Greek version of the Septuagint was also similar in this respect to that archaic Hebrew conceptualisation. It is visible in a bilingual version of the Greek and English.

In ESD: hast proved me, hast traced my path, hast fashioned me, laid thine hand upon me, thy hand would guide me, thy right hand would hold me, hast possessed my reins; hast helped me from my mother's womb, My bones, were not hidden from thee, madest in secret, nor my substance, in the lowest parts of the earth, All men shall be written in thy book; they shall be formed by day, Prove me, examine me, lead me.

In ASD: known me, knowest, understandest my thoughts, hast known all things, know my heart, know my paths.

In VSD: hast foreseen all my ways, Thine eyes saw my unwrought substance, See.

It is instructive to look at two versions of the Latin Vulgate: a version of Latin called Clementine Vulgate has more slots in the domain of the visual:

ESD: probasti me, investigasti, Quia tu possedisti renes meos, suscepisti me de utero matris me, etenim illuc manus tua deducet me,et tenebit me dextera tua, et in libro tuo omnes scribentur, Proba me, Non est occultatum os meum a te, quod fecisti in occulto, et scito cor meum, interroga me, deduc.

ASD: cognovisti me, cognovisti, Intellexisti cogitationes meas de longe, cognovisti omnia, formasti me, posuisti super me manum tuam, et cognosce semitas meas.

VSD: prvidisti, non obscurabuntur, illuminabitur, Imperfectum meum viderunt oculi tui, vide.

However, the critical version which was under the influence of textual criticism looks more cleaned and without the "spots of visuality":

ESD: investigasti me, formasti me, posuisti, super me manum tuam, manus tua deducet me, et tenebit me dextera tua, possedisti renes meos, orsusque es me in utero matris meae, non sunt operta ossa mea a te quibus factus sum, in abscondito imaginatus sum in novissimis terrae, in libro tuo omnes scribentur dies formatae sunt, scrutare me, et scito cogitationes meas, deduc me.

ASD: Cognovisti, cognovisti, intellexisti, intellexisti, cognosce cor meum.

VSD: vide.

It is interesting that in English we have only one example of a large presence of visual metaphors to refer to the relationship of the God and the psalmist. This is an experimental translation of the so called Basic English: BBE.

ESD: searching out all my secrets, I am shut in by you on every side, and you have put your hand on me, will I be guided by your hand, your right hand will keep me, My flesh was made by you, my parts joined together in my mother's body, I am strangely and delicately formed, when I was made secretly, strangely

formed in the lowest parts of the earth, in your book all my days were recorded, let my wandering thoughts be tested, be my guide.

ASD: have knowledge of me, have knowledge, have knowledge.

VSD: you see my thoughts from far away, keep watch over my steps and my sleep, there is not a word on my tongue which is not clear to you, My frame was not unseen by you, Your eyes saw my unformed substance; let the secrets of my heart be uncovered, See.

Against this background, the situation looks particularly interesting when talking about translations of Psalm 139 into Polish.

You can even risk a division of all available translations of the Psalm 139 into two groups: one experiential group consists of BB, BG, Cylkow, BW Milosz, while a group of distant translations, in which verbs are dominating the domain of the visual, is very large, and it consists of Lubelczyk, Wujek, Karp, BW-P, Staff, Brand, 1000, Ekumen, Paulińska.

We should bear in mind that these groups do not reflect the devotional divisions clearly, because in the first group we have indeed dominant Protestant translations (BB, BG, BW), but neither Cylkow nor Milosz belong to the Protestants. While in the second group, even though it is dominated by Catholic translations and paraphrases (Wujek, Karp, BW-P, Staff, Brand, 1000 and Paulińska), we find also Protestant Lubelczyk and Ecumenical translation which is also not Catholic.

The record holder when it comes to dominance of visual metaphors is a poetic translation by Karpinski:

ESD: doświadczałeś, I gdym miał mówić, język mi ruszałeś, Tyś mię sam stworzył; Ty mię utrzymujesz, Moc Twoja, Panie, doprowadzi wszędzie, I tam mię trzymać Twa prawica będzie! co me kroki wszystkie masz za świadki, Tyś go ukształcił w związek doskonały, Napisał w księdze, co z niego być miało, Boże, doświadczaj serce Ci znajome! Przetrząś me ścieżki jawne i kryjome, Wyprowadź z błędu.

