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“I will open my mouth in a parable”: “History” and “metaphor” in the Psalms

ABSTRACT

Metaphorical expression is profoundly transformative, both cognitively and theologically. However, not all metaphors are created equal, nor simplistically metaphorical in the strictest sense. Wheelwright (1962) identified two distinctive semantic movements in metaphor: epiphor and diaphor. Epiphor is the transference of a name to some other object, while diaphor works differently, creating meaning by juxtaposing the particulars of an old experience with new experiences, in order to transform despair to hope, lament to praise, complaint to trust. This article explores the semantic depth of the two ways in which metaphor functions, by investigating several historical references in the psalms with a view to understanding when history is history, when history is plainly metaphorical, and when history is best understood diaphorically.

1. “ALL SLANG IS A METAPHOR, AND ALL METAPHOR IS POETRY” (CHESTERTON 2018:61)

It has become, as Derrida (1974:30) noted, conventional in reflection on metaphor to begin with Aristotle:

There is a code, a program, a rhetoric ... in any discourse about metaphor: in the first place, by custom, Aristotle’s definition is to be recalled.



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A summary of Aristotle’s definition, as it is drawn from both *The poetics* and *The rhetoric*, still seems apropos and perhaps rises to the “plea of necessity”.

Metaphor [according to Aristotle] consists in giving [a] thing a name that belongs to something else; ... this is transference of a nominal label from one thing to another.

Aristotle (1922:356) goes further and not only describes the basic function of metaphor, but also praises its ability to communicate: “Metaphor, more than anything, has clarity and sweetness and strangeness” of expression.¹

There are two critical elements, in this instance, which have continued to influence discourse on metaphor. First, of course, is the idea of transference: metaphor is calling one thing by *another* name that properly belongs to something else, *i.e.* that is not *native* to it. There are a number of ways of characterising this technical exchange of meaning, for the present I will be using the fairly standard labels “source domain” and “target domain”. The “target domain” is the thing or idea that is being described; the “source domain” is the thing or field that is borrowed to describe it.² Example: “The LORD is my rock, my fortress, and my deliverer” (Ps. 18:2).

The second element is Aristotle’s characterisation of this transference as being defined by, and powerful because of its “strangeness”: it is *another* name that is borrowed to describe something else, and this other name is not *natural* or native to it. Example: “The LORD lives! Blessed be my rock” (Ps. 18:46).

Metaphor, then, is about transference (quite literally ... or literarily, *μετὰ + φέρω*) of meaning from one thing to another. For Aristotle, this was at least partially limited to the realm of the noun. The LORD is a “rock”.³

But is this all that metaphor does, and is the “simple” metaphor the only thing that does this? Is metaphor a form of expression, or is it also a way of thinking, of knowing? I will not rehearse the entire argument in this instance, but will summarise what I take as my own position. Kövecses (2005:2, 11) puts it this way:

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- 1 This is my translation, based on the Greek presented in the Loeb Classical Library edition of Aristotle’s *Rhētoriké*.
 - 2 Another standard is the “tenor and vehicle” where tenor = target and vehicle = source.
 - 3 “True metaphor therefore is confined to the limits of the Aristotelian onoma ... It seems, [however], that the field of the onoma – and consequently that of metaphor, as the transfer of a noun – is less that of the noun in the strict sense (a sense which it acquired very late in the development of rhetoric) than that of the nominalizable” (Derida 1974:30, 33).

we actually understand the world with metaphors and do not just speak them ... It is complex metaphors ... with which people actually engage in their thought in real cultural contexts; each source domain contributes predetermined conceptual materials to the range of target domains to which it applies.

Metaphor is one way – one essential way – in which we think and communicate our thinking, part and parcel not only of how we communicate, but of how we *conceive* and how conception is transformed.

Similarly, in her construction of theological reflection grounded in parable, Teselle (1974:632) mentions that

[i]n metaphor knowledge and its expression are one and the same, there is no way around the metaphor, it is not expendable.

In other words, metaphor is not reducible, in a simplistic way, to a grammatical function.

