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The Psalmist and His Adversaries: An Overview of Body-Related Metaphor in Psalm 73

Gabriela MYERS
University of Bucharest (Bucharest, Romania)
Department of Jewish Studies
gabriela.myers@lls.unibuc.ro

> If metaphor is a lens through which we see truth or reality, we must credit the poet with having made the lens, realizing at the same time that he made it out of existing materials. (Ryken 1982: 25)

Abstract. Metaphorical language is one of the central features of the Book of Psalms, providing a wide range of imagery and symbolism. The body and its various internal and external parts represent elements employed by metaphorical language in order to underline experiences, emotions, moral traits, and closeness to God. The purpose of this article is to examine the narrative of Psalm 73, in which the narrator employs a rich tapestry of bodily imagery to describe himself and his adversaries. The psalmist constructs a dichotomy of "righteous" versus "wicked", spotlighting specific body parts that epitomize the distinct moral traits defining each group. The "wicked" are depicted as indulging in gluttony and speaking oppressively, their faces serving as the focal point of their characterization. On the other hand, the "righteous", represented by the psalmist himself, strives to maintain the purity of his entire body. This vivid portrayal underscores the stark contrast between the two groups, offering a compelling exploration of morality and identity.

Keywords: Psalm 73, body, Biblical Hebrew, morality, metaphor

Metaphorical language in the Book of Psalms has received substantial investigation in the recent years (Creach 1996, Brown 2002, Gillmayr-Bucher 2004, Grohmann 2019, van Wolde 2020 i.a.),[1] especially because of its widespread popularity and abundancy in figurative language. Various metaphor theories have been applied, but two authors are significant for this article, as a result of their approach and topic: van Wolde (2020) for applying an early version of Deliberate Metaphor

1 For a more detailed survey, see Lancaster (2021).

Theory (DMT) and Gillmayr-Bucher (2004) for approaching body-related metaphors in the Book of Psalms in general.

In analysing the narrative of Psalm 73, in which the narrator employs a rich tapestry of bodily imagery to describe himself and his adversaries, the present article will adopt the updated Deliberate Metaphor Theory (DMT), as presented by Steen (2023), and will follow the "obligations" that metaphors impose on the reader of the Psalms, as formulated by Ryken (1982). The paper will be concerned only with *deliberate metaphors*, which will be comprehensively delineated in the subsequent chapter, setting the groundwork for the detailed analysis that follows.

1. Novel vs conventional metaphors: Deliberate Metaphor Theory (DMT)

At the heart of the Deliberate Metaphor Theory (DMT) lies the distinction between *deliberate* and *non-deliberate* metaphors: "DMT claims that language users somehow decide whether a metaphor is intended as a metaphor in communication, that is, counting as a genuine metaphor between language users, or not" (Steen 2023: 07). Moreover, "DMT claims that deliberate metaphor use always requires processing by analogy (or its more extended manifestation of cross-domain mapping) and therefore also involves comparison. This is live understanding of one thing in terms of something else" (Steen 2023: 07).

Earlier versions of DMT had been formulated by Steen (2008, 2017) before he reached its finest form, crystallized in 2023. The main question Steen asks is "How do we know whether an utterance is meant to be deliberately metaphorical?" The answer lies in the structure of the metaphor: "signalled metaphors, novel metaphors and direct metaphors are all metaphor structures that promote deliberate metaphor use" (2023: 08). Signalled metaphors are metaphors constructed using the preposition *like* (simile); novel metaphors lack a conventionalized target domain, therefore the analogy has to have a novel target domain; direct metaphors "present a direct expression of one or more elements of some source domain, and these need to be integrated within the surrounding target domain by means of analogy, too" (2023: 08). On the other hand, "non-signalled, conventional, and indirect metaphors do not promote deliberate metaphor use. They are more associated with non-deliberate metaphor use" (2023: 08).

