

„BABEȘ-BOLYAI” UNIVERSITY CLUJ-NAPOCA  
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## **DOCTORAL THESIS**

### **CONFIGURATIVE PATTERNS IN LITERARY DISCOURSE**

#### **ABSTRACT**

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**KEY WORDS:** configuration pattern, global comprehension, spatial metaphor, reading process, chiasmus, Nichita Stănescu, *Peter weeping bitterly*

The goal of my dissertation was to investigate the issue of configuration in the literary discourse. The thesis argues that the configuration pattern occurs in the act of reading in the form of images, metaphors, figures etc. and it is generated by a cognitive configuration process enabling readers to understand the text as a whole thanks to their global comprehension skill.

The premise relied on the reading experience shared both by the readers and the writers which explain the way they understand a book by appealing to a figure that compresses its meaning; through this figure (often a metaphor) the readers seem to capture in a comprised synthetic and consistent manner the meaning of the text, of the act of reading or writing. The figure we discussed about is becoming an objective correlative for the reading experience in its aesthetic, subjective and cognitive aspects; it translates the text values into an equivalent language, a metaphor, an image etc. used to express not only the reader's and writer's emotions but also their intuition regarding the reading and the creative process (Tomlinson 2005); it seems to be sensitive, but also intellectual, an event of the act of reading, but also an abstraction; it seems to offer the whole significant content of the text, not as a concrete occurrence of an already existent meaning, but as a condition for its existence. Nobody learn something new from that image more than the text itself offers, but each of us get and see something new from this reading experience that translates – reduces, sometimes to unconventional correspondences – the text into an image.

The theoretical framework of the thesis was designed by recourse to various theories in order to establish a consistent theory according to which the configuration pattern occurs in the reading process as a figure, an image, a metaphor etc. and it is instantiated by that figure.

The analytical approach was carried out in three directions, namely: (a) the reading theories, according to which the configuration pattern occurs as spatial metaphor of reading (Joseph Frank, Matei Călinescu, Frank Kermode), (b) the philosophical issue of global comprehension related to a basic human ability, characteristic for the way human mind captures reality and makes sense of it, (c) the theories of cognitive semantics and textual linguistics concerning the cognitive and configuration unity of the discourse.

The theoretical core of the paper discussed the issues of global comprehension of text related to the idea of capturing its meaning into an image. The concept of global comprehension, based on Paul Ricœur's theory, has been outlined according to Boethius's idea of *totum simul* (*The Consolation of Philosophy*) and Dante's idea about a point where all the times – past, present and future – are present (*Paradise XVII*, 17). Demonstration appealed to well-known theories that explain the nature of global comprehension: Boethius,

Dante, Louis O. Mink, Paul Ricœur, Frank Kermode. Diachronic overview and systematic theoretical concepts were led by an axiomatic reasoning that presents two different approaches to global comprehension theories: there are two poles between which the evolution of global comprehension and configuration has developed. A first pole associates global comprehension to divine intelligence, a model followed by human spirit (theories of Boethius, Thomas d'Aquino, Emanuele Tesauro, Baltasar Gracián). The second pole, totally opposed, emerges gradually, as the first one fades away and thus the figure becomes an exclusive creation of human mind and thus, potentially, a fiction (we found illustrative the cases presented by the novels of Henry James, J. L. Borges, William Gibson). The second pole is the place where specific reading approaches are created by appeal to grammar of forms and algorithms developed by various schools of criticism in order to establish and describe the configuration pattern.

Thus, the figures occurring in the reading process assert an absolute knowledge (the configuration pattern is a basic form of human spirit that informs the way humans understand reality as a whole), on the one hand, and on the other those figures are circumstantial constructs shaped by reading strategies. Both approaches – global comprehension conceived as divine intelligence ability or as human spirit ability – are determined by a figural knowledge according to which the ideas take shape and phenomena make sense; the configuration shapes comes out from the unity of the object and its inner cohesion, but also from the image generated by the human comprehension skills.