Furthermore, an essential quality of the metaphor is that it need not be bound by any rule of grammar, or into a particular grammatical form; it is free to transfer meaning and understanding, and thus bring about transformation in meaning and understanding.⁴ This is true not only of the potential source and target domains – in metaphor one may think of God as rock (Ps. 19:14; Isa. 26:4), an “eagle” (Ps. 91:4), and even “maggots” (Hos. 5:12), or of the human being as “tree” (Ps. 1:3; 52:8 [10]), a “horse or a mule” (Ps. 32:9), or even a “worm” (22:6) – but of the form which metaphorical reflection and articulation may also take. Metaphor, and the form in which it is borne, cannot be limited either grammatically or rhetorically.

A related and often noted issue has to do with the relationship of metaphor with simile. The argument is, usually, that a simile is essentially the same thing as a metaphor. Wheelwright (1962:71) also addressed this similarity, concluding that “the grammarian’s familiar distinction between metaphor and simile is to be largely ignored”. To a certain degree, it must be acknowledged that metaphor and simile perform, essentially, the same function. But, as Brown (2002:7) suggested, while the distinction in grammatical function may be relatively close, “rhetorically speaking ... the difference may be anything but negligible”.

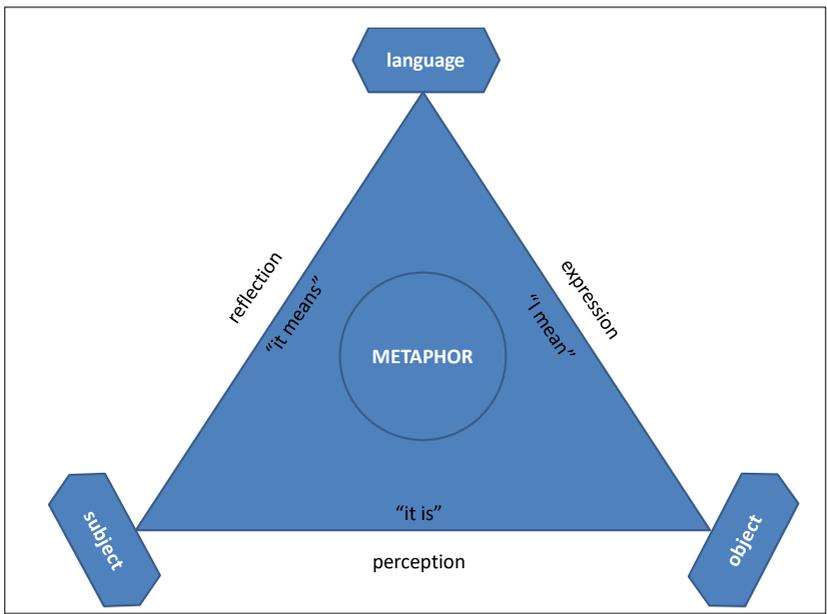
To quote Aristotle (*Rhētoriké* III.1406b) again: “A simile is also a metaphor ... differing in the form of expression.” This captures well the

4 “The test of essential metaphor is not any rule of grammatical form, but rather the quality of semantic transformation that is brought about” (Deirda 1974:30, 33).

both/and; metaphor and simile do the same thing, but differently. In other words, the relationship of the comparative functions of metaphor and simile may not be one of “apples to oranges”, but it is certainly one of “Fuji to Granny Smith”. The differences matter.

At this point, I want to suggest that there is also a good deal more subtlety both in the way in which metaphor functions, and in what serves – in different ways – the rhetorical function of the metaphorical. There is more to the idea of “metaphor” than meets the eye, and more that is “metaphorical” than the simplest form of transference.

Coming to grips with the complexity of the metaphorical will mean that there is more to metaphor than identifying the “target” and “source” domains. These are, in a sense, only two legs of the epistemological stool – and, in another sense, only one side of what is happening in metaphor. Wheelwright (1962:26-31) identified three essential elements of metaphorical reflection:



- 1. the subject which describes reflection: “it means”
- 2. the object which is described perception: “it is”

cultures shapes how the metaphors work. In many Western cultures, dogs are held close, familiar, beloved. “Man’s best friend”, we say. And so, to hang a dog and then call it names is (at least!) to go too far – we might think of comparing it to another metaphorical phrase, “beating a dead horse”. In much of China, however, dogs are viewed as dirty, undesirable, and obnoxious. Thus, in Chinese, the metaphor is one of encouragement; this is what should be done. “To beat a drowning dog” is, to some degree, equivalent to “kicking a man when he’s down”, except that, in China, one should do that to an unworthy opponent, whereas in English it means, again, that one is going too far. To borrow from Wu (2009:116):

[While] ... metaphors reflect the commonalities of human experience, they are at the same time interact[ing] with different cultural realities, thus we have metaphors with the same tenors [or target domains] expressed by different vehicles [or source domains].