ASD: Początek rzeczy z ich końcem pojmujesz! znasz wszystkie skłonności,

VSD: moje myśli przenikałeś, Przed wiadomością Twoją-m się nie schronił, Ty ścieżki moje uważałeś, Przed czasem widział myśli mej zapędy, wszystkie moje drogi przewidziałeś, Albo przed okiem ukryć się straszliwym? Patrzając na mnie od wnętrzności matki. Wglądając w Twoje niepojęte dziwy, Niedojrzały płód oczy Twe widziały,

Even the ecumenical translation, although it seems that Protestant translations try to remain faithful to the original conceptualization of Hebrew text, it is leaning toward the distant kinds of translations:

ESD: Ze wszystkich stron mnie otaczasz, i kładziesz na mnie swoją rękę, tam też poprowadzi mnie Twoja ręka, i podtrzyma mnie Twoja prawica, Ty bowiem ukształtowałeś moje wnętrze, utkałeś mnie w łonie matki. Moje kości nie były Ci obce, gdy byłem tworzony w ukryciu, tkany w głębi ziemi, i wszystko zostało zapisane w Twej księdze, dni zostały określone, doświadcz mnie, poprowadź mnie

ASD: i znasz, wiesz, znane są Ci, znasz je w całości, poznaj moje serce, i poznaj moje myśli.

VSD: Ty mnie przenikasz, z daleka dostrzegasz, Widzisz, Twoje oczy widziały mój początek, Przeniknij mnie, Boże, Zobacz.

Noteworthy is the paraphrase of the Psalm by Jan Kochanowski, which can not be clearly attributed to either of these two extreme groups, but I would point out to the first group.

ESD: już dawno brzmi w uszu Twoich, Tyś mię z tyłu i z przodku sam uformował, Tyś około mnie ręki swej nie żałował, Coś tak misternie sprawił, wieczny mój Boże, Ty wymacasz, Twoja nieuchroniona ręka dopadnie, Tyś mię w żywocie tworzył mojej rodzice, Ten związek tak misterny ciała naszego, Gdziem ja rósł osobliwym kunsztem wiązany, Dziwne są czyny Twoje, Tyś miał w swych księgach, Zmacaj serca, wytrząśni wszytki me rady, Najdziesz co we mnie, Niechaj jednako będę osądzon z nimi.

ASD: znasz, rozumiesz, chód mój […] Tobie wiadomy, jesteś świadomy; Ty myśli wiesz, Ty moje znasz tajemnice,

VSD: Rzecz namniejsza skryta być we mnie nie może; Widział; Żadna Tobie kosteczka tajna nie była, Okiem jeszcze słonecznym nie oglądany.

To this paraphrase, I will come back further.

<p style="text-align:center">***</p>

It seems that the Hebrew Masoretic text shapes present in this psalm subjects of a dialogue through the verbs used in a distinct manner: we have a presence here of the true sense of sight, but God is here characterised more as a scout, who uses the eye, but his actions are also searching, getaway, or the interview. In other contexts, God is the potter, weaver and writer. While the Psalmist against this background is presented as: embryo, clay, wings, implementation of the plan, inner world, a record.

The concept of God as – above all – the big eye is visible in late European concept of the eye of providence, so much that is reflected in the concepts of the Enlightenment. It is especially visible when searching the modern Masonry. Enlightenment made of eye and vision the main metaphor for intellect, but as history shows in the translations of Psalm 139, cognition not necessarily be conceptualised by metaphors of light and vision. This modern concept can be seen in one of the interpretations of Psalm 139, which uses a reference to the pre-Enlightenment concept of Newton.

Florence Nightingale commenting on Psalm 139 in her spiritual diary wrote this:

"His substance is within the substance of every being, whether material or immaterial, and as intimately present to it as that being is to itself. It would be an imperfection in Him, were He able to remove out of one place into another, or to withdraw Himself from anything He has created, or from any part of that space which is diffused and spread abroad to infinity, a Being, whose centre is everywhere and His circumference nowhere. Infinite space is the sensorium of the Godhead. Brutes and men have their [illeg]. But as God Almighty cannot

but perceive and know everything in which he resides, infinite space gives room to infinite knowledge and is as it were an organ to omniscience".

Her editor commented:

The "Being whose centre is everywhere and circumference nowhere" is from Pascal's Pensées. 184 Space as the "sensorium of God" is from Newton, Optics, Query 28, so that this "intelligent, omnipresent" Being "sees the things themselves intimately, and thoroughly perceives them," while images only are carried through the sense organs "into our little sensoriums."185 (Florence Nightingale's Spiritual Journey: Biblical Annotations, Sermons and Journal Notes by Lynn McDonald, Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2001)

It is a very characteristic of how the spirit of the times may overshadow the spirit of the original: first, Newton's concepts of metaphysics has been projected on the optical space as the sensorium of God, then a soulful woman, Florence Nightingale made reference to this, but she, however, lived in the times of the birth of cinema and cultural domination of sight. These the are complex fate of Psalm 139, that modernity has always interfered with its tongue in conceptualizing all subjects, even those that should – in theory – be timeless.