When it comes to the difference between conventional and novel metaphors, Philip (2016) defines a conventional metaphor as frequent and familiar. It also has "predictable contextual and phraseological constraints which signal not only semantic meaning, but pragmatic intentions too" (Philip 2016: 224). A novel metaphor occurs when words are used metaphorically in ways they have not been used before. Although novel metaphors are unfamiliar, they have "to be

close enough to existing ways of speaking or thinking about a topic in order to achieve successful communication" but also "different enough for the speaker to have to put some cognitive effort to fully comprehend it" (Philip 2016: 224–225).

DMT posits that non-deliberate metaphors do not have discursive purposes because they do not count as metaphors in the communicative dimension of language use, and therefore not in the discourse. They essentially disappear from the mental representations of situation model and context model during the integration stage of comprehension. Deliberate metaphors, by contrast, can also have discourse purposes: their construction of an intended local or more extended comparison is often clearly done for a purpose, which can be related to several aspects of a discourse event (Steen 2023: 10).

2. Metaphor in the Book of Psalms

An earlier version of DMT was utilized by Van Wolde (2020) in her paper about Psalm 22. Nevertheless, her applying the theory was an inspiration for this study, even if the author discusses both conventional and novel (deliberate) metaphors. Talking about DMT in the context of the Book of Psalms, van Wolde states that deliberate metaphors could be signalled by a simile (constructed with the preposition כ) or "by a combination of linguistic signalling and a new conceptual content, or by a peculiar (peculiar in the sense of attention seeking) usage of a conventional metaphor that in combination with other textual units develops a new meaning dimension" (van Wolde 2020: 645–646).

When we consider metaphors in the Book of Psalms, all metaphors might seem as conventional and the readers might overlook the novelty of some metaphors, "partly because of our familiarity with the Psalms conceals from our consciousness that we are reading a metaphorical statement" (Ryken 1982: 9).

Ryken states that the metaphor imposes some obligations to the reader of the Psalms. Firstly, the reader has the responsibility of *identifying* "the literal reference, or the vehicle of the metaphor […]. The necessity of correctly identifying the literal meaning of the metaphor becomes apparent if we look, not at the metaphors that are familiar to us, but the ones outside our own experience" (1982: 14). In other words, Ryken suggest that if we want to understand a novel metaphor, we have to firstly understand the literal meaning of the words constituting the metaphor, both alone and together.

The second obligation of the reader is "to *interpret* the metaphor". And, in this respect, "to undertake such an interpretation is to accept the poet's implied invitation to discovery" (1982: 18). When it comes to the meaning of metaphors, Ryken points out that "we should be aware that the meanings transferred from

vehicle to referent are only partially intellectual or ideational. Some of the meanings are affective or intuitive, and some are extra verbal" (1982: 19).

Metaphor, states Ryken, creates a vivid and concrete image that resonates with the readers' experiences and emotions. It also enhances the ordinary language, and it captures the audience's attention, rendering specific verses unforgettable and prompting deep reflection and analysis. "Poets also use metaphors for the sake of precision. The common assumption that scientific or expository discourse is precise while metaphor is vague is most inaccurate. Metaphor is a precise mathematical equation. It uses one area of human experience to shed light on another area. The Psalmists hate the approximate" (1982: 21).

3. Body-related metaphors in the Book of Psalms

Gillmayr-Bucher investigated body images in the Book of Psalms and concludes, "With more than a thousand explicit references to the body and its parts and a distribution that shows occurrences within 143 psalms, the semantic domain of the body is one of the most widespread and frequently used semantic domains of the Psalter" (2004: 301–302). The author is the first one to notice that in Psalm 73 the dichotomy "righteous" and "wicked" is created by using body images: "While the image of the evil doers (vv. 4–9) centres on their face (eyes, mouth, tongue) and heart, the outline of the lyrical speaker includes parts from all over the body" (Gillmayr-Bucher 2004: 314). She further concludes that the body becomes a vessel for the physical perception of the situation of the wicked: they prosper while the psalmist is miserable and makes an effort to remain pure. However, Gillmayr-Bucher does not investigate the metaphors associated with the two groups: the righteous (represented by the psalmist) and the wicked (the psalmist's adversaries), which is the main focus of the current paper.