The concepts of configuration act and configuration pattern were discussed having in view Mark Turner's study *Literary Mind* (1996) where the author asserts the existence of cognitive patterns that inform both the human knowledge and the literary discourse, both of them being guided by a formal pattern of a rhetorical figure that proves to be a cognitive figure. In this regard, we discussed the pattern of chiasmus, a thinking and compositional pattern encountered in Semitic manuscripts, in oral tradition of Homeric narrative, in the Old and New Testament, in the concentric movement of Bach's fugue, in liturgical hymns (Breck 2005, Lissner 2007), but also in Nichita Stănescu's poetry or in a thinking pattern instantiated in the architectural figure of the portico.

The thesis consists of two major parts, namely *Configuration Process* and *Configuration Patterns*, followed by *Conclusions*, *Annexes* and *Bibliography*. The first part contains the following chapters: I. *Theoretical framework*; II. *Configuration Act. Global Comprehension of Text*; III. *Figure in the Text*; IV. *Spatial Metaphors of Reading*. The second

one contains two chapters: I. *Analytic Approaches and Reading Strategies*; II. *Partial Configuration Patterns*.

Chapter I, *Theoretical Framework*, discusses the concepts of *pattern* and *discourse* – the first one taking a double meaning: as system of representation used to describe an object/text that argues a point of view or a theory (Cornea 2006) and as cultural construct that depicts the semiotic space of culture (Lotman 2001); and the second one, the discourse, seen as practice that projects and shapes the reality (Foucault 1998, Iser 2006). The chapter presents the methodology of research and the major theoretical studies that have influenced my research. In this sense, W. Iser's idea about the role metaphors play in human sciences has had a major impact upon the premises of my thesis. W. Iser sustained that metaphors act in soft sciences as cognitive compressors of the theory and analytic devices used to condense the theory and the text to a figure. The chapter shows how this idea has informed various areas of knowledge, from the literary theory of genres to the theory of institutional management; in all these instances metaphors acting as semantic devices that have major roles in discursive construction and transmission of knowledge.

Chapter II *Configuration Act. Global Comprehension of Text* discusses configurations and their specific processes which establish global comprehension. The section about global comprehension deals with comprehension ability presented in a wide range: from the attribute of divine intelligence (Boethius) to historical (Louis O. Mink) and narrative comprehension (Paul Ricœur). All these insights point out key feature of comprehension, the ability to comprehend the world as a whole and the whole text. Noting that in the first case – the knowledge as totum simul – it is a divine capacity specific intelligence, and in the second one, it is an exclusively human capacity. The section about configuration process defines configuration as (a) cognitive process, result of productive imagination and (b) mimesis of an action, in narrative type of knowledge (Ricœur). It is about structuring the reality apprehended in the reading process through intellectual and intuitive synthesis, which establishes the configuration pattern. The section on discursive forms of comprehension describes rhetorical and discursive ways of perceiving a text as a unity: theories of macro- and superstructure (Teun A. Van Dijk), prototype textual structures (J.-M. Adam), grammar of visual, narrative and symbolic forms, reticular structure of configuration, configurative and tabular reading.

Chapter III, *Figure in the text*, focuses on the relationship of contiguity between metaphorical figure of reading/book and the process of global comprehension. The idea of the figure in the text is illustrated with three fictions on this topic: Henry James's *Figure in the Carpet*, J. L. Borges's *Death and the Compass* and William Gibson's *Pattern Recognition*.

The analysis shows the values and the limits of those figures: the sum of its attributes does not exhaust its content and form. The figure issues a seductive sensual nature created by association of impressions, intuitions and self-reflection act of the spirit; searching the figure not only compresses something that is known, but opens ways to an extra sense; it is not the apprehension of a delayed pre existing meaning but its condition of possibility. In this context, the figure seems more a figure of figuration, a process of figuration than a fixed image.

Chapter IV, *Spatial Metaphors of reading*, illustrates the nature of metaphorical figure taking arguments from psychology of visual perception, Lessing`s aesthetics, poetics and phenomenology of the artwork. The chapter discusses the conditions that allow the text compression into an image (Frank, Arnheim, Ingarden, Ricœur) and the relevance of those exercises of abbreviation (Matei Călinescu, Rudolf Arnheim, Joseph Frank, Frank Kermode). The chapter proved an inventory of possible keywords for defining the figure – from aevum (Toma d`Aquino) to the icon (Paul Ricœur, William K. Wimsatt, Max Black) and synopsis (Rudolf Arnheim) etc. – inventory that places the debate into a broader framework of reflection whose target aims to capture the existence in its totality into an image.