In cases where imbedded cultural assumptions influence the basic understanding of either source or target domain, the way in which meaning is created may be different for different readers.

Metaphor creates, conceives, and communicates meaning by juxtapositions that are dependent, to some degree, on culturally embedded realities. In the case of metaphor in the Bible, specifically the Psalms, they may or may not be available to us, as they are also textually embedded. In other words, understanding the depth and breadth of metaphor requires not only imagination, but also a sense for other elements that may come into play in the process of transference.

I now turn to a comparison of simple or straightforward metaphor, and a different kind of metaphor that is more extensive in form and dependent on culturally imbedded traditions.

2. EPIPHOR, DIAPHOR, AND THE INTERSECTION OF HISTORY AND METAPHOR

Echoing Aristotle, Wheelwright identified two kinds of semantic movement in metaphor, namely epiphor and diaphor. Epiphor (which is what is usually meant by “metaphor”) is the transference of a name to some other object (Wheelwright (1962:72). Epiphors are conventional; they are comparison-based metaphors which, in light of their familiarity, may have lost their “emotive force”, in that they do not evoke a reaction to the “strangeness” which Aristotle emphasised.

Diaphor works differently, creating meaning by juxtaposing “certain particulars of experience” with new experiences (Wheelwright 1962:78).

A diaphor is a novel metaphor, which may at once suggest more dissimilarities or more commonalities between the source and target domains.

There is a good deal more semantic depth discernible in these two ways in which metaphor functions. This semantic depth is, in my estimation, nowhere more evident than in the historical references in the Psalms, where sometimes history is history, at other times language evocative of historical events is plainly epiphorical, and still others when history is best understood as diaphor.

2.1 Epiphor/Diaphor: The two essential functions of metaphor

Epiphor is the more familiar and common form of metaphor; it is the transference of a name to some other object. Psalm 18:2 employs a series of theological epiphors in which God is “named” “rock”, “fortress”, “shield”, “horn”, and “stronghold”:

The LORD is my rock, my fortress, and my deliverer,
my God, my rock in whom I take refuge,
my shield, and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold.

These borrowed names serve to describe God by comparison with familiar objects, in order to communicate some sense of the character of God, and so to transform theological cognition.

2.1.1 Epiphor (simple metaphor) in the “historical” Psalms

As with any genre or possible *Sitz-im-Leben*, the historical psalms employ epiphor. In a very real sense, metaphor is every bit as ubiquitous in Hebrew poetry as is parallelism.⁵

Psalm 78, the great Asaphite historical psalm, is replete with epiphorical expression. God’s anger appears as burning fire (78:21), which finds its outlet or “path” via the wonders God performs in Egypt (78:50). In the wilderness, where God provides both bread and quails for the hungry people, the psalm recounts mortals eating the “bread of angels” (78:25) and experiencing a “rain of flesh” (78:27). The fleeting span of human life is “a breath” (78:33), or a wind that passes (78:39). Sinful Israel is pictured as a “deceitful bow” (78:52), while God is a drunken, slumbering warrior

⁵ Van Hecke (2010:xi) notes in his introduction to metaphors in the Psalms, “Lowth clearly considered figurative language much more central to Hebrew poetry than parallelism.”

(78:65). In many instances, epiphor is employed to help retell the story, as in any poem.

The other historical psalms also employ epiphor; famine is the "breaking of the staff of bread" (Ps. 105:16); the earth opens up and "swallows" Dathan (106:17); idols are both "snares" and the object of wanton attentions (Ps. 106:36, 39); the winds are kept in "storehouses", and the physical characteristics of human-made images such as idols with mouths, eyes, and ears are empty metaphors, because they are untrue. Idols neither speak, see, hear, nor breathe (Ps. 135:7, 13-17). In each of these cases, epiphor is employed in crafting the poetry.

There are other instances, however, where the metaphorical language embodies a more intimate and insistent relationship between the source and target domains.