4. An overview of Psalm 73

Psalm 73 opens the Third Book of Psalms on a sombre note, as the Psalmist tries to reconcile the prosperity of his adversaries with his own suffering. In this respect, the Psalm could be compared with the Book of Job (Weiser 1962: 507) yet keeping the balance between the tribulations of the two: "In the psalm this battle does not indeed attain the gigantic proportions and wide range of background, the artistic greatness and dramatic force of the poem of Job; the structure of the psalm is simpler than that of the Book of Job, but its thoughts are for this reason no less penetrating and profound" (Weiser 1962: 507).

The reflective form of Psalm 73 posed a challenge for researchers in terms of determining its genre. Westermann argues that the Psalms cannot be exactly delimited: "Transition is the real theme of the Psalms discussed here. *They are no longer mere petitions, but petition that has been heard. They are no longer mere lament, but lament that has been heard*" (1981: 80). Tate also poignantly notices the difficulty of fitting Psalm 73 into a fixed framework and categorizes the Psalm as "reflective testimony", which is "not directly instructional but certainly intended to function in that mode" (1991: 232). Boadt considers the Psalm didactic in nature, teaching the reader a moral lesson (2004: 538).

As for the structure of the Psalms, DeClaisse-Walford, Jacobson, and Tanner notice that Psalm 73 is "unusually symmetrical", as the word אך marks three major divisions of the Psalm at vv. 1, 13, and 18: "The psalm might speak of confusion and doubt, but it does so in a very orderly way" (2014: 584), summarizing the outline of the Psalm as it follows (2014: 585):

> Surely God is good! (v. 1)
> My problem (vv. 2–3)
> The wicked are well off (vv. 4–12)
> Surely I have been good for nothing (vv. 13–16)
> Until I came into God's presence (v. 17)
> Surely I see the fate of the wicked (vv. 18–20)
> My problem resolved (vv. 21–27)
> God is good (v. 28)

Body-related metaphors in Psalm 73

In analysing body-related metaphors in Psalm 73, we will look at *deliberate metaphors*, meaning signalled metaphors, novel metaphors, and direct metaphors. After identifying them, I will apply the two "obligations" stated by Ryken (1982): I will look first at the literal meaning of the words of the metaphor and afterwards offer an interpretation of their meaning.

As stated above, when it comes to the wicked, their body-related metaphors concentrate on the face area (eyes, mouth, tongue). They also have a visibly fat body, probably as a result of gluttony (so, it could also be face-related). Moreover, their description also concentrates in a cluster of verses (vv. 4–9). In contrast, when it comes to the psalmist, parts from all over the body (inside and outside) are mentioned and "scattered" all over the Psalm (vv. 2, 13, 16, 21, 23, 26), stating his suffering over and over again. Hence, we will talk about metaphors in a number of the verses mentioned above, more precisely the ones that contain *deliberate* metaphors and not conventional ones: 2, 6, 7, 9, 21.

In verse 2,[2] the psalmist's doubt and *almost* loss of faith are pictured by the use of two deliberate metaphors:

But for me, my feet have almost stumbled	וַאֲנִי כִּמְעַט נָטָיוּ רַגְלָי
My steps nearly slipped	כְּאַיִן שָׁפְכוּ אֲשֻׁרָי

The two metaphors are parallel both semantically and syntactically: רגלי 'my feet' and אשרי 'my steps' align in form and meaning – plural nouns with pronominal suffix, the same as the verbs which are both in the *qal* paradigm and have similar meaning.