The discussion articulates on a syllogistic model and balances the double side of the figure – referential vs. autotelic function of metaphor – in order to outline the prerequisites for a major conclusion on the qualities of metaphor seen as device and process of configuration. The central idea of the chapter supports the heuristic and cognitive values of the figures as a tool for text and reading process.

As a whole, the theoretical approach of the paper aimed to fix the form outside the text, created from the materiality of the act of reading, in order to describe then its transcendental nature as principle of consciousness and of inner experience of the consciousness, on the one hand, and phenomenon to double nature, prior to any knowledge and cognoscible only as representation, on the other hand. Thus conceived the figure in the text is a figure of comprehension, but also the figure of configuration process that establishes the meaning and global comprehension.

Synthetic examples of the theory bring to chiasmus that is a syntactic and semantic figure of comprehension that structures the configuration process and establishes a configurative mode of comprehension, shaping the transfer of knowledge. An important chapter in the economy of the thesis has illustrated the value of chiasm in Nichita Stănescu`s poetry, in terms of cognitive structures that establishes the poetic act.

The second part, *Configuration Patterns*, deals with reading strategies and analytical

approaches used to establish configuration patterns in some schools of literary criticism (thematic criticism, psycho-criticism, socio-criticism etc.). Although the origin of those patterns remains dependent on the limits enacted by specific critical approaches, the pattern itself establishes the global comprehension act, thus generating the meaning of the text. What is important for the economy of my thesis is the identification of a new configuration pattern in G. Bacovia's poetry, namely *Peter weeping bitterly*.

The conclusions debate on a possible general theory of configuration patterns and describe some sets of concepts and conceptual networks associated to configuration patterns all through the paper. They reiterate the value of the pattern for the reading experience, but also for the knowledge experience and consider the configuration pattern as an operational concept.

The main conceptual network is made of fixed and mobile elements, which are inextricably bound up with each other in pairs, so that it creates a three-levelled configuration mechanism. From perceptible towards imperceptible, from concrete towards unrepresentative, from phenomenal towards transcendental the concepts are bound up together like in the following scheme:

I.

- (a) configuration pattern → the figure
- (b) configuration act – cognitive process
- (c) global comprehension – transcendental nature

II.

- (d) global comprehension → configuration act → configuration pattern → global comprehension etc. (but also in reverse direction: configuration pattern → configuration act → global comprehension).

The first correlation (**configuration pattern – figure**) sets the figure as the result of the configuration pattern. The configuration pattern itself emerges in concrete forms, figures, infinite and diverse depending on multiple variables (circumstances of reading experiences, repertoire data updated in reading process etc.). The figure can be here an image, a metaphor, a drawing (*Peter weeping bitterly*, the porch, the triangle, the rhomb and the labyrinth – in J. L. Borges's *Death and the Compass*, metaphors assigning the composition process in Barbara Tomlinson's investigation 2005); while the configuration pattern can be the scheme on which the figure establishes itself (the chiasmus seen as textual composition, textual structures, the theme of the text, reading codes established by different schools of criticism). If we remain



simply at this level of the link, the configuration pattern seems partial, being just about an algorithm which results in figure.

The second correlation (**configuration act – cognitive process**) emphasises the gradual nature of the configuration act and its cognitive nature. The configuration act is the mechanism by which knowledge of reality occurs. It determines the readers to use their mental content and release some mental processes (productive imagination, metaphorical thinking, figural thinking, thinking by analogies, thinking by synthetic configuration, rhizomatic thinking, but also the reading memory, image schemes and mental *patterns* which configures the literary pattern, the “figure in the carpet”). At this level, the configuration act establishes a way of producing and transmitting knowledge (from this point of view, *the chiasmus* is a configuration act, like *the concept* and *the spatial metaphor*), but also as a *cognitive event* (for example, simultaneous perception of the elements composing the image, apprehension of the crystallized meaning of a text, but also a dream or a mood, supervised spontaneously, Antim’s dream after which he develops the construction plans of his monastery, Nichita Stanescu’s intuition of the principle of pulsating poetry while travelling by train).