2.1.2 Diaphor: Historical metaphor

Diaphor works somewhat differently than epiphor does, creating meaning by juxtaposing the particulars of an old experience with new experiences. This is metaphor well beyond the scope of the simple noun. In Psalm 79, Israel's history, a set of the particulars of its collective past experiences, is juxtaposed with its present experiences, in order to transform despair to hope, lament to praise, complaint to trust. In this insisted upon intimate relationship, the historical recital, as diaphoric for a given present situation, finds purchase in strangeness, the "disconnect", the dis-similarity, the disorientation, which it not only identifies, but also intensifies, and seeks to transform.

Unlike epiphor (or simple metaphor), which is essentially representative in nature, historical diaphor may be intended to be constitutive in nature. The historical metaphor serves not as a comparative image or picture to enable sense to be made of a situation or event, but to bridge the gap between the past and the present, to make a more immediate connection between them.

2.2 The historical and the metaphorical

The historical references in the Psalms, whether sustained retelling or in symbolic reference, serve to convey a great deal of information and meaning in a relatively compact semantic unit. But unlike epiphor, which offers a basic semantic comparison of "A" expressed by "B", wherein "B" cannot literally be the "A" it represents, the historical referent *can*; in the historical diaphor, whether it is a sustained retelling or simple figurative language, one finds the source and target domains in remarkable proximity. There

is an intersection, in this instance, where history is history – it reports or retells – but it is also diaphorical. To paraphrase Yu (1981:213), metaphor is, at times, an act of *history*,

the edifice erected by the poet as fashioner of another world, one which is assumed to be as absolute and autotelic as the one on which it is modeled, “other” in that it is both beyond this world and imagined.⁶

The symbolic language of the remembered past is, I believe, often best understood not so much as a simple metaphor/epiphor, but as the more nuanced depth of metaphorical meaning that is diaphor.⁷ To be sure, not every moment or event of the remembered past is capable of exerting this profound symbolic effect; not all historical metaphors are established as equal. But there are certain events and individuals that bear this constitutive power. In the case of the Psalter, and perhaps much of the Hebrew Bible, the exodus event most clearly exerts this diaphorical level of influence.⁸ In this particular diaphor, the culturally embedded importance of the exodus event is brought into an immediacy, an intimacy of connection of source domain with target domain that may be inseparable.

This happens in different ways. First, some epiphors are bound to historical content; I am thinking of the epiphors for the nation of Israel as “flock” and “vine”. Secondly, symbolic language is drawn from historical events, and may be intentionally evocative of those events, such as the power of God’s “arm” and “hand”. Thirdly, the more sustained historical re-telling is presented to, or perhaps better laid alongside or over a new historical *Sitz-im-Leben* such as Psalm 78.

6 Yu goes so far as to call metaphor an act of fiction. See Derrida (1974:55): “any metaphor may always be read at once as a particular figure and as a paradigm of the very process of metaphorization: idealization and appropriation”.

7 In charting the “landscape of history”, Brown (2002:46-53) describes the historical material as a metaphorical “path” or “way” that fits the individual’s life and helps the individual make sense of life. While this is a part of the function of the historical material in the Psalms, it subsumes the historical metaphor entirely under the metaphor of “path”, limiting the way in which the historical metaphors might make meaning. There is more depth of meaning and nature to the historical referent, understood as diaphor, than simple ideogrammatical comparison.

8 The symbolic effect of the exodus in Asaph is similar to what Hiraga (2005:17) describes as a “purely” iconic text. Some texts or phrases, by virtue of their visual and auditory force, signal meaning in an absolute, concrete sense, almost “mimetically”. Others are more subtly iconic.

2.2.1 “Bound” metaphors

Some metaphors are, within their very contexts, bound so tightly to the source domain that they cannot be separated. Two examples will now follow.

2.2.1.1 Israel as sheep/flock

The frequently employed language of sheep, flock, and pasture, which appears in a number of psalms (Pss. 74:1; 75:21; 78:52, 71; 79:13; 80:1; 83:13), may at first blush appear to be simple metaphor, employed variously to describe the relationship of God and people, or to validate the role of the king as “shepherd” of the nation; elsewhere these images do function as such (e.g. Psalms 23; 95; 100).⁹ In many instances (particularly in the Psalms of Asaph [50, 73-83]), the sheep/shepherd/flock language is employed explicitly in connection with the exodus event. Psalm 95:7-9 reinforces the connection of flock imagery with the exodus (and wilderness). This enthronement psalm praises the glory of God above all other would-be gods:

For he is our God, and we are the people of his pasture, and the sheep of his hand.