The root נתה means 'to stretch out', 'to spread out', 'to extend', 'to incline', 'to bend', and only in Psalm 73:2 is used in connection with the foot (feet). There are two more similar occurrences, when the verb is used in connection to step (steps): Job 31:7 and Psalm 44:19.

The metaphor is understood also by contrast with the metaphors found in other Psalms: 17:5, 37:31, 40:3, and 44:19, where the psalmist boasts about having his steps firm on God's path.

The root שפכ means 'to pour', 'to pour out', and this is the only occurrence where the verb is used together with "steps". DeClaisse-Walford, Jacobson, and Tanner note that אשר appears 8 times in the Hebrew Bible and only in poetic texts, "and the meaning seems as much metaphorical as literal" (2014: 589, footnote 33).

Focusing on the adversaries, verse 6 describes metaphorically the way they are dressed:

Therefore their necklace is pride	לָכֵן עֲנָקַתְמוֹ גַּאֲוָה
Violence covers them as a garment	יַעֲטָף־שִׁית חָמָס לָמוֹ

We can see that the metaphors are deliberate and novel, as they only appear here. The root ענק appears twice as a verb in the Hebrew Bible and only here in the qal paradigm and has the meaning 'to put/serve as a necklace'. It is constructed with a 3rd-person plural pronominal suffix, doubled in the second part of the verse by the preposition למו. Therefore, they set as a "necklace their pride", meaning probably that they walk everywhere with a straight, proud neck. Pride and violence – גאוה and חמס – are parallel here, as two negative qualities that follow the adversaries everywhere. The comparison between violence and garment – חמס and שית – is unique in the Psalms, and the root עטפ 'to envelop/cover oneself' also appears predominantly. The adversaries are not only proud but also violent, as violence accompanies them everywhere they go, as a garment they wear.

Verse 7 depicts the adversaries' wealth, which is visible also physically, on their body:

2 The English translation of the Hebrew verses belongs to DeClaisse-Walford, Jacobson, and Tanner (2014).

Their eyes bulge out with fatness	יָצָא מֵחֵלֶב עֵינֵמוֹ
Their hearts overflow with delusions	עָבְרוּ מַשְׂכִּיּוֹת לֵבָב

The first metaphor poses trouble to researchers, as Tate notices and points out that "we are dealing with an ancient metaphor here, and fair equivalence is all that is necessary" (1991: 228, footnote 7a). The verb יצא has the meaning 'to go out', 'to come out', 'to come forth' and is in *qal* perfect, masculine, singular. Interestingly, עין 'eye' here agrees with the verb in the masculine, which is very seldom the case,[3] as the noun is usually feminine – maybe that is why LXX and Syriac amend the text to be read עונומו 'their inequity'. Maybe the metaphor is better understood when read together with verse 4, as the Psalmist states that 'their body is fat'.

The second metaphor is intriguing, as משכית, which means 'carved figure', is only here associated with the heart, לבב. The root עבר has the meaning 'to pass by/over', 'to pass on', 'to go/pass through', 'to cross', 'to go beyond'. Probably the metaphor implies that the wealthy things go beyond the imaginations of the heart, meaning that they have more than the heart wishes for. DeClaisse-Walford, Jacobson, and Tanner mention that the two metaphors are difficult to understand (2014: 589), maybe because they are archaic (or novel).

Verse 9, the last one referring to the adversaries, depicts further their negative moral qualities:

They set their mouths in the heavens	שַׁתּוּ בַשָּׁמַיִם פִּיהֶם
As their tongues walk in the earth	וּלְשׁוֹנָם תִּתְהַלֵּךְ בָּאָרֶץ