It is worthy to return to the paraphrase of Psalm 139 by Jan Kochanowski. Even in the case of his paraphrase of the Psalm, it appears to be absolutely brilliant, but also as an individual: there is no way to assign to it any explicit religious affiliation, but it is extremely expressive when it comes to conceptualizing the experience of the invisible. The experience of God through the Psalmist is very deep and intimate. Especially, I would like to point out the presence of the archaic use of the word grope "macać". We read in etymological dictionary by Bruckner:

"liczne złożenia; macek i macka, 'narząd dotykania u owadów'; mackiem, 'po macku', »po omacku«, 'macając w ciemności'; tylko u nas i u Czechów; maceć w psałt. flor. albo błąd pisarski, albo czechizm, w puławskim macać. Por. czes. maczkati, 'gnieść', nasze maćkać, rozmaćkany; pień mak- (mok-) powtarza czes. makati, 'dotykać'".

In no other form we can find this word, in a few fragments of Psałterz Dawidów by Kochanowski himself: "zmacać" will still be used in Psalm 17 and 64, and the word "Niewymacany" in Psalm 107. This is an old Polish counterpart of "explore", "study", „search". Again Bruckner:

"badać, badacz, złożenia z z-, wy-, o- (późne stosunkowo; dawniejsze tylko: zbadać i wybadać), badawczy (jak spostrzegawczy do przymiotników na -awy, jak ciekawy); częstotliwe do bóść (p.); tak samo u Czechów, bádati, gdzie i pierwotne znaczenie 'bodzenia' istnieje; cerk. probadati, rus. probodat', 'przebijać', serb. badal, 'oścień', badala, 'sonda', badil, 'łopata', badkawica, 'lancet'. Już w psałterzu stałe słowo: badanie, 'scrutinium'".

But today the word grope in English and "macać" in Polish have very specialized semantic profiles. We cannot find such profile in other English word referring to "macać" — palpate:

palpate – macać
1. "Touch something with your fingers, foot, etc., Trying to sense, identify something"
2. "To seek, investigate, probe"
3. "Cover, touch lasciviously"

palpate up – macnąć
1. "Touch himself, trying to feel something, recognize"
2. "Touching one another"
3. "Inspect, examine one another"
4. "Cover up, touch lasciviously"

In etymological resources we can find that "Indecent sense 'touch (someone) amorously, play with, fondle' (marked as 'obsolete in OED 2nd edition) is from c. 1200".

It is this use which will not be at all surprising in religious contexts, if we remember that in the Old Testament "to know man", can mean also "have sex with him". The paraphrase by Kochanowski in which he uses twice the core meaning associated with tangibility, palpability, the sense of touch refers to the very source of experience covering not only the sense of touch, but the whole body. This whole body experiences also in guts, by guts:

KJV
For thou hast possessed my reins: thou hast covered me in my mother's womb.
NIV
For you created my inmost being;

כִּלְיָה kilyāh in Hebrew means above all kidneys, but in Polish and English it is often translated by heart. This word means generally guts, the most private and intimate part of the human person. (Job 16:13; Ps. 139: 13; Prov. 23:16; Jer. 11:20; Lam. 3:13). It seems that sticking to the literal kidneys, in this context, the Hebrew kidneys are evoking unnecessary local associations. Most known translations highlighting their relationship with the original texts put in this semantic slot local equivalents to "kidneys", including the four analyzed control versions of German and Swedish Bibles. However, the significant choice by Cylkow "For you formed my guts" seems closer to the intentions of the original version of this fragment and corresponds to the pronunciation of the whole. The experience of God is comprehensive, covers the entire body, including viscera, is all-pervasive. That is why the NIV version also seems to be better here. However Polish Paulińska version „It is you who form my conscience" seems too distant, though in line with the intentions of the whole. It is clear for me that bodily dimension experience should be a priority here. Sublimity is at this point very close, the mask is broken, the contact becomes an intimate, all-embracing, palpable, immediate and overwhelming the whole body.

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Psalms

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    mon to call the translation *Gdansk Bible: Biblia Gdańska*, hence Bg. I use also *Bi-
    blia Gdańska w systemie Stronga. Stary Testament* oraz *Wykaz wyrazów i zwrotów
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    www.biblia-online.pl and in an app for iOS called Biblia (Polish Bible Collection)
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