O that today you would listen to his voice!

⁸ Do not harden your hearts, as at Meribah, as on the day at Massah in the wilderness,

⁹ when your ancestors tested me, and put me to the proof, though they had seen my work.

Explicit references to the trials in the wilderness make explicit the connection of the pasture/sheep metaphor to the exodus story. Thus, in many instances, the metaphor is bound; it is not free to be used in any way other than as descriptive and evocative of the memory of exodus. This, then, is no simple metaphor, but something more.

2.2.1.2 Israel as vine/garden

Another such image is that of the vine and the extended metaphor of the garden in Psalm 80:8-16. In this instance, the planting of the vine is paired with the power of God’s right hand. The right hand is directly associated

⁹ It appears that Brown (2002:151-152) views this as the primary function of the sheep/shepherd metaphor in the Psalter, pushing quickly to the role of king as shepherd. While Psalm 78 does this as well, the primary function of this language in Asaph is of God’s guidance of, and provision for Israel, associated with the exodus, which Brown appears to overlook in favour of monarchical connections supported by Assyrian parallels.

with the exodus, as Psalm 77 clearly shows, defining the power of God's right hand in terms of the deeds and wonders which God performed there (Goldingay 2007:467). In the planting of the vine in the Promised Land, the divine sword is turned to the work of the ploughshare as the vine that is Israel is transplanted (Brown 2002:177). Sometimes, a vine is simply a vine (see Pss. 78:47 and 105:33, where God strikes the vines of the Egyptians). In one instance, the vine is simply a horticultural metaphor for the fruitfulness of wife and family (see Ps. 128:3). But the diaphor of "vine", as it is most fully explored, is connected to the exodus tradition; this is thus more than simple metaphor.

2.2.2 Hand/arm

A second way in which metaphor may be understood as functioning diaphorically is in symbolic language, which, drawn from tradition, may evoke that tradition implicitly. In this instance, the "right hand" and "strong arm" of the Lord come into play.

Sometimes, the hand is simply a hand (see Pss. 8:6[7]; 10:12; 22:15[17]). At other times, the hand represents power or control, whether it is God's power (Ps. 31:5[6], 15[16]) or that of the enemy (Ps. 31:8[9]); the hand may also be the power or state of death מִיַּד־שְׁאוּל, "the power of Sheol", but literally the "hand of Sheol" (Ps. 49:16); or "trouble", מִיַּד־צָר, literally the "hand of the foe" (Ps. 107:2).

Brown (2002:175) noted that the use of the "hand", when it is God's, is meant to represent "the efficacy of God's response". This is often the case when God's power, victory, or creative action are praised in general terms (see Pss. 16:11; 20:7; 48:11; 104:28; 89:13[14]). That effective power of God's deeds is often also tied to the exodus, and it may be that, arising out of the exodus event, there is more semantic depth to this transference than the simple metaphor where "hand=power".

Several times in the book of Exodus the hand of God is "stretched out" to perform God's wonders in Egypt (see Ex. 3:20; 7:5; 15:12). In the Song of the Sea, Moses praises God's redeeming actions, "Your right hand, O LORD, glorious in power – your right hand, O LORD, shattered the enemy" (Ex. 15:6). Several psalms seem to borrow this imagery, and may well implicitly evoke the Song:

Psalm 138:7: Though I walk in the midst of trouble,
 you preserve me against the wrath of my enemies;
 you stretch out your hand, and your right hand delivers me.

Psalms 143:5: I remember the days of old, I think about all your deeds,

I meditate on the works of your hands.

Psalms 144:7: Stretch out your hand from on high;
set me free and rescue me from the mighty waters,
from the hand of aliens,

In each case, the work and the stretching out of God’s hand concern deliverance. While the exodus is not explicitly cited, it may be that the use of hand imagery bears the exodus along implicitly, calling to mind God’s historical action, to transform the psalm’s audience’s sense of now, and hope for the future.

More clearly, it seems to me, and in contrast to the praise of Exodus 15, that several psalms use the hand imagery diaphorically in the context of Israel’s struggles. Psalms 74 and 77 both lament the absence of the efficacy of God’s response, by juxtaposing the promise of the hand imagery with the perceived reality of their situation:

Psalms 74:11: Why do you hold back your hand;
why do you keep your hand in your bosom?