The third correlation (**global comprehension – transcendental nature**) is not a real one, but an award process implying the transcendental nature of the global comprehension, in the sense that some configurations can be perceived before being exemplified by a concrete figure, only in their phenomenal aspects as illustrations.

The fourth correlation (**global comprehension – configuration act – configuration pattern – global comprehension etc.;** but also in reverse: **configuration pattern – configuration act – global comprehension**) is a round one, tracing the sequence specific for the configuration process and setting the first three correlations in motion, very often in a hermeneutical circle. This network makes possible both a way of knowledge determined by discursive practices embodied in figures and the creation of some sensitive figures as a way of expressing a type of comprehension configured in patterns.

The extreme poles of the scheme (figure and global comprehension) strengthens the fragile condition of the reader, being in a permanent swing from the pole where the apprehension takes place (synthesis of data captured by intuition and expressed in speech, in discursive figures) to the transcendental apperception, where there is the possibility of any synthesis of the diverse, but in its absence; this being the point (Boethius, Dante, Kermode talked about) which allows the simultaneous grasping of the whole.

From another point of view the conclusions discuss the iconic character of these figures (illustrated by the chiasmus, the metaphor of the figure in the carpet, figure of Peter weeping bitterly, the porch etc.). First of all, the arguments state the dissolution of the dichotomy spatial vs. temporal. On one hand, *the spatial character of the figure is a function of time*, the perception of the phenomenon as spatial figure cannot ignore the time, grasping the global pattern of the book, of the reading experience, of an existential path in a figure although crystalized, proves to be temporal; conceptual maps, tabular, centripetal, configuration readings, all have a temporal nature which can be in/visible in the spatial resulting figure. On the other hand, *the temporal character of the figure is a function of space*: the temporal reading act and the process of configuration are only spatially represented, as the image of a thread in Laurence Sterne's novel, as Ariadna's thread in Hillis Miller's criticism, geometrical harmony and symmetry specific to art, music, literature, architecture structures etc.

Secondly, the arguments refer to the distinction between referential and transcendental nature of the figure. The dichotomy shows the delicate situation of the reader, placed between the materiality of the book and the reading act, a place where a potential configuration model occurs (as objective correlative of the reading experience) on one hand, and the transcendental nature of the comprehension process and of the connected cognitive schemes (chiasmus, metaphor, narrative thinking, thinking by analogy, thinking in chiasmus, rhizomatic thinking, reticular thinking, connectionism etc.) on the other hand. The reader experiences the concrete reality of the reading process – which he can explain through operational instruments he owns – and he grasps the meaning as supervening, mediated by a formula which conveys knowledge. This formula becomes the configuration pattern.

*Chiasmus and metaphor* are ways to configure and transmit knowledge. The process of transmitting knowledge is illustrated in the fourth correlation (d) of the configuration mechanism scheme; we visualize it starting from transcendent to immanent, but also by reverse, the figure being not the delayed material condition of an a priori meaning, but its condition of possibility; the pattern occurs after the experience was stored in memory, then the stored data reassemble themselves in another pattern etc. The chiasmus, the metaphor and the concept have a special status compared to other patterns because they simultaneously illustrate all the levels of the network: the syntactic material of the chiasmus, its cognitive process peculiarities and the accomplishment of the global comprehension in the focal centre of the chiasmus or in transcendental nature of the spatial metaphor. Frequently in the case of poetry global comprehension occurs in the revealing metaphor or in the focal centre of the

chiasmus (in Nichita Stanescu's poetry, the focal centre of the chiasmus appears frequently as metaphor). Both figures (chiasmus and metaphor) freeze time and set the point where all times are present, the point that captures the whole structure. The way in which those two figures relate to the time and their transcendental character get them closer to transdisciplinary knowledge.

In the potential infinite plurality of patterns which can be created in the reading act, the theory we illustrated validate the complete ones, in the sense that they can cover anytime the four levels of the conceptual map. Although the literary object and the reading act do not always satisfy the multi-faceted plurality of the configuration network and the reading experience is not visibly manifest in the four correlations of the configuration mechanism, the figure crystallized in the reading process occurs as an effect of the configuration mechanism. Once the figure is notified, it becomes operational as analytical device in approaching the text. If the figure becomes valid in the text analysis and interpretation, the configuration pattern is complete, in the sense that it is the result of the configuration process which sets global comprehension.

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