The two metaphors show parallelism by employing synonymous and complementary concepts: פיהם 'their mouth' and לשונם 'their tongue' are clearly synonymous and both nouns have 3rd person, masculine, plural pronominal suffix. בשמים and בארץ are complementary concepts, as heavens and earth are, depicting a complete picture/world. Both nouns are used with the preposition ב 'in'. The root שתת means 'to set', 'to appoint', and it is parallel with the root שית, which has a similar meaning, 'to put', 'to set', 'to appoint', 'send for'. The form תהלך is very interesting, as it seems to be a late *qal* verbal form, from the root הלכ 'to walk', 'to go', 'to come', 'to follow'. Common translations of the first metaphor "they have set their mouths against the heavens" imply that the adversaries speak evil of God, but, as de Boer suggests, this interpretation is excessive, the verse does not speak "of blasphemy but of mighty words whose speakers know how to enforce obedience far and wide" (1968: 263–264). This explanation is supported by the second metaphor, which tells us that their tongue (words, utterances) reaches everywhere. Therefore, read together with verse 6, we can conclude that

3 See, for example, Song 4:9b, 6:5; Job 21:20; Zech 4:10.

the adversaries are proud and exercise their influence both in heaven and on earth by means of violence and intimidation.

Considering all the aforementioned details, and the fact that the adversaries are not punished by God, verse 21 contains maybe the two most beautiful metaphors of the Psalm, as the psalmist describes the lowest point he reached in his relationship with God:

For my heart was embittered	כִּי יִתְחַמֵּץ לְבָבִי
And in my inward parts I was pierced	וְכִלְיוֹתַי אֶשְׁתּוֹנָן

The beauty of the metaphors lies in the parallelism between the two important organs representing the immaterial side of man: לבב and כליות 'heart' and 'kidneys' (i.e. inward parts in the translation), both particularized by the 1st person pronominal suffix. The heart is usually a symbol for the inner man (Jo 2:3, La 3:21, 1Sa 16:7 i.a.), the mind (Dt 8:2, 1Sa 9:19, 2K 10:30, Jb 34:10 i.a.), the will (2Ch 20:33, Ezr 7:10, 1Sa 7:10, i.a.), while the kidneys are thought to be the most sensitive and vital part of a person, and in that respect they are generally used in parallel with the heart (Jr 12:2, Ps 139:13, Jb 16:13, Jb 19:27, Pr 23:16, Lam 3:13).

Not only are the nouns parallel but also the verbs יתחתץ and אשתונן, as they appear only here and are conjugated in similar paradigms – *hitpael* and *hitpolel*. The root חמצ, which has the meaning 'to be sour', 'to be leavened', is usually associated with dough and bread. Here the heart "became sour" by itself (i.e. 'embittered' in the translation). The root שנן, which has the meaning 'to whet', 'to sharpen', in *hitpael* has the meaning of 'feeling stabbed', 'being pierced', as it seems, in the kidneys. By using these metaphors and associations, the Psalmist tells the reader that the pain and "deep, internal anguish" (Tate 1991: 230, footnote 21a) can be experienced as physical symptoms.

Conclusions

Throughout the paper, we examined a number of five verses belonging to Psalm 73. The verses were selected according to two criteria: firstly, the verses containing body-related metaphors were taken into account. Secondly, we considered the criteria of *deliberate metaphor* usage, as defined by Steen (2023), meaning that the metaphors were novel and not used anywhere else in the Hebrew Bible. Therefore, a number of verses were excluded if they contained conventional, well-known, and commonly used metaphors (e.g. vv. 23, 26). The verses were examined according to the two principles stated by Ryken (1982); hence, the literal meaning of the words was examined when interpreting the metaphors.

This analysis showed the reader the dichotomy between the Psalmist and his adversaries: while the adversaries are wealthy, gluttonous, and influential (vv. 6,

7, 9), the Psalmist cannot comprehend their wellbeing, and almost loses his faith (v. 2); he is also jealous, all these negative emotions manifesting as a physical pain (v. 21). The end of the Psalm concludes that this dichotomy is apparent, as the Psalmist realizes that God was always present, holding his hand and being his rock (vv. 23, 26).

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