Psalms 77:10: And I say, “It is my grief that the right hand of the Most High has changed.”

Psalms 77 goes on to say that the deeds of the Lord will be recalled, remembered, meditated on, and mused over, precisely (one assumes) as the disorientation of the psalmist’s experience is held in tension. In this instance, the hand imagery is clearly diaphoric, bringing the nation’s tradition, its history, into tension with the “present” reality.

The “strong arm” of God is another stock phrase – often a single word in Hebrew, זָרוֹעַ – that may be evocative of the exodus. In both Exodus 6:6 and 15:16, and several times in Deuteronomy (4:34; 5:15; 7:19, and so on), זָרוֹעַ is employed in connection with the exodus event. It may be that this word is employed elsewhere without necessarily appealing to the exodus event (see Isa. 33:2). But, in several instances, this language, as it is employed in the psalms, does seem to bear the event along with it. In Psalms 77 and 79, the use of the term is provocative:

Psalms 77:15[16]: With your strong arm you redeemed your people,
the descendants of Jacob and Joseph.

As a part of rumination on the Lord's "wonders (פְּלִאָּה) from of old" (77:11[12]), this redemption of "the sons of Jacob and Joseph", effected by God's "strong arm", cannot help but remind us of the exodus. Psalm 79 laments the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple, most likely at the hands of the Babylonians in 587 B.C.E (Hossfeld & Zenger 2005:243; Goldingay 2007:519; Limburg 2000:270; Weiser 1962:544). Following complaint about the Temple, Jerusalem, and the deaths of God's servants, the psalm closes with language evocative of the national history that serves as hopeful appeal:

Psalm 79:11: Let the groans of the prisoner come before you;
according to your great power (בְּגִדְלֵךָ הַגָּדֹל; lit. "your great strong arm")
spare these children of death.

Two verses later, the Psalm takes up further symbolic language,

Then we your people and the flock of your pasture, will give
thanks to you forever;
from generation to generation we will recount your praise (Ps. 79:13).

The "groans of the prisoners" and the appeal to the "strong arm", the reference to "children of death" paired with the image of Israel as flock mentioned earlier (common in the Asaphite material, see 74:1; 78:52, 70; 79:13; 80:2 and always redolent of the exodus), combine in potent diaphor; the exodus event, when God heard the plaintive bleating of God's flock, and with a strong arm destroyed the children of Egypt, then leading the children of Israel to freedom and green pastures, is brought to bear in the face of the destruction of the Temple, and the Babylonian exile.¹⁰

One last example of "strong arm" as diaphor is from Psalm 71:17-18:

O God, from my youth you have taught me,
and I still proclaim your wonders.
So even to old age and gray hairs, O God, do not forsake me,
until I proclaim your might (NRSV; הַיָּד הַגָּדֹל, literally "your strong arm") to
all the generations to come.

As in Psalm 79, the combination of "your wonders" (פְּלִאָּה, the word central to the exodus plague accounts), with the "strong arm", while not a part of any historical recital, is best understood as diaphor, bearing along with the image a closer connection to the historical source domain.

10 For other examples of this terminology, see Exodus 2:23-24; 6:6; Micah 2:12.

Finally, the right hand and strong arm are employed in parallel to one another in several instances. In Psalm 136:12, in the midst of several verses that praise God explicitly for the exodus event (vv. 10-15), the right hand and strong arm are combined in summary fashion of the way in which God delivers, “with a strong hand and an outstretched arm”.¹¹ In two other instances, Psalms 89:13[14] and 98:1-2, the pairing of these terms is employed without explicit reference to the exodus, but in both psalms the means of God’s victory – for Psalm 98, a general sense of victory on behalf of Israel, and in Psalm 89, a celebration of God’s creative and retributive powers leading to the covenant with David are couched in these terms – is the same, God’s strong arm and hand. In each of these instances, the use of the metaphor potentially bears with it an abundance of culturally embedded material. The very phrasing, the very use of either word, might transfer not only the general “work of God’s hands”, but also a broader sense of ancient historical events into the present situation.

At this point, it must be admitted that such potential transference will not happen automatically. If we do not know the story, if we are not steeped in the cultural memory, the connection cannot be implicitly made, and the symbolic language *is* reduced to a simple metaphor; indeed, the metaphor may be largely “dead” or dormant at this point, with hardly any resonance with the source domain at all. But the potential for a deeper metaphorical connection is borne in the words, if the observer of the metaphor – the diaphor – is equipped to see it.

2.3 Sustained historical reflection, or sustained diaphor

The final way in which metaphor functions diaphorically is in longer, sustained historical re-telling, which is presented for a new historical *Sitz-im-Leben*. The exemplar of this is Psalm 78. It is out of the question to consider the whole of Psalm 78, of course, but a word or two about its beginning and its end should serve for the present consideration of diaphor.

As I suggested, drawing from Aristotle, Wheelwright, McFauge, and Brown, there is a great deal more semantic possibility in metaphor than the simplest grammatical or rhetorical function. In terms of function (following Wheelwright) there is epiphor and diaphor. In terms of form, we might also (following Lowth) include under the umbrella of figurative language

11 Compare Psalm 44:3[4], which employs the pairing in reference to the “conquest”: “for not by their own sword did they win the land, nor did their own arm give them victory; but your right hand, and your arm”.

metaphor and simile, yes, but also analogy, prosopopoeia, allegory, and parable. Parable לְפָרָה, is what Psalm 78 calls itself as it begins. The psalmist says,

I will open my mouth in a parable (לְפָרָה);
I will utter dark sayings from of old, (Ps. 78:2)

The psalm goes on to rehearse, not once but twice, the story of Israel's liberation from Egypt, and its settlement in the Promised Land. On the one hand, this is plainly a poetic history lesson. On another, particularly with the psalm's ending in mind, it is a diaphor for the establishment of the Temple-centred kingdom in Jerusalem:

He put his adversaries to rout;
he put them to everlasting disgrace.
⁶⁷ He rejected the tent of Joseph, he did not choose the tribe of Ephraim;
⁶⁸ but he chose the tribe of Judah, Mount Zion, which he loves.
⁶⁹ He built his sanctuary like the high heavens, like the earth, which he has founded forever.
⁷⁰ He chose his servant David, and took him from the sheepfolds;
⁷¹ from tending the nursing ewes he brought him
to be the shepherd of his people Jacob, of Israel, his inheritance.
⁷² With upright heart he tended them, and guided them with skillful hand.

As God delivered the whole nation from bondage in Egypt, and planted it in the Promised Land, so God has delivered the people from the enemy which has consumed Ephraim and Shiloh (v. 60), and now establishes Zion, Jerusalem, and the house of David.

3. CONCLUSIONS: EPIHOR AND DIAPHOR IN PSALMS 18 AND 79

I have tried to show that Psalm 79 employs metaphor both freely and in connection with the exodus event. The epiphors of Psalm 79 are of God's anger as fire (v. 5), of God's anger as something that is poured out like water for wrath (v. 6), and of the enemy's victory as a "devouring" of Israel (v. 7). The diaphors of Psalm 79, which bear with their imagery an insistent remembrance of the exodus, are the groans of the prisoners (v. 11), the strong arm of the Lord (v. 11), and Israel as flock (v. 13). These

references are diaphorical in that these terms are, elsewhere, often bound to the exodus event; they characterise and are dependent on the traditions and significance of the exodus in Israel, as they are used to make and transform meaning. The cultural embeddedness of that seminal event is confirmed in the textual embeddedness of Psalm 79, which as one of the Psalms of Asaph lies between Psalms 78 and 80, both of which employ the sheep/flock imagery in explicit connection to the exodus. A canonical reading then reinforces the inclination to find in this metaphorical language the transference of far more than names.

Psalm 18, which in many studies serves as one of the centrepieces of the exploration of metaphor, because it is so rich in it, certainly contains epiphor and may also contain diaphor.

Psalm 18's epiphors include God's anger as fire (v. 8), God's voice as thunder-heralding lightning (v. 13), the imminent threat of death and Sheol are cords that ensnare, while the threats of “perdition” are felt as torrents (vv. 4-5). Finally, God is rock, fortress, shield, “horn of my salvation” (קַרְנֵי יִשְׁעַי), and stronghold (v. 2). Identifying diaphor seems trickier in this instance, but it may be that the references to the psalmist's deliverance in verses 16-19[17-20] are meant to elicit the deliverance at the Red Sea (Craigie & Tate 2004:174).

He reached down from on high, he took me; he drew me out of mighty waters.

¹⁷ He delivered me from my strong enemy, and from those who hated me;

for they were too mighty for me.

¹⁸ They confronted me in the day of my calamity; but the LORD was my support.

¹⁹ He brought me out into a broad place; he delivered me, because he delighted in me.

Still, some care is needed to avoid over-interpretation in search of diaphor. For example, it may be tempting to hear an inkling of the Promised Land in מְרִחָב, the “broad place” or “wide land” of 18:19 [20], but such a conclusion may push the search for transference too far. While it is true that רחב is employed in Exodus to refer to the Promised Land,¹² if there ever was an explicit connection between מרחב/רחב and the Promised

12 See Exodus 3:8: “I have come down to deliver them from the Egyptians, and to bring them up out of that land to a good and broad land (רְחֵבָה), a land flowing with milk and honey”; 34:24: “For I will cast out nations before you, and enlarge your borders (וְהִרְחַבְתִּי); no one shall covet your land when you go up to appear before the Lord your God three times in the year.”

Land, in the Psalms at least the metaphor seems largely to have become fixed into a sense of personal deliverance, apart from any connection to the exodus.¹³ Even in Psalm 18, this phrasing is repeated later:

You gave me a wide place (תַּרְחִיב) for my steps under me,
and my feet did not slip (Ps. 18:36 [37]).

The exploration of the nuances of metaphor – in thinking about functional differences of epiphor and diaphor, as well as various formal issues such as metaphor, simile, allegory, and so on – is, in my opinion, a fruitful avenue. But care is needed. It must be maintained that, while the power of metaphor lies partly in its ability to juxtapose, to transfer meaning from object to object in ways that are at once familiar and surprising, even disjuncting, the metaphor is equally challenging in that it bears in its strange conceptual framework the possibility of misunderstanding, the real possibility that a metaphor will be misapprehended, misapplied, or simply missed altogether.

At the risk of beating too soundly a drowning dog, there is a parable for us in the evaluation of the intersection of history and metaphor in the Psalms. Sometimes a cigar is simply a cigar. Sometimes, it is not and sometimes, it is both. So too with metaphor and history.

Sometimes history is simply the retelling of the story, and little if anything, more. In this instance, I am thinking of the great liturgical representations of Israel's story, Psalms 135 and 136. While epiphor is employed in these psalms, neither of them has a clear diaphorical target domain that can be situated in any clear historical *Sitz-im-Leben*. Each psalm does, however, have a liturgical end, to which the historical material (whether metaphorical or not) is put. In Psalm 135, the historical references provide the reasons given for the summons which the Kingdom of Israel receives from its priestly houses (Aaron and Levi) to come and "Praise the LORD" (Ps. 135:1, 19-21). In Psalm 136, the historical material serves as the means whereby the enduring steadfast love of the LORD is proclaimed. While historical and even epiphorical, in neither case does there seem to be a clear, present historical moment to be made sense of via the past through diaphor. It may be that these psalms could be employed diaphorically in the most general of senses – as they are applied by a new reader, in a new historical

13 Compare Psalms 4:1: "You gave me room (הִרְחַבְתָּ) when I was in distress"; 119:45: "I shall walk at liberty", perhaps literally "I will walk in a broad place" (וְאַתְּהִלְכָּה בְּרֹחְבָהּ). There are also a number of cases in which the verb functions either as magnification (Pss. 25:17; 101:5), or as an euphemism for opening wide the mouth (Pss. 35:21; 81:10[11]) or the mind (Ps. 119:32).

moment to that reader’s own situation. But this is hardly “diaphor” in the same sense.¹⁴

In other instances, history is plainly metaphorical, as in Psalm 79.

Finally, symbolic, figurative phrases both breathe poetic life into the psalm, and bear to the reader a transference of far more than name, but with that naming a wealth of cultural and textual connections that shape meaning and understanding profoundly. In this instance, the diaphorical historical referent works to transform cognition, both functionally and theologically, to offer a new way of understanding the present situation, be it personal/individual or communal/corporate.

This is the richness of diaphor. If metaphor is powerful and wonderful in all of its “clarity and sweetness and strangeness”, then the parables and dark sayings of the historical metaphors may be the strangest, sweetest, and most transformative of all.

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14 It may be possible to find such a moment through, by trying to pin down the historical moment in or for which these psalms were written, but the dating of the psalms is often, in my estimation, uncertain at best.

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